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978-0-521-29128-6 - A Chance to Learn: The History of Race and Education in the United States

Meyer Weinberg

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The history of race and education
in the United States

Meyer Weinberg

Professor of History, City Colleges of Chicago

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To the memory of Horace Mann Bond

**Believer in the right of every
child to learn and to grow**

**Historian of the travail in
protecting that right**

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Preface

This book is a history of the educational experience of black, Mexican-American, Indian-American, and Puerto Rican children in the United States. At the heart of the story is the unending attempt of minority parents to assure their children a chance to learn. Wherever possible, these efforts are documented from primary historical sources rather than through the screens and nets of second-hand commentary.

In this first book to comprehend such a broad scope, minority education is viewed in relation to the historic contours of the economic and political system. Economic subordination and political powerlessness are the pre-suppositions of public policy for minority education. These bitter facts have complicated immensely the efforts of minority communities to achieve educational equality for their children. Sustained efforts collided head-on with a deeply resistant economic-political structure. Yet from time to time, the structure gave way – only, however, under continued pressure.

Nearly two decades of participation in the civil rights movement in Chicago heightened my awareness of the subject of this book. As chairman of the education committee of the combined civil rights organizations in Chicago during the first six or so years of the 1960s, I came to know the abysmal conditions of segregated urban schools. I learned far more, however, from the parents who, despite their own meager schooling – often in the South but frequently in the very schools their children attended – were determined to change the schools. In addition, nearly thirty years of teaching young people in their first two years of higher education convinced me of the enormous creative potential they bear. Having taught young and old from every economic and ethnic condition in one of America's greatest cities, I strongly affirm the equality of all.

All this has informed, but not imprisoned, the history that follows. I have tried to tell the truth as far as I am able. In the course of the research and reflection, I have learned much. At numerous points I departed from various conventionalities and pieties, both of liberal historiography and the civil rights movement, some of which I had shared at an earlier time. It is up to the reader to judge the result.

A companion work to the present volume, *Minority Students: A Research*

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Appraisal (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, in press), is an analysis of the principal social science research literature of the subject.

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Gladys Hamilton typed the manuscript with her usual care and skill. It is a fitting close to a number of splendid years during which she deciphered my handwriting and I wondered at her wizardry.

M. W.