

SOCIAL RELATIONS SPATIALLY FIXED: CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

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ABSTRACT. More than 140 court cases filed in the United States between 1970 and 2003 argued that unacceptable and unconstitutional funding disparities exist among school districts in most states. In those arguments, stories, statistics, and maps are used to compare various school districts to prove that conditions are indeed unequal. Both sides—plaintiff and defendant—use such information to disprove each other’s contentions. In so doing, each assumes that the political spaces of the school districts are absolute, timeless, and independent. Failure to recognize that these spaces—the school districts—are not objective but, in fact, constitutive of the class and race relations actually being argued and debated in court further legitimates local geographies of privilege and deprivation. I examine the formation of the school districts around San Antonio, Texas to illustrate that these districts are far from independent of one another and were formed to isolate privileged communities from the rest of the city. A relational view of space-time allows such spaces as school districts to assume a political role, as opposed to the absolute, independent spaces they now represent. *Keywords:* absolute space, geography of education, San Antonio, spatialized social relations, Texas.

In 2003 the State Supreme Court of New York ruled that the state had short-changed New York City schools by not spending enough money to provide their students with a sound, basic education as guaranteed by the state Constitution. Although the ruling was written for New York City, other urban districts, including Buffalo and Rochester, were predicted to align themselves with New York City and against “those [schools] in districts (mostly suburban) with low percentages of students in poverty and high levels of income and property wealth” (New York State Department of Education 1999, vi).

In 2004 the 250th District Court in Texas ruled that “the current funding capacity of the Texas school finance system, in conjunction with the inequitable access to revenue in the system, does not provide property-poor districts with sufficient access to revenue” (*West Orange–Cove Consolidated Independent School District et al. v. Shirley Neeley et al.*, No. GV–100528 [250th Dist. Ct., Travis County, Tex. 2004], FOF 294). The court continues: “The property-poor Edgewood Intervenors lack adequate funds for, and do not have substantially equal access to[,] funds for school facilities, and therefore do not have all the facilities essential to providing students a learning environment in which to attain a suitable and adequate education” (FOF 298). Findings show “great discrepancy in the overall performance of students generally, and those with special needs, particularly LEP [limited English proficiency] and economically disadvantaged students. Those results also show great discrepancies between White and minority student populations” (FOF 75). Under this fund-

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