

KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW IN TEXAS: SOCIOECONOMIC AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

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In his recent book, Charles E. Silberman underscores the role of the law as an educating institution. "Since means shape ends, the kinds of legal procedures the society develops shape the goals and values and indeed the whole character and ethos of the society" (Silberman, 1970:42). He convincingly argues that the attempts in recent years to provide legal services to the poor have necessitated radical changes in the conception of the lawyer's role. "For one thing, he becomes an educator in a much more specific way, since the first (and perhaps most important) part of his job may be to educate the poor to what their rights are" (Silberman, 1970:43). Yet it is not only the poor who have difficulty when it comes to understanding the laws of society, and many people have been confronted with situations in which they have, after the fact, discovered that what they have done was illegal. The My Lai trials may be simply an extreme case in point. In the defense of Lt. Calley, the lawyers in the case were expected to argue that the defendant did not know the difference between a legal and illegal order and such an argument was used successfully in the similar Diener case. Yet the old adage has it that "ignorance of the law is no excuse." In many lesser situations citizens are unsure as to what their legal responsibilities are or what others legally have the right to do or not do.

This paper addresses itself to one problem among many within our legal system, i.e., citizen ignorance of the law. By ignorance of the law is meant not only ignorance of specific laws but of the rationale behind the entire legal process. The basic hypothesis of the research described below was that if law as a social tool is less effective than it might be, it is in part because many citizens are unaware of how legal processes may be used for their protection and for the solution of some of their problems. Citizens in many cases may have a negative attitude toward the law, partly as a result of belief that the laws are different (and perhaps more unfair) than they actually are. Injustice is often tolerated because citizens are not aware that laws are available to protect their interests or that the law is different from "practice."

A second hypothesis of the research was that knowledge of the law is not equal for all groups in the population; or, stated in another way, some are more ignorant than others. Generally, it was hypothesized that members of various economic and ethnic groups would differ in their knowledge of law. Attitudes were also expected to differ, but specific directions and extent of differences in knowledge and attitude were not predicted; generally it was expected that both knowledge and positive attitudes toward law would increase with economic status and majority group membership. Of particular interest were the attitudes and knowledge of the poor of all groups as compared to the more economically well off, particularly since so many federal government programs have been developed to aid the poor with their legal and social problems, and because the poor often have been seen as most vulnerable to illegal practices.

Experimental Design

The research project to be described was initiated in 1966 by individuals who were, at the time, members of the faculty and staff of the University of Texas School of Law. The questionnaire designed to assess attitudes toward and knowledge of the law was developed by these faculty and staff members with the added assistance of a senior law student who helped develop and pretest the instrument. The questionnaire was subsequently modified and correct answers were double checked by the law librarian. The survey was implemented by graduate students in the University of Texas Graduate School of Social Work. The sampling procedure was formulated by a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas who

was familiar with sampling procedures and population statistics for the city of Austin, Texas, where the survey was conducted.

The Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire¹ developed for the survey contained three major parts. Part I contained nine open-ended questions designed to assess general attitudes toward the law. Some questions were included to get an idea of what people would do if they had legal problems, or problems which could become legal problems. Part II contained 30 statements about the laws of Texas. The respondents were asked whether the statements were laws in Texas (knowledge) and whether they should be laws in Texas (attitude). The first statement, for example, was: "Under Texas law a person, because of his color or his nationality, can be prohibited from living where he wants." The respondent was to state whether or not he thought this was *in fact* a law in Texas at the time (the correct answer was no) and whether or not it *should be* a law. The first set of five statements concerned housing laws, the second set concerned welfare laws. The third set were questions about the civil rights of minority groups (laws involving integration); the fourth set were more general questions about the civil liberties of all citizens; the fifth set concerned consumer laws; and the final set dealt with laws pertaining to the family. Part III of the questionnaire was designed to obtain information about the respondent, such as age, sex, occupation, marital status, number of children, and length of Texas residency. Fifty individuals from each of six major economic-ethnic groups in Austin were interviewed by the social work students in the summer of 1966. The respondents were selected by random stratified sampling procedures using the census block as the primary sampling unit.

Sampling Procedure

Ideally, the intentions of the study could have been best served by sampling from populations that were stratified in terms of the two criteria of wealth (income) and ethnicity. That is, it would have been ideal if high-income, middle-income, and low-income Anglos, Negroes, and Mexican-Americans all could have been interviewed. Unfortunately, there were few high-income Negro and Mexican families in the Austin population. Middle-income Mexican families could not be located by census blocks since they did not live predominately in any one section of the city. Therefore, the ideal was compromised by reality and respondents who were identifiable by census block

information were selected from each of the following six strata for interviewing: 1) upper-income Anglos, 2) middle-income Anglos, 3) low-income Anglos, 4) middle-income Negroes, 5) low-income Negroes, and 6) low-income Mexican-Americans.

Fifty respondents in each stratum, a total of 300 people, were interviewed. The term "Anglo" was used to designate those who were neither Negroes nor individuals with Spanish surnames. "Mexican-Americans" were individuals with Spanish surnames. The criterion employed for the identification of the population of high-income families was the 1960 census blocks with property values averaging \$25,000 or above. Three census tracts had average property values of \$25,000, but were excluded because they were occupied mainly by university students. None of the remaining 99 blocks designated "high-income" were populated predominantly by Negro or Mexican-American families. Six of the 99 high-income blocks were randomly selected and served as the blocks from which sample respondents were drawn. Middle-income families were occupants of 1960 census blocks with average property values of \$12,000 to \$16,000 inclusive, or rental values of \$60-\$99 per month inclusive, or both. Six blocks of predominantly Anglo families and six blocks of predominantly Negro families were randomly chosen for canvassing. The criterion for identifying the low-income blocks was average housing values of \$5,000 and below, rental values of \$30 per month or less, or both. Low-income Anglo, Negro, and Mexican-American families were interviewed in census blocks with these housing values. A method was devised for obtaining respondents from the blocks which would insure, insofar as possible, a random selection of respondents from blocks chosen for canvassing. Only adults were questioned.

This sampling procedure eliminated from consideration all families in the Austin population whose residences had a property value of greater than \$5,000 but less than \$12,000 and all families whose residences were valued at more than \$16,000 but less than \$25,000. The implication of the exclusion of these families from the population sampled is that in the interpretation of responses among low-income, middle-income, and high-income families any consistency in the *direction* of differences would not be modified had the excluded population been included in the study.

The graduate students who conducted the interviews were provided letters from the Dean of the School of Social Work to present to the respondents. Each letter identified the student

and legitimized his purpose. There seemed to have been no problem in gaining interviews, and the students reported good cooperation from the respondents contacted. Spanish-speaking and for the most part Mexican-American students interviewed in Spanish neighborhoods. Negro students did much of the interviewing of Negro respondents. Individual interviews varied from 30 minutes to over an hour. Three completed questionnaires were the maximum obtained by any interviewer in an evening. Five hundred and ninety-one total contacts and attempted contacts were made during the survey, including return calls, or slightly less than two calls per completed questionnaire. Of this 591 total, 80 refusals and 196 "not at home" contacts were reported. Thus, 315 questionnaires were completed. Of these, nine were voided for insufficient or incorrectly completed data and six were surplus and randomly excluded. The final sample of 300 was thus derived from 591 attempted contacts. There were only four out of a possible 24 census tracts in Austin in which there were no respondents questioned. These four included two tracts in the south, one in the central, and one in the north part of Austin.

Description of the City Where the Survey Was Conducted

The 1960 population of Austin, Texas, was 186,545 and, in 1970, 251,808. As the sixth largest city in Texas, Austin is unrepresentative of urban populations generally because a significant portion of its population is involved in and supported by the University of Texas and state governmental agencies. Almost one third of the employed labor force in Austin are government workers. Austin has nearly twice as many professional and technical workers as does the state of Texas as a whole. Additionally, the percentage of these Austinites with at least some college education is significantly greater than the proportion for the population in the state as a whole. There is a general consensus among the Anglo population, at least, that Austin is a "good" place to live; and, though social problems exist, they are not perceived by most as severe as they are in other Texas cities. The seat of Texas government is the capitol at Austin and the news media fully report the happenings at the capitol. Thus, one would expect that in terms of knowledge of the law, Austin would represent one of the most "enlightened" cities in Texas. And if Austin citizens, or any groups of Austin citizens, are less than knowledgeable about the law, one would expect that citizens of other cities in Texas would be even less knowledgeable than Austinites.

Description of the Interviewed Sample

Demographic information on the respondents surveyed was collected partly in order to verify that distinctly different economic/ethnic groups were selected and partly to better clarify the findings of the study. Information on sex, occupation and employment, age, education, religion, marital status, size of family, and length of Texas residency were noted by the interviewers. A thumb-nail description of each group surveyed is presented below.

Upper-Income Anglos. Twenty-six males and 24 females were interviewed. The mean age of the respondents was 50.14 years. In these households 38 (76%) husbands² and 12 (24%) wives were employed and 8 (16%) husbands and 34 (68%) wives were unemployed (no information on the rest). The majority (76%) of husbands were professionals, semi-professionals, managers and proprietors, and 4 (8%) were skilled craftsmen, foremen, clerical, or sales personnel. One (2%) was classified occupationally as a protective service worker (policeman, fireman, military, etc.) and in seven cases (14%) no information was obtained or the question was not applicable. Forty-five respondents (90%) were married, one (2%) was divorced, two (4%) were separated, and two (4%) were single. Only two respondents (4%) in this group had not completed high school and no information was available on two others (4%). The rest (92%) had completed high school and 28 (56%) had completed college, 16 (32%) of these having done advanced college work. The large majority (76%) were Protestants and six (12%) gave no information as to their religious preference. Four (8%) were Catholic, one (2%) Jewish, and one other (2%) claimed some other religion. These respondents had an average of 2.3 children and an average length of Texas residency of 29.14 years.

Middle-Income Anglos. In this group, 30 males and 20 females were interviewed and the average age of respondents was 43.42 years. Most of the husbands were employed (74%). Fourteen percent were reported unemployed and for six (12%) no information was available. Thirty-eight percent of the husbands in these homes were identified as professionals, semi-professionals, proprietors, or managers, and 36% were skilled foremen and craftsmen or in clerical and sales occupations. Two (4%) were operatives and one (2%) was in protective services. No information was available on ten (20%). Forty-

eight percent of the women in the homes were unemployed housewives whereas 44% were working (no information on 8%). The educational status of the person in the house that was interviewed tended to be high school graduate or better, only 12 (24%) had not completed high school. The rest (76%) were high school graduates or better, 12 (24%) had completed college with three of these having done some graduate work. Almost all of the respondents were Protestants (90%) and the rest were Catholics. The fewest number of children had been born to this group — an average of 1.6. On the other hand, the respondents were often long-time Texas residents with an average of 34.56 years of residency.

Low-Income Anglos. Twenty-six males and 24 females were interviewed and mean age of respondents was 48.06 years. Sixty-two percent of the husbands were employed and 20% unemployed (for 18% no information was provided). The husbands' occupations reported were mostly blue collar or white collar — clerical, sales, foremen, craftsmen — (46%) although five (10%) were said to be professionals, semi-professionals, or proprietors. Eight percent were operatives, 8% were engaged in protective services and 4% were laborers. There was no information for the remaining 12 (24%) homes. Most of the women in the homes were unemployed housewives (58%) whereas 26% were employed (no information in 16% of the cases). The large majority of respondents (72%) were married (4% were single, 8% divorced, 14% widowed, and 2% separated). Sixty percent of the respondents were not high school graduates. Of the others, 32% had completed high school but not college, and an additional 8% had completed college. The group was overwhelmingly Protestant (90%), and of the remainder, 8% were Catholic and 2% claimed some other (but not Jewish) religion. Average number of children for the group was 2.5 and average length of Texas residency was 42.04 years.

Middle-Income Negroes. In this group were 22 males and 28 females whose average age was 38.86 years. Eighty-six percent of the husbands were employed and there was no report of unemployment, although for seven households (14%) no information was obtained. Twenty-four percent of the husbands' occupations were listed as professional, semi-professional, or proprietorships and 20% were in the clerical, sales, foremen, and craftsmen categories. Four percent reported the husbands to be operatives and 32% were in protective and non-protective service occupations. Six percent of the husbands were laborers

and no information accounted for the remaining 14% of the cases. The respondents were mostly married (86%), the rest divorced (4%), widowed (6%) or separated (4%). A majority of these households also contained working wives (60%) and the remainder of the wives (40%) were reported unemployed. The educational level of the group was generally beyond high school, only 18% had not completed the twelfth grade. Of the rest (82%) ten had gone to but not completed college, 15 were college graduates, 11 of these with an advanced year or masters degree. Reported religious preference was primarily Protestant (92%), the remainder Catholic. The respondents had an average of 2.3 children and a 34.12-year average Texas residency.

Low-Income Negroes. This group was quite different from the foregoing in terms of the demographic information obtained. Twenty-two males and 28 females with an average age of 53.02 years were interviewed. Although 60% of the male members of the households were employed, 22% were unemployed and there was no information in the remaining 18% of the cases. No husband was listed in the professional, semi-professional, managerial, or proprietor occupations and only one (2%) was listed in the foreman/craftsman category. Eight percent of the husbands were listed as operatives but the larger proportion of the group were in the lower two occupational rungs (28% services and protective services and 22% laborers). For 40% of the households no husband's occupation was noted. The women in these households also tended to be employed (54%). In 34% of the cases wives were not working and for the rest (12%) no information was obtained. In all but two cases (4%) educational information was obtained and most respondents (78%) had not completed high school. Of the rest (18%) only one had completed college. Almost all of these respondents were Protestants (98%), only one claimed a different religion (classified as "other," i.e., not Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish). This group also had by far the largest average of offspring (7.7) and the longest average Texas residency, 51.34 years.

Low-Income Mexican-Americans. In this final respondent group, 25 males and 25 females were questioned. Their average age was 39.98 years and husbands in the households were usually employed (74%) although 10% were unemployed and the remaining 16% provided no information or the question was not applicable. Most of the respondents were married (76%); however, six (12%) were single, three (6%) were divorced, and three (6%) were widowed. Most women in the homes were

unemployed (70%), only 20% were working (no information or not applicable, 10%). This was the least well educated group, 44% of the respondents had not completed elementary school and another 44% had completed elementary but not high school. Only six (12%) had completed high school. None had gone on to do any college work. Ninety percent of the respondents were Catholic, the remainder were Protestant. The average number of children was 3.0 and 38.26 years was the average length of Texas residency.

In summary, it should be noted that since a respondent had to be 21 years old and one of the primary adults in the family to be interviewed, the average ages were, of course, older than would have been the case for the population as a whole. The high-income Anglos and low-income Negroes were the oldest groups interviewed. The low-income Negroes indeed represented the "old South" perhaps to a greater extent than did the other groups. Almost all respondents except for some in the high- and middle-Anglo groups had lived in Texas all their lives, although not necessarily in Austin. This indicates that the last four sub-samples above were made up of those mainly "born and reared" in Texas and thus should have been in the best position to become acquainted with Texas laws. (Compare average ages with average Texas residency.) Since Austin, up to the time of the survey, was not usually a place to move "to" when young, but rather to move "from" to seek better employment opportunities elsewhere, the settled residents who remain or move in are often older, retired, or state government employees. Austin had few large industries in the 1960s and salaries were probably near to if not the lowest for urban Texas cities. It should also be remembered that the neighborhoods where students lived were excluded from the survey as well as were certain other intermediate income groups. The education and employment/occupation data on the above respondents were indeed distinguishing and these measures are usually regarded as the best indicants of social class. All respondents, of course, met ethnic group membership criteria for the groups they were a part of, for if they had not, they would not have been interviewed. Thus, it seems that the respondents interviewed did generally reflect the characteristics which were hoped for when the sampling procedure was delineated.

Results and Discussion

The first question asked of the respondents was, "We all know that people in this country are governed by a set of laws.

What do you think the *purpose* for having laws is?" The respondents could give single or multiple answers to this question. Table 1 indicates the number³ and types of responses made in answer to this question by strata. Most respondents indicate that the purpose of the law is "social order." Well over one third of the respondents mentioned social order, with Anglos being more likely to mention this as a purpose than non-Anglos.

TABLE 1: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF HAVING LAWS? FREQUENCY* OF VARIOUS RESPONSES BY STRATUM

Responses	Strata						Total N=300
	High In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Anglo (N=50)	Low In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Mexican (N=50)	
Social Order	23	32	23	13	16	15	122
Regulation & Control	15	16	14	23	10	12	90
Protection	9	10	6	14	17	13	69
Civil Rights & Liberties	9	10	3	7	4	1	34
Welfare	2	0	5	3	6	9	25
No answer, unclear	2	1	3	0	3	6	15

*Multiple answers possible.

Regulation and control were mentioned by 90 people, particularly members of the high- and middle-income groups. Sixty-nine of the 300 people mentioned protection, with non-Anglo groups being more likely to mention this than Anglo groups. Welfare was listed by only 25 people, and civil rights and liberties by only 34; in the latter case, 22 Anglos and only 12 non-Anglos mentioned civil rights and liberties as a purpose of the law. This is rather surprising, since most of the civil rights legislation directly concerns these minority groups. Fifteen people were unable to give a purpose for the law at all, or were not able to give an answer which seemed related to the question. No other purposes were mentioned by the 300 people interviewed. If these results are in any way indicative of attitudes prevalent at the time, one could make the following generalization: in the mid-sixties these citizens saw the purpose of the law mainly as an instrument of control, order, regulation—a force for social control which may or may not have been linked to the role of law as a force for guaranteeing liberties and "the pursuit of happiness." It is likely that these people would have agreed with other purposes for the law had they been pointed out to them, the above indicating only the purposes respondents identified without guidance in the interview situation. The method used, however, probably identified the most salient purposes for the law that citizens envisioned or

were able to articulate; and the results convey a picture of the law in the minds of these citizens as a coercive force to prevent social evil in the sense of regression from the status quo rather than as a constructive force for the enhancement of their ideas of social good. Perhaps most people in our society conceive of all "rules" in this way; the positive functions of rules may be more subtle and the coercive functions more obvious to persons who must abide (or not abide) by them.

Another open-ended question asked was, "Are there problems that should be taken care of by the law but aren't? (If yes) What kinds?" Forty-four percent of the individuals gave a negative, unclear or "no answer" to this question. Almost one sixth gave a "yes" answer but were unable to be specific about problems that were not being tackled by the law. Of the remaining 120, 33 individuals complained of a general inadequacy of law enforcement, and 21 mentioned inadequate enforcement of traffic and safety laws. Twenty-five mentioned that various laws should be made more strict, whereas only two felt more leniency was called for. Seven said that various laws should be revised. As to specific problem areas mentioned, 27 respondents felt that more should be done in the area of juvenile delinquency. Eleven Anglos and only five non-Anglos mentioned that additional problems related to discrimination should be tackled; six felt that something should be done about moral

TABLE 2: ARE THERE PROBLEMS THAT SHOULD BE TAKEN CARE OF BY THE LAW, BUT AREN'T? FREQUENCY* OF VARIOUS RESPONSES BY STRATUM

Responses	Strata						Total N=300
	High In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Anglo (N=50)	Low In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Mexican (N=50)	
No answer, unclear	9	5	7	5	1	7	34
No	13	13	13	20	26	12	97
Yes — Not specified	8	12	11	6	4	8	49
Yes — Revisions	3	1	2	0	1	0	7
Yes — Stricter	8	3	5	3	4	2	25
Yes — More lenient	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Inadequate enforcement (general)	4	7	4	7	3	8	33
Inadequate enforcement (traffic & safety)	3	4	4	1	1	8	21
Juvenile Delinquency	2	1	4	6	6	8	27
Moral issues	1	0	4	1	0	0	6
Discrimination	4	5	2	1	2	2	16
New laws	1	1	1	0	1	0	4
Other	3	1	1	3	3	0	11

*Multiple answers possible.

issues, and only four suggested new laws. The picture again was one of a general attitude calling for more strictness, more enforcement (i.e., more order, regulation, and control), with the individuals interviewed seeing the social control purposes of the law in need of strengthening. The breakdown of responses to this question by stratum is presented in Table 2. There do not seem to be any great differences by stratum, although the Negro groups were more likely to give a "no" response to the question; and 20 of the 27 persons mentioning that something more should be done about juvenile delinquency were in the non-Anglo groups. Anglos again were more likely to mention action relative to discrimination than were non-Anglo groups. Here again the responses to this question were left open-ended, and the individuals could give multiple answers.

The respondents were asked further, "Are you satisfied with the laws as they are? (If yes) Do you mean that they are all OK? (If no) What laws would you change and what would you change them to be?" Finally, they were asked, "If you don't like a law, is there anything you can do to help change it?" One hundred fifty-four individuals said they were "satisfied with the laws as they are," with the most privileged groups (the high- and middle-income Anglos) expressing the least satisfaction (see Table 3). Over half of all individuals in

TABLE 3: ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE LAWS AS THEY ARE?
FREQUENCY* OF VARIOUS RESPONSES BY STRATUM

Responses	Strata						Total (N=300)
	High In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Anglo (N=50)	Low In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Mexican (N=50)	
No answer, unclear	4	3	1	1	5	1	15
Yes	8	15	30	34	36	31	154
No, not specific	7	4	5	4	3	6	29
Moral & ethical issues	3	2	0	1	0	0	6
Personal, civil liberties	10	3	5	2	1	5	26
Restrictions of business free enterprise	4	1	0	2	1	0	8
Removal/Change	7	6	4	3	0	0	20
Penal code — too lenient	11	14	5	1	4	6	41
Penal code — too punitive	3	5	3	3	0	0	14
Welfare — too much	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Welfare — too little	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Judicial encroachment	5	0	0	0	0	1	6
Civil Rights — too much	4	2	0	1	0	1	8
Civil Rights — too little	1	0	0	3	1	0	5
States rights	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

*Multiple answers possible.

the low-income and minority groups expressed satisfaction with the laws "as they are," and very few who answered "no" were able to single out any particular dissatisfaction. When specific dissatisfactions were mentioned, they concerned two issues for the most part—the penal code and personal and civil liberties. Forty-one individuals mentioned that they felt the penal code to be too lenient, the larger portion being in the Anglo group. Only 14 mentioned that they felt the code to be too strict. The high-income Anglos were more likely to mention problems related to personal and civil liberties, and 20 individuals suggested that various laws should be removed from the books or changed. The small number of other types of responses to this question can be ascertained from the table.

Table 4 summarizes how these individuals would have gone about changing the laws if they did not like them. The question specifically asked if they thought that they could help change the laws, and, if so, how. As can be seen in Table 4, 32 individuals gave an unclear or no answer at all to the question. Sixty-seven individuals, 52 of whom were in the non-Anglo groups, gave "no" as an answer to the question. Only the middle- and upper-income Anglo groups gave a very small number of "no" answers. Of those who gave a "yes" answer, only two were not specific about what they would do. It is interesting to note that particularly the Anglo groups said they would contact public officials and organizations. Eighty-eight Anglos, as opposed to only 25 non-Anglos, mentioned that they would choose this avenue to seek change. Sixty-four persons or 21% said that they would vote for a change. This is a less direct way to secure change than some of the other methods mentioned and high-income Anglos mentioned this strategy least often. A question posed in another part of the questionnaire asked these individuals what they would do if they were denied the right to vote. Table 5 lists their answers. Thirty-three, or 11% of the 300 respondents, gave a response to this latter question indicating that they would "do nothing," and 44 gave an "unclear" or "no" answer. This constitutes 77 of 300, or 26%. If one fourth of the subjects in these groups said they would "do nothing" if they were denied the right to vote or were unclear about what to do, a much larger proportion might actually have done nothing if such a situation had confronted them. At least, there is a definite possibility that this would have been the case. Although the lower-income non-Anglo groups mentioned the vote as one of the major ways they

would seek change, most (over one half) would seemingly not have known what action to take if they were denied the right to vote.

TABLE 4: WOULD YOU TRY TO CHANGE LAWS IF YOU DID NOT LIKE THEM? IF SO, HOW? FREQUENCY* OF VARIOUS RESPONSES BY STRATUM

Responses	Strata						Total (N=300)
	High In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Anglo (N=50)	Low In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Negro (N=50)	In- Low come Mexican (N=50)	
No answer, unclear	4	3	5	5	3	12	32
No	3	3	9	11	24	17	67
Yes, not specific	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Vote for change	4	12	13	14	13	8	64
Contact attorney	3	1	2	6	1	4	17
Contact public organizations	35	33	20	12	8	5	113
Petition, register, spread complaint	9	6	9	13	3	5	45
Pressure groups, meetings	11	8	3	9	3	1	35
Other	4	1	0	0	1	0	6

*Multiple answers possible.

TABLE 5: WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE NOT ALLOWED TO VOTE EVEN THOUGH YOU MET ALL THE VOTER REQUIREMENTS? FREQUENCY* OF VARIOUS RESPONSES BY STRATUM

Responses	Strata						Total (N=300)
	High In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Anglo (N=50)	Low In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Mexican (N=50)	
No answer, unclear	4	6	10	3	6	15	44
Lawyer	19	16	6	13	4	6	64
Court or Judge	8	7	3	2	11	7	38
Check possible resources	3	7	0	6	5	3	24
National Rep.	6	5	0	9	2	1	23
State Rep.	4	6	7	9	4	2	32
Local Rep.	7	6	4	9	0	1	27
Election officials	12	7	11	2	8	6	46
Do nothing	0	2	10	4	9	8	33
Other	9	2	2	2	3	3	21

*Multiple answers possible.

A majority of upper- and middle-income Anglos said they would work for changes in laws by contacting public officials and organizations. Fewer in the other groups mentioned this approach. Only seven of the 35 individuals who mentioned pressure groups and meetings were in the low-income groups. In fact, the low-income Negro and Mexican-American persons questioned gave few examples other than the vote in answer to this question and the majority of the low-income minority

respondents gave a "no" or unclear answer to the question. This indicates that the low-income non-Anglo groups in particular do not know how one goes about changing the laws. Perhaps many changes in laws are changes brought about by the upper-income groups without much feedback or influence from the low-income, particularly non-Anglo, groups but one cannot conclude that in order to change this situation all that must be done is to remove external barriers preventing the individuals in question from action. Some thought to an educational program to remove internal "knowledge" barriers may also be in order.

The second major part of the questionnaire consisted of what was really a knowledge test about selected laws which were considered important. There were 30 questions, so an individual could get a "score" ranging from 0 to 30. Attitudes toward these 30 statements were also assessed. Table 6 indicates the mean number of correct answers on the 30 test questions by stratum. Also indicated is the degree of reported attitudinal congruence (agreement) with the *correct* answers and the mean number of correct responses to the questions on which there was *also* agreement. This last measure may be the most critical one, for it indicates how many laws on the average people had actual knowledge of and they *also agreed with*, and one would expect that an individual who both knows a law and agrees with it is most likely to abide by that law. It can be seen in Table 6 that low-income minority group members were accurate on only a little over one third of the questions and that in general knowledge increased with economic rank and/or majority group membership. Also all respondent groups agreed with more laws than they *knew* they agreed with! This is reflected in the discrepancies of means between row two (attitudinal congruence) and row three (knowledge plus attitudinal congruence).

TABLE 6: ACCURACY AND AGREEMENT MEAN SCORES ON A KNOWLEDGE TEST (30 ITEMS) BY STRATUM

	Strata					
	High In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Anglo (N=50)	Low In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Mexican (N=50)
Correct Knowledge	18.94	17.62	16.94	17.62	12.86	12.78
Attitudinal Con- gruence With Laws	20.76	20.74	18.36	19.14	16.68	17.16
Knowledge + Atti- tudinal Congruence	15.84	15.54	14.56	14.48	10.34	10.60

Analysis of variance was utilized to determine the significance of differences between groups on each of the three measures, i.e., (1) Knowledge, (2) Attitudinal Congruence Scores, (3) Knowledge plus Attitudinal Congruence Scores. Analyses of variance for overall group differences and the difference between specific groups are summarized in Table 7. Since there were missing cells, a 3 X 3 analysis was not possible for each measure. Therefore, orthogonal weighting coefficients were utilized to make the five comparisons possible (five degrees of freedom) for each score.

In general the Table indicates that the high- and middle-income groups scored significantly higher than the three low-income groups on knowledge, attitude, and knowledge plus attitude measures. The high- and middle-income groups did not differ except on one measure; middle-income Negro attitudes were not as congruent with the laws as were middle- and high-income Anglo attitudes. Among low-income groups Anglos scored higher on all three measures than did Negroes and Mexicans who did not differ from each other. For the means on each measure by stratum, the reader should reexamine Table 6.

TABLE 7: SUMMARY OF ANALYSES OF VARIANCE

	F Values Obtained		
	(1) Knowledge	(2) Attitude	(3) Knowledge + Attitude
Overall Groups (Strata)	19.55*	16.16*	14.08*
Orthogonal Comparisons			
Low-Income Anglos vs. Low-Income Negroes and Mexicans	31.68*	7.40*	26.08*
Low-Income Negroes vs. Low-Income Mexicans	.01	.62	.08
High-Income Anglos vs. Middle-Income Anglos	2.44	.00	.11
High-Income Anglos, Middle- Income Anglos and Negroes vs. Low-Income Anglos, Negroes, and Mexicans	61.10*	63.56*	41.37*
High- and Middle-Income Anglos vs. Middle-Income Negroes	.81	9.25*	1.08

* $p < .01$, all other F's not significant.

Some interesting specifics make the meaning of these results clearer. Question 1, for example, stated, "Under Texas law, a person, because of his color or his nationality, can be prohibited from living where he wants." The respondents could respond with a "yes," "no," or "don't know" answer. In reality, there was no Texas law preventing open housing at the time — and such a law would be unconstitutional — thus the correct answer was "no." Yet, as can be seen from Table 8, many

members of the ethnic minority groups who were questioned thought there was such a law (50% or more in the two Negro groups). Furthermore, most Negroes thought that there should *not* be such a law, as one would expect. Table 9 depicts the response patterns for this first question in a way comparable to Table 6. The results indicate that a majority of the respondents in each stratum believed that there should *not* be a law prohibiting people, because of race or nationality, from living where they want. Yet, a majority of Negroes questioned and a large minority in the other groups thought such a law actually existed. This confusion between that which is practiced or, per-

TABLE 8: NUMBER BY STRATUM GIVING EACH RESPONSE PATTERN TO OPEN HOUSING QUESTION: "UNDER TEXAS LAW A PERSON BECAUSE OF HIS COLOR OR NATIONALITY CAN BE PROHIBITED FROM LIVING WHERE HE WANTS"

Response Pattern Knowl- edge Atti- tude		Strata					
		High In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Anglo (N=50)	Low In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Mexican (N=50)
Yes	Yes	6	5	5	2	4	7
Yes	No**	11	14	13	22	19	12
Yes	?	1		1	2	2	1
No*	Yes	5	5	5	2	1	4
No*	No**+	25	22	18	19	19	21
No*	?			3			1
?	Yes			2			
?	No**	1	4	2	2	3	4
?	?	1		1	1	2	

*Correct Knowledge.

**Attitude Congruence.

+Knowledge + Attitude Congruence on this question would be indicated by a "No-No" response.

TABLE 9: NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS IN EACH STRATUM WHO WERE CORRECT ABOUT AND/OR NOT IN AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: "UNDER TEXAS LAW A PERSON BECAUSE OF HIS COLOR CAN BE PROHIBITED FROM LIVING WHERE HE WANTS"

Response Pattern	Strata					
	High In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Anglo (N=50)	Low In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Mexican (N=50)
Correct Knowledge	30	27	26	21	20	26
Attitudinal Congruence*	37	40	33	43	41	37
Knowledge + Atti- tudinal Congruence	25	22	18	19	19	21

*It should be kept in mind that Attitudinal Congruence for statements where the correct answer was "no" as in this question means that the people agree with what was correct and not with the incorrect statement itself.

haps, what they have been told and what is actually the case could have prevented Negroes from even seeking housing in non-Negro areas of the city. It probably affected their attitudes toward the law as well.

Another question was, "Texas law prohibits Negroes from teaching white children in the schools." The correct answer was "no" and Negro teachers were in fact teaching white children in some of the Austin public schools. Table 10 shows the answers received for this question. A larger proportion of all groups had correct knowledge on this question, the three low-income groups being less knowledgeable than the others. A large number also felt that there should not be a law prohibiting Negro teachers from teaching white children. Yet those who felt this way had a gap in knowledge, since many (14) in the low-income Negro group (and 29 in all groups together) seemed not to know that the law agreed with their opinions. Of those sampled who thought there *should* be a law prohibiting this practice (48 persons in all), the greater number were in the low-income Anglo and Mexican-American groups. Specifically, 15 low-income Mexican-Americans and 14 low-income Anglos felt that there should be a law against Negroes teaching whites. Three persons in each of the two Negro groups agreed with them. Six upper-income Anglos and seven middle-income Anglos agreed. The remaining respondents offered no opinion (?) on this question.

TABLE 10: NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS IN EACH STRATUM WHO WERE CORRECT ABOUT AND/OR IN AGREEMENT WITH TEXAS LAWS REGARDING NEGROES TEACHING WHITES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Response Pattern	Strata					
	High In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Anglo (N=50)	Low In- come Anglo (N=50)	Middle In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Negro (N=50)	Low In- come Mexican (N=50)
Correct Knowledge	38	46	31	44	30	24
Attitudinal Congruence	43	43	33	47	45	33
Knowledge + Atti- tudinal Congruence	32	39	24	42	28	21

A question on the poll tax shows that knowledge of laws may be a critical factor in behavior. The statement posed was, "In order to vote for President, a person is required by Texas law to have a poll tax." Due to federal legislation, the answer to this question was "no" at the time of the survey. Only 12 of 50 low-income Negroes knew this, however, and only seven

of the low-income Mexican-Americans. The other groups did a little better — 22 middle-income Negroes knew the correct answer, 26 low-income Anglos, 36 middle-income Anglos, and 34 high-income Anglos. Because this law had not been in effect in past elections it appears that there was a “cultural lag” in knowledge with the most disadvantaged groups being last to know of the changes. Even more striking in their variance from reality were the answers to the following question: “Texas law requires a person to let the police look through his house whenever the police want to.” Of course, the answer is “no.” However, 20 low-income Negroes (40%) thought the answer was “yes.” A similar question involving civil liberties was, “Texas law requires that when a person is arrested, he must cooperate with the police by telling them if he has done anything against the law.” The answer is, again, “no,” but 24 of the low-income Negroes (48%) thought the answer was “yes” and 32 (63%) of the low-income Mexican-Americans thought the answer was “yes.” Five, eight, and 18 of the high-, middle-, and low-income Anglo groups, respectively, thought the answer was “yes” and 22 middle-income Negroes thought the answer was “yes.” Even more surprising was the fact that nine, 12, and 19 Anglos felt that this should be the case (opinion) and 25 middle-income Negroes, 19 low-income Negroes, and 32 low-income Mexican-Americans thought the same. The results for this latter question seem to indicate that there was *both* ignorance of the law and a lack of sympathy with the policy underlying it.

The many additional findings of this research project regarding specific laws would be hard to summarize in a few pages⁴ but some conclusions seemed warranted. First, we observe that the low-income minority groups did no better than chance in answering the 30 questions posed to them about the laws that supposedly affect their lives. This was so despite the fact that the questions involved areas of law which seemed “basic” and not complex or “irrelevant” in terms of their implications for the average citizen. Many precautions were taken both during the interviews and in the pre-planning to insure that the respondents understood the questions. The language of the questionnaire was simplified several times after pre-testing to minimize communications problems. Yet even the more advantaged persons surveyed missed over one third of the questions. Thus, the second hypothesis is supported by the findings. The first hypothesis is also supported, although its impact on behavior must be left for further research. It would

be no cause for wonder, however, to discover that behavior would vary with knowledge of the law. Part of the problem of ignorance may be that there is no well-developed structure for teaching ordinary individuals the specifics of the legal process. That is why the law is so often left to the lawyers, one supposes.

The majority of the low-income individuals questioned were not high school graduates. Thus, to reach such people through traditional educational institutions, one would have to build into the curriculum of the public schools a legal education program to be completed in the earlier grades. With such a system, it would be difficult to find a way to point out changes in laws as they occurred and also to differentiate between laws and "practices." There also is an arguable need for educating people to the law as an avenue for social change. If the results of this study are typical, many citizens do not fully appreciate the law as a constructive social process.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Obtainable from the authors upon request.

² Not all male and female adults were "husbands" and "wives" since some male and female heads of households were single or not present for other reasons. However, for ease of expression "husbands" and "wives" will include a few cases in this and subsequent groups where the person referred to was the primary male or female adult. Occupation also includes a listing for some husbands who perhaps were deceased yet their widows gave the occupation in which the husband was working when alive. This is also the case for a very small number of divorced spouses in each group. In a few cases the "no information" category includes households where the question did not apply because no such person existed, as for example when the respondent was a single female and information on husband's occupation was being categorized.

³ The frequencies reported in Tables 1-5 indicate how many people gave a response in a particular category, but the strata totals add to more than fifty because one person may have given multiple answers to the question. For example, in Table 1, one person might have mentioned that purposes of the law are social order *and* protection.

⁴ A lengthy tabulation of results can be obtained from the authors.

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