

**The Law and the Poor: An Analysis of Legal Marginalization in a
Bay Area Community**

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Abstract

This paper describes some elements that characterize the relationship between the legal system and the Hispanic community of East Palo Alto and neighboring cities. First, it focuses on the population's legal needs. Secondly, it reviews the contacts that the Hispanic community has with the legal system and tries to assess their impact in the population. Finally, the paper seeks to describe the way in which the legal system is perceived by the community. In my conclusions, I will argue that an assessment that includes an analysis of the population's legal needs, their contacts with the legal system, as well as the way they perceive it, is useful to determine how marginalized the population is from the legal system. The conclusions will also advance some hypothesis about the current situation of the target population. I will argue that the population usually understands their legal needs as more of a nuisance than a right. In other words, there does not seem to be a sense of entitlement regarding their legal rights. I will also argue that their contacts with the legal system provide them with a wide variety of perspectives of legality. Even when these contacts have a potential to improve their conditions or vindicate certain rights, there seems to be a lack of involvement of the population. Finally, I will contend that there is a rather positive image of legal institutions in the community. Broadly speaking, people tend to believe that the system's function is to produce justice.

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