A Number Everyone Should Know – College Educational Attainment Percentages

The percentage of Bachelor’s Degree recipients is extremely important in American society today. According to the article “Family Background and Income in Adulthood” by Harding, et. al., the educational attainment of your parents influences the amount of income your family will make. In addition to this, Pakulski and Waters contend in the “Death of Class” that education explains a greater amount of what matters for occupational prestige than income does. Prestige, or status, aids in defining the class we associate with, according to Weber. (Even though this is in striking opposition to Marx, who thought that the means of production caused class struggle, it is appropriate to consider since a middle class has emerged, which Marx did not take into account.) Frank Parkin also theorizes that a form of social closure, namely education, is currently in place in professions as a way to exclude people from certain occupations. Thus, education plays a vital role in our lives: education limits the jobs that we can apply for, thus putting a threshold on the occupational status and status groups that we can obtain, which determine the class to which we belong.

As of 2005, when the American Community Survey was taken across the United States, 27.2% of Americans over 25 had an educational attainment of a bachelor’s degree or higher; this is the number that is crucially important. I must make a note here that since students normally graduate from college around 22 years of age, this percentage does not display all of Americans with a Bachelor’s Degree. Furthermore, twenty-seven percent may seem like a relatively small number of Americans over 25 with

a college degree, but since the 1940s this percentage has risen dramatically. In 1940, the percentage of Americans over 25 with Bachelor Degree was at 4.6%. The largest percentage gain during a census year since then was from 1970 to 1980 when it rose 5.5%, from 10.7 to 16.2%. In 2000, the percentage of Bachelor’s Degree holders in the United States was 24.4%\(^2\). Thus, having grown 2.8% in 5 years, if this rate of growth continues, then I predict that over 30% of Americans (over 25) will have attained a Bachelor’s Degree by 2010. Thus, 27.2% is a very important number since it symbolizes that Americans are continually placing an emphasis on education, in order to secure occupations in the hopes of advancing their lifestyle. I believe already we are revolutionizing the way we think about education. Not long ago, a high school graduate would go to college to set himself/herself apart. Now, college students feel almost obligated to go to graduate school in order to gain the educational experience needed to avoid the social closure on their occupational opportunities.

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