

**AND GRINGO JUSTICE FOR ALL?
LATINO YOUTH IN WASHINGTON STATE'S JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM**

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Executive Summary, November 27, 2006

"I was a normal kid, but I wanted to be a big guy. I got a lot of respect, but I lost a lot of friends. Now, I regret everything. When I grow up I want to be a good dad and teach my kids not to be in gangs." – 15 year old Latino youth in juvenile detention

Topic: My research focuses on Latino youth in the juvenile justice system. It addresses questions of why Latino youth are disproportionately represented in the juvenile system compared to their proportion in the general population. Specifically, this report examines how race and ethnicity impact case processing and how Latino youth receive differential treatment within the juvenile system.

Methods: My research in journal articles and other scholarly sources indicated that Latino youth are not only overrepresented throughout the juvenile system, but their proportion tends to increase through subsequent stages of case processing. I found racial disparities were particularly pronounced at arrest, intake, detention and confinement in secure facilities. I obtained the majority of my state and national data through annual reports issued by the Washington State Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee and the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. To gain a perspective of juvenile justice procedures and experiences, I interviewed an Intake Officer at the Walla Walla Juvenile Justice Center and two Latino youth with prior involvement in the juvenile system. I investigated efforts to reduce the overrepresentation of minority youth through successful measures adopted in counties in Oregon, California and Washington with funding through the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI).

Findings: My research revealed Latino youth are overrepresented in the juvenile system for a number of reasons. High rates of poverty, family disorganization, underserved mental health needs, school drop-out, and gang involvement put Latino youth at heightened risk for delinquent behavior. Biased law enforcement practices further increase their propensity to come into contact with the law. Yet Latino youth become further disadvantaged once they enter the system. Extralegal factors such as socioeconomic means and familial wherewithal continue to impact juvenile case processing. Racial stereotyping, cultural illiteracy and language barriers further generate a differential administration of justice for Latino youth. Juvenile justice systems are often ill-equipped to deal with Latino youth and their families, lacking culturally competent services and certified court translators.

Recommendations: The successes of JDAI in a number of jurisdictions reveal a number of feasible reforms to reduce Latino overrepresentation, including; using risk-based, race neutral screening criteria to guide decision making, enhancing culturally competent detention alternatives, partnering with service providers based in minority communities to provide a continuum of aftercare for minority youth, and recruiting bilingual and bicultural juvenile justice personnel.

Community Partner: Vance Norsworthy Juvenile Court Counselor, Walla Walla Juvenile Justice Center

