



On Equal Terms: The Constitutional Politics of Educational Opportunity

Douglas S. Reed

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Since *Brown v. Board of Education* and the desegregation battles of the 1960s and 1970s, the legal pursuit of educational opportunity in the United States has been framed largely around race. But for nearly thirty years now, a less-noticed but controversial legal campaign has been afoot to equalize or improve the resources of poorly funded schools. This book examines both the consequences of efforts to use state constitutional provisions to reduce the "resource segregation" of American schools and the politics of the opposition to these decisions.

On Equal Terms compares the relative success of school finance lawsuits to the project of school desegregation and explores how race and class present sharply different obstacles to courts. Since a 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that effectively deferred to the states in the matter of educational equity, about a third of state judiciaries have mandated reform of state-level educational funding systems. Douglas Reed analyzes both the rhetoric of reform and the varying effects of these controversial decisions while critiquing the courts' failure to more clearly define educational equity.

Well-written with keen insight throughout, the book concludes with an intriguing policy proposal that acknowledges obstacles to such efforts. This proposal aims to enhance education by fostering racial and economic integration locally. Setting the stage for a more coherent debate on this controversial issue and expanding our understanding of constitutional design, *On Equal Terms* will have far-reaching implications for law, public policy, politics, and not least, the future of American education.

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