

## It's time to put ethnic studies on a new track

by *Tom Horne* - Aug. 10, 2008 12:00 AM  
State schools superintendent

First, let's spend a minute on underlying philosophy. I believe people are individuals, not exemplars of racial groups.

What is important about people is what they know, what they can do, their ability to appreciate beauty, their character and not what race into which they are born. They are entitled to be treated that way. It is fundamentally wrong to divide students up according to their racial group and teach them separately.

In the summer of 1963, having recently graduated from high school, I participated in the civil-rights march on Washington, in which the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. stated that he wanted his children to be judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. That has been a fundamental principal for me my entire life, and ethnic studies teach the opposite.

I welcome the chance given to me by The Arizona Republic to debate in writing against Augustine F. Romero. I would love to debate against him orally. I have been given firsthand accounts of the kinds of things he does to students, having written about them

publicly a number of times, and I have never seen a denial from him.

Hector Ayala was born in Mexico and is an excellent English teacher at Cholla High School. He reports that Romero accused him of being the "White man's agent" and that when Romero was a teacher, he taught a separatist political agenda. Romero's students told Ayala they were taught in raza studies to "not fall for the White man's traps." Anglo students complained to Ayala that they were "dissed" in Romero's class for being White. When Ayala asked them why they took a raza-studies class, they responded, "I dunno. I needed a social-studies class."

There is another teacher who no longer works in the Tucson Unified School District, who is Hispanic despite his Anglo name: John Ward. In an excellent series in The Republic , columnist Doug MacEachern quoted him:

"But the whole inference and tone was anger. (They taught students) that the United States was and still is a fundamentally racist country in nature, whose interests are contrary to those of Mexican-American kids.

"Individuals in this (ethnic studies) department are vehemently anti-Western culture. They are vehemently opposed to the United States and its power. They are telling students they are victims and that they

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should be angry and rise up. ...

"By the time I left that class, I saw a change (in the students). An angry tone. They taught them not to trust their teachers, not to trust the system."

Because Ward objected, he was accused of being a racist and removed from the class. He writes: "Unfortunately, I am not the only one to have been intimidated by the raza-studies department in this way."

I have heard from many TUSD employees, complaining about the climate of fear created by Romero and the principals and TUSD board members aligned with him.

It is up to the citizens of Tucson to get the board to change or change the board.

**Tom Horne is state superintendent of public instruction.**

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