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:: OPINIONS &amp; LETTERS TO THE EDITOR online print edition



# Racist views are poor use of school funding

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In a column dated Jan. 29, 2007 "Let's ditch '50s mentality," *Republic* editorial writer Linda Valdez criticizes me for one of my lawyer's arguments in the *Flores* case.

This argument was that Tucson Unified should not be heard claiming that their English-language program suffers from lack of state funds. In fact, they waste huge amounts of the money they do receive on programs like "ethnic studies," including "Raza" studies. ("La Raza" means "the race.")

I want to thank her for opening up a vital philosophical issue, on which I would otherwise not have had the chance to comment.

Opposition to "ethnic studies" does not stem from a desire to return to the 1950s when White men ruled everything - the caricature contained in the column.

Rather it stems from an ideal: that what counts is the individual, not the group; that what matters about people is what they know; what they can do; what beauty they can appreciate; what is their character; not into which ethnic group they happen to be born.

The column implies that this ideal, which I believe to be the fundamental American ideal, has no place in the 21st century. I respectfully disagree.

I grew up in the civil rights era. In the summer of 1963, having just graduated from high school, I participated in the march on Washington, in which Martin Luther King gave his famous speech, that his son should be judged by the content of his character, not the color of his skin.

I have held onto this ideal in the face of subsequent fads: political correctness, identity politics, racial preferences, and "ethnic studies."

So, in education, I have promoted prejudice reduction programs, such as "World of Differences," that teach kids to treat each other as individuals, not as stereotypes of their ethnic groups.

"Raza" studies teach the opposite.

At Tucson Unified, it promotes a group called M.E.Ch.A. When I visited Tucson Magnet High School, the librarian was wearing a M.E.Ch.A. tee shirt, and Tucson Unified publications celebrate "MEChitsas."

MEChA's constitution and "plan" state, in part:

"We are Chicanos and Chicanas of Aztlán reclaiming the land of our birth (Chicano and Chicana Nation);  
2) Aztlán belongs to indigenous people, who are sovereign and not subject to a foreign culture . . . We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continent."

In other words, MEChA does not recognize the legitimacy of the United States.

I have firsthand accounts from teachers that "Raza" programs teach kids that they live in occupied Mexico, and warn them to "not fall for the White man's traps."

In my book, this is racism, to be condemned by decent people of all ethnicities.

In the meantime, I am responsible for the academic success of students of all ethnicities. It is therefore wholly appropriate for me to say to schools that they should use the funds they receive from the state for academics. - **Tom Horne**,

**Phoenix**

*The writer, a Republican, is Arizona superintendent of public instruction.*