

This piece was written for a local newspaper, *The Olympian* while serving as a member of the Diversity Panel from 2007 through 2008.

## **Social justice is about building communities of fairness**

By David Whitfield | The Olympian's Diversity Panel • Published May 30, 2008

I am considered by some a misfit, a rebel, and a trouble-maker. I am not fond of rules because I believe rules are made to be broken. I have no respect for the status quo; and I believe in iconoclasm — breaking traditions, especially when traditions no longer work, or work for only a select few.

By others, I am branded as different, excited and, at times, abrasive. What does this have to do with ignorance, arrogance, diversity and social justice?

As a social justice junkie, I refer to Senate Bill 1108, which is pending in Arizona Legislature. It deals with ethnicity and diversity in public education. Basically, this proposed law removes any sort of Chicano studies, African-American studies, ethnic studies, women's studies — among other programs — from any K-12 campus, community college or university throughout Arizona.

Wow! Sociocentricity rides again!

In social justice lore, institutions are a public system of rules. And the Arizona Legislature is no different; thus SB 1108 must be challenged, and the proposed law defeated.

Now you think that's Arizona and not Washington. My response to that is what Martin Luther King Jr. said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. ... Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

The proposed legislation further states that Arizona public schools would be barred from any teachings considered counter to democracy or Western civilization — to include U.S. values.

Whose values? As defined by whom? And on whose criteria is this proposed law based — mayors, students, senators?

This is ignorance, arrogance and myopia at its best. This legislation could eliminate literature or information about many Americans from curricula. How do we justify this type of tyranny? It reminds me of Kristallnacht — when the Nazis tried to destroy the presence of Jews. Is the purpose of this legislation to destroy the presence of those who are different just because they are different?

Chicano studies, African- American studies, ethnic studies and women's studies all are related to millions of Americans — their dreams, literature, belief systems, values, aspirations and pursuit of a better life. I believe other states will follow, similarly

to what happened with California's Proposition 209, which prohibited public institutions from considering race, sex, or ethnicity in admissions. Washington followed with Initiative 200, then Michigan with Proposal 2, though no quota system is flawless.

Will Arizona legislation help divide the nation? How will we pursue the national conversation on race, inequality, social injustice? What about the motto, "e pluribus unum," (out of many, one)? Or, "We're all in this thing together?"

The Arizona proposal violates this American motto.

What to do?

Social justice is partly about building communities of fairness, solidarity and citizenship. That's done by being inclusive, collaborative and open to different ideas and groups, not suppressing them. And social justice is also about understanding, sharing, etc. How do we foster justice by denying groups' presence in the education system? Finally, social justice is about fostering fairness (however that's defined). It's where one person's or one group's gains in status, power, goods, etc., will not render others any worse off than before.

Ignorance is our worse enemy; arrogance feeds it. The nation's diversity suffers from both.

