



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on March 28, 2011

Letters About Hispanic Students Stirs Controversy In Arizona

A substitute teacher in Arizona's public schools detonated a rhetorical bomb when a letter he wrote to a state senator was read on the state Senate's floor to support legislation requiring parents to prove their children are citizens of the United States before the children may enter school.

The letter, from a substitute teacher for the [Glendale Elementary School District outside Phoenix](#), claimed the Hispanic students in his class at [Harold W. Smith Elementary School](#) (picture at left) were unruly, out-of-control, unwilling to learn, and openly hostile to the United States.



The missive provoked the usual cries of racism from the usual suspects and an investigation by Glendale's school authorities to determine if the story the teacher told is true.

The Letter

[The letter](#) from substitute teacher Tony Hill to State Sen. [Russell Pearce](#), the legislator behind Arizona's famous [SB 1070](#), which gave police the power to determine the immigration status of anyone with whom they have lawful contact, is a damning indictment of the young Hispanic pupils in his class.

[Wrote Hill:](#)

During the Pledge of Allegiance I notice the vast majority of students refusing to stand and say the pledge. I asked the students why they refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance and they responded by saying, "we are Mexicans and Americans stole our land."

The teacher's instructions were for the students to read a few pages and answer the questions regarding Mark Twain in their history textbook and to finish their final drafts to Senator Steve Gallardo thanking him for his position on Illegal Immigration rights. Their teacher apparently had showed them a video with Senator Steve Gallardo and Lou Dobbs.

Most of the students came unprepared for class not possessing paper and pencil. I provided the students with paper and pencils only to have them wad-up the paper and throw it at each other along with their pencils.

The students' final drafts that I read were basically the same. Most of them stated they were in the country illegally, White Americans are racist, and that they came here for a better life. I asked the class if America adopted Mexico immigration laws would Americans still be consider racist?

That question they could not answer and called me a racist for asking it. I mentioned that my wife and children are Hispanic so how could I be racist? I asked the students to stop speaking Spanish in class because it was impolite to speak a language in front of people who may not speak that



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language. Their response was that Americans better learn Spanish and their customs because they are taking their land back from us.

When it came to completing the Mark Twain assignment only 10 students completed it out of all my classes. Most of the students refused to open the book, tore the pages out of the book, or threw the textbooks at each other. I thought are these the students we are trying to educate with taxpayers money. I have found that substitute teaching in these areas most of the Hispanic students do not want to be educated but rather [want to] be gang members and gangsters. They hate America and are determined to reclaim this area for Mexico. If we are able to remove the illegals out of our schools, the class sizes would be reduced and the students who wanted to learn would have a better chance to do so and become productive citizens.

Read On Senate Floor

Hill's letter is dated March 15. He landed in hot water when Republican state Sen. [Lori Klein read it](#) during a Senate debate over an omnibus immigration measure that would require parents to prove their children are American citizens before entering public school.

[Like another](#) bill requiring proof of citizenship on entering a hospital, [SB 1611](#) attempts to control the cost of illegal aliens, who [are draining](#) the state's budget with their demands for social services and education and rates of incarceration.

When [Klein read](#) the bill, she invited the usual charges of racism and intolerance.

State Sen. Steve Gallardo was aghast. "I don't think I've ever heard any floor speech similar to the one that was given out right now," he said, [according to](#) ABC News.

These students "do not have dreams to be gang members, they do not want to be thugs or whatever we want to phrase it as. These are good kids."

The bill "does one thing. It puts fear in our communities and our schools. That's all it does," he said.

Two state representatives also chimed in, reported television station ABC 15. "I was really shocked to hear the words coming out of Senator Klein's mouth," Rep. Ruben Gallego [told the station](#). "She owes all of Arizona an apology for interjecting such hateful words" into a "delicate" debate. [Added Rep. Catherine Miranda](#), "The words spoken go beyond recklessness and ignorance." The station reported that Miranda believes Hill's letter "also must reflect Klein's views of Hispanics."

An infuriated writer at the Tucson Citizen.com [declared that](#) Klein "made the connection that Mexican equals illegal immigrant and that Mexican equals un-America."

That's racist. Whether Klein is a racist is debatable but what she did was racist. There was no point to reading that letter during a debate on illegal immigration other than to vilify an entire class of people. She had no way of knowing whether those students were citizens or illegal immigrants.

What the all-white Republican legislative leadership in Arizona is failing to understand about their attempts to combat illegal immigration is that they're attacking an entire class of Americans based on their race and are cavalier about the effect and the reaction it's having in the Hispanic community.

Klein defended reading the letter on the floor of the Senate. "I believe that the taxpayers really should



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know what they are paying for and if there are kids there that are not there to learn and they are there to make political statement this is a problem," [she told](#) ABC 15. She also refused to apologize.

Glendale schools investigated Hill's charges, [the Associated Press reported](#), and claims the students to which he refers, which he taught on March 8 at Harold W. Smith Elementary School, deny everything he said.

District spokesman Jim Cummings said all students questioned in the inquiry have said everyone stood for the pledge and that none said their land had been stolen. "What we are finding here — and what we believe — is that the statements that he made weren't accurate," Cummings said.

The district believes the instance that Hill referred to in his letter came during his March 8 stint teaching reading, writing and social studies at Harold W. Smith Elementary School in Glendale.

Substitutes are required to fill out a report after their teaching stint, and Hill made no reference in the form to the Pledge of Allegiance or land claims made in the letter. He did state that students "refused to act proper" but didn't provide specifics in that category or in the section about "inappropriate behavior."

[Hill told](#) the *Arizona Republic* that he hadn't expected his letter to be read on the floor of the Senate, where it immediately became a public document and his name could no longer be withheld. "It just upset me that this was what's occurring ... to see this disregard for America and their hatred towards it and their entitlement," he said.

Sen. Pearce, the foe of illegal immigration, fiercely defended Hill's account, [the Republic reported](#):

"I am shocked that members of the minority are so quick to defend the actions of these troublemakers, and mock the frustration many teachers feel in bringing order to the classroom," Pearce said in his statement. "This is happening in our classrooms."

"[Teachers have] a First Amendment right to express themselves, and we have an obligation to our citizens to keep them informed on what is happening in our schools."

Regardless of the truth of his allegations, Hill won't likely substitute teach in Glendale again. [According to](#) the AP, "Since Hill isn't a district employee, any discipline against Hill would be left up to the temporary service, Cummings said, noting though that he doubts any of the district's principals would be comfortable having him as a substitute at their schools."

Hispanics In Arizona Schools

Whether Hill's letter is true, the University of Arizona published figures last year showing that Hispanics, who are 41 percent of the students enrolled in kindergarten through high school, lag behind whites and blacks in educational achievement.

[According to](#) its report, titled "Seeking Educational Equality and Equity in Arizona: A Critical Imperative Affecting the Future of All Arizonans," only 52 percent of Hispanics students graduate from high school, compared to 82 percent of whites, 80 percent of Asians and 72 percent of blacks. Only American Indians, at 47 percent, graduate fewer students than Hispanics.

For college and graduate school, the graduation rates are much lower. Only 10 percent of Hispanics graduate, compared to 28, 44 and 14 percent of whites, Asians and blacks, graduate college. Again, only American Indians, at 7 percent, graduate college at lower rates than Hispanics. And just 0.4 percent of Hispanics, earn a graduate degree, compared to 1 and 3 percent of Asians.



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The report blames “exclusionary practices” for the failure of Hispanics to graduate college and graduate school, but [it concluded](#) that the poor educational achievement did not bode well for Arizona’s future: “If the disparity in educating Hispanic and Native citizens continues, the economy of Arizona will suffer and the overall quality of life will drop for all citizens.”

Texas received a similar prediction from a demographer at Rice University. Steve Murdock [recently told](#) the *Houston Chronicle* that Hispanic population data in Texas show that “it’s basically over for Anglos.” Murdock believes that the low income and educational achievement among Hispanics in Texas will doom the state.

[Reported the *Houston Chronicle*:](#)

Unless the trend line changes, 30 percent of the state’s labor force will not have even a high school diploma by 2040, he said. And the average household income will be about \$6,500 lower than it was in 2000. That figure is not inflation adjusted so it will be worse than what it sounds.

“It’s a terrible situation that you are in. I am worried,” Murdock said.



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