



Vote no on Prop. 107

by [Mark B. Evans](#) on Oct. 01, 2010, under [Editorials](#)

Someone getting a government job, scholarship or contract by virtue of their race or gender offends American's senses of equality and fair play.

We strongly believe we're a meritocracy and only a person's qualifications and ability should matter.

It's that sentiment that fuels Proposition 107, one of 10 propositions on the November ballot.

Prop. 107 would eliminate from state governments race and gender hiring, school admission and contracting preferences.

On its face, it's a reasonable proposition that people should only get what they deserve.

But most legislation, whether enacted by the Legislature or by voters, is intended to solve a problem.

Prop. 107 is a solution in search of a problem.

It presumes that government preferences based on race and gender harms both whites and nonwhites. Yet there's no evidence of such harm.

Racial and gender preferences, on the other hand, were created decades ago to help right wrongs committed by entirely white male governments.

Our long, sad history of race and sex discrimination needed fixing and hiring preferences was one of the ways we went about it.

The question, then, should be whether we've progressed far enough in the past 50 years that we no longer need preference policies.

The evidence suggests we haven't. Huge disparities in income and education level still persist between whites and nonwhites in America.

Consider Tucson's school districts. The best public schools (in terms of test scores and state and federal labels) in the metropolitan area are in the affluent suburbs, where U.S. Census data show 90 to 95 percent of people living there are white.

At most of these schools the enrollment percentages in the federal free lunch program – an indicator of neighborhood poverty because only moderate and low income families can qualify – is zero or near zero.

The worst public schools in the area are in the urban core. The racial makeup of these schools is more than 90 percent black and Latino.

The free lunch enrollment in these schools is often greater than 85 percent and at some schools it's 100 percent.

The poor performance of these schools has nothing to do with the race of the students and everything to do with their poverty. But it illustrates the disparity in incomes between whites and nonwhites.

That poverty is rooted in the discrimination of the past. The poor tend to stay poor; the rich tend to stay rich. Since it is the white majority that caused that impoverishment for nonwhites through its past racial discrimination, it's only fair that we have preference policies and laws.

The persistence of income and education inequalities between the races also should offend our sense of fairness because they're real. While there are thousands of nonwhite Arizonans trying to break the cycle of poverty, there are damn few whites in Arizona who didn't get a government job because a hiring preference gave it to someone else.

We've come a long way since 1964 and there will come a time where these preference policies are unnecessary.

That time is not now.

Vote no on Prop. 107.