

# 'Red Tails' Shoots Down Racial Stereotypes

“We hope what youngsters get out of the story is that under some dire circumstances we prevailed. We performed successfully and we opened doors that they don't have to fight to.” Col. Charles McGee, “Red Tails” technical consultant and surviving member of the Tuskegee Airmen

Last week, I attended the New York premiere of a new George Lucas film about the heroic exploits of the all-black fighter pilot squadron that helped America defeat the Nazi's in World War II. I am not in the business of promoting new movies.

But, there are several reasons that compel me to highlight the release of “Red Tails,” the story of the pioneering Tuskegee Airmen. First, the movie has a virtually all-black cast with black male heroes – a rare depiction by Hollywood. Cuba Gooding, Jr., Terrence Howard, Nate Parker, David Oyelowo, and NE-YO all play key roles. Lucas has said that the black theme and black cast were major reasons Hollywood repeatedly declined to back the film. He struggled 23 years to get major studio financing. “I showed it to all of them,”

## TO BE EQUAL

Marc Morial



he said, “and they said no, we don't know how to market a movie like this.” He wound up pouring \$58 million of his own money into the project.

The second reason I am excited about this film is that recent comments by political candidates denigrating the African American

attempts to score political points. In a discussion of social assistance programs, Santorum said he doesn't want to “make black people's lives better by giving them someone else's money.” Santorum's appalling comment implied that people of color are a drain on resources mainly provided by whites, even though about 70 percent of food stamp recipients are white.

Santorum's statement was followed a few days later by a comment from Newt Gingrich that “African Americans should demand pay checks not food stamps.” Gingrich has called Barack Obama “The best food stamp president in American history.” We are outraged by the comments of both candidates and

denounced them in separate statements. The fact is, social safety net programs serve families in dire circumstances from all walks of life. Many of those who now find themselves in need, whatever their ethnic background, are the very people who have paid into these programs and made sacrifices to support their families and our

nation throughout their working lives. Which brings me back to the Tuskegee Airmen.

In the 1940s, before our armed

Johnson, and black director, Anthony Hemingway to create a film they all hope will inspire a new generation of African Ameri-

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community and reviving outdated stereotypes, make it more important than ever to spotlight the historic contributions and public service of black Americans.

In just the last few weeks, two presidential candidates, Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich, have perpetuated false and destructive racial stereotypes in desperate

forces were integrated, the Tuskegee Airmen became the first black aviators in the United States military. They were trained at Tuskegee Institute, now Tuskegee University in Alabama. Despite discrimination, during World War II, these brilliant airmen fought fascism abroad and returned to fight racism back home.

Lucas teamed with black co-executive producer, Charles Floyd

can youth. The message of the movie...the lesson of the Tuskegee Airmen is clear: We have the power to overcome any barrier to serve our nation and achieve our dreams. One movie won't solve the problem, but we think it's an important step in the right direction.

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# Arizona: Censoring History

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## TRANS AFRICA

Bill Fletcher Jr.

Using disingenuous suggestions that so-called ethnic studies programs are divisive, right-wing ideologues seek to obliterate from our education programs any discussion of the crimes associated with the founding of the United States, crimes such as slavery, genocide and the

annexation of northern Mexico. Instead they want our children to believe that North America was destined by God's will to be settled and conquered by Europeans. Slavery and genocide in that myth were collateral damage.

What is at stake is not simply the banning of certain education programs or the banning of a book. What is really going on here is the shutting down of any debate. History is not the reciting of facts. History always involves contention between different analyses or “takes” on a

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rounding the arrival of European settlers, *Rethinking Columbus* pays attention to the victims of the hemispheric invasion that began in the 1500s. If banning a book was bad enough, it must be understood in the context of decisions made in Arizona to ban Mexican American Studies. These are the sorts of steps being undertaken by right-wing activists who have infiltrated school boards around the country. Their aim is to shut down any comprehensive examination of history and the sciences and, instead, replace them with myths. Terminating the teaching of Mexican American Studies, particularly in a state that prior to 1848 was part of Mexico, is not only idiotic from the standpoint of scholarship, but is insulting to Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

series of events. As such, which facts are included or excluded from history reflects the basic message that someone wishes to convey. If you want to pretend that northern Mexico (currently the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Colorado) simply fell into the hands of Euro-American settlers, then little facts, such as that the USA provoked a war with Mexico in 1846 becomes very inconvenient. If you want to pretend that there was no one on this land except, perhaps, a few Indian tribes, then it also becomes inconvenient to discuss the land claims that Mexican Americans/ Chicanos have in the Southwest that frequently date back to the 1500s, not to mention the land that was occupied by significant numbers of Native Americans.

All of this is to say that history remains