

A Person of Distinction - Not Extinction

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Author's Note: I wrote this commentary almost nine years ago, in September 2006. We don't usually reissue previous commentaries, but in light of recent disparaging remarks, it seemed appropriate. The following is the text, except for minor updates in response to the current situation.

Personal honor was a fundamental value in my upbringing. However, honor was not about arrogance or conceit; it was about humility, honesty, and respect for oneself and others. We were to avoid boasting, yet there was no question that we were to be proud of our family heritage and ancestry. We were taught that we are a people of distinction.

Our parents recognized that social systems would tear us down, so they worked extra hard to instill a sense of history and dignity in us. As children, we were constantly told that we were not as smart or important as the Anglo children in our schools and neighborhoods. As a child, there were times that the discriminating practices in our segregated schools seemed insurmountable, but our parents modeled the belief that we could make a difference in our own destiny and so we did.

My grandfather, many generations removed, was born in 1601 in the New Mexico Territory, which includes the southern border states of Arizona and New Mexico extending into Colorado and parts of Texas. Yes, it was before the Plymouth Rock landing. Yes, it was before 1776. Yes, it was when the land was part of Mexico before being claimed by the United States. Yes, further back than many American history books and would be politicians account for. The truth is that many of us did not cross the border, rather the border crossed us.

I am proud to claim this ancestry and refuse to be accused of “being a problem to American society.” When discussing immigration we should

review the history of the settling of this land now known as the United States. We must not forget that the land was the homeland of American Indian brothers and sisters and stolen by European invaders, ending authentic civilization for thousands of people. We should not forget that much of the western region of the United States region was Mexico. We must remember that 99% of us are immigrants who came in search of the American dream. These historic realities are often discounted because our cultural elitism declares that we are entitled to anything we want.

Disparaging descriptions of immigrants, such as murderers, rapists, criminals, free loaders, leeches, illegal aliens, are thrown around without regard for their humanity or the potential for inciting hatred and neighborhood warfare. Generation after generation wages war; however, these days the wars are not confined to nation against nation. Sadly, the war now being waged against immigrants within the boundaries of the United States is resulting in fear and hatred of one racial group against another.

As a Latina and a Christian, I reject these accusations. Inciting fear and hatred is certainly inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus who taught love, compassion, and human understanding. Claiming a special preference for one race above another absolutely contradicts the basic Christian message of “loving our neighbor as ourselves.”

Despite current soundbites, I will not be told that people who look like me are the problem of American society. We are the American society. We are people of distinction, not extinction. And we vote.



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