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The notion of \"my country\"

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A young Mexican American middle school student in the Big Bear Valley Unified School District in California has filed a lawsuit supported by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). The lawsuit alleges that Coral Aviles, 13, was subject to racial harassment by her teacher because of her Mexican background and that the school and school district did not respond adequately, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

According to Aviles, in June 2010, the teacher asked her if she was Mexican because she was wearing a soccer jersey with "Mexico" on it. Aviles replied that she was of Mexican background whereupon, according to Aviles, the teacher just lost it:

"Why are you here? Why are you in my country?" the teacher is alleged to have said. "Because this is my country. And because of people like you, I pay high taxes, and because of people like you, my insurance is sky high."

According to Aviles, she fled the room crying and went to see the principal, but apparently nothing was done. The teacher, according to the lawsuit, denied Aviles entrance to her classroom.

The principal told the *Los Angeles Times* that she disputed Aviles' account of the incident.

Whether this case happened as the lawsuit alleges, the fact is that we have been witnessing during the last few years, especially during the economic crisis, the unfortunate growing of anti-Mexican and anti-Latino sentiment in this country.

More and more people are expressing their economic insecurities and frustrations in nativist ways that regrettably do little about the economic problems. The causes of this Great Recession are not people of

Mexican descent, the majority of who are U.S. born citizens as probably Aviles is. In fact, unemployment is higher in Mexican American and Latino communities than it is in white ones.

If Aviles' side of the story is correct, what good does it do for a teacher to berate a 13 year old? How is that going to deal with the economic issues? Teachers have a responsibility to treat their students with respect and to work to teach them irrespective of their backgrounds.

Moreover, what is further troubling, if Aviles' account is correct, is this notion of "my country" that the teacher is alleged to have said.

We have heard too many other people such as in the Tea Party movement cry out that they want to take "my country" back. What do they mean by "my country?" A country of only white people? Perhaps. A country of only U.S. citizens? But what about their ancestors who faced the same cry of older stock Anglo-Americans crying out that they were losing "my country" because there were too many Irish, Italian, Poles, Jews, Hungarians, etc. entering as immigrants?

The United States is not exclusively any one groups' country. It belongs to all those who have been here over the years, as U.S. born and as immigrants (even without documents) contributing to the wealth of this country, economically, culturally and politically.

What we need is tolerance and consensus today and not ignorant flashes of anger based on nothing but groundless fears.

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