

Patriotism is Hatred in a Red, White, and Blue Suit

by Stephen DeVoy

Alvaro and his mother were on their way to Home Depot in Glendale, California. Mom needed some tools to repair the washing machine. As they turned into the parking lot, a small group of white men with large American flags and signs were gathered. They were shouting something. They were waving their flags and signs.

"Look mom," said Alvaro, while pointing to the flags, "a parade! I love parades. They make me happy."

With a tense voice Alvaro's mom replied, "Those men don't look happy to me. They look angry."

"That sign says, 'Mexicans go home!'" said Alvaro, astonished. "But mom, we are home, aren't we?"

"Don't pay any attention to them, Alvarito, they're racists," huffed his mother.

"Hmmm," whispered Alvaro, "they've got flags, mom, doesn't that mean they are patriotic?"

"'Patriotic' is just a kind word for racist, my son," she replied.

Alvaro felt confused. "In school they tell us patriotism is good," he said. "How can it be racist?"

"As you get older, Alvaro, you will come to understand what I mean. Patriotism is about putting your country or your people before all others. Patriotism is about ignoring the good in others and exaggerating the good in yourself. If that is not racism and prejudice, then what is?"

Alvaro thought about what his mom said. They parked the car and got out. Alvaro could hear the chanting of the men and women with flags. Indeed, their voices were angry. Nearby, Mexican men were gathered hoping to get work for the day. No one would stop because of the protesters.

"Look at what they are doing, Alvaro. Those men need work, just like I need work, just like your father needs work. They have children like you. Those children need to eat, but they might not eat today because those selfish and hateful white men and women won't let them find work."

"You mean that fat white man will get to eat but that skinny Mexican man will not?" asked Alvaro.

"Yes, most likely that is what will happen today," she said sadly.



"That's not fare," exclaimed Alvaro with tears in his eyes. "He left his mom and ran up to the fat white man. Alvaro was only 11 years old, but he was angry. "Hey, you, why do you stop that man from finding work?" asked Alvaro.

"Shut up you dirty beaner," the white man yelled. "I'll call the Migra and have them haul your brown ass back to that slum you call 'Mexico,' so run along Pancho!"

"My name is not Pancho!" You're a bad man.

"Get lost kid," the fat man said.

Alvaro's mother came to get Alvaro. "You should be ashamed of yourself," she said to the fat man.

"Go home, mamacita," growled the fat white man. As he growled the fat around his waste swayed and jiggled.

"I am home," she replied. "You are on our land. This was Mexico long before it was the United States."

The fat white man turned red snarling, "Yeah, and we stole it fair and square."

"Let's go, Alvarito," she said, grabbing her son's hand. The two walked into Home Depot.

As they strolled the isles, Alvaro asked, "Where does all this hatred come from?"

"Well son, they need to hate someone to feel better about themselves. Look at how fat and ugly that man is. Do you think he is happy to be who he is? He probably is treated like dirt at work. Hating us and looking down on us makes him feel like he's better than someone. When a person is as loathsome and empty as he is, there is a desperate need to feel better than someone anyone. When he threatens you and me, he feels, for that moment, a sense of power that he does not feel when he is tending to his own hopeless life. His patriotism is all about grasping for a reason to believe he is something more than the fat and dumpy loser that he is. He cannot find greatness in himself so he grabs onto the one thing no one will stop him from grabbing onto, his delusion about the greatness of his country.

"Even if we imagine that his country is greater than all others, what did he do to earn his citizenship?" she demanded.

"He was born here," answered Alvarito.

"And so were you!" she said. "How is that something to be proud of? If he drops out of his mother here in Glendale he is suddenly greater than he would be if his mother dropped him out in Tijuana, just 140 or so miles south of here? Does that make any sense?"

"I never thought of it that way," answered Alvaro.

"That's all patriotism is," Alvarito. "Patriotism is hatred and self pity dressed up in a red, white, and blue suit. Show me a patriot and I will show you a hateful bigot. Show me a man waving a flag and I will show you a coward hiding behind the colorful cloth."

Alvaro looked shocked, but he knew she was right. "That's very sad," he said. "What can we feel proud about, mom, if we can't feel proud of our country?"

"Yes, Alvarito, it is sad. Rational and honest people feel proud about the good things they themselves do. They feel proud about how they improve themselves or how they show compassion to others. They feel proud about the accomplishments of those they love. They do not, however, feel hatred or contempt for others who are different. You can love your country, but love is not patriotism. A patriotic person cannot love another country the way he loves his own, because he defines his relationship to other countries in terms of hate. A good and honest person can love his country for its virtues and love other countries for their virtues too. This is not patriotism. This is humanism. Don't feel badly if you cannot be patriotic. Patriotism is nothing to be proud of. If anything, it is a reason to be ashamed. It leaves behind it starving children, genocide, war, arrogance, waste, and exploitation.

"Thank you mom. I understand now." he said.

They continued shopping. Alvaro was quiet. On the way home he turned to his

mother and said, "I'm not a patriot, I'm a humanist."

"So am I son, so am I," his mother replied.

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