

“Reporting Both Sides in an Anti-immigrant Climate” -- Part A

(This case was compiled by University of Georgia journalism student Kelundra Smith for JOUR 5170, Advanced Studies in Journalism, based on information on the Fox News and Fox Atlanta websites)

On March 29, 2010 Jessica Colotl, a senior at Kennesaw State University, was ticketed by a Cobb county police officer for impeding the flow of traffic. After presenting officers with only an expired Mexican passport as identification, and allegedly providing a false address, Colotl was arrested.

Fox Atlanta immediately sent reporters on this story and discovered that Cobb County participates in a program called 287(g) which allows local police to enforce Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) policies, including arresting undocumented immigrants. Colotl was brought to the United States illegally by her parents when she was 11-years-old. She graduated from Lakeside High School in Dekalb County and aspired to go to law school.

After Jessica’s arrest she was transported to a deportation facility in Alabama, where she spent 37 days in jail. Upon learning of Jessica’s arrest, her sorority sisters from Lambda Theta Alpha rallied at the state Capitol and raised \$2500 for her bond.

Fox put a poll on their website asking viewers whether they believed Colotl should be allowed to stay in the U.S. Many viewers expressed disgust that the case was even being reported because Jessica was in the country illegally. Many believed that she should just be deported and that Fox was spending too much time on the case.

Discuss:

- *Should Fox Atlanta have used more politically correct vernacular, like “undocumented immigrant” instead of “illegal immigrant”?*
- *Was it wise for Fox’s image to have put a poll on their website?*
- *How should Fox address its angry viewers who believe Colotl should be deported?*
- *Was it courageous for Fox to report the story in a state with known anti-immigrant sentiment?*

“Reporting Both Sides in an Anti-immigrant Climate” -- Part B

The president of Kennesaw State University wrote a letter on Jessica’s behalf asking that she be allowed to finish her degree.

In October 2010 the Georgia Board of Regents passed a motion saying that undocumented immigrants were no longer allowed to attend five Georgia schools that had previously admitted undocumented students. This list includes Georgia Tech, The University of Georgia, Georgia State University, Georgia College and State University, and Medical College of Georgia. Prior to this, undocumented students were allowed to attend Georgia universities if they paid out-of-state tuition. Colotl was paying in-state tuition at the time.

Fox then brought in members of the Board of Regents and Colotl’s attorney for live interviews. This sparked a debate about immigration because the Dream Act was pending in Congress. The Dream Act would have allowed undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children to remain in school, but this did not pass in Congress.

Discuss:

- *Should the president of Kennesaw State be fired for admitting an undocumented student, and then allowing her to pay in-state tuition?*
- *Was “impeding the flow of traffic” enough reason to arrest Jessica?*
- *Should local law enforcement agencies be allowed to enforce ICE policies?*

“Reporting Both Sides in an Anti-immigrant Climate” -- Epilogue

ICE gave Jessica a one year grace period to determine whether she can stay in the U.S. or be deported back to Mexico. This also allowed her to finish her KSU degree, with the stipulation that she be charged out-of-state tuition.

Colotl went to traffic court in October 2010 to face charges for driving without a license and impeding traffic. Fox was in the court room and captured footage of the sheriff expressing his belief that Colotl should be deported. She was found guilty for driving without a license, but not guilty for impeding traffic.

A group of Cobb County citizens who call themselves “Cobb Citizens United for Change Coalition” spoke to Fox reporters, alleging that the Cobb County Sheriff’s Department racially profiles Mexicans. The sheriff’s department’s actions are currently under investigation.

In February 2011 Jessica Colotl was indicted on a felony lying charge for allegedly providing a false address to a Cobb county police officer. The Cobb county district attorney felt there was enough evidence to bring Colotl’s case in front of a grand jury. The felony lying charge is currently awaiting a court date.

Discuss:

- *Should Colotl have gone back to Mexico upon graduating from high school and apply to be a U.S. citizen?*
- *If Jessica is deported was reporting the story worth it?*
- *Why was Jessica Colotl’s case worthy of national attention, after other cases like this have been swept under the rug?*

Works Cited

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