

Don't Forget the Children of 'Illegals'

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There has been a lot of discussion lately about the immigration issue as Congress debates reforms to what everyone agrees is a broken national policy. Much of the discussion centers on the economic impact of the large number of workers who are in this country illegally.

As a former high school teacher, I saw another side to this problem: the impact of illegal status on young people. Besides the millions of adults who hover in the half-light of illegal status, there are thousands of children growing up "illegal." Many of these young men and women came to this country as small children and have little memory of their "home" countries.

What do you think being "illegal" does to a young person's self-confidence? What do you think it does to his or her respect for the law? This is the human side of the permanent underclass. Even the toughest kids will have a little shame, a reflexive secretiveness, under the surface. Those kids have to choose: They either respect themselves or they respect the law.

I have found children of illegal immigrants often are distrustful of the police and more skeptical of the freedom and opportunity America offers than other children are. As we debate this important issue, let's not forget the children who bear the stigma of illegal status.

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