

Smuggling Rings in Two Cities Allegedly Traded Deaf Vendors

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Body

Smuggling rings in Chicago and New York frequently **traded deaf** Mexicans as part of a nationwide conspiracy to exploit the illegal immigrants, who were forced to peddle \$ 1 key chains and other trinkets, according to federal court documents.

In one case, a **deaf** woman identified as "Ana" was exchanged for three men, but when one of the men proved violent, the smugglers who had **traded** Ana demanded her back, the documents said. Ana's new bosses refused the refund, and eventually the unruly man, a **deaf** illegal immigrant, was simply abandoned in the streets of New York, according to the documents.

The **smuggling rings** have operated for nearly 10 years and were founded in Chicago, according to complaints and affidavits filed in U.S. District Court there following the arrest in recent days of three persons alleged to be among the originators of the scheme. Nine others have been arrested in New York. The man identified by the **deaf** Mexicans as the boss of the operation, Renato Paoletti-Lemus, remains a fugitive.

The **smuggling ring** in Chicago **allegedly** operated similarly though on a smaller scale than the one in New York. Another such **ring** was uncovered in North Carolina last week. The new court documents depict a large and long-standing conspiracy that also included an illegal border-crossing operation based in Southern California, recruiters who preyed upon recently arrived illegal aliens in Los Angeles and smugglers who transported the **deaf** Mexicans from the West Coast to Chicago and New York by bus and plane.

"We believe we have established strong evidence of links between the operations in Chicago and New York, and there are indications of links to activities in several other **cities** which we are pursuing," said Russ Bergeron, a spokesman for the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Investigators first learned of the **deaf** Mexicans' plight 10 days ago when four of them walked into a police station in Queens and reported living and working conditions that New York Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani described as "virtual slavery." A total of 55 people were **allegedly** held by an alien-**smuggling ring** that forced the Mexicans to work long hours selling trinkets on the subways, seized most of their money and subjected them to various forms of physical abuse.

Police found nearly \$ 55,000 in cash in **two** houses in Queens where the **deaf** peddlers were being held, including more than \$ 10,000 in \$ 1 bills, the court documents said.

Several of those alleged to have operated the New York **ring** and some of the West Coast operations are described as close relatives of Paoletti-Lemus, including his sister Adriana, 29, who is in custody in New York charged with coercion and grand larceny.

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Renato and Adriana Paoletti-Lemus allegedly learned the racket from a couple depicted in the Chicago documents as the first to use deaf Mexicans who were in the country illegally to sell trinkets. Norma Alcantana, who is deaf, and Frank Dueno, who is not deaf, allegedly originated the scheme in Chicago in 1988 or 1989. More recently, they are alleged to have traded trinket vendors with the Paoletti-Lemus. In custody in Chicago, they are charged with transporting and harboring illegal aliens.

The alien identified as "Ana" said that nearly four years ago, Dueno and Alcantana smuggled her into the United States and started her working in Chicago selling trinkets, collecting the proceeds of her sales every day. Last summer, she said Alcantana drove her and several other deaf Mexicans to a city in North Carolina where they plied their trade for several days.

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