

More Immigrants Are Deported As Officials' Power Increases

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Body

Equipped with new **powers** to turn away **immigrants** at the borders, and with **more** jail space available for those people they arrest inside the country, immigration **officials** in New York City have **deported more** than 4,000 people in the last year, an **increase** of 12 percent over the previous year.

Nationwide, nearly 177,000 people were **deported** or sent back to their home countries for criminal or noncriminal offenses during the 1999 fiscal year, an **increase** of 3 percent, according to a report released yesterday by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Of those, 62,000 people had committed, at some point during their residence in the United States, one of the crimes that are grounds for **deportation**. The agency said that about half of those **deported** had been convicted on drug charges. Most of the others had been convicted of assault, burglary or violating immigration laws. Almost 115,000 people were **deported** or turned away because they were in the country illegally or had tried to enter with false documents.

The higher numbers were likely to please those in Congress who have accused the agency of doing too little to find and **deport** aliens with criminal records and false documents. The immigration service estimates that 500,000 **immigrants** are in the country illegally, although it has been using the same estimated number for **more** than three years.

But advocates for **immigrants** said the **increase** seemed to justify their fears about a 1996 law that gave the I.N.S. an array of new enforcement tools, including the right to **deport** people quickly upon their arrival at an airport or land border without allowing them a lawyer or a judicial hearing.

That process is called expedited removal. It is used to turn away not only people with false documents, but also those who request asylum when they arrive. The agency did not provide figures for the New York region airports alone, but it said that **more** than 89,000 people at all the nation's borders had been the subjects of expedited removal in the last year, an **increase** of 16 percent.

"That is really frightening," said Elisa Massimino, director of the Washington office of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. "This is an administration who opposed expedited removal and unfortunately now embraced it to improve the **deportation** numbers. We are afraid of what this portends for refugees seeking asylum here."

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Immigration **officials** said that the **increase** in **deportations** was the result in part of the success of their efforts to identify criminals who are not citizens while they are serving their prison sentences. Nearly 20,000 people were **deported** straight from state and Federal prisons in the last year, an **increase** of nearly 45 percent.

In that same time period, the agency also received about \$80 million in a special appropriation -- bringing its **deportation** budget to \$809 million -- to expand its detention beds to about 17,500 and bring its staff of enforcement officers up to 15,000.

"The greater our capacity to detain, the greater our capacity to remove," said Russell A. Bergeron Jr., an agency spokesman. "If you cannot detain, odds are you will not remove them."

He said the field offices that look for undocumented **immigrants** generally will not initiate a raid on a workplace, for example, if there is not enough space to detain people awaiting **deportation**.

The jump in **deportations** in the New York district paralleled **increases** at other major gateway cities. San Francisco, for example, **deported** 23 percent **more** people and Houston 29 percent in the last year.

Since 1997, the agency has set annual targets for **deporting** illegal and criminal aliens. Each year, it has surpassed its goal, which for the 1999 fiscal year was 120,000.

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