

BIGOTS SHOW TRUE COLORS IN ATTACKS ON IMMIGRANTS

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Body

'BROWN is the new black.'

The phrase has gone from being a fashion statement to an apt description of racism today.

Because as African-Americans - after a lifelong struggle against discrimination (which is still strong and destructive) - begin to take their rightful place in society, unrepentant racists of all stripes have pointed their guns toward an easier target: immigrants, specifically Latinos.

"The rhetoric of anti-immigration groups increasingly resembles an orchestrated propaganda campaign of code words to vilify Hispanic-Americans as dangerous, threatening, subhuman and inferior," said Wade Henderson, president and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights - the nation's oldest and largest civil and human rights coalition.

Sadly, it is not only the Ku Klux Klan or the Minutemen who are spewing this rhetoric. One expects those kind of tactics from them.

There are also several prominent media figures - Lou Dobbs comes to mind - who have made a career out of vilifying immigrants. These people have had no qualms about throwing ethics overboard in pursuit of - one imagines - ratings, money and power.

Their attempt to blame undocumented immigrants for high unemployment among blacks is particularly disgusting. Sen. Barack Obama called it by its proper name during Thursday's debate with Sen. Hillary Clinton.

"To suggest somehow that the problem that we're seeing in inner-city unemployment, for example, is attributable to immigrants, I think is a case of scapegoating that I do not believe in, I do not subscribe to," he said.

The increase in the use of code words has been amply documented by the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League.

The intention, these two groups said, is to portray immigrants - particularly Latinos - as a threat to the American way of life. As such, they are called "an army of invaders," an "invading force," a "massive horde."

They are falsely accused of "bringing crime and disease" to America, including "leprosy, tuberculosis and malaria" and "gang warfare."

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The hate rhetoric goes as far as accusing Hispanics of being involved in "reconquista," some sort of conspiracy to take back lands in the southwestern United States for Mexico.

Almost unbelievably, though, this hate-filled rhetoric has become part of the mainstream discussion. Extreme and irrational anti-immigrant positions are now taken seriously and incorporated into the immigration debate along with a false and malicious portrayal of Latinos.

The level of hostility toward immigrants is unprecedented, even though the great majority of them had done nothing but leave behind their country, their language and their family to pursue the American Dream.

As Obama also said in response to a question about the controversy over driver's licenses for immigrants, "Immigrants don't come here to drive, they come here to work."

And contrary to what the hatemongers would have the American people believe, immigrants don't come here to take advantage of taxpayers. They come to contribute, with their hands and their sweat, to make this country bigger and better for all.

The National Council of La Raza has launched a Web site (wecanstopthehate.org) to counter the hate language and the lies that today pass for serious immigration discussion. It should be visited.

Bigots and hatemongers should not be allowed to turn brown into the new black. aruiz@nydailynews.com

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