

## *Born here, it's their Washington*

The Washington Post

August 31, 2010 Tuesday, Regional Edition

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**Distribution:** Maryland

**Section:** EDITORIAL COPY; Pg. A17

**Length:** 603 words

**Byline:** Daniel Brook

### **Body**

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Like so many residents of our nation's capital, I live here but am not from here. I moved to the District from Pennsylvania a few weeks ago for a five-month research fellowship. Come Christmastime, I'll be gone.

Most mornings, I walk from my apartment to the Columbia Heights Metro station and take the train to my office on Capitol Hill. As I exit, the looming Capitol dome is an unfailingly impressive sight. The building and what it represents -- "a republic, if you can keep it," as Ben Franklin famously put it -- remain inspiring even if, from what I read, very little actually happens there of late.

Despite massive unemployment, two wars and an overheating planet, the only issue that has Congress working overtime is immigration. Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) recently convened a special August session to approve a [\\$600 million border security bill](#). As the midterm elections draw near, a movement is afoot among Republicans to change the 14th Amendment to strip citizenship from the American-born children of illegal immigrants. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has come out in favor of holding hearings on the matter.

For many Americans, the targets of this proposed constitutional change -- the children of undocumented immigrants -- are an abstraction. They long were for me, too. But not since I moved to Washington. My new neighborhood, on the border between Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant, is as filled with Latin American immigrants and their children as it is with people like me -- college-educated, temporary Washington transplants.

I don't know how many of my neighbors are undocumented, but I suspect the number runs in the thousands. The panderias and taquerias along Mount Pleasant Street are filled with immigrant families. So is my local branch of the D.C. Public Library. On weekends, the men play soccer in Meridian Hill Park, just outside my window. While many of the grown-ups speak only Spanish, their children speak clear, American English. While the fathers play futbol, their sons often skateboard or play catch on the sidelines. And while transplants like me bring our far-flung accents to the District (despite my best attempts, I haven't completely excised the discordant strains of my Brooklyn birth and Long Island rearing), it is these immigrants' children who speak with a Washingtonian accent, an accent so rare in this city of transplants that many will tell you it doesn't exist at all.

Born here, it's their Washington

These children of immigrants are the true Washingtonians. While I go about this city trying to train myself to say "carry-out" instead of "take-out" and figure out what exactly a half-smoke is, for these kids Washington is their world. For many, it is the place they were born. It is their "normal." Washington is their city in a way it will never be my city. And America is as much their country as it is mine -- the great-grandson of immigrants, one of whom, incidentally, came here illegally.

So it is terribly ironic that back on the Hill, senators such as Lindsey Graham, with his syrupy Southern drawl, and representatives including John Boehner, with his stentorian Midwestern twang, are painting their Washington neighbors -- the ultimate D.C. locals -- as outsiders.

There are real issues in the immigration debate. But however America decides to deal with those who entered this country illegally, their children are Americans. It is not only unjust but also illogical to treat them as anything else. Go meet one and you'll see.

Daniel Brook, the author of "The Trap: Selling Out to Stay Afloat in Winner-Take-All America," is a journalist living in Washington.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** US REPUBLICAN PARTY (90%); IMMIGRATION (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); POLITICAL PARTIES (90%); CHILDREN (87%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (78%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (78%); US CONGRESS (76%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (73%); PUBLIC LIBRARIES (73%); FAMILY (72%); ELECTIONS (69%); MIDTERM ELECTIONS (69%); LANGUAGE & LANGUAGES (69%); APPROVALS (68%); DENATURALIZATION (68%); ADULTS (63%); LIBRARIES (62%); CHRISTMAS (57%); SOCCER (50%)

**Industry:** TRAINS (76%); PUBLIC LIBRARIES (73%); LIBRARIES (62%)

**Person:** MITCH MCCONNELL (56%); HARRY REID (56%)

**Geographic:** KENTUCKY, USA (79%); DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (95%); LATIN AMERICA (79%)

**Load-Date:** August 31, 2010