

THE REGION:

Under the New Law, Illegal Aliens Suffer Much in Silence

The New York Times

November 27, 1988, Sunday, Late City Final Edition

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Section: Section 4; Page 6, Column 3; Week in Review Desk

Length: 770 words

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Body

IN New York City, a half-million illegal aliens form what amounts to a new sub-class of the poor, more vulnerable than ever to sweatshop operators, eviction and criminals.

Congress had hoped that when the 1986 Federal immigration law was enacted, making it illegal to hire aliens not eligible for amnesty, these people and hundreds of thousands like them across the country would return to their native lands. But they have stayed on, and concern is rising that their troubles will eventually reverberate in the city and the nation.

"We have faced discrimination as an immigrant minority because of how we look and how we speak, and the new immigration law legitimizes that discrimination," said Guillermo Linares, a naturalized citizen and educator who is head of the Community Association of Progressive Dominicans. Speaking for the tens of thousands of undocumented Dominicans in the city, he said: "Now we are forced to go underground; we have a future that is very dark."

In the past, undocumented aliens lived under the shadow of discovery and deportation by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, but there was almost always a way to make a living. The new law puts employers at the forefront of enforcement: They must ask job applicants to prove they are authorized to work, and they can be fined or imprisoned for hiring undocumented workers. So illegal aliens nationwide are clinging to the employers they have, no matter how they are treated, out of fear they will be reported and deported if they complain or look elsewhere.

A hundred thousand aliens in New York applied to an amnesty program and received papers so they can legally work; nevertheless, some of these have been refused jobs or even fired for looking or sounding foreign, recent studies have found. Immigrant advocates tell of others who were denied apartment leases, refused promotion or forced to take pay cuts. And such problems multiply for the 450,000 to 700,000 New Yorkers who have no valid papers.

New York City cannot help but be affected by these changes, Mr. Linares and other speakers asserted at a public hearing this month organized by the city Commission on Human Rights. For example, in 1987 the Federal Government ruled that all applicants for legal residence, including amnesty applicants, must be tested for the AIDS virus and deported if it is found. No figures are available on the results. But aliens in the groups deemed most at risk - intravenous drug users, homosexuals and, at one time, Haitians - are presumably staying underground, out of reach of treatment and counseling, said Judy Rabinovitz of the American Civil Liberties Union's National Immigration Task Force.

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A Population of Prey

Another problem is that the city's undocumented **aliens** are easy victims, people who are afraid to report crime, consumer fraud or workplace abuse.

Large populations of undocumented immigrants live in rundown and heavily drug-infested neighborhoods in northern Flatbush, said Hillary Salmons of the Church Avenue Merchants Association. She said that she has tried to persuade some immigrants to report drug deals and other crimes in their buildings, but that they keep silent for fear the police will ask for their papers.

Ms. Salmons said the association, a community organization in Brooklyn, often receives reports of exploitation of undocumented workers by employers. One Mexican man, she said, was forced to work in a fruit market seven days a week at \$2.80 an hour. And with winter cutting off odd jobs in construction and yard work, Ms. Salmons warned, "undocumented immigrants are finding it so difficult to work that they are losing their apartments and are soon to be added to the homeless population."

Mayor Koch has said that the Federal Government is solely responsible for enforcement of the immigration **law**, unless undocumented **aliens** commit crimes, and that they are as entitled as anyone else to services like health care and education.

But immigrant advocates say it doesn't work out that way. For instance, the children of **illegal aliens** may attend the public schools, but they cannot sign up for free breakfast or lunch because their parents don't have Social Security numbers. Many **aliens** steer clear of city programs, afraid of any official contact. Others are unaware that they are entitled to assistance.

"If some **New** Yorkers are ill, poorly educated or easy victims of crime, all **New** Yorkers **suffer**," said Elizabeth Bogen, director of immigrant affairs in the Department of City Planning. "We cannot write off our undocumented **aliens** without great cost to ourselves."

Graphic

Photo of undocumented **aliens** are among the **new** immigrants learning English in a class sponsored by the Church Avenue Merchants Association of Brooklyn (NYT/Chester Higgins Jr.)

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (92%); **ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS** (91%); CITIZENSHIP (90%); IMMIGRATION **LAW** (90%); DEPORTATION (89%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (89%); CITY LIFE (89%); AMNESTY (89%); DISCRIMINATION (89%); HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIL LIBERTIES **LAW** (89%); HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS (89%); MINORITY GROUPS (78%); SWEATSHOPS (78%); FOREIGN LABOR (78%); NATURALIZATION (78%); EVICTION (77%); GARMENT WORKERS (77%); LEGISLATION (77%); PUBLIC HEARINGS (77%); CONSUMER **LAW** (77%); RECRUITMENT & HIRING (77%); CITY GOVERNMENT (73%); CRIMINAL FINES (72%); EMPLOYMENT SEARCH (71%); GAYS & LESBIANS (70%); AIDS & HIV (68%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (68%); WAGES & SALARIES (66%); HUMAN RIGHTS (64%); VIRUSES (60%)

Company: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (55%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (55%)

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Organization: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (55%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (55%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (55%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (55%)

Industry: RESIDENTIAL RENTAL PROPERTY (77%); EVICTION (77%); GARMENT WORKERS (77%); PROPERTY LEASES (71%)

Geographic: **NEW** YORK, NY, USA (90%); **NEW** YORK, USA (91%); UNITED STATES (79%)

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