

77 Aliens, in Debt to Smugglers, Found in Captivity in California

The New York Times

October 15, 1988, Saturday, Late City Final Edition

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Section: Section 1; Page 9, Column 5; National Desk

Length: 465 words

Byline: AP

Dateline: FULLERTON, Calif., Oct. 14

Body

A three-bedroom house here became a debtors' prison for **77** illegal **aliens** who could not afford to pay the **smugglers** who brought them into the United States from Mexico, the authorities said Thursday.

Ninety-one people were **found** in the house when it was raided Sunday, 14 of them suspected of being **smugglers**, the authorities said.

Twelve of the suspects were arraigned here Wednesday on charges of conspiracy and immigrant smuggling. The other two suspects are juveniles and will be deported, the authorities said.

Agents of the Immigration and Naturalization Service raided the house as part of a four-month investigation into a ring suspected of smuggling **aliens** into the country, said Tom Gaines, an assistant district director for the immigration service.

Mr. Gaines said all the **aliens** were from Mexico and owed the **smugglers** from \$300 to "whatever the market would bear."

"Some of them had just arrived, some had been there a couple of days," Mr. Gaines said. "There were no guns **found** in the house. The **smugglers** just had guards at every door. It was plain intimidation to keep them there."

Neighbors of the house, which had been rented, had noticed the coming and going of strangers in numerous automobiles over the last three weeks, said Donna Gimondo, who lives next door.

"We'd see three or four, as many as five get in a car, and it would be gone a half an hour and then just the driver would come back," she said.

She said the household was generally quiet, adding, "But on trash days there would be just this humongous pile of trash outside."

On Sunday, she said she saw three cars pull up to the house and heard an announcement, "Open up! Immigration officers."

Ms. Gimondo said the people in the house did not try to flee. She said she saw one family that included a mother, father and three children.

"One kid was 3 to 6 months old and the mother had him cuddled in a blanket," she said. "One was about 2 1/2 to 3 years old and the oldest was a 4-year-old boy. All were crying."

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While she thought there might have been as many as 30 people in the home, she said, "I was quite shocked and that there were so many in the house."

Helen Sklar of the National Center of Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles said such incidents would continue because the new immigration law did not address the problems that make people desperate enough to try illegal entry into the United States.

"The law considers the pull factor and not the push factor," she said. "Unless there is a comprehensive solution involving reduction of the debt facing Latin American countries and an end to civil strife, people are going to be fleeing here to escape starvation and war. That is a force powerful enough to nullify the effect of any employer sanctions law."

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (91%); SMUGGLING (91%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); **ALIEN** SMUGGLING (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (89%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); CONSPIRACY (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (77%); DEPORTATION (73%); INVESTIGATIONS (70%)

Company: IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE (US) IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (83%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (83%)

Organization: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (83%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (83%); IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE (US) IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (83%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (83%)

Geographic: **CALIFORNIA**, USA (79%); MEXICO (92%); UNITED STATES (92%)