

## **Immigrants say bias is 'swift kick' to citizenship**

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### **Body**

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When Eduardo Flores moved to Texas in 1981, he was content straddling two cultures: working in the United States but retaining his Mexican **citizenship**.

Now, the anti-**immigrant** sentiment spawned by California's Proposition 187 is making him have second thoughts: Flores wants a claim on the rights available in his adopted land.

Legal **immigrants** like Flores throughout the Southwest have been applying for **citizenship** at record levels, and many **say** they want the right to vote to stop the spread of laws like Proposition 187. If implemented, the law would deny education and certain medical services to undocumented aliens.

Flores **says** he's changed his view of U.S. **citizenship** for reasons both tangible and not.

Flores' son Jesus racked up straight A's in high school but couldn't accept a scholarship to Texas A&M, where he wanted to study computer engineering, because he's not a citizen. Instead, Jesus, now 21, is a meat cutter at a grocery store.

Flores also feels intangible prods toward U.S. **citizenship**.

Although he's lived in the United States for more than 14 years, Flores **says** he has begun to feel vulnerable since California voters adopted the Proposition 187 initiative.

He fears hostility toward **immigrants** could escalate to a point where police would check anyone who looks Latino for **citizenship** credentials.

"Proposition 187 can affect all of us," **says** Flores, 46, a school janitor who immigrated from Matamoros, Mexico. "They'll stop and investigate us just because of the color of our skin."

"We have folks who have made this their home for years and who now are afraid of what is happening," **says** Arturo Vargas of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials.

"If you want to be in the safe line, get your **citizenship**," adds Puerto Rican-born Enrique Birriel, at a **citizenship** swearing-in ceremony for his Nicaragua-born wife, Candida Rosa Birriel. "I told her and told her she needs to become a citizen, and after (Proposition) 187, she finally listened."

Legal residents wouldn't be affected by Proposition 187. But many aren't reassured.

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"(**Immigrants**) have been exploited, taken advantage of, and people have gotten away with it because they haven't been able to vote or express their rights," **says** Vargas. "It (Proposition 187) has been a real **swift kick** in the butt for the Hispanic community."

While noting the extra business, INS officials hesitate to attribute it to Proposition 187.

They cite a Green Card Replacement Program that requires legal residents who have been in the USA since 1978 to renew their cards by March 20. Instead of paying the \$ 75 fee, many apply for **citizenship** for \$ 95.

In addition, hundreds of **immigrants** who gained permanent residency through the Amnesty Program in the 1980s now are eligible for **citizenship**.

However, "there are other people who are kind of rushing the service to naturalize," **says** INS spokesman Ray Dudley. "They have been misled by certain people in the press who are creating a sort of fear."

In San Antonio, **citizenship** ceremonies are held monthly and average 250 people. But because of the increase in applicants, additional ceremonies have been scheduled.

"We can't handle the numbers of people we're getting per ceremony now," **says** the INS' Wiley Blakeway, who coordinates the ceremonies for applicants in a 78-county area.

At a February ceremony, U.S. District Judge Orlando Garcia waved a voter registration card before the crowd and urged all to take advantage of their new rights. "It's the single most important thing, next to the Holy Bible, that you will ever have."

Meanwhile, Jose Luis Gonzalez, 46, was preparing to teach free **citizenship** classes starting Monday behind the Pico de Gallo restaurant. Classes - three nights a week for 12 weeks - were expected to attract 80 restaurant employees and their family members for drills on 100 possible questions they could be asked during a **citizenship** test.

"You literally have to grab them by the hand, pull them out of the kitchen and sit them down and teach them how to be U.S. citizens," **says** Gonzalez, a former Marine.

Jacinto Hernandez, 37, a restaurant parking lot attendant, has enrolled.

"We work hard, but we don't get anything back from the government," **says** Hernandez, who immigrated from Mexico City in 1983. "I could vote for people that could do something to stop the discrimination."

More **immigrants** seek **citizenship** **Citizenship** applications in January rose sharply this year in some Immigration and Naturalization Service districts in Texas and California:

District	1994	1995	Increase
Los Angeles	4,259	17,094	301%
Dallas	617	1,468	138%
San Diego	957	1,905	99%
Harlingen, Texas	148	262	77%
El Paso	502	872	74%
Houston	1,048	1,748	67%
San Francisco	4,800	7,697	60%
San Antonio	454	494	9%

## Notes

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THE NATION; See related story; 01A; See info box at end of text.

## Graphic

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GRAPHIC, b/w, Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service (Chart); PHOTO, b/w, Darren Carroll

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