

Pressure on immigrants could erupt in anger

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Body

The rapid escalation of U.S. anti-immigration hysteria - fueled by ratings-hungry cable-television hotheads and leading Republican presidential hopefuls - is a dangerous trend: It may lead to a Latino intifada with the potential to rock this nation in the not-so-distant future.

Remember the Palestinian intifada of the early 1990s, when thousands of frustrated young Palestinians took to the streets and threw stones at Israeli troops? Remember the French intifada of the summer of 2005, in which disenfranchised Muslim youths burned cars and stores in the suburbs of Paris?

If we are not careful, we may see something similar coming from the estimated 13 million undocumented **immigrants** in the United States, most of them Latino, who are increasingly vilified in the media, forced further into the underground by spineless politicians and not given any chance to legalize their status by a pusillanimous U.S. Congress.

We are creating an underclass of people who won't leave this country and, realistically, can't be deported. They and their children are living with no prospect of earning a legal status, no matter how hard they work for it. Many of them will become increasingly frustrated, angry, and some of them eventually may turn violent.

I was thinking about all of this when I read about last week's U.S. Senate refusal to pass the DREAM Act, a bill that would offer a path to legalization to children of undocumented **immigrants** who were brought to the United States at a very young age, and who get a college degree or serve in the military.

The bill would have regularized the status of youths like Juan and Alex Gomez, the two Colombian-born Miami brothers who were brought by their parents to this country as toddlers, graduated near the top of their high school classes, and now face deportation to a country they don't even remember.

There are an estimated 1.8 million children in the United States who are growing up like other American kids, often speak no language other than English, but don't have legal documents, according to the Pew Hispanic Center. They are denied in-state college tuition fees or scholarships that are available to legal U.S. residents, and are eventually thrown into a labor market where they are barred from being employed.

Further, the Bush administration-backed escalation of raids against undocumented workers in factories, the increase of city ordinances prohibiting people from leasing apartments to undocumented **immigrants**, and the overt xenophobia spilling daily from Latino-phobic radio and cable-television shows will leave their mark on these and other children in **immigrant** communities.

A study released last week by the Urban Institute and the National Council of La Raza says there are about five million U.S. children with at least one undocumented parent.

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"The recent intensification of immigration enforcement activities by the federal government has increasingly put these children at risk of family separation, economic hardship, and psychological trauma," the report says.

The study looked at the impact of recent U.S. immigration raids in Colorado, Nebraska and Massachusetts, where about 900 undocumented workers were arrested at their work sites, and their children - most often infants - were suddenly deprived of their fathers or mothers.

"The combination of fear, isolation, and economic hardship induced mental health problems such as depression, separation anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide thoughts," it said.

My opinion: We have to stop this xenophobic hysteria. And please, dear anti-immigration readers, don't tell me I'm being dishonest for failing to point out that you are not against legal immigration, but only against "illegals."

You are making a deceptive argument. Leaving aside the fact that nearly half of the undocumented **immigrants** came to this country legally, and overstayed their visas, their non-compliance with immigration rules should not stigmatize them with the label of "illegals."

You may have violated a rule, but that should not make you an "illegal" person. You may have gotten a ticket for speeding, but that doesn't make you an "illegal" human being, even if the potential harm of your reckless driving is much greater than anything done by most of the hard-working undocumented **immigrants** in this country.

Carrying out enforcement-only policies, labeling undocumented workers as "illegals" and depriving them of hope for upward mobility - rather than working toward greater economic cooperation with Latin America to reduce migration **pressures** - is not only wrong, but dangerous. The millions of undocumented among us will not leave. They will only get angrier.

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