

**DEPORTED;**  
**IN A BOXCAR;**  
**A CIVIL RIGHTS NIGHTMARE**

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## **Body**

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I don't believe for a minute that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is anti-Latino, not with a Kennedy wife and his own immigrant experience to remind him he's not in Central Europe anymore. Then again, this Mexican-American wasn't picked up one day and herded into a **boxcar**.

But Ignacio Pina was, and he has a legitimate gripe against the rookie governor.

Schwarzenegger recently vetoed two bills that would have offered hope for an apology and symbolic bucks to Mexican-Americans like Pina who were illegally **deported** during the 1930s. If you were educated in America, chances are you never heard about one of the worst **civil rights nightmares** in our history.

Pina was only 6 years old when U.S. immigration officers showed up at his Montana home, jailed his family for a week, then put them on a train to Mexico. It was 1931. As the Great Depression settled in, America once more succumbed to anti-immigrant hysteria. President Hoover ordered the mass **deportation** of illegal Mexican immigrants. A lot of state and local authorities gladly lent a hand to Hoover's "repatriation program."

Nobody has solid numbers, but historians believe 500,000 to 2 million were shipped out, including tens of thousands of legal immigrants and children like Pina who were born in the United States. Pina eventually made it back after his family struggled to survive in Mexico. Who knows how many did not? He's 80 now and lives in Bakersfield, Calif.

"It's a feeling I will have until I die," he told the Associated Press. "This government did a very wrong thing."

The retired railroad worker will have to live a while longer with that feeling. So will others who lost their **rights**, property and livelihood.

In all fairness to Schwarzenegger, he wasn't the only historically challenged politician to reject justice for the "repatriados." So did former Gov. Gray Davis, and for the same reason. It would cost the state millions in legal fees and payments, and we just can't afford it after writing fat paychecks for state prison guards.

I wrote first about the plight of the repatriados last year, when **civil rights** groups filed a class-action lawsuit against Los Angeles and California. The lawyers didn't go after the feds because President Franklin Delano Roosevelt stopped the federal **deportations** in 1932. Most of the damage was done by zealous local and state authorities who

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kept the deportation boxcars loaded and southbound for most of the 1930s. That's why the state legislation was crucial. It would have allowed the repatriados to sue the state after the statute of limitations had expired.

If you want a full explanation of the deportations, and a better understanding of Mexican American sensibilities today, I recommend the 1995 book "Decade of Betrayal" by scholars Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez.

For now, anyone who stands for correcting this ugly, buried history should take heart in the example set by Japanese-Americans interned during World War II. They won an official apology and reparations after repeated rejections convinced them to take their story to the American people.

Maybe it's a script lost on California's actor-turned-governor, but politicians who reject justice that is long overdue often end up pushing it into the headlines and history books.

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