

WGGP IN THE NEWS:

The following Op-Ed column was published in the July 17, 2006 edition of the *Christian Science Monitor* (<http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0717/p09s02-coop.html>)

American-born children shouldn't be deported

Immigration reform must ensure that the best interest of American children determines the fate of their undocumented parents.

By Noreen M. Sugrue

CHAMPAIGN, ILL.

As the US government urgently seeks a unified policy to deal with illegal immigrants, law-enforcement officials seem to be paying more attention to enforcing current laws.

In June 2006, for example, more than 2,400 undocumented workers from across the country were seized. They are currently awaiting deportation hearings.

Their legal status in this country is one thing. But the status of their children is another. The overwhelming majority of those arrested in June are parents of American citizens - children born in the US - and the majority of those children are under the age of 10. These children are US citizens; they're no different from my child or the children of most of you. But because of the possible deportations of their parents, these children will probably be deported, too, if they want to stay with their parents. If they find a way to stay, they will become policy orphans; that is, citizens with no parents in the US to care for them and no place to live except foster care or in the home of some generous community members. One of the children affected by this June raid is Sylvia; she was fortunate to be born in a country where "children and families first" is an enshrined value. She also has the misfortune of being born to parents who are undocumented workers in a country determined to rid itself of all such laborers.

Sylvia is an American citizen. She is happy learning, listening to music on her iPod, playing with her friends, and wondering what she will do all summer. Like millions of other American children, she has plans and ideas

of how to spend her free time.

Yet last month, Sylvia's life changed forever. Unlike most other American children, her family does not have control over where they live. The US government will decide where Sylvia's parents will live, and she will be forced to go with them or live without her parents.

Sylvia's parents are undocumented workers who were apprehended in one of many government-led raids. Ostensibly, they were arrested to protect our economy, our borders, our sense of fairness, and our moral right to determine who lives in the US.

What is not clear is how Sylvia or any other of the hundreds of thousands of American citizens and their working parents are a risk to each of us. Illegals are usually arrested for their crimes while at work. The crimes committed by Sylvia's parents are hard work and an attempt to make a better life for their children and grandchildren, coupled with a willingness to work at whatever jobs are available to achieve it all.

Yes, Sylvia's parents are undocumented workers, or people working in the US illegally. They would have gladly come here legally, but they are not highly educated, have no special training and skills, and do not have millions to invest in the US. They also have no other family living in the US. Current immigration law allows only those with family members already legally in the US or those with significant education and/or investment dollars to enter this country on a permanent basis and move toward citizenship. The rest who come are here temporarily, and their path to citizenship is almost nonexistent.

Regardless of the lives undocumented workers have built in the US or their contributions to the economy and community, family status, and the needs of children - especially American-born children - are not paramount considerations in deciding who will be able to stay in the US and who will have to go.

Laws that de facto deport American citizens create immediate and long-lasting social, moral, and political problems for each of us personally and the nation as a whole. As adults, Sylvia and most exiled children are likely to come back to their country of birth. However, they may return bitter and less able to compete economically than if they, along with their parents, had been allowed to stay in the US. When they return needing social assistance, each of us will pay the economic price. We also pay a moral price for having turned away our own citizens; American children born to undocumented foreign workers are often robbed of life opportunities

because of US social policies that ignore their needs and interests. Immigration reform must contain two key provisions currently not under consideration. One ensures that the best interest of American children determines what happens to their undocumented parents. The other includes allowing noncollege-educated and nonwealthy investor immigrants to legally enter the US and acquire citizenship.

• *Noreen M. Sugrue is a faculty member in the Women and Gender in Global Perspectives Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*