

Focus on Immigration

MARIA: A Portrait

María, a mother of two living in Mexico, was faced with a question every mother dreads to hear from her child. "Can I have more to eat?" was her five-year-old daughter's cry at breakfast, lunch and dinner. All that María could say was, "There is no more to eat."

Hunger was one of the main reasons that María put her faith in God and decided to make the hard and dangerous trip from Mexico to the United States. In past years, her husband would leave her and their children in Mexico and migrate to the U.S. in order to make enough money to support the family. This went on for several years until María felt that her children did not really have a father and that she was missing a husband.

At age thirty-one, with two young children, she decided to make the trip to the U.S. In order to join her husband, she and her children crossed the Rio Grande alone. As she traversed the dark river in the middle of the night, she wondered what might happen if they fell out of the boat. The boat was small and her

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What You Need to Know About U.S. Immigration

- In 1993, the "Top Ten" immigration sender countries from which the U.S. received immigrants were Mexico (109,027), Mainland China (65,552), the Philippines (63,189), Vietnam (59,613), the former Soviet Union (58,568), the Dominican Republic (44,886), India (40,021), Poland (27,729), El Salvador (25,517), and the United Kingdom (18,543). ("A Guide to Immigration Facts and Issues." National Immigration Forum, 1994)
- More than half of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. come from six countries: Mexico (31%), El Salvador (9%), Guatemala (9%), Canada (3%), Poland (3%), and the Philippines (3%). (Ibid)
- Every year 1.1 million immigrants arrive in the U.S. 700,000 enter as lawful permanent residents, chiefly to join their spouses, parents or family or to contribute their talent to American universities, research institutions or corporations. 100,000-150,000 enter legally as refugees. 300,000 undocumented immigrants enter the country each year. Approximately 3.2 million undocumented workers live in the U.S.; an estimated 16,925 reside in North Carolina. (Statistical Department of Immigration and Naturalization Services, 1993)
- Today, immigrants comprise a smaller percentage of the population than they did at the beginning of the century. During the time between 1870-1920, approximately 15% of the total population was foreign born. In 1990, 8% of the U.S. population was composed of immigrants. (Ibid)
- Immigrants pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits. Legal and undocumented immigrants together pay 70.3 billion in taxes and receive 42.9 billion in services. Undocumented immigrants alone pay 7 billion in taxes. ("Setting the Record Straight." Michael Fix and Jeffrey Passel, Urban Institute, 1994)
- You may apply for U.S. citizenship if you: have been a lawful permanent resident for 5 years; have been a lawful permanent resident for 3 years and have been married to a U.S. citizen for those 3 years, and continue to be married to that U.S. citizen; are the lawful permanent resident child of U.S. citizen parents; OR have qualifying military service.

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SAF Mission:

To bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers, and build diverse coalitions working for social change.

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youngest son, a mere thirteen months, could easily be lost in the river's muddy flow. When María was asked if she would ever travel again the way she did the first time, she replied, "No." The only reason she might would be if her family became split between the two countries again. If fate divided her family, she would do anything to reunite it.

María explained that life is different in the U.S., because here she can feed her children. Both she and her husband work and provide for their family together. When she worked in a fabric store in Mexico, she was still not able to put shoes on her kids' feet. She heard that in the U.S. people can advance themselves, so she crossed the border to better feed and clothe her family. When asked if she found what she had expected, she said, "Yes, but it took a long time."

María has returned to visit her family in Mexico and has heard all of their tales about poverty. After hearing those stories, she doesn't want to live like that again. María said she would only return to Mexico if she could work and feed her family the way she can in the U.S.

The most difficult barrier that María and her family face in the U.S. is language. It is very hard to communicate with others here, she says. María tried to learn English, but feels she cannot

grasp the accent--she is afraid she will not be understood and will not understand others. María has been going to English classes, although it is hard to find time when she must work and care for her family. She is thankful that her children do not face the same difficulties with English as she does; she works hard to encourage them to get a good education.

Recently, María passed her citizenship test and now she is waiting to be sworn-in. She is happy that she lived through the initial nightmare of immigration and thankful to have escaped the poverty that drove her to migrate.

*by Graciela Magallanes,
1996 SAF Intern*

IMMIGRATION ASSISTANCE ORGANIZATIONS:

Immigrants Legal Assistance Project

224 South Dawson St., PO Box 27343, Raleigh, NC, 27611

Phone: (888) 251-2776

Fax: (919) 856-2175

Services: Free representation & legal advice in the areas of immigration, civil rights, employment/labor and education law for low-income individuals, non-profits and community agencies.

Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services

Phone: (415) 243-8215

Hotline: (415) 543-6767

Services: Non-profit, bilingual hotline provides general information on the new welfare reform law, welfare benefits, immigration procedures, becoming a citizen, and petitioning for relatives.



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

1996 Into the Fields Interns

During the 1996 Into the Fields Program, SAF Interns worked in rural areas in North and South Carolina with Migrant Education Programs, health clinics, community organizing groups, and Migrant Head Start Centers. Interns:

- Researched and developed an educational handout about U.S. immigration;
- Developed a curriculum to educate parents about how to discuss educational issues with their children's teachers and administrators;
- Worked with "La Voz de Carolina," a statewide Spanish language newspaper, to provide coverage of the migrant and seasonal farmworker community;
- Utilized the new Spanish Language Driver's Education Manual to teach farmworkers the basic skills necessary to pass the driver's exam;
- Coordinated Project Levante, a school drop-out prevention program for farmworker junior high and high school students; and
- Inspected migrant housing with the North Carolina Department of Labor.

SAF Staff & Board of Directors thank the 1996 Into the Fields Interns

Joanna Johnson (Appalachian State Univ.)	Tracy Thorpe (NC State Univ.)
Rachele Poling (Appalachian State Univ.)	Lori White (NC State Univ.)
Salvador Juarez (Boise State Univ.)	Elva Leon (Oregon State Univ.)
Maria Reynoso (Boise State Univ.)	David Cruz (Penn State Univ.)
Graciela Magallanes (CSU-Fresno)	Deborah Bell (Shaw University)
Jesus Mendoza (CSU-Fresno)	Rashaunda Shaw (Shaw University)
Ramiro Arceo (CSU-Sacramento)	Andrea Hickle (UNC-Chapel Hill)
Gabriela Chavez (CSU-Sacramento)	Chris Johnson (UNC-Chapel Hill)
Alejandro Fernandez (Davidson College)	Keith Kocher (UNC-Chapel Hill)
Ben Edwards (Duke University)	Benjamin Ousley (UNC-Chapel Hill)
Nadia Goineau (Duke University)	Debra Woodruff (UNC-Chapel Hill)
Eri Nishikawa (Duke University)	Drew Harton (USC-Columbia)
Sarah Hennessey (Guilford College)	Michelle Chin (USC-Columbia)
Bryn McNamara (NC State University)	Nadine Stewart (USC-Columbia)

Dear SAF,

I'm Berenice. A student from Lincoln Middle School. I'm writing because I'm concerned about the migrants and I'm writing because I would like to know how could I help with the migrants?

I am concerned as well about why we take advantage of the migrants? They're actually doing us a favor by putting fruits or vegetables on our plates. Still, we're paying them minimum wage and some people even say that we should make a big wall so they can't get here to America.

Let's put it this way. Let's say if there weren't any migrants to do these low paying jobs. Do you think a rich, important person is going to do the job?

So I would love to know how can my class or I help? Because migrants are human beings. I would like to know how can I help? Please write back.

Sincerely,
Berenice Covarrubias
Santa Monica, CA

SAF is seeking donations to support the 1997 summer interns. To make a tax-deductible donation, fill out the following form and send it to SAF, P.O. Box 90803, Durham, NC 27708. Please make checks payable to SAF.

____ Yes, I can support SAF's summer interns with a tax-deductible gift of:
____ \$200 ____ \$150 ____ \$75 ____ \$50 \$ ____ other

____ Yes, I can donate frequent flier miles to fly a summer intern from a farmworker family to the Carolinas.

____ Yes, I can host an Into the Fields Intern June 7 - August 7 in my home in (circle one):
• Asheville, NC • Benson, NC • Newton Grove, NC • Yadkinville, NC • Raleigh, NC

Name: _____ Phone _____ Address _____

The New Alien Restrictions on Public Benefits:

The Full Impact Remains Uncertain

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The new welfare legislation bars almost all noncitizens from receiving two significant federal programs: Food Stamps, the major food and assistance program for the poor; and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the cash assistance program for low-income persons who are aged, blind or disabled. Should they so elect, states can also bar legal aliens from three federal programs administered at the state level: non-emergency Medicaid, Title XX social services block grants, and the new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which replaced AFDC.

With the exception of Food Stamps and SSI, other "federal public benefits" will still be accessible to "qualified" aliens, but such aliens include only lawful permanent residents, refugees, persons paroled into the U.S. for at least a year, and those granted asylum or the withholding of deportation, or conditional entrant status.

Even "qualified" aliens who enter the U.S. after August 22, 1996, however, including most lawful permanent residents and parolees, will be ineligible for "federal means-tested" programs for the first five years after entry. Although "federal means-tested" is still undefined, it will *not* include emergency Medicaid, the major child nutrition programs, certain public health programs, some limited emergency disaster relief programs, Head-Start, post-secondary education loans and grants, foster care and adoption assistance, and federal job training programs.

Aliens who do not fit within the "qualified" immigration categories are banned from receiving any "federal public benefit" program. Because the term "qualified alien" is defined so narrowly, many aliens who are lawfully in the U.S. and working, such as applicants for asylum or adjustment of status, or aliens granted temporary protected status (TPS), will be treated under such programs as if they were undocumented.

By contrast, the term "federal public benefit"

is defined broadly as "any retirement, welfare, health, disability, public or assisted housing, post-secondary education, food assistance, unemployment benefit, or any other similar benefit. . . ." Exempted from the list are emergency Medicaid; public health programs for certain immunizations; short-term, non-case, in-kind emergency disaster relief programs, and services or assistance designated by the Attorney General.

Social Implications

Although the ultimate effect of the welfare legislation on legal immigrants will be severe and extensive under any assessment, its harshest impact will fall on children, the elderly, and others who are unable to naturalize. Congress has provided no allowances for those who have disabling accidents or illnesses after coming to the U.S., or for those who have lived here for decades.

Estimates are that this new law will cause approximately 500,000 legal immigrants to lose SSI benefits and almost one million to lose Food Stamps. About half of those losing SSI benefits will have been in the U.S. for more than ten years. The new five-year ban on qualified aliens' eligibility for Medicaid will affect approximately 636,000 new immigrants, but if the states elect to bar current Medicaid recipients the number rises to 1.3 million qualified aliens who will lose benefits. If the states decide to bar aliens from TANF, an estimated 320,000 legal aliens will lose those benefits.

The underlying motive for restricting legal aliens from federal and state benefit programs is economic. Eliminated coverage for aliens will save an estimated \$23.7 billion over the next six years, which represents 44 percent of the total \$53.4 billion savings in legislation. Although immigrants have been singled out for almost half

