

Immigrants Hide, Fearing Capture on 'Any Corner'

By Vivian Yee FEB. 22, 2017
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HEADLINE

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BILLBOARD OR SUBTITLE

No going to church, no going to the store. No doctor's appointments for some, no school for others. No driving, period — not when a broken taillight could deliver the driver to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

LEAD

It is happening on **Staten Island**, where fewer **day laborers** haunt street corners in search of work; in **West Phoenix's Isaac School District**, where **13 Latino students** have **dropped out in the past two weeks**; and in the horse country of northern **New Jersey**, where one of the many **undocumented grooms** who muck out the stables is **thinking of moving back to Honduras**. If **deportation** has always been a threat on paper for **the 11 million people living in the country illegally**, it rarely imperiled those who did not commit serious crimes. But **with the Trump administration intent on curbing illegal immigration — two memos outlining the federal government's plans to accelerate deportations were**

released Tuesday, another step toward making good on one of **President Trump's signature campaign pledges** — that **threat, for many people**, has now begun to distort every movement.

BODY

It has driven one family from the local park where they used to play baseball in the evenings, and young men from a soccer field in Brooklyn where pickup games were once common.

It has kept **Meli, 37, who arrived in Los Angeles from El Salvador more than 12 years ago**, in a state of self-imposed house arrest, refusing to drive, fearing to leave her home, wondering how she will take her younger son, who is autistic, to doctor's appointments.

"I don't want to go to the store, to church — they are looking everywhere, and they know where to find us," said Meli, who asked that her last name not be used out of fear of getting caught. **"They could be waiting for us anywhere. Any corner, any block."**

It has washed ever-larger tides of **immigrants in Philadelphia, New York, Los Angeles and beyond to the doors of nonprofit advocacy and legal services groups**, which report hearing the same questions: What should I do if I am stopped by an officer from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE? How quickly can I apply for citizenship if I am already a legal permanent resident? How can I designate someone with legal status as my children's guardian if I am deported? **"There's a real fear that their kids will get put into the foster care system,"** said Mary Clark, the executive director of Esperanza Immigrant Legal Services in Philadelphia. **"People are**

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/22/us/immigrants-deportation-fears.html?&moduleDetail=section-news-2&action=click&contentCollection=U.S.®ion=Footer&module=MoreInSection&version=WhatsNext&contentID=WhatsNext&pgtype=article>

asking us because they don't know where to turn."

The new policies call for speedier deportations and the hiring of 10,000 ICE agents, and direct them to treat any offense, no matter how small, as grounds for deportation. For Mr. Trump's supporters and longtime advocates of stricter immigration enforcement, they are a welcome move toward restoring law and order to a system that they say offered no deterrent to entering the country illegally. Undocumented immigrants, in their view, have filled jobs that belong to Americans, drained public resources and skipped the line for visas on which others waited for years.

But for the undocumented, the atmosphere in Washington is a signal to prepare for the worst.

In the parking lot of a Latino shopping strip in Austin, Tex., one couple who were walking with their two children out of a pediatrician appointment said they had picked a friend with documentation to serve as their children's guardian if they were sent back to Mexico.

"And we're getting our kids U.S. passports so they can come visit us in Mexico," said the man, a **stocky restaurant worker in a gray baseball cap, who has lived in Texas for 15 years** and declined to give his name.

He said he was not afraid to leave, but wanted to be prepared. **"If they're going to take me," he said, "they're going to take me."**

Two Roman Catholic nuns with the Sisters of Loretto, who did not want to be identified because they did not want to put the people they serve in jeopardy, **said they were already seeing the undocumented people they knew change their habits out of fear.**

They know a woman who has stopped going out to buy medication. They know a couple, restaurant workers, who have lived in the country for 25 years and are now taking turns going shopping. That way, they figure, their children will still have one parent if the other is picked up. Some low-income families in New York with children who are citizens have declined to re-enroll in a program offering food assistance worth several thousand dollars, said Betsy Plum, director of special projects for the New York Immigration Coalition, an advocacy group.

"There's a real isolationist reflex that's happening now," Ms. Plum said. On a good Sunday, **the Staten Island tamale restaurant run by Cesar Rodriguez and his mother makes \$3,000.** Since the start of the year, it has averaged only \$1,500, and this past Sunday only \$700.

Mr. Rodriguez, who was brought to New York when he was 13 and has temporary protection from deportation under an Obama-era program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, **said he thought undocumented residents were saving their money in case they were detained.** They may also be reluctant to leave the house for fear of immigration agents stalking outside.

"They are listening to fake news," he said. "Even if it's not true, they are afraid."

In some cases, fear has lapped fact.

For Graciela Nuñez Pargas, 22, who came here when she was 7 and is protected under DACA — which covers immigrants brought to the United States by their parents as children — the prospect of taking her driver's test has become daunting. Minor driving infractions are unlikely to lead to

deportation proceedings, but Ms. Nuñez, who lives in Seattle, was nonetheless anxious.

“They’re expanding what it is to be criminal,” she said. “Things that a normal person would do by accident could land me back home in Venezuela.”

CONCLUSION

The Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, a nonprofit legal services group in Seattle, has issued thousands of business cards in recent days, advising undocumented immigrants what they should do, or not do, if a law enforcement agent knocks. “Do not answer questions about where you were born or about your immigration status,” the cards advise. The group is also telling immigrants that if a knock does come, sliding a card under the door is acceptable. One side of the card reads, “To whom it may concern: Before answering any questions, I want to talk to an attorney.”