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Trends. Psychologies of Immigration: The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility

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The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, signed into law by the United States President, Bill Clinton in 1996, has become infamous for uprooting rooted lives, delegitimizing legitimate activity, and--in a take on the novel 1984--reconstructing the past as to the nature of crime and its consequences. Most importantly, legal immigrants who have been law-abiding for many years are being detained and often deported for minor crimes--crimes for which they have already paid the legal penalty (if any), crimes that have been re-categorized as more severe after the fact, and crimes that weren't even grounds for deportation at the time they were committed.

One psychological rationale for this state of affairs is that the law is the law and will be followed regardless of consequence. Another is that though this law is written to preclude discretion in what the legal consequence should be, a de facto discretion will still occur. However, the many noxious consequences speak otherwise even as this rationale serves as a convenient, if fragile, suppression mechanism against these very consequences. Yet another rationale is that the law is directly responsible for less crime in border areas, the hampering of drug cartels, and the slowing of illegal immigration. The problem with this rationale is that all three of its components may not be supported by a dispassionate and analytic review of pertinent data. Even if the components were supported, however, the necessary discounting or comparative minimizing of their noxious consequences would not be easily defended.

A case can be made that unconscious psychodynamics--viz., the demonizing of the other and reification of the self--is a motivating factor for many of the Act's supporters. And the converse may be the case for many of its opponents. Opponents and supporters might also be differentiated by indicators such as the degree of good and bad aspects perceived in the self and other, the permeability of self-other boundaries, and the degree of desired interaction between various aspects of the self and of others. Regardless of the ontological validity of such constructs, psychological motives in addition to a rational analysis of policy parameters may be at the crux of the Act and the political controversy about it. (See Charles, M. (1999). Patterns: Unconscious shapings of self and experience. *Journal of Melanie Klein and Object Relations*, 17, 367-388; Hagan, J., & Palloni, A. (1999). Sociological criminology and the mythology of Hispanic immigration and crime. *Social Problems*, 46, 617-632; Hedges, C. (August 30, 2000). Condemned by past crimes: Deportation law descends sternly. *The New York Times*, p. A 23; Shaw, C. L. (1997). Personal narrative: Revealing self and reflecting other. *Human Communication Research*, 24, 302-319; Shane, E., & Shane, M. (1997). Intimacy, boundaries, and countertransference in the analytic relationship. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 17, 69-89; Yang, P.Q. (1999). Quality of post-1965 Asian immigrants. *Population and Environment: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 20, 527-544.) (Keywords: Illegal Immigration, Immigration Reform, Psychological Analysis.)