

Aliens in LA County Jails

Suppressed report offers revealing view of crime

by Linda Thom

Nationally, many Republican politicians are joining the ranks of those who believe that the party should steer clear of the immigration issue. They reason that to discuss the negative impacts of mass immigration will alienate a huge new immigrant voting block. Even in California, with the largest immigrant population in the nation, Attorney General Dan Lungren (R) has formulated a Republican strategy to embrace immigrants and, hopefully, their votes by focusing on immigrants' positive contributions. With this strategy, he hopes that Republicans can win back the large block of immigrant votes lost to Democrats in the last election. Mr. Lungren has announced his candidacy for the Republican nomination for Governor when Pete Wilson's term expires.

Why, one might wonder, are politicians unconcerned about the very large bloc of native-born voters? Political pundits and immigration reform advocates continue to speculate about this issue. Perhaps a contributing factor is that Americans, unless they live at ground zero, do not have strong enough concerns to be willing to take action. Perhaps also many do not understand the full scope of immigration's economic, social and cultural consequences. Clearly, the media do not often report some of the most negative aspects of mass immigration.

One of immigration's most negative and least discussed impacts is crime. California's top cop is Attorney General Dan Lungren. His department keeps the criminal justice data which are summarized annually in a publication entitled *Crime and Delinquency in California*. Attorney General Lungren takes full credit for the *recent* decline in crime. What he does not tell Californians is how

precipitously crime would have declined were it not for immigration, even though the data collected by his Department of Justice clearly demonstrate the connection.

Los Angeles County is the nation's immigration epicenter and crime is declining in Los Angeles. Demographic experts note that young males commit most crimes. In Los Angeles the 15- to 24-year-old population plunged by 23 percent between 1990 and 1996 (McDonnell). During the same period, according to Census data, thousands of native-born persons moved out of Los Angeles and thousands of immigrants moved in. With this information, one might project that crimes committed by immigrants would be increasing both numerically and as a percentage of total crimes — and that is precisely what is happening.

These trends can be seen by examining the population of the Los Angeles County Jail. Jail is the abode of misdemeanants whose sentences are less than one year, and felons who are awaiting trial. Upon conviction, felons are transferred to state prison. County jails constitute one of the largest financial burdens of immigration for local government. LA County's jails are severely overcrowded. The media carry regular stories detailing the county's jail problems and how hundreds are released before their sentences are complete because of crowding. While other factors contribute to jail overcrowding, immigrant inmates are a large and growing share of the overcrowding.

For example, while the average length of stay in county jail is 33 days, the average stay for deportable criminal aliens in 1995 was 74 days. Immigrants who were sent to state prison upon conviction for felonies stayed an average of 104 days in the Los Angeles county jail system. The stays could be shortened if the INS would pick up the deportable aliens sooner but the INS lacks the prison capacity to do so, therefore, the financial impact falls on counties.

In 1990, Los Angeles County conducted a special study of deportable aliens in the criminal justice system. Deportable aliens may be legal or

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illegal aliens but mostly they are illegal. Updated data from 1995 show a steady growth in immigrant inmates. The new statistics, as yet unpublished, were obtained by the author from a county employee. Table 1 compares one-month samples from 1995 and 1990.

The one-month samples from 1990 and 1995 show that although inmates leaving county jail decreased by 18.6%, foreign-born inmates increased by 19.7% and deportable aliens increased by 25%. Note, also, the large increase in deportable aliens who were cited or bonded out of jail and the large increase in deportable aliens convicted of felonies and sent to state prison.

In the June 1995 sample, the most common charge for deportable aliens was drug selling/possession (27% of total). The next highest was driving under the influence (16%); burglary (5%), and spousal assault (4%). Fifty-eight percent of the aliens were charged with commission of felonies, 40% with misdemeanors and 2% with other less serious violations. As with criminals the world over, all but 8% of the deportable aliens were under 40 years of age.

Table 2 shows the disposition of the 1,504 deportable aliens arrested by the INS.

The most disturbing part of the study is the recidivism rates. [See *Chart 1 below*.] Since their release in 1990, Los Angeles County tracked 346 criminal aliens. The overall recidivism rate is 75%. The average subsequent contacts were 4.1, and 96, or 28% of the sample, had 5 or more arrests. The pie chart shows the nature of the rearrests and other subsequent contacts. The numbers add up to 101% because of rounding.

Two-thirds of the subsequent contacts were felony arrests. "Other" contacts include citations, illegal re-entries, deportation hearings, auto accidents and the like. Of the 1995 sample, 300 criminal aliens were tracked and the overall recidivism rate in just one year was 48%, almost half. Criminals used an average 5.3 names, and the average false birth dates were 2.2. In both the 1990 and 1995 samples, eight out of ten subsequent rearrests were made in LA County.

Perhaps Los Angeles County will release the jail study but maybe not. Nevertheless, people in Los Angeles County and Southern California seem to understand the immigrant crime problem. The connection is easy, really. Reports of the Ukrainian suspect in the Cosby murder make national

headlines but other increasingly routine homicides in Southern California do not. For example, at a semi-rural high school just outside Santa Barbara, an alleged Vietnamese gang member gunned down a Hmong youth in a drive-by shooting. Two other murders, one of a wealthy matron and another of a Mexican illegal alien, have been committed in the last six months in Santa Barbara. The death of the matron appears to have been connected with burglary and the death of the Mexican national appears to have resulted from a barroom quarrel. Both suspects, illegal aliens, fled to Mexico.

In poll after poll, Americans say they want less immigration and in other polls they say that one of their most serious concerns is crime. One can understand why politicians avoid discussing immigration; they want immigrant votes but why is discussion of immigrant crime so taboo? Perhaps, like teen pregnancy and homosexuality, the subject of immigrant crime will "come out" in time. To begin healing the dysfunctional family dynamics caused by alcoholism, the family members must stop whispering and start talking. Failing to discuss immigration and immigrant crime will not make the problems go away. To heal our American family, those who have the immigrant crime data must release it and those who are concerned must discuss it. **TSC**

REFERENCE

McDonnell, Patrick J., *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1997, "Highly Touted Theory on Age, Crime Disputed," p. B1.

Table 1
Deportable Aliens in Los Angeles County Jail

<u>Category</u>	<u>6/95</u>	<u>5/90</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Total Inmates Released* from County Jail	14,446	17,774	down 18.6%
Foreign Born Interviewed	3,983	3,327	up 19.7%
Total Deportable Aliens Encountered	2,416	1,933	up 25.0%
Percent Deportable Aliens of Total Released	16.7%	10.9%	up 53.2%
Aliens Arrested by INS	1,504	1,305	up 15.2%
Aliens Cited Out/Bonded Out	377	230	up 63.9%
Aliens Sent to State Prison	535	398	up 36.7%

*Released does not mean set free. Most aliens were arrested by the INS or sent to state prison.

Table 2
Disposition of 1995 Deportable Aliens Arrested by the INS

<u>Arrested by INS</u>	1,504	62% of total deportable aliens
Voluntary Returns	621	41% of INS arrests
Ordered deported	617	41% of INS arrests
Transferred for deportation hearings elsewhere	183	12% of INS arrests
Released Pending Investigation	62	4% of INS arrests
Still Pending, Granted Relief or Closed	21	1% of INS arrests

Chart 1. Recidivism among released criminal aliens