

# Mexico's 'Matricula Consular' Program

## *ID cards for foreign nationals illegally in the United States*

by Craig Nelsen

In the *Federalist Papers*, John Jay observed that Providence had blessed the people of the brand new United States with a common unity. This unity he ascribed to the fact that the earliest U.S. citizens were “a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs, and who, by their joint counsels, arms, and efforts, fighting side by side through a long and bloody war, have nobly established general liberty and independence.”

Today, over two centuries later, the basis for the kind of American unity John Jay described no longer exists. In our modern multiracial, multicultural, multiethnic country, bonds such as a common ancestry no longer unite us. Indeed, in today's America, a unity based on ancestry is regarded as wicked — at least for the majority — and its exact opposite, as in the 1990s slogan, “Diversity is our strength,” is acclaimed.

The bonds of union, for modern Americans, have been largely stripped of those impulses that arise from what is usual in national communities — the deep and powerful bonds of a shared culture, or a shared language. Today, American unity is found mostly along the surface: in a simple legal definition of citizenship, in economic co-dependence, and, it is said, in a shared love of liberty — an affection that hardly distinguishes Americans from other humans.

Insofar as there is any *emotional* attachment to one

another as Americans at all, it exists presently only in a shared nationality; the virtue of patriotism is the only tie left that binds. Thus patriotism, the emotional attachment to our shared membership in the national community, is possibly the last bulwark against national disintegration and conflict.

And now even that final defense is under attack. The modern phenomena of large-scale illegal immigration, radical universal egalitarianism, dual citizenship, corporate globalism, and excessive legal immigration are all posing serious threats to the American sense of national community.

The latest assault on American national unity comes to us courtesy of the Mexican government. Through its forty-three consulates, the Mexicans have launched in the United States a determined effort to issue an identification card called the *matricula consular* to its citizens illegally residing here. Famously indifferent to the needs of Mexicans in Mexico, the Mexican government is so eager to provide the card-issuing service to Mexicans in the United States that, in addition to distributing the card through its consulates, it has deployed mobile *matricula* units nationwide to hand out the cards in places like church basements and shopping malls.

The *matricula* card program has achieved an astonishing success in a very short time. Virtually unknown just two years ago, about a million of these illegal alien ID cards will be issued this year alone.

But the Mexican government does not stop with simply issuing the cards. It is also aggressively lobbying U.S. institutions to accept the *matricula* as a form of valid identification. In this effort, the Mexicans enjoy the enthusiastic cooperation of a diverse and growing number of U.S. institutions. Mexico's Foreign Ministry recently announced that more than 800 U.S. police departments, 15 cities, 20 counties in various states, and 13 states now

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accept the *matricula* cards as valid ID. Furthermore, more than 60 banking institutions around the country have also agreed to accept the cards as a means to open a bank account.

Because legal immigrants and legitimate visitors from Mexico have access to U.S.-issued identification, it is safe to assume that almost all *matricula* cardholders are illegal aliens. Indeed, that this is the case has been widely reported in the press. Thus, institutions and police departments that accept the card as valid ID do so knowing, and in reckless disregard of the fact, that the person carrying the card is almost certainly a foreign national illegally in the United States.

So what's the big deal? Illegal aliens are here anyway, so why not at least identify them? There are several very good reasons to insist that all persons in the United States carry U.S.-verified identification.

First, identity is important to unity. In the same way family bonds rely on the ability of family members to recognize one another, any sense of community relies fundamentally on the ability of the members of the community to identify other members of the community. In our pluralistic society, where the only common identity we have left is our membership in the nation, the *matricula* card presents the American people with what could be the decisive attack on its national, unifying identity.

If present trends continue, one can envision a not-too-distant future of an America occupied by a billion residents, but not countrymen; an America inhabited by masses of workers, but not compatriots; a teeming land of consumers, but not Americans. If the institutional acceptance of the *matricula* card is allowed to continue (and other countries are following Mexico's lead) why should we not expect, ultimately, to become nothing more than a vast labor camp, sharing with our neighbors not even the most basic of human bonds: our nationality? The possibility is all too real, and, if for no other reason, all thoughtful Americans should resist the *matricula consular*.

Second, immigration moderates have been warning since its appearance that the acceptance of the *matricula* card by U.S. institutions constitutes a "stealth amnesty" because it legitimizes the continued presence of illegal aliens in the country. The Mexican government itself openly says as much.

Roberto Rodriguez Hernandez, who supervises the

ID project for Mexico's Foreign Ministry, told the *Washington Times* that "(a) little lobbying, pushing from mayors up to governors, then going through congressional representatives and senators is worth the effort. If there is a negotiation [for an accord] between the two executive offices, it must end up going to Congress. So why not do this in reverse? We work first with the states, with the Congress and the senators, and then it will be easier to push forward an agreement" (read: amnesty).

Third, the United States has certain duties to its citizens—like ensuring national security and defending against international and domestic fraud—that require the responsibility for identification of persons in the United States to remain with U.S. authorities. These responsibilities must not be ceded to any foreign government. Particularly, in this age of terrorism, the already difficult task of keeping tabs on who is here and what they are doing should not be made worse by adding millions of persons in the country carrying questionable IDs issued by the government of a country that has long suffered under severe institutionalized corruption.

While Mexico protests that the *matricula* card is secure and tamper-proof, early anecdotal evidence is showing it to be anything but. In an incident reported in the *Denver Post*, an INS official told of one alien the INS arrested who had three different *matriculas* with three different names. "It was his picture," said Scott Weber, deputy director for the INS in Denver, "issued through the consulate."

Mexico's active interference in U.S. politics is also troubling when one considers that our meddling neighbor, through its *matricula* card agenda, is developing a database of millions of its citizens here in the United States — a database to which U.S. authorities do not have access. The political implications should worry any American. There are signs that the Mexicans are already putting their database to political use. For example, when a new municipality is considering whether to officially accept the *matricula* card, hundreds of Mexican illegal aliens will typically turn up at the City Council meeting at which the proposal is to be considered. The mere sight of such a large crowd is usually enough to intimidate the average council member into voting for acceptance. Are Mexican consulates using their new databases to orchestrate these events?

Responding to the threat of the *matricula* card, a new organization is attempting to reverse the trend. Friends of Immigration Law Enforcement (FILE) — a group of attorneys, immigration experts, and law enforcement officers — has developed a series of constitutional, statutory, and liability arguments that challenge the right and the wisdom of acceptance of the *matricula* by any American public entity or financial institution.

Briefly, the constitutional argument rests on the plenary power granted by the U.S. Constitution to

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Congress over all aspects of immigration law; no body other than Congress may make any policy that affects in any way the status of immigrants in the United States. The statutory argument cites the part of the U.S. Code that makes encouraging an illegal alien to remain illegally in the United States a felony. The liability argument rests on the responsibility an institution might bear for knowingly contributing to a dangerous condition if a carrier of the *matricula* card causes personal injury to someone, and that alien can be shown to have been aided and abetted in his illegal presence by the institution that accepted the card.

Much vital work is being done in Washington to improve immigration related legislation. Immigration reductionist groups in the capital have developed sophisticated and effective systems that track both good and bad legislation as it moves through Congress, that lobby lawmakers, and that translate growing public concern about mass immigration into political pressure on Capitol Hill.

But good legislation requires good enforcement, and it is into the enforcement breach that FILE has stepped. As the only immigration moderation group devoted entirely to immigration law enforcement, FILE could play a decisive role in fending off the growing menace of the

*matricula* card. Among other efforts, FILE has begun mailing out hundreds of notices detailing the legal objections to, and liability ramifications of, *matricula* acceptance by U.S. institutions. The letters have served notice on mayors, city council members, city attorneys, chiefs of police, county sheriffs, and county commissioners, as well as hundreds of banks.

A careful and legally solid notification of the problems of the *matricula* should give pause to American officials and businesspersons rushing pell-mell to acquiesce in the Mexican government’s designs. A well-argued notice might even persuade prudent executives and administrators of entities that already accept the card to reverse course. And perhaps the legal arguments and liability concerns FILE raises will give those Americans silently opposed to the *matricula* the arguments they need successfully to resist the card from within their own organizations.

Though the efforts are just getting underway, early feedback seems to indicate that the plan is working. Already, for example, one bank that received notice has contacted FILE and asked for a picture of the *matricula* card so that they could use it in warning tellers not to accept it.

Questions of identification are central to immigration issues ranging from national security, to immigration fraud, to access to “magnets” like employment and health care for illegals, to the very basis of human community itself. Therefore, a battle on the *matricula* is a battle well chosen. Furthermore, a battle against illegal immigration drawn along the lines of secure ID would help shield combatants from name-calling, and would enjoy wide popular support.

For the sake of the young and future generations, Americans must regain control over their community, and the membership therein, so that, as John Jay put it, this “band of brethren, united to each other by the strongest ties, should never be split into a number of unsocial, jealous, and alien sovereignties.” •