

## No second class families

Written by Benjamin Todd Jealous  
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African Americans have spent much of our history fighting for equal treatment. Just two generations ago, our parents and our grandparents were banned from eating at certain restaurants, attending certain schools, and working in certain professions.

So it is not difficult to empathize with the struggle of immigrants in our country. Like our ancestors who migrated from the former slave states of the Deep South, millions of undocumented immigrants move to the United States each year to find work and a decent education for their children. But when they arrive, they are confronted with blatant discrimination and racial profiling - with hardly any legal recourse and little public outrage.

As people of color, we have a responsibility to stand up for social justice whenever it is violated. That is why the NAACP has joined other civil rights and human rights organizations, including the Rights Working Group and the Leadership Conference of Civil and Human Rights, to support comprehensive immigration reform.

Across the country, an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants live in a permanent second-class status. Many immigrants come to the U.S. to find a better life, but find themselves living in the shadows, in constant fear of arrest and deportation. This segregation has a cost.

Undocumented workers are exploited on a regular basis. Many business owners pay low wages and provide dangerous working conditions for their undocumented workers, with little fear of retaliation. They know that their employees have too much at stake to risk contacting the proper authorities.

Undocumented immigrants are also targeted by police. Racial profiling has been legalized in states like Alabama and Arizona under the guise of immigration enforcement. Our national immigration laws, in conjunction with these state laws, encourage local police to stop people of

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color, whether they are undocumented or not.

Right now Congress is debating a comprehensive immigration bill that will offer a roadmap to citizenship and also deal directly with workplace discrimination and racial profiling. One proposed provision allows undocumented immigrants to have the full protection of American labor laws. Another one explicitly prohibits racial profiling by Homeland Security agents - which would make it the first federal law to do so.

The bill in its draft form is not perfect. The racial profiling provision needs adjustments that are being debated at the time of this writing. The draft bill also contains provisions that would eliminate the diversity visa program - which helps many African and Caribbean immigrants come to America - and dramatically expand the guest worker program. The NAACP and our allies will continue to make our voice heard as Congress debates the bill.

In August 1963 a sea of diverse activists stormed the National Mall to demand social justice and an end to segregation. In April 2013 a similarly diverse wave of legal immigrants, undocumented immigrants, and activists of all backgrounds gathered at the United States Capitol to call an end to second-class citizenship. The March on Washington pressured Congress to pass the Civil Rights Acts. This year, we need to show Congress again that American of all stripes care about progressive reform.

As Dr. King said, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. African Americans have spent much of our history fighting for fair treatment and equal opportunity. We must also offer support to our immigrant brothers and sisters. If we want to escape the sins of our past, we must ensure there are no second class families today.

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