

# Hate Speech

Ending language that undergirds discrimination and violence against immigrants

*So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them. Gen 1:27*

## Information:

Immigration reform is an issue that can be contentious and debate often evokes strong emotions. It is important however, to ensure that discussions center on policy and not groups of individuals. Today there are some voices in the immigration debate that resort to perpetuating stereotypes, demonizing and even dehumanizing immigrants, and using immigrants as scapegoats responsible for current societal problems. Unfortunately these voices are loud, well organized, and are often presented as legitimate opinions on matters of policy.

Anti-immigration groups appear on radio and television talk shows, testify before congressional committees, and purchase ads in main stream newspapers and magazines. Americans can mistake these voices and opinions as legitimate concerns about immigration policy because they publish reports and create organizations. These organizations have come together to form broad coalitions and initiated additional groups that seem to speak on behalf of immigrants and other minorities.

## Insight:

These organizations are no longer clandestine operations but under take major media campaigns designed to misinform and instill hatred and fear of immigrants and their intentions in coming to the United States. Extremist and racist rhetoric seeks to blame immigrants for environmental problems, diseases, and problems with the health care system. They deny that immigrants contribute to America and

ignore the statistics that show undocumented

immigrants use fewer resources than citizens and documented immigrants, pay taxes, and contribute to Medicare and Social Security (benefits which they are not eligible to receive). Annually the Social Security Administration receives \$6 billion to \$7 billion in Social Security tax revenue and about \$1.5 billion in Medicare taxes from the 9 million W-2's that are submitted with incorrect Social Security Numbers.<sup>1</sup> It is widely assumed that these W-2s belong to undocumented immigrants without their own Social Security Numbers and federal work permits.

When labels such as "illegal aliens/immigrants" are used to describe those who are undocumented or their migration is depicted as an "invasion", it dehumanizes immigrants, trivializes their desire to better themselves and their



<sup>1</sup> New York Times,  
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9803EEDD1F3FF936A35757C0A9639C8B63>.

situation, and does violence to the image of God which all humans bear. Language does matter and this increased and aggressive language can lead physical violence against minorities. The Southern Poverty Law Center documented a 40% increase in the number of hate groups since 2000. These organizations disseminate resources that have allowed an anti-immigrant fervor to sweep the nation. This is illustrated by the release of a report by the FBI which documents a 35% increase in hate crimes against Latinos since 2003.

### **Invitation to Act:**

Often unknowingly people participate in racist and hate speech which upholds the discrimination of immigrants. A first step to avoid participation in hate speech is being aware of the subtleties of language used to talk about immigrants, then working to curtail words that dehumanize and discriminate. Refrain from using the term "illegal" to refer to any of God's children and recognize the contributions that undocumented workers and families make to the United States.

Educate media outlets about language and urge editorial boards to use language that makes it clear no human is illegal. God created humanity in God's image and there is nothing illegal about that image. While people may knowingly or unknowingly violate immigration laws, which is not a crime but a civil matter, they are still made in the Creator's image and to be honored and valued for their uniqueness. To understand the contributions immigrants make to American culture, watch the film *A Day without a Mexican*.

Hate speech should not go unchallenged. Christians have a unique responsibility to stand with the "least of these"; those who are cast out by the dominate culture. Whether an immigrant is undocumented or documented, their humanity need always be respected and valued.

### **Inquire:**

There is not room for neutrality when it comes to racism and hate speech. Archbishop Desmond Tutu made this statement, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." Join in prayer for the courage to recognize God in our fellow humans and for the end of racism in all its forms.

*God we cannot imagine your glory yet we see glimpses of it in the faces of your people around the world. You created us each different, unique, and beautiful. Help us celebrate our diversity and in praise of our common parent. Remind us that no one people, nation, or church possesses your full truth. Turn us from the sin that makes us believe we can trust in our own race while ignoring the rainbow of people in which you've chosen to reveal your wisdom. It is in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

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