

The Monitor has run editorials supporting an “enforcement first” immigration policy, and recent stories indicate that such a policy is now being implemented by the Bush Administration. Generally overlooked in discussions of the benefits and problems associated with immigration is the moral issue relating to our responsibility to the millions of immigrants who have worked in the United States for years without official authorization. Four administrations over a period of 20 years have tolerated immigration across the Mexican border by allowing employers to hire undocumented immigrants with impunity. This policy is in conformity with orthodox economic theory which favors free markets, including a free market in labor. As a consequence, the U.S. labor market effectively welcomed millions of Latin- American immigrants who established roots in their communities, and many of whose children are American citizens. Given the policy of *de facto* invitation that has persisted for 20 years, is it morally right to treat these immigrant workers as criminals to be uprooted from their communities and expelled from the country?

The Monitor abets current anti-immigrant stereotyping by referring to working immigrants as “illegals,” a label that suggests serious criminal activity and implicitly sanctions harsh treatment. There are other options, for example, “unauthorized immigrant” as used in various Pew Center reports. (Another example of pernicious labeling is the depersonalizing expression “the Arab street” which evokes images of rampaging mobs; no similar expression is used to describe the public opinion of other cultures or nationalities.) I hope the Monitor will engage in a serious self-examination of these issues.

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