



#Not1More Means Not One More

By Carlos Garcia

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Photo by David Wallace

I watched the President's announcement in a packed room, filled with people who have been putting their bodies on the line to fight for expanded deportation relief. While many advocates in D.C. are claiming victory, no one in that room was celebrating. Even the eyes of those who will likely qualify for relief were brimming with tears, unable to set aside the many who will be left out.

Trying to find the magic words that will convince Americans to accept immigrants and support reform, millions of dollars have been invested in communications consultants who have complicated our message so fully that today, many are thanking the President for providing relief to less than 40% of our community and once again using the border as a bargaining chip.

Sometimes we've been told to be tough on crime, reflect a nation of laws, or call ourselves New Americans despite generational ties and, for many, indigenous

claims to the continent. The newest line we are supposed to swallow is that the President is prioritizing deportations of “felons, not families.”

Meanwhile the Right-wing has boiled their message down to the phrase, “What part of illegal don’t you understand?” It ignores the illegality of racial profiling, unconstitutionality of ICE holds, the denial of indigenous sovereignty along the U.S.-Mexico border, and the violations of civil and human rights in the name of enforcement but it makes for a simple argument that has carried the debate so far.

But over the course of the last year, the migrant rights movement has found strength and momentum around its own simple phrase, “Not one more.” We first painted it on a banner raised as people shut down Sheriff Arpaio’s jail in Arizona the first day that the racial profiling law, SB1070, was to go into effect back in 2010. It meant not one more raid, not one more victim of Arpaio’s sweeps, not one more racist law.

In 2014, “not one more” means “not one more.”

Some people have bristled at the idea. In an attempt to get reform in Congress, a compromise approach shakes at the thought that we would defend our entire community or hold the position that deportations are not bargaining chips, they are wrong, immoral, and should be stopped altogether. Not one more.

It is an end point, a long-term goal that we will build toward through the incremental steps of stopping the removal of individuals who have lost fear and decided to fight for the right to remain and incremental steps of passing local and national policies that dismantle the deportation machine and protect our families. But it’s the goal. There’s no one we wish to see thrown under the bus or left behind. We are fighting for nothing less than the liberation of our people, for the decriminalization of immigrant lives.

It’s time we shift from an assimilationist approach that puts on caps and gowns and sets forward our valedictorians as the face of immigration. While the strategy has earned the acceptance of immigrant youth, it has set an unreal standard of sainthood for us and has led to us being divided between good and bad immigrants, the deserving and undeserving, felons and families. If one person is a dreamer, does that mean that someone else is a nightmare?

Our organizing is based in the idea that when you organize from below, defending the most vulnerable, you lift everyone else up with you. When the most stigmatized have their humanity recognized, everyone else’s expands as well. That position has shifted and evolved over time but if one listens to the

debate now, both the fearmongering from the Right and the rational discernment from the Democrats made evident in the President's announcement, immigrants with criminal convictions are clearly living on the chopping block.

Elected officials who give the fullest condemnation of the current deportation crisis still have an asterisk at the end of their speech that cuts "criminals" out from their compassion. And the anti-immigrants spend their time constantly asking "but what about criminals." The President's announcement last night made clear that he decided it was politically expedient to provide relief for some, while putting those with criminal records in ICE's crosshairs.

Cutting out people stigmatized as "criminal" from our circle of compassion might be politically convenient but it lacks both an understanding of the extent to which immigration itself has been criminalized and how historically unjust the criminal justice system is, especially for people of color.

Immigration has always been understood as a civil offense but since Clinton's Presidency, federal criminal prosecution of immigrants who have re-entered the country rose 2,800% accounting for more than half of federal prosecutions. With George W. Bush's executive order to end "catch and release" at the border in 2006 and the expansion of Operation Streamline courtrooms that convict people at the rate of seventy defendants per hour, the deportation machine has also become a conviction factory.

For those of us who either got past the border or entered through other ways, there's then the life of being targeted by biased policing that over-patrols the communities we call home. In my home state of Arizona, people of color were found to be 2 to 3 times more likely to be stopped by the police before SB1070 legalized racial profiling. After getting arrested, 92% of people in the US will plead guilty and up to 60% without a lawyer. In such a system, deportation becomes double jeopardy and a cruel and unusual additional punishment that doesn't make anyone safer but in fact does the opposite.

If we understand that the act of migrating has been criminalized and that people of color disproportionately end up with criminal convictions, we realize that path to citizenship starts by rejecting criminalization. There's no other way to arrive at legalization.

Before the rest of advocates adopted the objective of the #Not1More campaign and pivoted to the President, we were told that we were giving up on long-term change, "tone deaf to what was going on on Capitol Hill," putting a historic victory in jeopardy. Now that the President himself proved those people wrong by acting on parts of our demands, there will once again be an effort to steer the

movement back toward the pattern of blaming Republicans and investing solely in Congress.

But if #Not1More has shown us anything its that there are multiple paths toward winning rights and stopping suffering. Organizing to stop deportations isn't giving up hope on immigration reform or legislation in Congress. It empowers and allows people to be engaged in our own liberation. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals came in the shadow of the DREAM Act's failure but it was no less of a victory. Deferred Action for Parents is much much less than what the President could do and nowhere near what the people who have fought for it deserve. But we will never allow either to be undone and we will press forward at every level of government, starting from the bottom up.

#No1LeftBehind #FelonsAreFamilies

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