

Am I illegal mama?

We are people who believe that not only is no human being illegal, but that all these borders are false constructs

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OPINION "Am I illegal mama?" My mixed-race, Mexican, Chinese, Puerto Rican, and Irish six-year-old son gazed up at me with the largest of puppy eyes after we watched a corporate media television report on Mayor Gavin Newsom's rejection of the legislation by David Campos that would give due process to migrant youth caught up in the criminal in-justice system.

After recovering from my sorrow at my son's logical interpretation of our criminalizing, dehumanizing society, I went on to explain that as far as I was concerned no human is illegal — or an alien, for that matter. I told him that the whole concept of "illegal people" is rooted in our society's attempt to create more products for the ever-hungry prison-industrial-complex by criminalizing poor youth of color, migrant workers, and houseless adults and elders in poverty for the sole act of being poor, seeking work not having housing, and so on. (Yes, I do talk to my son with truth and candor about such things because that is how my African-Boricua-Taina mama raised me.)

His discovery, albeit terrible, did not shock me. Rather, it was the final nudge I needed to release a public statement from all the multiracial, multicultural, multilingual mamas, grandmothers, aunties, uncles, fathers, and grandfathers I write with, make art with, co-mama with, co-teach with, and am in relationships with at POOR Magazine/Prensa POBRE. We are people who believe that not only is no human being illegal, but that all these borders are false constructs of imperialism. We believe in the rights of children, if you believe that all children, and all people, deserve basic due process rights — which is all the sanctuary legislation by Sup. David Campos grants.

So Mayor Newsom, why reject this modest legislation? Have you become so blinded by your desire to be tough on crime that you don't even recognize the voices and desires of your voting public in San Francisco, who overwhelmingly organized and spoke in favor of this?

But you can't blame Newsom alone. Corporate media and corporate government fuels this notion of illegality in relation to human beings and has so ingrained the terms "illegal" and "alien" as ways of describing human beings that many people use these words without direct malice or intent to harm. So, like most insidious racially unjust policies and practices in American culture, these terms and notions roll along, gaining steam and power.

In an attempt to address this ongoing disinformation campaign about migration and immigrants, POOR Magazine launched the Voces de Inmigrantes en Resistencia Project to ensure that the silenced voices of immigrants in poverty are not only heard but are redefined as journalists, poets, media producers, and scholars.

After our talk, my son looked up at me and said, "Mama, I have an idea — if all us people, kids, and adults in the world all stand together holding hands, then they won't be able to separate us or hurt any of us." Then he stopped and very slowly and carefully added, "Or crim-in-alize us." *

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