



Why Drop the I-Word?

Here are the top 3 reasons to eradicate this hateful term:

Reason #1 It's dehumanizing.

The i-word is shorthand for other harmful racially charged terms that dehumanize people. The i-word promotes violence and discrimination. It sends the message that immigrants are sub-human and undeserving.

Reason #2 It's racist.

Use of the i-word affects attitudes toward immigrants and non-immigrants alike, most often toward people of African, Asian, and Latin American descent. The discriminatory message is not explicit but hidden, or racially coded.

Reason #3 It's inaccurate legally and confuses the debate.

Immigration judges and attorneys don't use the i-word. Journalists who treat all transgressions as "alleged," – a tenet of ethical and professional journalism, don't use it either. The i-word finds many people guilty before they are tried and ignores the fact that our laws are unjustly applied. Immigrants without documents are regularly hired as cheap, exploited labor with a limited ability to protect their own rights. No one else who benefits from the set up, including the employers who recruit and hire these migrants, is labeled this way.

The i-word is used to unfairly label and scapegoat people who are out of status due to a variety of systemic circumstances. For example, many people:

- Are brought to the country against their will or by employers who often exploit them for cheap labor.
- Fall out of status and overstay their VISAS because of school or employment.
- Risk being killed in their country of origin due to political or religious beliefs or sexual orientation.
- Are affected by natural disasters and/or other reasons beyond their control.

Are forced by economics and harmful policies like NAFTA to leave their country to simply provide for their families.

- Are on a backlog waiting years to get processed, even when they are eligible to get papers through a relative. Reason.org illustrates this well with a chart of “Our Nation’s Broken Immigration and Naturalization System.”

Linking immigrants to language like “illegals” (the i-word) is dehumanizing, racist, confuses the immigration debate and it’s just not legally accurate. This anti-immigrant strategy has been moved into the media by a web of people and organizations committed to halting and derailing reasoned, informed debate and policy on immigration.

John Tanton, the founding father of America’s modern anti-immigration movement, helped spawn a host of organizations like the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), Center for Immigration Studies and Numbers USA which leverage hate language against immigrants to promote fear and encourage division, they are often quoted by mainstream media outlets.

Back in 2005, political strategist Frank Luntz issued a language memo to Republicans to guide how they framed immigration. “Illegals” is shorthand for “illegal immigrants,” the preferred term used to describe undocumented immigrants in his memo. It is no wonder that with clear direction to use “illegal immigrant,” the shorthand slur has become just as common among media pundits and political campaigns.

In addition pollsters like Stan Greenberg, Celinda Lake and Guy Molyneaux, engaged by beltway organization. Center for American Progress and America’s Voice, recommended that democrats adopt tougher language on immigration to engage more voters and create bipartisanship to achieve immigration reform. At this time political consultant Drew Westen, also recommended that democrats use the i-word to be more effective. Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) became one of the biggest cheerleaders for use of the term.