

## LAST I CHECKED, A HUMAN COULD NOT BE “ILLEGAL”

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### WHAT’S WRONG WITH “ILLEGAL ALIEN?”

It often bothers me to see the reference all over the media of “illegal aliens”. How can a person, a *human being*, be illegal? In the very sense of the word, it cannot be applied as a noun to define a person. The word “illegal” comes from a 1538 Latin adjective and is presently defined by Webster’s dictionary as an adjective. I already know the “other” side of the argument and I know that “alien” is a noun and *can* be “applied” to non-native USC’s. After all, the term alien is at least given a definition in the INA. Illegal Alien, on the other hand, is not.

Ironically, the term “Illegal Alien” is in fact an oxymoron, a double negative if you will. According to the INA, an “alien” is “any person not a citizen or national of the United States,” so therefore an “illegal alien” is someone who is not legally “not a citizen or national of the United States,” which would mean that person must be a citizen of the United States.

In any event, if you are using the term “Illegal Alien” or “Illegal Immigrant” as if they were proper nouns, you are criminalizing the *person* rather than the actual *act* of the person. Words matter. So much of the immigration debate is based solely on the underlying cultural climate and attitude and the way that the media portrays an issue. Words set the tone. Although the use of the term “illegal” in reference to non-citizens within the United States is widespread, it does not make it right nor does it make it all right.

The acceptance that a human being can be “illegal” is a dangerous road to tread down that can only lead to xenophobia and breed violence and contempt for fundamental civil rights. The term “illegal alien” has no legal meaning, is pejorative and carries negative connotations. Nativists will argue that we are being to extreme and that if “they” came here illegally then they are “illegal”. This is a typical response from someone who is uneducated and simply pre-judging (hence their “prejudice”) the situation. Regardless of a person’s immigration status, whether they are in status, out of status, EWI, etc., one thing they are not is “illegal”. Anytime a label is pejorative label is placed on people it is designed to reduce people to non-beings that are excluded from our conscience and that don't deserve any constitutional or civil rights. The last time I checked, our recently immigrated forefathers had the forethought to include in the Declaration of Independence “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness”.

Over time we have unfortunately seen many groups of human beings demoted to “them” where the rest of mankind has decided to resort to an “us” vs. “them” mentality. The list includes blacks, homosexuals, women, children, Japanese, Communists, Muslims, Jews, and others. If an area becomes inhabited by what society has accepted as “them”, it becomes acceptable to pass laws to drive them from their homes, to strip their civil rights, to rip families apart, to detain them, to intern them, to torture them, to destroy them, to kill them. This never happens overnight. In Nazi Germany, the first thing the Nazis did to further their goal was to dehumanize the Jews and other targets, calling them names referring to trash,

insects and animals. Many books have been written on the dehumanization of people and how words matter.

The propaganda of the “us” vs. “them” is slowly pushed through media and public policy and exploits people’s insecurities that are looking for someone to blame. Someone has to “pay” for what extremists chose to do on September 11, 2001. How has it gone from seeking out the terrorists to arresting the Hispanic guy who has never had any contact with ICE before and was simply buying coffee at a 7-11 while on his way to the hospital where his 4 year old daughter was receiving chemo? <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/17/AR2009021703451.html?wpisrc=newsletter>

### **What Options Do we Have Then?**

What words should you use? Typically many immigration attorneys use “foreign national” to generally refer to a non-USC. Or hey there’s an idea, how about “non-USC”? At least it’s not “them illegals”. If someone is not work authorized, say they are an “unauthorized worker”. If someone entered without inspection, we have an abbreviation – “EWI”. If someone is out of status, they are “out of status”. If someone is unlawfully present, they are “unlawfully present” or “ULP”.

Besides, when it comes down to it, even our founding fathers would have been called “illegal” if we followed today’s xenophobic trend. Take that you extreme Nativists!  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/27/opinion/27hogeland.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/27/opinion/27hogeland.html?_r=1)

It is important to take a stand even in what seems like these “small” issues, because small issues lead to large issues. To quote Pastor Martin Niemöller “In Germany they first came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me — and by that time no one was left to speak up”. So, like the song goes “Don’t Believe the Hype”, and speak up – be a voice for the voiceless.