

Striving Women *by Nadine Lovemore*

Ever since I was a little girl I wanted to immigrate to America. I often heard stories of how money grows on trees in the United States. A few of my friends obtained temporary visas and never returned to Jamaica. However, I often wonder what it is like for women who reside in the U.S. illegally. I will discuss some of their experiences and how President Bush's immigration plan will hurt them.

First of all, women who are in the U.S. illegally often suffer physical abuse by their boyfriends or husbands, and because of their immigration status they are unable to seek legal help. I remember not too long ago there was a lady who was murdered. Her sister came forward and made an announcement that her deceased sister was an illegal immigrant. She also claimed that her sister was physically abused for years. Her sister was too scared to seek help because of fear of getting deported.

Secondly, some of the women that are undocumented and reside in the U.S. are often unemployed because of their inability to provide working permits or a Social Security card. In some cases, employers take advantage of immigrants, especially if they are undocumented. Employers will pay them less than minimum wage for their hard labor like house cleaning, factory work, and caring for the elderly. These employers know that if an illegal immigrant complains, she is more likely to suffer some repercussion and possible deportation.

Finally, when a woman lives illegally in the U.S., she lives in isolation because of fear of getting deported. Often, when a Jamaican woman has the opportunity to come to the U.S., she must leave her kids behind because it is too hard to support them before achieving financial stability. I remember when my cousin came to the U.S. on a temporary visa. She had to leave her children behind for a few years until she was able to send



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for them. She often said to me, "If I had my kids with me and I got caught I wouldn't be able to escape." My cousin often expressed to me how sad it made her feel to leave her kids.

President Bush thought he could solve immigrants' problems with a new proposal entitled "Working Principles." His idea was to let immigrants come here to work for three years and then return to their native country. In my opinion, if a person works for three years she should be able to obtain permanent residency. Yet with Bush's new plan, there are no written guarantees. It is not fair that people should dedicate their time and effort to work for minimum wage and pay taxes, but not be able to partake of the American dream to become a permanent resident in the U.S. I recommend that the President support a legalization bill that would make it possible for immigrants who have been living in this country and supporting their families for many years to become legal residents. It would be a big help to women immigrants in particular who are often isolated, face domestic abuse, work at low-wage jobs, and have a hard time finding fair treatment or assistance in this country.

For more information see: www.immigrationforum.org

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