

Texas student's suicide highlights desperate plight of undocumented immigrants

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The suicide of Joaquin Luna, a high school student in Texas, highlights the worsening plight of undocumented immigrants in the United States.

Luna was a senior at Benito-Juarez-Abraham Lincoln High School, where he had a reputation among his peers as a hard-working and driven student. Despite having lived virtually his entire life in the US, Luna was undocumented.

According to his relatives, Luna had been growing increasingly anxious about his undocumented status as he grew older and was worried he'd never fulfill his dream of going to college and becoming an engineer. Luna had been particularly upset by the US Senate's failure to pass the Dream Act late last year. The bill would have granted undocumented immigrants in higher education permanent residency status.

Luna's suicide is a tragic consequence of the nationwide crackdown on undocumented immigrants being carried out by both big business parties and the Obama administration. While US President Barack Obama took office pledging to implement a comprehensive "immigration reform", he has instead presided over a record number of deportations and has overseen massive Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids against undocumented immigrants across the country. The raids and deportations are part of a stepped up campaign by the ruling elite to scapegoat immigrants for the economic crisis and divide the working class along national lines.

On the night of November 25, Luna locked himself in the bathroom of his family's Mission, Texas home and took his own life using a .38 revolver

Moments earlier, Carlos Mendoza had received a call from his younger brother, Luna, who was at their mother's house and sounded strange on the phone. "He told me to have a good life, and when I asked him why he was saying that to me, he said: 'Because I'm not going to

be here,'"

Mendoza told the *Guardian* that Luna said he felt he would never accomplish his dreams. "My road is finished here," Luna told Mendoza, who lives across the street. "I'm going away."

Fearing the worst, Mendoza rushed to his mother's house but arrived just in time to hear the gunshot.

Luna left behind a stack of letters written on notebook paper which he had tucked into a small Bible emblazoned with his name. When another half-brother of Luna's, Diyer Mendoza, asked a sheriff's investigator whether the letters mentioned Luna's status as an undocumented immigrant, his suspicions were confirmed. Last Friday, Luna's suicide notes were released by the sheriff.

According to Diyer Mendoza, while the letters did not explicitly mention his status, it was clearly implied. "Dear Lord, forgive me for what I am about to do tonight," said one note. "I know it has to be done because I have no point of existence in this cruel world... I have realized that I have no chance in becoming a civil engineer the way I have always dreamed of here."

Joaquin Luna was just six months old when his family crossed the Mexican border without visas and traveled 40 miles to the city of Mission, on the US side of the frontier. He had been born in Mexico while the family was on a trip to their native country. All five of his siblings are US citizens.

Luna's mother and siblings worked as migrant laborers, and Luna traveled with them to Arkansas, Indiana, and Minnesota. Together, the family harvested asparagus, cotton, jalapenos, melons and tomatoes, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

In an essay he wrote last January entitled, "Fulfilling a dream in waiting," Luna described the grueling conditions in which he and his family had to work. He wrote the essay in order to be considered for a scholarship. In his essay, Luna recalled the most difficult job he ever

had—picking asparagus in the fields of Big Rapids, Michigan. “I still remember the hot sun and the sunburns my family and I would acquire when picking the asparagus the wrong way. That summer I struggled, it seemed like it was never coming to an end,” he wrote. “My motivation grew stronger as the season was coming to an end. I could see the tiredness and anxiety in my family’s face.”

Seeing his parents and siblings toil in fields to the point of exhaustion had a profound impact on Luna. From an early age, he was determined to make a better life for himself and his family. In his essay, Luna described why it was so important to him that he attend college. “It would make a major impact in my whole family especially to my parents who have struggled practically their whole life,” he wrote. “I want to demonstrate to them that all that agricultural work done and all those days of giving their best would have been worth it.”

At his high school, Luna excelled in college credit classes and ranked 89 in a class of 467. “He was one of the smartest kids at school. His passion was for math and engineering, and he had developed his own blueprint for designing houses by computer program,” his brother, Carlos Mendoza, told the *Guardian*. According to his friends, Luna avoided dating because he felt it would interfere with his studies.

As he grew older, Luna grew more and more anxious about his undocumented status and whether he would ever be able to work. According to his relatives, Luna was worried that even if he did manage to gain a college education, he might still be unable to get a job since he didn’t have a Social Security number.

Luna grew increasingly frustrated as he followed news reports about the federal government’s crackdown on employers who hire undocumented workers. He was also deeply troubled by the stricter anti-immigrant laws being implemented in states like Arizona and Alabama and recent deportations in Texas. According to his brother Carlos Mendoza, “He (Luna) said the people passing these laws had no heart: how could they leave so many kids without parents and destroy so many lives?”

When the Dream Act failed to pass the Senate last year, Luna was devastated. “He got depressed real bad,” said Mendoza. “Every one of us, we all get depressed. Some of us can handle it, some of us can’t. Joaquin couldn’t.”

The hopes of many undocumented immigrants had been raised by the election of Barack Obama. During his campaign, Obama, with an eye to winning the Latino

vote, had said that mass deportations would be “intolerable” to most Americans and that undocumented immigrants should be given a route to legal status.

But since taking office, Obama has deported over a million people, with hundreds of thousands of others being held in detention centers far away from their families. A recent report by the American Civil Liberties Union uncovered nearly 200 accusations of sexual abuse of immigrant detainees.

In June 2011, the Obama administration claimed it was beginning a new policy of focusing immigration enforcement on violent criminals. However, a recent study by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University has cast doubt on the administration’s claims, revealing that of deportation proceedings that took place between July and September of this year, only 13.8 percent involved people with criminal charges.

Over the past three years the hopes of undocumented immigrants like Luna have been dashed by the reactionary policies of the Obama administration.

While immigration activists have been accused of “exploiting” Luna’s death for relating it to his undocumented status, his relatives are certain that his status and his lack of hope drove him to suicide.

“I know he did it because of his legal status,” Diyer Mendoza said at his funeral last week “I lived with him; I shared time with him. I know what I know.” Carlos Mendoza told the *Guardian* he believes his brother took his own life for a purpose. “Everybody has a mission in life and I think this was his—to communicate to people what’s going on in America.”



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