

“It is so difficult to bear the uncertainty of the future”

Life after deportation: an interview with a Mexican immigrant raised in the US

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7 July 2017

Alejandro is a 25-year-old born in Mexico. His family came to the US illegally when he was six years old. They spent most of their life in the US in a suburb outside a major US city where Alejandro and his siblings attended school, played sports, and grew up thoroughly integrated in American life and culture. Alejandro graduated from a four-year university, which he attended on a sports scholarship, with a bachelor's degree in finance. After a 2016 arrest, Alejandro was picked up by the police where he was then held for criminal and immigration charges. He spent six months in detention facilities before finally being deported back to Mexico, a country he had not returned to since he left 19 years prior. Alejandro spoke to WSWS reporters about his experience.

WSWS: Tell us about the events leading up to your detention.

A: Back in January of 2016 I was pulled over on my way to class to take an exam and I found out I had a warrant out for my arrest and I wasn't aware of it. The warrant was for three charges which were filed by an old girlfriend without my knowledge. ... I hadn't seen this girl for over a year and we had already ended our relationship so it caught me by surprise. From that moment I right away knew something was going to be wrong. I got worried because I had to apply for my DACA (deferred action for childhood arrivals) again and I knew this would become a problem in the future.

I wanted to take it to trial and I told my public defender that I was innocent on all these charges. The day of the trial she told me that we wouldn't win if we put it to trial and she put this idea in my head that I might go to jail if I did. I was honestly so scared. I ended up taking a plea agreement.

My understanding is that if you're not a citizen then the courts send information to homeland security about you, which is what must have happened. A while later, when I was working downtown doing finance for a company, I ended up getting arrested by three agents early in the morning on my way to work. I remember it was early in the morning. From there they took me to the county jail where I spent four months trying to fight my case. In my first hearing they denied my bail even though by this time I had already gotten about 30 letters of support from previous supervisors of old jobs who talked about

my character, and even one from a congressman, and also a federal judge who was my old high school coach who wrote on my behalf. I had a lot of great support and still he overlooked everything and my bond was denied. In jail I had to fight to open up my criminal case again, so I was fighting two cases—the immigration case and the criminal one. The next court date for my immigration was not until four months later. I spent all that time in jail just wasting time.

WSWS: Can you tell us about your experience in the detention facilities?

Alejandro: I was held in two locations. The first four months I spent in a regular jail—not even a detention center. It had people from federal cases to local cases. We were a group of about 80 people. The way they treat people that are there for immigration is rough. The conditions in general are very tough. Many of the people who come in do not know any English and the guards take advantage of that through verbal abuse or maybe not giving them basic hygiene materials.

I was in the position when I was there to assist those who did not know English, to help them read their legal work and things. There were many incidents when, especially after the new administration came in, the guards would hang signs like, “Trump is going to build a big great beautiful wall.” Or other things which were making fun of immigrants, not just from Mexico but also from the Middle East. They know that the immigrants are scared and vulnerable, so the officers feel like they are less likely to get in any trouble. A few times I contacted the sergeant who was in charge to complain about it, and also my attorney, even though I knew I could get in trouble.

The next place I went was a mixed facility, immigration and a regular county jail. People get moved around a lot for no reason, honestly. What's happening is the jails are taking in more federal inmates in the form of immigrants because from my understanding the federal government pays jails \$250-\$300 a night to house an inmate. The jails have an incredible financial incentive to keep immigrants locked up. In the jail I was in some nights they did not even have enough beds, and so people were just sleeping on the floor. The officers say, ‘here’s

a box for your things—sleep on the floor.”

WSWS: What sort of access do inmates have to their families, legal counsel and the outside world in general?

Alejandro: Just to connect with someone, not even to talk for a single minute but just to initiate a call costs \$5. In the county jail I think a 10-minute phone call costs you about \$25-\$30. Most of the immigrants did not have the money to make phone calls. The majority of their families were out of state. The immigrants I met had been picked up during work raids for seasonal agricultural jobs for which they traveled long distances, away from their families, to make some money. Their phone calls, since they were out of state, were even more expensive.

Visitation was also horrible. Family could only visit once a week. If you receive a visitor you have to speak with them behind a thick glass wall with a tiny hole in it where you can barely hear the other person. Most people don't have their families come in because they are scared that they will get deported as well, since most of their family members are undocumented as well, like my dad. I fear for him to even come near any center like that. People have gotten arrested outside of these places or even on the way to them at immigration stops.

WSWS: Could you describe the process of deportation?

Alejandro: At my last court hearing I had to decide between different options, like applying for asylum. Most Latinos are not able to get asylum though, so I chose voluntary departure, which means that I'll at least have a clean slate and I can apply to re-enter without certain limitations for those who have convictions on their record.

Once I bought my ticket, they gave me my documents and brought me to a different jail and held me for 24 hours. Two officers then picked me up and escorted me to an airport. We went through a special door, the officers took me to the plane, and handed my documents and passport to the pilot so that I wouldn't be able to run if we made stops.

Once I arrived in Mexico I had a lot of problems being let into the country. They told me, “you don't have a Mexican I.D., you don't have a birth certificate, you are essentially a ghost in Mexico.” The passport I had was expired by about a month. There was another guy who was there with me in the same position. Mexico didn't want to accept us into the country because we didn't have any valid identification. One of the captains there told me that I needed to go back to the US, and I tried to tell him that they didn't want me there either. So for a few hours I was stranded there in the office between the two countries.

For people who get deported and don't have the option for voluntary departure it's a very different process. Some of the friends I made during my time in jail were being deported. We set up a system so that we could check up on each other afterwards and make sure we were all okay. There were lots of systems like this among the immigrant community. In these cases, they were taken to a special facility the night before they

were to be deported near a special airport which is often at a military base. From there they take a flight to Texas, and then you take an hour bus ride with maybe 50 or 60 other people and they all just get dumped at a bus station. Hopefully you have some money and you can get a bus ticket somewhere, but largely the immigrants depend on volunteer organizations close by who try and help deportees get started in a new country.

One of my closest friends went through this process. He actually had his residency for a while, but it was revoked, and he was taken from his family and deported. He had given me a phone number for some of his family so that I could check up on him to make sure he had gotten there safe. When I called his mother she was crying and told me that he had been taken by the drug cartels and they were asking \$8,000 for his ransom. They told her that even if they did pay they might still kill him or use him as a drug mule. This is a well known practice in the area. It happens all the time to immigrants who are dropped off in Mexico at these bus stations with nothing, in a place they often barely know.

He ended up getting released the day before Christmas. When I spoke with him he told me that four other people were kidnapped that day, but they all four were being used as mules to cross over by force into the US. They were going to plant drugs on them and send them to Houston.

WSWS: What has life been like for you since arriving in Mexico?

Alejandro: For those of us who have never lived for any significant time in Mexico it is a complete culture shock to be here. I thought I would acclimate well because I speak Spanish, but I am learning that my Spanish is actually not the best. I thought I would have an easy enough time finding a job because I know English and Spanish and I have a bachelor's in finance but it's been over three months and I haven't found a job yet. Every single step is a process. Even just trying to get a simple ID was not as easy as I thought because in order to get my birth certificate I had to prove my identity and they would not accept my US driver's license. I was at a complete loss for two months without an ID. Even up to this moment it's a big difference and culture shock and everything that I do is very difficult. It has been very difficult.

I have been very surprised by everything that has happened. When I was in jail I often thought, “If I can't even get help, imagine someone who doesn't have any support network.” It is tough to comprehend what these people go through. It is so difficult to bear the uncertainty of the future.



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