

## Charlotte's First Baby of 2012 Sparks Anti-Latino Hate

Photo: istock

by Mónica Novoa

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Earlier this month, the [Charlotte Observer published a story](#) [<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2012/01/03/2894498/charlottes-first-baby-of-the-year.html>] about the birth of Tommy Arias, the first baby born in 2012 in Charlotte, North Carolina. The article sparked an outpouring of hate from some readers. How could news of a newborn baby instigate so much outrage?

Here's what happened. A photo of new mom Lucero Arias, 19, and baby Tommy, was published along with the article, which did not reference Ms. Arias' immigration status, or national origin. The piece, however, did mention that Tommy's grandfather called from Mexico City. That was enough for the comments section to fill up with anti-Latino, anti-immigrant rants, causing the Observer to shut down commenting for the article. The paper also added this note: "Comments have been disabled because of repeated violations of site policies. Please refrain from profanity, obscenity, spam, name-calling or attacking others for their views."

According to Observer readers and Drop the I-Word supporters, the attacks included the derogatory i-word and "anchor baby" slur. Jess George, the Executive Director of The Latin American Coalition, wrote the Observer asking them to Drop the I-Word. They didn't drop it, but they [published the letter](#) [<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2012/01/05/2898713/the-observer-forum.html#storylink=cpy>], which also sparked hateful reader comments, including these:

"... When kids see lawbreakers get away with their crimes they think they can as well and kids know what illegals are. There IS a difference between Human Rights and US Citizens Rights ..."

"That's right. When an illegal takes a job, he displaces a citizen. When the citizen collects unemployment and goes on food stamps, we pay. This is just one hidden cost of employing illegals."

"... The way to stop "stereotyping" is to have no illegals here, only legal Latinos. Where could any U.S. citizen sneak over a foreign border and expect a free ride?"

The incomprehensible reaction to the birth of a beautiful Latino baby is precisely why we so value the work of United 4 the Dream (U4TD), the youth group of the Latin American Coalition in Charlotte. We joined them last year in [launching a letter-writing campaign](#) [<http://colorlines.com/droptheword/blog/take-action-charlotte-observer.html>] asking the Observer to Drop the I-Word, and they followed up with a week of protests in December. They have written the Observer about the baby announcement incident and dropping the term "illegal immigrant" and still there has not been a response.

The incident is worrisome, as Charlotte, the city with the largest Latino population in the state, and host for this year's Democratic National Convention, has also seen a rise in anti-immigrant, anti-Latino bullying. In a span of two weeks at the end of 2011, at least seven cases of anti-Latino bullying in Charlotte public schools were reported to the Latin American Coalition.

If the hateful reactions don't illustrate to the Observer and others the racially coded, anti-immigrant, anti-Latino dimension of the i-word, then what will? We know that the i-word is most often used to describe immigrants of color, most often Latino, and especially used to attack Mexican migrants. And the UCLA Chicano Research Center recently released a study on hate speech on the radio in which they found that anti-Latino, anti-immigrant hate speech including the i-word, is [tied to political nativism](#) [[http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/11/new\\_report\\_calls\\_out\\_hate\\_speech\\_on\\_talk\\_radio.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/11/new_report_calls_out_hate_speech_on_talk_radio.html)].

The nativist language is sadly also tied to violence and this country's history of racism. In Long Island in 2008, before Marcelo Lucero was stabbed to death, one of the teens who attacked him said, "Hey, fucking nigger; fucking Mexican; fucking illegals, you come to this country to take our money."

The term "illegal immigrant," which many journalists are having a hard time giving up, is not too far of a stretch from describing people simply as "illegals," which the Associated Press, New York Times, and the Observer itself have deemed pejorative. Both terms are dehumanizing and further the concept that a person's being can be illicit. "Illegal immigrant" is not even legal terminology; the Board of Immigration Appeals does not use it, and neither does the Supreme Court. It's not constitutional or precise language not only because the term convicts people, denying due process. But also because people are never found by courts to be "illegal."

Sometimes inaccurate terms are repeated so much that they start sounding normal. It happens all the time. But if it's established that a term is inaccurate, nativist, rejected by the people it's used to describe/attack and legally incoherent, how can it be considered professional journalistic language? That is the question facing the Charlotte Observer and journalists at news outlets across the country. The community is asking them to do the right thing.

Charlotte Observer, [Drop the I-Word!](#) [<http://www.droptheword.com>]

Read this online at [http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/01/charlottes\\_first\\_baby\\_sparks\\_anti\\_latino\\_hate.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/01/charlottes_first_baby_sparks_anti_latino_hate.html)

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