

STEALING CITIZENSHIP

by MATT HAYES, Fox News
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The Immigration Service is naturalizing people who've stolen their identities.

At nearly every press conference, the attorney general assures us that another hole in America's immigration control has been plugged. But while the government mandates an entry/exit registration system for certain nationals, picks up and deports thousands of visa overstays and bars outright an ever-growing list of individuals, we face another, largely unacknowledged problem that has been with us for some time and has been unaffected by recent anti-terrorism efforts: The INS and its successor BCIS have granted U.S. citizenship to people who have applied for naturalization using stolen identities. To listen to BCIS officers, you'd think that this is not a serious problem.

"Alberto" is 78 years old and married to a U.S. citizen. He is a native of the Dominican Republic. He's a lawful permanent resident, and though nothing compels him to become a citizen, it's been a dream of his for a very long time.

Alberto has done everything right. His marriage is genuine, he applied for residency and has never fallen out of legal immigration status. He is something you don't come across that much any more: a gentleman.

Alberto first applied for U.S. citizenship in 1997. He passed the test (something which many of our high school seniors could not pass) and waited eagerly for the letter that would tell him the date and time on which he was to appear and take the oath of citizenship. He received a different letter instead -- one that told him that because he was already a U.S. citizen, his application for citizenship had been denied as being moot.

How should a person react to something like this? Alberto had no suspicions at first, but soon began to feel like a person who opens his credit card statement and sees \$10,000 in charges he knows to not be his.

Two lawyers and many filings later, Alberto and his new lawyer, Kevin Jones, were finally able to see the file that the BCIS maintains under Alberto's name. All of the biographical information in the file was correct, including Alberto's name, date of birth and place of birth. But the photo was not his -- it was of his brother, who had fled the Dominican Republic after the assassination of Rafael Trujillo in 1961, taking with him Alberto's original birth certificate.

Last June, the General Accounting Office reported that immigration authorities intercept tens of thousands of fraudulent documents at U.S. ports of entry, some of which are used in attempts to obtain U.S. citizenship. In March 2002, British authorities arrested a Nigerian couple after they found 13,000 forged birth certificates, driver's licenses, electrical and gas bills, and insurance cards in their suburban London home. But in

Alberto's case, his own brother had used a genuine birth certificate, not a fraudulent document, as the foundation of a new identity. All of the documents Alberto's brother had submitted in connection with his fraudulent citizenship application based on Alberto's genuine birth certificate were real -- they were just inaccurate.

This points to the critical flaw in efforts by foreign governments like Mexico's to normalize their nationals living illegally in the U.S. The matricula consular identification card requires that an applicant have two things: a birth certificate issued in Mexico and a photo ID. If you can provide these two items, you will be issued a matricula consular identification card. The Mexican government, and even some members of the U.S. Congress, has lobbied relentlessly for acceptance of this card at institutions like banks and departments of motor vehicles. Immigration authorities have arrested Mexican nationals with as many as 13 discrete matricula consular cards.

On May 3, 2003, Alberto returned to the BCIS on a second interview for his citizenship. For months, he and his lawyer had been operating under the assumption that the fraudulent application for citizenship filed by his brother had been investigated and that the lengthy process of denaturalization had begun.

"We were wrong," says Jones. "When we arrived, we found that nothing had been done, and I was told by an officer in the Naturalization Unit that there is a class of cases like this just sitting around because nobody at the BCIS knows what to do with them. And this occurred after I was told that the matter would be taken to the district director."

That is the first admission by immigration authorities that they are aware of a group of cases in which U.S. citizenship has been granted on a fraudulent application. What's more disturbing is that even after the much-heralded re-engineering of the INS (by which it was renamed the BCIS), the same individuals are conducting the business of the agency, and it still has no ability to address any problem that is even slightly out of the ordinary.

If Americans dislike the notion of an immigration amnesty because it rewards illegal immigrants, how should we respond when one of the most cherished features of American life -- citizenship -- is being subverted through fraud, and the very people charged with protecting it don't care enough to do anything to solve the problem? It's high time that immigration authorities got their priorities right. Denaturalizing those it has granted citizenship, after accepting a citizenship application now known to be fraudulent, is one of them.