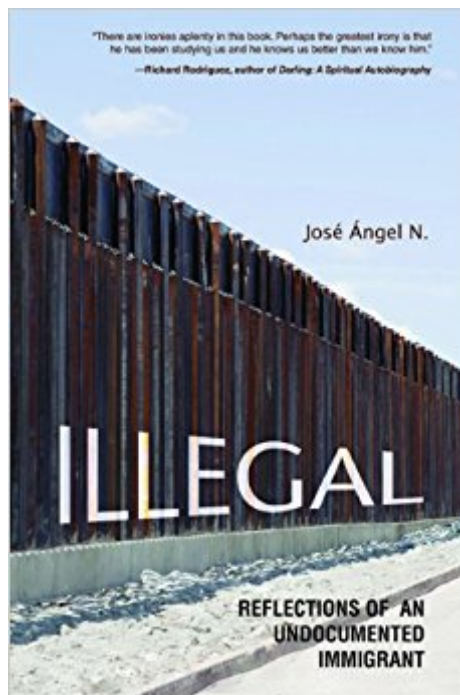




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# Illegal: Reflections Of An Undocumented Immigrant (Latinos In Chicago And Midwest)



## Synopsis

A day after N. first crossed the U.S. border from Mexico, he was caught and then released onto the streets of Tijuana. Undeterred, N. crawled back through a tunnel to San Diego, where he entered the United States forever. *Illegal: Reflections of an Undocumented Immigrant* is his timely and compelling memoir of building a new life in America. Authorial anonymity is required to protect this life. Arriving in the 1990s with a 9th grade education, N. traveled to Chicago where he found access to ESL classes and GED classes. He eventually attended college and graduate school and became a professional translator. Despite having a well-paying job, N. was isolated by a lack of official legal documentation. Travel concerns made big promotions out of reach. Vacation time was spent hiding at home, pretending that he was on a long-planned trip. The simple act of purchasing his girlfriend a beer at a Cubs baseball game caused embarrassment and shame when N. couldn't produce a valid ID. A frustrating contradiction, N. lived in a luxury high-rise condo but couldn't fully live the American dream. He did, however, find solace in the one gift America gave him—his education. Ultimately, *N.*™s is the story of the triumph of education over adversity. In *Illegal* he debunks the stereotype that undocumented immigrants are freeloaders without access to education or opportunity for advancement. With bravery and honesty, N. details the constraints, deceptions, and humiliations that characterize alien life "amid the shadows."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

N. came to the U.S. as a teenager 20 years ago, sneaking across the border and later traveling to

Chicago, where he settled with his extended family. During those years, he worked in the shadows in factories, yards, and kitchens until he earned his GED and then bachelorâ€™s and masterâ€™s degrees, which led to a career as a translator. But he never left the shadows. Instead, he was a hybrid creature of darkness and hope, one who can scratch the heights of prosperity but who remains permanently rooted in misfortune. Without legal documentation, he lived in dread of minor traffic stops, fretted over having drinks in a bar, and declined any chance to get on a plane and travel. With great eloquence and pathos, N. draws on his daily life and references philosophers from Socrates to Kant to describe the netherworld of the undocumented. He takes solace in his education and his gift for reflection as he watches the slow and frustrating process of immigration reform. N. gives voice to the millions who, of necessity, live in the shadows. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"With near-poetic language, this undocumented immigrant from Mexico. . . . describes his years-long journey from harrowing border crossing to proud husband, father and home owner."--Library Journal "We do not have enough courageous writers who take the risk of telling their stories while undocumented. Illegal offers important testimony of the type of life an undocumented immigrant can lead when they have opportunities like N's. From the moment I began to read it I could not put it down."--Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz, author of *Wild Tongues: Transnational Mexican Popular Culture* "Because we speak of them in the collective--as 'illegal immigrants' or 'the undocumented'--it is shocking to be addressed by a singular voice. Nearly twenty years ago JosÃ© Ãngel N. entered the United States under cover of darkness from his native Mexico. Now he addresses us in elegant American English. He is the cosmopolite in a country where he remains 'the illegal.' He works as a translator; he reads German philosophy; he is married to an American wife; they have a young daughter. The view from the skyscraper window is of Lake Michigan; on his computer screen, the face of his mother appears in her green house in Guadalajara, Mexico. There are ironies aplenty in this book. Perhaps the greatest irony is that he has been studying us and he knows us better than we know him."--Richard Rodriguez, author of *Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography* "N. is able to put a truly human face on the 'shadow' that he is in our society and show us that he, along with the other eleven million undocumented people who live and toil in our nation, deserve to come out into the sun"--el Beisman "A memoir from a decent man living in the shadows, evading questions and telling lies, presented here anonymously since to reveal his identity would mean to risk arrest and deportation. . . . An utterly believable close-up picture of one illegal immigrant's life in the United States." -- Kirkus Reviews Â "With great eloquence and pathos,

N. draws on his daily life and references philosophers from Socrates to Kant to describe the netherworld of the undocumented.Â He takes solace in his education and his gift for reflection as he watches the slow and frustrating process of immigration reform.Â N. gives voice to the millions who, of necessity, live in the shadows." -- Booklist

Riveting; heart-rending; personal and reflective while at the same time an urgent call to action. A must-read.

Illegal is a compelling personal testimony from a member of one of the most silenced groups in the United States. With striking detail, the author shows us how his undocumented status has enmeshed him in a world of perpetual hiding in which any true breakthrough to life as a free man remains, frustratingly, just out of reach. Throughout the book, we become painfully aware of the ironies in how undocumented immigrants are treated in the U.S.--they are tolerated as long as they remain on the fringes of society; however, any attempt to enter the main fabric of society will be immediately met with reminders that they are second-class individuals. We see what it was like for the author to forge a life under these circumstances--to learn English, to go to school, to form a family, to attempt to hold a professional job, to encounter literature and philosophy--and we see how all aspects of his life are unavoidably shadowed by his undocumented status, by the fateful decision he made as a young man to "penetrate America by night." We also get a staggering picture of what it is like to live without ordinary liberties most of us take for granted. For example, the author has gone years without being able to see his family back in Mexico, he is unable to drive a car or travel by airplane, he has difficulty producing identification to buy a beer at a baseball game, etc. The author of *Illegal* is an individual voice speaking out against a broken system that continues to dehumanize millions of otherwise honest people living and working among us. To our benefit, the author has chosen to use his gift for writing and the tools provided by his education in the U.S. to let at least his story be known.

Great book, very well written.

Illegal is a heartfelt autobiography about a person who suffered the consequences of a broken immigration system that focuses on politics instead of human life. This story is told by a man who is forced to live in the shadows due to his illegal status from the moment that he makes the dehumanizing journey across the Mexican border. With the odds stacked heavily against him he

was able to learn english which consequently opened the doors for him to receive his GED and further on his education. This book quickly became one of my favorite pieces of literature due to the immersion we experience into his life and for many of us who know the consequences of illegal migration, we are given an individuals story that explains the life of many other people who are in this country facing the same circumstances. Just as things seem to be falling into place we see the reality of this story, and the reality of life in which somethings happen that we can not control. The rich text and use of phenomenal pieces of Philosophy add to ones enjoyment of reading this piece. Although an autobiography, one reads this text as it were a novel. The unforeseen situations that the author goes through compels the reader to keep the pages turning. As an avid follower of immigration debates this book has become a go to piece of literature that I would highly suggest to anyone to read.

As most of the previous reviews aptly describe the setting and significant events of this memoir, I choose to focus, instead, on the implications of JosÁngel N. Acosta's work on the current political climate surrounding Latino immigration to the United States and the struggles of many Latina/o immigrants to access cultural and political citizenship. JosÁngel N., at the time of his marriage, had not been in the company of his mother in almost twenty years, along with his brothers and other family members who remained in Guadalajara, México. This is a situation confronted by many transnational and immigrant families today, who fear deportation if apprehended attempting to cross back into their country of origin. In November 2014, President Barack Obama announced his executive order to allow almost five million undocumented immigrants in the United States a temporary reprieve from deportation through Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Deferred Action for Parental Accountability. While this executive action does not make it any easier for undocumented immigrants to travel back to their country of origin, it does provide some hope for immigrants attempting to work and raise families in the United States without as much fear of separation. Lack of legal documentation is a major problem that plagues JosÁngel N. throughout this memoir. An embarrassing situation at a Cubs baseball game follows an inability to produce a valid ID to purchase a beer. Since this publication, Illinois has adopted legislation that attempts to change how undocumented immigrants travel. Driver's licenses are now available to undocumented immigrants in Illinois who show proof of one year of residency in the state and apply through the Department of Motor Vehicles. Undocumented immigrants can now travel within the state for normal activities like grocery shopping and dropping their children off at school without fear of being pulled over and apprehended for failing to produce a valid ID. This

legislation does not pave a path to legalization, but it does increase mobility for undocumented immigrants. *Illegal: Reflections of an Undocumented Immigrant* illuminates the experiences of many undocumented immigrants in the United States and serves as a call to action to increase access to natural rights legal citizens enjoy and expedite a path to citizenship.

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