

Judge is in immig groups' bad books

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A Brooklyn judge is courting controversy with a new illustrated children's book that some critics are calling a thinly veiled anti-immigration screed.

Criminal Court Judge John Wilson's "Hot House Flowers" warns of "effects of unregulated immigration" in a plot line about beautiful flowers that wither when dandelions sneak into their greenhouse.

"It's intended to describe defense of home and defense of country, and the reasons for that defense," said Wilson, who self-published the book, listed on Amazon.com at \$15.99.

The story tells of jealous weeds that hog all the water and soil in the greenhouse. The other flowers suffer, but don't do anything until it's almost too late - because they don't want to appear intolerant.

In what Wilson admits is a religious flourish, the flowers are saved at the end by a benevolent master who plucks out all the dandelions. The flowers learn never to let dandelion seeds grow in their greenhouse again.

"I'm not making any political statements here," Wilson, 45, told the Daily News, saying he was inspired to write because he couldn't find any books for his 4-year-old son that talked about big issues in a way a child could understand.

"They shouldn't call me anti-immigration, because I'm not," he said. "I know we're a nation of immigrants. But illegal immigration is making a mockery of the rule of law." Wilson, a former prosecutor and defense lawyer, is a Conservative Party member who worked with insurgent Democrats to get elected as a Bronx Civil Court judge in 2004. He has since been transferred to the criminal bench.

A judicial ethics panel ruled in 1999 that judges are allowed to write works of fiction, so long as they don't use their judicial position to promote it, said court spokeswoman Mae Yee.

Immigrant rights groups contacted by the Daily News said they were outraged by the book - and even more upset that its author sits on the bench.

"It's a shame that someone would write a children's book that teaches intolerance and hatred of immigrants," said Norman Eng, spokesman for the New York Immigration Coalition.

Margaret Fung, executive director of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, said Wilson was dehumanizing immigrants by talking about "weeds" and "invaders."

"I would hate to be an immigrant in his courtroom," Fung said.

Wilson handles night arraignments in Brooklyn, where he said he sometimes takes a defendant's immigration status into account when setting bail.

"While that's a factor, it's not the overriding factor," Wilson said. "It's got to be a factor - if a person's an illegal immigrant, how likely is it that he's going to come back to court?"