

United States: Trump's New Immigration Cruelty - Kidnapping Children

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Washington has a long history of using deportations to strike fear among undocumented workers. In recent years deportations have increased – Obama became known as “deporter in chief.”

But Trump has greatly stepped up the drive, mainly against Latinos without papers, unleashing Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) to carry out indiscriminate raids where Latinos congregate and deporting the undocumented. These include those without criminal records or guilty of only minor offenses, a step up from Obama's policy, often separating families.

Now an especially cruel new policy has been adopted, to tear children out of the arms of mothers and fathers for the “crime” of crossing the border seeking asylum from extreme danger in their countries, deporting the adults and sending the children into U.S. detention centers often hundreds of miles away from their parents or to distant foster homes never to be officially seen again. Their long-term fate is unknown.

In late April Trump's Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced: “I have put in place a zero-tolerance policy for illegal entry on our Southwest border [with Mexico]. If you cross the border unlawfully, then we will prosecute you. It's that simple. If you smuggle illegal aliens across our border, then we will prosecute you. If you are smuggling a child, then we will prosecute you, and that child may be separated from you, as required by law.”

What law justifying such separations? It doesn't exist. It is Sessions who is the criminal, ordering kidnappings, which is a serious crime.

Erika Guevara-Rosas, American director at Amnesty International, said this was “a flagrant violation of their [parents and children] human rights. Doing so in order to push asylum seekers back into dangerous situations where they may face persecution is also a violation of U.S. obligations under refugee law.”

A writer in the *New York Times* of June 12 says, “There are countless horror stories about what's happening to immigrants under Trump. Just last week, we learned of a teenager from Iowa who had lived in American since he was three was killed shortly after his return to Mexico.

“This month, an Ecuadoran immigrant with an American citizen wife and a pending green card application was detained at a Brooklyn military base where he had gone to deliver a pizza; a judge has temporarily halted his deportation, but he remains locked up. Immigration officers are boarding trains and busses and demanding that passengers show them their papers.”

Under the radar, already from last October to April of this year, more than 700 children, including 100 under the age of four, were seized from their parents and sent away. Since Sessions announced his “zero tolerance” illegal ukase, the snatching of children has accelerated. In the first two weeks, 650 were torn from their mothers' and fathers' arms and sent to detention centers.

The *Times* reporter said, “The human consequences have been horrific.” He related the story of a

five-year-old boy from Honduras “who had been separated from his father, cried himself to sleep at night with a stick-figure drawing of his family under his pillow. The Washington Post reported that Marco Antonio Munoz, a 39-year-old who is also from Honduras, killed himself in a padded cell after his three-year-old was wrenched from his arms.

“We will never know what torments besieged Munoz when he took his own life. But Pramila Jaypal, a Democratic congresswoman from Washington State, recently met with migrant women being held in a federal prison, many of whom, she said, were forcibly separated from children as young as one. Some had their kids physically torn from them. Others were told that they had to go have their photograph taken; when they returned, their children were gone.”

What happens to these children in detention centers is a government secret, even from U.S. Senators. Early in June, Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley travelled to Brownsville, Texas, to visit one of these centers in an old Walmart to see firsthand what was happening inside, and was turned away with a police escort. He tweeted, “I was barred entry. Asked repeatedly to speak to a supervisor – he finally came out and said he can’t tell us anything. Police were called on us. Children should never be ripped from their families and held in secretive detention centers.”

On June 12, Sessions turned the screw further, announcing that seekers of asylum could no longer base their appeal on the dangers they face in their home countries – effectively ending almost all such appeals of those crossing the Mexican border.

Debbie Nathan, a reporter for the investigative journalism website Intercept, which was started by Glenn Greenwald and Jeremy Scahill and other journalists known for digging up the truth, posted on the site an article titled “Hidden Horrors of ‘Zero Tolerance’ – Mass Trials and Children Taken from Their Parents”.

Since Sessions’ proclamation, so many parents have been charged that their cases are all lumped together and tried en masse. The result is so grotesque it can only be described as Orwellian. In an interview on Democracy Now about her article, Nathan said, “I’ve been to several of these trials in Brownsville, Laredo and El Paso [all in Texas]. What you see is somewhere between 20 and 40-something people ... their hands in handcuffs chained to their waists, and their feet shackled.

“They clunk and and clang into court.... They go through these mass processes in less than an hour, usually. They are instructed to answer [in unison]. So you’ll hear 40 people being asked a question, and they’ll say, ‘Si’ or ‘No’ all at once. It’s really uncanny. It’s shocking. It doesn’t feel like due process.

“One after one after one after one, with only one lawyer [for all of them] they plead guilty: ‘Culpable,’ ‘culpable,’ ‘culpable,’ ‘culpable’. I mean it feels like something out of Abu Ghraib, except that it is completely legal in this country to do this to people.”

In her article, Nathan reported that one judge, Ronald Morgan, early in May would ask “many of his questions en masse. This had the astounding effect of eliciting, from otherwise mute and downcast defendants, thundering group responses.”

She reported, “Are each of you satisfied with the help of the lawyer?” the judge asked. “Si!” they roared in unison. “Has anyone offered you anything or threatened you?” Another roar: “No!”

It should be noted that these lawyers, who are public defenders, see each defendant for only one or two minutes.

Judge Morgan subsequently started asking individual defendants questions about why they were

seeking asylum. They began to tell him about being separated from their children. Nathan reports Morgan himself was becoming disturbed by what he heard. “It was Thursday, the fourth day of ‘Zero Tolerance’ in his court, and defendants were telling their stories. The judge had just asked Holly D’Andrea, the assistant U.S. attorney handling illegal entry prosecutions that day, if it were true that families were being reunited in detention. D’Andrea sounded uncertain, but she answered she thought it was true.

“ ‘Tell you what,’ the judge said slowly, with a hard edge in his voice, ‘if it’s not, then there are a lot of folks that have some answering to do. Because, what you’ve done, in effect, by separating these children is you’re putting them in some place without their parents. If you can imagine there’s a hell, that’s probably what it looks like.’ ”

It’s worth reading on Intercept Debbie Nathan’s full article [\[1\]](#).

Barry Sheppard

Footnotes

[1] Available on ESSF (article 44799), [United States & Migrants: Hidden Horrors of “Zero Tolerance” - Mass trials and children taken from their parents.](#)