

Stop Immigrant Arrests, Close the Camps, Transform Immigration Policy

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Public awareness of the brutal repression against immigrants seeking entry to the United States, the reasons for their migration, and terrorism against immigrants living in the US are reaching levels that make them hard to ignore. The current immigration crisis is self-created and bi-partisan. Although the Trump administration's rhetoric is extreme, it reflects policies that have developed over a long period of time.

Under Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a person has “the right to leave any country, including his or her own, and to return to his or her country at any time.” Until the twentieth century, immigrants were welcomed into the United States. Immigrant and slave labor built many of the institutions and much of the infrastructure in the US.

It was after World War I, when migration to the US increased, that the government began to use quotas and exert more control over immigration. That control has become increasingly excessive, especially from the 1990's until today. The US' borders are highly militarized, which has adverse impacts on border communities, and immigrants have been criminalized, which has led to raids, detention and deportations that rip families and communities apart. This crisis will only be corrected if people demand new policies based on human rights and respect for the self-determination of all peoples.

The Immediate Crisis

People are fleeing Central America in large part due to US policies that have installed violent, repressive governments as well as corporate trade agreements that benefit US transnational corporations while exploiting workers. People are fleeing north for survival. Subjected to abuse at home, migrants are met at the border with more abuse.

The abuse includes people seeking asylum being held in detention camps while they await trial. It includes children being separated from their parents and sometimes [held in cages](#), often without basic necessities and with young children taking care of even younger children. [Corporations are profiting](#) from child detention while children die, like this [seven-year-old girl](#), or this [eight-year-old on Christmas Day](#). [Homeland Security's own Inspector General](#) has issued a report decrying the overcrowding and other poor conditions of immigrant detention facilities including [feeding people rotten, foul-smelling and spoiled food](#).

Some have described these detention camps as [concentration camps](#). While these are not the mass death camps of Hitler's Germany, they meet the definition of concentration camps: a place where large numbers of people, especially political prisoners or members of

persecuted minorities, are deliberately imprisoned in a relatively small area with inadequate facilities. Immigrants call the caged areas “dog kennels” and the cold rooms where they stay “iceboxes.”

These camps are run by government officials who have been caught making racist and vile comments on a [private Facebook group](#) with about 9,500 members. They “joked about the deaths of migrants, discussed throwing burritos at Latino members of Congress visiting a detention facility” and posted a photo of a father and his 23-month-old daughter lying face down in the Rio Grande saying, “I HAVE NEVER SEEN FLOATERS LIKE THIS.”

The [US has a long history of concentration camps](#) domestically and as part of imperial wars. It is a shameful history and some deny that the immigrant detention prisons are concentration camps. Those of us who can see the reality must face-up to another truth: our responsibility. Many have wondered how the concentration camps in Nazi Germany were able to exist in a modern, developed nation. Now we must ask ourselves two questions: How can these camps exist in the United States? What can we do to close them and liberate those being imprisoned?

We know from the history of concentration camps in the US and around the world that [we must act to close these camps](#). We cannot be complicit by not taking action. This is not merely about the 2020 election and removing Trump from office, it is about rapidly building a national consensus that these are unacceptable and people mobilizing to do all they can to close the camps.

This week, President Trump is taking his racist, anti-immigrant policy from the border to raids against immigrants across the country. Trump announced these raids two weeks ago, then delayed implementing the mass arrests. Communities across the nation have organized to protect their friends, neighbors and family members who are threatened by this attack. We applaud sanctuary cities that refuse to cooperate with ICE, churches that will house people threatened by immigration raids and people offering legal services to those who are arrested.



Bill Clinton announces his “tough on crime” agenda during the 1992 presidential campaign at the state prison at Stone Mountain, Georgia, the spiritual home and 1915 birthplace of the second Ku Klux Klan.

The Long-Term Reality Of Abusive Immigration Policies

The concept of the “illegal immigrant” comes from a 1929 law that made it illegal to enter the United States. The law made border crossings a criminal offense that became felonies with subsequent violations. The law was based in racism, authored by a segregationist Democratic Senator from South Carolina, Coleman Blaise who opposed the education of Black people, advocated lynching, and criticized First Lady Lou Hoover when she invited [Jessie De Priest](#), the wife of Chicago congressman, to the traditional tea by new administrations for congressional wives. Her husband, [Oscar De Priest](#), was the first Black person elected to Congress since Reconstruction.

On the Senate floor, Blaise said the First Lady should remember it is the “White” House. He then read the racist poem “[N***** in the White House.](#)” The poem was excised from the *Congressional Record* by unanimous agreement due to protests from Republican senators. Blaise also sought to make marriage between people of different races a federal crime. The roots of today’s immigration policies originated with white supremacists like Blaise.

President Bill Clinton made this racist law much worse in 1996. Clinton, a southern corporate Democrat, signed the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act in 1996. These laws [increased the severity](#) of immigration violations by expanding the list of crimes that could increase jail sentences and [fast-tracked deportations](#).

The Clinton laws [laid the foundation](#) for mass deportations under subsequent presidents. Bush, the Compassionate Conservative, more than tripled federal immigration prosecutions to 15,424 by 2003. In 2005, he incarcerated immigrants in federal jails when detention bed space in state facilities had become overcrowded. Illegal crossings declined significantly by 2008 but still, half the federal criminal docket was of immigrants crossing the border. The Bush administration intertwined local police with federal immigration enforcement by making more than 70 agreements allowing local police to enforce immigration laws. This is a continuing problem that results in immigrants not reporting crimes to the police.

President Obama remains the “Deporter-In-Chief” as he doubled the number of federal immigration prosecutions despite the fact that border crossings dropped by roughly half from 2009 to 2016. The result, the first Black president has the legacy of locking up more people of color on federal criminal charges than any other president in history. Immigration prosecutions topped 91,000 in 2013—28 times the number of such prosecutions in 1993. The Obama administration deported over 1.2 million people, the most of any president in US history. President Trump has come nowhere near the number of annual arrests and deportations of the Obama era.

The biggest difference with the Trump administration is the open cruelty of Trump and other administration officials in justifying their “zero tolerance” and family separation policies. The separation of young children from their parents is government-sponsored child abuse. The inhumane conditions in the migrant detention camps are violations of international human rights laws.

Stopping the Abuse of Immigrants and the Deportation Machine

People are organizing to confront this crisis, such as blocking access to immigrant prisons or mobilizing to [stop their construction](#). Below are some examples of actions people are taking. We hope it spurs you and the people in your community to act because this crisis must be confronted with direct action.

There were nationwide [Close the Camps protests](#) across the country on July 2. [Workers have walked off of jobs](#) of employers providing services to the camps. People are also [trying to donate diapers and toys](#) to camps where children are held, but are being rejected. On Friday, July 12, 2019, [Lights for Liberty: A Vigil to End Human Concentration Camps](#) will bring thousands of people to locations worldwide to [protest the inhumane conditions](#) faced by migrants.

There have been [interfaith protests at ICE](#) offices and people [risking arrest at the borders](#). People are blockading immigrant detention centers not just along the border but around the country, and are [facing jail sentences for doing so](#). [Youth are protesting local governments](#) who have agreements to work with ICE. [Students are marching to protest the detention](#) of fellow students.

Immigrants who are held in the camps are fighting back by [engaging in hunger strikes](#) sometimes [resulting in forced feeding](#) through nasal tubes. [Immigrants who are targeted](#) build community and defense committees to fight back against ICE.

Others are working to help migrants survive. The group “No More Deaths” is providing food and water to people crossing the border. This week, federal [prosecutors announced they will](#) retry Scott Warren, a border-aid worker accused of providing water to migrants, on three felony charges. In a prior prosecution, the jury was deadlocked and refused to convict him.

Also this week, [240 civil rights and immigrant rights groups](#) wrote the leadership of the House of Representatives to decriminalize border crossings, roll-back the Clinton-era laws, stop entangling local police in immigration prosecutions and end detention without bail. The letter lays out some of the problems. The demands will not be won by negotiation with the power structure but by building power so the political elites have no choice but to end this crisis.

[Organizations like RAICES](#) are on the front lines providing free and low-cost legal and social services to immigrant children, families, and refugees. [Lawyers are fighting for the due process rights of immigrants](#), rights that are often denied. The [National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights](#) has developed a list of national, state and local Immigration Hotlines to report raids, seek help if being detained or at risk of being deported and report missing migrants. Download a PDF of [IMMIGRATION HOTLINES](#) here. There is also the [National Immigration Detention Hotline](#) created and managed by Freedom for Immigrants.

While we work to confront the current crisis, we also must build a national consensus for systemic change in immigration policy. This includes ending criminalization and militarization of the borders and replacing them with open borders modeled after the EU to uphold the basic human right of freedom of movement. Open borders would be an economic benefit as they [would add \\$78 trillion](#) to the world economy. [Migration is also a benefit](#) to the US economy.

The US must end its regime change operations in Latin America, as well as trade policies designed for corporate profits, and institute a [Latin American Marshall Plan](#). US neo-colonial, imperialist interventions and corporate trade policies are root causes of desperate mass migration. We can end the self-created border crisis and replace it with policies based on respect for human rights and self-determination and cooperation to build an economy that works for all.

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Kevin Zeese and **Margaret Flowers** co-direct [Popular Resistance](#) where this article was originally published.

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