

The nightmare inside America's child immigrant jails

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25 May 2018

A report published Tuesday by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) details the systematic brutalization of unaccompanied immigrant children captured by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) from 2009 to 2014 at the US-Mexican border. Under the Obama administration, methods employed against these youth echoed those practiced by the CIA and US occupation forces at black site torture centers and Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison.

According to the report, "CBP officials regularly use force on children when such force is not objectively reasonable or necessary." One agent told a 16-year-old he would "fuck him up" and then "threw him down and smashed his head into the ground with his boot." Agents ran over another child in a truck and refused him treatment for a broken leg. Agents hit a 15-year-old with a thorny branch, smacked a child over the head with a metal flashlight, threw another child's head against a rock and used Taser guns on children "for amusement."

Officers routinely rape and sexually assault children. CBP agents forced one 16-year-old girl to strip and "forcefully spread her legs and touched her private parts so hard that she screamed."

Even the language used by border guards conveys the depraved character of their fascistic conduct. Agents put another child in a room and said, "right now, we close the door, we rape you and fuck you." A male and female agent forced another child to get naked while they watched her for 15 minutes, threatening to lock her in a room with a large male inmate to force her to be "his wife."

Agents dehumanized the children with verbal abuse. Agents mocked one child for being "gay" and said, "these people just come here to get a sex change operation." A pregnant young woman was told she was

coming to the US to "contaminate this country." Another agent asked a child why he "had come to fuck over this country." Agents laughed when immigrants requested paperwork to file a complaint.

The government keeps immigrant children in cages that have "body fluids on the walls and floors, along with used sanitary napkins and used toilet paper containing feces on the floors, all of which cause a strong offensive odor throughout the processing area," according to an internal government report.

Agents starve children and deny them access to water. One immigrant said agents refused repeated requests by mothers with infant children for milk. As a result, "children in the hold rooms were crying from hunger." Other children were repeatedly given spoiled milk and spoiled meat that made them sick.

Agents deny children necessary medical attention. One agent sicced an attack dog on a child, causing his eye to bleed, and then refused him medical attention. In another case, agents "denied [a child] her pain medication and sanitary napkins after she underwent surgery for an ovarian cyst."

Border guards also routinely throw out immigrants' personal belongings, identity papers and legal documents, including those necessary for proving their asylum cases. Agents also pressure children to sign "self-deportation" papers waiving all of their legal rights. One agent told a boy to strip naked and then told him "he would remain unclothed if he did not agree to sign the document." An agent told a teenage mother that he was going to rape her and then put her child in foster care if she did not sign a self-deportation form.

The Obama administration condoned and covered up the abuse, which violates both international law and the Eighth Amendment's proscription of "cruel and unusual punishment."

In 2014, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced that it was drastically cutting routine inspections of immigrant detention centers. Later that year, the Obama administration ignored an ACLU Freedom of Information Act request for information about abuse of minors. The 30,000 pages of internal documents upon which the ACLU report is based were only released through a federal lawsuit initially filed in 2015.

One 2014 email exposed by the report typifies the Obama administration's role. Responding to a complaint by one immigrant child, the Obama administration inspector wrote, "Are we sure we want to open this given the huge amount of more serious complaints we have?" In other words, the abuse detailed by the ACLU is not the conduct of a renegade agency; it is the official policy of the US government.

Conditions are only worsening under President Trump, who has encouraged the fascistic culture within the 20,000-strong border guard.

One immigrant who spent six months in a California detention center in 2017 told the WSWS, "It is very difficult to list all of the inhumane conditions. One of my fellow detainees tried to hang himself on a ladder, and another person hanged himself in the bathroom."

This week, Trump repeated the racist claim that immigrants are "animals", while Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said schools should report children to immigration agents for deportation. Last year, the US president encouraged police and immigration authorities to "rough up" arrestees.

CBP has taken Trump's orders to heart: Wednesday an agent shot a young immigrant woman in the head, killing her along the Texas border.

The Democratic Party supports Trump's "border security" measures, having recently voted to provide Trump with \$2 billion in border wall construction funds and \$600 million in added funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The Democrats have sought to silence opposition to Trump's anti-immigrant policies in order to focus all attention on baseless claims that Trump is tied to Russia.

The scant references to the report in the corporate press were drowned out by allegations that actor Morgan Freeman "harassed" women by commenting on their appearance, touching their backs and looking at them.

While representatives of the #MeToo campaign denounced Freeman, they ignored the ACLU report, which, in contrast, exposed evidence of actual rape and sexual abuse of hundreds, if not thousands, of immigrant children by the US government. This exposes the fact that the #MeToo campaign has nothing to do with halting "abuses of power." Its focus is not the conditions of the poor and oppressed, but rather the careers and bank accounts of multi-millionaire actresses and corporate executives.

The report is an urgent warning to the entire working class, regardless of immigration status. Amid a growing wave of strikes by teachers and other sections of workers as well as demonstrations by students and youth, the methods being used against "illegal immigrants" at the US-Mexican border and in the ICE detention centers will be used to attack "illegal strikes," "illegal demonstrations" and any other actions that threaten the wealth and privileges of the financial aristocracy. The defense of immigrants must be based on the broadest mobilization of the working class against the capitalist system.



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