

Kidnapping, rape and murder by US border patrol agents

Norisa Diaz, Meenakshi Jagadeesan
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Numerous migrants, mostly women and girls, have been victims of murder, attempted murder, kidnapping or rape at the hands of Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents. In the past four years at least 10 cases, primarily in the South Texas region, have come to light, while there is every indication that many more go undiscovered.

The agents who carried out these horrifying crimes have been described as having “violently snapped.” However, their actions reflect a more terrifying reality about the institutionalized disregard for the lives of migrants.

Whether it is the deliberate destruction of water supplies and other forms of humanitarian aid left for migrants traversing unfriendly terrain, or the abuse of immigrants in detention centers, the actions of the Border Patrol are expressions of the dehumanization of immigrants that has become routinized in their daily work.

In a report published earlier this week, the *New York Times* interviewed three Honduran women who were assaulted, raped, abducted and in two cases left for dead after their encounter with a Border Patrol agent. Their horrific experiences and the sadistic actions of CBP agents have come to light only years later in legal proceedings filed by the victims.

The victims interviewed for the report chose to be identified only by their initials. J.E., now 18, was 14 years old at the time. She was headed for the Rio Grande on her way from Honduras to join her parents, who were already in the United States. On the way, she met and joined forces with a teenage friend and the friend’s mother, who were also from the same region. The three planned to surrender to the Border Patrol and apply for asylum in the US.

Shortly after crossing the border, they saw a Border

Patrol agent and immediately surrendered to him. The agent, Esteban Manzanares, piled them into his vehicle. But instead of taking them in for processing, he drove the girls and the young woman to an isolated, wooded area 16 miles outside the border city of McAllen, Texas. He then proceeded to assault J.E.’s friend and viciously attack both her and her friend’s mother, “twisting their necks and slashing their wrists.”

Leaving the mother and daughter to die in the desert, Manzanares drove J.E. to another area, tied her to a tree and put duct tape over her mouth before coming to obtain her hours later after his shift ended.

Manzanares then drove J.E. to his apartment where he used shoelaces to tie her hands and feet to the bed. He took naked pictures of her and sexually assaulted her multiple times while she remained tied to a bunk bed in a bedroom.

“He behaved like he had done it before... In that moment, it felt like my life was over,” J.E. recalled.

Manzanares would have gotten away with the attempted murders had a CBP officer not happened upon J.E.’s friend and the friend’s mother. When asked who had done this to them, the mother told the agent it was a man “dressed just like you.”

FBI agents and Mission police worked to identify the agent and showed up at Manzanares’ apartment shortly after 1 a.m., when J.E. was still tied to the bed.

Manzanares shot and killed himself upon realizing that officers were at the door. Officials found a two-page suicide note from Manzanares explaining that he had been disturbed since he returned from his deployment in Afghanistan. “I am a monster,” he wrote.

The *Times* piece chastises the CBP for not taking more thorough measures to check on the work and mental state of officers, making it “easy for troubled

agents to go unnoticed.”

However, the newspaper ignores more fundamental issues, including the fact that the job of hunting and caging desperate men, women and children tends to attract backward and right-wing individuals and dehumanizes the psyche of those not already crippled when they sign up. And the fact that US administrations, both Republican and Democratic, have for the past several decades systematically militarized the border and turned border areas into death traps for thousands of impoverished workers fleeing death and violence in countries devastated by US imperialist exploitation and intervention.

This includes both the Bill Clinton administration in the 1990s and the Obama administration, the latter of which deported far more migrants than any previous US government, and whose attacks on immigrants paved the way for the fascistic policies of Trump.

Not surprisingly, several other violent crimes involving CBP agents have begun to come to light in recent days.

In April, Ronald Anthony Burgos Aviles, 29, an agent in the 116-county Laredo sector, stabbed and killed his girlfriend and their one-year-old son. In September, another Laredo sector agent, Juan David Ortiz, 35, confessed after being caught by investigators that he had gone on a 12-day killing spree, fatally shooting four people working as prostitutes and trying to abduct a fifth.

These instances of gruesome violence are in addition to the systematic abuse of migrants, particularly migrant children, carried out by immigration officers in various detention centers. An American Civil Liberties Union report published in May exposed widespread mental, physical and sexual abuse in detention facilities.

In the past few years, immigration enforcement agencies have become even more powerful than before, granted expansive powers as well as resources. Customs and Border Protection, the Border Patrol’s parent agency, is now the largest law enforcement organization in the United States, with more than 60,000 employees and a fiscal year 2018 budget of \$16.4 billion. The agents have the official imprimatur of the president of the United States, who last year told an audience of police, “Please don’t be too nice.”

The culture of violence is not limited to the CBP or

its agents. The treatment of immigrants is very much linked to the brutal violence and killings visited on civilian populations abroad in the course of unending imperialist wars.

It is not only the CBP agent Manzanares who found a monster within himself after a stint in Afghanistan. The Thousand Oaks shooter, Ian David Long, was heavily decorated for his service as machine gunman. During his formative years of 18–23, Long fought in the largest joint operation in Afghanistan, in Helmand Province.



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