Trump administration detained over 500,000 immigrant children in three years

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3 November 2020

Data recently obtained from US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) by the *Marshall Project* shows that the Trump administration has detained of over half a million immigrant children since 2017, peaking with 300,000 children detained during 2019 alone.

The figures show that in at least 40 percent of all cases, the US government violated the 72-hour limit in which children can be held in the custody of Customs and Border Protection. A 1997 settlement, known as Flores, set the 3-day parameters. Yet these have long been circumvented as the mandate can be extended with an influx of minors—defined as over 130 detained.

Since Trump took office, detention times have significantly lengthened as the number of children held at the border have soared. University of San Francisco law professor and immigration lawyer, Dr. Bill O. Hing, after visiting detention centers in 2019, reported witnessing minors held for increasingly long stints in unsafe facilities which were not designed to hold children and infants.

New revelations also show that within the last eight months, at least 200 children from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador have been deported to Mexico where they have no family or connections.

New York Times reporter Caitlin Dickerson gained access to an internal email written by an assistant chief of the US Border Patrol. In the leaked email the official stated that there were several suspected instances of Central American children being deported to Mexico, stating that it is a serious problem that needs to end because it puts in jeopardy Washington's agreement with the Mexican government during the pandemic.

Dickerson noted that Border Patrol "still haven't given us an explanation for whether these expulsions to Mexico were an accident, whether they're being done systematically from one port of entry and not another." The careless or potentially purposeful actions have put these children in grave danger of being preyed upon by gangs and cartels in Mexico, and leave their families and relatives in the US and in Central America fraught with worry for the whereabouts of their missing children.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of children have been rapidly deported to their home countries after crossing the US border. The pandemic has created the legal justification for Trump's invocation since March of the 1944 Public Health Service Act, authorizing the president broad powers to block foreigners from entering the country in order to prevent the "serious threat" of a dangerous disease and turn away asylum seekers and children on public health grounds.

The invocation of the 1944 act had been held in waiting by fascistic architects of Trump's immigration policy, and primarily among them Stephen Miller.

According to White House officials, Miller and his team have long viewed the special protections offered to minors as a major hurdle to carrying out full immigration bans and a block on mass deportations. Miller attempted to invoke the act in 2019, during a mumps outbreak, and he tried again that same year when an aggressive flu season impacted Border Patrol stations. As a result, the pandemic has presented a 'silver lining' for Trump and his fascistic advisors, allowing them to deport thousands of children and families since March and denying their right to asylum.

While Washington has been at the forefront of the brutality against immigrants, including revelations of torture in America's migrant detention centers of African asylum seekers from Cameroon, forced to sign their own deportation agreements, and the barbaric forced sterilizations of female immigrants, a global

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economic depression and the threat of COVID-19 have worsened conditions for migrants and refugees around the world, increasing in their desperation to seek asylum.

Multiple tragic drownings have occurred in the last week alone, claiming approximately 150 lives. At least 140 drowned when a boat carrying some 200 refugees sank off the coast of Senegal as it headed towards Europe. A spokesman for charity Save the Children said, “The English Channel must not become a graveyard for children,” in response to last week’s drowning of seven asylum seekers, including an entire family—mother, father and their three children including an infant—when their boat capsized as they tried to cross the English Channel.

Since the pandemic broke out, more than 7,029 detainees have tested positive for COVID-19 while in ICE custody, and there are eight confirmed deaths, with at least 24 detention centers reporting over 100 cases with major outbreaks in many areas including 448 cases in Phoenix at Arizona’s La Palma Correctional Facility, 373 cases in Atlanta’s Stewart Detention Center, and 339 cases in Virginia’s Immigration Centers of America-Farmville location.

The assaults on immigrant children are only the latest abuses toward this vulnerable population, which go hand in hand with the Trump administration’s efforts to whip up right wing xenophobia and fascistic appeals as the president has pledged to stay in office regardless of Tuesday’s vote. The Trump administration’s anti-immigrant policies are part of its open adoption of authoritarianism and fascism.

The Democratic Party has been complicit in the assault on immigrants. Both parties fundamentally and actively support the inhumane immigration policies of the United States and are directly responsible for the present crisis.

At the October 22 second presidential debate between Trump and Biden, when the latter had attempted to assign the full guilt of the attack on immigrants to Trump, Trump threw back at him the question of “Who built the cages?” and cited a 2014 photo of separated children sleeping in cramped quarters in cages, circulated by Democrats in 2018 as proof to the viciousness of Trump's child separation policy. Biden deflected the question and went on to promise, less than two weeks before the election, that his administration would lay a path toward citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants in this country.

This is a rotten and entirely cynical move by Biden and the Democrats, who under Obama built the cages used by Trump, deported over 3 million immigrants, separated children from families and caregivers, and implemented the Detention Bed Quota, a congressionally mandated quota that required ICE to maintain 34,000 detention beds at any given time, a blatant handout to the for-profit prison corporations. Just as Obama introduced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) within two months of the 2012 election as a direct appeal to Latino voters, Biden has done the same, turning the plight of the desperate masses of immigrants and their families into a pawn to be played when necessary for votes.

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