Witness to a social crime: The reality of US immigrant child detention

Repost of a WSWS exclusive report

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On any given day, thousands of immigrant children are detained in facilities run by the Department of Health and Human Services. For a brief moment in 2018, when Donald Trump initiated a 'Zero Tolerance' policy of family separation, the corporate media reported on conditions in these facilities.

The moment passed and the cameras went away, but the conditions remain the same. In 2018, the World Socialist Web Site *interviewed children detained at a facility in Brownsville, Texas. Today, these facilities are once again overflowing as a result of the Biden administration's decision to round up and detain immigrant children. The WSWS is republishing this long form article, based on lengthy interviews with many detainees.*

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In the corporate media, political establishment and middle class "left," the sound of sanctimonious appeals to America's responsibility to defend democracy in Ukraine has grown deafening. Without a shred of critical thought, the Mighty Wurlitzer of war propaganda gets spinning. We are told that a Ukrainian government riddled with neo-Nazis is a beacon of democratic hope, that American bombs are being sent to save lives, that American sanctions which choke the world's food supplies and throw hundreds of millions into the path of starvation are necessary humanitarian measures.

The biggest lie of all is that the US stands for freedom and democracy. As Vice President Kamala Harris said at the onset of the war in early March, "Ukraine is a country in Europe. It exists next to another country called Russia. Russia is a bigger country. Russia is a powerful country. Russia decided to invade a smaller country called Ukraine. So, basically, that's wrong, and it goes against everything that we stand for."

Recent history provides ample evidence of what American imperialism truly "stands for," which is the destruction of the international working class on behalf of finance capital. The specter of American imperialism hangs over the populations of Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Afghanistan, Serbia like the conquering general and aspiring dictator Caius Martius in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*:

> These are the ushers of Martius: before him
> He carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears.
> Death, that dark spirit, in's nervy arm doth lie,
> Which being advanc'd, declines, and then men die.

The constant barrage of war propaganda provides the world with an opportunity to revisit in greater detail the historic relationship between the United States and its smaller neighbors to the south, in Central America, and the impact of a century of imperialist destruction that can only be called sociocide.

Claims that the worst "excesses" of past policy have been corrected are belied by the treatment of Central American immigrants, including children, who continue to flee these countries as a result of the destruction wrought by American imperialism.

For a brief series of weeks in 2018, the treatment of immigrant children in the US was an item in the national and international news. Hundreds of millions in the US and internationally were shocked and horrified over the treatment of immigrant children, many of whom had been taken from their families at the border. This was not the product of actions by local jailers or errant border guards, it was the policy of the federal government.

None of this can be spoken of today. The media and the Democratic politicians, including those who traveled to the border and feigned tears, ignore the great social crimes undoubtedly being committed by the US government. Instead they focus exclusively on those crimes which are allegedly being committed by the government in Russia.

This article is a contribution to the mountain of evidence depicting the immense crimes carried out by US imperialism within its own borders. Here, for the first time, the WSWS documents conditions at a child detention facility by extensively publishing the words of the detainees themselves.

This is an account of conditions at an immigrant child detention facility in October 2018, which the author observed as an attorney. Although three and a half years have passed since the scenes described here took place, they could not be more relevant to exposing the lies at the heart of the US war propaganda today. No government which implements such conditions as state policy has the right to present itself as a defender of humanitarianism. And though Trump was in office when the events described here took place, conditions have not improved for immigrants under the administration of Joe Biden, who effectively barred the right to asylum by invoking public health measures.

Non-italicized sections of this article are based on the statements of detained children, events personally witnessed by the author, and contemporary press reports. All quotations in non-italicized sections are exact. Italicized sections of the text contain fictionalized accounts of true events that were relayed to the author by the detained children. The detainees gave the author permission to publish their stories pseudonymously.

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On Friday, October 12, 2018, a small group of people lingered outside the Gran Central Metropolitana bus station in San Pedro Sula, Honduras,

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the most dangerous city in the world. They came from Nicaragua and Honduras and El Salvador and Guatemala, they spoke Spanish, Mam, K'iche' and Miskito, and they represented an international working class for which the nation state system is a straitjacket and a historical dead weight.

They were single young men and mothers with babies and they were older men who were laid off or fired or quit their jobs. Groups of friends who made the decision to travel together formed circles and laughed and shuffled their feet to make room for the shy and quiet travelers who were making the journey on their own.

They came from quiet, green villages illuminated by the light of the moon and they came from cities that buzz at night with the perilous sound of flickering fluorescent lights. A half millennia of colonial exploitation seeps deep into a society over many generations, but it was in living, recent memory that these peoples' parents and grandparents and uncles and aunts were shot and tortured and violated by soldiers trained by the government of the country where they were to ask for refuge. Without thinking about this, the people who gathered at the Gran Central Metropolitana exchanged sheepish smiles and nods and understood one another.

They were mostly young people, the first born in the new millennium, representatives of a working class whose very lives and relationships epitomize its international character. As they readied to leave, they texted their parents and aunts and uncles 2,000 miles away, in New York and Los Angeles and Houston and Washington D.C.: *I'm leaving, it will be fine, don't worry*. They composed messages to boyfriends and girlfriends who were sitting alone in dark apartments, far away, whose faces were lit by the screen's deep blue, tranquil glow.

Through small particles of copper and lithium and tungsten mined from beneath Latin American earth, the people who gathered at the Gran Central Metropolitana were connected to the entirety of human existence like no generation before. They were connected to a world of people they would never meet, people who are awake, who are asleep, who are alone, who are in company, who are working, who are resting, to people in places where it is night, where it is day, where it is dusk and dawn, where it is autumn, where it is spring, to people who are on the bus, who are at school, to people who are eating, or laughing, or speaking, to people with all sorts of plans and ideas and goals.

In this world, people can speak to one another and send messages and mail packages and wire money and ship products from Kinshasa and Paris and Mumbai and Beijing and Dar es Salaam and London to every distant corner of the earth, but the people gathered at the Gran Central Metropolitana in San Pedro Sula put their phones in their pockets and began the 1,400 mile walk to the United States.

The people left San Pedro Sula through Colonia La Puerta and followed the brown Rio Chamelecon until they got into the countryside. When they got out of the city they realized there were more of them than they thought, maybe 500or 1,000. Along the way it seemed as though the people of the little pueblos were waiting for them. There were people running after them, kissing relatives goodbye, throwing backpacks over their shoulders. The group turned south, toward El Salvador. On October 14, when they arrived in Ocotepeque, near the Salvadoran and Guatemalan borders, the group had grown to 1,500 people.

On the night of Monday, October 15, the group crossed past police lines into Guatemala and arrived in Esquipulas. The next morning, Donald Trump tweeted that he had told Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, "If the large Caravan of people heading to the U.S. is not stopped and brought back to Honduras, no more money or aid will be given to Honduras, effective immediately!"

Hernández, the corrupt drug lord whose party was installed by the Obama administration in the 2009 coup of Manuel Zelaya, could do nothing. The group was already in Guatemala, where the people of the cities and the countryside came out of their shacks and small houses, saw the group, and they, too, thought, "Why not?" Soon the group became a moving mass of 7,000 people.

Trump solicited the help of the Mexican government, which made clear that Mexico, the 20th century bastion of asylum, would help Donald Trump enforce America's borders on Mexican soil. Mexican police attacked the caravan as it crossed the border, killing 26-year-old Honduran Henry Adalid Díaz Reyes. But the movement of people persisted, overcame the Mexican police, and the people of Mexico in the towns of Chiapas came out of their homes and greeted the group, bringing them water, bringing them mole sauce, encouraging them on.

On October 18, with the caravan still hundreds of miles away, Trump threatened to deploy the US military to close the US-Mexico border.

Calling the group of immigrants an "onslaught" and an "assault," Trump demanded that Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico all use armed force to stop the immigrants, tweeting:

"In addition to stopping all payments to these countries, which seem to have almost no control over their population, I must, in the strongest of terms, ask Mexico to stop this onslaught - and if unable to do so I will call up the U.S. Military and CLOSE OUR SOUTHERN BORDER!"

This inspired the working people of Mexico to greet the crowds going north with a degree of enthusiasm that only further enraged the American president. The Mexicans hoped these hardworking people, would be allowed into the US.

The US midterm elections were two weeks away. The administration was turning up the heat on the hot cauldron of American internal tensions. Earlier in 2018, Trump had enacted a Zero Tolerance policy deliberately separating immigrant children from their parents. The cameras flashed for a few weeks as the population watched in horror the images of children in tent cities. But the cameras soon shifted to other matters, and the Democrats largely dropped the issue. After all, Trump was not wrong when he said it was the Obama administration which first locked up thousands of children. Trump's policy only made *de jure* what Obama had imposed *de facto*.

In the weeks before the midterm election of November 6, the Trump administration was defending its family separation policy and advocating brutal new policies against immigrants, scapegoating them for crime and economic hardship. In an October 18 interview on *60 Minutes*, Trump said, "When you allow the parents to stay together, OK, when you allow that, then what happens is people are going to pour into our country."

Katie Waldman, a spokeswoman for the Department of Homeland Security, demanded that politicians "close catch-and-release loopholes in the law that would allow authorities to detain and remove family units safely and expeditiously. … However, the removal of actual family units, or those posing as family units, has been made virtually impossible by congressional inaction—which will most likely result in record numbers of families arriving illegally in the United States this year."

The Democratic Party instructed its candidates to ignore or publicly support Trump's attack on immigrants.

Speaking to a crowd in Austin, Texas, Democratic House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi told congressional candidates in the upcoming election not to focus on Trump's attacks on immigrants, explaining that calling for "shutting down ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement]" merely "serves the president's purpose." Pelosi said she tells Democratic candidates that focusing on the issue would "waste energy."

At an event at Harvard University that same week, Pelosi proclaimed the Democratic Party's desire to "find common ground" with Trump, explaining that Democrats "have to always try" to find ways to work with Trump. She said she thought Trump's proposal to construct a border wall between the US and Mexico would be "expensive" and "ineffective" at stopping immigrants.

On October 22, 2018, the crowd was in Tapachula, Chiapas, in southern

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Mexico. That morning, the immigrants were being fed breakfast by the people of Chiapas.

On the same morning, I began an inspection of a child detention center.

DAY ONE

The building where the government contracts out the detention of immigrant children is in a nondescript office park between Lowes, Walmart and Target. It is in a section of town familiar to everyone regardless of whether they've ever been to Texas. The view of clusters of strip malls and the billboards of familiar corporations, the dull hum of the freeway in the background.

The building is white and cheaply made. Those who pass the building might mistake it for one of the many dentist's offices visible from the freeway. Every day, thousands drive by the building without realizing it. Some living in the residential neighborhood a stone's throw away might not know what is next door.

The front windows on the building are blacked out to prevent anyone from seeing in or from seeing out. The institution is characterized by the government as a "child care center" but in reality it is an internment camp. It is operated by a "non-profit" where management pockets six-figure salaries from funds distributed by the Department of Homeland Security.

Behind the façade of the suburban normal, there are dozens or hundreds of children who had been detained by Customs and Border Protection in the previous days, months, or in some cases, years. Such buildings exist in neighborhoods far beyond the southern border, in states like Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey, and they existed before the Trump administration initiated the family separation policy in April 2018. But in the months that followed, thousands of children were taken from their parents by border police at the instruction of the president, put in cages, and then moved either to tent cities, repurposed army bases, or buildings like this.

I park in the employee parking lot and walk up to the main door over which staff have placed a sign reading "Welcome." I buzz in and am given strict instructions as to what I may or may not do. I have four days, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., to speak to children. On the third day there will be a two-hour inspection during which the facility will be represented by an attorney from the Department of Justice. I must leave my cell phone in the car. If I am caught with a phone, I will be expelled.

The staff have expected the visit for months. They have all clearly been instructed to exude politeness. The young woman at the front desk smiles, talks slowly and loudly so I can better hear her politeness, and calls me "sir." Decorations have been put up for Halloween, with words like "BOO" and "SCARY" posted in the hallways through which the children pass. The children explain to me that no decorations have been put up before, that this is an attempt to make the facility look child-friendly. The effect is eerie.

I am led to a cramped cubicle barely larger than a broom closet, with a window looking out on a hallway through which the staff and groups of children pass. In this small room I will conduct the interviews. I am given a piece of paper with a list of the names of the children presently detained. In four days it will only be possible to interview a tiny fraction of the hundreds of children detained here.

I select a child's name at random and wait for him to be brought to me. Members of the staff passing by shoot me short, suspicious glances, which give the impression both that they have been warned about me and simultaneously that they are fearful of eye contact, because they know what they are doing.

Chano

The first child is brought to my office. His name is Chano, he is 15, he says, and he is from Guatemala. His brown eyes dart from the floor to the table and his hands fidget on the cold table between us. He does not trust me and is unwilling to speak.

I ask him what happened when he was arrested by immigration agents. His defensive silence ultimately breaks down and he begins to speak.

"I was taken to a detention center where I was kept initially," he says. "It was so cold in there and all they gave us was this small aluminum blanket. When I was arrested the agents said they were going to release a dog to attack us."

The spirit of Guantánamo has trickled into every precinct house in America. At Guantánamo Bay prison the youngest inmate was 16.

Chano gets 10 minutes, twice a week, to call his mother. He told me what the phone calls were like.

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A male staffer in a buzz cut walks Chano up to a room with a series of landline telephones. Dirty carpets, fluorescent light, blacked out windows.

"You have 10 minutes," the staff member tells Chano after dialing the number.

Somewhere in Alabama a woman in her 30s, likely an agricultural or home service worker, hears her cell phone ring and darts over to the phone. Twice a week, she can speak to her son for 10 minutes. At the end of the calls she can hear her son begging the authorities for just a few more minutes, and the request is always denied. All she wants to do is hug her son; how much would she pay to hug him. Why did he have to get caught? Was she wrong to let him go alone? What else could she do? He had to get out. First it was the drought getting worse, but they thought it would pass. Then he got old enough for the mareros *[gangs] to notice him, and that's when he had to leave.*

"Bueno? Chano, hijo?"

"Yes, hello mom," Chano says. A few seconds of dead air, and then he starts to sob. "Mom, mom, you have to come get me."

His mother in Alabama nods and closes her eyes. "Honey, there is a process. You know that."

"I know, but please, please just come and get me. It is so hard waiting, I can't wait," Chano says.

There is no way to know how long it will take for the government to process the fingerprints and release him into the custody of his mother, perhaps months. There was talk of a home inspection but it is not clear to Chano or his mother if or when that will happen.

The conversation goes on for another eight minutes in short, declarative phrases. It is not easy to be honest. Chano's mother wishes she could tell her son how furious she is, how she filled out her paperwork promptly and acted with nothing but respect toward the social worker, that it was impossible to get a clear answer on anything. Instead, she reassured her son that it was all under control, that soon they would be together, that everything would be ok. And when 10 minutes had gone by, Chano's mother put her phone in her back pocket and walked out the door to work.

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In the mornings at the facility, Chano and the other children are forced to pledge their allegiance to the United States. This is done in Spanish so they understand. Then, a classroom full of children who are citizens of Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador will be told to declare, in broken English:

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to

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the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Chano says there are consequences for those who don't say the pledge of allegiance:

"You get punished if you don't. If you get reported, your release gets delayed. The staff routinely tell us that our case will get delayed for any reports we get."

What reports, I ask.

Chano leans over the table and looks me in the eye and says, "They report everything, they observe everything. One wants to explode. I was punished for one whole month one time because I asked a staff member, 'What happens if a child escapes?' I was just asking out of curiosity, but they punished me anyway by putting me under observation for a month. I want to cry all the time."

And you can be reported for not saying the pledge of allegiance? They delay your release?

"Yes," he says.

The directors of the facility have set up an entire system of punishing inmates for various petty infractions. The children do not fully understand how it works, but they can be given "points" or they can be "reported," and when such actions are taken, the child is given no formal means to explain or defend themselves before punishment is taken, a due process requirement in the public school system. And the penalty here is not mere suspension from class, it is the extension of their prison term, the forced prolongation of their separation from family. This is not merely the personal policy of errant guards, it is the policy of the entire facility.

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"What's wrong with you, your stupid ass want to get us all in trouble?" says the 14-year-old once the boys are back in their room. They hung their towels up, climbed into their bunks.

"Hey man, shut up," shoots back the 16-year-old. There are 10in the bunkhouse, ages12 to 17. It's a large age difference and makes for a complex social environment.

The 14-year-old has lived with his grandparents for his entire conscious life and has already been at the facility for four months, waiting to take the bus to some place called Michoagan where it is cold half the year. The 16-year-old, whose grandfather was tortured to death by the regime of President Efraín Ríos Montt [of Guatemala] and whose grandmother just died, arrived only two days ago en route to his father in Houston.

The 14-year-old boy says, "Just say the words, what difference does it make. You can be an idiot all you want when it only affects you, but this affects all of us. Don't risk it for us. Just stop complaining already."

The 16-year-old boy says, "I just spent four days in La Hielera ["the cooler"] with dogs barking in my face. I'm not saying that s--- again. They took my cell phone."

The 14-year-old responds, "You think you're the only one who wants your cell phone? If you don't say it they make a big deal out of it. What does it matter, just say it." A couple of the other boys, from their bunks: "He's right, man. Just go to sleep."

The 16-year-old gets in bed with a furrowed brow. There is no door and the abrasive halogen from the ceiling light in the hallway shines through enough to notice even with your eyes closed. "Whatever. My dad will get me out of here," he thinks to himself. "Stupid kid talking to me like that, just a campesino like me. What's the use. I have to spend time with these guys, I don't want them all to hate me. Just keep quiet and get it over with. It's true, it won't change anything. Plus, what do I care what that teacher thinks of me. Best to forget about it. Anyway, I caught sight of some of the girls today, they were looking at us too…"

At lunch, after the morning session, the 16-year-old sat by himself. Another boy from his bunk—older, been there longer, looked-up to by the others—sits by him. "Hey compa*, put these chips in your shirt and tuck it in, it'll look baggy with the sweatshirt and they can't tell," the boy said, slipping him his chips under the plastic table. Laughing with his mouth full of bread, the boy adds, "If they made our teacher eat what we eat, maybe she wouldn't look like such a cow."*

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Can a child decide to leave a child detention center? No, he or she cannot. Can a parent simply drive to the facility, ring the doorbell, walk under the "Welcome" sign and bring their child home? Also, no.

In July 2018, a 15-year-old girl fled an immigrant detention center in Homestead, Florida where she had been detained for three weeks. She was from Honduras. When she was roughly 4 years old, Barack Obama and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton supported a coup that brought to power elements of the military involved in the *contra* crimes of the 1980s.

The girl made her break as she was being escorted off-site to a doctor's appointment. She simply began running, with no plan, and evidently tried to find a building where she believed other immigrants were likely to be. She chose an auto body shop that was, in fact, staffed by immigrant workers.

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"She came running in from the streets," Frank Gonzalez, the owner of the shop, told the *Washington Post*. "She was crying."

The *Post's* report of July 28, 2018, reads: "The girl ran into [Mr. Gonzalez's] shop and hid in a corner behind a large shelf full of tools. It was a busy morning at the large auto shop that operates 14 bays. But she stayed there, crying, for more than an hour on Friday morning, refusing to move."

"We were giving her water and some food, but she stayed in that corner the whole time," Elvis Lopez, a mechanic at the shop, told the *Post*. "She seemed pretty scared. She kept saying she didn't want to go back."

The facility from which the girl was trying to flee housed 1,200 immigrant children in a tent-city near an Air Force base.

Lopez called his sister, Bertha, who spoke to the girl and then to the *Post*: "She was very afraid. She said she was from Honduras, and she has no family. I told her she would be safe, and we would try to help her."

The *Post* wrote, "Bertha Lopez called Nora Sandigo, head of a local nonprofit organization that helps immigrant families navigate the legal system. Lopez told the girl that they would get her a lawyer if she needed one. But the girl was inconsolable. … 'She didn't feel confident that anybody could help,' Lopez said. Before Sandigo could get there, police vans began circling the shop's parking lot" and officers found the girl.

Bertha Lopez told the *Post* she was still on the phone with her brother when the police arrived to arrest the girl. "I could hear her screaming and crying and begging not to go back," she said.

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"There are other rules that don't make sense," Chano says. "One time I didn't stop playing fast enough after they told us to stop, and I was punished for three days which meant I couldn't go to church or play. It was awful. And you cannot talk to girls unless they are several feet away. We can get in trouble just for lining up wrong. Every moment we are being vigilantly followed. The staff forbids us from eating chips, but they bring bags of chips and eat them in front of us. If we're caught eating them they would report us, and some staff sneak some chips for us, but we cannot get caught eating them. The children here joke about the fact that everything merits a report here, and that soon we'll get reports for breathing.

"The staff caught us talking among ourselves about Dreamers one day…"

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"Hey," the 13-year-old boy with a gap in his teeth said loudly to his 14-year-old brother in the lunch room. "My mom told me when we get out we can be dreamers. Have you heard about that?"

"No, man, just keep quiet," his 14-year-old brother responded, embarrassed.

"Yeah man, I heard about dreamers, that's what they're called," said a

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larger 13-year-old whose brother already lived in Los Angeles and who had told him a lot about how things worked in America. "Dreamers get to stay in the US because they are kids. So none of us will get deported, that's what they say."

"Wow!" said the 13-year-old, his face lit up with excitement. "I can't believe nobody told us!"

A third boy with a small frame and a bowl cut sounded startled: "You mean we could get deported in here?" His shoulders started to shake and he scrunched his face to hold back tears. He took a deep breath.

"Calm down, man," said another boy. "Worst case scenario you get deported you get to try again."

This did not console the smaller boy, whose body continued to shake. "Wh-what do you mean 'try again.' If you get deported you can't do anything, that's it."

One of the other boys pointed his finger and started to laugh. "He thinks getting deported means you die! Look at this kid! Can you believe it! How stupid can you be!"

The other boys started to chuckle and caused a small commotion. A 17-year-old sitting next to the smaller boy who had been silent the whole discussion stood up from his seat: "Because his cousin was killed the day he was deported to San Pedro Sula."

The laughter stopped and their 15 minutes for lunch were up. The next group was already lined up, they had to throw out what was left on their plates, which was usually nothing.

Later that night the long-haired staffer came in to turn out the lights in the bunk room. This staffer is the nicer one, his name is Logan. He is white and he tries to speak a little Spanish with the inmates in his block. Sometimes he brings them chips at night, when they're hungry, and tells them to be cool about it. Tonight he comes into the room with a translator, and before turning the lights off for the night, he says: "Hey guys, a few people saw what went down today in the lunch room. If you guys keep talking about the DREAM Act, they are going to write you up. You know what that means, so just be cool and don't do it, and it'll just be easier. There's no point in talking about politics, none of that stuff matters anyway."

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I asked Chano if he had heard of the caravan. No, he had not. What caravan? There are thousands of working people from Central America marching through Mexico right now, and they are being cheered and applauded by crowds of working people as they head north. They are going to get to a fork in the route, and they'll either go to California or Texas. If they turn right they'll be marching right this way. They are demanding the right to enter the US in defiance of Trump's threats to use violence against them.

No, he had not heard that, but he thought it was pretty cool. As far as he knew, nobody at the facility had heard about that. Something like that would get around, he said. He would have heard about it.

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The dead: Felipe Alonzo-Gómez

Some of the children do not make it to detention centers.

Minutes before midnight on Christmas Eve 2018, in a rural New Mexico hospital 2,000 miles from his home in Guatemala, an 8-year-old boy named Felipe Alonzo-Gómez died in US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody.

Though the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a statement calling the death an "unfortunate incident," the boy's death was the product of calculated state cruelty inflicted each day on the tens of thousands of immigrants caught crossing the US-Mexico border.

Six days earlier, on December 18, Felipe's long journey north came to an end when he and his father were captured in the desert west of El Paso, Texas. They were taken to the Paso Del Norte processing center, where they were placed in what is known as *La Hielera*—the ice box—a warehouse dungeon where temperatures are deliberately kept near freezing and prisoners are kept in cages under glaring halogen lights. Spoiled food, abusive guards and excrement-covered walls are commonplace.

According to CBP, Felipe was kept in the Paso Del Norte processing center for a day and a half and was then transferred to another dungeon, the El Paso Border Patrol Station. On December 22, the El Paso station was crammed full of immigrants—many of whom were likely sick from La Hielera, the journey north and the cold December desert temperatures—and so Felipe and his father were driven 80 miles north to the Alamogordo Border Patrol Station.

After six days of this, Felipe was coughing and looked seriously ill. It is unclear from official CBP reports when the boy developed his illness, but it wasn't until the morning of his death that he received any medical attention.

Felipe was driven to the Gerald Champion Regional Medical Center. Three hours later he was misdiagnosed as suffering from a common cold. In mid-afternoon, despite having a 103-degree fever, he was released from the hospital, given ibuprofen and amoxicillin, and driven to another holding jail on the side of the interstate highway.

That evening, Felipe began to vomit uncontrollably. There were no medical staff present at the holding jail, and as Felipe's condition worsened, he was transferred back to the hospital, where he lost consciousness and died.

Felipe is the second Guatemalan child to die in CBP custody in a several-week span. The body of 7-year-old Jakelin Caal Maquin, who died in El Paso on December 8, was buried on Christmas day in her impoverished mountainous hometown of San Antonio Secortez. Her 27-year-old mother, who is Q'eqchi Mayan, was too distraught to attend.

Felipe was from the municipality of Nentón, in the department Huehuetenango, located near the border between Guatemala and Mexico. Nentón's poverty, which Felipe and his father sought to escape, is the product of American exploitation and imperialist plunder.

Huehuetenango forms the westernmost part of what is now known as the Franja Transversal del Norte (Northern Transversal Strip), a resource-rich area in the center of the country containing the country's wood, oil and mineral deposits. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, poor peasants in the region engaged in some of the fiercest efforts to seize farmland from the control of wealthy landowners and corporations such as the United Fruit Company.

After a US-backed coup overthrew President Jacobo Árbenz in 1954, the strip, including Huehuetenango, was opened up to unprecedented levels of exploitation by American corporations. Thousands of peasants were killed to break the land movement. In the late 1970s and 1980s, when the civil war reached its most violent stage, many of the worst atrocities committed by the Guatemalan government and its CIA-backed death squads took place in Huehuetenango.

One of the worst took place in Felipe's home municipality. In 1999, researchers uncovered a mass grave at the San Francisco finca (land estate) in the municipality of Nentón, revealing a horrific government attack on the village as retribution for peasant land seizures. A *New York Times* report from 1999 describes what happened:

> On the morning of July 17, 1982, a convoy of army trucks made its way up a nearly impassable trail to this remote Mayan Indian hamlet and unloaded a company of troops. Soon afterward a helicopter arrived with the unit's officers.
>
> The US-trained soldiers rounded up the villagers with the promise of a feast.
>
> What happened next was an act of butchery that left all but four of the village's inhabitants dead and all the buildings razed.

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> According to contemporary accounts by people who lived in neighboring communities, many of the women were ordered to disrobe and raped. Children were torn from mothers' arms and eviscerated with knives or beheaded with machetes. The rampaging troops killed all they found—shooting villagers, blowing up others with grenades, hacking some to death, burning some or crushing them under the walls of falling buildings.

According to public records, it appears that Felipe Alonzo-Gómez's relatives may have been among the tortured and killed. Though this is difficult to verify, a list of the victims of the massacre shows that 24 members of the Gómez family and three members of the Alonzo family were killed. If Felipe's father lived in or near Nentón at the time, he would have been roughly 11 years old.

Yency

Yency's 13th birthday took place in detention, she said.

She was escorted into my office crying. She couldn't have weighed more than 80 pounds. She was quiet, but not in the way that young *campesino* children are quiet and shy because they are conscious even at a very early age of their lack of education. Yency was from the city, from San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Her eyes were quick and she was not embarrassed to be brought into the same room as a strange man with a tie and jacket. She speaks with purpose, thrusting her index finger onto the table to convey points and opening her eyes wide for emphasis.

Yency made the trip north with a cousin, and they were both arrested in the desert in the heat of July. From the quiet black nights of the desert Yency was thrown under the blinding floodlights of La Hielera, where she lost track of time.

"I was apprehended with my cousin around July 2018," she said. "When immigration apprehended us, they brought us to 'La Hielera'—the cooler. The agents were extremely strict, they would not let us sleep during the day. There was too much light all the time and it was really cold. I only was allowed to wash once a day. The bathrooms were very dirty and you could see everything, including the excrement, which was everywhere in the bathroom. We had to sleep on the floor using aluminum blankets which are very uncomfortable. I was in La Hielera for one night and then I was in 'La Perrera'—the doghouse—for two days. I couldn't tell if it was day or night because the lights are kept on all the time."

Yency's father lives in Austin, Texas, but he has not been allowed to pick her up and take her home. "He already sent his fingerprints to the government but they have not responded and it has been a month since he sent them," she says. She speaks with her father and has seen recent photos of him, but he left to work in the United States when she was a child and she hasn't seen him in years. "We are always in communication, though I have never met him," she says.

There is nothing in her tone or speech which implies a lack of faith in her father's ability to secure her release: "I don't know when I will be able to be free from here. The social worker here has not told me anything about when I can expect to be released and the process with my dad trying to free me has taken so long." She has been at the facility for three months.

***

"Did you talk to the social worker?" He asks.

"Yes dad. I keep asking why it is taking so long. They say that's just how it works," she replies. She has to use a stool to reach the telephone.

"You know I am doing everything I can," he says.

Don't worry, I know. Don't worry." "

"Are you feeling better? Are you eating?" He asks.

"Yes. Can we get McDonalds when you pick me up?"

"Yes, of course," he says, laughing. "I have to go to work now, I'm sorry. I love you, the first thing we do when I come get you is we will go to McDonalds."

In 12 years of living in America he has rented an apartment with three other men. Now he will have to get his own place, with his daughter. It will mean getting another job. Every pay day he goes to Western Union and sends what he can to his wife and daughter. At first it was just going to be for a couple of years. When his father died he didn't go back. He paid for the funeral, but that was it. To try to cross again isn't as easy as it used to be. Everyone understood. They thanked him for paying.

At first they would talk about how he might come home, but those type of conversations got further and further apart and then they stopped happening at all. Now his daughter is a day's drive away and he can't bring her home. Did he do something wrong? He filled out the paperwork like the lady said. He sent in his fingerprints. He heard you could be deported if you gave your information. He hoped he wouldn't be deported, but what could he do? Now he was waiting to be allowed to pick up his daughter, his 13-year-old daughter who was an infant when he last saw her. He would go from effectively single to the father of a teenage girl. He had missed her life, he had spent the last years working, and for what. In the end his daughter ends up hospitalized for suicide and there is nothing he can do about it.

***

Yency was losing weight.

"In both La Hielera and La Perrera the food was stale, bad, horrible. They give you hard bread, food you can't eat. The ham was spoiled. They gave us water, an apple, and chips for three days and nothing else. I was so physically weak and I was losing a lot of weight. When I got here, the doctor didn't help me at all with my weight loss. I told them I needed to be put on a weight gain diet but they ignored me."

"They give us milk with every meal here, even with soup," Yency says. "They give us oatmeal without sugar and it's inedible. They make a report and delay our release if we do not eat the food. They give us some flour tortillas that are horrible, they taste weird and I believe they are stale."

When she realized what it would be like at the facility, she grew despondent. Days went by and there was no clear sign she would be reunited with her father. The social worker said there was nothing that could be done, that if she behaves and eats and does what she is supposed to, she will get out sooner. Her anxiety grew worse. She kept thinking about the bright lights in La Hielera. Why the bright lights?

"Being alone like this is really sad," she tells me. "It gives me really awful anxiety. I was having very bad thoughts and I told my counselor. I was crying all the time and included thinking about killing myself. So they sent me to a psychologist who said I needed to go to the hospital. This was in July and I was there for six days.

"The supervisor here told me I would have my privileges taken away for going to the hospital. I couldn't go to the movies or anything and I couldn't go outside past the patio. It is not fair. They gave me four types of medication for my anxiety, to help me sleep, and also vitamin D. But I still have anxiety because even when I sleep, someone is always checking on us and is right on the other side of the door, and shining the flashlight on our faces."

***

The nurse is driving home from her shift, home to see her kids. They were getting to an age, testing her authority. Her husband knew when not to ask her about work.

She pictured the girl in bed 310. They blocked the room, on the orders of the officials who brought her there, so there would be no second patient in

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the room with her. That was odd, she thought. The other nurses who had been there longer said this happens from time to time. They bring girls over, sometimes with cuts in their arms. But this time the poor girl wouldn't eat. She was losing weight, and she had none to spare. She was weak and her mind was hazy. They should have brought her in sooner.

The nurse didn't speak Spanish but she could see the look in the girl's eyes. She was an intelligent girl, that she could tell by the look in her eyes. Her own daughter has bright, alert eyes, too. The girls are about the same age.

They hooked the girl up to an IV and she started to grow more alert. Two of her Latino co-workers took an interest and came in and spoke to her in Spanish. On the third day one of the nurses brought fast food from the food court and told her not to say anything. "Poor girl," the nurses would say to each other in the break room, shaking their heads. They are nurses and used to watching tragedies, but this one impacted the morale of the entire shift. This girl was a prisoner. She was always watched. There was someone there with her, someone who smiled falsely at us when we came in to change her sheets and empty her bedpan.

On the drive home, election signs everywhere. In one week, the midterms. How many people know about this, the nurse thought to herself. She put her foot on the gas to get home to her family just a little faster.

***

Yency is bored.

"Everything is so boring here it is hard to handle," she says. "We have to get up at 6 a.m. when they turn the lights on. On Saturday and Sunday they wake us up at 7 in the morning. Then we have school, and they don't give us textbooks or homework. It would be great if they gave us homework. School is so boring because we are never challenged. We came here to the US to make a future but we can't with school like this. I heard that classes in American schools are fun and I have friends who say they loved school in America, but in here they give us no fun exercises, no learning games. Everything is always, always, always the same."

"After school we go to our room and listen to music. Only sometimes do they let us pick the music. All we can do is talk and it gets so boring. They only have about five types of games. Then we go to our rooms at night but we can't read or do anything because we don't have lamps. I would love if we had lamps to be able to read. We also do not have any books in Spanish, all the books are in English.

"There are a lot of rules that are very hard to follow and you get punished if you break them, even accidentally. We can't wear our hair the way we want. They report me and get me in trouble if I wear my hair in certain ways. We can't even have our hair down—it is not allowed. They don't give us razors to shave which is difficult for women, we need it for our hygiene.

"They don't even give us shampoo. We have to use liquid hand soap on our hair and because of that everyone has dandruff. We have to clean our own rooms and they do not let us even have pictures of our families in our rooms."

***

Embarrassed by their surroundings, self-conscious about their isolation, each carrying the weight of their immense trauma, the girls fight with each other and pick on the younger girls, the skinny girls, the overweight girls, the most vulnerable.

Yency tells me, "the older girls say I'm worth nothing and say that nobody wants me. Another older girl teases me because I take medications to sleep. She was saying, 'There goes the baby going to sleep.' The other girls join in, and they all said nobody loves me. I feel extremely isolated and lonely, and these comments make me feel even worse.

"One of the girls started saying a lot of things to me the other day and I reacted badly. I did not hit her, I just grabbed her by the arms and told her not to speak to me like that. The staff punished me instead, sending me to speak to a Chief Leader and he said in another situation he would've reported me to the police and would get me arrested. I am very worried about the report he made about me, and about whether it could delay my release."

I stop her. She repeats that the staff member threatened to call police to arrest her because of this incident. I explained that would be illegal, and Yency shrugs. Chief Leader is *Hauptführer* in German.

I ask Yency why she thinks the girls are so mean to her. She is small, she cries a lot, it annoys the girls, she says. But they're going through a lot too, Yency explains. She is not the only one who cries, she catches the mean girls crying, too.

***

She cries in bed and keeps the other girls up. A guard comes in and flashes a light on her face, and she sobs until she eventually falls asleep. And when they tell her that nobody wants her, she sometimes wonders whether it is true. Her mother sent her north by herself and her father can't come and get her. She knows there are reasons. She knows her father is trying, she trusts him when he says so. It's her fault, really. If she didn't grab the girl's arm, she wouldn't have been reported. Now her release will be delayed, the staff told her. If she does it again she might go to jail. She has one friend who is on staff who tells her not to listen to the other girls, who tries to console her, who tells her not to worry.

***

Yency tells me she has asked the staff if she can use her 10 minute phone time to call both her mom and her dad for five minutes each. "They said no," she explains.

"What scares me too is that for the last two weeks the phone calls are not working to my mom in Honduras. Nobody answers at home. Sometimes it seems that the phone has been hacked because there are voices on the other line who say bad things and I don't know who they are."

***

Yency describes some of the activities in the facility.

"One time during Zumba activity I talked back to staff when I got reprimanded for talking to someone," she says. "The staff yelled at me and told me to shut up."

Sometimes they are allowed to play movies on the weekend. "The staff always wants to play movies in English, and none of us can understand."

On very rare occasions, a group of children are rewarded for good behavior with a trip to a nearby movie theater.

"In the three months I have been here I've been to the movies once. They don't buy us any snacks when we are there. At the movies there is so much security from the staff. There are staff at the end of each row and in the middle and also in front and behind us. Sometimes other girls say the movies are in English and nobody can understand. They won't let you talk to anybody at the theater, either. One time a woman was trying to be nice to me and she asked me 'how are you?' But the staff called me and said I couldn't reply."

***

Her town was in the news again. She had heard about the facilities, in passing, sometimes a short local news story, an article in the paper, but for a few weeks it was everywhere. Her cousin's friend worked at the facility for a few weeks, they needed Spanish speakers and paid $14.50 an hour. They quit and got a job at Walmart for $11.

Nobody really talked about it. Apparently the children were well taken care of, it was sad, their parents didn't want them. It's not the kids' fault, but the parent should know better. They shouldn't put their own kids in danger like that. Another cousin who works for the police department said it was mostly 17-year-old boys who are really adults, gang members. It was sad, but some of them were gang members. Most of them, probably. You should hear about their tattoos. They aren't really meeting parents in the US, they will get picked up by other gang members.

That's what some people said. She wasn't sure what to believe. She

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knew the national media was here again, she saw the reports on TV, and they showed photos of children in cages. She heard those pictures were from a few years back, that the photos were from Obama. Or maybe those were different photos. She wasn't sure if the photos were recent, but in any case, there were reports that thousands of children had been taken from their parents and that was something different. She couldn't believe that was happening. She always took the news with a grain of salt. You can never be sure what they are really up to, she thought to herself. The news probably exaggerates it to sell commercial time. It's all about the money.

And one day she took her 5-year-old niece to see a children's movie, and she was fretting over her little niece, who was spilling popcorn everywhere when two men walked into the theater with a group of 20 children in a single file line. They shuffled slowly by and walked up the felt stairs to the back of the theater and sat in the back row. Two women followed and the adults sat at the aisles on either side. Every now and then there was a stern voice that said "no talking" in English.

The lights dimmed and the trailers began, loudly, drowning out the sounds of the children behind her, their bodies bustling with energy, shifting in their seats, tapping their feet, looking around. The woman tried to put it out of her mind and she watched as the animated movie began. Halfway through the movie, her niece tugged on her arm and said she needed to go to the bathroom. The woman took her niece to the bathroom and they were washing their hands when the door opened and another woman walked in, holding the arm of a girl, skinny as a bone, who looked at her with big wide eyes. The niece looked at the girl and said "hello." The girl smiled shyly, like she was familiar with little girls, like she herself was prideful to be an older sister.

"Hello there," said the aunt, trying to smile. She looked at the girl and could see that there was something missing in her eyes. This was a child who did not have an easy life. The girl began to speak, and the woman holding her by the arm said "Shhh!" before whisking her into an unoccupied bathroom stall. It was then that the aunt realized it was worse than they said. She took her niece, got in the car and drove home.

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A TV news crew came to the facility once, Yency says.

"One time there was a reporter outside with a camera. I was outside playing in the fenced-in area and they told us all immediately to get in line and go inside in total silence without speaking."

***

"For two weeks, people kept spotting the mysterious truck," the *Washington Post* wrote on July 23, 2019. "An unmarked white Ford F-150, it circled the streets of Hermitage, a Nashville neighborhood where trampolines and plastic slides sit outside unpretentious ranch houses on the outskirts of the city. Several residents told *The Tennessean* that they didn't think much of it—until early Monday, when the truck turned on its flashing red and blue lights to stop their neighbor as he left his house with his 12-year-old son."

"Inside were two agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, who had been lying in wait as the sun rose. They had an administrative order granting them permission to detain the father, who had reportedly lived in the community for 14 years. But things didn't go as planned. Hours later, the agents left empty-handed, after neighbors worked together to block the man's arrest."

Black and white residents appealed to friends and neighbors to come to the home to prevent the arrest. ICE agents attempted to dupe the immigrants out of the van, through threats and even offers of cash. More and more neighbors arrived at the scene and the protest grew. Neighbors brought the immigrants sandwiches and gasoline so they could keep the air conditioner running on what was a hot day. At times the neighbors linked arms and formed a human chain around the van. The ICE agents were eventually forced to flee the scene.

The *Post* wrote, "When a reporter from the *Nashville Scene* arrived, one neighbor could be heard observing, 'They came to the wrong community on the wrong day.' The man whom ICE was trying to arrest has not been publicly identified, but a neighbor, Angela Glass, described him and his family as 'good people.' When flashing lights lit up their quiet subdivision at around 6 a.m. Monday, residents wondered what was going on. Glass told Nashville Public Radio she had lived near the family for five years but never realized that the father wasn't a citizen."

Glass said: "Everybody got mad and was like, 'They don't do nothing, they don't bother nobody, you haven't got no complaints from them. Police have never been called over there. All they do is work and take care of their family and take care of the community.'"

Felishadae Young told a local television station, "We stuck together like neighbors are supposed to do. We made sure they had water, they had food, we put gas back in the vehicle when they were getting low just to make sure they were ok…[ICE] was very mean to them, they talked to them like they were nothing."

The *Post* wrote that "ICE officers tried to cajole the pair into stepping out of the van. They dangled the possibility of cash rewards, telling the boy and his father that they would have to get out eventually." ICE had no warrant and had no legal authority to make the arrest.

"Finally, after about four hours, the agents gave up and left. Clasping hands, the diverse group of activists, neighbors, and concerned community members surrounded the van. They formed a human chain, lining the pathway that led to the family's modest brick home. The van's doors flung open, and the father and son raced inside the house. Cheers erupted from the crowd as the front door slammed behind them."

***

When an unnamed girl from El Salvador died in September 2018, US officials failed to notify the public of her death, leaving even the Salvadoran consulate in the dark. News of her death became public only eight months later. She was 10 years old.

A US government official has now confirmed that the girl entered the US in March 2018 in a "medically fragile state" but was not transferred to a health facility until May. After four months, she went into a coma on September 26. Only then was she transferred to Nebraska where her family lived. She died on September 29 of "fever and respiratory distress," the official said.

When CBS asked for comment, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) complained about the financial cost of mandatory medical screenings for children.

The Salvadoran girl was the first of six immigrant children who died in US custody between autumn 2017 and 2018. Over the course of the prior decade, no child died in immigrant detention.

This drastic increase in deaths serves as a warning: extreme right-wing forces in the White House, led by Trump's adviser Stephen Miller, were orienting increasingly toward the official use of lethal violence against immigrants. But this cabal of fascists was on a collision course with the vast majority of the American people, who view the deaths of immigrant children as a disgrace and an indelible mark of national shame.

The other five children who have died were Guatemalan and grew up in the devastating aftermath of the US-instigated civil war that ravaged the country from 1960 to 1966. In the early 1980s, Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt directed a genocidal campaign to murder peasants and workers with the support of the CIA and US military. Montt received military training in the US. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan called him "a man of great personal integrity and commitment."

Each child's short life story testifies to the devastation wrought by the capitalist system and US imperialism on the working class and poor farmers of Central America. In addition to Felipe Alonzo-Gómez,Carlos Gregorio Hernandez Vasquez died on May 20, 2019 at age 16. He was from Cubulco, Guatemala.

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Carlos, known affectionately as "Goyito," was "a very intelligent young man" who was in excellent health when taken into custody, his father told Telemundo. The family explained that Carlos's brother is mentally handicapped. Carlos was traveling to the US to send money to pay for his brother's health care, which the impoverished family could otherwise not afford. Carlos died after being found unresponsive on the floor of a holding cell.

Carlos's hometown is 10 miles from Rabinal, the site of the Plan de Sánchez Massacre. On July 18,1982, US-trained soldiers fired mortar shells at a packed farmers market. Hours later, soldiers closed the town's exits and went house to house, torturing and murdering the indigenous residents and raping women and children.

One witness testified that the government "separated the girls who were 15 to 20 years old from this group, and took them to Guillerma Grave Manuel's house; they raped them; they broke their arms and legs, and then they killed them … The children were smashed against the floor, and then thrown into the flames together with their parents…"

Wilmer Josué Ramírez Vásquez died May 14, 2019 at age 2. He was from Chiquimula, Guatemala.

According to family members, Wilmer's mother took Wilmer to the US because the young child was severely sick, and it was impossible for the family to pay for health care in Guatemala.

Wilmer's grandfather told Telemundo, "She fled the same desperation that [the boy's father] fled. She fled too, and with a sick child. There was nothing else they could do." Wilmer's mother cannot afford to return home for her son's funeral and must now work in the US to pay off the medical debt she and her son accumulated in the US.

Wilmer's hometown is in the same state as Panzos, where the Guatemalan military killed 140 indigenous Q'eqchi on May 29, 1978 after local workers and poor farmers marched to the city square to demand respect for their land rights. The region has large nickel deposits coveted by a local subsidiary of JP Morgan and the Hanna Mining Company.

The *Washington Post* reported, "It took just a few minutes of solid, frenzied gunfire for the Guatemalan Army to clear the village square at Panzos. When the shooting stopped, bodies of children, women and men lay bleeding among the trees." Five women holding babies drowned as they attempted to escape across the Polochic River.

Juan de León Gutiérrez died in April 30, 2019 at age 16. He was from El Tesorro, Guatemala City, Guatemala.

Juan fled his family farm after a prolonged drought wiped out the family's entire corn and bean crop in 2017 and 2018. Drought in the area is the product of climate change, which has caused 2.2 million people to lose their crops.

According to the World Food Program, 50 percent of families did not have sufficient food, the highest proportion ever. Family members say Juan fled because the family could no longer feed him. Juan's father said Juan "went seeking life, but found death." He was released from the hospital a day before he died of a brain infection known as Pott's puffy tumor.

Jakelin Amei Rosmery Caal Maquin died December 8, 2018. She was from San Antonio Secortez, Guatemala.

Jakelin's mother, a Q'eqchi Mayan, said, "I am living with a deep sadness since I learned of my daughter's death. But there are no jobs, and this caused the decision to leave." San Antonio Secortez is also located in the same state as the Panzos massacre.

The *New York Times* wrote in December 2018, "The army carried out some of its deadliest massacres under the presidency of Gen. Romeo Lucas García in the department of Alta Verapaz, where the Caal family lives, and neighboring departments. The names of the targeted villages are seared into Guatemala's memory."

Klara

Klara had left El Salvador months ago. She had been moving around with family for years since her mom died and her dad left. She had been staying with a cousin for a while, but the cousin left to go to the United States. She bounced around from house to house, but it was never safe and it was never permanent, so she left for the United States.

She seemed uninterested in speaking to me, she slouched, she looked around lazily, she was unimpressed. She was making clear she was much, much older and wiser than the little girls who she was bunking with. She wasn't a kid, she was almost an adult, she would be able to fend for herself.

She explains: "I was apprehended in August 2018 and spent a day in La Hielera—the cooler. I got in at about 1 p.m. and after three hours they gave me some crackers. I spent two days in La Perrera—the doghouse. There was a mountain of people in there and we were all very hungry. In two days we basically had some apples and very small waters. There was no food for the babies and they were all crying. There were so many babies crying. We couldn't sleep, and every 15 minutes they would get us all up in a line and count us."

Klara will be able to fend for herself. She is savvy, she is is on Facebook. She is on WhatsApp, but she's not allowed on social media in detention. She has family in the United States, living in the big cities. She has lots of family and they are all trying to get her out of the facility. It's complicated.

"I have been at the facility for about three months," she explains. "Nobody here tells me anything. I am not told anything about how I can get out of here. I have tried to get family to sponsor me but my family is scared because they know that they are deporting people now who sponsor kids."

Her family in the US is undocumented. Outside of San Salvador, the largest cities in terms of Salvadoran populations are Washington D.C. and Los Angeles. She has cousins in Virginia, a friend in Maryland, and another set of cousins in L.A.

"First my cousin XXXX, who lives in Virginia, said he could help, but the government denied his sponsorship because he has a different last name and they said he wasn't my family. He is actually my family though. Then the daughter of a woman who I lived with in El Salvador said she could do it, but she stopped answering calls from my case worker because she also got afraid that she would be deported. Her name is XXXX and she lives in Maryland. Then I am trying now to get a third cousin who lives in Los Angeles to sponsor me, and at first she said she could, but now she isn't answering my calls. It is so scary not knowing if anyone can help me and they say I might have to stay here for a really long time if nobody can sponsor me."

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Some of the girls eventually do leave. Their relatives eventually do come for them. Why do their families come for them, but hers won't? Her mother couldn't help dying but her father had a choice and he chose to leave her. Now nobody will take her. She should be a junior in high school, but instead of hanging out with friends and talking to boys she is stuck in a bunkhouse with a bunch of little girls who cry all the time. Why won't they just shut up.

***

She was 16 and the mareros *no longer ignored her. They began to notice. One boy in particular took special interest. He began to whistle at her. When his friends saw her they would call her his* wife, *his woman. She knew what would happen next.*

She spent the day in the little shop and manned the register. She sat on a stool and texted her friends, and before it got dark she would get on the bus and get to wherever she was able to find a place to stay. She texted

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her friends about going to America. She had friends in the US who she texted, too. They told her about school, about their jobs, making $8.50 an hour.

One day she was coming home from the Pizza Hut where she had been studying with some friends. An old man got on the bus and then two mareros *got on and saw the old man and sat right behind him. They started talking to him, threatening him, telling him the rent was due. The man got agitated and told the two young men to calm down. One of the young men pulled out a pistol and shot the old man in the head. The women on the bus started to scream and cry. The bus driver pulled off the road, stopped the bus, got off and ran as fast as he could. Everyone scrambled for the exit. Outside it was growing dark. People ran or walked away quickly, in every direction. The streetlight illuminated the side of the bus and the window that glistened red from blood, the only color in the grey and deep blue dusk. Now it was dark and she was several stops from home. She pulled her hoodie up and walked quickly.*

The next day she packed her things, paid almost everything she had for a bus ticket, and four days later she was in Tapachula, across the Mexican border. The next weeks were full of the soft yellow light of town plazas and the sound of the buzzing electricity and of drunken men shouting. Sometimes a bus, sometimes a train, sometimes on foot.

It was already mid-morning and hot when she gave herself up to the US border patrol near Eagle Pass, Texas. She kept up with the main group but they all scattered when they saw the helicopter overhead. It was only a matter of time before they found her. She climbed into the back of the van and recognized the familiar faces of her group. She recognized a woman in her mid-20s who had smiled and helped her the day before when she had begun to fall behind. She was glad to see her but sorry she was caught. The woman did not smile at her this time, she looked out the window and stared, her arms across her backpack in her lap.

By mid-afternoon they were processed into a repurposed warehouse with chain-link fence and floodlights from all sides. Men and women in the green uniforms of la migra *talking to each other, smiling, laughing. They are led into a chained-in area beneath an American flag. It is freezing even though it is the middle of the day. The place is packed. Someone comes around and hands out small packets of crackers, a cold bean burrito. There is no food provided for the babies, and they were all crying. There were so many babies crying.*

***

Klara was glad to get away from the blinding lights of the processing center. She was told the child detention center would be better.

"The rooms have no doors. The staff routinely use flashlights directly on our faces at night and it's impossible to sleep. Every five minutes they are flashing the bright flashlights on our faces. Sometimes there are females and sometimes males are coming near the door to shine this light in our faces. The rules are really, really strict and you can't go where you want. They give you 10 minutes to eat. You have to line up and sometimes it all takes a lot of time so we have less than 10 minutes to eat. The food is tasteless and you can't ask for any more if you are still hungry. You only get eight minutes to shower and they come and knock on the door after six minutes to tell us to hurry up."

During the interview, I ask Klara about the other girls in her bunk. Klara rolls her eyes. She admits that sometimes she isn't as nice as she should be to some of the younger girls. They cry too much, she says, but she will try to be nicer to them. Then she adds, "One staff member was very rude to me once. I was crying when I was here the first few weeks, and she told me if I didn't stop crying she would report me and delay my release. Her name is Miss Andrea. I had a sweater that I was holding up to my face while I was crying and she took it away from me telling me I cannot cover my face."

***

A ground level apartment in East Hollywood, Los Angeles on a beautiful, breezy day.

"Have some sympathy for the girl, she's had a hard life," the wife says to her husband. He has just come home from work, grease on his arms and grey mechanic's shirt. They are both in their mid 30s.

"We already have enough trouble as it is. You have been helping her, you sent her money, you did what you had to do. This goes beyond obligation," he says.

"She's an orphan, I knew her mother. Her mother took care of me…"

"You will get us in trouble with your big heart. You give them your fingerprints and they have you in the system, they can come get you whenever they want. Didn't you say that's what they're asking for? Fingerprints?"

Quietly, the wife says, "Yes."

"I'm telling you, no good deed goes unpunished. You give away your fingerprints and you can't get them back. She's your cousin. Didn't you say she has other cousins?"

"Yes, in Maryland."

"I'm sure they'll take her. Just stop worrying about it. It's tough enough as it is. What if they come and pick us up? Then our kids will be the orphans."

She couldn't bear the phone calls anymore. She didn't have the heart to say they couldn't do it. It felt so cruel, but what choice did she have?

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I ask: Is there anything else she wants to tell me? Yes, she says. There is a girl here who I must speak to. The girls are scared for her. She will see if this girl will agree to talk, but she isn't sure.

"She tried to hang herself, I think she tried to use a sweater," Klara says. The girl is 16 and from Guatemala. "She believes she will be here for three years." Sometime before, she tried to climb over the fence and make a break for it, but she was caught and punished by being kept inside. Klara does not know how long this girl has been here, but it was three weeks ago that she tried to hang herself.

"After she tried to do this, the staff told us not to try it ourselves. She felt so cooped up because she was told she couldn't go outside at all. She was very desperate. I feel really sorry for her."

***

In June 2017, nine immigrants died and 19 were in critical condition after being locked in a sealed semi-truck trailer in San Antonio, Texas for 24 hours. The trailer was parked in the sun in a Walmart parking lot in 100-degree weather.

Shortly before 12:30 a.m. Sunday morning, one of the trapped immigrants managed to break out of the trailer to ask a Walmart worker for water. The worker brought water and called 911 for help.

Police and immigration officials arrived at the scene and detained the immigrants as they stumbled out of the trailer and into the parking lot. Once those still alive had been captured, police dragged out the bodies of the eight who died of heat stroke or dehydration, including two children. Another individual died at the hospital later Sunday.

As investigators studied the scene in the parking lot Sunday, the Walmart store remained open.

It is difficult to imagine the hell the migrants experienced, gasping for air in the stifling heat as death encircled them. San Antonio Fire Chief Charles Hood told the press that the survivors "were very hot to the touch." Their heart rates were all above 130 beats per minute.

Amid reports that some of the migrants had fled the parking lot, police and immigration authorities launched a manhunt, searching the surrounding area for escaped immigrants to arrest and jail. A helicopter shone a searchlight in nearby woods and continued its search for hours as dawn broke.

Only the bodies of the dead will be allowed to stay in the United States, for burial. The survivors will be thrown into detention centers and promptly deported, most likely without the right to appear before a judge

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to plead their cases.

Thomas Homan, then the acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), delivered the following statement:

"The horrific crime uncovered last night ranks as a stark reminder of why human smuggling networks must be pursued, caught and punished. … These networks have repeatedly shown a reckless disregard for those they smuggle. … The men and women of ICE are proud to stand alongside our law enforcement partners" to "protect the public and those who would fall victim to their dangerous practices that focus solely on their illicit profits."

This statement will serve as a key exhibit in a future trial for crimes against humanity. Prosecutors will point out that, yes, what took place was a horrific crime. Furthermore, it is true that the criminals, driven by their drive for profit, display a reckless disregard for the lives of their victims.

However, it is not the "smuggling networks" that are primarily responsible for what took place in San Antonio. It is ICE, Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), and the bipartisan policies of the US government that are to blame. The San Antonio tragedy is a case of social murder, for which the ruling class is guilty.

In the 1990s, under President Bill Clinton, Democrats and Republicans enacted programs like "Operation Gatekeeper" and "Operation Hold-the-Line," the aim of which was to militarize urban crossing zones and force migrants to cross in the uninhabitable deserts.

In 2006, under the Bush administration, Congress passed the Secure Fences Act, which facilitated the construction of hundreds of miles of border barriers and further militarized the border. Those voting "yes" for this law included then-Senators Joseph Biden, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, John McCain and Charles Schumer. In 2010, Obama signed legislation that deployed a fleet of drones to the border and 1,500 National Guard soldiers to block or arrest immigrants. Thousands have been killed attempting to cross as a result of these policies.

Donald Trump was living up to his pledge to "unshackle" ICE and CBP and hired fascist and white supremacist advisers to key positions in the immigration agencies.

The tragedy in San Antonio went practically unnoticed in the political establishment. The Democratic Party response consisted of statements denouncing the smugglers, including the declaration of Joaquin Castro, US congressman from San Antonio, who said, "The smugglers responsible for the incident, who showed no regard for the lives of the people they were transporting, should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

Esmerelda

Esmerelda is a *Guatemalteca*, dark skinned, indigenous and from the countryside. She traveled to the US with her sister, who is a year younger than she. Esmerelda is 16. She and her sister were discovered by Border Patrol after spending the night in the desert alone. It is not clear where her sister is at the time I speak to her.

"It was about 7 in the evening when the coyotes left us in the desert. We spent the night in the desert and I was scared. My dad was telling me on the phone to watch out for the mafia and that I have to be careful. The mafia guys who took us across were yelling at us. I was worried I would be kidnapped. It was extremely hot and we had no water for over a day."

Extreme heat soon turned to extreme cold.

"After the arrest, I was taken to a detention center where I was kept for two days days—one in La Hielera, one in La Perrera. In La Hielera it was awful. There were no blankets, it was extremely cold. We did not have sweaters because it was summer and it was hot out. There was no food, and there were lots of babies crying, and mothers crying for their children. Some girls were saying the agents were mistreating them. One agent yelled at me, 'what are you looking at!' when I was looking at how big the agents were. Another told me I wasn't allowed to bend over and lean my head forward while sitting down. I was only given tiny bits of sandwich and I was so hungry."

Esmerelda is surprised by what she has experienced. She knows that somehow she has been caught up in something that she knows many people take very seriously, but she does not know why or how.

Her aunt lives in North Carolina. "She tried to sponsor me but the government denied her request. I don't know why. She is my real aunt and I want to be released to her as soon as possible."

Esmerelda hates the dandruff, she hates having eight minutes to bathe, she hates not having the right soap. More than anything she hates the rules that makes no sense.

"If we do anything that breaks the rules, we get reported, and the staff tell us that each report delays our release by two months. There are cameras in every corner and we are being watched all the time. The staff told us we are always being watched. One social worker told me there was a girl who was about to get released but she got a report against her and they delayed her release by two months to punish her."

Esmerelda explains:

"We also can't touch anyone or play games with our hands. Other rules include that when you draw, the staff checks to see what you have drawn. I don't know what kind of things we aren't allowed to draw. We cannot use endearing nicknames with one another either, and you can get written up if you call someone a nickname. If you don't eat, they make a report. You can't have a notebook because they say boys try to communicate with girls with notebooks. I would love a notebook that I could draw in and practice English words in, but they don't give it to us. I asked my counselor for a notebook but she didn't give me one. Girls with notebooks cannot share pages with us. I don't understand this. We can't take crayons or pens with us, and also they do not give us hair clips. I don't know why.

"They only have seven colored pencils and if you use them during free time, the staff counts each one when you return them. If you can't find one, they make you search all over for it and if one is still missing, they punish everyone who had free time at the same time and that is a lot of people. Yesterday a staff member threatened all of us when someone couldn't find a pencil."

As she finishes the interview, she asks me, "I also want to know how you get a lawyer. My dad is in Florida and he has deportation proceedings but he doesn't have a lawyer."

***

The children are not allowed to have writing utensils or paper in their rooms, on the grounds that they will harm one another. Some, apparently for good reason, are allowed to have notebooks, but they cannot share with girls who have no paper.

The children are told that a sharp pencil could be used as a weapon, as could a pen. On the basis that each could be used as a blunt stabbing instrument, both are banned.

But this does not explain the ban on the crayon, which makes for a pretty poor weapon. As for the provision of paper, it is even more difficult to justify this ban on security grounds. The ban exists to prevent children from passing notes, from drawing to express themselves, from writing to their families.

***

The new girl asked around and nobody had heard of her little sister. They had been separated in the processing warehouse. By the time she had arrived at the facility they had taken the new girl's cell phone and so she could not call her dad to tell him what happened. She asked the staff to give her the cell phone just so she could make one call.

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Not yet, they told her, you have to wait your turn at the phone like everybody else.

"But I can't find my sister," she said.

"Your social worker will help you with that when you meet with her. You just have to wait for your appointment. There is a process," came the response.

She was allowed to shower—finally—and she was shown to her bed in the bunk room. It was early in the morning and the other girls were just waking up. None of the girls had heard of her sister, apparently she was the only new girl brought in. Her sister must have been taken to a different place, who knows where. This is the information they had gathered from the other children or from the staff.

There must be a misunderstanding, they should not have been split up, they were sisters. The last night they spent alone was two nights before in the desert. They weren't sure they were going to live. She had hardly slept an hour in three nights. All she wanted to do was find her sister and go to sleep.

That afternoon she was brought into a common room with a number of other girls, including many she had recognized in the bunk room. She fell asleep sitting up on a couch under bright lights. She woke up as a staff woman walked into the room to tell the children they had to clean up and leave the room. The girl looked at the short table in front of her and saw several pieces of lined paper and two colored pencils. If she could write a letter to her sister she could tell her she is at the facility and that whoever was coming should come and pick her up there and soon.

The girls around her reluctantly started to gather the old board games and coloring sheets strewn about on the ground. She grabbed a piece of paper and the green pencil and put them in the front pocket of her hoodie and lined up to go to the next station on their schedule. But before they left, the staffer said that not all the colored pencils had been returned. Everyone was forced to empty their pockets, and the girl tried to drop the pencil on the ground as quietly as possible, but the staff woman saw her and came up to her and told her that she tried to steal, that it isn't allowed, that she was being reported, and that her release would be delayed a month.

The new girl's stomach twisted into a knot. "A month!" she blurted out.

Another girl spoke up: "But she's new, she didn't know."

The staffer looked at the second girl and shot back, "That's it, your phone calls Thursday are canceled."

The girls stayed quiet. They shuffled out of the room, eyes to the ground. Later that night in the bathroom the new girl heard someone in the next stall say to her friend: "She probably wanted to write to some boyfriend. The whole reason they won't give us pencils and paper is because of girls like her."

***

No, Esmerelda hadn't heard about the immigrant caravan, either. But it was good that those people were doing it. She hoped they would come to Texas and let them out, that's what they should do.

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October 2017: An immigration raid in a small town in Michigan

On a hot, quiet evening at the end of a long summer, a group of farmworkers watched the dusk drained to pale across the western Michigan horizon. Some of the men sat on a used couch pressed against the wall of the dormitory building and leaned their heads back against the outer wall, still hot to the touch from the day's sun. Others stood, preferring to straighten their backs after spending the day bent over blueberry bushes.

The men move through the rows and gracefully pluck the fruit, gracefully because the fruit cannot bruise. They fill 20 pound plastic lugs with fruit and they brush away wasps and they start on a new lug and after 12 hours, or after however long the grower needs, the vans bring them back to their dormitory in the town of New Era.

There is a certain peaceful hum to the dormitory in New Era at this hour. Imagine a city apartment building where everyone works at the same job and gets off work at the same time. Windows pop open to let in the cooling air. Band music plays on an old radio strung with three long extension cords through a window into someone's open dormitory. Phones buzz and beep and the two-story, green dorm building in the middle of a field connects itself to Los Angeles and New York and small villages in Oaxaca to the farthest reaches of the infinite horizon of life that is Mexico City.

Blueberry season is coming to an end and the men and women, mostly from Mexico, are passing around a clipboard with applications for the upcoming apple harvest. They are constantly on the move, moving from harvest to harvest, driving their old cars across the country, sleeping in Walmart parking lots or KOAs until they get to the next camp and pick the next fruit. They work for as long as there is work and then they move on. The constant movement becomes as natural as waking up in the morning, it is simply something one has to do.

The children of the farmworkers kicked up dirt with a soccer ball in the driveway of their temporary home. The haze from the dirt turned the sunset scarlet.

Mothers and fathers watched from the windows of their plywood dormitories. This was the goal. They worked hard, money was short, but they were safe, and they had made it. Their children would go to school, they would have better lives, perhaps they would become successful. The young fathers, with dirt caked into their arms by the 90 degree sun, sat together on the couch outside the dormitory building and drank cold beer. Not for a thousand years had any of their fathers given their children such an opportunity for a safe and prosperous life. How profoundly this feeling burns in the hearts of such fathers…

As the workers relaxed at the Bakery Agricultural Labor Camp, a convoy of immigration agents was speeding down the tree-lined country roads in a planned operation to raid the camp. They had no warrants, the raid was based on a legal pretense that another undocumented man had lived there some time ago. Minutes later, nine men and one woman were being sped in the opposite direction, some as far as Youngstown, Ohio, for processing and deportation.

***

"Dad, mom, the police are here," yelled a 10-year-old boy as he ran into the apartment his family had been living in since June. Five unmarked cars and SUVs had just sped into the camp parking lot one-by-one. Out-of-uniform immigration officers began ordering the workers to line up against the wall.

Days later, the inhabitants of the Bakery migrant camp were still in shock. Some had fled, fearing a second raid. The ground was littered with baseball caps, water bottles, work gloves, and kneepads left over from the roundup. The boy was in shock. How does a 10-year-old child process the fact that one minute their father was right there, and then he was gone, possibly forever? What does he think when his mother explains that there is nothing they can do about it?

The boy's mother, Juana, recalls the panic: "The police came and my husband went to the door. They told him, 'come outside' and forced him outside the door and arrested him."

"When they came, they told me to stay inside," she said. "They wouldn't let me talk to my husband. Our boys were watching, and they were crying. So was I. Immigration came with their very ugly character. They were very aggressive."

She fought back tears when she said she had only spoken to her husband once since he was taken to the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center. He told her on the phone how immigration officers had mocked them. "The racist officers started to make fun of him," Juana said. "They told him he was a criminal and that our sons are criminals because we cut our boys' hair ourselves, because they have buzz cuts."

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One farmworker living in a nearby labor camp was present when the raid took place.

"Immigration didn't have a warrant," he said, "they just had a photo of some guy who used to live there, but they ended up arresting 10 people. They were waiting around the corner for them to come home from work. People were just relaxing out front after a long day."

The raids produced shock and anger among the non-immigrant residents of the surrounding area, who are overwhelmingly white.

Elaina grew up in New Era and has never seen a raid like this before. She has lived next door to the camp in a trailer for years, she knows the workers are poor. She knows that they have come a long way, that their lives are different than hers in some ways but the same in so many more. She watched in anger as the raid took place.

"It's pretty messed up that they come and do that," she said. "The people were just sitting there and cooperating. They're calm, they just go to work and they're hard workers. They get out really late and come home to relax."

These were their friends. Perhaps not their closest friends, since the workers come and go after only a few months, but still, their lives had become intertwined with the lives of the residents of the little green dormitory over the years. The neighbors felt a certain responsibility to be welcoming and friendly. They conceived of their ambassadorship not as a political act, but as a matter of basic human decency.

Tammy, another next-door neighbor, explained that her family spends their free time with the migrant workers, even though they are often only living in New Era for three to four months. "Everybody here, so far, we all get along, we've never had problems. If we have birthday parties for the kids, they'll all come over and we just have fun."

Here in Michigan, she says, "some schools don't have the stuff that other schools do because they can't afford it." She said money was needed for social programs since there are many people "that really do need help with certain things." She said young people should be able to go to college. "You got kids that would like to have that backup plan from the state helping them go to college, but there's basically not enough money there because he's spending all this money trying to send the Mexicans back."

Juana, the young mother of the sequestered husband, looked meaningfully at the neighbor's home. Those were good people, she said, pointing. Before coming to the US, she heard stories and listened to songs about the racists in the North. But the more time she spent in the US, the more she felt she understood them. She knew life would be hard in the North, she had no illusions in that, but she didn't know it was so hard for *everyone*. "The people who live around here are not racist to us," Juana said, pointing at the surrounding homes. "They are workers, too."

Juana's next-door neighbor at the labor camp, Cristobal, invited us into his apartment where a smiling toddler played with a basket of apples. Upstairs, several of the arrestees had been living in hot, bare rooms, sleeping on slabs of wood covered with thin mattresses. These men, most in their early 20s, left behind belongings familiar to all young people: headphones, photos, energy drinks, cell phone chargers. Had it been a nicer room, it might have looked like a college dorm, the inhabitant a student who had rushed out late to class.

The physical strain of farm work is well-known. "We work up to 12 to 14 hours a day," Juana said. "If there's work, which is irregular, we make $700 a month. We follow the fruit."

Cristobal walked out to his 20-year-old minivan and explained that his family is always on the move. Migrant children may spend a school year in five states. "We've been in Florida, North Carolina, New Jersey, Georgia, and now Michigan," he said, "for blueberries and apples." Miguel, another farmworker, said he makes $70 to $80 in a nine- or 10-hour day. "It costs about $500 each time we move to the next crop," he added. Miguel also sends $400 per month to his family in central Mexico.

Stephany is another neighbor who has lived in a nearby home for many years and has come to know many of the residents of the camp. Referring to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, she said, "I have so much anger with these people. It's ridiculous what they're doing to the Mexicans. These poor people come here to work to send money back to their homes in Mexico where it is poor."

She saw images of recent earthquakes that hit Mexico City and Oaxaca, where some of the workers she knows are from. "Look at what's happening to them now," she said. "All it is, is a border. It's just a line. The border is stupid, I don't agree with it."

Juana's family comes from the impoverished south of Mexico that has been racked by multiple earthquakes in recent weeks. She hopes to save enough money to help her family. "The government here and the government in Mexico are the same," she says, upset over the Mexican government's failure to provide relief or adequate preparation from earthquakes. "They don't do anything for us. They don't help the poor. That's why we came to the US in the first place."

Stephany points around at the worn down homes of the Americans who live nearby and sighs. "With all the money spent deporting, detaining or arresting the immigrants, you could do the roads, better hospitals, you could even do medication that people don't qualify for insurance at a cheaper price. This is a very big problem around here. There's a bunch of people that are sick and can't afford to go to the hospital, or if they go they're going to have bad credit and can't afford to pay it. In my case, one of my medicines—insurance doesn't cover it, it is $491. I can't take it."

"I think the money being spent ruining peoples' lives could so help out the states like Texas, Florida—all the ones that just had a bad hurricane." [The government spends between $13,729 and $36,028 deporting each immigrant. Arresting a single immigrant costs between $4,856 and $27,155, depending on whether local police help. Detaining an immigrant costs an average of $5,400, while legal prosecution costs $1,495. The average cost of physical removal is $1,978 per immigrant].

At the end of our conversation, Stephany said she thought of something she wanted to tell America: "We all have kids, we all have family. We do not choose to be born Hispanic, white, black, Chinese, Asian or anything. We are born because of our parents, we all have red blood. If we get cut our blood is red."

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DAY TWO

The staff brings me one child at a time, and when I near the conclusion of one interview, I ask the staff to bring me the next name on my list. Someone goes and gets whoever is next. A couple of the children are not locatable for one reason or another. Two children I have heard about, one boy and one girl, who have been reported to have suffered substantially, or to have been somewhat "lost in the system" and perpetually incarcerated, are always indisposed in one way or another. It is always promised that they will be brought before my visit is concluded, but this doesn't seem to happen.

As it turns out, one child is located and the other is not, for reasons that remain unclear. It was rumored that the boy, who was later brought to me, was large and psychologically dangerous. The staff always said that if he came for an interview, I would be wise to leave the door open and to be cautious of upsetting him. But this boy did not ultimately appear until the conclusion of my visit, and on the second day, the only thing that had changed was that the guards had become more confrontational, that tensions had risen substantially, somehow, based on our conduct on the

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first day.

The first child who was brought to me on the second day was the youngest I met at my visit. She was not yet 12-1/2 years old.

Leila

"You can't even go near a window or they will yell at you," Leila tells me, "If you are five feet away from a window and if you start to walk toward the window, a staff will yell at you and tell you to get away from the window."

I ask her why, she isn't sure. Is it a legal formality which allows them to escape liability if children jump out of upper story windows? But that doesn't explain the fact that the windows are darkened to impair vision both from outside looking in and inside looking out. The aim is not only to keep passers-by from looking in, where they might see signs posted by the children begging for help. But the heavy tinting is on the inside of the window as well, and it only serves to stop the children from looking out on the world outside.

What legitimate purpose might this serve? There is no cogent argument that this serves the best interest of the detained child, who is in the custody of the federal government. Why can't they see out? Because it was decided that giving the children a semblance of contact with the outside world would reduce their sense of isolation and improve their spirits and morale. Because the purpose of the child detention complex is to weaken the children, to break their wills, to make them feel alone. This is the only reason why the windows are obscured from inside.

If she got too close to the window at the facility, where she could either see or be seen, she was told her release would be delayed by a month.

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"My mother and father are named XXXX and XXXX and they live in Michigan," Leila says. "We are waiting on a letter from the government but my parents sent fingerprints 20 days ago so I hope to hear soon and to get released soon. I don't know many details or why it is taking so long to confirm the fingerprints but I want to get out as soon as possible. All I want is to be with my mom and dad."

Leila has been detained for two months at the time I spoke to her. She will turn 18 in 2024.

She tells me she has a photo of her parents which she wants to put up on the wall by her bed. She had the photo in her bag when she was arrested, and she knows the staff at the facility keep their belongings until their release. All a staff member would have to do is get the photo, but this is not allowed.

"The staff doesn't let you put photos of your family on the wall," she says. "That does not seem fair to me at all."

What is the reason for this, I ask? No reason is given to the children. Such rules do not even exist in most prisons.

"You only get 10 minutes to call your family on the phone. After nine minutes the staff starts knocking on the door [of the small phone booths] to get you to leave. If you keep talking, you get reported, which means you have to stay at the facility longer and you can't leave. That's what the staff tells us happens when they report you."

There are other rules, rules which make no sense and which Leila does not understand. "You also can't cross your legs or fall asleep when we watch movies. If you fall asleep during a movie, they knock on the table to wake you up."

And, "if you get hungry at night, you can't have any food. The staff told me, too bad, you should have eaten more at dinner. Except they don't give us enough food at dinner."

Leila explains, "They wake us up at 6 in the morning. They don't let you touch others, you can't wear your hair the way you want. You get 15 minutes to eat and if you don't finish your food in time they throw it out. I have seen that. Three weeks ago, the staff told a girl that her family wasn't going to sponsor her, so she felt bad, and she was taking a while eating because she was sad. The staff came over and reprimanded her and took her plate and threw the food out right in front of her. She started to cry right there."

***

On the second day, I was waiting between interviews and saw a male staff member leading three teenaged girls wearing grey sweatshirts and carrying brooms. The hallway was busy, it was evidently a break in the schedule, and there were many children and staffers around. The male staff member leading the girls was wearing a T-shirt with the words "American Warrior" emblazoned above the American flag. American Warrior is a vigilante group comprised of armed volunteers who extralegally monitor the border and, it is rumored, kill immigrants.

I tell the girls to stop. They are not obligated to clean or do any work around the facility. They are not slaves, they have not been convicted of any crime, and involuntary servitude is illegal. The girls look at the staff member and hand him their brooms and walk away. He looks at me with a closed lip smile, and the understanding is that he will do whatever he pleases in 48 hours when I am gone and the facility is once again sealed to the outside world. This man—roughly 40 years of age, balding, supporter or member of a fascist militia—works here because he believes in the cause.

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Leila has severe food allergies and goes into anaphylactic shock. If she does not receive immediate medical attention, her throat will close and she will die. She does not know specifically what she is allergic too, because she was not able to secure the proper testing in Guatemala. She knows she is allergic to cake, but she isn't aware what ingredient.

"I also have explained to the staff that I have a very serious food allergy that comes from cake, and when I eat cake my throat closes and I vomit. Once before in Guatemala I had a bad allergic reaction and thankfully someone gave me Benadryl and it saved my life," she explains with wide eyes.

"Here they don't give me medication. I do not have epinephrine, which I am told I need. I also don't have Benadryl. All they do is give you a red bracelet informing the staff about the allergy, but I do not have the bracelet. Also, recently the staff gave me a piece of cake even though they know I'm allergic. That was a week or two ago."

She doesn't believe it was intentional in the sense that anyone was trying to poison her, but the staff simply does not care. If the child's allergy is noted in her file, that information was not deemed important enough to convey to the staff responsible for handing out food.

On one occasion, Leila began to have an allergy attack, she is not sure from what.

"They also don't take us to the doctor when we ask," she says. "I wanted to go to the doctor but they didn't let me. I was getting so upset that I was having difficulty breathing and finally they let me go to the doctor."

***

Leila gets yelled at a lot by the staff. She gets yelled at for crossing her legs, she gets yelled at for bringing her shoes into the bathroom instead of her sandals, she gets yelled at for getting close to the window, for trying to look out. She gets yelled at nine minutes into her 10-minute phone call to her parents in Iowa. She gets yelled at six minutes into her eight-minute shower. She gets shushed by the staff: "I think it's insulting and I don't like it. They make it so you can never relax. It's extremely stressful."

"They won't let us do anything. … They don't let us have yarn to weave lanyards to make bracelets because it is pretty common for people to try to kill themselves here."

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"Excuse me, Missus?" The 12-year-old girl asked the adult as the girls are getting into bed. "In my bag, the picture of my mom and dad. Can I have it?"

"What do you want to look at that for, it'll only make you sad," the woman says back to her.

"I want to look at it," the girl says.

"Why should you be the only girl who gets her photos? You think you're special?"

***

Two hundred immigration agents dressed in military gear descended upon two garden nurseries in the Ohio cities of Sandusky and Castalia, arresting 114 immigrants in one of the largest immigration raids of the Trump presidency in June 2018.

It was a workday that began like any other for the workers of Corso's Flower and Garden Center in the former industrial hub near Lake Erie. However, before noon, more than half of them were headed for immigration internment camps where they faced months or even years of detention.

Images of the raids depict a brutal crackdown of police-state proportions. Armed agents surrounded the facilities, swarmed the workers, lined them up against the walls, cuffed them and frog-marched them into the backs of unmarked buses.

Lynn Tramonte, the director of the immigrant rights group America's Voice Ohio, told the WSWS at the time: "These raids are significant for many reasons. One, our government is using SWAT-team-style tactics to arrest ordinary workers who pose no threat to anyone. It's an outrageous misuse of tax dollars. Two, our government is doing this without any regard at all for the consequences of their actions. What happens when Mom or Dad doesn't come home tonight? Who picks up the children from school? Who makes them dinner and helps them with their homework?"

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents set up full perimeters around the premises, preventing workers from trying to escape. Agents with guns strapped to their bodies tied up women, took their personal belongings, and forced them off the facilities.

The military-style raid sends a message that the Trump administration is preparing an ever-greater use of armed force to carry out its anti-immigrant program. The Associated Press reported that the raid was a "heavy show of force that involved aircraft surveillance."

Work at Corso's—like most agricultural and nursery jobs—is backbreaking and low-paid. An employment advertisement for Corso's on Glassdoor.com requires workers be able to "stand, walk, climb, bend, squat, stoop and twist for extended periods of time"; to "lift 5-50 pounds frequently throughout the assigned workday"; and have "extremely flexible scheduling"—all with a "positive upbeat attitude with a smile." According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nursery workers make an average of $23,380 per year.

Family and co-workers of the immigrants arrested described Tuesday's raids as "military-style," "SWAT-like" and "a nightmare."

Witnesses described a scene of total criminality. "They came with donuts," said Mercedes, a Corso's worker who was working at the time and saw the raid unfold. "They got all of us into the same area telling us they were officials doing a routine inspection. When we all gathered, they encircled us and took the badges out. They had dogs, helicopters, assault rifles and helmets. We were all crying." Another worker said some agents were disguised as construction workers.

Nearby residents said they could hear the raid from their homes and that it felt like a natural disaster was taking place. Many of those present said that the workers who are US citizens denounced immigration agents at the scene, yelling at them and imploring them to stop. Workers said immigration officials detained several US citizen workers to prevent them from calling co-workers and warning them about the raid. The American workers were shouting at the agents and writhing in their plastic handcuffs. Workers say agents ordered the documented immigrant workers to bring their passports to work from now on. The workers said they would do no such thing and the American coworkers backed them up.

As word spread, the working class immigrant population of the surrounding towns flew into panic as family and friends tried to reach loved ones. It was a desperate scramble, a nightmarish phone tree. "No, I don't know where he is," "No, she isn't responding to my texts."

Emily, an immigrant in Sandusky, told Univision: "In the morning I got a message from a work friend who was asking me about my mom, because she works there. My mom is fine, thank God, she had an appointment and wasn't at work. I was told it was really ugly. They came in big cars, some wearing civilian clothes, throughout the whole building. They took them by surprise and tried to take everyone. My understanding is that yes, there were children working there" who were also arrested.

The night after the raids, dozens of devastated family members gathered at a church in nearby Norwalk, Ohio, where most of the immigrants live. Dusk was falling as the meeting began. The room was packed full of nervous people.

For many, it was the first time they had seen each other since the raid. These were people fighting against time and desperate for information. Most had not spoken to their detained relatives who had been shipped to facilities hours away. Not only do family and friends fear separation by deportation, they are also aware of the deadly possibility of being loaded onto unmarked airplanes destined for violent Central American countries where life is very, very cheap.

Present in the room were an untold number of children who are now parentless. Jerry, an 18-year-old US citizen whose mother was taken in the raid, is now responsible for his younger sister and brother, ages 9 and 12.

"When I received that call I rushed over [to Corso's] to see my mom," he said. "I couldn't. I was detained. … An agent told me to pull over. He handcuffed me and wouldn't let me see my mom. I saw the bus she was in. It was 20 feet away, but it had tinted windows and I couldn't see in. I'm thinking that my mom saw me but I couldn't see her.

"It was a horrible experience that no one should experience. Just because my mom is an illegal immigrant trying to support her family in this country, it's horrible. They treated them like they're worthless. I saw officers with assault rifles, dogs and helicopters everywhere."

Jerry said he had been saving money to go to college by working in construction from a young age. "But now this has happened I'm going to use some of that money to support my brother and sister."

Flor, a high school student whose mother was also arrested, said, "I was at work. I was getting phone calls and messages from her. I felt bad because I couldn't answer the phone because I was too busy working. I finally called her back and she was yelling and screaming: 'They took me! They took me! Immigration got me!'"

Corso's workers working the afternoon shift in the days after the raids expressed their disgust at what they had seen.

One worker, Jerome, said, "These are good, hardworking people. They are my friends. I knew these people. I go over to their houses and we have parties together. You can't fault them for trying to better their lives, for coming here. People are starving where they come from. I'd risk my life to come here too."

Another worker said, "It was chaos. It was horrible what happened because people have children and they didn't know what to do with them. These are hardworking people and it's not fair. The women were all crying because they have kids too. I've known them for years, they're hardworking and they're just trying to better their lives."

A third worker said, "Some kids will now be put into foster care. They

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had dogs here. There was no way for anyone to hide. They don't deserve it. They work hard for their families. They were good workers, if they saw you needed help they would offer it to you." Many Corso's workers reported that they often worked 80 to 90 hours a week.

Ohio ACLU representative J. Bennett Guess told the WSWS at the time, "It was abhorrent the way they were detained, especially without regard for the children. Children were left at day care centers. These are extremely hard working, low-wage workers who are highly exploited. What happened is a travesty of justice. What we are witnessing is the systematic dismantling of due process by every administration, Democratic and Republican alike."

He added that this was of extreme concern for all, regardless of immigration status: "How you treat your non-citizens is how you will treat your citizens."

Many workers have stories of close calls. Some, including a family of five, have moved out of their home for fear they will be hunted down by ICE. Others reported having family who are too afraid to leave their homes.

As these horrific scenes play out, both the Democratic and Republican parties are calling for added "border security"—a term which means more ICE and CBP agents patrolling the country and terrorizing immigrants. Earlier this year, the Democrats supported a Trump-backed bill to hand hundreds of millions of dollars in additional funding to ICE. Some present at the meeting at the Norwalk church said they had family and friends who had previously been deported by the Obama administration.

Miguel

Miguel is quiet, shy, and, he says, afraid. If he goes back to Huehuetenango, he says, he will be killed.

***

The light above the door in front of the church illuminated the sidewalk, throwing a green hue reflecting the painted façade of the building. A small, one-story building, one main room, bright fluorescent tubes above the pulpit, white walls looking yellow from the fluorescent, the open door and the light from within are the only light on the dark street, tangled with overhead wires hanging from poles.

His mother's sister is 20 years old, only three years older than him. As they walk out of the church and turn toward home, they can hear the rush of the city around them and the dim lights of the shacks on the hillside above them. They turn the corner and the light of the church door is gone. It is only a four-block walk to their homes, but the streetlights are out.

They hear a whistle, but they don't turn to look. His heart rate jumps. He does not wish harm on anyone but he hopes the whistle is at someone else. But it isn't. Three teenagers come up to them, tattoos of the mara *all up their arms, on their necks. The boy says a silent "our father" and gets through most of it before he is pushed to the ground—he isn't sure from what direction—his head slams against the cold pavement.*

"*Hey* maricon *how much did it cost you to buy her?" Says a boy who he recognizes, a boy who used to be at school with him, a couple grades older. "What are you going to do to her,* maricon*? Are you going to be a man? I can tell you what I would do to her." And he tells her, to her face, and she is staying quiet, her head is down, her straight brown hair hanging over her face, but there are tears in her eyes.*

One of the other mareros *walks up to his aunt, takes out a switchblade, and cuts her blouse open from the top down, all the way down, cutting the blouse in two.*

"*Look,* maricon*, if you won't take her we will take her. You will sell her to us. She gets married, probably what this slut has always wanted, you can tell by looking at her. Tomorrow we will come to your house. You go in to pray one more time and I'll cut your f— throat the next time I see you."*

The three mareros *start to walk down the street. The boy and his aunt are still, her head down, she is holding her arms across her chest. When the* mareros *turn the corner he gets up and they run, feet splashing in dirty puddles through the dark street. They get home and they don't speak a word. He doesn't see his aunt until the next day. He stays home from school, she stays home from work. And then they hear a knock on the door. He goes around to the side of the house and looks out at the street in front of the house and he sees the* mareros*, the same three, one standing at the front door, two leaning against the wall of the house across the street. The* marero *knocks again. The boy silently prays. The banging on the metal door continues, there are dogs barking. People pretend not to notice, they walk away, they avoid the street.*

Eventually the mareros *walk away. But they are watching. That night he tells his mother, who cries. She gives them 2,000 quetzales and they pack some clothes in backpacks. In the morning, before the sun comes up, his uncle comes in his taxi and drives them to Quetzaltenango, where they catch a bus to the border, wade across the river, and walk to Tapachula. That night they sleep in the plaza for the Child Heroes of the Battle of Chapultepec.*

***

Miguel asks me if he will be deported. I don't know, I tell him. He asks if there is a possibility he will be deported before he can see his dad in Tennessee. In general, I explain, they are releasing children to their families, and not deporting them on the spot. His father sent the paperwork two weeks ago, he says. "I don't know why it is taking so long to get me released. Everything is in order but there are so many delays. I just want to get out."

"In here you are watched all the time," he says. "They are listening when you make a phone call, they don't even let you have pens to draw with or colors to paint. We only have 10 minutes on the phone and I can only talk to my parents once each week. I want more food. If you aren't hungry, you cannot give your food to another hungrier person or you get punished. The food here is awful. I get sick after eating sometimes, I get stomach pain. For breakfast and lunch they give us very little food and I am hungry all day every day. I feel weak at the end of the day."

"At school we only have one textbook to share which makes it very difficult to learn."

***

Miguel swore once, accidentally, when he first got to the facility. He doesn't remember the exact circumstances, he says. He was wrong to have sworn, he explains, but the word just slipped through his lips. Someone put him over the edge, he acknowledges with embarrassment. He was punished for it. Fair enough, he thinks, only the punishment was too harsh and he did not know that such harsh punishments could be dealt out for first offenses. Nobody explains the rules when a child arrives at the facility.

"The punishments are arbitrary and very strict," Miguel says. "Once, when I first got here, I did not know any of the rules. I still don't know the rules because nobody who works here has ever explained to me what they are. They don't give you a paper explaining what you can and cannot do, for example, and you only find out you have broken the rules when you are punished. One time I said a bad word and they took away my privileges. They wouldn't let me play soccer for seven days. It was not fair and it made me feel upset. I shouldn't have said the bad word but I am a young person and we make mistakes."

***

In the month since Miguel has been at the facility, he has been allowed to go to church one time. He regularly asks if he can go to church, but only once has he gone.

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"They took us to a real church on one occasion in my time here but it was strange because we were being watched the whole time by staff. There were 30 staff there for about 100 kids in church."

Miguel wanted to speak with some of the other churchgoers, but was told he could not. "We could not talk to other people and it was very oppressive. I do not feel free to really practice my faith under those conditions.

"I fled Guatemala in part because of the unbearable levels of violence which affected me and which made me fearful for my life. Gang members told me they would kill me if I ever went to church again. Religion is at the center of my life and for this reason I could not stay. I have to continue with my faith listening to the word of God. They also told me when I was walking with my aunt who is young—about 20 years old—that they wanted me to sell her so the gang members could make her their wife. That means she would become their slave. They came by my house looking for me."

***

Miguel tells me to speak to one boy, an older boy, who has been detained for three years. Miguel gives me the same name I have heard from other children, the name I gave staff the day before. They insist the boy will be brought, if I am really certain that I feel safe talking to him.

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Housing immigrant children at a former Japanese internment camp

In June 2019, the Pentagon announced that the Trump administration would detain 1,400 immigrant children at the site of a World War II-era Japanese internment camp, Fort Sill Army Base in Lawton, Oklahoma. Trump announced the decision as he denounced immigrants and socialism at a rally in Iowa.

"Immigration really is the defining issue of 2020," Trump said in Des Moines shortly after the Pentagon announcement. "When it comes to immigration, Democrats no longer represent American citizens. ... The Democratic Party is really now the socialist party."

In 2017 the WSWS visited the sites of two internment camps in Arizona: Gila River, located on the southwest side of Highway 10 between Phoenix and Tucson, and Poston, across the western border with California.

We saw Gila River first. It was not easy to find. We were looking for the camp driving westbound, but if there was a sign on the interstate, we missed it. It was almost dusk, all around me was the flat red horizon speckled with chaparral. Nowhere is the change from day to night as stark as in the desert.

We parked on a dirt road next to a garden plot farm, looking for Canal Camp, which consisted of 200 barracks. Another section of the camp, Butte Camp, had over 600 barracks. Together, Gila River detained 13,000 people. Eleanor Roosevelt made a smiling propaganda visit to the camp in 1943.

Now the camp is hidden. We walked over a series of drainage canals and through dry brush, looking for any sign of the camp. Google Earth provided us with some sense of direction, and eventually we came across a section of dirt and brush surrounded by cement slabs. And here in the middle of the desert is where thousands of people lived for five years. The last residents of Gila River were released in September 1945, weeks after Truman incinerated more than 200,000 people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The government released them back into their lives with no support. Their businesses and, in many cases, their personal belongings, were pilfered from them, and they would never get them back.

The Poston camp is in even worse condition. To construct the camp, the US government took land on the Colorado River Indian Reservation despite the fact that the tribes objected. It was not the first time the US government had made such an "arrangement."

There is a small memorial on the side of a lonely two-lane road passing through a deeply impoverished Native American reservation. At Poston there remain a number of standing buildings that are believed to comprise part of the former camp. They are off the two-lane road some ways, off in the corner of a field. There is a grove of trees and a chain link fence surrounding a dilapidated series of buildings defaced with gang graffiti and with needles and cigarette butts on the ground.

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The decision to house immigrant children at Fort Sill "is a gut punch to us to repeat history like this," David Inoue, executive director of the Japanese American Citizens League, told the WSWS.

"Those who were incarcerated under Japanese internment often return to the camps on pilgrimages to demand that such places be recognized for the egregious wrongs that took place there. Now, further injustices will be happening at these same locations. The trauma inflicted on these immigrant children will last for generations."

Fort Sill housed some 700 Japanese-Americans, including US citizens and first-generation immigrants, known as *issei*, during World War II. During Japanese internment, Fort Sill was known for its fierce windstorms and its unbearably hot temperatures. Average highs in July are 97 degrees Fahrenheit.

Between 1942 and 1946, the US government jailed 120,000 people without trial at internment camps across the country. Internment was initiated via Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 on February 12, 1942.

Fort Sill was the site of one of the many murders conducted by US Army prison guards during internment. The *Encyclopedia of Japanese American Internment* explains:

"On May 12, 1942, Kanesaburo Oshima, a barber from the island of Hawaii, climbed the outer barbed-wire fence in broad daylight reportedly shouting, 'I want to go home!' A guard barked out a warning, while another shot Oshima dead in front of his friends who had urged they be allowed to help him get down from the fence and return to the camp. Oshima was depressed, his friends revealed. He had been forced to leave his wife and 12 children who had little means of support."

Oshima's funeral "was attended by all of Fort Sill's Japanese Americans. Also present were Army guards with machine guns pointed at the mourners because they feared an uprising."

In *Life Behind Barbed Wire*, an internee recalled, "that night a mentally disturbed internee from the Mainland died from shock as a result of Mr. Oshima's death. The camp grew even more melancholy."

The military calls the new internment camp a "temporary emergency influx shelter," a dystopian echo of the US Army War Relocation Authority's decision to label Japanese internment camps "relocation centers."

Unlike the internees during the Second World War, the new internees will be isolated from their parents and denied basic visitation rights. They will also not be provided with effective education or recreation during their detention.

There is no country with as powerful and draconian a criminal system as the United States. In no other country on earth are 1 out of every 100 residents in jail or prison on any given night. Billions of dollars are spent each year on the detention of criminals. People receive life sentences for stealing candy bars on their third strike. Mentally handicapped people are executed by the actions of dozens of prosecutors and judges and politicians who received the best education.

But none of the political crimes are ever paid for. Not since the Civil War, when "every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword," (Lincoln) has the ruling class paid for any crime.

In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan announced that survivors of Japanese-American internment would be paid a few thousand dollars, amounting to roughly 10 percent of the value of the businesses stolen from them.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton issued a statement offering "a sincere

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apology to you for the actions that unfairly denied Japanese Americans and their families fundamental liberties during World War II. ... In retrospect, we understand that the nation's actions were rooted deeply in racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a lack of political leadership."

At Gila River, we notice graffiti on one of the asphalt slabs. Drawn in stick by one of the internees are the numbers 3/4/1943. It was impossible to know what the date marked; a birth, a marriage, or the day the cement was wet.

Edith

Edith is 15 years old and from Honduras. A gang member told her he'd kill her unless she used cocaine with him. She left the next day. During our interview, she was embarrassed, and kept calling me "mister."

She explained the process for going to the bathroom. She explained that nobody is allowed to go to the bathroom until eight girls have to go. When eight have to go, the staff take them to the bathroom and tell them to hurry up. Edith said with a quivering voice that many of the girls have just begun to menstruate, but that staff still makes them wait. The older girls try to help the younger ones, to explain what is going on, but there is only so much they can do.

The one thing she enjoyed doing at the facility was making bracelets. The bracelet material was confiscated, however, when a girl tried to kill herself with a small plastic cord.

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Emely

Emely is from Nicaragua, she is 14 years old.

"They can report you if you are crying for too long. They give you about 10 or 15 minutes to put your head down and cry, but they will report you if you take more time than that."

***

Four months ago, Emely left Nicaragua. "The government killed hundreds of protesters when I was there and things got deadly. I had to stop going to class because things were so dangerous. I fled for my life with my uncle and his wife."

She was arrested in July. "In detention I saw an agent take the phone away from a girl when she struggled to enter the phone number to call her family. This was the one call we each had and the agent would not let her try to enter the number again. They said, 'you lost your turn.'"

Her mother lives in Atlanta. It took two months to approve her mother's fingerprints, but even with this obstacle out of the way, it is not clear when Emely will be able to leave the facility.

"It is extremely boring here and they have such strict rules. You get 10-minute phone calls twice a week, which is not enough to have a real conversation. They make reports on you for doing anything and that delays your release. A friend of mine was reported because she talked to family for slightly more than 10 minutes on the phone during her allotted time. You can't even brush your friend's hair or the staff will make a report on you. The staff say that it can be a month delay for each report they have to make on you, even for small things. They report you for having a pen in your room.

"The school is not good enough. They don't give you textbooks, they don't give you notebooks, and there aren't enough different levels. There should be a higher level of advanced classes because otherwise it is so boring."

I ask: Is there anything else you want to share?

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"One time, in September, my roommate tried to hang herself. Police came and tied her up at the hands and feet, and another one of my roommates said the police treated her like an animal. When she said this, a staff person said, 'we can't touch them like that, and it's good, at least the police get to do their jobs.' The staff said that police shouldn't have to waste time because some girl is throwing a tantrum—they have better things to do. They said the girl that tried to hang herself was just trying to call attention to herself. These remarks were hurtful to me. I felt so bad for the poor girl who tried to kill herself."

***

Yes, she had heard about the caravan. The kids were talking about it. She heard there were some people in the caravan from Nicaragua.

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The dead: Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramirez and Valeria

June 23, 2019 was a Sunday morning. The bodies of a young father and his infant daughter floated on the banks of the Rio Grande. They had failed in their attempt to cross into the United States in Texas. The father was named Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramirez. He was just 25 years old. His daughter, whose arm was draped around her father's back when their bodies washed up on the shore, was named Valeria.

The deaths sparked mass outrage across Latin America and fired the hearts of millions of people with pain and hatred of the government in the North. Practically every major newspaper across Central America ran banner headlines describing the deaths and a litany of other horrors confronting immigrants fleeing north.

It came amid a wave of immigrant death:

That same Sunday morning in June, American officials discovered the bodies of four people—a 20-year-old, a young child and two babies—dead in the Texas desert on the US side of the Rio Grande. The Guatemalan embassy has since identified the young people as Guatemalan nationals. Temperatures in the area reached 113 degrees that Sunday.

The same weekend, Mexican police assassinated a young Salvadoran woman traveling to the US along Mexico's east coast. Elsalvador.com wrote:

"María Senaida Escobar, 19 years old, died after being shot in the head when Mexican police from Veracruz intercepted the truck in which she and other immigrants were driving to the United States."

On June 22, Mexican National Guardsmen wielding assault rifles were filmed tearing two Nicaraguan mothers from the arms of their young daughters at the border with the US in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. Photos of the National Guardsmen in battle gear frog-marching the crying mothers back to Mexico were widely viewed on social media throughout Mexico and Central America and particularly in Nicaragua.

The next day, the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) announced Mexico would deploy 15,000 members of the National Guard to its northern border on top of the 6,000 it deployed on the request of Donald Trump earlier that month.

The newly formed National Guard effectively served as Trump's shock troops for terrorizing workers and poor peasants of Central America. Later, AMLO ordered bus companies to work with police and federal police to check identifications of those buying bus tickets in order to arrest and deport immigrants.

Francisco Javier Calvillo, director of the migrant shelter Casa del Migrante in Ciudad Juarez, told *El Diario de Juárez* that AMLO's government "is doing the United States' dirty work."

The Trump administration was forced to relocate 300 immigrant children from a concentration camp in Texas where they were being housed under filthy conditions.

The *New York Times* reported: "The move came days after a group of

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lawyers was given access to the station in Clint and said they saw children as young as 8 years old caring for infants, toddlers with no diapers, and children who said they were waking up at night because they were hungry."

The lawyers "said that children lacked access to private bathrooms, soap, toothbrushes or toothpaste. Many were wearing the same dirty clothes that they had crossed the border in weeks earlier."

The children were whisked off to a variety of other concentration camps, including a tent encampment outside of El Paso, Texas.

The attacks on immigrant workers escaping home countries devastated by decades of US imperialist violence have provoked outrage in the American population as well.

Shortly after the decision was announced, a group of protesters gathered at the Fort Sill military base in Oklahoma. The group included a number of elderly Japanese Americans who themselves were interned there as young children, and one man who was born in a camp in Topaz, Utah.

Military police interrupted the protest and screamed at the former internees: "What is it you people don't understand!" one soldier shouted, demanding the protesters leave immediately.

"My earliest recollection is being on the train with my family, leaving that camp," Satsuki Ina, a 75-year-old woman, told *Newsweek.* "I was two years old."

Mike Ishii, whose mother, aunts and grandmother were detained in internment camps, also traveled to Oklahoma from New York. "I am just so heartbroken and outraged," he told *Newsweek*.

"For me, I don't feel like I have a choice. I have to go. I need to go there. I need to register my opposition and I think that is a sentiment that is shared by a lot of people in my community. As soon as I first saw the headlines coming out about this policy to bring 1,400 children to Fort Sill, I felt like I just had to be there."

***

DAY THREE

In the morning I interview more children, in the afternoon we will conduct the inspection.

Gladys

Gladys has lost contact with her mother in Guatemala:

"My mother in Guatemala is in the hospital right now because of the anxiety she has from knowing I am detained and far away from her. My mom doesn't stop crying when I call her. Recently I called her and nobody picked up."

***

"I don't know what to tell you, they just won't let me take her," her nephew told her. "They said it's because our last names don't match."

The girl's mother bit her fingernails. "What did they say she can do," she asked her nephew.

"They … they said that she has two choices. She can either stay at the facility for three more years until she turns 18, or she can agree to be deported," he said.

"Why can't I just tell them to let her go to you? Why can't I just explain it to them? Do they understand?"

"They said I could be a gang member."

***

"When I told my counselor that I was very sad thinking about my mom and that it made my head hurt, my counselor scolded me and told me not to think about my mom anymore. She said, 'Your mom shouldn't be sad because she isn't a child.' This angered me a lot and I was upset. Then my counselor told me that if I am thinking of my mom so much, I should get on a plane and go back to see her. The counselor's name is Raquel. She makes us cry and we are scared of her."

***

"I have developed bad headaches which I have all the time now. I think they are from all the stress. I also used to have glasses but I don't have them here and my eyes hurt a lot and I cannot see very well. I cry every day and it only makes these problems worse. About 20 days ago I asked for glasses but nobody gave me any. I told my counselor but I still haven't gotten any."

"The staff are always threatening to report us for things and to delay our release. If you stand a little bit outside the line when you are lining up, you can get a report. If you cry too much you can get a report. If you don't eat, they report you. If you talk at meal time you can get in trouble. They yell at us to lower our voices and it makes my head hurt. The doctors give me a little pill for this and it helps for a bit but then the headaches come back."

"We are also not allowed to look out the window. If we see someone going to the window, we are supposed to report them to staff so they can write them up. We can't see what is happening outside."

***

Emerson

The staff has finally found the child to whom I had been asking to speak for the first two days. His name is Emerson, he is 17 years old, and when he was a 7-year-old kid the United States carried out a coup in his home country of Honduras.

He has been kept by the government in various types of immigrant child detention "for one and a half years" in three different states.

He was a big kid, and the look in his eyes made clear that his prolonged detention had taken its toll on his consciousness. But he stuck out his arm and shook my hand and smiled when we started to talk, and it was clear that he was glad to speak to someone who was on his side. He knows this place is bad. The staffers pick on him. "On occasion the staff here have told me things like 'go back to Honduras,'" he says, and "one time an employee threatened to hit me."

I told him this was illegal, and he said he knows, but what can you do. He also says that without the approval of a family member, a doctor prescribed him sedatives that he now takes on a daily basis.

"I don't have family in the United States and I don't have anyone to help get me out," he tells me. "No one consulted my family to see if they agreed that I be placed on medications."

He says he has been told that he could be released if his health improves, but it seems to be understood that they may hold him until he turns 18, almost a year from now. We talked about Honduras and he told me it was beautiful there but he can never go back.

He has heard of the caravan. He heard there's lots of Hondureños in it. Good, he says. He hopes those people get to come here without being detained.

***

The boys were outside, playing soccer, it was nice out, blue sky. The staff are watching but the boys can talk a little bit while they're playing and the staff can't hear everything out there. The older boys let the smaller kids play, too. And a 12-year-old boy innocently says to a 17-year-

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old, "You think our parents are in the caravan?" and the 17-year-old replies, "Mine are in America already. But, yeah, yours might be," before running off to intercept a passed ball.

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Damarys

My last interview was with Damarys, a 15-year-old girl with a cell phone, who reads and wants to go to school to learn and make friends. She is well-adjusted, attentive, and an easy communicator. She wanted to talk to someone who could help fix this stupid situation that was keeping her from having a normal life.

"When immigration apprehended us, they were beating us and telling us to go back to our country," she said, referring to the border patrol. "They pushed some people back into the river. I wasn't beaten but I saw this happen."

She doesn't know what happened to the people who were beaten or thrown back into the Rio Grande, but she was kept in a detention center warehouse for five long days. She crossed with her uncle, but they were separated.

"My uncle was deported even though I was never told about that. I was separated from him by immigration officials," she said. "Immigration gave me no food or water on the day they arrested me. On the second day, I got a very small sandwich with ham and a tiny water bottle. It was so cold in the detention center that I could not sleep. There were about 70 of us in a room the size of a classroom. I couldn't sleep. The babies in the room were not given food and it was so cold that the babies couldn't sleep either. Mothers were crying for food for their babies, and there was only one officer who gave them food. I saw them take a child from their father."

I asked, "You saw them take a child from their father?"

She said, "Yes."

I asked what happened, and she said she didn't know anything more.

It turns out it has been complicated to get Damarys out. She has been detained at the facility now for five months. She does not want to celebrate her 16th birthday inside this place. She is annoyed and feels wronged.

After all, why can't they just unite her with her mother, who just came to the United States.

"My only relative in the US who can take me is my mother, XXXX. She came for me from Honduras with my little brother and she is currently in detention."

Her mother left Honduras to try to help her get out of here?

Yes, she says. "Before, while my mom was traveling to the United States, I told the staff about it and they told me that if my mom comes to try and find me, the government will deport me so there is no point in her coming."

Her mother and brother were arrested. Detained, there is nothing they can do to help secure Damarys' release. Damarys has a cousin who "was going to sign for me but they were afraid because someone told her that if she signs and gives her fingerprints to the government to take custody of me, that she can be deported. She was too afraid and so I have been stuck here since."

As a result, "Staff here have also told me that I have two options: to sign my deportation papers or to stay in this facility for three years until I turn 18."

But now, if she allows herself to be deported, she'll only be sent farther away from her mother. She hasn't spoken to her mother now in 12 days. "I'm worried about her because I don't know where she is or if she is OK. It makes me so nervous thinking about it."

Damarys has lost faith in the "process" she is told she must respect. She is fed up with her situation.

"This place is like a prison. I cannot leave when I want. They don't let us go. They don't even let us go outside for more than a small amount of time. They have taken me to church once but it was with so many staff observing me. I went to the movies once in five months. Girls here always say they want to run away to be free. But the staff is watching us 24 hours a day. They watch us when we sleep. This place is very secure, there are cameras in all the classrooms, in the hallways, all over.

"They wake us up at 6 in the morning, which is very early. At 6 a.m. they turn the lights on. On the weekends they wake us up at 7 in the morning, which is not much later. There are so many rules that are impossible to follow and they punish you by taking away your privileges. We cannot share food—if we try to share food they see us on the camera and they punish us. You have 10 minutes to take a shower, they monitor us while doing so and you get in trouble if you go over. They only let you go outside twice a day and if it's raining they say we can't go out at all. There are lines for everything, including to go to the bathroom. The people who are employed at this facility say that if you misbehave they will delay your case and make you stay here longer."

She wants to go to school, she wants to have a textbook, she wants to have her own pen and paper and to be able to talk to her friends on Whatsapp and watch videos and do what normal 15-year-old people get to do, since that's what she is—normal—except that somehow she has been locked up for six months for trying to not get killed in Honduras.

The people at the facility won't even let her make friends. In the six months she has been here, two or three girls passed through to whom Damarys became close. They were her age, they talked together, they complained about the cheap shampoo, talked about which staff member was mean and which was nicer. But when, after weeks or months, those girls were released to their families, the staff wouldn't even let her write down her phone number so she could keep in touch with her only friends in America.

"We cannot communicate with friends who leave from here either by phone or internet or otherwise. The staff say it is not allowed. Also, if some of our friends leave from this center, their belongings are searched thoroughly to make sure they do not take with them any phone numbers or other information about their friends remaining here."

The inspection

I arrive in the director's office and sit at the table across from his desk, where I can see photos of his family. Another lawyer arrives, well dressed, with a notepad. She is my age, she wears a hijab, she is counsel for the Department of Justice. She is polite to me, we exchange pleasantries, the director of the facility begins the inspection.

"This is our facility. It is broken down into four dorms. We have three female dorms and a male dorm. We have three dorms downstairs and our larger dorm upstairs."

He takes us down a hallway with the offices of case managers to the cafeteria, a small room with picnic tables.

"Lunch starts at 11:30," the director says, "they have 45 minutes to an hour to eat" but "sometimes they want to eat a little quicker, to get up and use the restrooms." Most of what he says about the rules and regulations is directly contradicted by the testimony of numerous children.

There are "about 300" people employed at the facility, the director says. There are over 100 staff who work directly with the children, and there are roughly 200 case managers, maintenance workers, cooks, security

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monitors, and administrative staff.

Those staff who teach the children's classes are not accredited or licensed. The only qualification is that they have a bachelor's degree. There are presently 12 staff members who perform teaching duties at the facility, and the director tells us that these staff members also perform cleaning services and also serve as youth care workers. "They have other job responsibilities as well," the director says.

I ask the director what would happen if a child were to bring a pencil or crayon into their dormitory. Would they be punished?

"There is no punishment," the director says, correcting me. "There are *consequences*."

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I read into my recording device the level of filth found in the boys common room:

"There's standing water and pieces of food or pencil shavings on the floor. There's some gum right by the water cooler, there's candy wrappers and food in the cracks along the wall. The floors are dirty, there are stains and what looks like more gum. There's a significant amount of dust and grime in the walls and along the cracks. There are crumbs and dust on every flat surface. In the cupboard by the TV there are some coffee mugs that have coffee in them, and the mugs are stained. There is what looks like a latex glove for medical purposes which appears to be dirty. There are some basketball shorts which could be dirty. There are papers lying about, everywhere. Behind the couch there is an immense amount of dirt and wrappers and napkins and lint and some food items. It's very dirty. There are video devices which are completely covered in dirt. There's a cheerio and a number of beans on the ground by the door. It's not sanitary."

The rooms are cramped. Each child has two drawers, the beds are wood planks, no mattress pad, and a mattress that is 5-6 inches thick. There are crumbs along the walls and food particles here and there. I find what looks like a dried carrot or a pepper on the ground.

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I come across what appears to be a closet door which I ask to be unlocked. Inside there is a large room full of screens showing video feeds.

There are two large flat screens and two large computer monitors below them. The right monitor has 10 cameras monitoring the outer perimeters, the parking lot, the play area, the patio with the soccer field and basketball court, as well as the front of the building. There are some notes on one of the desks with detailed entries about what children are doing at a given time. The notes appear to be pretty detailed, about a paragraph for each. One of the paragraphs describes the interaction between two children in a classroom. The notes do not indicate that any rule has been broken, but the description is very detailed. I had begun reading these entries more carefully when I am interrupted by the Department of Justice attorney and the director of the facility who lead me out of the room.

The director says staff watch cameras and are able to monitor the children over 80 percent of the time they are at the facility.

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The director acknowledges that within the last year, at least one staff member has been punished for sexually assaulting a minor. When I asked if any of these staff were still employed here, the DOJ attorney intervened and the director said he could not answer.

"Have you ever had to reprimand an employee for physical or sexual abuse?" I ask.

"I will not be able to answer that," the director responds.

"When was the last time anyone was reprimanded for any inappropriate touching or behavior?"

"Yeah, I will not be able to answer that."

"How long ago? Months, weeks?"

"Months, maybe. I don't have a specific date."

"But since you've been here."

"Yes … I've been here a year."

"When was the last time you called the police for something like that?"

"I don't believe we have had to call the police for that."

"You've had to reprimand someone, but you didn't call the police?"

"It's a different scope. The form of allegations, it varies. The scope is very, very broad."

"Is the person you mentioned who was last reprimanded still employed here?"

"I'm not going to answer that."

The attorney for the Department of Justice interrupts and says to me: "I'm reminding you that you are observing the conditions of the facility and you're asking general questions about procedures." Answering further questions on reports of sexual abuse by staff is "outside the scope" of the inspection.

Later I ask, "Are there any kids who were part of the initial zero tolerance family separation who remain detained here?"

The Department of Justice attorney again intervenes: "That's outside the scope."

We finish the inspection outside and pass through the employee parking lot on our way back to the facility. The parking lot is full of cars with police bumper stickers.

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In the director's office after the inspection, I am sitting alone with the attorney from the Department of Justice. I guess that she is my age, in our mid/late 20s. We were roughly the same age on September 11, when the war in Iraq began, when the markets crashed.

"Where did you go to law school," she asks me. She knows a former classmate of mine, who now works at the Department with her.

I ask her when she started working at the Department. She says, "September 2016," with a laugh. "I thought I would be working on civil rights cases for Hillary."

But she didn't want to change career paths after Trump won the election? After he banned travel from seven Muslim countries?

She shrugs and rolls her eyes, assuming I would understand.

The facility and immigrant detention centers were established under both Republican and Democratic administrations. On an individual level, the attorney is an insignificant figure, but she personifies the role of her party.

The first time the state decided to incarcerate immigrant children *en masse*, Barack Obama was president. Trump sharpened tools forged in Democratic administrations presiding over Democratic majorities in Congress. Democratic senators and congressmen have voted to fund this deportation machine for decade upon decade. When the television cameras point to the worst abuses, it is the Democrats who are first to act shocked.

In the summer of 2018, Democratic representatives visited child detention centers and the tears streamed down their faces. For 40 years prior, the Democrats signed their names to every law restricting the flow of immigration. The Democratic Party militarized the US-Mexico border under the Clinton administration and picked up where George Bush left off when Obama assumed office in 2009. There is not a single prominent Democrat who has consistently opposed all restrictions on immigration.

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DAY FOUR

This is the last day. There is no cathartic end to this narration. Before 5 p.m. on day four, the affidavits had to be read back to each child for

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corrections. Then corrections had to be made, the affidavits had to be printed, and the children had to be brought back to sign.

The kids had quick corrections, a fact confused, a wrong word, a mistranslation. It was the second time I had seen each of them. I told them I would fix the corrections and they would come down one more time to sign their statements later that day.

At the end of the day they lined up, all of them, and came back into the office for the third and final time. I stuck my hand out for handshakes, some shook my hand and some asked for hugs. They were all asking the same questions: “Where is the caravan now?” “Is it any closer?” “Is it turning toward Texas?” “Are they coming to get us?”

It was the last I would see of any of them.

Three days after I left the facility, Trump deployed 5,200 soldiers to the US-Mexico border to confront what he called an “immigrant invasion.”

At a press conference on October 29, the Monday after I got back from the facility, General Terrence O’Shaughnessy and Customs and Border Patrol Commissioner Kevin McAleenan outlined a possible offensive military assault. CBP was preparing for “riot control,” he said. The agency was calling in thousands of additional officers to man the “front lines” in the fight against the caravan.

General O’Shaughnessy said the Pentagon was deploying three companies of Black Hawk assault helicopters armed with “the latest technology,” as well as other “aviational assets,” including transport planes and drones. The mobilization will include US Marines as well as military police and “medical assistance”—forces that are deployed only when the military is preparing for potential combat. “The units are deploying with weapons,” O’Shaughnessy said, as well as hundreds of miles of razor wire, barricades and building material.

“This is just the start of the operation,” he added, noting that troop levels can be increased as needed.

President Trump and leading government officials were speaking the language of Hitler and Goebbels. “Many Gang Members and some very bad people are mixed into the Caravan heading to our Southern Border,” Trump tweeted.

“Please go back, you will not be admitted into the United States unless you go through the legal process. This is an invasion of our Country and our Military is waiting for you!” Trump said soldiers would be prepared to shoot at the caravan. Later it was reported that Trump wanted the military to “shoot them in the legs.”

On October 28, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen used language normally reserved for threats of war abroad: “[E]very possible action … is on the table” with regard to the caravan, she said, just days after threatening that the military and border patrol “have the ability of force to defend themselves.”

On Sunday, November 25, the caravan reached Tijuana and the immigrants were housed in a filthy stadium. The mayor of Tijuana denounced them as leeches and pledged not to spend a cent more than necessary on their care. The group arrived at the US border in San Ysidro waving the flags of Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and the United States chanting the words, “We are not criminals, we are international workers!” They were shot with tear gas and rubber bullets and not a single one was allowed to cross into the US.

Trump’s coalition of allies in the military and immigration enforcement agencies responded with sadistic excitement to Sunday’s attacks. US Border Patrol lead field coordinator Brian Hastings told *The Hill* that immigrant workers were “so willing to use violent methods and force” that the government would be “applying some consequences to these individuals.”

Ronald Colburn, president of the Border Patrol Foundation, mocked the immigrant victims of police pepper spray attacks: “You could actually put it on your nachos and eat it,” he said.

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What has happened?

The United States government has brought the whole weight of the coercive power of the state down on tens of millions of impoverished immigrants fleeing societies that have been ruined by that same government and the corporations it represents.

The government poured billions of dollars into militarizing a border with Mexico, a border that would have been a thousand miles further north had the United States not robbed 11 states’ worth of territory in the Mexican-American war.

The government built an army of tens of thousands of militarized police to guard the border and to creep through cities, arresting millions of people, splitting millions of families and sending countless deportees to their deaths. No exception was made in the treatment of children, who were torn from the arms of their parents and sent to detention camps where they were abused and mistreated because they attempted to cross a national boundary.

And yet the United States government still lectures the world about humanitarian rights.

* * *

America is not simply a land of border guards and slave catchers. The vast majority of its population was horrified when the Trump administration began its Zero Tolerance policy in the months before I arrived at the facility.

The facility is still open. The media has turned its attention away, the crying Democratic politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez who came to take photos have moved on. The children in this article are four years older than they were, but the number of children detained across the country has increased under the Biden administration. The facility is full of new faces, new children, coming out of the same *hieleras* and *perreras*.

But the black and white agricultural workers in Sandusky, Ohio who saw their coworkers carted away by an army of ICE agents have not forgotten what they saw, and the neighbors of the labor camp in New Era, Michigan, who listened to children cry through the night after agents took their fathers away have not forgotten what they heard, either. The international working class will realize its immense power and bring to an end the era of capitalist exploitation and the nation-state system.

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