

# Hundreds of federal agents begin anti-immigrant raids in New Orleans

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Federal Border Patrol agents began stepped-up raids in the New Orleans and Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan areas Wednesday, as the Trump administration escalated its police-state attacks on immigrants. The Department of Homeland Security set a target of 5,000 arrests in New Orleans alone, more than were seized and detained in weeks of raids in Chicago, a much larger urban area.

Gregory Bovino, the Border Patrol commander who has spearheaded previous city-wide campaigns in Los Angeles, Chicago and Charlotte, North Carolina is overseeing the patrols in New Orleans, focusing on Home Depot stores and other sites where day laborers gather in suburban Jefferson County, just north of the city.

Social media posts from immigrant rights groups say that detentions have taken place at two Lowe's stores, in New Orleans and Metairie, and two Home Depot stores, in LaPlace and Gretna. The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reported that five Border Patrol vehicles carrying as many as 25 agents raided the Lowe's on Elysian Fields Avenue in New Orleans on Wednesday morning, detaining two dozen men who were looking for work.

Officials of the Republican-controlled state government said they welcomed the influx of hundreds of Border Patrol agents. Governor Jeff Landry and Attorney General Liz Murrill have ordered full collaboration of the Louisiana State Police with the raids, while the New Orleans field office of the FBI said its agents would focus on "attempts to obstruct law enforcement actions"—that is, cracking down on protests expressing the widespread popular opposition to the anti-immigrant raids.

The Democratic mayor-elect of New Orleans, Helena Moreno, who was herself born in Mexico, pointed to

widespread fear in the Hispanic community over the Border Patrol operations. "The reports of due process violations and potential abuses in other cities are concerning," she said. But the city government is doing nothing more than informing potential targets of the raids of their legal rights—rights that are generally ignored by the federal agents.

"What they're seeing is what appears to be racial profiling of brown people and then going after these individuals and treating them like they are these significantly violent offenders," Moreno continued. "I know that I don't look Latina, but my father very much does," she added. "And my father speaks with an accent, so to me, that was very personal to me."

While Moreno's father, or even Moreno herself, could well be targeted by the immigration Gestapo, the Democratic Party has not lifted a finger to oppose the policies of the Trump administration, merely filing lawsuits while seeking to tamp down the mounting public outrage, which has led to the formation of safety patrols and alert networks in immigrant neighborhoods of Chicago, as the WSWs has reported.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a statement announcing what it called the "Catahoula Crunch," the latest in a series of juvenile nicknames for operations in which men, women and children are snatched by masked men, beaten and otherwise abused, and thrown into detention whether they have legal papers or not.

DHS Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin denounced the "sanctuary city" policy adopted by New Orleans, claiming that such policies "endanger American communities by releasing illegal criminal aliens and forcing DHS law enforcement to risk their lives to remove criminal illegal aliens that should have never been put back on the streets."

But despite the howling from Trump, Bovino and DHS Secretary Kristi Noem about targeting “the worst of the worst,” only a small proportion of those swept up in the raids in Chicago, Memphis, Charlotte, Los Angeles and other cities actually have criminal records, and these are frequently limited to driving violations and other non-violent offenses.

In an interview with CNN, the DHS spokeswoman said, “We’re talking about child pedophiles who are on our list of targets, burglars, gang members, rapists—those individuals we are highly targeting.” But the DHS statement only listed eight men with such offenses, while setting out its target of more than 5,000 arrests in the region that includes the Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf coast.

The Louisiana National Guard was already deployed to New Orleans over the Thanksgiving weekend, on the pretext of assisting police in security during the Bayou Classic college football game. New Orleans Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick said that police would not conduct immigration arrests because immigration status was a civil and not a criminal issue.

But according to a report in the *New York Times*, police in suburban Kenner, just north of the city, have entered into an agreement with DHS to deputize local cops “to identify undocumented immigrants and turn them over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.” Traffic stops in Kenner “had increasingly become a funnel for undocumented immigrants to be taken into federal custody and deported,” the *Times* reported, citing a local nonprofit outlet, *Verite News*.

As many as 100,000 Hispanic immigrants have moved to the New Orleans area over the last 20 years, an influx triggered by rebuilding efforts after Hurricane Katrina, which inundated much of the city in 2005. Without workers from Mexico and Central America, even the limited reconstruction of devastated neighborhoods that has taken place could not have been accomplished.

The campaign against immigrants in Louisiana is accompanied by an open attack on democratic rights more broadly. The American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana has filed a lawsuit against Act 399, passed earlier this year, which makes it a crime to “knowingly commit any act intended to hinder, delay, prevent, or otherwise interfere with or thwart federal immigration enforcement effort.”

Immigration Services and Legal Advocacy, the plaintiff represented by the ACLU, offers legal assistance to immigrants in New Orleans and throughout the state, but stopped holding “Know Your Rights” workshops for immigrants after the passage of Act 399. The lawsuit challenges the new law as a violation of the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of speech.



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