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Kidnapper Trump as Symptom



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Moral Atrocity, Bad Optics

The malevolent brute Donald Trump darkened his ugly blot on history by ordering thousands of migrant children (2300 is the commonly cited number), [including infants and toddlers](#), to be [traumatically](#) separated from their Central American parents at the southern U.S. border.

The Orange Obscenity deserves no moral credit for belatedly realizing last Wednesday that the [bad politic optics](#) of his child-snatching policy required him to seem to

benevolently reverse course by issuing an Executive Order calling off the separations and announcing that border authorities would start “Detaining Families Together” (how’s that for a catchy slogan?). A quick memo to his Christian Fascist Attorney General, the Alabama racist Jeff Sessions (who had justified the separations by quoting a Biblical passage once commonly used by southern planters to “justify” U.S. slavery), would have sufficed.

Trump has betrayed no remorse for the horrific policy he claimed to end. He offered no federal plan for re-uniting the asylum-seeking families that were torn-up at the border by his and Sessions’ “zero tolerance” policy. The families already ripped apart will not be “grandfathered” into the new executive order, federal spokespersons said after Trump issued his order (though that too seems likely to change somewhat under extreme political pressure, however). Many of the youths *have been sent to distant sites far from the southern border*. Until further notice (this too will be challenged and could change), it is up to detained and deported parents to try to locate and get back their own children from wherever they may have been placed. As CNN reports:

“Hundreds of migrant children forcibly separated from their parents were transferred thousands of miles away...some already have been placed in foster care, officials said...some children were taken to facilities along the border, including a new temporary shelter in Tornillo, Texas, while others headed to facilities as far away as New York....it’s unclear if or how those children will be reunited with their parents... Federal authorities have been tight-lipped about where exactly all the children are held”

The stolen children’s whereabouts are unknown to their frantic but trapped parents. The migrant mothers and fathers face the dreadful prospect of trying to locate their sons and daughters from U.S. detention centers or from back in in the horror, destitution, and doom of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Imagine yourself in these parents’ shoes.

Detaining intact families for the supposed transgression of pursuing asylum is nothing to be proud of. In sarcastic words of Samantha Bee: “Yay! No more baby internment camps — just regular internment camps...That’s what we call a win in 2018.”

The U.S. continues to conduct policies and support vicious regimes that create deadly, soul-crushing misery, oppression, and violence in Central America— this while pretending Washington has nothing to do with the terrible conditions that are pushing desperate people out of the “Northern Triangle” nations of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (on par with the Soviet Union claiming it had nothing to do with misery in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia during the Cold War).

The U.S. continues to react to asylum-seekers and “illegal” border-crossers alike with the goal of deterrence, dismissing basic human rights claims regarding the unmentionably U.S.-enabled suffering and fear the migrants and refugees have experienced in their home countries.

The orange nativist monstrosity continues to [crudely slander Central American migrants and refugees](#) by referring to them dangerous criminals who are “pour[ing] in [to] infest our country.”

This is Not About Immigration

So Trump and his fellow white-nationalist policy advisers and policy-makers richly deserve the shame he has received at home and abroad for his *racist* “zero tolerance” border policy and its aftermath. Nobody should doubt for a second that it’s about racism and white supremacy. As the [Southwest Political Report reflected](#) last Wednesday:

“Donald Trump isn’t anti-immigrant. He’s a White Supremacist. This isn’t about immigrants. Melania Trump is an immigrant. This is not about the children of immigrants. Ivanka Trump is the child of an immigrant. Eric Trump is the child of an immigrant. Donald Trump Jr. is the child of an immigrant. Joe Arpaio is the child of immigrants. Michael Savage, who has built his massive fan base on the pushing of ‘borders, language, culture,’ is the son of immigrants. The Klansman Fred Trump was the son of immigrants...Milo Yiannopoulos...an immigrant...tours the country terrorizing Brown undocumented students through rituals of public doxxing.”

“...This is not about the law. This is about the fear of a Brown America. Whatever the broad complexities of people crossing the border may be in the American imagination these politics play out in a very simple question... how many Brown people with Spanish last names can live in America and it still be America? This is the question that animates this so-called immigration debate. It is the driving force behind it. This is what is meant by ‘infestation.’ This is what is meant by ‘animals.’ This is what is meant by ‘drug dealers’ and ‘rapists.’ This is what is meant by ‘bad hombres.’...This is what drives for the call for a wall.... This is why Cambridge Analytica titled their portfolio for the Trump campaign ‘Project Alamo.’”

Bulls-Eye. Exactly right.

Do you think Trump would ever separate white children from Canada at the northern border, sending them far south, east, and west and leaving their Caucasian parents to find from detention camps North Dakota and Detroit?

Child Separation is as U.S.-American as [Violence and Cherry Pie](#)

Still, this is about more than dreadfulness of Tangerine Satan. Trump the Terrible is terrible indeed. Still, on the racialized border issue as in so many political and policy areas, he remains a symptom – albeit a remarkably noxious one – of deeper national, historical, and systemic diseases. He embodies in an unusually open and unadorned way maladies that have long poisoned U.S. policy and politics across party lines.

It might feel nice, moral, and politically expedient to say that the stealing and abuse of children and the destruction of families is “not what America is about” and “contrary to the spirit of the principles on which this nation was founded.” But the nation’s early white “settlement” and capitalist development was based on the [brutal ethnic cleansing of North American indigenous civilizations](#) and on the [forced labor and torture system](#) that was Black slavery.

Both of these national defining and originating white-national atrocities involved the mass destruction and separation of families and children.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, masses of ex-slaves [trekked across the South](#) looking for parents, children, and siblings from whom they had been torn by the soulless chattel system.

Thousands of Native American children who survived [the Holocaust](#) inflicted on their people were stolen from their families and tribes and placed in [Indian Schools](#) meant to properly assimilate them to Anglo-Saxon ways.

Children (including the young [Malcolm X](#)) were snatched from parents by local U.S. authorities on the [grounds of “poverty”](#) (attributed to parents) well into the 20th century.

How many Black families have been torn asunder by the United States’ [“New Jim Crow” regime of racist mass incarceration](#), so extreme that [one in three Black adult U.S. males](#) have served time in prison?

Then there’s the epic family destruction and separation caused by [the United States’ imperial foreign policy](#). The United States has separated millions of foreign children from parents and indeed from life itself since the Mexican-American War. [Seymour Hersh wryly notes](#) that the longtime leading U.S. foreign policy chief Henry Kissinger should “count burned and maimed Cambodian and Vietnamese babies,” not sheep, when he can’t sleep.

Let us never forget Bill Clinton’s Secretary of State [Madeline Albright’s infamous statement](#) on CBS that the killing of half a million Iraqi children by U.S.-led economic sanctions was “a price worth paying” for the advance of inherently noble U.S. foreign policy goals. How’s 500,000 dead kids for “child separation”?

Barack Obama has more than a few dead children to tally on sleepless nights. Just ask the people of Bola Boluk, a village in Western Afghanistan where [dozens of children were blown to bits](#)— their body-parts (that’s real *child separation* for you) were carried to local authorities in wheelbarrows – by U.S. bombers in the first week of May 2009. Obama refused to issue an apology for this atrocity, though his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton belatedly expressed “regret” over the “loss of life.”

Neither Obama nor Mrs. Clinton have ever apologized for helping [install a murderous right-wing coup regime in Honduras](#) in June of 2009. That regime has been [lethal for ordinary Hondurans](#), children included, ever since. It’s no small “push factor” behind the Central American migration north.

Obama’s “Aggressive Deterrence”

Obama also has plenty of unjustly detained Central American children to count on sleepless nights. The smiling Republican flak Matt Schlapp (chairman of the radically reactionary American “Conservative” Union) prevaricated when he claimed last week that Trump’s child-theft policy was “the same way Obama did it.” That’s misleading (no surprise there: Matt Schlapp exists for the sole purpose of making such statements). For just more than two decades, U.S. [law](#) has dictated that migrant children cannot be housed with parents in jail and must be placed in a Department of Health and Human Services shelter until they can be released to a legal guardian. Under Obama, this led to family separations. That was terrible. But, as law professor Peter Marguiles told [Politifact’s John Kruzel](#) last week, “Obama generally refrained from prosecution in cases involving adults who crossed the border with their kids...In contrast, the current administration has chosen to prosecute adult border-crossers, even when they have kids. That’s a choice — one fundamentally different from the choice made by both Obama and previous presidents of both parties.”

Professor Denise Gilman runs the Immigration Clinic at the University of Texas School of Law. While immigration attorneys “occasionally” saw separated families under Obama, Gilman told Kruzel, “families were usually reunited quite quickly once identified, even if that meant release of a parent from adult detention.”

Under Obama, border family separations were comparatively rare and collateral in nature. With Trump, beginning in April of this year, they were the result of a deliberate and sweeping White House initiative.

Trump’s white-nationalist political adviser [Steve Miller made no bones](#) about the fact that this “zero tolerance” shift was a departure specific to the Trump administration – a break

of which he was quite proud. “It was a simple decision by the administration to have a zero-tolerance policy for illegal entry, period,” said Miller. “The message is that no one is exempt from immigration law.” The goal, as Miller told Trump was immigration deterrence – keeping America as white as possible, that is.

Not being fully as awful as Donald Trump is no great accomplishment, however. Where was Obama’s supposed “big heart” when thousands of children from the Northern Triangle made death-defying treks to the U.S. border in the spring and summer of 2014? Did the “liberal” icon Obama reflect on how U.S. “free trade” (investor rights), climate, and “drug war” policies had combined with longstanding U.S. support for Central American terror and repression to make life intolerably perilous and wretched for Honduran, El Salvadoran, and Guatemalan campesinos, workers, parents, and children (many of whom were consigned to menial labor at young ages) and then channel the spirit of Lady Liberty by offering refuge to “your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free”?

Hell no. Obama ordered border authorities to lock up Central American migrant mothers and children in order send a clear message to other migrants: “don’t come up here.”

Breaking from the usual Department of Homeland Security (DHS) practice of releasing asylum-seekers as they awaited hearings, Obama’s DHS categorically detained and denied release on bond or other conditions. The Obama administration adopted “an aggressive deterrence strategy” in what the [American Civil Liberties Union called](#) a “violation of federal immigration law and regulations, as well as the Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibit the blanket detention of asylum seekers for purposes of general deterrence...”

What did Samantha Bee think of Obama’s more “regular internment camps,” of which there were many?

The immigration lawyer [R. Andrew Free recalls](#) “the utter inhumanity” that shocked him and other lawyers representing people in Obama’s “baby prisons” and “internment camps...I remember hearing the constant, violent coughing and sickness of small children, and the worry of their mothers who stood in the sun outside the clinic all day only to be told their kids should ‘drink water.’ I remember nearly doubling over when I saw the line of strollers.” And “Detention as Deterrence of future migration,” Free writes:

“doesn’t work. It assumes a parent would rationally chose to watch her daughter raped or murdered in Guatemala, El Salvador, or Honduras instead of helping her flee to seek the domestic and international legal protections of US law. People in the Northern Triangle

were (and are) fleeing for their lives. They're looking to what we've held out as a shining city on a hill and following the beacon to safety. To convince them not to flee, you must convince them a worse fate awaits at the end of the journey."

Trump's "DHS Kidnapping policy," Free notes, was "the logical extension of yesterday's family detention decisions. It's the same mouthful of detention-as-deterrence mouthwash, just swished to the other side."

When Free briefly met Obama on a rope line in 2015, he "thanked him for DACA" and then asked him to shut down the for-profit "baby jails" Obama's DHS had recently set up in Texas. "Are you an immigration lawyer?" Obama asked. "I'll tell you what we can't have," Obama told Free. "It's these parents sending their kids here on a dangerous journey and putting their lives at risk."

God Damn Trump – and God Damn America and Obama Too

That was Obama blaming the victims – the victims not just of misery in the Northern Triangle but of the long, bipartisan, and ongoing record of U.S. military, political, economic, and narcotics policies that have worked with and through "Third World fascist" forces (replete with [mass-murderous death squads](#)) to keep ordinary Central Americans poor and terrorized.

To paraphrase and adapt Obama's old fiery and rejected [preacher Jeremiah Wright](#): *God Damn Donald Trump? Yes, but Goddamn the United State of America and Barack Obama Too!*

Trump has brought his own distinctively nasty, racist, and "base"-pleasing tinge to the "border protection" issue. But he is doubling down on imperialist, capitalist, nativist, and frankly white-supremacist politics, policies, and practices that predate him and shaped the actions of his presidential predecessors (including not just Reagan and the two Bushes but also the silver-tongued neoliberal Democrats Bill Clinton and Obama). The orange-tinted white nationalist-in-chief hardly invented the large [private prison sector that houses 60% of the United States' detained immigrants](#)– a pernicious and politically influential corporate club that expanded under Obama, who set a new immigrant [deportation record](#), offering lucrative returns for the private detention investors.

Liberal pundits, talking heads, and politicians are having a political field day with Trump's "zero-tolerance" policy decision, from which he was forced by public revulsion to retreat last Wednesday. But they are selling their own snake-oil – the notion that the fix is to be found in electing right-wing corporate imperial Democrats like presidential prospect and U.S. Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA), who recently went on MSNBC to tell Chris Hayes

that the widely hated post-9/11 Immigration, Customs, and Enforcement Agency (ICE, accurately described by [Jimmy Dore](#) as “this fascist authoritarian fucking nightmare-creator”) should “certainly exist” because (in the “progressive” Harris’s opinion) immigrants commit murders and sexual assaults. Harris prefaced her defense of ICE by declaring (to MSNBC host Chris Hayes’ nodding approval) herself a proud, long-time prosecutor who believes that “there needs to be serious severe and swift consequence when people commit serious and violent crimes. One human being kills another human being,” Harris intoned. “A woman is raped. A child molested. There needs to be serious consequence.”

Bernie Sanders, by the way, went yesterday (Sunday, June 24th) on [CNN yesterday](#) to quietly decline to join Congressional candidate Cynthia Nixon in reasonably calling for the abolition and defunding of ICE.

The U.S. news cycle revolves around “Today in Trump,” giving little hint that the White House’s current menacing occupant is just a symptom of deadly and richly bipartisan societal diseases rooted in the living and intertwined histories of class rule, empire, racial oppression, patriarchy and ecocide – what we might call, [updating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.](#), “the five evils that are interrelated.”