

News was scarce during the first month of the “zero tolerance” policy, and most of the public was completely unaware of its existence. But when the silence finally broke in June 2018, the scandal gripped the nation—thousands of immigrant children separated from their parents; imprisoned in cages like animals; infants and toddlers crying for their mothers.

This was the reality of the Trump regime, a reality that previously had been concealed within the militarized concentration camps along the U.S. southern border. That reality struck the public consciousness with a force that no one in the Trump administration could have anticipated. More than any of the multitude of scandals that have become a routine spectacle of the Trump presidency, this outrage now represents the most serious threat to Trump’s power.

The nation is at a turning point, and the movement for immigrant rights is standing positioned to lead the way. All that is needed is leadership.

Zero tolerance & the intolerable President

In March 2017, two months into the Trump presidency and more than a year before “zero tolerance,” John F. Kelly first announced the intention of the Trump administration to separate immigrant children from their parents at the U.S. border, “in order to deter more movement,” Kelly argued. Kelly was then the Secretary of Homeland Security, and is now the White House Chief of Staff. His announcement of plans for child separation received an initial backlash, after which it was reported that the plans were scrapped.

In reality, however, the policy of child separation was already underway. From October 2016 to February 2018, the Department of Homeland Security separated roughly 1,800 immigrant families. (This was not disclosed to the media at the time.) But the worst was yet to come.

In April 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, along with Kelly’s successor as DHS Secretary, Kirstjen Nielsen, announced



NO MORE concentration camps NO MORE child separation NO MORE “baby prisons” NO MORE deportations NO MORE Trump

the “zero tolerance” policy, pushing criminal prosecutions for all immigrants crossing the U.S. border, imprisoning the parents and separating their children. As a result of this new policy, DHS revealed that from April 18th through the end of May, a total of 1,995 children had been taken from 1,940 adults. By mid-June, the number of child separations under the new policy had reached 2,342.

The rate and volume of family separations was dizzying, and media outlets struggled to catch up to the story as it was unfolding. During the first weeks of June, journalists discovered that the children were being detained in various facilities that could be anything from military tents to an out-of-business Walmart. Inside, the children were locked in cages which one reporter described as large “dog kennels,” with aluminum sheets for blankets. Journalists were only given access to the facilities for boys; DHS categorically de-

nied media access to the facilities for girls and the “tender age” facilities for infants and toddlers. Nevertheless, reports soon surfaced from childcare workers in the “tender age” facilities describing the sounds of dozens of infants, all crying for their mothers. These facilities quickly earned the moniker of “baby prisons.”

Outrage swept across the nation, and the voices of opposition included for the first time many powerful individuals who had previously always sided with President Trump (or at least had remained silently complicit)—corporations, Republican politicians, religious leaders, and even Trump’s legally-challenged attorney. The Trump regime was genuinely bewildered; it was simply beyond their feeble, depraved comprehension to imagine that anyone would care what happened to the immigrant children. White House Senior Advisor Stephen Miller arrogantly told reporters that “nine out of ten” Americans would agree with Trump’s strict border enforcement. In the estimates of Trump and his associates, the “zero tolerance” policy was supposed to be popular. There was a rude awakening.

The disoriented administration reeled from the backlash. While Stephen Miller touted the child separation policy as a



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“simple decision” by the White House to enforce law and order, President Trump himself decided to blame the policy on the Democrats. At the same time, Kirstjen Nielsen was attempting to deny that such a policy even existed. And Jeff Sessions, when asked to explain how the administration’s policy was any different from the treatment of Jews by the Nazis, offered the following jaw-dropper: “In Nazi Germany, they were keeping the Jews from leaving.”

Notwithstanding his outrageous falsification of history, it is even more remarkable that Sessions would mention it as the main distinction between Hitler’s regime of mass murder and the Trump presidency! (The original plans of the Nazis were to deport the Jews to non-German territories, such as Madagascar, Palestine, or Siberia. When the circumstances of the war made those plans impossible, Hitler then initiated the “Final Solution” to exterminate the Jews altogether.)

On June 20, Trump caved under the pressure and signed an executive order to reverse the policy of child separation. But the sudden turnaround exposed another side of the scandal: there were never any plans for how to reunite the families that had been separated. Many parents had already been deported to Central America, while their children remained in the United States. And the situation of refugees remains dire even in the absence of deliberate family separation. The crisis has not been put to rest. The world cannot unsee what it has seen: Donald Trump’s America is now exposed as a global villain, an abuser of children, and an enemy of human rights.

No, the crisis is only beginning.

The politics of the racial purge

While President Trump attempted to blame the Democrats for the policy of child separation, many Democrats were attempting to blame anyone *other than* Donald Trump—various journalists and politicians pointed their fingers at Stephen Miller, Jeff Sessions, Kirstjen Nielsen, or John Kelly, condemning them for the crime of “misleading” the President. That political tactic had been applied, previously, to the former Trump advisors, Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka.

But there is no hope for salvaging any positive image of Trump’s character. Almost immediately after reversing his policy, Trump began a series of racist rants to compensate for any appearance of

“weakness.” He railed against immigrants “infesting” and “invading” the country, and then tweeted his desire to carry out deportations without any courts or legal process, whatsoever.

In contrast, the bland, innocuous criticism from liberal leaders—generally aimed at Trump’s associates rather than at Trump himself—are the product of a misguided electoral strategy to lure Trump voters away from the Republican Party. The logic (if it can be called logic) supposes that “Trump,” “immigration,” and “impeachment” must never be mentioned, as Trump’s cult of personality and anti-immigrant fanaticism are too popular to attack directly. Such an attack, according to this logic, would risk losing white voters. In some especially blinkered liberal groups, the name “Trump” cannot even be spoken aloud.

But the falsehood of the “don’t say Trump, don’t say immigration” strategy became abundantly clear when the nation responded in outrage to the news of the child separations. The outrage was powerful and decisive; the spineless strategists were, at best, irrelevant.

The most dangerous weakness of the avoidant strategy is that it promotes the illusion that Trump is beyond the reach of anyone to oppose him—all must yield to Trump’s anti-immigrant horrors, to avoid being branded as un-American; all must refrain from criticizing the emperor, to avoid being branded as enemies of the people. That “strategy” ultimately devolves into social insanity: in order for Trump to be “opposed” and “defeated,” Trump must instead be permitted to win. We cannot follow that path. The path of least resistance becomes, inevitably, the path of *no* resistance.

The foundation of Trump’s power is the reactionary trend of anti-immigrant hatred, the mass paranoia toward what many conservatives openly call the “browning” of America. That racist foundation must be confronted and defeated in order for the rest of the regime to fall.

The task of the new immigrant rights movement is to crush the deportation machine: shut down the concentration camps and the “baby prisons,” free all the refugees, and build community defense guards to stop I.C.E. raids. And our movement must boldly name our enemy and defeat him: *Trump must resign or be removed.*

Heroism and youth leadership

In the fable of the Emperor’s New Clothes, the only person who dared to speak the truth was, naturally, a child. None of the adults would risk suffering the wrath of the Emperor, at least not until someone else did so first. After all, adults are the masters of cowardly sensibilities.

But youth are too vibrant, too idealistic for all of that prudent restraint. Did you ever see children watching the movie about “Luke Skywalker who listened to his uncle and became a successful farmer instead of fighting the evil Empire?” It was a smash hit. Or what about the animated film, “Moana who obeyed her father and stayed on the island to gather coconuts instead of daring to sail the open seas?” Audiences loved that one. Just like the old days, when folks listened to the great children’s song, “Peter who obeyed his grandfather and did not go outside to hunt the Wolf.”

Of course, all of that is nonsense. Youth admire heroism, and heroism is a distinguishing quality of youth. Complacency, conformity, obedience—those qualities must be developed through years of training and suffering. The training may be abusive or well-meaning, but under either form of training, childhood often feels like a cage.

In America today, those cages are not merely metaphorical; those cages are real. President Trump’s thousands of cages for children are the most villainous expression of his tyranny. In order to overthrow a regime of cages for children, one thing is needed: the heroism of youth.

To all of the young immigrants held in captivity: *you are our heroes. You have traversed a burning desert, crossed a militarized border, and suffered the cages of a hateful tyrant—all in the hope of finding freedom. Your efforts shall not be in vain. Your courage is an inspiration to all Americans who still believe in the dream of a free nation, and you are our fellow Americans. Your blood is our blood, your struggle for freedom is our struggle for freedom. Your very presence makes America the home of the brave—together we will make it the land of the free.*

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