

#1405 Biden Takes the Helm of Our Inhumane Immigration System

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of Left podcast in which we shall learn about the decades-old problems with our immigration system, what changes are being made under the new administration and some of the underlying causes for the massive dysfunction we have in addressing the issue. Clips today are from the Medhi Hasan Show, the Mother Jones podcast, Only in America, Democracy Now!, This is Hell, Intercepted and Future Hindsight.

Biden Eyes Sweeping Immigration Reform Legislation - The Mehdi Hasan Show - Air Date 2-18-21

PRESIDENT GEORGE HW BUSH: [00:00:28] Across the Atlantic, they came from every point on the compass, many passing beneath the Statue of Liberty, with fear and vision, and sorrow and adventure, fleeing tyranny or terror, seeking haven and all seeking hope.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: [00:00:44] That was president George H.W. Bush in November of 1990, the last time a major revamp of the immigration system passed in the United States. That bill he signed expanded limits on legal immigration and created the diversity lottery program, the one Donald Trump froze last year. And it was bipartisan. The bill passed both the House and the Senate with big majorities.

But in the over 30 years since, no such luck. Attempts by partisan immigration reform have failed time and again, under both Democratic and Republican presidents. Congress tried for bi-partisan bills in 2001, 2006, 2007, and again in 2013. As the New York Times reports, those all centered on a trade-off: amped up border security and immigration law enforcement in exchange for a path to citizenship. And all of them failed, despite bipartisan efforts and despite support from the president at the time.

And now the new president, Joe Biden, is taking his shot at it. Democrats formally introducing his immigration reform bill today. It includes an eight-year path to citizenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants, a faster track for Dreamers to get green cards, increases in diversity visas from the current 55,000 to 80,000, and some humanity injected into the whole way in which the government discusses migrants: no more offensive talk of aliens, they're simply non-citizens. And while the details and text of the bill came solely from Democrats, Biden has expressed hope for bipartisan support for his immigration bill.

It's going to be an uphill battle though, with Republicans already throwing cold water on his proposals. They were casting doubt last month. And on Tuesday, the president suggested he's willing to take a piecemeal approach to immigration reform.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: [00:02:36] I would, if you had a refugee bill by itself, I'm not suggesting that, but I would, there's things that I would deal by itself, but not at the expense of saying I'm never going to do the other.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: [00:02:49] In a virtual press conference introducing the bill, New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez today did not close the door to that approach, but made it clear why he thinks immigration reform has failed for the last three decades.

SEN BOB MENENDEZ: [00:03:02] The reason we have not gotten immigration reform over the finish line is not because of a lack of will. Because time and time again, we have compromised too much and capitulated too quickly to fringe voices who have refused to accept the humanity and contributions of immigrants to our country and dismiss everything, no matter how significant it is in terms of the national world security, as amnesty.

Biden Can't Make Trump's Immigration Cruelty Vanish Overnight - The Mother Jones Podcast - Air Date 2-24-21

JAMILA KING - HOST, THE MOTHER JONES PODCAST: [00:03:30] What were some of the big things that Biden did when he first entered office?

FERNANDA ECHAVARRI: [00:03:35] It's been nonstop since Biden enter the White House, and he immediately started signing executive order after executive order and policy memos, all related to immigration to start undoing the really tight knot that was left by Trump.

NOAH LANARD: [00:03:50] Yeah. So, it's hard to know where to start; there's been so many things. Just right from the start, Jamila, he signs an executive order ending the Muslim ban. There's an order stopping border wall construction that halts immediately. And then you see other things like the creation of a family separation task force that's looking into how to reunite families in cases where parents were deported without their kids. There's a memo that the scales back ICE enforcement to a place more similar to where it was at the end of the Obama administration. And some of these orders, as you can tell, are very concrete; so, border wall construction has stopped.

But others are more of a looking into. Biden, instead of just ordering that something be done, has often said he wants it to be looked into or for a taskforce to be formed. So, for example, with the public charge rule, which is basically a wealth test that's designed to block poor and working class immigrants from coming to the country, in his executive order he said to task the government, his government, with looking into it. And a lot of people, especially with an order that's so obviously biased like that one, would have preferred that he just eliminate it.

JAMILA KING - HOST, THE MOTHER JONES PODCAST: [00:04:52] So I want to talk about executive orders here a little bit. Can you tell me about the difference between an executive order and something that goes through Congress?

FERNANDA ECHAVARRI: [00:05:01] So, executive orders -- and we saw this a lot under previous administrations, also Obama and and Trump -- but that's something that the person who is sitting in that Oval Office and has the role of the President of the United States, that

person can write something, sign it and make it so, essentially. That can just, it can be done with the stroke of a pen. It can be undone with a stroke of a pen. So, somebody else comes into the White House, and they can just write their own new executive orders and rip the old ones and throw them in the garbage. Very different from something more permanent, which is writing legislation, passing it through Congress and making it more permanent. And as far as immigration goes, we haven't had permanent changes to immigration in a very long time. And of course, there was already criticism of just how many executive orders Biden was signing. And actually, while he was signing one of the latest immigration ones, he turned to the camera -- the cameras were rolling in the Oval Office -- and he said:

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: [00:06:00] There's a lot of talk with good reason about the number of executive orders that I have signed. I'm not making new law; I'm eliminating bad policy.

JAMILA KING - HOST, THE MOTHER JONES PODCAST: [00:06:09] So let's start with one of the most horrifying things that happened during the Trump administration, which was family separation. What's Biden doing about that?

FERNANDA ECHAVARRI: [00:06:18] So as Noah said earlier, the family separation task force is something that Biden has formed via executive order. So right now, he's not doing much of anything so far. All he said is let me now assign this group of people to come up with solutions and to find these parents and to reunite these families, but nothing is happening right now. And ideally, the goal of this is to reunite parents with their children, and that there will be major changes. But the damage has already been done. These kids and these moms and dads have already been torn apart, have spent time apart. Some have been reunited; some have not. But really, the trauma that this Trump policy cost and this separation, this is something that is probably going to be impossible to reverse in many cases.

JAMILA KING - HOST, THE MOTHER JONES PODCAST: [00:07:07] What's life like right now for someone who's living in the US as an undocumented immigrant?

NOAH LANARD: [00:07:12] When it comes to specifically on what has Biden done that has changed to life for undocumented immigrants in the US, the main thing is that ICE is now operating with far scaled back deportation priorities. Under Trump, it was basically anyone and everyone was a priority for deportation. If ICE knocked on the door looking for someone with a criminal history, for example, but they found three other undocumented people there, everyone would often get detained and deported, and that's been changed now.

The Biden administration has said they were going to take a far more targeted approach in which basically only people who very recently crossed the border or people with what are called 'aggravated felonies' are priorities for deportation. So, what that means is that for the vast majority of undocumented immigrants in the United States, they are no longer going to be actively targeted by ICE, although there is a lot of concern about whether ICE is actually going to be following the orders that have been given to them on high. But if those orders are followed, it would mean that the vast majority of undocumented immigrants would be, generally speaking, safe from deportation.

JAMILA KING - HOST, THE MOTHER JONES PODCAST: [00:08:12] So, that sounds like a lot of change all at once. Did people get what they wanted in those changes? And I'm talking specifically here about immigration advocates.

NOAH LANARD: [00:08:21] It's been a mix. On the one hand, if you look at the first couple of weeks and first month of the Biden presidency, he has certainly done far more than President Obama did in his first month in office.

But there are a lot of things that people were hoping that he would go further on. For example, at the border, there is still a CDC order in place that basically says that everyone, almost everyone who crosses the border is immediately expelled without even having the right or ability to request asylum or go before an immigration judge. And then on the visa side of things, there are two bans that are still in place that Trump put in last year during the pandemic that basically block most forms of legal immigration. So, three of Trump's harshest anti-immigrant policies are still on the books, and they may all be lifted soon, but we don't know when that's going to happen. The Biden administration hasn't said, and it's something that advocates are very frustrated about.

FERNANDA ECHAVARRI: [00:09:16] Part of what some of the folks that I've talked to in the immigrant rights movement are happy about is that there is a very clear message that the administration is sending from the start that this is a priority. While they may not be happy with how much time things are going to take or what exactly Biden is doing, he's made it a priority. He's made immigration a priority. And not just that, but it's really in the words that are being used. I know one of the executive orders that he signed -- I highlighted one of the sentences in there -- that said securing our borders does not require us to ignore the humanity of those who seek to cross them. The opposite is true. Which is definitely not the kind of language that we've seen in any sort of executive order or DHS memo for many years. And then speaking of the messaging and the words and how they matter, Biden has also now directed DHS to stop using the word alien or illegal alien. And that really matters to a lot of people. I spoke with Reyna Montoya is a DACA recipient. She's in Arizona, and she works with a lot . . . She does a lot of work with the immigrant communities, and this is what she said.

REYNA MONTROYA: [00:10:21] All these years of community organizing form a direct impact to the people. I think are a testament of what we saw in the language and the sophistication of the Biden plan from having to redefine how they addressed us, right? It is within the law that they call us aliens, and being able to refine that to non-citizens. It's a huge step that many people would think is Oh, that's just language, but words matter. And I remember being in high school and having to read that very awful rhetoric. It gets under your skin. I'm not an alien; I'm a human being.

The First 100: Joy Olson - Only in America with Ali Noorani - Air Date 1-27-21

ALI NOORANI - HOST, ONLY IN AMERICA: [00:11:00] If you could give a summary of Central American and Mexican migration to the US let's just say over the last 20 years, what are the major points? What are the things that people need to have in mind as we begin to look forward?

JOY OLSEN: [00:11:13] I think the biggest thing that people should have in mind is that migration at the US-Mexico border is a normal phenomenon. And that there are periods of what's perceived as a crisis, but having a steady and regular flow of immigrants and at times

asylum seekers is not a new and crisis phenomena. I think we have a tendency. . . we've had a tendency to call a lot of things of crisis that I don't think really are. So that's one.

The patterns of migration at the border have changed over time from Central America and Mexico. There've been periods where Mexicans were the predominant group crossing the border. And then there were periods when different Central American nationalities were the predominant nationality crossing the border. So these things tend to ebb and flow somewhat. There's still a good degree of Central American migration. And there have been -- I haven't checked the numbers on Mexico recently; it was for a long time that Mexicans were the ones who crossed. And then it became that Central Americans were, and as the Central American numbers started going down a couple of years ago, or in the past year, there was a little bit more of a Mexican flow. But I guess that's the main thing; it changes. It is a constant process, and it changes.

ALI NOORANI - HOST, ONLY IN AMERICA: [00:12:34] So, based on what's happened over the last four years, what do you think the biggest, say, three to five challenges are for the Biden administration moving forward when you look at migration from Central America through Mexico to the US?

JOY OLSEN: [00:12:47] Migration has been incredibly discouraged by the Trump administration, whether it be through things like restricting people's ability to apply for political asylum. It used to be that people crossed between ports of entry because they were doing it clandestinely. And then it became that they were crossing at the points of entry and applying for political asylum. People are back to crossing in remote areas again. That's one phenomenon that I wanted to point out, but I think that the biggest things have been that forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their cases were being determined in the United States. This created a population of people permanently stranded in Mexico and has been an enormous problem.

Another big issue for the Biden administration is simply that there is a pent up demand in Central America. Since the flows have been reduced this year because of not only the lack of consideration of political asylum claims but the COVID restrictions at the border, basically hardly anybody is being allowed to cross right now legally.

So I think what we're going to see here in the next few months. Is likely to be an increased flow of Central Americans across the border. And, there were over the past few years caravans where just a lot of people who wanted to come north got together and came all at once, at times in the thousands.

And people did this because it's expensive to get from Central America up to the US and basically if they all just came together and walked or took buses at different times, they found protection and they found that they could do it more cheaply. And I think there's a good possibility that we'll see something like that.

Another big thing that the Biden administration needs to deal with right away are these agreements with the northern triangle countries: Honduras, Salvador, and Guatemala that basically allow the US. to deport asylum seekers from other countries; they could deport Guatemalans to El Salvador instead of sending them back to Guatemala. And what they should really be doing is considering their political asylum case here in the US, but they've created this quasi what they call a safe third country agreement with the countries of Central

America. They created all these structures so that the US just doesn't have to consider political asylum for anybody.

There's MPP; there are the safe third country agreement; there are the COVID restrictions at the border. Those are probably three of the biggies.

Despite Immigration Pledges, Biden Admin Detains Thousands of Unaccompanied Migrant Children - Democracy Now! - Air Date 3-11-21

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:15:20] President Biden is struggling to address the overwhelming flow of migrant children crossing the U.S.-Mexico border without their parents, many fleeing extreme violence, poverty, natural disasters in their home countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Documents obtained by several news outlets show more than 3,500 children were detained at the border in just the first nine days of March. On Monday, CBS News reported some 3,000 children are still detained in crowded cells at Border Patrol stations. Many are being held longer than the legal limit of 72 hours as the government waits for beds to become available in shelters run by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, ORR, and Department of Health and Human Services. The Washington Post reports the shelters received more than 450 new migrant children per day, on average, in the first week of March. Most are between the ages of 13 and 17.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cited the, quote, “extraordinary circumstances” Friday, when it said the shelters can to return to pre-pandemic capacity if they implement enhanced coronavirus protections. Biden’s top adviser on U.S.-Mexico border policy, Roberta Jacobson, said Wednesday the administration is trying balance a humane response to the children with the message that they should stop crossing.

ROBERTA JACOBSON: [00:16:44] I think all of us, at every stage of this process, are doing everything we can to make sure that children are well cared for and moved into facilities that are appropriate for them. But I want to make a point again that it’s really important that people not make the dangerous journey in the first place.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:17:05] During Jacobson’s press briefing, she broke into Spanish several times to say “the border is closed” and announced the revival of an Obama-era policy that allows Central American children to apply for admission to the United States from their home country.

This comes as the Biden administration recently reopened a shelter in Carrizo Springs, Texas, that was used by the Trump administration, and plans to hold some 700 migrant teenagers there. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki defended the move.

PRESS SECRETARY JEN PSAKI: [00:17:34] This is not kids being kept in cages. This is — this is kids — this is a facility that was opened that’s going to follow the same standards as other HHS facilities. It is not a replication, certainly not. That is never our intention of replicating the immigration policies of the past administration.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:17:53] As the Biden administration looks for more space to house the record influx of migrant children, it may move to house them on military bases, or even a vacant NASA research center in the San Francisco Bay Area.

For more, we go to Aura Bogado, the senior investigative reporter at Reveal who has long covered immigration and the conditions of detained migrant children. Last year, in a series titled “The Disappeared,” she exposed how the U.S. was holding migrant children far longer than previously known.

Welcome back to Democracy Now!, Aura. It’s great to have you with us. Can you start off by saying — would you call this a surge? Would you call it a crisis? And what needs to be done?

AURA BOGADO: [00:18:33] There is an increase of young, mostly Central American, migrants at the southern border. We can use different words. We can call it a crisis. We can call it a surge, which is a term that’s usually more associated with the natural water phenomena. What we shouldn’t call it a surprise. The Biden administration long knew that there would be an increase of children at the southern border and had a long time to prepare. While he’s only been in office less than two months, he had been elected prior to that. And he campaigned on specifically changing policies and practices that happened under the Trump administration. Some of that has indeed happened. But when it comes to the number of children that are in certain facilities, whether they’re cages or shelters, and how long they’re being kept for, we haven’t really seen that much of a change.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: [00:19:33] And, Aura, explain what you think needs to happen. What should the Biden administration be doing now so that there aren’t so many children in detention?

AURA BOGADO: [00:19:43] Well, as a reporter, I would like for the Biden administration to be transparent, something, again, that I think the Biden administration, when he was a campaign, was both implicit and tacit about in his promises.

I was on a call with several reporters yesterday with the current commissioner of the CBP, Troy Miller, and he would not tell us the number of children that are in these cells at the border. They’re usually called the hieleras. They’re really cold cells. That’s how kids and adults describe them. And he wouldn’t tell us the number. He said that he couldn’t share because it was law enforcement-sensitive. He was pressed on this, and he told us that it was — that many multiple agencies were involved. Again, that doesn’t explain why he couldn’t tell us the number of children that were there. As you mentioned, several reporters have gotten their hands on internal numbers, and so it seems to be about 3,200 children are in these cells. I can’t imagine the reason why this would be law enforcement-sensitive. And I, as a reporter, can think of the reasons why people want to know.

So, I think, you know, at a very basic level, we should at least know the numbers of children that are being kept in different facilities, both at the border and also in shelters. That would be a great start. I would love to see the Biden administration just give us some really, really basic transparency.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: [00:21:19] And, Aura, can you explain how the pandemic has been impacting the ways in which unaccompanied minor children are being held? I mean, is it

taking longer to release them as a result of the pandemic? And explain what Title 42 is and how the Trump administration made the CDC invoke this title.

AURA BOGADO: [00:21:45] Yeah. So, Title 42 is a public health title, that it's a practice that keeps the public health — it centers the public health of the current U.S. population. And so, the idea is that you don't take people coming from the outside that might bring something like COVID into the United States. As it is, we know that COVID is already in the United States. And so, that was under the prior administration. The CDC felt the need to close the border for that reason. That's still in place. That's not to say that no one has entered the border, even during when Trump was still in office, but certainly now that Biden is in office. But people are still being barred from entering on the premise that there is a public health concern. And there absolutely is. There absolutely is a public health concern. People are still, unfortunately, dying from what is now a preventable disease, because we do have a vaccine.

And so, people are still being barred. And yes, sometimes things do take longer. You do want to make sure that no one is in the type of situation in which they may possibly be spreading the disease. But again, there are ways to prevent this. There are ways to — I think, in the last year, we've had a lot of time to figure out how to socially distance. And that may be something that is taking longer in order to process children through, but it doesn't really go to the heart of the question, which I think, for a lot of people, there is concern of the sheer number of children that are being kept at the border in these Border Patrol facilities and also in shelters.

Biden's Immigration Agenda Tested at the Border - The Mehdi Hasan Show - Air Date 3-9-21

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: [00:23:41] Less than two months into his presidency, it's clear that the growing influx of migrants at the Southern border and how the us will treat them is going to be one of Joe Biden's most closely watched challenges. Just out tonight, NBC News reporting the ICE agency will continue detaining families according to a senior official.

This is despite Biden, and Homeland Security secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, condemning the practice of detaining migrant families beyond 72 hours, and a recent court filing by the Biden administration that mentioned their plan to end that practice. The ICE official though said we are not ending family detention, we are not closing the family detention centers. That it's about making it very clear that the border is not open and people should not come. This news comes on the heels of Biden already facing criticism for how migrant children are going to be dealt with in the aftermath of one of the most egregious and inhumane episodes of the Trump administration, indefinitely separating children from their families, putting them in cages, not providing them with the most basic of sanitary supplies, like soap or toothpaste, even allegations of sexual and physical abuse. Joe Biden campaigned on a platform to quickly reverse his predecessor's profoundly cruel policies.

But once Biden was elected, he made it clear he couldn't actually undo all of Trump's directives as swiftly as he had promised.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: [00:24:56] I will accomplish what I said I would do, a much more humane policy based on family unification. But it requires getting a lot in place and requires getting the funding to get it in place. It's not going to be able to be done on day one, lift

every restriction that exists and find out that and go back to what it was 20 years ago, and all of a sudden find out we have a crisis on our hand that complicates what we're trying to do.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: [00:25:23] But the current situation, which some have called a crisis, is already getting complicated. According to the New York Times, the number of migrant children in custody along the border has tripled in the past two weeks to more than 3,200. And now the thousands of children are backed up in detention facilities.

How do you process them out of detention and into homes? How will they be treated while in custody? The questions of mounting and the influx is in part due to the fact that Biden is no longer expelling unaccompanied, migrant children, which Trump began doing last year. The White House press secretary said the situation has presented difficult choices. And the reality is some of those difficult choices might not look so good for Biden, like reopening an emergency influx facility in Texas for migrant children, one used by Trump in 2019. Or reopening a for-profit influx center in Homestead, Florida, a site rife with accusations of sexual abuse, overcrowding, and negligent hiring practices.

Aside from these facilities, the Biden administration is also still expelling children who arrive with their parents or guardians at the border. It's a pandemic-related restriction put in place by Trump, but it came despite the fact that a top CDC doctor said at the time, the decision had no basis in public health. And after Biden came into office, medical and public health experts sent a letter to the CDC saying the same, that there was no scientific basis for these restrictions on asylum seekers and migrant families.

As many point out, part of these tough immigration policies often have to do with deterrence, hoping more migrants don't come over if they know there'll be turned away, but is it working? Is it going to work and can bite and deal with this influx of migrant children in a way that's both effective, but also humane? Joining me to discuss this is Melissa Tavaréz from the Florida Immigrant Coalition, an immigrant advocacy group with more than 65 member organizations.

Melissa, thank you so much for coming on the show. Earlier today, news broke that ICE is going to continue its practice of holding migrant families in detention centers at the border, despite Biden and his Homeland Security secretary saying they were going to end it. Currently, according to the official, there was still more than a hundred families in a detention center near San Antonio, over 350 in another, in South Texas.

What do you make of all of this and the statement by this ICE official?

MELISSA TEVERAS: [00:27:30] And we are looking to open this homestead detention facility center for children as well. This is very lamentable, it's very sad that we are still looking at a policy that could possibly separate children from their families. There are alternatives to putting families inside of the detention centers and that have been successful in the past.

So this is very sad. It's very unfortunate. And I really hope that it moves in another direction.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: [00:28:00] And on the migrant children, on the specific issue of children being held, we've seen reports that the number of kids being held in facilities has tripled in recent weeks. The New York Times said it was more than

3,250, but the Biden administration wouldn't confirm. Jen Psaki today, his press secretary dodged the question of saying they couldn't confirm it because it was the Department of Homeland Security matter.

Does that worry you at all that they're refusing to say how many children are in detention?

MELISSA TEVERAS: [00:28:24] Of course, it does worry that us, because it also gives us sort of an indicator of what they know. And it's similar to what we saw with the previous administration, sort of how they haphazardly handled the children.

And look, you've talked, Mehdi, about how this policy of keeping families inside of detention could possibly be a way of deterring families. So the fact of the matter is if they do not keep families inside of detention centers, these for-profit organizations do not make a dollar. Here at the Homestead facility center, for example, they made \$775 per child per day. In some cases we heard from some case managers, we'll take a walk, unify these kids with their families because obviously the longer the children stayed inside of the facility, the more money they make.

I mean, look, when the news broke about children being separated from their families, we all heard the audio of the little girl crying for her aunt. In the audio, she kept insisting, I know my aunt's phone number. I can call her. So there are alternatives to keeping children inside of detention centers. There are children, there are churches, organizations that seemed more like a home. Look, we saw that with after the Cuban refugee crisis, there was an influx of also underage unaccompanied children coming in from Cuba under the Peter Pan program, which was highly successful. And these kids were actually put with churches, with families. They were never put inside of a military installation, where, for example, here in Homestead, it's adjacent to an Air Force base. These kids were listening to firefighter planes in the middle of the night. That's not a place to put children. That's not the best thing for kids.

Now, when we try to look at the justification for these policies and we look at the dollars, and we look at, for example, how in the time that the Homestead facility was open, they made about \$350 million. Then we really have to think critically and ask critical questions about what are the motivating underlining factors behind these policies.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: [00:30:29] And. So fascinating. We talk about the options and alternatives, because people say, well, if you don't detain them, you just have to release them on the streets and you're pointing out, no, there are other places that they can go, that they can be resettled, and yet it's not happening. In fact, the Biden administration is now talking about possibly reopening the Homestead facility in Florida, that once held up to 3000 children and came under fire in 2019 for reports of sexual abuse and overcrowding. They say they have no choice, they need the space, the welfare of the kids will be looked after. But, I mean your organization I know protested strongly and lobbied against Homestead. I mean, why pick Homestead? It's bizarre. Why, even if you have to put the kids in detention, why pick that facility of all facilities?

MELISSA TEVERAS: [00:31:10] Absolutely. Uh, literally a facility that's in a contaminated area. It's full of pesticides. The water's contaminated. There were no children agencies in charge of supervising the children, making sure that they were adequately treated and protected. As you mentioned in your introduction, there were allegations of sexual abuse. Why would you keep these children literally inside of a military detention center, where they were dressed in

gray jumpsuits, rather than putting them in homes or with churches or organizations where they will be cared for and treated like kids, not like prisoners?

Shut Down Detention Centers: Join the #FirstTen to #CommunitiesNotCages Week of Action, March 22-26 via @DetentionWatch - Best of the Left Activism

AMANDA HOFFMAN - ACTIVISM CZAR: [00:31:47] You've reached the activism portion of today's show. Now that you're informed and angry, here's what you can do about it. Today's activism: shut down detention centers. First Ten to Communities Not Cages.

A cage by any other name....is still a freaking cage. It doesn't matter what you call it or who is in the White House. America's archaic and inhumane immigration system began decades ago and today is built on a network of 200 barbaric detention centers across the country managed by money-hungry contractors and ICE - an agency with such a vile history of violence, misogyny, neglect, and racism, its very existence should be a crime against humanity.

Trump took advantage of this already broken and cruel system and added his own brand of evil, but until Biden does something bold and transformational to show he's not okay with the status quo, we are in for more nice-sounding re-namings and shuffling people's lives around on a spreadsheet.

That's why the immigrant rights organization Detention Watch Network is planning a week of action March 22nd to 26th to demand the beginning of the end of immigration detention in the United States.

The "First Ten" is the next phase of Detention Watch Network's "Communities Not Cages" campaign launched in 2018. "First Ten" demands that Biden shut down ten of the most notorious ICE immigration detention facilities in the first year of his administration and end detention contracts. As Detention Watch puts it, "these ten centers are emblematic of how the immigration detention system as a whole is inherently abusive, unjust and fatally flawed beyond repair."

The ten centers include Irwin County Detention Center in Irwin, Georgia, which recently made headlines due to reports of gynecological procedures performed without informed consent on detained women. That's in addition to serving meager and often rotten food, as well as hosting a "work program" that exploits the labor of those detained, paying one dollar for a full day of work. Others centers on the list, like Farmville Detention Center in Virginia and Otero County Detention Center in New Mexico, have had the most COVID-19 cases during the pandemic with a well-documented history of inadequate medical care and use of disciplinary solitary confinement.

These facilities cannot stand under any administration. Abolition is the end goal, but the First Ten can and must go, now.

Join in the week of action March 22nd to 26th by visiting detentionwatchnetwork.org and selecting the Communities Not Cages campaign in their Take Action drop down. If you live

near one of the ten facilities, you can email Detention Watch and be connected to local campaigns leading shut down efforts. Everyone else can download the campaign toolkit, share the social media materials and videos, sign the petition, and spread the word on social media using the hashtags #FirstTen and #CommunitiesNotCages. Be sure to follow Detention Watch on Twitter @DetentionWatch.

And finally, if you live in Maryland, New Mexico and Washington state help support the anti-detention legislation that has been introduced in your state this year as a result of the Communities Not Cages campaign. These pieces of legislation prevent new detention centers from being built in your states and prevent renewing existing contracts. Other states, take note.

The segment notes include all the links to this information as well as additional resources, and, as always, this and every activism segment we produce is archived and organized under the activism tab at BestoftheLeft.com.

So, if ensuring the humane treatment of our fellow human beings is important to you, be sure to tell everyone you know about Shut Down Detention Centers: First Ten to Communities Not Cages March 22nd to 26th so that others in your network can spread the word too.

The business of immigrant labor w/ Ruth Milkman - This Is Hell! - Air Date 3-10-21

CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL!: [00:35:18] Republicans' past stance on immigration reflected their support for business, even at the cost of workers in the United States who they depend upon for their support. Their current stance, however, seems to be more compatible with not with business interests but more with racial concerns. Has the Republican party made business interests less of a priority to the party than racial anxiety?

RUTH MILKMAN: [00:35:39] I think that's fair to say. There are a lot of employers who would like to see immigration reform, like the growers in the agricultural sector that I mentioned before are facing a huge labor shortage at the moment and have been actually for awhile. And they don't particularly like the idea that they can only find people who don't have legal status to work for them, which is a big chunk of the current agricultural workforce. They would love to see immigration reform. They're very quiet about it, but groups like that were part of the Republican coalition not very long ago.

And it's not just those industries. Employers like immigrants, generally. They would like to have a system that welcomed more immigrants on a legal basis into this country. And back in the days of, in the early part of this century when the first George Bush was running the show, he actually tried to get immigration reform. He failed, but had a coalition that included employers and business interests. So, the Republican party used to have a kind of business wing that was interested in immigration reform, and that's when it seemed possible that it might actually take place.

We haven't really had any major changes in immigration laws since 1986. But now, especially in the Trump years, but even -- you mentioned the Sensenbrenner bill before, that was another example of that -- the nativist wing of the party has become the dominant one. And

I think it's a losing strategy in the long run for the Republicans because of the demography of the country and how it's changing. But that's where they are at the moment. And, they haven't. Just because Trump is no longer president, that doesn't seem to have changed.

CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL! [00:37:14] So, this is all driven by a demand for low wage labor. How important is low wage labor for the survival of the sectors within which these low wage workers operate? For instance, would affordable produce or meat be possible if it were not for low wage labor? Do we need low wage labor from other countries for our own survival?

RUTH MILKMAN: [00:37:39] I don't think so. Meat packing is a great example because until about 30 years ago, it actually . . . the jobs in that industry paid quite well and were unionized, had all the benefits that we associate with union jobs: pensions, healthcare and so on. And in that industry, there was a deliberate effort to restructure the whole industry that led to the disappearance of those jobs. And often the physical movement of them from cities like Chicago, which used to have a big meatpacking industry, closer to where the cattle are raised. And that's like the whole complicated story in itself. But it does . . . The money that's saved does not go into the pockets of consumers. It goes into the pockets of those employers.

CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL! [00:38:23] Are jobs left behind for immigrants out of a sense of privilege? Does White privilege lead to low wage job loss to migrants?

RUTH MILKMAN: [00:38:34] I don't think it's White privilege; I think it's the degradation of work. But let me give you another example that we haven't touched on so far in this conversation which actually does not involve White workers but African-Americans, and that's paid domestic labor: cleaning houses and taking care of children and old people and that sort of thing. That used to be a field entirely dominated by African-Americans. In fact, in the 1930s, when the basic what are still the bedrock labor laws that we have in this country were first passed, they excluded domestic labor and agricultural labor, partly because at the time those were African-American dominated sectors, and to get the votes of Southern Democrats -- a historical phenomenon we've almost forgotten but there were a lots of them at that time -- they had to exclude African-Americans. So, that's a whole history in itself. Anyway, in the 1960s and 70's when civil rights legislation and the civil rights movement led to more jobs being opened up to African-American women: jobs in clerical fields, sales work, other kinds of service work than domestic service, they fled the occupation which they saw it as very much tied to the historical legacy of slavery and very degrading in all kinds of ways, and also very poorly paid. Meanwhile for a lot of different reasons, including the increased employment of mothers, including growing inequality and lots of other things led to the aging of the population, led to increased demand for paid domestic labor, and African-Americans were no longer available to do it. So, that became an immigrant occupation, too. Also, based on an exodus born, in this case, African-American female workers. That dynamic is not unique to things like construction or meatpacking. In a capitalist economy, there's a lot of economic churning in the labor market constantly, really, all the time. So the jobs are disappearing; other new jobs are being created. People are shifting around within the labor market. So, immigration is just one factor in that mix. That's how it's always worked.

CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL! [00:40:38] As often, when something is done to the vulnerable, the marginalized and the exploited, it is soon being done to not only them, but us, too. Are there any signs of the, as you call it Brown collar, the Brown collarification, if you will, of not only low wage labor that is now conducted by immigrants, but expanding into other sectors as well.

RUTH MILKMAN: [00:41:03] I don't know that Brown collar work *per se* is expanding into other sectors, but some of the labor practices that employers have institutionalized in low wage industries that affect immigrants especially, are becoming more widespread. So, the reason I call the book *Immigrant Labor and the New Precariat* -- that's a buzz word in my field, the precariat. It just means people whose employment is extremely insecure and often poorly compensated -- that's become a much more widespread phenomenon, even going up to the college educated part of the workforce, who often have no idea if their job is going to be they're the following month or the following year, even the following day. And we see the emergence of things like the gig economy where there's no security whatsoever. And those folks aren't even protected by employment laws because they're not considered employees. They're supposedly self-employed. So, that kind of thing, the kind of degradation of working conditions and pay is spreading throughout the economy. And I would argue that it's in the interest of US-born workers to lift up the pay and conditions of foreign-born workers which would benefit both groups, that we need better labor standards and higher minimum wages and all the rest of it for everybody. Because it's a race to the bottom, otherwise.

CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL! [00:42:13] You mentioned that identity politics actually lead to deeper resentment by White, non-college-educated workers. Why is that the case? Why do they get upset at identity politics and leading to more resentment?

RUTH MILKMAN: [00:42:25] There is a perception that the demands of people of color, women have somehow [led] to the declining fortunes of especially White men. And I don't think that it's a zero-sum game in the way it's portrayed, but similar to the scapegoating of immigrants, there is this sense that these folks are unfairly somehow cutting ahead in line of people who were there first. That's very unfortunate. But I think a narrative that instead emphasizes the ways in which corporate interests and right-wing policymakers who see the market as the solution to everything have hurt both White men and many of these other groups at the same time is much more likely to bring people together to make social changes that could help with everybody's economic wellbeing.

CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL! [00:43:16] I asked you that because it leads into these questions I have about the reaction by some on the left. You mentioned past guests on our show, like Andrea Nagel and Wolfgang Streck both advocating for restrictive immigration laws in opposition to people like the Koch brothers who support open borders and the exploitation of workers that that can lead to. So, how can low wage labor demand by US labor, US employers be curbed, be limited better than by restricting immigration?

RUTH MILKMAN: [00:43:45] The better way would be to organize immigrant workers, which is actually happening in some sectors -- think of Justice for Janitors or groups like that -- and lift up the floor for everybody. I know that argument is very appealing to some people on the left, but I think it's dead wrong. That, we need to, rather than endorsing the politics of division that employers and populist, right-wing folks indulge in, we need to figure out how

to build alliances across lines of color and nationality to improve the situation of workers generally.

And I think it's actually happening a little bit here and there, not just the organizing, but if you do look at the polls recently about immigration reform, the public is generally much more sympathetic to immigration than they were in the Trump years, partly because of some of the horrors of kids in cages at the border and stuff like that. There has been a kind of reaction to the reaction more recently. That doesn't mean that we'll get immigration reform, given the holding-the-line approach of Mitch McConnell and others in the Senate. But without getting rid of the filibuster, I think it's going to be difficult to have this changed legally.

But the public is ready for it. And I think that's true of the kind of labor reforms that help both immigrants and US-born workers, like raising the minimum wage. You probably know this, recently in Florida of all places, not a blue state or a bastion of progressivism, they passed an increase in the minimum wage through a referendum. So, even in places like that, the general public recognizes the explosive growth of inequality and the damage it's done and the need to improve the economics at the bottom in a way that would affect people, regardless of where they're from or what color they are.

The Democrats' Long War on Immigrants - Intercepted - Air Date 2-17-21

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: [00:45:32] No matter how decent they are, no matter their reasons, the 11 million who broke these laws should be held accountable.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:45:41] Barack Obama really furthered what Clinton put into place and also escalated it beyond that.

JEFFERY BROWN: [00:45:52] Today President Obama signed a bill upping borders security by \$600 million. The money will go for a thousand new border patrol agents plus 250 agents for ICE — the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency — and 250 officers with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the agency that polices against terror and other threats.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:46:14] Obama spent billions of dollars securing the border just as Clinton did in '94 after NAFTA. And under Barack Obama, the budgets of border and immigration enforcement actually began to outpace the budgets of all other federal law enforcement agencies combined.

CHIP REID: [00:46:31] Under President Obama's border plan, the national guard will assist with intelligence gathering, surveillance, reconnaissance support, analysis and training as well as supporting counternarcotics enforcement.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:46:43] Under president Obama, the kind of depictions in the public narrative of domestic and foreign threats they merged, right? So, the war at home and the war abroad boomeranged back and forth. The drones that the United States used to first attack Yemen and Pakistan were first tested on the U.S.-Mexico border. And President Obama, who received the Nobel Peace Prize, is a president who dropped an average of three bombs every hour in the year 2016, just prior to his departure, mostly through airstrikes and

drone warfare on Syria, on Iraq, on Afghanistan, on Libya, on Yemen, on Somalia and on Pakistan. And when he signed DACA, you know the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which was received with much praise and much celebration, but it was very worrying because he also signaled his intention to increase enforcement at the very same time using the Secure Communities Program, which is very similar to the Criminal Alien Program under Bill Clinton. And under Obama, deportation rates doubled, just as they had increased under Clinton, and by 2014 about half of all federal criminal arrests were immigration related.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: [00:47:58] Even as we are a nation of immigrants, we're also a nation of laws. Undocumented workers broke our immigration laws and I believe that they must be held accountable, especially those who may be dangerous. That's why over the last six years deportation of criminals are up 80%. And that's why we're going to keep focusing enforcement resources on actual threats to our security. Felons not families. Criminals not children. Gang members not a mom who's working hard to provide for her kids. We'll prioritize just like law enforcement does every day.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:48:39] In that same year, 2014, was the year where there was a surge of unaccompanied minors at the border. Obama began incarcerating migrant families by detaining them in camps on military bases.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: [00:48:52] Although this summer there was a brief spike in unaccompanied children being apprehended at our border, the number of such children is now actually lower than it's been in nearly two years.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:49:01] And you know, it was this foundation of incarcerating migrant families that then escalated to family separation and the crisis of hundreds of missing children and the caging of children under Trump. And in fact several of the photos of children in cages that went viral during Trump's presidency were actually taken during the Obama years.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: [00:49:21] Our message absolutely is don't send your children unaccompanied on trains or through a bunch of smugglers. We don't even know how many of these kids don't make it and may have been waylaid into sex trafficking or killed because they fell off a train. We have no way of tracking that. So that is our direct message to the families in Central America. Do not send your children to the borders. If they do make it, they'll get sent back. More importantly, they may not make it.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:49:52] This was a bipartisan practice and it is just simply not possible and would not have been possible for Trump to have done the horrific things that he did were it not for the foundations that were laid by president Barack Obama and previously by President Bill Clinton.

We already know that the U.S is implicated in why people are forced to move in the first place and imperialism is already a root cause of displacement and migration, but I would argue that now, another key pillar of contemporary imperialism is the outsourcing of border enforcement. And so the U.S. is basically funding immigration enforcement in Mexico, in El Salvador, in Guatemala, in Honduras. And through these various kinds of border outsourcing programs the U.S. is essentially left off the hook and other countries now enact U.S. border enforcement. The border just moves further and further south.

PRESS SECRETARY JEN PSAKI: [00:50:53] Beginning on February 19th, the Department of Homeland Security will take steps to begin processing individuals who, under the previous administration, had been forced to remain in Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocol. I will note this news should not be interpreted as an opening for people to migrate regularly to the United States; only eligible individuals will be allowed to enter through designated ports of entry at designated times. Through a whole-of-government approach...

HARSHA WALIA: [00:51:20] Trump's infamous Remain in Mexico program was a program that allowed U.S. border officials to return asylum seekers and refugees back to Mexico as they awaited their hearings. And so there was a lot of news about, you know, tens of thousands of Central American and African migrants and refugees who were trapped in Mexico, in teeming tent camps under horrific conditions and immobilized in Mexico unable to enter into the United States.

Really, what we will see under Joe Biden is that, you know, he may halt border wall construction, but he will continue to outsource border enforcement the way Obama did. And that will allow the U.S. to not only have a wall at the border, it will allow the U.S. to create an entire anti-migrant fortress that extends far beyond the wall itself. And we already saw this in the first few days of the Biden administration, when thousands of migrants from Honduras who were headed towards the United States were blockaded and tear gassed by Guatemalan soldiers and police.

[Sound of crowd being tear gassed]

The new frontier of U.S. border militarization is not Trump's wall. It's not that symbolic wall on the border. It is this far more dangerous, far more invisible, far more threatening and far more repressive form of immigration enforcement.

PRESS SECRETARY JEN PSAKI: [00:52:41] Now is not the time to come. And the vast majority of people will be turned away. Asylum processes at border will not occur immediately, will take time to implement.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:52:52] And the last thing that I would say is that we really have to go further to challenge the border itself. You know some of those early processes of border formation were very much about containment, whether that was the imperial annexation of over 500,000 square miles of Mexican territory, whether that was capturing indigenous lands and indigenous nations and forcibly forcing them into the U.S. settler state, or punishing free Black movement through the Fugitive Slave Act.

All of these acts of and processes were central to U.S. border formation. And I think in the contemporary era, we often think of, you know, indigenous elimination, anti-Black enslavement, imperialism and migrant exclusion as linked but separated processes, right? Like, often our social movements don't make these links. We see ourselves in solidarity with those struggles, but we don't always see these deep historic ways in which these processes required each other to make the U.S. the settler colonial, imperial empire that it is, right? So, the border was not just a line on a map. It is a constantly produced racial regime. It's a constantly produced labor regime and it's a carceral regime. It's a form of enacting immobilization and control. And that's why I think that, you know, an internationalist and interconnected abolitionist vision of freedom requires a world without police, requires a

world without prisons, requires a world without private property, requires a world without militaries and requires a world without borders.

The Democrats' Long War on Immigrants Part 2 - The Intercept - Air Date 2-17-21

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [00:54:37] All Americans, not only in the states most heavily affected, but in every place in this country, are rightly disturbed by the large numbers of illegal aliens entering our country.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:54:48] The Clinton years really normalized the most severe consequences of border militarization and mass detention, both at the same time.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [00:54:57] The jobs they hold might otherwise be held by citizens or legal immigrants. The public service they use impose burdens on our taxpayers. That's why our administration has moved aggressively to secure our borders more by hiring a record number of new border guards, by deporting twice as many criminal aliens as ever before. We are a nation of immigrants, but we are also a nation of laws. It is wrong and ultimately self-defeating for a nation of immigrants to permit the kind of abuse of our immigration laws we have seen in recent years and we must do more to stop it.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:55:33] 1994 is a really important year because 1994 was the year that the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [00:55:54] NAFTA will tear down trade barriers between our three nations. It will create the world's largest trade zone and create 200,000 jobs in this country by 1995 alone. The environmental and labor side agreements negotiated by our administration will make this agreement a force for social progress as well as economic growth.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:56:16] As Bill Clinton was signing NAFTA to ensure the free movement of capital, the impacts of which continue to be felt today, is when the Zapatistas rose up in armed rebellion, citing NAFTA as one of the reasons for their rebellion. And that was because the Zapatistas predicted, as many others did, that the North American Free Trade Agreement would bring misery and impoverishment, specifically and especially across indigenous communities in Mexico. And that it was the latest iteration of neo-liberal, colonial, capitalist warfare on their communities.

SUBCOMANDANTE MARCOS: [00:56:54] In Mexico, for the indian people, if you want food, if you want school, if you want help you must die or kill for take this. We don't want more papers. We want schools. We want hospitals. We want land. We want support of the government.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:57:15] At the same time that NAFTA was being signed and rammed through, the Army Corps of Engineers was fencing the U.S.-Mexico border to constrict the movement of people coming in from Mexico. And the Bill Clinton administration knew that NAFTA would create more misery and hence more displacement and more migration. Which is precisely why they tried to constrict the very movement of the people that they have displaced.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [00:57:40] The solution is to welcome legal immigrants and legal, legitimate refugees, and to turn away those who do not obey the laws. We will make it tougher for illegal aliens to get into our country and we will increase the number of border patrol, equipping them and training them to be first-class law enforcement officers. Today's initiatives are about stopping crime, toughening the penalties for the criminals and giving our law enforcement people the tools they need to do their job. And it's certainly plain to anybody with eyes to see that the border patrol is drastically understaffed. Breathtakingly understaffed.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:58:22] Border patrol tripled in size and it became the second largest enforcement agency in the United States at the time. And also we saw border patrol adopt the official strategy of what they call "prevention through deterrence."

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [00:58:35] For example I've asked the attorney general to increase those elements of our border patrol strategy that are proving most effective including the use of helicopters, night scopes and all-terrain vehicles. I've asked the members of the cabinet to create for the first time a national detention and removal plan to dramatically increase the identification and removal of deportable illegal aliens.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:58:59] And it's actually intended to create border deaths because you're trying to deter through death. And operations such as Hold the Line in Texas, Operation Gatekeeper in California, Operation Safeguard in Arizona, all worked together to militarize the border under this strategy.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [00:59:17] One of the cornerstones of our fight against illegal immigration has been a get-tough policy at our borders. We initiated Operation Hold the Line at El Paso, Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, Operation Safeguard in Arizona, all with one clear intention: to secure the southwest border. As we speak, these initiatives are making a substantial difference. Illegal immigration is down. Crime is down.

HARSHA WALIA: [00:59:47] And within six years of these operations, we saw that border deaths — which I argue we should more accurately call border killings because they're intentional and premeditated by the state — they increased by 509%.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [00:59:59] Under the budgets already passed, we've added a thousand new border patrol agents just in the southwest. By the end of 1996 our administration will have increased overall border personnel by 51% since 1993. Thirdly I have asked for new funds to double the deportation of criminal aliens next year and to triple them by 1996.

HARSHA WALIA: [01:00:27] In 1996, Clinton passed two laws that really kind of saw the nexus of this dehumanizing rhetoric of "crime and drugs and illegals."

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [01:00:37] But we won't tolerate immigration by people whose first act is to break the law as they enter our country. We must continue to do everything we can to strengthen our borders, enforce our laws and remove illegal aliens from our country. This week, I sent strong legislation to Congress to try to stop those abuses, to secure our borders in the future and to speed up deportation of illegal immigrants.

HARSHA WALIA: [01:01:11] And what these two laws did is they expanded the category of aggravated felony convictions which essentially widened the net for detention and deportation of legal permanent residents who had minor convictions in the criminal legal system stemming from stop-and-frisk racist policing and the racist war on drugs. What happened is within a few years the average daily detentions in the United States tripled and deportations shot up to an average of 150,000 people annually.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [01:01:43] Right now we're deporting 110 illegal aliens every day. That's almost 40,000 a year, and we're going to do even better. Our plan will triple the number of criminal and other deportable aliens deported since 1993. Whether they're innocent or guilty of the crimes they're charged with in court, they're still here illegally and they should be sent out of the country.

HARSHA WALIA: [01:02:06] As recently as last decade, half of the people that ICE detained came under its radar through what's called the "Criminal Alien Program" which uses collaborations between local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement as a pipeline for expulsion. And of course this disproportionately impacts Black communities, Afro-Caribbean communities, communities that are doubly triply punished through federal enforcement.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: [01:02:32] Our country was built by immigrants, but it was built also by people who obeyed the law. We must be able to control our borders, we must uphold respect for our laws. We're cracking down on this huge problem we found when I got here and we're going to keep working at it until we do much much better.

HARSHA WALIA: [01:02:50] You know this kind of structural inequality that was being entrenched through the war on crime, through the war on immigration, through the kind of war on welfare, all of these worked together to really entrench a criminalizing agenda on a number of racialized communities. And at the same time, it was justified through this kind of pathologizing rhetoric of, you know, that culture is the cause of poverty, rather than this deeply structural political inequality that was created as a consequence of racial capitalism.

THEN-SENATOR JOE BIDEN: [01:03:32] It doesn't matter whether or not the person that is accosting your son or daughter, or my son or daughter, my wife, your husband, my mother, your parents. It doesn't matter whether or not they were deprived as a youth. It doesn't matter whether or not they had no background that enabled them to have, to become a social — become socialized into the fabric of society. It doesn't matter whether or not they are the victims of society. The end result is they're about to knock my mother on the head with a lead pipe, shoot my sister, beat up my wife, take on my sons. So I don't want to ask what made them do this. They must be taken off the street. They are beyond the pale, many of those people. Beyond the pale. And it's a sad commentary on society. We have no choice but to take them out of society.

HARSHA WALIA: [01:04:40] So this is the context for how we see the explosion of the prison industrial complex, which includes detention centers. So the United States not only has the shameful honor of having the world's highest incarceration rate, it also has the world's largest immigration detention system on the planet. Those work in tandem. And I would argue that they're both a modern method of anti-Black and anti-indigenous genocide, which is the foundation of this country.

Separating Children: Laura Briggs - Future Hindsight - Air Date 2-18-21

LAURA BRIGGS: [01:05:07] In 1960 alone, 150,000 Black children entered the child welfare system as Southern States passed suitable home rules, one after another. And I think it's really important to think of the modern child welfare system being born in that moment as part of the work of punishing Black communities in rebellion for their work in seeking to de-segregate public accommodations through the schools.

MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT: [01:05:37] We examine the long history of taking children by the US government and what this history reveals about racism in America. Let's listen in. You show that the United States has a long history of taking children, all the way back to the time of slavery, and of course subduing Native communities. Why did you write this book at this time?

LAURA BRIGGS: [01:06:01] Well, I started to write it in the 2018-2019 period when we were all so focused on the Trump administration's policy of taking the children of asylum seekers at the border. I knew a lot about the fact that the Obama administration had done this, the Bush administration had done this, and I was struck by the conversation about this is not America. And I wanted people to really think about what would it mean to say, this is the United States, this is what we've been doing, and we've got to stop.

MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT: [01:06:43] Now, you argue that child separation policy is a product of racial nationalism. How does child separation look to achieve the goals of racial nationalism? How does it work?

LAURA BRIGGS: [01:06:57] So we've all been thinking a little more than usual about racial nationalism or White nationalism in the aftermath of the riot and coup attempt with the Trump administration. It's the people that we sometimes call the alt-right, and what the alt-right has done, is pick up a thread that's been present in US history since its inception of thinking about this as a White country. And this was the basis on which slavery became racial. That, it wasn't White people who could be enslaved or compelled to work without wages, it was African and African descended people. That was the conditions under which Indigenous people could be pushed off of their land. And so I wanted to think about those as twin pillars of the founding of the United States with a focus on how taking children has been a key part of enacting those as practices and policies of the United States.

MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT: [01:08:11] When I read your book, I thought that the examples of having children taken away from the enslaved, that was very familiar, in a sense that I think this is something that a lot of people know about and have read and see in textbooks, but that the separation of children from their families of Indigenous children was much less known. Your chapter about Indigenous people and was most illustrative of these White nationalists goals, which as you have just said, have been with us since the beginning of this nation. So tell us a little bit about what the process was and what was really the key driving factor in taking the children from Native communities.

LAURA BRIGGS: [01:08:56] Abolitionist activists made the question of taking children from enslaved mothers and other kin and caregivers a central piece of how they fought against

enslavement, how they fought to have the Civil War, be a fight over slavery. On the contrary though, with Native kids, and taking the children of native people was treated as a progressive policy. And the reason why people in the 19th century thought of it as progressive, and into the 20th century, is because the alternative was frankly killing people. As us settlers moved West, the Indian Wars of the 19th century were about killing people, displacing them, overturning treaties, overturning the legal apparatus of the relationship between Indigenous people and Anglo settlers that had evolved since the 17th century.

By the 1890s there were still Plains Indians Wars little bit kicking around, also in the Southwest, Apaches, and so the question was, was there ever going to be an end to the Indian Wars? And one of the proposals for how to bring an end to Indian Wars, short of giving them back their land and treating them with respect, was to take children, and to detribalized children by putting them in boarding schools, compelling them to learn English, cutting their hair, interrupting the transmission of culture and peopleness to Native kids. And so native kids were sent to boarding schools that were run under the aegis of military discipline and military rules.

In 1928, we had the clearest reckoning with what was going on in Native boarding schools. There was a Report, it was called the Meriam Report for the guy who wrote it up from the Brookings institution. The Meriam Report said that across boarding schools, children were ill-clothed, ill-housed, ill-fed, that there were significant cemeteries on the grounds of Native boarding schools, that children were being taken from communities, often by force, and that the goal of Native boarding schools was really to turn them into a servant class. They were being farmed out in the summers to work for White families as farmhands, as domestics. And this was the beginning of the end of boarding schools, but people who went to boarding schools are still very much around.

There's also significant mental health research about what survivors of boarding schools went through in terms of trauma and how that manifests later in their lives. So suicide attempts or alcohol abuse, and even manifests in their children as trauma.

MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT: [01:12:21] Yes, that's the most heartbreaking thing, that the trauma gets passed on. To what extent was this campaign of taking children actually successful in terms of achieving dominance over these populations?

LAURA BRIGGS: [01:12:38] Well, every time I hear about another effort to preserve Native language, I think of it as part of the continuing crisis of the boarding school policy. That we went from a time in the 19th century where a significant number of Native adults and youth were Indigenous language speakers to one where Indigenous languages are endangered, is about the kind of cultural genocide that was enacted through boarding school policy.

MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT: [01:13:16] Yes indeed. So one of the things that I thought was really interesting and the way you set up the book is that even though we no longer have enslaved people and we no longer really have these boarding schools, we continue to take children away through welfare or through mass incarceration. How did these two historical precedents morph into, let's say first, the taking of children through welfare?

LAURA BRIGGS: [01:13:51] So as the Black freedom movement transformed itself into a movement against segregation in public accommodations in the 1950s, what was the

primary target? The lawyers that failed in Plessy v. Ferguson to desegregate the railroad turned instead to Black children, and so Black children, in significant ways, became the focus of the civil rights movement, in Brown v. Board, in school desegregation.

And the other thing that was going on at the same time was White segregationists were not just focusing on school desegregation and trying to stop it, but they were also trying to say that the Black community was in the sort of respectable community that was being portrayed on the evening news as primarily church led organizations. They wanted to focus attention on welfare and impoverished mothers and their children. And so they started saying that impoverished mothers were promiscuous, were having lots of children out of wedlock, and so White segregationists came to focus on what they called welfare fraud or welfare dependency, and the more Black communities fought for their freedom, the more welfare was cut. And ultimately what we saw was a transformation of a very small child welfare program that primarily served White families to one that actively worked to take Black children. White supremacists explicitly relied on what were called "suitable home rules", whether children were in proper homes with essentially a nuclear family. And if they weren't, they could run the risk of being taken. And so in 1960 alone, 150,000 Black children entered the child welfare system as southern states passed "suitable home rules" one after another.

And I think it's really important to think about the modern child welfare system being born in that moment as part of the work of punishing black communities in rebellion for their work in seeking to de-segregate public accommodations through the schools. At the same time in the West, Indigenous communities were fighting tribal termination and they too begin to lose children in significant numbers, until such time as many as a third of Native children were in out-of-home care again. And this is after the decline of the boarding schools.

MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT: [01:16:48] You know, what really shocked me when I read this book is that the cycles just reappear, you know, it just pops up in another form, but with the same goals. And so what is the legal mechanism, I think it's worth talking about because it continues to exist today, in the government, through welfare workers or through mass incarceration, that gives them the legal right to take the children? And that these parents all feel powerless to get their children back.

LAURA BRIGGS: [01:17:17] Most people think that what the child welfare system is doing is mostly protecting children from abuse, but children who enter the child welfare system are actually overwhelmingly the children of birth parents who are accused of child neglect. And while states say they don't take children for reasons of poverty, over and over again, what child neglect looks like is not having food in the fridge. Having a bad landlord and exposed wires. Having homelessness.

And so there's actually, in the last year, increasingly, a movement to stop trying to reform the child welfare system and talking about defunding it, ending it. Because what we have essentially in this country are two ways of handling families in crisis. I'm a scholar, I'm middle-class, if something happens to me, I become really sick, or I develop a substance abuse problem, or I go to jail, then what's going to happen to my kids is they're gonna wind up with my sister. They're gonna wind up with a relative. What happens to impoverished people is that they very quickly lose their children to the enforcement agencies associated with poverty. And have what Erin Miles Cloud calls, the civil death penalty, which is you lose

the right to your child. And so we're increasingly in a conversation about a child welfare system that a lot of activists have sought to reform into a movement to think hard about how else we can care for families in crisis.

Summary

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:19:12] We've just heard clips today, starting with the Medhi Hasan Show highlighting the decades of failed immigration reform efforts. The Mother Jones podcast explained that the Biden administration simply cannot erase all of the horrors of the Trump administration overnight. Only in America spoke with Joy Olson about the big picture of our immigration situation and what problems Biden has to solve. Democracy Now! discussed the detention centers still being used to house children at the border and these xenophobic Title 42 policy. The Medhi Hasan Show discussed alternatives to the status quo that we should be exploring. Our activism for today is in support of the Communities Not Cages Week of Action from March 22nd to 26th from Detention Watch. This is Hell discussed some of the underlying issues and tensions between the business and racist interests vying for control of the Republican party. And Intercepted looked at the history of our immigration system from Obama forward.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips, including: more from Intercepted looking back even farther to the Clinton administration, when the Democrats really pivoted to a law-and-order approach to immigration; and Future Hindsight which discussed the even deeper history of separating children from their families as a form of social control. For non-members, those bonus clips are linked in the show notes and are part of the transcript for today's episode. So, you can still find them if you want to make the effort, but to hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support or request a financial hardship membership because we don't make a lack of funds, a barrier to hearing more information. Every request is granted, no questions asked. And now we'll hear from you.

Biden needs media training but isn't aggressively evil - Dave from Olympia, WA

VOICEMAILER: DAVE FROM OLYMPIA, WA: [01:21:05] Hello, Best of the Left, Dave, from Olympia Washington. I just listened to the foreign policy episode about the Biden administration, and your ending commentary focusing on this classically disjointed Joe Biden interview, and I just feel bad. He falls into the classic media relations traps that pretty smart, relatively informed, but not media savvy, and not great public speakers, just like trip trip trip trip.

First of all, the questioner, he asks about, "you had a conversation with China's leader. How did that go?" He framed it as a conversation, and so Biden, in an attempt not to be that kind of politician that doesn't answer the question that you get asked, he's overly literal about it and talks literally about the conversation he had, not about what the interviewer wanted to know about or what was important or what he should have been on message for. He starts rambling about the conversation. And he goes into this like he knows it's complicated, he knows it's nuanced, and he wants to share with everyone how nuanced it is.

There's reasons that people do stuff. I can't just say, no it's bad and ...tomorrow, no, it's like, it's this whole thing. And it was, it was painful to listen to.

And you could tell there were so many ideas popping into his head that he wanted to share about China's history about his relationship with the leader and they kept crowding into his mouth and he's stumbling over himself trying to say everything he thinks he wants to say. It's just classic Biden, and it's such a bad, it's such a bad media clip and such a bad explanation. I totally understand why people are like what? What is the US's policy here? What is he trying to say? What's the whole point? I get it because it was not good communication,

I lost my train of thought talking about the Biden interview, I wanted to end with kind of the distinction between, is it dumb or is it evil? Biden's kind of dumb. He's not great at public speaking, back to the communication, and you can contrast this with our former president who not only wouldn't have made a passing reference to an Abbott and Costello routine, would have played it up, made it, most of the thing, said something aggressively racist, tried to parlay it into talking about their "Plandemic" instead of even focusing on human rights abuse.

It's the difference between being unintentionally vague because you're not a great communicator and being intentionally vague where it could technically be open to interpretations. Like, " Oh, Nazis. Well, there's good people on both sides." And, five days later grudgingly coming out and saying, "well, I guess that, you know, Nazis are so bad and we don't want to support that." I forget exactly what our former president said in that instance, but it was clear that the first thing it was what was intentional and what was meant, and it was not very well obscured, but the intent was to give a wink and a nod to the racists and to the fascists, but obscure, be at least a little bit subtle about it.

And the media is so fanatically, or was, so fanatically anxious to hop on to, "well, he apologized, he took back the statement, they rolled back, they softened their initial statements," when it's calculated. It was not a slip for the tongue, it was not unintentional, that was on purpose. And I guess I'm still new enough into the Biden administration that it's refreshing, still, to at least not be aggressively evil. Maybe subtly evil in the way that you had mentioned the performative nature of our condemnation of the human rights abuses. But it's sustainably different. It's just a different league from the way our former president would mislead using the media or have doubt about what his statements were. Anywho, as always, stay awesome.

Final comments on the mental drain of media BS and the need for small victories

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:25:33] Thanks to all of those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or a question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at (202) 999-3991. Or write me a message to Jay@BestoftheLeft.com.

Somewhat in response to Dave's comments that we just heard, I will tell you about the thoughts I've been having this past week.

As I've been watching the news tickers go by and all of the profound levels of nonsense being discussed, the question popped to mind: is this the normal that we were really hoping to get back to? Just the pettiest of nonsense on one side, like defending the right for kids' books and cartoons to be racist and sexually aggressive. While on the other side, we're just excited about not being aggressively evil anymore.

On the whole. I would say that, yes, this is probably the normal we should of been hoping for. And if your expectations were appropriately low, then we may very well be meeting your low expectations, as we are more or less meeting mine, you know, boring inadequacy, punctuated by an absolute obnoxiousness is still better than fascism. That is for sure.

But I feel like. I am sort of having trouble readjusting. It's a bit like a soldier coming home from war who struggles to adjust back to the normal, relatively inconsequential bullshit of everyday life. On one hand, it's nice to be back and some degree of normalcy where your internal terror alert chart can be turned down to yellow or so. But it also really heightened the absurdity of the nonsense that we are pushed to pay attention to. Because on one hand, we have a political party and propaganda machine dedicated to focusing on the only thing they have left, which is the Culture Wars; and on the other, we have the rest of the media, which knows that nonsense is actually pretty good at capturing attention, which they can turn into dollars.

So again, it's better than fascism, but it's taking a different kind of mental toll, I think, to wade through the nonsense on any given day. Like we actually had to take a week off from a planned bonus show recording session because of this phenomenon. We knew that there must be some real stories out there to discuss, but we had been so mentally buried by the bullshit that we couldn't muster the energy to pull out the diamonds of substance from the dunghill of media that we'd been following, at least right up to the point of the Atlanta shootings, but our recording window had already closed by the time we could wrap our minds around that one.

So I don't know. What is the point of all of this? I guess it's that we're the real victims of the Trump administration? No, no, sorry, that doesn't sound right. How about this? We were talking behind the scenes here, the other day, about how we want to cover topics like Biden's immigration and the COVID relief package that just passed, and we want to talk about the need to take some time to celebrate victories, even small ones. Because the Right is always going to give us something to be annoyed about. And progressives are particularly adept at finding the flaws and focusing on them in an attempt to fix them. But what we need for our mental health is some focus on positivity every once in a while.

So we're going to try to do a bit of that. Not to be mistaken for cheerleading Democrats or Biden, and certainly not losing sight of the problems that need to be solved. But when we can, we'll try to include some focus on progress, even if it's minor and imperfect, because as any political organizer worth their salt will tell you, it is the small victories along the way that help keep up the energy for the big fights that can lead to big victories.

So that's the plan. If that's okay.

Keep the comments coming in as always at (202) 999-3991, or by emailing me to Jay@BestoftheLeft.com. That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show. Thanks to the

monosyllabic transcriptionist trio, Ben, Dan, and Ken for their volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, and so on and so on. And thanks to all of those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at BestoftheLeft.com/support as that is absolutely how the program survives.

And of course, everyone can support the show and earn rewards, including our super secret, Best of the Left artwork for your electronic devices by telling everyone you know about the show using our Refer-o-Matic system at BestoftheLeft.com/refer. For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all of that information can always be found in the show notes on the blog and likely right on the device you're using to listen.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from BestoftheLeft.com.