

DNA Collection Program Demonizes Migrants

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October 7, 2019

Soon, U.S. immigration officials will be allowed to start collecting DNA samples of detained migrants. Supporters of this argue that the program is necessary to find people posing as families and perpetrators of violent crimes. In reality, it violates the fundamental human rights of migrants and further perpetuates the U.S. surveillance state. Americans must be aware of this issue and fight against the demonization of undocumented immigrants.

The new DNA collection program assumes migrants are criminals. In fact, the FBI program that the immigration policy builds upon is for individuals who have been arrested or charged in connection with serious crimes. The U.S. government clearly holds the view that immigration is directly linked to lawbreaking. According to the Marshall Project, however, there is no evidence that undocumented immigrants commit more crimes. Additionally, a Cato Institute report found that native-born residents of Texas commit more crime than undocumented immigrants in the state. Considering President Donald Trump's racist and xenophobic rhetoric, it is unsurprising that his administration holds this unfounded position. This presupposition of criminality is unconstitutional and breaks the basic democratic principle that one is innocent until proven guilty.

It is important to recognize that the notion of DNA testing being infallible is false as well. In some instances, DNA results have shown to lead to wrong conclusions. One crime laboratory in Houston was found to be continually misinterpreting samples. In another case, a wrongful charge came from foreign DNA that ended up on a victim's fingernails. There are obvious issues with DNA testing and it should not be considered a foolproof method. The U.S. government's argument that DNA collection is necessary fails to recognize this fact.

The new program also changes the basic premises for the procedure. Rather than focusing on investigating and solving crime, it shifts the focus of law enforcement to mass surveillance. The National Security Agency's post-9/11 history of population surveillance shows that a possible future of genetic surveillance in the United States is not a far-fetched idea. It is also important to note that genetic information of any individual is linked to their family members. The program could lead to a slippery slope where sensitive biological information of both citizens and noncitizens is used for discriminatory practices in school admission and travel.

Americans must recognize that this DNA collection policy demonizes undocumented immigrants and fails to solve the problem that it targets. The program may lead to mass surveillance of both undocumented immigrants and U.S. citizens.