

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

## Keeping immigrant kids in cages wasn't just cruel. It's part of a larger plan

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August 11, 2018

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services took a victory lap on July 26 when it told U.S. District Judge Dana Sabraw in San Diego that it had reunited another 1,442 migrant children with their families. Thus, it claimed, substantially meeting a deadline set by the judge a month earlier.

It previously released many of the infants and children under 5 that had been in its custody.

But HHS has little to be proud of: It is still holding hundreds of children. Altogether, the government took 2,342 children from their parents under the anti-migrant zero-tolerance policy announced on April 6.

White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, then Homeland Security secretary, first broached the idea of seizing and incarcerating migrant children as a deterrent to illegal border crossings in early 2017.

They had the gall to say 'you deal with it'

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is working to reunite migrant children separated from their parents at the border. The agency has until July 26th to do so. This timeline sheds light on months of controversy and fierce backlash. USA TODAY

It's no surprise, then, that Homeland Security seized 1,768 children from their parents as part of a secretive family separation "pilot program" in the El Paso area that ended only in February.

Bumblng the same way they did months later under the zero-tolerance policy, HHS and Homeland Security failed to establish a system to track the children so it could reunite them with their parents at a later date.

HHS told the judge on that July 26 that 572 children still in its custody aren't "eligible" for reunification. In some cases, it said, the parents are unfit because of a criminal conviction, even of a vehicular offense, or a communicable disease.

Others are ineligible, it said, because the parents have been deported and the government doesn't know their whereabouts.

The government had the sheer gall to suggest in court on Aug. 3, when it reported its failure to reunite the remaining children, that the American Civil Liberties Union, whose suit weeks earlier had prompted the judge to stop the separations, be assigned to find the missing parents.

The judge didn't take kindly to HHS's request, which was tantamount to saying, "You deal with it. Any problem?"

Immigrants are not thugs or rapists

President Trump has demonized migrants as a pretext for stripping them of their rights.

On March 16, he told a group of law enforcement officers in California that undocumented residents were "animals." He has cast the migrants as thugs and rapists and used false or misleading statistics to buttress his case.

*The Washington Post* debunked some of his most recent claims on July 6, finding that he not just combined figures for legal and undocumented immigrants, but exaggerated the figures and confused arrests with convictions.

Moreover, in exhaustive research published in March, *The New York Times*, in collaboration with the Marshall Project, a nonprofit that focuses on criminal justice issues, found that crime "fell more often than it rose" in areas with a heavy influx of immigrants.

And the libertarian Cato Institute presented research in 2015 that found "criminal conviction and arrest rates in Texas for undocumented immigrants were lower than those for native-born Americans for murder, sexual assault and larceny." Nonetheless, Gallup reports, half of Americans, pummeled with anti-immigrant rhetoric, believe immigrants worsen crime.

As the senior writer at the National Crime Prevention Council, I have intimate knowledge of the principle that you never blame the victim. Of the many reasons, the most important is that it is unjust.

By example, a woman is not responsible for her rape because she had too much to drink; the perpetrator is held to account.

But in branding migrants as lurking criminals, the president has found it easy to blame them for their plight and claim they are 'getting what they deserve' — even seizure and incarceration of their children.

Throughout history, tyrannical regimes have dehumanized minorities to justify maltreatment or dispatch to terrible fates. Here, we should have seen it coming.

In his first TV interview after his election, on 60 Minutes on November 13, 2016, Trump said he would "immediately" deport "two million — it could even be three million" — undocumented residents. "We are getting them out of our country or we are going to incarcerate," he declared.

As president, Trump urged publicly that due process not be provided to either the undocumented or the migrants at the border.

The president cultivates an atmosphere of bias and blame solely to stoke his base.