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OPINION

Trump's War on Urban 'Carnage' was a Ruse

Moves spell trouble for police reforms

BY EBONY SLAUGHTER-JOHNSON

One of President Trump's favorite themes is what he calls "American carnage" — typified by "the violence" and "the gangs."

To that end, he's repeatedly highlighted the violence in Chicago.

A few days after he was inaugurated, he even issued this warning via Twitter: "If Chicago doesn't fix the horrible 'carnage' going on... I will send in the Feds!"

Trump, a vocal supporter of stop-and-frisk, additionally



pledged that his administration will "stop the gangs and the violence" and "stop the drugs from pouring into our communities" by empowering police officers.

To be sure, Chicago is facing a uniquely violent moment in its history: The city witnessed 762 murders and 4,331 shooting victims in 2016 — more than in New York and Los Angeles combined. The homicide rate was the highest it's been since 1996.

Yet the police are a critical component of this violence. A 2016 Justice Department investigation revealed scores of abuses by Chicago police, from racial discrimination to witness intimidation to endangering civilians.

In a particularly memorable

anecdote from 2013, an off-duty Chicago cop watched a man enter a vacant building. Deeming him suspicious, the officer pursued the man. When confronted, the man produced a shiny object, prompting the officer to fire his weapon, killing the man on the spot.

As for the shiny object, it wasn't a gun: It was the man's watch.

Despite not waiting for backup and initiating a deadly confrontation, the officer was put back on the beat. Last November, the same cop killed another man he claimed had brandished a gun. No gun was found.

Under the Obama administration, the federal government played a key role in exposing abuses like these in scores of local police departments.

Yet Trump's attorney gener-

al, Jeff Sessions, has promised to "pull back on" suits against police departments over civil rights violations. He recently ordered a review of all reform arrangements the Department of Justice reached with local police under Obama, which could imperil programs that have been shown to produce enduring positive changes.

Why? "It is not the responsibility of the federal government to manage non-federal law enforcement agencies," Sessions insists.

All this exposes Trump's promises to curb violence in America's cities to be what many suspected all along: a meaningless ruse. After all, when it comes to civil rights, he's actually pulling the feds out.

Need more evidence? The administration has also proposed depriving the Department of Jus-

tice of over \$1 billion in funding, including major cuts to the Civil Rights Division, which is in charge of managing police reform. And it's attempting to vacate another reform arrangement with the Baltimore Police Department, where the last administration found many similar civil rights abuses.

It's no great surprise that choosing an attorney general like Sessions, another stop-and-frisk proponent who's complained that civil rights protections undermine police officers, spelled trouble for police reform. Now trouble has come — and it seems like more is on its way.

Ebony Slaughter-Johnson is a freelance writer whose work covers history, race, and the criminalization of poverty. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

Help Our Immigrant Brothers and Sisters

Harrowing narratives of detention

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

The just concluded holy season of Lent and Easter in the Christian calendar was a time to reflect and act to help the most vulnerable in our midst.

With harsh assaults on undocumented immigrants and refugees who must fear every knock on their door, many American citizen children are afraid to go to school, afraid of being bullied, and afraid to leave their parents who might be arrested at any moment.

In Texas, these real fears are intensified with stories about building new walls on the border and about children, like their brothers and sisters, refugees from the violence of poverty and gangs and drug lords, locked in residential detention centers in their state.

A ban on crayons. That's what it came to at the visitors' center at the Karnes County Residential Center in Karnes City, Texas, one of three immigration detention centers that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) currently uses to house mothers and children who've been stopped seeking asylum in the United States.

Six volunteer lawyers who work with detained families wrote a letter to ICE explaining why they liked to bring crayons when



they met with clients: "Having children color and draw provides a distraction for children while their mothers relate incidents of trauma, violence and abuse. Other children sit outside the interview rooms and draw at the tables, so they are not forced to listen to their mothers' harrowing narratives nor witness their mothers' fragile emotional states during these interviews.

But ICE determined some of the children were doing "damage" to tables and walls in the visitors' center while coloring. The crayon ban was just another blow to children already essentially being housed as prisoners by the federal government. The latest memos from the Department of Homeland Security outlining plans for enforcing the executive

orders on immigration issued by President Donald Trump mean the numbers of children and mothers being detained this way (in America) will only swell.

Family detention centers are just one way current immigration policies hurt children. The Karnes County center is managed by ICE but owned and operated by the GEO Group, a \$2 billion for-profit private prison company that seeks to double the number of people it can hold there from its current capacity of 532 beds. Across the state, the Southwest Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas can hold 2,400 people. Also managed by ICE, that center is owned and operated by Corrections Corporation of America, also known as "CoreCivic," a for-profit company that makes upwards of \$260 million a year housing mothers and children at a rate of \$300 a

day, per detainee.

In December a Texas court struck down a regulation that would have allowed these two for-profit detention centers to obtain state child care licenses. Children's Defense Fund-Texas Associate Director Dr. Laura Guerra-Cardus, a medical doctor, was among those who testified that family jails are not child care facilities and that children held there with their mothers are not physically or mentally safe. Bree Bernwanger, managing attorney of the Dilley Pro Bono Project, commented, "Yet another court has found that locking up children and their parents is not a form of 'child care.' It's time for ICE to recognize that detaining families is illegal and these facilities should be closed."

Following that ruling 460 women and children were released from

the two Texas detention centers, flooding immigrant support networks in a surprise move officials said was unconnected to the loss in court. Many of those women and children had to be immediately hospitalized due to chronic conditions and other health problems resulting from their detention treatment. The centers have been the source of a number of controversies, including several alleged sexual assault and abuse cases and alleged use of solitary confinement as punishment for hunger strikes at the Dilley center. At the third ICE family center, owned and operated by Berks County, Penn., a group of 22 mothers imprisoned with their children between 270 to 365 days wrote a letter last year explaining why they were starting a hunger strike:

"We are already traumatized from our countries of origin. We risked our own lives and those of

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