

OPINION



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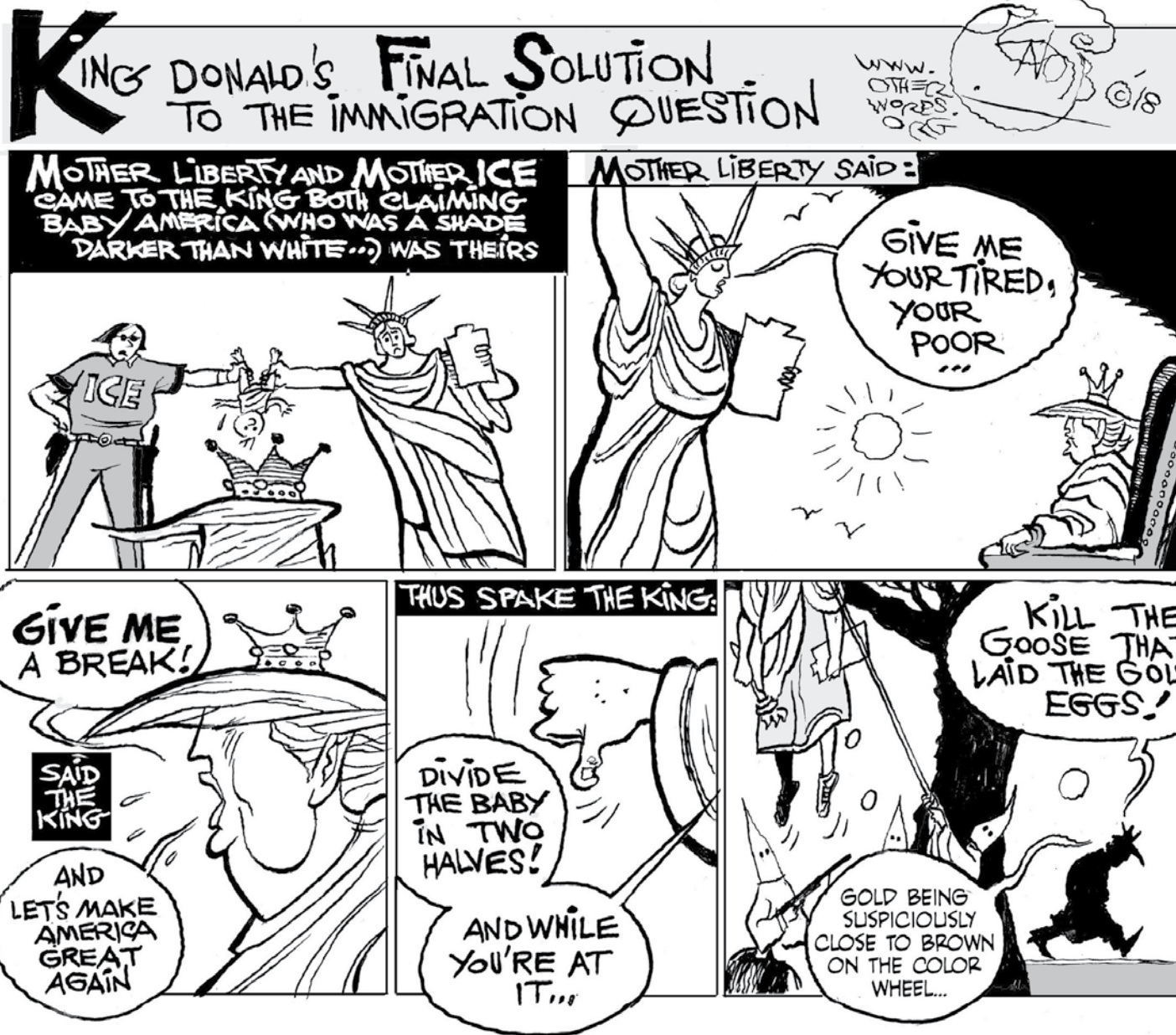
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Stop Piling Children into Immigration Detention

Trump harms children to scare parents

BY PETER CERTO

Most mornings lately, I've woken up to two things. First I hear my toddler, sounding off that it's time to get up. Then I see the news stories about other toddlers our immigration authorities ripped away from their parents.

For weeks, I've felt the gnawing need to write something, anything, about it. But God, where even to begin?

First, there are the stories. The Congolese asylum seeker who heard her six-year-old scream "Don't take me away from my mommy!" and couldn't reach her. The woman forced to put her 18-month-old in a car seat in an ICE van, the door slamming shut before she could even say good-bye. The man who hasn't seen his son in six months.



Then there are the photos. The rows of children sleeping on thin mats behind chain-linked fences. The kids being led by guards to make phone calls, hands tied behind their backs. The prison van full of infant car seats.

These are just the earliest fruits of the Trump administration's ghastly new pledge to prosecute every last undocumented immigrant who crosses our border. If they have their children with them, the kids are seized and warehoused in some overflowing detention facility.

The New York Times counted over 700 kids who'd been separated from their parents this way from October to April. But in the first two weeks of May alone, authorities disclosed that they'd taken nearly 700 more — an astonishingly rapid increase. The ACLU puts the second wave at 1,000 over five weeks.

Already the warehouses are filling up, leaving authorities to prepare holding pens on military bases for the inevitable overflow.

In theory, the children should be released to other family members within 72 hours. But with the

administration essentially threatening to deport any undocumented caretakers who come forth to claim them, more and more children are languishing in cells for months. NBC reported recently that over half the kids currently detained had been held past the limit, and that half of those were under 12.

"It appears we're setting up a long-term incarceration system for children," a former immigration official told VICE. Children whose only crime was having parents who tried to take them to safety.

The jackboots orchestrating this plot openly admit they're willing to harm children to scare off parents.

"If you don't want your child separated, then don't bring them across the border illegally," menaced Attorney General Jeff Sessions. "A big name of the game is deterrence," chimed in Trump chief of staff John Kelly, who promised the captured children "will be put into foster care — or whatever."

The administration isn't just arresting ordinary migrants. It's

also arresting asylum seekers who legally present themselves at ports of entry — people fleeing war, crime, and trauma few Americans could understand — and taking their kids, too.

These detention facilities are no place for kids. Even going back to the Obama era, immigration agents have been reported raping, beating, and threatening kids in their care. When U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley tried to inspect a holding site this month, operators locked him out and called the police. What were they hiding?

The United Nations has warned these detentions constitute "a child rights violation" and should be "halted immediately." Sen. Diane Feinstein has introduced a bill to end family separations for asylum seekers, while Senator Kamala Harris and Rep. Pramila Jayapal want to halt the expansion of new detention facilities.

Those would be welcome steps. But if you ask the dad in me, they should shut down the whole agency.

Peter Certo is the editorial manager of the Institute for Policy Studies and the editor of OtherWords.org.