

# OPINION

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## Lessons from the Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric

### Moments that give me hope

BY JASMINE AGUILERA

President Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric hasn't just infected U.S. politics. Now it's made its way south of the border.

As a caravan of hundreds of migrants arrive in Tijuana, some residents there have started taking up Trump's ideology. Juan Manuel Gastélum, the mayor of Tijuana, has been seen wearing a red "Make Tijuana Great Again" baseball cap. In an interview with Milenio News, he painted the migrants as a dangerous threat.

"Sure, there are some good people in the caravan, but many are very bad for the city," Gastélum said.

And on Nov. 19, a few hundred protested against the migrant caravan in Tijuana chanting "Tijuana first." In the days before the protest, locals even attacked some migrants with stones.

These are the real effects of Trump's rhetoric. Luckily, despite growing anti-immigrant

sentiments, there are still many in Mexico who support and defend the migrants. This gives me hope.

Thousands of migrants are facing a humanitarian crisis in Tijuana, after walking more than 2,500 miles. Many simply want their chance to seek asylum in the United States, which is their legal right. But they may have to wait



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months for their chance.

Not only are the migrants dealing with unsanitary, impoverished conditions while they wait. Now they have to face the hatred that's resulted from Trump's presidency before they even cross the border.

Migrant caravans have existed for decades as a way for immi-

grants to travel safely together to the United States. The media spectacle around the practice now obscures an important fact: Unauthorized migration to the U.S. has been declining for years. Last year, arrests at the border fell to a 46-year low.

But just before the midterm elections, Trump decided to pick on a caravan of migrants from Honduras, telling U.S. residents

that they're criminals to stoke fear — and to make himself the hero of the story.

Trump even deployed nearly 6,000 military troops to the U.S.-Mexico border while the caravan was still weeks away, making it clear to me that this was all just politics for Trump.

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Mexicans themselves, once the target of Trump's racist campaign (remember when he called them rapists and murders?), have started repurposing Trump's words to

point the arrow at a new target: migrants trying to escape some of the most dangerous countries in the world.

I'm the daughter of Mexican immigrants who saw their own share of hatred when they arrived in the United States. It's heartbreaking to me that Mexicans in

Tijuana would now start turning their backs on these migrants, and it's clear to me that Trump has influenced them. Just listen to their chants of "Mexico first."

The situation is dire. But for all of the hatred that's spewed out of this humanitarian crisis, there are hopeful moments.

While hundreds of anti-immigrant protesters took to the streets to express their anger, there were also people countering them with welcoming chants.

Many along the caravan's path welcomed the migrants, offering food, shelter, and clothing. A new president in Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has also promised more humane treatment of the migrants, and plans to work with the Tijuana mayor to come up with a practical solution.

If anti-migrant Mexicans are now taking after Trump, I hope more Americans will now take after the Mexicans who chose to welcome the refugees. No matter your ideology, they deserve to be treated humanely as they act on their legal right to seek asylum.

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## Heartbreaking Images of the Attacks on Asylum-Seekers

### Border response a new moral and human low

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

It has come to this: tear-gassing toddlers. Heartbreaking images of the American government's attacks on asylum-seekers at the border. In one photo, a barefoot child in a diaper sobs, clutching her mother with one hand and a plastic ball—a lone prized possession—with the other. Her mother, who was pictured in a second photo desperately trying to flee from the tear gas with her two young children, told an interviewer: "I felt sad, I was scared. I wanted to cry. That's when I grabbed my daughters and ran. I thought my kids were going to die with me because of the gas we inhaled."

When I saw those pictures last month I was instantly transported back to Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, to segregationist police chief Bull Connor's use of vicious police dogs and powerful

firehoses to attack black children marching for their freedom. I often say that I do this work because I don't want my grandchildren fighting the same fights we did back then. And yet here we find ourselves, with my grandchildren and young people across the country witnessing our government attacking small children for daring to dream of a better life.

President Trump and Administration officials act as if gassing babies at the border is business as usual, just as they did when the public cried out about our government ripping children from the arms of their parents and putting them in indefinite detention in cages and tent cities. But nothing about this is "usual" and we must not allow ourselves to become inured to cruelty and injustice. This is not who we should be as a nation. We must continue to come together, speak out at every turn and take a stand against the outrageous atrocities being committed by President Trump under the guise of keeping Americans "safe."



The Children's Defense Fund is working at the heart of this issue. When too few were paying attention to the incarceration of asylum-seeking women and children in harmful for-profit detention centers, our Texas office fought to stop these detention centers from receiving state-issued child care licenses that would have allowed more children to be incarcerated there for even longer periods of time. Our affiliate was one of the first organizations to report the shameful practice of separating children and babies from their parents on the border.

We must never ever give up, and we must keep fighting these evil acts. This administration's attacks aren't limited to small children and families outside our borders; they are taking action to harm immigrant families already in America, too.

The administration has proposed changes to the "public charge" rule that have the potential to plunge millions of children and their immigrant families into poverty, hunger, and homelessness. When parents and other adults apply for lawful permanent residen-

cy or entry into the United States immigration officials currently consider whether that person is, or is likely to become, reliant on the government, or a "public charge." The longstanding federal policy is to consider whether an individual will rely on the government by examining whether he or she receives cash assistance or will need long-term care benefits. But the change proposed by the Trump administration would allow immigration officials to deny green cards and visas to a much broader group of immigrants who use public benefits including non-emergency Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), housing assistance, and the Medicare Part D low-income subsidy.

With this change, the Department threatens to shut down legal paths to citizenship for families that use these safety net programs—including those to which they are legally entitled—to feed their children, put a roof over their heads and keep them healthy. Even people who haven't used these programs in the past can be denied a green card or visa

if there is a suspected risk they are "likely" to use them in the future. Nearly 1 in 4 children in America has at least one immigrant parent, and nearly 90 percent of those children are citizens.

By making legal use of safety net programs one of several new heavily weighted factors in determining whether an individual qualifies as a public charge, millions of immigrants will be subject to this expanded definition of public charge, which is likely to cause both immigrants and their children to forego crucial food assistance, health coverage, and safe housing for fear of the consequences.

Our inhumane treatment of families and children who come to America seeking a better life is degrading and diminishing us as a nation. It is not protecting us or making us great. Let us show immigrant children and families both inside and outside our borders who we really are by standing up for their safety, their lives and their right to pursue a better future.

*Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund.*