

Analysis

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TRUMP REVERSES COURSE ON FAMILY SEPARATION



After migration row, UK hails its Caribbean communities

Britain celebrated Friday the "enormous contribution" of its Caribbean migrants, who for a long time were airbrushed from history while some were even recently threatened with deportation. Prime Minister Theresa May attended a service at Westminster Abbey marking 70 years since the first arrivals embarked from the Empire Windrush ship at Tilbury docks, east of London.

Most of those who arrived on 22 June, 1948, were from Jamaica, but also Bermuda and British Guiana, answering a call for workers to help rebuild Britain after World War II. Tens of thousands followed from around the British empire, known as the Windrush generation and given free rights to live and work in a country they already considered home. May's government this week declared they would be remembered each day on June 22 with Windrush Day, and on Friday praised their "enormous contribution". "Our culture has been enriched and our society has been made stronger because of the people who travelled here to build new lives in the UK," she said.

'Very wrong'

But Britain has not always been so warm towards its former colonial subjects. Intense racism marred the experience of many of the new arrivals, while the government was rocked by a scandal earlier this year over their continued right to live in Britain. Some people who failed to get their papers in order at the time have fallen foul of a crackdown on illegal immigration, which May introduced when she was interior minister. Anthony Bryan, a 60-year-old decorator from London who moved from Jamaica when he was eight years old, was among those who was threatened with deportation. He told AFP earlier this year how the challenge to his legal status—which also left him unable to work — "broke the trust that I thought I had with the British".



LONDON: Performers from the HEbE Foundation charity prepare to perform during a Service of Thanksgiving to mark the 70th anniversary of the landing of the Windrush, at Westminster Abbey on June 22, 2018. — AFP

May apologized and promised compensation for those affected, as well as an inquiry. "The fact that Britain has always been home makes the treatment that some members of the Windrush generation experienced in recent years so very wrong," she said Friday. Sunder Katwala, director of the integration think tank British Future, said holding an annual Windrush day was "very welcome". "This was a positive, symbolic way to respond to that (scandal) and say that the government also thinks we should mark the positive contribution the migration has made to Britain," he told AFP.

Welcome home

When the Windrush arrived, the Evening Standard newspaper in London—where the majority of new migrants settled—greeted them with the headline "Welcome Home". Many had served in the British army, and in that year, parliament adopted a law giving citizenship to all its colonial subjects. "It was a way of thanking people for their sacrifice," said Nando Sigona, associate professor at the University of Birmingham. "But on the other hand, there was also an extreme need of a workforce." Yet the wave of migration over the following years caused tensions, culminating in racially-charged riots in London, Birmingham and Nottingham from 1958.

In 1971 parliament passed the Immigration Act which aimed to limit new arrivals and regularize the status of those already here. Katwala said many people were shocked at what they found when they arrived. "They had absolutely no doubt at all they were British," as they had been told this at school, he said. "The shock was to arrive in Britain, in London, and to find out that... that wasn't something the rest of Britain knew about." For decades the Windrush generation were largely ignored in public life, including being absent from British school textbooks. Despite Friday's events, Sigona said there was "still a lot to do" to make them feel appreciated. — AFP

Was migrant girl on US border taken from mother?

Numerous photos and videos have been circulating on social media since the United States began implementing President Donald Trump's zero-tolerance policy towards illegal immigrants, leading more than 2,300 children to be separated from their parents. But two of the most widely-shared images—most prominently that of a crying toddler which galvanized international public opinion against the Trump administration—have turned out to be misleading.

What are we verifying?

Two photos that went viral on social media depict scenes that are not directly related to the family separations taking place on the US-Mexico border since early May. The most prominent, of Honduran two-year-old Yanela Varela crying inconsolably, has become a global symbol of the separations—helping to attract more than \$18 million in donations for a Texas nonprofit called RAICES. The photograph was taken on June 12 in McAllen, Texas by John Moore, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer for Getty Images.

An online article about the picture, published by Time Magazine, initially reported the girl was taken from her mother, but was subsequently corrected to make clear that: "The girl was not carried away screaming by US Border Patrol agents; her mother picked her up and the two were taken away together." Time Magazine nonetheless used the image of the sobbing child on its cover, next to an image of President Trump looming over her, with the caption "Welcome to America". The head of Honduras' Migrant Protection Office Lisa Medrano confirmed to AFP that the little girl, just two years old,



A Honduran immigrant is received by his family at the Ramon Villeda Morales airport, in San Pedro Sula, 200 kilometers north of Tegucigalpa, after being deported from the US, on June 22, 2018. — AFP

"was not separated" from her family. The child's father also said as much. Denis Varela told the Washington Post that his wife Sandra Sanchez, 32, had not been separated from their daughter, and that both were being detained together in an immigration center in McAllen. Under fire for its cover—which was widely decried as misleading including by the White House—the magazine said it was standing by its decision.

"The June 12 photograph of the 2-year-old Honduran girl became the most visible symbol of the ongoing immigration debate in America for a reason," Time's editor-in-chief Edward Felsenthal said in a statement to US media. "Under the policy enforced by the administration, prior to its reversal this week, those who crossed the border illegally were criminally prosecuted, which in turn resulted in the separation of children and parents. Our cover and our reporting capture the stakes of this moment."

A second image, shared tens of thousands of times on Twitter, shows a child crying in what seems to be a cage, purportedly representing a US child detention center. It is in fact a photo of a staged detention of children as part of a protest against US immigration policy. It was published June 11 on the Facebook page of the Brown Berets de Cemanahuac in Texas.

What conclusions can be drawn?

Both images circulating on social media have been used out of context, often for political purposes, and cannot be taken as a representation of conditions in which children have been parted from their families, or confined to shelters on the US-Mexico border. — AFP

Lasting damage to the 'Idea of America'

By James J Zogby

The sights and sounds of Central American children being ripped from their parents by US Border Patrol officers have, by now, spread across the globe. The experience has been traumatizing to its victims and deeply painful to watch. It has also done incalculable damage to the very idea of America. This is June when we are supposed to be celebrating "Immigrant Heritage Month." Each year, I have taken this opportunity to recall my family's immigrant story—the opportunity and freedom they sought, the hardships they endured, and the remarkable progress they made in just one generation.

I have written how I learned from my own family's trajectory and the difference between the experience of immigrants in America and Europe. My friend Michael Baroody has spoken of the "alchemy of America" that has demonstrated the capacity, in every generation, to transform peoples from diverse cultures into Americans. And how, in the process, my country, itself, has been transformed, so that it simply isn't possible to speak of the many facets of American culture—our food, music, fashion, humor, or even our contemporary heroes—without acknowledging our indebtedness to the many cultures who have made us who we are.

At the same time, I have noted that coexisting with this welcoming and inclusive history have been our original sins of slavery, genocide and ethnic cleansing, and conquest. The challenge of every generation has been to fight against the residual legacy of these sins, while working to realize the promise of a better idea of America. This is what we have sought to do with "Immigrant Heritage Month." The problem I am hav-

ing right now is how to wrap my mind around the sights and sounds of the families at the border and how, in light of this horror, to still be able to lift up the idea of America.

I am uncomfortable with the banal responses of some liberals who say "this is not who we are" or "these are not our values" when, in fact, at too many times in our history, this is precisely who we have been. And it is especially true today, when we have an Administration supported by a Republican Congress and a significant segment of the public, all of whom: want to build a wall; support a Muslim ban; and accept the president's rhetoric about the danger of admitting people of color into our country, ending family unification, and limiting the entry of refugees and those seeking asylum.

Ignoring or denying the impact of our original sins on our political culture is not only a fool's errand, it makes us vulnerable to their corrupting appeal. I also take issue with those who fail to recognize the broader impact of the horrifying scenes unfolding on our southern border. This is not, as some have written, the equivalent of the post-Katrina debacle that rocked the Bush Administration. Bush's failure was due to incompetence and ineffectiveness in the aftermath of the hurricane.

What is happening now is different. It is the result of a deliberate, cold and calculated policy born of pathological racism and designed to play to the worst instincts of the President's supporters.

Mr. Trump has been preparing the ground for policies like this with years of rhetoric that have demeaned immigrants from the south. At different times, he has spoken of them as a mortal threat to our country, our culture, and our people. In his speeches he has portrayed them as "snakes" and an "infestation." He has also referred to them as murderers, rapists, criminals, or just simply "not the best people" who would only be a drag on our progress.

Once immigrants have been dehumanized in this manner, it becomes easier to abuse them and easier for the President's apologists to justify this abuse. Fox News commentators, for example, have dismissed the children's cries as "an act" and rebuked their parents as

"unfit" for having put their families at risk, suggesting that they deserve what is happening to them and their children. What Trump and his acolytes have ignored are the violence and desperate poverty in the home countries of those who have risked everything, trekking thousands of miles with their children seeking refuge in the US. Precisely because they courageously sought safety, freedom and opportunity for their families, I see them as heroes, not criminals. The story behind today's immigrants is no different than that of the Irish fleeing the famine, Jews fleeing pogroms, or Central and Southern Europeans fleeing war and economic hardship or Fascist or Communist oppression.

For me, it's also personal, because today's migrants also remind me of my own family's story. They are like my grandfather who took his wife and seven children over the mountains of Lebanon fleeing for their safety. He died in exile leaving his wife and children internally displaced. Today's "unaccompanied minors" are like my Uncle Habib who, at the age of 14, was chosen by the family to come alone to America in 1910, to pave the way for the rest of the family to join him.

And today's "undocumented" remind me of my father who, when he couldn't secure a visa to reunite with his family, entered the US illegally and was repeatedly forced into hiding until he received amnesty and became a citizen 20 years later. Once here, like other newcomers to our shores, my family endured bigotry and hardship, worked hard, and, in the end, succeeded. This is our American story. It is the one celebrated in the words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty and it has served, for generations, as a beacon to "the tired, the poor, those yearning to be free" from all over the world.

It is here that the cruel actions taken by the Trump Administration have done lasting damage. The sights and sounds of the children so brutally treated by presidential decree have, for many across the globe, extinguished the light of Lady Liberty and left an indelible stain on the very idea of who we have aspired to be. That is why I believe that the impact of this horror is more like the revelations of torture at Abu Ghraib. It will take us a generation to recover what we have lost.