



Patrick’s Politics:

America’s newest concentration camps are against American ideals

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Eighty-three winters ago, a young girl sat in the confines of a cramped annex and wrote the following words: “Terrible things are happening outside. At any time of night and day, poor helpless people are being dragged out of their homes... families are torn apart; men, women and children are separated. Children come home from school to find that their parents have disappeared.” If the scenes sound familiar, they should. Anne Frank ascribed to the Nazis what we should recognize today in the Trump administration and their repressive immigration policy. Those helpless people were taken to concentration camps; now, federal agents send those they arrest to “detention centers.” Sometimes, however, a spade must be called a spade. The government’s web of imprisonment is a system of concentration camps. This system is not the first in America’s history, but if we are to fight this hideously unethical practice, we must draw on the foundational rights we all share.

The term “concentration camp” is a highly charged expression, yet it is an apt one. The mind inevitably jumps to thoughts of the Nazis, of the six million Jews led to their deaths in the Holocaust. A mass murder and genocide of that scale might seem as if it can never be truly compared to anything else. Many historians consider locations such as Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen to have been death camps – the end goal, or the “Final Solution”, was to kill as many people as possible. But the concentration camps of Nazi Germany did not start out as places explicitly made for killing. The first, Dachau, was originally designed to hold political prisoners. The Nazis had a very similar euphemism to current America: Dachau was a place for “preventive detention.” Concentration camps are simply areas where groups of people are imprisoned together, usually for much less than a criminal conviction.

Trump’s immigration deten-

tion system bears significant hallmarks of concentration camps. People are snatched off the street and from their homes, often for little reason but racial profiling. Then, they are quickly sent to be processed and detained in prisons, often many miles from home. More and more immigrants have been arrested, and the government has had to make room by building new places to keep them. 70,000 immigrants are currently held in 212 federal facilities across the country; both of those numbers have nearly doubled since Trump took office. The administration doesn’t

distinguish between those with criminal records and those who don’t have one. According to the American Immigration Council, the amount of people arrested by Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) who have no criminal record has ballooned to 41% of all those incarcerated.

The inhumanity of these concentration camps has been well documented. Humanitarian concerns about immigration detention have swirled for some time, but the Trump administration has ratcheted up the cruelty. In 2025, 32 people were killed in ICE facilities. In just over a month, 2026 has seen

three more people die in custody. These are just the worst-case scenarios. Last November, seven immigrants detained by ICE sued the Trump administration, alleging inhumane conditions, inadequate medical care, and no right to legal counsel.

Perhaps the most important lesson American students are taught lies in learning the Declaration of Independence. That hallowed document tells us that all people have certain unalienable rights and “that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Contained within the Declaration is the sum of our ideals – that the

government should work with the people to defend those unalienable rights. You might think that Donald Trump, supposedly holding an America First worldview, would love to uphold those distinctly American ideological tenets. Instead, his administration has embraced the tactics of brutal repression and hate.

It’s important to note that ICE and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are not the first to bring the evil of concentration camps to America. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. decided that anyone Japanese living in the country was dangerous. As a result, tens of thousands of Japanese Americans, many of them U.S. citizens, were sent to “relocation centers” while the war went on. They endured overcrowding and harsh conditions in remote locations. Francis Biddle, attorney general at the time, called these centers for what they were: concentration camps.

To say America has continually failed to live up to its lofty ideals would be an understatement. Yet ideals are what we must cling to. Our founding documents are revolutionary not just because they helped form an entirely new country, but because they outline the hope for democracy. It is this hope for democracy that enabled us to fight against the evil of the Nazis, even as we repressed many of our own people at home.

The Trump administration is betting that the American people aren’t paying attention. In the age of social media, however, the ICE concentration camps and the conditions inside have been well documented. After World War II, German citizens could at least claim they had no way of knowing what went on in the camps. We have no such luxury. People are dying in custody. They are dying on the streets. They are being dragged into prison with prejudice and without due process. We know this is happening. The question is whether we believe in what America should stand for enough to stop it.

