We Are All Venezuelans Now

A DJ, a pro soccer player, a makeup artist, a streetwear designer. Just four of those beaten, shackled & carted off to Potus' & Bukele's gulag in the pre-dawn hours, hoping themselves to evade justice

March 25, 2025 By Mike Barr

2026 update: Obviously events have rendered this entry incomplete and out-dated. I was shocked and goes without saying elated at the unexpected release of the Cecot kidnapees. Will try to update this asap.

I am moving the update "addenda" to the end, as there are so, so many. Today, Monday April 14, with the two gloating gangster heads of state jerking each other off in the Casa Blanca, they appear to be playing a ridiculous but eminently predictable game of "Who? Not me!" The U.S. administration, aided and abetted by the most shameless (and disappointing) Sec of State since, well, Potus' last two SOS, claims it has no power to return the detainees from a foreign land-- and that the power rests with Bukele. In the same breath, Bukele insists that he is powerless to return anyone because the decision is one of the "foreign policy" of the United States, into which he must not interject himself.

What you need to know: While we are grateful to Noah Lanard and Isabela Díaz for their impressively expeditious analysis in Mother Jones, CBS (thank you, Cecilia Vega!) has done the most in-depth reporting on this so far, as far as I can tell. In their April 6 "60 Minutes" broadcast, they determined that 75% of those sent to Cecot had absolutely ZERO criminal charges in either the U.S. or Venezuela/El Salvador. Only 22% had any criminal charges (anywhere) at all. And for all but twelve, these charges were for theft, shoplifting, or trespassing. You can still watch or listen to it yourself at this link.

Of the 261 immigrants spirited away in the pre-dawn hours by Potus, Homan, Noem & Rubio, 12 have been found to have violent criminal charges against them. A full 75% have no criminal records at all.

The next protest I can find scheduled is being coordinated by Rise & Resist and slated for 5 pm this Thursday at Times Square subway stations. Sign up or get otherwise involved via this link.

Even before our friends and neighbors began emigrating to Canada, England, Spain, France, Ireland (and Mexico!!) to escape a repressive political regime, there was the Venezuelan exodus, clocking in now on its 20th— or geez, 25th— year now.

Hugo Chavez was first elected in 1998, curiously enough, after an unsuccessful coup, and then by pitting the dispossessed against the elites. He took over the National Assembly, rewrote the constitution to keep himself in power, started a war against the private sector, and destroyed the Venezuelan economy. He died in office after 13 years. Then came Maduro.

In Argentina's "Dirty War," from 1974 to 1983, somewhere between 22,000 and 30,000 citizens were "disappeared" or outright murdered. (Pinochet, in Chile, disappeared 1,200+.) The disappeared were those judged to represent a political or ideological threat to the ruling junta. Read more about it at The History Channel. Or Wikipedia.

Who would have imagined that we too might one day find ourselves fleeing a repressive regime?

Who will help launch a version of Women In Black? Or Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo?

Could we perhaps launch a version of Women In Black? Or Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo? Stand in front of 1600 Penn every day or one day every week-- endlessly-- until these detainees are returned?

But somehow not many people seem to care about what happened on March 15-16th.

(Or, although perhaps less brutal & gratuitously cruel— perhaps, the 300 asylum seekers (including at least one gay man fleeing persecution in Russia) unceremoniously shipped to Panama on February 19, 2025.)

The Bulwark's Tim Miller is the only one I have seen appear to get appropriately enraged by what happened in Harlingen, Texas last weekend. "Get these people out of this hellhole!," I think was his initial reaction last week. Are there just too many fights to fight?

On Monday, 31-March (super kudos to TM) he revisited this (YouTube link) with Noah Lanard and Isabela Díaz who had written about this for Mother Jones (link to their story).

On Tuesday, 01-April, TM posts yet again. Listen to his This Isn't A Mistake— It's Evil.

Yesterday in NYC was cold & rainy, and I was stuck at home waiting, for all things, a renewed

Cuban passport to arrive by express post (we have since canceled the trip, fearing we might get stranded there after another capricious & mean-spirited EO). So I decided to look up the CBS News list of the "passengers" on those 3 planes from 15-March.

> The men were pulled from the buses so fast the guards couldn't keep pace. Chained at their ankles and wrists, they stumbled and fell, some guards falling with them. With each fall came a kick, a slap, a shove. The guards grabbed necks and pushed bodies into the sides of the buses as they forced the detainees forward. There was no blood, but the violence had a rhythm, like a theater of fear. -Philip Holsinger, Time

In part, I was determined to do this because neither Sarah Longwell nor George Conway (nor the ACLU lawyer arguing case at DC appellate court yesterday afternoon) seemed to know (or to make much of an effort to find out, really) A) how many people on those flights were unquestionably not criminals (not that everyone is not due due process) but also B) the timing of the planes— from Texas to Tegucigalpa, from Tegucigalpa to San Salvador. As if this vast mystery of whether or not a judge's orders had been disregarded slash violated were so difficult to determine.

Conway had mentioned FlightAware (one of my hubby's favorite pastimes). And it turned out that the AP (yeh, that news organization banned from the Casa Blanca for refusing to rename the Gulf of Mexico) had already done the work for us. (Bless you, AP!)

Without question the orders had been ignored — while planes were either en route to Honduras, or parked there waiting to take off for the second leg of those extra-legal excursions.

On the NewsHour last night, Angelo Carusone of Media Matters, explained that the next step of the P2025 playbook is a showdown with the Judiciary, in order to establish a basis for their aspirational "unitary executive" theory of power.

While so far they have ignored "only" district courts, at around noon on Friday (28-March) they advanced their case to the Supremes (see WSJ report on this and all the reporting, as of 1pm Friday, here) and have given plaintiffs until Tuesday, April 1 to respond.

As The Hill pointed out, this is now one of four pending series of lawsuits the Trump administration has brought to the Supreme Court's emergency docket. They are 1) the AEA deportations, 2) mass firings of Federal workers, 3) anti-DEI teacher training cuts, 3) Ending birthright citizenship. So the fight is on. (Follow them at the SCOTUSblog at this link.)

Here's the AP's AEA deportations timeline:

5:25 pm

First plane, tail number N278GX, leaves TX.

5:45 pm

Second plane, tail number N837VA, leaves TX.

6:45 pm

Judge Boasberg tells (deputy AG) Doug Ensign that any plane taking off or in the air needs to return to the US.

7:26 pm: Boasberg written order released

7:36 pm

First plane (N278GX) lands in Honduras.

(???)

Second plane (N837VA) lands in Honduras.

7:37 pm

A third plane, tail number N630VA, which lawyers for Potus say held no one being deported via AEA, leaves TX.

8:02 pm

Second plane (N837VA) lands in El Salvador

(Not clear when it arrived or left Honduras)

9:46 pm

Third plane (N630VA) lands in Honduras.

10:41 pm: First plane (N278GX) departs Honduras

12:05 am (Sunday)

First plane (N278GX) lands in El Salvador

12.41 am

Third plane (N630VA) leaves Honduras

1:03 am

Third plane (N630VA) arrives in El Salvador

(Better late than never? The NYT, on April 30th, published a timeline of the above events. A bit bizarre- no, shameful- that it took them 6 weeks to do so. You can see their report at this link.)/

Among these "deadly gang members" spirited out of the country (Conway at least noted, from the gloating videos Tweeted at 8:13 a.m. Sunday morning by Salvadoran president Nayib Bukele (and retweeted by none other than Sec of State Marco Rubio minutes later), that many appeared to have bruises, even gashes, on their faces), were:

A soccer player

Agents who detained Jerce Reyes Barrios, 36, last September said his tattoo was "proof of gang membership." As has been reported in the Daily Beast and elsewhere, Reyes Barrios left his native Venezuela in 2024 after he was tortured with electric shocks and suffocation for participating in anti-Maduro demonstrations. As Yahoo!news and others point out with heart-wrenching irony, the country where he sought asylum (also via the Biden administration app CBP One, in December 2024, with a hearing set for April 17, 2025) has now consigned him to similar or worse treatment in CECOT.

Read a statement (on Twitter) by his attorney at this link

A baker

Neri Alvarado Borges left for the United States from a small town in north central Venezuela, Yaritauga, in late 2023, primarily to earn money to help his family care for his autistic younger brother, Neryelson. A talented baker, he had been working at a Venezuelan bakery in the Dallas area where the owner, Juan Enrique Hernández, could not speak more highly of him. "We're finding and questioning everyone who has tattoos," the ICE agent told him.

A barber

Francisco Javier García Cacique, a 24-year-old barber from Maracaibo, Venezuela, who had entered the US in September 2023, seeking asylum after spending several years living and working in Peru and Colombia.

Listen to (in Spanish) his mother, Mirelys Cacique, on Twitter (link).

Philip Holsinger, writing for Time magazine on 21-March, describes what sounds like Francisco's

arrival (& treatment) at CECOT, although perhaps it was Andry (below): “The intake began with slaps. One young man sobbed when a guard pushed him to the floor. He said, ”I am not a gang member. I’m gay. I am a barber."

“Inside the intake room, a sea of trustees descended on the men with electric shavers, stripping head of hair with haste. The guy who claimed to be a barber began to whimper, folding his hands in prayer as his hair fell. He was slapped. The man asked for his mother, then buried his face in his chained hands and cried as he was slapped again.”

A makeup artist

Andry José Hernández Romero, a 31-year-old man from Capacho, Venezuela with no criminal history— but two different crown tattoos on each inner wrist. He too had applied for (political) asylum and had been waiting in a detention center for months for his immigration hearing, scheduled for this month. For christ’s sake, even Joe Rogan thinks this is “horrific” (01:11 at this link). “How long before that guy can get out? I mean, can we figure out how to get him out? Is there any plan in place to alert the authorities that they’ve made a horrible mistake and correct it?” His otherwise odious guest astutely replies, nonchalantly, “Once you’ve done that, the incentive structure is never going to be to admit that and deal with that. The incentive structure is to say nothing, to cover it up, to pretend it didn’t happen.”

Read The Guardian’s reporting on this today: “Outrage As U.S. Deports Makeup Artist To El Salvador Prison For Crown Tattoos”

This is horrific. Is there any plan in place to alert the authorities that they’ve made a horrible mistake and correct it? -J Rogan, 3/30/25

A DJ

Arturo Suárez-Trejo, 33, left his native Venezuela in 2018 and had settled in Chile. There he made music, friends and fans. Wanting to try his hand in the US and perhaps broaden his musical genre, he entered the US legally under the Biden administration's CBP One app. But the Trump administration dismantled it on its first day in office and, in the cruelest of sadistic twists, is now using it to expedite location and apprehension of those who used it.

Listen to or read a Threads interview with his uncle, Edgar Trejo, here.

Read (in Spanish) more about Arturo in a piece from 19-March in the Venezuelan El Estímulo

A cattle rancher

Originally from a rural Venezuelan town called Coloncito near the Colombian border, Wuilliam Lozada Sánchez had been living in Bogotá with his sister, Génesis Lozada Sánchez, following Venezuela's economic collapse. Wuilliam had saved up for the journey to the U.S. working at a clothing factory. When he finally reached the U.S. in January of 2024, he was apprehended. From detention he called a cousin in the U.S. on Friday, March 14 to say he was about to be deported back to Venezuela. Little did he know.

They tricked these guys into signing papers by telling them they were being sent to Venezuela. -Génesis Lozada Sánchez (Wuilliam's sister)

A designer

Frizgeralth de Jesús Cornejo Pulgar, 25, made the long journey through the infamous Darien Gap last year in June. He too used the Biden era CBP One app. His dream was to open a store in the US to merchandise the streetwear brand he had started in Venezuela. He crossed with 2 other friends who were allowed to enter. He, though, was apprehended because of the tattoos on his body. He had been detained ever since.

Like Suárez and Alvardo, Frizgeralth had no criminal record in Venezuela— nor any known criminal history in the U.S. And there was no final deportation order. During his preliminary court hearings, the U.S. government never claimed or presented any evidence of ties to TdA. "He was doing everything he was supposed to do," his attorney, Joseph Giardina, explained. "He got vetted and checked when he entered the country. He was in detention the entire time. It's insanity."

Henrry Albornoz Quintero (Wapo story at this link)

A Salt Lake City delivery man (Capital & Main story at this link; The Marshall Project (Beyond

Borders) at this link)

Alirio Guillermo

Kilmar Abrego García

A Salvadoran man who came to the U.S. in 2011 fleeing violence. A U.S. immigration court ruled that he could not return to El Salvador because he risked being tortured (again) there. He has a wife and daughter in the U.S. who are both U.S. citizens. On Sunday night he was taken to CECOT. The administration's response? "Oopsie."

A mason turned car washer

There are differing accounts of the trajectory of Lainerke Daniel Manzo Lovera, from Venezuela's famous north coast oil town, Maracaibo. The Mother Jones reporting says that he entered the U.S. in October and had been in detention, first in San Diego, then in Arizona, ever since. But a March 29 piece in El Estímulo says that he arrived in the U.S. as a minor, 17 (which would be sometime in 2022 or 2023, as he was born on October 31, 2005). Upon entry to the U.S. he surrendered to immigration officials and was detained in a juvenile facility until he turned 18— at which point he was released. He immediately applied for asylum and a work permit, which he finally received in February of 2024.

Everything seemed to be progressing without incident until November 7, 2024 when, spotting his tattoos, an ICE official detained him. (His tattoos are the names of his nieces.) His initial immigration hearing was scheduled for March 26. On March 14, his girlfriend received a call from ICE saying that a deportation flight to Venezuela had been canceled "due to bad weather" (the same story other families received that day). She immediately suspected subterfuge because of his March 26 court date. On Saturday, March 15, he called his sister to tell her he was being deported— either to Venezuela or to Mexico, he wasn't sure. "My son went to look for a better future, the American Dream," his mother Eglee Xiomara says in a video (link to Facebook video). His six-month old daughter (in the U.S.) has never seen him.

> My son went to look for a better future, the American Dream. That was the worst decision he ever made in his life. -Lainerke Daniel Manzo Lovera's mother

There are more, of course, and I will try to add them in over the next few days. There were apparently 23 Salvadoran nationals on the planes— as well as 8 women. The women were sent back to Texas, it has been reported, because the notorious CECOT prison facility ("Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo") only takes men.

(Seventeen additional immigrants were sent to CECOT overnight 30-31 March, from Guantánamo (see AP,see BBC, see Wapo, see The Nation) It has been reported that 10 were Salvadoran nationals; and 7, Venezuelan.)

The videos of their spouses and parents and brothers & sisters are almost too heart-breaking to watch for long.

And despite the performative (Kara Swisher's favorite word, it seems; watch her with EK here or read her fun book) nature of these intentionally scary & cruel, made-for-TV deportations, team Trump is actually way behind team Biden in terms of numbers— monthly averages of 37,000 vs. 57,000— and he's reportedly not happy about it.

(I heard for the first time the phrase performative cruelty just yesterday. I think maybe from Bill Kristol.)

> It makes me uncomfortable when we focus on those 'mistakenly' [sent to CECOT] when in fact every single person on those planes was denied due process and is now confined to this prison, indefinitely. -Masha Gessen, NYT, 04 April

A centerpiece of Bukele's brutal anti-gang crackdown, CECOT is known for due process violations and extreme confinement conditions. Last year, CNN obtained rare access to the remote prison, which can hold up to 40,000 people. The network found prisoners living in crowded cells with metal beds that had no mattresses or sheets, an open toilet, and a cement basin. Visitation and time outdoors are not allowed. A photographer who was allowed into the prison as the Venezuelans arrived last month wrote for Time magazine that he witnessed them being beaten, humiliated and stripped naked.

Maybe we don't have the strength or resources to be protesting at Columbia (and Columbia) and Brown and in Ithaca and at Georgetown and Tufts and UAB and the DOJ and DHS and 1600 PA all at the same time, but can we at least take a moment EACH DAY to think of these people? Or check in on their status. Or heck, join (or initiate) the next protest in your town. Call your Congressperson, your Senator— daily or at least weekly— and friendly but firmly request updates & action.

After a weekend of protests that kind of reminded me of Ron Goldberg's description (from his hard to put down & oh, so thorough (& funny), "Boy With The Bullhorn") of ACT UP/New York's "Wall

Street II“ rush-hour protest (March 1988), Washington state’s Pramila Jayapal has gotten into the Civil Disobedience training game. ”Resistance Lab" debuted, gosh, I’m not sure when, sounds like March 20-ish. I just learned of it and think it’s super cool. They had to close the participant list the first day— when it exceeded 850. And just this past weekend, Rep. Jayapal et cie held a second Resistance Lab training. This time over 1,500 people showed up— not just from her district, not just from Washington— but from 31 states. “Act up! Fight back! Fight authoritarianism!”

www.usa.gov/elected-officials

Time magazine updated its page yesterday, “These Are the Students Targeted Over Campus Activism.” The Times published, “What We Know About the Detention of Student Protesters”

1. So far unnamed University of Minnesota grad student (taken 27-Mar)
2. Alireza Doroudi, University of Alabama, Birmingham (abducted 25-Mar)
3. Rumeysa Ozturk, Tufts (abducted 25-Mar)
4. Yunseo Chung, Columbia (filed pre-emptive TRO)
5. Badar Khan Suri, Georgetown (abducted 17-Mar)
6. Momodou Taal, Cornell (14-Mar) (news Monday, 01-April, that he decided to leave the U.S., and has done so)
7. Leqaa Kordia, Columbia (abducted 14-Mar)
8. Rasha Alawieh, Brown (detained 13-Mar and deported the following day despite judge’s order)
9. Mahmoud Khalil, Columbia (abducted 8-Mar)
10. Ranjani Srinivasan, Columbia (got outta Dodge, 7-Mar) (and is in Canada)

And they are taken to Louisiana (or Texas or Mississippi) detention centers, so-called "Detention Alley," (even in the face of judges’ orders not to move them) both because judges in these parts (the Fifth Circuit) have proven sympathetic to the MAGA crowd and because it makes it more difficult for them to have regular contact with legal representation, family and community at large.

Read the WJS’s piece today, “Inside Columbia Student Mahmoud Khali’s ICE Detention Center,” at this link.

Prisoners at the Central Louisiana ICE Processing Center, where Mahmoud is being held, can sign up for volunteer work shifts that pay $1 a day– funds that can be used, it is said, to buy food from an onsite store.

A 2024 report (link to .pdf), “Inside the Black Hole: Systematic Human Rights Abuses Against

Immigrants Detained and Disappeared In Louisiana," evaluating conditions at the for-profit (GEO Group) prison noted that the food is highly processed and regularly spoiled. Mahmoud's wife reported that he is encountering inconsistent provision of necessary medication.

Here are the links I used yesterday and today to read about these folks. May they soon be freed unharmed, reunited with their loved ones & communities, and compensated for the horrors they have been subjected to. (And as my new BFF Tim Miller suggested, apprehend & lock up all those responsible.)

Epilogue slash updates:

April 10-11 update: The past week brought a handful of procedural and frankly disappointing rulings that it took me until yesterday to really begin to wrap my mind around. The most helpful explanation of this I found via a conversation (around 19:25 at this link) between the Bulwark's Tim Miller and Andrew Weissmann, from his weekend home in Columbia county, New York, it seems.While Weissmann seemed to think that everything was working its way through the courts and would be resolved; specifically, that the "class action" case in a Boston court (from whence 2 of the Venezuelan men on those March 15 planes had originated-- and who had been removed at the last minute because of a call from their attorney(s)) included all 298 or so plaintiffs. And that, according to Weissmann, any cases originating from CECOT (or anywhere outside the United States and its territories) itself would, by law, be heard at the D.C. District Court.

Cecilia Vega, for CBS, did terrific if heart-wrenching reporting on this last Sunday night for 60 Minutes (link to video segment). (Results of CBS's analysis? 80% or more of those sent to CECOT have neither criminal records in the U.S. nor criminal records in their home countries. And what of the 20% or so that might have past violations? Most of those were for shoplifting— at a Chicago-area Macy's!) And Miller reprised and commented on bits of it (link) the next day. (Thank you again, TM. I would have completely missed Cecilia's piece on Sunday had it not been for you.) CBS deserves a Pulitzer for their reporting on this. But let's get these guys out before we start handing out prizes.

Update: On Tuesday, April 22, the show's executive producer for 26 years, Bill Owens, was forced out. Here is how his team treated the announcement on their Sunday broadcast (link to video tribute

And while it seemed like good news, or at least a beginning of fixing this cruel and massive fuck-up, last evening around 7 pm or so EST, when the Supreme Court ruled that the Maryland man abducted from an IKEA parking lot with his son and sent to CECOT must be returned to the U.S., follow-up reporting (again, Alan Feuer; thank you, Alan) on that today (3 pm Friday, EST) notes that the wording of their decision, to "facilitate and effectuate" his return, gives the administration an easy out. More exciting yet, at around 7 pm or so last night, the Supreme Court ruled in a unanimous decision that Kilmar Abrego García must be returned to the US immediately. And so we are more or less back where we started. Judge Paula Xinis continues to fight. But Kilmar is still in that terrorist mega-prison. And so are 245 or so innocent Venezuelan men (and 33 or so innocent

Salvadorians), the vast majority of whom had come to this country to make a better life for their families.

Potus will be hosting the likewise thuggish Salvadoran head of state, Nayib Bukele, at 1600 Penn on Monday, April 14th. Will he bring Kilmar with him at that time?

5pm, Friday (April 4): U.S. District Judge Paula Xinis ordered the T administration to return Kilmar Abrego García (the Salvadoran national, in the U.S. on Protected Status, married to a U.S. citizen, whom they pulled out of an IKEA parking lot, away from his 5-year old autistic son, also a U.S. citizen) back to the U.S.— by 11:59 pm EST Monday, April 7. The administration's response? "We will appeal."

07-April update: The administration's appeal went nowhere (link to .pdf of US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit's unanimous decision). Today they asked the Supreme Court to block the order for Mr. Abrego García's return. Read the NYT's account here.

07-April update: At around 5 pm Monday, Chief Justice John Roberts declined to support the unanimous appellate decision and instead asked "for more time." There is no nuance or lack of clarity here. This is simply shameful.

04-April update: In a Thursday hearing, reported on by the New York Times' Alan Feuer, Judge Boasberg concluded that there appeared to be a "fair likelihood" that his order had been ignored. He decided to wait until next week, while his team conducts a bit more in-depth fact-finding, to rule on whether or not this action/inaction constitutes contempt, "teeing up," as Feuer writes, a showdown at the nation's top court.

01-April update: In a court filing (link to .pdf), attorneys for the U.S. government admitted that Kilmar Abrego García, a Salvadoran national, had been deported to the CECOT gulag "because of an administrative error," but they have said nothing about the tens if not hundreds of others mistakenly abducted. So far people working around the clock to identify those caught up in this horrid & despicable dragnet have found only a handful with criminal charges or any discernible "gang membership."

29-March update: Prominent T supporter and mega-influential podcast host Joe Rogan publicly breaks with the Administration over the illegal and clandestine "deportation" flights, saying, "You gotta get scared when people who are not criminals are getting lassoed up sent to El Salvador prisons. It's horrific."

Tuesday's DOJ appeal was denied (2-1), but that very same day a Turkish national was swept up at Tufts University, as was an Iranian national, Alireza Dorourdi, a doctoral student at UAB; so the extra-judicial abductions continue. Rumeysa Ozturk, the Tufts student, was spirited away, yesterday it appears, to a Louisiana detention center despite a judge's order that she not be moved from the State of Massachusetts.

While I had initially understood that Boesberg had given the defendants (DJT et al.) until Monday,

March 31 to provide detailed information on the flights (and what occurred on them), it now seems that he gave the plaintiffs (J.G.G. et al.) the 3/31 deadline to “respond” to the government’s invocation of “state secrets privilege” in order to refuse to provide this information. So it doesn’t appear any of these folks are going to be released any time soon.

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Mike Barr, a longtime Poz Contributing Editor and founding member of and scribe for the Treatment Action Group (TAG), is a functional medicine practitioner and herbalist in NYC. Reach out to him here. Or sign up for his curated (and wildly discounted: 30% off first order; 25% off all auto-refills) professional grade supplement dispensary here.

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