

In Plain Sight: Race, Security, and the Urbanization of Border Violence

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ABSTRACT

This essay analyzes the current escalation of border violence in the United States under Donald Trump's second presidency. While Trump's immigration policies and discourses are widely portrayed as exceptional, I argue that the current dynamics of immigration enforcement in the US are better understood as a combination of continuity and rupture. The essay starts by uncovering the racial and (settler) colonial origins of border security in the US, showing how borders have been, since their inception, designed to enforce racial order. In doing so, it shows how Trump's reliance on racialized panics and border practices are not entirely "novel" but part of a much longer immigration history marked by racial anxieties. At the same time, the essay identifies a central shift: the increasing interiorization and visibility of border violence within urban spaces. This "border violence in plain sight" transforms the locus of border enforcement and how it is experienced, normalized, and contested.

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Introduction

Since the beginning of President Trump's second mandate, there has been an escalation in the violent conduct of immigration enforcement in the United States (US). Fueled by far-right rhetoric and moral panics around criminality, sexual threat, and public safety, Trump's government has not only increased public spending on agencies like US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) but also extended their powers and reach. ICE has been at the forefront of a concerted project of capture, incarceration, and deportation of so-called "illegal aliens"; a process that has affected the lives of thousands of Global South migrants—and citizens—in recent years, most of them of Latin American origins (Ong et al. 2025).

Trump's highly militarized immigration crackdown has rendered the oft "silent"—albeit habitual—violence of immigration enforcement in the US more visible and spectacularized. This process stems not only from the presidency's use of official social media accounts and websites to publicize ICE and CBP operations, but also from the increasing frequency of highly visible enforcement actions in major US cities such as Chicago, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles. As a result, border violence—often imagined as confined to territorial borders or their proximities—increasingly appears as part of the American urban experience.

The expansion of militarized immigration violence raises important questions about the trajectory of the US immigration project and opposition to it: how should we make sense of what is happening in the US? Should we understand this process of interiorization of border violence as a moment of rupture with the past? In other words, is this a moment of exception or continuity? And crucially, what political work does this modality of border violence engender?

Trumpism and its immigration policies and discourses are routinely portrayed—by parts of the media, their supporters, as well as their critics—as exceptional. Yet, as this paper discusses, what the US has witnessed over the past two years is a process of "interiorization" of border violence, whereby logics of surveillance, militarization, and punishment are reproduced "in plain sight" within domestic space. In this paper, I call this process of interiorization of border violence in the urban space "border violence in plain sight," a process whereby border security practices of violence become not only urbanized but also openly glorified.

To grapple with these questions, this essay argues that we must first interrogate and reassess the role of borders and, more specifically, border violence itself. This line of

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questioning requires taking a step back to consider the racial and (settler) colonial histories that underpin the discourses and practices constituting U.S. border security. Historically, border violence in the US—and across much of the Global North—has functioned not merely as a tool to defend territorial sovereignty, but as a mechanism to delimit, (re)make, and police racialized lines of belonging. Seen in this light, what is happening in the US today is best understood as both continuity *and* rupture. On the one hand, Trump's escalating violence against Global South migrants is not exceptional, but rather a rearticulation and intensification of a longer racial-colonial logic that mobilizes border mechanisms to secure the nation-state as an imagined white political and social entity. On the other hand, "border violence in plain sight" is novel and not only transforms *where* border security logic operates, but also how it is instituted, experienced, and resisted.

Race and Border Violence in the United States: A Historical Perspective

There is a generalized sense that Trump's contemporary immigration crackdown constitutes a moment of rupture in U.S. history. Trumpism's overt glorification of border violence against the so-called "illegal aliens," he frequently casts as criminals, drug dealers, and/or sexually deviant, as well as the increasing visibility of border violence in urban spaces, contributes to the perception that there is something novel about how immigration enforcement operates. Concomitantly, there appears to be a growing realization amongst scholars and the public that this process of interiorization of border violence operates in profoundly racialized ways. This perception stems not only from Trumpism's implicit—and often explicit—racialized rhetoric, but also from the increasing deployment of racial profiling, violent persecution, and mass round up of non-white migrants and citizens in public spaces. Considering this, our first question should be: is this growing nexus between border security and race in the US indeed something novel or different?

The idea that there is something exceptional in the racialized nature of border violence in the US likely connects to the fact that borders and border security have been historically understood as matters of national sovereignty rather than racialized domestic policy. It is commonsensical that border security is, before anything else, an essential tool to protect state sovereignty and reinforce territorial control. Few people would disagree with the notion that nation-states should have some form of security mechanism to protect their borders, controlling who and what enters and leaves the country. Indeed, policy discourse often frames exercises of border violence and immigration enforcement as, first and foremost, necessary and unavoidable, inherent to the process of protecting, enforcing, or restoring sovereignty.

President Donald Trump's remarks on a purported "migrant crisis," for instance, have been continuously permeated by this intuitive connection between border security and

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sovereignty. As early as 2018, he remarked that his plans to “halt the dangerous influx” and “invasion” of people, as the “only way to ensure the endurance of our nation as a sovereign country” (Trump 2018). His comments about US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)’s actions embody this same logic. Defending ICE agents against widespread criticism, Trump reiterated consistently that ICE agents should be seen as “patriots” and “heroes” responsible for protecting the nation’s borders and sovereignty (Llorente 2018). In another speech, Trump suggests that there could be no sovereign US without ICE forces. This, of course, is not unique to Trump’s or Republican rhetoric. Quite the contrary, despite differences in how “fiercely” border security and immigration should operate, border security and immigration enforcement has been historically framed as an essential tool to protect the state’s sovereignty, with racist applications often dismissed as an unavoidable byproduct, secondary to the value of border security.

This overemphasis on sovereignty has also been commonplace in International Relations (IR) scholarship. Historically, IR scholars have theorized dynamics of border security as essentially a response to sovereignty “anxieties.” These models frame border security as an inescapable reality, a product of a Westphalian international order wherein states are required to constantly delimit their “inside” from an (often threatening) “outside” (Walker 1993). Drawing on authors like Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, critical scholars have also shown that border security operates as a tool that allows states to both delineate and protect who and what belongs inside the state from what is, in turn, external to it (Aradau and Tazzioli 2020; Davitti 2018; Dines et al. 2015). More simply put, borders and border security are understood as instruments used to protect the limits of the territory while also producing and reinforcing identity lines between the “citizen” and its threatening and/or undeserving “others” (Topak 2014; Vaughan-Williams 2009).

This framework has led to the portrayal of immigration enforcement as almost “benign,” framing border security not simply as a matter of guarding of the physical border from illegal entry, but one requiring a much broader arrangement of infrastructures, practices, and legal systems designed to delimit, protect, and regulate borders. But is this all there is to border security? Can we really limit border security to a sovereign desire to police and reinforce sovereignty? The origins of immigration enforcement and security infrastructures at U.S. borders and beyond paint a different picture—one where race is not of secondary importance but indeed foundational.

U.S. border and immigration mechanisms first appeared in the second half of the 19th century as a reaction to increased immigration of Indian and Chinese people. Often under indenture contracts, Indian and Chinese migrants were quickly cast as a racial threat to the white U.S. population. While essential to an economic system that sought to replace Black enslaved labor with a new “free” workforce, such immigrants were consistently portrayed as “unhygienic,” as “vectors of disease,” and as cultural and even sexual threats—a menace to racial purity (Lee 2007). This incipient process of controlling immigration in the US resembles what Stanley Cohen calls “moral panics”:

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the discursive production of a certain group of people as a threat to cultural and societal values (Cohen 2011). More specifically, U.S. nascent border politics emerged as a response to *racial* panics, that is, the construction of certain racial identities as societal menaces.

Restrictive immigration laws, for instance, were firstly instituted in the Page Act of 1875, which overtly targeted “undesirable” East Asian migrants, especially Chinese people, widely perceived as a moral threat. The act’s aim was to bar the immigration of “coolies” (contract laborers) and Chinese female migrants portrayed as prostitutes. In practice, however, the act was more extensive: beyond targeting “unfree” immigration (contract laborers), the Page Act of 1875 targeted any single woman coming from China, even in the absence of clear proof that they were prostitutes. This policy was based on racist fears that Chinese women would eventually marry white men and raise families, thereby disrupting white households’ purported racial purity. Subsequently, in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act intensified this process by entirely banning Chinese laborers from entering the US, basing this decision on the understanding that their presence was a danger to the “good order” (National Archives 2021).

This centrality of race in dynamics of mobility control are reflected starkly in the history of US border security infrastructure and violence. For instance, the United States Border Patrol, founded in 1924, has a long and sustained history of racial violence (Porotsky 2021). The creation of the Border Patrol through the Labor Appropriation Act of 1924 followed the Immigration Act of the same year, whose new strict national-origins quotas were explicitly shaped by racialized demographic fears around the potential extinction of whiteness in the U.S due to the rise in the number of non-white immigrants (Yuill 2014; Stern 2022). This is not to say that the creation of the Border Patrol marked the first use of violence to police borders against racialized aliens. Violent dynamics of border patrolling, migrant interceptions, and immigration inspection, were already part of the US incipient bordering apparatus, targeting specifically Chinese and Mexican migrants. The creation of the Border Patrol, however, allowed the consolidation and institutionalization of a longer process of racial governance and securitization already underway at the U.S. borders.

Here, it is important to note that, in order to carry out and extend this racial work of vigilance and policing, the Border Patrol recruited from white supremacist organizations directly involved in racial brutality against Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic populations, such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Texas Rangers (American Immigration Council 2021). This recruitment proved central to the consolidation of the agency’s culture of racial violence, specifically at the southern border, where the use of racial profiling became deeply embedded in its modus operandi, effectively dictating who should be the target of border violence.

Historically, the Border Patrol has been charged with using violence to enforce the state’s mandate of protecting its citizens against racialized “aliens,” effectively

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institutionalizing violence as a state method to handle racial anxieties around co-existence. During the Second World War, Border Patrol agents were used to transport Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans to internment camps, where many agents also served as guards, leading presidents Clinton and Obama to apologize for this violent episode decades later (Michaelsen 2005). The link between racial violence and the Border Patrol becomes even more visible with the increasing othering of Latino communities and immigrants in the United States throughout the 20th century. This process intensified during the 1960s and 1970s, when the figure of the Latino immigrant was turned into a central “racial alien” against which the figure of the white citizen was defined. From this moment onwards, the image of the Latino immigrant became permeated by notions of otherness and threat, continually portrayed as “illegal, criminal, and culturally and intellectually deficient” as well as “public resource drainers and, ultimately, a threat to White hegemony” (Canizales and Vallejo 2021, 153). Latino migrants have consistently been at the forefront of Border Patrol operations since then, with the agency targeting bodies with an “apparent Mexican ancestry” or those deemed “Hispanic-looking” at the southern border.

Over the course of the 20th century, the agency expanded its policing and surveillance powers beyond the territorial borders. Having become an essential arm in the US “war on drugs” in the 1980s, the agency was increasingly militarized to intercept illegal drugs and apprehend undocumented immigrants. These new powers contributed to an unprecedented expansion of border violence and surveillance against non-white populations both at the southern border and within the interior. Beyond assisting other agencies in drug interdiction, Border Patrol agents were granted general arrest authority under federal law, that is, the power to stop, search, inspect, arrest, and detain individuals as well as seize their belongings. In practice, this authority provided the agency with a license to expand their presence in urban spaces far from the border, particularly in Latino communities. A central example is the use of 400 Border Patrol agents in 1992 in the crackdown on the Los Angeles riots, during which approximately 700 people from Latino communities were deported as part of policing efforts (American Immigration Council 2021).

With this context in mind, we ask: what is the role of borders and their attendant violence in the US? Are border security actors and infrastructures merely mechanisms for enforcing sovereign control over territory?

While borders and border security are often assumed to be inescapable expressions of sovereignty in the literature, the history of immigration enforcement tells a different story. The emergence of mechanisms of mobility control and border security in the US was, from the outset, embedded in racial anxieties. More than tools for managing territory, these mechanisms developed as instruments for protecting the nation-state from racialized threats and enforcing a particular vision of “good order.” Continually animated by racial panics around purity, sexual violence, and criminality, borders have functioned as a central mechanism for materializing an imaginary of the US as a white

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landscape—an imaginary that is rooted in settler colonial logics (Day 2016). Even as race officially disappeared from immigration legal parlance over the course of the 20th century, it remained a central and constitutive force animating migration politics in the US (see Day 2016; Sharma 2020).

U.S. border violence, in sum, has historically operated to delimit the racial lines of the state, legitimizing and reproducing a structure that constructs whiteness as the true “native.” The fact that border violence has been consistently directed against non-white populations is not incidental. Rather it reflects the very functioning of an immigration infrastructure that works continually to “settle” whiteness; a central mechanism for mobilizing white nationalism. US borders, therefore, have been shaped not only by a desire to police territorial limits, but by a deeper project of policing racial ones (Rosenberg 2022).

As the next section suggests, recognizing this historical relationship between race and the border is crucial for framing Trump’s current immigration crackdown as a continuation, rather than an exception.. Rather than a historical “anomaly,” it is deeply steeped in a much longer trajectory of racial violence and settler colonial politics that has found a permanent home in US immigration and border systems and infrastructures.

Continuity? On Trumpism and Border Violence

The Trump administration’s process of interiorization of border violence against non-white bodies might appear at first glance novel; however, as discussed, it relies on longstanding racialized discourses and practices that have been historically entwined with the operations of bordering in the US. This section approaches the current escalation of border violence in the US through the logic of continuity. In other words, I look at border violence under Trump’s second mandate not as an exceptional moment but as a momentary radicalization: an inflection of violence within a border security infrastructure historically animated by racial anxieties and an implicit desire to preserve the imaginary of a white state landscape.

First, and most visibly, President Trump’s increasing instrumentalization of border violence does not necessarily constitute a departure from previous administrations’ immigration policies, but rather their extension. Since 9/11, border security agencies in the US have amassed increasing power and budgets. This growing prominence has been coterminous with a surge in border violence against racialized bodies on and beyond the border. Border Patrol, incorporated into US Customs and Border Protection in 2003, alongside ICE, has been repeatedly accused of human rights violations and excessive brutality over the past decades. Myriad cases of beatings, killings, torture, sexual violence, and forced incarceration have been documented. Among the more widely documented practices are the use of “ice boxes,” in which racialized migrants are

placed in extremely cold rooms, and the detention of children, separating them from their families (Pilkington 2015). Beyond direct physical violence, border forces have also been accused of systematically confiscating and destroying migrants' property and documents—including religious items—thereby placing migrants in an even more vulnerable position (Owen 2022). The extension of border violence towards the urban space under Trump, thus, cannot be separated from this continuous process of securitization of U.S. borders; a process that, as the previous section has shown, has historically relied on the institutionalization of racial violence.

The second dimension of this process lies in the continual revival of racial panics as a discursive mechanism to legitimate and expand the militarization of border violence in the US. The official Homeland Security website now reports on an almost daily basis ICE arrests of so-called “illegal aliens” across the country. Here, language and aesthetics play an essential role in constructing an association between racial difference, aliens, and threatening ideas of criminality, sexual perversion, drug infestation, and violence. On March 20, 2026, for instance, the headline read, “ICE Arrests Murderers, Pedophiles, Rapists, and Other Depraved Criminals”(Homeland Security 2026a). Similarly, on April 28, 2026, another headline read , “Over the Weekend, ICE Arrests Multiple Pedophiles, Violent Assailants, and Other Public Safety Threats” (Homeland Security 2026b). These reports are routinely accompanied by headshots of non-white men with Hispanic, Asian, or African names who were arrested during the operations. The attempt to connect racialized immigration with criminality is also commonly found in President Trump's and political associates' online posts and public speeches, where Global South immigrants have been associated with “garbage,” “drug trafficking,” “lawlessness,” and “criminality” (Leingang 2025).

In the US today, we see the intensification of racialized moral panics surrounding non-white communities and, more broadly, Global South migrants, positioning specifically Latino and Black people as threats to whiteness. This, of course, is not new. As the previous section has shown, racial panics have been central to immigration enforcement since its inception, serving as one of its main animating logics. Trumpism's aggressive manipulation of racial panics, including implicit fears over “white replacement” in the US, are not exclusive to Trump's government nor a new trend in migration security (Joffe-Block 2024). It represents a more overt, less masked—or “unmasked”—form of white nationalism.

Third, and related, Trump's violent immigration crackdown is also grounded in a rhetoric of “cleaning” and “sanitizing” the country, which operates as a metaphor for his fight against migrant criminality (Kanno-Youngs 2025; Allison and George 2025). In practice, however, the rhetoric around dirtiness operates as a code for people of color, who are associated with the notions of “racial impurity.” Echoing eugenicist projects of the past, Trump's cleaning politics can be divided into three parts: 1) detecting “foreign” and “threatening” bodies, often through racial profiling; 2) separating them from the social “corpus” through forced detention and other forms of incarceration; and 3) eliminating

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or expelling these bodies, most often through deportations. Once again, the implicit concern with purity comes from a longer settler colonial imaginary that associates nativeness in the US with whiteness and that, by association, treats non-white bodies as suspicious or “out of place.” The recurring association of immigrants with “diseases,” “parasites,” “viruses,” etc. that threaten the nation, Sang Hea Kil argues, “helps to discursively hide the historical re-articulation of racist logics in a contemporary, color-blind manner” (Kil 2014, 185). As the previous section showed, associations between non-white migrants - and citizens - and criminality, sexual deviance, dirtiness, and public safety threats have been commonplace throughout U.S. history.

In this sense, neither this imaginary nor the border security practices associated with it are new. The concern with expunging the country of racial impurity through violent practices of detention and elimination has a much longer history in the US, where whiteness has not only been conflated with the idea of nation but also historically constructed as “pure” (Berthold 2010; Kil 2014). The “one-drop-rule,” established in the 17th century and codified into law in the 20th century embodies this logic of racial purity by establishing that one “drop” of “Black” blood was enough to consider someone Black. In other words, any Black ancestry was enough to classify someone as Black regardless of their phenotypes. As Kil explains, this construction of non-whiteness as a pollution, dirt, or a parasitic entity that threatens the purity of whiteness has been central to U.S. nativist discourses much before Trumpism, producing “racial tensions, anxieties and nightmares about borders and crossings” (Kil, 2014: 177). As Trump explained in September 2025 when addressing his fight against illegal immigration: “We’re going to clean them up so they don’t kill five people every weekend. That’s not war, that’s common sense.”

Trump’s immigration crackdown reflects not only rupture but also continuity. It relies on the rearticulation of longstanding racial panics surrounding purity, criminality, sexual threat, and violence, continually casting the nation as under siege by a racialized “other.” In this context, the state’s increasingly violent campaigns of detection, detention, and deportation appear less as deviations than as intensified responses to enduring and pervasive racial anxieties. The militarization of immigration enforcement in American cities can therefore be read as the latest chapter in a longer settler colonial history in which borders function to enforce a racial order centered on whiteness. Border violence, once again, emerges not simply as a response to territorial concerns, but as a mechanism to police racialized boundaries of belonging.

Beyond Continuity? Border Violence in Plain Sight

Despite these continuities, it is hard to deny that Trumpism’s immigration crackdown and its attendant border violence still seem—or at least *feel*—different. The novelty lies less in the revival of racial panics and more in how and where border violence is exercised, and in the effects it produces. This moment of rupture is tied to the

interiorization of immigration strategy, increasingly focused on the visibility and spectacle of border violence in urban space—what I call “border violence in plain sight.” In this process, bordering becomes both urbanized and more openly glorified.

In this configuration, the city itself becomes an extension of the border: a place of vigilance where racial lines of belonging are continuously policed and enforced. This process of internalizing borders is not new. As IR scholars and political geographers have long argued, dynamics of bordering are not limited to the physical space of the border. The practice of bordering often exceeds the territorial limits of the state, extending both beyond and within its formal frontiers. Yet, the internalization of militarized border violence in the US does point to something distinctive in its approach to urban space. What is different here is less that borders are internalized and more the fact that overt and militarized dynamics of border violence are now increasingly experienced in the urban space and in full public view. Essentially, many of the ugliest aspects of immigration enforcement—frequently hidden from the public—are now being openly transposed to major U.S. cities, reshaping how people live their lives.

The central shift, therefore, is not border violence itself nor the racialized anxieties surrounding it, but the current effort to bring violence into urban space and public view. Border violence, once largely confined to relatively hidden spaces—the physical border, detention sites, and other marginal zones—is now increasingly visible and, at times, overtly celebrated. Border violence has itself become a “spectacle,” part of a grandiose gesture of exclusion “in which the purported naturalness and putative necessity of exclusion may be demonstrated and verified, validated and legitimated, redundantly” (De Genova 2013, 1181). U.S. borders have been violent before; what appears different is the apparent effort to bring this violence into public view, transforming it into a public and increasingly urban spectacle. The growing number of ICE operations in city streets marked by racial profiling, street-level arrests, highly visible raids, and checkpoints points to a mode of bordering that foregrounds visibility within urban space. Schools, hospitals, neighborhoods, and even airports have become sites of enforcement, where masked agents in tactical gear—or at times plain clothes—carry out operations in full public view.

This spectacularization is further amplified through the government’s overt glorification of border violence. Trump, his allies, and official governmental accounts routinely share and celebrate images and videos of arrests online, presenting them as evidence of governmental effectiveness and as proof that the government is indeed “cleaning” the streets. The message, increasingly, is that border violence is not something to be concealed or justified reluctantly, but affirmed and even—sadistically—enjoyed. Trump’s recent endorsement of rebranding ICE agents as “NICE” agents illustrate this attitude towards border violence as something to be celebrated rather than concealed (Olmsted 2026). Within this increasingly unmasked white nationalism, border violence is repackaged as something one should not be “embarrassed” about and therefore

something that no longer needs to be hidden. It becomes a performance to be undertaken “in the open,” one intended to be collectively enjoyed.

From Border Violence to Cross-Race Solidarity

One reason why this shift towards border violence in plain sight “feels” different is that the wider public—not only migrants at the border—is now positioned as both witness and potential target of border violence. Militarized border security, often imagined as a far-away issue, is now both immediate and tangible. Immigration violence, of course, continues to disproportionately affect non-white populations, who remain the primary targets of enforcement (Ong et al. 2025). However, Trump has also justified extending border violence to those who resist or seek to obstruct it, making use of ICE’s legal powers to stop and arrest people—including citizens—who are suspected of “impeding” or “obstructing” an enforcement operation. This shift becomes clear when one looks at ICE’s violent responses to public outcry and demonstrations, where not even white citizens were spared from the militarized violence of the US borders. The death of two white citizens—Renée Good and Alex Jeffrey Pretti—in the first months of 2026 illustrates this process. Good and Pretti were shot dead by ICE agents in Minneapolis under questionable circumstances, with video evidence fueling nationwide outrage in both cases (Hellmann 2026). The killing of white unarmed American citizens in a city such as Minneapolis, illustrates how border violence is no longer confined to its “traditional” targets but increasingly spills over into broader society.

The urbanization and spectacularization of immigration enforcement have generated resistance and new forms of solidarity, which create a significant challenge. For this racial project to be sustained, border violence must become even more generalized, touching not only the customary non-white bodies but also anyone who stands in its way, including white citizens. As border violence becomes more generalized—extending beyond its customary targets to anyone who resists it—it risks producing solidarities that cut across racial lines. In big metropolises like Chicago and Los Angeles, for instance, Black and Latino grassroots organizations have openly joined forces and formed coalitions to protest and resist ICE’s violent immigration crackdowns in their neighborhoods (Evans and Macías Jr 2025). In Minneapolis, during the ICE “occupation” of the city, cross-racial community networks mobilized to protect those who were most vulnerable. Restaurants with undocumented workers put up signs that said, “this is a private area, you can only come here with a warrant” while other restaurants announced they would give food away to the local community and rely on donations to survive. Parents organized groups to patrol drop-offs and pick-ups at school, after they realized that ICE agents began waiting at bus stops to detain parents when they were collecting their children (Mohdin 2026).

These episodes expose a central tension at the heart of the process of interiorizing border violence. By making border violence more urban and executing this racial project

in the open—across neighborhood lines; in the city centers; and with extraordinary military measures and cruelty—Trump’s administration has also exposed it to heightened public scrutiny. Borders rely on brutal forms of racial violence, which are much more palatable when it is invisible; when it can persist under some form of plausible deniability. This is why state-sponsored racial violence often functions more effectively when hidden from public view. Trump’s approach, in other words, may be inadvertently generating the outcome it seeks to prevent: a collective opposition not only to border enforcement, but to the very racial imaginaries that underpin it.

Conclusion

This essay argues that bordering is not simply a tool to protect territorial sovereignty, but a historical instrument to enforce racial order. In the US, border violence has long been animated by racial anxieties and mobilized to reinscribe a settler colonial order centered on whiteness. In this context, it is important to reiterate that Trump’s crackdown is not only a rupture with the past but also a continuation of racial panics and settler colonial imaginaries that long predate his government.

What Trump’s immigration policies ultimately do differently, is transform the racialized violence of the border from something obscure into something publicly enacted and performed. The rupture brought about by Trump’s immigration crackdown, then, does not lie in the militarized or racialized logic of border enforcement, which remains deeply continuous, but in the visibility, scale, and spatial reach of its operations. Border violence is no longer relegated to the margins; it is enacted in the open, within urban life, and increasingly framed not only as legitimate, but as desirable. This shift produces heightened fear, particularly for those not immediately legible as white, but also renders the racial, illegal, and violent character of border violence more visible to a wider public and therefore more open to contestation.

Biographical Note

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