

Spring 2022

## The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote: Rehumanizing the Experiences of Immigrant Children During the Trump Administration

Jesuly M. Rosario  
Bard College, jo7678@bard.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj\\_s2022](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2022)

 Part of the [Latin American Studies Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

Rosario, Jesuly M., "The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote: Rehumanizing the Experiences of Immigrant Children During the Trump Administration" (2022). *Senior Projects Spring 2022*. 297.  
[https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj\\_s2022/297](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2022/297)

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2022 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@bard.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@bard.edu).

*The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote:*

Rehumanizing the Experiences of Immigrant Children During the Trump Administration

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Jesuly Mileidy Rosario

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2022



*Dedicado a las tres mujeres que me criaron:*

*Para mi mamá, Juana Rosario,  
gracias por ser mi luz e inspiración.*

*Para mi tía, Natacia Rosario,  
gracias por ser mi mejor animadora.*

*Para mi abuela, Melania Rosario,  
gracias por ser mi fortaleza.*

*Sin ustedes no sería la mujer  
en la que me estoy convirtiendo.*

*Las amo.*



## *Acknowledgments*

*To my professor, advisor, and mentor, Patricia López-Gay:*

Thank you for taking me under your wing and believing in me. Your fearlessness and work ethic inspired me to go out into the world and experience the beauty that is out there.

*To my advisor and professor, Miles Rodriguez:*

Thank you for being a phenomenal professor. The conversations you facilitated and the ambiance you created in class comforted me, especially during a time when I was experiencing impostor syndrome. You made me feel like I belong at Bard.

*To my Professor Nicole Caso:*

Thank you for being so supportive throughout this entire project. Your insight during my midway board inspired me to focus on the long term importance of this project.

*To my high school English teacher, Shareen Silva-Green:*

Thank you for believing in me before I could believe in myself. You are a gem and an inspiration. You continue to teach me the importance of making a difference in the world, no matter how big or small.

*To my College Persistence Advisors, Thiomarie Matta and Amanda Zayas:*

Thank you both for always checking up on me to make sure I was physically and mentally okay. You were both the “fairy godmothers” of my college career, exposing me to opportunities and mapping out my plans for the future.

*To my siblings, Frank, Meleni, Mileinys, and Erileinys:*

Thank you for supporting me and loving me unconditionally (like y’all have a choice). I am lucky to have been able to grow and continue to grow alongside all of you.

*Para mi tía Leonidas Rosario:*

Gracias por quererme y apoyarme como tu propia hija. Siempre me has motivado a seguir adelante y te agradezco por eso.

*To my girlies, Nike, Leslie, Bree, Manny, Khoa, and Sage:*

Thank you all for making my college experience memorable. I am blessed to have you all in my life. ¡Los quiero mucho!



## Table of Contents

Preface .....	1
Introduction .....	4
Chapter 1: Analysis of <i>The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote</i> .....	13
1.1. Still Waters in a Storm .....	15
1.2. Why is <i>Don Quixote</i> important to <i>Kid Quixote</i> ? .....	18
1.3. The Process of Writing <i>The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote</i> .....	23
1.4. What Effect Does a Musical Have on the Broader Context of <i>Kid Quixote</i> .....	27
Chapter 2: Dehumanization of Latino Child Immigrants during the Trump Era .....	30
2.1. Background: Journey to the United States .....	31
2.2. Donald Trump’s 2016 Campaign on Immigration in Arizona .....	36
2.3. The “Zero Tolerance” Policy and Family Separation .....	40
2.4. The Dehumanization of Latino Children: “Kids in Cages” .....	48
Chapter 3: How <i>The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote</i> Rehumanizes the Experiences of Children .....	52
3.1. The Story of Sarah Sierra .....	54
3.2. The “Rescuing Song” .....	56
3.3. “Prisoner’s Story” and The Letters .....	59
Afterword .....	65
Bibliography .....	68





## *Preface*

My interest in immigration began when I migrated to the United States from the Dominican Republic in 2005. At the time I was told that I would be visiting some family members in New York for a few months, but those two months ended up being 16 years. I came to this country with a permanent residency card or “green card” which meant that I had to provide extra documentation when traveling or applying for a school. It was not until I was 19 years old that I applied for my citizenship and no longer needed to show additional proof of my status in the United States.

The transition to American life was not an easy one. For one, I did not know the language. I remember being placed in an “English as a Second Language” (ESL) program where students who did not speak English were essentially separated from the rest of the English-speaking student body. In a sense, it was comforting to know that I was surrounded by students who spoke Spanish, but unlike many of them, I was “straight off the boat” which is a phrase that means I am a recent immigrant and I did not know the “New York culture.” It took longer for me to pronounce words correctly and I was often intimidated to speak in class. It was also difficult to make friends in my neighborhood because they already had their friend group. To be a child immigrant in this country is a lonely and intimidating experience.

There was one kid, however, who I felt comfortable speaking to in school because he was also a recent immigrant. He emigrated from Honduras to the US when he was five years old with his seven-year-old sister. His story was a little different than mine, however. Instead of flying here, he crossed the United States-Mexico Border and entered this country on foot with a group

of strangers. He overcame many obstacles to be able to sit across from me in a second-grade classroom of Public School 46.

The experiences of immigrant children should not be ignored. Their thoughts and emotions go unnoticed because they are both children and non-citizens. It is not until they are adults and citizens that their voices matter because they would directly impact legislation. Immigrant children deserve to have a platform to voice their opinions safely without compromising their future in the States.

On February 17, 2020, I had the pleasure of meeting the children of Still Waters in a Storm, a one-room reading and writing schoolhouse for immigrant students ages 5 to 17 located in Bushwick Brooklyn. At the time, the children finished the first part of their ongoing project *The Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*, and were invited to perform their musical play at Bard College. I was a tour guide at the time and was asked to give the children a tour of the campus before their performance. I was honored to show them around because I knew the importance of exposing immigrant children to higher education, especially during Trump's presidential term. They were all extraordinarily engaged in the tour. I was witnessing the next generation of exceptional first-generation college students. Later on that day, I walked over to Resnick Dance Studio at the Fisher Performing Arts Center to watch the children perform. It was truly a breathtaking show. *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* spoke to my inner child by teleporting me back to elementary school when my friend and I spoke about our dreams of saving kids from the perils of traveling alone to this country. I could not believe that 12 years later there was going to be a written archive of immigrant children voicing their opinions about social causes that affected their community. I saw myself in these children. It was at this moment

that I knew I needed to explore *Kid Quixote* and analyze the power of this project in a transnational scope. This was going to be my senior project.

My friend and I's experience growing up as immigrant children in the US, our desire to have our voices listened to, and *Kid Quixote* influenced this project. The children of Still Waters in a Storm are transcending the presence of Latino immigrant children in the US by creatively expressing their experiences through musical theater. Our backgrounds as migrants do not make us less of a person, we are humans just like you.

## Introduction

In this study, I focus on the dehumanization of Spanish-speaking immigrant children by the Trump administration and how the “activist” group at Still Waters in a Storm has worked to humanize them by collectively creating and performing a play titled *The Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*, inspired by the biggest dreamer of all, Cervantes’ Don Quixote of La Mancha. Still Waters in a Storm is a non-profit educational schoolhouse in Bushwick, Brooklyn where children and adolescents ages 5-17 read and translate excerpts from *Don Quixote*, transforming those selected fragments of the first modern novel into a contemporary musical. The kids are mostly children of Central American and Mexican immigrants. With the help of Stephen Haff, a former high school teacher and founder of Still Waters in a Storm, the kids translate *Don Quixote* from original Spanish to English. The kids then work with both Haff and Kim Sherman, an accomplished music composer, to adapt the novel into a musical play with original songs, respectively. The play’s profound take on child immigration during the Trump administration challenges the contemporary viewer to reconceptualize xenophobic sentiments that were exacerbated during this era by bringing forth these issues through the lens of immigrant children who gain agency through the creative work of translating and appropriating Cervantes’ text. In this study, I analyze how the kids of *Kid Quixote* have advocated against the dehumanization of immigrant children through musical theater.

In Chapter 1, I focus on *The Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*. As mentioned earlier, *Kid Quixote* is a play written by children and adolescents ages 5-17 based on the novel *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of la Mancha*, written in the 16th century. Most of the children come from immigrant backgrounds and they work together to write songs and stories inspired by

*Don Quixote* and their lives. Their main project is writing *The Serialized adventures of Kid Quixote*. They translate sections of *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* and adapt them into their play. These children are of Latin American origin and grew up speaking Spanish with their families. Since *Don Quixote* was originally written in Spanish, these children translate the Spanish text into contemporary English as they reimagine the story as their own. It is crucial to note that since the kids of *Still Waters in a Storm* are Latino, they include Spanish within the play, which is mainly written in English. Therefore, the kids are ultimately adapting *Don Quixote* into their own lives. In the process, they not only translate from old Castilian to contemporary English but also, to some extent, to Latin American Spanish as spoken in the United States today.

Chapter 1 is a literary analysis of the play *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*. In *Don Quixote*, Alonso Quijano is an avid reader who becomes obsessed with stories of chivalry and knighthood. He decides to become a knight himself to save the world and renames himself Don Quixote. Quixote is aware of the potential crimes that are out there in the world, therefore, he decides to take action the only way he knows: by becoming a knight. The kids of *Still Waters in a Storm* are aware of who Don Quixote is and what he represents. Therefore, they do the same by going on adventures to combat issues regarding immigration as it relates to their lives and the lives of their loved ones. In chapter 1, I invite the reader to understand the nature of *Kid Quixote* as a musical, as a creative adaptation of *Don Quixote*, and as a form of activism that humanizes child immigrants.

It is important to first make a distinction between the terms “immigrant,” “refugee,” and “asylum seeker.” According to the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS),

“permanent residents are also commonly referred to as immigrants;” however, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) broadly defines an immigrant as “any alien in the United States.” In other words, anyone who moved to the United States, documented or undocumented, is to be considered an immigrant. DHS uses the same definition for a refugee and an asylum seeker as someone from another country who is unable or “unwilling” to return due to persecution.<sup>1</sup> A major distinction between the two that DHS fails to mention is that an asylum seeker is someone who has not been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting for a decision on their claim. In this project, generally, I use the term immigrant which is a category that includes both asylum seekers and refugees. I refer to a mixture of both undocumented and documented immigrants. Many of them will be Mexican and Central American people who are not recognized by the United States as refugees.<sup>2</sup> The term “immigrant” broadly encompasses both meanings.

In chapter 2, I focus specifically on the language used by the Trump administration to describe Latin American immigrants, and the effects the zero-tolerance policy had on immigrant families, especially children.<sup>3</sup> Central American child immigrants have been largely dehumanized by the Trump administration. The administration’s immigration policies and its demeanor when addressing issues of immigration exacerbated an already flawed system through its xenophobic and aggressive language. In this project, immigrant children also refer to first-generation and second-generation children because their lives were also affected as a result of xenophobic comments made. The Trump administration encouraged many to openly express their disdain for the immigrant community after they saw Trump openly bash them. It created an

---

<sup>1</sup> I have put the word “unwilling” in quotation marks because it is often ignored in cases of Central American immigrant children who are seeking refugee status after fleeing their countries due to gang violence.

<sup>2</sup> Most of the migrants I will be referring to are those from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico.

<sup>3</sup> I will focus on the years of 2016-2020.

unwelcoming feeling in families that have been living in the United States for years, and it indirectly caused immigrant children, undocumented and documented, to feel ashamed of who they are and their upbringing.

In chapter 2, I explain how the Trump administration presented the aforementioned challenges to immigrant families. Chapter 2 is divided into four sections. Section one gives a synopsis of the reasoning why people from Central America and Mexico migrate to the United States. The main reason for emigrating from Central America, especially Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, is due to economic reasons and violence. The second section discusses Trump's 2016 campaign immigration speech in Arizona as it details the specific plans for dealing with immigration. In this speech, he refers to most immigrants as "criminals" and portrays them as disposable objects who are unworthy of protection in the United States. This speech has been crucial since the 2016 elections, setting a divisive tone on the topic of immigration policies that went far beyond the presidential election. In addition, Trump's strategic choice to have this speech in Arizona spoke volumes at the time. Arizona is a border state and has had a long history of repressive state immigration laws such as SB 1070 which made it a state crime to enter the country illegally. This law required immigrants to show proof of documents when faced by law enforcement officers and prohibited employers from hiring undocumented immigrants.

In section three, I examine the zero-tolerance policy which prosecuted any unauthorized immigrant caught entering the United States illegally. I discuss the reasoning behind the creation of the policy and the Trump administration's goals. I use Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia's book *Banned: Immigration Enforcement During the Time of Trump* to highlight the importance of Prosecutorial Discretion and how the "zero tolerance" policy disregarded it. Prosecutorial



Discretion (PD) in immigration enforcement refers to the prosecution taking into account the equities of a case. For instance, if an undocumented immigrant is pregnant or has a child that is a US-born citizen, then that factor will be taken into account for the immigrant's case. The "zero tolerance" policy, took away PD to speed up deportations resulting in family separation and unjust treatment of children at detention centers or Central Processing Centers. Furthermore, I use the Customs and Border Patrol's southwest border apprehension chart from the fiscal year 2014 to 2017 concerning the zero-tolerance policy to show the trends in immigration during President Obama's and President Trump's terms. By the end of the section, it will be made clear to the reader that the number of people migrating to the United States before and during the time of the zero-tolerance policy was significantly lower than when President Obama was in office. This proves that the Trump campaign and its success created a divide in the United States, leaving immigrant communities terrorized as they were presented as enemies to the nation.

The final section of this chapter focuses on the dehumanization of child immigrants through the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers on the US-Mexican border. These detention centers are designed to temporarily hold migrants while they await deportation, case hearings, or, in the case of children until the ICE can contact someone who can take custody of the child. Few family detention centers hold both the mothers (fathers are placed in a separate facility) and children who entered the country illegally. Therefore, children are often separated from their parents. I examine how Latino child immigrants have been treated on the US/Mexico border and describe how the Trump administration responded to public outrage. I touch on the introduction of "cages" or "the Icebox" as strategies to organize and "filter" undocumented children in detention centers. The

detention centers where children are held resemble a dog kennel with chain-link fencing and mats spread around the floors. The kids are constantly surveilled and have limited playtime. The conditions in these detention centers worsened during the Trump administration and the treatment portrayed undocumented children as savages. First, I discuss the language Trump used to refer to immigrants during his 2016 Arizona Campaign, where he shared his plans on immigration. Based on Stephen Haff's book *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*, the kids of Still Waters in a Storm revealed that they felt like their livelihoods were in jeopardy after Trump's victory. They were worried about what the next four years were going to look like for them.

A year after Trump's inauguration, the Department of Justice (DOJ) implemented the "zero tolerance" policy which federally prosecuted any adult caught illegally crossing the border into the United States regardless of whether they were with children. This led to family separation, as parents were placed in separate detention centers from their children. The children, accompanied or unaccompanied, were then placed in child detention centers and processed as unaccompanied. Overall in the third section of this chapter, I explore the "zero tolerance" policy and how it led to family separation. The final section of chapter 2 will study the treatment of children in detention centers from the implementation of the "zero tolerance" policy in April 2018 to the end in June 2018 when Trump announced that he was ending the executive order.<sup>4</sup> I will argue that the treatment of children in the detention centers violated The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) and the Convention of the Rights of a Child

---

<sup>4</sup> Despite the "zero tolerance" policy ending in June 2018, there remained practices of family separation. In January 2021, President Joe Biden rescinded the executive order, formally ending the practice once and for all.

(CRC) (1989), which were both documents published and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly detailing basic human rights and the rights of a child. Children are a vulnerable portion of the US population protected by numerous laws such as the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and the Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974.<sup>56</sup> However, while undocumented migrant children are even more vulnerable, the only laws in place to protect them are the ones that lie under the UDHR and the CRC. The term “Kids in Cages” was coined during the “zero tolerance” policy era and it caused turmoil nationwide due to its inhumane treatment of children. The Trump administration completely dehumanized migrant children through the “zero tolerance” policy and disregarded international law, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), meant to protect the livelihood and dignity of these children.<sup>7</sup> Many people were taken by this mistreatment, including the kids of *Still Waters in a Storm*. It was the vulnerability and at the same time the bravery, and perseverance to fight against justice that they saw in *Don Quixote*, the kids on the border, and in their lives that inspired the musical *Kids Quixote*.

In chapter 3, I argue that *Kid Quixote* can be used as an activism campaign to humanize and expose sentiments immigrant children had during the Trump administration’s mistreatment of minors at the border. The participants in *Still Waters in a Storm* may not know it, but they are real-life heroes. They are writing plays about their lives as immigrants and the lives of undocumented child immigrants. They are kids with a rich imagination. Not only are they heroes

---

<sup>5</sup> The Equal Education Act of 1974 stated that no state should deny education based on race, sex, color, and national origin.

<sup>6</sup> The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was enacted in 1974 to protect children

<sup>7</sup> The Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC) was written in 1989 by members of the United Nations years after the creation of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). Members believed that children are entitled to all that is written under the UDHR, however, children (people under the age of 18) require special protection.

in their play, but they are heroes everywhere they go and wherever they perform. *The Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* is performed in colleges, venues, consulates, and more. By going around and performing, these kids are simultaneously advocating for the humanization of immigrant children. Undocumented children come to the United States with dreams, and instead of focusing on those dreams, they are burdened with the thought of possibly being deported. Not only do they fear deportation. They are also afraid that they could be sent back to violence, prosecution, and, for many young men, gangs. The songs in *Kid Quixote* act as a call to action as the kids are imagining the fears detained undocumented kids might experience in the detention centers.

In this chapter, I use the book *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible* as the foundation for my argument since it describes the process of writing the songs and their creative brainstorming. I also allude to the letter exchanges the Kid Quixotes had with children on the border in 2017. Before writing their second scene of *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*, the kids briefly exchanged letters with Central American girls held in detention centers awaiting trial. Stephen Haff had connections with educators working at the detention centers and the kids were blessed with the opportunity to write to migrant children. These letters inspired the kids of *Still Waters in a Storm* to adapt a scene from *Don Quixote* and rename it “The Prisoner Story” to highlight the innocence of the children being detained. The scene directly speaks powerfully to the experiences of these girls and thousands of children who migrate to the United States.

In section 3.2, I analyze “The Rescuing Song,” which was the first song the kids produced and the first song in the musical. The use of repetition, biblical references, and imagery

powerfully encompass the kids' mission. They are motivated from the inside out. Their families, their community, and their experiences are at the center of their purpose. The news about the mistreatment of children at the US-Mexico border and the overall portrayal of immigrants during the Trump era are constant looming thoughts that translate into the way they perceive the world in which they live. The Rescuing song is a representation of all those elements. On a final note, this chapter will describe the impact the *Kid Quixote* project has had on the larger scope of immigration, as well as how children who advocate for other children influence the audiences.

## Chapter 1

### *Analysis of The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*

“Perhaps America — not the real America, but that white-only, English-only America — does indeed have a reason to fear the new generation of Hispanic children, these new Quixotes. They are beautiful, brilliant, well-educated, and multilingual. And they have had enough.”

~Valeria Luiselli

*The New York Times*, “The Littlest Don Quixote Versus the World”

Based on Still Waters in a Storm's play, *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*, in conjunction with *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of la Mancha*, I explore how those children who are of immigrant backgrounds view and interpret topics of immigration through musical theater. *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* is a recontextualized play based on *Don Quixote of la Mancha* that is written and translated by immigrant students ages 5 to 17 who reside in Brooklyn, New York. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences immigrant students face through musical theater.

I reference two texts that were written by Stephen Haff. The first text is *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible* written by Stephen Haff, founder and director of Still Waters in a Storm. In this text, Haff guides the reader through the process of developing *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*. The production of this musical began the same time former president Donald J Trump was running for office and then elected. Haff, aware of the impact the election would have on the children, encourages the kids to be vocal about their emotions during these tough times. Being an immigrant during the Trump era was difficult even for those in sanctuary cities like New York. In this text, Haff walks the reader through the ways the kids were able to share and incorporate their- and their family's- immigration stories within the musical. The second text is *Becoming Kid Quixote: A True Story of Belonging in America* written by Sarah Sierra, a student at Still Waters in Storm and the lead role in *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*, and Stephen Haff. In this text, the reader follows the story of Sarah Sierra as she navigates her place in the world and finds her voice. Sierra writes in the first person so the reader can step into the

world of a 10-year-old first-generation Mexican-American middle schooler. Sierra joined Still Waters in a Storm in 2015, a year before the musical started, in this text she shares her journey of becoming Kid Quixote. She shares stories of her family as it relates to the play and talks about her journey in overcoming shyness and finding her voice. Both texts are the core of this chapter as it is centered around the creation of *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*.

The students of Still Waters in a Storm were aware of the issues occurring at the border while they were writing *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*, especially issues regarding children. Through the power of imagination and innocence, the kids can uniquely address these issues. Choosing to reimagine the centuries-old novel *Don Quixote* into a musical to match contemporary issues of immigration as it relates to their personal lives, creates multiple layers to the musical. It is not just a fun, interactive play, it is arguably an advocacy campaign meant to raise awareness of the atrocities children like them were (and still are) experiencing at the border.

### 1.1. Still Waters in a Storm

Still Waters in a Storm is an afterschool program founded in 2008 that provides a safe space for immigrant students (ages five to seventeen) to be creative. Some of the kids are living in fear of deportation or family separation as most of them are children of undocumented immigrants. For many of these students, Still Waters in a Storm is a refuge where they can be themselves and be listened to. The students are required to follow one main rule: “everyone listens to everyone.” That way those who are younger get the same attention as the older kids.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Haff, *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*, (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2020), 6.



The program is run by Stephen Haff who is both an educator and a theater enthusiast.<sup>9</sup> Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, the students would gather in a small venue in Bushwick, Brooklyn and they would reimagine classic literature. The kids read *Paradise Lost* and *Aeneid* where they learned phrases in Latin with the help of a Latin expert and Haff himself.<sup>10</sup> According to Stephen Haff, the purpose of reading these old texts and dissecting the meaning of words in Latin is to teach the kids the importance of patience when reading. In addition to being patient, the students are also able to carefully listen to each other's interpretation of the reading. These interpretations often turn into storytelling. The kids relate the stories they read to their own lives; therefore, thanks to the main rule of the schoolhouse, the students can listen and talk about shared experiences.

In the fall of 2016 right before the United States presidential elections, Haff decided to introduce *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of la Mancha* because it is a classic novel written in Spanish and the kids are able to connect more to a text that is written in their native language.

<sup>12</sup> Haff, however, has a different approach to working with the novel. According to *Kid Quixotes*, Haff states:

This time we would not only be reading together out loud, we would also be translating the novel collectively, by speaking and writing, from Spanish to English, and for five years instead of one.<sup>13</sup> Later we would also decide to adapt our translation as a series of

---

<sup>9</sup> Haff, Stephen, *Becoming Kid Quixote: A True Story of Belonging in America*, summary.

<sup>10</sup> *Aeneid* is a Latin epic poem written by Virgil, a Roman poet, in 19BC. It is the story of the founding of Rome where Aeneas, a Trojan, flees the city of Troy after it was taken over by the Greeks. With the help of The Animation Project, the students of Still Waters in a Storm recently developed a short animated film reimagining *Aeneid*.

<sup>11</sup> *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem written by John Milton, an English poet, in 1667. Its first version was written in ten books. It is a biblical story about the Fall of Man which tells the story of Adam and Eve, Satan, and the Garden of Eden.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Haff, *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Before reading *Don Quixote*, the students would read texts like *Paradise Lost* aloud and share their own stories as it related to the text they were reading.

bilingual, musical “Adventure Plays,” reimagining the story of a delusional old man in Spain of the early 1600s as the story of a group of Spanish-speaking immigrant children living in Brooklyn today.<sup>14</sup>

The students slowly read *Don Quixote* so that they would be able to translate the text at their own pace. Some kids were younger than others, so it took more time for the younger students to understand the text. The students are also from different Latin American countries where the Spanish dialect may differ from one another and the text. Therefore, it took time to debate the translation. They also relate the novel to their own lives and later adapted it into a musical. The kids write the musical in which they act as a way of appropriating the text for it to connect to their own lives. Since these kids are children of undocumented immigrants, they often incorporate issues of migration in their plays. Finding a story that encapsulates their shared experiences in relation to Don Quixote takes time and patience. That is why it took five years to read *Don Quixote* and adapt specific scenes into the larger project of *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*.

As mentioned previously, the largest project the kids produced is *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* production. *Kid Quixote* is based on Miguel de Cervantes’s novel *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of la Mancha* where the main character- Alonso Quijano- becomes obsessed with reading books of knighthood and chivalry and sets out into the world as Don Quixote living out his fantasies and rescuing those who are in danger.<sup>15</sup> It is a musical play that re-imagines *Don Quixote of la Mancha* in a highly creative, more imaginative, and playful manner. All the adventures in *Don Quixote* are the product of Alonso Quijano’s

---

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Haff, *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> I will refer to *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* as *Kid Quixote* to shorten the name as I will be referring to it often.

imagination but as readers, we forget that we are reading made-up stories and get lost in Quijano's universe. *Kid Quixote* does the same thing in that the kids are playing with the idea of fiction versus reality by going on adventures. Their stuffed animal becomes a horse. In their own created fiction, Sarah, the girl who plays the character of Don Quixote, saves other kids from prison, alluding to the crisis of family separation and "kids in cages" that was happening at the time. Not only are the children of *Still Waters in a Storm* creating a fictional play, but they are also incorporating real-life events that are happening to children like them.

To contextualize *Kid Quixote*, let us first remember *Don Quixote of la Mancha* and its play on fiction. In the first modern novel ever written, Miguel de Cervantes uses the role of the author and narrator to confuse the reader about the autonomy of the characters. Alonso Quijano's obsession with knighthood and chivalry caused him to live out his imagination and declare himself a knight named "The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of la Mancha" who, going on adventures, also seeks to impress Dulcinea, his love interest. Don Quixote's determination to save the world is the main focus of *Kid Quixote* as the kids are encouraged to think about adventures they would like to go on during the writing of the play. Below, I invite the reader to reflect on the process the kids of *Still Waters in a Storm* went through to develop the adaptation of *Don Quixote*, and to interrogate the effect a musical adaptation of *Don Quixote* might have on the audience.

## 1.2. Why is *Don Quixote of la Mancha* important to *Kid Quixote*?

*Don Quixote* was the first modern novel published in the western canon. It appeared in two volumes, Parts I and II, published in 1605 and 1615, respectively. Published in the Spanish

Golden Age, *Don Quixote* speaks to our present time, still today. *Don Quixote* presents the confusion between reality and fiction uniquely. The confusion begins in the prologue to the first part when Miguel de Cervantes presents himself not as the father but the stepfather of Don Quixote. Cervantes states: “but though I seem to be the father, I am the stepfather of Don Quixote, and do not wish to go along with the common custom and implore you, almost with teary eyes...to forgive or ignore the faults you may find in this my child.”<sup>16</sup> The author is usually thought of as the origin and father of their own story, but here Cervantes takes a distance from his creation by declaring that he is *not* the father, but the stepfather. At the time, Miguel de Cervantes was not a successful author and he was in prison when writing the first part of *Don Quixote*.<sup>17</sup><sup>18</sup> It can be inferred that Cervantes purposely declared himself stepfather as a way to not declare full responsibility for his book in the off chance of it being unsuccessful. Regardless of the true reasoning, stating that Cervantes is the stepfather establishes a separate storyline. In chapter IX of art I, the figure of the narrator makes himself visible. Chapter IX nine is connected to the prologue because it explains why Cervantes would consider himself the stepfather instead of the father. The narrator is furious because chapter VIII ended at a cliffhanger due to him running out of manuscripts to copy from. In Chapter IX, he explains to the reader that he is now on a mission searching for the continuation of the manuscript. He finds it in a marketplace in

---

<sup>16</sup> Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de, and Edith Grossman, *Don Quixote: A New Translation*, 1st ed. Ecco, 2003, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Miguel de Cervantes was imprisoned in Seville, Spain in 1597 as a result of missed payments to the Spanish government.

Donald P. McCrory, *No Ordinary Man : The Life and Times of Miguel de Cervantes*. (Stanford: Peter Owen Publishers, 2014.), 47-72.

<sup>18</sup> There are two parts to the novel: *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* and *Second Part of Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*. Part one is broken down into four internal parts with each of those parts having chapters. The second part of the novel is only divided by chapters. Donald P. McCrory, *No Ordinary Man : The Life and Times of Miguel de Cervantes*, 47-72.

Toledo and it turns out that the stories are adaptations of Arabic tales. The novel so far, we understand, is an annotated copy of the original manuscript allegedly written, according to the narrator, by an Arab historian. In other words, the narrator is a stepfather to his text, and we now understand why Cervantes used that powerful image in his prologue. As the reader makes a connection between the narrator and the author, the confusion between reality and fiction is reinforced.

By contrast, in the prologue to the second volume of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes alludes to indeed being the father of Quixote. He states:

say no more to him, and I do not wish to say more to you except to tell you to consider that this second part of *Don Quixote*, which I offer to you now, is cut from the same artisan and from the same cloth as the first, and in it I give you a somewhat expanded Don Quixote who is, at the end, dead and buried, so that no one will dare tell more tales about him, for the ones told in the past are enough.<sup>1920</sup>

By deciding to have Don Quixote die at the end of the novel, Cervantes asserts his authorship. The historical context for this is that an apocryphal second part of *Don Quixote* had been published by an author that called himself Avellaneda. In the pirated version, Avellaneda makes fun of Cervantes' old age and disabilities in hopes to discredit him and Part I of *Don Quixote*. It is important to note that Cervantes was in the middle of writing chapter LIX of Part II and therefore decided to respond to Avellaneda in the prologue. Cervantes is furious and chooses to write the aforementioned words as a way to prove to the public that he is the owner of Don

---

<sup>19</sup> In 1614, a “false Quixote” titled *The Second Volume of the Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* was published under the name of Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda. The “him” Cervantes is referring to here is Avellaneda.

Meredith Mann, “The Case of the False Quixote,” The New York Public Library, April 22, 2015, <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2015/04/22/case-false-quixote>.

<sup>20</sup> Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and Edith Grossman, *Don Quixote: A New Translation*, 1st ed. Ecco, 2003, 458.

Quixote by ending the sequel with Quixote's death.<sup>21</sup> This is an important factor in the fiction versus reality game because it brings to life the role of the characters in the story. It brings up the question of whether or not the characters are their entity or if they are a product of the author, Or does the author, Cervantes, become another character after all? In the end, he makes it clear that he is the creator of Quixote and he is the only one who can tell his tales. At the very end of Part II (Chapter LXXIV) Cervantes reaffirms: "for me alone was Don Quixote born, and I for him; he knew how to act, and I to write; the two of us are one, despite and regardless of the false Tordesillan writer who dared, or will dare, to write with a coarse and badly designed ostrich feather about the exploits of my valorous knight."<sup>22</sup> All this reveals certain connections between reality and fiction because now the reader is attentive to what aspects of the character's life are connected to the real world.

In addition to the confusion between reality and fiction between the author and narrator, there is also a play on fiction with the characters of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. As mentioned previously, Don Quixote is an avid reader who becomes obsessed with stories of chivalry. He decides to become a knight himself and defend the helpless. Don Quixote then convinces Sancho Panza, a peasant who lives in his village, to join him on his adventures. Sancho becomes his faithful squire. He is one of the only characters to be present inside and outside Quixote's imagination. However, unlike Quixote, Sancho is aware of what is real and what is not within the story being told, and he often makes funny commentary along with the adventures. Sancho and Don Quixote are opposites of one another. As a peasant, Sancho is more

---

<sup>21</sup> Meredith Mann, "The Case of the False Quixote," The New York Public Library, April 22, 2015, <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2015/04/22/case-false-quixote>.

<sup>22</sup> Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and Edith Grossman, *Don Quixote: A New Translation*, 1st ed. Ecco, 2003, 939.

direct, realistic, and simple. Don Quixote is a knight with a massive imagination. With that being said, Sancho often gets lost in Quixote's world and feeds into Quixote's vision of the world despite being aware of what is real and what is not. Towards the end of Part II of *Don Quixote*, when Quixote falls ill and is on his deathbed, Sancho tries to convince his friend that he is just lazy and should get up to go on more adventures. Sancho Panza states:

Look, don't be lazy, but get up from that bed and let's go to the countryside dressed as shepherds, just like we arranged; maybe behind some bush we'll find Señora Doña Dulcinea disenchanted, as pretty as you please. If you're dying of sorrow over being defeated, blame me for that and say you were toppled because Rocinante's cinches; besides, your grace must have seen in your books of Chivalry that it's a very common thing for one knight to topple another, and for the one who's vanquished today to be the victor tomorrow.<sup>23</sup>

Despite Sancho and Quixote's differences, they are dependent on each other. When he sees Quixote on his deathbed disillusioned by his knighthood, Sancho tries to keep the adventures of chivalry alive by encouraging Quixote to get out of bed. By telling him that his illness is in his head and that he's just being "lazy," Sancho is trying to keep the fiction alive. Throughout *Don Quixote*, despite Sancho knowing what is fiction and what is real, he chooses to live in Quixote's imagination. Sancho, like the reader and the other characters in the book, wants to continue the story because he is completely engulfed in the imaginary world of Don Quixote. Without Don Quixote, he is nobody. Sancho and the other characters now believe in fiction and confuse fiction for reality. One considerable reason for this is that Sancho does not refer to Don Quixote as Alonso Quijano, he continues to call him Don Quijote.

*The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of la Mancha* is important because it teaches its readers to live with more imagination. Imagination is important because it requires introspection.

---

<sup>23</sup> Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de, and Edith Grossman, *Don Quixote: A New Translation*, 1st ed. Ecco, 2003, 937.

In other words, it requires the individual to think about their past and present experiences to build their ideal future. Imagination also allows the individual to escape reality and visualize their version of a perfect world. This visualization of an ideal world and future stimulates the mind of the individual and gives one hope for a better future for themselves and society. Hope is a feeling that people often use as motivation to continue whatever they are doing. Without imagination, it would be difficult to envision what the world could be like. It gives people motivation. For children, a vivid imagination allows them to develop problem-solving skills and understand the world around them. By reimagining *Don Quixote* through theater, the children of Still Waters in a Storm can explore the topic of immigration through their personal experiences, other children's experiences, and their imaginations.

### 1.3. The process of writing *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*

The students of Still Waters in a Storm have been working on translating and adapting *Don Quixote* since 2016. Each student received their own copy of the book in Spanish and they dissected the text during their sessions. All of the students know Spanish, some more than others but they help each other read and translate the text. Stephen Haff partnered with a renowned composer, Kim Sherman, to teach the children music theory and lyric writing. With the help of Haff and Sherman, the young students were prompted to choose fragments from *Don Quixote* that deeply spoke to their own lives. Based on those selected fragments, they rewrote those passages and adapted them to write the lyrics.

When the students were first introduced to *Don Quixote*, they were intimidated by the length of the novel. According to *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the*



*One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*, an eight-year-old girl by the name of Felicity “[had] never seen a book [that] big aside from the bible in church.”<sup>24</sup> The kids were shocked, especially the younger ones. Haff, however, alleviates their fear by stating that they will be reading *Don Quixote* over the course of five years, and that they have each other to lean on. “Everyone listens to everyone” is the number one rule of *Still Waters in a Storm*.<sup>25</sup> When reading, translating, interpreting, and reimagining the text, the children, younger or older, will work at the pace of the collective, making sure everyone understands. Some of the kids, especially the younger ones, cannot read in Spanish so the older kids who can read help them out. The way in which they help each other understand varies. Some kids love to draw, so they communicate their understanding through drawings. Others use storytelling to help the younger ones understand. In sum, all students are able to contribute and comprehend the text.

At the beginning of the after-school session, students gather around and pitch ideas for the songs and play. Haff would write down their ideas and together they would come up with the script. According to *Becoming Kid Quixote*, Sarah Sierra -who plays Don Quixote- states:

When we write our play, we use the events of *Don Quixote*, but sometimes we change the story so that it makes more sense to the kids living right now. For example, in the book, don Quixote does everything he does because he loves a woman named Dulcinea. He wants to be a better knight and fight harder for justice so he can live up to Dulcinea’s expectations. When we started writing our version of *Don Quixote*, we talked about how most of us are too young for dating or serious relationships, and it didn’t really make sense to us... so we changed Dulcinea to Mami, and at the beginning of every show, I say to the audience: “Mami, everything I do is because I love you so much in my heart.”<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Haff, *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Haff, *Kid Quixotes*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Haff and Sarah Sierra, *Becoming Kid Quixote: A True Story of Belonging in America*, 7-8.

In other words, the kids are adapting the story so that it can better relate to their lives. This is a good example of involving reality in the fictional play they are creating. The kids know that the play they are writing about is fiction or “made up” but they want to be playful and at the same time find a form to situate their place in the world. By substituting Dulcinea with Mami, the kids can recreate *Don Quixote* in a way that best reflects their lives. In doing so, the kids decide to replace Dulcinea’s love with maternal love. Instead of going on adventures and saving the world to impress a fictional character that does not mean much to them, they decided to do it for their biggest love, their mothers.

In addition, Sarah mentions another way they use reality within their fictional play. She says:

Stephen wants us to really be the characters, so even though I do a lot of the same things Don Quixote does in the book, in the play they just call me Sarah. It’s a lot easier to feel like I’m Sarah, fighting bad guys to help my Mami, than it is to pretend that I’m an old knight from four hundred years ago trying to impress his Dulcinea... When we are performing as ourselves, with our own names, it’s not really acting. It’s more like playing with your family.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the play being inspired by *Don Quixote*, Sarah decides to use her name instead to show agency within a fictional play.<sup>28</sup> Choosing to rename herself Sarah instead of her character, Don Quixote, shows the power of choosing her name and in turn exploring her identity. It is a way of humanizing herself within a fictional play. Renaming her Sarah instead of Don Quixote also feeds into the original storyline of *Don Quixote* when Alonso Quijano decides to rename himself to reinvent himself. Sarah is unknowingly adding to Cervantes’s game except the only difference

---

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Haff and Sarah Sierra, *Becoming Kid Quixote: A True Story of Belonging in America*, (New York, NY: 2020), 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> In the play, Sarah is not being called “Don Quixote”, they are just calling her Sarah so that it is easier for her as an actress.

is that only her mother and friend, Milly (Sancho), in the play call her Sarah. Every character who is in the adventures she goes on sees her as Don Quixote. To make the matter of metafiction more complex, in the play, Sarah's loved ones only call her Don Quixote to satisfy her imagination. After a long day of going on adventures, Sarah gives her mom *Don Quixote* to read before going to bed. Whenever her mom mentions Don Quixote Sarah exclaims "that's me!" Her mother responds by saying "no digas ridiculeces," stop saying nonsense. But Sarah insists that she is him. It is only when Sarah is asleep that her mother calls her Don Quixote.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Sarah's mother only acknowledges her imagination when she is dreaming, making her mother the only character able to separate reality versus fiction.

On the contrary, Milly, Sarah's friend, is appointed as her sidekick Sancho and goes along with Sarah's adventures. Unlike Sarah's mother, Milly is a child who is also creative and imaginative; therefore, it does not take much convincing to get her on board. In the beginning, it takes Milly some time to see Don Quixote/ Sarah's vision. However, she quickly transitions into her role as Sancho.<sup>30</sup> As mentioned in 1.2, Sancho Panza, Don Quixote's squire, is the only character in the novel that is aware of what is real and what is not. Sancho knows that Don Quixote is Alonso Quijano pretending to be a knight but as he gets more involved with Quixote's imaginative adventures, he only recognizes Alonso Quijano as Don Quixote. It was not until the end of the novel when Don Quixote is on his deathbed that the topic of his "real" identity is revisited. In that case, Sancho Panza- completely engulfed in the world of Quixote- refuses to revert to calling Don Quixote Alonso Quijano. The kids use this same concept with Milly's

---

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Haff and the Kids of Still Waters in a Storm, "The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote," Unpublished, 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Haff and the Kids of Still Waters in a Storm, "The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote," Unpublished, 10-13.

character. On one hand Milly is able to naturally accept Sarah's "adventures" because she too is a child. On the other hand, Milly understands that Sarah's adventures are temporary and she would be able to transition back into her life as a student. The children are feeding into each other's figment of imagination through empathy. They can relate to wanting to be a hero who saves the day.

Through fiction, the children are able to explore who they are and who they want to be. Although Sarah plays Don Quixote, everyone who contributes to the writing and production of the play also sees themselves as Don Quixote. They translate the theme of identity into the play. The children are incorporating their lives into the play and, as a result, they are discovering who they want to be.

#### 1.4. What effect does a musical have on the broader context of *Kid Quixote*?

*Kid Quixote*, the musical is based on *Don Quixote of la Mancha*. Choosing a *musical* play feeds into the theme of *Don Quixote* and the mind of kids by extending the use of their imagination. Musicals are often easier for kids to understand because it takes away from reading a text which can be daunting for children. In addition, musicals allow kids to be more creative with the content. In real life, people communicate by talking not singing, therefore, deviating from the norm of regular life and singing what one is feeling is another way of breaking away from reality. Singing is also a way of allowing people to express themselves and make others feel what they are feeling without directly stating it. According to *Kid Quixotes: A group of students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*, Stephen Haff states:

Kim has told us that the songs happen when words alone are not enough, when the feelings are so strong that there is an emergency need for transcendent or deep-diving expression.<sup>31</sup>

Reading, using your imagination, and going on adventures is the basis of *Don Quixote*, the fact that the kids are elevating the 400 year old novel by involving songs, deepens the play on fiction.

Musicals are also a great way to discuss contemporary social issues. Often seen as lively and extravagant spectacles, musicals are often used as a way to tackle social, political, or global issues going on at the time. *Hamilton* used rap and jazz to challenge the way America thinks about the creation of this country by emphasizing that one of our founding fathers was an immigrant from a poor background who fought his way to the top.<sup>32</sup> This indirectly challenged those who are anti-immigration to see the importance of immigrants. Similarly, *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* uses one of the most famous Spanish plays, *Don Quixote of la Mancha*, as a musical to raise awareness among both the adults and the kids about the inhumane living situations on unaccompanied minors on the US-Mexican Border. Using music is a great way to communicate the message with kids because rhythm and rhyme are easier to remember and resonate with. Upbeat notes in a song evoke happiness and slow and low tempo often evoke sadness. Identifying the emotions a song evokes happens naturally, without thinking. If a young child is watching *Kid Quixote*, they may not understand the content of it merely by what is being said, but they can get a sense of the overall emotions in the scenes because the plot of each scene often starts and ends with a song. Therefore, by listening to the tones and melodies, children will more or less understand what is being conveyed.

---

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Haff, *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> *Hamilton: An American Musical* is a rap based musical play created by Lin Manuel Miranda. It reimagines the biography of one of America's founding Fathers, Alexander Hamilton.

The play is centered around the lives of immigrant children in the United States. The children of *Still Waters in a Storm* include anecdotes about their personal lives. It represents their witty, creative, resilient, and innocent personalities. It's not only a musical play about an avid reader who outlives his imagination, it is about immigrant kids creating an ongoing project that they can use to express themselves in whatever way they see fit. Since watching immigrant “kids in cages” concerns them and is relevant to their lives, they use their created platform to voice their concerns, especially in the wake of the Trump administration. That is what makes *Kid Quixote* unique. It is a project that prospective students of *Still Waters in a Storm* can add on to and include their own experiences innovatively.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Dehumanization of Latino Child Immigrants during the Trump Era**

“When Mexico sends its people... They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime.

They’re rapists...”

-Donald Trump, 2016

As the children of *Still Waters in a Storm* begin to read and adapt *Don Quixote* into a musical play, they experience the beginning of an attack on the immigrant community by the Trump administration that would last four years. Former President Donald J. Trump has referred to Mexican and Central American undocumented immigrants as “illegal,” “alien,” and “dangerous.” He stated that those migrating to the United States are “rapists,” “criminals,” and “delinquents.” All these terms are dehumanizing. The Trump administration’s language towards undocumented immigrants paints America as a dystopia if nothing is done to stop illegal immigration. Although not mentioned directly, to Trump and his supporters, the United States is a much worse place with lenient immigration laws that encourage mass migration. In this chapter, I will address how the Trump administration degraded the immigrant community based on the language he used. The first section of this chapter gives the reasoning behind why families from Central America and Mexico migrate to the United States. I focus specifically on unaccompanied children. In the second section, I analyze Trump’s 2016 Presidential campaign speech in Arizona where he addressed his plans for the US Mexican Border by focusing on the language used to describe immigrants. The third section highlights the “zero tolerance” policy and congress’s motive to separate families as a tactic to deter families from coming to the United States illegally.

### 2.1. Background: Journey to the United States

Some Central American and Mexican immigrants migrating into the United States are in danger in their countries and are willing to sacrifice their lives to escape the violence and economic hardships back home. Amongst the millions migrating to the United States, many are



accompanied and unaccompanied children seeking a better life. Like the adults traveling across the border, children also experience the perils that are encountered along the way such as riding on “The Beast” or crossing dangerous rivers like the Rio Grande. “The Beast”, also known as “The Train of Death,” “is the freight train migrants use to get from southern Mexico to the U.S. border when they can’t afford a bus ticket or a smuggler and they want to avoid the immigration checkpoints of “la migra.”<sup>33</sup> The Rio Grande is a river located south of the United States and north of Mexico, forming a border between Texas and Mexico.<sup>34</sup> The river is known for its strong currents and danger. In 2019, Customs and Border Patrol advised undocumented immigrants to not attempt to cross the Rio Grande, especially when traveling with children. In the “fiscal year 2019, which began Oct. 1, 2018, Border Patrol agents have rescued more than 380 undocumented immigrants, including small children.”<sup>35</sup> It is a dangerous river. Sometimes these children are sent by their parents who already made it to the United States. The parents or family members who sent for them know about the perils of traveling to the United States; however, they are willing to do whatever it takes to make sure their child gets a chance at a better life, away from the dangers and injustices in their countries.

There are many reasons why parents would sacrifice everything to bring their child to the United States. One reason is to be more economically secure. People around the world believe

---

<sup>33</sup> Diaz, Paola. “‘La Bestia’ — the Train of Violence and Assault That Takes Migrants to US-Mexico Border.” *ThePrint* (blog), May 10, 2020. <https://theprint.in/features/la-bestia-the-train-of-violence-and-assault-that-takes-migrants-to-us-mexico-border/384506/>.

<sup>34</sup> Brand, Donald D. “Rio Grande | Definition, Location, Length, Map, & Facts | Britannica.” *Encyclopedia . Britannica*. Accessed April 28, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rio-Grande-river-United-States-Mexico>.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection. “Border Patrol Warns Immigrants of Life-Threatening Risks of Crossing Rio Grande River,” May 17, 2019. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/border-patrol-warns-immigrants-life-threatening-risks-crossing-rio>.

that the United States gives people the freedom to grow economically. Migrants emigrating from the Northern Triangle (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador) are leaving due to socioeconomic conditions. These countries have a long history of widespread poverty resulting from elite bureaucratic groups dominating the wealth. They believe they would be able to find a good enough job that pays well. Many of these people still believe in the American dream of homeownership, having a stable job, having a partner and children, and living in comfort. The idea of the American dream may be attainable, but it is extremely difficult for those who immigrate to another country.

Another reason to immigrate to the United States is to feel at peace. People who come from the poorest Latin American countries, such as Honduras, Guatemala, and some parts of Mexico, are trying to escape the violence and poverty. Their country has been overwhelmed with gang violence and their lives are in danger; therefore, they prefer to sacrifice everything they have in their country to move to another. The parents of the children migrating to the United States unaccompanied are focused on making sure their children are safe and free from violence. In these countries, gangs would try to coerce children into joining them and they would even try to blackmail families. Some of the blackmail include killing family members or paying large fees to compensate for not giving their child to the gang. Parents, mothers especially, want to make sure their kids do not end up with that future, so they save up as much money as they can to hire a *coyote*. A coyote is someone who helps people get into the United States. It is usually risky to send kids with a coyote because they are never liable for what happens to the child along the way. Many children are exposed to human trafficking, rape, and robberies along the way; these are usually caused by local gangs around Mexico. Coyotes are paid to help guide them without

imminent danger, but they do not care about that since their only worry is making sure they get paid.

As stated earlier, unaccompanied children are faced with many dangerous obstacles along the way. One of them is “The Beast,” often called The Death Train. “The train known in Spanish as “La Bestia,” which runs from the southern border state of Chiapas into neighboring Oaxaca and north into Gulf coast state Veracruz, carried migrants north for decades, despite its notorious dangers: People died or lost limbs falling from the train.”<sup>36</sup> This is a very dangerous train that is mostly taken by Central Americans who are trying to get across Mexico. Oftentimes, however, children would ride this train because it is faster than walking or hitchhiking their way through Mexico. Many accidents happen on this deadly train; for instance, Oscar Martinez, author of *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail*, tells a story about a Nicaraguan man named Jaime who doubled over the train, fell, and mutilated his leg. His bones were crushed, and he tried to cut off the part that the train crushed with his pocket knife to continue his trip to the United States.<sup>37</sup> Catastrophic accidents happen to many riding “The Beast.”

Unaccompanied children face many obstacles to get to the United States. They are escaping poverty and violence. They are risking their lives to hopefully get a better life in the United States. Unfortunately, once children reach the United States and relinquish themselves to Customs and Border Patrol Officers, they are treated unfairly. Mexican children, especially, get

---

<sup>36</sup> Mark Stevenson and Sonia Perez D., “Migrant Caravan on the 'Beast' Train to Avoid Mexican Police Raids and Make It to U.S. Border,” USA Today (Gannett Satellite Information Network, April 24, 2019), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2019/04/24/migrant-caravan-central-america-riding-beast-train-in-mexico/3563922002/>

<sup>37</sup> Oscar Martinez, *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail* (London: Verso, 2014), 56.

deported without the proper process for attaining relief. It is a tactic the United States has to prevent more Mexicans from entering the states and to regulate the number of Mexicans already living here. It is extremely unfair and unconstitutional; everyone is entitled to due process under the fifth amendment. However, since the immigration court is considered a civil court, Miranda Rights do not apply to unaccompanied undocumented children.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is allowed to deport unaccompanied children, if they wish to.

In addition, unaccompanied children should be treated with special care because most of them are unaware of what they just went through and did not voluntarily migrate into the United States. Regardless of the trauma these children experienced, if they do not show any “battle wounds, they may not have many ways to defend themselves and can be sent back to their country”<sup>39</sup> Mexican children are more prone to deportation. In fact, Valeria Luiselli states:

The procedure by which Mexican children are deported in this way is called “voluntary return.” And, as unbelievable as it may seem, voluntary return is the most common verdict. Other than a handful of lucky exceptions, all Mexican children are deported under this procedure. This- irrational, if not completely absurd- practice is legally backed by an amendment to the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, which was signed by President G.W. Bush in 2008. The amendment states that children from countries that share borders with the U.S. can be deported without formal immigration proceedings.<sup>40</sup>

Mexican children are at a great disadvantage when coming into the United States. They are searching for a better life, and some are trying to reunite with family members who migrated to The United States years ago. Children do not have ill intentions when coming here, however, when apprehended at the border, they are treated as criminals.

---

<sup>38</sup> Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends: an Essay in Forty Questions* (London: 4th Estate, 2017)), 68.

<sup>39</sup> Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends*, 61.

<sup>40</sup> Valeria Luiselli, 52-53.

## 2.2. Donald Trump's 2016 Campaign on Immigration in Arizona

Trump's presidential campaign uncovered hidden hateful discourses against the Latino immigrant community as he based his campaign on border enforcement and deportations. His campaign speech in Arizona about immigration detailed his plans for managing immigration. This speech took place on August 31, 2016, in Phoenix, Arizona. Trump strategically chose to go into detail about his plans for immigration in the state of Arizona. In the speech, Trump expressed his top four approaches to "strengthening" the United States' immigration policy as follows: build a wall along the southern border, end catch and release, "zero tolerance" for "criminal aliens," and block funding for sanctuary cities.<sup>41</sup>

One can assume he purposely delivered this speech in Arizona because it is a border state that often deals with border crossings, it is a swing state, and it is a state with a history of invasive immigration laws such as the SB 1070 which made it a crime in the state of Arizona to cross the border without documentation. This law made it legal for officers to ask for documentation and arrest the subject if they are not able to present such documentation.<sup>42</sup> In addition, according to Cecilia Ayón:

Legal Arizona Workers Act (State of Arizona, 2007) required the use of the E-Verify program to validate the immigration status of all newly hired employees, and businesses who knowingly hire undocumented workers can be penalized. Access to services was affected by Proposition 200 (Arizona Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act, 2004) because it required proof of immigration status when applying for public benefits.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Donald J Trump, "Full text: Donald Trump Immigration Speech in Arizona," Politico, August 31, 2016, Accessed April 4, 2022,

<https://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/donald-trump-immigration-address-transcript-227614>

<sup>42</sup> Cecilia Ayón, "Talking to Latino Children About Race, Inequality, and Discrimination: Raising Families in an Anti-Immigrant Political Environment." *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* 7, 2016, p.450, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26547153>.

<sup>43</sup> Cecilia Ayón, "Talking to Latino Children About Race, Inequality, and Discrimination: Raising Families in an Anti-Immigrant Political Environment." p. 452.

Arizona is the exemplar state for Donald Trump at the time because it abides by all the policies Trump was hoping to pass across all states. With that in mind, it was no coincidence that Trump chose to give a speech about his repressive immigration policies in a state that had laws in place to identify and prosecute undocumented immigrants.

Trump starts off his speech by stating that not everyone is fit to succeed in the United States and that the US needs to be more selective with the types of people it allows into the country. Trump stated:

While there are many illegal immigrants in our country who are good people, this doesn't change the fact that most illegal immigrants are lower-skilled workers with less education who compete directly against vulnerable American workers, and that these illegal workers draw much more out from the system than they will ever pay in.<sup>44</sup>

This statement is a bit contradictory because Trump starts off by saying that many are “good,” but most are a threat to the “white” American workforce. He then continues to dehumanize undocumented immigrants by continuously referring to them as “illegal” and as invasive species who come to this country to displace national workers. He victimizes American workers by calling them “vulnerable” signaling that undocumented immigrants are attacking or jeopardizing their livelihoods. Later on in the speech, Trump mentions the importance of making sure immigrants can assimilate and integrate into white American society. Trump is essentially stating that immigrants should leave behind their customs and traditions to better adapt to the dominant culture of the United States. He does not detail exactly how immigrants would be able to do that but one can assume that a major component of adaptation would be language. Many of the

---

<sup>44</sup> Donald J Trump, “Full text: Donald Trump Immigration Speech in Arizona,” Politico, August 31, 2016, Accessed April 4, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/donald-trump-immigration-address-transcript-227614>

immigrants entering the country through the southern border are Latinos who only speak Spanish. Not being able to speak English would make it harder for them to assimilate. However, it would not be hard for Spanish speakers to adapt to American society considering the second most spoken language in the United States is Spanish with over 40 million people speaking it.<sup>45</sup> Assimilation is not an issue for many immigrants in the United States, especially since there are hundreds of ethnic communities available for immigrants to fall back on. Trump's vision for assimilation resembles a Eurocentric transition.

Trump's first four approaches to immigration policies are building a wall, ending catch-and-release, implementing "zero tolerance" for criminal "aliens," and blocking funding for sanctuary cities. Trump believes that physically separating the United States from Mexico and installing sensor technology that would detect underground activities would deter immigration from Central America and Mexico into the United States. In his speech, Trump stated that Mexico would pay for the border; however, that claim was false as Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto made it clear that Mexico would not be responsible for the cost of the wall estimated at \$8 billion.<sup>46</sup> To this date, Mexico has not paid for the wall and only 453 miles of the 1,000 miles promised were built. However, it is important to note that Trump did not build a "new" border, he only replaced older fences which is one of the reasons the plan was less costly.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> "Languages spoken (at home) other than English in the United States by number of speakers in 2019," Statista, Accessed April 5, 2022

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/183483/ranking-of-languages-spoken-at-home-in-the-us-in-2008/>

<sup>46</sup> Todd Scribner, "'Catch and Release': Frequently Asked Questions." *Justice for Immigrants* (blog), Accessed April 5, 2022,

[https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/immigrant-detention/catch-and-release-frequently-asked-questions/..](https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/immigrant-detention/catch-and-release-frequently-asked-questions/)

<sup>47</sup> Jane C. Timm, NBC News. "Fact Check: Mexico Never Paid for It. But What about Trump's Other Border Wall Promises?" Accessed April 23, 2022.

He also believes in ending “catch and release” which was a policy where the Department of Homeland security would apprehend and release individuals caught crossing the border pending their case hearings.<sup>48</sup> The term “catch and release” is an incorrect phrase to use because it implies that individuals apprehended would be released without any consequence.<sup>49</sup> Trump’s “zero tolerance” policy is to automatically deport any undocumented immigrant with a criminal record. He did not specify what types of crimes would lead to deportations, but many people in the immigrant community were fearful for their future after these statements were made.

Finally, Trump planned to target sanctuary cities because they limit federal cooperation. According to “What Is a Sanctuary City Anyway?” by Naomi Tsu, “a sanctuary city has limited the extent to which it will volunteer resources in support of federal immigration enforcement agents’ responsibility to enforce federal immigration law.”<sup>50</sup> To Trump and other right-wing individuals, sanctuary cities are worthless because they “protect criminals.” However, what is often unsaid is that sanctuary cities give immigrants a safe space when reporting crime and give immigrants access to services that would otherwise be unavailable to them. Many undocumented immigrants live in sanctuary cities because they feel protected and have more opportunities to thrive.

Trump’s 2016 campaign on immigration in Phoenix, Arizona framed immigration as a national security risk. He described most undocumented immigrants as criminals and low-skilled

---

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/fact-check-mexico-never-paid-it-what-about-trump-s-n1253983>.

<sup>48</sup> Exec. Order No.13767, 82 Fed. Reg. 8,793 (Jan. 25, 2017).

<sup>49</sup> Justice for Immigrants, Accessed April 5, 2022.

<https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/immigrant-detention/catch-and-release-frequently-asked-questions/>

<sup>50</sup> Naomi Tsu. Learning for Justice. “What Is a Sanctuary City Anyway?,” May 22, 2017.

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/texts/what-is-a-sanctuary-city-anyway>.



workers who are unfit to thrive in American society. This speech opened the doors for xenophobic comments toward the immigrant community. It instilled fear into immigrants and children of immigrants already living in the United States by hinting at family separation.<sup>51</sup>

### 2.3. The “Zero Tolerance” Policy and Family Separation

The “zero tolerance” policy was implemented during the Trump administration to speed up deportations. In 2018, US General Jeff Sessions enacted the policy to prosecute any unauthorized immigrant caught crossing the US-Mexican border.<sup>52</sup> In this section, I focus on two main consequences of the policy. The first is that the “zero tolerance” policy disregarded prosecutorial discretion meant to recognize and take into consideration personal circumstances in immigration court. The second is that the “zero tolerance” policy resulted in immediate family separation by purposely prosecuting families caught illegally crossing the border to deter future families from doing the same.

In Justice Anthony Kennedy’s words, related to prosecutorial discretion, it means “enforcement of immigration law embraces immediate human concerns... the equities of an individual case may turn on many factors, including whether the [undocumented person] has children born in the United States, long ties to the community, or a record of distinguished

---

<sup>51</sup> The children of *Still Waters in a Storm* expressed their concerns about the language Trump used during his 2016 campaign to describe immigrants. It made many of them fearful for the future. In 2017, at the same time of Trump's inauguration, the kids were writing the first song for the play “The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote,” “The Rescuing Song.” One student in particular, Percy, mentioned that “the wall is stupid.” Percy refers to Trump’s plan to build a wall along the southern border to physically separate the US and Mexico. This influenced the song because while the kids were writing a song that relates to *Don Quixote* and their lives as immigrants, they were also incorporating their inner hero by advocating against family separation.

<sup>52</sup> Jefferson B. Sessions III served as the 84th attorney general of the United States from 2017 to 2018 under the Trump administration.

military service.”<sup>53</sup><sup>54</sup> In other words, it is a way for judges to take into account the immigrant’s contribution to American society such as paying taxes, involvement in the community, or military participation (whether it be themselves or their children). Family obligations are also a form of prosecutorial discretion. Many immigrants are parents of American citizens, who are often minors. According to Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia, “prosecutorial discretion is important because the government has limited resources it can use to carry out enforcement against noncitizens.”<sup>55</sup> Wadhia’s reflection includes a quote from an attorney she spoke to. The attorney mentioned the following regarding the Trump administration's disregard *vis-à-vis* prosecutorial discretion:

Attorney 6 describes the changes brought by the Trump administration as follows: Before the election... The legal system itself was already so flawed that it became necessary to emphasize the role that the government had in exercising humane and reasonable discretion. To not, for example, detain the eighty year old grandmother who had no criminal convictions or to not do things that would traumatize the life of children forever. But what the Trump administration did was just throw the discretion out the window and enforced everything to their maximum extent and change the existing legal standards to make them even worse for immigrants than they have already been.<sup>56</sup>

The “zero tolerance” policy, in every sense of the phrase, did not reserve sympathy for deserving cases. The policy extended to children and those brought to the United States as children. “The consequences of these changes have been sweeping as many individuals brought to the United States as young children and with a final order of removal are now targets of immigration enforcement.”<sup>57</sup> Some immigrants brought to the United States as young children are recipients

---

<sup>53</sup> Justice Anthony Kennedy is a retired lawyer who served as a Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States from 1988 to 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Wadhia, Shoba Sivaprasad, *Banned : Immigration Enforcement in the Time of Trump*, (New York University Press, 2019), 2-3

<sup>55</sup> Wadhia, *Banned : Immigration Enforcement in the Time of Trump*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Wadhia, 30.

<sup>57</sup> Wadhia, 35.

of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).<sup>58</sup> Under the Barack Obama administration, they were protected against forced removal for a renewable two-year time period. No one was safe during the “zero tolerance” policy.

The dehumanizing rhetoric amongst politicians, especially those of the Republican party, reinforced the disregard for prosecutorial discretion. For instance, the term “alien” starts to be used in an indistinctive manner, to describe all kinds of immigrants, documented or undocumented. According to the Oxford dictionary, the word alien means “(...somebody/something) strange and frightening; different from what you are used to,” or “not usual or acceptable,” or “connected with creatures from another world.” It is a term with negative undertones used to oftentimes describe a supernatural being unworthy of sympathy. The word alien is without a doubt dehumanizing and isolating used to inflict fear amongst the majority which in this case would be (white and/or wealthy) American citizens.<sup>59</sup> The United States is a country where even the documented immigrants are reduced to less of a human.

Undocumented immigrants are often referred to as “aliens,” “illegal aliens,” and “illegal immigrants.” In fact, on June 2018, Attorney General Sessions referred to undocumented immigrants as all three in his Remarks at Lackawanna College on Immigration and Law Enforcement Actions. He stated “estimated 11 million illegal immigrants... Pennsylvania alone

---

<sup>58</sup> The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a policy implemented in 2012 during President Barack Obama’s Presidential term by former Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano to defer action from deportation for a renewable two years. DACA allows its recipients to apply for a driver’s license, social security number, and a work permit.

<sup>59</sup> As an immigrant, I was myself an alien in the eyes of the federal government until I applied for and received my citizenship. For a long time I looked at my Permanent Residency Card with disdain because it was often referred to as the alien card. If I applied for a visa or college, I would have to provide my alien number or A-number for a short. It made me feel different. It made me feel unwelcome in a country that I believed projected itself as “welcoming.” I was an outsider.

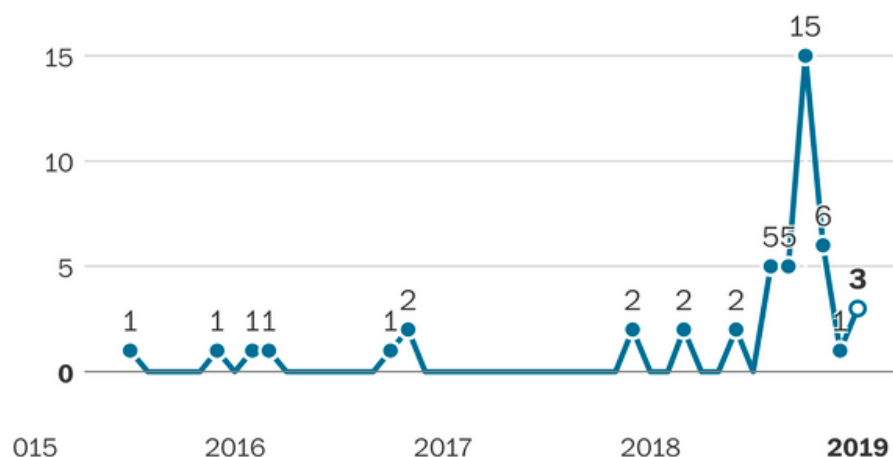
has an estimated 180,000 illegal aliens.”<sup>60</sup> There was not a moment in this speech where he referred to those individuals as “undocumented” immigrants. This is due to Trump’s efforts to try to resurrect the term, illegal alien. Before Trump ran for office, it was known among politicians that the term alien or illegal is insensitive, especially since a person cannot be illegal. Aaron Blake from *The Washington Post* writes: “While many politicians (mostly Democrats) have decided people can’t be “illegal” — even if their method of entry was — almost all politicians have decided that “alien” unfairly connoted invaders who were not human.”<sup>61</sup> However, when Trump ran for office, he began to use the term more often. Furthermore, Aaron Blake’s article provides a graph (figure 1 shown below) that shows the number of times Trump used the term illegal alien from his candidacy in 2015 to 2019. Based on the graph, Trump gradually increases his use of the term “illegal alien,” more importantly, he uses the term more often in 2018 during the time of the “zero tolerance” policy. It is not a coincidence that at the precipice of anti-immigrant times, which can be argued to be during the “zero tolerance” policy era, Trump profusely uses such a dehumanizing term to refer to immigrants. For many of the members of the Trump administration, including Sessions and Trump himself, all undocumented immigrants are illegal aliens, especially if the topic they are discussing involves crime rates within the undocumented immigrant community.

---

<sup>60</sup> Sessions, Jefferson B.. 2018. “Immigration and Law Enforcement Actions.” Transcript of speech delivered at Lackawanna College, Scranton, PA, June 15, 2018. Accessed March 30, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-jeff-sessions-delivers-remarks-lackawanna-college-immigration-and-law>

<sup>61</sup> Aaron Blake, “Trump seeks to resurrect a long-dormant phrase: ‘illegal alien’,” *The Washington Post*, January 14, 2019, Accessed April 4, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/01/14/trump-seeks-resurrect-long-dormant-phrase-illegal-alien/>

### Trump's uses of "illegal alien" over time



Source: Factba.se

ATTHAR MIRZA/THE WASHINGTON POST

Figure 1. "Trump's uses of "illegal alien" overtime"<sup>62</sup>

The Zero Tolerance Policy resulted in family separation, especially for mothers traveling with their kids. According to "Exclusive: Trump administration considering separating women, children at Mexico border" by Julia Edwards Ainsley, "Republicans in Congress have argued women are willing to risk the dangerous journey with their children because they are assured they will be quickly released from detention and given court dates set years into the future."<sup>63</sup> Considering the language Trump used to describe undocumented immigrants and his plans for immigration during his speech in Arizona, Republicans in Congress during the Trump

<sup>62</sup> Aaron Blake, "Trump seeks to resurrect a long-dormant phrase: 'illegal alien'." *The Washington Post*, January 14, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/01/14/trump-seeks-resurrect-long-dormant-phrase-illegal-alien/>

<sup>63</sup> Julia Edwards Ainsley, "Exclusive: Trump administration considering separating women, children at Mexico border," Reuters, March 3rd 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-children-idUSKBN16A2ES>

administration felt comfortable taking advantage of immigrant populations that were handled with more precautions during previous presidential administrations.

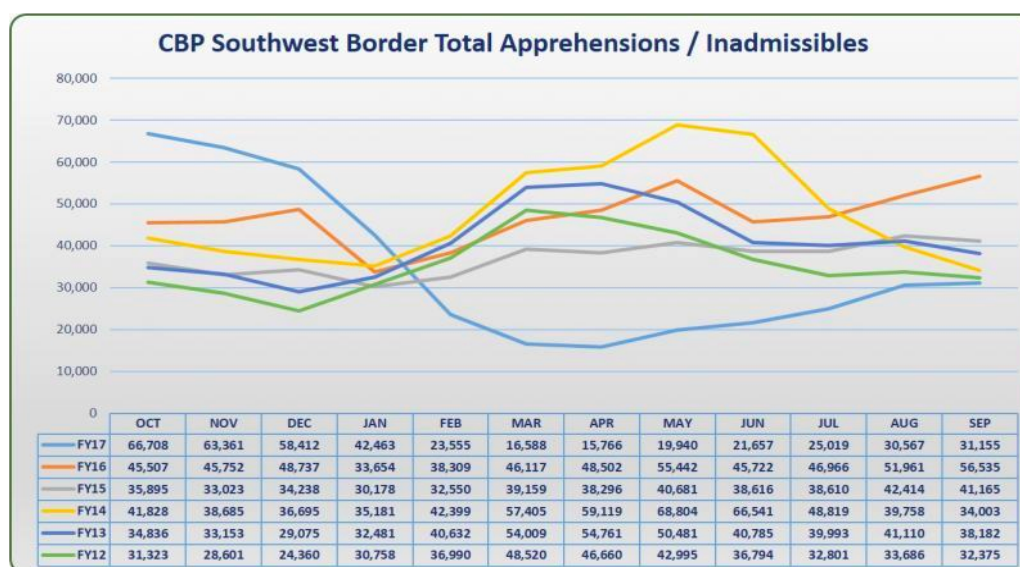


Figure 2. Customs and Border Protection Southwest Border Apprehension Totals<sup>64</sup>

Certainly, during the Obama administration, more undocumented immigrants were being deported than previous presidential terms, however, compared to the number of undocumented immigrants crossing the border during the beginning of Trump’s term, Obama had significantly more people to account for. Take a look at Figure 2, a line graph taken directly from the US Customs and Border Protection’s Southwest Border Migration Apprehension statistics. This graph shows the number of people migrating to the United States from the fiscal year 2013 to the fiscal year 2018. The yellow line shows the fiscal year 2014 (the start of Obama's second term). The light blue line shows the fiscal year 2017 (the start of Trump’s first term). The number of apprehensions was at its all-time high from March to June of the fiscal year 2014 compared to its all-time low in the fiscal year 2017 before the “zero tolerance” policy was implemented. The

<sup>64</sup> Figure 2. CBP Southwest Border Total Apprehension/ Inadmissibles, US Customs and Border Protection, December 15, 2017. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration-fy2017>

main takeaway from this observation is that the Trump administration did not have unprecedented numbers of people crossing the southern border to justify aggressive policies like “zero tolerance.”

As previously stated, the Republicans in Congress’ tactic to deter people from entering the United States illegally was by targeting family units. Women were willing to undergo more risk to enter the United States, so as a counter incentive, the “zero tolerance” policy strategically separated children from their families once apprehended. Children were then placed in a separate facility while their parents were being prosecuted. According to Dara Lind’s article “New statistics: the government is separating 65 children a day from parents at the border,” it states “Trump administration officials said Tuesday [June 18, 2018] that 2,342 children have been separated from 2,206 parents at the US-Mexico border between May 5 and June 9 as part of the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” policy of prosecuting people who cross the border illegally.”<sup>65</sup> Human Rights Watch added:

the “zero-tolerance” policy did not actually lead to prosecutions of 100 percent of adults apprehended at the border. The government specifically chose to prosecute parents traveling with children over adults traveling alone. This is in sharp contrast to the policy under previous administrations, under which parents traveling with children were rarely criminally prosecuted.<sup>66</sup>

It is clear that the Trump administration specifically targeted families. Based on the numbers given in Figure 3, it shows that, yes, there are more families entering the United States in fiscal year 2017. However, compared to the total number of border apprehensions that year, family

---

<sup>65</sup> Dara Lind, “New statistics: the government is separating 65 children a day from parents at the border,” Vox, June 19, 2018.

<https://www.vox.com/2018/6/19/17479138/how-many-families-separated-border-immigration>

<sup>66</sup> “Q&A: Trump Administration’s “Zero-Tolerance” Immigration Policy,” Human Right Watch, August 16, 2018.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/16/qa-trump-administrations-zero-tolerance-immigration-policy#q2>

units only accounted for about 24.88%.<sup>67</sup> Given these numbers, one can conclude that The Trump administration did not have enormous amounts of family unit immigration. There was no need to separate families for the sole purpose of warning prospective immigrants about the potential consequences they may face. On the contrary, it may encourage unaccompanied child migration putting children at danger and subject to trafficking.

USBP	Demographic	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	Total
Southwest	UAC	6,704	7,346	7,187	4,405	1,910	1,041	997	1,473	1,949	2,475	2,987	2,961	41,435
Border	Family Units	13,115	15,588	16,139	9,300	3,123	1,126	1,118	1,580	2,322	3,389	4,631	4,191	75,622
<b>Southwest Border Total Apprehensions</b>		<b>46,184</b>	<b>47,211</b>	<b>43,251</b>	<b>31,576</b>	<b>18,754</b>	<b>12,195</b>	<b>11,127</b>	<b>14,519</b>	<b>16,087</b>	<b>18,187</b>	<b>22,288</b>	<b>22,537</b>	<b>303,916</b>

Figure 3: Office of Field Operations Inadmisibles FY2017 (October 1 - September 30)<sup>68</sup>  
\*UAC= Unaccompanied children

The language, motive, and result of the “zero tolerance” policy were damaging to the immigrant community. It made an already vulnerable population feel unsafe and unprotected. It also disregarded individualized assessments of court cases made possible by prosecutorial discretion. The policy was short-lived ending in June 2018 two months after former Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced it. The policy resulted in multiple lawsuits including two class-action lawsuits filed in February 2018 and June 2018, respectively, by American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for separating families.<sup>69</sup> Despite the policy ending in June 2018, families continued to be separated at the border under different premises. For instance, according to Nicole Narea,

<sup>67</sup> Figure 3: Office of Field Operations Inadmisibles FY2017 (October 1 - September 30), December 15, 2017. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration-fy2017>

<sup>68</sup> Figure 3: Office of Field Operations Inadmisibles FY2017 (October 1 - September 30).

<sup>69</sup> “The Trump Administration’s “Zero Tolerance” Immigration Enforcement Policy,” Congressional Research Service, Accessed March 31, 2022, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/homesecc/R45266.pdf>, p. 10-11.



it [the zero-tolerance policy] did separate more than 1,100 additional families on a case-by-case basis where it found that the parents were unfit to care for their children. Officials cited DUIs and nonviolent offenses from a decade ago, the fact that the parents entered the US without authorization, and, in one case, that a father couldn't change diapers quickly enough as grounds to take children away, Gelernt said. He has argued that the Trump administration violated the court order in doing so.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, authorities under the Trump administration continue to separate families by finding loopholes that justified the separation. The “zero tolerance” policy set the tone for further approaches to immigration during the Trump administration. Current United States President Joseph Biden has made the effort to rescind the policy as a way to move forward and suppress the remaining effects of the zero-tolerance policy. Despite Biden's efforts, social discourses about immigration and racial hatred still prevail today, to a certain extent.

#### 2.4. The Dehumanization of Latino Children: “Kids in Cages”

The “zero tolerance” policy resulted in an increase in children being detained at the border due to family separation. These children were held in detention centers while they await pickup by a family member. These facilities were in place during the Obama administration; however, due to Trump's immigration policies, the number of children entering the detention centers increased, and so did, as consequence, the overall number of detention centers.<sup>71</sup> Many of the children housed in detention centers entered the United States accompanied by a parent. However, due to the zero-tolerance policy, they have been placed in a separate facility and

---

<sup>70</sup> Nicole Narea, “Biden rescinds Trump's “zero-tolerance” policy that enabled family separation,” Vox, January 27, 2021. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2021/1/27/22252294/biden-zero-tolerance-family-separation-trump>

<sup>71</sup> Anna Flagg and Andrew Rodriguez Calderon, The Marshall Project. “Trump Detained More Migrant Children At The Border For Far Longer Than We Knew,” October 30, 2020. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/10/30/500-000-kids-30-million-hours-trump-s-vast-expansion-of-child-detention>.

processed as unaccompanied children (add citation). The Homeland Security Act of 2002 appointed the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Health and Human Safety (HHS) the responsibility to care for unaccompanied children. (add citation) These are the departments that are partly responsible for the inhumane treatment of children in these centers

Detention centers often resemble a dog kennel with chain-linked fences and mats on the floor. This is where the term “kids in cages” emerged from. This term is used to describe the inhumane living conditions of these children. According to Katherine R. Peeler, Kathryn Hampton, Justin Lucero, and Roya Ijad-Maghsood,

They are referred to as hieleras (iceboxes) given their frigid temperatures. Sleeping mats and actual blankets are only inconsistently provided. As a result, children frequently attempt [to] sleep in freezing rooms with constant illumination on concrete floors with aluminum blankets as the only coverage for warmth.<sup>72</sup>

These children are not allowed to have a restful sleep because the conditions of the facilities do not allow it. Most children are sleeping on concrete floors because of limited mat supplies. They are also only given an aluminum blanket which is not enough to stay warm under cold temperatures and cold floors. In addition, according to Human Rights Watch,

US Border Patrol is holding many children, including some who are much too young to take care of themselves, in jail-like border facilities for weeks at a time without contact with family members, or regular access to showers, clean clothes, toothbrushes, or proper beds. Many were sick. Many, including children as young as 2 or 3, were separated from adult caretakers without any provisions for their care besides that provided by unrelated older children also being held in detention.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> PEELER, KATHERINE R., KATHRYN HAMPTON, JUSTIN LUCERO, and ROYA IJADI-MAGHSOODI. “Sleep Deprivation of Detained Children: Another Reason to End Child Detention.” *Health and Human Rights* 22, no. 1 (2020): p. 318. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26923495>.

<sup>73</sup> “Written Testimony: ‘Kids in Cages: Inhumane Treatment at the Border.’” *Human Rights Watch*, 11 July 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/11/written-testimony-kids-cages-inhumane-treatment-border>.

In addition to having to deal with frigid temperatures and minimal sleep, children in detention centers do not have access to regular phone calls to their loved ones and are not given basic toiletries. Older children are also given the responsibility of taking care of younger children who are strangers to them.

As mentioned earlier, these children experienced trauma in their hometowns and on their journey to the United States. Many of them come from low-income households and are escaping violence. They are underprivileged even more so once they reach the US. These children are traumatized in the sense that they have endured emotional, physical, and mental damage.<sup>74</sup> Human Rights Watch expressed that “[u]nder US law and international human rights law, the ‘best interest of the child’ should govern the state’s actions toward children.”<sup>75</sup> Depriving children of adequate sleep, proper hygiene, appropriate care for toddlers, and sufficient education do not comply with the “best interest of the child.” Therefore, one can argue that Trump's policies violated international law.

Overall, common knowledge about family separation as well as the increase in the number of kids detained in these centers drew the public's attention to the mistreatment of these “kids in cages.” Depriving children of sleep, warmth, food, hygiene products, and proper medical and child care is an act of systemic neglect against humanity. It dehumanizes these children because neglecting basic human needs convey that they are less than a human. Forcing children to sleep on cold concrete floors and denying them the right to regular family contact reveals that

---

<sup>74</sup> They hold on to the idea of hope. They hope for safety, love, security, nutrition, education, and opportunity for growth. These are all things many American children take for granted because it is federally available to them. These children are no different. They deserve fair treatment.

<sup>75</sup> “Written Testimony: ‘Kids in Cages: Inhumane Treatment at the Border.’” *Human Rights Watch*, 11 July 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/11/written-testimony-kids-cages-inhumane-treatment-border>.

DHS and HHS treat these kids as if they were animals. They are detained as prisoners. The mistreatment of these children raised national concerns as the conditions were often televised across a wide array of media platforms. The wide coverage of this scandal by the media resulted in everyone, including immigrant children already living in the United States, witnessing how US authorities treated children like them. The dehumanization of immigrant kids in detention centers does not only impacts those children, but also the lives of all Latino immigrant children observing and experiencing the hate and discrimination by Trump supporters who believe they do not belong in this country.

### Chapter 3

## How *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* Humanizes the Experiences of Child Immigrants

“They belong in this country, and this project will carry on...until the whole country agrees.”

~Stephen Haff

*Kid Quixotes: A group of students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where*

*Everything is Possible*

It is evident that the Trump administration had a strong impact on the immigrant community. From his campaign speech to implementing the “zero tolerance” policy to institutionalizing immigrant detention centers, the Trump administration made undocumented Latino immigrants already living in the US concerned about deportation. Within this demographic of worried people, were the children of Still Waters in a Storm. As mentioned earlier, in 2016 the kids began their journey in writing a musical adaptation of *Don Quixote* that fuses their lives as immigrants and their purpose as “kid heroes.” This chapter summarizes how the events (such as the “zero tolerance” policy and family separation) mentioned in Chapter 2 influenced *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* as discussed in Chapter 1. It is crucial to emphasize that the children of Still Waters in a Storm come from immigrant backgrounds. As shown in the pages that follow, the policies, the language, and the dehumanization of immigrants during the Trump administration directly impacted these children. The first song written by the group, “The Rescuing Song,” was the initial step of their journey. In *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*, Stephen Haff writes about the impact the news on Trump had on the children. Many of the children were worried their families were going to be separated as a result of the promises Trump made to American citizens in his Arizona speech. It was a terrifying moment for the children, and “The Rescuing Song” is reflective of that. This chapter examines the kids’ exposure to detention centers when they briefly exchanged letters between unaccompanied girls who were in the custody of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. The musical *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* functions as both a

creative project and an advocacy campaign meant to raise awareness about the stolen innocence of immigrant children in the United States, especially during the Trump administration.

### 3.1. The Story of Sarah

Chapter 1 of *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible* begins with the story of Sarah Sierra, a (then) seven-year-old Mexican-American girl. *Kid Quixotes* is a book written by Stephen Haff that details the children's process behind translating and adapting *Don Quixote* into a musical production. Throughout the book, Haff details the story of Sarah's family. Sarah is a student at Still Waters in a Storm and she plays Don Quixote and herself in *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*. Sarah is also the co-author of *Kid Quixote: A True Story of Belonging in America* which was discussed in chapter one.<sup>76</sup> Sarah lives in a low-income neighborhood in Brooklyn with her mother and father. Her mother's upbringing was a difficult one because she grew up in a humble household with an abusive father and an honest mother. Sarah's mother was raised in the countryside with eight siblings where they would harvest potatoes. Sarah's grandparents could not afford to send their children to school. Therefore, Sarah's mother left her home in Mexico with the goal of reaching the United States.<sup>77</sup> Haff discloses, "[Sarah's mother] would eventually walk for more than two weeks across the burning desert sand, carrying nothing, avoiding snakes and going days without water, to climb over the wall into the promised land."<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> *Becoming Kid Quixote: A True Story of Belonging in America* is a novel written by Stephen Haff and Sarah Sierra detailing Sarah's trajectory of finding her own voice, and finding her place as a first generation Mexican immigrant in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen Haff, *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*, 23-25.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

Sarah's mother migrated to the United States seeking a better life for herself and her future children, and to escape the abuse she faced back home. Sarah is aware of her mother's sacrifices. When asked about her own opinions on the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, and what she would say if an agent approached her, she replies that she would ask them to "please stop doing what you're doing."<sup>79</sup> In other words, she would request to stop treating immigrants harshly, particularly because the agents are unaware of the trauma they carry. Haff continues by stating that Sarah would suggest that the ICE agents should walk across the desert or try living in a cage themselves to understand the difficulties undocumented immigrants face to get a chance at a better life.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, Sarah believes that the best way to address the flaws of how we address immigration is through empathy.

Sarah's story is similar to the stories of the rest of the *Kid Quixotes*. All of them are either first-generation immigrants or immigrants themselves. Still Waters in a Storm is both an after-school program and a refuge for these children where they can be free to express themselves.<sup>81</sup> Throughout the process of creating the first part of *Kid Quixote* (the musical), the kids are encouraged to share their immigrant experiences in New York City and the world. Since Sarah Sierra plays Kid Quixote in the musical, the book highlights her family's story in detail; however, her story is akin to the other kids' stories.

### 3.2. The "Rescuing Song"

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Haff, *Kid Quixotes*, 24

<sup>81</sup> There are many definitions for first generation immigrants, I am using the US Census's definition which describes a first-gen immigrant as a US citizen whose parent(s) were born outside the United States.



In the wake of the Trump regime, in late 2016, the children began to work on their *Kid Quixote* project. With everything they were witnessing on the news and the conversations they would overhear from their parents, it was difficult to ignore what was unfolding before their eyes. “The Rescuing Song” was the first text the kids wrote together. According to Haff,

The first step in writing “The Rescuing Song”- named by the kids for the desperation of the historical moment in which we are writing... is to make a list of who or what we want to rescue. Sarah writes, “poor people, immigrants, kids in cages, little kids that came here by their self, hungry people, people getting bullied, humble people, my neighborhood, my family, and the Earth.” While she doesn’t say so directly, it seems she might be trying to rescue herself, reaching in as well as reaching out.<sup>82</sup>

“The Rescuing Song” is about people or objects they want to rescue, and since they are witnessing their community being degraded, they want to save them. The kids are from Bushwick, Brooklyn, they belong to a community of immigrants and working-class people. When brainstorming “The Rescuing Song,” Sarah mentions what she witnesses in her everyday life that needs rescuing; at the top of her list are “poor people, immigrants, and kids in cages.”<sup>83</sup> When Haff mentions that “she might be trying to rescue herself,” he makes it clear to the reader that these kids also fall into the category of people they are trying to save. Therefore, this project is a reflection of their lives as well as the lives of immigrants who are being demeaned by the current presidential administration. When the kids finished writing the song, they strategically chose to place it towards the beginning of the musical.

The musical begins with Sarah being woken up by her mother to get ready for school. While her mother is helping her get ready, Sarah is lost in reading *Don Quixote*. After her mother sends her off to school, Sarah takes off her uniform skirt and says “Yo soy Don Quijote,” “I am

---

<sup>82</sup> Haff, *Kid Quixotes*, 34

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Don Quixote.”<sup>84</sup> That phrase transports the audience to the world of *Kid Quixote*. Sarah, also known as Don Quixote, asks “is anyone in distress?” That is when “The Rescuing Song” begins to play.<sup>85</sup> The song is being sung by a boy begging to be heard. The boy sings:

I beg you to understand me  
 To listen to my voice  
 I’m not asking to be revered, here  
 I just want to have a choice  
 I just want to have a choice  
 Por favor, [¡]entiendanme!  
 Ignorance built this wall.  
 I don’t want to live in fear  
 Mi familia is my best of all.<sup>86</sup>

This is the first verse of the song and it instantly addresses the concerns the students of Still Waters in a Storm are facing. The boy, a representation of all immigrant kids, is pleading to be listened to. Kids are often being told what to do by their parents, teachers, guardians, caretakers, and other adults. Decisions are often made for them. It is not until a person turns 18, in the US, that they have legal autonomy. It is the age where one can vote and influence legislation. In other words, it is not often that a child has authority over what happens to them. With that said, immigrant children have no authority over their parents' decision to have them travel to the United States. Furthermore, children have no control over when their parents are being deported or discriminated against. Finally, they are powerless when an administration separates their family and puts them in hostile detention centers. The kids understand that they have limited control over the aforementioned situations, but, thanks to *Kid Quixotes* (the musical), they can step into the world of imagination and unleash themselves of any other person’s authority over

---

<sup>84</sup> Stephen Haff and the Kids of Still Waters in a Storm, “The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote,” Unpublished, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 3.

their lives. The boy in “The Rescuing Song” is asking to be listened to and to gain some authority over his life. According to Cambridge Dictionary, “‘hearing’ is an event; it is something which happens to us as a natural process. ‘Listening’ is an action; it is something we do consciously.”<sup>87</sup> It is important to make the distinction between hearing and listening because when listening one chooses to pay attention to what one hears. The boy is actively asking the audience to acknowledge and empathize with him.

Additionally, the last three lines mention the “wall” Trump promised to build that would physically separate the US and Mexico. The children understand that the wall is a tangible item used to figuratively differentiate American citizens from immigrants.<sup>88</sup> When drafting those lines, the children were brainstorming a phrase that rhymes with “ignorance built the wall” and also connects to the word “fear” which is the last word of line 8. Haff states:

Then Sarah, seven years old at the time, reads “My family is my best of all.” We know from the quiet in the room that something meaningful has happened. The line rhymes according to the pattern we’ve established, it identifies the nature of the “fear” in the line before, the fear of separation of a family by deportation of the parents, and it is spoken in the voice of a child, “my best of all.” The image is vivid: a child on one side of the wall, the parents on the other.<sup>89</sup>

The first verse of the rescuing song is arguably the most crucial part of the musical. In only nine lines, the kids were able to incorporate their purpose for the project, their motive, and their call to action. Their purpose is to be kids with a big imagination and be heroes who advocate for children like them. Their motive is their immigrant families who live in fear of deportation and family separation during the Trump regime. Finally, their call to action is for American citizens,

---

<sup>87</sup> “Hear or Listen (To) ?” Accessed April 15, 2022.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/grammar/british-grammar/hear-or-listen-to>.

<sup>88</sup> Stephen Haff, *Kid Quixotes*, 59.

<sup>89</sup> Haff, *Kid Quixotes*, 60.

especially those who are Trump supporters, to understand and choose to listen to them. They are begging American citizens to listen to them because immigrant kids are affected the most when they vote for leaders and policies that forcefully separate kids like them from their families. These kids are constantly living in panic; however, when we read Haff's text, we learn that, whether they know it or not, they are becoming something greater. They are advocates! Still Waters in a Storm is the Kid Quixotes' sanctuary, it is a safe space for the children to find their voice. Now, with this ongoing project, the kids are advocating for a country where children like them feel safe enough to use their voices.

### 3.3. "Prisoner's Story" and The Letters

In the *Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote*, there is a scene where Don Quixote frees prisoners. It's called "The Prisoner's Story." In this scene Don Quixote and Sancho Panza come across galley slaves who are prisoners of the King, and Quixote insists on meeting every prisoner. The two main questions Quixote asks are: What is your name and why are you here? Some of the prisoners' responses are funny like in the case of Willian who is imprisoned for loving a basket of laundry. However, two of the prisoners are there for issues that are affecting the children in their real life. Zadie for instance is imprisoned because she could not pay off the judge.<sup>90</sup> In other words, she is poor. The children of Still Waters in a Storm come from low-income immigrant families who may be unable to afford immigration lawyers, much less have enough time, patience, and money to keep their case active and get it in front of a judge. Furthermore, Stephen reveals:

---

<sup>90</sup> Stephen Haff and the Kids of Still Waters in a Storm, "The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote," Unpublished, 21.

The crime of poverty, committed by the third slave, is one they all share, and as the injustice for their situation come to lights, the kids internalize the shame of having less than others. Rebecca, who played the Shepherd boy in the whipping scene- the one whose boss won't pay him for his work- until her family moved away, used to come to class everyday after school without food.<sup>91</sup>

As the children adapt *Don Quixote* to make it relevant to their lives, they simultaneously introspect about their feelings regarding their financial, mental, and physical state. The kids are also aware that other immigrants can sympathize with their stories, so they include them in the play so that audience members everywhere recognize the narrative of immigrant children like them. You, the reader, and readers of both *Becoming Kid Quixote* and *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and The One Room School House Where Everything is Possible* are made aware of the student's personal narratives that are waved into the musical. However, from the perspective of an audience member with no prior knowledge of the process behind the musical, the stories being told can be any immigrant's story. Therefore, it is imperative that the kids deliberately select stories that can relate to other immigrant children.

In continuation with the prisoner scene, the fourth prisoner Don Quixote comes across is a child who is detained because she is an immigrant. A few weeks before the kids began working on the prisoner scene, Stephen Haff invited them to write letters to teenage girls that are detained under the custody of ICE.<sup>92</sup> Sarah Sierra states, "the girls are mostly from Guatemala, which is in Central America, south of Mexico. They are teenagers. But they are stuck in a detention center, waiting to hear what will happen to them, instead of going to school... Stephen encouraged us to tell them stories that would cheer them up."<sup>93</sup> In light of all the darkness that undocumented

---

<sup>91</sup> Stephen Haff, *Kid Quixotes*, 206.

<sup>92</sup> Sarah Sierra and Stephen Haff, *Becoming Kid Quixote*, 13.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

children are going through in the ICE detentions, the kids of Still Waters in a Storm were able to communicate with them to comfort them in the best way they could, by telling them stories. The kids understand that other children like them are being mistreated simply for seeking asylum in the United States. They can relate to the kids and they want to help. When the kids are ready to create the prisoner scene, Haff pulls out a stack of letters that the detained girls have written in response to the kids of Still Waters in a Storm. One of the detained girls said “Dios te bendiga” (God bless you) to Sarah.<sup>94</sup> After reading the response letters, the kids were ready to write the prisoner scene.

Now it's time to work on the prison scene for our show... We all know exactly how we will adapt the prison scene. The prison will be like a detention center, and we will share the girl's stories in our play so that everyone who watches us perform will know their tale. Then I, Kid Quixote Sarah, will free the prisoners!<sup>95</sup>

The prisoner scene is a crucial moment in the play because it directly exposes the audience to the “kids in cages” crisis that is happening at the time. At that moment the kids step into the role of advocates and imagine the world where kids like them are put into positions where they can save innocent and vulnerable children being detained.

When Don Quixote finds out the reason why Mia- the migrant child imprisoned by the king- is being detained, she asks her a couple of questions. Mia's response embodies the mind of an innocent child:

Quixote: Where is your home?

Mia: A rainbow house with a silver roof where the sun will always shine.

Quixote: How did you come here?

Mia: We followed the path of a signing coyote

Quixote: Why are you alone?

Mia: I lost my mommy's hand.

Quixote: What do I need to know to enter your fragile little heart?

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Mia: Hug me tight; tell me to close my eyes; tell me I'm safe and this is just a bad dream [Quixote hugs mia]<sup>96</sup>

Mia's response shows that she needs a mother. It proclaims the injustices of separating families. After Quixote hugs Mia, the kids read the letters out loud to the audience. Unfortunately, the letters are not included in the original script for privacy reasons. Only those who attend the *Kid Quixote* performances have the pleasure of hearing excerpts from the letters. The letters create a separation between reality and fiction. The audience can step away from the imaginative world of *Kid Quixote* and enter reality. It fuses the fictional moments in the play with the reality of Trump's family separation policies. The audience is able to listen to real stories of children being detained from the voices of the children themselves. The children are giving a voice to the voiceless kids. Being detained strips them of social, academic, and physical rights. It deprives them of their humanity. However, through the "Prisoners Story," the "Kid Quixotes" can be real-life heroes and acknowledge the kid's experiences.

In contrast to sharing immigrant stories, the kids also understand the vitality of censoring fragile details because they may be used against them if told to the wrong crowd. In *Kid Quixotes*, Haff clarifies the reasoning behind Mia's initial silence in the scene:

They decide, based on stories in the news that scare them at night more than monsters under the bed...[t]his...is where the song happens, their response to the silence of incarcerated migrant children separated from their families. Cleo's [Sarah's then six-year old sister] initial silence in the scene represents the hiddenness of immigrants' stories in general, stories that can, if told to the wrong person, undo their lives.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Stephen Haff and the Kids of Still Waters in a Storm, "The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote," Unpublished, 21.

<sup>97</sup> Stephen Haff, *Kid Quixotes*, 219.

The students understand the importance of staying quiet when asked about their immigration status. Despite living in a sanctuary city, the kids are conscious of the political atmosphere they are living under. As mentioned in chapter 2, Trump was against sanctuary cities. Therefore, kids were feeling unsafe everywhere they went. It was impossible to decipher who, during the Trump era, was anti-immigrant or not, despite living in a progressive city like New York. Stephen mentions a time when an audience member asked the children to disclose to them if they are “DACA” recipients. Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) is a program enacted by former President Barack Obama to protect immigrant children from deportation and authorize their work visas. DACA, at the time the question was asked, was being threatened by the Trump administration. Therefore, none of the children responded to that question.<sup>98</sup> The kid’s silence spoke volumes as it conveyed a message to the audience to respect immigration status, especially when asking children.

Overall, *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* is a musical that fuses the experiences of the kids writing it and the injustices immigrant children like them are facing. It is evident that the kids of *Still Waters in a Storm* are under the impression that this project is meant to highlight their lives as immigrant children as well as encourage them to be the imaginative, creative, and smart children that they are. However, it is unclear whether they think of themselves not only as fictional heroes but also as heroes in real life. *Kid Quixote* references the “zero tolerance” policy which led to family separations. It also references “kids in cages” which is a larger humanitarian conflict that continues to be recognized as a global issue.<sup>99</sup> The kids are

---

<sup>98</sup> Haff, *Kid Quixotes*, 219.

<sup>99</sup> Hilary Andersson “‘Heartbreaking’ Conditions in US Migrant Child Camp,” BBC News, June 23, 2021, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57561760>.



well aware of the xenophobic language used by Donald Trump and the unjust policies implemented during his administration campaign. Instead of letting the news discourage them, they- with the help of Haff- incorporate immigration current events within their play to create a dialogue that would otherwise be ignored, generally, by children their age and people who are uninterested in it.

*Afterword: A personal note on this project*

As an adaptation of *Don Quixote* written by the kids and their teacher, Stephen Haff, of Still Waters in a Storm, *The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixotes* serves to reimagine the lives of immigrant children in the United States. When these children began the *Kid Quixote* project in 2016, during the beginning of the Trump administration, they witnessed, together, Trump talking down to Latin American immigrants, who were, in his view, unworthy of the “American dream.” The kids who participate in this initiative are either immigrants themselves or children of migrants. Therefore, the demeaning words Trump used to describe immigrants impacted them directly, as highlighted in Chapter 3.

Instead of sweeping aside the xenophobic comments made by Trump, these children took action against those words by incorporating the moments they were living within their writing project. Without the intent to be advocates, they created a project that spoke against immigrant child detention centers and the mistreatment of immigrants, from the perspective of a child. In the case of one of them, Sarah Sierra, becoming Don Quixote allowed her, explicitly, to gain confidence and speak out on the experiences her mother had faced when migrating to the United States. The experience of collective writing and performing made her more appreciative of her origins and by doing so, we might think, it also inspired others, peers and audience members alike, to do the same.

The language Trump used in his campaign speech in Arizona demonized undocumented immigrants. He used terms such as “criminals,” “dangerous,” and “rapists” to refer to undocumented immigrants coming from Central America and Mexico. These terms portray

undocumented immigrants as evil or threatening. Furthermore, once in office, Trump implemented policies to directly target undocumented immigrants already living in the US and those thinking of entering. The zero-tolerance and family separation policy were designed to punish and prevent immigrants of Latin American origin from coming to the US to seek asylum. As shown in previous pages, Trump was not dealing with unprecedented numbers of immigrants at the US-Mexican border. The numbers have been decreasing since 2017 and were at their all-time low moments before implementing the “zero tolerance” policy. Regardless, it was unnecessary for Trump to execute these aggressive policies.

The application of the “zero tolerance” ideology led to family separation at the border. Children were separated from their families and placed in detention centers until a guardian or a refugee center picked them up. For undocumented immigrants already living in the US- like Sarah’s mother- the policy threatened their family’s livelihoods. Sarah and other children attending Still Waters in a Storm were afraid that at any moment ICE agents would knock on their door and detain their parents. The Trump era was a frightening moment for immigrants all over the United States, even those who had documentation, like me.

*The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote* is a project that embodies resilience in the face of adversity. These children in a way represent immigrant children all over the United States who are often only defined by their paperwork, or lack thereof, and not by their creativity or potential contribution to society. This project is important because there is now a platform where children can voice their opinions about social issues. This project is an ongoing series of children voicing their opinions on real-life matters and using their platform to become, in my eyes, “real-life heroes.” It is a metafictional theatrical play where marginalized vulnerable kids

gain agency, as they reflect on their very own practices of collective writing and performance. Through an act of shared imagination, the children believe they can be anything they set their minds to. “I am very good at pretending,” declares Kid Quixote. The product of their act of imagining together, as a community, opens a safe space where the children can discuss issues that remain generally unspoken in their age group. Through fiction, the kids can regain autonomy. As we are reminded in the play, Kid Quixote is, after all, the ultimate “Desfacedor de Agravios y Sinrazones, the Righter of Wrongs[!]”

## Bibliography

- Ainsley, Julia Edwards, “Exclusive: Trump Administration Considering Separating Women, Children at Mexico Border,” Reuters, March 3, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-children-idUSKBN16A2ES>.
- “Alien\_1 Adjective - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced American Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.Com.” Accessed April 6, 2022. [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/alien\\_1](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/alien_1).
- Andersson, Hilary, “‘Heartbreaking’ Conditions in US Migrant Child Camp,” BBC News, June 23, 2021, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57561760>.
- Ayón, Cecilia. “Talking to Latino Children About Race, Inequality, and Discrimination: Raising Families in an Anti-Immigrant Political Environment.” *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* 7, no. 3 (2016): 449–77. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26547153>.
- Batalova, Jeanne Batalova Erin Babich and Jeanne. “Central American Immigrants in the United States.” *migrationpolicy.org*, August 6, 2021. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states>.
- Blake, Aaron, “Analysis | Trump Seeks to Resurrect a Long-Dormant Phrase: ‘Illegal Alien.’” *Washington Post*, January 14, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/01/14/trump-seeks-resurrect-long-dormant-phrase-illegal-alien/>.
- Brand, Donald D. “Rio Grande | Definition, Location, Length, Map, & Facts | Britannica.” *Encyclopedia . Britannica*. Accessed April 28, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rio-Grande-river-United-States-Mexico>.
- “Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy.” *Congressional Research Service*, 27 Oct. 2021, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF11151.pdf>.
- Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de, and Edith Grossman. *Don Quixote*. 1st ed. Ecco, 2003. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat03691a&AN=bard.b1251097&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Cheatham, Amelia. “Central America's Turbulent Northern Triangle.” *Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations*, 1 July 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-turbulent-northern-triangle>.

- Constantino, Annika Kim. “The Majority of Central Americans Who Want to Migrate Internationally Are Driven by Economic Factors, Report Says.” CNBC, November 23, 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/23/central-americans-migrating-internationally-driven-by-economic-factors-report-says.html>.
- Council on Foreign Relations. “Central America’s Turbulent Northern Triangle.” Accessed April 6, 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-turbulent-northern-triangle>.
- Council on Foreign Relations. “U.S. Detention of Child Migrants.” Accessed April 6, 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-detention-child-migrants>.
- Diaz, Paola. “‘La Bestia’ — the Train of Violence and Assault That Takes Migrants to US-Mexico Border.” *ThePrint* (blog), May 10, 2020. <https://theprint.in/features/la-bestia-the-train-of-violence-and-assault-that-takes-migrants-to-us-mexico-border/384506/>.
- Goldstein, Dana, and Manny Fernandez. “In a Migrant Shelter Classroom, ‘It’s Always Like the First Day of School.’” *The New York Times*, July 6, 2018, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/06/us/immigrants-shelters-schools-border.html>.
- González, Ángel Rodríguez. “Realidad, Ficción y Juego En ‘El Quijote’: Locura-Cordura.” *Revista Chilena De Literatura*, no. 67, 2005, pp. 161–175. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/40357142](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40357142).
- Green, David. “The Trump Hypothesis: Testing Immigrant Populations as a Determinant of Violent and Drug-Related Crime in the United States.” *Social Science Quarterly* 97, no. 3 (2016): 506–24. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26612334>.
- Haff, Stephen. *Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teacher, and the One-Room School Where Everything is Possible*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2020.
- Haff, Stephen, and Sierra, Sarah. *Becoming Kid Quixote: A True Story of Belonging in America*. New York, NY: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2020.
- Stephen Haff and the Kids of Still Waters in a Storm, “The Traveling Serialized Adventures of Kid Quixote,” Unpublished,

- Human Rights Watch. "Q&A: Trump Administration's 'Zero-Tolerance' Immigration Policy," August 16, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/16/qa-trump-administrations-zero-tolerance-immigration-policy>.
- Kwan, Jonathan, "Words Matter: Illegal Immigrant, Undocumented Immigrant, or Unauthorized Immigrant?" University, Santa Clara, Accessed April 6, 2022. <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/focus-areas/immigration-ethics/immigration-ethics-resources/immigration-ethics-blog/words-matter-illegal-immigrant-undocumented-immigrant-or-unauthorized-immigrant/>.
- Lind, Dara. "New Statistics: The Government Is Separating 65 Children a Day from Parents at the Border." Vox, June 19, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/2018/6/19/17479138/how-many-families-separated-border-immigration>.
- Luiselli, Valeria. *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2017.
- Mann, Meredith. "The Case of the False Quixote." The New York Public Library. April 22, 2015. <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2015/04/22/case-false-quixote>.
- Martinez, Oscar. *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail*. London: Verso, 2014.
- Mark Stevenson and Sonia Perez D., "Migrant Caravan on the 'Beast' Train to Avoid Mexican Police Raids and Make It to U.S. Border," USA Today (Gannett Satellite Information Network, April 24, 2019), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2019/04/24/migrant-caravan-central-america-riding-beast-train-mexico/3563922002/>
- McCrary, Donald P.. *No Ordinary Man : The Life and Times of Miguel de Cervantes*. Stanford: Peter Owen Publishers, 2014. Accessed April 28, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Miñana, R. (2020). Stephen Haff. Kid Quixotes: A Group of Students, Their Teachers, and the One-Room School Where Everything Is Possible. *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America*, 40(1), 215.
- Narea, Nicole. "Biden Rescinds Trump's 'Zero-Tolerance' Policy That Enabled Family

- Separation.” Vox, January 27, 2021.  
<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2021/1/27/22252294/biden-zero-tolerance-family-separation-trump>.
- OHCHR. “Convention on the Rights of the Child.” November 20, 1989,  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.
- Shah, Sural. “The Crisis in Our Own Backyard: United States Response to Unaccompanied Minor Children from Central America.” *Harvard Public Health Review* 9 (2016): 1–8.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48503138>.
- Scribner, Todd. “‘Catch and Release’: Frequently Asked Questions.” *Justice for Immigrants* (blog). Accessed April 23, 2022.  
<https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/immigrant-detention/catch-and-release-frequently-asked-questions/>.
- Sessions, Jeff, “Attorney General Jeff Sessions Delivers Remarks at Lackawanna College on Immigration and Law Enforcement Actions,” June 15, 2018.  
<https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-jeff-sessions-delivers-remarks-lackawanna-college-immigration-and-law>.
- Statista. “Languages Spoken in the United States 2019.” Accessed April 6, 2022.  
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/183483/ranking-of-languages-spoken-at-home-in-the-us-in-2008/>.
- Statista. “Latin America & the Caribbean: Homicide Rates 2020, by Country.” Accessed April 26, 2022.  
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/947781/homicide-rates-latin-america-caribbean-country/>.
- Stevenson, Mark and Perez D., Sonia, “Migrant Caravan on the 'Beast' Train to Avoid Mexican Police Raids and Make It to U.S. Border,” *USA Today* (Gannett Satellite Information Network, April 24, 2019),  
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2019/04/24/migrant-caravan-central-america-riding-beast-train-mexico/3563922002/>
- Tenorio, Luis Edward. “Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and the Integration of Central American Unaccompanied Minors.” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2020): 172–89. <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2020.6.3.08>.



- Terrio, Susan. "Dispelling the Myths: Unaccompanied, Undocumented Minors in US Immigration Custody." *Anthropology Today* 31, no. 1 (2015): 15–18.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44082018>.
- Timm, Jane C., NBC News. "Fact Check: Mexico Never Paid for It. But What about Trump's Other Border Wall Promises?" Accessed April 23, 2022.  
<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/fact-check-mexico-never-paid-it-what-about-trump-s-n1253983>.
- Tsu, Naomi, "What Is a Sanctuary City Anyway?," Learning for Justice, May 22, 2017.  
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/texts/what-is-a-sanctuary-city-anyway>.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "Border Patrol Warns Immigrants of Life-Threatening Risks of Crossing Rio Grande River," May 17, 2019.  
<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/border-patrol-warns-immigrants-life-threatening-risks-crossing-rio>.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "Southwest Border Migration FY2017," December 15, 2017.  
<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration-fy2017>.
- Wadhia, Shoba Sivaprasad. *Banned : Immigration Enforcement in the Time of Trump*. New York: New York University Press, 2019.  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat03691a&AN=bard.b2380454&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Zatz, Marjorie S., and Nancy Rodriguez. "No Good Options: Unaccompanied Minors in the US Immigration System." In *Dreams and Nightmares: Immigration Policy, Youth, and Families*, 1st ed., 113–56. University of California Press, 2015.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt14btfn8.8>.