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Louisiana benefits from immigration crisis, 'embraces' ICE detention centers

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As National Hispanic Heritage Month comes to a close, we have a unique opportunity to reflect on how we have honored the legacies and contributions of all people in the United States of Latinx descent. In true Louisiana fashion, the Asociacion Cultural Latino of Acadiana (ACLA) held its annual Latin Music Festival on Oct. 5. Although the event offered an excellent opportunity to experience a sliver of the culture that Louisiana residents can relate to the most (good food, music and art), the publicity given to the event has steered clear of a glaring elephant in the room that hasn't been addressed — the migrant crisis.

This year has seen the problem snowball. The Trump administration has been aggressively adamant about limiting the number of asylum seekers. There are a few notable attacks on the migrant community that have been especially egregious. The "Zero Tolerance" policy is perhaps the most notorious action against immigrants taken and has caused the separation of thousands of children from their parents. Then, reports surfaced that the children held in these ICE facilities experienced gross neglect — lacking soap, clean clothes, diapers and even access to facilities to clean themselves.

We've seen mass, targeted immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrests, like at the Tyson chicken factory in Mississippi (notably, when the workers attempted to unionize). Officials of the Trump administration have even gone so far as suggesting that the writing on the statue of liberty be changed.

Action to combat these attacks has been slow but present. Luckily, the ACLU sued the Trump administration in federal court last February, and on June 26 U.S. District Court Judge Dana Sabraw issued a preliminary injunction that ordered the government to return all children under five years old to their parents within 14 days and within 30 days for the rest. A few hundred children were removed from the overcrowded facilities to other ones. And naturally, there was a huge surge of backlash that ensured no one would take such a ludicrous suggestion seriously.

While other states such as California have pushed back against ICE detention centers, Louisiana has embraced them, becoming a popular hub for detained migrants. Eight jails have begun to host asylum seekers and other migrants over the past year, six of which are located in LaSalle parish. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement have reported that Louisiana now holds about 8,000 migrants in Louisiana out of 51,000 nationally — nearly 16%. These centers are hours away from major cities like New Orleans, making it even more difficult for detainees to access resources to aid in their cases, such as immigrant rights groups and immigration lawyers.

There's an incentive on both ends for the unlikely union. Many of these towns (and let's face it, the majority of the state) already relied heavily on the profits reaped from the prisons. Since ICE stepped into the picture, the AP reported that salaries have risen from $10 an hour to $18.50. ICE has also only had to pay $70 per day for each inmate, more than double what the state was paying to house convicts, but still well below what ICE pays nationally, which was estimated to be roughly $133 per day in 2017.

This is an issue that represents the culmination of issues Louisiana has faced for too long. We've relied on jobs brought to our state from unethical and unsustainable methods that only continue to decline as the understanding of the world advances. There's a global shift away from the oil industry, and with the war on drugs edging closer to an end, we soon won't have the vast for-profit prisons to bring cheap labor and jobs to run these for-profit prisons. Yet, state officials and citizens alike are still vocal in their support of President Trump, whose administration only seeks to regress further, taking Louisiana with it.

In an area of the state that owes its inception to a group of religious asylum seekers from Canada, it's ironic that so many people here choose to turn a blind eye to the real struggles and fears that bring immigrants to this country. This Hispanic Heritage Month should've been about more than fun and games — it needed to be a spark of a growing movement to provide aid and education about what's really happening in this state.