

We Must Stop Caging Black and Brown Bodies

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Our criminal justice and immigration systems are at a breaking point. Once perceived to be two different systems, the recent “zero tolerance” enforcement and the subsequent use of Operation Streamline has blurred the lines. Immigrants are being charged in federal criminal court—ultimately making up half of all defendants in federal court and a quarter of federal prisoners. At the same time, documented black and brown communities continue to be disproportionately incarcerated at higher rates than their white counterparts. The tactics employed by both systems are age-old ones – categorize certain groups, identify them as economic and public safety threats, lower the threshold that justifies state intervention, separate them from their families, and place them in cages under the guise of retribution. All of this with public support built on fear and falsehoods. From slavery, internment camps, mass incarceration and now immigration, the system and rationale changes, but rarely does the strategy. This is not uniquely American, but it is overwhelmingly so. What we’ve been sold is a violation of human rights labeled as a solution to a problem that doesn’t exist. What we’ve been told is that we have an immigration and a public safety issue. In reality, we have a human rights issue.

Directly impacted communities have long urged philanthropy and advocates in the immigration and criminal justice systems to see the parallels in the caging of black and immigrant brown bodies, now we’ve arrived at a point where we can no longer afford to *not* listen and act accordingly. Criminal justice reform efforts must intentionally integrate the needs and experiences of immigrants in immigration facilities, while opponents of the current immigration system have a great deal to learn from black communities and criminal justice system reformists and abolitionists.

Nelson Mandela once said, “for to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” At Ceres Policy Research, our most recent study on the inhumane practices of Operation Streamline is in many ways no different than our research and advocacy efforts towards ending mass incarceration: both are critical moves towards our north star of fostering the liberation of communities and ensuring the right to move freely.

For more information on current legal challenges being waged against the criminalization of immigration, register for our September 5 webinar [here](#). You can also download our report on how Operation Streamline courts fail to provide due process protections for immigrants [here](#). For any questions contact Mitzia Martinez at mmartinez@cerespolicyresearch.com.