**Thursday, Aug. 22, 2024 / The migrant crisis, via Chicago**

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

**[BILLBOARD]**

NOEL KING (host, *Today, Explained*): The Democrats brought their biggest party to Chicago this week.

SCORING IN <apocalypse swag - BMC>

*<CLIP> Barack Obama: Chicago! It’s good to be home!*

NOEL: Lotta joy. Chicago’s also had a rough few years.

*<CLIP> FOX 32 Chicago*

*Roger Romanelli: The only way Chicago survives, the only way, is we set our laws and we enforce our laws.*

NOEL: The south side is a troubled spot. It’s very segregated. Predominantly Black. It is chronically - and some say almost criminally - under-resourced.

*<CLIP> Hady’s Reporting*

*Aisha Ray: When we ask and say what we want, we are still ignored.*

NOEL: Now, two summers ago, Texas Governor Greg Abbott started busing migrants into Chicago. More came too - from Denver and Mexico. And people who already felt left behind … got very angry.

*<CLIP> DNC\_TUESDAY\_12\_ZOE*

*ZOE: What is this? Like they setting up job training for them?!*

*NOEL: Is that a bad thing if they’re setting up job train–*

*ZOE: Why are they not set up job training for us?!*

NOEL: Immigration may be the Democrats’ BIGGEST liability - and a crisis is unfolding just a couple miles away from the DNC. That’s coming up next on *Today, Explained*.

**[THEME]**

NOEL: I’m Noel King in Chicago. At least forty-six thousand newcomers to this city in the last two years. And where are they going? A lot of them are going to the Southside.

NOEL: Aisha Ray, is a developmental psychologist who raised her family on the South Side says it was ALREADY hard done by the city.

*<CLIP> Hady’s Reporting*

*Aisha Ray:They don't have adequate childcare programs for parents, afterschool programs. They don't have adequate, physical activities like basketball groups or little league.* Our kids systematically do not have access to these kinds of things. *i think what has happened with the current migration issue, the most current issues, in the last year or so, is that it really raised for many Black communities the question about - what about us? There are examples where, empty school building was promised to the community. And it turned out to be a shelter for, migrants. And this created a kind of anger.*

NOEL: This dynamic enrages Zoe Leigh. She took me to a shuttered hotel on the South Shore that was reopened as a shelter for migrants,

*<CLIP> DNC\_TUESDAY\_12\_ZOE*

ZOE: <inaudible> Look at these cars! This a hotel! Do you know, man?! Hey.

NOEL: You're pointing to a nice jeep. You're pointing to a couple of nice looking sedans. And your assumption is that these are owned by migrants?

ZOE: They are owned by migrants! Not, they– your assumption. Do you know– and they get free parking. Do you know that we will get our stuff towed?

NOEL: Tuesday afternoon, I took the L to Woodlawn.

*DNC\_TUESDAY\_ONE*

*<CLIP> DNC\_TUESDAY\_ONE\_TRAIN-02*

*NOEL: All right. How close are we to King?*

*CADDY: Are we about, like, two minutes?*

*NOEL: What's your name?*

*CADDY: My name is Caddy.*

NOEL: I met Caddy Bender on the L. I know that data shows: the flow of migrants to Chicago SLOWED this year. But if you LIVE in Woodlawn it is easy to have missed that.

*DNC\_TUESDAY\_ONE*

*<CLIP> DNC\_TUESDAY\_ONE\_TRAIN-02*

*CADDY BENDER: This is a serious problem. they is getting more benefit than the people who here are hungry and been on the streets all their life, and they came in and the president and the government and the mayor is taking care of them.*

*DNC\_TUESDAY\_TWO*

*<CLIP> DNC\_TUESDAY\_TWO\_WALKTOCHURCH-07: <AMBI OR CROSSTALK>*

*<CLIP> DNC\_TUESDAY\_TWO\_WALKTOCHURCH-07:*

*NOEL: What if we get off together at King? And then I can talk to you while we’re out on the street, there’s a little bit less noise–*

*CADDY: You can walk with me because I'm gonna to walk to the church.*

*NOEL: Wait are you going to…*

*CADDY: The New Beginning, down the street.*

*NOEL: That's where I'm going.*

*NOEL: Well, while we're walking to the church, you can tell me your story. I would love to hear it… <fade under Caddy>*

NOEL: Caddy works part time, doing deliveries for a nail salon. His rent is $570 a month. He’s on his way to the church to pick up some food. Money is very tight. He can’t afford much extra … anything. Of particular irritation, Caddy can’t afford to get a lady friend.

*<CLIP> DNC\_TUESDAY\_TWO\_WALKTOCHURCH-07:*

*CADDY: She going to need stuff. She need like clothes wash. She need like to get to work. She need like to hang out with her friends cause she's young.*

*NOEL: All right. So you're not looking for a girlfriend. That part I get. So it's very rare that the government, for example, is just going to hand anybody a check, including a migrant. Right.*

*CADDY: Yea.*

*But but you're you're talking about specific resources like housing and food stamps.*

*CADDY: Yea!*

*NOEL: Are those things that you could use.*

*CADDY: Yes. Well, I seen that they wearing better clothes than i’m in.. They buying them clothes, getting them a gift card to buy clothes. And geting them a gift card to live and giving them a gift card to go shopping and buy groceries and all that.*

*NOEL: How do you feel about that?*

*CADDY: I don't think that’s right.*

NOEL: It takes about ten minutes to walk to the church. Along the way Caddy points out evidence of the neighborhood’s distress.

NOEL: There’s the street you can’t walk safely because of the gangs.

*<CLIP> CADDY: they can’t come over here*

NOEL: There’s the shops - none of them are owned by Black people he says.

*<CLIP> CADDY: You aint seeing no black owning no business over here….*

NOEL: There’s the housing project with police out front.

*<CLIP> CADDY: there’s always something going on in here…*

NOEL: And then we get to the church.

NOEL: Two stories, tan brick, directly across from the early stages of a multi-million-dollar community center that will provide job training, have restaurants, and a bank. It’s the brainchild of Pastor Corey Brooks.

*DNC\_TUESDAY\_EIGHT*

*<CLIP> DNC\_TUESDAY\_EIGHT\_PASTOR*

*COREY: I'm the senior pastor of New Beginnings Church of Chicago. I'm also the CEO and founder of an organization called Project Hood. It is a, not for profit, that helps people to transform their lives.*

NOEL: Pastor is a local celebrity, often quoted in conservative media - a behave-yourself Republican, a get-a-job Republican, a be-a-mannnn Republican.

NOEL: His political views, as you’ll hear, shape his views immigration. But so does the reality of the south side’s economy.

*COREY: Here in this neighborhood where we are right now, there was a McDonald's that was closed, a Walgreens that was closed, the grocery store closed, another grocery store that was closed. And so you see an area that has been hard hit, economically and hard hit because of crime as well.*

*NOEL: I want to ask you to take me back in your mind to the moment when you realized, hey, there's a lot of new people in Woodlawn that didn't used to be here.*

*COREY: I think that moment occurred when, out of nowhere, we had about five Venezuelan and Colombian families come to the church, and some of the women were really broken, crying and trying to get help. And I felt horrible because, here are these individuals who have been let into our community and then just kind of left to fend for themselves. So I felt compelled. Listen, we have to do something. Even though I'm real, I have a real hard stance on immigration and how I think the border ought to be controlled and helped.*

*NOEL: What's your stance?*

*COREY: My stance is, you know, I believe in I want people to come to America, but I wanted to do it legally. I think we have these open borders, especially under the Harris and Biden leadership, that they just kind of allow people to just come in, and I'm totally against that. I'm not for open borders. I'm not for people just being able to come in illegally and have all of this access. So I believe in a controlled border.*

*NOEL: So I got off the train about a ten minute walk from here, and every person I spoke, I asked about this dynamic. Everybody knew what I was talking about, and I heard a lot of real anger.*

*COREY: Well, those individuals who feel that way have a reason, a legitimate reason to feel that way. It’s become a joke here. How fast individuals get cars. These are individuals who come into the country and they haven't been here a month, but they have a car. And that's not fantasy. That's something that we see in reality - that's actually happening. There's a lot of assistance and a lot of money being spent.*

*NOEL: And so the pushback I'm hearing is. I'm a resident of the South Side. I was here before. And you? The city, the state, the federal government. You didn't do that for us. In your mind. Is that complaint real and justified and true?*

*COREY: That complaint is real and justified. Anytime we have children reading at a 6% or 4% proficiency and our schools are in horrible condition, and then you bring individuals into our neighborhood and you give them funds that could have gone toward bettering our educational system. That is a serious, serious issue.*

*NOEL: Have you ever found yourself in a position where. A migrant family or a migrant community, or an individual has asked for help and you've said no.*

*COREY: Absolutely not. if anyone comes to us needing help, we're going to figure out a way to help them. And, especially if we communicate to them that, listen, you're going to have to help yourself as well. This is just not going to be some type of handout type of thing. And they understand that we go all out. You know, there are individuals who have come into our country illegally, and for whatever reason, there are some people who are putting them first. But I also tell them that that does not give you the right to become a victim. We have to still roll up our sleeves, we have to still be accountable, and we have to still decide that we're going to make life better. We just can't lay down and just say, no one is helping me and cry all day.*

*NOEL: You talk like someone who has been voting Republican for a very long time.*

*COREY: I have a lot of conservative principles, and I've been voting Republican for a long time. That would be a true statement.*

*NOEL: How do you feel about Kamala Harris?*

*COREY: Well, you know, I think that. Her policies are lacking. I think she, has not spelled out enough. And then, a lot of people feel as if too, she was the immigration czar, and she's, added to the issues and problems that we're facing in the inner cities of America.*

*NOEL: The reason migrants came to Chicago was they were bused to Chicago by Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott. Do you have any animus toward him?*

*COREY: No. I think one of the reasons why they did that is because Chicago called itself a sanctuary city and said, hey, anybody from anywhere can come to Chicago and you'll be okay. I think that is the bigger problem that title of being a sanctuary city and opening the door and inviting everyone to come, that's the issue.*

*NOEL: When you're speaking to your congregation and you know these concerns exist, there are new people coming in. They're getting things that we're not getting. Life is really hard. And you know that in that same congregation there may be some of these people who are recent arrivals to Chicago, also listening to what you have to say. How do you preach about this?*

*COREY: Yeah. Well, I just did a series on Job, and in that series I talked about my opening statement. The most profound lesson that I've learned in life is this life is hard.Whether you're a Venezuelan. A Colombian. A Mexican or an American. Principles don't discriminate. Love your neighbor is one of the greatest principles that has ever existed. And if we abide by that, regardless of how we feel about immigration, it will help us to love a lot of people and help a lot of people.*

SCORING IN <Canopy Dusk - BMC>

NOEL: Before I left, Pastor Brooks introduced me to a pair from Venezuela who were at the church that day – now, I don’t speak Spanish – here’s what they said: they are happy to be here. They feel welcome here. “We haven’t had any problems with the Americans,” they told me.

*<CLIP> NELCE ROMAN: También es Como intellectual porque cuando ideas pains cuando ai eventos a nosotros estamos hablando. Entonces ellos bank nosotros is algo similar. Como entonces su forehand Como Como esa union e. No problem.*

*Translation: It's that they see us interacting with others. When they open up food kitchens, when they hold events, we are there helping. They see that the interaction between us and them is the same as with anyone else. They see we’re like other people. We haven't had any kinds of problems here!*

NOEL: Coming up next: What immigration to Chicago and other cities could mean for the 2024 election.

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7lgner6IO0)*> Wilco - Via Chicago*

*Searching for a home*

*Searching for a home*

*Via Chicago*

NOEL: It’s *Today, Explained*. So we heard a lot of claims on the south side of Chicago. And the specifics on what KIND of support newcomers are getting are a little hard to find.

We know, because the city publishes a nifty “cost dashboard,” that Chicago spent around $460 million dollars on care for migrants.

The DNC actually complicated things a little bit. When the Dems chose Chicago last year, Texas Governor Greg Abbott started sending even more buses here.

Yesterday on a mostly-deserted street outside the main venue while delegates and some protesters and some pamphleteers strode around the streets – we met this guy:

GERALDO CADAVA (history professor at Northwestern University): My name is Geraldo Cadava. I'm a history professor at Northwestern University and a professor of Latina and Latino studies. I wrote an article for The New Yorker in early April called “Can Chicago Manage Its Migration Crisis?”

NOEL: Most people who try to pinpoint the start date for Chicago's migrant crisis will talk to you about the summer of 2022. Can you tell us exactly what happened that summer?

GERALDO: It was around the time when Greg Abbott and Ron DeSantis started shipping migrants from Latin America, from Florida, the Texas border, to Martha's Vineyard, to New York, and to Chicago.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-LSEg-Btt8)*> KHOU: New tonight, Governor Abbott's office announced they are now sending migrants from the border to Chicago. First bus arrived tonight at the city's Union Station.*

GERALDO: Here in Chicago, I mean, I think there was a way in which me living up in the North side, I could kind of remain oblivious to it for the first couple of months, because I think a lot of the migrants were being placed in shelters on the South side, primarily. But I think as the numbers increased, the city had to kind of expand the footprint of migrants across the city.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPxvZRRsst4)*> ABC 7 Chicago: Now, they plan to voice their concerns over a Park District facility in the Edgewater neighborhood that's been used as a migrant shelter for almost half a year. The group wants neighborhood programming that so many depend on, including children and seniors, to return…*

GERALDO: They opened more shelters in different parts of the city. And I think that's when many in Chicago who don't live on the South Side, started seeing a lot of migrants, and we started hearing a lot more about African-American communities having very mixed feelings to, to say the least, about the situation.

NOEL: When I was on the South Side yesterday, talking to people in those African-American communities, one thing that I heard repeatedly was “they put them here. They didn't have to put them on the South Side, but they put them in our neighborhoods.” It sounds like that is also your understanding.

GERALDO: It is. It is. I mean, it's for a lot of different reasons, I think. I don't think it's just a desire of the city to impose migrants to kind of create a conflict in the neighborhood. But the way it was explained to me was that a lot of it stemmed from the fact that ten, 12 years ago, Mayor Rahm Emanuel closed many high schools in the city, and many of those high schools were on the south side.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD_laXLlWME)*> AP, concerned parent: This is all they ever known, for all the years of their life, of being in school. And you going to take that away from them? Rahm Emanuel, whoever, I want him to get down here and I want him to come have a meeting with us.*

GERALDO: And so, when the city was thinking about what vacant spaces do we have available to us, a lot of the vacant spaces they had available were on the South Side.

NOEL: I wonder if you can walk us through the process of what happens when an undocumented immigrant arrives in Chicago?

GERALDO: Well, they they come in the busses or in a plane – I mean, O'Hare was also a kind of landing point for them as well – and so, they would ostensibly use the shelter as a temporary residence while they looked for jobs, got their kids settled in schools. But for many of them, the kind of very temporary stays turned into longer stays. And that's when we started reading reports about unsafe conditions or unsanitary conditions, the outbreak of various illnesses or, you know, the lack of good sources of water or showers, those sorts of things.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tBNhR42a9A)*> Chris Gerardi, volunteer: Not enough, uh, supplies, not great amount of food, very little shower capability, toilets, things like that. The basics are, are really very, are missing here. It’s been heartbreaking.*

NOEL: When you were doing your reporting for The New Yorker on the South Side, did you hear sentiments like, they have nicer clothes than us, the city is giving them money and food stamps, they have new cars?

GERALDO: I heard those things and more. I mean, I heard that they were, you know, all getting $9,000 as soon as they arrived in the city and buying homes. I mean, I heard that, and I was like, well, what kind of home can you buy for $9,000? I don't know, but there was certainly the sense that resources were flowing to the migrants that could be going to communities in Chicago that have been asking for greater resources for a long time. When they talked about $9,000, new shoes, clothes, houses, in the case of the person I talked to, I just heard it more as an expression of their frustration that they had been forgotten.

NOEL: To what extent, then are new migrants – so it's been two years since the busses first came – to what extent are they integrated into the formal economy, and to what extent are they in more of the gray economy – working under the table, selling things on the street?

GERALDO: I think it's a full range. You know, I talked to people who did find something that sounded more like stable work, either cleaning houses, working in a restaurant, things like that. But then, you know, you also just see throughout the city, families basically asking for handouts.

NOEL: Can you talk about the case for these people being here, the case for the necessity of people being here?

GERALDO: Yeah, totally. You know, Chicago has lost population. You know, the black population in Chicago has declined – Many black people are moving either to the suburbs or even back to the south, a kind of reverse great migration. And, so I've heard the argument that we need migrants to do the work that had been done by people who'd left the city. I think Chicago, like New York, you know, has the advantage for migrants of having big Latino communities. You know, I mean, for migrants, it's a kind of welcoming place to come to because they can speak Spanish easily. They can find grocery stores easily that sell the things that they're looking for, you know.

NOEL: So they may benefit the city. And on the flip side of that, or maybe adjacent to that, I want you to just consider – knowing what you know, the idea that many people are coming here to get nice shoes and nice clothes.

GERALDO: Yeah, sure.

NOEL: And food stamps.

GERALDO: Yeah, sure. I mean. Here I will put on my kind of academic hat a little bit and just say that that is a very old idea about migrants coming to the United States,to kind of leech off of the United States and take our resources, but I think that immigrant rights organizations have tried to respond by talking about the many, many contributions that migrants make to the United States, in particular communities. I mean, I just heard the president of the United Farm Workers talking this morning about how, you know, all of you sitting in this room probably aren't going to need a lawyer or a doctor today, but you will need to eat three times today. And so you benefit from a migrant being here more often than you benefit from the services of a lawyer or a doctor or something like that. You know, one thing I found really interesting, as I've given talks about Latino conservatism and the work that I'm doing in the field of Latino history, I give talks at universities where a lot of the students are the sons or daughters of immigrants. And they always want to ask this question at the end about like, you know, how should I feel about this? Because for the first time, I feel like my family is being directly impacted by the presence of other migrants because…  
  
NOEL: In what way?  
  
GERALDO: Well, they say that their parents’ court dates for legalization, naturalization, temporary work status, whatever. Their family's court cases have been delayed because the courts have been inundated with these new cases to process. And so it was unfamiliar to me to hear young Latinas and Latinos feel very conflicted about immigration because, you know, from having taught Latino history for 15 or 16 years, I mean, young Latinos, college students, they've kind of uniformly been on the side of immigrant rights. And they feel more conflicted about it now because it's impacting their families directly.

SCORING IN <Scanning the Horizon - BMC>

NOEL: Avishay Artsy produced today’s show. Hady Mawajdeh produced and reported. Miranda Kennedy edited. Laura Bullard fact-checked. Patrick Boyd and Rob Byers engineered. Thanks to Amina Al-Sadi in Washington. Thanks in Chicago to Brian Alexander, Andre Smith, Dylan Sharkey, Aimee Hilado and Daniel Borzutzky. Tomorrow, the biggest speech of Kamala Harris’ life. Sean and I will be in your ears with analysis. I’m Noel King in Chicago. This is *Today, Explained*.

**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**