

## Immigration policy

## Suffer the children

WASHINGTON, DC

## Putting a horrific practice in historical and international context

MIRIAN and her 18-month-old son fled Honduras after soldiers threw tear gas into their home. They requested asylum at the American border with Mexico five weeks later. Mirian surrendered her Honduran ID card and her son's birth certificate, which listed her as his mother, whereupon immigration officers took her son. "My son was crying as I put him in the seat," Mirian told a court. "I did not even have the chance to comfort my son, because the officers slammed the door shut as soon as he was in his seat. I was crying too. I cry even now when I think about that moment."

Since October, hundreds of children have been taken from their parents at the border and put in separate facilities. In March 2017, John Kelly, then secretary of homeland security, suggested his department would do that "to deter more movement along this terribly dangerous network". The administration has since backed away from the rationale of deterrence.

But this April Jeff Sessions, the attorney-general, announced a "zero tolerance" policy towards illegal immigration, vowing to prosecute unlawful border crossings and to separate parents and children "as required by law". Entering America illegally is a criminal misdemeanour, punishable by up to six months in jail.

America is not just imprisoning people who are in the country illegally. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), they are imprisoning asylum-seekers who present themselves at the border—in violation of international law, the Homeland Security Department's stated policies and the Fifth Amendment's due-process guarantee. And once they release border-crossers, the government appears to make little effort to reunite them with their children. Lee Gelernt, the lead lawyer in the ACLU's case against the Trump administration over the separations, calls it "the worst thing I've seen in 25-plus years of doing this work".

Separations also happened under previous administrations, but generally they were inadvertent. Under the Obama administration, says John Sandweg, a former acting director of America's immigration police, "the overarching goal was family unity...even if we were enforcing the law against them." Families were detained together while the government adjudicated their status.

## Culture wars

## Roseanne's self-immolation

CHICAGO

## Racist tweets from the star spur ABC to cancel its hit show

ONE of the defining features of life under Donald Trump is that even as his presidency reassures Islamophobes, xenophobes, misogynists, bigots and racists, it simultaneously stiffens the resolve of Americans who value tolerance and inclusion. Take the reaction to a tweet by Roseanne Barr, the eponymous star of the smash-hit reboot of a 20-year-old sitcom. On May 29th Ms Barr tweeted, in response to a thread discussing a loony conspiracy theory about the CIA spying on French presidential candidates in Barack Obama's time, that "Muslim brotherhood & planet of the apes had a baby=vj". She was referring to Valerie Jarrett. Ms Jarrett, who was born in Iran but is not Muslim, is the daughter of a distinguished black pathologist and served as an aide to Mr Obama.

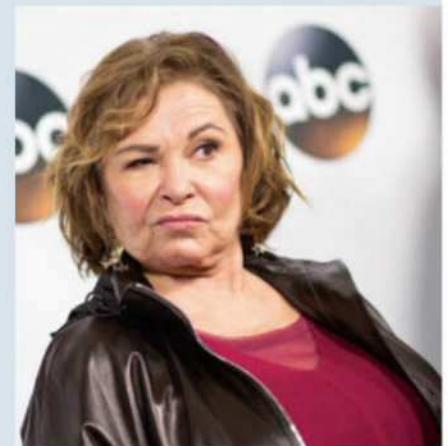
Ms Barr later deleted her tweets and apologised to Ms Jarrett. The response was nonetheless swift. Within hours of the tweet, ABC, the television network that airs "Roseanne", cancelled a planned second season. "Roseanne's Twitter statement is abhorrent, repugnant and inconsistent with our values, and we have decided to cancel her show," Channing Dungey, head of ABC entertainment, said in a statement on May 29th. Bob Iger, the boss of Disney, which owns ABC, tweeted that "there was only one thing to do here, and that was the right thing".

The end of the "Roseanne" reboot is a loss for ABC—more than 27m viewers tuned in to the first episode. The network had just started to promote the show's next season to advertisers. ABC's motivation in cancelling the show was mainly economic: advertisers would have boycotted it, says Clint Wilson, the author of a book on racism and the media. It is a reflection of the growing willingness of corporations to take a political stand; after a recent massacre at a high school in Florida, Delta, an airline, Enterprise, a car-rental company, and other big corporations cut ties with the National Rifle

Association, a pro-gun lobby.

It is not the first time Ms Barr's political views have caused consternation. Now a fervent Trump supporter, she once ran for the presidency on a Green Party ticket and championed liberal views on gay rights and abortion. But she has increasingly taken to retweeting conspiracy theories from the fringes of the internet. On the same day as posting her missive about Ms Jarrett, Ms Barr also tweeted that Chelsea Clinton, daughter of Bill and Hillary, was married to a nephew of George Soros, a philanthropist. She called Mr Soros "a Nazi who turned in his fellow Jews to be murdered in German concentration camps & stole their wealth". In late March she accused David Hogg, a teenager who survived the Florida shootings, of giving a Nazi salute.

Last year Ms Barr's children took control of her Twitter account, deleted her past tweets and changed her password. Shortly before the premiere of the "Roseanne" reboot, she was back on Twitter. ABC took a risk when it commissioned the revival of a show about the lives of an unremarkable working-class family in the Midwest. The main danger, it turns out, was the star of the show.



Appraising the Barr

One near-parallel to America's current immigration practices came in 2005, when George W. Bush's administration ramped up criminal prosecutions for border crossing, rather than just sending people back voluntarily or removing them through the civil immigration system. As a result, federal courts along the border found their resources strained. Prosecutions for people and drug-smuggling declined as those for petty immigration violations rose.

Amnesty International, an advocacy group, has urged America to end the practice of separating asylum-seeking families—something done by few if any other rich countries. In the Netherlands, asylum-seeking families are detained together, and the children can attend school. Even Australia, which detains asylum-seekers arriving by boat in miserable conditions in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, does not take children from their parents. ■