The Dilley detention center promises Central American asylum-seekers humanitarian housing—but some may be receiving more abuse.
Gerardo Gonzalez, a 70-year-old lifelong resident of Dilley, Texas, did not recognize them. The two middle-aged white men dressed in button-ups and slacks stood out ostentatiously among the Mexican watermelon pickers and oilfield workers taking their lunch break in Taqueria Jalisco, one of the few restaurants that offers sit-down dining in the small, 3,000-person town of Dilley. Even the way the two men said taco attracted attention. “It’s not tawk-co; it’s thah-co,” Gonzalez thought as he paused from eating his enchiladas verdes to examine the men. They clearly were not locals. Only 85 miles from the South Texas border, Dilley is almost entirely Mexican. Gringos—those with white skin—are conspicuous. Occasionally, white deer hunters pass through, or tourists come to take pictures of Dilley’s haunted Feed and Grain Mill, “Watermelon Capital of Texas” monument, and “Slice of the Good Life” welcome sign, but the two men didn’t wear the faded green attire of hunters nor bear the oblivious smiles of tourists. One of them held a briefcase; they were here on business. The two men, Tommy Aulsp, an employee from the private prison company Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), and a representative from Target Logistics, a company that specializes in workforce housing, arrived in Dilley on August 25, 2014, to alert the city council that the 51.5 acre tract outside the town previously used to house oilfield workers would be converted into the South Texas Residential Center, the largest immigrant detention facility in the United States.

The meeting between the two men and the Dilley City Council was merely a formality. CCA and Target Logistics had already received the go-ahead from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to begin construction on the detention center. “It was out of our hands because it was a private business leasing out a private piece of land,” Noel Perez, the city administrator of Dilley, recounted. “Even though it’s within our city limit, we
ICE calls a “family detention space.” The States (U.S.), the Dilley complex is what undocumented persons dot the United conference, announced that the 51.5-acre one of the arid, red dirt roads that line the

o to CCA employees. 

and has sold many new gym memberships

West Coast,” according to a young lady appeared in Dilley. Most were “from the

tide of foreign CCA and Target Logistics for the detention center, the two men 

fathers aren’t as lucky as him. 

a year after their initial separation. Luis reunited with his family in San Antonio, 

running for my life,” Luis said, grinning, “The night is the best time, but I was still 

the border or die,” Luis recounted. Using

members of the Zetas cartel spo

sixteen-year-old who currently resides in 

Central Americans from the tropics to the 

sixty percent increase from the previous five

months. All the migrants claimed the cause of the spike in detentions. Of the 68,445 family units that entered the border from January to June, 34,570 were from Central American countries, 20,270 from Honduras, and EL Salvador, collectively known as the Northern Triangle. 

Gang violence—similar to what Luis experienced in Mexico—often drives Central American families to flee the barren desert of Texas. Marilla, a sixteen-year-old who currently resides in the U.S. was wounded in a shooting; however, she was 

her family from El Salvador to the Gulf Coast, so she and her brother and sister, 

Santurachu (MS-13) gang took in an interest in her. “In El Salvador, they take young girls and young boys and put them in plastic bags,” Gabriela explained to the United Minorities Agency. “My uncle told me it wasn’t safe for me to stay there.” According to the U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime, Honduras, Guatemala, and EL Salvador rank one, four, and 

respective for countries with the highest homicide rates. Honduras tops the list with 94.9 killings per 100,000 people. The massive migration of family units from the Northern Triangle to the U.S. this past summer has overwhelmed President Barack Obama’s administration. In an attempt to expedite the legal proceedings of families arriving from Central America, Obama has based his immigration policy on detaining adults with their children, according to a White House press release. By keeping family units centralized in detention facilities, the government “can enable the prompt removal of individuals who do not qualify for asylum,” said Obama. 

Although Obama’s rhetoric has focused on efficiency, Johnson barged into Dilley with a different message. To 

the South Texas Residential Center carries this refrain to immigrants: you will be apprehended. It will now be 

from January 1, 2014—in other words, beginning of this year—are now priorities for removal by their

and entering the United States illegally after January 1, 2014. “Any oversight is minimal. With shareholders in mind and 

all the detention centers and prisons that ICE oversees "free and federal," the Eloy Detention Center has the highest death rate. 

who have died in the facility since October 2003. Krauss shrugged of the statistic with the answer: "People die all the time. Yet, the cause of deaths are alarming. 

on October 8, 2008, Emmann Owusu, a 62-year-old Ghanaian arrested for shoplifting, hanged himself after spending less than two years in Eloy’s detention center. Two others—a 32-year-old 

from Guatemala and a 29-year-old from Mexico—also hanged themselves on November 1, 2010. You are more可能 be apprehended if they offered proper proof of identity, unless Dilley’s city administrator, said the new center is a “humanitarian move from the immigration process. They will have better integration and less chance they’ll be put in their home countries," Johnson announced in a press conference after the opening of the immigrant detention center in Dilley. He added, “It will now be more likely that you will be apprehended by the Border Patrol. If they are not, then you will be brought to Dilley. It is a possible home for families attempting to escape persecution in the Northern Triangle.”

Cristina Parker, the Immigration Pro

non-profit that monitors private prisons and the detention of immigrants, concluded that the organization is targeting fleeing women and children migrants specifically. “I don’t know why, but they are.” 

Nina Pruneda, the ICE agent overseeing the Dilley detention center, refused to comment on the purpose of the new center. “We do not discuss with the media about the operation of the facility, including the racial, ethnic, and religious composition of the population being detained,” she said. “It is for national security reasons.”

Don’t Call It a Prison

The two rows of palm trees that line the entrance of the new 2,400-bed detention center in Dilley look out of place among the scoured grass and barren dirt roads of South Texas. They seem rather out of place, not piercing, desert heat. Two “South Texas immigrant centers” hang against a fashionable limestone wall inflicted with stucco, one next to each set of palm trees. Judging by the name and entrance, a passersby might think that the complex is a wealthy collection of apartments. Only the barbed wire fence around the center’s perimeter signals otherwise. Inside the South Texas Residential Center, two soccer fields and three playgrounds are nestled among the modular homes and dirt roads. Inside each home is a flat-screen television and two red couches. Common areas have Xhoses, and the learning centers have computers with a rotating “Bienvenidos!” “Welcome!” in Spanish— as the screensaver. Residents will be offered a meal each day. The amenities won’t be new, however. Dilley’s detention center do not sound like the “real experts” who would explain the immigration process. They will have some counseling, they will have training, they will have the medical care, remarked Dr. Sandra Basquez, Director of the St. Mary’s Health Science Center in San Antonio, TX, after reviewing the cases of those who died in the facility. “If they are really getting screened and taken care of, these deaths shouldn’t happen.” Krauss, after learning the specifics of Eloy Detention Center deaths, still puts his trust in the Corrections Corporation of America and believes it is a “professional organization and will deal accordingly with issues they have.” A CCA representative from the Eloy facility also confirmed that the center has improved its medical and psychiatric services, has not incidentally reduced the amount of time U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers spend at the facility. Bob Libal, the executive director of the Immigration Policy Center at the American Immigration Council, said that the CCA is “the real experts” who would explain the immigration process. “The CCA is really in control of its own actions,” he said. “You don’t think that’s minimal. With shareholders in mind and a bad track record, do we really want the Corrections Corporation of America at the helm of our immigration policy?”
one of them explained: “It's for our own protection,” the other added.

The male CCA officer, who worked in the area of immigration, described the residential advisories as “resident advisors,” RAs, and wardens are called “administrators.” The naming system was to show how the RA’s job is not just to ensure the safety of their occupants but also to make sure they have fun. The CCA employees feel the same way. One of Alta’s children from Guatemala ran around the facility playground, pretending to shoot woes out of his “Spiderman” toy. He yelled while climbing the dark green monkey bars as if they were part of his fantastical adventures, while climbing the dark green monkey bars as if they were part of his fantastical

Alta García tries to quiet her 10-year-old daughter Ana, who lies on the floor in a sobbing fit. Her younger brother Victor stays quietly curled in the corner. He hasn’t said much since they arrived at the “residential center.” Martín, Alta’s 7-year-old son, has grown accustomed to throwing tantrums and hitting other kids. Alta’s children were not always this way. Albright’s children were not always this way. Albright’s children were not always this way. Ana was well behaved back in El Salvador. Victor, now walking in the corner, was sociable, and Martin was calm. Their mannerisms changed after a month of living in Karnes County Residential Center, an immigrant detention facility for families in Southern Texas. The first alleged that the Karnes County Residential Center is now a luxuriously priced place that makes the migrants feel like prisoners. It is a place where people are detained, where children have been separated from their parents, and where people are kept in solitary confinement. The Karnes County Residential Center is a place where people are treated like animals.

The second allegation accused male residential advisors of sexual abuse. A male RA repeatedly called one female detainee “hussy” (girlfriend) in Spanish. He hooked her and tried to kiss her in front of her children. Another detainee was offered assistance with her family’s immigration case in return for sex. Both allegations were revealed under the “zero-tolerance policy” of the U.S. government. Both allegations were revealed under the “zero-tolerance policy” of the U.S. government.

MALDEF further alleged that the environment at Karnes facilitates such abuse. Guerrero explained that families—sometimes pregnant—are detained and that they have no access to defense attorneys or family reunification advocates who could have prevented the sexual harassment. Guerrero explained that families—sometimes pregnant—are detained and that they have no access to defense attorneys or family reunification advocates who could have prevented the sexual harassment.

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