


SWEET LAND, BITTER DEAL

Immigrant Detention and Unbreathable Air
in Florida's Sugarcane Heartland



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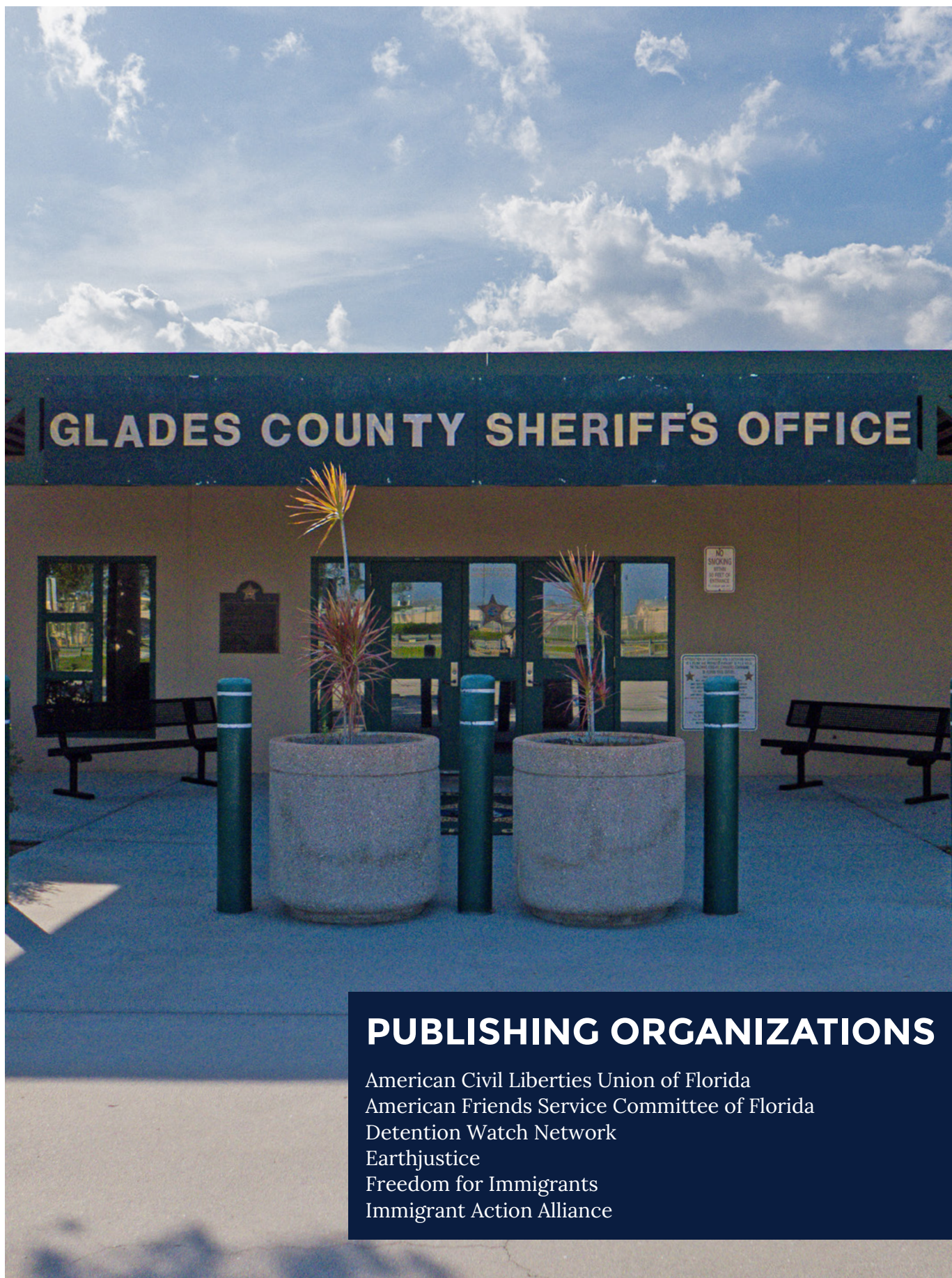
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Executive Summary	7
Cane and Confinement	8
Metastasizing Jails	16
Unbreathable Air	30



Moore Haven, Florida, 2025

FOREWORD

Between 2008 and 2022, thousands of immigrants spent hundreds of cumulative years detained at the Glades County Detention Center, a county jail on the western shore of Lake Okeechobee, in the Everglades region of Florida. This report documents the jail as a site of environmental and carceral violence. It is the result of a collaboration between researchers and a coalition of immigrants' rights and environmental organizations and tells the story of the Glades County Detention Center: how and why it was built; how the region's sugarcane agricultural industry parallels Glades County's business of detention; and how people detained there experienced, documented, and contested the conditions of their confinement.¹

The \$33 million facility opened with an initial 440 beds, nine times the number of people the existing county jail held, with the express goal of using the new jail to generate revenue from the confinement of federally detained immigrants.² Through Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSAs) with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Marshals Service, this local jail was transformed into a massive detention center. This arrangement promised economic benefits for Glades County, one of the poorest counties in Florida.³ It also transformed Moore Haven, the site of the jail, into a prison town: by 2020, more than half of the town's 1,566 residents were incarcerated, either at the Glades County Detention Center or the Moore Haven Correctional Facility, a private prison run by The GEO Group across the street.⁴



Florida has long been a laboratory for diverting public money and political will away from community needs and towards the criminalization of immigrants. The state has redirected unprecedented public resources toward the surveillance and confinement of immigrants, embedding immigration policing into government at every scale: by early 2025, all 67 County Sheriffs in Florida have signed 287(g) agreements, which delegate certain federal immigration enforcement powers to state and local law enforcement. These agreements integrate local law enforcement into the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deportation pipeline and divert local resources and infrastructure for federal policing. Other agencies that have signed 287(g) agreements include city police

departments, universities, Florida Highway Patrol, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the Departments of Agriculture and Environmental Protection. A 2025 state bill appropriates \$250 million in public funding to create a State Board of Immigration Enforcement and broadly expands local law enforcement spending on immigration policing.

In June of 2025, Florida escalated this punitive agenda by building a mass detention camp—officially named Alligator Alcatraz—on environmentally sensitive wetlands within Big Cypress National Preserve, 45 miles west of Miami. The facility was constructed in just eight days and has the capacity to detain 3,000 people, with plans to expand to 5,000. The site was commandeered by the state of Florida from Miami-Dade County under a 2023 executive order declaring a state of emergency that allows the Governor to suspend “any statute, rule, or order” seen as slowing the response to the immigration “emergency.”⁵ The camp was fast-tracked without any environmental review and prompted a lawsuit claiming violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).⁶ The facility threatens the sovereignty of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians, for whom this land is sacred, and poses serious threats to the sensitive, interconnected Everglades ecosystem and endangered and threatened species. Detained people have reported environmental and other harms, including flooding, mosquito infestation, unsanitary facilities, maggot-infested food, and lack of plumbing and medical care. The state has announced plans to replicate this model, including at military sites like Camp Blanding outside of Jacksonville.

The Glades County Detention Center exemplifies a broader trend in Florida: the repurposing of state and local infrastructure, capacities, and resources to criminalize,



Moore Haven, Florida, 2021

confine, and punish immigrants. Beyond Florida, and across the U.S., immigration detention increasingly relies on county jails to detain people in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody. This is done largely through Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSAs), which allow the federal detention system to flexibly expand and contract. IGSAs authorize cooperative agreements for state and local entities to provide beds for ICE detainees in lieu of ICE facilities themselves, often in rural counties. In Glades County, the new jail was purpose-built to detain people in federal immigration detention, and the business model relied upon a steady stream of immigrants.

The facility promised revenue for Glades County and local jobs, and since opening, the Glades County Development Corporation has generated more than \$42 million dollars in revenue. This money went not to Glades County but to repaying outside bondholders. When the numbers of detained people dipped, Glades County drew on County

funds to keep the jail open. While the County subsidized the jail, they could not fund basic services for Glades County residents, including ambulances and the Emergency Medical Services system.

Instead of bringing economic benefit to Glades County, the Glades County Detention Center drew from public funds, both federal and municipal, to siphon money to out-of-state bondholders. Rather than generating local development and prosperity, the Glades County Detention Center drained and diverted public money, and harmed those detained there, many of whom were loved and valued community members from across Florida and the United States. In building and operating the Glades County Detention Center, the County inadvertently opened a black hole: one that disappeared detained people, who experienced profound harm inside this facility, and devoured and diverted public funds, which might have instead been used for durable community development and services.

The Glades Detention Center was a site of environmental hazard for detained people and workers. Through exhaustive documentation, this report shows that detained people were sprayed with antimicrobial sprays at toxic concentrations, exposed to disabling carbon monoxide leaks, and sprayed with pepper spray as punishment, retaliation, and revenge for asking for necessities like water and toilet paper. These are just three of myriad forms of pervasive, systemic environmental harm. Together, these hazards rendered air within the Glades County Detention Center unbreathable. This collectively punished detained and jailed people, who could not escape these environmental conditions.

The findings of this report are only possible because of detained people who, supported by advocates and organizers, created an archive of unbreathable air.

The findings of this report are only possible because of the detained people, who—supported by legal advocates and organizers—created an archive of unbreathable air documenting conditions at Glades. This archive was built over years and at great personal risk. Reporting or contesting violent conditions at Glades was often met with retaliation. The Glades County Sheriff's Office and the Glades Correctional Development Corporation deny that any abuse took place at the facility, but detained people reported violence at Glades despite the documented

pattern of retaliation for reporting. They did so not only to seek justice for themselves but to create an archive that illuminated patterns of abuse at Glades. This archive allowed legal advocates, community organizers, and now, researchers to assemble documentation and identify common practices in detention.

In 2020, a coalition emerged to fight the facility, led by Immigrant Action Alliance, a small grassroots organization based in Miami. Joined by local and national immigrants' rights and environmental organizations, the Shut Down Glades coalition worked in partnership with detained people to suspend the Intergovernmental Support Agreement between Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and shut down the Glades County Detention Center. Through the strategic use of legal complaints by detained people, media, advocacy, and organizing, advocates successfully highlighted the Glades County Detention Center as a place of environmental violence. In 2022, all detained people left the facility, and it was shut down for more than two years. In April 2025, following the inauguration of the second Trump administration, the Glades County Detention Center reopened.

Signed,

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Glades County Detention Center, 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is divided into three parts.

Part I, “Cane and Confinement,” shows how the business of immigrant detention in Glades County operates in parallel to ongoing environmental racism in the region’s sugarcane plantations. Like immigrant detention, sugarcane relies upon the devaluation of Black and immigrant lives. We draw on historical sources, interviews with local residents, and municipal records to understand how the detention facility promised—and failed to deliver—a meaningful alternative economy to sugarcane.

Part II, “Metastasizing Jails,” draws on nearly 20 years of financial data, municipal records and meeting minutes, and interviews with members of the Glades County Sheriff’s Office, Glades Correctional Development Corporation, and Glades County Board of Commissioners to show that though the detention center

promised Glades County jobs, economic benefits, and a new jail complex, it instead funneled revenue to out-of-state investors. While bondholders benefitted from the confinement of detained people, a rural county struggled to sustain a facility it did not need, and that did not provide secure employment or rural development.

Part III, “Unbreathable Air” documents the Glades County Detention Center as a site of environmental injustice. This section synthesizes Department of Homeland Security’s Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) complaints filed by detained people, environmental science scholarship, and interviews with advocates and formerly detained people. We argue that exposure to airborne hazards inside the facility—antimicrobial chemical sprays, carbon monoxide, and pepper spray—systemically restricted detained people’s ability to breathe.



Marion Post Wolcott, Harvesting sugar cane for USSC [United States Sugar Corporation] near Clewiston, Florida, 1939. Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection (Library of Congress).

CANE AND CONFINEMENT

This section explores sugarcane and confinement as parallel industries in Glades County. Florida is the largest cane-producing state in the United States, and most sugarcane is grown on the southern shores of Lake Okeechobee, known as the Everglades Agricultural Area. Cane has long been the dominant industry in the region.⁷ In what follows, we contextualize the Glades

County Detention Center and the Glades Correctional Development Corporation in relation to histories of environmental injustice and exploitative migrant and immigrant labor on sugarcane plantations in Glades and neighboring counties. We argue that like the sugarcane industry, the business of confinement relies on the devaluation of Black and immigrant lives.

Long before the Glades County Detention Center opened, Glades County was a place of environmental violence and a profitable extractive industry that generated revenue for investors elsewhere.

Sugarcane cultivation in the Everglades is built upon histories of enslavement in the southern U.S. Starting around the turn of the 20th century, the earliest sugarcane labor was seasonal work, done by an “exclusively Black” citizen labor force, primarily sharecroppers and migrant farm laborers from northern Florida and Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana.⁸ Black workers were tightly managed through Jim Crow policing, with widespread accounts of sugar corporations engaging in peonage and forced labor practices, made possible with help from local sheriffs.⁹

Rumors circulated that the U.S. Sugar Corporation was running a “slave camp” at its sugar plantations in the Everglades. Then, in 1942, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) launched an investigation into the widespread practice of forced labor on sugarcane plantations.¹⁰ Soon, seasonal workers stopped coming to harvest cane in the Glades. By the early 1940s, the refusal of U.S. citizens to work in cane plantations combined with wartime labor shortages created a crisis for sugar growers.

To resolve this labor crisis, the Florida sugar industry turned to Caribbean workers to do the “hard, dirty, and dangerous work” of cutting sugarcane.¹¹ Through the H-2 worker program, the Florida sugar industry was able to secure a steady supply of Black migrant workers from the former slave plantation economies of the Caribbean.¹² For the next fifty years, the industry relied on Jamaican, Bahamian, Bajan, and other Caribbean migrants. Growers favored seasonal migrant workers over Haitian immigrants because guest workers’ status as H-2 visa holders

made them readily deportable and so offered growers a powerful instrument of control.¹³ Importing migrant labor through the H-2 guestworker program allowed growers to “recover their position of power,” as the threat of deportation “took the place of the instruments once applied to southern blacks under Jim Crow.”¹⁴

Sugarcane cultivation in the Everglades is built upon histories of enslavement in the southern U.S. Starting around the turn of the 20th century, the earliest sugarcane labor was seasonal work, done by an “exclusively Black” citizen labor force, primarily sharecroppers and migrant farm laborers from northern Florida and Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana.

When the H-2 visa program for sugarcane workers ended in 1995, the sugarcane industry shifted from H-2 visa holders to undocumented immigrant workers. Today, the majority of all sugarcane planting and harvesting is done by immigrants, primarily from Haiti, Guatemala, and Mexico.¹⁵ Agricultural work in South Florida remains hazardous and exploitative, and cases of forced labor continue.¹⁶

Glades County has long relied upon migrants and immigrants to sustain local industries. The Glades County Detention Center was just another way the county sought to generate revenue relying on the labor and time of immigrants.

BLACK SNOW AND ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

Sugarcane is a polluting industry. This is in part because the United States is one of the only remaining countries in the world that permits the burning of sugarcane before harvest to strip the leaves.¹⁷ Sugarcane burning fills the air with smoke and ash, known as “black snow.” It releases particulate matter and pollutants including polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, volatile organic

compounds, and carbonyls—substances linked to asthma, chronic bronchitis, and sinus problems, as well as increased risks of cardiovascular disease and lung cancer.¹⁸

This chemical process is amplified by production choices. In Glades County, Black and brown communities south of Lake Okeechobee have claimed that sugar companies intentionally burn their sugarcane on days when the wind blows westward toward them (the “Hazard Zone”), directing black snow away from wealthier, whiter Palm Beach and Martin counties.¹⁹



Burning cane, Moore Haven, Florida. February 2025.

Patrick Ferguson, Sierra Club Senior Organizing Representative on the Stop The Burn Go Green Campaign in the Glades region, explains this process:

“Pre-harvest sugar field-burning is an industrial scale, open field-burning practice that happens on an annual basis, beginning in October and lasting through May. During this roughly eight-month long period, close to 400,000 acres of fields are burned, releasing very large quantities of toxic air pollution regionally. What makes this such a quintessential example of an environmental justice issue is that on a given day, during the harvesting season, if wind conditions are projected to carry the toxic smoke and ash, which is referred to as “black snow” within the region, towards the more affluent and whiter communities in central and eastern Palm Beach County, burn permits will be denied. When the winds blow the opposite direction, towards the Glades communities, which are predominantly Black and brown, lower income communities, there are minimal protections put in place. So, these communities have to disproportionately bear the impacts of what is essentially a toxic, outdated, and unnecessary harvesting practice, a prime example of environmental racism.”²⁰

Communities in the path of smoke and ash from sugarcane burning “routinely face periods of extremely poor air quality conditions during the sugarcane burning season,” and residents have elevated rates of asthma compared to whiter, westward counties.²¹

DEVELOPMENT DILEMMAS

As an unusually polluting agricultural industry, sugarcane burning lowers property values in surrounding areas. This forecloses land uses that are incompatible with noxious plumes of smoke and ash.²² Sugarcane burning prevents economic development and thwarts other kinds of industries. Eighty-six percent of Glades County is farmland.²³

Sugarcane keeps land and labor cheap in Glades County, creating the ideal conditions for carceral land uses. When the Glades Detention Center was built, the most significant non-agricultural and private employer in Glades County was the privately-owned prison across the street, owned and operated by GEO Group.²⁴ As a former County Commissioner explained, “The land was cheaper here, and we already had a private prison next door.”²⁵ Indeed, changes to Glades County’s comprehensive plan in 2003 expressly allowed for the development of prisons and power plants on its agricultural land.²⁶

This brief, bitter history—including environmental racism and histories of enslaved and indentured labor—shows that Glades County was primed for an industry like that offered by the Glades Correctional Development Corporation (GCDC). Racism describes the devaluation of human life on the basis of an individual or group’s racial or ethnic difference. Here, the devaluation of the lives of Black and brown communities is manifested as environmental racism: toxic and unbreathable air that disproportionately impacts Black and immigrant communities.²⁷ The devaluation of the wellbeing and labor of Black and immigrant workers and residents made sugar a cheap commodity in the United States.

It is in this context—a toxic rural economy, built on the exploitation of migrant and immigrant labor—that the Glades County Detention Center was planned and built.

“Modified Slavery Days”

The Glades County Detention Center was built to generate revenue by detaining immigrants in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). By renting beds to federal agencies, the project promised to transform immigrant detention into an industry beyond sugarcane for the County. People detained at the Glades facility were aware their time was being stolen in order to generate revenue from their confinement. N.T., an immigrant from St. Lucia who has spent nearly his entire life in the United States, explicitly connected his experience at Glades to histories of enslavement:

“The thoughts running through my head at Glades was, this is just updated, modified slavery days. The only thing they can’t do is force us to work. Literally. But they beating on us the same damn way. They fucking starving us. They treating us like dogs. That was just what it was like. All this weird power stuff. They sometimes wouldn’t let us shower, they made us wait a certain amount of days to shower, or they would throw us in the hole [solitary confinement]. At that jail, because it’s so small, and in the location that it is, the guards had more control. The guards had a level of comfortability, because they have been getting away with this shit for so long. It was like, we’ll never get caught up.”²⁸

N.T. related the jail’s remote location to abuse within the facility. Remoteness is common in immigrant detention: more than half of immigrants detained by ICE are housed in rural facilities. This is not a coincidence. Lauren-Brooke Eisen, senior director of

the Brennan Center’s Justice Program, explains this as the result of “the hospitable environment in rural areas: cheap labor, cheap land.”²⁹

Silvana Caldera, Senior Policy Strategist with the ACLU, explains that remoteness is often a feature of decisions about where to site immigration detention facilities:

“That is by design. Having facilities that are remote is absolutely a tool to isolate folks and make it harder for advocates to provide oversight--and definitely to run a shutdown campaign as well...the location, political makeup of the place, lack of competing interests, the isolation of the people inside, all of that goes together.”³⁰

Being detained at a remote detention facility makes it more difficult for detained people to secure legal counsel. Those who are able to access counsel are often unable to see their attorneys in person, as rural detention facilities offer systematically inadequate access to in-person visitation. Further, telephone and video teleconferencing communication routinely do not function adequately.³¹ Hours away from federal courthouses, people detained at Glades frequently had to appear at court hearings via video conferencing. Studies of video conferencing demonstrate that detained people were more likely to be deported when their proceedings occurred over video conference.³² Though highly profitable for the private companies that transport detained people,³³ remoteness isolated detained people, who could not reliably communicate with or receive visits from their families.³⁴

Detained people connected this remoteness to bad conditions and overcrowding within the facility. At the same time that austerity measures were put in place to ensure a flow of revenue to bondholders, there were



Clewiston, Florida, 2025.

growing reports of abusive and hazardous conditions. Detained people were offered ibuprofen as a response to a range of medical complaints, including serious illness and injury.³⁵ Meals at Glades were of “marginal nutritional quality” and routinely did not supply daily caloric requirements³⁶ and detained Muslim men were repeatedly denied halal meals.³⁷

Maria Asunción Bilbao, formerly a community organizer with Immigrant Action Alliance and now Campaign Coordinator at the American Friends Service Committee of Florida, explained that remoteness also contributed to violence and abuse from guards. Glades

was “in the middle of nowhere, so the people there felt the impunity.”³⁸ Detained people noted that this violence was also specifically anti-immigrant. N.T. explained:

“An immigrant in America is one thing. But a locked-up immigrant is different. We get the bottom of the barrel. I’ve served two purposes; I’ve served both sides. I’ve served the criminal side, in a regular jail, county jail, the treatment you get there—it’s not going to be, you know, civilian treatment, you get treated like shit. But what I can say is from a criminal level to a locked-up immigrant level, an immigrant incarcerated is the bottom of the barrel.”

It also led to unchecked guard violence, which detained people identified as explicitly anti-Black. Guards routinely referred to Black men as “monkeys,” “boys,” and “niggers.”³⁹ Patrick Ferguson of the Sierra Club Stop The Burn Go Green campaign, related experiences of racist violence against immigrants detained at the Glades jail back to sugarcane plantation histories:

“That culture of exploitation still continues in the region. Civil rights issues and environmental harms that folks in the Glades Detention Center have to endure fit a pattern, a historical paradigm, of it being acceptable to exploit people here. And it is the same thing [as sugarcane plantations] with the detention center, which is that it is a major employer in a rural region without a lot of economic diversity and opportunity. This creates a paradigm, a foundation, for something like that to take place.”⁴⁰

Discussions of police and guard violence are often met with calls for further training and education, a demand that hinges on the belief that such treatment is aberrant. As this section has shown, inhumane and violent conditions and treatment at the Glades County Detention Center was not a problem of individual guards in need of further training. Instead, their actions were connected to a history and system of the devaluation of Black and immigrant lives, here, confined within the Glades County Detention Center.

Immigrant detention in Glades County is built—quite literally—on top of a rural sugar economy. Understanding cane and confinement as parallel economies shapes our analysis of why people imprisoned at the Glades County Detention Center were subject to violence.



THE BITTER HISTORY OF CANE IN THE GLADES

1816-1858:

In the decades before the Civil War, the United States waged a genocidal war against the Seminole people. The descendants of Creek and other Indigenous people who fled to Spanish-controlled Florida along with enslaved people of African descent, the Seminole Tribe sought refuge in the Everglades, which stretched from Lake Okeechobee to the southern end of the peninsula.⁴¹

1920:

Commercial sugarcane production begins in Moore Haven. Private developers and government entities continue to “reclaim” the Everglades south of Lake Okeechobee by dredging and draining swamps, transforming wet marshes into rich agricultural land and soon, sugarcane plantations.

1934:

The 1934 Sugar Act subsidizes domestic sugar production in the U.S. and protects American sugar plantations, restricting imports from competitors such as Cuba and Jamaica.

1920s-1940s:

Sugarcane is harvested by an “exclusively Black” labor force, primarily sharecroppers and farm laborers from Northern Florida and surrounding southern states.⁴²

1942:

In 1942, the U.S. Sugar Corporation and several employees are indicted on federal peonage charges and accused of violating workers’ Thirteenth Amendment rights and “holding sugarcane workers against their will deep within the Everglades.”⁴³

1943:

Facing wartime labor shortages, sugar corporations fly in Bahamian guest workers to harvest sugarcane. Public Law 45 establishes a formal guestworker program, which expands to include sugarcane workers from Jamaica, British Honduras, and Barbados.⁴⁴

1940s-1990s:

Sugarcane is harvested by guestworkers and migrants from the Caribbean. The scholar Gail Hollander writes, “The ‘deportability’ of workers, of course, was the lynchpin in the industry’s labor control machinery.”⁴⁵

1990s:

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, sugarcane labor shifts to workers from Haiti, Guatemala, and Mexico. In 1995, the H-2 visa program officially ends for sugarcane workers as growers move to mechanization in response to lawsuits alleging wage violations.⁴⁶ Despite these changes, planting remains dependent on manual labor.

2000s:

Because so many sugarcane workers today are undocumented, sugarcane laborers are vulnerable to policing and deportation. Sugarcane remains seasonal work, which makes it more difficult to organize for workers’ rights.



Onoval Perez Montufar was a 51-year-old Mexican man who was died at the Glades County Detention Center after testing positive for COVID-19. The Shut Down Glades Coalition held a vigil to commemorate and protest his death.

METASTASIZING JAILS

The Glades County Detention Center promised—but failed to deliver—rural development and durable economic benefits to Glades County residents. When the detention facility was first discussed in the early 2000s, proponents framed the project as a strategy of rural development providing jobs, infrastructure, and, eventually, revenue to the County. They argued that by renting 85% of available beds to federal agencies, the new jail complex would funnel in federal money: initially to the bondholders, to pay off the principal loan, and then later to the County. The project was pitched as “a means to address the County’s own need and as an opportunity to offer beds for rental to the federal agencies, producing economic benefits to the County.”⁴⁷ This deal also promised a poor, rural county a brand new jail complex: once the bonds were paid off,

Glades County would own the facility, which it could then use to generate its own revenue.

Purpose-built as a detention center, the project tethered the promise of jobs and municipal infrastructure to the criminalization and confinement of immigrants. When filled with hundreds of detained people, the facility did generate a steady stream of funds towards paying off the principal loan, but this revenue went to out-of-state bondholders, not Glades County. More frequently, when the facility sat largely empty, the project cost Glades County money: in funds paid to bondholders and in lost opportunities to invest in better economic futures for Glades County residents. The GCDC was initially considered a sensible investment by the County. When it turned out that was not the case, the County was left with both financial loss and a series of complaints documenting abuse within the facility.

Surrounded by fields of sugarcane, the detention center sits on land that originally belonged to Glades County. This land was purchased by the Glades Correctional Development Corporation (GCDC), a non-profit organization created by the County with the tax-exempt purpose of “developing, financing, constructing and operating a new jail complex.”⁴⁸ Nearly ten times bigger than the previous local jail, this new jail complex was built not to house local people, but, instead, to generate revenue by confining people detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS). It promised jobs, revenue, and a new county jail for Glades County. Drawing on financial records, interviews, and Glades County Board of Commissioner meeting minutes, this section shows how this promise was broken.

Though the facility was profitable for investors, nothing of value was produced at the Glades County Detention Center. Revenue was generated parasitically, through the transfer of money from the federal to the municipal and from the municipal to bondholders—or, as was often the case in Glades County when detention numbers were low, from the municipality to bondholders. It is the confinement of criminalized migrants that enables this transfer. What was extracted from detained people was not labor, but time. Time spent detained facilitates the flow of money through Glades—in wages for guard and per diem payments from federal agencies to Glades County, for example. Any revenue generated by this flow is directed to bondholders and to pay off the bond.⁴⁹ While other municipal revenue bonds are paid back by accumulated tolls or tariffs, the Glades County Development Corporation interest and debt payments were drawn from per diem payments by ICE or the Marshal Service—or, when numbers were low, by the County. It was time stolen from detained people that allowed this money to

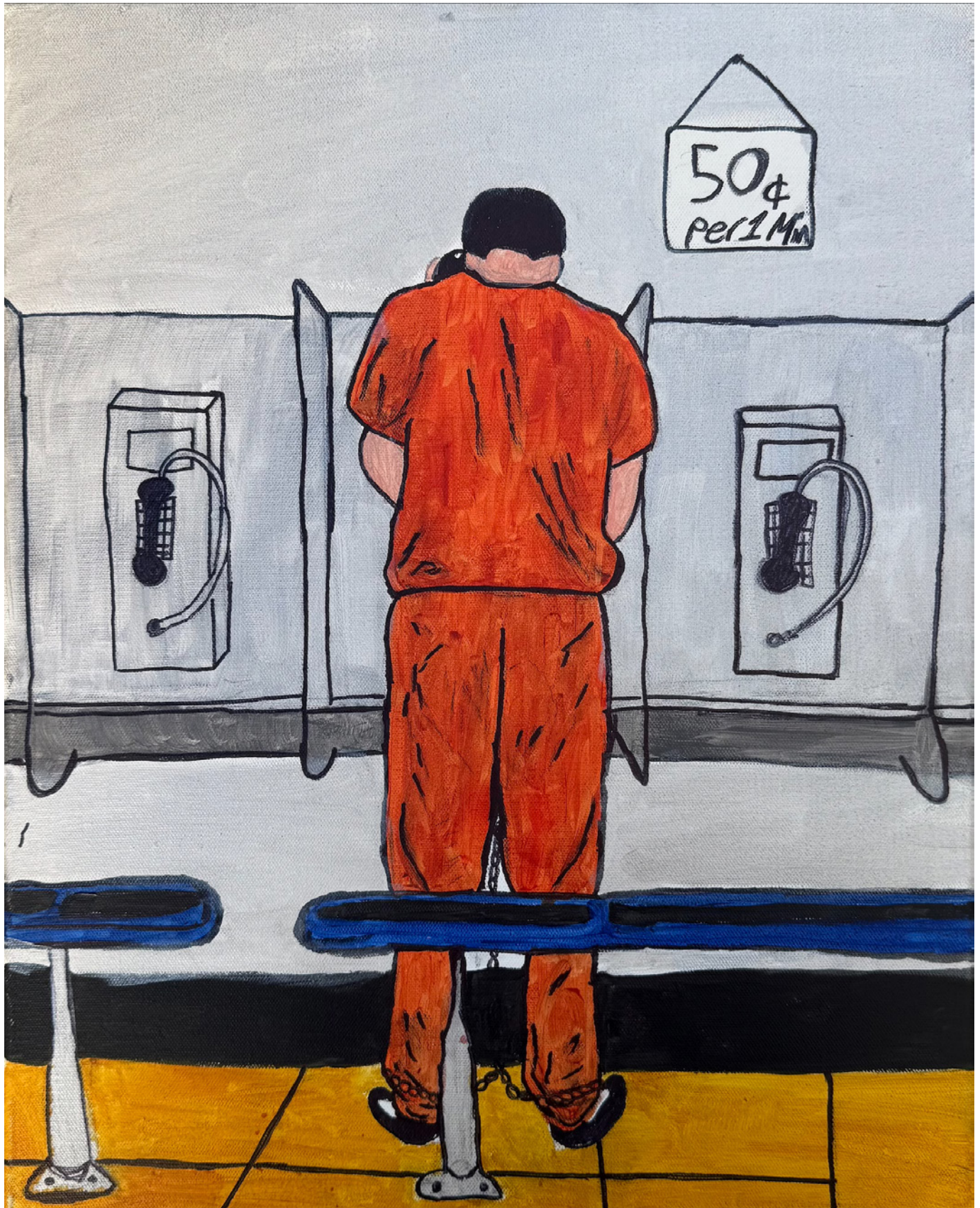
flow through the detention center and to bondholders. **This “profit” was not profit at all: it was revenue siphoned off of both federal and municipal funds. According to Patrick Ferguson, with Sierra Club’s Stop the Burn Go Green campaign,**

“...you look at big, exploitative industries like these [sugar and detention] and it tends to be the case that the vast majority of profits are cycled outward instead of inward into the community.”⁵⁰

The Glades County Detention Center promised economic development to an impoverished rural municipality. For the Glades Sheriff’s Office, this was also an infrastructural project. Glades Sheriff’s Office Chief Deputy Duane Pottorff explained, “Our admin building was worn out. Our jail was worn out...We’re a very fiscally restrained county, so this was the vehicle we knew we could use to get this.” The new jail also promised a source of revenue for the County. Former County Commissioner John Ahern explained that the County hoped that after the bondholders were paid off, the facility could be a “major cash flow.”⁵¹

The project also promised jobs for Glades County residents. A former County Commissioner and GCDC board member explained:

“We are a small county of 13,000 or 14,000 people, one of the poorer counties in the state. This was something that was needed. We were trying to create jobs because that’s what we needed and hopefully this would have more people move into the area. The primary benefit was the jobs. We are an agricultural area, and we had a sugar mill here in Moore Haven that at one point was booming, but then it failed, and we lost a lot of people over that, back in the 1970s. We had a need for another, larger employer.”⁵²



Rene Murillo, *The Price of a Voice*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas.

As the Chief Deputy Duane Pottorff explained,

*“If you're not U.S. Sugar or you're not a born and bred cowboy, there's just nothing here. There's no big hospital for all the nurses to go work at after they get out of school. Everything's on the coast, so it was nice having something, you know? And by having the civilian employees for booking clerks and control room operators, I didn't even need just the ones that wanted to be cops or correctional officers and had to go to the academy. I could have the one that, hey, she did good in school, you know, and she's smart and got a good head on her shoulders. She can work here, you know, as a booking clerk. It was able to keep quite a few people actually here with jobs. I think it just gives you security, your kids close by... It's about keeping the kids here. That's what this was supposed to do, help the kids and give the youth someplace to go work when they get out of school.”*⁵³

Robert DeMann, a former Glades County Sheriff and Project Manager of the Glades County Development Corporation explained that the big agriculture model for sugar-growing meant that the industry does not provide jobs to citizen residents:

“This is a major agricultural area, but those people that were born here are not necessarily working in agriculture, because these are big tract-type owners. So, they wanted to try to keep some of their younger folks, give them the opportunity to be employed in a professional job that they could build and continue on in the area.”

When construction on the Glades County Detention Center began in 2006, rural Glades County had just 10,932 residents.⁵⁴ According to a feasibility study that analyzed projected bed use for the new detention center, the average daily population at the existing Glades County jail fluctuated between 27 and

51 people between 2000 and 2005.⁵⁵ This was just a fraction of the capacity of the new jail, which opened with 440 beds and would soon expand to 626.⁵⁶

The business model of the detention center seemed simple. The facility, managed and staffed by the Glades County Sheriff's Office, who left behind a smaller facility, would rent beds primarily to Immigration and Customs Enforcement and charge the federal agency a per diem rate for each person detained. Revenue from this operation would be used to pay off the principal loan. When this loan was paid back, Glades County would assume ownership and continue to rent beds, generating revenue directly for the county. In the meantime, Glades County closed their smaller, older jail and paid the Glades County Development Corporation a per diem rate to house jailed people. As a strategy for rural economic development, the project tethered local jobs and municipal infrastructure to the criminalization and confinement of immigrants.⁵⁷

The Promise of Development?

“As county after county has been building bigger and bigger jails, and as more and more people have been detained and incarcerated, the nature of jail incarceration—the way that the different levels of the state are using jails—has changed.”

*Jack Norton, Lydia Pelot-Hobbs, and Judah Schept.*⁵⁸

Since the 1980s, a “quiet jail boom” has swept smaller cities and rural counties, even while incarceration rates fell in the largest cities in the U.S. Between 2000 and 2020, prisons and detention centers closed, and yet the number of jail beds in the United States increased 35%.⁵⁹ This “carceral devolution” concentrates resources in sheriff's offices, as county jails

come to serve not just as jails but also as prisons and migrant detention centers.⁶⁰

This is the larger context in which the Glades County detention center was built. Construction of the new facility was financed by \$33 million in tax-exempt revenue bonds issued by the Glades Correctional Development Corporation (GCDC). More than 30 million of these bonds were issued at a rate of 7.375% per year, almost three percentage points higher than the year's average interest rate for municipal bonds—making these bonds profitable for investors.⁶¹

Bonds are a form of borrowing: the government—in this case, the non-profit GCDC—will pay back the loan over a given period, with interest. Revenue bonds are backed by the promise of future revenue, which can include sources like bridge tolls or water utility bills. The GCDC bonds were initially classified as tax-exempt. But the bonds were in fact intended to generate revenue, and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) found that the bonds had been improperly classified and argued that “when a jail is purpose-built to raise revenue as a provider of detention services, rather than built primarily to serve the local criminal legal system, it should not benefit from the preferential treatment afforded to core public functions.”⁶² In 2017, the GCDC bonds lost their tax-exempt status.⁶³

The municipal bonds to build the new jail were issued not by Glades County itself but by the nonprofit Glades County Development Corporation (GCDC), an arrangement that shielded Glades County and the Glades County Sheriff's Office—who would manage and staff the facility—from liability. This unusual administrative structure was created under the guidance of external consultants and served as a model for other county jails seeking to

expand into immigrant detention. The Baker County Detention Center, for example, “was a carbon copy of the deal put together for Glades” and shared the same underwriter, bond counsel, and feasibility consultant.⁶⁴

The Glades County Detention Center promised the possibility of revenue from a flow of per diem payments from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the U.S. Marshal Service (USMS) for the confinement of thousands of people detained by these federal agencies.⁶⁵

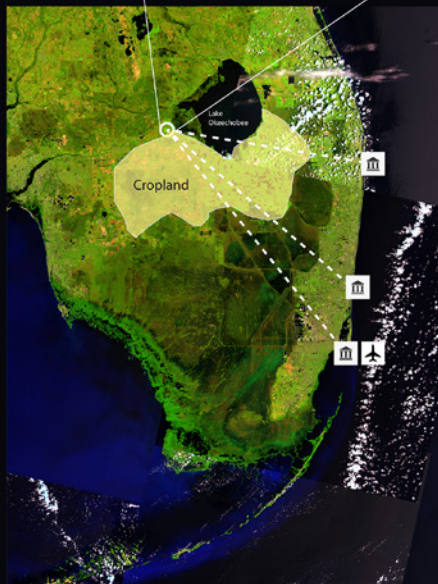
The detention center did produce revenue, but this revenue went to bondholders, with no profit to Glades County. As soon as the facility opened, it began to funnel money back to bondholders. As Jacob Kang-Brown and Jack Norton of the Vera Institute for Justice summarize, “Put simply, investment in GCDC bonds was an investment in immigrant detention.”⁶⁶ Between 2006 and 2014, the GCDC made annual debt servicing payments averaging 2.6 million dollars per year. Because the bonds have not yet been paid off, the County has seen no return on their significant investment in the facility.

Payments on the principal and interest relied on a steady stream of detained people. When this stream faltered, particularly during the second Obama administration, the GCDC was unable to pay bondholders. As the Glades Correctional Development Corporation Program Manager Robert DeMann explained, “bonds had to be restructured, because there was a period of time there that we didn't have enough bodies in here as far as detainees to pay the bills.”⁶⁷

In September 2014, the GCDC went into default status after failing to issue an expected bond interest payment of \$1,042,825.⁶⁸ Unable to pay the bondholders, in 2015 and 2016, the GCDC entered into a forbearance

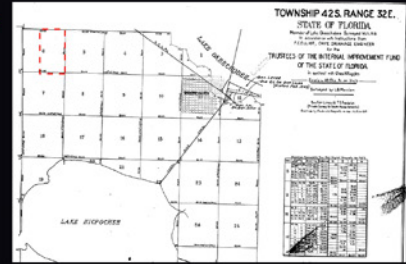
Glades County Detention Center

Moore Haven Correctional Facility

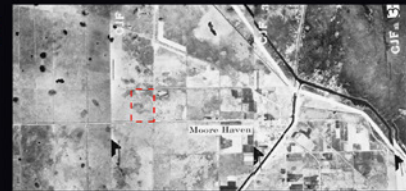


- Federal District Court
- Airport with Regularly Scheduled Deportation Flights
- Majority Sugar and Citric Cropland

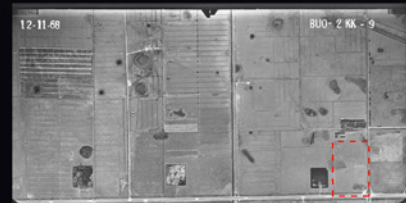
1918



1940



1968



1974



1981



1995

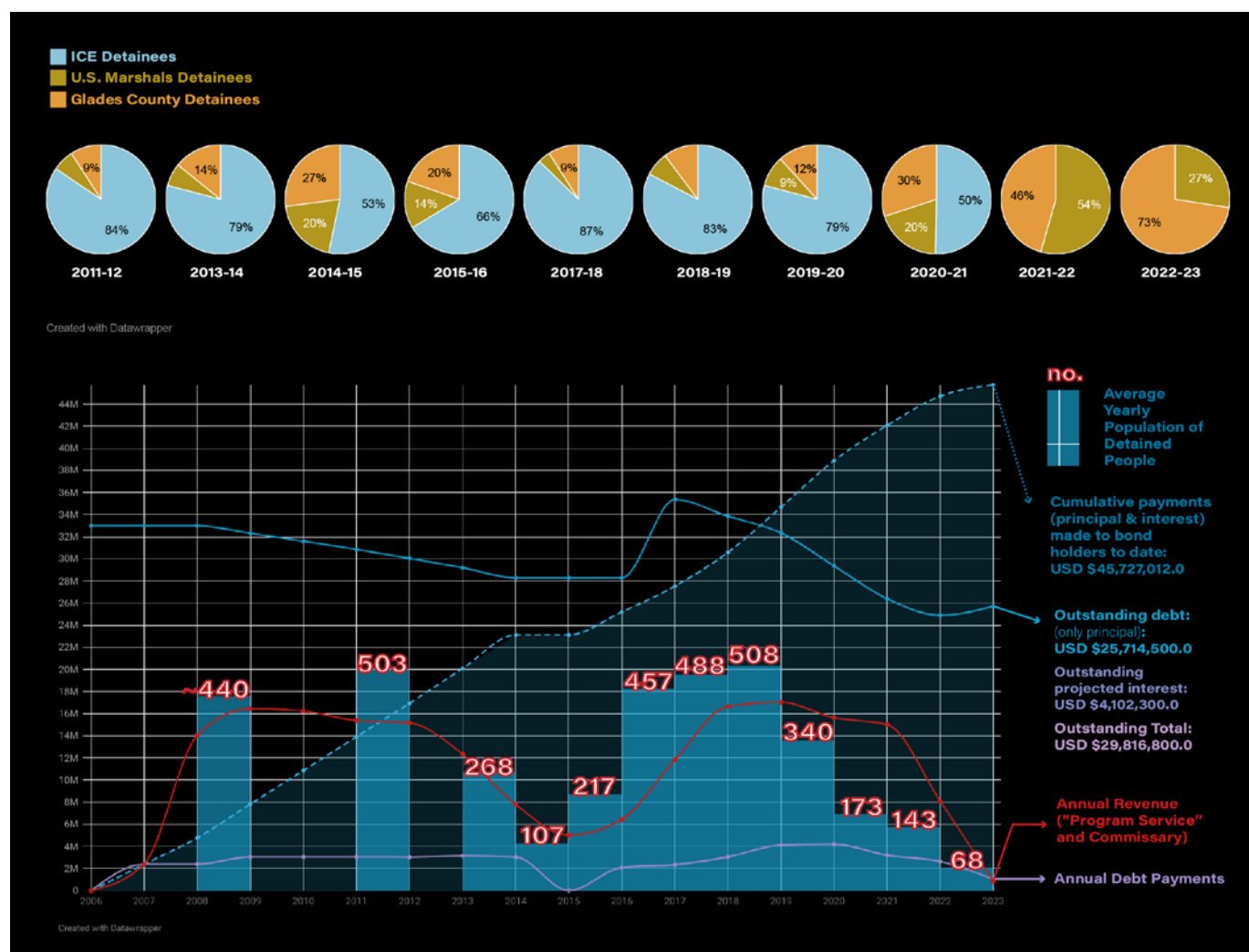


Image showing the location of the Glades detention center in South Florida, the location within Moore Haven, and the transformation of land uses over time. Carol Iglesias Otero, 2023.

agreement (a temporary pause on payments) until the Glades Correctional Development Corporation was able to refinance their loans. Though they had already made cumulative payments to lenders adding up to almost 20 million dollars, when they restructured their bond loans in 2017, their remaining balance was over \$32 million.⁶⁹

To service this debt, the Glades County Correctional Development Corporation minimized spending to ensure that any revenue would be dedicated towards debt payments to investors. As Program Manager Robert DeMann explained, “Because we’re

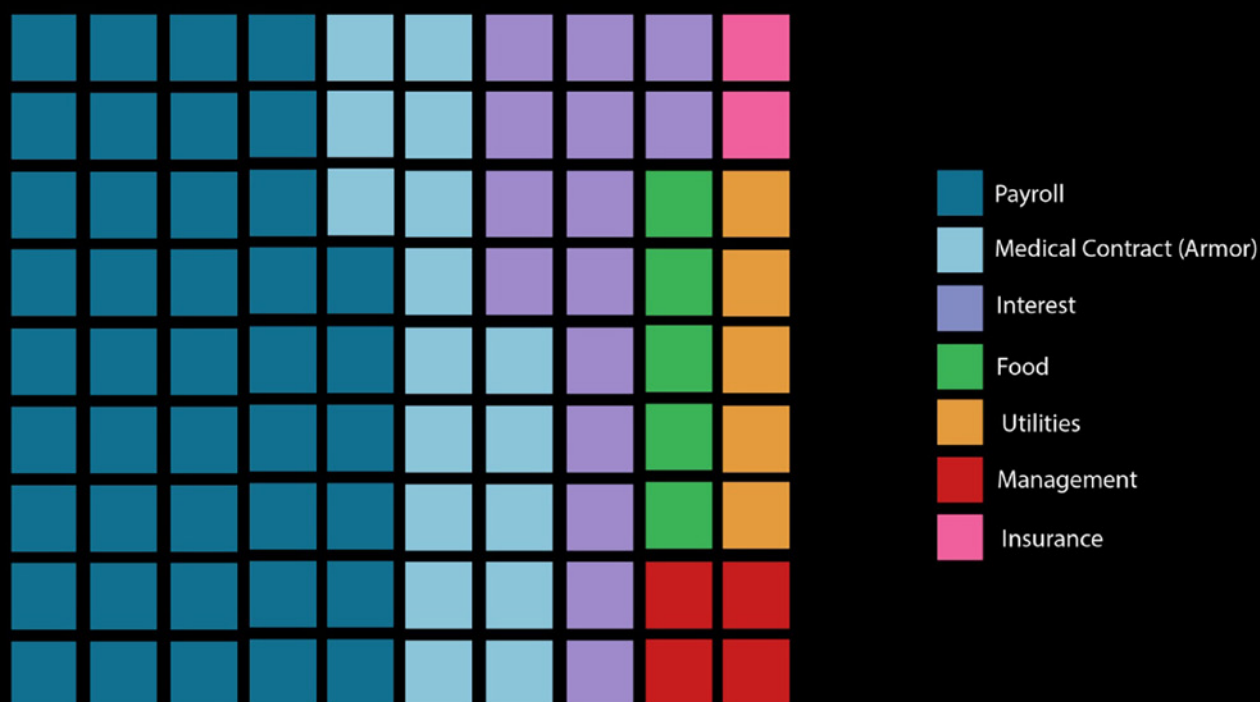
trying to pay those bonds off so GCDC can dissolve, and the County can have their facility...if there were any funds that we didn’t use, those would all go back to them [the bondholders].” He continued, “We had to pay things out because we had short bond schedules, it wasn’t amortized over 50 years, [which is] the life expectancy of the building. They were wanting to get in and get their money out and be gone.”⁷⁰ As an employee of the Glades Sheriff’s Office summarized, “when there’s bondholder and investors involved, you have got to make sure they’re happy. That’s why they do it.”⁷¹



The number and institutional distribution of people detained at Glades with cumulative payments made to bondholders, remaining debt, remaining projected interest owed, and revenue. *Note: data not available for 2009-2010 and 2012-2013.* For a detailed breakdown of data and sources, please see Appendix 1.

Carol Iglesias Otero, 2024.

Breakdown of Median Yearly Expenses



The breakdown of median yearly expenses at the Glades County Detention Center between 2008 and 2022. The majority of revenue went to payroll expenses for guards and administrators, followed by medical expenses (paid to a private company) and then interest payments.

For a detailed breakdown of data and sources, see Appendix 2.
Carol Iglesias Otero, 2024.

The Glades County Detention Center promised the possibility of revenue from a flow of per diem payments from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the U.S. Marshal Service (USMS) for the confinement of thousands of people detained by these federal agencies.

Though the new jail complex failed to benefit Glades County or Glades County residents, the Glades Correctional Development Corporation kept the facility open. Meeting minutes of the GCDC reveal that between 2014 and 2016 and in 2017—when the number of people detained nationally decreased and the GCDC loans were restructured—the Glades County Board and bondholders desperately wanted to keep the facility open, even though it was not financially viable. They “did not want an enormous jail standing empty in the cane” and they hoped to rehire laid off personnel and eventually generate revenue.⁷²

To keep the jail open even though it was not generating enough revenue to sustain itself, the GCDC relied upon Glades County's money to subsidize daily operations. During a Glades County Commission meeting in October 2015, the Board of County Commissioners discussed a motion that would allow the use of Sheriff's Office funds to keep the jail in operation for the length of the forbearance operation. Sheriff Stuart K. Whiddon explained that while numbers of detained people were increasing, the numbers varied, and "investors seemed to be looking to see how involved the county was with this issue." Commissioner Storter Long stated "she felt the Board should give Sheriff Whiddon a chance to make this work at the jail."⁷³ Chairman Stanley stated that "he did not mind investing some to keep things going at the jail facility" and County Manager Carlisle stated that "he felt the motion would show the investors that the County was supportive of the efforts being made to keep the facility open."⁷⁴ The motion to allow the jail to tap into Sheriff's Office funds was approved by a unanimous vote.⁷⁵ In 2017, with the inauguration of the Trump administration, the jail's fortunes rose. A GCCD employee explained that following the inauguration of the first Trump administration, "we were back full within months."⁷⁶ By March 2017, the Glades County Detention Center was "back on the right track:" the "numbers were up" and the facility was running at "approximately 85% of its capacity."⁷⁷ A former County Commissioner and GCDC board member explained, "It was designed to be about a 425-bed facility but during the good times there were over 500 people there! It was throwing off a lot of extra cash. The bondholders did good on that."⁷⁸

Even when the facility was nearly full, the vast majority of this revenue **went directly to bondholders, not to the municipality or**

residents of Glades County. This revenue was vulnerable, however: in 2020, "after the election [of the Biden administration], then things started decreasing again."⁷⁹ The project's Program Manager summarized, "There are obviously issues with politics... the up and down of populations [of detained people.] That's what caused us the majority of the issue....it was politics. Up and down."⁸⁰

By 2021, Glades County Board of Commissioners began to seriously discuss abandoning the facility.⁸¹ The Chairman of the Board stated that "the budget would be extremely less if the County didn't have the ICE contract...the County has 50 additional employees because of ICE" and "those extra 50 employees are costing the County big money."⁸² He concluded that ICE is "a burden on the County at this moment."⁸³ A month later, the Sheriff's Office announced extensive layoffs.⁸⁴ The promise of durable jobs for Glades County residents was again broken.

Former Commissioner and GCDC board member John Ahern explained:

"Over time, the administration changed, and there were less and less customers from the federal government, and the facility—it was pretty much totally dependent on immigration, on ICE. It wasn't enough without a good headcount there to make it work out. It did well for a while and there were changes in the administration and there were not as many customers. With less customers and the same amount of overhead, your profit shrinks a lot."⁸⁵

As a facility purpose-built to contract with ICE, the Glades County Detention Center was particularly vulnerable because, as Program Manager Robert DeMann explained, "We were built not for the 50 we had, but for the 450 they had."⁸⁶ Under the mandate of the GCDC

Board, the Sheriff's Office went through multiple rounds of layoffs to attempt to offset shrinking revenue, a decision deeply felt in small town Moore Haven. Chief Deputy Duane Pottorff explained, "In this small community we know everybody. Our kids go to school together...so you treat people differently, you know? We all know each other, we go to church, we hang out." Many of the people who were laid off "took their whole family when they left."⁸⁷

While the County subsidized the failing detention center, they could not fund basic services for Glades County residents, including ambulances and the Emergency Medical Services system. In 2021, the Emergency Medical Services was without a working ambulance for several weeks when the County's primary ambulance caught fire and the backup broke down.⁸⁸ While Glades County officials debated what to do with an enormous empty jail complex, Glades County could not afford to respond to emergency calls. In April 2023, the County had just one ambulance dispatcher, which means that if a medical emergency took place, the dispatcher could not hang up and take other calls. Meeting minutes note that "since March [2023] there have been three Code Red [indicating a person's life is in danger] with no medical coverage available."⁸⁹ **Because the Glades County Detention Center brought no economic benefit to Glades County, the County would have had no choice but to draw from other public funds to siphon money to bondholders.**

In March 2022, the Glades County Detention Center was notified that their contract with ICE would not be renewed. Faced with an empty facility and no revenue from intergovernmental service agreement (IGSA) contracts, the Glades County Sheriff's Office faced a series of difficult decisions. Chief Deputy Duane Pottorff explained:

"We had a guaranteed minimum of 325. We weren't even close. I think we were running like 70. And as a taxpayer, I know if you're paying me for 325, but I only have 70, somebody's not getting what they want paid. Eventually, the investors were the ones that said, hey, you just got to keep trimming. And we had the first set of layoffs, and then we had the second set of layoffs. And when they came back for the third, I'm just like, there's no third. We'll just have to move the jail out of here."

With the IGSA with ICE suspended and the facility shut down, the Sheriff's Office looked elsewhere to try and keep the facility open. But the State of Florida tends to contract with private prison companies, like the GEO Group, to confine people in state prisons. It was impossible for the Glades Sheriff's Office to compete with an international corporation like GEO, which runs the private prison across the street from the Glades facility. As one Glades County Sheriff's Office employee explained, "By the time I hire all these instructors to teach GED and woodworking and all this stuff, it's \$100 [per inmate] per day, so I couldn't compete with GEO. That's the game GEO is in worldwide, so they have the advantage."⁹⁰

By March 2022, the result of shifting federal policies on immigration and the grassroots Shut Down Glades campaign, there were zero people detained by ICE at the facility.⁹¹ Unable to maintain a massive, empty jail, Glades County returned to the former jail, which they had left when the new jail complex was constructed, spending roughly \$700,0000 fixing up the crumbling, 92-bed building.⁹²

"When we were going through the bad times, when we were having to lay off people, that's why we ended up in the old jail. Because they're just like, you got to cut the fat. Cut the fat. And I'm like, the only fat

left is the 19 employees I got left, and I can't cut them, so the only way out is to move out. And that's what we did. We moved back into our old jail. We spent probably 700,000 fixing it back up but, it's bad.”⁹³

Between 2022 and 2024, the Glades County Detention Center sat empty, except for an administrative wing, where the Glades County Sheriff's Office rents office space from the GCDC.⁹⁴ Former County Commissioner and GCDC Board Member John Ahern explained:

“Without ICE, you have extra space the county doesn't need. It's created quite a challenge. Some things you can rebuild and do something else, but a jail is kind of unique. A jail is a jail. What do you do with it, other than be a jail? If you are going to invest a bunch of money in it, you have to make it work out.”⁹⁵

Even proponents of the detention center worried that it was harming Glades County. As early as 2016, County Commissioners worried about “deficits in the [County] budget that needed to be addressed so that essential life and health issues along with safety issues could be provided to the community.”⁹⁶ In a July 2021 County Commissioners meeting, **Commissioner John Ahern, a former chair of the Glades County Board of Commissioners and a member of the GCDC Board, stated that “he does not want to continue to put the county in a situation where it continues to subsidize the operation of the GCDC when there is money there that is being swept up by shareholders.”⁹⁷** Another member of the board noted that “there were many years that the GCDC could have funded raises” and “during those years no one got raises.” When a board member asked how many detained people were required for the GCDC to “cover its cost,” Glades County Sheriff's Office Financial Director Shelley Ridgill replied “400 inmates to break even.”⁹⁸ Without the

required number of detained people, the facility could not generate revenue.

The detention facility promised rural development that would benefit residents of Glades County, but this was a broken promise. **Instead, financial records show that any revenue from the facility went to bond holding investors while Glades County struggled to cover the cost of running the detention center.** In 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Glades Sheriff's Office won a 425-bed “guaranteed minimum” contract from ICE, which meant that ICE paid for 425 beds regardless of whether they were filled.⁹⁹ The guaranteed minimum agreement briefly propped up a failing economic project and—once again—funneled money to bondholders. **By 2022, the GCDC had made \$42 million in payments to investors—far more than the initial 33 million in bonds—but still had \$25 million in debt remaining.**¹⁰⁰

Although they were unable to provide basic medical services to County residents, the Board of County Commissioners tried to keep the detention center afloat. In May 2024, they approved a \$20,000 consulting fee to Summerill Group LLC to try to negotiate another IGSA to house federal prisoners.¹⁰¹

When asked what their hopes are for the facility, people employed by the Glades Sheriff's Office and Glades County Correctional Development Corporation said that they hoped the building would eventually be paid off and be passed to the County, but they were unable to estimate how long that would take. Several noted that paying off the debt might take longer than the 50-year life expectancy of the building.

Proponents of the Glades County Detention Center promised Glades County that the facility would bring them benefits: jobs, revenue, and a brand-new jail complex. This

strategy relied upon the criminalization and confinement of immigrants. None of these promises were delivered. Instead, Glades County was left without jobs or revenue and subsidized a failing economic project while the County struggled to meet the basic needs of residents. **Instead of providing jobs, revenue, and new municipal infrastructure, the detention center extracted revenue for bond-holding investors.**

This report began with the sugarcane plantations that surround the Glades County Detention Center. The shift in sugarcane cultivation from citizen to migrant labor mirrors the financial strategy of the Glades Correctional Development Corporation and the Glades County Sheriff's Office, which expanded from jailing local citizens to the mass confinement of detained immigrants. Like the sugarcane plantation, the Glades detention center is a site where the lives and time of detained immigrants were devalued and stolen. The criminalization of migration and the theft of migrant time together worked to generate revenue for bondholders, not Glades County residents.

Patrick Ferguson (Sierra Club) situated the detention center in the context of sugarcane economies:

“If you are going to talk about the history of the sugar industry, you’ve got to start with this industry being the driving force in the transatlantic slave trade, beginning in the Caribbean. This is a labor-intensive industry, with harsh conditions. This industry is rooted in exploitative labor practices, it is rooted in the history and expansion of the institution of slavery in the Western Hemisphere and in Florida in particular. From the very beginning, in the 1930s and 1940s, the labor force was predominantly African American. The United States Sugar Corporation was indicted on federal charges for violating the 13th Amendment, for basically enforcing peonage, for fundamentally treating workers like slave labor. This [history] is ever-present. Folks are still being exploited and there is this cultural strain within this region in particular where this is tolerated and looked at as the cost of doing business.”¹⁰²

The devaluation of Black and immigrant life in the Glades region long predates the construction of the new jail complex. This devaluation of life and the imperative to siphon revenue to bond holding investors shaped conditions at the Glades County Detention Center.



Erickson Martinez, 2023. Acrylic on canvas.

Artist's Statement by Erickson Martinez

This image is confinement. Confinement is cruel punishment because when you're detained, they put you in the box and you're locked up 24 hours. They give you one hour out of confinement and one hour for law library. This image explains that detention to me is just incarceration. It's just a county jail and that's it. You go to jail and do time.

You can see the phone there on the left side of this image. They roll it to your door and you have to kneel down and stick your hands out to dial the numbers and talk like that. I included the phone in this image because that is one way they control you.

It's just so expensive to make phone calls and so it is a way of trying to make you work. There is no freedom.

On the right-hand side [of the window] you can see that I did a little drawing, a silhouette of a person. That is your picture. They put your picture on the door with all your info, what country you are from and everything.

Detention is a jail cell—sure, a lot of the laws are different, and they will make it sound like detained people are different, but they are not different at all. There are [immigration] officers and sheriffs and police officers and companies that are contracted by them. But it's all the same old thing.

The following section analyzes how the devaluation of life and anti-Black and anti-immigrant violence manifested as unbreathable air at the Glades County Detention Center. These were not the only forms of violence at Glades, but they are exemplary of the devaluation of Black and immigrant life at this facility.

UNBREATHABLE AIR

The Glades County Detention Center was a site of environmental harm for detained people. This section synthesizes Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) complaints filed by detained people, environmental science scholarship, and interviews with advocates and formerly detained people. We show that exposure to airborne hazards inside the facility—antimicrobial chemical sprays, carbon monoxide, and pepper spray—restricted detained people's ability to breathe and collectively punished those confined.

Detained people were sprayed with antimicrobial sprays at toxic concentrations, exposed to disabling carbon monoxide leaks, and sprayed with pepper spray as punishment, retaliation, and revenge for asking for necessities like water and toilet paper. All these were collective dangers, and yet those affected most—just like in the County's long history of sugarcane burning—were overwhelmingly Black detained people.

These are just three of myriad forms of pervasive, systemic environmental harm. **This section documents the environmental dimensions of violence at Glades, highlighting hazards that impact breathing:** they are well-documented in the testimonies of detained people and visitors to the facility, official Glades County Sheriff's Office records, and Homeland Security Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) complaints filed by people detained by ICE at Glades. Video surveillance footage at the Glades County Detention Center was unlawfully deleted, in violation of the Federal Records Act.¹⁰³ In the absence of video documentation, and at great

personal risk, detained people documented what they experienced and survived. Their testimonies and formal grievances, combined with evidence obtained from the Glades County Sheriff's Office, offer an extensive archive of unbreathable air. Unbreathable air within and beyond the detention facility reflects the devaluation of the lives of confined and free Glades County residents.

While in operation between 2007 and 2022, the Glades County Detention Center was a place of systemic racism and anti-Blackness.¹⁰⁴ People confined in the Glades facility were subject to punitive arbitrary administrative sanctions and physical violence, including physical assault, the widespread use of restraint chairs, pepper spray, and solitary confinement. This was representative of a wider trend in detention in South Florida, where the disproportionate use of force as well as anti-Black and anti-immigrant slurs and threats are prevalent.¹⁰⁵ We focus in this section on the experiences of people detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), who made up roughly 85% of people confined at the Glades County Detention Center.¹⁰⁶ We believe their experiences are representative of others confined at the facility, including jailed people and people detained in U.S. Marshal Service custody.

It is this combination of indiscriminate harm and specific targeting of Black and brown detained people that exposes GCDC as a "black hole": not simply devouring the funds of the county that might be used to improve the lives of residents, but devouring people as well.

TOXIC SPRAYING

During the COVID-19 pandemic, detention centers and jails in the U.S. systemically failed to protect those inside their walls. People detained at Glades did not have access to sufficient protective equipment or basic sanitation supplies, and describe unsanitary and unsafe conditions:

“There is no hand sanitizer in the pod for detained people to use... We previously asked the guards for hand sanitizer and they refused. The guards told us the use of hand sanitizer is only for them...The food is usually delivered by one detained person and about four guards. No one wears masks or gloves for the food delivery.”¹⁰⁷

“We do not have consistent access to soap. There is hand soap in the bathroom, but when it runs empty, the staff do not come to fill it up until after dinner time. We never have access to hand sanitizer... The bathrooms are still being cleaned with toilet water.”¹⁰⁸

Like Glades, carceral institutions across the county did not implement basic preventative measures such as social distancing—a measure that is near impossible to implement in a jail setting—nor did they provide personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks.¹⁰⁹ People in federal immigrant detention and jails were routinely denied proper medical attention even when experiencing severe symptoms of COVID-19, exacerbating transmission within crowded facilities and leading to preventable deaths and COVID-related disabilities.¹¹⁰ People experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 were not allowed to quarantine, which meant that sick and healthy detained people were confined together in crowded, poorly ventilated spaces.

While detained at Glades, Astley Thomas tested positive for COVID-19 in June 2020. Even after testing positive, he was detained in a pod with approximately 61 people, many of whom had not tested positive: a practice that ICE called cohorting. Rather than identifying and isolating individuals who had contracted the virus, ICE opted to “cohort” large groups of people detained at Glades and quarantine them together for weeks at a time, placing uninfected individuals at greater risk for infection.¹¹¹ People living with chronic conditions that made them especially vulnerable to COVID were not released home so that they could safely quarantine. By the end of May 2020, the Glades Detention Center had one of the highest COVID-19 rates in the country.¹¹²

Instead of providing sufficient protective equipment and sanitation supplies and releasing those at high-risk for COVID-19 infection, ICE and the Glades County Sheriff’s Department chose to spray a highly toxic chemical disinfectant multiple times per day—in enclosed and poorly ventilated housing units, and in the presence of detained people. A June 23, 2020, CRLC complaint filed by Immigrant Action Alliance explains:

“[They] spray the dorms three times a day every day and it’s causing shortness of breath in a lot of people. The containers look like a backpack with a hand pump to spray the chemical mist in the air.”¹¹³

Spraying happened at 6am, 12pm, and 6pm every day. Detained people were not allowed to leave the pod while the chemical dissipated.

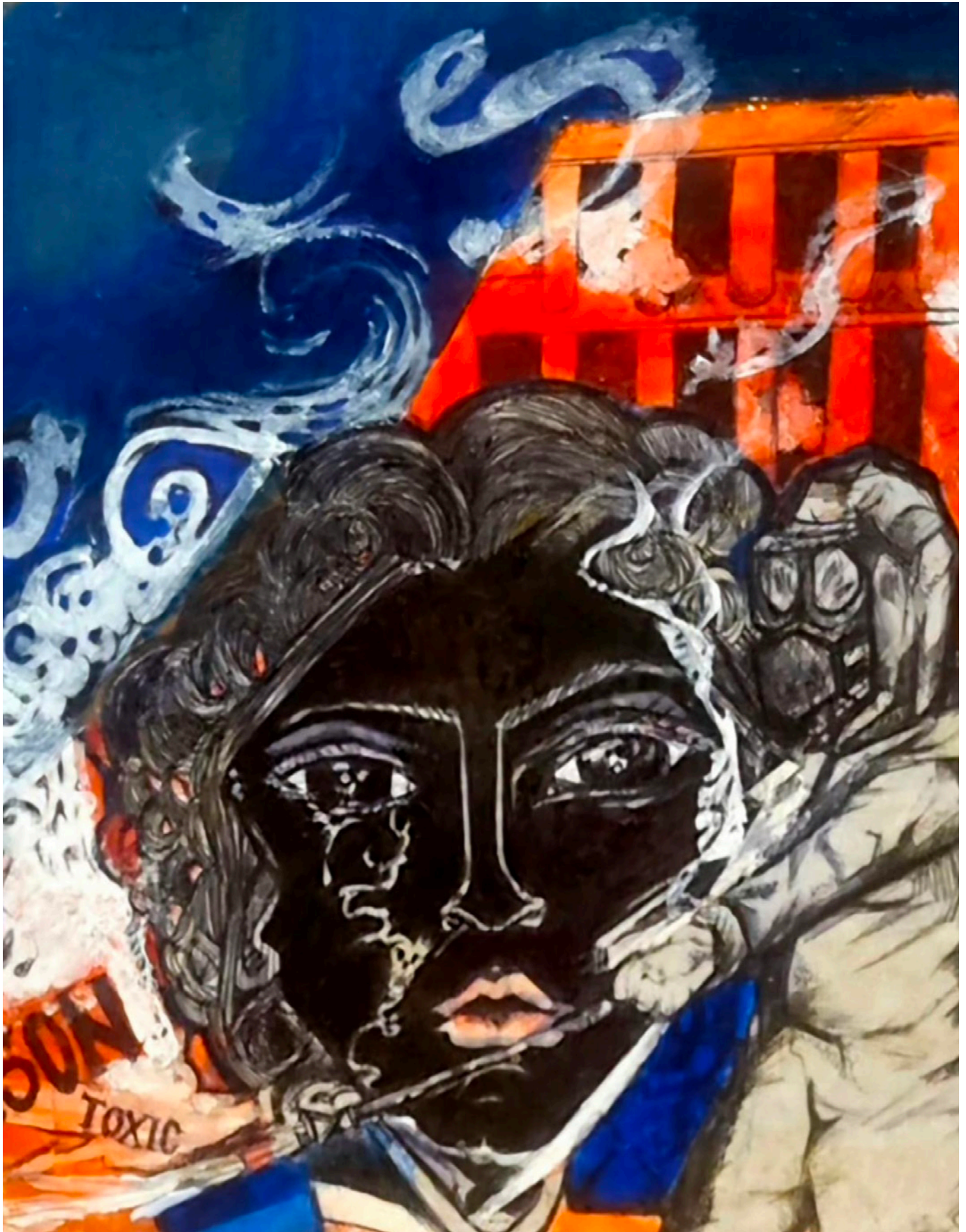
“We are not permitted to leave the pod while the chemical is sprayed... There is no ventilation in the pod, so the chemical does not quickly dissipate.”¹¹⁴

Lunise, a woman detained at Glades, reported that the chemical spray “turns the air gray” and lingers for several minutes and that when guards enter to spray, detained women would “scatter around the pod and away from the areas that were sprayed.” Lunise would hide under her bed sheet until the gray cloud dissipated.¹¹⁵ Detained people reported being sprayed at night, while sleeping, and waking up sweating and with breathing difficulties.¹¹⁶

Two disinfectant sprays were used at Glades: Mint and Maxim Neutral. Both contain antimicrobial quaternary ammonium compounds (QACs):¹¹⁷ biocidal agents that work by disrupting the cell membranes of microorganisms, rendering them unable to function or reproduce effectively. Mint and Maxim Neutral include active ingredients Didecyl Dimethyl Ammonium Chloride (DDAC) and Alkyl (C12, C14, C16) Dimethyl Benzyl Ammonium Chloride (C12–C16 ADBAC). These compounds are irritating to the skin at high concentrations, and are toxic through oral, dermal (C12–C16 ADBAC only), and inhalation exposures.¹¹⁸

In the United States, antimicrobial pesticides like Mint and Maxim Neutral are regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). FIFRA regulations stipulate how substances like Mint and Maxim Neutral are to be used, but these requirements were violated at Glades. Indeed, the EPA “does not recommend use of fumigation of wide-area spraying.”¹¹⁹ Both spraying indiscriminately into the air indoors (instead of spraying on specific surfaces) and spraying at higher concentrations than directed carry civil and criminal penalties under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA).¹²⁰

Further, both Mint and Maxim Neutral were administered at much higher concentration than allowable by the manufacturer or the EPA. As concentrates, the EPA mandates that Mint and Maxim Neutral must be diluted in water before use, so that the substance is highly reduced and safer for use. An investigation by *Scientific American* revealed that staff at the Glades County Detention Center were not diluting the Mint compound: a March 12, 2020, email obtained via Public Records Request by journalist Matthew Phelan revealed that Chad Schipansky, commander of the detention division at Glades County, wrote to his colleagues at the Glades County Sheriff’s Office that the Mint disinfectant was so thick that it was “clogging up the backpack sprayer.”¹²¹ Schipansky directed personnel to “mix one gallon of the mint [sic] with a half-gallon or so of water to thin it out a bit.”¹²² As documented in a letter from Earthjustice and the Shut Down Glades Coalition, this 2:1 ratio is 64 times greater than the maximum concentration permitted by Mint’s FIFRA labeling.¹²³



Erickson Martinez, 2024. Acrylic on wood.

The use of these toxic sprays at high concentrations and in violation of appropriate protocols and EPA policies caused respiratory distress for people detained at Glades. A CRCL complaint filed by Immigrant Action Alliance on May 23, 2020, documents that following spraying, detained people experienced “coughing a lot,” “headaches and difficulty breathing,” unbearable vapor and smell of a chemical, burning eyes, as well as nosebleeds and vomiting.

In court testimony, one person detained at Glades reported:

“The facility staff continues to spray the disinfectant while we are all in the pod. The chemical that is used causes us difficulty to breathe and also burns our eyes. When the chemical is sprayed, it goes all over the whole pod. The chemical also causes us to cough, which could potentially further the spread of the virus.”¹²⁴

A detained man from Haiti shared that:

“One man in the pod who sleeps near me has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (“COPD”) and he experiences chest pains whenever they spray this chemical in the pod. At Krome [a detention facility in Miami] when they sprayed a cleaning solution, we were allowed to wait outside until the spray went away. This does not happen at the Glades County Detention Center.”¹²⁵

Together, these complaints and testimonies detail that people detained inside Glades experienced painful, burning, red, and swollen eyes, nose, and throat; painful breathing, accompanied by sneezing and coughing that sometimes produce blood; severe nausea; stomach pain; and headaches as a direct result of hazardous chemicals being sprayed on them.¹²⁶

The physical effects of the spraying were compounded by how the staff administered the spray: specifically, how they misinformed detained people about the risks of spraying and neglected medical requests of people exposed to chemical spray. Reports confirm that “the Glades County Sheriff’s Office staff have not verbally shared or posted any safety risks or precautions regarding the chemicals they are spraying with the individuals in detention.”¹²⁷ Manufacturers safety data sheets for QAC-based disinfectants warn against “inhaling them or allowing them to come into contact with the skin or eyes—and note that such exposure to the compounds can cause breathing problems, skin irritation or blindness, respectively.”¹²⁸ Further, “high vapor concentrations may cause central nervous system effects,” the Mint data sheet states, inducing symptoms such as headaches and dizziness. Detained people experiencing symptoms from exposure to toxic spraying were routinely denied adequate medical treatment.¹²⁹ A detained person explained:

“I’m not doing too good. I been having shortness of breath, especially when they spray the dorms with that chemical. There’s a lot of people complaining about the same issue. I put in two medical requests to see the doctor and they never respond.”¹³⁰

In a CRCL complaint filed June 23, 2020, a person detained at Glades testified:

“Yes, they are still spraying the chemical in the dorms 3 times per day...I’ve been suffering from chronic pain and shortness of breath, especially when they spray the chemical in the dorm, but they keep telling me and other people with medical issues that there is nothing wrong with us. It’s been two weeks since I put in a medical request to see the doctor and I have not gotten a response.”¹³¹

The failure to appropriately protect detained people from carbon monoxide poisoning highlighted the widespread incompetence of guards and administrators. This was a double failure: to protect detained people and kitchen workers from carbon monoxide exposure, and to follow appropriate evacuation and assessment protocols in the wake of a nearly fatal poisoning incident. This negligence had serious, long-term consequences for detained people.

The debilitating physical effects experienced by people detained at Glades are consistent with laboratory and public health studies. Scientists have raised significant concerns about the health impacts of quaternary ammonium compounds (QACs), the active ingredient in both Mint and Maxim Neutral. Severe QAC toxicity can induce acute respiratory, liver, and renal failure, cardiovascular collapse, seizures, coma, and death. Long-term exposure to QACs is associated with increased asthma risk,¹³² and animal studies indicate that even short-term exposure to some types of QACs can lead to severe airway inflammation and altered breathing patterns.¹³³ Chronic exposure to QACs is also associated with serious impacts to the reproductive system, including altered reproductive cycles, reduced fertility, and birth defects.¹³⁴

Further, scientists believe the EPA's current method of grouping and regulating QACs is insufficient to address the wide range of QACs chemistries, potential toxicities, and exposure scenarios. Consequently, they believe that the risks posed by QACs are not well enough understood.¹³⁵

Had these substances been sprayed outside of a detention center or jail, the Florida Department of Health in Glades County's Environmental Health Program could have intervened to ensure the health and safety of impacted people. The Department of Health claims that because these hazardous conditions took place within a jail, they were never notified of these incidents and had no authority to intervene.¹³⁶

CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

Toxic spraying was not the only airborne hazard endured by detained people. Austerity measures intended to create as much revenue as possible for bondholders, poor infrastructure, and the devaluation of the lives of detained and jailed people led to a severe airborne poisoning incident.

On Tuesday, November 23, 2021, a carbon monoxide buildup in the Glades detention center kitchen poisoned nine people: six detained kitchen workers and three Glades staff members. Breathing in carbon monoxide—an odorless substance produced by gas-burning stoves—prevents the body from using oxygen properly, and harms the brain, heart, and other organs. The poisoning incident was so severe that four detained men (and at least one Glades Sheriff's Office employee) were hospitalized following the exposure. Two of the hospitalized men experienced such severe carbon monoxide poisoning symptoms, including losing

consciousness, that they were then airlifted from the local Hendry Regional Medical Center to AdventHealth hospital, a Level I trauma center in Orlando.

Some kitchen workers that were exposed to carbon monoxide were not even taken to the hospital, regardless of whether they were detained or not. Instead, they were forced to remain in the kitchen, where poisonous gas was presumably still building up, until they had finished serving lunch. Only after lunch service was complete were they taken to the jail's medical unit, where their vitals were checked, and they received thirty minutes of supplemental oxygen. Later that same day, they were sent back to serve dinner—even though the kitchen was not cleared as safe until the next day. While detained people working in the kitchen were the ones primarily impacted, detained people working near the kitchen reported experiencing symptoms.

Exposure to carbon monoxide aggravated the asthma and other chronic conditions of detained workers. One detained kitchen worker from Jamaica, who lives with high blood pressure, required six to seven hours of supplemental oxygen while hospitalized.¹³⁷ Yet he received no further medical care following his return to detention that night. Two weeks later, he continued to experience headaches, dizziness, and fatigue. Another detained person, also from Jamaica, suffers from chronic asthma. Following the poisoning event, he reported “significant symptoms related to the exposure to carbon monoxide, including weakness, fatigue, nausea, constant headaches, dizziness, confusion and memory issues, and constant vomiting.”¹³⁸

A Glades County Sheriff's Office kitchen worker was hospitalized in intensive care for several days. She returned to work months after the incident but quit in a short period of time because she remained unwell.¹³⁹

Carbon monoxide poisoning is easily preventable, but the Glades detention center did not have a carbon monoxide monitor.¹⁴⁰ The failure to install carbon monoxide monitors was part of a pattern of neglect that rendered the air inside the jail unbreathable.

This extended beyond the initial carbon monoxide poisoning event. Glades guards failed to follow proper evacuation procedures at the time of the event: “employees shall be removed from the enclosed space if the carbon monoxide concentration exceeds a ceiling of 100 ppm (0.01%).”¹⁴¹ Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) states that once “the level of carbon monoxide reaches 150-200 parts per million,” the gas “can cause serious complications including disorientation, unconsciousness, and death.”¹⁴² Although the carbon monoxide concentration at the time of the event is unknown, it is very likely that it reached or exceeded 150 ppm given that two people in the area were rendered unconscious. Yet rather than clearing all people from the enclosed space at that point, GSCO forced them to continue working. When they returned for the evening shift, they received no assurance or proof that carbon monoxide levels had abated.

Glades' failure to appropriately protect detained people from carbon monoxide poisoning highlighted the widespread incompetence of guards and administrators. This was a double failure: to protect detained people and kitchen workers from carbon monoxide exposure, and to follow appropriate evacuation and assessment protocols in the wake of a nearly fatal poisoning incident.

This negligence had serious, long-term consequences for detained people. Even when it is not fatal, carbon monoxide inhalation is debilitating and can cause permanent damage to the brain, heart, and other vital organs.

The Florida Department of Health in Glades and Hendry Counties were required by law to investigate the incident but it is not clear if they completed a site visit. An epidemiologist with the Department refused to comment.

The carbon monoxide incident highlights that low-wage workers were also at risk for environmental exposure in the Glades detention facility. Instead of providing dignified work and economic benefits for Glades County residents, unsafe and subpar conditions at the detention center exposed kitchen workers—detained and not—to harm.

PEPPER SPRAY

“From day one, they used pepper spray like it's nothing. They used pepper spray to take control of the environment.” N.T., formerly detained at Glades.¹⁴³

Toxic chemical disinfectants and carbon monoxide were not the only substances that made the air unbreathable at Glades. Pepper spray was systematically deployed as a form of punishment, and in retaliation when detained people asked for necessities like water and toilet paper. In addition, a series of CRCL complaints and legal cases established that pepper spray was disproportionately used against Black people detained at Glades. Exposure to pepper spray also placed detained people at greater danger for COVID-19 infection and exacerbated existing medical conditions.¹⁴⁴

Pepper spray is part of “law enforcement’s ‘less-lethal weapon’ repertoire,”¹⁴⁵ and it is routinely used by police officers and prison and jail guards. Pepper spray is usually made of oleoresin capsicum, a highly concentrated form of the active ingredients in hot peppers, or its synthetic form, pelargonic acid vanillylamide or capsaicin II. Pepper

spray produces a burning sensation in the eyes and skin, causes temporary blindness, and restricts breathing. These impacts are debilitating and painful. The use and misuse of pepper spray is linked to serious injuries and death.¹⁴⁶

This section is organized around three stories. Each story exemplifies patterns in the use of pepper spray at Glades. As with other genres of environmental harm that render the air unbreathable, pepper spray in the Glades County Detention Center functioned as a kind of collective punishment, impacting people far beyond the individual being directly attacked.

Mr. Simeon and Anonymous¹⁴⁷

In the early morning on June 10, 2020, a Haitian man named Mr. Simeon reported that he asked a guard, Sergeant Sierra, for drinking water. The water jug in the pod had been empty all night, and Mr. Simeon was thirsty. Sergeant Sierra refused and told Mr. Simeon to step outside of the pod. Mr. Simeon refused: he was afraid that the guard would take him into the hallway, out of sight of video surveillance cameras, and beat or physically harm him—a common practice at Glades. When he refused to leave the pod, and again asked for water, Sergeant Sierra pepper sprayed Mr. Simeon directly in his eyes, at close range. The pepper spray directed at Mr. Simeon spread through the pod and made other detained people cough.

Another detained person, who is identified only as “Anonymous,” rushed to help Mr. Simeon, leading him to the bathroom and helped him clean the burning pepper spray off his face. The pepper spray got on the man helping Mr. Simeon, and he too began to experience respiratory distress. He said, “I had trouble breathing and stopped breathing.” The man who helped Mr. Simeon



Rene Murillo, *The Dream that Hurt Me Back*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas.

had recently tested positive for COVID-19 and was asthmatic, but no doctor checked on him or provided care. He explained, “I am an asthmatic with serious respiratory problems and complications could arise from being exposed to chemical agents.” In this incident, it was not only Mr. Simeon whose breath was restricted—the man who helped him also experienced respiratory distress.

Mr. Simeon’s story exemplifies a well-documented pattern at Glades: the punitive use of pepper spray to exert power in minor, non-violent negotiations between detained people and guards. According to the 2019 National Detention Standards, “under no circumstances shall force be used to punish a detainee.”¹⁴⁸ Yet Mr. Simeon’s ability to breathe was violently restricted simply for asking for water and hesitating to step out of the pod to receive punishment. Guards routinely deployed pepper spray at close proximity, in enclosed spaces, and against detained people who were not resisting and posed no threat.

As we see in Mr. Simeon’s story, pepper spray also functioned as *collective* punishment for detained people. Anyone in proximity to the person being targeted was also impacted. Ventilation in the pods was so poor that when pepper spray was used in a neighboring pod, detained people could feel the effects for days.¹⁴⁹ Detained people exposed to ambient pepper spray would cough, rinse their eyes, and cover their faces with blankets.¹⁵⁰ Higher quantities of chemical agent in enclosed spaces is associated with more severe injuries related to pepper spray, which include respiratory distress, shortness of breath, chest pain, dizziness, fainting, rashes, blisters, or burns on contact with skin, bronchospasm (sudden constriction of the walls of the lungs), pulmonary edema, asphyxia, and even death.¹⁵¹

N.T.’s Story¹⁵²

N.T. is a Black immigrant from St Lucia. During his detention at Glades, he was in his early twenties. Early in the morning on September 21, 2021, N.T. went to exchange his empty toilet paper roll and empty soap bottle so that he could receive new ones. Guards in the housing unit told him there was no toilet paper available. N.T. responded that he needed to use the bathroom, and the guard replied that N.T. could “wash his ass in the shower” and closed the door on him. N.T. knocked on the door before walking away. A few moments later, someone opened the door, so N.T. returned to the door. When N.T. again asked for toilet paper, Lieutenant Mondragon told N.T. to turn around and place his arms behind his back and handcuffed him, making the cuffs extremely tight around his wrists. N.T. did not resist. Lieutenant Mondragon then said, “You can shit on yourself for all I care. You won’t get any toilet paper.” The Lieutenant marched N.T. out of the pod and into the hallway, where he slammed his head against a door made of plexiglass and metal. The Lieutenant pulled N.T. into a second hallway and, out of camera’s view, pepper sprayed N.T. directly in the eyes.

N.T. struggled for air. His eyes were burning, and he asked a guard present to pull down his face mask because he could not breathe. The officers took N.T. to the bathroom, but because his hands were in restraints behind his back, he was unable to wash out his eyes. Still blinded, he tried to use his cuffed hands to turn the tap on. As he struggled to turn on water, he was pepper sprayed again. Officers then pulled him out of the bathroom, slammed him against the bathroom wall, and brought him to another room, where he was strapped into a restraint chair. N.T. was left in the restraint chair for

four hours, his upper body soaked in pepper spray. When N.T. was finally removed from the restraint chair, uncuffed, and permitted to shower, his hands were swollen, bruised, and red, and he had lost feeling in his thumbs. He received no medical treatment before being taken to solitary confinement, despite notifying medical staff that his hands were injured and his entire back, neck, face, and eyes continued to burn. Three years after the incident, N.T. continues to experience numbness and pain in his thumbs.

N.T.'s story exemplifies a well-documented pattern at Glades. Pepper spray was not only used as punishment during routine, non-violent encounters with guards. *Prolonged and repeated* exposure to pepper spray was systematically used to further punish detained people by extending the excruciating pain of exposure. Prolonged exposure time is associated with more severe injuries related to pepper spray.¹⁵³

A review of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) complaints filed by people detained at the Glades County Detention Center and other accounts suggest that personnel at Glades exposed detained people to pepper spray in several ways.¹⁵⁴ Guards routinely denied access to showers or water to wash pepper spray off of their skin and out of their eyes, or placed people in restraint chairs, often for hours at a time. Guards denied people who they sprayed a change of clothes, forcing them to wear clothing saturated with pepper spray for hours or days following the initial assault. Detained people were also routinely placed in solitary confinement after being sprayed, where they were unable to seek help from cellmates or a full shower. Finally, people who had been sprayed were denied medical care to alleviate the symptoms of exposure to pepper spray.¹⁵⁵ The National Detention Standards require that after *any*

use of force, medical personnel shall examine the individual involved and any “medical services provided shall be documented.”¹⁵⁶ This Standard was routinely ignored at Glades, and people like N.T.—who had a previously existing heart condition—were put at severe risk of injury and death. In Florida alone, there are several documented cases of the use of pepper spray against confined individuals that have resulted in death.¹⁵⁷

A.S.'s Story¹⁵⁸

On September 16, 2021, A.S., a Black African immigrant, was resting in a six-man cell with a group of other Black African immigrants. At around 6am, Captain Gadson and a group of at least 15 guards approached the cell. Without explanation, Captain Gadson and other guards pepper sprayed the men in the cell. Captain Gadson aimed his pepper spray cannister directly at A.S.'s face and the side of his head. The attack was completely unprovoked.

After being pepper sprayed, A.S. was handcuffed and dragged out of the pod. A.S. lives with chronic kidney disease, and after being sprayed, he began to have trouble breathing and experienced a high blood pressure episode. He was briefly taken to the medical department before being thrown in solitary confinement. A.S. reported to a legal advocate:

“Is there any way I get help I’m in the hole we’ve all been sprayed with (6) of my cellies we haven’t taken a shower place [sic] in the hole for no reason.. I’m not going to be able to talk often but we need help or transfer out of here please help us.”¹⁵⁹

No shower, change of clothes, or medical care was provided, and the pepper spray remained on his skin and clothing. According to his

cellmate, A.S. cried for help all day and did not receive any response.

The following day, one of the other men sprayed with A.S. was rushed to the emergency room after swallowing and choking on a pencil in an apparent suicide attempt. That same day, A.S.'s cellmate swallowed pieces of metal in front of an officer, but the officer did not respond or call for mental health support. That same evening, A.S.'s cellmate attempted suicide and was taken from the cell. A.S. did not know where his cellmate was or if he was still alive for multiple days. On September 19, a full three days after being pepper sprayed and assaulted, A.S. had still not received any medical attention, despite communicating that there had been blood in his urine for more than 24 hours, indicating rapidly worsening problems with his chronic kidney disease. No medical staff responded to his requests for help.

A.S.'s story exemplifies a well-documented phenomenon at Glades: the use of pepper spray to collectively punish detained people, particularly Black African and Caribbean men. In his complaint, A.S. stated, "We want to be treated fair, like anyone else. When it comes to us, the Africans, they have a problem with us."

In the story of A.S., pepper spray was used on a group of men who were simply sitting on their beds, in a general population dormitory. Pepper spray was used indiscriminately, to collectively punish all six men, who were sitting and talking after eating breakfast. Legal advocates speculated that the attack could have been in retaliation for their previous organizing efforts at detention facilities or for efforts to organize hunger strikes demanding better conditions at Glades.¹⁶⁰

Guards routinely denied access to showers or water to wash pepper spray off of their skin and out of their eyes, or placed people in restraint chairs, often for hours at a time. Guards denied people who they sprayed a change of clothes, forcing them to wear clothing saturated with pepper spray for hours or days following the initial assault. Detained people were also routinely placed in solitary confinement after being sprayed, where they were unable to seek help from cellmates or a full shower.



Erickson Martínez, 2023, Acrylic on wood.

Artist's Statement by Erickson Martinez

This image explains how they use pepper spray as a weapon, constantly. It is the number one technique that they use. This shows how they use it as a weapon, they keep it in their pants like a gun, and a lot of them have really big pepper spray bottles, they look like Coca Cola cans. They're trigger happy with the pepper spray. I saw so many people sprayed, and I got affected by it a lot of times because the pepper spray flies through the air. When they spray, you start coughing and some people throw up.

This image is in the hallway because when they spray you, they move you to a place where the camera can't catch it. The walls in the hallway are that color, that dark blue. That hallway is the place where people got sprayed the most, because there were no cameras. So that whole hallway was a blind spot. If they want to beat you

up, they will beat you up in there. In this image, if you really look at it, you can see the officer has a little smirk, he's laughing, because it's a game to them. It's fun to them, something exciting in their jobs. They control with fear, they control with gas [pepper spray].

You can also see in this image that there are three ICE agents in the back (melting, because that's what ice does). I added them because they cover up the corruption and violence at Glades. If the sheriff does anything wrong, ICE is going to protect them. The dollar sign represents being for sale. There's so much money being made off of all the people they keep locked up.

The detainees wear oranges, the clothes they give you. The detainee in this image has his hands the way they are to show that he is not a threat. He has both hands together, without any kind of force or any kind of threat, but the guard is just spraying him.

Creating an Archive of Unbreathable Air

Exposure to toxic spraying, carbon monoxide poisoning, and the use of pepper spray rendered air within the Glades County Detention Center unbreathable. This **collectively punished** detained and jailed people, who could not escape these hazards. Like the black snow produced by sugarcane burning, this was a form of environmental racism: it disproportionately targeted immigrants, the majority of people detained in the facility.

This section of the report is only possible because of the detained people, who—supported by legal advocates and organizers—created an archive of unbreathable air documenting conditions at Glades. This archive was built over years and at great personal risk. Reporting or contesting violent conditions at Glades was often met with retaliation. Glades County Sheriffs and the Glades Correctional Development Corporation deny that any abuse took place at the facility and characterized the complaints as “lie after lie after lie.”¹⁶¹ As N.T., whose story is featured above, explains:

“The minute you speak on something, it’s turn around, they put you in handcuffs, they take you out in the hallway to do what they do and then they throw you in the hole and make it seem like you are the heathen.”¹⁶²

Detained people reported violence at Glades despite the documented pattern of retaliation for reporting. They did so not only to seek justice for themselves but to create an archive that illuminated patterns of abuse at Glades. This archive allowed legal advocates, community organizers, and now, researchers to assemble documentation and identify common practices in detention. As N.T. explains:

“I just knew a paper trail is always good. One person comes and says, this happened. People might not believe it. But then, eventually, over time, you’re getting the same complaint. It’s kind of hard to say, no, you’re not doing this. Even if my complaint doesn’t shed light right now, maybe two years down the line or a year down the line, the same incident happens to somebody else, and they may put a grievance in. Then, boom, you’ve got two grievances. You’ve got a paper trail. These two people don’t know each other, right, so how are they speaking on the same thing? There’s got to be something there. It wasn’t that I expected something to happen right then and now. I was just putting it out of hope. You know, maybe somebody will run into this and will question this. That is why I continued to do it.”¹⁶³

The Shut Down Glades Campaign relied upon these testimonies to build relationships across the jail’s walls and, together, challenge detention at Glades.

Sworn declaration of a man detained at Glades. Testimonies like these were crucial components of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) complaints that documented violence at the Glades County Detention Center.

SWORN DECLARATION OF

I, _____, swear under penalty of perjury and state as follows:

1. My name is _____ I was born on _____, 1982 in Somalia.
2. I have personal knowledge of the matters contained and set forth in this declaration.
3. I am currently in segregation housing, a/k/a "the hole," at Glades County Detention Center.
4. I was on the December 7, 2017 flight to Somalia that returned to the U.S. I have remained in ICE custody.
5. I am afraid of the guards at the Glades County Detention Center because of what I have seen them do to other detainees, including physical violence and threats.
6. On December 25, 2017, I was in the pod and I saw two men arguing over a phone. One of the men was Somali; the other was not. There are four phones for the pod, but only one or two of them were working that day.
7. The guards grabbed a Somali man named _____ and took him to the hole. He was not one of the ones who had been arguing. The guards told him he would never get out. I did not hear them give him a reason.
8. The guards pepper sprayed the Somali man who had been arguing, and it spread throughout the pod.
9. The next day, December 26, 2017, I saw two other Somali men leave the pod to talk to the guards. One of them, _____, came back. Speaking in Somali, he told me, "_____" and another Somali that he thought the guards were going to take all of us to the hole. So, I packed my things.
10. Sergeant Mims came into the pod and asked if we were ready to go to the hole. I went with him. He never gave me a reason why I had to go to the hole.
11. After they put me in the cell, they sprayed pepper spray and it came into my cell and I was coughing. I don't know why because I didn't do anything. I heard others in the hole coughing.

12. Four days after I was put in the hole, I had a hearing. Even though I didn't really understand what I was being accused of, I just said I was guilty because I thought I might get out of the hole faster that way. Instead, I was told I got 30 days in segregation but they did not tell me why.
13. In segregation, I am only able to shower every other day. I am confined to my room 24 hours a day. I get my food through a slot in the door. I can't see sunlight, and the lights are always on. I never know what time it is.
14. I am only able to use the phone to call an attorney, but I have to make a request, but I have to pay 50 cents per minute.
15. I am currently in handcuffs that are attached to a band around my waist with handcuffs. The handcuffs are only removed when I shower or am in my cell.
16. I have been in jail before and in the hole, but Glades is much worse than anything I ever experienced in other jails.

Under penalty of perjury, I declare that I have read the foregoing declaration and that the facts stated here are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

In witness whereof, I sign the instant declaration in Moore Haven, Florida, this 8th day of January, 2018.

As the result of ceaseless organizing from inside and outside of the facility, the Glades County Detention Center was such down in 2022. It reopened in April 2025, following the inauguration of the second Trump administration in January.

Appendix 1

All numbers on the financial timeline section (bottom of the graph) were cross referenced between IRS reports and financial statements from the Glades Correctional Development Corporation. For IRS reports, see: <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/30479709>. For GCDC reports, see the EMMA (Electronic Municipal Market Access) database: <https://emma.msrb.org/IssuerHomePage/Issuer?id=503FD08FCC4C12D58842CB44E0A8A482&type=G>.

For the roll call portion of the graph, we draw upon a combination of sources including GCDC reports from the EMMA database, available at: <https://emma.msrb.org/Security/Details/A9A38766792CC88AB1CD64162409C2A5B>. Information about the number of detained people is included in reports as "average daily population report" or "occupancy report." When population numbers were not available via GCDC reports, we derived population information from the Minutes of the Glades County Board of Commissioners, available at: <https://gladesclerk.com/bocc-meetings/>.

Year ending Sept. Of	Revenue	Outstanding PRINCIPAL (qtd. From bonds payable in financial forms at the end of tax year, sept)	Principal Annual Payment	Interest Annual Payment	Principal plus Interest Payment	Cumulative Payments	Avg year population total	ICE	Marshals	Local jail
2007	2,389,760.00	33,000,000.00	-	2,382,450.00	2,382,450.00	2,382,450.00				
2008	14,022,929.00	33,000,000.00	-	2,382,450.00	2,382,450.00	4,764,900.00				
2009	16,449,219.00	32,315,000.00	685,000.00	2,365,325.00	3,050,325.00	7,815,225.00	440			
2010	16,229,986.00	31,595,000.00	720,000.00	2,327,200.00	3,047,200.00	10,862,425.00				
2011	15,375,621.00	30,840,000.00	755,000.00	2,290,179.00	3,045,179.00	13,907,604.00				
2012	15,155,649.00	30,045,000.00	795,000.00	2,240,248.00	3,035,248.00	16,942,852.00	503	425	32	46
2013	12,328,359.00	29,195,000.00	850,000.00	2,290,179.00	3,140,179.00	20,083,031.00				
2014	7,770,328.00	28,280,000.00	915,000.00	2,113,767.00	3,028,767.00	23,111,798.00	268	212	18	38
2015	5,001,979.00	28,280,000.00	-	-	-	23,111,798.00	107	57	21	29
2016	6,425,056.00	28,280,000.00	-	2,079,857.00	2,079,857.00	25,191,655.00	217	142	30	42
2017	11,829,157.00	35,352,000.00	1,002,386.00	1,335,144.00	2,337,530.00	27,529,185.00	457			
2018	16,646,120.00	33,852,000.00	1,500,000.00	1,549,795.00	3,049,795.00	30,578,980.00	488	426	18	44
2019	17,025,157.00	32,352,000.00	2,657,192.00	1,448,305.00	4,105,497.00	34,684,477.00	508	420	36	52
2020	15,631,392.00	29,352,000.00	2,853,543.00	1,341,550.00	4,195,093.00	38,879,570.00	340	269	31	40
2021	15,007,663.00	26,387,472.00	1,953,792.00	1,235,550.00	3,189,342.00	42,068,912.00	173	87	34	52
2022	8,072,727.00	24,887,472.00	1,500,000.00	1,131,550.00	2,631,550.00	44,700,462.00	143		89	54
2023	833,736.00	25,714,500.00	-	1,026,550.00	1,026,550.00	45,727,012.00	51		Around 13	

Appendix 2

These numbers are derived from each year's "Glades Correctional Development Corporation Financial Statements," available via the EMMA database (<https://emma.msrb.org/Security/Details/A9A38766792CC88AB1CD64162409C2A5B>) and cross-referenced with IRS reports. All details are included in financial statements in the "Statement of Functional Expenses" section of each report.

	PAYROLL	MEDICAL	INTEREST	FOOD	MANAGEMENT	UTILITIES	INSURANCE
2008	4,643,728	1,989,426	2,362,000	547,312	500,000	690,150	426,908
2009	5,867,299	2,307,583	2,362,000	672,685	500,000	865,118	338,365
2010	6,327,526	2,241,440	2,327,200	582,253	500,004	959,003	309,216
2011	5,743,607	2,272,353	2,290,179	626,365	500,004	818,388	306,082
2012	5,837,036	2,379,394	2,240,248	738,587	500,000	729,252	273,436
2013	5,683,832	2,264,716	2,179,251	729,186	500,000	727,042	284,631
2014	4,697,695	1,583,888	2,113,767	462,989	208,335	621,410	135,091
2015	4,288,056	1,173,348	2,079,857	264,486	50,000	433,792	280,347
2016	4,174,444	1,102,836	2,085,650	363,623	50,000	431,272	256,892
2017	5,114,295	2,038,372	1,335,144	588,717	166,668	515,198	281,474
2018	6,084,974	2,682,067	1,549,795	755,607	500,004	616,364	359,072
2019	6,291,688	2,883,605	1,448,305	868,976	500,000	575,252	332,262
2020	6,229,783	3,024,628	1,341,550	895,723	500,000	662,275	367,926
2021	989,977	281,405	1,026,550	N/A	104,168	264,406	221,402
MEAN	5,140,996	2,016,076	1,910,107	578,322	362,799	636,352	298,079
MEDIAN	5,713,719.00	2,253,078	2,099,708.00	626,365	500,000	641,842.50	295,356.50

MEDIAN TOTAL EXPENSES

12,130,069.00

Proportion Converted to a Scale of "Out of 90" (Based on Median)

PAYROLL: 42.39 out of 90

MEDICAL: 16.72 out of 90

INTEREST: 15.58 out of 90

FOOD: 4.65 out of 90

MANAGEMENT: 3.71 out of 90

UTILITIES: 4.76 out of 90

INSURANCE: 2.19 out of 90

Publishing Organizations

The mission of the **American Civil Liberties Union of Florida** is to protect, defend, strengthen, and promote the constitutional rights and liberties of all people in Florida. We envision a fair and just Florida, where all people are free, equal under the law, and live with dignity.

American Friends Service Committee of Florida coordinates local, statewide, and national campaigns to demand the fair treatment of all immigrants and build collective power. We focus on immigrant justice, immigration legal services, and just economies. Our vision is to accompany Florida immigrants so that they may live more peacefully in an imperfect society.

Detention Watch Network is a national coalition of more than 100 organizations building power through collective advocacy, grassroots organizing, and strategic communications to abolish immigration detention in the United States.

Earthjustice is the premier nonprofit public interest environmental law organization. We wield the power of law and the strength of partnership to protect people's health, to preserve magnificent places and wildlife, to advance clean energy, and to combat climate change. We serve more than a thousand public-interest clients, providing top-tier legal representation in their fight for justice.

Freedom for Immigrants is an immigrant-led, abolitionist organization working to end immigration incarceration by organizing with and following the leadership of currently and formerly detained immigrants. We're building a future in which all people can move freely and thrive.

Immigrant Action Alliance (IAA) was a non-profit organization that fought to end immigrant detention and abolish ICE. Between 2013 and 2023, IAA provided direct support to hundreds of people detained at Broward Transitional Center, Krome Service Processing Center, and Baker County Detention Center through in-person visits, phone time, books, legal referrals, post-release support, advocacy, and more. IAA initiated and led the successful fight to shut down the Glades County Detention Center in 2022.

Endnotes

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