

ANNALS OF IMMIGRATION

THE MAKEUP ARTIST DONALD TRUMP DEPORTED UNDER THE ALIEN ENEMIES ACT

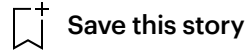
*The President has invoked the law to send Venezuelans to prison in El Salvador without due process—
and, in many cases, under false pretenses.*

By Jonathan Blitzer

March 31, 2025



Illustration by Anuj Shrestha



Throughout the fall and winter, Alexis Romero de Hernández struggled to accept a grim new routine. She lived in a small town in central Venezuela called Capacho, with her husband and the younger of her two sons. Her eldest, a thirty-one-year-old makeup artist named Andry José Hernández Romero, was being held in an immigration jail in San Diego. He called her every few days, usually late in the afternoon, to reassure her that he was safe. The calls would last about a minute. Alexis had to put money on his calling card to keep them coming. “Mama, relax,” Andry would tell her. “I’m fine. They’re treating us well. What’s bad is that we’re stuck here.”

In Capacho, Andry was a member of a local theatre troupe, and he acted in an annual church procession during the Epiphany, which, in the Spanish-speaking world, is known as El Día de los Reyes Magos, or Three Kings Day. He loved to draw, and had a penchant for bringing aesthetic flourishes to every corner of his life. When he worked as a hotel receptionist for a time, he created balloon decorations in the lobby; at home, he designed costumes and clothes. He made friends easily but, Alexis said, didn’t drink or stay out late. Andry is “very, very humble and very, very open,” she told me, by phone. “He’s comfortable being alone. He cooks for me and helps clean. He’s a homebody.”

In 2023, Andry took a job at a state-run television station in Caracas, the country’s capital. It was an ideal job—he was responsible for prepping the show’s anchors and guests for the screen, and his family, who have a shop that sells glass for mirrors and tables, needed the money. But he was gay and skeptical of the country’s authoritarian regime, which made him a target for abuse. The year he spent in Caracas, Alexis told me, was one of “persecution and discrimination. People in high places always discriminate against those who are lower down. They

humiliated him.” At night, after work, he was often followed home and harassed by armed vigilantes aligned with the government; on one occasion, his boss at the station slapped him in front of his co-workers.

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When Andry told his parents that he'd decided to leave Venezuela, in late May of 2024, they begged him to stay. “At least see how things go with the elections,” Alexis told him, referring to [the country's Presidential race](#) that August. “His father talked to him, too. But there was no way to convince him not to go.” Andry's decision initially seemed prescient: the current President, Nicolás Maduro, who appeared to have lost the vote by an overwhelming margin, declared himself the winner. Andry was one of roughly seven hundred and sixty thousand Venezuelans who travelled to the United States during the Biden Administration, traversing an infamously dangerous jungle known as [the Darién Gap](#), between Colombia and Panama. “He made the journey,” Alexis said. “He wanted to change his life, to reach his potential, and to help us here.”

The first time Andry tried to enter the U.S., he was arrested and sent to Tabasco, Mexico, where a friend helped him download a government app that allowed migrants to make appointments at ports of entry. The system, known as CBP One, was the Biden Administration's attempt to create a more orderly process for people to enter the country. Part of the premise was to incentivize migrants to

come “the right way,” though it often took months for slots to open up. On the morning of August 29th, a U.S. official interviewed Andry at the U.S.-Mexico border in San Diego. Andry had no criminal record, and the exchange seemed straightforward.

“Did you claim asylum while in Mexico?” the official asked.

“I didn’t know I could do that,” he replied.

Andry eventually passed his preliminary asylum screening. Officials determined that he demonstrated a “credible fear” of persecution in his home country. But during a physical exam, they had fixated on his tattoos. A snake extending from a bouquet of flowers covers his left forearm and biceps. On each of his wrists is a crown, with the words “Mom” and “Dad” inked next to them in English. The photographs in his file show a thin man, slight of build, with a youthful face and dark hair; there are rings under his eyes, and he is standing before the government photographer without a shirt.





Andry José Hernández Romero. Photograph courtesy Lindsay Toczyłowski

Andry denied belonging to any gang. The agent, who asked him about the tattoos, described his “demeanor during interview” as “uncooperative.” A note was added to his file: “Upon conducting a review of detainee Hernandez’s tattoos it was found that detainee Hernandez has a crown on each one of his wrist. The crown has been found to be an identifier for a Tren de Aragua gang member.” These crowns, according to the government, were “determining factors to conclude reasonable suspicion.”

Often, asylum seekers who pass their initial screening are released with a future court date, but Andry remained in custody, apparently because of the government’s suspicions about his tattoos. In December, three months into his detention, he met Paulina Reyes, a lawyer from the Immigrant Defenders Law Center, a legal-advocacy organization, who agreed to represent him on a pro-bono basis. Reyes filed an asylum application on Andry’s behalf. They spoke regularly, both in person and on the phone, while waiting for a court appearance scheduled for March 13th.

About a week before the hearing, Andry and a number of other Venezuelans in San Diego were transferred to a facility in South Texas. Reyes, whom Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had neglected to inform, found this out when Andry called her from Texas. That was the last time the two of them spoke. During his March 13th hearing, in San Diego, Reyes thought he might appear on video. When he did not, the proceedings were postponed until March 17th. Reyes wasn’t able to speak with him, so she didn’t realize that, on Friday, March 14th, he’d managed to make one last phone call to his mother. He told her he was fine, but that the government was about to transfer him again. He had no information about his destination.

When Andry failed to appear at his second hearing, the immigration judge wanted to know why the government wasn't making him available. "He was removed to El Salvador," the ICE lawyer replied. "We just found out today." This surprised the judge, who was there to determine whether or not Andry should be deported. "How can he be removed to El Salvador," the judge asked, "if there's no removal order?"

On March 14th, Donald Trump had signed a proclamation declaring that his Administration would begin using vastly expanded Presidential powers under the Alien Enemies Act—a law from 1798 that had previously been invoked just three times, supplying the rationale for the U.S. government to target British nationals during the War of 1812, to intern Germans during the First World War, and to intern Japanese, German, and Italian immigrants during the Second. The law allows the President to detain and deport immigrants living lawfully in the U.S. if they are from countries considered "enemies" of the government. In this case, Trump claimed that the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua, operating "in conjunction" with elements of the Maduro government, had "infiltrated the United States" and was "conducting irregular warfare."

The White House didn't make the proclamation public for another day. In the meantime, the government was secretly putting Venezuelans who were in federal custody on planes, readying them for deportation. Andry was one of them; there were two hundred and thirty-seven others who, like him, were accused of belonging to the gang. The vast majority were involved in pending immigration cases but were not given an opportunity to contest the alleged evidence against them. A high-ranking ICE official later acknowledged that many of these men had no criminal records in the U.S. but insisted that the absence of such a history "actually highlights the risk they pose."

El Salvador is a conspicuously punitive destination. The country's President, Nayib Bukele, has suspended parts of the country's constitution and, during the

past three years, jailed more than eighty thousand alleged gang members without clear charges. In February, after a meeting in San Salvador with Marco Rubio, the U.S. Secretary of State, Bukele offered to house immigrants who'd been arrested on American soil in his newly built prison, which is called the Terrorism Confinement Center. "We have offered the United States of America the opportunity to outsource part of its prison system," Bukele wrote on X. "The fee would be relatively low for the U.S. but significant for us, making our entire prison system sustainable."

On the day that Trump signed the order, Lee Gelernt, a veteran litigator with the American Civil Liberties Union who specializes in immigrants' rights, was in a courtroom in Washington, D.C., arguing a case about another controversial decision recently made by the Administration. In February, the President had sent a hundred and seventy-eight Venezuelan men from U.S. detention to the military compound at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. After the A.C.L.U. brought a legal challenge, the Department of Homeland Security deported the men to Venezuela, evidently to avoid a court fight over their access to legal representation. But the government said that it planned to send more migrants to Guantánamo. Gelernt was trying to insure that they'd have access to lawyers. In the hours before the hearing, he'd also been monitoring early news reports that the President was preparing to invoke the Alien Enemies Act to deport more Venezuelan migrants.

As soon as the hearing ended, Gelernt rushed back to his hotel, where he worked through the night with his A.C.L.U. colleagues to prepare an emergency lawsuit. The idea was to prevent the government from deporting anyone under the Alien Enemies Act while the case could be argued in court. "If people already had final orders of removal, the government doesn't need the Alien Enemies Act," Gelernt told me. "Using the Alien Enemies Act is all about short-circuiting the immigration process, not only to eliminate hearings in immigration court but to be able to send them wherever the government wants."

Through a national network of immigration attorneys, the team identified five plaintiffs who fit the profile of those at the greatest risk of being summarily deported to El Salvador: they were Venezuelan men in federal custody who had open immigration cases and had recently been transferred to a detention facility in Texas. The lawyers took down affidavits from the plaintiffs' immigration attorneys—the men themselves were unreachable—and crafted an argument to protect a wider class of migrants in custody. The A.C.L.U. filed its brief sometime after two in the morning on March 15th—a Saturday. Within hours, a federal judge in Washington, D.C., had issued a temporary restraining order to block the deportation of the five plaintiffs, who, it turned out, had already been taken to the airport. Four of them had to be pulled off the planes on the tarmac. The other passengers were left to wait on the aircraft for several hours more.

The judge, James Boasberg, a former prosecutor who'd been appointed to his current position by Barack Obama and to a prior judgeship by George W. Bush, scheduled a hearing on Zoom for five o'clock that afternoon. About an hour before it was set to begin, the White House announced its invocation of the Alien Enemies Act. At the hearing, Boasberg asked the government lawyer, "Are imminent deportations and removals under this proclamation planned?" According to a transcript of the proceedings, the lawyer responded, "Your Honor, I don't know the answer to that question." Boasberg turned to Gelernt, who said, "I recognize it's Saturday, but, on the other hand, the government appears to be moving planes very rapidly to El Salvador with hundreds of people. So we hope that, in the next five minutes, counsel for the government can get an answer to that." Boasberg gave the government forty minutes.

During that time, according to an analysis by the *Washington Post*, two planes full of migrants left Texas for Honduras. Either the government lawyer was unaware of these departures or he feigned ignorance, because when Boasberg reconvened the hearing at six o'clock the attorney still couldn't provide any information. "I am still trying to get additional details," he said.

At a quarter to seven, Boasberg issued a ruling to extend his temporary restraining order to anyone in federal custody, which meant that, until further notice, the Trump Administration could deport people under federal immigration laws but not under the Alien Enemies Act. “Particularly given the plaintiff’s information unrebutted by the government that flights are actively departing and plan to depart, I do not believe that I am able to wait any longer,” Boasberg said. He instructed the government’s lawyer “that any plane containing these folks that is going to take off or is in the air needs to be returned to the United States.” He added, “However that’s accomplished . . . I leave to you. But this is something that you need to make sure is complied with immediately.”

The judge’s verbal order was entered into the written record at 7:26 p.m. Shortly after that, the two planes that had left Texas during the adjournment arrived in Honduras, and a third took off from Texas. Within a few hours, each of those planes departed Honduras for El Salvador: one at 11:39 p.m., another at 11:43 p.m., and the last at 12:39 a.m. Just before eight o’clock on the morning of March 16th, Bukele posted a New York *Post* article about Boasberg’s order, adding in a comment, “Oopsie . . . Too late.” Rubio retweeted Bukele’s sarcastic post. Bukele soon began releasing footage of Salvadoran soldiers swarming the migrants as they got off the planes. Videos showed the men looking stunned, as their heads were shaved and they were frog-marched into prison.

Several hours later, Nelson, a thirty-five-year-old from Venezuela, who works as a truck driver in North Carolina, spotted his younger brother, Arturo, in a photograph of the detained men dressed in prison whites and crouching in rows with their heads bowed. (Nelson’s last name has been withheld for his protection.) He couldn’t see Arturo’s face, but he didn’t have to: Nelson spotted a hummingbird tattoo on his neck. Beyond that, he told me, “We don’t have any signs that my brother’s even still alive.” Arturo’s case was first reported by *Mother Jones*, but Nelson and I met through another Venezuelan in the U.S., whose cousin had been deported. She was too scared to talk to a journalist. “We can’t give an

interview because his life is at risk in Venezuela, and we're in danger here," she texted. "*Este señor*"—Trump—"is even threatening the lawyers who defend immigrants."

Arturo is a singer who worked landscaping jobs in the U.S. He left Venezuela in 2016, living in Colombia and then Chile with his wife, who, three months ago, gave birth to their daughter. As part of his application for temporary protected status in the U.S., which would have theoretically shielded him from deportation and granted him work authorization, he was supposed to have an appointment with D.H.S. on February 12th to get fingerprinted. But, on February 8th, he was arrested at a house where he was shooting a music video. In Nelson's telling, ICE officers turned up looking for someone else but took Arturo into custody as a "collateral arrest."

The family didn't have the money to retain a lawyer, and Nelson was told he couldn't raise bond. Still, Nelson managed to secure documentation from each of the countries where his brother had lived, demonstrating that he didn't have a criminal history. When I asked Nelson whether he thought Arturo's tattoos were the reason for his deportation to El Salvador, he told me, "I imagine it has to be. He hasn't even gotten a speeding ticket in the U.S., which is how they normally get Latinos. I just don't even understand how there's evidence to categorize him as a criminal."

Other family members learned of their relatives' deportations the same way that Nelson had—from the footage released by Bukele. As the *Washington Post* reported, Mervin Yamarte, a twenty-nine-year-old father from Maracaibo, who had worked as a roofer in Venezuela, had called his mother in mid-March saying he would see her soon: after being arrested, he and three of his friends from home, who were living together in Dallas, had agreed to sign deportation orders, expecting to be returned to Venezuela. When his mother recognized him in a video posted by Bukele, she told the *Post*, "I couldn't speak." The father of Carlos

Daniel Terán, an eighteen-year-old Venezuelan who was first arrested in January, shared with NPR a series of text messages he had exchanged with his son on the eve of Carlos's deportation. "With God's help, we are leaving today," Carlos had said, assuming that he was being deported home. "God bless you, son," his father replied. A few days later, someone sent him a photo of his son in the Salvadoran prison. Other relatives panicked when they hadn't heard from the men but could not find them in the U.S. government's searchable database of people in immigration detention. The wife of Franco Caraballo, a twenty-six-year-old, told Reuters, "I've never seen him without hair, so I haven't recognized him in the photos," adding, "I just suspect he's there because of the tattoos that he has and right now any Venezuelan man with tattoos is assumed to be a gang member."

The Trump Administration has denied the Venezuelans a chance to respond to the government's allegations of gang membership, but the most obvious through line, in each case, appears to be their tattoos. As part of the White House's effort to invoke the Alien Enemies Act, ICE officers received a document called the "Alien Enemy Validation Guide," which provided a point system based on different categories of incriminating behavior or associations. If an immigrant in custody scored six points or higher, according to the rubric, he "may be validated" as a gang member. Tattoos, which fall under the "Symbolism" category, constitute four points; social-media posts "displaying" gang symbols are two points. Using "open source material," agents at the investigative arm of ICE compiled photos of tattoos considered suspicious: crowns, stars, the Michael Jordan Jumpman logo. Jerce Reyes Barrios, a thirty-six-year-old soccer player and youth coach, fled Venezuela last year after marching in anti-government protests. His immigration file cites two grounds for suspicion: a gesture he made while posing for a photo that was posted to social media and a tattoo of a crown on top of a soccer ball with a rosary and the word "*Dios*." His lawyer, Linette Tobin, worked with his family to secure documents from the police in Venezuela to show that he hadn't committed any crimes. They also tracked down Barrios's tattoo artist. "He wanted a tattoo related to soccer," the artist said in a legal declaration. "We searched on

the internet and the ball with a crown caught our attention to represent the king of soccer, and he liked the idea.”

In the aftermath of the deportations, someone took photographs of Tobin’s court filing and posted them on social media, where they soon went viral. Critics of Trump shared them as evidence that innocent people were being sent to “rot in prison” in El Salvador, while the President’s defenders shared photos of Tobin, deriding the affidavit she gave as a “hoax.” “I looked at my phone, and I saw the calls and the emails. I was seriously horrified,” she told me. Right-wing groups were singling her out for harassment, but she was more upset about her client, whose personal information was now being widely circulated.

Andrés Antillano, a criminology professor at the Central University of Venezuela, has spent much of his career studying Tren de Aragua. “This is the first time I’ve ever encountered any reference to the significance of tattoos,” he told me. He called the thinking “absurd” and “naïve.” Tattoos were typically associated with Central American gangs that built their identities around holding specific territory, he said, but “it’s been a long time since that sort of thing would apply to Tren de Aragua.” In fact, the guidance ICE provided to its officers for identifying members of Tren de Aragua seems to be based on the operations of the Salvadoran gang MS-13. It flags graffiti, hand signs, and tattoos—all hallmarks of MS-13, but “irrelevant” to how Tren de Aragua functions, Antillano said.

Ronna Rísquez, a Venezuelan journalist who’s reported extensively on criminal groups in Venezuela, published the definitive book on Tren de Aragua. “The truth is that a tattoo identifying Tren de Aragua does not exist,” she told me. “Tren de Aragua does not use any tattoos as a form of gang identification; no Venezuelan gang does.” In Rísquez’s view, tattoos are a completely unreliable indicator of someone’s criminal proclivities; rather, they reflect contemporary fashions and socioeconomic class. “Most young people in Latin America these days have tattoos,” she said. Often, they imitate those of celebrities: a watch in reference to the Argentinean soccer legend Lionel Messi, the phrase “real hasta la muerte,” in

homage to the Puerto Rican singer Anuel AA. (Both of these symbols appear in the ICE documents.) Rísquez went on, “People get a tattoo because it means something particular to them.”

Andry’s tattoos have an immediate significance to the people in Capacho. For a hundred and eight years, the town has held a special festival for the celebration of Three Kings Day, replete with elaborate theatrical acts, sets, costumes, and casts of dozens. The holiday is observed widely across Venezuela (and indeed throughout much of the Christian world), but the production in Capacho is legendary in the country and has been awarded distinguished status as a national *patrimonio*, or heritage. “This work represents for the community of Capacho the greatest cultural expression of street theatre,” Jorge Cárdenas, a leader of the Foundation of Reyes Magos of Capacho, told me earlier this week. “To speak of Capacho is to speak of the Reyes Magos.”

Cárdenas has known Andry since he was a boy, when Andry participated in the festival’s program for children. When we spoke, Cárdenas described Andry’s contributions to local theatre, including all of his roles in the festival itself, before leaving me a series of messages brimming with literary and religious detail. Andry was one of the thirteen main actors in the show, a makeup stylist for the others, and the costume designer for nearly two dozen dancers. One of the principal symbols of Three Kings Day is a crown. “Andry is a great lover of the festival, and the two crowns on his wrists are a tribute to his passion for it,” Cárdenas said.

During the past week, several of Andry’s friends—some in the U.S., others in Venezuela—urged me to watch footage of Andry at the festival, which is on YouTube. There was something painfully desperate in their insistence, as if seeing images of Andry for myself would help correct an otherwise stunning cultural misunderstanding.

One morning, a childhood friend of Andry's named Alejandro, who currently lives in the state of Georgia, where he works as a food deliveryman, spoke to me during his shift. Alejandro came to the U.S. at the end of 2023, shortly after the death of his father, who owned a bus company. He had spent a few years in Venezuela as a taxi driver but eventually abandoned the job because he had to pay too much of his meagre wages to local criminal groups as protection money, a tax known as a *vacuna*, or vaccine. The irony wasn't lost on him that he was now living in a country where he could be accused of gangsterism. "They're taking everyone now," he told me. "It doesn't matter if you have papers or not." He lives in an apartment with his brother-in-law and two others from Capacho. One of them, in a nod to their home town, also has a tattoo of a crown.

Judge Boasberg called a hearing on March 17th to determine whether the Trump Administration had deliberately flouted his earlier order. If so, it meant that the White House was choosing to ignore the Constitution's foundational system of checks and balances—and challenging the judiciary to do something about it. By then, the Justice Department had unsuccessfully asked a higher court to remove Boasberg from the case. In the courtroom, Boasberg explained to the Administration's lawyers that he wanted to "perform fact finding." When did the planes leave for El Salvador? How many people were on each one? When were the migrants transferred into the custody of the Salvadoran authorities? "I'm not at liberty to disclose anything about any flights," one of the Administration's lawyers said. Trump's legal team then struggled to explain why they couldn't say more. "If you tell me it's classified, then we will go down to a classified facility in this building, and you can give me that information then," Boasberg said. "If what you are saying is that it's classified and you can't tell me, then you are going to need to make a good showing as to why that is."

The government lawyer said that he could "consult with the clients on that, but we don't believe it's necessary." Gelernt told the judge, "There's been a lot of talk

over the last seven weeks about constitutional crisis. People are throwing that term around. I think we are getting very close to it.”

Within a day, Trump began attacking Boasberg on Truth Social. “This Radical Left Lunatic of a Judge, a troublemaker and agitator who was sadly appointed by Barack Hussein Obama, was not elected President,” he wrote. “I’m just doing what the VOTERS wanted me to do. This judge, like many of the Crooked Judges’ I am forced to appear before, should be IMPEACHED!!!” In response to the President, Chief Justice John Roberts issued a rare rebuke, saying, “For more than two centuries, it has been established that impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision.”

Soon, Attorney General Pam Bondi’s name began to appear on an increasingly aggressive series of filings. One of them called the judge’s requests for information “a picayune dispute over the micromanagement of immaterial factfinding.” The Administration claims that it did not violate the judge’s order, because two of the three deportation flights had already left the United States when Boasberg made his ruling. According to federal officials, the Venezuelans on the third plane weren’t removed solely on the basis of the Alien Enemies Act. But that assertion raises another question: if they were deported under regular immigration procedures, why would they be sent to El Salvador without prior warning? Early last week, the Justice Department invoked the “state-secrets privilege,” claiming that sharing even minimal details about the deportation flights “would pose reasonable danger to national security and foreign affairs.”

Gelernt was the lead litigator in some of the highest-profile lawsuits of Trump’s first term, including successful challenges to the initial Muslim ban and the Administration’s family-separation policy. He pointed out that the last time Roberts rebuked the President was in 2018, when, in another case brought by Gelernt and the A.C.L.U., a federal judge blocked a Trump proclamation ending asylum at the border. Trump lambasted him as an “Obama judge.” The echoes were unmistakable, yet they also reinforced the fact that the Administration has

only become more combative since Trump's first term. "They're much more intent on picking a fight with the federal judiciary," Gelernt told me. "It appears to me that they think that's a winning political issue for them." He continued, "The stridency of their positions is what's catching me, the unwillingness to give at all. What also seems clear is that the D.O.J. lawyers do not have authorization to make any concessions in court."

On March 26th, a federal appeals court upheld Boasberg's temporary restraining order. One of the judges, Patricia Millett, had expressed disbelief that Venezuelans were being sent to El Salvador without any notice or opportunity to mount a legal defense. "Nazis got better treatment under the Alien Enemies Act," she said. The Justice Department filed an emergency petition before the Supreme Court. In the meantime, Trump's Secretary of Homeland Security, Kristi Noem, who has publicly called undocumented immigrants "dirtbags," visited the Salvadoran facility. Standing in front of a cell crammed with prisoners who appeared to be Salvadorans, covered in MS-13 tattoos, she said, "This facility is one of the tools in our tool kit that we will use if you commit crimes against the American people."

Andry's American lawyers are caught in something of a paradox. They're vocal about sharing the details of his disappearance, because, if he fades from the news, his situation may grow even more dire. Yet Andry is also an asylum seeker. Disclosing the full identity of someone fleeing persecution is inherently risky. One evening, while I was talking with one of his attorneys, Lindsay Toczyłowski, the president of the Immigrant Defenders Law Center, CBS News published the full list of the two hundred and thirty-eight Venezuelans deported to El Salvador. "I had spent nights looking at his Instagram pictures, thinking, *How can something like this happen to him?*" she told me. "But at the same time I felt like we couldn't share that information. When the list was published, it was inevitable that those pictures would be out there."

Toczyłowski and her colleagues had debated whether disclosing that Andry was gay would make him a target inside the Salvadoran prison. They decided it was pointless to try to hide it, and that maybe it would make the public more sympathetic to his case. Ordinarily, this would be a conversation they could have had with Andry. Under the circumstances, all they could do was discuss it with his mother. She told them, “Do absolutely everything you can to get him out of there.”

On March 21st, *Time* published a report, by Philip Holsinger, an American photojournalist, who gained access to the Salvadoran prison when the Venezuelans first arrived. In the story, he described someone roughly resembling Andry. “One young man sobbed when a guard pushed him to the floor,” Holsinger wrote. “He said, ‘I’m not a gang member. I’m gay. I’m a barber.’ ” The description went on: he “began to whimper, folding his hands in prayer. . . . He was slapped. The man asked for his mother, then buried his face in his chained hands and cried as he was slapped again.”

On social media, people connected this account with the photos that Toczyłowski had shared of Andry. Toczyłowski told me that it seemed unlikely Andry would have described himself as a barber. But was it possible that, in addition to a gay makeup artist, the Trump Administration had just deported a gay hairdresser? One user on X posted a photo of Andry alongside a photo taken by Holsinger of a Venezuelan prisoner getting his head shaved. “The first photo is of a young Venezuelan named Andrys—a twenty-three-year-old gay makeup artist,” the person wrote. (Andry is thirty-one.) A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security quoted the post and responded, “No. DHS intelligence assessments go well beyond just gang affiliate tattoos. This man’s own social media indicates he is a member of Tren de Aragua.”

The residents of Capacho have been holding regular vigils for Andry, and they’ve recorded videos of spirited pleas to release him. Cárdenas, the head of the Three Kings festival, begged Bukele directly, calling Andry a “great talent of our town.”

At the gatherings, many people turned out wearing costumes from the festival. Andry's full name is ubiquitous in the Spanish-language coverage. Online, there are already dozens of photos, not just of him but of his old neighbors and friends filling the streets before the local church. In one of them, Andry's mother and father are standing next to three men in festival garb, holding signs for Conscience, Justice, and Liberty. On each of their heads is a crown. ♦

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