

Neglect at the U.S.-Mexico Border: How An Incomplete Immigration History Harms Immigrant Children

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BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

- Though children are mentioned in immigration literature, they are not explicitly focused on. This is problematic considering children are often at the center of the immigration controversy.
- The events currently occurring at the U.S.-Mexico border have shown that children are too often inadvertent casualties of exclusionary immigration policies that are only directly intended for these children's parents.
- Decades of anti-immigrant policy have created a disregard for the children of immigrants as the public does not understand the scope of how they are affected, and lawmakers do not acknowledge the harm of the policies they are creating.

KEY IMMIGRATION POLICIES

- 1862 Anti-Coolie Act
 - First restriction on voluntary immigration by individuals
- 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act
- 1924 National Origin Quotas Act
 - Established a national annual limit on immigration based on country of origin
- 1965 Hart-Cellar Act
 - Overturned quotas
 - Merit and family reunification standards
- DACA (2012)
 - Provides temporary protection from deportation for unauthorized immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as minors
 - First time children were really thought of as a social and political question



Figure 1. A migrant family runs away from tear gas in front of the border wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

ISSUES AT THE BORDER

- Children being kept in cages
- Allegations of forced sterilization in migrant detention centers
- Blocking teen migrants from accessing abortion care
- Trump's zero-tolerance family separation policy

EMPHASIS ON CHILDREN

- More than 15,000 migrant children are in U.S. custody at the southern border
- Parents of 445 separated migrant children still have not been found.



Figure 2. Children taken into custody related to cases of illegal entry into the U.S. rest in one of the cages at a facility in Texas.

ARGUMENT & CONCLUSIONS

- Many immigration policies are inherently anti-immigrant. Many of them directly focus on adults; however, children are heavily affected by them as well.
- While scholars do not necessarily hold negative stereotypes, they do not focus on children due to the mechanics of actual immigration trends (i.e., immigrants arrived as labor sources and children do not fit into that narrative). This has caused children to be widely left out of the historical literature.
- Since children of immigrants do not "steal" jobs and are ineligible to vote, ideas historically associated with unwanted immigrants, there is little space for them in how Americans have historically come to think about immigrants.
- The gap in U.S. immigration literature reveals the problem of neglecting the place of children in U.S. immigration history and contributes to a social "blind spot" that makes it easier for contemporary politicians to impose exclusionary policies that neglect the overall health and safety of the children of immigrants at the U.S.-Mexico border.

KEY SOURCES

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