

# Cruelty at the U.S.-Mexico Border

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At 11:59 PM EDT on May 11, Title 42 of the Immigration law expired. The code was enforced for three years during the coronavirus pandemic. Title 42 allowed the government to stop and expel migrants from entering the country.

Since its enforcement, millions of political and economic refugees have been stranded in Mexico or other countries in horrific conditions.

Both Democratic and Republican administrations have carried out inhumane treatment of migrants. While the rhetoric by Republicans has been openly racist, the practical results produced by the Biden administration are equally cruel.

The end of Title 42 means little for those trying to enter the country. Under pre-Title 42 rules, former president Barack Obama deported more people than any previous president.

## Reality at the Borders

“In the hours leading up to Title 42’s termination,” reported the May 12 *Los Angeles Times*, “migrants continued to gather near ports of entry on the southern border with Mexico, hoping for a new opportunity to enter the U.S. as confusion over the imminent policy changes and their impact persisted.

“Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas issued a warning Thursday that ‘starting tonight, people who arrive at the border without using a lawful pathway will be presumed ineligible for asylum.’

“He noted that 24,000 Border Patrol agents and officers had been deployed to work alongside ‘thousands of troops and contractors, and over a thousand asylum officers to help enforce our laws.’”

A few steps away on the Mexican side, a group of National Guard elements held their own drill. Mexico has helped Biden in his anti-immigrant efforts, as the *Times* details:

“Mexico’s National Guard has been positioned along the southern layer of border barrier in recent weeks, and Thursday was no exception. Tijuana police also seemed to more closely monitor activity at ports of entry.”

## **We Are Human Beings**

Who are those people seeking entry on the southern border? Many are not from Central America. The issue of migration is global, and not only at the U.S. border, as discussed in the editorial in the previous issue of *Against the Current* (#224), [“Desperate Journeys, Sick System.”](#)

It can take years to become a naturalized citizen in the United States, even assuming you are granted a “green card” or temporary legal status (special employment visas, for example, in high tech).

But U.S. economic sanctions against countries such as Cuba (a seven-decade embargo), Venezuela and Nicaragua, as well as Iran, Syria and other countries, along with other factors from war to climate disaster, cause tens of thousands of people to flee for survival.

“People from Senegal, Cameroon, Bangladesh, Iran, Russia and Brazil were among those who waited in seats under tented white tarps for rapid COVID-19 tests and travel itineraries. Migrants pay their own way, though the Regional Center for Border Health helps supplement if needed,” added the *LA Times*.

“I.B., a Peruvian man who asked to be identified by his initials out of concern for his immigration case, said he had flown to Mexicali, crossed the border and turned himself in to border agents. He was detained for six days before being released in Yuma....

“Guri Singh, 21, said he fled India after experiencing religious discrimination as a Sikh. His parents, who are legal residents in England, couldn’t get him a visa. So, he said he paid smugglers \$50,000 to fly to El Salvador, then took buses to the U.S. border.”

Knowing nothing about Title 42 or changing border policy, Singh “just knew he had a flight to the Bay Area and would be at his cousin’s home by 3 pm Friday...”

Those are a few among many human stories.

## **Record of Discrimination**

U.S. policy on immigration was based historically on national origin and ethnic discrimination. Early settlers were from England, Scotland and northern Europe.

In the 1800s there was a de facto open door to people from northern Europeans (“Caucasians”). Asians, Africans and other nonwhites were only accepted as workers, as Chinese men learned in California — they built the railroads but could not bring in women or other family members.

Each state decided immigration policy. The first major federal law was passed by Congress in 1882—the Chinese Exclusion Act. This was preceded by state laws excluding both bonded and free Black people as well as Chinese immigrants.

In 1924 Congress passed a sweeping immigration law. A key plank codified quotas for legal immigration, based on people already living in the United States by national origin as of the 1890 census. There were few Asians or other nonwhites, except former enslaved and Indigenous peoples, living in the country.

In 1965, under the impact of the anti-colonial revolution and a powerful domestic civil rights movement, the government changed its policy regarding quotas for Asians and Africans. The new system made it easier for family reunifications.

When Obama was elected as the first biracial Black president in 2008, the Republican Party first decided it needed to become more open to minorities as demographics were changing.

## **From Trump to Biden**

But in 2016 with the rise of a white fear-mongering backlash led by Donald Trump, a lifelong New York City Democrat who decided to run for president as a Republican, popularized the once fringe view that “others” were taking over the country.

Trump declared anti-immigration his main campaign issue. His “Build the Wall” slogan became a chant at his rallies. Every Republican politician who runs for office rants about foreigners (undocumented or legal) replacing “Americans.”

Most pro-immigration rights groups had hoped that the Biden government would be better than Trump’s. It quickly became clear that while the rhetoric is more friendly, the administration’s practice is more similar than not. Biden was the vice-president alongside “Deporter-in-Chief” president Obama.

The immigration issue for Biden is not about justice and human rights. He pledges enforcement of current laws, and supports stricter rules, a better border wall and making it harder for immigrants to stay.

Biden is quietly building a 30-foot wall in southern California, opposed by locals on both sides of the border.

Contrary to predictions, the end of Title 42 did not lead to “chaos” at the border, as the Biden team has been implementing a strict removal and denial of immigrants for two years.

Title 8, a law in place since 1940, means keeping new immigrants from applying for five years if they don’t follow the new rule. It includes requiring registration in a third country and setting up an appointment by using a special mobile phone app, which works unreliably if at all.

The United States already has over 11 million unauthorized people, according to the Migration Policy Institute. Harder border restrictions will not stop people entering, as has been true for decades.

Big agricultural enterprises and other manufacturing businesses as in California, seek cheap labor and will hire them. Scaremongering the public will not change that.

## **Demand: Open Borders**

Open borders — South, North and other ports of entry — should be implemented to give all refugees from economic crises caused by U.S. sanctions and by climate changes.

Refugees should be given court dates, temporary work permits and allowed basic services. Obviously that requires a functional and expanded social safety net — and experience shows that refugees, like all immigrants, create more wealth than they take in their transition to permanent residency and citizenship.

Most are willing to do jobs that many native-born citizens won’t. Their children get educated and generally are successful.

Democrats and Republicans both know these facts. An Open Border policy is the solution that few

politicians will acknowledge — since it begins with human rights, not cruelty and scapegoating immigrants for society's other problems.

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**P.S.**

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