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Beginning in the 1970s, in states like Texas and in California, political leaders supported expansive, new criminal codes that accelerated what was already a disturbing trend—the United States was incarcerating a much larger fraction of its population than ever before. The trend began when more Americans were using controlled substances and when violent crimes were often tied to drug addiction, but through the Reagan Administration and into the Clinton years, “mass incarceration” was becoming a most obvious, dominant trend in state and federal governments. In California, the legislature increased public funds for prisons and “correction,” such that they approached, and then exceeded, appropriations for public higher education. Texas built many new prisons to house more inmates than ever before, and it pursued other policies that reflected this harsher turn in the criminal law. Texas reinstated the death penalty in 1976; Texas has executed over 550 inmates since then.

By 2010, the United States was incarcerating roughly 800% more people than it had in 1970. About 1.5 million people were in state or federal custody at any given moment, not counting persons held in detention or in local jails prior to their criminal trials. Researchers also noted clear racial disparities in the rates of incarceration: the odds that a white male will be under the supervision of the criminal justice system at some point in his life were 1 in 9; for Latino men, they were 1 in 6; and for African American men, they were 1 in 3. People of color were about a third of the American population in 2010, but they were two-thirds of the American prison population. These were not random patterns, however, and yet nowhere was the gap between social science research and public policy so wide—leading researchers provided mountains of data to show that many jurisdictions were “governing through crime,” in ways that were racially biased, and that exacerbated racial inequality and racial disparities. Local, state, and federal officials were enforcing laws in ways that targeted communities of color and created cultures of fear, often by relying on a small number of sensational, highly publicized cases to justify all the punishment. The aggregate social science clearly showed, though, that after a certain point, mass incarceration was not deterring crime.¹

Leading politicians, though, were undeterred: when he was running for President of the United States, George H.W. Bush ran an infamous political ad that featured Willie Horton, a convicted murderer. Bush and his supporters ran that ad over and over again, a single,



sensational case, over and over, and it suggested that if you were voting for the Democratic candidate, Michael Dukakis, you were going to let him release people like Willie Horton all over America.

President Bush won the election, but two years later, his campaign manager, Lee Atwater, was diagnosed with a crippling brain tumor. As the illness progressed, Mr. Atwater apologized to Mr. Dukakis—Atwater described the ad and other campaign strategies as acts of “naked cruelty” (against Dukakis). Mr. Atwater conceded that others would see his political strategy as racist, although Atwater denied that he was, in fact, racist. He never apologized to any particular African American, however, nor to African Americans in general, nor to white voters who were terrified and voted for Bush because of his ads, but he did acknowledge that this kind of racially-charged political campaigning was not good for America, or for him. He had many regrets. Lee Atwater passed away in March 1991, about one year after he’d been diagnosed with brain cancer.²

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Governor Pete Wilson insisted that he was not racist either, but in 1994, his re-election campaign and other supporters of Proposition 187 in California were running ads of “illegals” rushing across the southern border, “invading” the state. The ads looked so...familiar. They were shot in a grainy black-and-white, and the narrator pleaded for law and order against these people of color, framed as criminals. The ad suggested that if you voted for the Democrat, the entire state would turn Mexican, infested with “illegal.” The ad looked as though Lee Atwater could have made this himself. In American history, there are rare, singular moments that mark a shift in the public culture, and I’m not certain that this particular ad marked such a shift, but it certainly didn’t help—politicians and political campaigns were portraying immigrants as criminals, the people crossing the border as wrongdoers.



These very people could have been Central American, not Mexican, and they could have been seeking asylum in the United States, as was their right under international treaties and under American refugee law, but all of the nuances of their condition were reduced to a blunt, nefarious criminality. Instead of triggering compassion or empathy or even a desire for a fair hearing of their claims, this ad did the exact opposite. Again, like George Bush or Lee Atwater, Pete Wilson insisted that he was not racist, that he didn’t mean to promote a racist, anti-Latino ad, and

yet I assure you, thousands of other people saw the same kind of racism running through these things. A “dog whistle” is a high-pitched whistle that only dogs can hear—among American political strategist, a “dog whistle” appeal is one that speaks to people with overt or latent bias, and the appeal is designed to *affirm* that bias. If, for example, some people were already biased against Mexicans and other Latinos, or if they didn’t like “illegals” in general, the ads for Proposition 187 were loud and clear appeals for them to vote in favor of a rule that would cut them off from all social services and perhaps cause them to self-deport.³

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Voting has consequences, and whether people are voting based on clear-eyed assessments and analysis, or fear and irrationality, or some combination of these factors, all votes count the same. Many politicians figure out that fear and irrationality can tip a close election, and so it’s not surprising that many candidates for high office resort to such tactics. People who make irrational promises tend to keep them: through 1990 and 1996, many politicians stoked fears toward immigrants, people of color, immigrants of color, and once in office, they supported immigration rules that became more punitive. The Immigration Act of 1990 defined entering the United States without inspection as a federal crime; the rules in 1996 greatly enlarged the grounds of “removable” offenses, and then they eliminated forms of relief from deportation for those with criminal convictions. Congress re-defined “deportation” itself—it was now called “removal.” By changing this basic definition, members of Congress attempted to set aside a long line of federal precedents that once protected people who’d faced “deportation.” All of these changes had popular support: President Bush signed the Immigration Act of 1990, which had been co-sponsored by Senator Edward Kennedy; and President Clinton signed the rules in 1996, many of them co-sponsored by leading Republicans, including Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, and Representative Jay Kim of California, the first Korean American congressman in the United States.

After 1990, the United States progressed toward an era of “mass deportation,” or maybe “mass removal,” and this trend resembled the one toward mass incarceration in many ways. Both trends—removal and incarceration—disproportionately targeted people of color. Even though Europeans, Asians, and Canadians were also “out of status” or “subject to deportation,” federal immigration officials were not targeting, say, areas just south of the Canadian border to round up those horrible Canadians. Irish migrants, South Koreans, and Eastern Europeans were coming to the United States on valid visas of one kind or another ever since the late 1970s, and then they were falling “out of status,” but again, federal officials never went after these folks in work-place raids, early-morning round-ups, or random airport check-points. Federal officials concentrated their efforts in areas north of the southern border, in workplaces with a significant number of Latinos, to the point where it all smacked of racial profiling. In several leading cases, the United States Supreme Court suggested that this kind of profiling was disturbing, maybe unconstitutional.⁴

Mass deportation, though, continued, just like mass incarceration. Over the last two and a half decades, the United States has “removed” more people than in any period in its history.

Under Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama, the United States removed and removed and removed, and these Presidents created strange new diasporas in Mexico and in Central America. Yet, if nothing else, these American deportees tended to underscore the interconnectedness of the United States and its southern neighbors, in ways that were both boring and deadly. It could be boring: if you had had a complaint with your credit card bill in 2010, for example, your 1 (800) call was often routed to Guatemala City, where a guy who grew up in LA could go over your recent charges with you. He spoke perfect English because he'd grown up in Inglewood, he was an American deportee listening to your concerns. That's just weird.

After 1990, though, many more American deportees were involved in much more dangerous and lucrative trades, like drug trafficking, lots and lots of drug trafficking, and their numbers swelled the cartels and accelerated horrific levels of violence all the way south into Columbia and Bolivia. American deportees had American connections. New emboldened criminal gangs destabilized important cities and regions in nearly every country south of the United States by 2005; American deportees, many of whom knew the United States intimately, were helpful in developing new routes to move drugs and money north, while taking guns and explosives south. These patterns were catastrophic, and infinitely more tragic when we consider how these countries had been emerging from years of civil war.⁵

Our federal government, especially under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, devoted more resources to border enforcement in response to these patterns, and then



they sent new aid packages to governments in Central America, so that they could build more prisons and enhance their own military and police forces. These policies reinforced the idea that the United States had, in fact, correctly removed “dangerous people,” that these people should then be incarcerated in their “home” countries, and that militarized strategies were necessary for both immigration and drug control. Part of the package included military advisers—American special forces

and other elite military units would train their counterparts in Honduras, Colombia, and El Salvador.⁶

Of course, the United States had done this kind of thing before in the 1980s, when leftist rebels and right-wing government troops and paramilitaries embroiled these same places in endless conflict and war, displacing thousands of people and forcing them north. But it wasn't as though these governments had grown magically more progressive in the intervening decades—many foreign policy scholars were aghast that, once again, our government was financing right-wing dictators to our south. President Trump was very wrong to think that “migrant caravans” are a new thing—they were not, they dated to at least the Carter and Reagan Administrations,

and the newest ones were arriving through Mexico and along our southern border for much of the same basic reasons now as then. After a decade of urban warfare, this time between drug cartels and paramilitary units, many areas of Central America, Mexico, and South America were becoming unlivable once again. Also, as if to recommend our own unfortunate patterns, the United States was sending aid to countries to do as we'd done—militarize, criminalize, incarcerate, and police, as though these remedies were the only answers to these entrenched social problems, even though these policies were never especially effective in our own country.

If a person is fleeing violence and chaos in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, and if they're fleeing from hyperviolent cartels staffed with American deportees, as well as paramilitary groups armed with American weapons, all to suppress a drug trade whose origins are also profoundly American, is that person a "refugee"? President Trump has answered no. He has also been extremely upset that after years of sending military aid to Central American countries, they can't seem to "stop" the migration of so many people from these countries into ours. He has tweeted his displeasure on multiple occasions, almost like a man who isn't getting what he (or his country) had paid for. In his anger and frustration, he has ordered the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security to pursue a "zero-tolerance" policy toward all persons attempting to cross without visas along the southern border. After April 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions ordered federal officials were to prosecute everyone.

Everyone. Many of these migrants were seeking asylum, and they were traveling with their children: because children can't be prosecuted for anything, and because all of their parents had to be prosecuted under President Trump's "zero tolerance" policies, federal officials were separating children from their parents well into the summer of 2018. They put the parents into immigration detention facilities, and then they put their children into separate "shelters," including "tender-age shelters" for very young children. What's the difference between a "detention facility" and a "tender-age shelter"? In a shelter, no one can leave without permission, everyone is under constant supervision and surveillance, and there are guards everywhere. They look and feel like prisons. The Trump Administration was incarcerating hundreds, and then thousands, of children by the end of that terrible summer. Here in immigration policy, we were witnessing two disturbing trends in American public law that were combining to produce something so disturbing and morally revolting that it shocked the conscience. It was as if Americans had become inured to mass incarceration, as well as to the exclusion and removal of immigrants—everyone—and now federal officials were holding children in large, tented prisons, and thus deliberately separating these children from their parents.⁷

It happened that these children were also children of color. In another time, in a different era of American history, children of color were once held like this, in cages and in pens. It's so disturbing to contemplate this connection. It made me wonder. Would President Trump and members of his administration have pursued this policy if, say, these children were from Western Europe? Would he have so casually linked European immigrants with criminality, in a vain attempt, even just to himself, to justify what he was doing? Or, had he ordered these policies precisely because these families and children were, in President Trump's own words, from "shithole countries." As a teacher, I have tried hard to remain objective; as a professor, I was

trained to examine political and legal phenomenon from a distance, as a social “scientist,” the very definition of “scientist” suggesting a studied, reasoned detachment from the things that we were observing. In private, however, I’ve felt that Donald Trump was an unrepentant, cowardly, regressive, and horrid racist and demagogue, among the worst political villains in recent memory. I’ve felt as though his moral depravity has been matched only by a wandering, undisciplined, and self-centered stupidity that has reflected nearly everything that he’s said, tweeted, and done.

I cannot believe that his Administration—that my country—was separating children from their parents and holding all of these migrants indefinitely as a core aspect of immigration policy. Even I had not expected such depraved practices that amounted to child abuse. Because of widespread moral revulsion of the kind that I’ve expressed here, President Trump did sign an executive order in June 2018 to end family separations, but no one mistook these actions as somehow reflective of his own ideas, nor related to his own sense of compassion. In these policies, and in his person, President Trump appeared as the racist, misogynistic, and cruel American id that must pass out of our body politic if we were ever going to become the sane, multi-racial democracy capable of addressing the significant challenges in this nation and in our world. When he started incarcerating children and sending their parents hundreds of miles away, I lost my sense of objectivity toward this President. Or perhaps it was that the objective facts of his behavior did not recommend him for his current office. I understand why some Americans would like to impeach this President—it’s like taking a laxative to speed his passing—but I’m inclined to think that he should be completely and totally defeated at the polls, as his passing in any other way would strain the democratic institutions that have already strained so much under his tenure.

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President Trump may, in fact, be a danger to the institutions and to the prestige of the United States, but without question, climate change is the single most significant existential threat facing our world. In a broader view, this President is but a distraction. The changing climate has already colored everything, and often, in our present, we can see glimpses of our future. Climate change is vast, yet its impacts are profoundly local, and it can make many regional problems much worse, much more global. For instance, many of the migrants in that caravan in November 2018 were from Honduras. Honduras is, like many of its neighboring Central American countries, a troubled and beautiful place all at once. It has dense rainforests, plants and animals found nowhere else in the world, and a reef system off of its northern coast that is one of the most complex in the world. Its climate is changing: powerful hurricanes have



damaged many of the coral reefs, and these storms have come much more often. Hurricane Mitch in 1998 flooded and destroyed several regions in Central America, and over 19,000 people perished in that one storm, killing at least 7,000 people in Honduras alone. Rising temperatures in the surrounding ocean waters have also caused the reefs to “bleach,” meaning that the reefs are dying and leaving eerie, white skeletons that no longer support fish and other marine life. In the country’s interior, logging companies have harvested vast portions of the rainforest, coffee and banana plantations have become ever larger, and mining companies have carved entire mountains to remove gold, iron, and silver.⁸

The owners and executives of these companies have failed to protect the environment: Lake Yojoa has always been a stunning body of water, one of the largest in Central America, set within a volcanic depression 2,300 feet above sea level. The lake is the single most important source of fresh water for the country. Since 1990, however, the surrounding forests have been clear-cut, and because of this deforestation, storm run-off can carry tons of denuded soils downstream, overwhelming everyone and everything in its path. On many occasions, after storms, the waters of Lake Yojoa have turned into a toxic, orangish chocolate brown. Dead fish float up to add to the sickening stench. Like other large lakes, this one is becoming a less reliable source of drinking water—people in the major cities, including Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, have noticed strange tastes and odors when they’ve turned on their taps, and after 1998, the entire country was again struggling with outbreaks of water-borne illnesses.

The most affluent people in Honduras have relied on expensive water filtration systems, and many simply bought bottled water for drinking. However, because over half of all Honduran people experienced poverty, and because Honduras has remained one of the poorest countries in Central America, despite its abundant natural resources, bottled water isn’t an option for the vast majority of people. Inequality itself was a persistent problem: like many Latin American countries, Honduran stratification had clear ties to its colonial past, when Spanish colonizers dominated the indigenous people across Mesoamerica. Spanish colonists and their descendants became large land holders, and they were the political and social elite of Honduras in 1821, when the country was first formed. Persons of Spanish ancestry tended to marry one another, they regarded themselves as “gente de raison,” “people of reason,” even as they regarded indigenous peoples as backward, child-like, and perhaps not fully capable of becoming “people of reason.” These patterns of inequality have persisted into the present day, they still color the politics of Central America. In some places, these so-called elite people speak of their indigenous neighbors in ways that can only be described as racist.

For about two hundred years now, the top three to four percent of Honduras has controlled economy and society—below them, about two-thirds of people live in poverty, about forty percent live in abject poverty, and the overwhelming majority of these people were landless. A significant fraction of the poor and landless were of indigenous backgrounds, including the Lenca, Tolupan, and Mayangna people. Honduras has always been a diverse, plural country, and yet its ruling elite have been disproportionately, almost exclusively, of European ancestry, and they’ve lived lives that might resemble a European feudal class. They’ve relied on poorer, landless people for their wealth—when they’ve needed to hire miners to take the precious metals, or workers to produce agricultural commodities, or men and women to cut

the rainforest. Yet this social elite has been loath to share or redistribute this wealth in taxes or to finance social services. Again, this was a pattern that is common among many countries in Central America. In places with great social and economic inequality, the very wealthy and the very poor never quite bridge the giant gaps between them, and these gaps can grow more entrenched and more obvious because of ethnic, religious, and cultural differences between the haves and have nots. In Honduras, it was possible for the heads of logging companies to become multi-millionaires, while the people doing the hard work never worked out of poverty. You'll notice that the wealthy political and economic elite of Honduras were not among the people walking through Mexico in that migrant caravan in October and November 2018.

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A decade earlier, in 2008 and 2009, President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras was having a change of heart. He had once drawn his political support from a cross-section of conservative landed families, and he himself was of a powerful and affluent family that controlled one of the most lucrative lumber operations in Honduras. In 1975, his father was convicted for his role in a brutal massacre of peasants and other “leftists” during that horrible period in Honduran history when peasants and landlords had engaged in armed conflicts with one another. Manuel took over the family’s business, he prospered, and he became a leading politician in the 1980s and 1990s within the Honduran National Congress. Yet even though he was of a notorious, some said infamous, family, Manuel Zelaya campaigned for his nation’s highest office from a more leftist direction—he promised land reform, more stringent environmental regulations, more taxes for corporations or for wealthier Honduran families, and more social programs for the very poor. Hurricane Mitch in 1998 exposed inequality in disturbing ways—wealthier families recovered property and losses much more quickly than the very poor, and the poor suffered much longer in miserable conditions, their mortality rates reflective of their impoverished, vulnerable conditions after that devastating storm.

As a member of the National Congress, and as a member of a family who’d enjoyed financial success for many decades, Zelaya had not been an especially progressive person. As he became a national candidate, however, he promised a wide range of reforms to address poverty and inequality. President Zelaya promised better schools: just a very tiny fraction of Hondurans had had access to decent private schools, and most of the landed families sent their sons and daughters abroad for high school and for a higher education. There were simply not enough highly skilled workers to attract foreign investors to Honduras, and too many highly educated people were leaving; to address poverty, and to diversify its economy, the candidate said, Honduras had to invest in public schools, colleges, and universities. Zelaya also proposed programs through which schools and other public institutions could also address *abject* poverty: at least one quarter of the country’s children lived at or near malnutrition, and so by financing free meals in schools, Honduras could feed the very poor while also improving the prospects for the next generation.

His presidency in 2006 represented an interesting shift in Central American politics: Zelaya’s election was quite narrow, and yet this was one of the very few free and fair elections

when poorer Hondurans, people who were landless, and other disaffected people had participated in an election that felt like a national referendum. President Zelaya quickly moved his country left: with allies in the National Congress, Zelaya supported bills that increased the country's minimum wages by 70%; he signed new rules that mandated funds for public schools, including those free meals for all students; and he authorized new infrastructure projects that sent electricity and other basic infrastructure into portions of Honduras that never had it, or had lost it in Hurricane Mitch. He also persuaded banks and other institutions to offer "micro-loans" at low interest rates to stimulate small business activity, in an effort to lift the poor out of poverty through entrepreneurship. Zelaya's government was marred by charges of corruption, but his greatest political crisis came in 2009, when his allies in the legislature and in the army signaled that they would abandon him entirely if he proceeded to raise taxes on corporations and on the wealthy families to finance all of this new spending. Thus far, Zelaya's government had relied on foreign aid and on debt relief from the United States and from the International Monetary Fund, but these were insufficient to offset basic spending on social programs and on infrastructure. Honduras would have to raise taxes.

By the way, what are taxes? Taxes are the price we pay for civilized society, to paraphrase a famous American jurist, but in places where effective tax rates are extremely low or non-existent, people with wealth and income experience no or low taxes, and yet they are often surrounded by people who are very poor, people who have nothing, no access to work for the basic necessities of life and no means to find a way out of poverty. Also, if an affluent person suffers no rule to pay a minimum wage to the least of his workers, and if he can always find yet another poorer person willing to work for less in an unregulated labor market, wages will always resemble something less than subsistence. In Honduras, where the landed families and their companies paid little or no taxes for decades and decades, just the very thought of significant increases in taxes did not entail, at least for them, the promise of a more civilized Honduras. For these folks, taxes felt more like the taking of *their* private property, and for the use and benefit of people that they'd never really regarded as fellow citizens. Should a wealthy Honduran pay for the education and for a free school lunch for an impoverished, indigenous child, while also helping to finance a microbusiness that might lift that child's parents out of abject poverty? Having lived such separate lives—the wealthy Honduran experiencing one reality, the indigenous family another entirely—were the wealthy *ever* going to tolerate public laws, including a system of public finance, that brought them together?⁹

Apparently not. In June 2009, military officials put President Zelaya on a plane for Costa Rica, and his one-time ally, Roberto Micheletti, assumed the Presidency after a cursory vote in the National Congress. President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton characterized these events as a coup, and they refused to recognize the new government in Tegucigalpa, as did many heads of state throughout Central and Latin America. President Obama threatened to cut off all aid. Nevertheless, Zelaya was unable to assume the presidency ever again, and his successors, Presidents Lobo and Hernandez, both of wealthy, landowning families, either stopped doing, or reversed, many of their predecessor's most progressive policies. They have thus far been undeterred by demonstrations, and by international and domestic protests against these developments. Journalists who'd been critical of the coup

government have turned up dead, while others were imprisoned for spreading “lies.” The landed families “won,” but in many ways, their country was losing: all objective studies of poverty and inequality showed that Honduras slid backwards after the coup—poverty and abject poverty were worse than in 2008, the economy suffered negative growth, and the Honduran government likely grew weaker in the face of rampant crime, drug cartel activity, and corruption within the state itself.¹⁰

To make circumstances even worse, hurricanes and tropical storms have continued to batter Honduras. They have names like Sandra (2015), Earl (2016), Nate (2017), and Michael (2018). They look similar from space, winding their destruction in larger and larger circles, the result of (still) warming waters in the Caribbean Sea that now produce “super storms.” Prior to 1990, every two decades or so, severe hurricanes had hit this region, but in this era of the new “abnormal,” severe storms are rolling into Central American countries every year or every other year. Droughts are more common as well—thus, these periods of intense rain have come after long, dry spells, in ways quite difficult to forecast. If such trends continue, the changing, violent,

and unpredictable climate in the western Caribbean will have profound, negative impacts on every aspect of economy and society, throughout all of Latin America. In places like Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, where electricity and communications are already spotty, and where many people cannot “see” these storms coming, many people are in special danger.

In a way, the people migrating from Honduras in that season leading up to the American elections in 2018 were and were not “refugees.” The conventional definition of a refugee was a person with a “well-founded fear of

persecution,” based on that person’s race, ethnicity, religion, political opinion, or membership in a social group. It’s not clear that these migrants were, under this definition, “refugees.” These people were rather “abject,” or “thrown aside,” citizens of a country where their own government did not care or were not interested in their welfare. These migrants were not “persecuted,” just neglected, within a political system dominated by a handful of wealthy families—these “elites” rather chose to use the organs of *their* government to avoid taxes, to avoid redistribution, and to save for themselves the right to exploit natural resources and poorer laborers without care or concern for their long-term welfare. In 2009, the wealthy families of Honduras did as they always have done: they removed a politician whom they’ve perceived to be no longer in their narrow financial interests.¹¹

As for these migrants leaving Honduras by the thousands, we did not have, yet, a language to describe these persons, even though there was substantial evidence that they were, at



least in part, “climate refugees” or “ecological refugees.” Their condition requires us to re-think our own public law, our own response to people who are fleeing countries where natural and ecological disasters have brought people to a tipping point—neglected by their own governments, unable to sustain a decent, even subsistence life, and thus cast aside, they left for places that were not receptive at all. Where could these people go? In a strange way, President Trump was right to that these people were most likely not “refugees,” and thus not entitled to asylum in the United States, and yet he was very wrong to think that their predicament was unrelated to climate change and to political neglect in their home countries, maybe also American foreign policy in these places. His response was the very opposite of that phrase, “give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Did he—did this response—reflect the majority will of the American people, or was this a minority view?¹²

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Immigration law and policy in the United States has always been about “strangers,” the “others” who were not yet American citizens, and yet who pleaded to be admitted, included, passed into American citizenship. When faced with such petitions, and in the midst of these pleas, the Americans have replied, and in their replies, they have said a great deal about the character of the nation, as well as its ethos in the world, its willingness to assume, or to set aside, moral and political leadership. In 1965, when President Johnson signed the new Immigration Act, a rule that he’d promised was “not a revolutionary bill,” he was, perhaps, underestimating just how radically it would change his country and the entire world. I would argue that he was showing moral and political leadership: the United States was no longer going to be white supremacist in the selection of its immigrants, and everyone could now pass into American citizenship. In this country, such changes *were* revolutionary—indeed, it’s difficult to overstate the tremendous shift in American law and society that resulted from that one rule.

As we’ve learned, however, in subsequent decades, new immigration rules have encouraged the rich and the educated, they have discouraged the very poor, and they’ve created unusual populations of people who are here and not here, present and yet politically disenfranchised, and for long, indefinite periods of time that still stretch endless. Moreover, if current trends continue, we may see, in the United States, more removals than admissions, more hostility toward immigrants in general, and greater levels of xenophobia than ever before—I shudder to think what horrifying, morally baseless policies will come *after* the detention of migrant children in “tender-age shelters.” Precisely what do these policies say about *us*? Are they signs, perhaps, that this nation will give up political and moral leadership during a time when the entire world will sorely need it, when no corner of this world will be spared from devastating ecological challenges?

In a democracy such as this, where women and men, older folks and younger folks, white folks and people of color—where we all participate and vote and exercise sovereign authority over one another, there is the real possibility that things will become ungovernable, that we will tear each other apart, that we will come to hate our opposites, and that we will think only of ourselves, our tribe, my family, my neighborhood. In a world as chaotic and dangerous as ours,

such public choices might even seem understandable—vote for my country first, for me first, for me, me me mememe. Behavior that is understandable, though, isn't always the same as behavior that is admirable. To do the understandable thing, rather than the admirable thing, is to miss what could be a great opportunity, for in this diverse, plural world, there is now the thrilling possibility that by engaging with others, by learning about people totally different from ourselves, and from all over the world and all walks of life, and by listening and by paying attention to their realities, we can create, collectively, a nation and a world much better than the one handed to us.

That is, it's one thing to make myself better off, me me memememe, but it's far more rewarding and more admirable to make *all of us* better off. This would require, of course, being attentive to the needs of others, and to consider even one's own good—like the pursuit of a higher education—in a much broader social and political context. Wonderful is the education that helps you, but truly blessed is that learning that helps us all, that helps the world. People who are hopelessly self-centered will never understand or appreciate such a truth, and so they will keep missing these kinds of opportunities, but in my heart of hearts, I hope we will all endeavor to do the admirable thing, not just for the sake of others, but for our own sake as well. Whether future generations will admire us or judge us harshly—that is entirely up to us.

Endnotes

¹ Many scholars have presented findings about mass incarceration, including Bryan Stevenson, Ruth Gilmore, and Jonathan Simon. For a more accessible account, see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2012). As the title suggests, Professor Alexander considers how mass incarceration is like a new form of segregation, one that white political majorities have supported in the wake of desegregation. This has been an illuminating and highly influential argument.

² This campaign appears in detail in Jon Meacham's biography of George H.W. Bush, published in 2015. The author suggests that President Bush acceded to these campaign tactics, but did not design them.

³ For an excellent study of how Proposition 187 was similar to other racially-charged propositions before and after, see Daniel HoSang, *Racial Propositions* (2010). Caroline Tolbert and Rodney Hero, *Race/Ethnicity and Direct Democracy*, J. POL. (1996).

⁴ For a discussion of this problem, see Mary Romero, *Racial Profiling in Immigration Law Enforcement*, CRIT. SOC. (2006).

⁵ The best single book about deportations and their impact on the countries to the South of the United States is by Daniel Kanstroom, *Aftermath* (2014).

⁶ It's quite illuminating to see how the United States spends its foreign aid in Central America and in the Caribbean. For a recent overview, see Peter Meyer, *United States Foreign Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean*, CONG. RES. SERV. (2018).

⁷ In June 2018, the American Psychological Association sent an open letter to President Trump protesting the "zero-tolerance" policy and its attendant family separations, arguing that this amounted to a form of child abuse that caused tremendous psychological harm to parents and to their children. Similar concerns and protests against these policies came from religious organizations, the U.S. Congress, governments abroad, Melania Trump, and many professional academics and their organizations. Several conservative commentators, including those on Fox News, defended these policies; Laura Ingraham referred to the children's shelters as "summer camps." For a review of these policies, see Salvador Rizzo, *The Facts About Trump's Policies Separating Families at the Border*, WASH. POST (June 19, 2018).

⁸ Before mining and logging, Honduras was a "banana republic," a place dominated by large-scale plantation economies that exported agricultural commodities to the United States. See, for example, John Soluri, *Banana Cultures* (2006), and Daniel Reichman, *The Broken Village* (2011).

⁹ The deeper political and social problems within Honduras appear in some detail, in an American ambassador's account of his time there. See, Jack Binns, *The United States in Honduras, 1980-1981* (2000).

¹⁰ For studies of post-coup Honduras, see: Carlos Lauria and Sara Rafsky, *Journalism in Post-Coup Honduras*, AMER. QTLY. (2013); Elisabeth Malkin, *In Honduras, Land Struggles Highlight Post-Coup Polarization*, NY TIMES (Sept. 16, 2011); and Maaret Jokela-Pansini, *Spatial Imaginaries and Collective Identity in Women's Rights Struggles in Honduras*, GEND. PLACE & CULT. (2016).

¹¹ See, Rodolfo Fasquelle, *The 2009 Coup and the Struggle for Democracy in Honduras*, NACLA REP. AMER. (2016).

¹² See, Collectif Argos, *Climate Refugees* (2010).