

# US policy in Honduras set the stage for crisis



Hondurans fleeing poverty and violence make up most of the participants of a “caravan” slowly moving through Mexico in the hope of reaching the United States and receiving refuge, while Trump has characterized the caravan as, “an onslaught” and “an assault” an “invasion” of the United States.

The mainstream narrative of such movements of people often reduces the causes of migration to factors unfolding in migrants’ home countries. In reality, migration is often a manifestation of a profoundly unequal and exploitative relationship between countries from which people emigrate and countries of destination.

As I have learned through many years of research on immigration and border policing, the history of relations between Honduras and the United States is a prime example of these dynamics. Understanding this is vital to making immigration policy more effective and ethical.

I first visited Honduras in 1987 to do research. As I walked around the city of Comayagua, many thought that I, a white male with short hair in his early 20’s, was a U.S. soldier. This was because hundreds of U.S. soldiers were stationed at the nearby Palmerola Air Base at the time. Until shortly before my arrival, many of them would frequent Comayagua, particularly its “red zone” of female sex workers.

U.S. military presence in Honduras and the roots of Honduran migration to the United States are closely linked. It began in the late 1890s, when U.S.-based banana companies first became active there. As historian Walter LaFeber writes in “Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America,” American companies “built railroads, established their own banking systems, and bribed government officials at a dizzying pace.” As a result, the Caribbean coast “became a foreign-controlled enclave that systematically swung the whole of Honduras into a one-crop economy whose wealth was carried off to New Orleans, New York, and later Boston.”

By 1914, U.S. banana interests owned almost 1 million acres of Honduras’ best land. These holdings grew through the 1920s to such an extent that, as LaFeber asserts, Honduran peasants “had no hope of access to their nation’s good soil.” Over a few decades, U.S. capital also came to dominate the country’s banking and mining sectors, a process facilitated by the weak state of Honduras’ domestic business sector. This was coupled with direct U.S. political and military interventions to protect U.S. interests in 1907 and 1911.

Such developments made Honduras’ ruling class dependent on Washington for support. A central component of this ruling class was and remains the

Honduran military. By the mid-1960s it had become, in LaFeber’s words, the country’s “most developed political institution,” – one that Washington played a key role in shaping.

This was especially the case during the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. At that time, U.S. political and military policy was so influential that many referred to the Central American country as the “U.S.S. Honduras” and the Pentagon Republic.

As part of its effort to overthrow the Sandinista government in neighboring Nicaragua and “roll back” the region’s leftist movements, the Reagan administration “temporarily” stationed several hundred U.S. soldiers in Honduras. Moreover, it trained and sustained Nicaragua’s “contra” rebels on Honduran soil, while greatly increasing military aid and arm sales to the country.

The Reagan years also saw the construction of numerous joint Honduran-U.S. military bases and installations. Such moves greatly strengthened the militarization of Honduran society. In turn, political repression rose. There was a dramatic increase in the number of political assassinations, “disappearances” and illegal detentions.

The Reagan administration also played a big role in restructuring the Honduran economy. It did so by strongly pushing for internal economic reforms, with a focus on exporting manufactured goods. It also helped deregulate and destabilize the global coffee trade, upon which Honduras heavily depended. These changes made Honduras more amenable to the interests of global capital. They disrupted traditional forms of agriculture and undermined an already weak social safety net.

These decades of U.S. involvement in Honduras set the stage for Honduran emigration to the United States, which began to markedly increase in the 1990s.

In the post-Reagan era, Honduras remained a country scarred by a heavy-handed military, significant human rights abuses and pervasive poverty. Still, liberalizing tendencies of successive governments and grassroots pressure provided openings for democratic forces.

They contributed, for example, to the election of Manuel Zelaya, a liberal reformist, as president in 2006. He led on progressive measures such as raising the minimum wage. He also tried to organize a plebiscite to allow for a constituent assembly to replace the country’s constitution, which had been written during a military government. However, these efforts incurred the ire of the country’s oligarchy, leading to his overthrow by the military in June 2009.

The 2009 coup, more than any other development, explains the increase in Honduran migration across the southern U.S. border in the last few years. The Obama administration has played an important role in these developments. Although it officially decried Zelaya’s ouster, it equivocated on whether or not it constituted a coup, which would have required the U.S. to stop sending most aid to the country.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in particular, sent conflicting messages, and worked to ensure that Zelaya did not return to power. This was contrary to the wishes of the Organization of American States, the leading hemispheric political forum composed of the 35



member-countries of the Americas, including the Caribbean. Several months after the coup, Clinton supported a highly questionable election aimed at legitimating the post-coup government.

Strong military ties between the U.S. and Honduras persist: Several hundred U.S. troops are stationed at Soto Cano Air Base, formerly Palmerola, in the name of fighting the drug war and providing humanitarian aid.

Since the coup, writes historian Dana Frank, “a series of corrupt administrations has unleashed open criminal control of Honduras, from top to bottom of the government.” The Trump administration’s recognition, in December 2017, of President Juan Orlando Hernández’s re-election—after a process marked by deep irregularities, fraud and violence. This continues Washington’s longstanding willingness to overlook official corruption in Honduras as long as the country’s ruling elites serve what are defined as U.S. economic and geopolitical interests.

Organized crime, drug traffickers and the country’s police heavily overlap. The frequent politically motivated killings are rarely punished. In 2017, Global Witness, an international nongovernmental organization, found that Honduras was the world’s deadliest country for environmental activists.

Although its once sky-high murder rate has declined over the last few years, the continuing exodus of many youth demonstrates that violent gangs still plague urban neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, post-coup governments have intensified an increasingly unregulated, free market form of capitalism that makes life unworkable for many by undermining the country’s limited social safety net and greatly increasing socioeconomic inequality. Government spending on health and education, for example, has declined in Honduras. Meanwhile, the country’s poverty rate has risen markedly. These contribute to the growing pressures that push many people to migrate.

What will happen to the thousands of people now moving northward? If the recent past is any indication, many will likely stay in Mexico.

What the Trump administration will ultimately do with those who arrive at the U.S. southern border is unclear. Regardless, the role played by the United States in shaping the causes of this migration raises ethical questions about its responsibility toward those now fleeing from the ravages its policies have helped to produce.

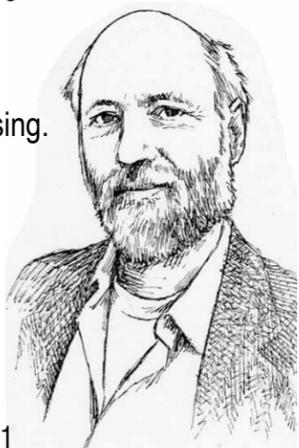
**Joseph Nevins**

*theconversation.com*

## Eugene ‘Ed’ Denson Attorney at Law

Marijuana Defense,  
counseling and licensing.

- Medical
- Commercial
- Recreational
- Spiritual
- Personal



PO Box 158,  
Alderpoint, Ca 95511  
Phone: 707-923-4764  
email: edenson@asis.com

CSB 202415

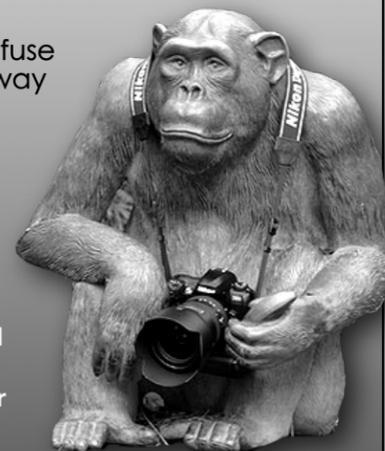
In secret enclaves around the globe, Waking Dog operatives are receiving their marching orders...



~JOIN THE WAKING DOG COLLECTIVE~  
YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS MEAN  
THE SIGNAL CAN'T BE STOPPED.  
~P.O. BOX 493 REDWAY CA 95560~

Create you own MUIR REPORT with  
**The Muirwalker Himself!**  
on a tour of the wilds  
of Northwildwest California\*

Write:  
Muir@Greenfuse  
Box 493 Redway  
CA.95560



\*No Plants  
or Animals will  
be Harmed  
during the tour