



JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STRUGGLES OF HAITIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS

On September 19, 2021, pictures from Del Rio, Texas went viral showing US Customs and Border Protection agents mounted on horseback and appearing to use whips to stop a group of Haitian migrants from crossing into the United States. At the time, many observers drew parallels between those photos and the slave patrols of the antebellum South¹.

For many, it was also the first time that they were confronted with the reality that Haitian migrants are coming to the US/MX border. The common perception is that it's predominantly Central American migrants, but this does not match the reality on-the-ground. In fact, Haitian migrants have been coming to the US/MX border as early as 2016 and this has only increased since, especially since the second half of 2020.

Why Are They Coming?: The Root Causes of Haitian Migration

Haiti is still suffering from the consequences of colonialism and the legacy of slavery. In 1791, Haiti became the "first people in the modern world to free themselves from slavery"² by gaining their independence from France and establishing their own country. However, the French imposed an enormous debt on this new government in exchange for their recognition of

Haitian sovereignty. If Haiti hadn't been forced into this debt, they could've added "\$21 billion to [their country's development] over time."³ Beginning in the 1860s, the US perpetuated this injustice by granting Haiti a loan. Continuous debt has prevented the country from developing and investing in public infrastructure such as schools and hospitals.

In addition to this debt, other factors have destabilized the country and fomented violence: a government coup in 1991 backed by foreign powers, the assassination of their president in 2021, gang violence, and food insecurity. In May 2022 alone, this violence left over two hundred people dead and thousands of people fleeing from the country.⁴

Migrating through the Americas: The Haitian Journey from South America to the Border

From 2010 to 2016, Haitians began migrating to Latin American countries, predominantly Chile and Brazil. Both countries offered work permits and protections allowing Haitian migrants to settle in those countries. By 2019, however, both countries had elected conservative presidents that began implementing restrictive immigration policies, making it difficult to obtain legal status and find employment.⁵ Additionally, communities

in these countries were often racist towards Haitians, discriminating against them in several ways.⁶ These factors, in addition to economic downturns within the countries, forced many Haitian migrants to look for more hospitable conditions further north.

Confronting Racism: The Experience of Haitian Migrants at the US/MX Border

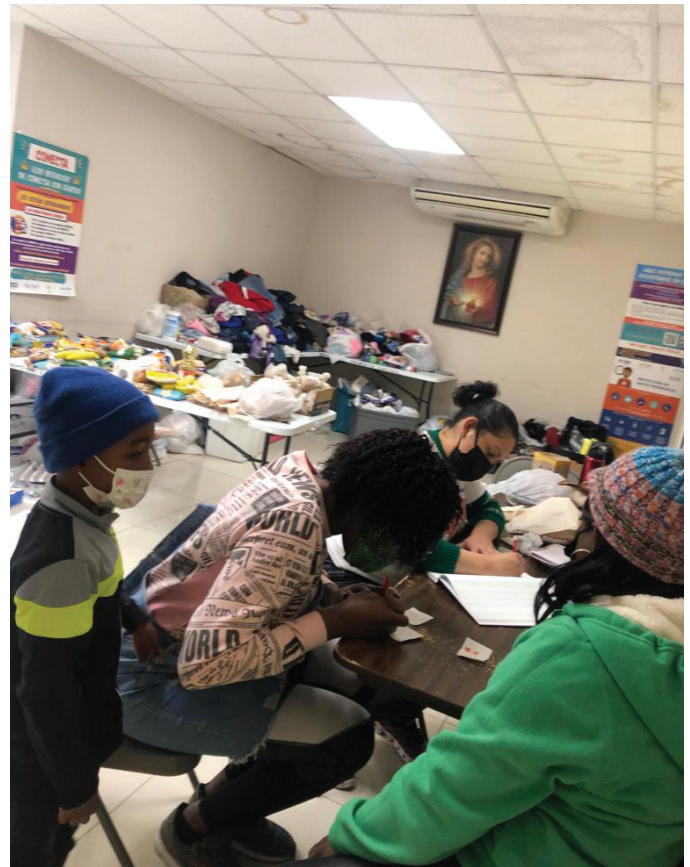
Like the migrants who arrived before them, Haitians are being forced to “remain in Mexico” under Title 42 and MPP.⁷ These policies continue to endanger the lives of many migrants by making them wait in a country where they face several challenges and dangers. Haitians also experience unique challenges, such as discrimination, racism, and a disproportionately high rate of deportation. Since President Biden’s inauguration in January 2021, over 20,000 Haitian immigrants have been sent back to Haiti, with over two hundred deportation flights. “At this point, about 1 in every 575 people living in Haiti today was on an expulsion or deportation plane during the past 13 months.”⁸ This percentage is significantly higher than other groups.

As another example, between 2018 and 2021, only 4.62% of Haitian asylum seekers were granted asylum by the US — the lowest rate among 84 groups for whom data is available.⁹

The Missionary Society of St. Columban is witnessing the cruelty of these policies as it accompanies the Haitian community in Ciudad Juárez, which shares the border with El Paso, TX. Our organization runs several humanitarian assistance projects that offer a safe space to protect families with young children and provide them with basic needs. ■

Citations

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4. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/31/americas/haiti-gang-violence-intl/index.html>
5. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/haitian-migration-through-americas>
6. <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-10-01/chile-haitians-migration>
7. <https://columbanjpe.org/article/its-past-time-end-title-42>
8. Isacson, A., & Isacson, A. (2022, February 17). A tragic milestone: 20,000th migrant deported to Haiti since Biden inauguration. WOLA. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <https://www.wola.org/analysis/a-tragic-mileston>
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What can you do?

- Join us in our advocacy to #EndTitle42 and #RestoreAsylumNow. Title 42, along with MPP, continue to endanger asylum seekers by forcing them wait in Mexico. Title 42 specifically is causing the deportation of hundreds of Haitians by sending them back to danger in Haiti.
- You can learn more about, and donate to, the Missionary Society of St. Columban’s humanitarian projects in Ciudad Juárez by visiting <https://columbanjpe.org/haiti>.



TAKE ACTION