**Dividing Lines: The Human Face of Global Migration [Part 3]**

By Haley Sweetland Edwards *TIME Magazine, February 4 – 11, 2019*

Announced by former Attorney General Jeff Sessions in April 2018, [a U.S. policy shift] resulted in untold thousands of children under 18 being forcibly separated from their parents at the U.S. border last year. Sessions presented it as common sense. People who cross the border illegally are committing a crime, he explained, and therefore must serve jail time. And since children can’t be jailed with their parents, they must be removed from their families. “It’s that simple,” Sessions said. “If you don’t like that, then don’t smuggle children over our border.”

The policy was unprecedented in modern U.S. immigration history and, because of it, American officials, following federal orders, acted en masse to detain children. Because of poor record keeping, scores of parents were deported without their kids, -advocacy groups say, and hundreds of migrant children may end up permanently in U.S. foster care. Officials are still scrambling to figure out how many families may have been torn apart. A January 2019 report from the Department of Health and Human Services revealed that the Trump Administration may have begun separating children from their families at the U.S. border in 2017, long before Sessions announced the new policy. Thousands more children may have been separated from their families than previously known.

While the Trump Administration, in the face of intense, bipartisan political pressure, eventually distanced itself from the effort, the question at the heart of the policy remained unanswered: What moral obligation do wealthy nations like the U.S. owe to the world’s most vulnerable? Or, to put that another way: To whom should Americans grant refuge?

In the past, policymakers attempted to answer that question precisely. When the U.S. signed the 1967 U.N. refugee protocols, a refugee was defined as someone outside his country of origin who is afraid to return because of persecution “for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” In 1979, Congress passed the Refugee Act, committing the U.S. by law to grant asylum to anyone who met that description. But in a changing world, many of the international migrants arriving at the U.S. border no longer fit neatly in any legal category. The Cold War refugee protocols are silent about migrants fleeing rape or corrupt police harassment, or climate-related destruction, or hunger so severe that kids wake up every night crying.

Darileni Rodríguez, 25, left Honduras with her husband, her 3-year-old twin girls and her niece, because they didn’t have enough food. “Sometimes you go one day, two days, without eating,” she said. “I can take it, but the children can’t.” Patricia Hernández, 39, fled her town in El Salvador when she was raped and stabbed after being accused of reporting a gang murder to police. Should either qualify for asylum? What about David Maldonado, 31, a wiry construction worker who fled Honduras after gang members shot him with a 9-mm pistol, once in each leg, just above the knee, for taking a job on a construction site controlled by a rival gang? What about Luz, who fled Honduras with a fresh cesarean scar because her husband beat her so violently she feared he’d kill her next time?

There are no easy policy answers to these questions, no hard-and-fast algorithm that decides whether Albertina and Yaquelin get to stay in Tennessee. What’s clear, however, is that two years into Trump’s presidency, his black-and-white approach to immigration is having a measurable effect, according to Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse. By June 2018, less than 15% of people applying for asylum were allowed to proceed through the process, down from nearly 33% a year earlier. And as of last year, the U.S. agreed to accept fewer refugees than it has in more than 40 years.