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Issue Story

Immigration has been an issue since the late 1900's, when laws in America began to change, leaving those who have entered to be called "illegal." Now, during recent years, the issue has grown immensely with a surge of immigrants entering the United States.

According to *BBC News*, a few hundred immigrants from Honduras have been trekking across Central America through Mexico all the way to the U.S. border in order to seek asylum from their crime-ridden country, finding a better future for themselves and their family. Along the way, other migrants from El Salvador and Guatemala have joined the migrant caravan, increasing the number to almost 3,000 immigrants.

This number has caused President Trump to send troops to the U.S. border in an effort to stop the immigrants from entering the U.S. illegally, leaving them with the options to take refuge in nearby cities, settling in Mexico or returning back to their homeland. Those who take refuge near the border still hope their claims of asylum will be heard.

Although there have been immigrants who may take advantage of the asylum system, according to *USA Today*, President Trump has begun to suspend asylum to illegal immigrants partly to blame for the increase in claims from 5,000 in 2008 to 97,000 in 2018 by fleeing Central Americans, including Hondurans.

Honduras ranks high as one of the poorest countries in Central America, mostly to blame the unequal distribution of income, as well as the high rates of unemployment, violence, murder and corruption, according to *NBC News*.

The condition of Honduras currently relates to Guatemala in the early 1960s. At that time, there was inequalities in wealth and political corruption because of the Civil War. As war continued, people of Mayan descent were being persecuted in the 1980s and therefore, escaped to Mexico and different parts of the U.S. including Houston.

Néstor Rodríguez, professor of sociology at the University of Texas, dedicates himself in researching topics in immigration, including unauthorized immigration in the U.S. and border enforcement policies.

“The violence that happens (in Honduras and Guatemala) unstabilised communities, their economies, and...committees cannot function. In addition to violence and fear...and conditions of social decline so people, when the government cannot help them, (or) is the problem, they create ways to survive,” said Rodriguez. “One of the ways is to migrate, to seek survival from violence or to find work for money to send back to families.”

During the early 1990s “Houston became an important center of Guatemalan immigration,” as more Mayan descendents settled along Westheimer and continued to grow since the “U.S.

economy was restructuring and trying to become more competitive” as more “Employers...turn to immigrant labor as a way to improve production,” said Rodriguez.

Although border patrol arrests continue to grow, immigrants do seem to have some benefits to the U.S. economy, but it does not deny the fact immigrants face many risks when attempting to cross the border. For this reason, the migrant caravan is traveling in large groups as a way to keep each other safe from kidnappings or drug trafficking.

“To pay a smuggler from Central America to come to Houston, that is going to cost (an immigrant) \$7,500 at least...so one of the things that people find when they migrate in groups is safety, but not absolutely...and more confidence in what they are doing,” said Rodriguez.

To those who seek asylum, the solution Rodriguez said is to set up a “reception center” to immigrants who are arriving and “guarantee everybody has a right to apply.” The asylum claim process is slow, so if President Trump sent “intake staff” rather than troops the size of the migrant caravan would decrease.

Cecilia Flores, immigrated from Honduras to the United States 16 years ago and knows the risks of crossing the border illegally, recalling the time when she made the dangerous journey.

“I was scared and alone, traveling with a few strangers after paying a smuggler to take us all the way to the border...we arrived at the Rio Grande river where I crossed almost neck deep to

Texas,” said Cecilia. “A van was waiting for us on the other side so we got in and drove for hours before arriving at a church in San Antonio where they provided food and shelter for us.”

Afterward, Flores traveled to Houston, Texas where she settled and found work as an in-home nanny, sending money to her two children and mother who still are in Honduras. It does take a toll on her she says, but at least she still has hope in one day bringing her family to Houston.

“Even though I have found a well-paying job, I still think about my family constantly and call every day, but knowing the situation hasn’t gotten better worries me. I pray that my son and daughter are safe and will one day bring them home to me,” said Flores.

Many of the immigrant’s stories, including Flores, show the struggles they face and the constant worry of providing for their families, which is why they took the decision to escape poverty and hope for the American dream.

Although the dream of a better life is possible, the situation of the migrant caravan continues to worsen as more immigrants are arriving at the city of Tijuana. According to *USA Today*, because of the rise in numbers, it becomes difficult for U.S. immigration officials to process asylum claims with only 40-100 a day compared to the 7,000 plus immigrants currently at the border.

“The large majority (of immigrants) have a reason (to seek asylum), doesn’t mean that it meets the standards, but they have a reason... there are always people who will seek asylum even if

they don't qualify" said Rodriguez. "We should always strive for the highest value of humanitarianism and democracy."

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