

Asylum, Terror, and the Future

English Transcripts

Video series by Anne Lewis
Based on the case stories of Jennifer Harbury

Me siento frustrada, desesperada, preocupada



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Table Of Contents

Episode 1: Asylum Claim	4
Introduction	4
Transcript	8
Episode 2: Happy 18th Birthday	11
Introduction	11
Transcript	12
Episode 3: Crying Babies	16
Introduction	16
Transcript	18
Episode 4: 'Hieleras'	22
Introduction	22
Transcript	24
Episode 5: From Military Officer to Drug Lord	27
Introduction	27
Transcript	29
Episode 6: Nazis Among Us	33
Introduction	33
Transcript	35

Asylum, Terror, and the Future

“The problem, of course, lies with the realities concealed from us. This has always been the case... In the end, however, this is our government, and torture is being utilized in our names and supported by our tax dollars. We are responsible.”

- Jennifer Harbury

Asylum, Terror, and the Future is a video podcast series by documentary filmmaker Anne Lewis that explores the Central American diaspora and humanitarian crisis unfolding on the US/Mexico border in 2019. This series is based on the case stories of Jennifer Harbury.

This text contains the introduction and English transcript for the following episodes:

- Episode #1: Asylum Claim
- Episode #2: Happy 18th Birthday
- Episode #3: Crying Babies
- Episode #4: Hieleras
- Episode #5 From military officer to drug lord
- Episode #6 Nazis Among Us

Video and introductions by Anne Lewis.

Compilation by Xica Media.

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Asylum, Terror, and the Future

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Episode 1: Asylum Claim

Episode 1: Asylum Claim

Introduction

AUSTIN — Last February I was at a party to celebrate a return visit to Austin of radical labor attorney Larry Daves. Jennifer Harbury from Weslaco began to talk about what was going on at the U.S./Mexico border. I had a camera there to perhaps film Larry, but the camera stayed in its case. Afterwards, I kicked myself for not filming Jennifer. Her ability to express a wailing narrative of human misery with total lack of sentimentality was devastating. I was overwhelmed.

Jennifer's husband, Efrain Barnaca Velasquez, a Mayan resistance fighter, "disappeared" in March 1992. He was tortured for two and a half years and murdered by CIA-paid, School of the Americas-trained members of the Guatemalan army. Jennifer exposed her husband's torturers to the world and then wrote about it.

Jennifer speaks truth from direct knowledge.

Jennifer still speaks truth from direct knowledge. When she looks at the brutality that pushes people out of Guatemala and other Central American countries to smash up against our southern border, she speaks with the intensity of one who can live with the horror of a baby's fingernails torn out — albeit many years ago — and know deeply why people flee that terror these days. Her husband's torturers took off their military uniforms and continued on as high-level drug lords terrorizing civilians, protected by the CIA which was concerned about what they might say about us.

She has written three books about it. That is the ultimate political act of the writer — to speak the unspeakable truth so that it cannot continue.

Episode 1: Asylum Claim

Jennifer calls Trump a “child abuser.” Who else would order small children to be wrenched from the arms of their mothers and fathers after such a long journey?

She got that crying babies tape to Pro Publica.

Jennifer was responsible for getting that crying babies tape to Pro Publica.

Those unbearable sounds of young children crying over and over for Mami or Papá or an aunt whose phone number they have memorized, probably did more to change policy than any kind of nonprofit study. As a mother, I cannot listen without feeling hatred for my government. And what of the trauma that must remain and all those children still alone, parents still alone.

Matthew Gossage, Laura Varela, and I went with women from the Angry Abuelas and Tias of the Rio Grande Valley across the bridge at Matamoros. We couldn't pass to Reynosa. It was too dangerous to go there. I often wonder what life must be like for all the people stuck there if we are afraid to go even for a few hours. Recently, the top immigration officer in Reynosa held refugees in the basement of the federal building for a ransom of \$3,500 each. Telemundo documented the atrocity and corruption.

And what did we see on the other side of the bridge in Matamoros? Children's socks drying on a fence, razor wire at the top; a half-grown cat sleeping in a box, unresponsive and perhaps dying; exhausted people in tents, waiting, who had been waiting for months.

There were also those things we didn't film.

A young child with a smile that stretched her face, couldn't stop hugging Laura, couldn't keep her hands off the microphone I held. Laura wondered how she could trust strangers like us and thought it must have been the volunteers who gave her water and oranges.

Episode 1: Asylum Claim

A young man came towards us at the edge of the bridge, beautiful, almost falling from exhaustion, trying to smile in greeting. From Cameroon, he spoke only French. He had been on the streets of Matamoros for three weeks, shunned by shelters because he was black. He pulled up his sleeves and showed us scars. It looked as though a machete had hacked at his arms.

When you look at our work, you, the viewer, will have to forgive our inadequacies. We would need a tripod and wide lenses. We would need the stamina and commitment of someone like Jennifer. We would need much greater intuition about what needs to be told.

These are fragments of understanding through Jennifer's eyes.

Please look at these pieces as fragments of understanding through Jennifer's eyes, stories of people she knew in the most harsh and imprisoned situations, in our government's (and our) hands. Look at the actuality as fragments of a humanitarian crisis that our country has made. Try to imagine what must be seen.

My greatest hope is that in forgiving our flawed material, you realize that you must bear witness yourself. Perhaps it's good that it's not art; it's not complete. Fill it yourself, not with guilt that confines itself to an inward gaze, but with the rage of perception that makes change. And go there to see for yourself. These short pieces are at best snapshots of what is there, less than 250 miles away, and of what must be done.

Jennifer Harbury is a lawyer and human rights activist.

Episode 1: Asylum Claim

[Anne Lewis is a documentary filmmaker whose films include *On Our Own Land* (DuPont-Columbia award), *Fast Food Women* (POV), *Justice in the Coalfields* (Gold Plaque, Intercom), and *Morristown: in the air and sun* about factory job loss and the rights of immigrants. Her latest film *A Strike and an Uprising* (in Texas) looks at the pecan shellers' strike in San Antonio in the '30s and the union uprising in Nacogdoches in the late '80s (audience award, Hecho en Tejas, Cine Las Americas) She serves on the executive board of the Texas State Employees Union TSEU-CWA 6186 and teaches at the University of Texas at Austin.]

Episode 1: Asylum Claim

Transcript

Jennifer Harbury [00:00:00] You cannot apply for asylum from another country. What the statute says is you walk across the international bridge and there at the gate where all the officers are taking people's passports and visas, they say, "I don't have a visa. I'm in danger. I want to ask for asylum."

[00:00:17] When someone says they're in danger like that the officer "shall" (that means "must") send a person for proper processing under our asylum procedures. They get a court hearing. Must.

[00:00:30] So what has the United States done? They've blocked access to before people even getting to the port of entry building to ask.

[00:00:50] Mexican officials started guarding the entry way to the bridge and demanding everybody's papers. And for Central Americans if they didn't have the right paperwork - or Africans - if they didn't have a complete visa or whatever to be in Mexico or the 30 day permits they weren't allowed on the bridge. And if some of them made it to the halfway point, then U.S. officials would say, "Sit there and wait your turn," and the Mexican immigration officers would come get them and drag them away. And that is shocking. There's an absolute international right to ask for asylum. There's also a right to leave any country anytime you want. I mean they can't like hold you in. So all of that was wildly illegal.

Episode 1: Asylum Claim

[00:01:45] In 2017 right after the inauguration we had one woman who had come north from Guatemala with her eight year old daughter and they'd been packed into a van. And as they approached Reynosa they were chased by the gangs who wanted to take them. And the van flipped over and a number of people were killed. The little girl was crushed. The mother had a smashed pelvis and went through the windshield leaving a huge gash where she was nearly decapitated. She lived. She was in the hospital for quite a while and then being a tough resilient woman, she took her walker she went to the bridge and she hobbled across. And they said, "Nah, we're kind of busy now." They had 10 people in an 80 person waiting room. You know, "Go back and come back some other day." No dates given.

[00:02:30] So she hobbled back across the bridge and because she couldn't run she was kidnapped at the front of the bridge straight out of surgery. She was on a dirty mattress with 30 other people for a couple of months. Well her dad rounded up the money. We then went across with her and had quite a shouting match with immigration officials back then. And she finally got through and was held at the Port Isabel detention center with such poor medical care that after a year her entire femur was so infected that she couldn't walk anymore. She was in a wheelchair and with shooting pains up and down her leg. She nearly died and it's a miracle she didn't lose her leg. She survived and kept her leg because finally they let her out on parole since they didn't want her to die in custody. At that point they gave her back to us after a year. We got her to California where a team of doctors gave her three emergency surgeries and saved her. Despite immigration we're just tossing the Statue of Liberty out the window here.

[00:03:41] This was 2014. Two hundred women and kids came into Anzalduas Park and turned themselves in to Border Patrol and we were dumbfounded and they just said, "We can't go anymore and there's nothing to go back for. Take us. We want to apply we're not going across the desert. Our kids won't make it. Just take us."

Episode 1: Asylum Claim

[00:04:02] So Sister Norma gave us a call and said you know, "Bring food, bring toiletries, bring clothes, and help at the shelter." So even my neighbors (who were pretty conservative actually) took their two little kids and several boxes of clothes and a picnic basket full extra food and went over there and they said "Me and our kids are, we're going to volunteer today to help at the shelter because we want our kids to learn this is what you do when there's a problem. There's moms and babies over there. Go over there and help." I mean it wasn't an issue to them.

[00:04:34] At one point I saw a journalist back then talking to one of the mothers with two very sick children and saying, "Didn't you know how dangerous the trip would be?" And she was very nice she just clearly felt was kind of stupid right. And she said, "Well yes, yes I knew it would be very dangerous. But they killed my husband and burned the house down. So I had to do it," you know, like you know, just trying to make him understand.

[00:04:59] Well I don't deal with it very well, I mean the only thing I can do (as you can notice probably) I just get madder and madder and madder. I just stay really busy working against it. And you know I don't have any magic wand to wave to make it better. Just keep fighting. You know, at the very least we're not going to just say "Oh, it's too big a problem I'm just going to let it happen." That's why I'm really proud of so many people in the valley. It's a very international culture that hasn't lost the idea that am I my brother's keeper? Well duh, of course! What do you think?

Episode 2: Happy 18th Birthday

Episode 2: Happy 18th Birthday

Introduction

Saturday morning at the greyhound bus station in Harlingen – yard sale a block down the street, a homeless woman paces back and forth in front of the station; bird calls and Bank of America building in the background. We are told that we cannot film inside.

This is one of the places where families are left after detention in hieleras – if they have relatives who will sponsor them. Volunteers pick them up at the bus stations along the border, assess their medical needs, take care of them in shelters, provide them with information about help along the way, and return them to the station for their trip north and east and west.

This morning Michael, a high school teacher and volunteer with La Posada, brings two young men from Guatemala to the station. They have been held at a Southwest Keys youth detention facility in Brownsville along with 1,400 other young people since crossing the border -- one since October, the other since December. Linda, one of the Angry Tias and Abuelas of the Rio Grande Valley, sees their black bags and greets them “Feliz cumpleaños.”

Episode 2: Happy 18th Birthday

Transcript

Interviewer [00:00:20] Happy birthday? Yes?

Young Man 1 [00:00:22] Yes.

Interviewer [00:00:23] Today or yesterday?

Young Man 1 [00:00:24] Yesterday.

Interviewer [00:00:25] Two languages?

Young Man 1 [00:00:26] Yes.

Interviewer [00:00:28] Kiche?...O?

Young Man [00:00:29] Queqchi.

Interviewer [00:00:29] Queqchi, ah.

Interviewer [00:00:37] These are the bags that are issued to them at the child detention centers.

Young Man 1 [00:00:43] I am from Guatemala. I'm going to Maryland.

Young Man 2 [00:00:48] I am from Guatemala. I'm going to Alabama.

Translator [00:00:49] You have folks there in Alabama?

Young Man 2 [00:00:50] Yes.

Episode 2: Happy 18th Birthday

Translator [00:00:51] Oh that's good. Thank goodness.

Young Man 1 [00:00:54] Here is all our food.

Translator [00:00:58] That's good, that's good.

Young Man 1 [00:01:02] Yes, here is all the clothes.

Translator [00:01:05] A jacket. That's good. For the cold. Well now the cold is starting to leave.

Young Man 1 [00:01:12] This is all we have.

Interviewer [00:01:16] What center?

Young Man 1 [00:01:17] Casa Padre.

Interviewer [00:01:18] Casa Padre? Very, very big. How many people?

Young Man 1 [00:01:23] 1,400 minors.

Translator [00:01:29] 1,400 kids.

Young Man 1 [00:01:31] They remove us because we turn 18 years old. I have been here for 6 months.

Jennifer Harbury [00:01:43] I'm surprised they haven't parted him off to jail. That's what they've done with a lot of my clients. Eighteenth birthday, 8 a.m., where we go out of the foster care over to the detention center. So horrible. That's how I ended up with a street kid in my house for a while. It's like, nah, we're not doing that.

Episode 2: Happy 18th Birthday

[00:02:07] That would have been '08. He was Honduran. The gangs had come for him once and he said, "No, I won't work with you." And then they came for him again. He would have been 15 or 16 and he said no and they ran him over with their car.

[00:02:20] And he woke up a few days later and his mother grabbed all the money she could find like 30 dollars and said run. So he ran. He got on La Bestia after being attacked a few times by soldiers and robbed in Guatemala and Salvador. But he survived and got on La Bestia. But along the tracks there were pieces of hair, pieces of bodies.

[00:02:42] I mean it was just horrible. When he got to the border. He jumped in the river and it could kind of swim but not really nearly drowned. Sommersalted onto the shore with this mop of wild curly dark hair and Border Patrol came and picked him up and he's like how did they know I wasn't from...he was quite sort of offended by that. But he ended up in an ORR center in Nixon, Texas where the church and child welfare department had warned the United States government over and over that the administration knew nothing about taking care of kids they were violating all the protocols and that the children were totally unsafe there and to do something immediately.

[00:03:23] And because it was very cheap and near the border and had a lot of beds nothing was done. We had a lawsuit come out of that for 14 kids including this person who were sexually abused by the guards there.

[00:03:35] He was put into foster care for a little while from that shelter and the day he turned 18 his foster mother had said "I'm going to bake you a cake."

[00:03:46] So she was in the kitchen while he was getting ready for school. You know mixing up the cake mix and immigration appeared and handcuffed him and took him away to an adult place.

Episode 2: Happy 18th Birthday

[00:03:56] And I went to see him and he was this, you know, five foot guy in an adult detention center. Everybody loved him. You know he's the most charismatic kid I've ever met. Sara was kind of taking care of him but he's in these big long orange overalls and talking to me from behind plate glass windows. And I asked him, you know, why couldn't he get out? And it's because he didn't have a sponsor.

[00:04:17] So I sponsored him and he was with me maybe four or five months. He had nightmares about the train ride and the people falling off and then what happened in Nixon. And he received asylum, amazingly enough. But he was just very broken and he would do very very well for a while and work and adored the children that his sister had and he would take care of them and would just do fantastically well and then he'd be on the streets for a while and then he'd be back for awhile and then he'd be on the streets for a while. But he went on the streets once too often and died of an overdose. I miss him, he was a great kid. It's a wonderful warm hearted you know really bright wise young old man. But so be it.

Episode 3: Crying Babies

Episode 3: Crying Babies

Introduction

“Having children does not give you immunity from arrest and prosecution...I would cite the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13 to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained the government for his purposes.” Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

“Creating psychosis isn’t the cure.” Pope Francis

It’s hard to imagine young children being taken away from their parents. It brings with it flashes of scenes from the Holocaust or, closer to home, slave auctions and American Indian Residential Schools.

“Zero tolerance” was inherited from the Bush administration, continued through Obama with families housed together in private prisons. It was at least partially discontinued at T. Don Hutto under strong social protest led by Grassroots Leadership, but the idea of punishing parents through separation and hardship directed towards children remained part of immigration policy. In April 2018, the Trump Administration specifically implemented separation of children from their parents at the border.

As a result, in six weeks, thousands of immigrant children were separated from their parents. On June 15th, the Office of Homeland Security announced a figure of 1,995 during that short period of time. This figure did not include families that used an official crossing, claimed asylum, and then were separated.

Episode 3: Crying Babies

On June 18, as reporters waited for Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen to brief them, they listened to an almost 7-minute tape of children crying in detention after being separated from their parents. It was the moment of truth. No longer able to separate their humanity from expediency and arguments of deterrence, they asked Nielsen questions like, “How can this not be child abuse?” On June 20, 2018, Trump gave in, blaming the policy on Democrats in Congress, and agencies tried to figure out how to reunite the separated families. The nation tried to forget what we had done.

This episode includes Jennifer Harbury, who was the first to receive the tape and was responsible for it getting out. Segments of the tape are pulled from ProPublica’s site; none have any internal editing.

Link:

<https://www.propublica.org/article/children-separated-from-parents-border-patrol-cbp-trump-immigration-policy>

We see refugee families stuck on the Matamoros side of the border and hear Jennifer’s description of border guard attitudes towards a pregnant and sick teenager on the bridge.

We still are not clear how many children remain separated and ways in which the policy mutates and continues to this day.

Episode 3: Crying Babies

Transcript

Jennifer Harbury [00:00:00] A Border Patrol agent told me once, "I just go up to the kids and give them a chocolate bar and we chat for a while and then they trust me."

[00:00:06] I was like, "Oh please, these kids have come all the way north knowing anyone in any uniform with boots you should be terrified of and run from the guns. A 2 year old knows that."

Child crying [00:00:20] No quiero que lo paren. No quiero que lo deporten. (I don't want them to stop my dad. I don't want them to deport him.).

Title [00:00:26] This audio tape was given to Jennifer Harbury in June 2018.

Child [00:00:34] Papi! (Daddy!)

Title [00:00:36] Jennifer gave the original to ProPublica.

Jennifer Harbury [00:00:41] We can't get in and they cannot call out. Doctors were being turned away. The Senator was turned away. They knew.

[00:00:56] Don't cut it. Don't. Don't take anyone's voices out. Just produce the whole thing or we'll be accused of tampering with it.

[00:01:05] So it's the whole thing and what I heard were little tiny children just crying and crying frightened out of their wits and screaming for mom. And one of the children who did not speak much Spanish just kept saying, "Papi, oh Papi." Papi. .

Child crying 2 [00:01:24] Papa. Bye bye.

Episode 3: Crying Babies

Workers [00:01:30] Workers talking about providing food. Children crying.

Jennifer Harbury [00:01:35] A little girl was saying, "I've got my aunt's number. Her name is this and here's her number. Call her right away and tell her to come get me please."

Little girl [00:01:45] Quiero que venga mi Tia por mi para que me lleve. (I want my Aunt to come so she can take me to her house.).

Border Patrol [00:01:57] Ella te ayuda llamar a tu Tia si tienes el numero, para que puedas hablar con tu Tia. (She'll help you call your Aunt if you have the number, so that you can talk to your Aunt.).

Little girl [00:01:57] Yo tengo el numer de ella. (I have her number.).

Border Patrol [00:01:57] Okay, pues ahorita ella te ayuda para que hables. (Okay, so she'll help you right now so you can talk to her.)

Jennifer Harbury [00:02:02] Some other child is asked, "Where are you from? And he just answers, "Guatemalaaaa..." and he just breaks into tears.

Border Patrol [00:02:09] De en donde son ustedes? (Where are you from?).

Child 3 [00:02:13] El Salvador.

Border Patrol [00:02:13] Y tu? (And you?).

Child 4 [00:02:13] Guatemala (starts crying.).

Episode 3: Crying Babies

Jennifer Harbury [00:02:17] Any human being we're wired if we hear a tiny child begging and crying for help like that. We know the difference between crying cause you're mad and crying cause you're in danger and terrified and in pain, right. And it's just impossible to hear that tape. You just can't put up with it. And that's why it had so much impact. I mean people from all sides including many Trump supporters from other religious networks were were outraged by that tape and I was glad it means there's still at least a little thread of humanity in us.

[00:02:53] Actually quite a few of the guards would say things to different lawyer friends of mine like, "The worst thing in the world to ever have to hear is a five year old being taken away from his mother." That's just horrible. And someone else said I don't know. You know it's like they started the separations today and the parents the children and the parents both screamed from you know 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 at night when I left. It's just unbearable in there. So a lot of them didn't like it at all. And I'm happy that they didn't.

[00:03:25] I saw a much harder attitude by Border Patrol and Customs officers when people were forced to sleep on the bridge in the heat with no food and no water and no bathrooms for weeks at a time. It was a very hardened attitude.

[00:03:44] At one point there was a 15 year old girl out there who was sick. She'd been gang raped. And her mother was tending to her and very upset.

[00:03:52] So I was sitting about, they were sitting about the same distance that you are from the border patrol guards. So I walked up and said, "What are you doing? You know there's a young girl there who's pregnant she's going to end up in a hospital you need to let her in right now." And they're basically, they're saying, "No, all those parents are bad parents. Why did they bring their kids here?"

Episode 3: Crying Babies

[00:04:14] And then we had a little discussion about how they themselves as U.S. officers are not allowed to go under Ray Nelson because it's too dangerous. And the pregnant girl and next morning was gone. They didn't take her in while I was there that night but they whisked her in in the morning.

[00:04:29] Cause I was saying, "If she starts bleeding out on the bridge or suffers an infection or whatever it's you you did it. I don't care. I don't want to hear about how it was their fault and they and they just decided it was worth it and they're stupid, right? You're doing it. You know, let's just get down to it."

[00:04:45] [Children crying.]

Border Patrol [00:04:52] Bueno aqui tenemos una orquesta. (Here we have an orchestra.)

[00:04:55] What we're missing is a conductor.

Man's voice [00:05:06] No llores! (Don't cry!)

[00:05:10] We used to be the greatest of all you know everybody was so successful and. And here comes this person saying it's not our fault it's because all these people are taking the bread out of our children's mouths. You know maybe that empire needed to fail.

[00:05:24] Maybe it was an evil empire. But the question is how to rebuild it into a non-empire that's a good country.

[00:05:34] Destruction of the soul scares me much worse, actually...than anything else.

Episode 4: 'Hieleras'

Episode 4: 'Hieleras'

Introduction

“The hielera was freezing cold. It was so cold that my son’s lips began to chap. His lips were so chapped that they burst and his lips were bleeding.”

“I was held with a woman who had an 8-day-old baby. The baby was screaming and crying because it was so cold. The little baby was forced to lie on the cement floor because there were no beds. The women all begged CBP to do something to help this baby—to give it a blanket, give the nursing mother extra food, or let the baby’s mother be processed first so that the baby could leave, but CBP refused.”

Special Report, American Immigration Council December 2015

Link:

https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/hieleras_iceboxes_in_the

A class action case filed in June 2015 alleges “freezing, overcrowded, and filthy cells in violation of the U.S. Constitution and the agencies’ own policies.” Photographs unsealed in 2016 remain some of the few pieces of visual documentation.

Link:

<https://splinternews.com/these-unsealed-photos-offer-rare-peek-inside-border-pa-1793857894>

This short video contains descriptions of conditions from Jennifer Harbury. We see refugees on the bridge in Matamoros, Mexico. They wear warm clothing in 90 degree heat, knowing that they are close to the head of the line and will be taken directly to hieleras. A refugee notices the sun and shares her umbrella with an aide.

Episode 4: 'Hieleras'

“Hieleras” or iceboxes are frigid, concrete, supposedly short-term detention cells run by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. They hold men, women, and children – even babies. These days everyone who turns themselves in to the border patrol goes straight to the hieleras -- including unaccompanied minors. The detained are stripped of warm clothing and blankets; denied adequate food, water, medical care, and basic hygiene items like diapers and sanitary napkins; and held incommunicado for days at a time.

We now know that five children from Guatemala have died in and because of conditions in the hielaras this year. There are more. We don't know their names or where they were from.

Carlos Hernandez Vásquez, a 16-year-old was found dead May 20, 2019. Video sent to the family shows Carlos healthy and waving in a raft crossing the Rio Grande just days before he was found unresponsive in a U.S. Customs and Border Protection cell in south Texas. At that time a virulent strain of flu was sweeping through the McAllen hielera where he was held.

Link:

[https://twitter.com/TelemundoNews/status/1131153032253792256?](https://twitter.com/TelemundoNews/status/1131153032253792256?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1131153032253792256&ref_u)

[ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1131153032253792256&ref_u](https://twitter.com/TelemundoNews/status/1131153032253792256?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1131153032253792256&ref_u)
[boy-who-died-u-s-custody-wanted-help-brother-n1008826](https://twitter.com/TelemundoNews/status/1131153032253792256?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1131153032253792256&ref_u)

Two other Guatemalan children, seven and eight years old died in CBP custody in December and a two-year-old who fell ill while in custody died in a hospital in May.

These are “black boxes.” There is no recording from within them other than shots provided by CBP. People who provide help, sanctuary, and access to medical treatment for families released from hieleras report a level of human misery rarely seen by most of us. The conditions released refugees describe in the hieleras amount to torture and child abuse.

Episode 4: 'Hieleras'

Transcript

Anne Lewis [00:00:01] Hielera.

Jennifer Harbury [00:00:01] The icebox.

Anne Lewis [00:00:04] Who invented that term?

Jennifer Harbury [00:00:05] Migrants did because for them was it's like being in a refrigerator. It's been there for quite a while but people didn't used to spend anywhere near that much time in there. And they, and it was always abusive but now it's insane.

[00:00:34] They turn themselves in you know. Or if they get across the bridge eventually they go to the hielera with their kids. All of them. And the hielera it's the ice box is what it's called and it's the first stop while they get checked out and decisions made where they're going to go. You know detention center or what.

[00:00:54] Right. And the air conditioning is cranked way up. Which is why it's called the hielera or the ice box and they can't tolerate it but all of their blankets and coats and sweaters are taken away from them. They're packed in. They have those ridiculous mylar blankets that give them no heat at all. And because they're all packed on top of each other, the flu rages through. Chicken pox rages through because of the cold. And because they're really little kids and stuff they all come out with...they don't go in sick. They come out with (because of us) horrible respiratory illnesses, coughs, pneumonia, bronchitis, bad strains of flu. I mean it's just terrible. Hungry. Crying.

[00:01:48] As you know people have died and people are suffering. The combination of all those things together is just to make the level of misery and pain and suffering so high. Trump's hope is that people just won't keep coming. What he doesn't understand is that what they're running from is even worse. They don't have a choice. They can't survive back home.

Episode 4: 'Hieleras'

[00:02:31] I hear people often say, "Well why don't they stay and get their own country and make it better?" They've all tried and Central America there's been just a tad of interference by the United States.

Anne Lewis [00:02:51] ***Saber rattling or something.

Jennifer Harbury [00:02:53] ***Saber rattling and a baby.

Anne Lewis [00:02:54] Yeah well.

Jennifer Harbury [00:02:57] I mean I'm just like...that's just obscene.

Gladys [00:03:03] The truth is that it is difficult to be up here. And more you who have spent so much time, and so many months. Waiting. For what. For what. To pass. And you have had patience and have kept your place [in line] and all that. Here you have to have patience. I know that things are happening that should not happen.

Jennifer Harbury [00:03:28] They knew they were going to the hielera straight away and were trying to dress for that. Everyone goes through the hielera. And everyone says it's a nightmare and it's abusive and they all say the same thing. It was horrible but yeah. Paso. So now it's over and we'll just take the next one now we've got a 48 hour trip on a bus to Minnesota. We'll do it. I mean these people can take it. And the question is why do they have to?

[00:04:13] A mom was holding her little girl who had had chickenpox and the pox were dried. But you know the child was just limp. And she had a little bag of food and stuff to go to Boston I guess and some blankets. And she said, "Ya paso," you know the the hielera was terrible but now it's over. And now we're going north. And I said, "It's a long trip and you're going where it is cold but you're gonna get there, huh?" And she said, "Dios quiere, ya voy." And she just kind of set her jaw. You know it's just like *whatever we gotta do. You know I'm going to get my kids there. To safety.* And the dads are just exactly the same.

Episode 4: 'Hieleras'

Anne Lewis [00:04:53] You know what's interesting for me when I began thinking about is maybe Trump's right to be frightened of these people.

Jennifer Harbury [00:05:01] These people are awesome people.

[00:05:05] You know we're not Puritan white guys anymore. I mean that changed, it's supposed to change is called evolution.

Episode 5: From Military Officer to Drug Lord

Episode 5: From Military Officer to Drug Lord

Introduction

When people say that the current removals of workers and families, use of military force, concentration camps, denial of entrance for refugees, snatching of children from the arms of their mothers and fathers are new under the Trump Administration, they have little understanding of our history. It's easy to find examples of all of these – based in the pervasive belief that white America is racially, ethically, and politically superior to other nations and peoples, both within our national boundaries and without.

This podcast explores with Jennifer Harbury why it is that so many refugees flee from Central America even though they know full well the danger of the journey with kidnapping, rape, and physical torment, and the potential for torture, imprisonment, and deportation across our border.

Documented CIA involvement in the countries of the Northern Triangle began in Guatemala in 1954 under President Eisenhower and continued through a UN brokered peace in 1996. In the 1980's the Reagan Administration stationed thousands of U.S. troops to train right-wing rebels in Honduras. In El Salvador, the U.S. trained and funded Atlacatl Battalion killed as many as 1,000 men, women, and children in a village, and the Reagan Administration under a Cold War containment policy ran a war in Guatemala that resulted in an estimated 150,000 civilian deaths, 85% committed by U.S. trained death squads.

Episode 5: From Military Officer to Drug Lord

For a century, the U.S. government has intervened on behalf of the United Fruit Company, coffee companies, mining companies, and right wing dictators against efforts towards self-emancipation and liberation of the mainly indigenous population. The idea of Manifest Destiny (that the U.S. under God should spread democracy and capitalism across the continent) followed by Theodore Roosevelt's 1904 declaration that we are "the international police power" in Latin America, has provided a morally equivocal basis.

Why should we feel responsible for refugees with asylum claims from the Northern Triangle of Central American numbering in the hundreds of thousands?

Tamal refugee to Britain, A. Sivanandan expressed this simply and well. "We are here because you were there."

If we look towards the future, liberal ideas of inclusion and shared humanity, while ethical and correct, will not move us very far against the current administration. Economic programs like the new Marshall plan proposed by Julian Castro, although well intended, seems like a misunderstanding of post World War II Western Europe and current conditions in the Northern Triangle. Add to that real skepticism about how much the U.S. should intervene in the economies of other nations and how much we can and will do to improve conditions for working people in those nations. Instead we could look towards solutions like the priest from Columbia during the Medellín cartel era who proposed legalizing narcotics, all narcotics; or efforts to transform trade deals like CAFTA into something that benefits agricultural workers in their home countries by setting international wage, benefit, and environmental standards; or support for international labor unions; or support for indigenous movements towards liberation and worker control; or even a true pledge that the U.S. military will not be involved in any capacity providing guns and money and training torturers and murderers – shut down the School of the Americas/WHINSEC this November in honor of the 30th Anniversary of the Central American University massacre. The list of solutions could go on and on based on principles of self-determination, self-empowerment, and international law.

Episode 5: From Military Officer to Drug Lord

Transcript

Title [00:00:00] Refugee camp at the edge of the bridge. Matamoros, Mexico

Jennifer Harbury [00:00:03] I'll talk about Guatemala because it's what I know the most about but the pattern is the same in Honduras and Salvador for sure. The Guatemalan military were established to protect the oligarchy's huge plantations. So someone asked for a minimum wage those people get wiped out there's a union project they get wiped out.

[00:00:21] As people try to rise up because their children are starving they raise up the incredible brutality. They will make a woman watch well they pull her baby's fingernails out so that she won't look for her husband anymore. That happened to Rosario Cuevas. During Easter week back in 1985 it was a message to the group, for the disappeared, not to look for their husbands anymore or they would lose their kids.

[00:00:44] In 1954, the C.I.A. ended ten years of democracy in Guatemala. A bloodbath ensued that lasted 42 years. The U.N. Truth Commission reported at least 200,000 killed, 83% Mayan, and estimated 1.5 million refugees.

Episode 5: From Military Officer to Drug Lord

[00:01:03] After the war ended a lot of the higher up military officials especially within the intelligence division had been for a very long time running drugs. They started, you know, just sort of helping out the Colombians with air strips and then went from there. It was very profitable. And they are now high up drug lords in their own right. For those of us that were there in the 80s, what's really noticeable is the same level of brutality. Two women from the Rio Negro massacre were found in the city dump, you know, recently and their teeth had been pulled out and their breasts were cut off. That's drug lords and that's drug lords who were previous military. A lot of those previous military people from the intelligence division were also partners with the CIA called assets. Paid informants. My husband, Efraín Bámaca Velásquez was tortured and killed over a three-year period of time by a team of very high level military intelligence officials, most of whom were trained at the School of the Americas. 12 of them in fact. And many of whom were also being paid by the United States CIA to share intelligence from the different prisoners being tortured, including my husband. Once you work with the CIA they protect you no matter what.

[00:02:21] Tamaulipas, this stretch of northern Mexico on the South Texas border, is really owned by the cartels. This is their business station. Refugees don't have a penny to their name but their relatives up north, if they're kidnapped, they'll go get five to ten thousand dollars to be able to save a child's life or a sister's life or a father's life.

[00:02:44] So the cartels have discovered they're worth five to ten thousand apiece. So they are a primary target for kidnapping. These aren't people up here to panhandle. You know, and to get free into the hospital. I mean, this is madness. I mean no one would make those kinds of trips across Mexico and Central America so that they could buy a new car.

Episode 5: From Military Officer to Drug Lord

[00:03:14] There was one young man who had been told a dozen times he had to join the local gangs or else. He was in the forced recruitment age bracket. That's the favorite time, 15 to 20, right. And when he was 19 or so he was married and had a little child and they came back from and said, "Now you really do have to go with us." And he said I don't want to. It's not the work I want to do. You know I just don't want to. And they said well we'll be back tomorrow and we're going to kill the people closest to you. So he fled that afternoon with a wife and baby got to Laredo, tried to cross several times and was turned back. We finally got the wife and child across and he called home to say I'm about to come back and get you mom and my brother and sister. And the priest answered the phone and said the day you left your mother was bludgeoned to death. So is your brother your little sister, who was 12, was gang raped and she's in a mental hospital. Do not come back. So he crossed over in despair, just in despair...and was put into detention. Prison. And denied bond. Why? I mean he also his wife and child got out. Why wasn't he released? That was a different kind of family separation that was very common. The mom would get out with the kid and the dad stayed in prison. He waited for his hearing, he was denied asylum. It was denied on appeal and he was deported.

[00:04:39] When he got back. I did get a call and he said you know I'm just on the outskirts of the capital now. I'm hiding. But I'm going to try to go back for my sister. I found out she had a baby. She's 12. So I'm going to go back for her and the baby and we're going to try to get somewhere else. And that's the last I ever heard from them.

[00:05:03] What leverage do we have? We could arrest them for drug running. We could extradite them. We could release the files on them for genocide and for drug running and for trafficking. We won't. We're still protecting them. So masses of people are being blown up here again. And we say that they're taking advantage of us.

[00:05:23] To make it safe for them to go home, we have to cough up our former partners and we don't want to because they'll talk about what we did as their partners. So we're protecting our own names too.

Episode 5: From Military Officer to Drug Lord

[00:05:41] Now we have a whole lot of blame in all of that, needless to say. We have a whole lot of responsibility. And I'm not suggesting we all put our head down and just feel bad. I'm suggesting we do something about it. Like obeying the statutes we have, U.S. domestic law, requiring them to be allowed in to apply for asylum. It's common sense. I also suggest that we legalize all drugs as rowdy as that sounds because the profit is so huge that people are willing to carry out acts of extreme barbarity to protect their income.

[00:06:16] Get rid of the monster with a machine gun at the corner of the playground. I mean let's at least do that.

Episode 6: Nazis Among Us

Episode 6: Nazis Among Us

Introduction

I remember the slogan during Vietnam anti-war protests, “Fascism is imperialism turned inwards.” We took that to mean that once we had forced an end to the war (along with the North Vietnamese), the ruling class would turn on U.S. workers for exploitation and profit instead of relatively privileging them. We now know that it is entirely possible to have both fascism and imperialism at the same time. The slogan was probably based on Lenin’s definition of both imperialism and fascism as embodied in “decaying capitalism.” We also had the illusion that capitalism would collapse in on itself (perhaps as early as 1974) giving us the opportunity to build a better world.

We posed the question to Jennifer Harbury: “What is going on with our government -- political opportunism, nativism, or fascism?” Jennifer’s response draws on her family history, refugees from the Netherlands where 70% of the Jewish population was killed during the Holocaust. This webcast concludes the series.

Aimé Césaire from French Martinique wrote in 1955 in his *Discourse on Civilization*

Each time a head is cut off or an eye put out in Vietnam and in France they accept the fact, each time a little girl is raped and in France they accept the fact, each time a Madagascan is tortured and in France they accept the fact, civilization acquires another dead weight, a universal regression takes place, a gangrene sets in, a center of infection begins to spread...

the gestapos are busy, the prisons fill up, the torturers around the racks invent, refine, discuss.

People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: “How strange! But never mind—it’s Nazism, it will pass!”

Episode 6: Nazis Among Us

And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves... that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole of Western, Christian civilization in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack.

We are, without question, in this together. Social change takes place when masses of exploited and oppressed people rise up in solidarity. That remains both possible and necessary, but only with organization, imagination, passion, intellect, culture, and morality. Our relationship with the refugees who petition for asylum at our border and our relationship with the countries where they originate will determine our own future.

Episode 6: Nazis Among Us

Transcript

Title [00:00:00] From the Gateway Bridge. Matamoros, Mexico.

Anne Lewis [00:00:01] I've been trying to figure out what on earth is going on with our government. Is it opportunism? Is it nativism? Is it fascism?

Jennifer Harbury [00:00:11] You know my father was in Holland. Hitler was ranting and raving over in Germany where the best where the Aryan race where no one. It's those dark people over there who have invaded our country we need to drive them out we need to deport them. My father was 11 when he heard that and they all bolted out of there and survived. But you know his other relatives who had fled Germany and arrived in Holland and had left everything behind and money for the boat tickets and they didn't get out of Holland. But he and my aunt and others in the family when they hear Trump talking like that, it gives them nightmares because they all say the same thing. It's like, "We've heard that before." Only in German.

[00:00:53] You know we heard it on the radio at night our father would be listening to it every single night you know trying to gauge what was going to happen.

[00:01:00] We see a white supremacist feeling threatened, trying to scream that we've got to fight back now and you know drive these dark people back to their shithole countries as Trump said. I mean it's absolutely racist in tongue. I know it when I say to people, you know, on the bridges and stuff, you know, "Welcome, my dad was an immigrant too. Like we all are. They'll look at me and be very puzzled by that. And I realize you know the term "immigrant" has become a racial epithet.

[00:01:31] And how can that be?

Episode 6: Nazis Among Us

Anne Lewis [00:01:34] Well I don't think Hitler had a bunch of people coming asking correctly.

Jennifer Harbury [00:01:38] No. No, no one was going there. But it was like, "throw them out." Right.

Anne Lewis [00:01:45] Right.

Jennifer Harbury [00:01:46] Exactly.

Anne Lewis [00:01:46] Pushing people out.

Jennifer Harbury [00:01:46] Yes.

Anne Lewis [00:01:47] What we're doing is...

Jennifer Harbury [00:01:49] ...pushing people out...de facto, you know, by not letting them cross to the port of entry and ask for asylum. We're taking pre-emptive strike where.

[00:02:03] The rage I feel every time I see border patrol guards, customs, U.S. officers pushing people back, Of course with my heritage, right. You know I just see people being shoved back at Ellis Island back to Nazi Germany, right, and I just feel this overwhelming rage.

[00:02:24] I have a young journalist from Sierra Leone who wrote against female genital mutilation and in favor of gay rights and was run out of the country. He got here having worked for the international teams on the Ebola crisis full of positive images of Western ideals and democracy and human rights and stuff...and walked across the bridge in Laredo legally and asked for asylum. And suddenly found himself handcuffs. He's in despair and now he's breaking.

Episode 6: Nazis Among Us

Anne Lewis [00:02:56] Where is he?

Jennifer Harbury [00:02:57] He's in the Laredo the Rio Grande detention center.

Anne Lewis [00:03:04] How long has he been in there?

Jennifer Harbury [00:03:04] Three years.

[00:03:13] All of these places are run by private companies that run the prison systems.

[00:03:19] So when one woman found out on a phone call that her daughter had just been murdered back home, she was crying hysterically. And the other women in the in the dormitory formed a circle around her and they were holding hands and doing a procession and laying hands on her and trying to hold her and stuff to make her feel better. Then the guards came rushing in and screamed, "You know you can't have any physical contact with each other! You stop touching other each other right this minute, we're putting you in the hole for these violations!" And they had to step back and leave the woman crying all alone.

Episode 6: Nazis Among Us

[00:03:54] Those are the kinds of stories that you hear day and night. You know, an older woman who saw her brother hacked to death basically and her son was with her that day and they had moved all over the country trying to get away from the gangs who wanted to kill him because they were witnesses. And she had several smaller children and a new husband. So the whole family fled up here. They were attacked in southern Mexico. They were kidnapped at one point. I visited with her in the Reynosa shelter. And said, "You know it's OK. Now they're not going to take your kids away now. You can try to cross the river." And she said no, too many of the children are drowning. And I know for example that just a little while ago a mom was nursing a baby and had a 2 year old and a 3 year old on the boat and the 3 year old fell in. And she screamed at the boatmen to stop so she could get her child out. And he said, "We don't stop in the river lady," and kept right on going. So the child drowned. So she and many others just said there's nothing worse than going by the river for a small child. You know we're not going to do that. But I'll just wait here as long as I can but I can't even go across the street, we'll be kidnapped. And we talked about what would happen once she got in and tried to ask for asylum.

[00:05:12] And you know that because it's a gang, a lot of the asylum courts say that's not government repression. Yes, it is government repression. And it's not like you can go to the police and ask for protection. She understood she might get deported. And what she decided she was going to do as soon as she got to the United States, she was going to ask her former sister in law to adopt her children. And she was going to try to convince her to do that. And she said that way, if I get deported I'll get killed. But at least I'll know they're safe up here. They won't be mine they won't come back with me but at least I'll know I've found a safe place for them. And this is a large, quiet woman about 40, 45 I guess. And then she looked me straight in the face and said, "Will you adopt some of my kids, if she won't take all of them?"

[00:06:05] You know, I tell a lot of people when they'll say well the crying baby tape was fake...But when this is over what are you going to tell your grandchildren when they ask you how this happened? And people cringe.