

Migrant 'crisis' at the border encapsulates the many challenges that this region faces

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Though often called a “crisis,” what’s happening at the U.S.-Mexico border

can be more accurately described as an ongoing tragedy, a national shame and a violation of human rights. That’s how history will remember it, at least.

The numbers — and images — are stark. We’re seeing record apprehensions of undocumented migrants and refugees, the majority of whom are immediately expelled or deported to uncertain fates. In October, a report by Human Rights First found more than 7,600 cases of people subject to kidnapping, extortion and other crimes after being expelled to Mexico or deported to their home countries.

In September, we all saw the pictures of mounted patrolmen maneuvering their horses and long reins in an attempt to corral Haitian migrants along the Texas border. These photos evoked the ugliness of 19th

century “slave patrols” in the United States, as well as the enslavement of Haitians under French colonial rule in the 18th century.

Less well known is that, so far this year, at least 190 sets of human remains have been found in Arizona’s deserts. Forty-three were found in June, the highest one-month total since July 2010. More than half of the remains were discovered within one week of death — 16 were located in one day.

Republicans say President Biden is to blame for this. But President Trump faced a similar surge in 2018 and 2019 that was only (temporarily) ended by the pandemic. There were near-record numbers of migrants then, too — like when thousands camped out for months at the ports waiting to apply for asylum, or when a 2019 episode in Tijuana on New Year’s Day sent adults and children running, screaming and crying after U.S. border agents fired tear gas.

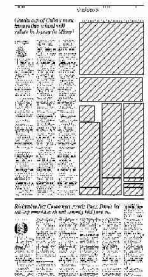
Despite the recent influx, the tragedy of the border has been going on for decades, overseen by both Democratic and Republican administrations. Of the almost 70,000 mi-

grants who died worldwide between 2000 and 2018, about 10,000 perished on the U.S.-Mexico border. Hundreds of thousands more have perished from cartel violence in Mexico since the U.S.-sponsored war on drugs began there in 2006.

These deaths represent a massive failure of U.S. policy. The border is on the front lines of many of the most difficult issues of our time: migration, drug abuse, gun violence, police brutality and corruption and environmental devastation.

But solutions lie at the border, too. They include long-term legal and legislative efforts to decriminalize drugs and migration, as well as limit the sale and transfer of guns and other weapons to Mexico and Central America until human-rights abuses are stopped.

Solving the border’s problems will require some radical rethinking and deep, consistent attention. But it can be done. The model for a secure and peaceful border — one where people and the environment are treated with fairness, dignity and respect — already exists. Border residents, along



with groups like the Southern Border Communities Coalition, are working hard to bring that vision into being. By healing the

wounds of the border, we will heal our own. *Miriam Davidson is author of "The Beloved Border:*

Humanity and Hope in a Contested Land."

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A U.S. Border Patrol agent on horseback uses the reins to try to stop a Haitian migrant from entering an encampment along the Rio Grande.