

HAITIANS HAVE BEEN PUSHED NORTH BY A SUCCESSION OF RACIST LAWS AND POLICIES

Their Story Began Long Before the Bridge

Our work engages many intersectional themes, including human rights, race, migration, climate, and accountability. The below opinion article was written by [S. Priya Morley](#), our Racial Justice Policy Counsel, and [Dominique Day](#), Chair of the UN Working Group on People of African Descent.



Haitian Migrants line up to receive food at a shelter in the Mexican border city of Ciudad Acuña. Photograph appears in [this article from The New Yorker](#) and was taken by Pedro Pardo / AFP / Getty Images.

Recently, Americans were shocked by a “[sudden surge](#)” of Haitian migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border. Many were left aghast at the human rights violations they witnessed in real time – notably mounted U.S. Border Patrol officers [cracking straps like whips](#) at Haitians. Black Americans’ “blood memories” cried out at both this conduct, which mirrored the slave patrols and lynch mobs of American history, and the ease with which government agents are still using these tactics today.

What has not been front and center in these conversations is that these Haitian migrants have already been forced to move through country after country in Latin America due to increasingly restrictive immigration laws and shifting public sentiment. Long before arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border, their search for safety and security has been impacted by anti-Black racism, xenophobia, and other forms

of discrimination. If the Biden Administration is serious about addressing systemic racism and promoting human rights in the region, it must immediately change course in its treatment of these Haitian migrants.



Long before arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border, Haitians' search for safety and security through Latin America has been impacted by anti-Black racism.

Photo appears in this [LA Times article](#) and is credited to the Associated Press.

Most Haitians now arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border originally fled Haiti following the massive 2010 earthquake and the violence, instability, and insecurity that subsequently gripped the country. Some initially went to Brazil, which started granting work visas to Haitians in anticipation of the 2014 FIFA World Cup. After Brazil's economy declined in 2014, exacerbating anti-immigrant sentiment and leading to more restrictive immigration laws, many Haitian migrants were left with no choice but to uproot their families and lives again.

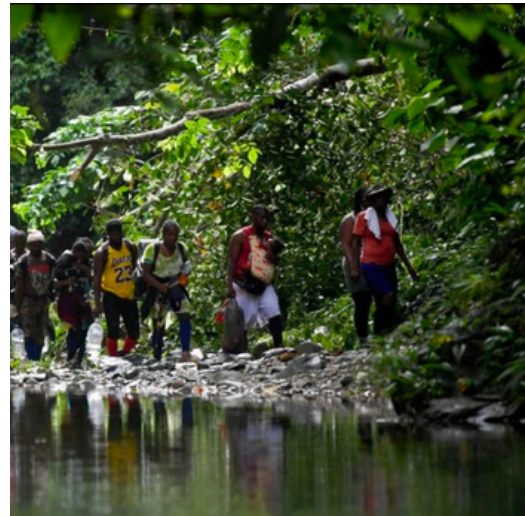
From 2015 to 2018, many Haitians then migrated to Chile. Again, they obtained documentation to reside and work in the country. But as their numbers increased, so did their visibility as Black migrants in a predominantly white country. They faced overtly racist attacks, discrimination and structural barriers that impeded them from finding stable employment or otherwise integrating into Chilean society. In 2018, they were left with precarious immigration status when a right-wing government took power, fueled anti-Black racism, and stopped issuing work authorization to Haitians. Many had to migrate again in search of safety and security. This time many headed to Mexico.

To get from Chile to Mexico, these migrants embarked on a costly and dangerous journey through the Darién Gap, a [particularly harrowing](#) 100 mile stretch of rainforest between Colombia and Panama. When they reached southern Mexico, they had to face a militarized Mexican National Guard deployed in apparent collaboration with the US to deport migrants back to their countries of origin or, [with increasing regularity](#), to Guatemala. In Mexico, as in Brazil and Chile, they

faced daily indignities and structural barriers, the result of [widespread skin color discrimination, anti-Black racism, and xenophobia](#) in that country.

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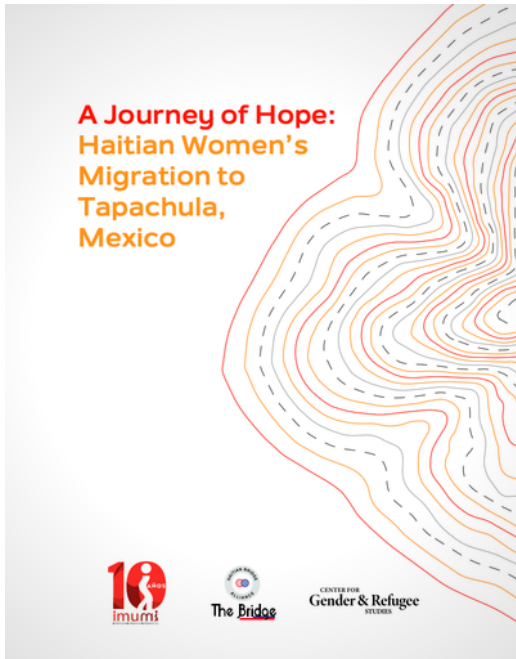
Photo appears in this article from The Atlantic and was taken by Raul Arboleda / AFP / Getty.



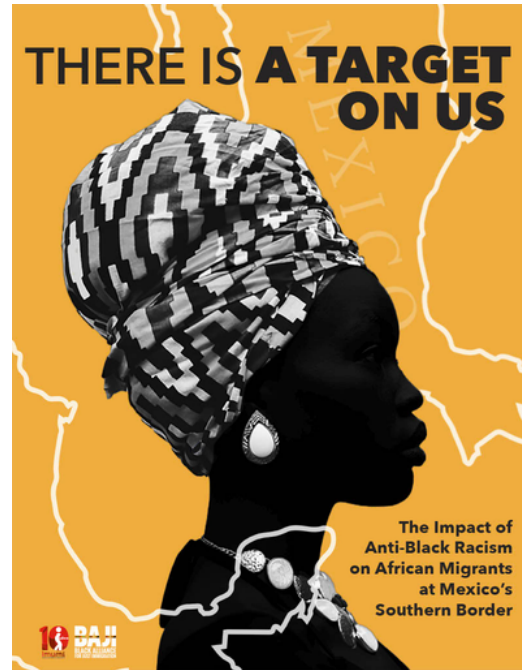
These experiences, along with the [hope](#) of seeking asylum in the United States, led many Haitians to continue north to the US-Mexico border, where they were met with racial violence, deprived of their right to seek asylum, and are being deported – in unprecedented numbers – back to Haiti. This conduct violates international law, the United States’ [treaty obligations](#), and domestic immigration processes. As recently [described](#) by outgoing State Department senior advisor Harold Koh, these practices – and Title 42, the Trump era policy being used to justify them – “violate our legal obligation not to expel or return (“refouler”) individuals who fear persecution, death, or torture, especially migrants fleeing from Haiti.” What’s more, this conduct is a clear and visceral example of the persistent impacts of the U.S.’ racist, colonial, and imperialist history.

The Biden Administration’s rhetoric around race and human rights is little more than a media strategy unless meaningful changes are made. This Administration must start by immediately stopping deportations, revoking Title 42, providing humanitarian assistance, and allowing Haitians and other migrants to seek asylum in accordance with the law.

For more information about the experiences of Haitian and other Black migrants on their journey through Latin America and in Mexico, including racial and gender-based discrimination, see:



Read this [report published by CGRS](#) with a foreword by Promise faculty member [E. Tendayi Achiume](#), UN Special Rapporteur on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Report co-written by S. Priya Morley.



Read this [report published by BAIJ](#), co-written by S. Priya Morley, with a foreword written by [Dominique Day](#), Chair of the UN Working Group on People of African Descent.



Immigration reporter Elizabeth Trovall interviewed S. Priya Morley for [this piece in the Houston Chronicle](#).