



AMERICAS (/TOPIC/AMERICAS)

'I Want to Go Back': In Guatemala, US-Born Kids Struggle After Their Parents' Deportation



By Katya Cengel (/contributor/katya-cengel)

April 13, 2016 | 1:30 pm

Amavilia remembers the United States. She remembers watching *Dora the Explorer* and eating ice cream at a Chinese buffet. She remembers hanging out with friends after school, living in a three-bedroom apartment, and speaking English. She also remembers what relatives told her about her parents' home country of Guatemala.

"They told me [it was] a dangerous place," the 13-year-old says.

Her 10-year-old brother, Edison, mentions a video of Guatemala he once watched, and the "very bad things" it showed — police and people fighting on the street.

"I knew it was ugly," he says of the country where he and his sister, both born in the US, now live.

In 2014, a historic peak of about 68,000 unaccompanied and undocumented children from Central America were apprehended in the US after violence and poverty drove them north. That number is lower today, but of the countries that make up Central America's troubled Northern Triangle region — Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador — Guatemala sends the most children northward. Between October 2015 and January 2016, US Customs and Border Protection reported that 8,329 unaccompanied Guatemalan children were apprehended.

Amavilia and Edison, however, are part of a group of children making the opposite journey: American-born kids who end up back in Guatemala — and in Mexico and other Central American countries — after their undocumented parents are deported from the US. Following nationwide raids begun earlier this year to round up and deport migrants who have been issued court-issued deportation orders, their plight is likely to become more common; as of 2012, about 4.5 million minors born in the US lived with unauthorized immigrant parents.

According to Clara de Reyes, a regional delegate for the National Council of Attention to Guatemalan Migrants (CONAMIGUA) who is working with the children and their mother, Amavilia Maxima, American-born children often face discrimination and bullying after moving south.

"[Other people] will tell them 'Go back to your country, because you're taking the opportunity away from real Guatemalans,'" Reyes says. Amavilia and Edison both had trouble speaking and writing Spanish when they arrived in Guatemala with their parents in 2011, and Maxima says that when she raised the issue with a school official, she was told the kids should go back the US.

Reyes says 50 American children have moved to her region west of Guatemala City since 2009. She has helped them obtain documents and find medical care, and she aided eight of them in returning to family members living in the US. According to CONAMIGUA, no one knows exactly how many American-born children there are in Guatemala, and the US offers no help to them there.

In his 2015 book *Forgotten Citizens: Deportation, Children, and the Making of American Exiles and Orphans*, Luis H. Zayas, dean of the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work, looked at the effects of deportation on dozens of US-born children. The children Zayas studied were all of Mexican descent and fell into three groups: those living in the US under threat of parental deportation, those living in the US following parental deportation, and those living in Mexico following parental deportation.

Related: Escaping Into Prison: The Battle Over Immigrant Mothers and Children Detained by the US (<https://news.vice.com/article/escaping-into-prison-the-battle-over-immigrant-mothers-and-children-detained-by-the-us>)

The children taken to Mexico had more problems with depression and struggled in school, both academically and socially. Their families were also doing worse economically. All of the kids said they intended to come back to America once they turned 18 or finished school, and most wanted to go to college in the US, but Zayas found the rural schools they were attending in Mexico were not preparing them.

"You have future repercussions for US policy when you think about these kids, who return to the US when they come of age — or before," says Dennis Stinchcomb, program manager at the Center for Latin American & Latino Studies at American University in Washington, DC.

A 2013 report by Oakland-based advocacy organization Human Impact Partners on US children whose parents either live under the threat of deportation or have been deported found that the kids faced poorer health, economic, education, and social outcomes. Lili Farhang, co-director of the organization, said children who find themselves amid Central America's worst violence would probably face even greater stress.

"This a population of kids who've been disconnected from a whole host of civic and governmental institutions in the US," she says. "They may have all of these baseline conditions that don't set them up for optimal health in the future."



Delia Junech (right) with her son Brayan Francisco. (Photo by Daniele Volpe)

Children born to Guatemalan parents qualify for Guatemalan citizenship, Rodriguez says. But the process to requires three trips to the capital of Guatemala City. For Maxima, the process was even more complicated. Reyes helped the children obtain documents, but the identification number Amavilia obtained to attend school didn't work, and Amavilia ended up assigned to night school with adults.

Both children have stopped attending school.

Maxima, who raises the children alone — their father left the family following their return to Guatemala — seldom lets them leave the courtyard that surrounds the room where they live since the neighborhood near Antigua is a "red zone," a place of high violence. Maxima is especially strict with Amavilia. Psychologists, government workers, and advocates who work with migrants in Guatemala say that women and girls who return from the north are often considered sexually loose.

"We had two girls last year who were physically abused in school for that reason," Reyes says.

It is quieter in San Jose Calderas, about 40 miles west of Guatemala City, where Delia Junech lives with her six children, two of whom were born in the United States. Junech was on maternity leave from the Postville, Iowa meat packing plant where she and her husband, Francisco, worked when federal agents raided it in 2008. She avoided deportation because she wasn't at work, but Francisco didn't; he was arrested with close to 400 other workers in the historic workplace raid, at the time the largest in US history. Delia Junech eventually chose to join her husband back in Guatemala.

The baby, Brayan Francisco, is now an energetic 7-year-old. His slight 9-year-old sister, Yaritze de Rosario, was also born in the US. Neither remembers their birth country, but Junech remembers the problems they had when she brought them to Guatemala. Yaritze suffered a number of intestinal ailments. Brayan needed immunizations, but because Brayan did not yet have Guatemalan documents, Junech had trouble getting him his shots. However, the biggest difference between the two countries, she says, is in the education systems.

"There you feel like they learn more, they study all day," Junech says. "But here, there's really not much."

Junech, who never made it past second grade, says her older daughter, Paola, who was born in Guatemala, was supposed to enter sixth grade when they returned, but was placed in third grade instead. Paola dropped out a year later. Yaritze has struggled to learn to read and is still in first grade. Junech is considering sending both Yaritze and Brayan back to the US; six months ago, Francisco returned to Iowa to work.

Related: Accusations of Rape and Murder at a Guatemalan Mine Will Finally Be Heard In a Canadian Court (<https://news.vice.com/article/guatemala-lawsuit-against-canadian-based-hudbay-will-finally-see-its-day-in-court>)

Maxima is also planning to send Amavilia and Edison back to the US — their grandfather lives there — though they have both forgotten their English. At CONAMIGUA, Reyes has collected the stories of American-born children with whom she works in a booklet. Amavilia and Edison appear on page 17; under the girl's picture, she is quoted as saying: "The United States is tranquil and pretty.... I want to go back there."

Katya Cengel reported this story with help from an International Reporting Project (IRP) (<http://www.internationalreportingproject.org>) fellowship. Follow her on Twitter: [@kcengel](https://twitter.com/kcengel) (<https://twitter.com/kcengel>)

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Lara_2 · 16 days ago

So, the parents miss having the U.S. school system to feed their kids, provide structure, and fill the kids' day. Once in their home countries, the parents seem to take little responsibility. . . one father running off entirely, and both mothers allowing the kids to drop out of school and hang around. It's not America's responsibility to raise your children.

7 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



expose_them_all · 19 days ago

We can't turn America into their countries - sorry.

7 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



MidwestNorsk → expose_them_all · 11 days ago

Just watch the democRATS try.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → expose_them_all · 18 days ago

'3rd world blacks are like vultures.' (a previous post by you)

Fukk Off, Racist Right Winger TROLL. A most unpretty trail of sh!tt you leave behind you everywhere, Moron.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



William Williams → doroteo arango · 18 days ago

I was told US businesses need unskilled workers to drive down wages I mean remain competitive but it's okay because they pay congress bribes I mean campaign contributions so that makes up for the shrinking middle class and lower wages. And anyone who does not support the race to the bottom 100 percent is totally a racist.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → William Williams · 17 days ago

Yes, you are definitely leading in that 'race to the bottom', Will. And nothing will keep you from winning that race, no matter what. So blow

nothing will keep you from winning that race, no matter what. So blow your man, Donnie Chump a big kiss for us, will yuh PLEASE. And be sure to visit one of his casinos.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Seyrah Kerrigan → doroteo arango · 14 days ago

Their only arguments require racism, hyperbole and false equivalency' we certainly need a final solution for these white supremacists. You cant reason a man out of a decision he wasnt reasoned into. But good ol legal public executions remove him from the equation. Take them all to The Hague.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → Seyrah Kerrigan · 13 days ago

So, are you into @nal fisting as much as I am? Just kinda getting that vibe from you. Maybe we could meet up IRL for a Dorito pie and some Mountain Dew on the rocks ;)

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → Seyrah Kerrigan · 14 days ago

Fine then, Sarah.

'But good ol legal public executions remove him from the equation.'

Let's line up both Clintons, Obomber, Trump, Cheney, and Dubya and impale them all! Make it nasty and brutal, too! Off with their butttts! They showed others no mercy, and no mercy should we show them!

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Rudi → Seyrah Kerrigan · 7 days ago

This is the kind of world that you want to live in ?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



constantthreat · 17 days ago

This "citizen of the world" bullshit needs to stop there are borders for a reason not everyone is the same some are better than others, and we dont want this third world scum here speaking spanish, having a bunch of kids they cannot afford and using up public resources. Trump cannot come soon enough!

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → constantthreat · 13 days ago

If only there was a true communist running for POTUS! I'd jerk it so hard my tiny balls would fall right off!

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → constantthreat · 17 days ago

I resent your obnoxious racist attitude, BlowHard. And it figures that you are part of Trump's klan. You are his perfect bed buddy, in fact.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



vern huffman · 19 days ago

The violence in Central America (and elsewhere) is largely due to the drug prohibition which is a failure and disaster. Well, failure except for cops, pimps, drug dealers and crooked bankers. Anyone who wants drugs anywhere can get them and vicious criminals have become very rich.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



southtpa · 19 days ago

there is no one to blame but the parents. they chose to illegally enter the US. they chose to have children. they chose to keep custody of any US born children. I feel some empathy for the children, but they're bad genetic material so,

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



dg → southtpa · 18 days ago

They couldn't possibly be worse genetically than you, You obviously lack the gene that makes humans humane. Please die before reproducing.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → dg · 18 days ago

He won't. In fact, he is what is known as a total dumbfukk in the USA.... though dumbfukkker might be more accurate a term for him. He's probably got about a dozen kids via the barrack whorres that the US military towns are infested with.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Tom Bremner → doroteo arango · 18 days ago

So can you tell Doritos to make new flavored yet!

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → Tom Bremner · 13 days ago

I'm hoping they make Mountain Dew flavored Doritos! I've been writing letters requesting this to the company head for years but it hasn't happened yet :(

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → Tom Bremner · 18 days ago

Tom, I see that you are already munching on the new dung chips that yo

mama made for you.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Rudi → doroteo arango · 15 days ago

Everybody take a good look at this jerk. You want to deal with him ?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Monica · 16 days ago

Wow, things have changed in the past 15-20yrs! I worked w/ an ObGyn apx 17yrs ago & after much extensive research & working w/ our legal team, found one of his patients (from Mexico) he wanted to protect, as he had been her unborn child's caregiver & advocate while she was working (yes, illegally it turned out) @ a local nursery. The corporate attorneys informed us that if "we" could get her advanced pregnancy to kick in asap (she was due in 3wks, was very young & undernourished, so early delivery was likely), by US law, she could not be deported until the child turned 18yrs old & no longer a dependent to her. Needless to say, Dr worked closely w/ legal & myself, charged her nothing (his focus, as w/ all of his pts, was her & her baby's health) & delivered a perfectly healthy Mexican-American to a teenage mama ... now safe to live in the US, earn wages & support her child. I'm not saying it was right, but that was the law & they knew it ... have an American-born child & you're safe.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



disqus_1sTHMHXFPx · 16 days ago

At the end of the day the parents broke the law. Sad for their kids that the parents would do that to them

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango · 20 days ago

Guatemala is the quintessential, mess up capitalist strong arm (military run) state. It has no independence from US control over its affairs and the future looks very bleak, just like its past has been.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Clint Eastwood → doroteo arango · 20 days ago

"Capitalist strong arm"
Capitalism, Guatemala.
Pick one.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → Clint Eastwood · 18 days ago

Yes, Clint. You are right. Only you know that Guatemala has been a commie country for decades now! Good work!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Isc222 → doroteo arango · 20 days ago



Joe333 → doroteo arango · 20 days ago

Uh huh...and what is your excuse for why they trailed western civilization before they had contact with white people?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



dg → Joe333 · 18 days ago

But they didn't, you dolt. Perhaps you should find time to read between incestuously inbreeding.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → dg · 18 days ago

You can try. But you cannot lead these mules to water if they don't want to go. ...and they don't.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Joe333 · 20 days ago

These guys sound like they are racist against Hispanic people

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Rudi → Joe333 · 15 days ago

You mean illegal immigrants ? You people sound better than the working class to have their wages dragged down by them.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



RedStatePatriot · 7 days ago

I love how I am supposed to feel guilty about this.... well BS, I don't and won't feel guilty. If these children are upset they need to blame there parents for the situation not the US.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



MidwestNorsk · 11 days ago

Boo Hoo. Get the F out you parasites.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango · 18 days ago

Uncle Sam- 'I want to go back into covertly and overtly killing Guatemalans once again.'

'The U.S. Military Group supports other agencies within the U.S. Embassy in counter-drug efforts; coordinates search and rescue support for U.S. military activities in the region; coordinates emergency disaster relief support; and conducts humanitarian and civic assistance exercises in different regions of Guatemala.'

<http://guatemala.usembassy.gov...>

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Rudi → doroteo arango · 15 days ago

Obama you mean ?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango → Rudi · 15 days ago

He certainly did return the US into helping kill Hondurans once again.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



doroteo arango · 15 days ago

Link to imperialist central in Guatemala City...

<http://www.aaccla.org/amchams/...>

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