



## PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN AND OUR FUTURE

A 10-year-old boy just walked past my window, slowly following a butterfly. A minute ago, as I was coming down the hall, I saw a slightly older girl carefully observing the bees at work in the lavender. This season is such a wonderful time for connecting with life. School is out, the books are put away, and now there are many new things to be learned about the other beings who inhabit this planet with us. Every day there are fresh lessons in the garden and the orchard. Now I see a teenager looking at the blossoms on the Olive trees. There will be teenagers all over the world doing exactly the same thing and they have been doing it for centuries!



These things I'm observing are only dreams for young people who are fleeing violence and poverty — or even simple neglect. I learned yesterday of camps of migrants in the Middle East where they only receive water one day a week. The UN has reported that there are more migrants now than at any time in human history, exceeding even the displaced persons following World War II. But the situation that is most painful for many of us is what is happening on our southern

border. The United Nations, congressional members, nonprofit organizations, and even the Inspector General of the agencies acting in my name and your name, all point out the horrible, inhumane, and morally indefensible treatment these children are receiving.

Is this simply a tool of our increasingly authoritarian government to discourage people from seeking asylum in the United States? Well, it is that, I'm afraid, but it is also rather profitable if you happen to be friends of the right people. A few days ago Paul Krugman, an opinion columnist who is also a Nobel prize winner in Economic Sciences, made the following alarming statement,

*There is also money to be made, because the majority of detained migrants are being held in camps run by corporations with close ties to the Republican Party... A couple of months ago John Kelly, Trump's former chief of staff, joined the board of Caliburn International, which runs the infamous Homestead detention center for migrant children.... Every betrayal of American principles also seems, somehow, to produce financial benefits for Trump and his friends.*

Can it be that this is really what the United States has become? Is this how we think it is acceptable to treat children? Sadly it is nothing new.



It has been nine years since Howard Zinn died. For younger readers, he was an outstanding historian and social activist. Shortly before Zinn died he wrote about children in a way that stays with me. But first he warned us to be careful about things that were supposedly done "in the national interest." His study of history and personal war experience found this phrase was usually a veil hiding class interests, and made way for countless actions under this guise. President Truman taking "police action" that killed several million people in Korea. Johnson and Nixon carrying out a war in Indochina where 3 million people died. Reagan invading Granada. Bush attacking Panama and then Iraq, which Clinton bombed over and over again. All of that was before Trump and his red hats.

In the Afterword of Howard Zinn's final revision of *A People's History of the United States* he turns to children, in a way that makes me wonder if this is not the foundation stone of our culture for him.

*What struck me as I began to study history was how nationalist fervor – inculcated from*

*childhood on by pledges of allegiance, national anthems, flag-waving and rhetoric blowing – permeated the educational systems of all countries, including our own. I wonder now how the foreign policies of the United States would look if we wiped out the national boundaries of the world, at least in our minds, and thought of all children everywhere as our own. Then we could never drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, or napalm on Vietnam, or wage war anywhere, because wars, especially in our time, are always wars against children, indeed our children.\**

As I read those words again, I thought that is how to see what's happening at our southern border. We are waging a war against our children, and against the Dreamers who grew up here, and many other wonderful people with whom we are related by nature and by spiritual bonds of fundamental compassion and humanity.

Howard Zinn ended the Afterword with part of Shelley's poem quoted at the beginning of this Reflection. It was something that was recited by women garment workers in New York to one another at the beginning of the 20th century in their fight for decent treatment. Let us hope that we, 119 years later, are able to somehow “Rise like lions after slumber” and save OUR children at the border from more heartless imposed trauma.



What follows is very personal. But I have to assume that in some way readers are also friends. There are a few things that move each of us no matter what circumstances they occur in. It's undoubtedly different for each one of us but for me it has to do with a young child finding herself or himself in an uncertain situation and reaching for a parent's hand. I have felt that way for years. Perhaps the first time was when I was in the fifth grade and we were in the middle of World War II. A mother came to the door of the classroom. My classmate rose from her desk and without saying a word slowly walked to her mother and took her hand. Later we were told that her father had been killed in battle. I will never forget that. Neither will I forget the recent picture of the bodies of Óscar Alberto and his little daughter Valeria in the Rio Grande River. She was still holding onto her father.

It was late on a very cold night many months ago when I first met two young boys. They

were holding on to their parent's hands. I watched the boys grow. The older one was determined to learn English and he did so at a remarkably fast rate. He also expressed himself creatively with art. He loved reading and although he had never seen a computer, he took to it right away — certainly surpassing my ability! What impressed me most was his sensitive caring for other people. When his young brother had to go to the hospital he said, *"I have him in my heart."* I feel like he has the whole world in his heart.



The little brother, who just turned two, has remarkable dexterity. Adults are amazed by his eye-hand coordination. The first time anyone threw a ball to him, he caught it and speedily returned it. His skills have improved from that remarkable moment. It doesn't take much imagination to see this little guy in a Boston Red Sox uniform! But I still remember that tiny hand reaching up for his mother's hand.

Where would these two boys be if on that cold winter night they had been thrust in another direction, separated from their parents, and placed in the trauma producing detention facilities suffering from the actions of our often heartless government?

Yes these two boys who I strongly feel will enrich our society and our world are part of that migration from violence and poverty. By some, such kids are being labeled as dangerous and inferior. They are wrong and such politicians are the very real danger to our society.



I heard a historian remark that the United States made a shift from the common good to individual profit and gain in 1849. It had to do with striking gold in California. I think the historian was making a bit of a stretch but I do believe it is high time we bring compassion into a more prominent place in our politics.

"Compassion" is an interesting word. It's Latin root literally means *"to feel pain with."* That is a lot more important now than the attitude of someone who feels he or she is the center of the universe and approaches every human situation by asking, *"What's in it for me?"*

Timothy O'Brien wrote in a recent biography that Trump's world-view is "eat or be eaten."

Applying that to children brings up images of the sacrifices of children to the ancient god Moloch. The Hebrew bible is filled with condemnations of Moloch. Five in the Book of Leviticus alone! Warnings about Moloch have continued through the ages; John Milton (1608–1674) in *Paradise Lost*, Allen Ginsberg (1926–1994) in *Howl*. Certainly we cannot stand by if an era of Moloch II is unfolding on our southern border!



Blessed are the little hands that reach out for reassurance and the adult hands the make the world a little better — for one person or for the whole planet.

### ***Brother Toby***

\* Quoted from Howard Zinn, *A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES*  
(Harpers - 1999, 2015- New York)