

The impact of the USA on the people of Honduras

Throughout this essay, I will reflect on my year in a rural Honduran village and draw from my experiences to explore the profound and complex impact of the USA on Honduran people.

Background information

The history of US intervention in Central America is one of socioeconomic destabilisation. Since its formation, the USA has worked to retain its position as the most powerful political force in the Americas. In attempts to repress rising political powers in Central America, the USA would often involve itself in civil conflicts, frequently escalating them to points of social breakdown. Each country in Central America has a unique history with the US usually involving wars, US occupation, and military coups. During the Cold War, Central America was carefully monitored by US powers due to its proximity to the USA. The USA wanted to ensure that opposing international powers could not form alliances with their geographical neighbours. The US government has a history of funding civil unrest in Central America by providing arms and funding to violent political groups, leading to social unrest.



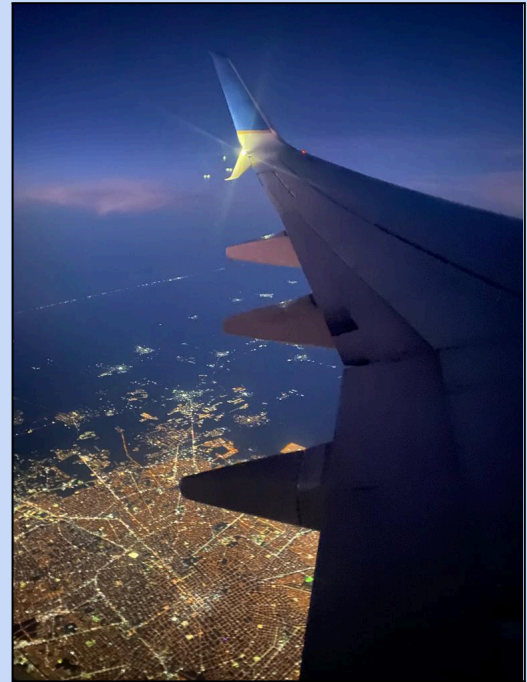
In 2009, the Honduran military ousted their Democratic President in a military coup. The USA determined it to be legitimate, contrary to the United Nations, a decision that is thought to have increased instability and violence within Honduras. During the years after the coup, homicide rates in Honduras rose sharply. Persecution of activists became a more frequent occurrence.

This difficult history has set in motion the social and economic breakdown that nowadays forces many Central American people to flee north to the US. It is estimated that 800,000 to 1 million Honduran people are currently in the US, most of whom are unauthorised.

Having established the complex history of US intervention in Honduras, I want to explore the modern-day dynamic between these two countries using firsthand observations made during my time in Camasca.

My experience

After landing in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in August 2023, we were exhausted from our long journey but very excited for the year ahead. As we navigated the bustling streets of San Pedro Sula, the glaring lights of US brand names illuminated the night, a reminder of the pervasive US influence I would understand more deeply over the next twelve months. We passed a MacDonalds, US hotel chains and I noticed several Star Spangled Banners outside businesses and on billboards. It was on this journey from the airport that I first started to think about the relationship between the US and Honduras and wondered how it affected the Honduran people and their way of life.



During my placement in Camasca, a rural village in southwest Honduras, I soon realised that the influence of the US on Honduran communities extends far beyond commercialism. The deeper impacts, particularly those related to migration and cultural shifts, became increasingly apparent through my interactions with the community.



In Camasca, I worked at a public bilingual school in classes that ranged from preschool to 6th grade. My role involved teaching, assisting the teachers, and tutoring certain students. One-on-one tutoring was a great way to get to know the children better while working on their conversational English skills. These sessions introduced me to the impacts of Honduran migration to the US. In a one-on-one English tutoring session, I asked a 6th grade student “Do your parents have a job?”. The boy told me that

his Mother stayed home while his father worked. When I asked where his father worked, he hesitated before proudly saying, “In Texas, United States”. I hadn't expected this answer but quickly learned that this was normal among Honduran families. Within the school, almost all children had either a parent, an older sibling, or an uncle working in the US.

This was intriguing to me. I had been aware of Mexico - US border crossings through news reports, but had never considered that the makeup of people making these journeys was largely not Mexican, but rather that they had travelled from many countries across Latin America. Low living standards, limited economic opportunities, and unemployment in Honduras force people to journey North in search of a more stable lifestyle. Living in a community in which everyone had a family member who had taken that journey across the border made the subject far more tangible.



With many young Hondurans migrating North, communities are left with ageing populations. Children are left parentless, often cared for by older relatives or family friends. This family separation leaves lasting psychological impacts. There is a sense of loss and disconnection in the communities left behind. Although many migrants send remittances from their US employment, these large sums of money simultaneously support and destabilise local Honduran economies. Economic dependence on the US, while offering financial relief to individuals, ultimately deepens the social and cultural rift within communities like Camasca.

While I was in Camasca, people often assumed that I was from the US, with Americans being the only white people the majority of Hondurans have encountered. After school one day Carlota, the school cleaner, asked me which part of the US I was from. I explained to her that I am European which surprised her. She had asked because she had family friends who had moved to California. I naively asked if they had flown to the US which made her laugh. She told me that most migrants she knew had had to make the journey across the border illegally on foot to avoid issues with border control. I was shocked as she described journeys, often several weeks long, through the desert landscape with little food or water. Through this, I got a better sense of the desperation that some Honduran people feel concerning the economic breakdown of their country, the belief they have in the USA, and the stability they hope to find there.

I assisted in the preschool (3-6 years) class for part of my placement, helping their main teacher, Danelia, with the English class and delivering other activities to the children. As she only spoke Spanish, our communication could have been better but we became great friends and often chatted over lunch once the children had gone home. One day, over our rice and refried beans, we discussed one of the pupils, a four-year-old, who I commented had quickly picked up the English from my classes. "Well that's good" responded Danelia "She'll be using it all the time



soon”. She explained that this student was set to make the expedition to the US in just a few months. I thought about the treacherous journey Carlota had described and imagined how confusing and terrifying that would be for the little girl who had so innocently played with me at recess. This moment emphasised the harsh reality that even the youngest members of the community are affected by migration and economic instability.

In 2023, the US border patrol force encountered 180,000 Hondurans crossing the US-Mexico Southwest border. Through my experience in Camasca, I witnessed firsthand the struggles that force people to move illegally to the US. The “American Dream”, for these migrants, represents a chance at a better life, but it is a goal that often comes at great personal and communal costs. Sadly, recent US government bodies have failed to act in a humanitarian manner towards Central American immigrants when, ironically, the US is partly to blame for the social and economic breakdown that has led to this large-scale migration.



This back-and-forth migration between Honduras and the US in combination with the influence of social media has allowed US culture to reach Honduras, influencing aspects of everyday life. Just as the US historically imposed its political influence on Central America, its cultural dominance today continues to shape the identities and aspirations of young Hondurans.

Honduras celebrated its independence day about a month into my placement in Camasca. It is a beautiful celebration filled with vibrant displays of Honduran culture in the form of dance, music, and dress. It was an honour to have had a part in preparing the children at the school for this special occasion. However, one aspect of the day that stood out to me was a large group of young girls dressed in skimpy US-style cheerleading costumes. Their



presence in the traditional parade was jarring, and I was saddened to hear them express that they felt prettier in these outfits than in the intricate traditional Honduran dresses.

The rising presence of US culture in Honduras leads to the erosion of local traditions and cultural values. Honduran young people are heavily influenced by US Social Media, which shapes their everyday tastes and preferences. Many conversations I had with 10-12-year-old students at the bilingual school were centred around social media. I noticed that younger generations, mainly girls, have the desire to look

American, they dream of the idealised US that they see portrayed through platforms such as TikTok.



One of my proudest achievements during my year away was delivering after-school music lessons to several pupils. Even though we were only working with a half-functioning battered keyboard, some of the kids made impressive progress and it was also a great opportunity for them to practice their English speaking. After one particular keyboard lesson with a 9-year-old student, I was encouraging him to ask me some questions in English when our conversation turned in a way I never would have expected. “Why did you come here?” he questioned. I began my reply with how I wanted to see the world and have new experiences but he interrupted me “Yes, I know” he said “ But why did you come here?”. We continued our conversation like this for a while, going around in circles while the boy got more frustrated. “But why

here?”. I asked him to explain to me in Spanish. He asked me why out of all the countries in the world I would ever want to come to Honduras, much less the small rural village where he had grown up. He couldn't understand why I hadn't gone to the US instead where people “work hard” and have a higher quality of life as a consequence.

This exchange highlighted how pervasive the idealisation of the US is becoming among young Honduran people, a direct result of the cultural infiltration I observed in other aspects of rural village life. Many young Hondurans are aware of better living conditions in the USA and, through the influence of social media and migrating relatives, have built a perception in their heads that they are somehow inferior, simply for being Hondurans.

The impact of the USA on the people of Honduras is profound and complex, influencing nearly every aspect of modern-day Honduran society. Large-scale migration has reshaped the country's demographic, impacting people and communities. Cultural exchanges have altered social norms and values, often at the expense of Honduran traditions. Understanding the complex dynamic between the two countries is crucial for addressing the ongoing systemic issues facing Honduras, and fostering a more sustainable relationship between the two nations and their people.

