**Walls vs principles**

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Consider the limited thinking that produces a concept such as ‘border security’. The essential assumption here is that the United States of America is primarily a physical container – three and a half million square miles of freedom and prosperity, whoopee, but the supply is limited. Sorry, have-nots, we don’t have room for you.

The border agents, presumably, are protecting all the exclusive goodies that constitute America.

With this assumption in place in the American mind, the concept of an ‘open border’ is horrifying, conjuring up a land rush of the planet’s wretched refuse, sort of on the order of the Europeans’ land rush of earlier centuries that displaced the continent’s native inhabitants. (What goes around comes around. Most people have at least a subconscious awareness of this.)

The downside of such thinking has been partially laid bare by the Trump presidency, which, as it began taking children away from asylum-seeking parents at the Mexican border and warehousing the children in places unknown all over the country, triggered large-scale public outrage. No doubt much to their surprise, the bureaucrats in the departments of Justice and Homeland Security set off what can only be called an alarm of violated principle: Ripping families apart is a moral horror. It doesn’t keep us safe, but even if it did in some superficial way, it’s utterly wrong. This is not who we are as a nation.

A remarkable aspect of this phenomenon, unacknowledged by the media, is that the national outrage has been triggered not by some tangible fear – of terrorism, of Russian hackers, of job theft by foreigners – but by compassion. We don’t have to know the mothers and fathers whose children have been snatched in order to grasp their unbearable pain. We don’t have to know the children in order to reel in shock at their kidnapping and imprisonment.

Something far larger is at work here – a sense not merely of responsibility but of connectedness that transcends the concept of national borders. Because of it, an inhumane policy has been interrupted. The last time the U.S. government was held accountable to a transcendent principle – to compassionate sanity – and forced to change its behavior may well have been the mid-’70s, when it pulled out of Vietnam.

Since then, the principle of global connectedness as a governing force has been in slow retreat, back into irrelevance and cliché. The Reagan counterrevolution was a revolution of fear – of Commies and criminals and welfare queens. George H.W. Bush did a quick invasion of Iraq and defeated “Vietnam syndrome,” i.e., the public aversion to war. Bill Clinton strengthened the prison-industrial complex. And then along came W ... and permanent war was underway. Barack Obama, the candidate of hope and change, didn’t change this.

But now the Electoral College has bequeathed us Donald Trump, who, as the face of America, has proven far more able to reveal the truth of who we are than his predecessors were. Whatever abuses occurred at the border under previous administrations did not, for instance, have this sort of news value:

“Numerous sworn testimonies in court affidavits indicated children at Shiloh (a Texas facility holding immigrant children) were regularly given psychotropic medication without the proper parental consent. Sometimes,” the Washington Post recently reported, “they were told these were vitamins”.

“In an April 16 court filing, lawyers wrote that ‘psychotropic drugs can seriously and permanently injure children.’

“The importance of oversight when giving psychotropic medications to children is well established,’ the lawyers wrote. ‘Without it, the potential for abuse – including using drugs as “chemical straitjackets” to control children, rather than to treat actual mental health needs – is unacceptably high.’...

“‘The staff threatened to throw me on the ground and force me to take the medication,” Julio Z testified. ‘I also saw staff throw another youth to the ground, pry his mouth open and force him to take the medicine. .?.?. They told me that if I did not take the medicine I could not leave, that the only way I could get out of Shiloh was if I took the pills.’”

Nobody sings “God Bless America” after reading something like this. But even if the takeaway is nothing more than a partisan smirk – the Trump administration is awful – a principle, raw and basic, emerges: Human lives matter. We can’t cage children or slap them in chemical straitjackets and call it security.

This article has been excerpted from: ‘Border Security: Walls vs. Principles’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org