

January 14, 2024

To the Anthony Shadid Award Committee:

In 1938, the United States outlawed child labor, promising that children would no longer toil long hours in dangerous conditions. Eighty-five years later, Hannah Dreier of The New York Times revealed how America has failed to keep that promise.

Thousands of migrant children, who have been crossing the border alone in record numbers since 2021, are ending up working punishing jobs in all 50 states, Dreier found. [Marcos Cux](#) was 14 when his arm was torn open at a Perdue slaughterhouse. [Carolina Yoc](#), 15, worked to exhaustion packing Cheerios at night. [Juan Ortiz](#), 15, fell to his death his first day as a roofer.

In 20 months of reporting, Dreier found these violations were not limited to a few employers or industries, but had become a new economy of exploitation. She uncovered government failures at every level, from the agencies that were supposed to care for the children, to the inspectors who were supposed to monitor their employers, to the schools that ignored their plight. She held leaders to account, including Susan Rice, President Biden's top domestic policy advisor, and Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra.

Two days after the first article in this six-story series was published, in February, the White House [announced](#) an immediate crackdown. "The New York Times story is heartbreaking and completely unacceptable," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre [said](#). It was just the start of a remarkable wave of impact that led to more support for migrant kids, changes in how child labor laws are enforced, and new [state laws across the country](#). The groundbreaking nature of the reporting was borne out by [widespread media attention](#). More than 1,325 articles cited Dreier's reporting, and it was covered on [every major news network](#). "Bombshell," [said](#) MSNBC.

Without this work, the astonishing scope of this child labor resurgence and the willful ignorance of officials would have stayed hidden. But it was not always clear that we would be able to undertake the project at all. Dreier began in April 2022 with a question: What was happening to the hundreds of thousands of young people who were crossing the border by themselves? Fully reporting out the answer required us to navigate a host of conflicting ethical values.

Documenting harm vs. the risk of further harming vulnerable children: There are few more vulnerable groups than minors living on their own in a strange country. At the outset of this project, we needed to decide whether we would use children's full names and identify their employers. This would be the surest way to help readers connect with the children and give the stories the verisimilitude that leads to change. But children cannot generally consent to being in the newspaper, and their adult sponsors were sometimes more akin to traffickers than guardians.

In discussion with The Times' standards editors and outside experts, we came up with a solution: We would name children and the products they made only after seeking permission from both

their U.S sponsors and their parents back home, as we explained in an [editor's note](#) on our first piece. Dreier tracked down parents in villages with limited phone reception and hired interpreters to communicate with adults who spoke Indigenous languages. In cases where we determined that contacting sponsors would put children at risk, we omitted these young people from our reporting.

Finding several dozen working children we could name with confidence required an unusual depth of reporting. Dreier ultimately [spoke](#) with hundreds of children and traveled to 13 states. Most of those children never appeared directly in the stories; the journalistic value in naming them was not worth the harm it might do.

Bulletproofing reporting vs. avoiding putting extra pressure on children: Dreier confirmed children's ages with government records, but she couldn't rely on the word of children alone to determine what they did at work. For every job named, Dreier assembled detailed proof in ways that didn't require cross-examining kids. She relied on their pay stubs and entry badges, leaked corporate documents, photos from inside plants, export records and interviews with dozens of adult workers. These adults were often undocumented, and we took care to protect their identities.

Exposing labor violations vs. children's need to work: The children in these stories were working because they had to, and we knew our reporting might cost them their jobs. Mindful of this tension, we focused exclusively on children who had already been hurt at work, or who were doing jobs banned for minors because of the high likelihood of injury. We also considered whether specific children would be able to fulfill basic needs including food and housing if they lost their jobs, and omitted some cases for this reason.

Documenting exploitation vs. portraying children as full people, not simple victims: We needed to tell readers how lost and alone these children were. But articles about young people enduring extreme difficulty can often come across as pitying or sensationalistic. To avoid this, we looked for ways to empower the children at the heart of this reporting. We produced a [visual investigation](#) about child roofers that relied on videos shot by the children themselves and highlighted the pride they felt about helping their families. We also gave children an unusual amount of editorial control over their portraits. Many chose to dress in their nicest clothes and pose in places where they felt proud, like church or school.

Others in the industry recognized how The Times walked this delicate line. Longreads named the reporting among the five best investigations of the year, and [said](#), "Dreier's reporting is as human as it is probing, making clear that the children she profiles are far more than tales of adversity or damning statistics. They're *children*."

Children told Dreier they wanted their stories to reach others like them, so we translated the articles into Spanish and they were [covered in 15 Latin American countries](#). We also created a [TikTok](#) and [Instagram](#) version of our roofing investigation, embracing the platforms migrant children use most. Dreier gave Spanish-language interviews on [Telemundo](#) and Jorge Ramos's popular [Univision program](#), which drew more engagement from young workers.

Journalistic neutrality vs. connecting isolated children with help: State and federal law enforcement agencies [opened multiple investigations in response](#) to our reporting. Dreier began receiving calls from investigators who asked for specific information about ongoing child labor abuses. We decided that we could not share information with law enforcement without compromising our journalistic ethics. Instead, some of these inspectors and officials became sources on subsequent stories.

Some children did need urgent help. In these instances, we did not include the children in our stories, and instead flagged them to adults in their communities, including their teachers and pastors. After the stories ran, help poured in from readers. Many of the children obtained work permits allowing them to get safer, legal jobs. One boy [received](#) more than \$40,000 to pay off his debts. [Another](#) was given medical care for his back injury. H.H.S. offered intensive social services to every child named in the series.

Reporting with specificity vs. sources' concerns about breaking confidentiality: It was important to show not only the scope of child labor in the U.S., but also the reasons behind its explosive growth. Dreier relied on people who rarely speak openly—government contractors, investigators on trafficking cases, hiring managers, political appointees and White House staffers—to share what they had seen. This required sources to break confidentiality requirements that apply to human resources matters, internal policy discussions and, most of all, unaccompanied children. As Dreier began publishing these pieces, sourcing became increasingly fraught. Supervisors sent companywide warnings about her. The Department of Labor banned inspectors from speaking with her. Slaughterhouses around the country distributed flyers with her photo. For many sources, speaking even on background would be a fireable offense.

To protect sources, Dreier expanded her reporting by relentlessly chasing every lead. For instance, Dreier interviewed more than 60 government social workers who detailed, in anguish, how they could not help children. For each private meeting mentioned in this reporting, she attempted to speak with everyone who had been present. In the end, no sources lost their jobs as a result of speaking out.

Readers and journalists noticed the attention we dedicated to these thorny ethical issues. Bloomberg named the project among the best journalism of 2023, and [said](#) it showcased “the time and care it takes to do huge investigative projects and earn the trust of subjects.”

For her blistering exposés that revealed the enormity of child labor in the U.S., and the care she took in helping migrant children tell their stories, The New York Times is proud to nominate Hannah Dreier for the Anthony Shadid Award.

Nominator: Kirsten Danis, Story editor, kirsten.danis@nytimes.com

Reporter: Hannah Dreier, hannah.dreier@nytimes.com

Main entry

2/24/23 Alone and Exploited, Migrant Children Fill Brutal Jobs Across the U.S. *

9/19/23 The Kids on the Night Shift *

4/17/23 As Migrant Children Were Put to Work, U.S. Ignored Warnings *

12/14/23 Children Risk Their Lives Building America's Roofs

12/28/23 They're Paid Billions to Root Out Child Labor in the U.S. Why Do They Fail?

12/28/23 Where Migrant Children Are Living, and Often Working, in the U.S.

***Judges: Please consider these three stories most closely**

Impact stories

2/27/23 Biden Administration Plans Crackdown on Migrant Child Labor

9/22/23 Tyson and Perdue Face Child Labor Investigations

3/3/23 Lawmakers Clamor for Action on Child Migrant Labor As Outrage Grows

4/24/23 Susan Rice to Step Down as Biden's Domestic Policy Adviser

7/27/23 Labor Department Denounces Surge in Exploited Migrant Children

Service and reader engagement

3/3/23 Searching for the Faces of Migrant Child Labor

3/10/23 The Daily: A New Child Labor Crisis in America

3/7/23 Spanish-language newsletter: Solos y Explotados

3/12/23 Lesson Plan: A New Child Labor Crisis in America

3/25/23 Editorial: The Dangerous Race to Put More Children to Work

12/14/23 "Ruferito" TikTok video

