Interconnected Imperialism, Policy and People

The Refugee Crisis in the United States

Lauren Marks
Introduction

• The United States’ and Mexican border
  • Transnational Issues of sovereignty, global capitalism, and national security

• 2014 Spike in migration ➔ The Refugee Crisis
  • Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador
  • Economic Strife, Political Instability, Humanitarian Violations

• Then what?
  • Rates have remained high and therefore issues
  • Family separation, increase in violence, inhumane conditions

• That sounds bad. What does it mean?
  • U.S. policy structure is incapable of processing this number of refugees
Historiography

• Scholars agree on origin of migration and unstable policy structure
• Different Approaches
  • Historical Perspective – García, Legal Perspective – Tienda, Social Perspective – Nawyn, Interdisciplinary Perspective - Xòchitl
• Field Still in Progress
• My Research aims to bridge gap between current events, policy, and history by relating U.S. intervention policies to U.S. immigration policies
The extremity of the refugee problem that we have today is a consequence of political, and social failure. Through the evaluation of historical and political context of Latin American, this essay will provide and analysis of the humanitarian emergency that the U.S. is facing today, and show how some are combatting the actions of the government, and working to re-contextualize the cultural, social, and political atmosphere of the boarder by giving a voice to the people.
Historical Context: Focus on Nicaragua and El Salvador

- Why did we Intervene?
  - Fear of Communist Expansion, Manifest Destiny, and the Monroe Doctrine
- Conflicts over land, power and resources in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala turned into decade-long revolutions involving surrounding countries
- Framework for Revolution
- Gunboat diplomacy, U.S. Economic Domination, disparities in wealth
Nicaragua and the Sandinista Revolution

- Shows economic and political role that U.S. Played
- 1979 Sandinista Rebels Overthrew Anastacio Somoza (The U.S. supported dictator) + Big Bad Earthquake
- The Carter, Reagan and the CIA intervene
- The Conrta Scandal

(leftvoice.org, bbc.com)
El Salvador and the 14 Families

- Disparities in wealth and power led to revolution – The 14 Families Oligarchy
- 1932 *La Matanza* began a 40 year-long conflict
- Border conflict with Honduras – The Soccer War
- 14 Families supported Guerilla Death Squads
- Due to fear of Communism Reagan and Bush financially supported 14 Families

(Britannica.com, zinnedproject.org)
Let’s Talk About Asylum

• Who Counts as a Refugee?
• a person who is outside of their country of origin, and who is unable or unwilling to return to that country, and who is unable to attain protection from that country because of “persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.” The person must be of special humanitarian concern to the United States, must not be resettled in another country and be admissible to the U.S. – The INA
How to get Asylum

• Referral for USRAP
  • 3 priorities for consideration
    • 1. cases referred by UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or NGO
    • 2. Groups of Specific Humanitarian Concern
    • 3. Family Reunification Cases

• 2 separate for processes for asylum
  • 1. Affirmative – Those physically in U.S. within 1 year
  • 2. Defensive – Defense process after ICE or CBP detention
Associated Problems

- Timed Procedure but huge backlog. In 2019 there were 83,000 pending cases.
- Average wait time for an immigration hearing is 830 days.
- Humanitarian Issues
- IIRIRA states that all seeking asylum at border points must be detained and they stay there.
- Separation of families and criminal charges – Trump’s “Zero Tolerance Policy.

https://trac.syr.edu/
Detention Centers and Humanitarian and Economic Issues

- Economic Motivation for Continuance of Humanitarian Violations
- Southern Poverty Law Center Study shows that Detention Centers are often privately owned former prisons that were closed for civil rights violations
- Detainees denied due process, medical care, mental healthcare, and subject to physical abuse, segregation, lack of religious accommodation, prevention from outdoor recreation
- Refugees criminalized and dehumanized
- Privately owned detention centers are a billion dollar business who can increase profit by providing less and detaining more
  - CoreCivic, and Geo-Group publically trade stock in the New York Stock Exchange
Detention Centers

(USAToday, thenation.com)
Social and Political Issues

- Strong movement fueled by racist and xenophobic fear that criminalizes immigrants and refugees through rhetoric and language
- First the 1965 “Latino Threat Narrative”
- Next ”The War on Terror” and ”The War on Drugs”
- Now politicians, media and government officials use hate speech as part of their platform
Artists NGOs and Lawyers

- Groups working to provide aid and relief to bridge the gap between the U.S. and Mexico
- Pink Seasaw Instillation
- Lawyers conducting interviews
- NGOs, and Universities Work to Draw Attention
Now What?

- The conditions of the detention centers reflect the gravity of the crisis
- Are the detention centers reflective of concentration camps?
  - Throughout history use of camps reflects severe political unrest, conflict, fear, and humanitarian tragedies that are now tied to the refugee crisis
- Cross-roads
- If policy continues to treat refugees as the “other” the cycle of violence and fear will continue to grow
Thanks for watching!