



Resources for Adults about the Refugee and Immigrant Experience



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Introduction

Do you want to learn more about the refugee experience? Do you want to read firsthand accounts of refugees in the US? Consider reading a book, listening to a podcast, or watching a movie featured on the following pages. All the books and films are intended for adult readers. [See our recommended literature for children and adolescents at refugeeone.org.]

Settings: The themes that run through these stories often tell truths of the refugee or immigrant experience, no matter which countries they come from. Some tell the story of life in a war zone or conflict, flight from a home country, life in a refugee camp, or adjustment to a new home in a faraway country. Check them out from your local library or buy some as a gift.

Recommendations?

Please send book, film or podcast recommendations to volunteer_at_refugeeone_dot_org.

Sources

Images, synopses, and other information for this handout were gathered from Amazon and Google. This list was curated with input from RefugeeOne staff, interns, volunteers, and supporters.

Where to Purchase

We encourage supporting your local booksellers. If you plan to shop on Amazon, consider purchasing through AmazonSmile and selecting RefugeeOne. A portion of your purchase will be donated to us.

About RefugeeOne

As the largest full-service refugee agency in Chicago, RefugeeOne has welcomed more than 18,000 refugees fleeing war, terror, and persecution since 1982. RefugeeOne walks alongside refugees from the moment they land at O'Hare Airport – providing welcome, English classes, furnished homes, job search support, mental health care, after-school programming, and mentors to help refugees integrate into American society. Our ultimate goal is to empower refugee families to achieve self-reliance in as few as 6 to 9 months in the U.S., and to build the foundation for a flourishing life in the years that follow. What's remarkable is how quickly they succeed!

Contact Us

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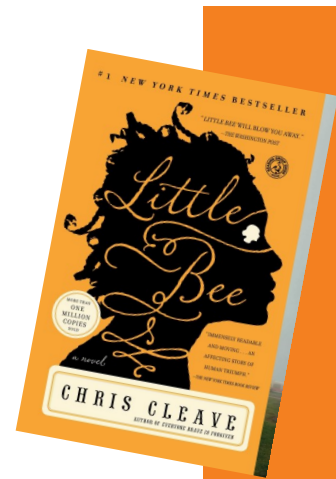
refugeeone.org

Fiction

Little Bee

by Chris Cleave

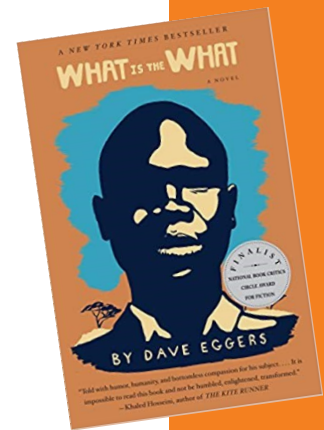
Little Bee is the story of a sixteen-year-old Nigerian girl who is seeking asylum in England after her village is destroyed and her family slaughtered. You need to know something, so we will just say this: This book is extremely funny, but the first scene is horrific. The story starts there, but the book doesn't. And it's what happens afterward that is most important. Once you have read it, you'll want to tell everyone about it. When you do, please don't tell them what happens. The magic is in how it unfolds.



What is the What

by Dave Eggers

This is the epic novel based on the life of Valentino Achak Deng who, along with thousands of other children —the so-called Lost Boys—was forced to leave his village in Sudan at the age of seven and trek hundreds of miles by foot, pursued by militias, government bombers, and wild animals, crossing the deserts of three countries to find freedom. When he finally is resettled in the United States, he finds a life full of promise, but also heartache and myriad new challenges.



The Good Braider

by Terry Farish

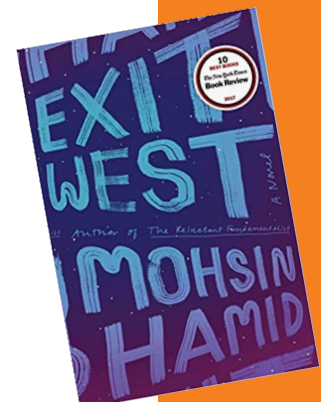
In spare free verse, Viola's strikingly original voice tells the story of her family's journey from war-torn Sudan, to Cairo, and finally to Portland, Maine. Here, she dreams of South Sudan while she tries to navigate the strange world of America—a world that puts her into sharp conflict with her traditional mother who, like Viola, is struggling to braid together the strands of a displaced life.

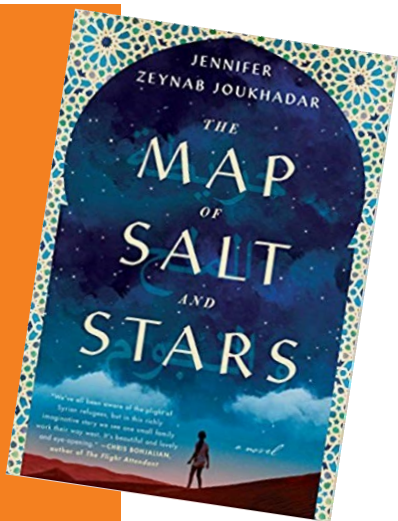


Exit West

by Mohsin Hamid

In a country teetering on the brink of civil war, two young people meet—sensual, fiercely independent Nadia and gentle, restrained Saeed. They embark on a furtive love affair, and are soon cloistered in a premature intimacy by the unrest roiling their city. As the violence escalates, Nadia and Saeed decide that they no longer have a choice. Leaving their homeland and their old lives behind, they find a door and step through.

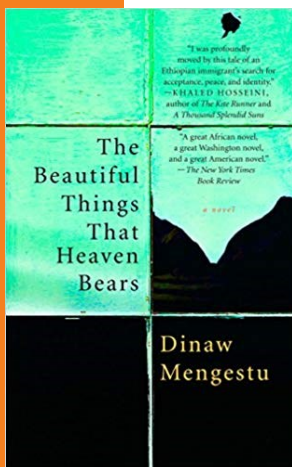




The Map of Salt and Stars

by Zeyn Joukhadar

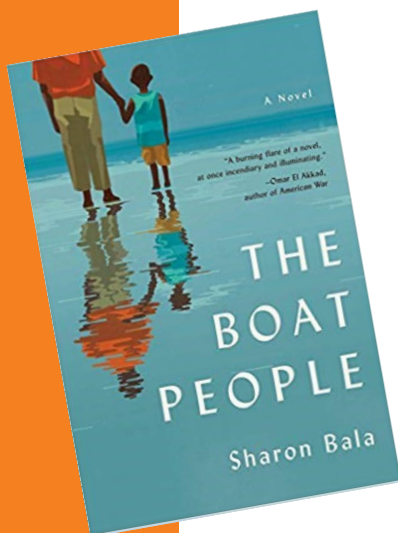
The story of two girls living eight hundred years apart—Nour, a modern-day Syrian refugee seeking safety and Rawiya, a medieval adventurer apprenticed to a legendary mapmaker. Following alternating timelines and a pair of unforgettable heroines coming of age in perilous times, *The Map of Salt and Stars* is the epic story of one girl telling herself the legend of another and learning that, if you listen to your own voice, some things can never be lost.



The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears

by Dinaw Mengestu

Seventeen years ago, Sepha Stephanos fled the Ethiopian Revolution for a new start in the United States. Now he finds himself running a failing grocery store in a poor African-American section of Washington, D.C., his only companions, two fellow African immigrants who share his bitter nostalgia and longing for his home continent. As his environment begins to change, hope comes in the form of a friendship with new neighbors Judith and Naomi. But when a series of racial incidents disturbs the community, Sepha may lose everything all over again.



The Boat People

by Asma Mobin-Uddin

When a rusty cargo ship carrying Mahindan and five hundred fellow refugees from Sri Lanka's bloody civil war reaches Vancouver's shores, the young father thinks he and his young son can finally start a new life. Instead, the group is thrown into a detention processing center, with officials and headlines speculating that these terrorists now pose a threat to Canada's national security. Told through the perspectives of Mahindan; his lawyer, Priya, a second-generation Sri Lankan Canadian who reluctantly represents the refugees; and Grace, a third-generation Japanese Canadian adjudicator who must decide Mahindan's fate as evidence mounts against him, *The Boat People* is a spellbinding and timely novel that provokes a deeply compassionate lens through which to view the current refugee crisis.

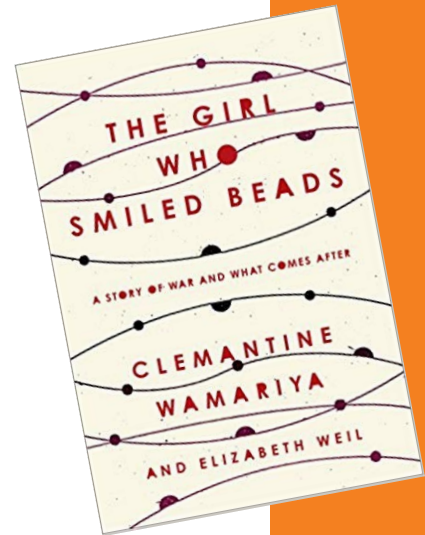
Non-Fiction

AFRICA

The Girl Who Smiled Beads

by Clemantine Wamariya

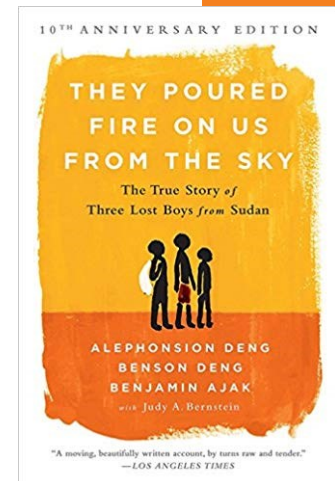
When Clemantine was twelve, she and her sister were granted refugee status in the United States; there, in Chicago, their lives diverged. Though their bond remained unbreakable, Claire, who had for so long protected and provided for Clemantine, was a single mother struggling to make ends meet, while Clemantine was taken in by a family who raised her as their own and seemed to live the American dream. Yet the years of being treated as less than human, of going hungry and seeing death, could not be erased. In *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, Clemantine provokes us to look beyond the label of “victim”.



They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky

by Alephonsion Deng, Benson Deng, and Benjamin Ajak, with Judy A. Bernstein

Between 1987 and 1989, Alepho, Benjamin, and Benson, like tens of thousands of young boys, took flight from the massacres of Sudan's civil war. They became known as the Lost Boys. With little more than the clothes on their backs, sometimes not even that, they streamed out over Sudan in search of refuge. They walked nearly one thousand miles, sustained only by the sheer will to live. *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky* is the three boys' account of that unimaginable journey.

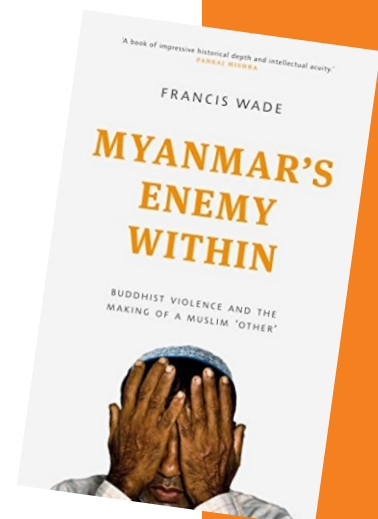


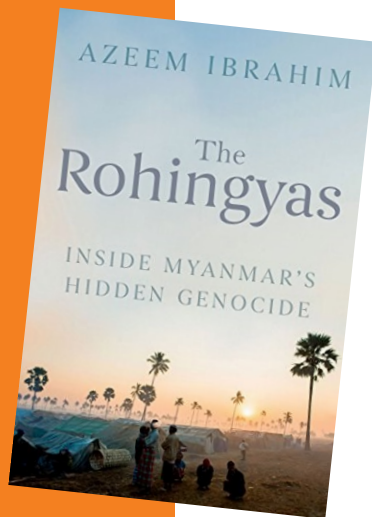
ASIA

Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim 'Other'

by Francis Wade

In June 2012, violence between Buddhists and Muslims erupted in western Myanmar, pointing to a growing divide between religious communities that before had received little attention from the outside world. Attacks on Muslims soon spread across the country. Francis Wade explores how the manipulation of identities by an anxious ruling elite has laid the foundations for mass violence, and how, in Myanmar's case, some of the most respected voices for democracy have turned on the Muslim population at a time when the majority of citizens are beginning to experience freedoms unseen for half a century.



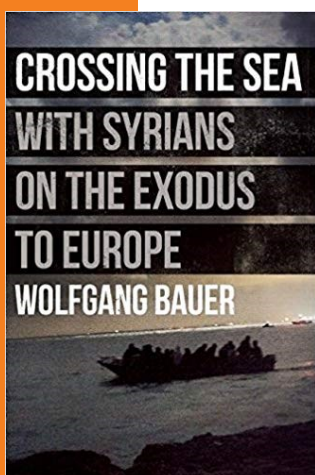


The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide

by Azeem Ibrahim

The Rohingya are a Muslim group who live in Rakhine state (formerly Arakan state) in western Myanmar (Burma), a majority Buddhist country. According to the United Nations, they are one of the most persecuted minorities in the world. The Rohingya face regular violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, extortion, and other abuses, a situation that has been particularly acute since 2012 in the wake of a serious wave of sectarian violence. Rohingya individuals are denied citizenship rights in the country of their birth, and face severe limitations on many aspects of an ordinary life, such as marriage or movement around the country.

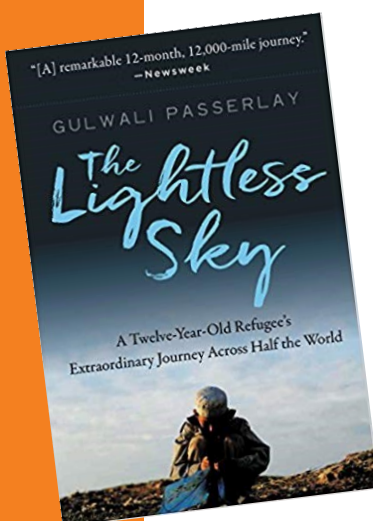
MIDDLE EAST



Crossing the Sea: With Syrians on the Exodus to Europe

by Wolfgang Bauer

Journalist Wolfgang Bauer and photographer Stanislav Krupar posed as English teachers in 2014, they were direct witnesses to the brutality of smuggler gangs, the processes of detainment and deportation, the dangers of sea-crossing on rickety boats, and the final furtive journey from Egypt through Europe. Combining their own travels with other eyewitness accounts, *Crossing the Sea* brings to life both the systemic problems and the individual faces behind the crisis.



The Lightless Sky

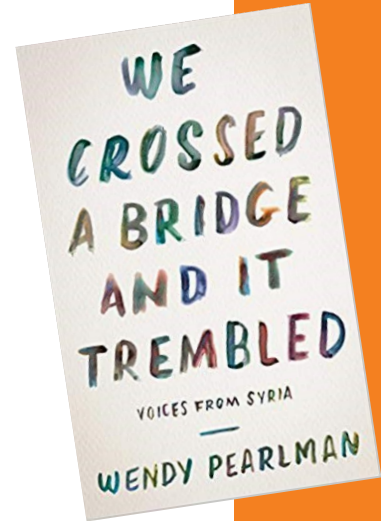
by Gulwali Passarlay

In 2006, after his father was killed, Gulwali Passarlay was caught between the Taliban who wanted to recruit him, and the Americans who wanted to use him. To protect her son, Gulwali's mother sent him away. Over the course of twelve harrowing months, Gulwali endured imprisonment, hunger, cruelty, brutality, loneliness, and terror—and nearly drowned crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Eventually granted asylum in England, Gulwali won a place at a top university, and was chosen to help carry the Olympic Torch in the 2012 London Games. In *The Lightless Sky*, Gulwali recalls his remarkable experience and offers a firsthand look.

We Crossed a Bridge and it Trembled

by Wendy Pearlman

Against the backdrop of the wave of demonstrations known as the Arab Spring, in 2011 hundreds of thousands of Syrians took to the streets demanding freedom, democracy and human rights. The government's ferocious response sparked a brutal civil war that has escalated into the worst humanitarian catastrophe of our times. Yet despite all the reporting, the video, and the wrenching photography, the stories of ordinary Syrians remain unheard. Based on interviews with hundreds of displaced Syrians conducted over four years across the Middle East and Europe, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled* is a mosaic of testimonials from the frontlines.

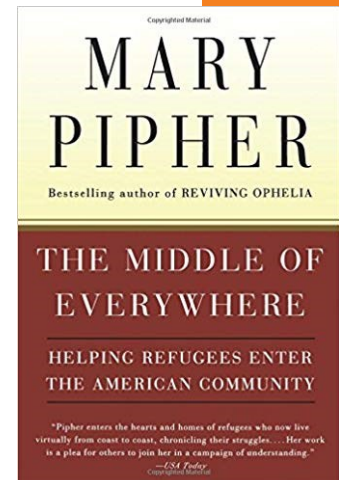


REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

The Middle of Everywhere: Helping Refugees Enter the American Community

by Mary Pipher

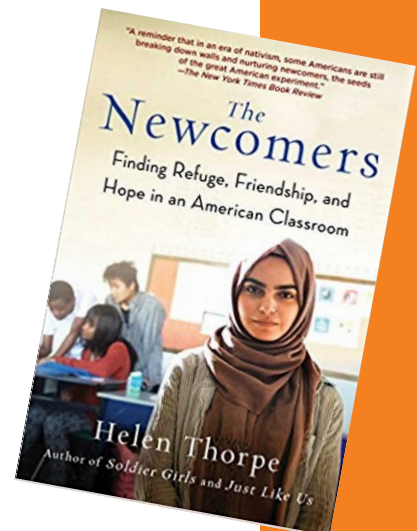
This book connects us with the newest members of the American family--refugees. In cities all over the country, refugees arrive daily. Lost Boys from Sudan, survivors from Kosovo, families fleeing Afghanistan and Vietnam: they come with nothing but the desire to experience the American dream. Their endurance in the face of tragedy and their ability to hold on to the virtues of family, love, and joy are a lesson for Americans. *The Middle of Everywhere* moves beyond the headlines and into the homes of refugees from around the world.

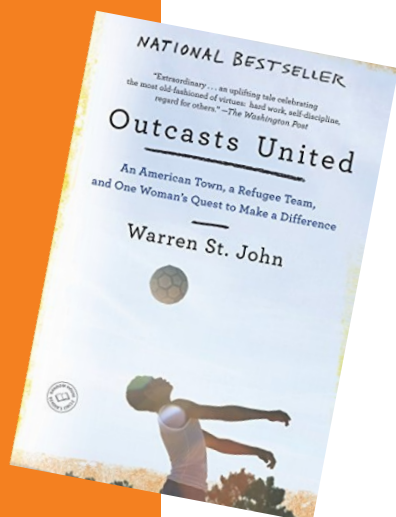


The Newcomers

by Helen Thorpe

The Newcomers follows the lives of 22 immigrant teenagers throughout the course of the 2015-2016 school year as they land at South High School in Denver, Colorado. These newcomers, from 14 to 19 years old, come from nations convulsed by drought or famine or war. Many come directly from refugee camps. Some arrive alone, having left or lost every other member of their original family. At the center of their story is Mr. Williams, their dedicated and endlessly resourceful teacher of English Language Acquisition. With the US at a political crossroads around questions of immigration, multiculturalism, and America's role on the global stage, Thorpe presents a fresh and nuanced perspective.

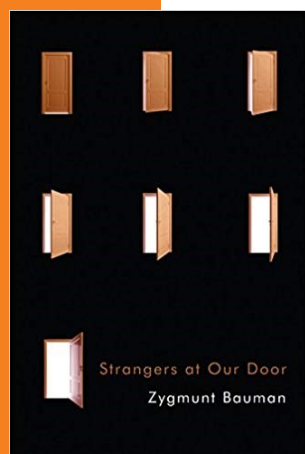




Outcasts United: An American Town, A Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference

by Warren St. John

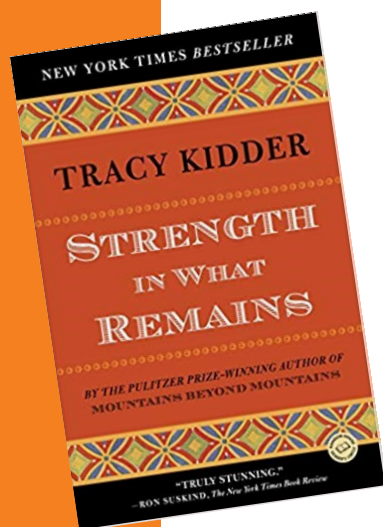
Clarkston, GA was designated a refugee settlement center in the 1990s. Suddenly Clarkston's streets were filled with women wearing the hijab, the smells of cumin and curry, and kids of all colors playing soccer in any open space they could find. Outcasts United follows a pivotal season in the life of the Fugees, a soccer team made up of refugee children, and their coach and founder, Luma Mufleh. Coach Luma relentlessly drives her players to success on the soccer field while supporting them in the face of a series of daunting challenges.



Strangers at Our Door

by Zygmunt Bauman

In this short book Zygmunt Bauman dissects the present-day migration panic. He shows how politicians have exploited fears and anxieties that have become widespread, especially among those who have already lost so much - the disinherited and the poor. But he argues that the policy of mutual separation, of building walls rather than bridges, is misguided. It may bring some short-term reassurance but it is doomed to fail in the long run. We are faced with a crisis of humanity, and the only exit from this crisis is to recognize our growing interdependence as a species and to find new ways to live together in solidarity and cooperation, amidst strangers who may hold opinions and preferences different from our own.

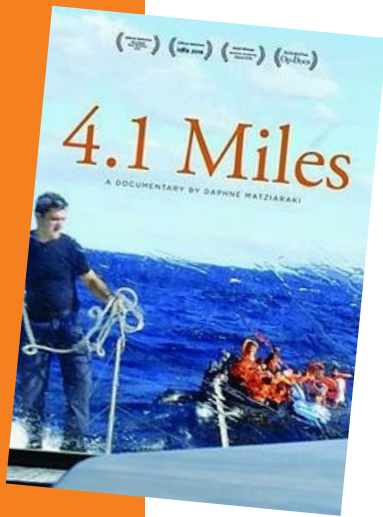


Strength in What Remains

by Tracey Kidder

In *Strength in What Remains*, Tracy Kidder gives us the story of one man's inspiring American journey and of the ordinary people who helped him. Deo arrives in the United States from Burundi in search of a new life. Having survived a civil war and genocide, he lands at JFK airport with little money, knowing no one. He survives by delivering groceries, living in Central Park, and learning English by reading dictionaries in bookstores. Then Deo begins to meet the strangers who will change his life, pointing him eventually in the direction of Columbia University, medical school, and a life devoted to healing. Kidder breaks new ground in telling this unforgettable story as he travels with Deo back over a turbulent life and shows us what it means to be fully human.

Films



4.1 Miles

A film by Daphne Matziaraki, NYT Op-Docs

4.1 Miles follows a Hellenic Coast Guard captain on a small Greek island that is suddenly charged with saving thousands of refugees from drowning at sea during the European migration crisis. The short is an intimate close-up portrait that gives viewers hope for humanity. (Documentary)

Watch: YouTube, POV, New York Times Op-Docs



Fire at Sea

A film by Gianfranco Rosi

Fire at Sea takes place in Lampedusa, a remote Mediterranean island that has become a major entry point for refugees into Europe. Director Gianfranco Rosi forgoes narration, commentary and interviews, allowing the viewer to fully engage in the cinematic artistry and a rich cast of characters. Fire At Sea is a beautifully rendered microcosm of a humanitarian crisis. (Documentary)

Watch: Netflix, Amazon, Google Play, YouTube Movies, iTunes



God Grew Tired of Us

A film by Christopher Dillon Quinn and Tommy Walker

During the second Sudanese Civil War, from 1983-2005, two million people died and four million more were displaced. God Grew Tired Of Us chronicles the arduous journey of three young men, John Bul Dau, Daniel Pach and Panther Bior, who walked a thousand miles to escape their war-ridden homeland and ultimately arrived in the United States as refugees in 2001. (Documentary)

Watch: Amazon, Google Play, YouTube Movies, iTunes

The Good Lie

A film by Philippe Falardeau

After their village is destroyed and their parents killed by Northern militia, Sudanese orphans Theo, his siblings and other survivors make a difficult journey to a refugee camp in Kenya. Thirteen years later, the group gets the chance to settle in the U.S. They are met in Kansas by Carrie Davis (Reese Witherspoon), who has been charged with finding them jobs. However, seeing how adrift they are in 20th-century America, Carrie endeavors to help them in rebuilding their shattered lives. (Feature Film)

Watch: Google Play, YouTube Movies, iTunes



The Good Postman

A Film by Tonislav Hristov

The Good Postman follows a postman's mayoral run on a platform of welcoming refugees into his Bulgarian border town, Great Dervent, with only 38 elderly residents. His opposition includes Halachev, who wants to prevent refugees from taking jobs, as well as the current mayor, a woman named Vesa, who is amusingly indifferent to both men's pursuits. (Documentary)

Watch: Amazon, Google Play, YouTube Movies



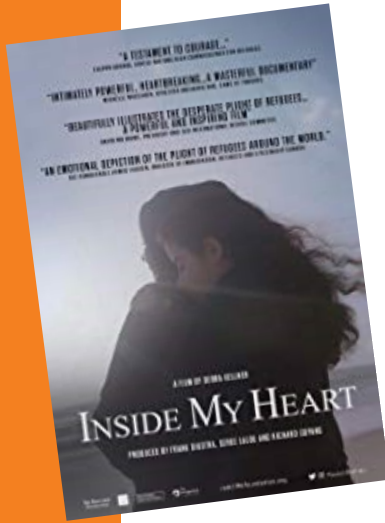
Human Flow

A Film by Ai Weiwei

While many other films follow individual, smaller stories, Human Flow stretches across the globe through 23 countries. The film follows a chain of urgent human stories that elucidates both the staggering scale of the refugee crisis and its profoundly personal human impact. For Ai Weiwei, "the purpose [of the documentary] is to show it to people of influence, people who are in a position to help and who have a responsibility to help." (Documentary)

Watch: Netflix, Google Play, YouTube Movies



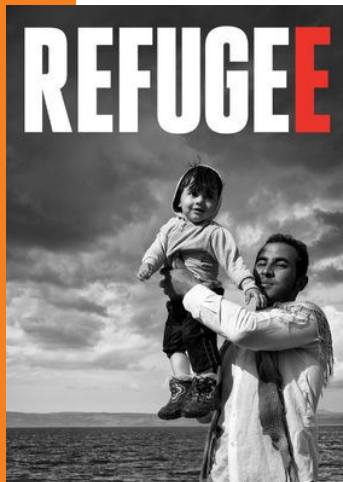


Inside My Heart

A film by Debra Kellner

This film follows the lives of three families forced to flee war-torn Syria and Afghanistan, seeking safe harbor on foreign shores. In the wake of witnessing unthinkable atrocities and having the lives they've known wrested away, these people – mothers, fathers, sons and daughters – exhibit remarkable resilience as they fight for survival. The fly-on-the-wall techniques utilized in the film allow us to witness the families' frustrations over the course of three years and better understand the hopes they have for their children. Director Debra Kellner delivers a vital reminder about the families and individuals who have been swept up in a global crisis that has seen more than 68 million people driven from their homes. (Documentary)

Watch: Amazon, Starz



Refugee

A film by Clementine Malpas and Leslie Knott

Five acclaimed photographers travel the world to provide a detailed inside into the difficult conditions face by refugees who dream of a better life. This short documentary follows these photographers and their subjects in Colombia, Cameroon, Greece, Croatia and Slovenia, Germany, Myanmar, and the US.

Watch: Netflix



Turtles Can Fly

A film by Bahman Ghobadi

In a Kurdish refugee camp in 2003, residents await the U.S. invasion of Iraq, hoping for Saddam's defeat but fearing a violent aftermath. Satellite (Soran Ebrahim) organizes children into work gangs, disarming and selling land mines to arms dealers. Satellite falls for Agrin (Avaz Latif), who comes to the camp with one-armed brother Hengov (Hireh Feysal Rahman) and baby brother Riga (Abdol Rahman Karim). As the invasion starts, Satellite looks for a satellite dish so the camp can watch the war. (Feature Film)

Watch: Amazon

Podcasts and other Media

Displaced (series)

International Rescue Committee

Grant Gordon and Ravi Gurumurthy from the International Rescue Committee take a deep dive on three major themes: the future of war, refugee resettlement, and displacement from climate change. Each theme will examine the implications for crisis and displacement, dive into the solutions for these issues, and talk with those most affected by these changes.

<https://www.rescue.org/displaced>

Abdi and the Golden Ticket

This American Life, July 3, 2015

A story about someone who's desperately trying to make it to the United States and become an American. Abdi is a Somali refugee living in Kenya and gets the luckiest break of his life: he wins a lottery that puts him on a short list for a U.S. visa. This is his ticket out. But then police start raiding his neighborhood, targeting refugees.

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/560/abdi-and-the-golden-ticket>

Are We There Yet? & Don't Have to Live Like a Refugee (2 part series)

This American Life, July 29 & August 5, 2016

A bunch of us from our show went to refugee camps all over Greece. We found people falling in love, kids mad at their parents for dragging them to Europe, women doing their laundry in a baseball stadium locker room, and hundreds of people living at a gas station—sitting next to the pumps, smoking. We hear what that's really like. In part two, we return to Greece where we meet a couple who fell in love even though they weren't expecting it, and even though her family didn't approve. We also meet a shopkeeper in a camp who's running what amounts to a cigarette charity.

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/592/are-we-there-yet>

Refugees Welcome

A collection of TED Talks

Not since World War II have so many people been forcibly displaced by war and persecution. These twelve talks, ranging between 5 and 25 minutes, address why it's important to help refugees thrive, and personal stories of starting over.

https://www.ted.com/playlists/294/refugees_welcome

