

#1439 Power, Policies and Prejudice in a World of Refugees

[00:00:00] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left Podcast* in which we shall take a look at the slow motion disaster that is the worst worldwide refugee crisis. We start with the recent focus on Afghan refugees fleeing their country in the wake of America's 20 year war before expanding the view to American and European policies toward asylum seekers from around the world.

Clips today are from *Democracy Now!*, *All In with Chris Hayes*, *VOX*, *Art and Ideas*, the *PBS [00:00:30] News Hour*, *Vlogbrothers*, *the Documentary Podcast*, and *In the Thick*.

[00:00:37] **AMY GOODMAN:** In response to the Taliban's takeover, of Afghanistan president Biden has allocated half a billion dollars in new funds, for relocating Afghan refugees, including those who applied. for Special immigrant visas known as SIVs.

The U.S. had already vowed to help evacuate over 80,000 Afghan civilians who qualify for these [00:01:00] visas and risk retribution from the Taliban, such as translators and interpreters for the U.S. military or NATO. There's already a backlog of more than 17,000 Afghan nationals. 53,000 of their family members awaiting visa approval.

For more. We go to Manoj Govindaiah. He is the director of policy and government affairs. at The refugee and immigrant center for Education and legal services known as RAICES, which has resettled more than 600 Afghan refugees since 2017, including [00:01:30] 116 this year among them 79 kids and a family of 10 just last night.

Welcome to democracy. Now, Manoj, start off by saying what is happening. You're talking. about Hundreds, the number of people who are trying to get out of Afghanistan right now are in the thousands, perhaps the tens of thousands.

[00:01:51] **MANOJ GOVINDAIAH:** Thank you so much for having me, Amy. yeah, I mean, we, are talking about thousands of people who are trying to flee Afghanistan about [00:02:00] 18,000 to 20,000 have applied for something called special immigrant visas SIVs, which are available to Afghan citizens who provided valuable and faithful service.

To the United States, government or contractors to support their efforts during the U.S.-led war. the average processing time for this visa is over 800 days. So it takes several years. This process, and it involves [00:02:30] all sorts of security checks and background checks and letters of support from us military commanders that confirm an individual's assistance, you know, all sorts of, documents that need to be provided, in order for someone to apply for this visa and make their way to the United States with permanent residency and eventually be able to bring their family.

over. Now, of course, if there's 18,000 [00:03:00] people who are in the pipeline, we have known for many years, at least 800 days, that there is this number of people who are trying to make their way here, who appear eligible. For permanent residency in the U.S. and yet our government, the administration has taken very few efforts to date to actually support this population, knowing that we are withdrawing from Afghanistan and that this [00:03:30] particular group of people who have provided support to the United States are at serious risk of harm once a different government in this situation.

Now the Taliban take over. In the country. the Biden administration has evacuated, I think, around a couple thousand folks, nearly 2,000, to Fort Lee in Virginia, and has announced that they will be working on evacuating, additional SIV [00:04:00] applicants to other military bases, which is a start for sure.

But, you know, I think the entire process. Could have been this entire backlog and this delay in evacuating, people Could have been handled very differently because we've known, you know, I think Trump announced in February of 2020 that he was going to be withdrawing all troops from Afghanistan.[00:04:30]

so at that moment, we've known that this day is coming and these people are vulnerable.

[00:04:35] **AMY GOODMAN:** Congressman Omar, your family came to the U.S. as Somali refugees. In your book, you so eloquently talk about your growing up, your first eight years in Somalia, talk . About [00:05:00] Somalia. Tell us... you know more than anyone, being in Congress, how little information most people understand about Africa, unless they are from there. And then particularly Somalia, why you left your experience as a refugee which so informs what you do now, working on immigration rights. Talk about your family.

[00:05:17] **REPRESENTATIVE ILHAN OMAR:** Well, my story is uniquely an American story. We have been known as a country of immigrants, there has

been the [00:05:30] arrival of immigrants for a really long time from different parts of the world, but we are now just seeing Somali immigrants, and there's a lot that is not understood, and I thought it was really important for me to write this book and spend a lot of time telling people about the Somalia I grew up in, where there was a lot of warmth.

I had a really happy upbringing up to the age of 8. I grew up in a very [00:06:00] loud, loving family where we didn't really have any ideas of hierarchy. We were all allowed to have the freedom to express ourselves, to own our agency, and I grew up in a household and in a community where music and the arts and, all of [00:06:30] those things were very vibrant.

And the tragedy of living in that and then one day waking up and having the kids that you played with in the streets now carry guns is something that most people don't know, and I wanted to give people an insight of what happens when a society is stable and [00:07:00] is not really nurturing that stability, how everything can disappear in a day. And how someone who had that happy upbringing finds herself in a refugee camp, missing four years of formal education, coming to the United States, getting that golden ticket and opportunity, and overcoming a lot of [00:07:30] the challenges that continue to exist in this country for people who arrive without nothing, and what it means to now have that voice in Congress, bringing attention to all of those disparities that exist here and in countries like Somalia.

[00:07:51] **AMY GOODMAN:** Let me ask you about the issue of refugees. Certainly your experience and immigrant [00:08:00] justice in the United States, groups are now suing the Biden administration over its use of Title 42, that Trump-era policy that allows for the expedited deportation of asylum seekers arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border, citing so-called public health concerns during the pandemic. The Biden administration says it will continue enforcing the policy, which could bar entry to hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers.

Human Rights Watch says over 600,000 [00:08:30] have been expelled from the U.S. under Title 42 since March of 2020, going back through Trump. The lawsuit was filed by the ACLU, RAICES, and Oxfam, among other groups, which denounce Title 42 as cruel, illegal, and a violation of due process rights. Your thoughts, Congressman Omar.

[00:08:53] **REPRESENTATIVE ILHAN OMAR:** I think these Trump-era policies that the [00:09:00] administration chooses to keep in place are inhumane. On a deep, personal level I got emotional just thinking about this right now, because a lot of the people that come to our border are escaping

desperate situations and it's easy for people to judge. It's easy for people to talk about what makes somebody come to the border until they find [00:09:30] themselves there, and I think a lot about what would have happened if Kenya closed its borders to my family when we were fleeing or chose to deport us back. Where would I have been today? And so, for me, it is really important for this administration and for every single person in this country to realize that these policy [00:10:00] choices have consequences.

And we have a moral imperative in, this country to, get our immigration policy right, and make it a more humane system. We have the Citizenship Act that we have been pushing for in Congress that would stabilize the status of 11 million people in this country. We have been working so [00:10:30] hard to try to come up with actual solutions to our immigration crisis, and it is disheartening that instead of people working with us to find a solution, that they do the easy thing that sometimes seems might win you political favor, might [00:11:00] stop some headlines from being written, but chip away at your soul, knowing that you are turning people away who desperately need help, and are coming to this country, knowing that we have been a country that welcomes people and provides opportunities for people.

[00:11:24] **CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN:** Something that might, I think, be worth noting for people just because your family went through this, is just [00:11:30] the level of application, paperwork, vetting, difficulty, hoops, that one jumps through to become a official refugee to the United States is really, really onerous.

This is not an easy process. It's a very long, drawn out process, and I wonder if you think people... there's, I think, some conflating of people presenting for asylum at the Southern border and folks like your family that had to apply from abroad.

[00:11:58] **REPRESENTATIVE ILHAN OMAR:** Right, and I think oftentimes [00:12:00] we forget just how lengthy of a process it is. For my family I would say was one of the shortest processes, it was couple of years, for a lot of families it could be five, six, ten years, some 20 years to go through the process of getting vetted, waiting for a state to be resettled in if you're coming to the United States. It's a really long process.

And as we even talk about [00:12:30] capacity I want to remind people the kind of capacity challenges that we are talking about at the border really doesn't apply to capacity challenges existing with the refugee resettlement program, because there are resettlement agencies that partner with the United States

government that do this processing, that process a lot of the vetting that takes place, and then help families when they get to the United States to get [00:13:00] assimilated into society.

And so those partners have come out and said we have the capacity. We are ready for you not to only bring the 65,000 we've all been having a conversation about since inauguration, but we can even do more than that. And what we want, what we are advocating for, is this administration to keep its promise, what they campaigned on, would they have promised us since inauguration, and what we know to be true in regards to their [00:13:30] policy and what they morally say they believe.

[00:13:33] **CHRIS HAYES - HOST, ALL IN:** This is a personal question, so if you don't want to answer it, you don't have to, but do you remember when your parents told you, or your family told you in Mombasa, that they'd gotten the green light, that you were actually were going to go to the United States?

[00:13:48] **REPRESENTATIVE ILHAN OMAR:** Yeah, it wasn't a conversation with me, but I do remember my grandfather and father talking about us starting the process of relocating to the United States. And I remember there [00:14:00] being a long interview process. I remember as waiting for nearly a year to know if we would get a second interview. Remember going through testing, medical testing, other testing. I remember us going to Nairobi to do more processing work. I remember the long process of orientation. And I remember the long process of waiting to hear if our flight had been scheduled.

So it is not an easy process [00:14:30] and many of the people who are in those refugee camps who have already started the process long ago have been waiting and waiting for their papers to get processed. We hear from so many people in the United States who have family members that they themselves have sponsored, who are asking what is taking so long, when they will be reunited with their family members. This is something that people had high hopes for, something people fought so hard to make sure that this new [00:15:00] administration was going to be able to do. And it's just with desperation and frustration that we are speaking out against the Biden administration in their backtracking on this. And we do applaud them for changing course, and we just want to make sure that they follow through with clear communication on what those numbers are going to be so that we can feel comfortable where those numbers will land.

[00:15:25] **ARCHIVE FOOTAGE:** Outrage outside of detention center in New Jersey today...

the disturbing [00:15:30] images of small children being torn from their parents were troubling enough....

The Trump administration's reportedly weighing their options of housing immigrant children at military bases...

[00:15:38] **AJ CHAVAR - HOST, VOX:** How did the United States get here?

In the last 15 years, America has taken in more refugees than anywhere else in the world. A fraction of those refugees, asylum seekers, have grown in recent years, to the point of overwhelming the current system. And now, the country is at a tipping point.

The legal [00:16:00] definition of a refugee is, someone who isn't able to live safely in their home country, or has a really strong reason to fear that they won't be safe if they stay. Persecution that is racial, religious, political, or national, or, targeting what's called a particular social group.

[00:16:17] **DARA LIND - HOST, VOX:** Who's been persecuted can apply for refugee status in their home country, or in the first country that they flee to, you know, where they might apply in a refugee camp, for example.

[00:16:28] **AJ CHAVAR - HOST, VOX:** An asylee [00:16:30] is a refugee. It's just that they've already arrived at another country, like the United States, and fear going home.

Here's how it works: asylum seekers must fill out the I-589 application, a 12 page form. If that sounds complicated for someone fleeing an oppressive homeland, don't worry. There's a 14 page instruction booklet to help. Both the form and the instructions are only available in English, and the I-589 has to [00:17:00] be filled out in English, or it'll get sent back.

[00:17:03] **DARA LIND - HOST, VOX:** Not every asylum seeker necessarily understands the process, or has the resources to kind of go about it exactly the right way. Customs and border protection itself has been accepting very few people in recent weeks, who are presenting themselves for asylum. So people are waiting to be allowed to set foot in the U. S. And claim asylum for, you know, two weeks.

On bridges in Ciudad Juarez, in the, you know, [00:17:30] in the heat of summer, at a certain point, it starts to seem like the safer option to go in between ports of entry, and risk breaking the law.

[00:17:38] **AJ CHAVAR - HOST, VOX:** If someone enters the United States without papers, they can't even file an asylum application until they convince the government in person that they're in danger at home. This is called "credible fear." They're detained and given at least 48 hours before the credible fear interview. But asylees often must wait much longer.

[00:18:00] If the fear isn't deemed credible an asylum seeker can be deported pretty much immediately, unless they file an appeal. If that fear is deemed credible, or the appeal is successful, they wait for a judge to review their application.

[00:18:15] **DARA LIND - HOST, VOX:** Yeah, this is where the process gets very complicated, depending on the circumstances of the case.

[00:18:20] **AJ CHAVAR - HOST, VOX:** An asylee might have a judge sympathetic to their case, or one with a stricter view. They might end up waiting comfortably with family, or they may be held in a [00:18:30] detention center. And in Spring 2018, they could even have been separated from their children under Trump administration policies.

China has historically had the most applicants for asylum to the United States, and that hasn't changed. But applications from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have increased 234% in the past three years, with more applicants in that time period than the previous 17 years combined. This area is called the [00:19:00] Northern Triangle. Civil wars and political unrest from the 1950s through the 1980s left institutions unstable. Violence, extreme poverty, and crime stemming from drug and gang activity, is widespread.

Asylees fleeing this area aren't responsible for the danger they live in. They're trying to escape it

[00:19:21] **DARA LIND - HOST, VOX:** In the Northern triangle, it's a little more complicated, because instead of talking about persecution by the government, we're talking about, often, persecution by [00:19:30] gangs.

[00:19:30] **AJ CHAVAR - HOST, VOX:** So whether they qualify for asylum is up for interpretation by immigration judges. And all of this is being debated while the current system is straining just to keep up. The backlog of asylum case loads has surged since 2012, and immigration attorneys have cited waits as long as five years.

[00:19:50] **DARA LIND - HOST, VOX:** The Trump administration thinks that the solution here is to make it harder to even pass the initial screening interview. If you think of the asylum system [00:20:00] as a multistage process, which it is, that starts with, you know, asking for and getting a credible fear interview, and ends with finally getting asylum, people are falling off at every stage of that process. Very few people who start by asking for credible fear screenings in the U. S. are ultimately getting their asylum claims approved at the end.

They essentially may be deprived of due process, uh, in trying to get asylum. And so people who do have legitimate persecution [00:20:30] claims are going to get sent back, which, theoretically, is exactly the outcome that this entire system is set up to prevent.

[00:20:38] **DR. HELEN ADAMS:** So it's a hard question to ask. Why did you stay? Why didn't you go? Did you think about going, why didn't you go? Actually sometimes I made a lot of people cry by mistake, because obviously when you move, it's often associated with a big life change, a divorce or a loss of a family member, or your mother throwing you out of the house, or you've lost your job.

So when you ask the question, it's often [00:21:00] quite traumatic sometimes to give the answer. But yeah, people just think through, well, actually, what is it? Okay. What is it that I stay here for? Oh, Because my husband won't leave his mother, you know, or it's it's because the memory of my dead mother is here.

It's often, you know, they're the reasons people choose, but I think Michael would agree, it's actually quite hard to get to the bottom of it. When we give a reason, we give one of many influences on why we move. Maybe the one that we remember the most, or maybe the one that's easiest to tell a stranger, but it's never really the whole story.

[00:21:29] **PROFESSOR MICHAEL COLLYER:** Yeah, I totally [00:21:30] agree with that. So one of the really fascinating things about studying migration is that it's not the migration itself, the actual movement, it's the inevitably you're studying things which are really fundamental to people's lives.

[00:21:40] **DES FITZGERALD - HOST, ART & IDEAS:** I mean, the human element seems so critical. And I think new researchers in these kinds of areas are often quite rightly criticized for working on marginalized communities rather than with them. And Michael, actually your team has actually been working, I think, with migrants in the cities you're studying quite directly. Can you tell us a bit about that?

[00:21:56] **PROFESSOR MICHAEL COLLYER:** We've been conducting a whole range of different community [00:22:00] meetings. We've been doing different sorts of engagement with interviews. We've started on a related project training people to make films and working with them to do participatory films. So they take a lot of the choices around what they film and how they film and how they take control of the story, really, it's the important thing. We've also been working with comics in Somaliland, in Bangladesh, in Sri Lanka and in Zimbabwe, to narrate relatively complex stories in much simpler ways that could be understood in school [00:22:30] classes, for example. They're often useful for communicating with policy makers as well, in that context that, you know, a story that can be told in two pages of comic books comes across a lot more clearly and a lot more quickly than a lot of data and a lot of statistics in many cases.

[00:22:45] **DR. HELEN ADAMS:** I did some research. I wouldn't say as participatory as that, but with refugees in Lebanon, Syrian refugees. And I also used a comic actually, and it was a playwright. He's actually a playwright, wrote the script based on the themes of the research and then an illustrator drew [00:23:00] it.

Going back to this idea of the complexity of human decisions around migration, they captured all those, I think, quite beautifully in the comic in a way that you couldn't do in numbers.

So in some ways they're more simple. In some ways they're able to capture complexity that you couldn't get across in numbers.

[00:23:14] **DES FITZGERALD - HOST, ART & IDEAS:** I suppose if I was to put myself in the place of a policymaker who sometimes has to live in a world that strips away complexity for quite necessary reasons. I mean, how would you see this kind of work in the kinds of research you're doing potentially informing policy decisions, and what would you expect policymakers to be doing based on the [00:23:30] kinds of evidence that you're collecting?

[00:23:31] **DR. HELEN ADAMS:** There are a lot of good people doing a lot of statistical work, you know, a lot of amazing geographers finding data sets on environmental change, finding datasets of intra and inter country mobility and coming up with quite similar conclusions a lot of the time.

In terms of what we're asking people to do, I mean, actually I'm finished us. I'm on the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment and a chapter is about the international dimensions. And one of those sections is about [00:24:00]

migration overseas due to increased extreme weather. And, you know, my recommendation there was that we've got to start looking at potential future receiving countries, maybe not in the short term the UK, but we've got to look at issues like xenophobia, why do we fear people from the outside? And why are we so bad sometimes? Or why does integration, or, you know, you wouldn't say the word, you know, we don't want people to assimilate, but why do those issues of kind of bringing communities together sometimes fail so badly?

[00:24:28] **DES FITZGERALD - HOST, ART & IDEAS:** Would you say, Helen, that the [00:24:30] situation is actually increasing xenophobia?

[00:24:32] **DR. HELEN ADAMS:** I think it's used as a distraction tactic. There's a lot tied up in that question. I think climate migration has got tied up with broader debates around xenophobia at the moment. And I don't think you can analyze them separately. We're in a world where we're closing borders. We're in a world where we're becoming a little bit inward-looking and we're analyzing climate migration in that context.

[00:24:52] **DES FITZGERALD - HOST, ART & IDEAS:** I mean, Michael, maybe this is a moment to open up that term "climate refugee," which is one that has entered, I guess, the policy discourse and that we hear, you know, in [00:25:00] a reasonably frequent basis in the media. Helen has given us reasons to be maybe a bit suspicious of how that term is used. I mean, do you share that or do you think it's doing important work?

[00:25:08] **PROFESSOR MICHAEL COLLYER:** Yeah, I share that entirely. I think the main source of a lot of the suspicion and fear around migration that is at the root of xenophobia is a misunderstanding of the potential for climate migration. So we've seen statistics battered around over the last 20 years about, you know, upwards of 20 million people who be on the move and everybody thinks, well, they're all going to come to Britain.[00:25:30]

And our research shows that, I mean, firstly, as Helen said earlier, people really want to stay where they are, unless they absolutely have to move in the most part. And where people have to move, they tend to go pretty nearby. They don't have the resources to travel internationally. They didn't want to travel internationally. They think that if they go to the nearby city, then maybe if things improve, they can come back to their crops. They want to be close by.

All of these things are I think important to get across in as many ways as we can to show that this isn't something [00:26:00] that we should be afraid of.

It's also another reason to be suspicious of these kinds of statistics. It's incredibly difficult to know when someone has migrated as a result of climate. I mean, ultimately one point that I try and make all the time is that nobody migrates because of climate. Everybody migrates because of a whole range of things which are affected in themselves by climate.

When you speak to someone and say, why did you move? Nobody says, well, I moved because of the climate. They'll say, well, I moved because my crops failed or I moved because my animals died, or I moved because the [00:26:30] land that I was trying to live on with gradually being eaten away by the river. The climate doesn't come into the way people explain their own movement.

In many cases, people move in advance of significant climate change. There's a real complexity to this, which means that people aren't moving directly as a result of climate change. It's very difficult to attribute numbers to that sort of complexity of movement. And often as we started with at the beginning, it's not necessarily a question of having to move, but what are the [00:27:00] resources to support alternatives?

And one of the reasons why it's so surprising in this country to see people who are grouped in that climate migrant, climate refugee situation is because we assume that that's something that happens elsewhere, generally, where we don't have the resources to build sea defenses or to respond to irrigation, to agricultural change.

Then that's where people have to move. So it's significantly a question of resources as much as actual choices that people are making.

[00:27:29] **DARA LIND - HOST, VOX:** [00:27:30] The deadliest border crossing in the world is the Mediterranean Sea between Africa and Europe. The first four months of 2015 were the most dangerous yet. In a few cases, migrants are coming from countries that have been dealing with conflict or civil war. The Syrian civil war has created millions of refugees. Often migrants will come from Sub-Saharan Africa, for economic purposes, to Libya. Since Libya has become much less stable itself in the last few years, they have [00:28:00] nowhere to go but north.

If you're a migrant in Sub-Saharan Africa and you want to make it all the way to Lampedusa it costs about \$10,000, that's about 18 years worth of salary. So, what they do is go as far as they can pay and then work for a while in forced labor to the people who are transporting them. At that point, it's no longer a

smuggling. If you're being coerced into labor or being forced into labor, [00:28:30] and you're a victim of human trafficking.

[00:28:31] **UNIDENTIFIED REFUGEE:** Some peoples are trying to try to swim, but they cannot swim. Many people died inside the water. It was very hard.

[00:28:40] **DARA LIND - HOST, VOX:** Often you'll have hundreds of migrants on the ship at once. In one case that got a lot of attention throughout Europe earlier this year, and generated a lot of humanitarian outcry, a boat with 700 migrants on it sank.

[00:28:54] **CECILIA MALMSTRÖM:** The Frontex Plus operation will substitute, take over [00:29:00] Mare Nostrum.

[00:29:00] **DARA LIND - HOST, VOX:** When they took over this operation in the Mediterranean last fall the European Union said that we weren't going to solve the problem unless we tackle the root causes. To address the long-term problem without addressing the short-term solution leaves a lot of people in the dust.

[00:29:18] **FRANS TIMMERANS:** First of all, what will make the situation worse is doing nothing.

[00:29:24] **DARA LIND - HOST, VOX:** In the wake of cases that brought attention to just how deadly the Mediterranean had become, [00:29:30] the European union has decided that it's going to restore some search and rescue in the Mediterranean.

[00:29:36] **UNIDENTIFIED REFUGEE:** I'm going because of Italia. My country is not good, every time it's fighting. Like me, I'm walking and some people tell me if you walk in that walk we're going to kill you. That why I'm fear.

[00:29:46] **DARA LIND - HOST, VOX:** There is a lot of xenophobia going around Europe right now. UK domestic politics have definitely taken an anti-immigrant turn over the last few years, both the conservative party and the [00:30:00] center left labor party have been moving right on the issue of immigration, not just from outside Europe, but even within the EU.

The US may have something to teach Europe about how it views immigrants and how openly xenophobia is expressed and tolerated, but Europe has

something to teach the US about whether or not you can expect a long-term policy solution to pay off immediately, or whether you're leaving people to suffer in the short term.

[00:30:25] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Putting faith in the Mediterranean has always been Russian roulette. [00:30:30] This November has been a particularly wicked month.

The woman from Guinea in west Africa was crying for her six month old son, Joseph. They were among a hundred people on board a dinghy that cast off from Lybia. Most were saved by Spain's Proactiva Open Arms, the only non-profit running a civilian rescue service in the med. Proactiva's director, Riccardo Gatti:

[00:30:54] **RICCARDO GATTI:** The boat totally divided, the two tubes, the floating tube device, [00:31:00] one and the other. All the people directly fell into the sea.

[00:31:04] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Six people died, including baby Joseph.

[00:31:08] **RICCARDO GATTI:** The baby was recovered, but the after some hours the baby stopped, he stopped breathing.

[00:31:15] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** A similar capsized was captured on video by the crew of an aircraft operated by the European border agency, Frontex. These people had set off from Libya towards Italy. Frontex alerted Libyan coast guards who rescued [00:31:30] 102 people, two bodies were recovered.

These migrants could so easily have suffered the fate of another dingy, which earlier capsized off the Libyan coast with the loss of over 70 lives. Speaking from the Libyan port of Misrata, Steve Purbrick of Doctors Without Borders.

[00:31:47] **STEVE PUBRICK:** We're dealing with survivors of a shipwreck, number of which you have gasoline and salt water burns. So nasty chemical burns. In addition to the mental health needs of people who have seen their loved ones drown in front of them, who have [00:32:00] been fighting for the space on the boat that is collapsed as well, in order to save themselves.

[00:32:05] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Some of the victims of the disaster described by Purbrick washed up on beaches

and were found by Libyan fishermen, carrying dreams of a new life in Europe. They'd crossed the Sahara desert to reach the north African coast. But Libya is one of the most dangerous places on earth.

[00:32:21] **STEVE PUBRICK:** We hear numerous cases of abuses, of torture for ransom, as well as other forms of violence. It's directed towards the migrants who have little to no legal protections inside Libya. [00:32:30]

[00:32:30] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** 23 year old Mouliom Souleman was lucky. He was picked up by Doctors Without Borders earlier this year. He's from Cameroon in west Africa, where an insurgency has forced half a million people to flee their homes.

[00:32:44] **MOULIOM SOULEMAN:** We have decided to leave our home because you don't really feel satisfied with home because of war. It's economic, social or political problems, at least I [00:33:00] think Europe should send us a hand. We really need your hand.

[00:33:04] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Europe's five-year long migration crisis has been punctuated with tragedies that only witnesses remember. This was July, 2016 off the Libyan coast. 22 perished after their dinghy sprang a leak. In the haste to get off, the migrants were stepping on the corpses of people who'd been alive an hour earlier. Nine months earlier, an overcrowded boat went down off the Greek island of Lesbos. [00:33:30] More than 70 people are believed to have drowned.

[00:33:32] **UNIDENTIFIED WOMEN:** Seven, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

In the name of God!

There's no--there is no pulse.

[00:33:40] **SONYA SCEATS:** There was an enormous outpouring of public sympathy five years ago, but one of the real problems was that the sympathy didn't translate into empathy.

[00:33:48] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Sonya Skeets runs Freedom From Torture, a London-based nonprofit.

[00:33:52] **SONYA SCEATS:** We are still seeing refugees as others. You know, people not like us, to feel pity for at these particular [00:34:00] moments when our emotions are, are heightened.

[00:34:02] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** As far as non-profits are concerned, the situation in the Mediterranean has deteriorated.

This video leaves no doubt about their stance.

[00:34:10] **ARCHIVE FOOTAGE:** EU governments are doing everything they can to deny their responsibility to those seeking safety. Turning a blind eye to those in distress, leaving people adrift for hours or even days without food, water, or medical attention.

[00:34:24] **HASSIBA HADJ SAHRAOUI:** It's a policy of stopping people at any cost.

[00:34:29] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Sahraoui [00:34:30] is the humanitarian affairs advisor of Doctors Without Borders or MSF. We first met four years ago during a three-week-long assignment aboard the Aquarius, the nonprofit's rescue ship. The Italian government forced the Aquarius out of the Mediterranean. It was replaced by another vessel, Sea Watch 4, but that too has now been impounded by the Italians.

[00:34:53] **HASSIBA HADJ SAHRAOUI:** NSF, since it has been at sea trying to save people who are trying to cross the sea [00:35:00] has been subjected to a campaign of harassment and criminalization of its activities. A campaign of criminalization that is very reminiscent of authoritarian governments, and certainly not of European countries or sensibly committed to the rule of law.

[00:35:19] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Doctors Without Borders and Proactiva accuse the Frontex border force of helping Libyan coast guards to return migrants to inhuman conditions and possible torture. [00:35:30] Frontex denies participating in illegal pushbacks. It says it adheres to international law by alerting the nearest national rescue center when it spots a vessel in distress. And in many cases, that means Libya.

European Commission, the executive arm of the EU, has recently outlined plans for a new migration policy. It proposes fast-tracked screening of potential asylum seekers before they cross external borders. It's an attempt to [00:36:00] discourage people from setting sail in dangerous craft.

But Hannah Berens, director of the Brussels-based Migration Policy Institute, has little confidence that it'll stop people from coming.

[00:36:11] **HANNE BIERENS:** There's so little room to move through these kinds of legal channels, such as resettlement. There are very limited opportunities to come to Europe through legal migration. So these people who are also very desperate, whether it's because they're fleeing persecution or because they're having very little chances to sustain themselves at home, they will [00:36:30] continue to move to Europe. And in the absence of very legal and safe channels, they will have to rely on smugglers and other more criminal networks.

[00:36:39] **MALCOLM BRABANT - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** In a sign of increasing desperation, thousands of Africans trying to reach Europe by avoiding Libya are taking to the Atlantic ocean with its storms and currents. The launching from Senegal in west Africa and aiming for Spain's Canary Islands, a thousand miles away, 17,000 people have made the harrowing journey this year, a tenfold increase from [00:37:00] 2019.

The Spanish authorities have been building emergency camps to cope with the recent influx. Senegalese activists say that clandestine immigration is nothing new, but this year has been catastrophic, with nearly 500 deaths recorded. This week, eight more people were added to that ghastly toll. Found on the shores of the Canaries, the remains were carried on stretchers wrapped in emergency blankets.

There's little doubt the waves will continue to be mass graves, as long as life is so bad at home [00:37:30] that people are prepared to take these kinds of risks to escape.

[00:37:33] **JOHN GREEN - HOST, VLOGBROTHERS:** Let's begin with an old saying, often attributed to that great expert in the field of human evil, Joseph Stalin: "When one man dies, that's a tragedy. When thousands die, that's a statistic."

Large numbers can feel cold and distant, and even kind of comforting, because they don't feel like people. And I think that's one of the reasons much of the world was able to ignore the years-old Syrian refugee crisis until recently.

But then, after thousands of refugees died this year trying to get to Europe, one three-year-old [00:38:00] boy's body washed ashore in Turkey. His name was Alan Kurdi, and he drowned with his five-year-old brother and his mom trying to get to Greece.

His father Abdullah survived, and has now returned to Syria to bury his wife and children. In fact, when offered the opportunity to resettle in another country, Abdullah said, "Now I don't want anything. What was precious, is gone."

To talk about the refugee crisis, we need statistics, but let us not forget what is precious.

So, for the past four and a half years, there has been a horrific civil war in Syria, which began with the hope of the [00:38:30] 2011 Arab Spring Protests. Several dictatorships were toppled during the Arab Spring-- although some have since ended up with new dictators-- but in Syria, long reigning dictator, Bashar al-Assad, has refused to relinquish power, and instead has battled the rebellion with astonishing violence, including torturing children, and gassing his own people with chemical weapons.

So back in 2011, Syria had a population of 22.4 million people. Here's what it looks like today: more than 250,000 people have been killed; about 10.6 million Syrians, less than half the [00:39:00] population still live in their homes; 7.6 million people have been forced to flee within Syria, either moving to refugee camps, or to areas that are for the moment safer; and another 4 million Syrians have left the country entirely.

Of those people, about 1.6 million currently live in Turkey; there are about a million each in Lebanon and Jordan; and there are a few hundred thousand more in Iraq and Egypt.

95% of Syrian refugees live in those countries, and they have been stretched incredibly thin by this refugee crisis. Jordan's population is now 25% refugees. [00:39:30] You've probably seen the huge, sprawling camps in Jordan and Lebanon for refugees.

And everything is completely underfunded, because the UN refugee agency doesn't have nearly enough money to deal with this number of refugees.

And in Turkey, most refugees live in a kind of legal limbo, outside of camps, because Turkey doesn't expel them, but they also aren't allowed to work. So even though many Syrians have good educations, and labor skills, they can't make a living. And so in search of lasting refuge, thousands have turned to Europe.

And they pay smugglers thousands of Euros to get them by a boat [00:40:00] from Turkey, Morocco, or Egypt, to Malta, Southern Italy or Greece's southern islands. Those smugglers are essentially the only people benefiting from Europe's inconsistent, inhumane, and disorganized response to the refugee crisis.

To quote the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, "More effective international cooperation is required to crack down on smugglers, including those operating inside the EU, but in ways that allow for the victims to be protected, but none of these efforts will be effective without opening up more opportunities for people to come legally to Europe and find safety upon arrival."

And [00:40:30] that leads us to a very important distinction between the words "migrant" and "refugee." This has often been called a migrant crisis, but it really isn't, because migrants choose to leave their homes in search of better education, or employment opportunities. Refugees to, again, quote the UNHCR are "Persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution." These are people for whom the denial of asylum has potentially deadly consequences.

And ever since the 1951 refugee commission, refugees have had certain rights under international law. These include the right not to be [00:41:00] returned to their country of origin, if their safety cannot be assured; the right not to be penalized for entering a country illegally, if they request asylum; and the rights to life, security, religious expression, primary education, free access to courts, and equal treatment by taxing authorities.

If a migrant arrives illegally in the European Union, they can be turned around, and in most countries, sent home fairly quickly. But a refugee, and most of the people arriving in Europe right now, are refugees. They have certain rights under international law that all of Europe, and basically all of the world, has [00:41:30] agreed to for the last 65 years.

In short, European countries have no obligations to refugees until those refugees arrive in Europe. But once a refugee is in your country, you have certain legal responsibilities to them. And that's why the boat smuggling has continued.

European governments want to make it difficult for refugees to get to Europe. They benefit when the trip is dangerous. If it were made safe, or easy, there would be far more refugees coming to Europe. The real solution to dramatically increase the number of refugees legally [00:42:00] accepted through non-smuggling routes, like a quota system, well, that stuff's politically unpopular.

But until legal opportunities are available, the smuggling and deaths will continue. To, again, quote the UNHCR, "Thousands of refugee parents are risking the lives of their children on unsafe smuggling boats, primarily because they have no choice."

And this is true, not only for Syrians-- because only about half the people seeking asylum through these sea routes are from Syria; another 12% are from Afghanistan, which was the world's leading producer of refugees for 30 years, until Syria came along; another [00:42:30] 8% are from the Northeast African nation of Eritrea, which has one of the worst human rights records on earth (it's government has been cited by the UN for executions torture, forced labor and systemic rape by government officials).

So about 70% of the people trying to get to Europe are from those three countries. Of course, there are also many migrants trying to get to Europe via these dangerous over-water routes. But most of the people we're hearing about on the news are refugees, and the distinction is incredibly important.

Okay, so we have this massive humanitarian crisis. Who's to blame? [00:43:00] Pretty much everybody. I mean, the Assad regime definitely gets a lot of the blame, but so do Iran, and Russia, and China who are providing direct, or indirect, support to that regime, and doing very little about the resulting refugee crisis. The Arab States of the Gulf, although they've pledged financial support to Syrian refugees have accepted zero-- zero! refugees from Syria.

Australia's refugee record is truly abysmal, and possibly in violation of international law. Canada is accepting 30% fewer refugees than they were a decade ago. And the United [00:43:30] States is to blame as well. We've accepted a tiny number of Syrian refugees, fewer, for instance, than Brazil. And instead of talking seriously about how to address the refugee crisis, our immigration debate has become increasingly racist and irrational.

For instance, you often hear in the U S and Europe, that immigrants are disproportionately likely to commit crimes. But that's simply untrue; a huge body of data says that refugees and first-generation immigrants to the United States commit crimes at a much lower rate than other Americans.

Okay... And then there's Europe.

The truth is, the xenophobic responses to the [00:44:00] refugee crisis seen from some European governments are just shameful. Like, when Hungary's prime minister says that they must keep Muslims out of Europe to "Keep Europe

Christian," he's not just denying the multicultural and multi-religious history of European; He is denying the international law that requires countries to protect and house refugees, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Hank, when discussing refugees, I often hear, "Well, it's not our problem," or "We have to take care of our people," but we are one species, sharing one profoundly interconnected world, [00:44:30] and humans, all humans, are our people. And when the oppressed and marginalized die, because they are oppressed and marginalized, the powerful are at fault.

[00:44:38] **KATY LONG - HOST, THE DOCUMENTARY PODCAST:** Every morning, all across America, school children pledge allegiance to the flag. But here in Cactus, those words have added meaning, because for many, most, of Cactus's families, America was never just a given. For many of these children, Cactus is their lucky break, the first rung on the [00:45:00] American Dream, and a world away from where their lives began.

[00:45:05] **TJ FUNDERBURK:** I knew there was a country named Myanmar, and then it was Burma, but I didn't realise just alone in that country, that's about the size of Texas, there's about five different languages.

[00:45:14] **KATY LONG - HOST, THE DOCUMENTARY PODCAST:** TJ Funderburk is principal of Cactus Elementary.

[00:45:18] **TJ FUNDERBURK:** Then we've had Cuban; we've had Congolese; Haitian; Guatemalan is our biggest influx now.

[00:45:27] **KATY LONG - HOST, THE DOCUMENTARY PODCAST:** Presumably, as well, you know, on top of the [00:45:30] language, there's also religious diversity. I could see some... a few girls, wearing head scarves.

[00:45:36] **TJ FUNDERBURK:** You know, there's a mosque here, which is, you know, you think small Texas town, that's, kind of, a different thing for a lot of folks.

[00:45:47] **KATY LONG - HOST, THE DOCUMENTARY PODCAST:** When I first heard about Cactus's extraordinarily diverse community, I immediately want to know, why? Why do so many refugees and immigrants coming here [00:46:00] to live under bleached skies in a town twice flattened by tornadoes?

You can hear the answer as soon as you arrive, about the same time as you smell the stench of rendered beef fat in the air. Cactus is a meat packing town.

[00:46:16] **KOSHA KOOD:** You see, most of refugees don't have much knowledge in English. They are not educated. So, what they do, they just... They look for places like Cactus so they can have a jobs. Like, we have a plant in here, in Cactus, [00:46:30] JBS. So, what brought them to this place is to work, because most of them are... they, they can find a job that they need. The only thing they can find is a job like this.

So that's a part of my story. I came to Amarillo because I was looking for a job, and because we have a plant in Amarillo called Tyson, and, uh, that's the same thing brought all the people, immigrants to Cactus, because they're looking for jobs.

[00:46:56] **KATY LONG - HOST, THE DOCUMENTARY PODCAST:** Kosha Kood is a pastor at the Cactus African [00:47:00] Church of the Nazarene, and a refugee from South Sudan. And as he explained during my 2018 visit to Cactus, the town and the people are impossible to separate from the huge meat packing plant that sits just the other side of the highway.

Links between refugee resettlement and meatpacking run deep, and not just in Cactus. The reason is simple: meatpacking is paid well. Right now, salaries at the cactus plant [00:47:30] started \$18 an hour. That's two and a half times the minimum wage in Texas.

For workers who don't speak English, and have just 90 days to become self-sufficient after arriving in America, this industry is a lifeline.

But refugees are also a lifeline for JBS and other meat packing plants, because Americans don't want to do these jobs. It's hard and sometimes dangerous work, and even refugees don't want to stay if they can find [00:48:00] better alternatives. JBS is constantly advertising open roles on its Facebook page, even promising four figure referral bonuses.

And so Cactus has developed two different sides, two personalities, two attractions. On one side of the highway, a billion-dollar meat plant. As for the other, Kosha Kood explains.

[00:48:24] **KOSHA KOOD:** And they are also looking for a small place, so they can... so they can just raise their [00:48:30] families. And, uh, an easy place. Cactus is very easy for us.

[00:48:34] **KATY LONG - HOST, THE DOCUMENTARY PODCAST:**
And is that partly because it's a small town, rather than a big city?

[00:48:39] **KOSHA KOOD:** One thing too, is you feel like you're home. When I came over here to Cactus, I feel like I'm out of sea, because when I walk, sometimes I just walk and I see different nationalities. I see my people everywhere, and I see people raising chickens, and hens, and it reminds me of my nation, my country, where I grew up.

And the simplicity, you know, people [00:49:00] are just walking around. If you go to downtown, you will see that. And then you will see people just doing the cultural things. And, uh, it reminds people of their nations, where they came. You identify yourself in them.

[00:49:13] **KATY LONG - HOST, THE DOCUMENTARY PODCAST:**
There's a Somali cafe in Cactus, and a Thai restaurant. But there aren't any pavements, and many of the mobile homes are in a state of disrepair. This is not the white picket fence version of the American Dream.

But, [00:49:30] in another sense, Cactus fits right into that most American of narratives: the idea that, if given the opportunity, the huddled masses will turn into good American citizens. It's this belief that helps to explain another incongruous site, a few blocks away from Cactus Elementary: the brand new buildings of the Cactus Nazareen Ministry, who arrived in 2013, and now run development programs staffed by the kind of white missionaries you [00:50:00] would normally expect to find in Africa, or the far east. Kasha Kood works here.

Phil Anderson is co-director..

[00:50:08] **PHIL ANDERSON:** The world has come to Cactus, Texas. And, as a refugee, as an immigrant, as a migrant worker that's here legally, whatever position that you're in, there are needs that maybe other communities wouldn't have.

And so, when we start really delving into what's out there, uh, [00:50:30] there's a lot of... a lot of need that... that we're trying to meet holistically, even just in, uh, for lack of a better term, "assimilation" for people, to help them to understand how to live in the United States. To use a kitchen that they may not have had living in the Sudan; to know what insurance is, or a credit card, or to set up a budget, to get a bank account, and all the things that, sometimes, we just take for granted living in the west.

Um, but that's not something [00:51:00] that people who come from oppressed villages, or countries in North Africa, have experienced in their life, and they kind of get thrown to the wolves, so to speak.

[00:51:10] **KATY LONG - HOST, THE DOCUMENTARY PODCAST:** Yeah. So I'm curious, how much did you know about the refugee resettlement program before you started working Cactus?

[00:51:18] **PHIL ANDERSON:** Yeah, sadly, I didn't know much about it. I did not. So I'm learning and, uh, it's a deep pool. There's a lot that goes on with all of that. And I'm learning that, yeah, [00:51:30] Cactus is in some ways an anomaly, but it's not, as much more and more small towns with agriculture areas are receiving refugees and immigrants.

And so, there's a lot of trauma based issues with refugee resettlement, that if you've never experienced living in another culture before, you really don't understand. You're just, you know, most people would say, "Well, just live, do what you need to do. Go to the bank, go to the grocery store, do what you gotta do, pay your bills."

But you don't understand that our system is very [00:52:00] different than another system, and you come to a country, and you have a couple of months, maybe, to get your feet settled and start working, or whatever. And then you get moved to a different location, or whatever it is, and all of that is different. And it really is stressful. It's difficult.

And I'm learning that people really struggle, which then invites substance abuse, potentially, just to cover things for you. And it's a huge, real, massive issue with refugee resettlement. Bigger than just inviting someone to [00:52:30] come and live in your country, much bigger.

[00:52:32] **MARIA HINOJOSA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** We can't talk about the Vietnamese community in the United States, unless we talk about the Vietnam war from 1955 through 1975. And yes, the United States was involved up until 1972, sending thousands of soldiers. Also this war in Vietnam led to wars in nearby Laos and Cambodia.

What role did the United States play in shaping the [00:53:00] Vietnamese immigrant community story here in the United States, which is like, well, everything, right? I mean, if the United States hadn't gone to Vietnam, Vietnamese refugees probably would not be coming to the United States.

[00:53:12] **JAMES BOO:** I just want to say first up, I am not Vietnamese American. I'm not speaking on behalf of the Vietnamese community or communities. But having grown up in Southern California and being surrounded by folks who have these stories and now reporting on it. Yeah, I think it's really important to just point out the irony of a population of people [00:53:30] who have to flee their home country, and are displaced. And are welcomed by the country that was in their home. And it gets really complicated. I always get a little nervous about oversimplifying.

[00:53:43] **MARIA HINOJOSA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** Right. We're talking about a war that has to do with a colonial power, France, and its colonial power over Vietnam, the United States getting involved because of geopolitical reasons. And we're talking about tens of thousands of deaths here. So we'll take a breath and not want to [00:54:00] simplify.

[00:54:00] **JAMES BOO:** Right. With this story, though, you just have this huge realization, a moment of irony, where the very people who are being picked up by ICE and are being deported to Vietnam. This is not the first time that they're being targeted by government. It's not the first time that they are being put through this process. It's not the first time that they're being displaced as a people. It's not about just learning the history, but it's about understanding that these stories don't come from nowhere. And it's tragic that we have to learn about it through exactly what's happening right now, [00:54:30] which is deportation.

[00:54:31] **MARIA HINOJOSA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** So Phi, you're actually, you're a second generation Vietnamese American. Your parents fled Vietnam by boat in 1978. By the way, I'd been writing about this and you guys know this very horrible term that all of the news media in the United States and probably the world used to refer to human beings, calling them -- the papers of record, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, ABC [00:55:00] News, CBS News, everybody -- refugees, human beings from Vietnam were referred to as "boat people."

That would be like referring to the central Americans who are waiting on the Mexican side of the border, it would be referring to them as "concrete people" because they're waiting to come here on concrete. The people who were leaving Vietnam were waiting to get accepted and they were on boats.

Okay Phi, got that off my chest. What's your personal perspective of this? You grew up in the south, your [00:55:30] parents fled this, so what's going on for you?

[00:55:32] **PHI NGUYEN:** A lot. I think one of the funny things for me is that I grew up with a very different narrative of the Vietnam war than what I'm sort of seeing now doing some of the work that I'm doing, and seeing the cycle of displacement that James referred to earlier.

My family, as you said, they fled in 1978. They were resettled in 1979 in the middle of [00:56:00] nowhere, Iowa. They were sponsored by some very nice American people, a Catholic priest, and they lived out what we call the American dream. And so I kind of grew up buying into that idea. My parents came here with nothing. My dad went back to school. He raised me and my four sisters. He worked two jobs for the longest time. He finally retired from one job. So now we say he [00:56:30] only works five days a week.

[00:56:31] **MARIA HINOJOSA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** Immigrants. We get the job done.

[00:56:34] **PHI NGUYEN:** Yeah. Yeah. So, so within a generation, they raised five daughters and each one of us graduated from college. Every one of us has a graduate degree. Some of us have two, not me, but some of my sisters do. And so I grew up with this idea that we really turned things around that my parents are living proof of the American dream.

And so as I've [00:57:00] delved into other Vietnamese American narratives that aren't as well told in the mainstream, including all the stories of the people who are now being targeted for incarceration and deportation, then that's really been an awakening for me in terms of the different stories that exist out there. And that what happened to Vietnamese refugees as they resettled in America was really a combination of [00:57:30] luck and what political policies and powers were in play at the time that people were able to migrate over here.

[00:57:38] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** And by luck, you're meaning the political power saying that migrating here during the war, are you saying that it was more conducive? Can you just explain that a little bit more?

[00:57:47] **PHI NGUYEN:** Yeah, sure. The first big wave of Vietnamese refugees came to America in 1975. And those that were able to come in 1975 were airlifted out of Vietnam in April [00:58:00] when Saigon was falling. And a lot of those individuals who were airlifted were people who were, you know, we say lucky, but it's a funny term to be considered lucky to be airlifted out of your country because you have no other choice.

But as amongst all the Vietnamese refugees, they are actually considered the ones who were luckiest because they were the ones who were able to escape political persecution and were able to [00:58:30] avoid that terrible passage at sea that killed so many people.

And so that first wave of refugees, they were typically people who were affiliated either with the American government or people who were affiliated with the South Vietnamese government, so were thought to be most in danger when the North Vietnamese prevailed in the Vietnam war. And at that time, then America obviously [00:59:00] was welcoming those individuals, or at least the governmental players were. I don't know if the American people as a whole were.

[00:59:08] **JAMES BOO:** Yeah. That's an important point. The actual kind of polling from that time show is a pretty divided opinion.

And one of the things that were really motivating for the story for Tan and myself was looking around and on the surface, you see the story of Vietnamese Americans historically supporting the Republican party. Right. And there are plenty of second gen Vietnamese Americans who maybe ring hands [00:59:30] over that. And that's part of a broader, ongoing conversation in Asian-American communities about political conservatism of our prior generations. But I think something that's really important to remember is not everybody welcomed Vietnamese refugees. And in the first wave and second wave, the Democratic party and Republican party were quite different and in particular how they related to this issue.

And so, there's a personal element to this story involving Tan's family and that's how, when you talk to the older generation, especially the ones who were [01:00:00] politically motivated and wanted to see a free Vietnam, they did embrace the Republican party for reasons that when you walk through them with their experience of being welcomed by, for example, the Republican governor of Washington, or local Republican congressmen, they just form a different bond and it does have to do with that experience of history.

[01:00:19] **MARIA HINOJOSA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** So Vietnam is so important just historically for this country, but in terms of the refugees, before we talk about what's happening to them now in this country, I [01:00:30] just want people to understand that the Vietnamese people who were seeking refuge because their country was being bombed, in part with military hardware from the United States. This was the first time in the world, actually, that we were seeing tens of thousands of refugees on television.

Prior to that, the other war refugees would have been World War II, would have been from the Korean war. Most people didn't have television. We didn't have television news.

[01:00:59] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** Right, TV [01:01:00] wasn't, it wasn't mass media.

[01:01:01] **MARIA HINOJOSA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** Right. By 1975, we're seeing this. And so I just want people to realize and think back about the images that we have of Vietnamese people who were being shown on television as -- er, does it ring a bell? -- as massive hoards of people, desperate, dirty, unclear politically, trying to get in either by waiting on concrete, don't speak English or coming on a boat [01:01:30] and the whole imagery.

[01:01:32] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** I know, but I think this is a really good point. And what you guys have talked about also fascinates me because being a student of history, the notion that they weren't welcome, I love how Phi, how you framed it, the political leadership might've been like, this is good, but the rest of America might've had problems.

So let's take it from after 1975 to now, when we talk about deportations, when we talk about this policy of detainment and sending people [01:02:00] back home, we know it didn't start with the president of the United States that is in our office right now. So Phi, can you talk a little bit more about the progression of how these policies -- I know we talked about the seventies -- but how did it evolve then over time and how did it impact the Vietnamese refugee community in this country?

[01:02:19] **PHI NGUYEN:** After 1975, then essentially you saw a lot of what you see playing out today with other refugees play out in America, where America [01:02:30] basically had had enough. And so had the countries surrounding Vietnam who were countries of first asylum. So everybody said, okay, we've done as much as we can. You are overcrowding our countries and our resources. And so you started to see a slow down of migration and countries willing to accept more Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees. Then as, I think it was Maria, [01:03:00] you mentioned before, we were at a time where some of this was being televised. And so a lot of the crisis was actually being televised. And I think that that really pushed people, political leaders to step up and say, okay, we are in a time of crisis and we have to do something. It's the moral thing. It's the humane thing to do. And in fact, my parents were also resettled in a state with a Republican governor and he was one of the first

leaders in America [01:03:30] who really stood up and said, we have to do something.

[01:03:32] **MARIA HINOJOSA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** And that was Iowa?

[01:03:33] **PHI NGUYEN:** Yes, it was governor Robert Ray who passed away a couple of years --

[01:03:36] **MARIA HINOJOSA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** I'm sorry, Phi, but basically just understand, so basically Vietnamese refugees were being used at that time as political pawns to be put into states with Republican governors as, these are anticommunists and they're going to be good for the Republican party.

I get a sense that that's a little bit of what's going on for

[01:03:54] **JULIO RICARDO VARELA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** diversity.

[01:03:55] **MARIA HINOJOSA - HOST, IN THE THICK:** But go ahead.

[01:03:55] **PHI NGUYEN:** I'm not sure. I actually had the opportunity to meet [01:04:00] governor Ray a couple of years ago, and he was a very, very kind man. And the story that he tells is that he, I think he was returning from a basketball game and he was sitting in his office with another member of his staff and they actually saw footage on TV of one of these boats that you mentioned earlier, a very overcrowded boat, literally being pushed back into sea by one of the neighboring countries of Vietnam who said enough, we're not taking people anymore. And so they were pushed back [01:04:30] into sea, left there, many of them probably died. And so that was when he really stood up and really encouraged other governors around the country to also pledge, to actually take more refugees.

And that was kind of the political climate at the time. And I do think that Vietnamese people, when we talk about them being Republicans, and then there is a lot of that that's tied to how they were treated politically [01:05:00] by people who were in power during the Vietnam war and in the aftermath of the Vietnam war.

[01:05:07] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today, starting with *Democracy Now!*, discussing the Biden

administration's plans for relocating Afghan refugees. In a second *Democracy Now!* clip, they spoke with Ilhan Omar about her life story and the consequences of policy choices. *All In with Chris Hayes* also spoke with Ilhan Omar about the refugee application process and the legacy of Trump policies. *Vox* gave an [01:05:30] overview of why applying for asylum in the US is so hard. *Arts & Ideas* discussed the concept of climate refugees and the real reasons why people decide to leave their homes. *Vox* explained the deadly crossing of the Mediterranean sea for refugees fleeing Africa into Europe. *The PBS News Hour* described the non-profits working in the Mediterranean and the policies of European countries that make the crossing so treacherous. And the *vlogbrothers* explained the 10,000 foot perspective [01:06:00] on refugees using the Syrian war as a lens.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips from *The Documentary Podcast*, looking at a small town in Texas with a high population of refugees, and *In The Thick*, which looked at the legacy of refugees fleeing the end of the Vietnam war.

To hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at BestoftheLeft.com/support, or request a financial hardship [01:06:30] membership, because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information. Every request is granted, no questions asked.

And now we'll hear from you.

Thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as a VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at (202) 999-3991, or write me a message to jay@bestoftheleft.com.

First we heard from Mike from Texas, [01:07:00] so welcome to the show, it's good to hear from you. Our latest abortion episode, if you haven't gotten to it yet, is number 1430 from July 24th or thereabouts, depending on your time zone I think, but I'm sure we'll be covering it again soon, so stay tuned for that. Dan from North Carolina called in and he was talking about Joe Manchin and control of the Senate, and so I have some further thoughts on this.

Dan's response and explanation in the [01:07:30] simple explanation that people who follow politics know, generally. The mechanics of the control of the Senate and so forth. Those who suggest that we need to follow strategies that buck that traditional wisdom I think generally claim to be looking at a bigger picture,

thinking outside the box, and advocating for something that they know is outside the box. They know that it is beyond the horizon of this [01:08:00] congressional term and who's controlling the Senate committees and all of that. So this usually goes hand in hand with first of all, not reflexively labeling the Democratic party as the "good guys". "We" being in control or something like that because of the Democratic party has control, it's not necessarily the equivalent of Progressive's being in control, as I think most people recognize. And then secondly, suggesting that their strategies will maybe help break [01:08:30] that two party stranglehold, or even if it causes short-term setbacks, we'll have long-term benefits, those sorts of things are usually what go into these outside the box strategies.

And as much as I'm open to new and interesting strategies, the problem is I've never heard an argument or an explanation for how one could viably work. And I'm not talking about a geometric proof for how it can be guaranteed to work, I just mean a general [01:09:00] theory like, "here's how I think it could work. If we do A, then that might cause B to happen." That's all I mean, yeah. The closest I have ever heard to a theory along these lines actually being given some shape was back in 2016 when, primarily it was Jimmy Dore who I was hearing say this, but the broader "Bernie or bust" crowd was arguing along the lines that a long-term strategy for progressives should [01:09:30] include preventing Hillary Clinton from winning the presidency and thereby perpetuating neo-liberalism any farther by allowing Trump to win. And the argument went like this. If Trump wins, it'll be an absolute disaster. Things will get as bad as any of us can imagine as progressive's, and that will help wake the country up to the dangers of pure, [01:10:00] unfiltered, destructive conservatism entirely unleashed. And the response will be enormous. The political backlash will be the biggest we've ever seen and anti-Trump sentiment will sweep in progressive change, like an unstoppable wave.

And at the time I thought that this theory had a chance of being right, but I still thought that it was immoral to pursue due to all of the inevitable death and destruction that would happen along the way, [01:10:30] particularly because the impact would be felt most strongly by people who don't look like Jimmy Dore and the others spearheading the "Bernie or bust" movement and making this argument. There was also the possibility that it just wouldn't work at all. Now with the benefit of about five years of hindsight, I think it's a decidedly mixed bag. We did have the women's movement, which was record-breaking and somewhat progressive. 2018 was the year that we saw The Squad elected in a [01:11:00] wave of anti-Trump voting just as predicted, but in 2020 we elected Joe Biden, the prince of neo-liberalism and American imperialism. So we got a little bit of progress, progressive ideas are gaining more traction in the Democratic party than they were in 2016, but now we're digging out of a four

year unmitigated disaster, the brunt of which was predictably felt most strongly by those least eager to adopt the "Bernie or bust" strategy because [01:11:30] of their inherent vulnerability to that strategy. So that was an out of the box theory of change, and this is how it worked out. So just take that as a set of data points and do with that information as you will.

Now there's also this sort of anti theory of change strategy that lends itself to this other way of thinking of getting outside the box, but this is getting outside the box so far it's like [01:12:00] advocating against the idea of having a strategy. So a member and regular commenter on Patrion has been writing in response to this original call and my discussion about Joe Manchin and that listener's driving point has been that insisting on having a theory of change is defacto moderating. That it's a strategy used by moderates who don't want progress as a method of slowing down the conversation and ultimately helping it to just stall out. [01:12:30] And this listener went on to explain that quote, "you want a theory of change? That phrase in itself is absurd on its face since it comes from a supremely American way of thinking, feeling, acting, advocating, and it comes from" drum roll, please..." the corporate sector of the US. Oh, yes that is what you're advocating. That we use this system whose origins are from corporate America to figure out what is legitimate, [01:13:00] complete with charts and diagrams and questions and checklists ad nauseum. So, no, I don't have a theory of change, and I don't think any fucking oppressed person in history has ever felt they needed one to be a serious and legitimate counterforce to whatever the prevailing status quo is that they live under presently. You know it's indefensible, but you still look to a theory of change. Fuck that, full stop. We don't need it." [01:13:30] End quote.

And so, okay. I'm open to a differing idea, but the weird thing is that this is how she ended up concluding her thoughts. Quote, "if we want to have fundamental radical change here, then we need human rights enshrined into our laws. Just like anyone who has ever fought, it is the bare fucking minimum. Without it, we can lose anything and everything at the whim of a political [01:14:00] party." unquote. So as I told her, and I'll say again, now I hate to break the news, but advocating for the passing of human rights laws is inescapably part of a theory of change, no matter how distasteful one might find that phrase. Unless you're calling for a violent overthrow, which actually in and of itself would also be a theory of change, then the only other option is to advocate for progress through the political [01:14:30] process, which, it turns out, she is doing. Enshrining human rights into law is a great place to start. That's a great theory. Now let's figure out how that can happen.

Well, we can get enough human rights supporting politicians elected and pressure them to prioritize human rights legislation, or we can demand the Congress write a constitutional amendment, or we could write a constitutional amendment and call for a constitutional convention, circumventing Congress, and to do any of those things will require [01:15:00] organizing and strategizing and utilizing finite energy and resources and human capacity into the power to force change. Which is the definition of running an activism campaign. And before you know it, you're in an office somewhere looking at charts with the goal of figuring out how to best use your resources to make the greatest impact, and you have become exactly that which you despise. Or you could invent a new way of organizing ideas into a [01:15:30] movement, and a movement into political power, and political power into lasting policy change. As always, I'm open to new ideas.

But if your idea is to just shout from the sidelines, with a sense of moral superiority, then what you're really doing is just letting someone else do the hard work of making change for you. So I still argue that theories of change are an inescapable part of the process, but none of this is to say that some out of the box thinking that takes a longer view [01:16:00] than Congressional committee chairmanships in any given cycle couldn't possibly come along and be a genuinely good idea with a real possibility of working. I'm always actively on the lookout for new and better strategies to move us forward. So keep the ideas coming.

And as always, keep the comments coming at (202) 999-3991 or by emailing me to jay@bestoftheleft.com. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the [01:16:30] show and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Ken, and Scott for their volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support or from right inside the Apple Podcast app. Membership is how you get instant [01:17:00] access to our incredibly good bonus episodes, in addition to there being extra content and no ads in all of our regular episodes.

For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all that information can always be found in the show notes on our website and likely right on the device you're using to listen.

So coming to you from far outside, the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC. My name is Jay!, and this has been the *Best of the Left Podcast* coming to twice weekly thanks entirely to the members and donors to the [01:17:30] show from bestoftheleft.com.