

“I came to America because I heard the streets were paved with gold. When I got here, I found out three things: First, the streets weren’t paved with gold; second, they weren’t paved at all; and third, I was expected to pave them.” – Painted on a wall at the Ellis Island Museum in New York City (unknown Italian immigrant)

The above quote opens a new (2022) book by economists Ran Abramitzky (Stanford) and Leah Boustan (Princeton). The authors analyze data about millions of everyday immigrants to America to illustrate how they and their descendants fared over time in the United States. Abramitzky and Boustan promote a long view on immigration as their research challenges myths and wide-ranging rhetoric about immigration in America. For example, immigrants comprise 14% of the U.S. population, the same share as they did a century ago. They also found that “immigrants are less likely than those born in the U.S. to be arrested and incarcerated for all manner of offenses ... as was true in the past and even more true today.” They are also more likely to fill positions that employers can’t fill with native-born workers, challenging the myth that immigrants are stealing jobs from U.S. workers. The reality is that refugees and immigrants have made our community and our country better for everyone. Households led by immigrants earn billions of dollars each year and pay millions of dollars in local and state taxes (challenging another long-held myth). They help to fill jobs in hospitality, agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, and many business sectors that need workers.

[2018 data](#) from New American Economy indicate that immigrants in the Buffalo metropolitan area have \$1.5 billion in spending power. Immigrants fill labor shortages in high-tech and manual labor fields and start new businesses that create job opportunities for immigrants and natural-born citizens alike. Immigrants and refugees also bring culture to our cities, making Western New York a more diverse and lively place to live, work, and play. Refugee and immigrant-owned businesses are popping up all around the Buffalo-Niagara region, sharing their cultural goods and their delicious cuisines with our community. Despite all of the good they bring, many foreign-born neighbors experience backlash stemming from misconceptions, racial discrimination, and language access barriers, all of which is detrimental to their quality of life and safety.

Before you begin reviewing the **Week 11** resources, take a moment to consider:

- What would it take for you to grab your family and run from your home?
- Could you imagine leaving behind everything for which you have worked so hard?
- Can you imagine fleeing to a place you have never been, where you don’t know a soul?
- Can you imagine having only one hour to pack, preparing to embark on what may be a long and arduous journey? What would you leave behind?
- How would you feel, in some cases, to put yourself and your family at the mercy of strangers?

This is the experience of refugees: individuals who have fled their country of origin and who meet the United Nations' criteria of having a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." Or, as you will see in one article, being in a same-sex relationship which could result in the very real possibility of the death penalty. Unfortunately, refugees, as well as other immigrants, face very real racism and discrimination in their new communities.

Some global facts:

- There are more than 80 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide.
- Of those 80 million, less than 1% will have the chance to start a new life through refugee resettlement.
- The average stay in a refugee camp is currently 17 years.

People migrate to a new country as a refugee, asylee, or immigrant. Refugees and asylum seekers are typically people who are forced to flee their homes, whereas immigrants mostly move by choice.

To learn more, visit the [refugee and migrant crisis page](#) of Oxfam International.

Immigration in the United States is one of the dominant forces shaping our experience of race today. While it is customary to refer to the United States as a nation that welcomes immigrants or "the melting pot," immigrants, specifically in the past 50 years, have been taken advantage of for their cheap labor and singled out as second-class citizens. Until we unambiguously eliminate the intrinsic racism that is in the substance of our immigration policies, we cannot have an unprejudiced immigration system that establishes a possible path and paradigm for immigrants to call the U.S. home and not feel like outsiders

READ

[Immigration has been a Defining, Often Contentious, Element Throughout U.S. History](#)

As host to more immigrants than any other country, the United States has been shaped and reshaped by immigration over the centuries demographically, economically, culturally, socially, and politically. Even as immigration has been a regular feature of American life, it has also been historically contentious and in recent decades has been seen through an increasingly partisan lens. While the United States continues to rely on immigration to bolster population growth, for family reunification and to fill job needs, the system no longer keeps pace with these demands. This 2022 Migration Policy Institute article looks at how America and its immigration policy has shaped public narrative. (About a 14-minute read)

[The 'Double Punishment' for Black Undocumented Immigrants](#)

Although only 7 percent of non-citizens in the U.S. are black, they make up 20 percent of those facing deportation on criminal grounds. Research suggests that because black people in the United States are more likely to be stopped, arrested, and incarcerated, black immigrants may be disproportionately vulnerable to deportation. In this 2017 article from the Atlantic, Jeremy Raff explores the experiences of black undocumented immigrants. (About a 5-minute read)

[Forgotten Twice: The Untold Story of LGBT Refugees](#)

The UN Geneva Convention is clear: sexual orientation and gender identity constitute solid grounds to claim refugee status. In many countries, social norms, traditions, and customs make a life for LGBT people impossible, even if the law is not officially against them. In 72 countries, same-sex relationships are currently criminalized. In eight, they are punishable by death. These are the very real risks faced by LGBT refugees escaping violence, discrimination, and abuse in their home countries. This is the untold refugee crisis. (About a 6-minute read)

WATCH

[The Law that Broke U.S. Immigration](#)

Immigration looked very different before 1996, when President Bill Clinton signed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). The law was supposed to stop undocumented immigration by increasing enforcement and punishing people for being in the U.S. undocumented. Instead, it incentivized people to stay in the U.S. — and the undocumented population doubled. (About 6 minutes)

[Making Buffalo Home – Immigration in a Welcoming City](#)

This WNED PBS original production hosted by Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, Executive Director at the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG), welcomes guests from city government, an anti-housing discrimination group, academia, and members of the immigrant community for an engaging conversation on creating a welcoming place for immigrants. (About 28 minutes)

[Immigrants and the State of Florida – Florida This Week \(06/30/2023\)](#)

One of the biggest issues of the presidential campaign is immigration. Immigrants come to the U.S. for a variety of reasons. Some of Florida's most important industries leverage immigrant labor. Governor DeSantis warns the U.S. cannot absorb any more illegal immigrants. This episode of *Florida this Week* explores this critical issue with a panel of experts (About 27 minutes).

[Unladylike2020: The Changemakers](#)

The PBS series *Unladylike* offers one-hour or less interviews with and digital shorts about extraordinary American heroines, women trailblazers past and present. In this quiet, deeply personal interview with United We Dream co-founder Cristina Jiménez, we learn about what inspired and still inspires her efforts to organize for immigrant rights, particularly for children and women of color. Cristina also draws through lines to historical and cross-identity patterns of discrimination. (About 50 minutes)

Valedictorian Reveals Undocumented Status in Speech

At 12 years old, Larissa Martinez moved to the United States with her mother and sister from Mexico City to escape an alcoholic and abusive father. All three had valid tourist visas. They lived with relatives until finally able to afford a one-bedroom apartment. Six years later, Larissa graduated as the valedictorian of McKinney Boyd High School in North Texas. In her commencement speech, which has been viewed more than 2 million times, Martinez revealed her undocumented status. Her revelation helped spark a national conversation about undocumented students, those who are living in the United States without official permission. Martinez later graduated from Yale University. (About 6 minutes)

What do Native Americans Think about 'Illegal Immigration'?

This brief video shares what the people who are native to this land have to say about who is "illegal" and who isn't. (About 3 minutes)

Actions are Illegal, Never People

Jose Antonio Vargas, an award-winning multimedia storyteller, is the founder of Define American, a campaign that seeks to elevate the conversation around immigration. Born in the Philippines, Vargas immigrated to the United States at age 12. Stunning the media and political circles and attracting world-wide coverage, Vargas wrote the groundbreaking essay, "My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant," for the New York Times Magazine in the summer of 2011. A year later, he was the author (and subject) of a cover story for TIME magazine headlined "We are Americans — just not legally." (About 17 minutes)

LISTEN

You Cannot Divorce Race from Immigration

Immigration policy is polarizing - travel bans, family separation, defining who qualifies for asylum. But one thing a lot of people agree on - the U.S. immigration system is broken. Last month, the senior editor of the Atlantic, David Frum, wrote a cover story proposing that the U.S. cut legal immigration by half. NPR's Rachel Martin talks to Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas for a response to that story. (About 6 minutes)