
War and Forced Displacement

History 600

Tuesday 1:20 - 3:15pm
Humanities 2611

Spring Semester 2026

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 12:15pm - 1:15pm and by appointment



COURSE DESCRIPTION

War drives the movement and dislocation of people. While many are forcibly displaced due to violence and political persecution in their home countries, they are not always able to find new countries that will take them in. The United States, for instance, only admit and recognize certain groups as refugees. For those who are unable to secure the legal status of refugees, many enter the United States as undocumented asylum seekers.

Refugee, Asylee, and Undocumented - what purpose do these labels serve and who makes these determinations? This capstone seminar addresses these questions and examines three wars - WW II, the Cold War in Southeast Asia, and the Cold War in Central America - to probe into the special circumstances that enabled some groups to enter the United States as "refugees" and others as "undocumented." It also considers how these immigration statuses, in turn, shaped the lived experiences of the displaced.

Ultimately, the goal of this seminar is to inspire you to develop your own research topic and contribute to a deeper understanding of U.S. immigration history. Given that immigration has been the touchstone of U.S. political debates, research into these matters allows us to navigate through the many refugee- and undocumented- related issues dominating our national forums.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), reading, writing, individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

Attendance and Participation	200 points
Response papers	200 points
Research proposal	100 points
First Draft of Research Paper	200 points
Research Presentation	100 points
Final Research Paper	200 points
TOTAL	1000 points

COURSE POINT BREAKDOWN

Letter Grade	Point Range	Percentage Range
A	925 to 1000	92.5% and higher
AB	875 to 924	87.5% to 92.4%
B	825 to 874	82.5% to 87.4%
BC	775 to 824	77.5% to 82.4%
C	695 to 774	69.5% to 77.4%
D	595 to 694	59.5% to 69.4%
F	594 and below	59.4% and below

COURSE POLICIES

Honesty: Please read the [university policy on academic integrity and misconduct](#). Please note that all information borrowed from print sources or the web, including ChatGPT, must be clearly identified and properly credited. Any instance of plagiarism or cheating on assignments or exams will result in a "F" grade for the assignment or exam and the course. Submitting AI-generated text for class assignments is plagiarism.

Accommodations: Please contact the [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#) if you feel that you may need accommodations for this course: 608-263-274 (phone); 608-225-7956 (text); info@mcburney.wisc.edu (e-mail).

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Calculated Kindness

Tu 1.20 Introduction

Reading:

- Gil Loescher and John S. Scanlan, "Introduction" from *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

WEEK 2 Displaced Persons of the WWII Era

Tu 1.27 Response Paper 1 DUE

Readings:

- Gil Loescher and John S. Scanlan, "Jews, Displaced Persons, and the First Refugee Act" from *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).
- Beth Cohen, "Welcome to America" and "Unaccompanied Minors" from *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

WEEK 3 Stranded Students and U.S. Cold War Politics

Tu 2.3 Response Paper 2 DUE

Readings:

- Madeline Y. Hsu, "Disappearance of America's Cold War Chinese Refugees, 1948-1966," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 31, no. 4 (2012).
- Yelong Han, "An Untold Story: American Policy toward Chinese Students in the United States, 1949-1955," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 2, no. 1 (1993).

WEEK 4 The Southeast Asian Refugee Crisis

Tu 2.10 Response Paper 3 DUE; Discussion of Research Proposal

Readings:

- Gil Loescher and John S. Scanlan, "Flight from Saigon" and "Providing Safe Harbor for the Boat People" from *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).
- Yen Le Espiritu, The "We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose" Syndrome: U.S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the "Fall of Saigon," *American Quarterly* 58 no. 2 (2006).

WEEK 5 Southeast Asian Refugee Resettlement in the United States

Tu 2.17 Response Paper 4 DUE; Film: *aka Don Bonus*

Reading:

- Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do*.

WEEK 6 Central American Asylum Seekers

Tu 2.24 Response Paper 5 DUE

Readings:

- María Cristina García, "The Wars in Central America and the Refugee Crisis" and "Refugees or Economic Migrants? The Debate over Accountability in the United States" from *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
- Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky, "The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles" from *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (November 2009).

WEEK 7 **Undocumented in America**

Tu 3.3 Response Paper 6 DUE; Film: *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary*; one-on-one meetings with Professor Cheng

Reading:

- Rebecca Hamlin, *Crossing: How We Label and React to People on the Move* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2021.

WEEK 8 **Undocumented in America**

Tu 3.10 Response Paper 7 DUE

Reading:

- Javier Zamora, *Solito: A Memoir*.

WEEK 9 **The End of Asylum**

Tu 3.17 Response Paper 8 DUE

Reading:

- Andrew I. Schoenholtz, Jaya Ramji-Nogales, and Philip S. Schrag, *The End of Asylum* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press), 2021.

WEEK 10

Tu 3.24 Research Proposal DUE; Presentation of Research Topics

WEEK 11 **Spring Break**

Tu 3.31

WEEK 12

Tu 4.7 NO CLASS MEETING

Draft of Final Paper DUE Sunday, April 12th at 5pm

WEEK 13

Tu 4.14 Peer Review; one-on-one meetings with Professor Cheng

WEEK 14

Tu 4.21 Class Presentation of Research Project

WEEK 15

Tu 4.28 Class Presentation of Research Project

Final Paper DUE Tuesday, May 5 at 5pm