

IMMIGRATION 101



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AN ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

This course offers a broad overview of the US immigration system from historical, legislative, policy, and social justice points of view. We will discuss the mechanisms that have reproduced discriminatory practices and human rights abuses against immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and particularly against poor immigrants of color. Introductory presentations will explore the criminalization of migration, the asylum process, immigration detention, immigration courts, and border militarism. We will also read and discuss a set of short sources including personal testimonies and book selections. This course is designed for anyone who is interested in immigration justice work and human rights or who seeks to accompany immigrant communities. You are welcome to sign up for one or two session or the entire series depending on your time and interests.

This workshop is part of the Memory and Resistance Coalition, a year-long commemoration series launched by the InterReligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia.

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Despite popular conceptions of the United States as a nation welcoming for immigrants, a look at the history of US immigration enforcement and policy paints a very different picture: laws criminalizing the entry of different racialized groups, the exploitation of migrant labor, and the systemic rejection of poor immigrants of color, including refugees and asylum seekers. In the past years, we've witnessed a multitude of human rights abuses against immigrants in detention and asylum seekers arriving at the US-Mexico border, as well as the persecution of our immigrant communities. Although the backlash against immigrants has accelerated in the past years, these abuses have taken place under several administrations and they have been made possible by a complex system of laws, policies, and money-making infrastructures of detention, deportation, and border enforcement. In the post-9/11 era, the expansion of the immigration enforcement system has affected not only Muslim, Latinx, and other immigrant communities, or asylum seekers arriving at our borders, but it has also led to a massive expansion of US militarism in the world. To properly address the scope of US immigration enforcement, we need to first understand its intricate bureaucracy and functioning and the ways it is related to the global United States capitalist-military-carceral regime affecting not only BIPOC and immigrant communities domestically, but also destabilizing other societies abroad.

TO REGISTER PLEASE VISIT:

FRIDAYS

5:30 PM - 6:45 PM

OCT 23 - NOV 20

OCTOBER 23: THE CRIMINALIZATION OF MIGRATION

United States border enforcement has historically relied on discriminatory legislation that has criminalized migration and on deliberate practices of deterrence with the purpose of controlling and blocking the movement of poor immigrants of color. This has led to high levels of violence, human rights abuses, and the loss of many lives, making the US-Mexico border in particular one of the most dangerous places for migrants worldwide. This session focuses specifically on the US-Mexico border because it has been both a space for the exploitation of migrant labor and one of the most heavily militarized theaters of violence against immigrants and asylum seekers in the past decades. We will discuss the laws that criminalize entry without documents, the process of expedited removal, and zero tolerance policies, which have led to the arbitrary detention of asylum seekers and migrants, family separation, fast-track deportation, and other human rights abuses.

PLEASE READ: Gloria Anzaldúa, [“The Homeland, Aztlán. El Otro México”](#) in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Fourth Edition. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

OCTOBER 30: THE ASYLUM PROCESS

The United States asylum process is an incredibly convoluted system, designed explicitly to involve multiple decision-making actors, with lengthy times of processing and scarce chances of obtaining asylum protections. It is also an adversarial process: instead of being received by specialists trained in international refugee law and being given access to legal and social services, asylum seekers arriving at the US-Mexico border have been forced to endure confrontational and abusive treatment by immigration enforcement agents and immigration judges, the cruelty of an opaque bureaucracy sometimes used as a weapon against them, prolonged detention, and most often deportation. In the past few years, asylum seekers have been stripped of their human rights, placed in expedited removal, detention, and deportation proceedings with little recourse to legal representation or community support. Under the cover of the pandemic, most asylum seekers have been blocked altogether from requesting asylum and forced to wait in makeshift refugee camps on the US-Mexico border. This session will take a look at the history of the US asylum process, the human rights abuses perpetrated against asylum seekers under different administrations, and the latest immigration reform policies that aim to shut down asylum altogether.

PLEASE READ: ["Testimony of Edwidge Danticat for the House Immigration Subcommittee Hearing Detention and Removal: Immigration Detainee Medical Care,"](#) October 4, 2007.

NOVEMBER 6: IMMIGRATION COURTS

United States immigration courts are not courts of law in the traditional sense, as the term is used in the federal court system. They are part of an administrative office, the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR), housed in the Department of Justice (DOJ). Most often, immigration judges are former attorneys elected and hired by the Attorney General in order to perform the duties and rules prescribed regarding immigrants the government is trying to deport. Studies have shown that decisions made in similar asylum cases by different immigration judges can vary widely, making the immigration court system highly arbitrary and prone to politicization. This session takes a look at the structure of the immigration court system, its general procedures, and main actors. We will also discuss the situation of unaccompanied children forced to appear in immigration courts alone and with little access to legal representation.

PLEASE READ: Valeria Luiselli, [“Forty Questions”](#) from *Tell Me How It Ends*, Harper’s Magazine, February 2017.

NOVEMBER 13: IMMIGRATION DETENTION

The US operates the largest immigration detention system in the world, with approximately 30,000 immigrants imprisoned on any given day in for-profit private detention facilities and county jails across the country. These facilities, which are often money-making businesses, have been scrutinized for the egregious conditions to which they subject immigrants including poor to non-existent medical care, subpar hygiene and nourishment, and psychological and bodily abuse. This systemic neglect has led to the death of over 200 immigrants in detention since 2003. Despite the efforts of immigration advocates and medical experts to shut down immigration detention facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing being an absolute impossibility, immigrants continue to be detained and transferred among facilities. Most recently, reports have emerged that some detainees have been subjected to unwanted hysterectomies and other forms of gendered abuse. This session provides an overview of the US immigration detention system and the social justice actions challenging these horrendous human rights abuses.

PLEASE READ: Nilson Barahna Marriaga, ["In ICE Custody: America, the Country I Love, is Allowing Detained Immigrants Like Me to Be Treated in Inhumane and Degrading Ways,"](#) Freedom for Immigrants Imprint (September 25, 2020). + Cindy Knoebel, Interview with Amina Salvador, ["I was terrorized and beaten by the medical staff,"](#) Freedom for Immigrants Imprint (August 26, 2020).

NOVEMBER 20: BORDER IMPERIALISM

Immigrant justice projects that only aim to reform national immigration policies do not fundamentally challenge the role of global capitalism and militarism worldwide in displacing and destabilizing communities. The lens of border imperialism (a term coined by Harsha Walia) can help us reframe our social justice work by addressing a set of interrelated factors: the role of extractive capitalism and militarization in producing refugees, the expansion and externalization of the US-Mexico border, and the criminalization of migration. The transnational nature of the phenomena producing mass displacement of communities and the destruction of our natural landscapes require transnational responses and a broad vision for social justice which defends not only the freedom of movement, but also the freedom to remain, and the healing of the consequences of social, political, economic, and environmental violence. To undo border imperialism is to first acknowledge that, while freedom of movement should be a human right, movement is currently restricted by a global system of economic inequities separating the South from the North.

PLEASE READ: Harsha Walia, ["What is Border Imperialism?"](#) from Undoing Border Imperialism, AK Press, 2013.

Alexandra Magearu is an independent scholar, writer, and immigration advocate. She collaborates with the InterReligious Task Force on Central American and Colombia as a researcher and educator.

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