

Migration as Product of Empire

How militarism, imperialism, and war structure displacement and global inequalities.

THESIS

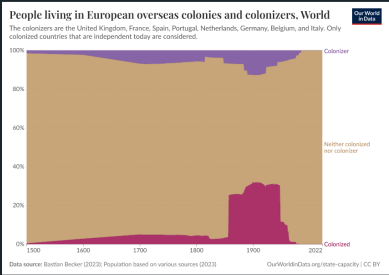
Colonialism, imperialism, militarism, and globalization produce migration - they are not background conditions. War creates displacement; imperial infrastructure (bases, alliances) channels where refugees move; immigration policy decides who is welcomed and who is turned away. "Rescue" narratives obscure empire's role in generating the very crises states then respond to. Migration is a product of empire and a mechanism that sustains global inequalities.

KEY CONTEXT

- Post-WWII / Cold War - Refugee policy tied to "defeating communism" (Wu)
- 1975+ - Vietnam evacuations via U.S. bases: Philippines, Guam, Thailand -> mainland (Espiritu)
- 1980 - Refugee Act; ceilings and priorities tied to foreign policy
- 9/11, 2017+ - Sharp drops in admissions = policy choice
- Black internationalism & Palestine - Imperial outpost, shared state violence (Rickford)

1. MILITARIZED REFUGE(ES)

- Vietnamese refugee flows were routed through the same U.S. military base network that had sustained the war (Vietnam -> Philippines, Guam, Thailand -> mainland).
- Espiritu: the myth of U.S. "rescue and liberation" makes the militarized nature of evacuations invisible (25).
- War and empire produce displacement; imperial infrastructure then channels who moves where. Refugees are cast as proof of U.S. virtue even as their flight follows from U.S. intervention.



Colonial rule over time. Our World in Data (Herre 2024).

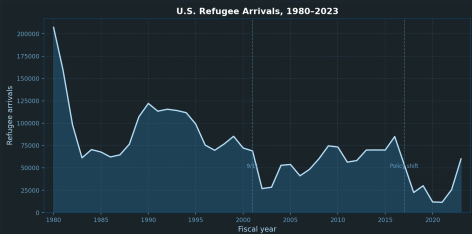
2. IMPERIALISM & RACIAL HIERARCHIES

- Imperialism connects sites of oppression: occupation abroad and subordination at home.
- Rickford: Black liberationists came to see Israel as an imperialist outpost and Palestinians as "ideological peers - subjects of state violence and occupation whose resistance offered a valuable model for African Americans" (53).
- Same logic of racialized border-making: Indigenous removal and Black exclusion are roots of U.S. immigration control. Who is removed, excluded, or allowed to belong is decided by empire and race.

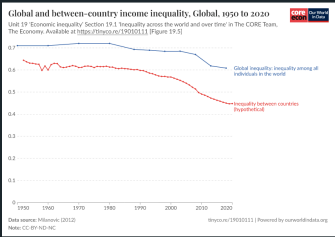


Indigenous removal & Black exclusion. Mapping Deportations (2025).

3. IMMIGRATION POLICY AS GEOPOLITICAL WEAPON



U.S. refugee arrivals (1980-2023). DHS Yearbook Table 13.



Global & between-country income inequality. Our World in Data.

- Wu: "U.S. geopolitical ambitions, especially the overarching goal of defeating communism everywhere, spurred the exodus and entry of refugees and asylees" (216).
- Selective valuation: those fleeing communist states often welcomed; those fleeing U.S.-allied regimes often denied. Cold War policy shaped who counted as a refugee.
- Chart shows spike (1980 Act), drop (9/11), collapse (2017-21) - "magnitude" is policy-driven. Income inequality chart = global disparities within which these hierarchies operate.

CONCLUSION

Militarized refuge, imperialism and racial hierarchies, and immigration as geopolitical weapon show that colonialism, imperialism, militarism, and globalization actively structure migration. Wars create displacement; infrastructure channels movement; policy and narratives decide who belongs. Migration is a product of empire and a mechanism sustaining global inequalities. This matters today: debates still frame exclusion as common sense or security - a reminder to ask which identities our policies privilege and what costs follow.

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