**Refugees in the Early Modern Atlantic World**

0.2 – About this Module for Students

**Introduction**

In this module, we ask what caused an intensification of the forced migration of refugees in Europe, West Africa, and the Americas in the late 17th century and, more broadly, who gets to define a refugee and why.

In 2022, there are more than 30 million refugees around the world, as well as more than 50 million other people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Much of the media attention surrounding these refugees just moves from one so-called crisis to another, as the refugees themselves become either nameless statistics or emotionally charged anecdotes. Meanwhile, the political debates around these movements focus less on the moral responsibilities of the hosts than on determining whether migrants are ‘really’ refugees, and thus entitled to international support and protection, or ‘merely’ economic migrants seeing to improve their financial situation.

This module asks us to step back from these circular debates, and instead provides a historical framework for understanding why such movements happen, as well as how to distinguish between *what is* *actually* happening, versus *how we* *talk about what is happening*. The goal is to help you separate yourself from the political rhetoric of your moment, and instead to be able to make thoughtful and critical assessments of the situation and take appropriate actions based on those assessments.

In the process, we will also learn why the late seventeenth century saw such an intense expansion in refugee movements on three continents around the Atlantic World. As we will see, while the people and cultures affected were extremely diverse and far flung from one another, they were intimately connected to one another by a set of processes transforming world history at the time.

You will learn:

* Why did large refugee movements happen in Europe, Africa and the Americas about the same time in the late seventeenth century?
* What factors shaped refugees’ movements?
* And what factors shape how we think about refugees, including who we categorize as refugees?

We will also be practicing historical skills that will allow us to critically assess who counts as a refugee and who does not. They involve assessing:

* Who produced the evidence about refugees at the time that survives today and why?
* Who told the stories about refugees in later years and why?
* And how has all of this shaped historical memories about them?

We designed this lesson to require about six hours of class time over two weeks and about twice that amount preparing for class. If it takes significantly more than that, you should talk to your professor. It may be that they can offer some useful guidance to you, or to the *History for the 21st Century* project to adjust the lesson for future students.

**Format**

In this module, you will work with your instructor and fellow classmates to understand what factors shape why people might flee their homes, as well as where they might escape to. You will begin by learning some interpretive frameworks to compare forced migrations. Then you will begin applying those frameworks as you examine a series of examples of refugee movements in the later seventeenth century. The first case will look at religious refugees, the Huguenot, in Western Europe. Next, you will head to West Africa to learn about widespread refugee movements taking place along the Gold Coast at about the same time. Finally, you will travel to the other side of the Atlantic, to see how the processes taking place in Europe and Africa were affecting lives in North and South America. In some cases, Europeans and Africans were becoming refugees in the Americas, though as we will see, so were many indigenous peoples of the Americas. We will finish by comparing who told the stories about the various refugees we have studied in later generations, and ask how those later retellings shape people’s understandings today. You will end by preparing a final assignment that considers how what we have been studying helps us reconsider some of the heated political rhetoric about refugees today.

**Schedule and Readings**

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| **Topic** | **Readings before the class** | **In-class activities** |
| **Before the module** | * About this module |  |
| **Lesson 1: Introduction** | * 1.1 – Reading 1: Introduction * 1.2 – Primary Source: Shire | * Thinking about migration |
| **Lesson 2: Refugees in Western Europe** | * 2.1 – Reading 2: Refugees in Western Europe * 2.2 – Primary Source: A Refugee in the Dutch republic, 1670s-1690s | * Primary source analysis of Huguenot Anne Marguerite Petit |
| **Lesson 3: Refugees in Western Africa** | * 3.1 – Reading 3: Refugees in Western Africa * 3.2 – Primary Sources: Reports by Slave Traders in West Africa about Refugees, 1670s–1710s | * Primary source analysis of Western African refugees * Comparison of sources to Lesson 2 |
| **Lesson 4: Refugees in the Americas** | * 4.1 – Reading 4: Refugees in the Americas * 4.2 – Primary Sources: Refugees in the American Colonies, 1670s-1710s | * Primary source analysis of refugees in the Americas * Comparison of sources to Lessons 2 and 3 |
| **Lesson 5: Memories of Refugees** | * 5.1 – Reading 5: Memories of Refugees in the Early Modern Atlantic World | * Analysis of 19th century memories of refugees * Investigation of how the module’s primary sources were saved and published |