

# Today's Refugees: Yesterday's Refugees

BY ROBERT E. SEGAL

Huge amounts of oil gushing from Nigeria's rich soil drew thousands of poor Africans from other lands in the last few years. Now the world oil glut has sent Nigeria's economy into a tailspin, giving birth to a new crisis -- the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of aliens.

Most people far removed from the African scene won't be expected to add to their worries much feeling of compassion about the 1983 refugees pouring primarily into Ghana or seeking haven in Chad and Niger.

Throughout the 20th century, this old planet has witnessed so much human uprooting that good minds fail often to grasp the scope of the agony and feeling of rejection afflicting those in flight.

Dare we even indulge in a cursory survey of escape from slavery, poverty, revolution, persecution, the ravages of endless wars? In the years immediately following the Russian Revolution of 1917, some 1-1/2 million people fearing life in a Communist state fled Russia. In those days and also going back to the assassination of Czar Alexander II, the United States provided haven for 2-1/2 million Jews.

Each decade has seen the stream of refugees widened. Early in the century, many Armenians and Greeks fled Turkey. Hitler's insane acts, in addition to writing the words "Holocaust" and "Genocide" forever into the books of infamy, sent millions fleeing from many European nations. Hundreds of movie goers now drawn to a striking portrayal of Gandhi's life may be awakened to the fact that later on the Indian-Pakistan War added 10 million refugees to the long list. In the 1950s, war in Korea produced nine million more. In our time, we have witnessed the expulsion of the Dutch from Indonesia, the ousting of hundreds of thousands from Uganda by Idi Amin. Florida has absorbed hundreds of refugees from Castro's reign of a quarter century. Few realize that 7% of all Afghans have been driven out by the Russian invasion. Many are lodged now in Pakistan. Angola's civil war uprooted 15 million people, and more than two million have left Indochina. Who speaks of the tortured Boat People today?

Were those nations better blessed able to organize rescue missions through these years of the disgorging of so many millions? We can recall that in 1921 the short-lived League of Nations established an office of high commissioner of refugee work; that in 1938 a committee for refugees grew out of a meeting of 32 nations in France; that after World War II, the UN International Refugee Organization proved of some assistance; that the American Displaced Persons Act of 1948 saved nearly half a million from

life under tyranny.

Why is it then that in tracing this gloomy rescue resume of flight and organized efforts to ameliorate the lot of the driven, one segment of the tragic story has been shown consistently

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on a gigantic screen? Why has such disproportionate attention been drawn to the Arab refugee issue? Is this case study referred to again and again because it offers more pathos, more drama than all the other histories of refugees combined?

In May 1948, when Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Syria, spurning the partition plan granting Palestinian Arabs autonomy, land, and self-government, unleashed their guns against the new State of Israel, there were 870,000 Jews residing in Arab lands. Hundreds of thousands of these became refugees in the true sense of that word. Today, Jews still in Syria number 4000; in Iraq, 40.

Some 500,000 to 800,000 Palestinian Arabs comprised the initial rolls of Arab refugees, many of whom left at the urging of Arab leaders. Despite sharp, continuing criticism by Arabs of the UN Relief and Works Agency For Palestine Refugees, that and other relief units have provided outstanding service. Financing of much of this effort has come from the U.S.; a significant small amount from Arab states.

Today, many do not realize that thousands of persons listed currently as Arab refugees are children and grandchildren of those who departed the partitioned areas in 1948. Many either do not know, or have forgotten, that rich Arab states covering vast areas could have rescued their brethren long ago.

Thanks to the effective lobbying and propaganda campaigns of Arab chiefs and their allies the world over, the Arab refugee plight lodges longer in the minds of millions than that of any other refugee group. A writer of such sensitivity as Mary McGrory has much to our amazement and sorrow penned this distortion: "It is a fact that Jews have never directed their excellent minds to the question of the Palestinian refugees." This despite the fact that Jews have made every reasonable overture in the textbooks of compassion and rescue and despite the fact that some 650,000 to 700,000 Arabs now have residence in Israel.

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