

## World Citizen Essay Contest

March 2022

## Don't Forget They're People Too

World War I. Ask anyone to name big events in history, and that would undoubtedly be listed. Everyone knows something about it, even if that is just the name. Like most wars, this was not caused by one specific moment (although it was kickstarted), but rather a buildup of tensions, in this case between Austria-Hungary and Serbia (Britannica). However, soon after the Austrian Archduke was assassinated, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, on July 28, 1914. Austria-Hungary got Germany on their side while Serbia had Russia backing them. Within a week, nearly the entirety of Europe was at war (Britannica). This, of course, resulted in thousands upon thousands of people seeking refuge, for a couple of different reasons. One main cause of the surge of refugees was enemy occupation in people's homeland, like Russia being in East Prussia, which caused many Germans to flee. The second main cause of the refugee crisis was the government pushing against its own people, also known as organized deportation (British Library).

This happened with refugees from Armenia, when Turkish troops massacred them, even though both Armenia and Turkey were a part of the Ottoman Empire. However, the Turkish suddenly viewed their long-term neighbors as "the enemy within" (British Library). Lots of people took pity on the Armenian refugees, viewing them as "innocent Christian victims" (British Library). The Middle East and Russia offered the Armenian refugees' food and medical support, took care of orphan children, and even had basic academic education available. One young Armenian girl, Aurora Mardiganian, turned her experience of the tragedy into a film, *Ravished Armenia*, in 1919. The movie used refugees to show the weight of the situation and how it affected the entire nation, not just the people fighting the war. Serbian authorities did something similar with their refugees, going to great lengths to photograph the great retreat of Serbia. (British Library) This was meant to symbolize the idea of Serbia's martyrdom after their defeat by Austria-Hungary. The images depicted those services of hospitality "not only accommodated refugees but were expected to remind them of collective national suffering" (British Library).

Britain had 160,000 Belgians come in, and over 2,500 committees were happy to provide services for them. However, Belgian refugees began to take advantage of this and act as though they had a right to the British hospitality. Once the initial Belgian refugee craze settled down, they became an insufficiently grateful burden to the British (British Library). Similarly in Russia, people were insistent on assisting the refugees, early on. They set up emergency accommodations everywhere they could, in schools, empty factories, breweries, hotels, cinemas, barracks, cafes, and even prisons! However, the eagerness to help, to be a part of the craze, dwindled soon after people realized that most refugees had no means of paying for their food or accommodation. (British Library).

Sometimes, returning home after a war can be nearly as difficult as leaving. Seeing all the change and damage to the people and place they may call home. That is what most Belgian refugees did, return home. Serbia's refugees went to an entirely new country, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, otherwise (formerly) known as Yugoslavia (British Library). Armenian refugees eventually found themselves in Western Europe and as far as North America. Russia's refugees still had more to go through with the war between Soviet Russia and Poland, which ended only in 1921 (British Library). That, however, is quite another story.

Whether refugees are seeking shelter, or returning home, or going somewhere else entirely, they need help to get settled into their lives, temporary or permanent. There seemed to be a common issue with the refugees not appreciating or compensating their hosts. One way that this may have been solved is with the refugees doing work to repay their caregivers until they go back home or elsewhere. This type of deal could be struck between the refugees and the organizations. Having a job may give the refugees some sort of stability and routine in their lives. Along with getting basic survival tools such as food, water and shelter, people could also donate their unused or old things. Over 15 million tons of clothing get thrown away each year in America (Road Runner). Plenty of those could easily be donated to people in need. Should there be some sort of basic language or educational barrier between refugees and citizens, high school students could earn volunteer hours by teaching them, and college students could educate the refugees in what they are majoring in. You know a subject best when you can teach it.

Although integrating refugees into common communities may be difficult for some people, simple acts such as inviting them to a barbecue or gathering where they do not feel different or awkward could make all the difference. Offering a helping hand to a person or family, to show them around or introduce them to others. If they are from a far country, showing them day-to-day activities/sports people participate in. For the most part, the thing that is going to make the refugees feel most welcome and comfortable is treating them like they are normal. Not always asking if they are okay or pointing out to everyone that they are refugees. If you put yourself in the shoes of a refugee, what would you want? After all, they're people, just like the rest of us.

#### WORKS CITED

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Causes and Effects of World War I." *Britannica*, 2

Oct. 2020, [www.britannica.com/summary/Causes-and-Effects-of-World-War-I](http://www.britannica.com/summary/Causes-and-Effects-of-World-War-I).

Brown, Rachel. "The Environmental Crisis Caused by Textile Waste." *Roadrunner*, 8 Jan. 2021,

[www.roadrunnerwm.com/blog/textile-waste-environmental-crisis](http://www.roadrunnerwm.com/blog/textile-waste-environmental-crisis).

Gatrell, Peter. "Europe on the Move: Refugees and World War One." *British Library*, 29 Jan.

2014, [www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/refugees-europe-on-the-move](http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/refugees-europe-on-the-move).

