Smriddhi Nair

Kenneth Stern

Hate Studies Essay

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The International Rescue Committee

The International Rescue Committee is a global organization that was created in order to help people experiencing humanitarian crises by providing immediate relief as well as long term assistance in times of war, persecution, and natural disasters. It was founded as the International Relief Association in 1933 through the request of Albert Einstein during the Holocaust, and continues to this day to help refugees become self-sufficient in the country they escape to. Originally, the committee was founded in order to help Jewish people escaping from Nazi Germany, but since then the organization has expanded to help people all throughout the world seeking asylum from persecution through a slow descent of Hungarian Refugees, Cuban refugees, African refugees, and then expanding to accept refugees from all around the world. The International Rescue Committee helps clients based on a timeline laid out by the United States Office of Refugee Resettlement. That is usually 8 months within a Match Grant Program, and then 5 years for additional services. However, this timeline does not necessarily have to be as strict—if a family needs more time within each department as they start building their roots within the country, then they are able to do so upon each supervisor's request. This way, each family has a fighting chance at living a sustainable life within their country.

I originally found out about the International Rescue Committee from my search in finding an internship that would provide me with hands-on experience in fighting hate. Through

my study at Bard, I was able to see the need for academic research on the hate immigrants face in the United States. However, I wanted to spend the summer working with people who were on the front lines of fighting hate in order to gain a different perspective of the Human Rights conversation within the United States. In addition, to my knowledge, Bard College had an otherwise unknown affiliation with the organization. The company that preceded the International Rescue Committee—the Varian Fry team, which was a small group of individuals who were able to "help at least 1500 refugees escape from France to Spain and provided support to over 2000 more", had a young member named Justus Rosenberg. Justus Rosenberg was a professor at Bard College, who taught there from 1962 until his passing in 2021. The Varian Fry Group and an existing committee called the International Relief Association (IRA), would combine in order to warn the world about the Holocaust and continue trying to aid refugees in their escape, ultimately expanding to be the organization I interned at over the summer.

From the beginning of June 2023 till the end of August I worked within the Resettlement Department at the IRC. The IRC had several different departments, such as Health and Wellness, Youth Education, Adult Education, Employment, Career Development, and Asset Building, but the department I worked out of focused on helping refugees within the first 90 days of arrival to the United States. The time that immigrants went through meant that they were going from one program within the organization to the other, and different departments would help out in each one of them—like the Education Team, Enrollment Services Team, and the Health Services team. Each of these departments played a vital part in order to ensure that each family made it through their first few years in a new country.

One of the first things I noticed about the office space in Atlanta that the International Rescue Committee had was the diverse group of employees from different cultures and

countries. When speaking to the different clients, oftentimes the IRC was able to in-source and ask one of their employees to communicate with the clients, which allowed for the use of shared language and an understanding that outsourcing was not able to always provide. Walking through the office, you often hear colleagues coming up to one another, asking 'Do you speak ____?', and then handing over the phone. It made for an incredibly comforting, open, and vibrant space, which was helpful when clients were brought into the office for meetings and things of the sort.

My primary task was to aid Resettlement Caseworkers, who are employees with the primary role of providing material support and core resettlement services to incoming refugees for the first 90 days in their arrival to the United States. For obvious reasons, the first 90 days are oftentimes the most crucial for each of the refugees. This is probably the scariest and most vulnerable time for the crowd, as they enter a completely new environment, with new people, new climates, and a completely new culture.

Caseworkers are legally required to follow a strict timeline in order to support their clientele. The strict timeline are as follows:

24 Hours Upon Arrival:
- Reception and Arrival
- Home Visit Next Calendar Day
- Housing and Personal Safety Orientation

5 Days
- Intake Interview
- Pocket Money (Must be within the first 30 days)

7 Days
- Apply for Public Benefits

10 days
- Assistance to Enroll ESL and Employment Services

30 days
- Complete Health Screening
- Referrals for Class A Mental Condition
- School Enrollment
- Transportation

- Selective Service
- Registration
- Home Visits
- Resettlement Service Plan

90 Days

- Home Visits
- Cultural Orientation
- Assistance Addressing Health Concerns
- Enroll in all Other eligible benefits

Each and every part of this timeline required care, attention, and a lot of paperwork from each and every caseworker. In addition, they often had to track every time they made progress with their client by updating their databases with case notes, which they routinely submit for review to the government. These caseworkers are there for their clients every step of the way, which means they usually do not have enough hours in the day to complete what they hoped to do. Caseworkers are often seen with two laptops on their desk, a monitor open, stacks of paperwork in piles all over their desk, and their work phone on, awaiting a call from their clients. In my experience, I have found them to be incredibly hardworking, kind, and aware of the different challenges that their patients face coming to the United States as a lot of them are immigrants themselves.

My Work as An Intern

Interns were tasked with a varying number of tasks to help with their casework. The organization hired over 40 interns from all over the country to come work for the organization, and they were from all corners of the United States, allowing for me to learn from my very own colleagues. On some days, I would attempt to call the Social Security Office and wait in line to try and get our clients appointments (which only worked half of the time). Other days, I would

spend my time filling out health referrals through the internal systems to get clients doctors appointments, health exams, and more. On the most interesting days, I was actually able to meet the clients, and help them on a one on one basis. This looked like going to doctors appointments with the clients—providing translation through interpreters, as well as making sure they had the correct personal documents and ID to get past the waiting room. The time there made me realize the tiny, minute things that make it incredibly difficult for immigrants to get the help that they need. If they can not speak the language, then the documents they are handed are virtually impossible. If they have not been handed a photo ID, then they can't be seen by doctors. If they come from a different culture, then even the simple hand movement to come inside the doctor's office can be misconstrued. The people born in the United States often have a winning hand that they themselves are often not aware of.

One specific example of a day I had at the internship was when I was able to accompany a mother and child to the Women, Infant, and Children's office. This office was a government funded program created to help women and children get the food and doctors visits that they needed. I found it wondrous that this organization was specifically created to help women, but I had never even heard of it. During this visit, I was able to aid the client in translation as well as providing the correct documents in order for the client to be able to get a three month food supply for her and her baby, and get the correct information for how she could provide for the child that she was pregnant with.

In addition, I was able to deliver baby supplies, such as bassinets and diapers, to families expecting a baby as soon as they landed in the United States. I was also lucky enough to deliver mail—which may seem hardly interesting, but provided me at least a different sort of joy when I realized what I was delivering was a lot of people's livelihood—Social Security cards that

needed be signed and scanned, Employment Authorization Cards (more formally known as EAD cards, or better known as work permits), and even Food Stamps. Caseworkers were quite literally providing their clients with the most important documents that they could ever need in the United States everyday. Oftentimes, American citizens take these kinds of documents for granted, but a lot of the times, a single day can change the lives for immigrants depending on the mail they got that day.

How The IRC Fights Hate

Caseworkers did more than just apply for these documents—they also referred their clients to the departments that helped them find a new job, helped them enroll into English learning classes, and helped them get their kids into registration. The work that they do, simply put, is life-changing.

The International Rescue Committee as a whole recognizes the different problems immigrants will face as they arrive into the United States, and work to combat it as soon as their clients touch the ground into the United States. Their recognition of the hate immigrants face and immediate action showed me how the frontlines on the Human Rights discussion *actually* worked. It was less of a study as I did during my time at Bard College, and more like caseworkers striving everyday in order to try and find a solution to their clients problems—may it be a lost document, a lack of a job, their kids have not been registered into a school, their having health problems, etc on the spot.

One of the biggest problems that the IRC worked to eradicate was the lack of economic well being for their clients. During my orientation into the Hate Studies program, we learned a lot about modern-day racism, and the different parts of the United States government that can be wielded in order to hold back immigrant families. James Waller, in the *Escalating Risk of Mass*

Violence in the United States, writes about how especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, "the economic shock of COVID-19 in the United States has been differentially, and unequally, felt across American society" (11). The people who have majorly felt the complete brunt of this impact are the "low-wage, minority workers, Black women, Black men and mothers of school-age children" (11).

Coming to the United States when there is such a crisis regarding money is something that the IRC prepares for—mostly through cash assistance and the employment services provided. At the end of the three months, caseworkers often visited their clients with itemized receipts of the purchases they had completed—oftentimes under $10,000 is provided by the government, that would be incredibly difficult for immigrants to come up themselves brand new to the country. However, as an interview with my supervisor will later detail, the money that the immigrants received was often not enough to support them as they wanted, meaning that sometimes the IRC had to outsource and sometimes the money was simply not what they had hoped for.

Clients come to the office looking for jobs and employees spend their time trying to search for jobs that could work for them, including their language barriers and the kids at home who need to be taken care of. Employees are able to offer job applications, interview preparations, resume building, and the ability to connect to employers. This also ties into the Adult Education department, a part of the IRC, where clients are able to attend English classes, learn job skills, learn about American culture, and more. There are even free American Citizenship Preparation Classes. These employees often work in the Employment Services department, as they search to find jobs that work with their schedules and also have a livable wage, which is often difficult down in Georgia, where minimum wage is $7.25. In addition, the

IRC also provides business training skills, mentoring to immigrant families who are starting new businesses, and specialized mentoring to women who are starting in the United States, which is important in order to address the gender inequalities. The mentoring looks like a team of business professionals who work with each client to grow their own business, asking about rent, about their social media, and more—trying to find ways that their clients can succeed in this economy.

To find out more about the different challenges families face once they arrive in the United States, I interviewed my supervisor, Mohammad Hamim, a resettlement case manager who worked to help each individual case worker and their own clientele as a whole. As a refugee himself, Mr. Hamim had started at the IRC as a Case Aid, and then worked his way up to a Manager within a year. I asked him about the different difficulties that he experienced in his day to day life, and he described how oftentimes, "families expected a lot more" monetary assistance than the government was able to provide them with. They were oftentimes disappointed with the little money they got, and the IRC struggled to do more.

In addition, this summer Personal Documentation was getting increasingly more difficult to ascertain—there was a backlog of assistance in Georgia, especially for Food Stamps, as the Division of Family and Child Services (DFCS) faced a shortage of staff. Interns would try to take clients to the office to get them registered for food stamps and be there for hours, dealing with long lines and overworked employees who were simply trying their best. Hamim described the expectations and fears they fought, as their clients faced a lack of Food Stamps, Medicaid, Work Stamps, etc—everything that is incredibly vital to livelihood in the United States. He also described the measures that he would take to ensure that his client would be okay—working

overnight, figuring out grants and other stipends to pull from; anything to make the ends meet for his families.

Other difficulties that the staff faced were the base level slew of worries that every organization working with immigrants often have to think about—-lack of language interpreters, large cultural barriers, and a lack of respect between one another as both employee and client struggled to find a balance between what they know and what they are learning about one another.

Hate Faced

To find out more about the hate immigrants face coming to the United States, I was able to talk to an employee at the International Rescue Committee who had come to the United States as a refugee years ago. They had arrived through American Pathways, which is a partner organization to the IRC and have incredibly similar goals that they strive to achieve. They were kind enough to speak to me about their time, and for privacy's sake, they will be named Anon.

Anon had arrived in the United States as a Muslim from Russia, where they had studied at school for almost 6 years—5 years of schooling, and 1 year to prepare for college. However, Anon knew that their schooling would be futile if they stayed in Russia. No matter how much schooling and preparation that they had, the only job that was available for immigrants at that time was construction. Anon did not see themselves as a construction worker—especially when they had studied for years at school, majoring in Scale Building Management. Therefore, they were able to get to the United States through the American Pathways organization, however, unfortunately their troubles did not end there.

The biggest form of hate that Anon faced arriving in this country was the complete lack of education that Americans had towards immigrants. Without any knowledge, they often

grouped immigrants together as a whole and refused to take the time to get to know people. As Anon balanced a full time schedule as a student in the United States, as well as a cultural advisor to the military, they also worked as an Uber driver three days a week. This was where they faced a large majority of racism, as they were introduced to a wide variety of people. They faced hate from uneducated Americans who met a Muslim person from another country, with a different appearance, accent, and skin color—and immediately assumed them as a terrorist. Anon describes the patience they had to have in order to explain to Americans why they weren't very different from them, and especially the patience to explain to others why they had come to this country— to "find peace, build their future, and be helpful and supportive to this country". Anon even went forward to describe how coming to this country was never really about themself, but rather to "sacrifice our future to our generation so that they will one day become doctors, lawyers, pilots—good people in this country". They then went on to describe their own children, who they hope will have a fruitful future here in America.

Anon was surprised to find this sort of racism in the United States, stating "it's not easy to handle", and on top of that, they had come to this country with no family or anyone to rely on. They describe their experience as lonely, as they navigated a whole new life all by themselves. James Waller, in the *Escalating Risk of Mass Violence in the United States,* writes about this experience as a sort of social fragmentation that can cripple immigrants, as they lose their community that often upholds their culture. Anon was just recently married, and now has a family that faced evacuation from Afghanistan just recently. They are now a happy family of four.

Anon describes how the American Pathways were helpful—especially when dealing with the massive "culture shock" that immigrants face when coming to the United States. That kind of

knowledge was incredibly helpful when dealing with completely new environments. However, no matter the help that the American Pathways provided, they still faced hate during their everyday life, which they still were able to detail even years later. My last question to Anon was if they missed Russia, or their homeland—to which they replied that they did not, because they were aware that there was no future for themselves there.

My time at the International Rescue Committee was incredibly fruitful to my career goals. As someone who hopes to find a career in a nonprofit organization, and comes from a family of immigrants myself, I found the work that I was doing here to have a meaningful impact on the people coming to the States. However, it is important to note that there is not much that organizations such as this can do to combat hate, as it still remains a huge part of the experience immigrants face as they come to this country. There is so much more to learn and see here, and I hope to revisit the International Rescue Committee in the future as well.