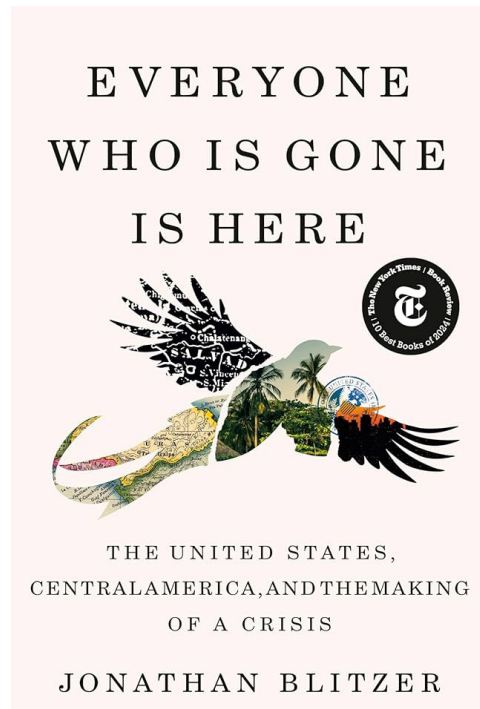


TODAY'S CRISIS, YESTERDAY'S NEWS

BY JOYCE BENNETT



Everyone Who is Gone is Here: The United States, Central America, and the Making of a Crisis by Jonathan Blitzer, who was a Fulbright Scholar to Spain in 2010

Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here: The United States, Central America, and the Making of a Crisis is a timely and significant explanation of how the United States arrived at today's immigration crisis. Perhaps even more importantly, it details the heartbreaking, brutal reality of our broken system. The book opens in the basement of a church at the Mexico-Guatemala border with a meeting of a group of migrants attempting to reaching the United States and quickly transitions to U.S. immigration policy. The opening is representative of the book, which award-winning journalist and New Yorker staff writer Jonathan Blitzer wanted to "be a kind of go-between" between migrants and policy makers, a rarely achieved goal that he executes with convincing precision. Blitzer expertly weaves together the life histories of key grassroots activists's lives including Juan Romagoza, Eddie Anzora, Keldy Mabel Gonzáles, and Lucrecia Mack. Into these complex realities, Blitzer integrates the policy decisions and processes playing out from the White House, into consulates, and beyond while retaining the focus on the humans – not the policies, places,

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or political results—of this crisis. Writing in this way, Blitzer centers what is often lost in discussions of the border crisis: humans and the very real people who live through this reality every single day.

Blitzer argues that the current immigration crises can only be understood through the policies and actions of the United States government in the twentieth-century, and that the humanitarian results are nothing less than horrific, including rape, murder, torture, forced disappearances, and more recently, separating children from their parents. The book uses an astounding set of resources: hundreds of interviews conducted over more than 15 years, newspaper and journal publications, and even participant-observation work, such as walking alongside migrants and attending bureaucratic meetings

Part I of the book details how the U.S.-backed Civil Wars that embroiled the Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador) in the mid-twentieth century. This section begins with Juan Romagoza's early life, laying the foundation for understanding how he came to be a key figure in holding Central American leaders accountable for their acts of torture in the latter half of the twentieth century, acts that laid the foundation for today's border crisis. As the book proceeds, Blitzer introduces and traces Romagoza along with Eddie Anzora, Keldy Mabel Gonzáles, and Lucrecia Mack through their lifetimes of challenges, legal proceedings, heartbreak, and survival while updating readings on how individual lives were impacted by policy. Part 2 brings readers into South Los Angeles and the gang wars of the late 1980s, including the origin of the notorious Mara Salvatrucha gang, which Blitzer directly relates to U.S. immigration policy and interactions with the L.A. police.

Part 3 examines Central America in the late 1990s and early 2000s when natural disasters increased and made life in the Northern Triangle untenable in new ways. Taking us through Obama's good intentions and into Trump's xenophobia, Blitzer details the complexity in navigating immigration policy, the ad-hoc nature of which makes any significant change difficult to attain. Part 4 brings readers through the Coronavirus Pandemic, where Blitzer documents the U.S.'s intentional deportation of COVID-infected migrants to Northern Triangle countries, exacerbating already insufficient healthcare systems, a subject of little discussion and journalistic attention at the time. Blitzer connects the Trump administration's policies to the long history of policy decisions that have made collaboration with Northern Triangle governments increasingly difficult, as distrust of the U.S. grows.

The book does not arrive at grand conclusions or policy suggestions. Instead, readers are left with the bitter reality of a broken, inhumane immigration system which impacts all of Central America. It is not likely a coincidence that migrants themselves are left in the same bitter ambiguity.

The book's 523 pages are strengthened by the journalistic nature of the writing that moves quickly from one chapter to the next. The tight integration of biographic data, interviews, and archival data make for approachable reading although the text is anything but easy, given the ruthless reality of the violence perpetrated in the name of the governments involved.

Everyone Who is Gone is Here is a book any American could read since today's crisis is so deeply rooted in the country's past actions, but the book would be particularly useful for any scholar, activist, or instructor working on the topic. Blitzer lays bare a history and current reality that few have been willing to tackle but that is absolutely necessary if the U.S. is ever to hope for a more humane immigration system.

Blitzer, Jonathan. *Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here: The United States, Central America, and the Making of a Crisis*. New York: Penguin Random House. 2024. 523 pages. \$32.00.

BIOGRAPHY

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