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“Stateless: Syrian Refugees in Detroit,” Documentary Short Film

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Extended Abstract

After fleeing Syria to escape the destruction of war, refugees continue to face challenges in their attempts to reorient themselves in a foreign nation. *Stateless: Syrian Refugees in Detroit* is a short documentary film that addresses these new hardships through the perspective of Syrian refugees resettling in Detroit, Michigan. The film questions the extent to which the United States of America has a responsibility to aid Syrian refugees given its history of support for Bashar al-Assad’s regime, current conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, and position as a world superpower.

Many individuals, specifically those in the Hamtramack and Dearborn regions of the metropolitan Detroit area, welcome the refugees. They explain that these areas have a long history of immigration from Arab countries, and that by settling the refugees in a community with a substantial Arab and Islamic influence they will be able to readapt quickly. The pro-refugee movement strongly believes in welcoming Syrian refugees as a means of sanctuary from the hardships of war. Additionally, they believe that doing so could provide a solution to Detroit’s devastated economy which is still recovering from the crash of the automobile industry as many of these refugees have skills from their careers in Syria, and hope to be entrepreneurs in their new economy. They do not fear any form of terrorism that may have a higher probability of occurring with the influx of refugees, but instead believe they will benefit their community that has had a turbulent economic history.

The anti-refugee movement, however, considers the refugees to be a draw on the already diminished resources. They will contribute to the unemployment rate by flooding the job market, and strain the welfare system further. Some individuals in this movement also feel as if the dominate Western culture is threatened. Prominent politicians such as President Donald Trump, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, and Michigan House Republican Representative for the 94th District, Tim Kelly, also confirm that the influx of refugees jeopardizes national security after the Director of the FBI, James Comey, released a statement saying that the Federal Bureau of Investigation cannot properly vet the surplus of refugees in such a short time span. This measure of vulnerability comes in the aftermath of the Paris attacks of 2015.

In a combination of protests, news clips, and interviews, a discourse between pro and anti refugee residents of Detroit emerges. The documentary is a forum in which these advocates voice their opinions, while the refugees themselves attempt to justify their own presence in their new community. The film includes archival news footage in which politicians and journalists continue this dialogue on a national scale, and interviews that localize the national issue to the lives of a few residents in Detroit and those of the refugees that are now their neighbors. The film includes the voices of individuals effected by Syrian

refugee resettlement in Detroit, culminating in a decision that either accepts the refugees, or forces them to retreat once again. A final decision is generated by the audience viewing the film, as the documentary itself offers each perspective without a defined solution. A portion of the documentary will be screened to educate the audience on the arguments so that they may participate in the proposed ongoing conversation.

Screening Requirements: A projector with audio capabilities, screen, and computer.