

Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction

By Kevin Kenny

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- What are the origins of the word diaspora?
- When did diaspora assume a theological significance?
- Why does the theological heritage matter today?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of defining diaspora with a typology (i.e., a list of required characteristics)?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of cultural approaches to diaspora?
- If diaspora is just another word for migration, then why are both words necessary? Is every form of migration diasporic?
- If diaspora is just another word for ethnic group, then why are both terms necessary? Is every ethnic group diasporic?
- Does every conception of diaspora necessarily include the notion of return in some sense?
- What kinds of interaction and connectivity does diaspora facilitate among migrants once they have settled abroad?
- Why did the idea of diaspora proliferate in academic, popular, and political usage in the era since World War II?
- What was the significance of decolonization in this process?
- Why and when did people of African descent embrace the idea of diaspora?
- Why and when did diaspora proliferate to the point that it was applied to virtually all migrant and ethnic groups?
- If diaspora is used in such a broad sense, how much analytical value does the term retain today? How can we preserve its explanatory value?
- Who uses the word diaspora today and for what purposes?
- Why are governments today so eager to reach out and claim “their” diasporas? What is at stake economically, politically, and culturally?
- What are the implications for how citizenship is defined?
- How does international migration today resemble and differ from migration in earlier periods?
- Does diaspora support or undermine nations and nationalism?
- What is the future of diaspora? Will the term become more or less relevant and popular in the twenty-first century?

Other publications by Kevin Kenny

Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn’s Holy Experiment (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Ireland and the British Empire: The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (Ed.) (Oxford University Press, 2004)

The American Irish: A History (Longman, 2000)

Making Sense of the Molly Maguires (Oxford University Press, 1998)

“Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study.” *Journal of American History* 90 (June 2003): 134–62

Further Reading

Rogers Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28.1 (2005): 1–19

Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2008)

Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (University of California Press, 2009)

Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)

Kim Knott and Seán McLoughlin (Eds.) *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, and Identities* (Zed Books, 2010)

Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge University Press, 2003)