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“The refugee problem”: an examination of Hmong refugee resettlement in Minnesota and its relevance to the modern-day refugee crisis

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Vassar College

“The Refugee Problem”:

An Examination of Hmong Refugee Resettlement in Minnesota and
Its Relevance to the Modern-day Refugee Crisis

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Arts in
International Studies

by

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Chapter One

Introduction



“At Home -- In Vietnam”

*My mother (kneeling, far left) and her family immediately before migrating to
the United States in 1990*

A week after taking office, Donald J. Trump issued his fifth Executive Order entitled “PROTECTING THE NATION FROM FOREIGN TERRORIST ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES”. The reason for this directive was because of the supposedly “Numerous foreign-born individuals [who] have been convicted or implicated in terrorism-related crimes since September 11, 2001, including foreign nationals who entered the United States after receiving visitor, student, or employment visas, or **who entered through the United States refugee resettlement program**” [emphasis added]¹. The executive order suspends the U.S. Refugee Admission Program for 120 days during which time the Secretary of State will “determine what additional procedures should be taken to ensure that those approved for refugee admission do not pose a threat to the security and welfare of the United States”². The order also outright bans all refugees from Syria because it “is detrimental to the interests of the United States” and “[proclaims] that the entry of more than 50,000 refugees in fiscal year 2017 would be detrimental to the interests of the United States”³. This executive order was in place for only a week until a federal judge put an injunction on it, but during that time

“Just 15 percent of the 843 refugees who were admitted [on a case-by-case basis]...were Muslim, compared with a weekly average of 45 percent in 2016...Only two refugees were allowed in from the seven Muslim-majority countries affected by President Trump’s travel ban. About 1,800 refugees from these countries had arrived in the United States every week on average since 2016”⁴.

¹ Office of the Press Secretary, "EXECUTIVE ORDER: PROTECTING THE NATION FROM FOREIGN TERRORIST ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES," White House, last modified January 27, 2017, accessed April 24, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/27/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states>.

² Office of the Press Secretary, "EXECUTIVE ORDER," White House.

³ Office of the Press Secretary, "EXECUTIVE ORDER," White House.

⁴ Audrey Carlsen, K.K. Rebecca Lai, and Adam Pearce, "SHARE Muslim Refugees Were Admitted at a Lower Rate During Trump’s Refugee Ban," New York Times, last modified February 26, 2017, accessed April 24, 2017,

By placing a ban on the entry of all refugees and immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries which have been deemed a threat to national security, Trump has placed the plight of the refugee in the forefront of the liberal American imagination. From women in knit pussy hats carrying signs that say “Refugees Welcome” at the Women’s March on Washington to Hollywood celebrities dramatically reading personal narratives of Syrian refugees⁵, it is popular for liberals to support refugees, especially in reaction to half of the nation agreeing with the anti-refugee rhetoric of Trump. But how does this support manifest itself? Can there be true solidarity between Americans and refugees?

Since the end of World War Two, American opinion towards refugees has wavered between being “impressively generous in their welcome of refugees...[or] neglectful, disinterested, and sometimes hostile”⁶. This conditional love of refugees cannot be equated with genuine solidarity. Does current support of refugees come from a desire to actually support refugees (and what does that look like?) or is it coming from a desire to be oppositional to the current administration and is that sustainable? Because refugees “often receive disproportionate media attention (both positive and negative)...[they] represent those whose life experiences most clearly demand humanitarian respect and action...On the negative side, refugees who violate the ideal refugee image...are subject to very sharp rejection”⁷. Refugees are an easy group for the Trump administration to target and an easy cause for liberal Americans to support. However, is the only support envisioned by these champions of refugees based on traditional resettlement

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/02/26/us/trump-refugees-muslim.html?_r=1&mtref=undefined&gwh=CA102739D0B531296773C67D150A6554&gwt=pay

⁵“I Hear You,” Oxfam America, accessed April 24, 2017, <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/take-action/i-hear-you/>.

⁶ David W. Haines, *Safe Haven?: A History of Refugees in America* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2010), [Page 1].

⁷ Haines, *Safe Haven?*, [Page 2].

policy and assimilation? This thesis aims to reimagine support for refugees by examining one group in particular: Hmong refugees who were resettled in the Minneapolis and St. Paul⁸ area.

The motivation for this thesis comes from a very personal place. My mother and her family came to the United States in 1990 as political refugees of the Vietnam War. My grandfather had been a South Vietnamese Air Force officer and after the war was sent to a communist reeducation camp for eight years. Because my family was deemed anti-Communist, they were persecuted and banned from higher education and most professions. But in 1990, they were granted asylum in the United States. When they arrived in Lansing, Michigan, by way of a refugee camp in Thailand, Catholic Social Services sent them to stay with a family who ended up being my paternal grandparents. My grandparents housed over a hundred refugees from Southeast Asia and the former Soviet Union over a ten year period.

My grandfather was a United Methodist minister who was disgruntled with the lack of support the church was providing refugees. In 1980, working with Catholic Social Services, he helped bring the Phu family from North Vietnam to Hastings, Michigan. This family of seven (which eventually grew as more babies were born and my grandfather helped find and sponsor more family members to join them) was the first refugee family and the first Vietnamese family to come to their county. My grandparents, and other members of their church, helped find this family a place to live and employment for the parents. My grandmother enrolled all five children in the local public school, helped teach them English, and took care of them after school when their parents were still at work. The oldest son and my father have been best friends since--he's even my godfather--and I'm friends with the second generation of this family. They eventually moved to Houston, Texas because of the large Vietnamese population and the job opportunities available (they had been fishermen in Vietnam and once in Texas, initially joined the shrimping

⁸ Hereafter referred to as the Twin Cities.

industry). By many metrics, the Phu family can be considered an “American success story” and they have always attributed their success to the support that my grandparents gave them when they first arrived.

In the fall of 2015, I was studying in Paris when the terrorist attacks on the night of November 13 occurred throughout the city. Holed up in an apartment for three days, I read countless news articles of politicians from the United States and various European countries demonizing refugees because the perpetrators were rumored to be Syrian and using these attacks as an excuse to deny refugees entry. The then-governor of my home state, Mike Pence, issued a statement four days after the attacks saying:

“In the wake of the horrific attacks in Paris, effective immediately, I am directing all state agencies to suspend the resettlement of additional Syrian refugees in the state of Indiana pending assurances from the federal government that proper security measures have been achieved. Indiana has a long tradition of opening our arms and homes to refugees from around the world but, as governor, my first responsibility is to ensure the safety and security of all Hoosiers. Unless and until the state of Indiana receives assurances that proper security measures are in place, this policy will remain in full force and effect.”⁹

Despite the fact that Governor Pence had no authority to make this suspension--and it was not in fact enforced at all--his message resonated and was repeated by several governors the weeks following the attacks in Paris. It is rhetoric like this which made Pence an attractive running mate for Trump and which has led to the current anti-refugee policy of this administration.

⁹ IN.gov, "Governor Pence Suspends Resettlement of Syrian Refugees in Indiana," Governor Archives, last modified November 16, 2015, accessed April 25, 2017, http://www.in.gov/activecalendar/EventList.aspx?view=EventDetails&eventidn=239126&information_id=233816&type=&syndicate=syndicate.

Because of my family history, I have been able to see and understand both sides of refugee resettlement practices of the late 20th century. But I realize that I am writing this thesis from a place of privilege and that the identities and experiences that I will be discussing are not my own. Much has been written on ethnically Vietnamese and Chinese refugees of the Vietnam War, but I want to shed light on how the United States has treated Hmong refugees because of their unique role during the Vietnam War and yet they are rarely the focus of discussions of Southeast Asian refugees. I believe that there are lessons to be learned from the resettlement of Hmong refugees in the Twin Cities which should be applied to the current refugee crisis.

Chapter Two

A Brief History of American Policy and Attitudes Towards Refugees



“The Chinese are uncivilized, unclean, and filthy beyond all conception, without any of the higher domestic or social relations; lustful and sensual in their dispositions; every female is a prostitute of the basest order”

-Horace Greely, New York Tribune

Immigration Policy and anti-Asian Sentiments

The United States has a long and storied history of banning the entry of certain groups of people, beginning with the Page Act of 1875. This was the first piece of federal legislation that prohibited a particular group of people from entering the United States by banning the entry of Asian immigrants deemed immoral. The act states “That in determining whether the immigration of any subject of China, Japan, or any other Oriental country, to the United States [...] it shall be the duty of the consul-general [...] to ascertain whether such immigrant has entered into a contract or agreement for a term of service within the United States, for lewd and immoral purposes”¹⁰.

This was the first time that the United States codified the requirement of a morally sound potential citizen-subject. With the implementation of the Page Act, which targeted Asian prostitutes, it effectively ended all immigration of Chinese females to the United States, regardless of their actual involvement with prostitution. While the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and nationality are fascinating to examine in the Page Act, its legacy can be seen in modern policies and practices of refugee admittance which make one's conduct a determining factor in whether a migrant will be able to access American citizenship. This can be seen by the intense level of security processing which all refugees must undergo:

“The Department of State and DHS work together to submit the refugee’s information into a U.S.-based security screening process, which compares biometric information, personal data, and the refugee’s application information against a wide array of U.S. government databases and terrorism watch lists, including from the FBI, Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Defense, as well as the National Counterterrorism Center as well as additional

¹⁰ Page Act, H.R. 141 (1875).

intelligence agencies. Refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States.”¹¹

This level of scrutiny by multiple agencies and databases should suggest that the refugees which are admitted to the United States pose no threat to the American populace. However, the demonization of refugees by fearmongering politicians continues and it has its origins in centuries-old xenophobic policies and mentalities. Several pieces of legislation prohibiting the entry of Asian migrants followed the Page Act, culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which banned the immigration of all Chinese laborers for ten years, but which eventually became a permanent law. This act is the legal manifestation of the fear of the Yellow Peril which was prevalent in the American imagination of the late 19th century and continues today. It also feeds into the perception of Asians and Asian-Americans in the United States as “perpetual foreigners”, which led to negative attitudes toward Hmong refugees upon their initial resettlement and as they created their own communities, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

World War One and the Creation of the Modern Refugee

The First World War unleashed death and devastation on a level which had been previously unknown. It shattered notions of state and sovereignty with the destruction of empires and the creation of new countries and led to civil wars erupting throughout the continent and eventually to the Second World War. The result of these conflicts were millions of stateless people--which Hannah Arendt defines as “persons [who] had lost the protection of their government and required international agreements for safeguarding their legal status”¹².

Minorities who were displaced during World War One existed outside of the nation-state

¹¹ Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, "U.S. Refugee Admissions Program FAQs," U.S. Department of State, last modified January 20, 2017, accessed April 25, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2017/266447.htm>.

¹² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951), [Page 279].

because they were wanted nowhere. Their existence outside of structured government challenged the traditional French notion of the inalienable (and therefore supposedly independent of any form of government) Rights of Man but it "turned out that the moment human beings lacked their own government and had to fall back upon their minimum rights, no authority was left to protect them and no institution was willing to guarantee them"¹³. The challenges which stateless persons faced following World War One have only grown since since "it appears that every political event since the end of the first World War inevitably added a new category to those who lived outside the pale of the law, while none of these categories, no matter how the original constellation changed, could ever be renormalized"¹⁴. Arendt argues that the two "solutions" to the issue of refugees, repatriation and naturalization, failed because they were conceptualized within the framework of a functioning network of nation-states and did not fully take into consideration the needs of the stateless person but there still does not exist an alternative solution. The policy for handling refugees was not created by the refugees themselves but by the nations which in many cases were directly or indirectly the reason for their stateless status.¹⁵

¹³ Arendt, *The Origins*, [Page 292].

¹⁴ Arendt, *The Origins*, [Page 277].

¹⁵ Emily Short to Moodle--Policing Borders and Transnational Solidarity Weekly Forum Post, "...they begin to belong to the human race in much the same way as animals belong to a specific animal species," February 6, 2017.

Refugee Resettlement Policy in the Aftermath of World War Two

PERIOD		NUMBER
1948–1952	Displaced Persons Act	415,000
1953–1956	Refugee Relief Act	214,000
1956–1957	Hungarian refugees	32,000
1959–1974	Cubans	656,000
1965–1974	Parolees	78,000
1975–2009	Africa	241,619
	Asia	1,365,683
	Eastern Europe	301,314
	Soviet Union	605,105
	Near East	229,263
	Latin America	105,829
	Other	22,375
Grand total		4,266,188

Sources: The data for arrivals since 1975 come from the U.S. Department of State's Refugee Processing Center. Earlier data are from the actual legislative approvals (for DPs), from special tabulations of Cuban arrivals as presented in Taft, North, and Ford (1979: 67), and from counts of parolees under the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act from the Congressional Research Service (CRS 1980: 12). Note that asylees and Cuban-Haitian entrants are *not* included but ODP arrivals and Amerasians *are* included. Note also that an additional 6,000 Hungarian refugees were admitted as part of left-over authorized numbers from the Refugee Relief Act. See CRS (1979b, 1980) for more detailed breakdowns of admissions numbers for the pre-1980 period.

*Table 1: Refugees admitted since the Second World War*¹⁶

The Trump administration's bias against refugees of a specific religion is not a new phenomenon in American politics. Modern American refugee policy has its origins in World War Two, particularly in the rejection of the S.S. *St. Louis* and the failed Wagner-Rogers bill in Congress. In the spring of 1939, the S.S. *St. Louis*, a ship carrying more than 900 refugees (the majority whom were German Jews fleeing the Third Reich) hoped to land in Cuba before continuing to the United States. The refugees had passports stamped with red *Js* to designate them as Jews and all of them had Cuban landing permits. However, when they arrived in Cuba they were not allowed to disembark because the Cuban president had invalidated their landing permits. Many of the passengers also had registered for American visas,

¹⁶ Haines, *Safe Haven?*, [Page 4].

“but their entrance dates varied from three months to three years after their arrival in Cuba...they believed that the United States would wave the delay. But the United States government, including Roosevelt, the consuls, and Congress chose not to...Governmental inaction and indifference forced the ship to turn back to Europe, where the crew distributed the passengers among various countries.”¹⁷

Some of the passengers on board the S.S. *St. Louis* had affidavits of support from sponsors or organizations which had pledged to aid the refugees in their resettlement. At the time, “there was a division of labor between the government (which decided on admissions) and non-governmental organizations (which ensured that refugees were not a public burden after arrival)”¹⁸. While multiple pieces of legislation which have been passed address this dichotomy, the separation of the responsibilities of hands-on refugee resettlement continues in some form to this day, with religious and non-profit organizations taking on the brunt of the work involved in helping refugees initially settle upon arriving in the United States.

While the fate of the S.S. *St. Louis* remained uncertain, the Wagner-Rogers bill which would have permitted 20,000 German refugee children floundered in Congress. Senator Robert Wagner “went on the radio and pointed to the desperate plight of the refugees on the S.S. *St. Louis* as proof that America needed to change its policies” six days after Cuba sent the ship back to Europe¹⁹. The Wagner-Rogers bill was specifically worded to avoid identifying the refugee children as Jewish and was very limited in its scope compared to the extent of the humanitarian crisis in Europe, but it still failed because of anti-Semitism and a fear of accepting too many

¹⁷ Diana L. Linden, "Ben Shahn, the Four Freedoms, and the S.S. St. Louis," *American Jewish History* 86, no. 4 (December 1998): [Page 430-31], http://www.jstor.org/stable/23886436?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=SS&searchText=st.&searchText=louis&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3Ffc%3Doff%26amp%3BQuery%3DSS%2Bst.%2Blouis%26amp%3Bacc%3Don%26amp%3Bwc%3Don%26amp%3Bgroup%3Dnone&seq=12#page_scan_tab_contents.

¹⁸ Haines, *Safe Haven?*, [Page 143].

¹⁹ Linden, “Ben Shahn,” [Page 430].

refugees. The S.S. *St. Louis* returned to Europe and no refugees of World War Two were admitted until after the war.

These two events are emblematic of a theme in American refugee policy “of rejecting or accepting refugees based on their specific identity...[Refugees] who could unite multiple constituencies have fared best of all, for example, by appealing to the humanitarian impulses of the left, the anticommunist impulses of the right, and the communitarian impulses of co-ethnics and co-religionists”²⁰. The case of Southeast Asian refugees in particular played into American concepts of justice, guilt, and responsibility because not only were those fleeing Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos perceived as being anti-Communist, but they were also fleeing a humanitarian crisis worsened and in many ways created by American military conquests. In some ways, the acceptance of Southeast Asian refugees by the Americans who chose to help them can be seen as a moral reaction to an incredibly unpopular war which the United States worsened and then abandoned once it became clear that there was no chance that they could win. This moral commitment is particularly evident when it comes to the case of Hmong refugees, who became a part of the U.S. military industrial complex during the CIA led “Secret War” in Laos (which will be expanded upon in the next chapter).

Refugee policy in the United States prior to 1980 came in the form of emergency pieces of legislation passed in reaction to world events that created humanitarian crises. After the inaction of the United States during the S.S. *St. Louis* situation and the end of World War Two which exposed the extent of the atrocities committed and created millions of displaced persons, the United States passed its first official piece of legislation that allowed for the entry of refugees: the Displaced Persons Act of 1948²¹. While the Wagner-Rogers bill failed in part due

²⁰ Haines, *Safe Haven?*, [Page 3].

²¹ "Displaced Persons Act of 1948," Legisworks, <http://www.legisworks.org/congress/80/publaw-774.pdf>.

to anti-Semitism, support for a formal piece of legislation to address the displaced persons following World War Two substantially grew “only as the public began to realize that most of the [displaced persons] were, in fact, Christian”²². This policy allowed for certain European refugees to enter the United States. A displaced person (using the definition from the Constitution of the International Refugee Organization) would be eligible for entry to the United States if between September 1, 1939 and December 22, 1945 they entered Germany, Austria, or Italy, resided in American, French or British zones in either Italy, Germany, or Austria, were a victim of persecution by the Nazi government, or were a native of Czechoslovakia who fled from persecution or fear of persecution.

A quota was placed on immigration visas for eligible displaced persons: 200,000 immigration visas were permitted during the first two years of the act, 2,000 visas were permitted to be issued without regard to quota limitations, and eligible displaced orphans were eligible for up to 3,000 non-quota immigration visas. This policy was enacted following the admission of more than 250,000 displaced Europeans. The act allowed for the admission of an additional 400,000 displaced Europeans. In 1953, the law was amended to allow for the admission of 200,000 more displaced Europeans after they had reached the original limit. The division of labor between the government and volunteer agencies remained following the passage of these laws. The representative who proposed this bill, William Stratton, “stressed how unlikely these people were to need assistance since they ‘represent a survival of the fittest, having escaped and endured what millions of their kinsmen could not survive’”²³. This inaccurate perception of the psychological distress which refugees experience allowed the

²² Haines, *Safe Haven?*, [Page 143].

²³ Haines, *Safe Haven?*, [Page 143-144].

government to remain absent in the day-to-day process of refugee resettlement which faith and ethnicity based volunteer agencies carry out.

Refugee Policy during the Cold War: 1965-1980

The next piece of overarching legislation to address refugees was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (aka the Hart-Celler Act). This act reformed the quotas set for countries for the first time since the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, allowing for an influx of Asian immigrants to the United States which had been hindered by the Quota Act and the Chinese Exclusion Act. The new law maintained per country limits but created seven preference visa categories, including a category for refugees. This act defined a refugee as:

“any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion”²⁴.

This landmark legislation defined how the U.S. admits immigrants and refugees (until the Refugee Act of 1980).

Following the Fall of Saigon, the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 was enacted to allow for approximately 130,000 refugees from South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia under special status²⁵. This act also allotted for special relocation aid and financial assistance, allocating \$305 million for the Department of State and \$100 million for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. This act financed the transportation, procession, reception, and resettlement costs. The Indochinese Refugee Assistance Program was developed,

²⁴ Immigration and Nationality Act, H.R. 2580 (1965).

²⁵ Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, H.R. 6755 (1975).

giving clearance for any Vietnamese, Cambodian, or Lao refugees to use resources which Cuban refugees had used in the early 1970s. While these funds and resources finally started to address the imbalance between the responsibilities of the state and those of volunteer organizations, it was still far from equitable: “the federal government was handling processing and the voluntary sector was handling actual resettlement”²⁶.

The mass influx of Southeast Asian refugees posed challenges which had not been seen with previous waves of refugees. There was no community of Southeast Asians in the United States before the Vietnam War created a situation in which they had to escape, which allowed for a dispersal of refugee arrivals across the country to avoid any one area being inundated with refugees but also meant that there was no community which could help them resettle apart from these volunteer organizations. As much as Americans liked to perceive these refugees as a homogenous group, there was in fact an incredible amount of diversity of ethnicities, nationalities and languages (not to mention conflict between certain ethnic groups during the Vietnam War) which meant that there could not be a “one size fits all” program of refugee resettlement. These challenges, in addition to the logistical disorder which came about as a result of having different pieces of policy for dealing with different groups of refugees, meant that reform was desperately needed. This was supposed to have been achieved by the Refugee and Resettlement Act of 1980 which was “designed to enable the United States to meet any refugee situation, anywhere in the world, and to deal with it effectively and efficiently. The new law [was] intended to end years of *ad hoc* programs and different policies for different refugees by putting the U.S. refugee programs on a firm basis”²⁷.

²⁶ Haines, *Safe Haven?*, [Page 145].

²⁷ Edward M. Kennedy, "Refugee Act of 1980," *The International Migration Review* 15, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 1981): [Page 143].

The lead proponent of all major refugee and immigration law in the United States from the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 to the Refugee Act of 1980 was Senator Edward Kennedy. At the opening hearing on comprehensive refugee legislation in 1979, he began by stating: “I believe our national policy of welcome to the homeless has served our country and our traditions well. But we are here this morning to explore how we can do this job better”²⁸. The Act redefined the United States’ definition of a refugee in order for it to be in adherence with the United Nations Convention and Protocol on the Status of Refugees. The Refugee Act of 1980 created a permanent, systematic procedure for the regular and emergency admission of all refugees of special humanitarian concern. The act raised the limitation from 17,400 to 50,000 refugees admitted per fiscal year and provided emergency procedures for when that number exceeds 50,000. The act also created the Office of U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. “Since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, annual admissions figures have ranged from a high of 207,116 in 1980, to a low of 27,100 the year following September 11, 2001. Seventy thousand refugees were admitted in both 2013 and 2014.”²⁹

²⁸ Haines, *Safe Haven?*, [Page 146].

²⁹ Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, "Fact Sheet: History of U.S. Refugee Resettlement," Mission of the United States: Geneva, Switzerland, last modified June 19, 2015, accessed April 24, 2017, <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2015/06/19/fact-sheet-history-of-u-s-refugee-resettlement/>.*

*This was not my original source for this quote. When I went to cite this quote on April 24, 2017 this fact sheet had been removed from the State Department’s website and replaced with a “Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration” Factsheet which does not include the annual admissions figures.

Chapter Three

Hmong Refugee Resettlement in Minneapolis and St. Paul



The First Hmong Family in Minnesota:

Dang Her, his wife Shoua Moua, their sons Touvi and Bill

(the first Hmong baby born in Minnesota)

In 2010, there were 260,073 Hmong living in the United States.³⁰ With more than 66,000 Hmong residing in Minnesota today, the Twin Cities metro area is home to one of the largest concentrations of Hmong in the United States.³¹ While the largest population of Hmong is in California (along with most other Asian-American ethnic groups), I felt that it was more important to research the creation of a Southeast Asian ethnic enclave in Middle America. While the Hmong began arriving in the United States as refugees in the late 1970s, they remained a small ethnic group, largely overshadowed by the number of Vietnamese refugees and their contribution to American military operations during the Vietnam War remained classified until the 1990s. While they have been in the United States for over forty years, many Americans do not know much about the Hmong and if they know anything at all, it begins with the Vietnam War. Even in conversations with classmates about my thesis, most of them had only heard of this because of the Clint Eastwood film *Gran Torino*, which featured a large Hmong American cast (albeit in dated, stereotypical roles as gang members). I would like to begin my case study of Hmong refugee resettlement in the Twin Cities by providing a summary of the history of the Hmong people before their migration to the United states.

³⁰ Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, *A Community of Contrasts Asian Americans in the United States: 2011*, [Page 11], accessed April 26, 2017, http://advancingjustice-aajc.org/sites/default/files/2016-09/Community_of_Contrasts_US.pdf.

³¹ "Hmong in Minnesota," Minnesota Historical Society, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://www.mnhs.org/hmong>.

The History of the Hmong in Asia: Origins to the First Indochinese War

The Hmong have traditionally traced their roots to southern China, but sometime during the beginning of the nineteenth century they were pushed into the mountains of the northern Indochinese peninsula by the expansion of the Chinese empire. They were constantly threatened by the Chinese and earned the reputation of “nomads, mountain dwellers, and isolationists who did not mix with other peoples”³². At this time, the French had begun their northward colonization of Indochina, starting with the southernmost tip of Vietnam and eventually taking over the entire peninsula. The Hmong, as an ethnic minority in Laos, which the French considered to be the least important of its colonies, were subjected to additional taxes and as a result revolted in 1896, which resulted in the appointment of a representative to the colonial administration³³.

During the revolts which happened between the Hmong and the French during the beginning of the twentieth century, Pa Chay Vue emerged as the leader of the *Guerre du Fou*. Pa Chay became a near mythic figure amongst the Hmong. He was said to have “miraculously created a Hmong script on his own [...] Pa Chay performed spectacular feats of magic and convinced followers and fellow villagers that he could talk directly to heaven [...] people set aside their clan differences and transferred their loyalty to him”³⁴. While the Hmong lost the *Guerre du Fou*, those who had collaborated with the French were rewarded by being granted more representation in colonial administration. Working with the French

³² Chia Youyee Vang, *Hmong America: Reconstructing Community in Diaspora* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2010), [Page 20].

³³ Vang, *Hmong America*, [Page 21].

³⁴ Keith Quincy, "From War to Resettlement: How Hmong Have Become Americans," in *Hmong and American: From Refugees to Citizens*, by Mary Louise Buley-Meissner and Vincent K. Her (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), [Page 62].

colonists, particular in supplying them with the opium they required for their narcotics trade, in order to sustain their way of life became the goal for Hmong leaders. Touby Lyfoung, chief of the Ly clan and possessing a formal education, emerged as a leader of the Hmong during the 1940s with his appointment to the Opium Purchasing Board and became an important political leader throughout the First Indochina War (1946-1954)³⁵.

The Secret War

With the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu, French soldiers returned home only to be replaced by American troops. With Laotians choosing to either support the United States or the Vietnamese nationalists, the United States began to train Laotians to fight the communist guerillas. However, this practice formally ended with the 1962 Geneva Accords (also known as the International Agreement on the Neutrality of Laos) which required foreign troops to leave Laos. Military operations in Laos needed to continue, so the CIA began the “Secret War”. The CIA offered Vang Pao, who had worked alongside Touby Lyfoung and the French, the command of an army of Hmong soldiers who would be trained and paid for by the CIA. Working with the Americans, Pao raised an army of Hmong men that would combat the Vietnamese communists. They were supplied with American military equipment--from grenades and guns to helicopters which allowed them to “attack and withdraw anytime and anywhere. Eventually, the CIA diverted jets and bombers from Vietnam to back up the Hmong in Laos. The air assault was unrelenting: more bombs were dropped in Laos [...] than in all of World War II. The air support enabled the Hmong guerrillas to decimate tens of thousands of North Vietnamese”³⁶. However these victories, made in the name of anti-

³⁵ Quincy, "From War to Resettlement," [Page 63].

³⁶ Quincy, "From War to Resettlement," [Page 64].

communism in order to support American imperialist military conquests, took its toll on the Hmong who were seen as expendable by the CIA. By 1970, so many Hmong men had been killed by a war that had “[mutated] into a conflict that threatened their survival” that they were starting to be replaced by adolescent Hmong boys³⁷. The CIA eventually made the decision to replace half of the Hmong guerrilla army with Thai forces by 1972. Vang Pao’s authority given to him by the CIA increased and eventually he became the leader of the entire Hmong region in Laos, disregarding traditional clan separations. In order to get the support of the clans (who would send their men to join the secret army), he appointed clan leaders to prominent official positions within the Hmong military.

However, by the mid 1970s it became clear that the United States was fighting a losing battle in Southeast Asia and began to withdraw its troops as the region came under communist control. With the CIA, and its funds, gone, Vang Pao and about 2500 Hmong elite were airlifted by the CIA to Namphong, Thailand. In a scene that was nearly identical to the evacuation of Saigon the previous month, thousands of Hmong attempted and failed to get on cargo planes out of Laos. The Hmong who remained in the now Communist controlled Laos were persecuted for their collaboration with the United States. Those who were caught by the Pathet Lao had their property seized and were sent to concentration camps. Many Hmong spent the late 1970s evading capture by hiding in the jungles of Laos and surviving on wild tubers and trying to cross the Mekong into Thailand.

³⁷ Quincy, "From War to Resettlement," [Page 65].

Life in the Refugee Camps

For many Hmong-Americans of the first and 1.5 generations, a significant portion of their lives were spent in refugee camps in Thailand. The first camps set up immediately following the communist takeover of Laos were in horrid condition. Displaced Hmong had to make their own shelters out of plasting sheeting and whatever debris they could gather, all while surviving on starvation rations of food. In 1971, in reaction to civil war in South Asia which created millions of Pakistani refugees, the UNHCR depleted its funds from its member nations. By the time the Hmong refugee crisis occurred, the UNHCR unofficially changed its policy: “repatriation [which cost significantly less than humanitarian aid] became the overriding goal [...] Hmong refugees experienced the first phase of this policy: make camp life so miserable that refugees might be persuaded to repatriate”³⁸. However, after involvement by the United States and USAID, the Ban Vinai camp was built which would eventually hold up to 40,000 refugees by the early 1990s and had schools, marketplaces, and refugee run businesses.

The refugee camp is an interesting space of exception to explore-- at once the physical manifestation of international conflict and international agreement, it contains people who represent an entire history of an ethnic minority, living outside of the realm of the traditional nation-state in a stateless limbo. It is the space in which one’s identity as a refugee is officially formed due to their lack of freedom. The refugee camp creates “a condition where refugee identity is embedded in and takes off from a multiplicity of places, experiences, and positions in life [...] They are places where inhabitants become objectified and thus learn how

³⁸ Quincy, "From War to Resettlement," [Page 70].

to negotiate multiple identities for survival”³⁹. It is in these Thai refugee camps where Hmong and refugee identities began to collide. As one Hmong refugee put it, “On one side of the imagined line separating Laos and Thailand, Hmong were citizens unwanted; on the other, we were refugees unwanted”⁴⁰. As Yer, a college student of the 1.5 generation of Hmong Americans, explained Jeremy Hein in interviews, refugee identity is inherent to Hmong identity, which is difficult to explain to others: “When they say, ‘Where are you from?’ I say, ‘I don’t really have a country, but I’m from Laos.’ [...] ‘Are you Lao?’ Some people say that [because] they don’t know about the Hmong, so I say ‘refugee.’”⁴¹

Refugee Resettlement Practices of the 1970s-1980s

The Refugee Act of 1980 formalized what had been the prevailing belief and practice of resettlement practices in the United States since the 1940s: the ultimate goal for these refugees once they had been resettled was for them to assimilate to American culture and society as quickly as possible so that they would not negatively affect the community in which they now lived. This was to be achieved primarily through English language acquisition and economic stability. The Refugee Act established the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which was a step towards taking on some of the responsibilities of the non-governmental volunteer agencies by providing them with federal funding to carry out the steps needed to ensure assimilation. The office was to:

“(A) make available sufficient resources for employment training and placement in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency among refugees as quickly as

³⁹ Vang, *Hmong America*, [Page 40].

⁴⁰ Her, "Searching for Sources," [Page 34].

⁴¹ Jeremy Hein, "Homeland Narratives and Hmong Americans in Wisconsin," in *Hmong and American: From Refugees to Citizens*, by Mary Louise Buley-Meissner and Vincent K. Her (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), [Page 52, 54].

possible, (B) provide refugees with the opportunity to acquire sufficient English language training to enable them to become effectively resettled as quickly as possible, (C) insure that cash assistance is made available to refugees in such a manner as not to discourage their economic self-sufficiency...(2) The Director, together with the Coordinator, shall consult Consultation, regularly with State and local governments and private nonprofit voluntary agencies concerning the sponsorship process and the intended distribution of refugees among the States and localities”⁴².

Refugee policy in the United States is made with the interests of the American public in mind. There was fear that with the mass influx of Southeast refugees coming into the country, they would all end up in one location, “taking over” cities and threatening the American way of life like Cuban refugees had been perceived as doing to Miami. Because there was no significant Southeast Asian community in the United States when they first started arriving in 1975, the placement of refugees was determined by the location of those who volunteered to sponsor them through various agencies such as Catholic Social Services, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and the YMCA. While these volunteers tended for the most part to have the best of intentions, they were still tasked with carrying out the agenda of the American government by pushing these refugees toward assimilation. The paternalistic and patronizing nature of refugee sponsorship and assimilation continues to this day. While this attempt to scatter refugees seemed to work at first, it did not take very long for the first settled refugees to act as sponsors for their relatives and friends who were still in Asia. Secondary migration, when refugees move from their initial placement, began to occur as refugees reconnected with each other and heard of burgeoning ethnic communities.

Secondary migration was discouraged by the United States government and by the volunteer organizations and sponsors who had helped the refugees initially settle. Secondary

⁴² Refugee Act, S. 643 (1980), Section 412.

migration would lead to what was initially feared when Southeast Asian refugees began to come to the United States: the creation of ethnic enclaves. The initial sponsors, who despite their best efforts lacked the understanding of the culture of these refugees, would sometimes become resentful if the refugees rejected the services and the probable economic stability which the sponsors offered in order to migrate elsewhere to reunite with friends and family. The practice of secondary migration became so concerning to the government, that an official response was created with the

“Refugee Placement Policy Task Force [which] was established in November 1981 to develop and coordinate a national placement policy by defining areas which would be "adversely impacted" by additional refugees, by identifying strategies to avoid or reduce the "negative" impact of refugees, and to determine which strategies should be made part of placement policy by the major policy developers [...] Resettlement personnel [viewed] initial placement as a "major determinant" in the resettlement success of refugees, and thus view secondary migration as contributing to the failure of many aspects of refugee resettlement”⁴³.

These recommendations were eventually codified by a proposal with the goal of preventing the creation of areas of high refugee concentration. By working to prevent secondary migration, the government and volunteer organizations continued to patronize and hinder the development of these refugees by refusing to respect their autonomy. After being forced out of their country, confined in a refugee camp, and then being sent to a country without having a say in when this would happen or where they would end up, it is important for refugees to be able to make the decision to move to an area where they can be supported by members of a community which share their cultural practices and experiences. However, as part of the agreement which refugees signed when applying for resettlement, they were expected to accept all assistance provided to

⁴³Carol A. Mortland and Judy Ledgerwood, "Secondary Migration Among Southeast Asian Refugees In The United States," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 16, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1987): [Page 298], JSTOR.

them, regardless if what was provided was subpar and psychologically damaging, and prevented the refugees from becoming fully autonomous subjects. The “Statement of Understanding” which Hmong refugees were required to sign upon the completion of their refugee application (despite the fact that most Hmong were illiterate) stated:

“I understand that if I have close relatives in the United States, my sponsoring agency will make every effort to resettle me with them. If that is not possible, I will accept resettlement anywhere in the United States. Once I am resettled in one city, after arrival I cannot expect to be transferred to and assisted in another city. I will accept the initial housing arrangement provided for me and my family. If I am of working age and able to work, I will accept whatever work may be offered, whether this work is my specialty or not. I understand that I may change jobs at a later date, but that the voluntary agency or sponsor is not expected to assist me with finding another job”⁴⁴.

This agreement exemplifies the authoritarian, paternalistic, and assimilationist ideology which has guided refugee policy in the United States since the end of World War Two. The refugee is not seen as an autonomous person and furthermore should be grateful and accepting of any conditions which the United States provides them because the American government and its citizens are providing them with salvation. Secondary migration and the eventual creation of ethnic enclaves is essential for the psychological and economic well being of refugee groups. This can be seen in the Hmong ethnic enclave which was formed in the Twin Cities.

From One Family to the Hmong Capital of the World: Hmong Refugees in the Twin Cities

The emotional and psychological experience of the first Hmong refugees who arrived in the United States can best be conveyed by this ritual *qeej* song:

⁴⁴ Vang, *Hmong America*, [Page 49].

“Every time I sit down to a meal of *zaub tsuag* [plain boiled greens],

I hear dirging so full of sorrow.

Each dish of plain rice brings out more sadness and grief.

Looking to the sky, I see stars scattered in full display;

The night is a camouflage of colors.

I have nothing with which to start a family.

How shall I begin my life?

Thinking about all of this has brought me many tears.

Much of it has fallen, soaking my shirt, soaking my shirt”⁴⁵

In 1976, the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act was expanded to allow for refugees from Laos, including ethnic Laotians and Hmong. The first Hmong family arrived in Minnesota in December of 1975. Dang Her (pictured with his family on page 20) was a former USAID field assistant who was granted entrance into the United States under the U.S. Attorney General’s parole authority⁴⁶. Two months later, the first Hmong family to be resettled through the refugee resettlement program joined them followed by many more over the following years. The culture shock was immediate as “many walked out of the airport in sandals and t-shirts, only to be confronted by the brutal force of a snowy Minnesota winter”⁴⁷. While some refugee families initially resided with their sponsors, the majority were placed in low-income public housing in Minneapolis.

⁴⁵ Vincent K. Her, "Searching for Sources of Hmong Identity in Multicultural America," in *Hmong and American: From Refugees to Citizens*, by Mary Louise Buley-Meissner and Vincent K. Her (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), [Page 35].

⁴⁶ Vang, *Hmong America*, [Page 41].

⁴⁷ Chia Youyee Vang, *Hmong in Minnesota* (Saint Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2008), [Page 12].

For the first few years, Hmong refugees primarily lived Minneapolis neighborhoods which “consisted of predominately low-income communities, primarily residents of color [...] Some landlords began to rent entire apartment buildings primarily to refugees because they tended to pay their rent on time”⁴⁸. These housing projects provided them with stable, affordable, quality housing, however some families had difficulties adhering to their strict policies, particularly when it came to the number of people living in one unit as Hmong families tend to be quite large. In the early 1980s, the Hmong population gradually moved from Minneapolis to St. Paul and by 1982 occupied nearly half of the four main public housing in St. Paul⁴⁹.

Hmong refugees were subject to racialized attacks and hostility upon their arrival. According to the *Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Minneapolis-St. Paul*, a 1984 study prepared by the Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project at the University of Minnesota for the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the five most common false rumors about Hmong refugees which circulated during the first few years of their arrival were: “1) the Hmong eat dogs, 2) the government gives every Hmong family a free car, 3) the Hmong do not have to pay taxes for seven years, 4) the Hmong get higher welfare benefits than anyone else, 5) the Hmong get free apartments”⁵⁰. While these rumors were harmful to the early Hmong refugees, they were still generally well perceived by the American public because of anti-communist Cold War ideology. When documents detailing their role during the CIA’s Secret War in Laos became declassified in the 1990s, their contributions to the American war effort were recognized and they were labeled as one of America’s greatest allies during the Vietnam War. The Hmong were still, however, perceived as being relatively unassimilated to American culture in comparison to other Asian-American ethnic groups because of their tendency to live in ethnic enclaves and to preserve

⁴⁸ Vang, *Hmong America*, [Page 58].

⁴⁹ Bruce T. Downing et al., *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Minneapolis-St. Paul*, [Page 6].

⁵⁰ Bruce T. Downing et al., *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Minneapolis-St. Paul*, [Page 9].

elements of their culture and way of life which had constantly been threatened since the 19th century.

This perception of the Hmong as the perpetual foreigner, “stuck in their ways”, and unassimilable would come to a head in the early 2000s with President George W. Bush’s “War on Terror”. The 2006 Patriot Act classified the Hmong as terrorists because they had aided American soldiers during the Secret War, which was against Laotian law. Because the Hmong had engaged in unlawful activity against their country, at the behest of the CIA, they were now classified as terrorists by the country who forced them to engage in this activity. This led the United States to ban “Hmong and thousands of other refugees from entering the country or prevented those already in the country legally from adjusting their immigration status”⁵¹. Many Hmong reported that they had “difficulty obtaining green cards, driver’s licenses and passports because they or their relatives aided the United States”⁵². While many advocacy groups led Hmong-Americans to protest this law, which eventually was amended to exclude the Hmong and nine other groups who were originally listed, the damage had been done.

These stereotypes, combined with the fact that they entered American society by way of these low-income, urban areas made life difficult for Hmong refugees. This was exacerbated by a change in policy which occurred in the spring of 1982 when “refugee cash assistance was reduced from thirty-six to eighteen months. Those living in states without generous welfare programs for unemployed two-parent families had their benefits cut off. Thus some moved to states with a generous public-assistance program that accepted intact families”⁵³. Minnesota’s generous public assistance, in addition to the growing Hmong created and staffed community

⁵¹ Vang, *Hmong America*, [Page 139].

⁵² Associated Press, "Laotian, Hmong immigrants protest Patriot Act," Mercury News, last modified December 16, 2007, <http://www.mercurynews.com/2007/12/16/laotian-hmong-immigrants-protest-patriot-act/>.

⁵³ Vang, *Hmong America*, [Page 48].

assistance groups in the Twin cities were key factors in why many Hmong began moving to Minnesota.

By the 1980s, many Hmong refugees began arriving in the Twin Cities either by being sponsored directly to Minnesota from the refugee camps by a relative or by migrating from their first placement to join the growing Hmong community. The Hmong Resettlement Study stated that “41% [of household heads] indicated that they had lived in some other locality in the U.S. prior to coming to Minnesota”⁵⁴. While Minnesota’s welfare programs and the availability of jobs in the area helped the Hmong refugees in the Twin Cities, it was not the only factor that contributed to their success. The Hmong in Minnesota’s dependence “on public assistance since they began arriving in the United States has remained lower than in California. The Minnesota population has not only grown in size but also in terms of prosperity in various sectors”⁵⁵. This is because of the ethnic enclave and systems of Hmong mutual assistance associations which have grown in the Twin Cities. These associations have helped improve the lives of thousands of Hmong-Americans by helping them achieve social and economic autonomy, and the history of the politics involved with these mutual assistance associations is fascinating as they include conflicts between Vang Pao and various clan leaders (in some ways continuing the power struggles which existed during the war).

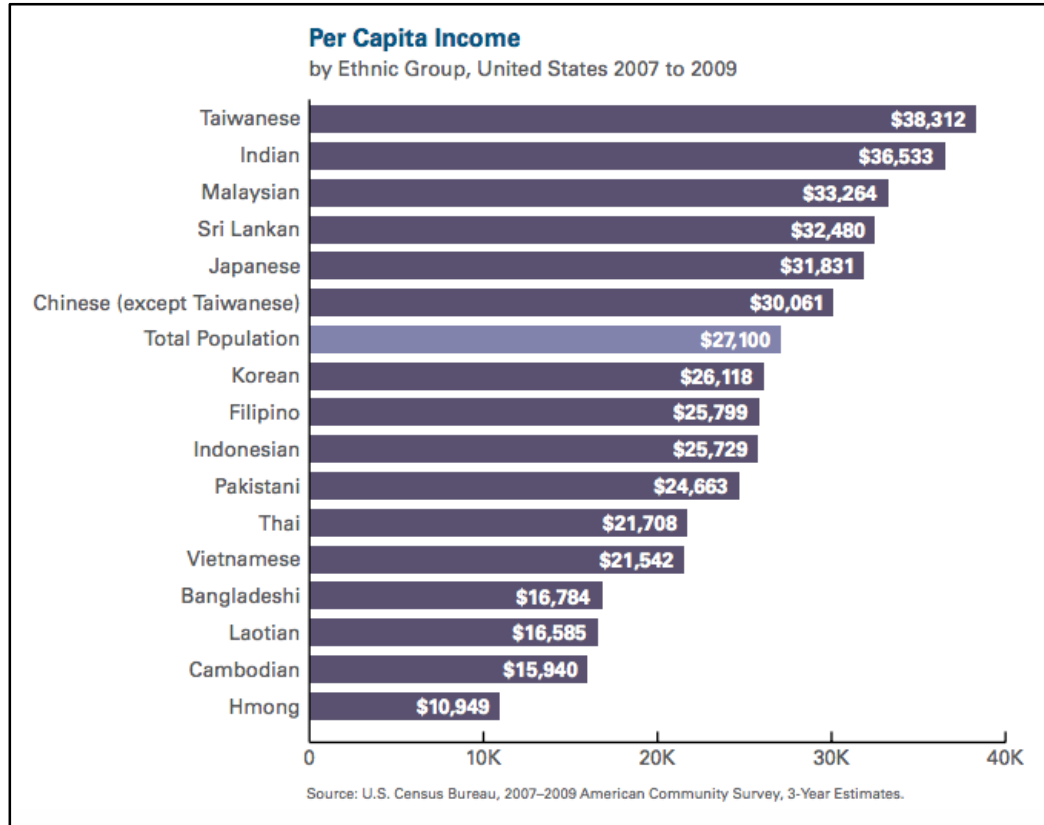
As the Hmong community in the Twin Cities has grown, the number of Hmong-owned businesses has increased, providing jobs and economic stability to community members. They have been able to preserve their traditions and culture while at the same time adapt to life in the United States in a metropolitan area which now accepts and celebrates this community. There are primarily Hmong schools in St. Paul which cater to their specific needs and offer bilingual

⁵⁴ Bruce T. Downing et al., *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Minneapolis-St. Paul*, [Page 16].

⁵⁵ Vang, *Hmong America*, [Page 59].

teaching. There's Hmong Village, a large shopping center in St. Paul which allows Hmong businesses to flourish. And the annual Hmong New Year celebration is one of the largest in the country. The reputation of ethnic enclaves as necessary for the success of refugees has grown. In the mid 1990s, the refugee camps in Thailand closed but there were still many displaced Hmong. They constructed a village near the Wat Tham Krabok monastery in northern Thailand, where they had lived for years without aid from the UNHCR or other international humanitarian organizations. In 2004, the U.S. State department offered refugee status to all Hmong living near Wat Tham Krabok and the final wave of Hmong refugees arrived directly to Hmong ethnic enclaves, a sign that decades of anti-ethnic enclave policies had come to an end. While the strength of the Twin Cities Hmong ethnic enclave has contributed to the success of some Hmong refugees, there are still issues which exist in the Hmong community and are often overlooked by the federal government.

*The Damaging Model Minority Myth and Community Organizing*⁵⁶



The 2011 report *A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans in the United States* by the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice revealed many disparities between the various Asian ethnic groups. Chief among these findings is the fact that despite statistics which show that Asian Americans in general have high per capita incomes, “Hmong Americans have the lowest per capita income of any racial or ethnic group nationwide”⁵⁷. The perception of Asian Americans, primarily Japanese and Chinese Americans, as the model minority has existed since the mid-20th century and has masked many challenges which other Asian American groups face. Because the Hmong came to the United States as refugees, were immediately settled into low-income, urban housing, and were given the bare minimum in terms of support by the federal

⁵⁶ Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, *A Community of Contrasts Asian Americans in the United States: 2011*, [Page 34], accessed April 26, 2017, http://advancingjustice-aajc.org/sites/default/files/2016-09/Community_of_Contrasts_US.pdf.

⁵⁷ Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, *A Community*, [Page 4].

government, many Hmong-Americans face the highest rates of poverty than any other Asian-American ethnic group. Upon their arrival, “some in these model communities [i.e. East Asian American communities] viewed Hmong acceptance of public resources as something shameful”⁵⁸. The Hmong community has worked hard to combat the challenges which many of its members face. The Hmong community leaders of the mutual assistance associations have worked closely with federal and state administrations in order to make the government aware of the needs of the Hmong community. Many national Asian-American advocacy organizations, such as OCA--Asian Pacific American Advocates (previously known as the Organization of Chinese Americans) have in recent years shifted from being focused on one ethnicity to being concerned with issues facing all Asian American and Pacific Islanders. These, and many Hmong-led organizations, work for data disaggregation on the state and federal level so that inequalities between various Asian-American ethnic groups can be revealed and then sufficiently addressed.

⁵⁸ Vang, *Hmong America*, [Page 123].

Chapter Four

Conclusion



My initial hope for this thesis was that I could provide recommendations for how to effectively resettle and support incoming refugees to the United States because of my study of the Hmong refugees in the Twin Cities. There are so many similarities between the Vietnam War and the multiple conflicts which the United States has been embroiled in in the Middle East that it seemed only natural for the case of Hmong refugees to inform the case of refugees from these various conflict zones. But what's happening in the United States right now in terms of attitudes towards refugees so so bleak, it's hard to know where to start. Present-day refugees face an American political and social landscape that is completely different than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. There was a desire to welcome refugees amongst American citizens and it was reflected in American policy. Hmong refugees faced racism and innumerable challenges created by institutional failures and the ignorance of American citizens, but they were still categorized as anti-communist fighters in need of assistance. Refugees arriving from the Middle East in the last few decades have faced all of the difficulties which Southeast Asian refugees faced, but also have been categorized as terrorists and been the victims of intensely violent racist and Islamophobic attacks.

In the current administration, no refugee is safe, regardless of how long they have been in the United States. Right now in Minnesota, Cambodian-Americans who came to the United States as children are being rounded up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and deported back to a country they escaped that doesn't want them⁵⁹. While there is a lot of support for refugees by American liberals and activists, they are still operating in the traditional refugee resettlement mindset of saviorism and assimilation. The stakes are much higher now and the goals are much more fundamental. While there is a lot of reform that needs to be done, right now it is important that the system of admitting refugees to the United States survives this

⁵⁹ "Release MN 8," <https://releasemn8.tumblr.com/>.

administration. Quotas on the number of refugees need to be raised to reflect the number of displaced persons in the world. Once these basic objectives have been achieved, then reform regarding the resettlement of refugees can be addressed. In making refugee resettlement policy, I believe that involving refugees in this process is necessary. Hmong refugees have a unique experience in terms of their resettlement process and they have been able to survive in the United States because of their resistance to American policies that tried to keep the Hmong refugees apart in order to forcibly assimilate them to American culture. Their stories should help inform American resettlement policies by addressing the needs they had after their initial resettlement and the challenges which they face today. Refugees coming to the United States today should be allowed to join or create ethnic enclaves and community structures which will help them the most in their transition. Refugee resettlement policies should work with existing and burgeoning ethnic enclaves to provide them the support that they need to support the incoming refugees.

True refugee solidarity will come when their experiences and needs are respected and reflected in policy.

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