

THE TRANSITION OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN AMERICA

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The Vietnam Conflict has affected the lives of many people. This includes the South Vietnamese refugees and immigrants who came to the United States in the years following the conflict. Many of these individuals were seeking to escape hostile treatment.

Regardless of the various reasons, refugees and asylum seekers faced societal and everyday obstacles as they arrived in a new culture. These obstacles heightened as they dealt with the trauma and ramifications of coming from a country in conflict. Our project focuses on understanding and portraying the transition of Vietnamese refugees into American society and the impact the Vietnam Conflict had on how they have adapted.



VIETNAMESE REFUGEES: TIMELINE

1950

Between 1950 and 1974 only 650 Vietnamese arrived as immigrants; this doesn't include students, military, or diplomats.

May 23, 1975

Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act was passed by President Gerald Ford. Under this act around 130,000 refugees from Laos, South Vietnam, and Cambodia were given access into the US and they were given special relocation aid and financial assistance.

1980

Second wave: A second wave of immigrants fled Vietnam and this lasted until the mid 1980s. In South Vietnam there was famine and many businesses were seized and nationalized. There were also re-education camps or concentration camps for former military and government workers. To escape around 800,000 people took small, unsafe, crowded fishing boats to sea. Around 70% of the "boat people" were from urban areas and were lower on the socioeconomic scale.

Present day:

Since 2017, around 1.3 million Vietnamese reside in the United States. Which makes up 3% of all the immigrants in the US and they are the sixth largest foreign born group in the United States.

April 30th, 1975

The Fall of Saigon,

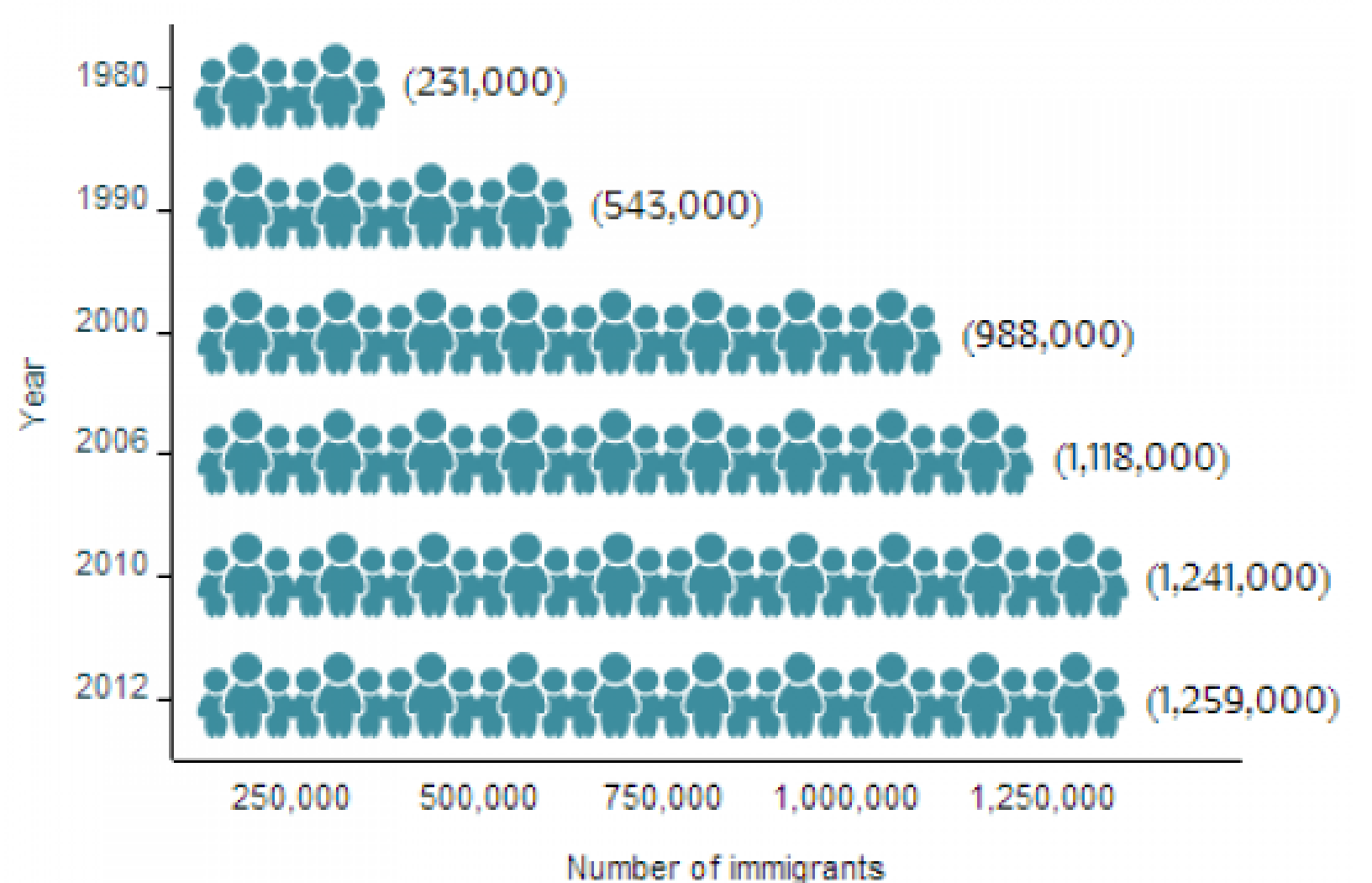
First Wave: The capital of South Vietnam, Saigon fell to the communists. This leads to the first wave, a week before the fall of Saigon 15,000 left on scheduled flights while another 80,000 left by air, more left on US navy ships. They were given temporary housing on US military bases and given personal support from the US. 125,000 people left South Vietnam.

1976-1977

5,000 more people left Vietnam

1981-2000

Third Wave: The country accepted 531,310 refugees. Many moved to California and Texas, where it was warmer, and they had the larger Vietnamese communities, better jobs, and social safety nets which is a collection of services provided by the state.



VIETNAMESE REFUGEES: IMMIGRATION AND POLICIES

Towards the end of the Vietnam War, South Vietnamese began to flee to the United States due to the rise of communism in their country. In early 1975, the State Department prepared an evacuation plan for the U.S. forces as well as 18,000 Vietnamese refugees. After the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, on May 23rd of 1975 (during the first immigration wave), president Gerald Ford passed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, where approximately 130,000 refugees from South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, had their entrance in the United States allowed, and under special status, with financial assistance and relocation aid.

The act allocated funding of \$305 million for the Department of State and \$100 million for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for the resettlement of Vietnamese and Cambodian. The money went towards transportation, reception, processing and resettlement costs of the 130,000 refugees who were evacuated from Vietnam.

Each refugee underwent a security check and could theoretically be denied admittance if he or she "violated a social norm, had a criminal record, or had offenses that were political in nature.". The main problem is that repatriation, once asking for refuge in another country was not allowed in Vietnam, so the resettlement process of those refugees was being carefully assisted by many immigration and resettlement agencies.

Passed unanimously by the Senate in late 1979 and signed into law by President Jimmy Carter in early 1980, the Refugee Act of 1980 amended the earlier Immigration and Nationality Act and the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act. It raised the annual ceiling for refugees from 17,400 to 50,000, created a process for reviewing and adjusting the refugee ceiling to meet emergencies, and required annual consultation between Congress and the President.

The Act also changed the definition of "refugee" to a person with a "well-founded fear of persecution," a standard established by United Nations conventions and protocols. The number of Vietnamese immigrants has been growing significantly since then. It is roughly doubling the number of immigrants every decade from 1980 up until 2000. And after the 2000s, it has been increasing at 26%.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF THE VIETNAM CONFLICT ON VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Studies have shown that historical and cultural traumas can affect families for generations. Future generations experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Research has also identified at least four adaptive styles of survivors and their families (DeAngelis, 2019).

Expressions of these styles include being unwilling to move on, being overly protective, emotionally detached, or being intolerant of weaknesses. The transmission of these traumatic effects across generations can be from communication styles, indirect effects like poverty, or the telling of survival messages and ideas (DeAngelis, 2019).

PRE AND POST MIGRATION TRAUMA AND STRESSORS

Vietnamese refugees and immigrants experience emotional and psychological distress, not only from their experiences during the war but also as they left as refugees and as they transitioned into a new society. Pre-migration trauma involves experiences of political trauma, crime victimization, violence, sexual assault, accident, or relational trauma. Post-migration stressors involve perceived discrimination, legal status, English proficiency, and acculturative stress (Li & Anderson, 2016).

Research has shown that Asian Americans immigrants that experienced pre-migration traumas are significantly associated with experiencing psychological distress, directly and indirectly, enhanced by post-migration stressors (Li & Anderson, 2016).

The disruptive trauma experiences of the Vietnamese during the conflict, the struggles they faced as refugees, and the stress they faced in a new culture develop a “chain of risks” that could increase their likelihood of experiencing anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Li & Anderson, 2016).

Research has indicated that for Vietnamese immigrants, pre-migration trauma is not associated with psychological stress or perceived discrimination. Explanations for this may be that a high percentage of Vietnamese immigrants have common characteristics like limited English proficiency, a lower socioeconomic status, and have experienced certain forms of pre-migration trauma, leading them to stay together as a community. This limits the potential for discrimination and they can surround themselves with people of similar backgrounds (Li & Anderson, 2016).

Phinney, Ong, and Madden expand on this by stating that it is the immigrant parents or those that arrive in America as adults, that retain the traditional cultural values (Phinney et al., 2000).

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF THE VIETNAM CONFLICT ON VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

PRE AND POST MIGRATION TRAUMA AND STRESSORS (CONT.)

The explanation by Li and Anderson, of Vietnamese immigrants staying together as a community, therefore limiting their interactions in out-groups, seems contrary to Phinney, Ong, and Madden's explanation of Vietnamese immigrant families experiencing higher rates of intergenerational value discrepancies and questioning of roles and values (Li & Anderson, 2016; Phinney et al., 2000).

Consider the rate of acculturation: The younger generations, those who grew up in America and have been in America longer, are more likely to interact with the out-group or people with western values.

The older generation and those who immigrated when they were older and have spent less time in America, are more likely to interact within their in-group due to language barriers and the connection with people of a similar background. This leads to what Phinney et al describe as dissonant acculturation, or the slower adaptation to another culture (Phinney et al., 2000).

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Although reports from Vietnamese immigrants regarding mental health concerns have decreased, this does not mean that the immigration process and the pre-migration experiences do not influence the relationships within the family today. Within the Vietnamese culture, the family roles and responsibilities differ from that of the American culture (Dinh et al., 1995). This is exemplified by the concept of an individualist society, as seen in America, compared to a collectivist society, such as Vietnam, where there is a patriarchal structure within the family and children are expected to fulfill their roles (Phinney et al., 2000). The potential for intergenerational conflict grows as the descendants of Vietnamese immigrants and refugees are faced with a culture of different values and expectations.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF THE VIETNAM CONFLICT ON VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

Research has found that immigration and the acculturation process may have long-term effects on the relationships within the family, particularly the parent-child relationship. To come to these results, research has looked at the influence of the personal qualities of parents, the expectations concerning familial roles and discrepancies within values (Dinh et al., 1995; Phinney et al., 2000)

Research indicates that the parents of the second-generation Americans remain resistant in the adaption of cultural values but are willing to make changes in certain aspects of life (Dinh et al., 1995). Phinney, Ong, and Madden state that value discrepancy increases over time within a new culture (Phinney et al., 2000).

.There is a significant value discrepancy between immigrants born in Vietnam, or have been in America for a short amount of time, and American-born immigrants and those who have been in America longer, indicating differences in acculturation rates (Phinney et al., 2000).

The father-son relationship is shown to be less positive in Vietnamese born children compared to their female and American-born counterparts. This conflict can come from different cultural perceptions of the role of the child within the family. This can lead to intergenerational conflict regarding the perceived protective and controlling behaviors of the parents towards their children as they become older and more independent (Dinh et al., 1995). Additionally, parent-child conflicts are also attributed to a difference in styles of communicating emotions. A more reserved behavior is seen within traditional Vietnamese families, while in the American culture this communication is more open (Dinh et al., 1995). These differences between family roles, cultural values, and styles of communication can put a strain on the parent-child relationship.

REFUGEES: FACTS AND MYTHS

(Information provided by the Indiana State Department of Health)

- **MYTH: Refugees Do Not Pay Taxes.**

FACT: Refugees are subject to the same employment, property, sales, and other taxes as any U.S. citizen. Refugees cannot vote, however.

- **MYTH: Refugees come to the U.S. for Economic Reasons.**

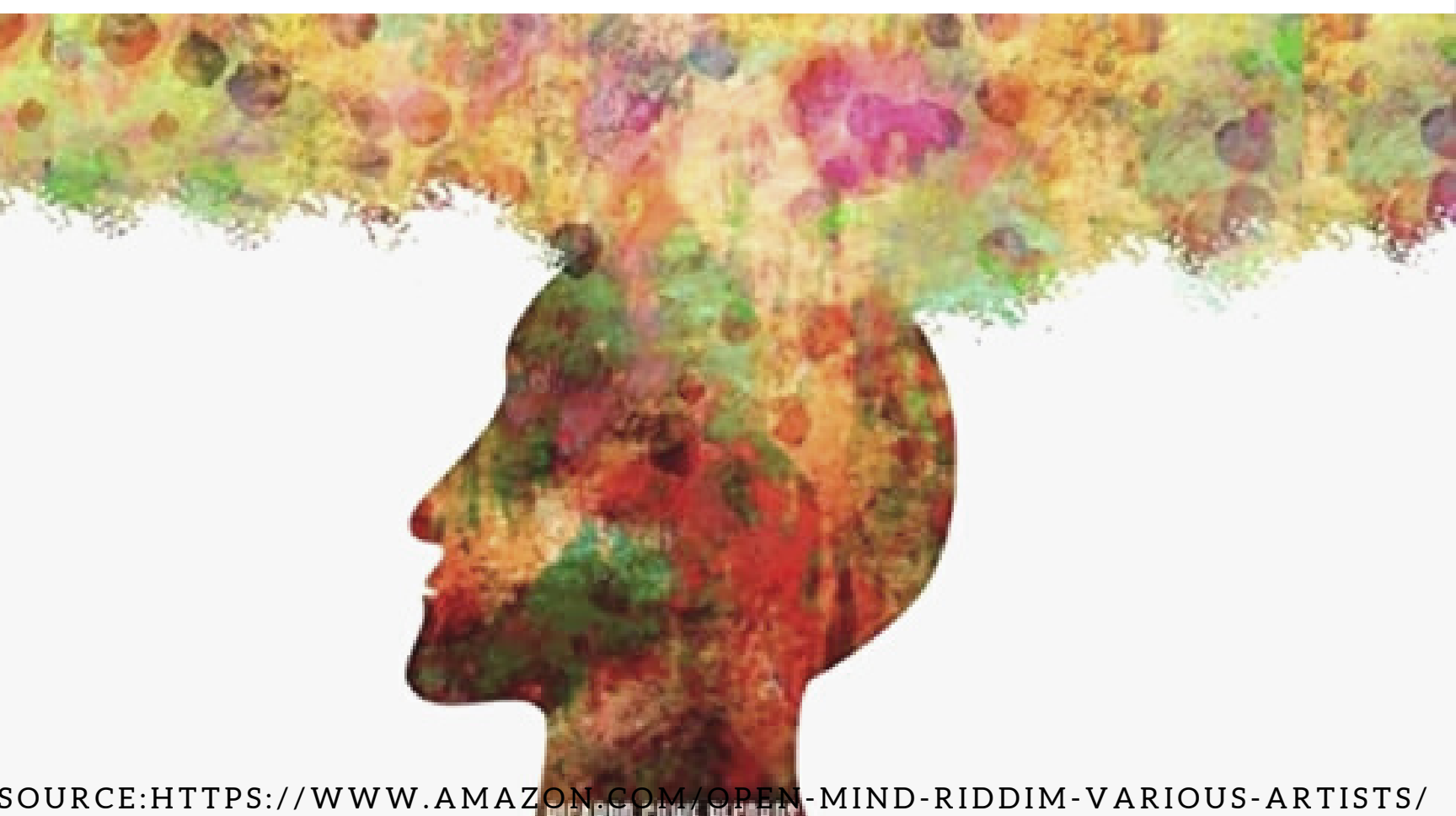
FACT: Refugees are individuals or families who have come to the U.S. because they were forced to flee their homeland, many times with little or no belongings, leaving family and friends behind and are unable to return.

- **MYTH: Refugees Do Not Contribute or Participate In Society.**

FACT: Refugees contribute a great deal to this country through the sharing of their talents, skills, cultures and customs. History indicates that some of our most significant contributors to the U.S. have been refugees and immigrants. And, as noted previously, refugees do pay taxes.

- **MYTH: Refugees Take Jobs From U.S. Workers.**

FACT: Refugees are not provided any special treatment when obtaining employment. They must apply and compete for jobs the same as any citizen. Refugees often enter economic sectors currently unable to supply adequate numbers of native workers. Refugees and immigrants also create jobs for U.S. workers because they have a high propensity to start new businesses. Refugees have been a major force in contributing to the urban renewal of several major U.S. cities.



ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS

Even though the Vietnam War is over, and after 65 years, it is a much safer country, there are still many people who have their life threaten and live in inhumane conditions. Here are some local refugee resettlement agencies that you can give any time of support to:

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF AKRON

330-376-5106

Daniel.torma@iiakron.org

www.iiakron.org

USCRI CLEVELAND

216-781-4560

kwishner@uscrioh.org

www.refugees.org/field-office/cleveland/

CATHOLIC CHARITIES MIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICES

216-281-7005

txmrosko@ccdacle.org

www.clevelandcatholiccharities.org

WORLD RELIEF

214-471-7478

kulmer@wr.org

www.worldreliefakron.org

TOGETHER, INC.

216-450-5093

htarkhanova@ustogether.us

www.ustogether.us

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