

Vietnamese in New Hampshire

Focus on Nashua

Moving to America (1960-present)

- Only a few Vietnamese in U.S. before 1960; by 1970, not quite 10,000 here, most of whom were students, not immigrants, thus Vietnamese to US during late 1970's had no community to welcome them
- Some 125,000 Vietnamese emigrants in first wave in spring, 1975, when Communists took over Vietnam; most well-educated, highly skilled, and westernized; large number of Vietnamese officials escaped to U.S.; communists intolerant of dissent or rebellion; former officials imprisoned and abused; Buddhist teachers who refused to teach communist doctrine arrested; most refugees to a series of camps, first in Asia, then in the U.S.; purpose of U.S. camps to help transition from temporary refugee to immigrant; most Vietnamese accepted sponsorship by a religious or social service group as a way to leave the camps; to reduce local impact Vietnamese were scattered all over the U.S., though most later resettled in CA and TX; by Dec., 1975, these camps closed; this group learned English, moved ahead, though accepted jobs below their abilities
- Second wave from 1977 to mid-80's, when about 2 million Vietnamese fled in small, unsafe, crowded boats (hence the name "boat people") to avoid "reeducation" camps or being forced to move to "new economic zones"; ended up in asylum camps in SE Asian nations from where they could enter countries willing to accept them; peak year of entry to U.S. was 1980 with 95,000 new Vietnamese; were *refugees* rather than immigrants, i.e., feared persecution in Vietnam; otherwise, would not have qualified for admission; poorer and less educated than earlier wave; resemble more traditional disadvantaged minority groups; poorly equipped for urban life; between 1981 and 2000, U.S. accepted 531,310 Vietnamese refugees and asylees; U.S. government again dispersed refugees throughout the country, which challenged their family and community life; for many, only choices were government assistance or low-paying jobs; women to work caused stress in families
- By 1980, 245,000 Vietnamese in U.S.; median age 21.5 years; in 1990, more than doubled to 593,213
- In 1992, Vietnamese to U.S. peaked again, fueled by release of refugees from re-education camps and growing numbers of Vietnamese sponsored by their families already in the U.S.; in 2000, population of Vietnamese in U.S. rose to 1,122,528
- Today, Amerasians (children born in Vietnam to Vietnamese women and American fathers during the war), former political prisoners, and family members still coming to U.S.; numbers much smaller than in past; U.S., having opened

diplomatic relations with Vietnam, plans to “normalize” the migration through regular immigration channels

Vietnamese Immigrants

- Closeness of Vietnamese extended families created a market that led many to go into business for themselves in U.S.; between 1982-87 businesses owned by Vietnamese Americans increased by 414%
- By 1990, median family income of Vietnamese Americans above national average; as second generation entered workforce, numbers of middle class Vietnamese rose
- Focused first on economic footing; earliest refugees became important voices in communities; also assisted others as translators and facilitators and worked with government and volunteer agencies
- Slow to organize politically; today, Vietnamese work with other rapidly growing immigrant groups, ex. Asian-Americans and Latinos, to have a stronger political voice
- Have not abandoned old culture: value family and community; respect, harmony and loyalty; preserve their language, foods, customs, and religion; stress diligence, hard work, resourcefulness; sustained by these traditions
- Festival of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, is most important holiday and occasion for cultural activities; usually falls between Jan. 19 and Feb. 20; start of a new year and celebration of return of spring; symbolizes new beginnings and rebirth of the culture; in U.S., Tet is time to remember the past while celebrating the new and looking to the future; performances including music, dance, and fashion shows often held as part of celebration
- Vietnamese films, music, and literature respected by Americans; 1989 musical, *Miss Saigon*, about last days of American involvement in Vietnam: long run on Broadway and across the nation, though racist and sexist undertones anger many Vietnamese and Asian Americans; 1993 motion picture, *Heaven and Earth*, was based on the autobiography of Le Ly Hayslip: first major movie from perspective of Vietnamese American woman; narratives of boat people have allowed Americans to see what escape by sea was like for the refugees, ex. *Voices of Vietnamese Boat People* (published 2001); both American and Vietnamese children enjoy stories such as *The Golden Slipper*, a Vietnamese Cinderella tale, and *In the Land of the Small Dragon*, in which a dutiful daughter, mistreated by her stepmother, is rewarded by her fairy godmother

Vietnamese Religions in the United States

- Since 1975 over 100 Buddhist temples and prayer halls have been built within Vietnamese American communities in the U.S.; serve as cultural centers as well as places of worship; Buddhism teaches to embrace suffering as necessary aspect of life; admitting they need help is to some Vietnamese, particularly elderly, a stigma, results in loss of dignity
- Other Vietnamese religions transplanted to US include Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, both related to Buddhism, and Chau Van
- Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church, built in 1986 in New Orleans, LA, was first church built and owned by Vietnamese Americans

Education

- Vietnamese place high importance on education; studies show that adolescents share parents' faith in education as means of success, financial self-reliance, winning respect and prestige; about 21% of Vietnamese adults have bachelor's degrees, close to U.S. average though below the 41% for Asian-American groups as a whole

Other Vietnamese Institutions

- Mutual Assistance Associations formed and run by Vietnamese communities; funded by private and government monies; goal to promote assimilation; National Congress of Vietnamese Americans (NCVA), founded in 1986, to "advance the cause of Vietnamese Americans in a plural but united America... by participating actively...in the areas of education, culture and civil liberties"
- Over time some associations catered to professionals, sponsored conferences, such as the Vietnamese Professionals Society (VPS), started in 1990, to help the Vietnamese people and advance a democratic Vietnam; Vietnamese American Professionals Alliance (VAPA) funds scholarships, helps needy families; Vietnamese American Science and Professional Engineering Society (VASPES) offers professional support to members; sponsors conferences on topics such as political issues, community action, and a dual Vietnamese and American identity
- Viet Kieu, group of professionals who return to Vietnam as entrepreneurs and temporary residents; helping to develop Vietnam with their capital and experience

FYI

- Vietnamese refugees not welcomed by some Americans; in 1981 in Galveston Bay, TX, American fishermen, claiming unfair competition, turned to the KKK to terrorize Vietnamese fishermen; Southern Poverty Law Center represented the Vietnamese and won the case, securing protection from US Marshals; generally, anti-Vietnamese sentiment revolved around fears that the newcomers would take jobs from locals or would end up on welfare; neither of the scenarios resulted to any significant degree
- In 1994 U.S. lifted a trade embargo and established diplomatic relations with Hanoi; relations between U.S. and Vietnam more friendly; Vietnamese Americans can visit family there; can also represent American employers there
- Vietnamese have achieved in many fields, becoming elected officials, judges, leaders in science and high-tech industry, actors, and professional sports team members; Ke “Jonathan” Huy Quan, a Vietnamese American who appeared in the Goonies and as “Short Round” in Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom; in 1985, Jean Nguyen and Hung Vu, first Vietnamese immigrants to graduate from West Point; in 1987, Hoang Nhu Tran, first in his class at USAF Academy; Eugene H. Trinh, NASA astronaut, in 1992 first Vietnamese American in space; in 1996, Danny Graves, first Vietnamese born player in Major League Baseball; in 1997, Thang Nguyen Barrett, first Vietnamese American judge when appointed to San Jose, CA, Municipal Court bench; Dat Nguyen, born in a refugee camp, son of parents who fled Vietnam in 1975, an All-America linebacker at Texas A&M, first Vietnamese American drafted into NFL, joined Dallas Cowboys in 1999; in 2001, Viet Dinh, law professor, appointed by President George W. Bush as Assistant Attorney General for legal policy
- Largest number of Vietnamese live in Southern CA, Houston and Dallas areas, and states of WA, PA, MN, MA, NY, IL

Vietnamese in New Hampshire

- NH ranks 39th of the 50 states in Vietnamese population; according to the 2000 Census, NH had 1,697 Vietnamese, a 519.34% increase since 1990 (274 persons)
- Located in Manchester, two agencies that resettled refugees were the International Center and the Manchester Diocese Resettlement Office of the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC) of New Hampshire; Catholic Conference recruited refugees from Indiantown Gap Camp in PA; major tasks of The International Center: find housing; assist in job placement and processing of Medicaid, various insurance applications, filing for food stamps; registering children for school; Resettlement Office found and screened sponsors, held clothing drives, located language

classes, arranged social events to bring together Vietnamese in various cities throughout NH, monitored progress, and assisted sponsors in finding apartments for the Vietnamese; Resettlement Office also supervised the welfare of about 20 students originally sponsored by Nathaniel Hawthorne, New England, and Franklin Pierce colleges

- Major problems commonly experienced by Vietnamese were language (found English extremely difficult); cultural adjustment (values, norms, worldviews, lifestyles); weather (which caused illness); homesickness; employment not appropriate to their skill levels (definitely work-oriented so worked menial, unskilled jobs that locals would not accept)

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