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## THE ASSIMILATION OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES: SOCIAL SERVICE ISSUES

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### ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the recent history of the Indochinese refugee experience in the United States and factors inhibiting their assimilation. Social service practice and policy issues which have arisen during their settlement are discussed.

America's experience during the past decade with the "boat people" and other refugees from Indochina has reignited longstanding controversies regarding immigration. The exodus of the Indochinese has stimulated national interest in the growing world refugee problem and has revived the discussion regarding this country's historic role as a haven for the dispossessed. Social welfare institutions have been challenged to respond to the practice and policy issues associated with the resettlement, adaptation, and assimilation of international exiles. This paper reviews the assimilation of the refugees from Southeast Asia from a social services perspective. As the nation begins to respond to the current migration of refugees from other regions such as Central America, the experience of their more recent predecessors could lend insight into the design of future social services policies and programs for refugee assistance.

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### Background

The "boat people" of Indochina provided a dramatic example of a growing worldwide crisis. Estimates are that about 16 million individuals have fled their country for asylum and it is unlikely that this trend will be reversed (Newland, 1981). During the first five years of communist rule in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos over 1.2 million Indochinese escaped from their home country (Wain, 1981). Yet the mass exodus in Indochina is not unique in recent world affairs. Nearly two million people have felt compelled to leave Ethiopia. Another 1.7 million have abandoned Afghanistan to find a new home in Pakistan and Iran (Newland, 1981). The plight of the 1.7 million Palestinians now living in Jordan, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip has also aroused concern throughout the world.

The massive numbers of sanctuary-seekers and their perilous economic and political position has increasingly come to the attention of the international social work community and the profession is developing strategies of coping with this new clientele (Mayadas, 1983). In the United States, social work professionals have been involved in the administration of relief and resettlement programs and most public welfare workers have had at least some direct contact with refugee families. Given that the United States has had an historic role in refugee relief and that this tradition is likely to remain intact despite the protestations of nativists, it is important that social workers become more familiar with the relevant policy and practice issues in regard to assisting these people.

### Indochinese Refugees in the U.S.

Since the end of World War II approximately 1.6 million refugees have immigrated to the United States (Skinner and Hendricks, 1979). Most numerous among the migrant groups are the Indochinese. At the end of the Second World War, 7 million displaced persons

were scattered throughout Europe. Only 365,233 of them were admitted to the U.S. between 1948 and 1952. Both during and after the War many Americans feared that the nation would be overrun by those seeking sanctuary, particularly European Jews (Dinnerstein, 1982a). The next large scale exile movement to this country followed the Cuban Revolution. Between 1958 and 1963, 215,000 Cubans emigrated to the U.S. (Fagen et al, 1968). The U.S. supported government in Saigon fell in Spring 1975 and by April 50,000 had evacuated to Guam (Montero, Indochinese 1975b). By mid-1975 over 145,000 had arrived in the United States under the provisions of the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of that year. Many more relocated throughout Southeast Asia and in resettlement camps of primary asylum (Skinner and Hendricks, 1979). As of 1978 the number admitted to the U.S. had grown to 170,000 and the rate of exodus in Indochina was accelerating (Montero, 1979a). President Carter liberalized U.S. admission quotas in 1979 to 168,000 per year and by 1983 the U.S. had admitted over 625,000 Indochinese (Morin, 1983).

Other nations responded to the exodus as well. By 1980 a half million refugees from Indochina had migrated to countries other than the United States. The People's Republic of China admitted 265,000 and Canada and France each allowed entrance to over 70,000 (Newland, 1981; Wain, 1981; Tepper, 1980). These four countries have borne the greatest resettlement burden outside of Indochina, yet within the region there remain today over 350,000 expatriates and displaced persons. Of these, fully 175,000 live under perilous conditions in Thai camps (Wain, 1982). Despite continuing efforts by the governments Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia to encourage industrial nations to accept more emigrants from the region, American willingness to act as a refuge for the Indochinese appears to be declining and the U.S.

government has moved to restrict the flow of migration (Wain, 1982b).

The Indochinese refugees consist primarily of four distinct ethnic or national groups: Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Hmong (pronounced Mung). Within and between the groups there is considerable diversity in background and culture. This is reflected by large differences in educational attainment, class background, religion, occupation, and ethnicity (Skinner, 1980).

The largest group, the Vietnamese, is highly heterogenous. Among the first wave of Vietnamese emigrants were those closely associated with American interests: military officers, highly-placed officials, professionals, and the propertied classes. Early waves of asylum-seekers were those who clearly felt most at risk under a communist government. In addition religious minorities were represented. Nearly half of the first group of Vietnamese who sought sanctuary are Catholic although only ten percent of the Vietnamese population are of that faith (Montero, 1979b). Most are well educated by Vietnamese standards and represent what was the country's elite. A substantial number of them are of Chinese ethnic origin who fled racial persecution under the new Soviet-influenced regime. Fully one fourth of the refugees are of Sino-Vietnamese background (Dunning and Greenbaum, 1982).

Subsequent waves of Vietnamese immigrants have represented a broader cross-section of their society than early refugees and include many of the very poor who are fleeing economic hardship as much as persecution. Recent economic crises in Vietnam, poor harvests, and the perception of a liberal immigration policy in the U.S. have encouraged substantial numbers of Indochinese from the lower socioeconomic levels to emigrate as well (Skinner, 1980) (Smith and Davies, 1981). For differing reasons Vietnamese from the various socioeconomic levels have had difficulty

adapting to U.S. society. The upper classes were often unprepared for the sizeable decline in status and occupation they faced. The lower classes had fewer transferable skills and generally entered the labor force at the very lowest levels of the occupational ladder (Stein, 1979).

Many Laotians and Cambodians have escaped for reasons similar to those of the Vietnamese. The excesses of the Cambodian Pol Pot regime encouraged many thousands to take flight. It is estimated that over a million Cambodians were executed during this regime (Garry, 1980). With the Vietnamese domination of Cambodia and Laos there has been a sizeable departure of the upper and middle classes and of religious and political minorities in both countries.

Among the most disquieting examples of refugee persecution, flight, and adjustment is the case of the Hmong. A rural people from the mountains of Laos, the Hmong were a U.S. ally in the Vietnam War, losing 50,000 people in that conflict. Facing cultural and political persecution in Laos, over 51,000 relocated in the United States. They have had the greatest difficulty adjusting of any of the Indochinese groups. A traditional mountain people, they supported themselves by farming with hand tools and water buffalo. Until twenty years ago, they had no written language. Their lifestyle in Laos did not prepare them for autonomy in this country and indeed nearly 75 percent of the Hmong in this country are public assistance beneficiaries. Although ill-suited for life in the U.S. by reason of culture, climate, and occupation, there is no recourse for them to return. It is estimated that 70,000 Laotian Hmong have been killed since the "Secret War" ended in 1975 (Morin, 1983).

The view that there is no recourse for return is widespread among the refugees. The expropriation of ethnic Chinese property in Vietnam, the murder of the Hmong in Laos, and deteriorating economic conditions throughout the region have in effect "burned the

bridges" behind these groups. The majority feel they had no alternative but to seek asylum and are now adrift in the United States, a country with a strong nativist heritage (Liu and Muratta, 1977).

#### The Welcome Mat

Two competing traditions in American immigration history continue to be in evidence with the latest refugees. Until 1924, the nation was a traditional asylum for religious, ethnic, and political exiles despite the presence of nativists, Klansmen, and racists.

Although the country was settled by "foreigners," nativist sentiment has been a perennial feature of the American socio-political landscape. The Scotch-Irish and Germans were selectively taxed during the Colonial Period and in the middle of the nineteenth century the Know-Nothing party mounted an ultimately losing campaign to restrict immigration. Between 1875 and the turn of the century, several restrictive Acts of Congress banned undesirable aliens such as "lunatics," "idiots," and prostitutes. The first effort to exclude an ethnic group was embodied in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. It forbade Chinese immigration in part because of a widespread conviction that laborers from the Orient undercut American wages. Most western states subsequently disallowed Chinese land ownership and in 1913 California made it illegal for any "non-American" to own property.

Total immigration peaked between 1901 and 1910 with 8.8 million aliens being admitted. A disproportionate number of the new Americans hailed from southern and eastern Europe. The perception that these Europeans were less desirable was evident in the Dillingham Commission's Report of 1911 which recommended that restrictions based on national quotas be implemented. Xenophobia was heightened during the Red Scare and the First World War. In 1921, during the decade of intolerance which saw the rise of the

second Klan, Congress adopted a policy which restricted immigration on the basis of national origin. The policy was elaborated in 1924 when two bills were passed which set the pattern of immigration for decades. The Johnson-Reed Act tightened national quotas and favored Northern Europeans, while the Oriental Exclusion Act locked the borders to all Asian-born people. Anti-Asian sentiment ultimately contributed to the incarceration of Japanese Americans in 1942 when American prejudice toward minorities was of greatest intensity (Dinnerstein, 1982b). It is in this historical tradition that the latest Asian-Americans must be considered.

At first the U.S. acted quickly to relocate 134,000 refugees who hurriedly left Indochina in the spring of 1975, but the response thereafter never kept pace with the exodus. By the spring of 1978, the total number of those admitted had grown to only 160,000 yet the massive relocation of the Indochinese into camps in Thailand and other first asylum countries had begun. Although the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees accepted nearly all of those who fled Indochina as genuine refugees, the United States carefully categorized them and set limiting quotas. Politically this seemed wise at the time for 54 percent of Americans polled in 1975 opposed Indochinese resettlement in this country (Wain, 1981). By 1980 public

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as "a person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."



sentiment had not moderated. In one national study the encouragement of local Indochinese settlement was opposed by 79 percent of the sample and 74 percent opposed providing funds to aid Indochinese exiles in America (Starr and Roberts, 1982).

Despite the force of public opinion, the Carter Administration gradually raised the ceiling on refugees. Responding in part to international pressure (particularly from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and to humanitarian and human rights concerns, restrictions on their admission became fewer. During his administration Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980. It clarified policy on asylum procedure and more importantly established the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services. The Office was authorized to set up employment and language training programs and to make economic and medical assistance available. Although these efforts were designed to encourage a rapid transition to economic self-sufficiency, many Americans resented the instant eligibility of Indochinese refugees for AFDC, Medicaid, Food Stamps and job assistance (Skinner, 1980). In the words of one white American, "They are given everything for nothing. The government makes employers give them jobs other Americans need" (Starr and Roberts, 1982, p. 173).

Historically the greatest opposition to immigration has been from the lower classes, conservatives, and recent arrivals to the country (Dinnerstein, 1982b). It is argued that those who perceive that they have the most to lose under a liberal immigration policy will be its strongest opponents along with those who are politically or culturally xenophobic for reasons of nationalism or racism. In the case of the Indochinese, strongest support for their resettlement has generally been among liberals, those of higher occupational status, and the well-educated. Opposition has been reflective of traditional patterns of prejudice toward Asians and is related to low education, political con-

servatism, fundamentalism, and low occupational status (Starr and Roberts, 1982). Antagonism toward the Indochinese has also been noted among Blacks and among America's most recent large-scale immigrant group, Mexican-Americans (Skinner, 1980).

The aversion to the settling of the Indochinese has been manifested on occasion in violence, boycotts, and harassment. The most infamous of the racial incidents took place at Galveston Bay in Texas where two Vietnamese shrimp boats were burned in a flare up between local shrimpers and Vietnamese refugee fishermen. Faced with stiff competition from rather industrious and successful Vietnamese fisherman, Texan fishermen invited the Ku Klux Klan to make a show of force in the form of rallies, burning crosses, threats, and harassment (Stevens, 1981). The incidents reflected a theme in nativism: lower class, poorly educated whites and ethnics acting not only out of prejudice, but also out of fear of economic dislocation by "outsiders."

The cool reception given to the newcomers has been part of a pattern in American immigration during this century yet each national, ethnic, or religious group to arrive here has responded in a unique way to the challenge of assimilation. The nature of the mutual accommodation between the new Americans and the larger society is determined not only by the cultural and economic climate of the nation but also by the attributes of the arrivals.

#### Indochinese Assimilation

The accommodation of a minority group and a larger culture is in large part a function of linguistic, cultural, occupational, and racial distance. To the extent to which it is perceived that a group is significantly dissimilar, their integration is made more problematic. In addition the circumstances of arrival or "mode of entry" play a part as well as the perceived threat to labor or the cultural status quo. For

these reasons it is no surprise that those groups which have adapted most quickly to an "American way of life" and succeeded economically have been those who are most similar culturally to the dominant group in society. Although the assimilation of the Germans, Scandinavians, Jews, and Eastern Europeans was not without difficulty, it proceeded relatively smoothly as compared to the integration of the Chinese, Japanese, or Mexicans. Obvious religious, physical, cultural, and class differences can impede the integration of groups into the cultural and economic mainstream. An observer of American immigration history would note that laws concerning the admission of aliens have long been linked to preferred national and racial types with priority given to culturally similar Northern and Western Europeans. Bogardus' (1959) classic study of social distance found that Americans ranked these groups above others when asked to consider permissible social contacts with various ethnic and national aggregations. Prejudice toward the Indochinese and their integration may be understood in relation to their perceived social distance; they represent religious minorities (Catholic, Buddhist, animist), speak languages not widely understood in this country (Vietnamese, Chinese), and of course as Asians are racially and culturally distinct.

Economic obstacles to assimilation have been problematic as well. Although the first wave of migrants was better equipped for success than subsequent arrivals they, like most refugees, have not been fully integrated into the economic mainstream. Early entrants were relatively well-educated and disproportionately middle and upper class. At least two-thirds of the group were wealthy urbanites who had some familiarity with Western culture (Montero, 1974). The 1975-76 cohort of Vietnamese immigrants has been less dependent on government assistance and has shown higher labor force participation rates than later cohorts (Dunning and Greenbaum, 1982). Nonetheless,

the original migrants have experienced a decline of economic and occupational status (Stein, 1979; Montero, 1979). Subsequent newcomers have been less equipped for occupational assimilation. They have lower educational attainment, fewer work skills, and humbler class origins. Correspondingly their experience has been one of higher unemployment and greater dependency on government assistance (Dunning and Greenbaum, 1982).

Indochinese refugees typically have experienced short term unemployment and long term underemployment since resettlement. Stein (1979) found that although initial unemployment is quite high, the rate declines steadily in each successive year after arrival. Unemployment rates for those here fifteen months or longer (14 percent) approach the national average. Underemployment is quite high however. Heads of households are found to be working at a lower occupational level than in their home country in 68 percent of Stein's sample. Among the Vietnamese, those whose adjustment to the labor force was most rapid had completed more schooling prior to immigration and had been employed previously as career soldiers, skilled workers, or professionals. Even though over a quarter of the Vietnamese refugees had received some schooling in America and 70 percent had undergone English language training, economic self-sufficiency still eluded a large minority. Of those sampled in one national survey, 43 percent received some form of government income support (Dunning and Greenbaum, 1982).

It is clear that the transition to self sufficiency and economic integration is not yet complete. Because refugees arriving in 1979 and thereafter generally have a lower human capital level than earlier arrivals, it can be anticipated that problems in economic integration will continue. There is considerable room for optimism, however. The Indochinese are widely regarded as industrious and diligent workers with a desire for

self-sufficiency (Chrysler, 1981). They have been able, despite all obstacles, to steadily improve their median earnings (Dunning and Greenbaum, 1982). In a national longitudinal survey of Vietnamese workers, Montero (1979) found that over a three year period the percentage of employees earning under \$50 weekly declined from 12.4 percent to 6.2 percent while the percentage of those who make \$100 a week or more grew from 47.6 percent to 77.6 percent. During the same time period he found labor force participation increased from 82 percent to 95 percent. In addition, it has been shown that the need for government income assistance declines each year after entry (Montero and Dieppa, 1982).

It is likely that if the Indochinese are able to continue to achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, their cultural, psychological, and social adaptation will be accelerated. Furthermore their self-sufficiency will tend to mitigate the opposition generated by those who believe that they will be dependent on taxpayers. Representative Burt Talcott of California has said, "we have too many Orientals already...the tax and welfare rolls will get overburdened and we already have our share of illegal aliens" (Starr and Roberts, 1982, p. 170). Representative Sam Hall of Texas has observed, "the U.S. can't serve as a depository for every person in the world who wishes to leave his country. Word must be sent back that America is getting ready to draw the line" (Chrysler, 1981, p. 65). Such perceptions, which are not rare among political leaders, hopefully will diminish as the refugees enter the economic mainstream.

The unfortunate aspect of the economic integration of refugees and minorities is the "Catch-22" or double bind of success. Failure to become economically autonomous is scorned and regarded as evidence of cultural or racial inferiority while success is viewed as the result of preferential treatment or government assistance. On balance, however, the economic

success of an immigrant group tends to mute the voices of nativists (Dinnerstein, 1982b).

### Social Service Issues

Social work has from its beginning in this country been closely tied to the problems of immigrants. The Settlement House Movement (1886-1916), in particular, served a clientele who were making the transition to a new culture, economy, and language. Settlement House workers were confronted with individual problems of adaptation and assimilation among immigrant families and also by institutional and attitudinal barriers to their integration. Faced with a hostile and nativist environment, immigrants had great difficulty achieving economic independence and cultural accommodation. Consequently, the interventive methods of the Movement included social-reform efforts and advocacy in addition to socialization and neighborhood programs (Axinn and Levin, 1975). The experience of today's refugees accentuates the continuing need for workers to address institutional and cultural barriers to adjustment in conjunction with direct interventions on behalf of individuals and families.

Social workers have been found at each stage of resettlement. They are working in camps in Southeast Asia and were found in the now-closed American processing centers. In addition to playing key roles in sponsoring agencies such as the United States Catholic Conference and the Tolstoy Foundation, members of the profession have been involved in employment assistance, public welfare, and mental health programs for refugees under state and federal government.

The first priorities in refugee policy have been economic security and self-sufficiency. Many arrived with only a suitcase, others came with nothing but their clothing (Nhu, 1976). The Refugee Act of 1980 therefore made them immediately eligible for cash assistance, food stamps, and Medicaid. The bill

emphasizes the temporary nature of these benefits by funding "employment training and placement in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency among refugees as quickly as possible" (P.L. 96-212, Sec. 412a).

Despite the best efforts of public and voluntary agencies to protect their economic security many have fallen through the safety net. Vietnamese and Hmong have been found living in desperate poverty with little or no agency contact (Morin, 1983). And although economic autonomy has been a cardinal feature of resettlement policy, as many as 40 percent of the Vietnamese receive some form of government income assistance. Over two-thirds feel that their migration has resulted in a significant deterioration in economic status (Dunning and Greenbaum, 1982).

The desire among the Indochinese to become economically independent, however, has been great. They have moved into the labor force quickly. Montero, (1979), for example, found that 95 percent of Vietnamese males are employed in some capacity, usually well below their human capital level. Under-employment has been a chronic problem and is reflected in their desire for advancement.

In a survey of Indochinese perceptions of social service needs in Utah, Moore (1981) found that the first priority for refugees was employment improvement. This was followed by the perceived need for better housing, language training, and cultural understanding. Although widespread mental health problems associated with adjustment have been noted among the group, Moore found that mental health services were seldom listed. The perceptions of social service agency personnel were quite similar. They emphasized English language training, employment counseling, and housing services.

In a national survey of Vietnamese refugees Dunning and Greenbaum (1982) discriminated between requirements upon arrival and long term needs. The respondents reported their immediate necessities as

maintenance of ethnic identity (100 percent), language training (85 percent), and employment (35 percent). Long term needs were more predictable: employment (48 percent), language (23 percent), and acculturation (17 percent). In identifying specific social service insufficiencies most of those surveyed (76 percent) perceived a need for government services such as welfare, followed by job services (53 percent), and housing services (48 percent). Policymakers, practitioners, and refugees appear to generally be consistent in perceiving that the social service system should initially focus on income security, employment counseling, housing assistance, and language training.

For purposes of practice it is useful to differentiate between two phases of refugee adjustment. During the first stage, recent arrivals are functioning under a normative system which is principally Asian (Ishisaka and Takagi, 1982). The perception of their needs is strongly shaped by the exile experience and its trauma: the sense of homelessness, economic insecurity, and the necessity to adapt rapidly to a new culture. Survival and security requirements are paramount and the individual is principally concerned with finding economic assistance, a job, housing, and acquiring functional language skills. The tendency is for anxiety and mental health problems to be repressed as the more immediate concerns are addressed. Once the person has found a home, a job, and become proficient in the basics of American culture and language, the less immediate problems of adjustment emerge. The normative system is no longer solely Asian but rather is in flux.

It is during the second stage of adjustment that the refugee can take inventory of his losses. While initially elated over new found freedom and preoccupied with immediate physical tasks it is possible to overlook the losses and separations: relatives and friends left behind, decline of occupational prestige and status, isolation from one's homeland, and more.



These feelings of loss, when coupled with indifference or rejection by the host culture, can result in depression, anger, chronic anxiety, and amotivational syndrome (Moore, 1981; Kinzie, 1982). Problems of second stage adjustment are often more pronounced among older refugees who may find it easier to withdraw and resist acculturation (Moore, 1983).

In both stages intervention proceeds in a Maslovian fashion from provision of concrete and referral services to socialization and finally, if appropriate, to counseling and treatment. Throughout the interventive process the importance of the informal helping network should be recognized. Most Vietnamese expatriates, for example, secured their first job through a personal contact such as a friend or relative rather than through an employment program (Dunning and Greenbaum, 1982). The informal network is not only important, therefore, in providing a social support system (e.g. Vietnamese Mutual Assistance Associations) but also in providing concrete services.

#### Broader Issues

The Indochinese exiles are but one group among many to be faced with the problems of adapting economically, culturally, and psychologically to the United States. Since the beginning of their influx, the country has also been receiving refugees from Cuba, Haiti, Poland, El Salvador, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere. The groups have in varying degrees confronted the same problems of adaptation: economic self-sufficiency, cultural differences, linguistic barriers, loss of ethnic identity, and nativist rejection. For those who have arrived with few marketable skills such as the Haitians, the process of adaptation has been particularly harsh and difficult. Given the turbulent nature of foreign affairs it is unlikely that the armies of peoples adrift on the seas of displacement will abate. Senator Edward Kennedy has observed:

Refugees have become a worldwide phenomenon of countless men, women, and children forced to leave their homes for as many reasons as there are behind the violence and conflict among people and nations. Yet today, this drama is of greater and more pressing dimensions than any time in recent years. There are more refugees now needing homes in new countries than any time since the worst days after World War II. (1979)

If the country is to continue to play its part as a leader among industrial democratic nations in providing a sanctuary for the dispossessed, it is crucial that the social work profession in this country move to the forefront of national and state refugee policy-making. Given social work's historic commitment to human rights, egalitarianism, and social justice, it is not sufficient for workers to be limited to the professional provision of basic human services to this new clientele. It is incumbent upon social workers to become their advocate in a nation which is increasingly unreceptive not only to the needs the world's abandoned, but also to its own internal exiles. In this era of rediscovered isolationism, the agenda is becoming clear.

At the outset the profession must challenge the pervasive belief that immigrants must at all costs be "Americanized" in order to adjust. This ubiquitous notion cruelly discounts the positive effects of pluralism on American society. It disallows the aspiration of individuals to find their identity in the context of an ethnic history and finally submerges real identity in deference to a presumed ideal type. Linguistic proficiency and the acquisition of human capital do not inherently obviate the preservation of an ethnic identity.

Secondly the profession must directly confront the unremitting tradition of nativism and ethnic bigotry which too often transforms the character of immigration from one of emancipation to one of isolation, rejection,

and fear. This tradition which occasionally explodes into confrontation and violence is more often expressed as silent intolerance. Rooted in unfounded fears of economic threat, in perceived threats to a national identity, and in parochial ignorance and isolationism, this xenophobia interfaces all too readily with dangerous traditions of ethnic intolerance and aggressive nationalism.

It may also be of concern to social workers that while political exiles from communist nations such as Vietnam, Cuba, Poland, and Hungary have been classified as legitimate refugees and thereby entitled to legal status and government assistance, those who have left non-communist countries tend to be viewed officially as "economic" refugees. Over a half million Indochinese have been admitted legally since 1975 and 130,000 Cubans were granted asylum in 1980 alone (Newland, 1981). By way of contrast, in 1983 the Immigration and Naturalization Service has been detaining 1,800 Salvadorans a month along the southern border and about 10,000 citizens of that country are in some phase of the deportation process (Turtle, 1983). In part this discriminatory approach to policy is linked to the provisions of the 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act. The bill restricted entry ideologically to aliens who fled communism and geographically to fugitives of the Middle East. These conditions were repealed by the Refugee Act of 1980 which by adopting the United Nations' definition of a refugee provided a legal basis for a non-discriminatory approach to international asylum (Congressional Research Service, 1980). Nonetheless, the current administration contends that Central Americans are requesting asylum for economic reasons. The effect has not been to stop the migration but rather to make it illegal. The Federal Immigration and Naturalization Service estimates the number of Salvadorans in this country at one half million - a figure equal to 10 percent of El Salvador's

total population (Shenon, 1983). We are witnessing the emergence of a new class of undocumented aliens - the "fugitive refugees." While the legal status of this group will have to be addressed, perhaps it is of greater long term significance that refugee policy be the product of human rights considerations as well as of purely geo-political aims. This agenda can be suitably injected by the profession with the most significant humanitarian legacy.

Like the Settlement House workers who worked with immigrants at the turn of the century, contemporary social workers are recognizing their dual obligation to simultaneously provide professional services to individuals and communities while directly confronting the attitudinal, institutional, and legal obstacles to a just society.

### Summary

The worldwide refugee problem is growing and shows no signs of abatement. The international social work community is recognizing the importance of the profession's role in dealing with this new clientele. The experience of this country with its most recent major immigrant influx has enhanced social worker awareness of the problems of refugee assimilation, economic adaptation and social-cultural adjustment.

Indochinese expatriates are a heterogeneous group representing several nationalities, religions, cultures, and class backgrounds. Although their adjustment has been difficult they have moved quickly into the occupational structure toward economic self-sufficiency. Generally the refugee is underemployed and the loss of status, homeland, culture, and relatives has contributed to individual problems of adjustment. The American reception of its newest candidates for citizenship has not, on balance, been a warm one. Nonetheless, the Indochinese have steadily improved their median earnings and the net use of government assistance declines each year after entry.

Policymakers, practitioners, and refugees tend to be consistent in perceiving a hierarchy of needs which initially focuses on income security, employment, housing, and language competence and which subsequently emphasizes cultural, familial, and personal adjustment. Practice with the group recognizes the stages of cultural adjustment and utilizes the natural helping network.

Finally, social work can make an important contribution by working at an institutional, attitudinal, and policy level to dismantle the nationalistic and nativist barriers to a mutual accommodation of refugees and a plural society.

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