

The migration of the vietnamese



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Imagine America with one culture; this country would not be what it is today without the diversity. Beginning in 1975 Vietnamese immigration started, because of the war in Vietnam and the takeover of communist North Vietnam. This caused fear, and threatened the safety of the people, so they began to escape Vietnam for their own safety. The migration of the Vietnamese to America had reached the 135, 000 mark by the end of the 1970s, with other Vietnamese fleeing to other countries such as Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand and the Philippines. In 2007 there were about 1642950 Vietnamese living in the US, with thousands living in major cities such as San Jose, West Minster, Orange County, Dallas and New York. (Census 1) The large immigration of the Vietnamese brought major cultures to the US with places like Little Saigon in Los Angeles, California and many restaurants all over the US.

From the year 1980 to 2000, the Vietnamese boat people were the largest group of refugees coming to America. (Lowman, Shep 1) The migration brought over thousands, which quickly became hundreds of thousands. This all happened due to the growth of communist North Vietnam and the uprising of the Vietnam War. Through hardships, and challenges Vietnamese migration was legalized and refugee camps were established to help Vietnamese immigrants achieve a safer and better life.

“ In 1954 communist North Vietnam began a hostile takeover against those who did not believe and support the communist way of governing.” These groups of communist supporters were known as the Vietcong, with the majority living in North Vietnam; some also lived in the South as well. “ In the early 1960s the U. S. entered the war in hopes of ending the spread of

communism by helping South Vietnam defeat the communist North.” Millions of US soldiers served in the Vietnam War, using the Navy, Air Force and Marines in its efforts to defeat North Vietnam. Due to the strength of North Vietnam the U. S. involvement in Vietnam ended and national advisor Henry Kissinger negotiated a peace treaty in 1973 with North Vietnam, which had soon conquered South Vietnam and reunited it as a socialist republic.

(Hutchinson 1) At the end of war some 20000 South Vietnamese soldiers, 1 million North Vietnamese Soldiers, 500000 civilians and 56555 U. S. Soldiers were killed from 1961 to 1975. (Hutchinson 1).

With Saigon falling to the communists, about 135000 Vietnamese fled to America. First to leave were mainly ex military, government officials and Vietnamese who had worked for the US during the war and their families. “ Conditions in the southern portion of the newly reunified Vietnam worsened in the late 1970s, and government had decided to rid the country of its Chinese merchant class; as a result thousands of Vietnamese and Sino Vietnamese south to escape the country.” Under contract from the state, they resettled these new arrivals in communities throughout the country and arranged sponsorships for refugees. “ These sponsorships involved the provision of housing and initial support from interested Americans.” “ When these Vietnamese refugees arrived in the U. S. they were stationed in four U. S. military bases in California, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, and Florida.”

(SEARAC)

America was not the only place the Vietnamese fled to. Between 1975 and 1982 about 500000 Southeast Asians became refugees. Vietnamese also fled to Southeast Asian countries, such as Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand and the

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Philippines on boats, which caused them be called “ Boat People”.

(Hutchinson 1)

One of the largest migrations was from Vietnam to Hong Kong: it was reported that 160000 Vietnamese fled towards Hong Kong, but many were attacked at sea by Thai Pirates. It was reported that in 1989, 50000 boat people remained in cramped refugee camps. In 1979 alone almost 69000 Vietnamese refugees landed in Hong Kong. With the large over population of Vietnamese in Hong Kong, the UK government began forcing the Vietnamese to leave; was reported that in 1996 only 18000 resided in Vietnam. In 1997, China made it very clear that when they took over Hong Kong they wanted all Vietnamese clear of the territory. (Hutchinson 1) The 18000 left believed that China’s takeover of Hong Kong from the British would force the U. S to accept them. (Vietnamese Refugee Resettlement 3) At the end of 1997 Hong Kong had sent the remaining Vietnamese back to camps in Vietnam, using force when necessary. (Lowman, Shep 1) At the end of 1997 3, 364 refugees still resided in Hong Kong. In May of 2000 Hong Kong closed its last refugee camp and a decision was made to give Vietnamese refugees residency in Hong Kong. (Hutchinson 1) Hong Kong was not the only country that the Vietnamese boat people immigrated to, they also went to Japan. About 105 Vietnamese refugees made their way to the shores of Japan; about 35 reached the southern city of Kunamoto where they fled into the mountains in fears of being deported back to Vietnam. According to reporters “ Almost every day this month a boat has pulled up at Nagasaki or some other Japanese port or has been spotted at sea by a tanker or other vessel and brought to Japan where the refugees have been put into overcrowded

camps” Government shelters were filled with more than twice the number of refugees than they could handle. Finally in 1985 Japan took the extraordinary step of allowing 10000 Indochinese refugees to come into their country legally. In other countries, such as Thailand, there were agreements with the UNHCR and the UN refugee agency that allowed the return of all Vietnamese refugees to Thailand by the middle of 1996.

The US also had troubles with the growing population of the Vietnamese refugees. Only those who had affiliations during the War would be accepted into the US, but without proof many were sent back (Vietnamese Refugee Resettlement 3). Because many Vietnamese immigrants left families behind, the US started a family reunification program, allowing those with family in Vietnam to immigrate legally, those without family were forced to escape Vietnam by boat. (SEARAC 1) By 1988 it was decided that all Vietnamese boat people living in the US were illegal immigrants until they proved that they were qualified for refugee status. (Hutchinson 1) By the mid 1980s there had been disputes about the Vietnamese resettlement programs and its eligibility. This caused slowing of departures for the illegal immigrants, but departing immigrants continued in 1987. (SEARAC 1) “ The US had many efforts to help Vietnamese. On April 22nd 1996; US announced a program that would provide efforts to empty refugee camps in other countries. This program offered possible resettlement in the US for certain refugees; this would be done through interviews with American Immigration officers, but this could only happen after the immigrants returned to Vietnam. This program had two purposes, to assist those refugees for whom the United States had special concern, and to minimize to the greatest extent possible,

the violence.” (Lowman, Shep 1) Registration for the program was announced but not many immigrants were informed, and therefore missed the deadline for applications. This ended the program, leaving many Vietnamese unable to return to the United States.

In December of 1996 the US made an effort to return 37000 Vietnamese still residing in camps back to Vietnam. “ The last Vietnamese were expected to be home by the end of 1995, but only 5000 were returned in 1995 versus the 12500 in 1994. Under the US plan, Vietnamese in camps would be taken to Ho Chi Minh City by the UN.” (Vietnamese Refugee Resettlements 3). This showed that not only Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Thailand, or the Philippines had problems such as the overpopulation in refugee camps but countries like the United States did as well.

For the past 20 years, the Vietnamese migration was the largest in the United States, with programs and funding from the UNHCR to help the migration run as smooth as possible. Due to their efforts thousands of Vietnamese were able to escape the Communist rule of North Vietnam and the uprising of the War. Now with the number of Vietnamese in America reaching millions the culture has started to be reflected in America. With openings of Vietnamese restaurants and the growing popularity of Vietnamese centers such as Little Saigon, Americans are able to indulge themselves in foods from the Vietnamese culture. The Vietnamese culture has altogether brought more diversity into the United States.