A study of Southeast Asian youth in Philadelphia: A final report

Heather A. Peters

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Family Support Administration Office of Refugee Resettlement Washington, D.C.: January 1988

Government Project Officer: Ellen McGovern p.

Prepared for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, under contract No. SSA-RFP-86-0198.

TABLE OF CONTENTS p.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY p. i

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) considers the present and future progress of Southeast Asian (SEA) refugee youth toward their own educational and employment goals essential to the attainment of the refugee program's goal of self-sufficiency. In order to obtain a better understanding of the activities and roles of refugee youth in relation to economic self-sufficiency, in September 1986 ORR contracted three community studies of SEA youth: to San Diego State University of San Diego, CA; to the University of Minnesota of Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN; and to the Institute for the Study of Human Issues of Philadelphia, PA.

This study was contracted to the Institute for the Study of Human Issues under Contract No. SSA-RFP-86-0198. It was directed by Heather A. Peters, Ph.D. The study conducted an investigation of the SEA youth in the Philadelphia community. It not only describes and analyzes the current employment and educational pursuits of SEA youth, but also explores the youth's aspirations, expectations, and strategies for future educational and employment goals. The study is also concerned with both the opportunities and obstacles which the youth perceive to exist, as well as the roles, responsiblities, and relationships in their families and communities as these pertain to the pursuit and attainment of economic self-sufficiency.

In accordance with the specifications of the contract, this study employed a qualitative, ethnographic methodology emphasizing intensive, interpretative analysis rather than

extensive, statistical approaches. In using the ethnographic approach, the researcher employed participant-observation techniques, collected life histories and conducted intensive interviews. p. ii

The study is divided into six chapters.

CHAPTER I THE PHILADELPHIA SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEE COMMUNITY

Chapter I provides information about the Philadelphia SEA refugee community, its size, location and general cultural and background information.

The current estimates for the Philadelphia SEA refugee community is 19,000. The community is diverse and includes approximately 5-6, 000 Vietnamese, among which 2,000 claim to be ethnic Chinese, 4-5, 000 Khmer, 3,000 Lao and 364 Hmong.

The majority of the SEA community are concentrated in several sections of Philadelphia: West Philadelphia, Southeast Philadelphia, Kensington, Hunting Park/Olney, and Logan. Their residences tend to cluster by blocks within these sections.

CHAPTER II ROLE OF ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN YOUTH IN THE PHILADELPHIA COMMUNITY

This chapter explores the significance of ethnicity among the SEA youth in relation to their current roles and their perceived future roles in American society. In our study ethnic identity emerged as an important factor which played a role in how the youths perceived themselves, their families and their future roles in American society. The youth are very conscious of who they are - they are not simply Asian, but are Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao or Hmong. As such, they carry

p. iii cultural models which exert strong influences on their decisions regarding the future. Recognizing these differences is important when designing and implementing programs for the SEA refugee youth.

CHAPTER III ATTITUDES OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN YOUTH TOWARDS EDUCATION

This chapter analyzes the attitudes of SEA youth to education. It explores them in relation to ethnic group, gender, and background and aspirations of parents. The chapter focuses on the obstacles perceived by the SEA youth as blocking their educational goals.

The researcher found that attitude towards education is an major indicator of the aspirations and expectations youth will have for the future. In general, we found that the attitudes of the SEA youth were very positive. All of the youth interviewed recognize the need for adequate education in order to achieve success in American society.

However, contrary to the perceived stereotype that all the SEA refugee youth are doing well academically in school, many of the youth are experiencing learning difficulties. In light of this, we found that the strategies developed by the school system to integrate non-native English speakers are less successful with the SEA youth than they may be with other non-native English speakers. Among the complaints cited are:

1. Indescriminate age-grade matching
2. Inadequate and poorly designed ESI programs
3. Mainstreaming SEA students into regular classes before they are ready
4. Lack of bi-lingual staff or counselors
5. High incidence of violence and prejudice directed against the SEA students
6. General insensitivity of the school system to the special
7. needs of the SEA refugee student.

p. iv

In addition, SEA youth express strong concern over the high cost of education in the United States. They clearly perceive this cost as a major obstacle to pursuing higher educational goals beyond high school. We found that SEA youth need better guidance and advice about how to apply for financial aid, or educational loans, or even to know more about what opportunities are available for them.

CHAPTER IV ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN YOUTH

This chapter probes the employment aspirations and expectations of the SEA youth. It investigates them with regard to ethnicity and gender of the youth, and to the background of the parents. In addition, this chapter looked specifically at marriage patterns among the female SEA refugee youth.

The researcher found that aspirations divided more along gender lines than among ethnic. SEA girls, especially Hmong and Cambodian, were more likely to aspire to early marriages. Their expectations concentrate on child bearing and raising rather than employment. They regard employment simply as a means of contributing to family income, if necessary, rather than as a career. Some Hmong high school girls are beginning to formulate higher expectations, but they encounter cultural barriers. Sino-Vietnamese and some Vietnamese girls exhibited the highest and strongest career aspirations and expectation.

Among the boys, the majority who where doing well academcially in school indicate that they wish to pursue

employment in the sciences - engineering, computer science, etc. Among the non-academically motivated, all want to get some kind of training program which would provide them with a good skill - being an auto mechanic was mentioned often.

p. v.

The obstacles the youth perceive to attaining their employment goals correspond to ones already encountered in education - i.e. language and financial.

CHAPTER V SEA PROBLEM YOUTH

This chapter investigates the growing problem of anti-social behavior among the SEA refugee youth. In broad terms, the problem group is primarily male, usually between the ages of 16–24 and arrived in the United States when they were around 13–14. This group is experiencing

serious difficulties in the Philadephia School System; they are beginning to drop out of classes and taking to “hanging out” on the streets.

Vietnamese, Sino-Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao and Hmong all have their “problem elements”, but the most serious problems in terms of crime are found among the Vietnamese youth. The chapter looks specifically at the emergence of the phenomenon of Vietnamese gangs and begins to isolate some patterns among the boys who join.

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSIONS

Our conclusions include the following main points:

1. The general attitude among the majority of SEA youth towards education is positive. Most recognize that in America, education and training are important for obtaining well-paid jobs which have a future.
2. However, our research also discovered significant problems within the school system
p. vi which currently inhibit the SEA students' ability to attain, at the least, a high school education.
3. The youth express a wide range of expectations and aspirations for the future. However, they perceive two major obstacles to pursuing their goals: insufficient command of English and insufficient funds to obtain the training and education they seek.
4. Our study also uncovered an important sub-group within the SEA youth category - the “problem youth”. There is a growing community of young men disillusioned with life in America and who participate in anti-social behavior.

p. 1

INTRODUCTION

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (hereafter ORR) considers the present and future progress of Southeast Asian (hereafter SEA) refugee youth toward their own educational and employment goals essential to the attainment of the refugee program's goal of self-sufficiency. In order to obtain a better understanding of the activities and roles of refugee youth in relation to economic self-sufficiency, ORR contracted three community studies of SEA youth: to San Diego State University of San Diego, CA; to the University of Minnesota of Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN; and to the Institute for the Study of Human Issues of Philadelphia, PA.

The purpose of this research was to conduct a study of the SEA youth in the Philadelphia community. The study not only describes and analyzes the current employment and educational pursuits of SEA youth, but also explores the youths' aspirations, expectations, and strategies for future educational and employment goals. The study is also concerned with both the opportunities and obstacles which the youth perceive to exist, as well as the roles, responsibilities, and relationships in their families and communities as these pertain to the pursuit and attainment of economic self-sufficiency.

The study focused on the following primary questions as stated in the contract called for by the ORR:

1. What apsirations do refugee youth have with regard to their education and careers?
2. What are the expectations of refugee youth as to the employment opportunities that are available to them?
3. What kinds of employment opportunities are available to refugee youth?
4. What attitudes and values do refugee youth have about their own achievement in school and at work? p.
5. What is the role of the refugee youth in the economic status of their families?
6. What are the expectations of refugee youth regarding their own financial independence?
7. What kinds of strategies do refugee youth use in pursuit of education and employment?
8. Generally, how do refugee youth view their future?
9. What problems do refugee youth see in reaching their goals?
10. Where and to whom do refugee youth look for guidance, assistance and information?

The study consists of six chapters. The first introduces the background of the Philadelphia SEA refugee community. The second analyzes the role of ethnic identity among the SEA refugee youth. The third investigates the attitude of the SEA refugee youth towards education. This chapter focuses on the problems within the Philadelphia School System which are preventing the SEA youth from receiving the education they need. The fourth chapter analyzes the aspirations and expectations of the SEA youth. The fifth concentrates on the growing problem of antisocial behavior among young SEA refugee males. The sixth chapter presents the conclusions to this study.

As the principle investigator, I wish to espress my deep felt thanks to all the people in the Volunteer Agencies (hereafter VOLAGS), Mutual Assistance Associations, State and City agencies and the school system who offered their gracious cooperation in this research. I particularly would like to

extend warm gratitude to specific individuals: Yang Sam, Southeast Asian Coalition; Bee Lor, Southeast Asian Coalition; Caroline Wong, Nationalities Service Center; Hang Vinh, Nationalities Service Center; Harriet Sam, Lutheran Children and Family Services; Elena Santora, Catholic Social Services; Pairat Sethbhakdi, Community College of Philadelphia; Hung Phan, Philadelphia School District; and David A. Feingold, Institute for the Study of Human Issues. p.

Special thanks and gratitude, of course, go to all the SEA youth who shared their lives so graciously with the researcher. This study could not have been done without their willing cooperation.

I would also like to thank my interpretators, Phaukol Thor, Narith Om, Ha Son Nguyen, Hang Shao, Jade Phu, and Shelly Luan Tu, who spent long hours contacting the SEA families and accompanying me or my assistant to the interviews.

Finally, I would like to thank my assistants - Meredith Jones for her invaluable help in the initial phase of the project, especially for her work on the bibliography - and Linda Robinson who

tirelessly assisted in the interview phase of the study. I also expresse gratitude to Bonnie Crossfield for typing the bibliography.

However, as primary investigator and author of the report, I take sole responsibility for the contents herein.

p. 4

METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the specifications of the contract, this study employed a qualitative, ethnographic methodology emphasizing intensive, interpretative analysis rather than extensive, statistical approaches. The aim is to understand how informants organize and perceive their social world, and how they act in accordance with these perceptions. The emphasis is, thus, less upon statistical representation than upon deriving a grammar of social action and meaning. Such an approach enables the researcher to handle a greater degree of social complexity in a more sophisticated manner.

The ethnographic approach recognizes that an event or utterance cannot be understood without accounting for its significance for those involved in it. For the ethnographer, this means seeking to clarify and understand the conceptions and formulae which the people themselves use to define what happens to them. These are used in the interpretation of cultural and social events.

The ethnographic approach has a number of important consequences for the implementation of research, and for the kinds of results it produces. It involves more than collecting various types of data (tape-recorded verbal interactions, observations of events, interviews about experiences). Throughout the course of research, it uses each of these materials to raise questions about, provide answers for, and

p. 5

contribute to the interpretation of the other bodies of data. This kind of continuous feedback of questions and interpretations among the various kinds and levels of research data allows and necessitates a constant contextualizing of that material; at the same time, it clarifies the detailed significance of particular events. Finally, the ethnographic approach is designed to deal flexibly with unexpected contingencies in the field situation. Research questions may be continually re-evaluated and reformulated as research continues to sharpen their focus.

In using the ethnographic approach described above, the researcher employed various informal and formal contexts for data-gathering. Informal participant-observation techniques used included:

1. Tutorials
2. “Hanging Out”

Formal techniques utilized were:

1. Life Histories

2. Interviews

Tutorials

The researcher's previous study on adaptation strategies of Sino-Vietnamese refugees in Philadelphia (Peters, Schieffelin, Sexton and Feingold 1983) established that one way to set up contact with students was through helping them with homework or English. The situation provided the interviewer and the student with the opportunity to get to know each other in a non-threatening situation.

As part of this study, the researcher, on several occasions, helped to teach English classes set up by the Catholic Social

Services for Vietnamese and Amer-Asians youth in the Kensington section of Philadelphia. p.

Hanging Out

This approach requires participating in youth activities, allowing for relaxed and informal contact. The relaxed approach of "hanging out" enables the interviewer to raise more difficult topics.

Using this approach, several SEA youth parties were attended during the Christmas season. In addition, the researcher and her assistant became "older sisters" for several young SEA female teenagers. Time was spent with them participating in activities such as going shopping, sitting around and chatting about life, and helping them with personal problems they felt unable to discuss with their parents.

Visits were made to both the the Thai-Lao Temple and the Vietnamese Temple which included participation in religious ceremonies. In addition, the visit to the Cambodian temple included the opportunity to speak with both the head monk and resident nun. Because it was the weekend, it was possible to observe the young Cambodian boys who were there to study Khmer and Buddhism.

Life Histories

The life history approach has proven effective in past research with Asian youth. While collecting life histories is a more structured kind of interview, it is often perceived as non-threatening by members of this community. Our past experience with this approach has demonstrated that members of the SEA refugee community are not reluctant to talk about their past,

even when one might assume the contrary. p.

This technique is enhanced greatly when the interviewer is someone who has lived for long periods of time in Asia, speaks some Asian languages, and has a detailed understanding of and

familiarity with the culture and history of each group. The researcher has extensive experience in China and Southeast Asia and speaks fluent standard Chinese (Mandarin) and some Thai.

Gathering life histories provides important information on the parents' background, their educational level and professions. This data establishes an important framework for better understanding the youths' own goals and aspirations. Life histories can also provide insights into values and attitudes towards education and life goals.

In interviews with the youth, the researcher frequently began by taking a life history with the parents. This method provided a non-threatening way to begin the interview and set the parents at ease. Because the parents rarely spoke fluent English, the researcher carried out this part of the interview with the help of a native interpretator for languages other than Chinese. Because of the researcher's experiences in Southeast Asia and China, the interview often took the form of a conversation with an exchange of ideas and experiences rather than a formal interview.

The researcher decided not to tape these interviews in order to maintain the degree of informality which had been achieved. The researcher did take extensive notes.

When parents were not available (for example, they were not

p. 8 at home or they were not in the United States), the researcher took the life history with the youth themselves. The amount of information obtained from the youth varied according to their age. The younger youth, especially those who had spent several years in refugee camps, remembered less about their lives in their native countries. Others, such as a 23 year old Hmong male student, gave very detailed and precise information about his father and brothers and their lives during the war.

Altogether, 40 life histories were collected.

Interviews

Interviews with the Youth

Extensive interviews were conducted with the youth themselves. These informants came from a variety of sources - from contacts in VOLAGS, church groups, ethnic organizations, and schools. In addition, we used a technique known as “snowballing” which means that our network was extended through friends or contacts of the original contacts.

It is important to point out that because of the nature of the ethnographic interview, there is a difference between the exact number of people interviewed and the number of people about whom you receive information. For example, frequently during one interview with one family member, the researcher obtained extensive information about sisters, brothers as well as a circle of friends. Thus, one interview can provide data on more than ten additional people.

The number of informants interviewed is as follows: Vietnamese: 12

Amer-Asian: 7 Sino-Vietnamese: 8 Cambodian: 18 Hmong: 18 Lao: 10

p. 9

Where the informants were not speakers of Chinese, the interviews were conducted in English, sometimes directly and sometimes through the help of an interpretator. Regardless of the level of English of the informant, the researcher always brought an interpretor with her, someone who was a young person and who themselves was from the refugee community. This greatly facilitated entree into the households and smoothed initial contact with the families. The interpretators relaxed the initial stage of the interview, often simply by their presence.

We used a broad range of interpretators. Two of the young Cambodian men had been social workers in the Philadelphia SEA refugee community before attending college. They were were also active in the cultural affairs of their communities. One of our Vietnamese interpretators was a young man who is still a social worker for the Vietnamese community. He works specifically with the troubled youth. One Sino-Vietnamese young woman who helped is a student at Community College and another was Vietnamese 18 year old girl who is still a high school student. Our principle Hmong helper, a 15 year old teenage girl, is still in high school and participates actively in the Hmong Youth Association.

Interviews were conducted at the homes of the youth - usually on weekends or in the evenings. This setting provided

the opportunity to observe the living conditions of the refugee families and to observe other family members who weren't participating in the interveiws. It also provided a more relaxed environment for the interview. The family and youth were more secure; it also put them in the role of host and the researcher as guest. The families usually offered some kind of snack and drink and the interviews sometimes ended with the families bringing out their photo albums to show the researchers picture of their life in Southeast Asia and the refugee camps.

p. 10

Interviews with Persons in Volunteer Agencies, City and State Organizations, Ethnic Organizations and School System

Extensive interviews were conducted with people from the volunteer agencies (VOLAGS), state and city agencies, self-help ethnic organizations and educational institutions who worked with the SEA refugees in the Philadelphia community. The interviews were conducted at the place of work. In addition to the formal interviews, the researcher maintained informal contacts with people from several of the organizations.

A total of 39 people were interviewed who came from the following organizations and institutions:

VOLAGS

Catholic Social Services (CSS)

Lutheran Children and Family Services

Nationalities Service Center (NSC)

State and City

Refugee Vocational Training Center

Targeted Assistance Program (TAP)

Community Legal Services The Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, Black/Asian

Relations Section

The Philadelphia Police

p. 11

Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA) and Other Ethnic Associations

Southeast Asian Coalition, Inc.

Greater Philadelphia Overseas Chinese Association

Hmong United Association of Pennsylvania, Inc.

Laotian Family Community Organization of Greater Philadelphia, Inc.

Vietnamese Youth and Cultural Association

Indo-Chinese American Council

Asian American Council of Greater Philadelphia, Inc.

Educators

English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers from the Philadelphia School System

Faculty from the Education Dept., Univ. of Pennsylvania

Faculty from the ESL Dept., Community College

Personnel from Philadelphia College of Art

Other

Jewish Employment & Vocational Service (JEVS)

Southeast Asian Resources Project (SEARP), United Communities

THE PHILADELPHIA SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEE COMMUNITY

p. 12

Population Statistics

Philadelphia is a major resettlement area for the approximately 806,245 refugees from Southeast Asia admitted to the United States since 1975 (ORR 1987:7). At the close of 1986 it was estimated that Pennsylvania had a population of 26,600 SEA refugees (Office of Refugee Resettlement 1987:96), making the state tied for fifth place among the 18 states with populations of 10, 000 or more SEA refugees. It is further estimated that nearly 19,000 of these 26,600 SES refugees now live in Philadelphia (SEA Coalition, Inc., personal communication 1987). The reader should be careful, however, that this is an estimate only, and that no official census has been taken. Philadelphia social service agencies which work with refugees and Asian community leader report difficulties in obtaining accurate demographic figures because the communities are still very mobile. Individuals and families sometimes shift seasonally.

The SEA refugee population in Philadelphia is highly diverse. There are approximately 5-6, 000 Vietnamese, among which 2, 000 claim to be ethnic Chinese, 4-5, 000 Khmer, 3, 000 Lao and 364 Hmong (these figures represent estimates suggested by SEA community leaders).

We should note that the current estimates indicate a substantial increase in the Khmer population from 2,101 in 1982. This increase reflects the continuing political problems in

Cambodia. These figures also indicate a substantial decrease in the Hmong population from over 3, 000 in 1981 to 500-600 in 1984 to the current 364 (Hmong United Association of Philadelphia, Inc., personal communication 1986). This decrease reflects significant shifts of the Hmong population. The reasons for their departure from Philadelphia include fear of urban violence, desire to rejoin family members living elswhere, and belief that job opportunities and welfare benefits in other states are better than those in Pennsylvania.

p. 13

Most of the agency people with whom the researcher spoke said that they expected an increase in the Lao (both upland and lowland) population beginning Spring and Summer 1987. The reason for this increase is that the Lao are undergoing a new processing stage. They should be arriving from Thailand during summer 1987.

The Neighborhoods Where the SEA Refugees Live

Since their initial settlement inside the city, there has been a slow trickle of refugees into the closer suburbs, such as Upper Darby, where safer housing conditions prevail. However, the majority of the SEA refugees still reside within city limits and are concentrated in several sections: West Philadelphia, Southeast Philadelphia, Kensington, Hunting Park/Olney, and Logan. Their residences tend to cluster by blocks within these sections.

All the neighborhoods manifest tension between local, long time residents and recently arrived SEA refugees. Frequent criticism is leveled at the state ORR and local agencies by concerned individuals who feel that no one adequately prepared

p. 14 the local residents for their new neighbors (personal interviews, Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations 1985:54). Refugees were placed into some of the most economically depressed neighborhoods of Philadelphia.

West Philadelphia

West Philadelphia has one of the more diverse populations in the city. Within this multi-ethnic community live Blacks, Whites, Koreans, Japanese, Ethiopians, Haitians, Indians and Southeast Asian refugees. As an indication of the recognition of the large Southeast Asian population, the local supermarkets have expanded Asian food sections, and posted signs in Vietnamese, Lao and Khmer.

Although interviews with students and teachers revealed that nearly all the high schools in the Philadelphia School System exhibited tensions between the black students and the recently arrived SEA refugee students, University City High School in West Philadelphia seems to be one of the most troubled. Local newspapers and interviews with students document the ethnic tensions between black and Asian students which frequently erupt into violence. Programs designed to help the situation have alleviated some of the problems but incidents still occur (see below, Chapter III, Discrimination section).

Thus, West Philadelphia, while it is home to the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel College, suffers from many “inner city” problems. Well maintained residential streets lie cheek by jowl with run-down slums operated by absentee landlords. Refugees have been settled into these decrepit, often condemned

p. 15 buildings with little preparation given either to the refugees or to the predominantly Black community residing there (informant complaints, *Philadelphia Inquirer* articles, Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations 1985:54). Cambodians, Lao, some Hmong and some Vietnamese still live there.

Southeast Philadelphia

Southeast Philadelphia is predominantly an Italian neighborhood with some Black sections. Within recent years, more and more Vietnamese families have been moving into areas close to the Italian section which they perceive as a safer, better environment for raising their children. Our earlier study (Peters, Schieffelin, Sexton and Feingold 1983) revealed that, if parents have the money, they prefer to send their children to parochial schools because they believe that the schools provide better education, are safer and have better discipline.

Many Vietnamese shops, restaurants and small businesses have sprung up in the Italian Market area in South Philadelphia. In one two block area, the researcher counted 6 restaurants, 2

grocery stores and 1 bookstore. Some professional services, such as dentists and doctors have also appeared.

Many Cambodians also moved into South Philadelphia, but have chosen to buy homes in an area which constitutes a sort of “no man's land” between the Italian and Black neighborhoods. Because this area was dilapidated, the homes sold cheaply. The Cambodians are renovating the blocks. This neighborhood now contains several Cambodian grocery stores as well as their *Wat* (temple) which houses several Cambodian monks who offer instruction and services to the community.

Kensington

p. 16

Recently, Vietnamese families have been moving into the Kensington section of Philadelphia, a predominantly working class white ethnic and Hispanic neighborhood. Like the students interviewed from other high schools, the Vietnamese youth attending Kensington High complained of harassment from their fellow students, but the father of one of the families interviewed commented that he found his immediate neighbors friendly and helpful.

Hunting Park/Olney

The small Hmong community is concentrated in the Hunting Park/Olney region of northeast Philadelphia (the other principle neighborhood where they are found is West Philadelphia). The neighborhood is predominantly Black with some Hispanics. The section spans truly poor and devastated areas which look as though they have been bombed out, to better maintained middle class homes. The Hmong families which remain in Philadelphia seem to be doing relatively well, and in the Hunting Park-Olney section, they live in the better sections in large homes which house multiple family members.

Logan

Finally there is a concentration of Vietnamese, Lao and Khmer in the Logan area of Philadelphia. Predominantly a Black neighborhood, the SEA live here in uneasy proximity with their neighbors. However, the community has settled in over the years since their arrival. The area hosts three Asian grocery stores, 1 Sino-Cambodian and 2 Vietnamese; a Cambodian garment factory

and a Cambodian tailor shop which specializes in traditional costume. There are also several Korean and Indian shops in the neighborhood.

p. 17

In addition, Logan is the location for the Indochinese-Community Center which was founded by the Indochinese-American Council. The center functions as a youth center primarily for Vietnamese youth and also offers classes in English. The council also sponsors cultural events.

Background and Composition of the Philadelphia SEA Community Vietnamese

Most of the Vietnamese community in Philadelphia come from South Vietnam. The majority of those interviewed by the researcher come from urban areas. Occupations of the fathers included the military, bureaucracy, small business and professions such as journalism. The education level of the fathers is generally high. They all completed high school and many had had some form of additional education, such as military training. Most of the fathers were too young (except one) to have been trained under the French education system, so they usually speak only Vietnamese with a little English.

The mothers, on the other hand, were housewives and have a lower level of education. A few of the mothers, particularly those who had born Amer-Asian children, had worked as housekeepers at one of the Anerican military bases, or as waitresses. However, despite their contact with Americans, their command of English was very limited and poor.

Because of the association of many of these refugee parents

p. 18 with both the South Vietnamese and American government and military, they and their children suffered after the communists occuppied Saigon in 1975. Many of the fathers had been sent to re-education camps (these camps are essentially prison camps for political indoctrination) - sometimes for up to 6 or 7 years. The children of these families were not permitted education above the high school level. We found that the decision to leave Vietnam frequently occurred after the father had been released from re-education camp.

The families the researcher interviewed included both Buddhist and Christian. We noted that several of the Buddhist families had set up altars to Quan Am (i.e. Avalokitesvara (Sanskrit) or Guan Yin (Chinese), the Buddhist Bodhisattva of Compassion), but because of the distance of the Vietnamese Buddhist Temple, these families said that they visited the temple only occasionally. Only one home contained an ancestral altar in view of the investigator.

Amer-Asians

The researcher would like to call the attention of the reader to an important sub-group within the Vietnamese community. These youth are the legacy of America's involvement with the Vietnam War. Since 1983 special legislation passed in the United States has permitted these children of American fathers and Vietnamese mothers to apply to come to the United States as part of Vietnam's Orderly Departure Program. Thus, they are technically not refugees, but their situation in the United States parallels that of the refugees.

Two of the VOLAGS in Philadelphia, NSC and CSS, have

p. 19 contracts to settle these youth and the families that accompanied them to America. Thus, there is a growing number of Amer-Asian youth in Philadelphia - estimated around 100. These youth strongly identify with the Vietnamese community and frequently formed part of the groups of Vietnamese youth we contacted.

The background of the youth was similar to the Vietnamese. Most had lived in Saigon, and attended school. The mothers we interviewed did not have Vietnamese husbands and had worked in Vietnam to support their children. They had decided to apply for permission to come to America in hopes of finding a “better life” with better opportunities for their children's futures.

The children range in phenotype - some look very American, others more Vietnamese. Yet, regardless of their appearance, all are culturally Vietnamese and had been raised speaking only Vietnamese. While in Vietnam most had harbored the idea that they would adapt to America quickly because they “had American blood”. In reality, they are no more American than their Vietnamese friends. Because of the growing significance of Amer-Asians, this study includes examples from this group.

Sino-Vietnamese

The majority of the Sino-Vietnamese families in Philadelphia came from Saigon and Cholon (the Chinese district attached to Saigon). Based upon the interviews taken for this study together with those taken during the 1982 study (Peters, Schieffelin, Sexton and Feingold 1983), we found that most of the fathers were born in China (usually Guangdong) and had emmigrated to Saigon as young men. There they had naturally associated with the local

Chinese community and married into second generation family of Sino-Vietnamese. For this reason, we found that among the refugees families in Philadelphia, generational depth in Vietnam on the whole, tended to be shallow. They, thus, frequently had grandparents or great-grandparents who were born in, and who still resided in China. The majority of the Sino-Vietnamese families had been small shop owners in Saigon. p. 20

The Sino-Vietnamese speak both Cantonese and Vietnamese and some, who had the opportunity to attend the Chinese schools before they were banned in 1975, also speak Mandarin.

Cambodians

The majority of the Cambodian families that we interviewed came from rural backgrounds with fathers who had had little education other than learning how to read and write Khmer at their local temple school (in Theravada Buddhist countries, the traditional education for boys was provided by the Buddhist monks in the community temples). With few exceptions, the brutal Pol Pot regime succeeded in exterminating most of the educated Khmer population who were unlucky enough to be in Cambodia at the time. For example, one of our interpretors was the son of a wealthly Phnom Penh doctor. In April 1975, just a few months after his father sent him to the United States, Phnom Penh fell to Khmer Rouge troops. He has never heard from his father, mother and three sisters again. Two surviving siblings had been in Paris the same time he was in Phildelphia.

Most of the families interviewed came from Battambang Province. Battambang Province lies on the border between

p. 21 Cambodia and Thailand. On the one hand, it is a region which sustained relative peace during the war-torn period between 1970-75 and many families moved there to escape the chaos elsewhere. On the other hand, it is the region hardest hit during the famine in 1979 following the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. The region also suffered the impact of post - 1979 fighting because it harbored the various resistence forces, including the Khmer Rouge (Shawcross 1984), all of whom the Vietnamese troops are trying to eliminate. It makes sense that the majority of refugees would flee from this region which took the brunt of the post-Khmer Rouge problems.

As it did in Cambodia, Theravada Buddhism plays an important role in the lives of the Cambodian community in Philadelphia (see Ethnicity Section). The recently established a Cambodian temple serves as a strong focal point for the community, both young and old. We noted that a few Cambodians have become Christians, for example, two of the daughters of one family the researcher visited on a Sunday morning were off at church. The father was a Buddhist, but said that he didn't mind his daughters attended church. However, conversion does not appear widespread.

The primary language spoken among the Cambodians is Khmer. We encountered few people who could speak French. This contrasts with the researcher's recent visit to Cambodia where French still functions as the important *lingua franca* in Phnom Penh. The reason for this is undoubtedly the strong presence of the international aid community which uses French as its principle language of communication. Otherwise rusty French is now being

p. 22 used once again. The ability to speak French does have certain age parameters, however, with people under 35 preferring to learn English instead. The language emphasis in the refugee camps, for obvious reasons, is English.

Lao

The Lao community in Philadelphia is predominantly rural. However, some agency workers have noted that the Lao seem to be better educated than the rural Cambodians. Like the Cambodians and Vietnamese, the Lao were fleeing the new communist regime in their country.

Agency workers have also noted that the Lao seem to have entered the job force more quickly than the Cambodians. They attribute this fact to the Lao establishing strong networks through which they help each other to secure jobs.

Lao culture is linked closely to Thai culture in terms of language, cultural traditions and religion. Philadelphia's Thai community (mainly middle-class professionals, numbering around 3,000) joined forces with the Lao community several years ago to open up a *Wat* (Temple) for their community. The temple finally opened in Spring 1986, but the Lao community does not participate as strongly as they might. Reasons seem linked to traditional biases between the

two groups. The Lao accuse the Thai of cultural snobbism, and the Thai stereotype the Lao as ignorant and unsophisticated.

Hmong

The majority of the Hmong in Philadelphia came from Xieng Khouang Province in northwestern Laos. This upland province is

home to most of the Hmong in Laos. Traditionally Hmong practice swidden ("slash and burn") p. 23
agriculture growing rice, opium and vegetables, and raising pigs. The war in Laos changed all this, and while all of the Hmong interviewed classified their fathers as farmers, more than half of them said that their fathers had left the farm to become soldiers.

Many of the fathers had been recruited by the CIA as soldiers for the anti-communist forces fighting the Pathet Lao. Fear of persecution from the post-1975 communist government in Laos was, thus, cited as a primary motivation for fleeing Laos by these families.

Few of the fathers of the young Hmong men had had substantial education, but the young men themselves report that their fathers had tried to provide them with some basic education in schools in Lao villages. This reflects development changes that Laos had begun to undergo during the 1970's. The women, however, both the mothers and the sisters of the young men, had had no formal education. They worked in the fields and performed other domestic chores such as tending the pigs and collecting water.

Because of their fathers experience in the army and because many of the youth had had some schooling in Laos, most of the men and young men could speak both Hmong and Lao.

Traditional Hmong religion includes variety of beliefs, such as ancestor worship as well as belief in local gods and spirits. Many of the houses have ancestor portraits hanging on the walls. In one home the researcher observed an elaborate altar which

ironically the 15 year old daughter could not explain. In addition, many Hmong have converted p. 24
to Christianity, some while they were in the camps, and some after their arrival in the United States. This phenomenon probably reflects of the role of various church organizations in their resettlement.

ROLE OF ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN YOUTH IN THE PHILADELHIA COMMUNITY p. 25

Overview on Ethnicity

In our study of the SEA refugee youth, ethnic identity emerged as an important factor which played a role in how the youths perceived themselves, their families and their future roles in American society. In this regard, the youth are very conscious of who they are - they are not simply Asian, but are Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao or Hmong. As Chinese, or

Cambodian, etc. the youth are carrying cultural baggage which exerts strong influence on their decisions regarding the future. Recognizing these differences is important when designing new programs for the SEA refugee community.

Not recognizing the distinctions among the groups can lead not only to maladaptive programs, but also to resentment among the groups themselves. For example, many of the youth complain that at school the Black students constantly lump them altogether. The Black youth call them derogatory names like “gook” or “chink”. One Hmong girl complained, we are not Chinese, we are Hmong. Why can't the Black kids recognize this difference? She said that sometimes she and her friends retaliated by calling the Blacks “Africans”. She said that they did not like this.

Consequently, the Asian youth in Philadelphia organize themselves into groups which are strongly based upon ethnicity. Many of their activities are ones which emphasize their identification. Aspirations and attitudes are strongly influenced by these groups.

p. 26

Hmong

Some of the groups, like the Hmong, for example, have organized more formal groups. They have their own Youth Association which is sponored by the Hmong United Association of Pennsylvania. The group elects officers, has a small budget and plans several annual activities. At the moment the group is more social in nature; for example, they organize outings, fall and spring parties. However, the current president, a 19 year old young man currently in his senior year of high school is making changes. He plans to introduce service activities aimed at helping the older members of the Hmong community.

Informally, the young Hmong in high school spend alot of time with each other. On Saturday afternoons boys and girls gather at the nearby park simply to talk and hang out, to play the guitar and volleyball.

The somewhat older Hmong youth (ages 22-24), who had already graduated from High School are no longer part of this group. Many of them are working in Philadelphia's large and bustling restaurant industry, jobs which they got through a Hmong network. They consequently report a wider circle of friends through their job association. Some of these older boys also report that they had been successful in making some Black friends while in high school and that these friendships continue today. Yet, on their days off, we noted that the majority prefer to visit Hmong friends.

We observed that the Hmong youth still participate in several traditional Hmong activities which strengthened their

p. 27

ethnicity. For example, one young man in his early 20's told us that he and friends had killed about 100 pigs during the past several years for various Hmong ceremonial occasions. He said that they bought the live pigs from Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Hmong New Year's was constantly talked about by many of the young people. It was an occasion they obviously enjoyed a great deal and further served to strengthen their sense of "being Hmong". Although the youth are picking up American cultural values, such as dress and music preferences, they also express their "Hmongness" through the marriage system which is still celebrated in the traditional manner. In fact, it is their marriage system which is exerting the strongest influence on the decisions of teenage Hmong girls regarding their future (see section on marriage). In at least two houses, we observed young girls doing traditonal *bandao* (Hmong embroidery), an important skill for Hmong girls.

Another interesting aspect of Hmong ethnic bonding is the formation of their surname associations. Theoretically, the Hmong believe that everyone with the same surname is related (Geddes, 1976; personal communication, Bee Lor 1986), but in reality, in Laos and Thailand, the groups are too large for everyone to be biologically related or even to know one another. Yet, in America, families with the same surnames, who were formerly total strangers to one another, immediately forge friendships which are based upon bonds of kinship. This bond enables the Hmong to form networks which crosscut the entire United States, providing strength and unity for a small population.

Vietnamese

p. 28

The Vietnamese youth also tend to stick together. Like the Hmong youth, the Vietnamese groups include both boys and girls. But, unlike the Hmong, the Vietnamese do not have the more formal youth associations. This difference probably results from the greater number of Vietnamese youth. Instead, the youth interviewed talked about their informal groups of friends which were school or neighborhood based.

The Vietnamese youth groups also included Amer-Asians and some Sino-Vietnamese. The Amer-Asian youth said that they felt more comfortable with their Vietnamese friends than with Americans. In fact, they did not seem to be suffering from major discrimination by Vietnamese here. Contrary to what the Amer-Asians might have thought before they arrived in America, most Americans perceive them as Vietnamese and not American. Some may look more Western in terms of phenotype, but their language, their behavior and their general cultural affiliation binds them with the Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese boys in West Philadelphia also report that they hang out with Lao girls, but not Lao boys. It has been noted (Office of Refugee Resettlement 1986:10) that the ration of Vietnamese boys to girls between the ages of 12-21 is 2:1. Although this difference is lessening (Office of Refugee Resettlement 1987:10), we suggest any imbalance is probably sufficient to drive teenage boys interested in girls to widen their options. Other cultural factors related to the Lao may also be involved (see below, section on Lao Youth). Few of the

Vietnamese youth said that they had Cambodian friends (see below, section on Cambodian youth).

p. 29

The Vietnamese youth also participate in larger group activities and lots of parties, both formal and informal. The formal parties are organized by any willing member of the Vietnamese community, frequently businessmen. For these parties, the organizer rents a hall, a band, and charges $10-15 for admission. The party usually has a live band (Vietnamese) which plays Vietnamese rock music. Youth who attend range from their teens to their 30's. Food and drink concessions sell snacks, soft drinks, and beer. We observed little drinking other than beer. The parties focus on dancing and talking. During the 1986 holiday season, these parties were the target of problems from the “gangs” (see below, Chapter V), but efforts by the Philadelphia police have eliminated their presence at these parties (at least for the present).

Although their Tet, or New Year's, coincides with Chinese New Year, they hold similar but distinct festivities from the Chinese.

The degree and kind of contact with Black teenagers varies. Some schools, for example, Furness and South Philadelphia High Schools, the contact is minimal. Harassment by Black teenagers is widespread, and SEA teenagers feel that little is done by the teachers to correct the situation. The Vietnamese students at these schools reported very little contact with American students.

Yet, as among the Hmong, one can always find individuals who

p. 30 somehow transcended the hostility and formed friendships. At Kensington High School, there was a Black teenager, whose father had been in Vietnam, who took it upon himself as a personal mission to welcome the Vietnamese into his community. He served protector for a number of the smaller boys, and even showed up at English tutorial sessions at a Kensington church to help. His Vietnamese friends that we met at the tutorials were obviously very fond of him. Another boy, an Amer-Asian, told me that he was “pro-Black”. He said that Blacks liked him because he was able to tell funny stories. However, this boy's closest friends were still Vietnamese.

Sino-Vietnamese

The Sino-Vietnamese youth form an interesting category, because their ethnic identification is more complex; the youth are basically bi-cultural. One tendency is for them to emphasize their Chinese ethnic affiliation. Based on our earlier research with the Sino-Vietnamese (Peters, Schiefflin, Sexton & Feingold 1983), this was a trend we expected. For example, one group of college age Sino-Vietnamese girls specifically reject Vietnamese association. They report that even in Vietnam, the Chinese and the Vietnamese remained separate. They admitted that in Vietnam they discriminated against Vietnamese much in the same manner that many Whites have traditionally discriminated against Blacks in the United States. As an aside, they acknowleged that Vietnamese also dislike the Chinese because they controlled so much of the economy.

These girls clearly identify with the Chinese community.

Several work at part-time jobs in Chinese restaurants which they got through parental connections. In addition, they enjoy taking trips to Resorts International at Atlantic City, not to gamble, but to enjoy the nightclub acts which the casino brought in from Hong Kong and Taiwan. This particular casino caters to the wealthy Chinese communmity from New York, Philadelphia and Washington (mostly male) who come to gamble. These young women love to watch the Chinese entertainment and keep large scrapbooks with photos of their favorite actresses, singers, etc. p. 31

Another example of this identification with the Chinese community can be seen in the Asian Cultural Week events held by Community College in Spring 1987. One of the events planned was a fashion show illustrating traditional Asian dress. Not unsurprisingly the Sino-Vietnamese girls requested a special section for themselves, separate from the Vietnamese girls.

There is also a group of Sino-Vietnamese young men studying Mandarin Chinese at Drexel University. These efforts represent a very conscious attempt to forge links with their Chinese heritage, rather than their Vietnamese background. We should be reminded that the majority of the Sino-Vietnamese in Vietnam speak Cantonese as their primary language. They would have learned Mandarin in the Chinese schools, but these were banned after 1975.

A countervailing tendency among the Sino-Vietnamese youth is to identify more with ethnic Vietnamese. Sino-Vietnamese young men, more than women, fall into this category. As noted above, our young male Vietnamese informants, all report that their circle of friends includes Sino-Vietnamese. Conversely, Sino-Vietnamese

male teenagers we interviewed seemed less conscious of the distinctions between Sino-Vietnamese and Vietnamese friends. p. 32

We suggest that the reasons for this strengthening of cross-cultural ties derives first from common language (all young Sino-Vietnamese spoke Vietnamese fluently and frequently could not speak Mandarin because Mandarin schools had been banned), second, their common experience in suffering political discrimination in Vietnam, together with the strong pull of male bonding in a new and unfriendly environment where their similarities outweighted their differences.

Cambodians

The Cambodian youth mix less with the other SEA ethnic groups. For the most part the Cambodians simply remain separate from the other groups. In the Southeast and West Philadelphia neighborhoods, some youth even report that hostilities have erupted between the Vietnamese and Cambodian young male groups. When asked why, the Cambodian youth respond that they don't like the Vietnamese because the Vietnamese dominate their country. International political and historical tensions apparently have filtered into daily life in far-off Philadelphia.

The *Wat* or Buddhist temple constitutes an important symbol of Cambodian ethnicity and plays an important role in the lives of both the young and the old, the men and the women. One young man who works closely with the Cambodian youth community noted that even when tough looking street youth entered the temple, they immediately assume a manner of respect towards the monks and the older people present.

p. 33 For the male youth, the temple plays a special role in preserving ethnic identity and also strengthens the degree of separateness the Cambodian youth have. The Cambodians in Philadelphia have continued the tradition of "Temple boys". Every Friday night boys between the ages of 11 and 15 go to the temple where they study Cambodian language, history and the Buddhist religion. They stay in the temple through Sunday. Besides studying, the boys simply have a good time there. They are with their friends, they talk, fool around and form a tight knit group. This activity provides them with a clear and distinct sense of identity with which to confront the outside world which does not understand them.

An American young man who spends alot of time with the Cambodian youth in Southeast Philadelphia, reported that stories of magic, shamans and the power they wield are held in great awe among the youth of the community. Rather than expressing embarassment over these ideas, they instead seem to regard them as things which make them different and more Cambodian. This same individual witnessed several healing ceremonies performed by a man regarded as the most powerful Shaman-healer in the Philadelphia community. The ceremony was carried out on a young 16 year old girl whose psychological distress was greatly alleviated by the shaman's powers. Thus, we can suggest that traditional concepts of psychology and healing still play an important role among the young Cambodians and not just the older people.

Cambodian New year is, of course, an important holiday which

p. 34 unites the entire community. The temple and the monks play important roles; there is alot of eating; and there are performances of music and dance. Just as the researcher observed in Cambodia and in the Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand, Cambodian classical dance has assumed the important role of symbolizing the Khmer people's struggle to preserve their culture and civilization.

Lao

The Lao boys, like the Vietnamese and Cambodian, tend to keep to themselves as well. One West Philadelphia Vietnamese teenager quite frankly said that "we hate the Lao boys". I asked why and he responded that "their style is different. They have longer hair, wear different clothes". He said that the Lao boys hate them as well.

On the other hand, this same boy said that many Lao girls hang around in his group. When I asked why, he said that the Lao girls hate the Lao boys just as much as he does. This somewhat unusual situation may be partially explained by the manner the Lao boys have affected. They, more than the other Southeast Asian groups, have affected a kind of street style, i.e. speech patterns, dress and outward physical behavior which is perceived by other SEA as being

“Black”. The widespread distrust and fear of Blacks among the Southeast Asian youth, in general, might very well contribute to this inexplicably intense dislike of the Lao boys. It is also possible that the Vietnamese boys like the Lao girls because they are freer and more relaxed in their social relations with boys than very traditional Vietnamese girls.

Conscious Ethnic Awarness

p. 35

The youth are clearly aware of who they are, but do they really understand what being Vietnamese or being Hmong means? Have any of them come to terms with what it means to belong to two cultures, i.e. SEA and American? Have any of them thought about what being a Hmong or Cambodian will mean to their children or children's children?

For the most part, we found that “being what they are” is experienced on a gut level. It is not easy for them to express in words what being Vietnamese or Cambodian is. We did encounter, however, several young adults within the different communities who were beginning to verbalize, and come to terms with what their ethnicity means.

In this regard the Hmong are very unusual. One young leader in the Hmong community was concerned with drawing up a list of traits which represented what it meant to be a Hmong. He felt that young Hmong ought to be aware of them and to abide by them. They were simple traits, such as Hmong men never have long hair, but Hmong girls should never cut theirs; and maintaining the traditional Hmong New Year.

On the other hand, we were struck by the sophistication with which several of the 14 and 15 year old Hmong girls expressed themselves. In discussing marriage (see Chapter IV) they recognized that as Hmong they must marry young, ideally before they were 18 years old, but, as new Americans they wanted to complete high school, perhaps attend college and get jobs. They were trying to resolves this conflict and asked whether married

girls with children could go to college? Would people think they were bad? They astutely recognized that their daughters would be culturally more “American” and less traditionally Hmong than themselves.

p. 36

One of my interpretators, a young Cambodian man in his late 20's who has been here since 1975 and has a college degree, is also interested in the concept of ethnicity and the problems of ethnic preservation in the midst of the pressures to Americanize. He is currently reading about earlier immigrants who came to America, in order to understand the process of change in the second and third generations of American born Cambodians.

Mutual Assistance Associations and Ethnic Identity

Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA's) play an important role in ethnic preservation within the Southeast Asian communites. However, they are criticized by some Southeast Asian community leaders as being too concerned with cultural preservation at the expense of cultural adaptation.

In addition, not all members of each community are completely aware of the activities of their respective MMA. Often it is simply a matter of distance. For example, the Cambodian MAA is in the Olney section of Philadelphia (northeastern section). The Cambodian community living in Southeast Philadelphia does not go there that often. In other MAAs, such as the Vietnamese MAA, politics has created a split among its members, rendering it less effective.

Other of the MAA's, such as the Greater Philadelphia Overseas Chinese Association, is also plagued by political

p. 37 factionalization. Some members of the community have criticised it saying that its activities are too directed at the older members of the community and neglect the youth.

Finally, many of the youth perceive these associations as `old fashioned'. The older members of these groups are finding it difficult to come to terms with the changes in their children. Consequently, many people question the effectiveness of the role that these groups can play with the youth.

Conclusions on the Role of Ethnic Identity Among SEA Youth

Many of the Southeast Asian youth have adapted the dress, hairstyle and manner of American teenagers, but their sense of ethnic identity remains strong. This identity, unlike the Asian American, who politically identifies with all Asians, is very group specific. The youth are Hmong, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Sino-Vietnamese or Lao. The exclusiveness of the youths' ethnic identity is reflected in the relatively few numbers of cross-group friendships. Their friendships reflect the strong bonding of shared experiences in addition to shared language and culture in a new country.

This sense of ethnic solidarity not only links people into groups of friendship, but serves to form networks which help the youth in employment. The Hmong, for example, have specialized in working in Philadelphia's more trendy restaurants. We found that access to these jobs is primarily through introduction by friends. Sino-Vietnamese girls, on the other hand, use their bonds of ethnicity to form solid groups of friends who offer strong support to one another.

p. 38 We did observe however, that the exclusivity of ethnic identity is beginning to break down among the younger children (ages 7-10), which is natural. These children speak good English and are aculturating in ways which go much deeper than their older siblings. These children form much wider circles of friends.

p. 39 ## ATTITUDES OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN YOUTH TOWARDS EDUCATION

Overview on Education

Attitude towards education is an important indicator of the aspirations and expectations someone will have for the future. We found that, in general, the attitudes of the SEA youth

toward education were very positive. All of the youth interviewed recognized the need for adequate education in order to be successful in America.

Naturally, the kind of education the youth felt was adequate or wanted varied, not only from group to group, but from individual to individual. As expected, these attitudes varied in terms of ethnicity and gender of the youth, and in education level and background of parents.

The standard response from the majority of the Sino-Chinese and Vietnamese youth, for example, was that they wanted to attend college. At the least, all of the youth interviewed recognized that they must at least finish high school in order to get some kind of job in American society. Among those who didn't wish to attend college, most expressed the desire to acquire some kind of additional training which would prepare them for better paid jobs with better futures, i.e. jobs which were not “dead end”. The youth wanted jobs where they could learn new skills which would allow them advancement.

Yet despite their high expectations, many of the youth studied reported that they are bored and frustrated in their high school classes. Some admitted that they have stopped going to school everyday. Although accurate statistics are not available,

the agency workers report that they observe an increased drop-out rate for SEA students at certain high schools. This trend is causing alarm among their parents and community leaders. p. 40

This trend fits with the overall trend of increased drop-outs in the Philadelphia School System in general. A recent article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Sunday July 5, 1987) described the situation as so bad that school researchers project that as many as 35-40% of the Class of 1988 will never receive a high school diploma. For the academic school year 1985-86 certain schools reported total drop-out rates as high as 22%. Among the schools hardest hit were University City High School (16%), South Philadelphia (19%), Kensington (22%), Olney (15%), Furness (13%) - all schools with large numbers of SEA students. Minorities and the urban poor have the highest drop-out rates, although it was noted that Asian females have the lowest.

Although the *Inquirer* article focused on the numbers of Hispanic youth who were dropping out, it also strongly criticised problems within the school system itself which were encouraging the drop-out rate: for example, indifferent or hostile teachers; uncaring parents; disruptive students who were not given any constructive criticism. The drop-out problem was reported as usually beginning with the student cutting classes. It was pointed out that if a student doesn't come to school regularly and then shows up, the teacher is more annoyed at having to handle the problem student than pleased that the student has returned to school. Parents frequently do not know that their children are cutting classes because the counselors are too overworked to inform them. As we shall see below, the SEA youth

at these schools complain of similar problems reported in this article. We feel that the SEA students can't help but be influenced by this trend. p. 41

Hmong

Given widely held stereotypes, the number of young Hmong men in Philadelphia who have graduated from high school is surprisingly high. We say young men, because among the older youth who are now 20-24, the high school graduates, are predominantly men and not women.

On the other hand, there is a group of Hmong girls currently in their teens who came to America when they were only 7 or 8. These girls speak good English and are better adapted to American life. They are currently aged 14-16 and in high school. More of them will be graduating soon, if they do not marry first (see chapter IV). For example, our Hmong assistant, a 15 year old girl, chatters on about boys, clothes and hairstyles like any other Philadelphia teenager. She is concerned with what she will do after high school, the choices being more schooling or a job. Her concern with early marriage, however, betrays her strong Hmong cultural affiliation and illustrates one of the problems Hmong girls face in adapting to life in America.

The number of Hmong from the Philadelphia community who have continued on to college is so far miniscule - from five to eight boys and one girl (personal communication, SEA Coalition 1987). However, we predict that these statistics will increase as more of the youth currently in high school receive their diplomas.

The generation of young Hmong in their 20's represents the

p. 42 group that had to struggle the most. They arrived in America when they were already 13 or 14 with inadequate educational backgrounds. However, those currently living in Philadelphia are generally doing well. Among those covered by this study, all had finished high school and were very proud of their diplomas. The researcher was able to interview all of them directly in English, a testimony to their success in difficult circumstances.

Therefore, contrary to what we anticipated, the Hmong community in Philadelphia places high emphasis on education, at least for men. In addition, every male youth in the study had some education in Laos before leaving. Even in rural Hmong villages, fathers were aware of the need for their sons to receive a better education than they had in order to survive in the modern world. The encroachment of the war undoubtedly heightened this awareness of education. Before arriving in either America or even the Thai refugee camps, these young men had already learned to speak Lao and had acquired basic training in math, science and even some history.

This enlightened attitude did not apply to women. In Laos, Hmong girls did not receive much education, if any at all. Their responsibilities centered around domestic chores, farm work, and of course marrying and raising children. Hmong girls are receiving some education here, but the numbers which graduate high school or continue on to college are fewer than the boys. Many girls do marry early and drop out of high school. Those that like school and want an education, like Yang for example, often have to do so against the will of their fathers who still do not

p. 43 recognize the need for girls to be as educated as boys. Yang attends a Philadelphia junior high school which has a very bad academic reputation together with a discipline problem. Yet,

despite this drawback, she is determined to get an education and is doing very well academically. Because of her strong desire to do well in school, she has drawn the attention of her teachers. Her advisor, in particular, has provided considerable encouragement. Consequently, she has qualified to attend one of the five elite high schools (entrance is selective, based on grades and teacher recommendation) in the Philadelphia system starting in September 1987.

The explanation for this emphasis on education among Hmong in the Philadelphia community and the higher rate of success of the Hmong men in finding jobs, may be a function of the particular population which remains here. As reported above, the Hmong population in Philadelphia was initially considerably higher - over 3,000. Those who left may represent the less adaptive members of the community, i.e. those who could not survive the urban problems of Philadelphia life. The 364 who remain represent the more successful ones who were able to adapt to life here. Consequently, Philadelphia's Hmong community may well represent an unusual sample of the Hmong population in the United States.

Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese

In general, the Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese youth are highly motivated toward achieving post high school education. At Philadelphia Community College (from 1985-86 statistics obtained

from Community College's ESL Program), 75% or 159 of the 211 students registered in the ESL p. 44
program were Vietnamese (note: this figure does not distinguish between pure Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese. One of the schools ESL teachers estimates that 2/3 of this total are Sino-Vietnamese). Only 44, or 21%, were Cambodian and 4% were Lao (note: this figure does not distinguish between lowland Lao and Hmong). Among the 159 Vietnamese students, 68% were male and 32% were female.

This high percentage of young men at Community College, however, does not indicate the number of receiving college degrees. Based on discussions with ESL teachers and college administrators, we discovered not all graduate or go on to 4 year colleges. But regardless of the ultimate outcome of their careers at Community College, teachers said that their attendence at Community College puts them in a more better qualified job category - white collar as opposed to blue. We were informed of a side benefit; apparently Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese girls consider men with any college education better marriage partners than men with none.

One 22 year old Sino-Vietnamese young woman informed us that most of her girl friends (all Sino-Vietnamese or Chinese from Hong Kong) were doing quite well in terms of education - by this she meant that all were pursuing educational goals above the high school level. Suzie herself, for example, is currently enrolled at Community College and contemplating transfer to Philadelphia College of Art. Among her three sisters, one (sister #2 in terms of age) attends the Kraft Fashion Institute, and another (sister #4) is pursuing an accounting course at a business college in

Jenkintown. Only sister #1 has no career training. She is married and has a baby. It is interesting
p. 45 to note that the three sisters engaged in post-high school training (includes Suzie) graduated from Girls High at the same time - June 1986.

Among Suzie's friends, she mentioned one who attends Temple and is majoring in pharmacy. Others, she says, are all very serious about geting an education. She reports that they have all decided against marrying early. They want to get good jobs, which they perceive as ones with good salaries, good benefits and opportunities for future advancement. She added that many of her friends talked about wanting to travel before settling down. She told me about her initial surprise at finding women teachers in America who had not married. These teachers, however, had been very helpful to her and her friends, and that they now decided that they didn't have to get married to become successful!

We discovered, however, that not all the Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese youth are doing well in school. Suzie, for example, worries about her brother and his friends who represent a particular element found mostly among the Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese male youth today. One of her younger brothers, who is in his senior year of high school, does not like to study or do his homework. His idea of a good time is “hanging out” with his friends on the streets. Needless to say, the parents are anxious about him. They do not approve of his friends and the hours that he keeps, but they cannot seem to change his attitude. The “problem youth” will be discussed in greater detail below in Chapter V.

p. 46 However, we found that the Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese tended to have the highest educational aspirations. We correlate this with several factors; for example, the Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese families we interviewed in Philadelphia come from predominantly urban areas in South Vietnam. The level of education of the parents, even though it is lower than the 1975 group of refugees, is higher than the other SEA groups. Furthermore, not only had the youth themselves received more education while in their native country, but their education had been less disrupted than the Cambodians, or Lao or Hmong.

In addition, we might mention the importance of the cultural tradition common to both China and Vietnam, namely the Confucian tradition, which places high priority on the value of education as a means to success. Traditionally, success was defined in terms of receiving a bureaucratic position in the imperial governments which was awarded through competetive examinations. Success today is still defined in terms of getting the education which will give access to white collar jobs. Consequently, parents from the Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese families place high priority on their children getting an education - even if it means sacrifice on their part. They were able to project into the future and perceive the economic advantages an educated son or daughter would bring to the entire family. This system, of course, assumes that the son or daughter will remain within the family structure once they become economically productive.

Cambodians and Lao

Because the majority of Cambodian and Lao parents come from

rural areas and are not as highly educated themselves, they have difficulty in guiding their children in the American school system. p. 47

We discovered that teenage Cambodian girls, for example, attend school on a less regular basis than teenage boys. Two teenage sisters in one family reported that they did not always go to school because they did not see any reason to go. They still did not speak English very well and said that, besides, their future was to get married and raise children. However, the youngest child in this family, a girl around 9 years of age, spoke English fluently, went to school regularly and received good grades. We predict that there will be changes in the educational patterns of Cambodian girls when the younger children grow up.

Another Cambodian father rather philosophically stated that he simply wanted his children to learn to speak English well and to be able to get along in America. He wants them to be able to get jobs where they speak English. He vaguely understands - but not completely - that school is a pathway to success in America. He is most concerned about his son, age 22. The boy is still in high school, although nobody seemed to know how or where. He is trying to improve welding skills he learned in the refugee camp. We received the opinion that the father had little control over the son's activities and whereabouts, and that he was anxious.

We were struck by the dilemma of one Cambodian boy who was caught between loyalty to his parents and his own aspirations to achieve more education. This young man had been classified as

brillant at math and science by his teachers and counselors, and they were encouraging him to apply for scholarships to attend college. The boy, however, feels tremendous obligation to his parents and wants, instead, to take a job to help support them. The parents who do not completely understand the significance of their son getting a college degree, offered no encouragement for the boy to go to college rather than taking a job. Unlike Chinese or Vietnamese parents, we felt that his parents do not fully realize that a few more years of economic struggling would pay off in greater long term benefits. p. 48

Lao girls also experience problems from culturally conservative parents. One girl we knew who had academically qualified for one of the selective high schools did not attend because her father was afraid to let her travel to this school on her own. He prefered to keep her at a closer neighborhood comprehensive school which is frought with academic and disciplinary problems.

The Lao caseworker for the Lao MMA complained about the high high school drop-out rate for Lao youth. He attributed this failure to problems within the school system (see section below). On the other hand, we encountered a small group of Lao teens who had been in the United States since they were 8 years old. They all spoke good English, were doing well in school and planned to attend college when they graduated.

Obstacles Encounterd by the SEA Youth to Getting an Education Problems with the Public School System

School district officials estimate that there are

p. 49 approximately 5,500 Asian students out of 194,000 in the Philadelphia Public School System (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sunday March 30, 1986). This figure is based upon statistics for students enrolled in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program in the School district. We must point out that the figure merely provides a rough estimate because it does not include students enrolled at Catholic schools, nor does it include students attending schools which do not have ESOL programs, nor does it include students no longer attending ESOL classes. On the other hand, it does include Chinese from Hong Kong, Taiwan or China, and Japanese and Korean students none of whom are SEA refugees.

In trying to understand some of the problems SEA students have encountered in the school system, let us first look at the ways in which the school system tried to integrate them into the system. They used strategies already established by the school system for other non-English speaking students, primarily Spanish speaking, which entailed the following: 1) match the age and grade of the student as closely as possible; 2) place the student in special English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes; but, 3) mainstream the student as quickly as possible into regular classes so that the student does not fall behind in basic subjects and gets as much exposure to English spoken by native speakers.

This last strategy was intensified during the year 1985-86 under a new program called “ESOL Plus Emersion”. Whereas previously a student could take up to five periods of ESOL a day if he or she needed it, now the maximum number of ESOL classes is

p. 50 three. Whereas previously non-English speakers could be introduced to content classes taught by the ESOL teacher, now the student is required to take history, math and science in regular classes. For Spanish speakers, bi-lingual programs exist at certain schools. It is reported that the ESOL Plus Emersion affects them less since they are still able to take content classes in Spanish if they are available.

Have these strategies worked successfully with the SEA students? Many SEA students themselves, SEA community leaders, agency people and some educators themselves argue that these methods have not been successful with the SEA students. Let us look more closely at some of the criticisms.

Age-Grade Matching

One of the major complaints cited by many of the Asian community leaders, agency people, and teachers who work directly with the students is the insistence of the school system to try and match age and grade of the SEA refugee student as closely as possible. In theory this sounds reasonable. You cannot place a 15 year old boy in the 4th grade.

On the other hand, how can you place a 15 year old boy with only a 4th grade education and whose English is virtually non-existent in the 10th grade? Even in the best of circumstances, usually with the Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese children, the refugee children have lost at least one or two years of school from the time they leave their native country to the time they are resettled in America. None of the refugee camps provide adequate education. Most now teach some English, but in

Thailand, not even English classes were freely available until around 1982. The Cambodian children have lost more education than the other SEA children. They literally received no education from 1975 until they arrived in America - sometimes a gap of 6 to 8 years. p. 51

Thus, placing these children, who may be now 14 or 15, in high school classes which approximately match their ages creates serious problems. Not only do they not understand their classes because of the English problem, they also do not have the educational foundation to learn the math, science and social studies which is expected of them.

Realizing the learning difficulties they will face if placed in classes too advanced for them, some SEA refugee youth have lied about their ages in order to be placed in lower grades. While this method temporarily solved the educational gap problem, it created social ones where 20 year old young men are in the same classes with 14 year olds. This, of course, is the very problem educators sought to avoid in the first place.

English for Speakers of Other Languages

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is designed to help students who are not native speakers of English and who have difficulties participating in regular classes. One problem with ESOL classes cited by the teachers themselves is that there is no standard curriculum for ESOL teachers, no over-arching goals and objectives. This, in one sense, leaves the teacher free to adjust the class to the needs of his students. But more common, is a general lack of direction in the ESOL classes,

especially among the less gifted teachers. p. 52

Leaders in the SEA community complain that their children are not learning the fundamentals of English. They sit in ESOL classes and are neither prepared for their regular coursework, nor for getting along in American society. For example, they neither understand their math classes, nor know how to fill out a job application, or apply for a drivers license.

The SEA high school students we interviewed also complained that ESOL English is not connected with their other classes, so that outside their ESOL classes, they are not able to comprehend their science, math and social studies classes.

Mainstreaming

Initially the ESOL program in high schools offered non-native English speakers as many as five ESOL classes per day. As of 1985-86 the trend has been to cut back on ESOL classes and to promote “mainstreaming” under the ESOL Plus Emersion program. The method is designed to get the student into regular classes as quickly as possible.

The rationale for this method is that the more the student is exposed to English spoken by native speakers, the quicker he or she will learn. Unfortunately this theory is not working for the majority of SEA students. Younger children fare better in this system, because they have less to lose and less to catch up. Too many of the older students we interviewed describe feelings of helplessness when they sit in classes they do not understand. They complain that they are bored and frustrated by being placed into regular classes before they are ready.

p. 53 Teenage boys, more than girls, seem to tire quickly. One teacher philosophically attributed this problem simply to their being teenage boys - a time when they wish to establish their masculinity and to prove to the world that they are young adults. They are frustrated by these feelings of failure and seek to prove themselves in other ways - such as hanging out on the streets, acting tough, smoking cigarettes, drinking, chasing girls, etc. Their boredom leads them to cut classes with friends which results in a predictable downward spire.

When questioned about this problem with the older students, the school authorities explain that if the student cannot understand the course, he can repeat the course during the summer or the following year. What this reasoning fails to recognize is that the older refugee students do not have the luxury of repeating classes. Most of their families still depend on some form of cash assistance from Welfare. If the family's period for receiving Refugee Cash Assistance has expired (18 months after arrival), families with children usually qualify for AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). AFDC provides for needy children who are under the age of 18, or age 18 if a full-time student in a secondary school, or in the equivalent level of vocational or technical training, and is expected to complete the program before reaching age 19 (Dept. of Health and Human Services 1986, 45 CFR Ch. II, Part 233.20:102).

Because the SEA refugee families feel that they cannot afford to support a student in high school without the additional AFDC cash payments, it is crucial that the student finish high school within the allotted time period. If he or she falls too

p. 54 far behind, then there is usually no other alternative than to drop out and to take any sort of job to help support the family.

Some Suggested Solutions to These Problems

What can be done about these problems with the school system's strategy? Obviously, the students have to learn English somehow and, ideally they should not fall behind in their other subjects. Several community leaders have argued for bi-lingual education as a solution, i.e. classes in math, science and social studies taught in the child's native language until his

English level is sufficient to understand the regular classes. Others, however, have pointed out several problems with using this approach for the SEA youth. First, there are too many different languages - it would be difficult to find capable and trained teachers fluent in both English and the native language. Second, not all the SEA students are literate in their native languages.

Another suggested solution is a major re-evaluation of the current ESOL curriculum, adjusting the course to the academic and daily life needs of the students. In addition, the schools might try a method already used by Community College of Philadelphia.

Philadelphia Community College offers ESL (English as a Second Language) classes that try to prepare the student with the skills needed to take other college courses. They even offer some courses, such as Psychology or American History, which are taught by ESL teachers. These courses are designed to go more slowly, and to introduce the non-native English speaker to the specialized vocabulary in the course. Prior to 1985 the high schools had used ESOL teachers to introduce content material.

But, according to school officials, because these teachers were not accredited to teach content courses, the students did not receive credit. This approach be re-evaluated and improved. p. 55

A third method which has already been used in some schools in other parts of the United States, San Francisco, for example, or Fairfax, Virginia, is to establish special school centers for the SEA students for a specified period of time. The center may serve only as an “intake center” for a day or two at the beginning of the school year. The center would be staffed by bi-lingual personnel who could explain to both the parents and students what the school system is all about. The SEA students could be tested in their native languages to establish properly how much education they received in their native countries.

Other more radical options are to isolate the SEA students for as long as one year at special schools where they could be provided with intensive bi-lingual training and English without the pressures of the regular school environment. Philadelphia is now considering creating a one-day intake center for Southeast Asians beginning this fall 1987 (personal communication, Education Law Center, Philadelphia, 1987).

Discrimination by Fellow Students and Teachers

Nearly every SEA youth interviewed complained of experiencing problems and tensions with other youth, expecially Black youth. Naturally, there were always exceptions, like Tommy, a 17 year old Amer-Asian, who said he was “pro-Black”, or one young Hmong who was able to make friends with some of the Black students at University City High School. Another Hmong

told us that once he became the friend of one very large Black young man, nobody else ever bothered him. However, most SEA youth perceive themselves as targets of discrimination - especially by Blacks. p. 56

This discrimination has taken more agressive forms than simple name-calling and taunting, and has resulted in some serious and unfortunate incidents such as the stabbings and severe beatings of several Southeast Asian teens. These events always make the newspapers, and are followed by a public outcry. However, these tragedies are quickly forgotten and life goes on as usual in the high schools. But this kind of attitude is extremely destructive. It not only creates obstacles to getting an education, but lays the foundation for a continued future of racism between Asians and Blacks.

Even more shocking is the attitude of some of the teachers at these schools. One student reported that their teacher told the Asian students that “if she had enough money she would send them all back to Asia where they belonged.” Another student, who complained of attacks and harassment in the cafeteria during lunch, said that both of the adults assigned to security duty there were biased against Asians. One of the adults had a newphew who had punched one of the Asian students. The adult interceded on behalf of his nephew whose suspension was cancelled.

Whether or not these reports are 100% accurate is not the issue. What matters, is that many of the youth perceive that they are discriminated against, not only by their fellow

p. 57 students, but by the school system itself. If they feel that they cannot get fair treatment from the teachers or the principal, to whom can they turn for help?

University City High School used to be cited as the worst offender in this regard. In Fall 1984, The Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations held a series of four public investigatory hearings on the increased violence directed at Asians in the Philadelphia area (Philadephia Commission on Human Relations 1985). One result of the testimonies given at these hearings was that more attention was directed to the specific abuses occurring at University City High School. For example, groups of students were taken to Fellowship House Farm (a non-profit, nonsectarian educational center for human relations and social change) for two day “unlearning racism” workshops. There, in the relaxed, informal atmosphere of the countryside White, Hispanic, Black and Asian students explored their differences and played sports together.

The workshops are highly successful, but the question always remains, can this isolated experience survive the pressures of the urban environment? Thus, the school instituted more culture sharing programs and classes within the school system itself. One Vietnamese student who is junior at University City High School, also reported week long retreats where he had been taken to the countryside with fellow classmates. He felt that the friendships established during this time continued after his return to school.

Although the situation at University City High School is far from perfect, students currently enrolled there, and some of the

p. 58 recent Hmong graduates, report that conditions are much calmer than in the early 1980's. However, other high schools, such as Furness and South Philadelphia, have increased

problems. This increase reflects the movement of the refugees into these neighborhoods which previously didn't have many Asians.

In general, the Vietnamese boys say that they want to avoid trouble with hostile youth in school. One boy said that when problems erupted, he and his friends usually tried to avoid direct confrontation. If things got too bad, then they simply - left school for the day. On the street as well, they said that they tried to avoid fighting with local, hostile youth, but that if pressed they would. Banding together in their own gangs provides them with a degree of protection they need. However, one Cambodian teenager reported that he frequently confronted Black teenagers and had been involved in fights using knives. So far he does not seem to have been seriously hurt.

Two Hmong girls, ages 14 and 15, reported that they were constantly taunted for getting good grades in school. One said that she was called “nerd”. She hoped that when she got to Girl's High that there would be less of this since only students with good grades could attend Girl's High. The other girl, who already attends Girl's High, told her friend that she found that even at Girl's High students cheated and made fun of her when she got good grades. This suggestion of anti-intellectualism found even at the city's best and most competitive schools symbolizes deeper problem within the Philadelphia school system itself. One of the girls wistfully expressed the desire that there could be

schools where only people who wanted to learn attended, and all the other people went to other schools. p. 59

Another program aimed at ameliorating the special cultural tensions between the SEA and the Black youth was the two year Southeast Asian Resource Project (SEARP) run by United Communities Southeast Philadelphia from 1985-1987. The primary goal of the project was to train professionals in health care, education, the police, and community centers to better understand the new SEA community they service.

In the area of education, the project worked only with schools in School District #2 of which two were high schools, South Philadelphia High School and Furness (which only includes grades 9 and 10). The project's strategy was to provide consultations, class assemblies and workshops for staff, teachers and students and parents of the SEA students which would introduce Asian cultures and provide cross-cultural training. Unfortunately, the two high schools were not overly receptive to this project - it was most successful among the elementary schools.

The project also approached community centers which had youth programs in the Southeast Philadelphia region to encourage them to consider inviting Asians to participate. Some success is illustrated by the enrollment of some SEA children in the preschool programs at Houston Community Center and by some Asian groups, like the Vietnamese boy scout troop, renting space.

Although the program was a dynamic and exciting one, its major drawback was that there were no resources to conduct any follow-up evaluation on the program's impact. The training of

professionals has had a lasting impact on the treatment of the SEA community as exemplified
p. 60 by the dynamic health care programs being developed by Jefferson Hospital for treating SEA women. However, the long term impact on the school system is less clear. During the project's duration, the SEARP committee, of constituted primarily of educators and SEA community leaders, did devote three sessions to problems within the school system. A draft of recommendations was drawn up and sent to the Superintendent of the School District in winter 1986. In general, these recommendations have not yet been acted upon.

Insensitivities of the Philadelphia School System to the Southeast Asian Students

Community leaders and agency people involved with the Southeast Asian youth complain that the schools lack people who understand the problems of the Asian students. The schools lack guidance counselors who can specifically advise and direct the Asian students. The Southeast Asian leaders resent that the Black and Hispanic students have Black and Hispanic teachers, but that the Asians are not comparably served.

As a result, Asian students are frequently misdirected. For example, one Hmong young man at University High School wished to go to Community College to study computers. When he spoke with one of the counselors at Community College, she told him that Asians always did well at computers, but they failed all the other tests and requirements. She told him that he would have to pass English 101 and 102 in order to graduate and that most Asians could not pass. The student was so discouraged that he

p. 61 didn't even apply. He instead went to the National Institute of Health Technology and trained to be a dental technician. And, he passed his English test.

Another Hmong student, currently a senior at Olney High School, is planning to attend college in the fall. However, he had not yet applied (it was May) and wasn't completely sure how to go about it. He knew that he also needed to apply for financial aid. He reported that his advisor at school had provided him with some forms for financial aid, but that he didn't know how to fill them out and the advisor hadn't helped. This particular young man was more astute than many of the youth we encountered, and yet he still was confused.

It is our opinion that the schools need to employ more counselors specifically to help the SEA students. They need help not only in guiding them through their high school curriculum but in locating post high school colleges and training programs as well. It goes without saying, that counselors should help the students to complete their applications and inform them about financial aid and educational loans. A faculty member of the ESL Department at Community College commented that she had noticed that the Vietnamese and Cambodians seemed to have established their own networks to help each other with these problems. The Lao, on the other hand, seemed less skilled with finding out these things for themselves and needed extra attention.

Some of the schools, such as West Philadelphia High School and Furness, have tried to redress this issue by hiring an Asian

(in these cases, two highly educated Vietnamese men who have Ph.D.'s and who have been in the United States for a long time) to teach the ESOL classes, and to serve as guidance counselors. We have to commend the school's efforts, but unfortunately in both instances, the teachers are overworked, and are constantly frustrated by their lack of authority to make any real changes in the programs. p. 62

Another serious insensitivity of the school system is the failure to hire staff who can communicate with the parents of the Southeast Asian students. Through their community leaders, parents of SEA students have complained that they have no means of making their opinions known to school administrators or teachers. Alternatively, the school has no way of communicating with the parents when there are academic or disciplinary problems with the SEA students. For example, on the problem of truancy, SEA students can cut classes for weeks and no one ever tells the parents. The lack of bi-lingual staff in the schools or the reluctance to use interpretors in order to explain problems to the parents of SEA children has led to a class action suit (*Y.S. v. School District of Philadelphia*, C.A. 85-6924 [E.D. PA]) filed on behalf of Asian students in the Philadelphia School District and their parents (see below).

The school system has also been insensitive to learning disabilities among the SEA students. ESOL teachers reported that any learning problem noticed among the SEA students is automatically attributed to inadequate command of English and is referred to the the ESOL teachers. They have perceived more

serious learning disabilities among the students, such as retardation and psychological damage, which thus pass unnoticed in the school system. p. 63

A corollary of this complaint, is that few of the teachers appreciate the degree of psychological trauma these children have suffered during the chaos in their countries. Many of them have seen mothers and sisters raped, or witnessed brutal fighting and killing. The children are reluctant to talk about these experiences - they simply live with them.

Alternatively, the school system also lacks the ability to recognize gifted children as well. One ESOL teacher who had recommended several SEA youth for advanced classes had found that they had been rejected on grounds that they failed the standardized tests used to place the students. This teacher astutely noted that these tests were designed specifically for American children and that many gifted SEA children failed for cultural reasons, not for lack of intelligence.

A final, somewhat dramatic, example which illustrates the school system's general insensitivity to the SEA students is the much publicized “Killing Fields” incident. In early 1985, the SEA ESOL teacher and guidance counselor at University City High School requested $220 from the school district in order to take 110 students to see the “Killing Fields”, a film which he felt would provide an important cultural and psychological experience for the SEA students. In his classes, the teacher had discussed the history of Cambodia, the turbulent 1970's, and the period of the Khmer Rouge government. Half of the students in the class were Cambodian and they had not yet seen the film. He

also noted that few of the students felt comfortable talking about their experiences during the
p. 64 Khmer Rouge period. The teacher consequently felt that seeing the movie might help them. Much to the surprise of everyone, the Assistant Superintendent turned down the request, saying that “the movie was not sufficiently educational”.

The teacher fought the decision, but it was only after Warner Brothers, hearing of the dispute, offered free tickets for all the students that the School Board reversed its original decision and agreed to pay the $220 for the tickets (the incident was communicated to the researcher through interview, and was also reported in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 7, 1985). Incidents like these can't help but to affect the learning environment in the school system.

Class Action Suit

These insensitivities of the school system to the needs of the SEA students, which include the problems with the ESOL Plus Emersion program, has led to a class action suit filed against the Philadelphia School System in December 1985 by The Education Law Center. (*Y.S. v. School District of Philadelphia*, C.A. 85-6924 [E.D. PA]).

The suit represents the interests of the SEA refugee students in the Philadelphia School system but began initially as a response to three Cambodian youth with handicap problems which were not handled in accordance with school district regulations. In collecting the depositions from numerous school faculty, community leaders, SEA students and their parents, the Education

p. 65 Law Center uncovered an array of problems within the school system which match the grievances the researchers discovered in their own interviews. It was because of the enormity of the problems that the Education Law Center decided to file a class action rather than individual suit.

It is interesting to note that the school system has not denied that many of these problems exist. Yet, they maintain that their programs are still valid. They admit to spotty implementation and inadequate follow-up of programs.

However, the school district is currently considering some changes to redress the problems. Under discussion at the moment are recommendations for introducing some bi-lingual classes (in SEA languages) and Asian counselors (two, as noted above, have already been hired, although the Vietnamese counselor at University City High School was hired long before this case), and agreement to slow down mainstreaming until the student is more prepared. In addition, there has been some discussion about creating a one-day intake center for the SEA students with bilingual staff to introduce the school system to SEA parents and children.

Financial Obstacles to Education

One of the most frequently perceived obstacles to education was financial. Most of the youth worried constantly about how they would gather sufficient funds for pursuing their educational

goals above the high school level. In fact, as noted in the section above, we even encountered students who feared that they may not even be able to complete high school. For example,

three Vietnamese brothers arrived in the United States in September 1985 without their parents. Their father had worked for the American military and for an American bank, but was unable to escape with his sons. The two oldest brothers, twins, were 19 when they arrived. The youngest brother was 17. Although the two twins were technically too old to qualify for high school, they convinced Kensington High School to accept them. All three began in the 10th grade (the twins had been in the 11th grade in Vietnam). p. 66

All three brothers are extremely bright and have performed academically very well in school. One of the twins is very good at math and computers and wants to go to Temple, following in the footsteps of an uncle who is currently enrolled there. The younger brother wants to be a high school teacher. Both of these boys have also been accepted in a special Temple University summer program for high school students funded by the William Penn Foundation. The problem is, that the initial 18 months of Refugee Cash Assistance for these boys expires July 1987 and because the twins are considered as "Heads of Household", they do not qualify for AFDC. Unless special arrangements are made for them, they will have to drop out of school in order to take jobs.

Additional complaints are voiced about lack of funding for training programs. Philadelphia supports two programs which receive federal and state funding. One, the Refugee Vocational Training Center was developed specifically for refugees; it is run by the Jewish Employment and Vocational Service (JEVS) and is funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. In

theory, the program is a good idea. It seeks to provide training in woodworking skills which should lead to relatively good job placement. In addition, it includes classes in English and math, which are structured around the language and math skills the workers will need in their job. p. 67

The program has several problems. First, it is too short - each session runs for 15 week sessions and even that is shortened by pressure to take jobs before the program has finished. Second, the range of skills it offers is too limited. Third, the program does not include bi-lingual staff. The present staff justifies this lack by saying that most of the training involves learning by watching and doing. However, interpretators could and should be provided in those classes which discuss safety regulations, and workers rights and benefits.

The second program which provides some training for SEA refugees is the Orleans Technical Institute. JEVS has been allotted 25 slots in the Institute which can be filled by refugees. The English and math requirements are stringent and many of the older men who wish to take the program cannot qualify. Another disadvantage is that the students only receive state funding for programs no longer than 6 months. Those programs which can be completed within 6 months do not include training in computers, a popular choice among the refugees.

JEVS reported that at the moment, most of the SEA refugees applying for these programs were not the youth - Lao men in their late 20's and 30's favored the woodworking program. They felt that the youth had more ambitious goals, in terms of their careers. But they observed that the older men - men in their

p. 68 late 20's and 30's who were more interested in these programs - had greater difficulties with the English and math requirements at both programs.

Conclusions

1. In general, the attitude towards education among most of the SEA youth was positive. They all recognized that in America, education and training were important for obtaining well paid jobs which had a future.
2. However, our research confirmed that differences in attitude toward education varied with ethnicity, gender and background of parents. For example, we observed that SEA girls, in general, have a less positive attitude towards education because of their traditional roles. Sino-Vietnamese girls constitute an exception to this pattern, and Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese, in general, place greater emphasis on higher education.
   Not unsurprisingly, parents with more education, from all the groups, placed higher emphasis on education for their children (including girls) than those with less.
3. Our research also discovered significant problems within the school system which currently inhibit the SEA students' ability to attain, at the least, a high school education. The major complaints cited are:

   a) Indescriminate age-grade matching
   b) Inadequate and poorly designed ESOL programs
   c) Mainstreaming SEA students into regular classes before they are ready
   d) Lack of bi-lingual staff or counselors
   e) High incidence of violence and prejudice directed against the SEA student.
   f) General insensitivity of the school system to the special needs of the SEA refugee student
4. Students are greatly concerned about the high cost of education in the United States and
p. 69 clearly perceive this cost as a major obstacle to pursuing higher educational goals beyond high school. Students need better guidance and advice as to how to apply for financial aid, to get educational loans, and even information about what opportunities are available to them.
5. Finally, through our interviews we also came to realize that contrary to reports in the newspapers, not all SEA youth are doing well in school. Some are not doing well because of failures in the school system itself which have been outlined above. Others are simply not good students and should be recognized as such.
   One Asian teacher who is deeply involved with the SEA refugee students classified them into three categories. The first are those who are strongly motivated and doing well in school despite the problems. We do not have to worry about these students. Then there are those students whom she feels are already beyond simple help. These are the youth who are becomming seriously involved with criminal activities and severe antisocial behavior

(see Chapter V Problem Youth). The third group includes those youth who are “on the edge”. They are not doing well in school, but they are basically good children who need special attention. With a little extra help, these youth could become productive members of society.

ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN YOUTH p. 70

Overview

Among the Southeas Asian youth, not everyone was able to talk about his or her aspirations or expectations. It wasn't simply that some couldn't articulate their hopes, but some actually didn't have any, or hadn't yet begun to think about them. These differences are important.

In general, career aspirations divide more along gender lines than along ethnic lines. Whereas getting a specific job was frequently the result of ethnic networking.

In addition, we found that parental needs and expectations can and do play a role in the career choices of many, but not all of the youth. In traditional Asian cultures, personal goals and aspirations are usually not considered as important as the overall well-being of the family. Families may develop long range strategies for the family members which will determine which sons receive the most education and in what field, who will work and at what job, and who the children will marry. In our interviews we found that the youth perceive themselves as part of a family unit more than as individual units. Thus, they frequently report their own goals and apsirations in terms of the greater needs of the family. Even the “problem youth” discussed in Chapter V, despite their rebellious behavior, exhibit tension between their concern for “the family” and their own individual anger.

Apsirations and Expectations of the Girls

Career Aspirations

Among the girls, nursing ranks high as a possible career. One of the ESL teachers at Community College who works closely with the SEA students, reported that many of the Lao girls want to be nurses. She speculated that they may have chosen this career because many of the mothers of the girls had been midwives. Perhaps they perceived nursing as an extension of this profession. p. 71

But nursing is also an acceptable and respectable job for a woman, even in traditional Asian society. In addition, many of the students do well in math and the sciences where slightly less English facility is required, and, nursing as a profession requires more science and less English skills. Finally, the girls also feel that nursing is a job which can provide a service to their communities where visits to the doctor or hospital by older members of the community are usually frought with anxiety. However, many of them worry that their level of English is not sufficient to take all the courses which are required as part of their training. This fear is not ungrounded reports the ESL teacher at Community College. She discovered that several of the students she recommended to the Nursing Department were rejected for this very reason. She

was most upset about one young woman in particular who had already received nurses training in Laos, but was rejected for further training here. Because the woman was already married and had a small child, she opted to take a low-paid job as a sewing machine operator rather than pursue the more difficult path of nursing.

Nursing was also mentioned by two of the Hmong girls, and

p. 72 one we encountered was actually training at the moment. Some Vietnamese girls express interest in nursing as well. Related to this interest in nursing is an interest in counseling. Hahnemann Hospital which runs a special program to train mental health workers has already graduated 1 Cambodian woman, 1 Vietnamese woman and is currently training a Lao and Hmong man.

We also discovered interest in nursing among the Cambodian community. One Cambodian young woman, who wants to be a nurse, first said that she wanted to be a beautician, a career her mother was encouraging her to pursue. It was only after speaking more to us than she confessed that she really wanted to be a nurse.

Beauty school or cosmetology, however, is another popular career choice for Southeast Asian girls. Some of the Philadelphia high schools provide combination training courses where students can get both their cosmetology certificate and high school degree at the same time. Ling, a rather tough and punky looking Vietnamese girl is following this course. Ling's exterior harshness belies her kind disposition, but it reflects her acculturation to the predominantly Black and working class environment of her school. Other girls, like Xiong, a young married Hmong woman, took a separate training course after she graduated from high school. When we spoke with her, she was in the midst of studying for her state exam.

On the whole, Sino-Vietnamese girls have more ambitious aspirations. They want to go to college and to pursue employment which would give them both money and a high status position. One girl at Temple University wants to become a

p. 73 pharmacist. Other popular choices include medicine (both doctoring and nursing), computer science, and other kinds of sciences.

Sometimes the role of the parents in the choice of career or job is apparent. For example, in one Sino-Vietnamese family, the father has future plans to open up a restaurant. To prepare for this day, he is encouraging his children to acquire skills which can be applied to the restaurant industry. For example, daughter #4 attends business school, and son #2 is being encouraged to learn cooking. Daughter #3 is also expected to study accounting or some other kind of business skill.

Conflict has developed, however, because daughter #3 desparately wants to become a photo-journalist, and is pursuing photography courses at Community College. Her father, to his credit, has allowed her to take these courses. But we suspect he is hoping that, in the end, she will help with the business. She has already worked part-time in Chinese restaurants in Chinatown for several years, and is well acquainted with the restaurant business.

Other kinds of jobs mentioned (although they doen't really represent aspirations as much as what they do when they have to get work) include restaurant work, factory work, garment industry work (i.e. sewing machine operators), and housecleaning. There is a network in Chinatown which provided work not only for Sino-Vietnamese youth, but for other ethnic groups as well. The growing number of Vietnamese restaurants also provides more jobs for Vietnamese youth.

There are also certain factories which have begun to employ Asians, and once one is there and does well, they help their friends get jobs. Many Hmong girls, for example, work at an auto-parts factory called Cadon Industry. The work is hard, but it is a job. Sewing machine operators are exploited horribly, but it is a job that requires little English and requires a skill which many Asian girls have acquired in their native countries. This kind of work is sought more by Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese girls than Lao or Cambodian. p. 74

There were always those girls who were exceptional and did not fit into predicted categories. One Hmong girl, for example, told me quite frankly that she wanted to be a professional flutist and a banker. She apparently loves music and takes flute lessons at school. It turned out that her idea of “banker” was actually a bank teller, a job which she said she would do until she had enough money to attend college.

Then there was Mom, a young and vivacious 17 year old Cambodian girl who began to study Khmer traditional dance while she was in Khao Yi Dang, one of the major refugee camps for Cambodians in Thailand. She has sustained her interest in dance here, and travels to Washington D. C. every week to continue training with the troupe based there. She performs with her sisters and brother for Cambodian New Year and by special invitation. Mom is bright, outgoing and mature beyond her years. She definitely wants to go to college and talks about inventing new dances as well as preserving the old. She has the support of a warm and loving family who are obviously very proud of her. They associate with the small circle of Cambodian traditional

musicians and artists. p. 75

Attitudes Toward Marriage

On the whole, Cambodian girls are less apt to finish high school, much less to go on to college. Marriage and raising a family is still the most important role for a young Cambodian woman, and the majority of them find themselves married off by their late teens. Marriages are still arranged by parents, even though parents insist that children can make their own decisions. In reality, Cambodian young women are given much less freedom in their activities. They are restricted to the home more so than boys and have less opportunity to meet young men on their own. For example, although the Cambodian Association holds. Saturday night dances, they are really for married couples and men. One young Cambodian man confided that unmarried girls who attend these dances are considered prostitutes.

Many of the girls are unhappy about their arranged marriages, but they feel helpless. One 18 year old girl, a Sino-Khmer, is to be married to a young Sino-Khmer in Seattle. This young woman not only has to cope with marriage to a man she barely knows, but she has to live far away from her natal home and friends. She worries that if her new husband abuses her, she will not have her natal family to protect her. She obviously feels very trapped in this marriage. Running away is not an option for these girls - where would they go and what would they do? Suicide, however, is an option, and love conflicts have played the major role among the few cases of suicide reported in the Philadelphia area.

p. 76 Attitude towards marriage among Hmong girls deserves special attention because Hmong girls traditionally marry young - as young as 13 - and attention has been focused on the young marriages still going on among Hmong girls in the United States. It is often assumed that parents are arranging the marriages and are thereby perpetuating a traditional cycle which restricts acculturation on the part of the Hmong girl.

While no doubt some Hmong marriages are arranged, we found that in Philadelphia the majority are not. Even in Hmong traditional courtship, girls and boys choose their own mates, usually from within prescribed groups. But Hmong courtship is characterized by its openess and flexibility. One of the Hmong community leaders informed us that even the most serious taboo - marriage within one's own surname group, can be circumvented by officially altering one's surname through a special ceremony.

Although our Hmong informants report that there are many Hmong girls going to college (in states other than Pennsylvania), or getting jobs after high school, we found that the cycle of early marriage still prevails. Why is this custom so dominant? It obviously has to do with the strength of culture.

As we talked one Sunday morning with some young Hmong girls, we noticed that they kept saying things like, “if I can only finish high school, I will..., or “I really doen't want to get married before I finish high school, but I hope I can make it”. It was almost as if there were an invisible force which would decide their fate for them. They seemed helpless in its wake.

In pursuing this topic, we discovered, not surprisingly,

p. 77 that they all believe that it is essential for them to marry. It is inconceivable for them to imagine not doing so. The crucial question for them, is when. We were then told that when Hmong boys reach around the age of 23, they realize that soon it will be time to take a wife. When this happens, they simply ask their girlfriends to marry them. Because their girlfriends are usually very young, Hmong girls, thus, marry young. When we asked why the girlfriends were so young, we were told that Hmong boys prefer girls very young because that was when girls were the prettiest. One of the girls added that girls must be much younger than the boys because the girls will bear alot of children and age more quickly than the boys.

One of the problems with this early marriage pattern is that most of the girls drop out of school soon after marriage. Our informants feel that some of the girls they knew dropped out because

they really didn't want to be in school anyway. Others, though, drop out because they get pregnant, and it is too difficult both to tend children and attend classes.

Furthermore, both male and female Hmong informants felt that Hmong men, on the whole, prefer that their wives doen't acquire too much education. Apparently it has to do with fidelity. Hmong men are afraid that a more educated wife will not be faithful - although it is still accepted for Hmong men to have more than one wife. Our young female informants told us that they wouldn't seriously consider marrying an American, but they do complain that Hmong boys doen't treat Hmong girls as equals.

One unfortunate by-product of the combination of these early marriages which result in numerous children (Hmong girls usually

said they want as many as 4 to 6 children) together with good medical care in the United States, p. 78
is that these young women are producing too many babies too quickly. One agency worker has noted an increase in physically and mentally handicapped children among the Hmong. An even darker side of this cycle are increasing reports of child abuse by young Hmong mothers who no longer have the built-in support of the family and village to help relieve the burden of caring for several young children.

Some of the girls we talked with are clearly trying to come to terms with living within two cultural systems. They accepted that they must marry young or else be considered old maids. But the girls who have been here since they were 7 or 8 years old also want to graduate high school, get jobs or even attend college. They are struggling with how to accomodate these two goals which they perceive as conflicting. For example, they wanted to know whether they could be married and have children *and* go to college.

In Hmong marriage, it is also accepted that wives move in husbands family after marriage (patrilocal residence pattern). The Hmong girls we spoke with still think that this arrangement is, in essence, a good thing (they express hope that the mother-in-law will help to watch the children). But, the traditional role of a Hmong daughter-in-law is harsh. Following the traditional Chinese model, the new daughter-in-law is expected to bear a heavy load of the domestic chores in the family and to wait on her mother-in-law and father-in-law. This new generation of Hmong girls are less enamoured with this role because they

clearly have new alternatives. p. 79

On the other hand, despite the stated ideal, we observed several instances of girls marrying when they are in their early 20's. For example, one of the girl's who strongly believes that it is important to marry young has a sister who is 18 and who doesn't even have a boyfriend. The young Hmong woman studying for her state cosmetology exam is 22 and just married. (Her husbands sister, however, married at 13 and moved to Ohio. The marriage didn't work and the girl, now age 15, is back at University City High School). The Hmong studying to be a nurse is not only just married and studying nursing, but she is 23 and her husband is only 19! Yet despite these examples contrary to the ideal, the girls we spoke with assert that girls have to marry

when the boys ask them, because if they say no, then they run the risk of the boys asking someone else. They, then, might never marry.

Marriage among Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese girls occurs later, the ideal being between 20 and 25. The Sino-Vietnamese girls, as described above, are quite adament that they will marry only after they complete their education and find good jobs. Among the Vietnames girls, marriage occurs earlier among those who have more problems with school and with finding work.

Preferred marriage partners for all the girls come from their own ethnic group. Although, we were told that a few years ago there had been a shortage of Cambodian girls, and a number of Cambodian men were reduced to marrying Lao and Vietnamese girls.

p. 80

Aspirations of Boys

Career Apsirations

Among the boys we found a strong sense of wanting to do *something*. They had all arrived in America with expectations of securing a brighter future - sometimes this hope had been fueled by their parents, but they believed it nonetheless. There is a distinct group of boys who have been sorely disappointed with their experiences in America (See section on Problem Youth), but the majority still have hopes of achieving success in their lives here. Success is naturally defined differently by each boy.

Among the young men who attend or want to attend to college, aspirations usually run to futures in the sciences. Math, computers, engineering - these were the careers frequently cited. Boys with these aspirations are found among all groups, the Vietnamese, the Lao, the Cambodians and the Hmong.

It is surprising that there are not more people interested in business degrees. One exception is Lo, a young Hmong youth currently doing a degree in Public Management at Community College who will transfer after he completes his 2 year degree there. His family background is exceptional - his father, originally a farmer, had taken a job as an official - a kind of district representative in the town of Longchieng, captial of Xieng Khouang Province (province in Laos where majority of Hmong live). Lo's father had sent all of his 6 brothers to school, and he, the youngest, had been sent away when he was only 4 or 5 years old to live with a Lao family so that he could begin school speaking fluent Lao. Lo's father and older brothers were very

p. 81

active in the anti-communist forces , but he had been too young to fight. In 1977, when he was about 14 years old, he left Laos with a slightly older relative to seek a better life. His father, mother, and brothers are still in Laos. He is a remarkable young man exuding confidence and intelligence. He represents a new breed of Hmong which contradicts the image of the uneducated, hill farmer who finds it difficult to adapt to life in America.

Other Hmong youth, however, have had less education and less opportunities than Lo. Yet, we were struck by a degree of strength in their community. A number of young men have begun working in various restaurants in Philadelphia's young and vibrant restaurant industry. They are not, for the most part, working in Asian restaurants; they are working in many of the trendy, nouvelle cuisine restaurants owned and managed by young Americans in their late 20's and 30's.

Once a couple of them had gotten jobs at these places, they helped their friends to get jobs as well - i.e. a network formed. Some of the men, like Lo, work at these restaurants part-time while studying in college. Others, like Fang are making careers of this work. He had basically apprenticed himself and was moving up the ladder in terms of position and salary. The next step was obviously to open his own restaurant - a hope which both he and others expressed. This kind of hope was still in the future, because no one as yet had the capital to begin such an enterprise.

Many Hmong youth who are not in the restaurant business, nor academically motivated, are busy in the waterbed industry.

Apparently some of them had gotten jobs making waterbeds, and consequently helped friends to get jobs in the trade as well. However, most regard this work simply as a way to receive a salary. One young man , Xiong, is unhappy at this job and wishes desparately to become an auto mechanic. He spends every spare moment tinkering with his cars (he buys old ones cheaply and works on them). His English is less fluent than some of the other young men we interviewed, but he had graduated high school. He expressed a desire to find some kind of training institute where he could learn the skills necessary to work in a car garage. He complains that garages will not hire people and train them on the job. p. 82

Xiong was not alone in this aspiration. Many of the young men from all the ethnic groups who are not interested in going to college, or who simply don't possess the skills necessary to attend college, say that they had thought about becoming an auto-mechanic. One might ask, why auto-mechanic? Perhaps being an auto-mechanic is merely a symbol of wanting to learn some kind of additional skill which will provide them with better jobs, i.e. jobs with benefits and a future.

Having a good future was repeated over and over again. Simply having a job was not enough. The youth have been here long enough to know that this aspiration is not sufficient. They recognize the need to find jobs which will allow them not just to increase their salary, but to increase their skills as well, so that their job will allow them advancement. In addition, they look for good benefits, especially medical benefits they lack

when they are off welfare. p. 83

Parental expectation did guide some of the career choices, or even the decision to work rather than go to college. For example, the young Cambodian mentioned in Chapter III who exhibited potential in Physics, but who felt strong responsiblity to support his parents.

Attitude Toward Marriage

In general, most of the boys feel that marriage is something they will do later rather than sooner. They all wanted to complete whatever education they could and to get a good job. Like the girls, the idea of marriage is not questioned. One day they will all marry and have children.

The Vietnamese boys describe future wives as being Vietnamese. Most want their wives to have some education and to work. Although they “hang around” with Lao girls, they do not want to marry them. The same opinion applies to American girls. Having an American girlfriend is a status symbol for many of the high school boys, but they do not want to marry an American. In addition to cultural differences, they said they have heard that Americans frequently get divorced. This is a propsect which they find highly undesirable.

Youth Without Aspiration

Among the youth, there are many who are unable to express their aspirations and expectations for the future. With some of the youth, this is more a question of their age, and also probably class. At age fourteen or fifteen, and as sons of farmers suddenly transplanted to America, it is hard for them to

p. 84 articulate goals beyond getting through high school.

Among others, the lack of aspirations and expectations reflects serious problems. They is a group who simply has no thoughts or ideas about the future. Some teachers and agency workers fear that these youth are nihilistic. The total scope of their lives extend only as far as tomorrow's party. They represent part of those youth involved in the gangs and street life. They are discussed in detail in Chapter V.

Aspiration of SEA Youth in Relation to Their Families

We wish to emphasize that most of what the SEA youth chose to do was usually seen in the perspective of their families. None of the SEA youth we interviewed lived on their own or with unrelated friends. We were told of cases where youth have run away from their families and lived alone, or, among the unaccompanied youth, some have banded together and live in houses in a kind of “family” situation. But, the majority of the youth, even after they have completed their schooling and begun work, continue to live at home. Their incomes, thus, constitute part of the family's total income. In the families where the parents were too old or unable to work, and where they only received some form of cash assistance such as SSI, this income became a major contribution to the economic well-being of the entire family.

Patterns of part-time work cross-cut all the ethnic groups. Restaurant work is very widespread among the older youth. As described above, Sino-Vietnamese youth in college frequently work week-ends or a few evenings a week in Chinese restaurants. The

p. 85

Hmong young men have also found a niche in the French and nouvelle cuisine restaurant industry.

But many of the high school students also said that they want to find summer jobs. Unfortunately, summer jobs are hard to come by, not just for SEA youth, but for all high school students. Some of the case workers at the different VOLAGS are trying to negotiate summer jobs for these youth. Our young Hmong informant also worked during the summer. Through a friend of her father's, she worked as a housekeeper at one of the New Jersey shore resorts. There is also a thriving seasonal farm labor industry in New Jersey in which many SEA refugees participate. This industry is a separate topic in itself and does not constitute part of this research. However, it should be noted that some of the youth, especially Cambodian and Lao, do work on the farms during the summer months.

Conclusions

The youth express a wide range of expectations and aspirations for the future. The kinds of aspirations divide more along gender rather than ethnic lines. However, specific groups, like the Hmong and the Lao, have become associated with certain kinds of jobs or places of work, and they help their friends to have access to these jobs through an informal networking system.

Their aspirations are clearly linked, but do not always coincide with those of their parents. Most of the youth had come to America with high expectations of success and a bright future. They had left homes to which they were still deeply attached in order to escape political and economic persecution. Many of

their preconceived ideas about life in America were false and consequently, many were sorely disappointed after their resettlement in Philadelphia. Many also expressed their confusion over the contradictions of American society where they are surrounded by so much material wealth, without the means to acquire it. p. 86

Their reasons for disappointment grew from the difficulties they encountered when they sought to obtain the training and education they realized was necessary in order to get the better jobs in America. Part of their difficulties lay in their acquiring sufficient command of English. Even the brightest youth had to struggle to master English sufficiently enough to qualify for the schools, training programs, and jobs they desired.

But, even if their English were sufficient and they qualified for the training, they were not expecting the financial obstacles they encountered. The cost of higher education in America is staggeringly high - especially when compared to the rest of the world where colleges and universitites are usually government funded.

In one sense, SEA youth are not unlike other underprivilieged Americans who are confronted by the financial obstacles to education. But unlike Americans born here, they are much less aware of the options and paths available to them. Thus, one suggestion made here is identical to the

one presented in Chapter III. In order to overcome many of their perceived difficulties in attaining their aspirations, the SEA need better

p. 87 guidance, advice and help to locate and utilize channels available to them.

p. 88

SOUTHEAST ASIAN PROBLEM YOUTH

Overview

Every group has its "problem elements". By problem elements we refer to those young people who actively participate in antisocial behavior and who are not striving for goals which would help them to integrate successfully into American society.

In broad terms, the targeted problem group is primarily male. Some girls may be included in this group (usually they are the girlfriends of the boys), but, they are in the minority rather than the majority. The boys are usually between the ages of 16-24 and arrived in the States when they were around 13 or 14 years old. These are the youth who are having difficulties at school, some are dropping out and participating in street life.

Vietnamese, Sino-Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao and Hmong, all have their problem elements, but the most serious problems in terms of crime are found among the Vietnamese. Let us now explore these youth in greater detail.

The Gangs and Gang Activity

In the past year newspapers have reported the appearance of Vietnamese gangs in California, Texas, Boston, New York and even philadelphia which are engaging in serious illicit activities such as armed robbery, extortion and even murder. This phenomenon has alarmed both the local police and the FBI who fear the development of crime groups organized above the local level (for example, *Philadelphia Inquirer* December 30, 1986, *New York Times* July 9, 1987:20, *Refugee Reports* 1986 vol. VII no. 8).

People in the SEA community have known about these groups

p. 89 for some time, but they have been very reluctant to acknowledge the problem openly. Local police, for example, have complained that one of the major obstacles in tackling this problem has been the reluctance of the Southeast Asian community itself to speak out. Their natural fear of going to the authorities and their fear of retaliation on the part of the gang members themselves prevent them from confronting this problem. Finally, however, some breakthroughs have been made, and the communities are trying to come to terms with these youth.

What about the young men themselves? Who are they and where do they come from? The majority of those involved in more serious trouble come from the Vietnamese community. The group includes some Sino-Vietnamese and some Amer-Asians as well.

Among our interviews were several boys who had been arrested and who had gang associations. While they were not “hardcore” gang members, these boys provide a glimpse of gang and street life, and the motivations behind it. Many people who are working with the problem youth are quick to point out that there are gangs and then there are Gangs. Most people feel that the more serious Gang activity linked with the crimes that crosscut state boundaries was not yet a major problem in Philadelphia.

For the most part, the boys come from disrupted or disturbed homes. One Sino-Vietnamese young man, whose age is approximately 25, goes by the American name John. John lives in squalor in North Philadelphia. He left Vietnam by boat in 1978 with an uncle, and has lived alone in Philadelphia until recently when three younger siblings arrived. John is dirty and unkempt

with bad teeth. His right forearm is covered with a beautiful dragon tatoo. p. 90

John is very vague about his life both in Vietnam and here. He came from Cholon (the congested Chinese city attached to Saigon) and had not received much schooling there. He did not go to the schools in his refugee camp in Malaysia, and he quit Olney High School after attending for only one month. John had been placed in the 11th grade because of his age (around 16 at the time), but because his command of English was so poor, he couldn't understand any of his classes. He dropped out because he was frustrated and saw no other options. John no longer receives any form of cash assistance and for several years has followed a pattern of working for a while at some unskilled job, such as janitorial work at hotels, and then quitting. He says that he would like to get some training in something like mechanics, but does not have the financial means to do so. He also still has a language problem. He can get along passably in English, but his level is still very poor.

Another boy, T., lives with his father and younger brother in West Philadelphia. The father, a former South Vietnamese official, came to America in 1981 after suffering for six difficult years in a Vietnamese re-education camp. Because he had lost all of his money, he could not afford the cost of putting his entire family on a boat to escape to America. Thus, he came first. His plan was to send money back to his family in order to help them to leave Vietnam. In 1983 T. (at age 13) was placed on a boat with his younger brother (age 11). They succeeded in reaching America by 1984.

Their situation in Philadelphia, however, is difficult. T. 's father never recovered from his experience in the reeducation camp. He is depressed and cannot hold a job. Thus, depite the presence of a father in this family, the children have no guidance. The family structure has been turned upside down, and the children have no respect for their father. It is unclear when the mother and sisters will be able to join them, and in the meanwhile, T. is causing his father trouble. p. 91

H., a young 16 year old Vietnamese boy, arrived in the United States in May 1985, accompanied by his older brother. H. lives with his older brother and an unmarried aunt. His father, a former South Vietnamese military officer died in a reeducation camp in 1983. His mother and other

siblings have been trying to escape to the United States since that time, but only H. and his brother have been successful. H. was only 14 at the time, and his brother was about 16 or 17. H. is plagued by an inability to learn English. He is frustrated in school and stopped going about three weeks ago. He is not a truly bad boy, but he has already been arrested once for shoplifting and was put on probation. When he escaped from Vietnam he said he had high expectations for freedom and a better future in America. The urban decay of Philadelphia, the hostility of the Black students, and his general frustration have dampened his enthusiasm for life in America. He expresses worry about the future. His aunt (his mother's sister) is a pleasant woman in her 40's. She means well, but she is not the boy's mother. She has to work and the boys are pretty much left on their own.

p. 92 D., now age 18, is a Vietnamese boy who arrived in America in November 1985. D., his mother, two sisters and younger Amer-Asian brother left Vietnam through the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) under its new provisions which allows Amer-Asian children and their families to leave. D.'s mother had been married to a South Vietnamese policeman. They lived in Binh-duong, near Saigon and had three children. The mother complained that her husband ignored her and they separated. She obtained employment as a housekeeper at Long Binh Camp, an American military base, and her fourth child, a boy, was the result of a love union formed in 1969. The father of this child left Vietnam before the child was born and she has never heard from him again. She continued to raise her children alone under difficult circumstances.

She said that she decided to leave Vietnam for political reasons and because of Vietnamese discrimination against Amer-Asians. D., the oldest son is clearly having problems. He is sullen and unresponsive. His command of English is poor. He complains about being bored in classes he cannot understand. In fact, it is unclear whether or not he still attends classes. He says that many of his friends are dropping out of school because they cannot understand English. When we asked what they did when they do not go to class, he said that they do not get jobs - they hang out on the streets and in the shopping malls (where alot of the shoplifting takes place). D. as do other boys in this category, expresses the desire to return to Vietnam where he had friends and could at least speak the language.

D.'s younger Amer-Asian brother, G. is a very young 15 year

p. 93 old. He is physically small and very boyish. His English is better than his brother's, but still not good. He, too, said he would like to go back to Vietnam.

The family is clearly having problems. The mother confided at the end of the interview that she was worried about daughter #2, who is 20, and who is pregnant by a Vietnamese boy who abandoned her. The mother was concerned that although the high school has permitted the girl to continue classes, the girl wants to drop out.

K. on the other hand, a 15 year old Vietnamese boy, lives in Philadelphia with both parents and four siblings. They left Vietnam in July 1983 when K. was only 9, and arrived in America in by March 1984 after having been in camps in Malaysia. They were resettled rather quickly because a younger brother of the father had been in the States since January 1981.

K. is currently in the 7th grade. His command of English was quite good, probably because he began his education in 1984 in the 5th grade. By 1986 he no longer took ESOL classes and he reports that he can understand all his classes. K.'s junior high school does not have other Vietnamese students - only three Cambodians. The rest of the students are Black. K. reports that he “hangs around” with the Cambodians in school, but after school he seeks out Vietnamese friends from the neighborhood.

K. is an interesting case, because although he has potential for doing well, he is already showing signs of problems. He likes to “hang out” on the streets and in the shopping malls. His two older brothers have already been arrested on more serious

charges - armed robbery. Brother #1, age 21, finished high school. Brother #2, age 19, has not. p. 94
However, for the moment things look brighter. Both boys are on probation for 8 months and have just taken good jobs at a laminating company.

K's father, a rather young man age 40, had been in the South Vietnamese army from 1968-1975. He took over management of his own father's gasoline station in 1975. Although he was not sent to re-education camp, he had been restricted by the government for two years. Because of his military connection, his children could not attend school beyond high school. K's father spoke relatively good English. He recently left a good paying job (his words) in order to work at the same laminating company as his sons. This job provided him the opportunity to spend more time with his sons and was also closer to home than the previous job. The mother also worked. The Vietnamese caseworker who accompanied me to this family felt that the father and mother, although well intentioned, had not provided enough discipline for the children.

Amer-Asian Youth

The Amer-Asian families have special problems. In most of the cases, the family is a single-parent family. Obviously very sensitive to the stigma attached to mothers of Amer-Asian children, the mothers we interviewed all described the American fathers of their children as “husbands”. One such woman, G., bore two children, a boy and a girl, and after it was clear that her “husband” was not going to be able to bring her to America, she set about supporting her children. G. never married a

Vietnamese, and has brought her two children to America with the hopes that they will have a p. 95
better future here. The oldest child, a girl age 17, is terribly shy. She is trying hard, but is not doing well academically at school. The second child, a boy age 16, is acting out his frustration more agressively than his sister. He is cutting school alot and hanging out on the streets.

One 15 year old Amer-Asian girl lives with her mother, Vietnamese step-father, and a mentally ill 26 year old brother. The mother had apparently conceived her during a liason with an American soldier while the mother was still married to a Vietnamese husband. H. was the product of this union. H. says that she studies very hard and likes computers, but she still doesn't speak much English. She spends most of her time outside of classes with Vietnamese friends.

Another Amer-Asian, 19 year year old woman, already has born a child out of wedlock in America. The father is Vietnamese, but he has abandoned her. The girl speaks no English at all despite 6 months of intensive training in the Philippines before her arrival in the United States. She had no education in Saigon and does not go to school here. She lives with her mother and two sisters who are not Amer-Asian.

Many of the Amer-Asian children are obsessed with finding their fathers. Caseworkers at the Catholic Social Services describe how the children beseech American agency workers at every point of their departure process for help in finding their fathers. But the request is not that simple, and tracing the fathers is difficult. Sometimes, when the fathers are finally

p. 96 located the children themselves then have difficulty in actually coming face to face with them. For example, Tommy Smith, who goes by his father's name, and his mother, were, in fact, located by the father while they were still in Vietnam. The father wanted to sponsor them to come to the United States. In the end, Tommy and his mother decided to come on their own as part of the Orderly Departure Program. Despite Tommy's father's eagerness to help them, both the mother and son have not yet been able to bring themselves to meet with him. They have been in Philadelphia for nearly two years.

Conclusions on the Vietnamese and Amer-Asian Problem Youth

What are some of the factors behind the anti-social behavior of these youth? There is the belief by some members of the Vietnamese and Sino-vietnamese community, that many of the youth are simply being led astray by “bad elements”. Some say that many of the more serious problem youth were already “bad elements” in Saigon. They accuse these young men of forcing their way onto the fleeing boats by threatening to expose the escape plans to the officials. These men continue their bad ways in America and lead astray the younger, frustrated teenagers who are having difficulty in school.

A similar suggestion which came from community leaders is that the leaders of the gangs are older men. The community leaders believe that these men are former soldiers from the South Vietnamese army who are organizing the frustrated and unhappy younger boys.

While there is undoubtedly some truth to these accusations,

p. 97 it does not account for the widespread presence of the youth who are not part of the more serious gangs, but who are frustrated, unhappy, are hanging out on the streets, and getting into minor trouble. Some of the answers lie in the problems with the school system, described in detail in Section III, and others lie in the disrupted family patterns which characterize the situation of many of the Vietnamese and Amer-Asian youth.

The traditional Vietnamese family structure is based upon the Chinese model - i.e. it is patrilineal and lineage based. The strong connections among male members of the lineage produce an extended family model. Because male members of the family are regarded as

important links between the ancestors of the past and the ancestors to come, the needs and wants of any specific individual may be sacrificed for the greater needs of the greater family.

This model produces a strong concept of family unity and the necessity of hierachical order and structure. Disruption can leave younger family members floundering.

Among the several case studies presented in the beginning of this section, certain themes emerge. First, many of the families of the problem youth are not intact.

Among the Vietnamese youth currently in the United States, many have arrived without adult family members. Parents, desparate to provide their children with what they believe is a better life in America arrange for their children to leave Vietnam on boats. Some children report that they did not know until they were actually on the boat that they were leaving their

parents. Because children under the age of 18 are legally not able to live alone, they may be placed in foster care homes which creates other problems not pertinent to this study. p. 98

Other children, like P. may leave with an older brother. P. was only 7 when his parents put him on the boat with a brother who is 12 years older than he. P. is surviving, but he misses his parents terribly. He is now 16 years old. P's brother is unusual in that he married a Lao girl who is also here without her parents. P's brother is a fisherman and spends alot of time in Louisana during the fishing season. The “family” still lives in Philadelphia because the wife has various part-time jobs and P. is trying to finish high school. P is basically a good child. He is polite, well behaved and tries to do well in school. But, he complains of headaches and bad memory. He would like to become an engineer but doesn't believe that he will be able to do so. Instead he says that he would like “to fix things”.

These children are frequently referred to as “anchor children”. The hopes and apsirations of the rest of the family back in Vietnam are placed on the frail shoulders of these youth. It is up to them to succeed in America and to bring the rest of the family over. Trying to bring the rest of the family members over becomes an obsession. This task is, at best, difficult. The strain of guilt and anxiety on the children is tremendous. Alternatively, many of the children suffer anger at their parents who put them on a boat and simply sent them off to a new land alone.

In other families with problem youth, some but not all family members were present. In the cases we looked at, the

father was in America, but not the mother. In our cases, two of the fathers were depressed and unable to work. In one case, the father, a former military official, had been severely physically handicapped by the war, his English was poor and he could not get a job. The positions of authority of these fathers is sorely tested by sons who no longer have respect for them. p. 99

Among the intact families there are also problems. Fathers, if they do work, frequently have to take jobs which are lower in status than the ones held in Vietnam. Mothers who did not previously have to work are now engaged in low level factory work, the garment industry, or housekeeping work. Because of the parents' inability to learn English well, they must rely on

their children to help them in the new society. This role reversal between parent and child has resulted in the parents' lack of control over their teenage children who disregard their parents disciplinary actions.

The Amer-Asian families described above have particular problems. They are almost always a single-parent family with the single parent being the mother. But unlike children who are moving from an intact family into a broken family unit, these children have always lived under the difficult circumstances of a single parent family together with the stigma of their American biological heritage. Most of the youth will not discuss any discrimination they may have suffered in Vietnam because of their background. For example, when they are interviewed, the youth report that they had lots of friends in Vietnam and that they liked it there. Few admitted that they wanted to see their

p. 100 fathers. They insisted that they were happy with their present families.

Their mothers, on the other hand, more readily discussed the problems their children faced in Vietnam. They frequently cited discrimination and poor prospects for the future as the most common reasons for taking advantage of the program which brings Amer-Asians to America.

A second theme which emerged from these interviews, was that most of the boys who were having problems were doing very poorly in school and had bad command of English. These boys were easily convinced that going to school was a waste of time when they could be doing more interesting things such as “hanging out” with their friends.

The third theme to emerge was the constant reminder of the frustration and disillusionment these boys have experienced after their arrival in America. Over and over again the youth described how they had risked the dangerous escape routes in order to pursue freedom and a better life. It doesn't matter whether or not they really understood these goals - it is what their parents told them. The result is that they are terribly disappointed in what they have found here.

All miss Vietnam terribly - the anguish shows visably in their faces when they talk about “home”. For some, the disappointment challenges them to succeed. For others, their disappointment is channeled in less constructive directions.

There is an intensity about the Vietnamese youth. They occupy two extremes along the continnuum of acculturation. On

p. 101 the one hand, they are among the most successful academically, and, on the other, they have formed the most problamatic and agressive street gangs.

Problem Youth from other Groups

Both the Cambodians and Lao also have their problem youth, but they do not seem to have formed the same kind of gangs as the Vietnamese. The Lao case worker for the Lao MAA is worried because not many Lao finish high school. He blames the school system for not being able to adequately integrate the Southeast Asian students into the school system.

Although the Lao youth are constantly cited as looking the most "street tough" in terms of dress, manner and speech, they are not accused of serious gang behavior. Yes, they do hang out and have been involved with some criminal activity, such as shoplifting and grafitti. But, the general feeling is that they have not yet moved on to more serious activities. Lao families, are in general, more intact.

Cambodian youth, while manifesting problems tendencies, also have not become involved in the more serious street activities. The Cambodian youth in South Philadelphia do hang out on the streets, but they usually do so in groups of four or five. One man who worked closely with the Cambodian youth felt that their dress and behavior superficial and represented a lack of suitable role models. The youth live in urban, ghetto neighborhoods surrounded by streetwise youth of all types. The youth are copying what they see around them in their attempts to conform to American life.

In general, the Cambodian community still seems somewhat shellshocked by the traumatic experiences they have been through. Many of the families were very introverted - going outside only to visit the temple or friends. The young girls, as mentioned above, were kept in the house and off the streets by their parents. The Cambodian families have not yet come to terms with the Khmer Rouge experience. Very few observers report either the parents or the youth talking about it. This situation contrasts with the situation the researcher encountered in either Cambodia or the Khmer resistence camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. There the horrors of the Khmer Rouge are openly discussed as part of the continual political struggle which still tears Cambodia apart. p. 102

Part of the answer as to why the Cambodian youth in Philadelphia have sustained themselves in the midst of tremendous difficulties may lie in the temple. The temple serves as a stablizing influence in the community. As observed above, even the youth who looked tough and street-wise, immediately became humble and respectful when they entered the temple.

CONCLUSIONS

p. 103

What are the conclusions we can draw from this study of the expectations and aspirations SEA youth in Philadelphia with regard to their education and future employment?

1. The SEA youth are generally optimistic about their lives here. The majority are acculturating faster than their parents would like. They have taken quickly to American teen clothes, music and habits. Many express their enjoyment of the degree of personal freedom which they experience here.
2. The general attitude among the youth towards education is positive. They all recognize that in America, education and training are important for obtaining well-paid jobs which have a future.
3. Our research confirmed, however, that differences in attitude toward education varied with ethnicity, gender and background of parents. For example, we observed that SEA girls have less positive attitudes towards education because of their traditional roles. For example, Hmong girls still tend to marry young, by age 15. The birth of children usually disrupts any

plans for education. Cambodian girls also accept their traditional roles of wife and mother, and we found that certain Cambodian teenage girls do not attend high school because they perceive little use for formal education. Sino-Vietnamese girls constitute an exception to the pattern. Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese tend to place greater emphasis on higher education than other groups. But, in

4. Philadelphia, we found that the Hmong community placed special emphasis on men
p. 104 receiving an education. Not surprisingly, parents with more education, from all the groups, placed higher emphasis on education for their children (including girls) than those with less.
5. Our research also discovered significant problems within the school system which current ly inhibit the SEA students' ability to attain, at the least, a high school education. The major complaints cited are:

    a) Indescriminate age-grade matching
    b) Inadequate and poorly designed ESOL programs
    c) Mainstreaming SEA students into regular content classes before they are ready
    d) Lack of bi-lingual staff or counselor
    e) High incidence of violence and prejudice directed against the SEA student
    f) General insensitivity of the school system to the special needs of the SEA refugee student.
6. Students are concerned about the high cost of education in the United States, and clearly perceive this cost as a major obstacle. Student s need better guidance and advice as to how to apply for financial aid, to get educational loans, and even information about what opportunities are avaiable to them. We should point out that this obstacle is diagnostic not just of SEA youth, but of America's poor in general. The high cost of education and the inability to secure funds to pay for it plagues all low-income families.
7. We also came to realize, that contrary to reports in the newspapers, not all SEA youth are doing well in school . Some are not doing well because of failures in the school. system itself as outlined above, and need help. Others are simply not good students and should be recognized and helped as such.
8. The youth express a wide range of expectations and aspirations for the future. The kinds of
p. 105 aspirations divide more along gender than ethnic lines. The more educated boys in all the groups want to enter the field of engineering, math, computers, and science. Specific jobs, however, frequently become ethnic linked because of the networks which develop. For example, the Hmong young men dominate those Southeast Asians working in Philadelphia's non-Asian restaurant industry. The Lao entered the hotel industry and help each other to get jobs.
9. Among the girls who aspire to careers, nursing ranks high. The more ambitious Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese girls frequently cite goals in the sciences and medical field. Among the less ambitious, cosmetology is a favorite choice. Girls who simply must work in order to get money often find jobs in factories or work as sewing machine operators
10. The aspirations of the youth are linked to, but do not always coincide with, those of their parents, i.e. both the youth and their parents wished to see the youth succeed. However, while both sides agreed that success was defined economically, they did not always agree on the path chosen to reach this goal.

11. We found that patterns of part-time work cross-cut all ethnic groups. Many of the youth work in restaurants while they attend college to help support themselves arid their parents. We further found that even high school youth say that they want summer jobs or part-time jobs during the school year. However, they reported difficulties in locating them.
12. Whatever the youth chose to do, however, is seen in the
13. perspective of their families. The majority of youth, even those who completed their schooling, still live at home. Their income plays an important part in the family's total resources. After marriage, the couple may set up a separate household, but will still contribute to the economic support of parents. p. 106
14. In pursuing employment goals, the youth perceive two major obstacles which parallel those perceived in education:

    a) They fear that their level of English is not sufficient,
    b) They are concerned about the high cost of post-high school training which they realize is necessary in order to pursue particular goals.
15. The non-college oriented youth all express that they want more training programs available. When we asked the young men who want to become auto mechanics why they simply didn't get a job at a garage, they responded by saying that it is difficult to get training on the job. They report that the available jobs require skills which they are unable to learn by themselves.
16. Our study uncovered an important sub-group within the SEA youth - the “problem youth”. Although the majority of youth are full of hope and expectation for a better future in America, there is a growing group of young men engaging in anti-social behavior. Every ethnic group has its problem elements, but the Vietnamese group is drawing the most attention because of its involvement with more serious criminal activities. These young men express keen disappointment with their lives in America. They experience difficulties in school, both academically and socially, and are having trouble learning English. They spenc most of their time with Vietnamese friends - “hanging out” and getting into trouble.
17. We wish to conclude with a statement expressed frequently by the people we interviewed in the VOLAGS, ethnic and community organizations and the schools - namely that *the Southeast Asian youth are a forgotten group who often slip between the cracks of other studies*. They all expressed relief that OOR is focusing attention on this particular group. Many of them had already noted potential problems among this group which could slowdown the ORR's program goal of self-sufficiency among the SEA refugees. p. 107

REFERENCES p. 108

1 Geddes, W. R.
2 1976 *Migrants of the Mountains*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
3 Office of Refugee Resettlement
4 1986 *Report to the Congress. Refugee Resettlement Program*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement.
5 1987 *Report to Congress. Refugee Resettlement Program*. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement. Unpublished Ms.
6 Health and Human Services, Department

7 1986 *Code of Regulations, Public Welfare*. Office of Federal Register. Government Printing Officed
8 Peters, Heather, B. Schieffelin, L. Sexton, & D. Feingold 1983
9 *Who Are The sino-Vietnamese? Culture, Ethnicity, and Social Categories*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues
10 Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations
11 1985 *Asians and Their Neighbors: A Public Investigatory Hearing*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations.
12 Shawcross, William
13 1984 *The Quality of Mercy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Suggested Readings for the Ethnographic Approach

14 Agar, Michael H.
15 1980 *The Professional Stranger*. New York: Academic Press.
16 Spradley, James P.
p. 109 17 1979 *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.