Social relations in a refugee neighborhood Indochinese In St. Louis; Missouri

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The major objective of this study was to examine the adjustment strategies of Laotian and Vietnamese refugees living in a St. Louis neighborhood. Two subsidiary objectives were to explore the formation and functioning of intra-ethnic cooperative networks and inter-ethnic systems of accommodation among the Southeast Asian refugees (SEAR) within the neighborhood.

The subjects in this study were Southeast Asian refugees living within a bounded area in St. Louis. They were Vietnamese and Laotian adults, both married and single, whose median period of stay in St. Louis was 13 months. A variety of qualitative methods were used by the co-investigators to examine questions concerning inter- and intra-ethnic relations. These methods included participant observation, formal observations of a public area within the SEAR neighborhood, structured indepth interviews with individuals within the SEAR community, and informal interviews with non-SEAR in local businesses and relevant helping institutions in St. Louis. Data obtained through these qualitative methods delineated the SEAR cooperative networks, their formal (institutional) and informal support systems, as well as inter-ethnic patterns of accommodation.

The study revealed that Laotians and Vietnamese in the target neighborhood had reached a state of mutual accommodation with each other and with American whites and blacks whom they encounter. We found that differences in their patterns of interaction with other groups reflect variations in their relative positions, as well as in the nature of their contact. Perhaps more importantly, we found that both Laotians and Vietnamese had developed cooperative networks based primarily on neighborhood affiliation. At the present time, these cooperative networks foster adjustment to life in the United States and, hence, reduce reliance upon more formal assistance programs.

Results of this project suggest that settling concentrations of SEAR (of similar language and cultural heritage) within a bounded neighborhood speeds formation of support systems within their own community, and thus provides an effective and economical means of reducing their reliance upon more formal government assistance programs.

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p. 1 **SECTION I INTRODUCTION**

The following report, primarily based on data gathered between September, 1982 and February 1983, examines social relations in a neighborhood containing Southeast Asian refugees (SEAR). The target neighborhood was located in St. Louis, Missouri, and contains a mixed population of Laotians, Vietnamese,[i] Cubans, American blacks and American whites. Our primary focus was upon the role of neighborhood and common ethnicity in the development of cooperative networks. We will argue that these networks enable the SEAR to adjust to life in the United States. Our findings center on two major areas: 1) the positive survival value of the intraethnic networks; and 2) salient factors influencing mutual accommodation of SEAR and non-SEAR. A common theme throughout the discussion will be non-SEAR interaction patterns. Our conclusions are based on data gathered through the use of several qualitative methodologies: participant observation, formal observations of a public area (a park), intensive use of photographic techniques, informal interviews with non-SEAR relevant to refugee life, and indepth interviews with members of the local SEAR population.

The specific goals of this study were to describe support networks of SEAR groups, to analyze the role of the neighborhood versus other transactional bases in the formation of cooperative networks, to compare and contrast different kinds of networks, to examine refugees' place in the local American community (perceived and actual), and to consider the implication of these findings for current federal refugee policy and programs.

p. 2 **Community Context**

Although reliable figures are difficult to obtain, there now appears to be a substantial and fairly stable population of refugees from Laos and Vietnam in the St. Louis area. Most of these were brought into the area under the aegis of the International Institute of Metropolitan St. Louis, although some have been sponsored through local churches and/or family reunification. An official at the Institute estimates that there are now some 500 Laotians and 1200 Vietnamese currently living in St. Louis.

At the present time, there are four major areas in St. Louis where SEAR live in some numbers. These concentrations reflect the changing resettlement policies of the International Institute (the principal agency involved in refugee resettlement in the St. Louis area) and the effects of federal programs, most notably Section 8. In University City (a highly urbanized inner suburb of St. Louis) live a number of Vietnamese (both those who arrived in 1976 and some of the so-called “Boat People” who began arriving in the late 1970s). By 1980, however, costs of transportation and housing in University City made the area less desirable as a locus of primary resettlement for refugees.

Another area where many SEAR now live is generally referred to as “South Grand”.[ii] Few refugees are settled here on arrival in St. Louis, but many families living in the South Grand area are members of large households (usually extended families) and have previously lived in one of the areas of primary resettlement. While more comfortable physically, this area is not necessarily viewed as more desirable by the refugees

themselves. This is because members of the same nationality live scattered over a relatively large area, particularly compared to our study area, “Lindell”. It is not unknown for individuals and families to move from “South Grand” to “Lindell”. p. 3

Since June 1982, most incoming refugees have been settled in one area adjacent to South Grand Avenue, which the refugees refer to as “near the Institute”. This is a predominantly black neighborhood currently undergoing vigorous revitalization. While many of the apartments are larger and more pleasant than those in our target area, racial tensions and such crimes as burglary and car theft render it less attractive to individuals now living in our target area which the refugees call “Lindell”.

This contract will focus on social interaction among refugees in the so-called “Lindell” neighborhood (see Map 1), which is centered on a three-block stretch of Lindell Boulevard. This area is attractive to SEAR for three main reasons: (1) apartments are cheap and plentiful; (2) their proximity to each other creates an environment similar to an extended family household (food, clothes, and the like are frequently shared); and (3) they are within walking distance of the International Institute, with its English classes and other important services for refugees.

In this vicinity, Lindell is dominated by management firms and social service agencies. It is not a retail business section, and few buildings attract pedestrians. There is one large supermarket where the refugees buy meat and household necessities (soap, toilet paper, etc.). Next door is a chain drugstore. An important focal point for the neighborhood is “Kendrick Square”, a small but pleasant park with

fountains and benches, as well as room for sports. Here, members of many different groups—Laotians, Vietnamese, Sino-Vietnamese, Cubans, American blacks, and American whites—can be seen relaxing or playing games. On the street nearby, men gather to tinker with their cars in the shade of large cottonwood trees (see Map 2). p. 4

The Neighborhood

At the time the research proposal was written, there were three main buildings in the Lindell area which were occupied by roughly equal numbers of Vietnamese and Laotians. In the intervening months, three major changes have taken place: 1) the International Institute has stopped settling new refugees in this neighborhood, preferring to concentrate them closer to the Institute; 2) one of the larger buildings was closed, apparently due to its declining physical condition; 3) the great majority of the single Vietnamese males have moved to other sections of the city. When the latter were asked why they were moving, they said there were now “too many Lao on Lindell”.

As a result of the above changes, we decided to focus attention primarily on the Laotians living in the Kenrick apartment building. We did, however, still maintain a research interest in remaining Vietnamese in the building. We feel that, due to demographic differences between them and the Laotians, the Vietnamese provide a necessary counterpoint to the more extensive data collected on the Laotian community.

Many factors make the Kenrick building itself a small neighborhood, in particular, its physical layout, the stable population of refugees living in the building and, finally, the interaction patterns maintained

p. 5 by the refugees.

The Kenrick is a decaying, seven-story building with 96 small apartments on six floors. In the six months of the study alone, there have been major water leaks, no hot water, no heat at times, peeling paint, plus endemic insects and rodents. The management has made sporadic attempts to correct these and other problems, with minimal effect. For comparable prices, the refugees could probably find better living quarters elsewhere, yet they continue to live in the Kenrick. Perhaps one reason is that its physical layout is conducive to both private life (one's apartment) and social activities (in the public areas) (see Map 3). The hallways are large, offering play space for the children during rainy or cold weather.[iii] As many as 15 to 20 children at a time can play a form of jump-rope, practice with roller skates, and play other rather active games on the large open areas at the head of the stairs on each floor. Teenagers lounge around by the stairs, chatting, smoking, and observing all that goes on. Young mothers sit in groups on the floor, babies in their laps and their toddlers playing nearby.

In good weather, the street, the adjacent park, and the grassy area in front of the apartment building (see Map 2) are all heavily used: Children play, women with small children sit together in the sun, people returning from work stop to chat, small clusters of men tinker endlessly with their cars, people hang out of apartment windows exchanging greetings and news with those below. Members of other ethnic groups who live in the apartments seem almost invisible as they pass through this lively scene.

p. 6 For a number of reasons, there was considerable movement in and out of Kenrick before the onset of this study. Until June, 1982, the International Institute settled refugees in this and nearby apartment buildings. In July and August of that year, many Vietnamese moved out of the Kenrick. Also during these summer months, two nearby apartment buildings were effectively closed to the refugees (one closed completely, and another discouraged refugee settlement). As will be seen later, despite this earlier mobility, the population has been surprisingly stable during the period of our study.

Since the onset of this study, the population among the Laotians has been fairly stable at Kenrick (see Table 1), and it may be that the disparity of married to single among the Lao and Vietnamese is a factor influencing their degree of mobility (see Table 2). Stability has made it possible for every Lao to know other Kenrick Lao. In fact, they usually address each other by nicknames (e.g., *Ky* meaning “fat”, and *Dia* meaning “short”), fictive kin terms (e.g., *Euay Var*

meaning “older sister Manivan”). or by terms referring to their actual positions in their respective families (e.g., *Maa Bac Dia* meaning “mother of Bac Dia” or *Mia Phan* meaning “wife of Phan).

The situation for the Vietnamese at the Kenrick is quite different. The two married couples seem never to associate with the single males, and the single males do not even know the names of the married people; some seem not even to be fully aware of their presence. Although the young men know the names of their roommates and the Vietnamese occupants of adjacent apartments, many of them do not know their countrymen on other floors. Curiously, almost the only person everyone knows, at least by

name and apartment, is a man of Vietnamese origin who was born and raised in Laos and p. 7
associates primarily with Lao. As can be seen in Table 2, the Vietnamese population has been far more mobile than the Laotian, even within the study period. Informal observations by Rynearson indicate that, before the study began, before the mass exodus of Vietnamese males in the summer of 1982, the population of Vietnamese within the Kenrick was even more fluid, with young men moving between apartments in the building and between the Kenrick and adjacent apartment buildings in the Lindell area. Again, this appears to derive from the demographic imbalance within the Vietnamese population (i.e., the preponderance of single, unrelated males).

Neither physical layout nor stable population, alone or together, would be enough to justify calling the Kenrick apartment building a neighborhood. In the spring of 1982, the neighborhood was, in fact, larger, including nearby apartment buildings (see Map 1); however, as previously explained, these other buildings are no longer important residential areas for refugees. During the period of our study, we observed few, if any, SEAR walking between the Kenrick and nearby residential buildings. None of our respondents on the indepth interview mentioned residents of those buildings as significant to them. In general, the Kenrick now seems to exist in social isolation within its geographic area. (Neighborhood businesses and post office continue to be patronized intensively by Kenrick residents.) The Kenrick's Laotian residents no longer call this area “Lindell” as they did in mid-1982; it is now just referred to as “Apartments”. (Other Laotians in the area continue to call it “Lindell”.) In fact, the Kenrick Laotian residents go so far as to refer to themselves as “*Ko:n* apartment” (people of the apartment)

to distinguish themselves from Laotians in other areas of the city (many of whom also live in p. 8
apartments).

Refugee Resettlement Program Activities

The principal refugee resettlement agency in this area, the International Institute of Metropolitan St. Louis, is located within walking distance of our target neighborhood. We could not begin to understand the SEAR adaptation to life in the city without taking into account the activities of this organization. As the primary sponsor for new refugees coming into St. Louis, it is currently involved in resettling refugees from Vietnam, Laos, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Poland, and Cuba.

Besides initial resettlement, it offers many services for refugees who, like those we studied, have been in St. Louis for six months or more. It offers an ongoing series of orientation programs on such topics as home medical care or dressing for cold weather. As we shall see in this report, its Job Placement Department continues to be crucially important to SEAR (and other refugees) during these times of economic uncertainty. The English-as-a-Second-Language Program offers classes five days and four nights a week, with over 300 students currently enrolled.

Even those refugees who speak some English and are relatively acculturated continue to draw upon the help of bilingual case workers (speaking Laotian, Vietnamese, and Chinese) in handling medical and legal emergencies. The Institute also schedules workshops to help large numbers of people fill out income tax forms, apply for energy assistance, and the like. The preservation of traditional arts and religious traditions is encouraged by providing facilities for large-scale social gatherings. Many refugees also take advantage of the Institute's help in the area of immigration

p. 9 counselling (chiefly green cards and family reunification).

Although many of the SEAR in the refugee neighborhood we studied have passed or are about to pass beyond the 18-month limit for federal aid, the International Institute continues to be a focal point for obtaining this and other vital services.

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SECTION II METHODOLOGY

In this work, qualitative methodology was used to gain a clear understanding of the structure and substance of inter- and intra-ethnic relations of a Southeast Asian refugee population living in the neighborhood. To achieve this end, we used *triangulation*, that is, "the process for checking the veracity of findings through multiple data sources or methods" (Adams 1982:6). For a projected schedule of project tasks and methods, the use of multiple observers (Drs. DeVoe and Rynearson) proved to be an effective type of triangulation, as expected. Not only did it allow for shared observations of the same event(s); it also allowed an occasional division of researchers' roles (i.e., the division into expressive and instrumental tasks), especially when we participated in ritual events. For example, many researchers have noted the critical importance of preserving traditional medical practices as a source of both psychological and physical well-being of immigrants (Rubel 1966). In order to learn more about this facet of the refugees' life, Rynearson (who did, in fact, become ill during the research period) participated in several different curing ceremonies. While she was actively involved, DeVoe noted the procedures, participants and social setting, taking extensive photographs whenever possible. In other ritual events, such as a ba-si, both of us participated, but again, Rynearson played a more expressive role and DeVoe a more instrumental one. We found that such role divisions encouraged free and open communication between the target group and the researchers, while, at the same time, allowing the accumulation of reams of extensive, detailed data.[iv]

p. 11 At larger social events, having two observers also meant a better coverage of the action. For example, when four Buddhist monks from Laos came to St. Louis to celebrate a traditional

ceremony of thanksgiving, there were two major types of activities occurring at the same time within the building, but with different participants in different sections. In one area, the Laotian band was playing; people were singing, dancing, and chatting. In another room nearby, the monks were meeting with members of the Laotian and Thai community(ies), divining, counselling, and receiving alms. Both activities were highly meaningful in understanding social relations within the Laotian community. We moved back and forth between the two foci in order to get an overall picture, yet each spent the majority of her time in different areas, thereby effectively covering the whole event.

The use of multiple qualitative methods was the second type of triangularization we used in this study. That is, we derived our data from participant observation, non-participant observation, informal interviews, structured indepth interviews, and photographic techniques. The following describes how and with what success these varying procedures were implemented.

Participant Observation

Direct and informal participation in all possible activities and aspects of the subjects' daily lives was the backbone of our study. Through the continued strengthening of social ties formed before the outset of this particular project and the extensive formation of new ties, we have been able to gather masses of data about SEAR behavior, both during crises and during routine daily activities. This information was used to cross-check materials derived from other methods (particularly

the indepth interviews), as well as to glean a better understanding of the multitude of minute transactions which go to make up their cooperative networks. Thus, we discovered a good deal about such diverse topics as the refugees' inter-ethnic interactions, their support network, as well as their rationale for decision-making involving such issues as employment. p. 12

Our renting an apartment in Kenrick facilitated our interaction with both Laotians and Vietnamese refugees. This arrangement made it possible to develop an easy interchange of visiting between the SEAR and use. Therefore, we were able to observe the natural flow of interaction intra- and inter-ethnically. We were also present when problems developed and observed/participated in their solutions. It is, in fact, largely due to this high level of participant observation that we began to understand how the Kenrick SEAR divided themselves (ethnically) and defined themselves as a group in opposition to other Laotians in Metropolitan St. Louis. (The Vietnamese at Kenrick apparently do not define themselves this way.)

Photographic Techniques

Photographic techniques involved the extensive use of photography during the observation periods and during other social/ritual events. (In fact, Ronald E. Mertz, Ph.D., was able to videotape for us a “birthday party” for the ancient spirit *nya-poh* (honorable father). We feel that this acceptance of the video camera with such a sensitive event indicates how well the Laotians have accepted us and the presence of the camera, whether for still photographs or

videotape). As we had anticipated, photographs were very helpful as an initial focus in informal settings. Actually, it proved to be a stronger magnet than we had thought it would be. For

p. 13 example, it drew into our apartment (we put *all* of the pictures from the first four months on the walls) both socially prominent and retiring individuals in the Kenrick SEAR population, i.e., pivotal women, young single Vietnamese and Laotian men, children, some of the more isolated men, and married women with small children.

We were also able to use the photographs taken during the observation period to learn more about the people we did not know initially at the Kenrick. They were useful in learning names, functional positions ("he's the one who fixes TVs"), kinship, and other information (i.e., "she's Khamchanh's wife; she works at the shampoo factory").

Besides building rapport with the SEAR (by giving people pictures of themselves and their families) and helping identify SEAR initially unknown to us, the photographs have been important in gathering social network information. For example, we have pictures of Laotians[v] going fishing together; going on vegetable-picking expeditions; leaving to do laundry together; working on cars; attending a naming ceremony, private dinners, a wedding, *ba-si*; or clustering at larger, formal events held for all of the Laotians in Metropolitan St. Louis. We were able to use this information, along with our other observations, in drawing up a social network chart of the Laotians at Kenrick.

Formal Observations

In this study, formal observations refer to the observations made of a public park directly in front of the Kenrick apartment building (see Map 2). The main function of this method was to empirically examine interaction between SEAR ethnic groups (i.e., Laotian and Vietnamese), and among SEAR and non-SEAR ethnic groups (i.e., Cubans, American blacks and American whites).

p. 14 Besides being a valuable source of data, this observation process served other functions. Its very formality served as a public announcement of our presence as investigators, thus obviating a number of potential ethical problems raised by purely participant observation methodology. Besides giving the SEAR opportunity to observe us observing them, they were able to ask us questions between interview periods (one hour each), to look at our notations on the map, and generally (we hope) to regard us as benign intruders.

Structured Interviews

Indepth structured interviews were conducted by the investigators (separately) with the aid of a translator/research assistant whose home language was Laotian or Vietnamese (although we had prepared a Chinese interview schedule, none of the subjects chose this language for the interview). Before embarking on this stage of the research, however, we needed to determine what the ethnic composition of Kenrick was. Therefore, through a number of key informants, we

developed a household composition survey, which is information basic to all ethnological research.

This survey enabled us to define the general demographic features of the SEAR population within the Kenrick apartment building. We determined people's names, whether they were married, had children, were employed, spoke English, had a car, etc. Much of this data was obtained informally; since most of the Laotians knew each other, a few key informants were able to give us this information. This use of key informants was much less successful in obtaining background data on the Vietnamese; it provides yet another indication of the fragmentary nature of this ethnic group in Kenrick.

Using the foregoing data, we selected a representative sample of SEAR from the building. The criteria we established in choosing SEAR to interview were: ethnicity, marital status, sex, and employment status. Due to the nature of the type of jobs SEAR can obtain, high number of layoffs, and the present economic conditions in the U.S., it proved nearly impossible to use employment status as a criteria for choosing SEAR for an indepth interview. Although we used different interview forms for the 27 SEAR we talked to, we nevertheless believe that these intensive personal interviews enabled us to gather data on a variety of topics relevant to the objectives of this study, i.e., generally, the areas we were interested in were the subjects' ethnic origin, work history, education, English language familiarity, social and cooperative networks. p. 15

The tentative interview schedule included in the original proposal has been refined into several different indepth interview schedules to be administered as appropriate, e.g., according to the informant's ethnic group, sex, and marital status. Furthermore, the investigators felt free to follow a particular area of interest, even though given questions were not on the schedule. Assorted versions were developed for different language (Laotian, Vietnamese, and Chinese) and by marital status. Each schedule was translated and back-translated (by a second person) into English to be sure of attaining a good English-target language equivalence. Translator/research assistants were trained for 4 to 8 hours before the interviews began.

Indepth interviews allow us to get equitable types of information from a range of individuals, making it possible to compare groups. The

interview situation proved to be an efficient way to gather at least superficial data on a broad range of related topics. However, such information may not always be accurate. Therefore, data gained through participant observation was used to fill in the “missing blanks” in the interview results, e.g., what persons are not mentioned and why. Let us take one case as an illustration: There is a young man whom we have often observed helping others in various ways (e.g., translating, moving, carrying groceries, etc.). Frequently, he has been seen eating at other people's homes (a common way of repaying someone for service/aid) and receiving other tokens of support. Yet, his interview indicates that he sees himself to be very isolated, with little interaction and support from the Laotian community. Hence, our knowledge of this person gained through formal and participant observation helped us to weigh the information given in the interview; and, the interview helped us to recognize something about this person we had not realized earlier (his feelings of depression and isolation). p. 16

Informal Interviews with Non-SEAR

Informal interviews with non-SEAR were a minor, but still important, part of the research project. We were interested in talking with relevant non-SEAR in the neighborhood and in other relevant institutions concerning their perceptions of the SEAR. The relevant non-SEAR informally interviewed included members of the local American community institutions important to the SEAR (e.g., the post office manager, and clerk, Kroger supermarket's manager and chief clerk, a gas station owner/manager,

p. 17 as well as a local drug store's two pharmacists and a check-out clerk); the Kendall apartment building's manager, his assistant, and non-SEAR renters; the chief administrator and guard of an adjacent business establishment; and, finally, important helping institutions' representatives (e.g. a social worker, two job placement officers, and an English-as-a-Second-Language instructor from the International Institute; non-SEAR helpers from various churches, ex., Mormon Church; personnel at the city hospital and the Division of Family Services). Each of these non-SEAR were interviewed where situationally appropriate (i.e., at their work place or in their home) and over a wide range of topics depending on their relationship to the SEAR. The importance of these informal interviews lies in their providing an alternative to the SEAR's own perceptions of their place in the neighborhood, as well as in the larger St. Louis community system. Thus, the information gained provides a balanced (because its multi-sided) picture of SEAR and non-SEAR relationships.

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SECTION III "KO:N APARTMENT": DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF "PEOPLE OF THE APARTMENTS"

Presently (early 1983), there is a total of 144 SEAR living in Kenrick, 124 of these being ethnically Laotian and 20 Vietnamese. Table 1 shows the breakdown of these groups by age and marital status, and subethnic affiliation. It is noteworthy that amongst the Lao there is a high percentage of married adults, as compared to the Vietnamese (45.2% versus 20%, respectively).

The following figures describe the 27 Kenrick SEAR interviewed. From our knowledge of the total Kenrick SEAR group, we do feel that this information is representative of the total Kenrick sample. There were two areas we were particularly interested in as points of reference for survival: past and present socio-economic variables.

Previous occupation before coming to the United States (see Table 3) demonstrates the range of skills and abilities among this population. The largest single occupation was student (30.6%), probably reflecting the comparative youth of the subjects (median age = 25 years; range between 18 and 47 years of age).

The median length of time the SEAR had been living in St. Louis (at the time of their interviews) was 13 months (range between three months and 29 months). During this time, 58.3% of those interviewed had held at least one job (see Table 4), with the mean number of months at the most recent place of employment being five months. Nevertheless, reliable

figures on employment are impossible to obtain since the situation changes almost daily. Many people are forced to take temporary jobs; partial or permanent layoffs are common. This is p. 19
indicative of the types of jobs held by the majority of the refugees. Most of the Laotian are in entry level jobs, often involving clothing manufacturing and restaurant work.[vi]

Many of the Vietnamese are students. Those who are employed work in “chop suey”[vii] restaurants. This latter work often involves 72-hour work weeks at less than minimum wages. A more common problem among the Laotians is underemployment, with many people working 25 to 32 hours per week. Not withstanding these problems, the overall level of employment is quite high given today's economic conditions. This relatively positive picture may be due to three factors: the refugees' desparate desire to work, the International Institute's job placement unit's vigorous efforts, and the SEAR employers' general high level of satisfaction with their SEAR employees' job performance (DeVoe 1982).

As might be expected, the subjects had few family members (e.g., spouse, children, brother, cousin) living with them or living in the city of St. Louis. The mean number of people living in the subjects' apartments is four. Of these co-residents, 38.9% consist only of relatives, 27.8% consist of a mixture of relatives and non-relatives, and the final 33.3% consists of only non-relatives sharing an apartment. Among the married SEAR (those identifying themselves as married or having children), 73.7% live with their spouse. Of those not living with their spouse, one (2.8%) spouse lives in another part of the U.S., another is still in the home country and, in three cases (8.3%), the spouse is dead. The median number

of children living with married subjects is 2 per family. Seventy-seven point eight percent of the p. 20
subjects had no relatives living in St. Louis (other than those living with ego).

As to the question of intracity mobility, 50% of the subjects interviewed have never moved within St. Louis, remaining at Kenrick. Thirty-six point one percent have moved once since coming to St. Louis, 8.3% have moved twice, and 5.6% have moved three times since being settled in St. Louis.

SECTION IV INTRA-ETHNIC COOPERATIVE NETWORKS p. 21

The Laotian Network

Our first goal was to ascertain the existence of cooperative networks among the refugees in the neighborhood. It was immediately apparent that, among the Laotians, there was indeed a strong intra-ethnic cooperative network, neighborhood based, functionally important, commonly recognized and symbolically expressed. As will be seen later, the Vietnamese in Kenrick differed somewhat from this pattern (they will be discussed later in this section).

Data was drawn from various sources (participant observation, formal observations/photographs, and indepth formal interviews). From each dataset, we were able to derive a cooperative network, and the three networks overlapped strikingly, thus strongly supporting the existence of a cooperative network within the neighborhood. Therefore, when we

refer to *the* Laotian cooperative network, we are hereafter referring to the composite network derived from these three data sources.

Neighborhood Based

The most striking feature of this cooperative network is its localized character. The relations with other Laotian Kenrick residents are multi-faceted, that is, giving or receiving help, they turn to each other far more often than to any outsiders, whether Laotian, Vietnamese, or American. So strong is the influence of common residence that, when someone moves to another area of the city, their contacts within the cooperative networks decrease markedly.

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Functionally Important

Kenrick Laotians are involved in an elaborate internal support system. That is, the neighborhood residents cooperate to perform a number of vital activities. This complex interchange includes employment (finding jobs) and a system of reciprocity (exchanging food, services and/or small amounts of money). As we shall see, this system of exchange is not only important in dealing with the complexities of everyday living in St. Louis, but is also important in reifying the existence of their sense of community.

Employment is a continual source of concern for the SEAR. As noted above, the Laotians are mainly employed in entry level jobs, characterized by underemployment and high levels of uncertainty (i.e., temporary or complete layoffs). Almost every individual is constantly aware of the possible need to find a new job, whether s/he is employed at the present or not. They want to have jobs and to have control over whether they remain in these positions or not. Yet, they find themselves locked into an economic system which is effectively beyond their control, creating an underlying current of anxiety in the most mundane decisions.

The Laotians tended to use personalistic means to address this important problem area (and others as well). For many people, the job placement officers (JPO) at the International Institute are central figures in finding employment. While the placement officers view themselves as trying their best to fit individuals to jobs appropriate to their skills, this policy results in a massive misapprehension on the part of the SEAR: The very individuals the Laotians see as most deserving a job—older married men—are, in fact, those least employable from the

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viewpoint of the JPO. Their English skills tend to be low, and their job experience in Laos limited to non-mechanized farming and/or soldiering. Because they do not recognize skill as a variable, the refugees assume that the job placement officer's choice of assigning a particular individual to a given job is based mainly on personal whim. Again and again we heard “If Bruce likes you, he can get you a job”.

Since the SEAR interpret the JPO's decisions personally, that is, in terms of the personalities involved, many attempt to improve their chances by activating ties with those who, it is believed, the JPO “likes”. Repeated attempts were made to involve the researchers and other SEAR, who are seen as having a positive relationship with JPOs, as intermediates in dealing with

job placement officials. It appears likely that there is a personalistic element in selection, insofar that projecting an acculturated appearance (American clothes; cut and curled hair; use of English, however limited) has some influence on the JPO's weighing an individual's ability to handle the challenges of a new job. One (admittedly extreme) case involving personalistic ties involved a man who could not go to work for 1 to 2 days because of illness. Rather than call the employer himself or tell one of his co-workers (a Laotian resident of the Kenrick) to give their employer this message, the sick man called one of our interpreters (a good friend of his). The interpreter then accosted Rynearson during a break between English-as-a-Second-Language classes (where she teaches) and asked her to ask the JPO to call the employer and tell him the man was sick. This transaction could be represented thus:

Sick man → Interpreter → Researcher → JPO → Employer

Transmission of this simple message involved activating ties between five individuals, any one of whom could have performed the task alone. p. 24

Paralleling the use of the placement services at the Institute are the refugees' own efforts to find jobs for their friends. Everyone knows who needs a job, who is unhappy at his/her job and other vital bits of information. (The easy exchange of such information is yet another benefit of living close together.)

Once one or two people are successful at a particular workplace, they often recruit their friends to fill every available job opening as it arises. In one case, for example, the JPO found one Laotian woman a part-time job in a restaurant. In a few weeks, an American unexpectedly quit. The Laotian hurried home to tell her friend whom she knew was very unhappy with her current job. She and her friend returned immediately to the restaurant and succeeded in obtaining the job. Soon another opening appeared, and the two women told a Laotian man who had just been laid off about the new job possibility. When they went to apply, he was accepted; however, their boss told all three of them, “He'd better work out, or I'll fire all the Laotians”.

The above strategy is very useful, but it can have disastrous consequences if that particular business closes or resorts to massive layoffs. One highly successful restaurant, which employed many Laotians, recently closed abruptly and unexpectedly; its Laotian workers were devastated. Within a month, another major employer who had been running three shifts a day seven days a week also laid off almost all of its SEAR employees, causing a massive financial and emotional crisis within the Laotian community.

Of course, it must be noted that chance and personal efforts sometimes play a role in successfully obtaining a job. For example, one man was unexpectedly offered a job as he was walking past a business. As opposed to such chance encounters, personal initiative has also been a successful strategy for some individuals. In one case, a young man (living in Kenrick, and so, knowing the conditions in the building) went to the manager and suggested that he be hired to keep it clean. Not only was he accepted; he also obtained insurance—an extremely important fringe benefit from his perspective.[viii] p. 25

A system of reciprocity constitutes the transactional content of the neighborhood-based network. The SEAR are involved in a complex exchange of food, services, and small amounts of money. Although these are not, in fact, discrete categories of interaction, they will be discussed separately. It must be remembered, however, that no two people exchange only food, services or money to the exclusion of other media.

An ideal norm is that any Laotian can go to any other Laotian resident and receive food. Of course, this is true only of close friends or as part of the exchange system. Our observations indicate that anyone visiting another's house around meal time will be offered food; only close friends usually accept. Others, claiming to be “full already” (*i:m laew*), will sit and watch the family eating with no visible signs of unease.

Comments elicited both during the interviews and our observations indicate that distribution of special food is a strong boundary indicator. Special foods include those items obtained in large quantities and for which the Laotians have had to pay little or nothing. For example, fish,

p. 26 apples, and wild food. Even in the dead of winter, some Laotians continue to go fishing, often bringing home amazingly large numbers of fish. Within the neighborhood, they are distributed to friends, neighbors, and others with whom they have special ties (i.e., someone who has translated for them, whose telephone they use, etc.). Kenrick residents also cooperate with each other to make large purchases of food. For example, in one case, a number of families joined together to purchase a dressed steer. On the other hand, when Laotians living outside of Kenrick catch large numbers of fish, they *sell* them to Kenrick residents. Non-Kenrick Laotians also make and sell other kinds of food (e.g., sausages) to Kenrick Laotians. This exchange of food is one of the most clearly observable boundaries between Kenrick and non-Kenrick Laotians.

Transactions involving food are tightly interwoven with other types of exchanges. Food, in fact, is often used as repayment or an expression of gratitude for extraordinary services, such as transportation to a hospital in an emergency, aid in obtaining a driver's license, and the like. This usually takes the form of an invitation to a particularly elaborate meal.

Furthermore, major cooperative efforts are required to stage ceremonial events such as *ba-si*, weddings, or naming ceremonies (cooking large quantities of food, preparing the *pak wan*, buying beer, etc.). According to our observations, it is predominantly neighborhood-based ties which are activated for this purpose. That is, when such an occasion is celebrated within the apartment building, fellow Kenrick Laotians do most of the work. When the events are held in other parts of the city, many of the “Ko:n apartment” attend, but are not actively involved in the preparations.

p. 27 Food and other types of repayment for special services are not considered a kind of commercial transaction; rather, they are seen as maintaining the balance of reciprocal obligations among members of the group. The rationale is social rather than economic. For example, a particular Laotian, a skilled mechanic, fixes other Kenrick Laotians' cars or television sets or the like. In return, he receives small amounts of money which are not

considered payments, but “just something to help him buy more tools”. Car owners can be called upon to take people to school, laundrymats, stores, etc. In return, they are given money “to help pay for the gas”.

The depth and breadth of the exchange system among Laotians in the neighborhood has only been briefly touched upon in the above examples. People depend upon others for help in such areas as buying a car, obtaining a driver's license, opening a bank account, and dealing with the Division of Family Services. On a more mundane, but equally important, level, many apartments have no hot water—a serious problem for people who take two to three baths a day. Whole families can be seen trouping to another apartment to take baths. This reciprocal system of numerous services, large and small, gives depth and meaning to the neighborhood-based cooperative network.

Commonly Recognized and Symbolically Expressed

Kenrick Laotians refer to themselves as “*Ko:n apartment*” (people of the apartment). Use of this term shows that neighborhood Laotians are aware of themselves as a bounded group, and express this group identity symbolically through this label. It is the complex system of reciprocal

exchange, described above, which gives social, as well as geographic, validity to this definition of boundaries. p. 28

Neighborhood boundaries are commonly recognized outside this unit as well. At public, city-wide gatherings of Laotians, “*ko:n apartment*” usually cluster together. Other private affairs, such as weddings or *ba-si*, bring together “*ko:n apartment*” with Laotians from other parts of the city. Photographs taken at these private events clearly show this public expression of group identity (e.g., clustering) within the cooperative network.

The Vietnamese Network

The situation for the Vietnamese is markedly different. As we have observed, the Kenrick Vietnamese do not have the same community infrastructure as do the Kenrick Laotians. This group of Vietnamese, as noted earlier in the report, are small in number, with most being single males. The existing social imbalance is aggravated by the fact that there is little to no interaction between the single males and the two Vietnamese families living at Kenrick.

At the outset of our study, we expected to find that the local Vietnamese had little, if any, neighborhood-based cooperative networks. This expectation was based on our preliminary observations of their small numbers and high level of mobility (both within and outside of Kenrick), as well as of their nonuse of public spaces within and around Kenrick for group interaction. However, the results of our interviews and further participant observation surprised us. Their individual networks, although quite small, were very dense. Individuals did turn to other

Kenrick Vietnamese for various types of support.

p. 29

The composite network of Vietnamese (obtained like that of the Laotians from comparing networks generated by formal interviews and participant observation) shows that it is a more highly focused and densely knit network. In personal terms, this means that any given individual turns to a few other individuals for many reasons. (This is in striking contrast to the Laotians, who tend to turn to many other Kenrick Laotians for different kinds of support.) In fact, in almost all cases, an individual Vietnamese male's significant others are his roommates. Given the high mobility of individuals (from one apartment to another and out of Kenrick [see Table 1]), their network is functionally important, but extremely fragile.

We noted that, while these cooperative networks were dense in terms of ties, they were also shallow in terms of the total range of transactions. To some extent, this is due to their relative lack of resources, i.e., cars, telephones, and the like. Perhaps the major difference in available resources concerns the absence of women in the Vietnamese network. True, there are, at the present time, two women married to Vietnamese who are living in the apartment, but they were not mentioned by any of our informants. Most did not even know the women's names. Among the Laotians, it is the women who bear the primary responsibility for staging festivities, so important in establishing the sense of group identity.

This group of men from Vietnam are, in fact, of two different ethnic groups: those of Chinese descent and those of Vietnamese descent. Nevertheless, although our data is by no means conclusive, ethnicity did not seem to play a significant role in the shape of the cooperative

p. 30 networks. Rather, lack of available resources seems to be the major controlling factor.

Overview

Thus, we see that the policy of settling a number of refugees (particularly families) from the same country in a small area does promote formation of cooperative networks. These people from similar backgrounds, placed in close proximity, facing similar problems, will tend to cooperate in a number of ways. This promotes the development of an intra-ethnic community. The community-based approach (i.e., nucleated settlement) to solving problems avoids the tensions arising from the personal conflict, accusations of self-aggrandizement, etc., so endemic to formal ethnic self-help organizations. As we have seen in this section, the neighborhood-based cooperative network has enormous positive survival value for refugees in a new socio-economic environment. This policy of nucleated settlement can thus operate to reduce much of the dependence on federal and state programs.

p. 31

SECTION V INTER-ETHNIC ACCOMMODATION

In order to understand how the inter-ethnic neighborhood groups accommodate each other, we must also understand what their perceptions of each other are and perhaps what gave rise to these perceptions. Thus, in considering the issue of accommodation (at least mutual tolerance) of SEAR and non-SEAR neighborhood residents, we noted the importance of experience (i.e., an

empirical basis) in the perceptions of both the SEAR and non-SEAR towards each other, as well as how this experience was generalized. It became clear in examining the information we gathered through informal interviews, formal observations and participant observations that there were two major spheres of accommodation: associations based primarily on functional contacts, and those based primarily on neighborhood contacts (i.e., spatial proximity).

Functional Associations

A major source of contact between SEAR and non-SEAR both generally and within the neighborhood is functional associations (i.e., with personnel in government agencies, hospitals, churches, sponsoring agencies and local businesses). Obviously, such associations would have an impact on inter-ethnic perceptions; therefore, in this section, we will examine functional associations.

The surrounding business community's personnel is a mixture of American black and American white, i.e., Kenrick manager (black), owner/manager of gas station (white), postal clerks (black and white), grocery

store clerks (black and white), guard and other personnel of adjacent business (white). In our p. 32
interviews with various members of these businesses, we found that the SEAR were perceived as having little visibility (even they the SEAR could be seen using these establishments). For example, the gas station owner/manager paid scant notice to the SEAR who frequently used his pay telephone or bought sodas in his machines. The gas station owner/manager said, “They never come over here”, just at the time a Vietnamese came in to use his phone. One exception to the above was the representative of a professional institute adjacent to the apartments. When asked about the SEAR living in the neighborhood, three main responses were elicited: 1) The children caused concern because they played on the business's property. 2) The adults caused concern because they picked the leafy weeds out of the grass for food. 3) Finally, in discussing the Southeast Asian refugees, the term “refugee” became a dominant concept, resulting in a merging of the SEAR with the Cubans who were resettled in the same building two to three years ago (somewhat before large numbers of SEAR were settled in the building). Comments from the director indicated concern over vandalism, bloody fights, and drunkenness. When asked specifically if SEAR were seen doing these things, he was able to distinguish between the SEAR and Cuban men. Most of these problems had occurred about two years ago with the Cubans (who were, at the time of this study, no longer so numerous or so violent). What was of interest to us is that this third response was also inadvertently elicited from a number of local non-SEAR whether we began our questioning with “Southeast Asian refugees” or “Laotian and Vietnamese refugees”. The word that caused this response was “refugees”, leading to the same merging of Cubans resettled

in this area with SEAR. Again, as with the director of the adjacent business, distinctions could p. 33
be made between SEAR and Cubans within the SEAR group, except at the post office) if we pressed for examples.

In the wider community, as well as in the local business area, there were frequent expressions of goodwill toward the SEAR, yet also frustration over communication problems. Hospitals, for example, tend to be very document-dependent; there are certain types of information emergency rooms have to record (for example, for legal protection and business reasons); there is, therefore, a high level of frustration when dealing with those who do not speak English well. In an effort to relax and disarm the SEAR clients, a medical doctor, for example, opened the meeting with “Hey, wa'da'ya' know?” This was, of course, an extremely confusing question, which left the refugee (who actually spoke English quite well) trying to figure out what it meant and how s/he could respond. Rather than being disarmed, the SEAR was taken aback and stunned into complete silence. The practitioner, in turn, assumed the SEAR did not speak English and proceeded accordingly.

Related to these basic communication difficulties is the problem of not having the correct papers or information. Here is a fairly typical interchange:

“Where do you work?”

“Onion factory.”

“What's the name of the factory?”

/Does not know/

“Where is it?”

“Far.”

p. 34

Further, because the SEAR are dealing with governmental agencies, there are frequent demands for great numbers and varieties of documentation. For example, forms contain such perilous points as “What is the child's mother's maiden name?” Another example is getting energy assistance. The individual must produce the name, social security number, and birth-date of every household member; rent receipt; heating bills or special form stating cost of heating is not included in the rent; figures on total income for entire household, including current food stamp letter, current general relief letter, all paycheck stubs since November 1st. If any paycheck stubs are lost, they need a letter from the employer stating wages for that period. If laid off, they need a letter from the employer stating they were laid off and for how long.

At the same time, all of these local businesses said that they had not made any real adjustment in order to deal with the SEAR. The pharmacists added that the SEAR usually brought along someone who could speak English fairly well. The post office could use visual material to determine what was needed (i.e., show a 20ç stamp or airmail letter). Although the new supermarket manager did not feel that any changes had been made to accommodatethe SEAR

customers, his clerk noted that, as of two years ago, the store had begun stocking for more produce than previously. Another clerk noted that the SEAR had not understood how to use food stamps at first, but now there were no longer any misunderstandings. The clerks also commented on how trusting the SEAR were in getting change back, etc. (From their side, the SEAR tended to be suspicious of American black clerks in the store—afraid the clerks might be cheating them.)

Neighborhood Contacts

p. 35

The fact that there are several different ethnic groups (i.e., American whites and blacks, Cubans, Laotians, Vietnamese, Sino-Laotians, and Sino-Vietnamese) all living within Kenrick gives each group an opportunity to observe or to interact with the others. However, as our formal observations indicate, there is very little interaction among different ethnic groups. When within the same area, working on cars or playing, the situation can best be described as parallel play or parallel activity (i.e., non-interaction).

This section of mid-St. Louis is, in fact, a very heterogeneous area due to the existence of a nearby university and racially mixed local businesses and resident population. Nevertheless, there is remarkably little interaction between the groups. Aside from interaction with the Kenrick manager (an American black), we noted very little interaction between non-SEAR and SEAR, or between Vietnamese and Laotians. In general, there was only the most cursory acknowledgement of the presence of someone from another ethnic group.

We did, however, observe a few cases of interaction between SEAR and white Americans, whether as friends or helpers. Over the research period, there were two or three individuals whom we consistently observed in the presence of given Laotians. Some of these relationships were based on friendships formed at work. Others were Institute personnel who had become more closely involved in the lives of their clients. Still others were missionaries actively proselytizing the SEAR. For a short period, a few young, white, skilled workers were living and working

in Kenrick; they also formed friendships among the Laotians. There $$e also occasional p. 36
transitory relationships between the younger SEAR an$ students at the University. However, we were surprised to discover $rom our indepth interviews that almost all these inter-ethnic relationsh$$s have very little cognitive salience for the SEAR; indeed, most such individuals (i.e., non-SEAR) were not mentioned at all. Regardless of their relative importance, most of these white Americans do not raside at Kenrick.

The vast majority of non-SEAR Kenrick residents are American bl$cks with a scattering of Cubans and elderly American white women. Many (probably most) blacks living in the Kenrick are responsible, law-ab$ding individuals; but, their very normality makes them far less visible t$an the few “troublemakers”. In observing and interacting with them, th$ SEAR unfortunately encounter more of the negative side of lower-clas$ American blacks, that is, fighting among young males, fighting within families, robberies, and burglaries.

The Laotians (and Vietnamese as well) discuss endlessly the mo$$ dramatic events involving black troublemakers. For example, one ni$$$, a 12-year-old Laotian girl woke up in her parents' apartment and sa$ an American black standing over her. He was burglarizing their apa$$ment while everyone was asleep. He told her that if she made a sound he $$ould slit her throat. She lay still until he left.

Although the crime rate has abated somewhat at Kenrick since $$e SEAR's arrival, it was almost endemic to the area. Much of the cri was committed (or so the refugees believed) by American blacks or C$$ans. In at least one case, the Laotians thought they knew who was commit$$ng many of the burglaries—an American black living in the building.

p. 37 In another instance involving Laotians and American blacks, a Laotian couple was at home when a black man broke the door, entered, and took $200 dollars from them. Everyone knew the man's name; he lived in the building. When the Laotians complained to the manager, he said, “Non-sense”, that the Laotian couple had just thrown the money out the door. The man, passing by, had found it in the hall. Whether or not the story is true in all its details, it is believed to be true by the refugees, thus reconfirming their attitudes towards American blacks.

The SEAR can also observe cases of interpersonal violence among some American blacks residing at Kenrick. For example, when one of the researchers was visiting a Vietnamese, she could hear someone being thrown against the wall of the adjacent apartment. When she asked, “What was that?”, the reply was simply “Black people”. “Cuban?” “No, American.” Such observations reinforce the SEAR's negative attitudes towards blacks.

Despite their problems, Laotians do not see themselves as totally helpless victims in this interracial environment. Their numbers and sense of community combine to make possible concerted action in their own defense. They tell with relish, for example, of one incident last year when a young woman who was feeling ill stayed home from work. She left the apartment for a few minutes to visit a friend down the hall. Returning, she found the door broken and the stereo taken. She screamed, ran down the hall, and encountered a group of young Laotian men just returning from English classes. Acting quickly, the men dispersed; some watched the entrances to the building; some notified the manager; while yet others searched the corridors and open areas. With the

p. 38 manager's help, they found the stereo and other stolen goods hidden in an empty apartment. The Laotians remember this incident with pride as a case of community action.

This is not to say there are no friendships or positive/neutral interactions between American blacks and SEAR. There are. At least two Laotian men are friends with the American black manager of Kenrick.[ix] Also, we have occasionally observed an American black playing games (football) with some Laotian boys. These positive relationships are, unfortunately, conspicuous by their rarity.

On the other hand, the white American residents of the Kenrick are frequently elderly women living alone. The SEAR are very little involved with them. One woman (who had lived there for 13

years) we talked to said that she did not think there was any problem with the SEAR living in the building, although she never said more than “hi” to anyone. A Laotian woman said she and her children sometimes carried bags for another elderly woman living across the hall from her own family.

Yet it must be said that all contacts with American whites are not positive. Because of past and continuing positive association with whites, many Kenrick Laotians appear to trust *any* white. This, in itself, has led to problems (though apparently it has not changed their basic positive attitudes). For example, one fall day, several Laotians were working on their cars outside of Kenrick. A large white man whom no one knew came up to them and said for $300 he could fix the cars ($150 down to buy the parts and the rest on completion. The agreed, paid him the money, and let him take their cars. He left without anyone knowing his name or where he was taking the cars. They simply trusted him because he was white.

In another case, a Laotian woman, shortly after her arrival in St. Louis (then living on South Grand, but who now lives in Kenrick), was home alone with her two young sons. A young white man knocked on her door. He told her he was the landlord's son and had come to fix the hot water heater. She let him in, following him as he walked all over the house, looking into closets, etc. Finally, after 20 minutes, he said he would fix the hot water heater if she would give him $40.00 cash. She replied she did not have $40.00. He asked how much she had. She replied $20.00. He said “Okay” he would fix it for $20.00. He took her money and left, promising to return. In telling this story, the Laotian woman said she felt clever at the time because she really did have $40.00 (a common bartering tecunique). This example again illustrates the danger of the overall tendency to see blacks as “bad guys” and whites as “good guys”. p. 39

There remains a third sphere of inter-ethnic relations to be discussed: Laotian and Vietnamese interaction. In contrast to SEAR associations with whites or blacks, these relationships are marked as being affectively neutral and nonthreatening. Although a few people expressed a lingering hostility (largely due to historical conflicts between their two countries), in their present environment they both seem to dismiss the other as being largely irrelevant. That is, each group is viewed as being in a position neither to help nor hinder the success of the other.

The cooperative networks of these two SEAR groups are articulated through a few pivotal individuals of mixed ethnic heritage. One couple

of Vietnamese heritage, who were born and raised in Laos, pla$$ an active role in both the Vietnamese and Laotian cooperative networks. There is another individual, a woman of mixed Laotian and Chinese $$scent, who speaks Laotian, Chinese and Vietnamese. Unlike the forms$$ couple, this woman interacts primarily within the Laotian network; nevertheless, she does maintain friendly contact with the Vietnamese, especially those of Chinese descent. That there is a srong element of $$oice in her pivotal position can be seen in comparing her persona$$ network and that of two other individuals of mixed Laotian and Chine$$ heritage: Neither of the latter have been discovered interacting with $$e Sino-Vietnamese in any way, nor did interview data reveal any lin$$ with Sino-Vietnamese. Thus, it is obvious that they have not cho$$n to activate potential mixed ethnic ties. Although the Sino-Lao an woman and the Lao- p. 40

Vietnamese coupls can be considered pivotal inte$$ediaries, they are by no means cultural brokers. That is, they do not appear to be interesting in activating their disparate networks for their $$wn social, economic, or political advantage.

Overview

Thus, we can see from the above that most of the SEAR's contacts with American whites tend to be functional: stores, post offi$$s, helping agencies, and the like. While perhaps seeming unfeeling and impatient, the whites are not usually seen as threating. Most SEAR-whi$$e interaction we observed was either affectively neutral or positive in t$$. Although there are also American blacks in functional positions (e.g. the hospitals and the Division of Family Services), the other negative co$$ct the SEAR have with blacks seems to have had an overriding negative i$$act on their

p. 41 perceptions of blacks in general. Yet, as we have seen, there have been cases of whites taking advantage of SEARs.

Perhaps the factors which best account for this difference of perception are the kind of crimes involved and the residence of the criminals. That is, in the cases of victimization by whites described in the preceeding, there was no perceived threat of violence. The refugees' attitude is that they were outsmarted, due to their ignorance of the American system. In contrast, many of the problems with blacks involved physical force, actual or implied, causing these incidents to be more highly charged emotionally. Furthermore, the white malefactors were strangers, while the blacks were often residents of the building, heightening SEAR's ongoing tension level. In fact, an active folklore about these incidents has developed among SEAR residents of the Kenrick. Word spreads quickly to every Laotian in the building (for example, after each incident), and its ramifications are endlessly discussed thereafter. Previous incidents are recalled; the new incident is placed within the wider framework of racial stereotypes.

Unlike SEAR-white relationships which tend to be viewed positively, or SEAR-black relationships which tend to be viewed negatively, relationships between the two SEAR groups in the neighborhood (Vietnamese and Laotian) tend to be characterized by no involvement. They are neither positively nor negatively charged.

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SECTION VI CONCLUSION

Adjustment Strategies of Refugees in the Lindell/Kenrick Neighborhood

Using the data derived from several qualitative methods, we have drawn two main conclusions: First, concentrating refugees with the same or similiar background in a bounded area promotes the development of neighborhood-based cooperative networks and improves individual and group survival. Second, the SEAR have evolved differing systems of accommodation with the various major ethnic groups within their immediate environment.

We found that there was, in fact, a cooperative network within each SEAR group, and that the local ethnic neighborhood was central to understanding its operation. Our evidence demonstrates that among the Laotians we studied, there exists a strong intra-ethnic cooperative network, neighborhood-based, functionally important, commonly recognized and symbolically expressed. The Laotians are involved in an ongoing reciprocal system of numerous services, large and small, which give depth and meaning to their neighborhood-based cooperative network. Further, we found that this informal cooperation operates to improve individual and group survival and well-being. The cooperative network among the Vietnamese was also neighborhood-based and useful in many ways, though it was not so far-ranging and complex as that of the Laotians.

In providing the refugees with a strategy for responding to both daily and exceptional needs, the neighborhood-based cooperative network

functions to improve refugee adjustment to life in the U.S. By encouraging the formation and p. 43
functioning of such neighborhood-based cooperative networks, refugee resettlement program activities could operate to reduce individual and group dependence on more formal assistance and service programs provided by federal and state governments. What is particularly important to note here is the economy of this nucleated settlement approach. Unlike ethnic self-help organizations, the neighborhood-based cooperative network is not dependent on any particular leader, any formal organization, or any special physical facilities. It must be noted, however, that these conclusions are based on processes within a demographically balanced community of similar language and ethnic heritage, i.e., ethnic Laotians. The cooperative network among the Vietnamese we studied (largely single males) had far less range and depth. It must be further noted that this nucleated settlement policy could be detrimental to the adjustment of persons of mixed ethnicity from the same country with a history of inter-ethnic conflict, e.g., Hmong and ethnic Lao.

In examining mutual accommodations between the SEAR and non-SEAR, we have found that different systems have evolved for each of the significant ethnic groups in this area: Sear with American white, SEAR with American black, and Laotian with Vietnamese.

Through formal observations, participant observation, and informal interviews with relevant non-SEAR in the neighborhood, we have ascertained that neighborhood SEAR have a relatively low profile in relation to local whites (most of whom interact with the SEAR primarily on functional terms). The whites are aware of the refugees' presence, but do not perceive them as threatening or problematic in any significant way. Insofar as there are any difficultues surrounding the SEAR position, it appears to derive from a tendency to merge them with the Cuban males who have been

settled in this same area (and who are perceived very negatively) under the concept “refugee”. p. 44

While the whites do not consider the SEAR salient, the SEAR view whites as critically important. They see whites as controlling access to power and prestige in our society. This perception is valid due to the positions of whites as helpers, employers, and other gatekeepers. As we saw in

Section V, the SEAR, lacking power themselves, tend to use personalistic strategies in their efforts to survive and prosper in their new socio-economic environment.

In contrast to the generally positive perceptions of whites by SEAR, American blacks tend to be viewed with more suspicion. Although our observations indicate the presence of many responsible blacks, these people are less salient in the refugees' experience. There is an emergent folklore developing around incidents of crime and violence involving SEAR and American blacks.

We feel that the SEAR socio-economic environment confronts them with a complex reality in which good and bad, weak and strong exist in every racial group. From this total mass of experience, they filter out what they perceive to be salient characteristics of each racial group. These evolving racial stereotypes thus act as a channel for inter-ethnic relations, thereby affecting the nature of their social reality.

Whether dealing with American whites or American blacks, however, the refugees do not necessarily see themselves as helpless victims. In dealing with the larger socio-economic system (which they see as largely controlled by whites), SEAR believe that they can activate personal ties within their cooperative network to further their interests as individuals or as a group. The cooperative network can also provide them with

p. 45 mechanisms for concerted action on their own behalf. Thus, we see that having been settled in a neighborhood has enabled the SEAR studied to reach a point of reasonably satisfactory manual accommodation with the non-SEAR in their environment.

p. 46 **Implications for Federal Policies**

The following recommendations are based upon the policy implications of this study:

1. *Publish monthly a local newsletter in native language*.

1 *Rationale*:

i) Helps SEAR to learn to cope with the rules, forms, and demands of medical, educational, legal, and other bureaucratic institutions.
ii) Reduces repetitive and small-scale demands upon personnel at refugee resettlement programs.
iii) Helps to alleviate anxieties due to lack of information or misinformation.

2 *Description*:

i) Practical advice on day-to-day problems, such as: changing bus routes, or completing forms (income tax forms, energy assistant application forms, school forms, and the like.
ii) Announcements on events in the local SEAR community, e.g., national holiday celebrations.

iii) Current news on relevant events in the United States, refugee camps, and countries of origin, e.g., changing policies on family reunification.

2. *Focus medical and social personnel*

3 *Rationale*:

4 Reduces problems due to time loss, errors, expenses, and possibly misapplied funds, in processing SEAR through governmental and other helping institutions, e.g., hospitals.

5 *Description*

6 Core of case workers or other personnel within each institution who will be trained in, and responsible for, dealing with people of limited English and from different cultures. p. 47

3. *Settle refugees of similar language and ethnicity in bounded neighborhoods*.

7 *Rationale*:

i) Promotes formation of neighborhood-based cooperative networks.
ii) Aids in the development of a sense of group identity.

4. *Description*:

a) Concentrate demographically mixed, but ethnically similar refugees in nucleated settlements.
b) Locate settlements within easy reach of refugee resettlement agency(ies).

APPENDIX A MAPS p. 50

MAP 1. The Lindell Neighborhood p. 51

MAP 2. p. 52

MAP 3. Kenrick Floor Plan p. 53

APPENDIX B: TABLES p. 54

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[i] Unless otherwise specified, we refer to the local SEAR population in terms of country of origin, i.e., Laos or Vietnam.

[ii] Here is a typical conversation exchange:

[ii]

[ii] American: “Where do you live?”

[ii]

[ii] SEAR: “South Grand.”

[ii]

[ii] American: “What's your address?”

[ii]

[ii] SEAR: “2400 Louisiana.”

[iii] In this and all succeeding segments, comments pertain only or primarily to Laotians, unless otherwise specified. The Vietnamese appear to make little use of public space in the building.

[iv] All Laotian words used in this report are transcribed according to the Lao phonetical system presented in Marcus (1970) and Hoshino and Marcus (1981).

[v] Due to the number and nature of the Vietnamese (i.e., largely single males) living at Kenrick, we have noticeably fewer pictures of them. Even during the observation period, they seldom appear in pictures. They simply do not make much use of public space.

[vi] It does appear that most of the men and women (even some with small children) are employed at any one time.

[vii] A “chop suey” restaurant is a small, carry-out food shop.

[viii] Most of the jobs held by the SEAR do not provide medical insurance for their employees; this particular family had lost everything due to a child's sudden illness. Thereafter, the man had been actively seeking a job with insurance.

[ix] This same manager undoubtedly causes others to fear and distrust him, in part because of his personal mannerisms (apparently rough, loud, and authoritarian), and in part because when another Kenrick American black commits a crime, the SEAR (rightly or wrongly) feel it reflects on him.