

Racial and Ethnic Groups in the Gulf of Mexico Region

Vietnamese



Introduction

As part of a larger project that examines demographic and community-level changes in the Gulf of Mexico region, we reviewed literature for eight key racial and ethnic groups with significant influence in part, or all, of the region. The Gulf of Mexico region is incredibly diverse – with more than 13.5 million residents who trace their origins to scores of places in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America (see Table 1).

Of these various groups, we focused our reviews on eight specific racial, ethnic and ancestry groups: African-Americans, Cajuns, Creoles, Croatians, Latinos, Native Americans, Vietnamese and other Asians (not Vietnamese). Although some of these groups may be small in number, their effects on the region have been substantial (see Table 2). For example, although only about 7.8 percent of the residents in the region identify as Cajun/French, this group has had significant influence in shaping the cultural and economic climate of the region through the

tradition of Mardi Gras, ethnic food ways, commitment to Catholicism and culture of revelry.

These eight groups emerged as significant through the existing literature that details their unique influence in building the culture, economic stability and political climate in the region, as well as their ties to the oil and gas industry operating in the Gulf of Mexico. For each group, we have focused our review on common elements such as the culture, history, immigration, ties to the oil and gas industry and economic standing. In addition to those common elements, we examined other prominent themes that emerged for particular groups. For instance, the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the Vietnamese fishermen living in southern Louisiana was widely discussed by scholars and thus became a prominent discussion in our review of the literature on Vietnamese living in the region. Below you will find the second in a series of reviews. This review discusses the experiences of Vietnamese in the

region, a group that became prominent in the United States during the Vietnam War.

Prior to the fall of Saigon in 1975, few Vietnamese immigrants lived in the United States. Since that time, there has been a rise in Vietnamese immigration to the United States as war refugees and increasing numbers of Vietnamese settling in ethnic communities across the country. Vietnamese immigrants have had unique social, cultural and economic effects on the states in which they reside (see Figure 1 next page). Their histories of war, displacement and reestablishment have created distinct experiences for the Vietnamese. Because of shared French influence, the prevalence of Catholicism and similar subtropical climates, many Vietnamese immigrants have settled along the Gulf of Mexico and have had cultural, political, economic and social effects on the southern United States as Vietnamese immigrants merge their ethnic identity with being “southern” (see map next page).

Table 1. Diversity in the Gulf of Mexico Region

Ancestry Category	Percentage of Total Population	Number
British	15.36	2,147,789
French	7.81	1,092,377
German	8.71	1,218,236
Middle Eastern	.49	68,544
Northern/Eastern European	5.24	733,424
Southern European	3.09	432,724
Subsaharan African/West Indian	1.22	170,670
Total Population: 13,985,914		

Table 1 Data from ACS Five-Year Estimates.

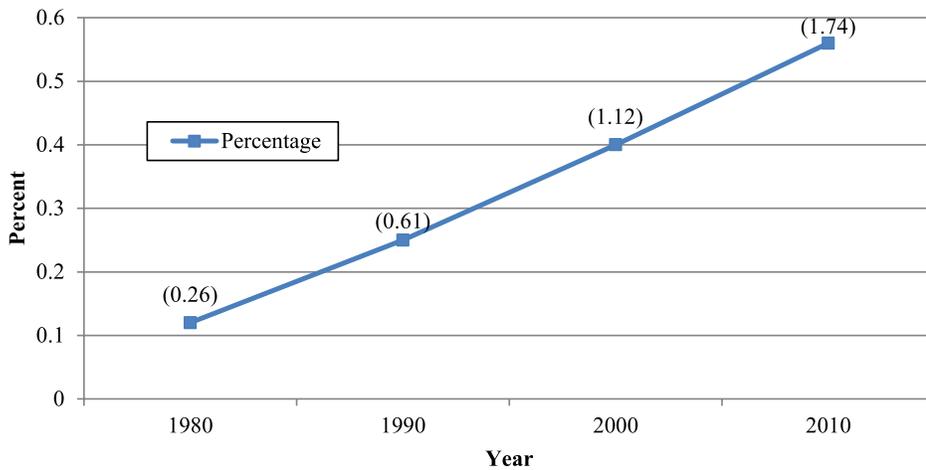
Table 2. Groups of Interest in the Gulf of Mexico Region

Racial/Ancestry Group	Percentage of Total Population	Number
African-American	19.14	2,568,703
Cajun	7.81	1,092,377
Croatian	.05	6,422
Latino	29.72	3,988,491
Native American	.64	85,455
Other Asian	2.95	396,007
Vietnamese	1.15	154,669
White	63.72	8,912,239

Table 2 Data from ACS Five-Year Estimates and 2010 U.S. Decennial Census. Numbers do not add to 100 percent because individuals can indicate more than one race, ethnicity or ancestry group. “Other Asian” refers to Asian groups other than Vietnamese.

Figure 1. Data from United States Decennial Census. (Vietnamese population in millions in parentheses).

Vietnamese in the United States: 1980-2010



Origins and History

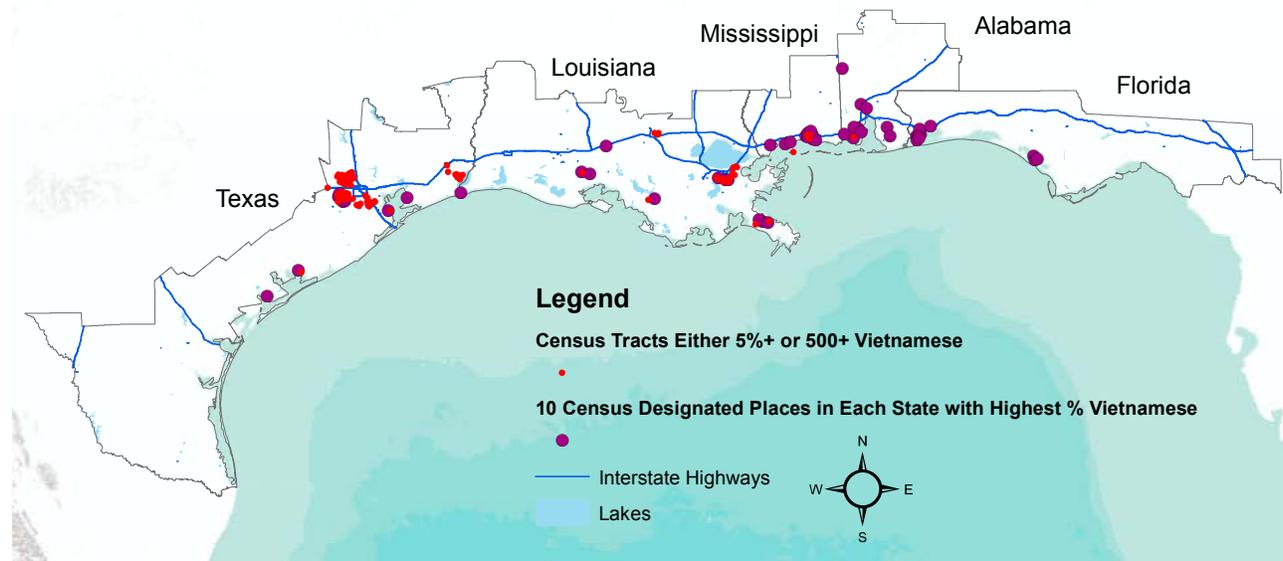
Although other Asian groups such as Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese and Laotian people arrived in the United States through a variety of means, most Vietnamese immigrants are refugees from the Vietnam War. In fact, prior to the Vietnam War, few Vietnamese immigrants lived in the United States (Bankston III and Zhou 1996, Tang 2011). Since 1975, however, over 1 million Vietnamese refugees have immigrated to the United States,

primarily through Vietnam War government resettlement programs (Airriess and Clawson 1994, Bankston III and Zhou 1996, UN 2000).

Since many of the Vietnamese immigrants are war refugees who left Vietnam because they had few alternatives, it is important to consider a brief history of their experiences prior to arriving in the United States. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees released a book in 2000 titled “The

State of the World’s Refugees: 50 Years of Humanitarian Action.” In this book, the experiences of many war refugees are detailed, including Vietnamese refugees. Vietnam is unique in that, as a country, it experienced almost 30 years of continuous war and repeated displacement from 1945 to 1975. With the French defeat in 1954, a communist state was formed in northern Vietnam and a separate state was established in southern Vietnam. Many Vietnamese living in the north at that time moved south to escape communist rule. In 1960, when the United States sent in more than 500,000 anticommunist troops, more displacement happened. By the late 1960s, more than half of South Vietnam’s 20 million people had been internally displaced. In 1975, with the fall of Saigon, some 140,000 Vietnamese who were closely affiliated with the South Vietnamese government were evacuated and resettled in the United States. Other refugees went to Thailand (5,000 refugees), Hong Kong (4,000 refugees), Singapore (1,800 refugees) and the Philippines (1,250 refugees) (UN 2000). In 1979, war continued as Chinese forces attacked Vietnam border regions, creating a new wave of refugees.

Vietnamese in the Gulf of Mexico Region



Data from 2010 Decennial Census. Counties selected from Fannin et al. 2011

By 1982, more than 20 countries – led by the United States, Australia, France and Canada – resettled about 624,000 Indochinese refugees (UN 2000). More of this process of immigration will be described in the next section titled “Migration.” At any rate, however, displacement is a common element in the Vietnamese history.

Upon arrival in the United States, Vietnamese immigrants typically went to one of four refugee camps on military bases. When the government came to understand that the immigrants would be settling here permanently, private organizations were tasked with dispersing Vietnamese immigrants across the United States. With time, however, many of the Vietnamese immigrants resettled in a small number of ethnic communities. Several of these enclaves emerged in the southeastern United States due to the strong presence of Catholicism, shared French influence and environmental elements that were similar to Vietnam (Elliot and Ionescu 2003, see Figure 2). Using 1990 census data, Elliot and Ionescu have shown that Asians and Pacific Islanders are a large share of Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi’s foreign-born population at 35.1 percent, second

only to British immigrants (Elliot and Ionescu 2003). In fact, this is a larger percentage of Asian foreign-born residents than any other region of the country, including the West, where the Asian population makes up only 30.4 percent of foreign-born residents (Elliot and Ionescu 2003). In some areas, such as New Orleans, La., Vietnamese immigrants are the largest Asian ethnic group – making up 69 percent of the entire Asian population in New Orleans (Bankston III and Zhou 1996). Prior to Hurricane Katrina, approximately 12,000 Vietnamese immigrants lived in the New Orleans area (Airriess and Clawson 1994). Versailles, a particular neighborhood in New Orleans, housed more than 5,000 of these immigrants, making it the largest concentration of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States (Airriess and Clawson 1994, Tang 2011).

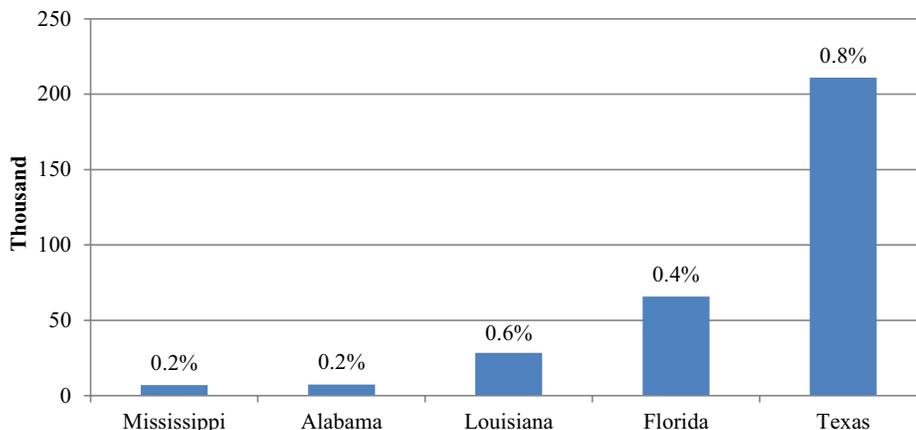
Versailles is a neighborhood in New Orleans East that stretches as far as 20 miles east of downtown and is situated on its eastern-most edge, along a waterway known as Chef Menteur Pass. The neighborhood’s official name is Village d’Lest, but it was dubbed Versailles because when the first wave of refugees arrived, they were placed

into the Versailles Arms Apartments (Tang 2011). Most of the New Orleans Vietnamese residents are refugees of Vietnam who arrived in the United States during the Vietnam War and were poor rural farmers prior to their immigration (Airriess and Clawson 1994). Many of the immigrants that settled in Versailles in the mid-1970s never moved on. New Orleans East is the only home other than Vietnam that they’ve ever known (Tang 2011).

Although Vietnamese immigrants primarily came to the United States as war refugees, most have settled here permanently. Although refugees were strategically scattered initially throughout all 50 states by resettlement programs, they quickly concentrated themselves in a few primary locations. As a result of regrouping, New Orleans has become the most important destination for Vietnamese immigrants and continues to be home to the highest concentration of Vietnamese immigrants in the country. Other southern states, such as Alabama and Mississippi also have seen large numbers of Vietnamese immigrants take up permanent residence. The unique history of war and resettlement among these immigrants has created unique economic, social and political effects on the communities in which they reside.

Figure 2. Data from 2010 United States Decennial Census. Percent of total state population as data label.

Vietnamese in Gulf of Mexico Region by State: 2010

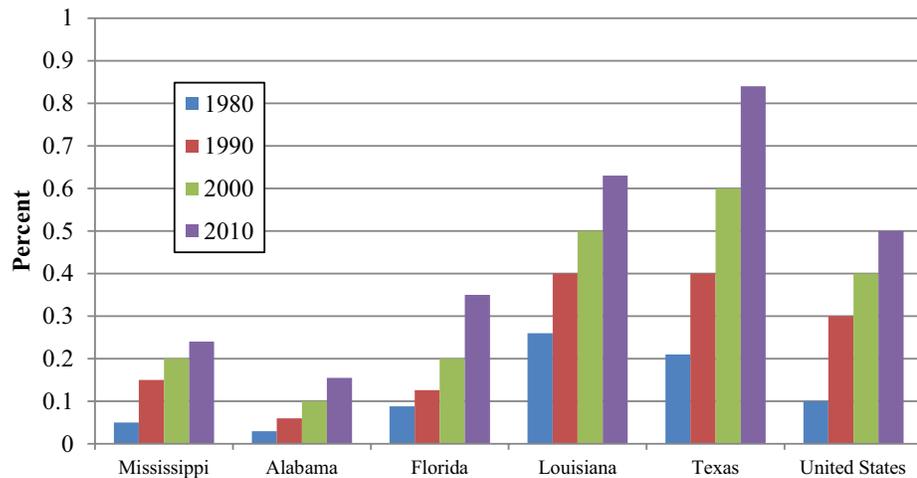


Migration

More than 3 million people fled Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos over the two decades following the 1975 events in Indochina. These refugees settled in countries all over the world, but the United States became a permanent settlement for more than a million Vietnamese refugees (UN 2000). More than 175,000 refugees arrived within the first two years following the fall of Saigon in 1975. Initially, many of these refugees were housed in makeshift refugee camps on four military bases. Upon realizing these war refugees

Figure 3. Data from 2010 United States Decennial Census.

Vietnamese Population of the United States and Gulf of Mexico Region: 1980-2010



would be settling permanently in the United States, the government enlisted approximately 12 private organizations and charged them with the responsibility of resettling these refugees (UN 2000). These private organizations initially worked to scatter Vietnamese refugees across the country (Bankston III 2000). Over the years, however, it became evident the Vietnamese were re-grouping into ethnic communities, some of which were in the Gulf of Mexico region (see Figure 3). By 1978, a fifth of the Vietnamese refugees lived in California and a third had concentrated in just nine other states. By 1990, half of the Vietnamese refugees lived in California and a third still lived in the same nine states (Bankston III 2000).

Although many Vietnamese immigrants live in California, Vietnamese have made their way to every state and almost every major U.S. city (UN 2000). Initially, Americans responded positively to Vietnamese refugees, especially since many Americans took issue with our country's involvement in the Vietnam War. In addition to American guilt, many of the first wave of immigrants were educated and skilled,

which allowed for easier transition into American life. Most of the Vietnamese refugees from the first wave were from the urban middle class, 40 percent had some secondary education and 25 percent had university degrees (UN 2000). In fact, by 1982, the Vietnamese rate of employment in the United States was higher than that of the general population, which began to create some tension between American workers and Vietnamese immigrants.

Within a few years after the initial first wave of immigrants, a smaller number of immigrants trickled into the United States. Only 3,200 Vietnamese arrived in 1976, and just 1,900 arrived in 1977. In 1978, however, there was a surge of 11,100 Vietnamese immigrants as a result of an expanded resettlement program in the United States. Vietnamese citizens were fleeing their home country due to continued political and economic unrest. These immigrants became known as "boat people" because they often were fleeing Vietnam in small unseaworthy boats (Bankston III 2000). Neighboring countries of Vietnam were less welcoming to the second wave of immigrants, given

that they were still trying to cope with the effects of the first wave of immigrants. In response to the hostility that Vietnamese refugees were facing in neighboring countries, the United States expanded the existing refugee program (Bankston III 2000). This legislation was known as the Orderly Departure Program of 1979, which made it possible for Vietnamese to migrate directly from Vietnam to the United States (UN 2000). Initially, this was intended to benefit the relatives of refugees already in the United States and residents in South Vietnam who had ties to the U.S. government. The program was later extended to Vietnamese children of U.S. service members, former political prisoners and re-education camp detainees. Between 1979 and 1999, more than 500,000 Vietnamese immigrants entered the United States under this legislation (UN 2000).

This second large wave of Vietnamese immigrants was less equipped for life in the United States in several regards. They were, on average, less educated and came from rural backgrounds, and few spoke English (UN 2000). By the time the second wave of immigrants came, Americans were growing weary of refugees and anti-immigrant sentiments were growing (UN 2000). Similarly, in 1982, shortly after the second wave of Vietnamese refugees arrived, the United States started reducing its aid to newly arrived refugees. One way of reducing aid was to introduce a number of measures to ensure incoming refugees were entering the workforce as soon as possible, which resulted in many of the second wave of refugees working in low-skill and low-wage jobs (UN 2000).

Arguably, there were two large waves of Vietnamese immigrants to the United States. The first group arrived after the fall of Saigon in 1975, and the second group arrived

in 1978 due to legislative shifts. The first wave of immigrants received a reasonably warm welcome into their new communities, but with time and as a result of the second wave of immigration, Americans grew weary of the Vietnamese refugees. As a result, many Vietnamese refugees have concentrated in a few locations throughout the United States. Within these larger settlements, there is a rich culture and history that is shaping the immigrants' relationships with other Americans.

Culture

Within the concentrated Vietnamese communities, there is evidence of strong cultural ties to Vietnam. In particular, Vietnamese refugees have held tightly to their agricultural roots, native foods and strong Catholic history. By transporting these elements of culture to their new homes in America, many Vietnamese immigrants are able to cling to their ethnic identity and unique history.

Market Gardens

One of the most evident features of Vietnamese culture that was transported directly from rural Vietnam to their new homes is gardening (Airriess and Clawson 1994, Tang 2011). Gardening is particularly visible among the refugees who settled in New Orleans, La. The first wave of immigrants who settled in New Orleans were primarily from farming or village backgrounds and soon after settling in the Versailles area, these immigrants built garden beds that float atop the nearby wetlands (Tang 2011). Airriess and Clawson examined these gardens extensively in the early 1990s to better understand the nature and function of these gardens (1994).

Arguably, there are two types of gardeners in the Versailles area – those who garden in their backyards and those who are “levee gardeners” or tend to the floating gardens. More

than 43 different plants are grown in these gardens, many of which are not common in the western diet. The seeds are obtained directly from Vietnam, enclave stores or cuttings received from friends and relatives (Airriess and Clawson 1994). Most of the gardeners are elderly and have resorted to gardening due to limited English, few marketable job skills, reliance on children or lack of extended family. Gardening allows the elderly a sense of responsibility and accomplishment in their new home (Airriess and Clawson 1994). Similarly, by growing traditional Vietnamese foods, gardening creates a connection to home and helps the community maintain its ethnic identity. Gardening also serves an economic function because it reduces household food expenditures.

One reason that many of the refugees reside and remain in the New Orleans area is that the southern Louisiana climate resembles their home environment of lowland Vietnam (Airriess and Clawson 1994). There are subtropical climates, a nearby coast, floodplain soils and a long, hot growing season. As the Vietnamese immigrants in this region continue to acculturate into mainstream society, however, these ethnic food ways and gardens are likely to decline and potentially disappear altogether.

Catholicism

Many of the Vietnamese refugees brought a form of Catholicism with them that had distinctive religious and cultural traditions that set them apart from American Catholics (Bankston III 2000). Catholicism has a long and complicated history in Vietnam that began with the arrival of Catholic missionaries in Vietnam as early as 1615. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, Catholicism spread across Vietnam and became associated with political and social persecution (Bankston III 2000).

Historically, Vietnam was divided into north and south and was governed by two families. In 1788, the country was unified after a peasant rebellion and the rebel leader Quang Trung gained power over the unified country. When Quang Trung died, he left the throne to his son Canh Thinh. Experiencing much frustration over the unification of Vietnam, the remaining heir to the southern portion of Vietnam, Nguyen Anh, went to France and secured its backing to reclaim southern Vietnam. Fearing that French involvement would cause Catholics in the region to rise up against him, Canh Thinh, the emperor of unified Vietnam in 1798, issued an edict against Catholics and began publicly persecuting them (Bankston III 2000). As a result of this persecution, Catholicism took on a tradition of faith and martyrdom that became central to Vietnamese Catholicism. Persecution of Vietnamese Catholics was repealed and reinstated many times in Vietnam's history as new emperors took reign. Overall, most of the rulers throughout the history of Vietnam supported the persecution of Catholics (Bankston III 2000).

The hardships faced by Vietnamese Catholics continued under Ho Chi Minh. When Ho Chi Minh's resistance army overthrew Japanese forces in 1945, Vietnamese Catholics initially supported his government. This support soon weakened after the formation of the second Ho Chi Minh government in 1946, as divisions between the communists and noncommunists became stronger. By the 1950s, as Ho Chi Minh established his third government, Vietnamese Catholic leaders increasingly and openly condemned his communist leadership (Leong et al. 2007). When the 1954 Geneva agreements split Vietnam into two regions, with communists governing the north and the noncommunists governing the south, the Catholics residing in Vietnam had a tough decision to

make. Many Vietnamese Catholics had moved north, and now, under the agreements that once again divided Vietnam, had a limited period of time to move to the south if they desired to. As a result, some 900,000 refugees, mostly Catholics, fled from their villages in northern Vietnam to live under the noncommunist rule in the southern region of Vietnam (Leong et al. 2007).

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, many Vietnamese in South Vietnam attempted to flee, and many immigrated to the United States. Among the 125,000 earliest refugees from Vietnam to America in 1975, 200 were Catholic priests and 250 were nuns (Bankston III 2000, Leong et al. 2007). Percentages of Vietnamese Americans choosing the priesthood as a vocation remain among the largest of any ethnic group, suggesting that Vietnamese Catholics are particularly devout. And some Vietnamese Catholics residing in America take issue with the claim that their Catholicism differs all that much from American Catholicism. According to Father Bui from Morgan City, La., Vietnamese Catholicism most likely remains salient because it is a means of retaining ethnic identity in a new homeland – not because their Catholicism is all that different from other Catholics in South Louisiana (Bankston III 2000).

The U.S. Catholic Conference accounted for 35 percent of the total group sponsorships to resettle Vietnamese refugees in the United States (Leong et al. 2007). In the earliest years of resettlement, about 3,000 Vietnamese refugees were sent to New Orleans, La., and the Catholic Church was charged with helping them settle, which resulted in close ties to the church (Bankston III 2000). As relatives began to join these migrants, the Vietnamese community in Versailles only continued to grow. Prior to Hurricane

Katrina, there were approximately 6,000 Vietnamese immigrants living in Versailles, an estimated 80 percent of whom were Catholic (Leong et al 2007, Bankston III 2000). In a broader sense, about 27 percent of all Vietnamese Americans, approximately 250,000 people, were Catholic in the mid-1990s.

Occupations

Vietnamese immigrants throughout the southeastern United States are involved in a variety of occupations ranging from service sector work as restaurant employees to blue-collar work as fishermen to white-collar work in managerial or academic jobs (Nash 1988). Fishing has been a particularly important industry for refugees along the coast (Bankston III and Zhou 1996), however. Upon resettlement, Vietnamese immigrants in southern Louisiana found it difficult to assimilate into the mainstream labor force, and thus they began to rely more heavily on entrepreneurship, particularly in the fishing industry.

Entrepreneurship is particularly salient in the Vietnamese community because their “others-focused” culture allows individuals to raise the capital needed to start a business from within their community rather than relying on banks for loans (Bankston III and Zhou 1996). In their examination of census data from the 1990s, Bankston III and Zhou found that 10 percent of all Louisiana’s Vietnamese residents were self-employed, compared to only 7 percent for the broader Louisiana population (1996). Nearly 55 percent of those self-employed were in a concentration of four industries: fishing, groceries and related products, groceries, and eating and drinking establishments.

Because of their historical ties to fishing in Vietnam and lack of formal education, many of the immigrants from coastal areas of

Vietnam have come to use the fishing industry as a means of entrepreneurship. In particular, census data from the 1980s and 1990s demonstrates fishing as an occupational concentration for the Vietnamese immigrants living in southern Louisiana (Bankston III and Zhou 1996). One-third of all of the self-employed Vietnamese immigrants in Louisiana are in the fishing industry, and although Vietnamese make up only about 0.3 percent of the entire Louisiana population, they account for more than 5 percent of the employees in the state’s fishing industry (Bankston III and Zhou 1996).

Vietnamese fishermen have been met with a variety of responses to their presence by other fishermen operating in the Gulf (Starr 1981). Some American fishermen offered to teach classes to the new Vietnamese refugees about the laws, regulations and customs of commercial fishing in the United States. Others came to view the success of Vietnamese fishermen as unfair competition and, in turn, harmed, threatened or hampered the fishing efforts of the Vietnamese (Starr 1981).

Beyond having the skills to be successful fishermen, there are other aspects, such as labor recruitment and economic incentives, that make fishing a particularly appealing industry for Vietnamese immigrants. Initially, the fishing industry in the southeastern United States had a demand for low-wage manual laborers. In 1975, when many refugees were looking to settle in the United States and the refugee camps were placing the refugees with sponsors, some southeastern fishing companies, such as Spence Fishing Co. in Florida, actually sponsored refugees to move to their areas and work for the companies (Bankston III and Zhou 1996, Starr 1981, Moberg and Thomas 1993). After a few seafood companies successfully resettled Vietnamese refugees, three of the

major seafood processors in Florida organized a 12-week program to train 237 refugees in English and American fishing methods (Starr 1981).

With time, female Vietnamese refugees also became instrumental in the seafood processing industry as oyster shuckers and crab pickers in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas (Starr 1981). Despite the skill and low-wage work the Vietnamese immigrants supplied to the seafood industry, due to linguistic and cultural barriers, the once-positive relationship between refugees and business owners in the fishing and seafood processing industries soon deteriorated. In particular, some of the older refugees had difficulty respecting the younger and less-experienced American fishermen. Layoffs also were common in these industries when the demand for seafood fluctuated (Starr 1981). Although the initial intentions by sponsors and refugees were positive, the relationship eventually resulted in mutual exploitation and distrust between the two groups (Starr 1981). As a result, many of the refugees started their own fishing firms and became very effective and highly visible competitors.

Despite this rise in success, Vietnamese fishers still faced significant barriers to success. The refugees were limited by their immigration status to remain within a 3-mile territorial limit off the coast. Similarly, language barriers prevented the refugees from learning the American etiquette of boat handling and rights to resources and the environment (Starr 1981). For example, in their ignorance of fishing regulations in the United States, many of the Vietnamese fishermen followed their own cultural practices that violated federal, state and county/parish laws (Starr 1981). Another common misunderstanding among Vietnamese fishermen regarded food

preferences of Americans. Many caught and dressed seagulls and pelicans, which are foods commonly consumed by coastal people in Vietnam, but protected by federal laws here. Similarly, many Vietnamese fishermen tried to sell undersize shrimp, squid, eel and snails that Americans would regard as undesirable or inedible altogether (Starr 1981).

In addition to the economic motivations, with time, legislative changes also made it easier for Vietnamese immigrants to operate fishing vessels. Prior to 1989, the U.S. Coast Guard had a law stating noncitizens could not operate vessels over 5 tons or beyond a certain distance from shore (Bankston III and Zhou 1996). Similarly, there were laws created to restrict the Vietnamese fishermen from becoming established in a community (Starr 1981). In 1989, however, immigrants filed suit to have these laws repealed, which gave them increased control over their own economic destinies. In turn, the money Vietnamese fishers have made from their entrepreneurial endeavors has been instrumental in funding their communities. For instance, much of the funding for the large Vietnamese Catholic Church in New Orleans was provided by donations from successful fishermen (Bankston III and Zhou 1996).

Oil and Gas

Although few Vietnamese immigrants work directly in the oil and gas industries, many Vietnamese refugees living in the southeastern United States work in related fields such as fishing and seafood processing. These industries are affected by the decisions off-shore oil and gas industries make and the spills that occur in the Gulf of Mexico.

Some researchers have begun to examine the effects the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf

had on the Vietnamese fishermen in the area. The Gulf seafood industry accounts for \$21 billion and one-fifth of the entire seafood production in the United States (Shiraki 2010). So, when the BP Deepwater Horizon rig exploded on April 20, 2010, fishermen in the region braced for impact. For Vietnamese fishermen, this spill was particularly disheartening, given their history of displacement in Vietnam and challenges overcoming discrimination and establishing communities in the United States. Similarly, unlike the American fishermen who work in other industries during the off-season, the Vietnamese rely almost exclusively on fishing as their livelihood (Grossman and Mark 2010). Today, Vietnamese Americans account for one-third of all commercial seafood workers in the Gulf coast area, and at least 80 percent of those in the Asian community in the southeastern United States rely only on the seafood industry for their livelihood (Grossman and Mark 2010, Shiraki 2010).

In an effort to recover from the effects of the BP oil spill, Vietnamese immigrants have faced unique challenges. The first barrier to recovery is language access in that language differences make filing paperwork and seeking educational materials more difficult for those immigrants who are not proficient in English (Grossman and Mark 2010, Shiraki 2010). Much of the information about the spill and the recovery process is not only in English but it also is primarily accessible online – and few Vietnamese families have ready access to computers (Grossman and Mark 2010). Second, the claims process lacks appropriately translated materials or sufficient numbers of translators for immigrants. This is particularly troubling because not only are there language barriers but the claims process involves technical and legal verbiage that often is difficult for even those speaking the

native language to understand (Shiraki 2010). Also, many Vietnamese fishing families rely on cash transactions and thus were unable to prove their income, a requirement for filing a claim with BP (Grossman and Mark 2010). Again, this experience is particularly troubling for Vietnamese immigrants in that not only are they dealing with the anxieties from the oil spill but also lingering anxieties from the Vietnam War, relocating and Hurricane Katrina (Shiraki 2010).

Unlike other fishermen who went to work conducting cleanup, only 10 percent of Vietnamese fishermen who wanted to work for BP during the cleanup operations were employed by BP because of language barriers (Grossman and Mark 2010). The alarming fact is that without increased attention to the unique needs of Vietnamese fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico region; they may never completely recover (Shiraki 2010).

Politics

Historically, Vietnamese immigrants have been regarded as primarily passive and politically inactive (Lee 2010). In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, however, it became more evident that Vietnamese immigrants were becoming increasingly politically active as the Vietnamese living in the New Orleans, La., area known as Versailles rose up to rebuild their neighborhood and stand against political injustices (Leong et al. 2007, Lee 2010, Li et al. 2010, Tang 2011).

In some areas, political groups also have been started by Vietnamese leaders explicitly to encourage political participation. For instance, in New Orleans, the Vietnamese American Voters' Association was started by lay leadership to help Vietnamese immigrants prepare for and pass the American citizenship exam. This group also provides in-

formation about citizenship to new citizens in the neighborhood and encourages voting among all residents (Bankston III 2000).

Hurricane Katrina

When Hurricane Katrina made landfall in southeastern Louisiana on Aug. 29, 2005, it brought national attention to the Vietnamese community residing in New Orleans, since they were one of the first groups to move back into the area and successfully rebuild. Versailles was among the hardest hit neighborhoods during Katrina in 2005 due to its close proximity to levees (Lee 2010). By spring 2006, 75 percent of Vietnamese businesses were back in operation, and by 2007 more than 90 percent of the Vietnamese residents had returned to Versailles compared to only 50 percent of the African-American population from the Versailles area (Tang 2011, Leong et al. 2007). Some scholars argue this resilience is due to refugee experiences, the leadership of the Catholic Church and the historically specific circumstances of the Vietnamese in Versailles (Leong et al. 2007, Tang 2011). For instance, because of their experience with the Vietnam War and watching their parents rebuild after war, many Vietnamese residents in Versailles felt reclamation of home was a success that trumped all others (Tang 2011).

Along with the remarkable rate of return among Vietnamese residents in Versailles, there also were quite a few acts of solidarity between black and Vietnamese neighbors (Tang 2011). While solidarity might not seem notable among neighbors after a shared tragedy, this relationship is unique for several reasons. First, Asian Americans historically have been enlisted to delegitimize black claims for justice in the aftermath of racial crises. For example, there has been a notable contrast made in the media and in academia between

Asian American self-reliance in comparison to black government-dependency (Tang 2011). Second, Vietnamese are perceived to be an intractably conservative ethnic group.

Versailles was not the only Vietnamese community to be affected by Hurricane Katrina. A nearby community in Biloxi, Miss., also experienced great loss from the hurricane. Prior to the hurricane, approximately 1,700 Vietnamese Americans – 900 of whom were foreign born – lived in Biloxi (Park et al. 2010). Many of the community members felt at home in Biloxi and worked in seafood processing plants. Unlike the Vietnamese residing in Versailles, however, the Vietnamese community in Biloxi has been slow to rebuild and may never completely recover (Park et al. 2010). Thus, given that other Vietnamese communities have been less successful at recovery after Katrina, the story of the Versailles residents is all the more notable.

Beyond their resilience and solidarity after Hurricane Katrina destroyed their neighborhood, the Vietnamese residents in Versailles gained national attention for their political outcries after the disaster. Post-Katrina, Vietnamese Americans in Versailles demanded greater accountability for government providing recovery aid through acts of civil disobedience and media outcries. These political rallies were aimed at getting increased government assistance and toward closing a landfill that opened less than half a mile from their homes in Versailles that was to contain a quarter of all the Katrina debris in New Orleans (Tang 2011). This landfill was built on Feb. 14, 2006, in the area Vietnamese residents had used as garden beds atop the wetlands. It was not secured for toxicity and was opened without any public hearings. There also were no preventative measures

put into place to stop seepage from the landfill from entering nearby canals that provide water for the Vietnamese gardens (Lee 2010).

Just weeks after that landfill's opening, more than 400 people protested at city hall. Following the protests, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin promised to close the landfill by August 2006. He later indicated that he had no intention to follow through with this promise (Tang 2011), however. So 7,000 tons of Katrina debris continued to come to the landfill daily, and the Vietnamese community continued to stage protests, file lawsuits and ally with surrounding organizations to convince Nagin the landfill should be closed (Lee 2010). On Aug. 15, 2006, the day the landfill was to be closed, the Vietnamese living in Versailles staged a protest. Thirty-four volunteers signed waivers saying they would do whatever it took – including arrest – to stop production at the landfill (Lee 2010). They were successful in having it shut down, and their efforts made national news. These efforts made the Vietnamese community in Versailles visible as a political force to be reckoned with.

Ecology

Most notably, Vietnamese immigrants have ties to the land through their gardening practices and fishing businesses. Both of these practices, although originating as cultural practices used to sustain the family, became a means of meeting economic demands as gardeners sold their crops and fishermen sold their catches (Airriess and Clawson 1994). Gardening and fishing have been instrumental to the socioeconomic adjustment of Vietnamese refugees (Airriess and Clawson 1994).

Education

Several scholars have examined the role education plays in helping Vietnamese immigrants assimilate

into their new communities. In particular, scholars have been interested in understanding the role cultural capital and English as a second language have played for second generation Vietnamese youth residing in the Versailles area of New Orleans.

The Role of Cultural Capital

Zhou and Bankston III followed Vietnamese youth in New Orleans to better understand the ways in which cultural capital can be used to offset the difficulties immigrant offspring face while adapting to their new homes (1994). The process of assimilation often is particularly troublesome for the second generation since they feel pressure at school and from friends to conform to mainstream society while simultaneously being urged by family to remain true to their “home culture.” This process is complicated further for refugee children because they also are dealing with the loss of loved ones and the loss of homeland (Zhou and Bankston III 1994).

Zhou and Bankston III found their participants consistently reported high regard for values such as obedience, industriousness and helping others (1994). Similarly, many of the youth expressed high levels of dedication to and involvement in the Vietnamese community. Despite living in a low-income area that resembles an urban ghetto, the Vietnamese youth drop out at a lower rate than their other ethnic and racial counterparts in the state and are significantly more likely to receive academic awards (Zhou and Bankston III 1994, Bankston III et al. 1997). Zhou and Bankston III show that commitment to work ethic and ethnic involvement, both cultural characteristics of the Vietnamese living in Versailles, were positively correlated with academic achievement (1994). The notion that attitudes and habits that foster academic achievement are maintained

by Vietnamese communities was later corroborated by Bankston III, Caldras and Zhou (1997). In other words, students with a strong traditional family, commitment to work ethic and ethnic involvement were more likely to receive As and Bs and to have college plans regardless of their living arrangements or their parents' education or employment characteristics (Zhou and Bankston III 1994, Bankston III et al. 1997).

Young women are particularly likely to benefit from this cultural capital because Vietnamese families typically exert greater control over daughters. Since Vietnamese immigrants recognize the importance of education, push their children toward academic achievement and exert greater control over their daughters, young Vietnamese women are more likely to outperform their male counterparts academically (Zhou and Bankston III 2001).

The Role of Language

For educators, English literacy traditionally has been a method of integrating immigrant minorities into mainstream society. Historically, English literacy has been made a priority for immigrants in legislation. For instance, in 1906, Congress denied citizenship to immigrants who could not speak English (Bankston III and Zhou 1995). Most often, educators believe English should replace the native language. During the 1970s and 1980s, Americanization, in language and culture, was a dominant part of the refugee educational system meant to prepare Vietnamese refugees for life in the United States. More recently, however, bilingual educational programs have emerged so immigrant students can develop proficiency in English while maintaining proficiency in their native languages (Bankston III and Zhou 1995).

Conclusion

Despite a long history of war and displacement, Vietnamese immigrants have come to create strong ethnic communities across the Gulf of Mexico region. Each wave of Vietnamese immigrants brought unique challenges and changes for the communities in which they settled, but Vietnamese immigrants ultimately have transplanted parts of their culture and established economically and politically sound communities. Their troubled history has resulted in a resilience that is evident in the Vietnamese entrepreneurial, educational and political success. Although Vietnamese communities have faced resistance, discrimination and even disasters, their presence has remained and will likely continue to remain strong in the United States.

As second and third generations continue to assimilate into mainstream southern society, however, it is likely some of the visible elements of culture will continue to diminish and eventually be an artifact that is only captured by those who study the Vietnamese immigrant experience. Therefore, it is important that scholars continue to examine the effects initial immigration as a result of the Vietnam War had on the immigrants and the communities in which they settled, as well as the continued assimilation of generations to come.

Appendix

Overview of Vietnamese in the Gulf of Mexico Region

Section	Broad Conclusions
Origins and History	Prior to the Vietnam War and the fall of Saigon in 1975, few Vietnamese immigrants lived in the United States. Though Vietnamese immigrants primarily came to the United States as war refugees, most have settled here permanently.
Migration	Arguably, there were two large waves of Vietnamese immigrants to the United States. The first group arrived after the fall of Saigon in 1975, and the second group arrived in 1978 due to legislative shifts. In 1975, some 140,000 Vietnamese who were closely affiliated with the South Vietnamese government were evacuated and resettled in the United States. Although refugees were strategically scattered initially throughout all 50 states, they quickly concentrated themselves in a few primary locations such as New Orleans.
Culture	Within the concentrated Vietnamese communities, there is evidence of strong cultural ties to Vietnam. In particular, Vietnamese refugees have held tightly to their agricultural roots, native foods and strong Catholic history. By transporting these elements of culture to their new homes in America, many Vietnamese immigrants are able to cling to their ethnic identity and unique history.
Occupations	Vietnamese immigrants throughout the southeastern United States are involved in a variety of occupations ranging from service sector work as restaurant employees to blue collar work as fishermen to white collar work in managerial or academic jobs. Many of the Vietnamese settlers along the Gulf remain as fishermen, however.
Oil and Gas Industries	Although few Vietnamese immigrants work directly in the oil and gas industry, many Vietnamese refugees living in the southeastern United States work in related fields such as fishing and seafood processing. These industries are affected by the decisions off-water oil and gas industries make and the spills that occur in the Gulf of Mexico.
Economy	Historically, Asians supplied low-wage work during the Reconstruction Era that created economic stability in the region, and most of them eventually settled permanently in areas along the Gulf Coast. Asians also have started a variety of businesses that contribute to the economic stability of the region.
Ecology	Most notably Vietnamese immigrants have ties to the land through their gardening practices and fishing businesses. Both of these practices, although originating as cultural practices used to sustain the family, became a means of meeting economic demands, since gardeners sell their crops and fishermen sell their catches
Politics	Historically, Vietnamese immigrants have been regarded primarily as passive and politically inactive. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, however, it became more evident that Vietnamese immigrants were becoming more politically active.
Hurricane Katrina	When Hurricane Katrina made landfall in southeastern Louisiana on Aug. 29, 2005, it brought national attention to the Vietnamese community residing in New Orleans, since they were one of the first groups to move back into the area and successfully rebuild.
Education	Several scholars have examined the role education plays in helping Vietnamese immigrants assimilate into their new communities. In particular, understanding the role cultural capital and English as a second language have played for second-generation Vietnamese youth has been of interest to scholars.

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