

University of Wisconsin-Madison



**SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEES OF THE COLD WAR**

Hist 246, Asian 246, AsianAm 246

Fall 2024, TR (9:30-10:45am, 1101 Humanities

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Office Hours: F 3-5pm, or by appointment

Teaching Assistant:

Office Hours:

From 1975 to the late 1990s, over two million Southeast Asians fled from the three former French colonies frequently referred to collectively as Indochina: Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Over 1.3 million of these migrants came as refugees to the United States and added four new major ethnic groups to American society: Hmong, Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese, including among them ethnic Chinese and the children of American military personnel (frequently referred to as "Amerasians").

This course is intended to provide a better understanding of the conditions that led these people, and thousands of others, to flee their homelands in Southeast Asia and eventually take refuge and start new lives in the US, as well as in the other countries that offered them asylum (including Canada, Australia, and France).

The course will be divided into four parts and will emphasize the Cold War conflicts and wars that devastated these three countries and resulted in the flight and resettlement of these refugees beginning in 1975. **Part 1**, *Peoples of the Indochina Countries*, will introduce the themes of the course and provide basic information on the histories, cultures, and social organizational patterns of the four ethnic groups that are the focus of the course: Hmong, Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese. **Part 2**, *Colonial Origins of Conflicts in Indochina*, will concentrate on the modern history and changing societies of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, with an emphasis on the last decades of French colonial rule, the Japanese occupation during the Pacific War, and the nationalist, revolutionary, and global (Cold War) struggles and upheavals that took place in these three countries, especially from the 1920s through the 1950s. In addition to discussing the larger contexts of the Cold War, this section will emphasize the significant social, economic, political, and geopolitical developments that took place in French Indochina during the first half of the 20th century. **Part 3**, *The "Cold" Wars in Indochina*, will survey the violent conflicts of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, with emphasis on the wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, the political alignments (international and domestic) that these conflicts created,

the traumatic aftermath of US withdrawal and Communist victories, and the post-1975 developments and continuing conflicts that further devastated all three countries. **Part 4, *Disorderly Departures: Refugees and Migrants***, will concentrate on the flight of thousands of people from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos from 1975 to the 1990s. It will attempt to describe and analyze the mass exodus of refugees and migrants and the global efforts to facilitate their survival and resettlement. Lectures and readings will concentrate on the reasons for seeking asylum (or continued resistance), the chaos and hardship of the escape, the difficult realities of camp life, and the mechanisms of resettlement in the US. This section will also explore some aspects of the early resettlement experiences of refugees and migrants in US during the end of the 20th century.

The content of the course will be presented through lectures and discussion sections, electronically accessible readings, and film/video documentaries. All the course lectures, readings, and films, as indicated, will be available on Canvas.

In addition to the exams, students will also be required to read and submit a written report on one memoir, family history or refugee narrative to be selected from the list of choices (see below). These books will all be made available on Canvas.

Grades in this course will be based on the following criteria:

- 1) 60%: three examinations (10%, 25%, 25%):
  - \* all three are take-home exams (see separate exam schedule)
  - \* 1st exam: Sept 24; 2nd exam: Nov 7; 3rd exam (final): Dec 10
- 2) 20%: report on memoir/family history; due: Dec 3, OR BEFORE
- 3) 20%: attendance and participation in discussion section (criteria defined in section)

**Learning Outcomes:** by the end of the course, students should be able:

- \* to demonstrate knowledge of the modern history (19th & 20th centuries) and the refugee crisis (1975-95) of three Southeast Asian countries: Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, with the intention to better understand the impact of this history on the present
- \* to analyze the information presented within a comparative and interdisciplinary framework aimed at achieving a greater understanding and appreciation of the role of these groups in American society
- \* to develop more effective oral and written skills

**Note to Students:** This course (4 credits) meets as a group in lecture (3 hours per week) and in section (1 hour per week) and carries the expectation that you will spend an average of 2 hours outside of class for every hour in the classroom. As such, please plan to allot an average of 8 hours a week for reading, writing, and preparing for discussions, and/or for studying for exams.

**SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEES OF THE COLD WAR  
SPRING 2024**

**INTRODUCTION**

**LECTURE 01: Clarifying Some Terms & Mapping the Road Ahead**  
(September 5)

The view from: *King of the Hill*  
Hank Hill bids farewell to the Souphanousaphon family:  
"Ya'll come back now: that's Texan for *sayonara!*"

**LECTURE 02: COMMUNISM & THE COLD WAR: AN OVERVIEW**  
(September 10 & 12)

**REQUIRED READING**

- \* M.P. Leffler, "Assuming Hegemony, 1947-1950" in *The Specter of Communism* (New York, 1994): 64-96.
- \* O.A. Westad, "Introduction" and "Creating the Third World" in *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge, 2005): 1-3, 110-119; 152-157.

**PART 1: PEOPLES OF THE INDOCHINA COUNTRIES**

**LECTURE 03: Vietnamese, Cambodians, Lao, and Hmong**  
(September 17, 19, & 24)

**Vietnam & Its People: The Vietnamese**

**REQUIRED READING**

- \* F.M. LeBar, et al., "Viet-Muong: Vietnamese" in *Ethnic Groups in Mainland Southeast Asia* (HRAF, 1964): 161-171.
- \* N. Kibria, *Family Tighrope: The Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans* (Princeton, 1993): 38-64

**Cambodia & Its People: The Khmer**

**REQUIRED READING**

- \* M. Ebihara, "Mon-Khmer" and "Lowland Groups: Khmer" in *Ethnic Groups in Mainland Southeast Asia*, by F.M. LeBar, et al. (HRAF, 1964): 94-95, 98-105.
- \* J. Hein, "Peoples: Khmer" in *Ethnic Origins: The Adaptation of Cambodian and Hmong Refugees in Four American Cities* (New York, 2006): 45-59.

## **Laos & Its People: The Lao & the Hmong**

### **REQUIRED READING**

- \* "Social Systems" and "Lao" in *Laos: A Country Study*, ed. by D.P. Whitaker (Washington DC, 1971, 1985 ed): 39-50.
- \* "Laotian Tai" [Lao] and "Miao Yao" [Hmong] in *Ethnic Groups in Mainland Southeast Asia*, by F.M. LeBar, et al. (HRAF, 1964): Hmong: 63-64, 72-77; Lao: 215-220.
- \* J. Hein, "Peoples: Hmong" in *Ethnic Origins: The Adaptation of Cambodian and Hmong Refugees in Four American Cities* (NY, 2006): 60-75.

**REQUIRED VIEWING:** \* *Miao Year* (see list of films for content)

**FIRST EXAM (10%):** To be posted on Canvas on Sept 24 (Tuesday); to be returned to Canvas by Sept 26 (Thursday); required materials: content of Lectures 01-03, all readings, & film *Miao Year*.

## **PART 2. COLONIAL ORIGINS OF CONFLICT IN INDOCHINA**

### **FOCUS ON INDOCHINA: From French Colonialism to Cold War Decolonization**

(1850s-1950s: French Conquest and Colonial Rule; Nationalism and Communism: Struggles for Liberation; Japanese Occupation; Toward Decolonization and the Start of Cold War Conflicts)

### **LECTURE 04: VIETNAM to 1954**

(September 26 & October 1)

#### **REQUIRED READING:**

- \* N. Owen, ed. "Vietnam, 1885-1975: Colonialism, Communism, and Wars" in *Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 2005): 335-349.
- \* W. Duiker. "Roots of Revolution" in *Vietnam: Nation and Revolution* (Boulder, 1983): 28-48.

**REQUIRED VIEWING:** \* *The Roots of War* (see list of films for content)

### **LECTURE 05: CAMBODIA to 1954**

(October 3)

#### **REQUIRED READING**

- \* N. Owen, ed. "Cambodia, 1884-1975" in *Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 2005): 361-370.

### **LECTURE 06: LAOS to 1954**

(October 8 & 10)

#### **REQUIRED READING**

- \* N. Owen, ed. "Laos to 1975" in *Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 2005): 371-375.
- \* G. Evans, *A Short History of Laos* (Crow's Nest, NSW, 2002): 42-59, 70-92.
- \* G. Barney, "The Meo of Xieng Khouang Province, Laos" in *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations*, ed. by P. Kunstadter (Princeton, 1967): 271-294.

**PART 3. THE "COLD" WARS IN INDOCHINA  
FOCUS ON THE WARS IN VIETNAM, CAMBODIA, AND LAOS**

(1950s-1975: Communist-Led Revolutions for Independence; US, USSR, and PRC Involvements; Internal Political Upheavals; and Final Resolutions)

**LECTURE 07: The Vietnam War -- The American War: to 1975**  
(October 15 & 17)

**REQUIRED READING:**

- \* W. Duiker. "A Nation Divided" in *Vietnam: Nation and Revolution* (Boulder, CO, 1983): 49-70.
- \* W. Turley, "Of Lessons and Their Price" in *The Second Indochina War* (Lanham, MD, 2009): 237-263.

**REQUIRED VIEWING:** \* *America's Mandarin* (see list of films for content)

**LECTURE 08: Cambodia -- Drawn Reluctantly into War: to 1975**  
(October 22)

**REQUIRED READINGS**

- \* D. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, CO, 1996 edition): 191-208.
- \* N. Sihanouk, "Organizing Treachery" in *My War with the CIA* (New York, 1973): 36-48.
- \* W. Shawcross, "The Coup" in *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York, 1979): 112-127.

**REQUIRED VIEWING:** \* *Cambodia and Laos* (see film list for content)

**LECTURE 09: The Not So "Secret" War in Laos: to 1975**  
(October 24 & 29)

**REQUIRED READING**

- \* G. Evans, *A Short History of Laos* (Crowsnest, 2002): 98-112; 120-133; 146-150; 165-175.
- \* M.N. Lee, "Epilogue" in *Dreams of the Hmong Kingdom*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015: 302-312.
- \* K. Quincy, "A Hmong War" and "Resistance" in *Hmong: History of a People* (Chenny, 1995 edition): 189-215.

**LECTURE 10: Post-War Wars & Conflicts in Indochina, 1975-1990**  
(October 31 & November 5 & 7)

**REQUIRED READING:**

- \* D. Elliott, *The Third Indochina Conflict* (Boulder, 1981): 1-19.
- \* D. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, CO, 1996 edition): 209-235.
- \* G. Evans, *A Short History of Laos* (Crowsnest, 2002): 176-191.

**SECOND EXAM (25%):** To be posted on Canvas on November 7 (Thursday); due back on Canvas by November 11 (Monday); required materials: content of Lectures 04-10, all readings, & required films.

## **PART 4. DISORDERLY DEPARTURES: REFUGEES & MIGRANTS**

### **LECTURE 11: Managing Refugees: Global Responses to Regional Crisis**

(November 12)

#### **REQUIRED READING**

\* W. Robinson, *Terms of Refuge* (London, 1998), 10-38.

### **LECTURE 12: VIETNAM: Flight to Camps**

(November 14)

#### **REQUIRED READING**

\* J. Freeman, *Changing Identities: Vietnamese Americans, 1975-1995* (Boston, 1995): 29-42.

\* U.S. Committee for Refugees. *Vietnamese Boat People* (1984): 18-page pamphlet.

\* J. Freeman, "Flight to Freedom" in *Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese-American Lives* (Stanford, 1989): 291-302, 313-319, 343-349.

**REQUIRED VIEWING:** \* *Oh, Saigon* (see film list for content)

### **LECTURE 13: CAMBODIA: Flight to Camps**

(November 19)

#### **REQUIRED READING:**

\* N. Smith-Hefner, *Khmer Americans* (Berkeley, 1999): 1-12.

\* S. Chan, *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States* (Urbana, IL, 2004): 39-80.

\* U. Welaratna, *Beyond the Killing Fields* (Stanford, 1993): 165-195.

**REQUIRED VIEWING:** \* *Refugee* (see film list for contents)  
\* *Cambodian Doughnut Dreams* (see film list for contents)

### **LECTURE 14: LAOS: Flight to Camps**

(November 21)

#### **REQUIRED READING:**

\* U.S. Committee for Refugees. *Refugees from Laos: In Harm's Way* (July 1986): 24-page pamphlet.

\* P. Van Esterik, *Taking Refuge: Lao Buddhists in North America* (Tempe, AZ, 1992): 11-32.

\* A. Fadiman, "Flight" in *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (New York, 1997), 154-170.

\* L. Long, *Ban Vinai: The Refugee Camp* (NY, 1993): 31-72.

\* S. Chan, *Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America* (Philadelphia, 1994): 42-60.

\* T. Pfaff, *Hmong in America: Journey from a Secret War* (Eau Claire, 1995): 49-63.

**REQUIRED VIEWING:** \* *Becoming American* (see film list for contents)  
\* *Betrayal* (see film list for contents)

### **LECTURE 15: Statistical Overview**

(for reference only)

**LECTURE 16: "A Nation of Immigrants"**

(November 26) – no required readings

**\*\*\* FALL BREAK: November 28 to December 1 \*\*\***

**\*\* MEMOIR REPORT DUE: December 3 (Tuesday) on Canvas \*\***

**LECTURE 17: Assessing Early Resettlement in the US**

(December 3, 5, & 10)

**REQUIRED READING (17 & 18):**

- \* C. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate* (Princeton, 2008), 133-140; 145-166.
- \* J. Hein, *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia* (New York, 1995): 11-25.
- \* W. Robinson, *Terms of Refuge* (London, 1988): 127-138.

**RECOMMENDED READINGS (FOR FINAL) (17-18):**

- \* W. Robinson, *Terms of Refuge* (London, 1988): 187-230.
- \* J. Hein, *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia* (NY, 1995): 50-68.
- \* S. Chan, *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States* (Urbana, IL, 2004): 81-102; 107-122.
- \* S. Cowan, "Lao Refugees in Lowell: Reinterpreting the Past, Finding Meaning in the Present" in *Southeast Asian Refugees and Immigrants in the Mill City: Changing Families, Communities, Institutions - Thirty Years Afterward* (Lebanon, 2007): 131-152.
- \* A. Fadiman, "The Melting Pot" and "Why Did They Pick Merced?" in *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (New York, 1997), 181-209; 225-249.

**THIRD (FINAL) EXAM (25%):** To be posted on Canvas on December 10 (Tues) after the last lecture; due back on Canvas by December 16 (Mon); required materials: content of Lectures 11-17, all readings, & required films.