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# Enmity to Refugees Puzzling

## Reaction Unlike That for Cubans, Hungarians

By William Greider  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The sudden burst of passion was like a last poisonous convulsion from the finished war in Vietnam—so ugly and out of character with an American past when refugees were welcome.

"Gooks, go home," the placard in Arkansas said. Elsewhere, the message was less crude, but the same. Public officials whined about the cost. Members of Congress received letters of protest. The Gallup Poll reported that a majority of Americans would not welcome the Vietnamese refugees, 54 to 36 per cent.

"It's very troubling," said David Reisman, the Harvard sociologist and student of the American character. "Americans are full of self-pity. We are all justifying our grievances by striking out at others. The national mood is poisonous and dan-

gerous and this is one symptom—striking out at helpless refugees whose number is infinitesimal."

What happened to change public attitudes so much? No one can say for certain, of course, and there is some hope among thoughtful observers that this first burst

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of hostility toward the Vietnamese refugees will quickly fade, replaced by a more generous mood. In the Florida town of Niceville yesterday, some citizens were hanging up "Welcome" banners—embarrassed by their own nasty comments reported in the press the day before.

This is the same country, after all, which absorbed 400,000 displaced persons from Eastern Europe after World War II. It took in

200,000 more East Germans who were fleeing from a Communist government in the early 1950s. It celebrated, almost euphorically, the arrival of 40,000 Hungarians—"freedom fighters" in the anti-Soviet uprising of 1956. During the last 15 years, America has absorbed, at great expense, more than 675,000 refugees from Castro's Cuba.

The difference in 1975 is potent. The long and costly war is over, the U.S. ally utterly defeated. Now a total of 55,000 refugees from South Vietnam have been declared eligible for admission and 70,000 more will soon be added.

The speculative explanations range from a latent racism aimed at Orientals, suddenly brought out by the sorry climax in Vietnam, to

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more complicated theories about public frustration.

"Obviously, people are different with nonwhite races," said Amitai Etzioni, director of Columbia University's Center for Policy Research. "It's widely suggested that we would not have dropped the atomic bomb on a white country. People in California have often talked in the past about being overrun by the 'yellow hordes.' The color line has often affected how Americans feel about things."

Yet, every year without fanfare or controversy, Asian nations—China, the Philippines, India—are leading sources of immigrants. So the resentment must involve something deeper than the "mere gook syndrome," the GI slang which soldiers sardonically used to explain the casual killing of Asians in the war.

The frustration may be political, a pent-up disgust with the war, with its high cost, even with the ally whom America tried to help.

"The major thing," said Nathan Glazer, co-author of "Beyond the Melting Pot," "is the change in the way people see America's role in the world. With the Hungarians and the Cubans, it was 'fighting communism' and people supported that in the 1950s and the early 1960s. Now they've given up on that view . . . I don't think we feel on the same side politically as the South Vietnamese. The press has been so hostile to them—they've been described as corrupt, so unable to defend themselves."

Reisman sees a peculiar coming together in the public resentment—the working-class and the upper-income elite, both hostile to ward the South Vietnamese for different reasons.

"The middle Americans, ordinary working people, don't like war and sacrifice, they don't like 'wogs,' as the British would say," Reisman said. "The educated of the antiwar movement, especially the young, always had an extraordinary callousness toward the South Vietnam-

ese.

"So we have middle America which never accepts 'furriners' anyway, then we have the enlightened America which neither has sympathy for nor knowledge of South Vietnamese, which regards them all as corrupt carpetbaggers."

Charles Gordon, former general counsel of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, who helped manage those earlier surges of refugees, thinks the American people this time were overwhelmed by events—the press of the recession and its unemployment, the sudden collapse of Saigon, then the on-rush of immigrants.

"People just haven't had a chance to digest this," Gordon said. "They're facing nearly 10 per cent unemployment in this country and then the State Department is talking about hundreds of millions in relief. We thought we'd gotten out of Vietnam, now we're suddenly faced with all this. I think this is a reaction to the whole episode—we got ourselves in such a mess and now there's this."

When Americans rallied to help the Hungarians nearly 20 years ago, the country was genuinely united in the belief that the Hungarians' doomed struggle for independence was a heroic cause. Universities and cities made a great show of helping the refugees to resettle, to find jobs and homes.

Chalmers Johnson, an Asian scholar at the University of California, said he was having dinner the other night with a Berkeley faculty colleague who was one of those Hungarian refugees. "He said it just scared the crap out of him to read what was being said about the refugees now and he hoped that Americans never found themselves in the same position," Johnson remarked.

Ironically, Johnson noted: "From everything we know about this population, this is one of the most attractive group of immigrants we are ever likely to get."

Oriental, generally, have the highest educational attainment of ethnic minorities and these Vietnamese, coming largely from the city of Saigon, will be "much more sophisticated in terms of linguistic ability and education than the Asian immigrants overall, most of whom, after all, were working population," Johnson said.

Furthermore, he suspects that the Vietnamese immigrants, contrary to popular impressions, will include a lot of schoolteachers and clerks, women and children and elderly—instead of a concentration of corrupt war profiteers and police thugs.

"This reaction may change," Johnson said, "when we know more about them. The press has suggested that they are all cutthroats from the Phoenix program, whereas most of them are likely to be, as in

the Cuban and Hungarian situations, intellectuals and teachers."

Etzioni, likewise, thinks the initial shocked reaction of Americans will pass, that six months from now the refugees will be absorbed without special dislocations and the public will forget it was upset.

"The media is a cause of this reaction as much as anything," the Columbia sociologist said. "If somebody steps on my toe for a moment, I say ouch and soon forget about it. But if somebody takes a picture of it, I feel much worse."

Glazer also thinks that the American society will ultimately accept the Vietnamese newcomers, just as it has so many others before them, without any genuine pain or dislocation.

"I hope the hostility is a kind of abstract one," Glazer said, "and that we won't see it taken out on a personal level. I don't think we will, I hope not."



Associated Press

Nguyen Thi Liap Tien studies forms at Camp Pendleton.