

Southeast Asian Americans

and the

School-to-Prison-to-Deportation Pipeline



History of displacement and resettlement

Since 1975, over one million refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam have been resettled in the United States, making Southeast Asian Americans the largest refugee community in U.S. history.ⁱ

Poverty

Today, over 18% of Cambodian families and 27% of Hmong families still live below the poverty line, compared with 11% of U.S. families overall.ⁱⁱ Poverty is mostly concentrated in cities, such as Philadelphia, where 41% of Cambodians live below the poverty line.ⁱⁱⁱ

Education

Over 34% of Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong students do not complete high school, compared with 13% of the general population.^{iv}

Mental health

Southeast Asian American communities suffer from high rates of mental health disorders. In a 2005 study in Long Beach, 62% of Cambodian American adults showed signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.^v

Criminalization

While disaggregated data is scarce, one study of the California Youth Authority in 2002 found that Cambodian and Laotian youth were incarcerated at 4 and 9 times the rate that would be expected by their respective populations.^{vi} Vietnamese and Laotian youth had the second and third highest arrest rates in Richmond in 2000 after African American youth.^{vii}



Hmong refugee family resettled from Laos to St. Paul, MN. Photo credit: Wing Young Huie

Deportation

Southeast Asian American youth who came to the U.S. as children fleeing war and persecution with their families are subject to the same systematic marginalization as many other communities of color in the U.S.: failing schools, multi-generational poverty, racial profiling, over-policing, and mass incarceration. Yet for immigrant youth who have not naturalized, the school-to-prison pipeline may end in deportation and permanent family separation.



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Southeast Asian Americans are 3-5 times more likely to be deported on the basis of an old criminal conviction compared with other immigrant communities.^{viii} Deportation is automatic and mandatory for immigrants, including lawful permanent residents, with any of a wide range of old criminal records, regardless of the unique facts of their cases. Individuals always serve their full criminal sentence before they are deported.

ⁱ Office of Refugee Resettlement, Report to Congress on the Refugee Resettlement Program (2008), A-1.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

ⁱⁱⁱ Asian Americans Advancing Justice. *A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the Northeast*, 2013.

^{iv} U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

^v Grant N. Marshall et al., 2005. Mental Health of Cambodian Refugees 2 Decades After Resettlement in the United States. *JAMA* 294(5):571-579.

^{vi} Isami Arifuku, Delores D. Peacock, and Caroline Glesmann. 2006. "Profiling Incarcerated Asian and Pacific Islander Youth: Statistics Derived from California Youth Authority Administrative Data," *AAPJ Nexus*, 4(2):69-93.

^{vii} Thao Le, Isami Arifuku et al. (2001). *Not Invisible: Asian Pacific Islander Juvenile Arrests in Alameda County*. Oakland: National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

^{viii} Deportation outcome by charge, 2008 – 2012, from Transactional Access Records Clearinghouse, Syracuse University.