

Hmemo to Hmayor Kelly of St. Paul, MN

Take a closer look at the Hmong

by Edwin S.
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The Hmong resettlement is one of the extraordinary immigrant stories in our very long history of immigration," says St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelly, speaking shortly after a Hmong-American resident of his city was arrested for shooting six hunters to death in the woods of neighboring Wisconsin. ("*Hmong get closer look since shootings,*" by Tom Kenworthy, *USA Today*, November 21, 2004.)

Mayor Kelly was part of a large chorus extolling the virtues of Hmong refugees following the shootings. They are invariably described as hard-working, entrepreneurial types who send their kids to college and participate in the civic life of the community.

Some undoubtedly do. The broader picture, however, is quite different.

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When large Hmong populations started coming to the U.S. after the fall of Saigon in 1975, they settled mainly in California and the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, where welfare was well-funded and jobs were supposedly available. After nearly three decades they have assimilated well – into the welfare culture.

Here are public assistance reciprocity rates for Hmong and other ethnic groups as reported by the 2000 Census:

- 30.4 percent of Hmong households receive public assistance, as compared with:
- 8.2 percent of Black households
- 7.2 percent of Hispanic households
- 3.2 percent of Chinese households
- 2.4 percent of white households

These are national figures. The situation in Minnesota may be worse. A study by the Minnesota House of Representatives reports that "...more than 46 percent of Asian Americans eligible for welfare were immigrants. Among this group, 93 percent cited their nationality as Cambodian, Hmong, ethnic Laotian, or Vietnamese."

The study also finds that "...more than 70 percent of Asian-American parents had not

completed high school, nearly triple the percentage of non-Asian AFDC parents who had not completed high school." [Source: Minnesota House of Representatives. "*Factors Contributing to Longer Stays on Welfare: A Literature Review,*" Information Brief, March 2002.

The report's somewhat obvious conclusion: "Asian Americans have a lower probability of exiting (AFDC) than whites."

Furthermore, relative to other immigrant groups the Hmong and their South Asian neighbors are linguistically challenged. Just compare, for example, the rate of "linguistic isolation," i.e., the percent of households in which no adult speaks only English, or speaks English "very well," for major ethnic groups:

- 35 percent of Hmong are linguistically isolated as compared with:
- 46 percent of Vietnamese
- 27 percent of Mexicans
- 22 percent of Japanese
- 11 percent of Asian Indians

Unlike other Asian groups (e.g., Japanese, Korean, and Chinese Americans) there is no tradition of formal education among the Hmong. Indeed, there apparently was no written Hmong language until the 1950s. [Source: "Disentangling Poverty and Race," Deborah Johnson, *Applied*

Developmental Science, 2000, Supplement 1.]

More than one-quarter (28 percent) of Hmong adults have less than a ninth-grade education. Only Hispanics, at 26 percent, approach that figure.

Will second- and third-generation Hmong close the education and language gaps? That scenario appeals to many immigration enthusiasts. But people who study the subject aren't so sure. Writes Deborah Johnson:

The history of cultural displacement enters the educational system along with the child and has long-term significance for learning and success. More important, this history affects the child's and the family's ability to rise out of poverty. ...In Wisconsin, nearly 90 percent of Hmong adults read little or no English.

Bottom line: importing Hmong has been a disaster for America, and for the Hmong themselves – even before the recent news that the influx has been suspended because it has caused the outbreak of a particularly unpleasant form of tuberculosis.

In contrast, the French policy of settling Hmong in virgin Caribbean jungle seems to have worked quite well. (“Hmong's new lives in Caribbean,” by Bethan Jinkinson, BBC, March 10, 2004).

But that would deprive the American refugee industry – and their political mouthpieces – of clients. ...And victims. •