

Vietnamese Americans

LESSONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Size and Geographic Locations of Vietnamese American Population

Estimated at over 1.12 million, the Vietnamese American population is the fourth largest Asian ethnic group in the U.S. after Filipina/o Americans, Chinese Americans, and Asian Indian Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This figure represents an 83 percent increase in the past decade.

The most significant concentrations of Vietnamese Americans are located in the states of California, Texas, Washington and Virginia. In fact, 40 percent of all Vietnamese Americans resides in California, where they make up the third largest Asian population in the state. Moreover, although less significant in terms of actual population count, Vietnamese Americans are the largest Asian American population in both Texas and Louisiana.

Orange County, California, has the largest concentration of Vietnamese Americans among all counties in the nation and is the largest Vietnamese population concentration outside of Vietnam.

TOP U.S. COUNTIES WITH VIETNAMESE AMERICAN POPULATIONS

County	Vietnamese Population		Percentage Change from 1990 to 2000
	1990	2000	
Orange, California	71,822	135,548	89%
Santa Clara, California	54,212	99,986	84%
Los Angeles, California	62,594	78,102	25%
Harris, Texas (Houston area)	31,056	55,489	79%
San Diego, California	21,118	33,504	59%
King, Washington (Seattle area)	11,030	27,484	149%
Alameda, California	13,374	23,817	78%
Fairfax, Virginia (Washington, D.C. area)	11,994	23,044	92%
Dallas, Texas	9,935	21,355	115%
Tarrant, Texas (Fort Worth area)	8,574	19,396	126%

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS 1990 AND 2000

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Diversity Among Vietnamese Americans

The Vietnamese American population is quite diverse, representing immigrants, refugees, and second- and third-generation individuals. To understand this diversity, it is important to examine immigration and refugee exodus patterns of the community.

The first significant wave of Vietnamese refugees to the U.S. began directly after the fall of Saigon in 1975. A large majority of this first wave was relatively more educated and more affluent than the subsequent flows of Vietnamese refugees and immigrants.

Those that left Vietnam beginning in the late 1970s, popularly known as “Boat People,” escaped under dangerous conditions.

Another peak of Vietnamese immigration to the U.S. occurred in 1992, when many individuals in Vietnam’s re-education camps were released or were sponsored by their families to come to the United States.

EBB AND FLOW

The fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, triggered an exodus of nearly 2 million refugees and other immigrants to the United States over the next 25 years.

1975

The first wave of refugees — including many of the country’s most affluent and well educated citizens — fled Vietnam after the fall of Saigon.

1980

A second wave of refugees peaked with exodus of “boat people.”

1992

The flow peaked again after an increase in refugees released from re-education camps and immigrants sponsored by their families living in the United States.

Total Vietnamese Immigrants and refugees, 1970-2000: 1,824,197

SOURCE: LOS ANGELES TIMES, APRIL 23, 2001.

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Socioeconomic Status of Vietnamese Americans

Census data show that the socioeconomic status of the Vietnamese American population had significantly improved from 1980 to 1990. In this ten-year period:

- The proportion of college graduates among Vietnamese American adults age 25 and over was 17 percent, up from 13 percent;
- The labor force participation rate of Vietnamese Americans age 16 and over grew from 57 percent to 65 percent, equaling that of the general American population; and
- Ethnic entrepreneurship burgeoned to 7 percent as compared to 3 percent in 1980.

By 1990, the median household income of Vietnamese Americans stood at \$29,772, more than double what it had been the previous decade and almost equal to the \$30,056 median income of all American households.

Despite these improvements, census data also show significant socioeconomic disparities between Vietnamese Americans and their American counterparts. Although Vietnamese American household income are on par with all American households, the 1990 Census reported that more than one out of every five Vietnamese families contained three or more workers, significantly more than the all American families combined.

Moreover, the per capita income of the Vietnamese American population was \$11,027, compared to \$14,420 for all Americans and \$15,687 for white Americans. In percentage terms, the Vietnamese American per capita income was 31 percent and 42 percent less than those of the entire U.S. population and the white population, respectively.

In 1990, substantially more Vietnamese American families are struggling below the poverty line than average American families, 24 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

NOTE: FOR UPDATED INFORMATION BASED ON THE 2000 CENSUS, PLEASE VISIT WWW.CENSUS.GOV

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Profile of Vietnam

OFFICIAL NAME

Socialist Republic of Vietnam (adopted in 1976)

GEOGRAPHY

Area: 329,560 sq. km. (127,243 sq. mi.); equivalent in size to the states of Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee combined

Cities (1999): Capital — Ha Noi (2.6 million) Other cities — Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Sai Gon; 5 million) and Hai Phong (1.6 million)

Terrain: Varies from mountainous to coastal delta

Climate: Tropical monsoon

PEOPLE

Nationality: Vietnamese (used as noun and adjective, and singular and plural)

Population (1999): 77.3 million (1999)

Annual growth rate (1999): 1.4 percent (1999)

Ethnic groups: Vietnamese (85-90 percent), Chinese (3 percent), Hmong, Thai, Khmer, Cham and mountainous tribal groups

Religions: Buddhism, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Christianity (predominately Roman Catholic and some Protestant), animism and Islam

Languages: Vietnamese (official), English (increasingly favored as a second language), some French, Chinese, Khmer, and mountainous area languages

Literacy (1998): 89.5 percent

Health (1999): Infant mortality rate — 38.8 per 1000. Death rate — 6.6 per 1000. Life expectancy — 65.7 years for males, 70.6 years for females

GOVERNMENT

Type: Communist Party-dominated constitutional republic

Independence: September 2, 1945

New constitution: April 15, 1992

Branches: Executive — president (head of state and chair of National Defense and Security Council) and prime minister (heads cabinet of ministries and commissions) Legislative — National Assembly Judicial — Supreme People's Court; Prosecutorial Supreme People's Procuracy

Administrative subdivisions: 61 provinces, 3 municipalities (Hai Phong, Hanoi, and Ho Chi Minh City)

Political party: one, Vietnamese Communist Party

Suffrage: Universal over 18 years of age

ECONOMY

Gross Domestic Product (GDP, 1999): \$28.6 billion

Real growth rate (1999): 4.8 percent

Per capita income (1999): \$372

Inflation rate (1999): 0.1 percent

External debt (1999): 37.1 percent of GDP, \$10.6 billion

Natural resources: Coal, crude oil, zinc, copper, silver, gold, manganese and iron

Land use: 21 percent arable; 28 percent forest and woodland; and 51 percent other

Agriculture and forestry (1999): 22.3 percent of GDP. Principle products — rice, maize, sweet potato, peanut, soya bean, cotton, coffee and cashews. Cultivated land — 12.2 million hectares per year

Industry and construction (1999): 34.5 percent of GDP. Principle types — mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, gas and water supply

Services (1999): 40.1 percent of GDP. Principle types — wholesale and retail, repair of vehicles and personal goods, hotel and restaurant, transport storage and telecommunications

Trade (1999): Exports — \$11.5 billion. Principle exports — garments/textiles, crude oil, footwear, rice (world's second-largest exporter), sea products, coffee, rubber and handicrafts. Major export partners — Japan (16 percent), China, Singapore, Australia, Taiwan and Germany Imports — \$11.6 billion. Principle imports — machinery, oil and gas, garment materials, iron and steel and transport-related equipment. Major import partners — Singapore (16 percent), Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong and Thailand. Exports to the U.S. — \$655 million Imports from the U.S. — \$291 million.

SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE





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