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America in the late 1800's and early 1900's was a immense magnet world wide. People emmigrated here for a variety of reasons. Among these were economics, adventure, search for a better life and escape from persecution. These immigrants came mostly from Europe. They often ^{came} with the ideas that America was the promised land, where the streets were paved with gold, livin' was easy and everyone was a millionaire.

In the 1980's the Southeast Asians in Bowling Green, Kentucky come for a variety of reasons, not in the least is to escape persecution. But do these conceptions held by earlier immigrants apply to these more recent immigrants?

In this paper I will present the results of my interviews as well as my observations concerning Southeast Asian immigrants, in this case Cambodians, to attempt to discern whether or not their conceptions and expectations of America coincide with earlier conceptions.

I was unfortunately able to interview only two people directly. One was a man and one a women both in their forties. I did receive comments both on tape and off from the translator - also Cambodian - which I will use as a base for interpretation also. This along with time spent simply observing at the Refugee Assistance Center while

waiting for interviews will be used as rationale.

This brings up the subject of not being able to get a thorough amount of interviews. This is not to say that appointments were not made, but they were too often concealed by the narrators to be. Why this happened a total of eight times is not entirely clear. Granted, no one was obligated to speak with me and certainly genuine excuses were made, but I believe that things went deeper. Perhaps people were leery of why I wished to speak to them, not fully understanding what **I** intended. This would be a fault on the part of myself and not theirs. Then again, this hesitancy to be interviewed might be attributed to an embarrassment over their lack of English, the feeling that what they had to say was unimportant, or that it was simply none of my business and the only polite way out was to make an appointment and then cancel.

The following are some impressions of what I found during my time spent interviewing and observing.

The people I spoke with were at first hesitant to be interviewed. This seemed to be true of most of the people with whom I came in contact. As explained by one male narrator this was due to his lack of English; he felt he should be able to speak with me directly and not through

a translator. But he did seem proud that he was learning English and he was eager to have a working knowledge of English to allow him to do more in the community.

Freedom was a recurring idea in the answers of both male narrator and translator. They related that America to them meant freedom. As the translator stated, "You can speak out and nobody go to jail or kill you like communist. That's what freedom all about." This freedom would seem to be one of, if not the most, important things about America to them. This love of freedom, of speech, religion, etc. also shows a marked relief they have that now they have freedom from constant fear. They no longer have to continuously watch what they do, say or listen to with the fear of reprisals.

Both gentlemen also wanted to make clear their feelings about communists. Naturally, they view them as deceitful, dangerous and destructive. Using people to achieve their goals and then discarding those same people. Indeed, Sitta Ros, the male narrator, wanted everyone who listens to the tape, derived from his interview, to adhere to his advise. "Don't believe communists. All communists not true." He related how he was treated by the communist regime by saying, "they tossed him around like dice." This is a natural and expected reaction from their personal

experiences with communism. Their feelings actually mesh well with the conservative aspects felt so strongly in America today. I can not stress enough how much they felt about communism. There was a distrust that I believe will never lessen. They also indicated that they are instilling this idea in their children. Letting them know of what their experiences were and instructing them never to trust communists. Sitta Ros indicated that a way to thwart the communists was to be educated. Saying, "communists hate educated. Can brainwash only the uneducated." So he believes that the deceiving techniques applied by the communists would not work on the educated and so this was a major reason he wanted a good education for his children.

Education and children was a strong subject of discussion for both narrators. Talk constantly turned to discuss the education their children would get in America. In fact, when asked what they wanted from America, an education for their children was one answer. Sat Kung, the female narrator, stated through the translator, "America give good education to her children. And after her children have good education, they can help themselves." There was a great importance and respect placed on education

and these parents showed great pride when speaking of how their children were doing in school. As a matter of fact, children were never talked about with me in light of recreation, household, or duties, but only in connection with education.

When asked what they had to give to America the answer was, nothing. They had only the ability and willingness to work and a love for the country and people to give. They seemed to consider themselves unworthy or unable to give more than this. They both lived, it seemed, very much for their children and the future they would have in this country. As Sitta Ros said when asked about his future here would be, "family happy here because can go to school and learn English."

As for the American people, they viewed them as people with slightly askew conceptions, but people who are willing to help none the less. Americans on the whole seem to lack a complete understanding of the situation from which the narrators came but they are as Ros described them, "be honest, friendly, kind. Have no problems." Americans also have a great abundance it would seem. The government aids in many ways. Whereas in Cambodia the poor are taken advantage of and struggle everyday, in America as Kung

stated, "but here it doesn't matter, if you poor you still have a car to drive." America is seen as a very powerful country. One deserving of respect. In the case of Sat Kung, this power or feeling of it was transferred to her when she arrived here. In her words, "she come to America, feel big because she thought she's an American. America is the powerful country in the world."

The government here is seen as a great aid. The willingness of the American people to help is reflected and supported by the government. They provide clothing, shelter, food stamps, etc. but perhaps Sitta Ros stated, the most important thing the government provides, when he said, "government help others and give opportunities. Help you to try."

When discussing Cambodia today there was a lack of hope projected. According to the narrators, life there is down trodden and a feeling of hopelessness prevails. Sitta Ros related that in Cambodia, people, "don't trust communist at all, but have no where to go." They seem to be only "expecting to die." A problem, especially in the refugee camps, would seem to be that, as the translator remarked, "some of them want to come to America but they can not come because all the politicians."

With the festival in April, I believe it is clear that the Southeast Asians don't wish to lose their past and traditions even though they are now in America. As the translator said, "I'm American but deep down inside my heart, you know, I told myself I'm Campuchean. Can not change. But I'm proud to be American citizen, too. I'm very proud." So it seems a sense of tradition and self is still strong.

I will say that in my interviews and outside discussions, that I often felt as if I were getting the answers to my questions that they thought I wanted to hear. This isn't to say that they weren't being honest. It is just a feeling I had, ~~the~~ the feeling that I was receiving pat answers. Maybe this was due to the nature of my questions. That the answers seemed pat because they were so much like the beliefs held by earlier immigrants, that they seemed almost unreal. I hope this to be the case, but I am unable to say for certain.

In conclusion, if the ~~is~~ answers were indeed straight from the heart, I believe one can infer a connection to the ideas held by earlier immigrants. As they searched

for a place where they could live in less fear of persecution, so it seems many Southeast Asians search for the same and America, in myth, at least, provides that place. The idea that living is easy and the streets are paved with gold, hold true to some degree. People in America are aided by the government, given food stamps etc. and again everyone, even the poor has a car. So as in earlier times, America is money and that translates into power. As many earlier immigrants came to work to provide a better future for their children, so it seems to be the case with many Southeast Asians. Thinking less of their own personal futures and more for their children's'. The idea that anyone can succeed in America seems to be continuing through the Southeast Asians. They appear to believe that with hard work and a little help they will succeed in life here and provide a better chance for those who follow. America, as myth, seems to be continuing. It still seems to be represented as a place where truth and justice, freedom and opportunity reign. Whether this myth correlates to reality is a question I'll leave for others to answer. But with my limited research, I believe the American myth is one that is cross-cultural and contemporary.

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