

# **The Hmong in Green Bay: Refugees in a New Land**

**Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the  
United States Commission on Civil Rights**

**April 1998**

*A report of the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. This report will be considered by the Commission and the Commission will make public its reaction. The Advisory Committee's observations should not be attributed to the Commission.*

### **The United States Commission on Civil Rights**

The United States Commission on Civil Rights, first created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, and reestablished by the United States Commission on Civil Rights Act of 1983, is an independent, bipartisan agency of the Federal Government. By the terms of the 1983 act, as amended by the Civil Rights Commission Amendments Act of 1994, the Commission is charged with the following duties pertaining to discrimination or denials of the equal protection of the laws based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice: investigation of individual discriminatory denials of the right to vote; study and collection of information relating to discrimination or denials of the equal protection of the law; appraisal of the laws and policies of the United States with respect to discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law; investigation of patterns or practices of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of Federal elections; and preparation and issuance of public service announcements and advertising campaigns to discourage discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law. The Commission is also required to submit reports to the President and the Congress at such times as the Commission, the Congress, or the President shall deem desirable.

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## Letter of Transmittal

Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the  
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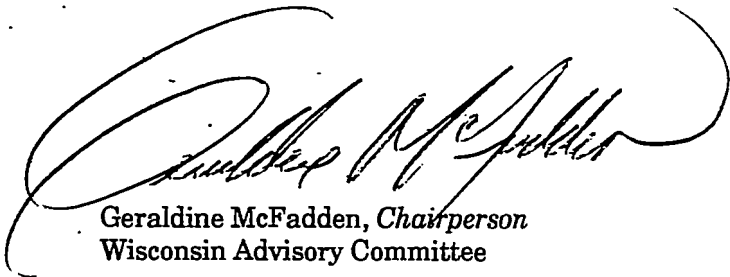
Ruby G. Moy, *Staff Director*

The Wisconsin Advisory Committee submits this report, *The Hmong in Green Bay: Refugees in a New Land*, as part of its responsibility to advise the Commission on civil rights issues within the State. The report was unanimously adopted by the Advisory Committee by a 10-0 vote. The Advisory Committee is indebted to the individual participants for their time and expertise and to the Midwestern Regional Office staff for the preparation of this report.

This report is a summary of a community forum held in Green Bay on November 21, 1996, regarding the Hmong. Participants at the community forum included individuals from the Hmong community in Green Bay as well as the mayor of Green Bay, the Green Bay Police Department, the Green Bay Area Public Schools, the Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, government and community agency officials who work with the Hmong, and academic researchers.

The Advisory Committee understands the Commission has an active interest in race and ethnic tensions, and trusts that the Commission and the public will find the material in this report informative.

Respectfully,



Geraldine McFadden, *Chairperson*  
Wisconsin Advisory Committee

# Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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## I. Executive Summary

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Residing in Green Bay and in more than a dozen other communities throughout Wisconsin is a distinct ethnic immigrant group from Southeast Asia—the Hmong.<sup>1</sup> As a people, the Hmong actively supported United States military operations in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. Their immigration to the United States from Laos began in the mid-1970s as a direct consequence of their alliance with the United States.

The Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights conducted a community forum on November 21, 1996, in Green Bay, Wisconsin, to examine equal opportunity for the Hmong. Representatives from the Hmong community and representatives of State and local government agencies and community organizations—including the mayor of Green Bay, the Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, the Green Bay Police Department, the Green Bay Area Public Schools, and the State's employment office—spoke at the public meeting. The scope of this inquiry was limited to the Hmong living in Green Bay, and it should be noted that the opportunities, problems, and experiences of the Hmong community in Green Bay are not necessarily similar to those of Hmong living in other parts of the State or the Nation.

The duty of the Advisory Committee is to advise the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on matters in its State regarding discrimination or denials of equal opportunity on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin. The Wisconsin Advisory Committee is balanced by political and philosophical affiliation; diverse by gender, race, religion, and national origin; and independent of any national, State, or local administration or policy group.

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<sup>1</sup> The word "Hmong" means "free people." This name comes from Thailand, which is a neighboring country of Laos, where the Hmong people also live. The Hmong gave themselves this name because of their history and religious beliefs. Throughout their history, the Hmong have wanted to remain independent as a people. They fought or moved rather than be taken over by another culture.

This report is the unanimous, agreed statement of the Advisory Committee.

### **The Hmong in Laos and Their Migration to the United States**

The political and military involvement of the United States in Southeast Asia during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s produced an influx of refugee immigration to this country from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos that involved almost 1 million people. Within this flow of immigrants was a distinct ethnic group from Laos, the Hmong. The Hmong are a distinct ethnic group and are believed to have originally migrated into southwestern China from Siberia several thousand years ago. In the 18th century, some of the Hmong population living in China migrated to the highlands of Laos.

When the United States became actively involved militarily against the communists in Southeast Asia, most of the Hmong in Laos allied themselves with the United States. The United States recruited the Hmong to assist in a front-line defense strategy against both the communist North Vietnamese in Vietnam and the communist Pathet Lao in Laos. Although not documented, the Hmong believed that the United States promised them independence and sovereignty in Laos if the communists were defeated, and asylum and support outside the country if the communists prevailed.

Hmong men under arms and allied with the United States peaked in 1969 when 40,000 Hmong soldiers operated in the Laotian highlands in collaboration with the CIA and the United States military. Hmong forces in Laos supported the United States military by mining North Vietnamese supply routes, ambushing North Vietnamese troops, and rescuing American pilots shot down over Laos and Vietnam. By the early 1970s the Hmong were the only remaining effective fighting force in Laos resisting the Pathet Lao.

In 1975 the Pathet Lao won total control of Laos. With the military victory of the communists,



some Hmong fled the country; others were captured by the Pathet Lao and sent to "reeducation" centers where many died from malnutrition and hard labor; and thousands of other Hmong scattered throughout the countryside, some trying to escape to Thailand, while others retreated back to their ancestral highlands and continued an armed resistance against the Pathet Lao.

Estimates of the total number of Hmong who fled Laos since the mid-1970s are 150,000. A similar number of Hmong are still believed to live in Laos. Of the thousands of Hmong who escaped from Laos, most spent years in refugee camps before being resettled in a third country. Most of these Hmong refugees from the camps came to the United States, with smaller numbers going to France, Australia, and Canada.

### **The Hmong Community in Green Bay**

Emigration of the Hmong to the United States began in 1975 when Congress authorized the initial admission of 3,466 Hmong under the "parole" power of the U.S. Attorney General. In subsequent years, more refugees from Southeast Asia, including Hmong, were granted entry under this parole. By the early 1980s some 50,000 Hmong had been resettled in the United States, and by 1988 more than 100,000 Hmong were living in the United States.

In Green Bay, the Catholic diocese was the primary agency responsible for assisting Hmong refugees resettle in northeast Wisconsin. The diocese undertook a sponsorship-model of refugee resettlement, and over the next two decades 80 percent of the Catholic churches in the Green Bay-De Pere area sponsored Hmong refugees. The number of Hmong refugees resettled by the diocese since 1975 is 4,713; of these about 1,500 have been resettled in the city of Green Bay.

In 1978 the Green Bay area began experiencing a dramatic increase in secondary migration of the Hmong to Wisconsin from other parts of the country. A contributing factor to this secondary migration was the desire of refugees to cluster around traditional civil and clan leaders who had already settled in Green Bay. Current estimates of the Hmong population in Green Bay are 4,000 individuals—4 percent of the city's population.

The Hmong population in Green Bay is very young and has a very high birth rate. Hmong

families average 3.8 children, even though nearly half of the adult women are under the age of 30 and have not completed their child-bearing years. This results in a child/woman fertility ratio of more than 1200 children per 1000 women aged 14-45, several times greater than that of the general population. Although intergenerational households are common in traditional Hmong society, fewer than 20 percent of the households in Green Bay include persons other than nuclear family members (mother, father, and children); only about 5 percent of the Hmong households include an older parent; and 15 percent include a brother or sister of one's spouse.

The reaction from some in the Green Bay community to the immigration of the Hmong has been hostility and discrimination, and stereotypes and misconceptions of the Hmong persist. There are reports of employers denying employment to Hmong, and landlords refusing to rent to the Hmong. Tensions do exist in Green Bay between the Hmong community and the nonminority population. Efforts to reduce misunderstanding and assimilate the Hmong into the general populace have been and continue to be undertaken by church groups, the city administration, the schools, and other social and community agencies.

To reduce possible overt conflict, the Green Bay Police Department employs a Hmong liaison officer, specifically assigned to work with the Hmong community and other refugees from Southeast Asia. A concern in both the Hmong community and the general community is the level of gang involvement by Hmong youth. Reports in the local press of significant Hmong gang activity have exacerbated ethnic tensions between the indigenous population and the Hmong community, even though evidence indicates that the percentage of Hmong youth implicated by these problems is lower than for the population as a whole. Nevertheless, such reports present a negative message about the Hmong youth in the Green Bay community and feed common community stereotypes about the Hmong.

### **Language Patterns and Education of the Hmong in Green Bay**

Similar to other immigrant groups, first generation Hmong in Green Bay still use their native language extensively. Approximately 30

percent of Hmong adults communicate exclusively in Hmong in all interactions, and nearly all Hmong adults in Green Bay speak Hmong or mostly Hmong with their spouse and relatives. Although Hmong is used almost exclusively between adults, the use of English is significant and widespread among Hmong children and their friends. In one-fourth of Hmong families, the children speak mostly English or only English with one another.

Currently in the Green Bay area public school system, there are 1,150 students of Hmong descent. The school system offers an English as a second language (ESL) program to the Hmong children, and the Hmong student population represents approximately 68 percent of the district's total ESL program enrollment. ESL services to Hmong children begin with a prekindergarten program and extend through the high school level.

There are 27 elementary schools in Green Bay; 17 of those schools have less than 5 percent Hmong enrollment. Eight schools in the school district have more than 10 percent enrollment of Hmong students, and those schools account for 80 percent of all of Hmong students in the elementary grades. The concentration of Hmong in the Green Bay schools is comparable to that found in other Wisconsin communities. The concentration of Hmong students in a relatively small number of schools in the community is largely the consequence of residential segregation, and that is largely the consequence of economic segregation. Many Hmong households have incomes at or below the poverty line, and the only housing they can afford is located in the community's older, central city neighborhoods.

Hmong are attending the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (UWGB). In the fall 1996 semester, 30 Hmong males and 19 Hmong females were enrolled as full-time students. Many of them were not born in the United States, and 55 percent of all Southeast Asian students at UWGB are not citizens. Although all the Hmong students are fluent in English, English is still often their second language, which causes some problems in literature and writing classes.

### **Employment and Welfare Issues Regarding the Hmong in Green Bay**

The percentage of Hmong in Green Bay dependent on welfare has declined dramatically in the last 10 years. In 1988, 80 percent of Hmong were on welfare. In 1997, the percent of Hmong dependent on welfare has fallen to 24 percent. Still, in the Green Bay area, although the Hmong account for approximately 3 percent of the population, they are 28 percent of all AFDC recipients. The most important reason for the decline in welfare dependency among the Hmong is the State's new welfare program, which is designed with an emphasis of moving individuals from welfare dependency to self-sufficiency.

The State's program, coupled with welfare reform at the Federal level, has caused particular grief in the Hmong community. Many Hmong, particularly veterans of the war in Southeast Asia, feel the new welfare reform measures are a betrayal of promises made by the United States to the Hmong in Laos in the 1960s for their support against the communists. New welfare legislation at the Federal level limits aid to 2 years for nonworking noncitizens. Some Hmong argue that they did not come to America for economic reasons, but as political refugees. Citizenship was never required of them in Laos when they died saving American lives, and they would not have allied with the United States and be in this country today if such a condition had been set.

Numerous problems confront the Hmong immigrants in obtaining employment, including discrimination, low levels of formal education, poor job skills, language barriers, and cultural differences. Those obtaining employment usually work for very low wages. Most placements made by the job service are for jobs paying less than \$6 an hour, and often the employment is part time. Education and training will be critical to the Hmong if they are to compete effectively in the job market, as the cultural norms and skills they brought to this country are not ones economically useful in an industrialized, urban setting. However, this group of people is not as ignorant of industrial society as is sometimes portrayed in the media and in other studies, as they traded goods in cities in Laos with the Laotians and fought with the United States in a technologically modern war.

Until 1992 there was a Hmong community center in Green Bay that received funding from Federal, State, and local government agencies. The community center, staffed and managed by local Hmong residents, provided counseling, refugee services, and job services to the local Hmong community. In recent years, government funding for these programs was eliminated or transferred to other agencies in Green Bay outside the Hmong community. The center, now the South

east Asian Community Center, still operates with an unpaid volunteer serving as director, primarily serving as a cultural center for the Hmong community. Some in the Hmong community feel that funding for the center should be restored, and that the Hmong community, as opposed to the non-Hmong community, should receive and control the government grants for the jobs and refugee services programs.

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## II. Prologue

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Way Kong is a Hmong who lives in Green Bay, Wisconsin. He emigrated to the United States from Laos in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. During the war he fought on behalf of the United States. He addressed the Advisory Committee and told about his participation in the Vietnam War in alliance with the United States, promises to the Hmong by the government of the United States, and how he and other Hmong came to emigrate to this country. His experiences are not untypical of other Hmong. His comments are presented unabridged and unaltered.<sup>1</sup>

My name is Way Kong and I'm happy to be here today. I'm going to tell you about my life in Laos working for the CIA, working for the Americans. If I say this too harshly, please don't take it towards yourself; but if I say something good, keep it and listen to it.

I want to tell my story to all of you. I was one of the persons who is in the service for the airplanes that fight all over Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos. I want to tell you about the help that I gave to all of you for the CIA, and for you to listen.

I was one of the persons who picked up the bones, flesh, and everything from the helicopter that crashed, helicopter number 441. I picked it up, all the [body] stuff, and send it back to America. When I got here, nobody seems to know me and appreciate it. I'm very sad.

All of you and every American person seems to forget what we Hmong did and how we helped the American people. We have loved every American that we have helped, and we love every one of you. We have used many thousands of lives to replace one American life that served in our country. But since we came here, nobody seems to recognize us, and nobody seems to appreciate what we did. You seem to push us down into a hole and put cement over us, and seem to forget. Now you are putting more and more heavy cement over us. You don't appreciate what we did for you at all.

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<sup>1</sup> Way Kong, testimony before the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Green Bay, WI, Nov. 21, 1996, pp. 114-20. Way Kong addressed the Advisory Committee in Hmong; Mary Xiong was the interpreter.

I want to ask you to remember all the lives that we have saved and given back to you, so you can remember that we are the ones who saved those people. Now remember us as those people. To let you know, one American pilot crashed in my country. We right away called to general that American pilot plane crashed and the pilot had jumped out with a parachute. There's a lot of bad guys out there, and colonel ordered us to get him, even if we lose our troops lives, we have to get him out. So Hmong used their lives to go and save this person, and it seems nobody appreciates what the Hmong have done.

If you think that you do not believe me, you can call Washington, DC and ask for my name. I have a name up there that served the CIA until now.

I want you to remember that the gun number 55 was the one that you brought into Laos; the gun number 16 is the one you brought to Laos. I want you to remember that. You should know that you brought those to my country. It is because of those firearms, that is why we have to come to this country. If not for that, then we would not be here today. When we were in my country, or of the Chinese, or Vietnamese, each one of us can go through their country and back and forth.

Since the Americans signed the contract that will help them, that is when it started. The American government had asked us to fight with them, to be a part of them and fight the Vietnamese. That is why we help them with the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and that is what happened.

American government said if we Hmong lost, they will help us leave the country. If we win, then we will get our country back. Americans promised us if we lost, they would find for us a land to live. Now I want to know where the land is. Not only did I hear that promise, but all the people who were in the meeting together in Laos heard this promise also. My bosses, Mr. Po [phonetic] and Mr. Blame [phonetic] my boss, they know it too. They said if I get to this country and show my face here, they will give me money to help me, and give me money to live on. Now that I am here, the government said they are going to cut off my money and won't let me have the money that you promised me.

I want you to see this. Why did the government do that? And say that? Why do we have to become American [citizens] before you will help us with the money? I have been fighting with the Americans since I was 15 years old, carrying a gun until now. Why do we have to become American citizens so you won't cut our grants off?

When you handed us the guns and all the ammunition, we were American then. Why now--why do you say we have to become American now? Why did you not ask us then to become US citizens before we can fight for the United States, why ask us now? You could have asked us then, and if we were not US citizens, then we would not participate.

Our parents died for us, my parents, too, died. I got burned on my face and all over on my body from the Vietnam people. The pain is still in my back.

I fueled the American planes. There was no machinery for me to put gas in planes, so by myself I had to lift up the tank to put gas in the plane. When we have no one else, I was the only one who put gas in plane. You put me all over the hills and the flatland. I was all over with the Vietnamese. Now why do you say all these words to me?

It is very hard on us and on our people. I want you to look at us and appreciate us. All the roads to Ho Chi Minh city are all damaged. There were no American people or persons standing there. Everybody that was killed there was Hmong. Why don't you see that?

I want you to remember and to appreciate us for what we did. I want you to remember General Vang Pao and that he signed to help the United States. It seems like you don't really remember him today or the people who lost their arms and legs from the fighting that have come to this country. See the Hmong people here who hang themselves and die because of all the depression and pressure they got from the war. You don't see that today, our people, how much we have been through, why can't you see that?

Can you find another government idea to help us and not let us down like this? We are here, and if we have to fight somebody else to stand for this country we are still here to do the same thing we did in Laos. We have to help American government just like we did back then.

This is all I have to say. I want to say thank you to all of the Committee that is here to listen to me. If I have said anything too harsh to all of you, please forgive me.

### III. History of the Hmong in Laos and Their Migration to the United States

The political and military involvement of the United States in Southeast Asia during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s produced an influx of refugee immigration to this country from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos that involved almost one million people. Within this flow of immigrants was a distinct ethnic group from Laos, the Hmong,<sup>1</sup> who traced their origins as far back as 2700 B.C. Many of the Hmong allied themselves with the United States during this Nation's military involvement against communist forces in Southeast Asia. Hmong forces in Laos supported the United States military by mining North Vietnamese supply routes, ambushing North Vietnamese troops, and rescuing American pilots shot down over Laos. In addition, the Hmong fought on behalf of the United States against the communist Pathet Lao forces in Laos, and by the early 1970s the Hmong were the only remaining effective fighting force resisting the Pathet Lao.

The Hmong began emigrating to the United States in December 1975, when the U.S. Congress authorized the admission of 3,466 Hmong under the "parole" power of the U.S. Attorney General. In May 1976 another 11,000 Laotians were granted entry under this parole, but there is no information on the ethnic mix of this group of refugees so the exact number of Hmong is unclear. In August 1977 Congress "paroled" another 15,000 from Southeast Asia, and by the early 1980s some 50,000 Hmong had been resettled in the United States. By 1988 figures from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services showed more than 100,000 Hmong in the United States. Since Hmong immigrants fall under the provision of war refugees, Federal and

State agencies must approve State and local plans for their settlement in local communities. It has been a common practice to coordinate the resettlement of the Hmong refugees with religious groups, which sponsor refugee families.

**TABLE 1**  
**Hmong Population, By State, 1983-1988**

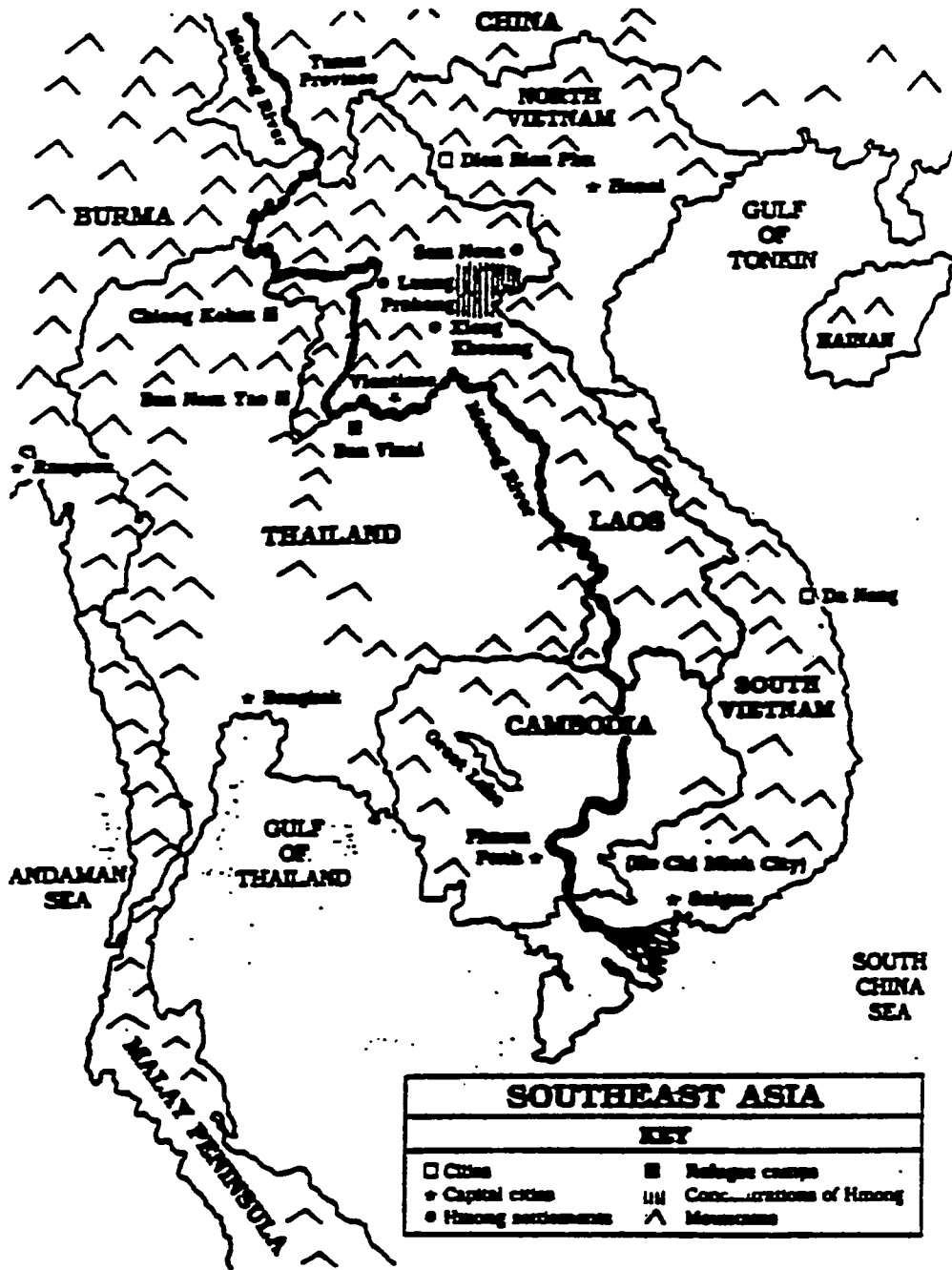
	1983	1988
California	28,000	59,000
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>4,720</b>	<b>16,450</b>
Minnesota	8,730	13,700
Illinois	2,050	710
Rhode Island	1,700	2,180
Colorado	1,750	1,300
Michigan	1,570	2,760
Utah	1,500	170
Pennsylvania	1,200	750
Washington	1,100	1,185
Oregon	1,100	1,130
U.S. total	61,000	105,000

Source: Ray Hutchinson, "Acculturation in the Hmong Community," University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

A significant concentration of Hmong have settled in more than a dozen communities in Wisconsin. The Hmong population in Wisconsin quadrupled in the 5-year period, 1983-1988. Unlike California where the Hmong are primarily concentrated in a single urban area, the Hmong in Wisconsin are dispersed throughout the State, with eight cities having more than 1,000 Hmong in each of their communities. Most of this migration to Wisconsin has been the result of resettlement of the Hmong in the State from other parts of the country. Often the Hmong location to Wisconsin was sponsored by various religious denominations. In the Green Bay area, the Catholic diocese has been particularly active in sponsoring Hmong immigrants. By 1990 there were 410 Hmong families and more than 2,300 Hmong living in Green Bay, a city with one of the heaviest concentrations of Hmong in the State.

<sup>1</sup> The history of every ethnic people is involved and complex. The material in this section is a brief and simplified summary of the Hmong in Laos in order to give the reader an understanding of how the Hmong came to emigrate to the United States. The material in this section was compiled from a variety of sources by staff in the Midwestern Regional Office of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Chicago, Illinois. A bibliography of the sources used in this section is in the appendix.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Laos and the Hmong Homelands**



Source: *Acculturation in the Hmong Community* (Center for Public Affairs and the Institute on Race and Ethnicity, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1992), p. 7.

## Hmong Migration to Laos, the French Colonization of Laos, and Early 20th Century Laotian History

The Hmong living in the United States today came from Laos, a small landlocked country in mainland Southeast Asia. Although their exact origin as a people is uncertain, Hmong legends tell of migrations from an original homeland to Siberia and from Siberia to southwestern China several thousand years ago. For thousands of years, the Chinese government received tribute from the Hmong and, in exchange, allowed them their autonomy. This policy changed during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), when the Chinese government practiced a policy of political persecution and oppression against the Hmong. Although the Hmong resisted and most remained in China, some Hmong migrated to the mountainous regions of Laos where they may have numbered as many as 300,000 in the 1960s. Today there are still more Hmong in China—estimates range from 2.8 to 5 million—than in the rest of the world combined.

The country of Laos is mostly mountainous. It shares borders with five countries: China to the north, Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the south, Thailand (known as Siam prior to 1941) to the west, and Burma to the northwest. The only neighboring country with a natural ease of entry to Laos is Thailand. High mountains, some of which rise to almost 10,000 feet, hinder access to Burma, China, and Vietnam, and the large waterfalls along the Mekong River make movement between Cambodia and Laos extremely difficult.

In the Laotian highlands, the Hmong were an agricultural community, primarily cultivating three crops: rice for their own consumption, corn for livestock, and opium as a cash crop to trade with other groups. When the French colonialists arrived, coffee and cotton were also cultivated as cash crops, but neither supplanted opium as the primary export product.

European colonization of Southeast Asia began in 1858 when a French naval expedition landed in Da Nang, a port on the eastern seaboard of south central Vietnam. The Vietnamese repelled this first French incursion, but 3 years later, in 1861, the French returned and captured Saigon—a major port in the southern part of Vietnam. From Saigon the French pushed out into Southeast Asia, and by 1863 the French had established control over Cambodia and southern Vietnam.

In 1866 the French began to venture northward from southern Vietnam and Cambodia via the Mekong River, a river north of Cambodia that is the western boundary of Laos. The French hoped the Mekong River would be a navigable waterway to China from the south and a basin from which they could challenge Great Britain's influence in China.<sup>2</sup> This southern route into China failed to materialize, and the French instead concentrated on conquering the people and territory of Southeast Asia.

By 1882 the French had completed their conquest of Vietnam and consolidated political control over the entire country, which they administered in three provinces. With their conquest of Vietnam complete, the French laid complete claim to Laos. The French claim to Laos was disputed, however, by Thailand, which had held Laos as a tributary state since 1825.<sup>3</sup> Thailand could not match the military power of the French, who, after two decades of conquest and military buildup, were the greatest military power in Southeast Asia. Consequently, in 1893 with the signing of the Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1893, Thailand acceded to the French all claims on Laos. The French established Vientiane as the colony's administrative capital, and Luang Prabang as the royal capital, placing King Sisavang Vong on the throne as the head of all Laos and, thereby, unifying the country. The king of Laos carried only social status and no political power.

To the French, the colony of Laos was their least significant possession in Southeast Asia. As evidence, in Vietnam there were more than 40,000 French administrators and colonists, whereas in Laos there were only a few hundred French nationals. The few French in Laos relied on the existing Laotian political structure as much as possible to maintain law and order and imported Vietnamese to assist them in their administration of the country. Lao village chiefs served as intermediaries between the French colonial administrators, their Vietnamese assistants, and their own people, the Lao, and the other ethnic groups.

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<sup>2</sup> Great Britain had become the dominant European power in China after the Opium Wars (1839–42 and 1856–60).

<sup>3</sup> Laos was not considered a unified country in the 19th century. What is today called Laos consisted of four kingdoms, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, Vientiane, and Champassak and several minor principalities.



Under initial military and political domination by the French, the Hmong in Laos were essentially deemed a small, unimportant, and indistinct portion of the general Laotian population. The Hmong, due to their living in the rugged and virtually inaccessible mountainous regions, had limited contact with the lowland Lao and the French colonialists. The major exception to this pattern was the Hmong trade of opium in exchange for either cash or items that the Hmong did not produce themselves, e.g., tools, certain clothing items, and fuel. The Hmong had learned to cultivate the opium poppy in China, and the highland climate and soil in Laos were well-suited to the production of this labor-intensive and highly profitable product.

The Laotians rebelled several times against French colonial rule. The first large anti-French uprising was the Kha rebellion in southern Laos. The revolt began in 1901 and continued for 7 years. Before World War II there would be at least three other major revolts against the French, the last raging continuously for more than ten years before being suppressed in 1936. The Hmong rose against the French in 1919, and were crushed by the French 2 years later.

During their occupation of Laos, the French made little effort to develop the country economically, unlike their concerted efforts at economic development in their other Southeast Asia colonies. In Laos few roads were built, and no railways were constructed. Education of the local population was ignored. No high schools were established, and by 1940 less than 10,000 Laotian children had received any type of formal schooling. Instead, the country, its resources, and its people—including the Hmong—were used to assist the French in the expansion of their colonial interests in more promising areas of Southeast Asia.

During World War II Japanese military forces moved into Southeast Asia and controlled the area. The French Vichy government signed a treaty with Japan that allowed Japanese troops to move freely in Indochina while the French colonial regime remained in place.<sup>4</sup> Japanese troops used Laos and other areas of Southeast Asia as a staging ground for attacking the nationalist Chinese forces north of the Laotian and Vietnamese borders, while France, although

committed to neutrality with respect to Japanese control of the region, covertly promoted unrest in the area. The major Hmong clans took different sides; some supported and worked with the Japanese; others allied with the French and made forays against Japanese military posts.

In 1944 the French Vichy government in Paris fell, and Charles de Gaulle set up a new provisional "free French" government. To assist the Allied effort in Southeast Asia, de Gaulle ordered "free French" commandos into Laos to set up resistance bases against the Japanese. Some Hmong assisted the French in this effort and served as guerrilla fighters against the Japanese in the highland areas of Laos. Responding to the incursion of French commandos into Southeast Asia, the Japanese abrogated their treaty with France and seized control of all government operations. Throughout Indochina French residents were imprisoned, and the national leaders of each country in the former French colonies were ordered to declare independence and submit to Japanese rule.

The Laotian king, Sisavang Vong—the king placed on the throne by the French—resisted the Japanese demand and, instead, called upon the Laotian people to fight the Japanese. He was supported in this effort by the country's premier and viceroy, Prince Phetsarat. The Japanese countered by seizing the capital city, Vientiane. The king, with Japanese troops in control of the capital, acquiesced to the demands of the Japanese and declared Laos to be independent of France. Independence was short-lived, however. After Japan's surrender in August 1945, French military forces returned to Southeast Asia and reclaimed their colonies, including Laos.

## **The Hmong in Laos and the First Indochina War**

In Laos, the French compelled the monarch to repudiate Laos' declaration of independence, and proclaim the French protectorate over Laos still in effect. Prince Phetsarat urged the king to resist, but the king again acquiesced and placed Laos under control of France. Prince Phetsarat formed a resistance group to the French, denounced the king for his submission to France, and organized an independent provisional government, the Lao Issara or the Free Lao movement. The defense minister of the new provisional government was Prince Souphanouvong, Phetsarat's half-brother. French troops moved against the Lao Issara and

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<sup>4</sup> The French Vichy government was the Nazi-collaborationist regime that governed France from 1941-1944.

defeated the group's forces in 1946. The leaders of the new government fled the country, and set up a government-in-exile in Thailand. Supported by the French, King Sisavang Vong formed a new government known as the Royal Lao Government (RLG) with a popular elected national assembly, and in 1949 Laos was given the status of an independent state within the French Union.

In exile, Souphanouvong allied himself with the Viet Minh—the independence movement in Vietnam under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh—which had begun fighting the French in 1946. Some in the Lao Issara government were reluctant to support an alliance with the communist Viet Minh and urged compromise with the French. Feuding factions developed, and unable to resolve differences among its members the Lao Issara disbanded in 1949. After its dissolution, some of the Lao Issara leaders—including Souphanouvong's half-brother Souvanna Phouma—returned to Laos and joined the RLG government. Souphanouvong and other leaders along with their followers moved to the Viet Minh headquarters in northern Vietnam and formed a resistance movement against the RLG and the French called the Pathet Lao.

Believing their plight would be better served by the RLG within the French Union, most—but not all—Hmong sided with the French in the First Indochina War and fought against the Pathet Lao. The French organized these Hmong into guerrilla units called Meo Maquis. Not all Hmong, however, allied with the French or remained neutral. Similar to their earlier support of Laotian independence from France in the first part of the century, several thousand Hmong, under Faydang Lobliayao, fought with the Pathet Lao against the French.

In 1950 France withdrew its troops from Laos to defend against the Viet Minh attacks in Vietnam. The RLG organized the Royal Lao Army and operated under French guidance and with U.S. support supplied through the French. In 1951 the U.S. formalized its aid to the RLG when it signed an economic assistance agreement with RLG leader Phoui Sananikone.

The French found it increasingly difficult to maintain military control in both Laos and Vietnam under the relentless pressure from the Pathet Lao and Viet Minh. The United States, fearing a military French collapse in Southeast Asia would lead to communist governments throughout Indochina, began to covertly assist

and advise the French in their fight against the Pathet Lao and the Viet Minh. Within the State Department of the United States, the prevailing opinion was that an independent, noncommunist government could be formed in Laos, and that the formation of such a government could alleviate some of the pressure on France to maintain its control in the area, thereby thwarting the advance of communism in the region. In October 1953—both to reduce the number of fronts on which they had to fight and in response to American political pressure—the French granted Laos full independence. The long-standing monarchy assumed full political power, but the new government did not include the Pathet Lao.

Following the granting of independence, the French moved to solidify their military base in the rest of the region. The French began deploying 16,000 troops into Dienbienphu, a heavily fortified military base close to the Laotian-Vietnamese border surrounded by steep mountainous terrain. The French were confident that the natural terrain surrounding Dienbienphu made the fortress impregnable and that from this secure base of operations they could eliminate the Viet Minh and Pathet Lao.

The French, however, had miscalculated. Over the waning months of 1953 and into the early months of 1954, 33 Viet Minh battalions—with support from sympathetic Hmong—transported heavy weaponry and artillery up the steep cliffs around Dienbienphu. In the spring of 1954 the Viet Minh forces attacked. The surrounded base was overwhelmed by heavy weapon and artillery fire, forcing the French to surrender. The surrender of Dienbienphu ended both the First Indochina War and French military involvement in Southeast Asia.

## **The United States—Hmong Alliance and the Second Indochina War**

An international conference was held in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1954 to work out the political settlement for both the Korean War and the First Indochina War, jointly chaired by Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Under the terms of the agreement, Laos remained intact, and a constitutional monarchy was established with a prime minister and national assembly.<sup>5</sup> The first

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<sup>5</sup> Under the 1954 Geneva Conference Laos remained undivided. This was in contrast to the other two countries

constitutional government formed in Laos after the 1954 Geneva Conference was a coalition government and included the communist Pathet Lao. The neutrality of Laos was to be ensured by the explicit stipulation in the Geneva accord and endorsed by all major powers that no foreign country could deploy or station troops in Laos.

Although the United States abided by the terms of this provision, it remained enmeshed in the internal affairs of Laos through the United States Operations Mission (USOM), a campaign that disbursed economic aid to factions in the country opposed to the communists. The United States further entangled itself with Laos with the South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). Signed in 1954 by the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, Thailand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and New Zealand, the treaty guaranteed SEATO intervention in the event of a military threat from China. SEATO also unilaterally extended its protection to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Prince Souvanna Phouma, the half-brother of the Pathet Lao organizer, Prince Souphanouvong, organized the first government. He would also organize several other coalition governments that ruled the country between 1954 and 1957. However, because of his familial ties to Souphanouvong and his refusal to disavow all cooperation with the communists, Souvanna Phouma never had the confidence of the United States that his government would keep Laos from falling under communist control. As a result, the United States continued to support other Laotian leaders who disdained any show of support for the communists.

In 1958 a new government was formed by Phoui Sananikone. The Sananikone government dissolved the national assembly, denounced the 1954 Geneva truce, and entered into a military and economic alliance with the United States. The Sananikone government also moved against the communists, abolishing the Pathet Lao as a legal political party and arresting and imprisoning its leaders. Some Pathet Lao leaders managed to flee to North Vietnam, and there reorganized Pathet Lao forces. With military and logistical assistance from the North Vietnamese, the reconstituted Pathet Lao began attacking outposts of the Laotian government. The Sananikone govern-

ment, despite U.S. backing, was unable to suppress the military operations of the Pathet Lao and by 1959 open civil war seemed imminent.

In the hope of restoring peace to the country, Sananikone offered his resignation to the king. Before a new government was formed, however, Phoumi Nosavan—backed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States—staged a coup and seized the government. Nosavan followed the coup with elections that elevated Prince Somsanith to prime minister and himself to minister of defense.<sup>6</sup> Nosavan's coup and the elections, however, did not alleviate the volatile political situation in the country. The Pathet Lao gained new recruits, continued to receive military equipment and supplies from the North Vietnamese, and stepped up its military activity in the countryside.

As the military situation facing the Laotian government deteriorated, a second coup occurred in 1960 staged by an army captain named Kong Le. After seizing power, Le initiated a policy of strict neutrality. All foreign bases in Laos were ordered closed and all foreign troops and operatives were expelled. A new national policy was established by which all economic and military foreign aid that subjected the country in any way to the giving country was refused. In an attempt to mollify the warring factions and avert further civil strife, the regime reinstated Phouma to the post of prime minister and offered Nosavan the deputy prime minister post. Nosavan refused, and, with logistical and military support from the United States, established an independent military force with its base of operations in southern Laos.

Le's attempt to pacify the country further unraveled when Thailand abruptly ended its neutrality in the civil strife, and formally entered into an alliance with the U.S.-backed Nosavan in southern Laos. In addition, Thailand imposed an economic blockade on the country, effectively isolating the new government. The Laotian government appealed to the United States to use its influence and persuade Nosavan to disarm. The United States, though, concerned about Phouma's political leanings, declined, and insisted that control of the government be given over to Nosavan. Prime Minister Phouma refused.

With his plea to disarm Nosavan rebuffed by the United States and Nosavan actively engaging

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involved, Vietnam and Korea, both of which were divided into two sectors—one communist and one noncommunist.

<sup>6</sup> Allegations persist that these elections were fraudulent.

in military action against the sitting government, Phouma turned to the Soviet Union for aid and the Soviet Union responded with air support and other military supplies. The Laotian national army, still led by Kong Le, formed an alliance with the Pathet Lao to fight Nosavan's forces. The North Vietnamese entered the northern portions of the country to reinforce the Pathet Lao and the national government army. By the beginning of 1960 the country of Laos was engulfed in all-out civil war, with one faction supported by the United States and the other faction supported by the Soviet Union and North Vietnam.

It was during this time of turmoil in Laos that the United States, through the CIA, first actively began recruiting the Hmong into a mercenary army to impede the military operations of both the communist Pathet Lao in Laos and the North Vietnamese communist forces in Vietnam. There is no official documentation denoting the exact promises, if any, of the United States Government to the Hmong for their cooperation against the communists,<sup>7</sup> though many Hmong assert the United States promised the Hmong sovereignty and independence if the communists were defeated, and asylum outside of Laos if the communists were victorious.<sup>8</sup> With the U.S.-Hmong alliance forged, the CIA began airdropping arms, ammunition, food, and medical supplies to Hmong allies, and by 1962 an estimated 15,000 Hmong were organized into military units operating under the direction of the CIA.

During the civil war, the combined military forces of the national government and the Pathet Lao gained control over most of the areas populated by Hmong allied with the United States. This, in conjunction with the guerrilla type of warfare the Hmong were fighting, forced many Hmong to flee their homes and became almost totally dependent upon CIA supplies for

survival. As the fighting in Laos escalated, the United States realized that a complete victory by the Nosavan-led forces was unlikely.

Subsequently, the United States reversed its opposition to a Laotian coalition government that included communists. To resolve the conflict an international conference was again convened in Geneva in 1961 with all three parties attending—the communist Pathet Lao, the U.S. backed faction, and the neutralists. A provisional coalition government was established under Souvanna Phouma, and all factions were included in the new government.

The coalition government and the peace that it brought to Laos collapsed in less than 12 months. In 1963 several ministers of the government friendly to the Pathet Lao were assassinated in the capital city of Vientiane. In response, Pathet Lao leaders withdrew from the government, reorganized their army, and resumed military operations to take control of the country. The United States responded by openly supplying and assisting the national army.<sup>9</sup> As Laos again erupted into civil war between communist and noncommunist forces, the United States was finding itself increasingly committed to neighboring South Vietnam in its fight against the North Vietnamese.

With the conflict in South Vietnam escalating and with it the strategic and logistic importance of Laos, both sides in the Laotian civil war received substantial amounts of military support from the warring factions in Vietnam. As the 1960s unfolded, more and more North Vietnamese troops entered Laos to use the country as a corridor to South Vietnam. The United States, in turn, bombed the corridor with incessant air raids in an attempt to close down the supply lines from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. Much of this fighting was staged in Hmong homelands, and the Hmong were increasingly recruited by the U.S. Government to impede the operations of the North Vietnamese. As the military arms supplied to the North Vietnamese from the Soviet Union and China became more lethal and sophisticated, these were turned with intensified fury on the Hmong to keep open supply lines to South Vietnam. The Hmong were caught in the middle and, forced away from their agricultural way of life, became an uprooted people, increasingly

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<sup>7</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency, the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Army were contacted about promises made to the Hmong by the United States for their service. Documents relating to the Hmong and their operations with the United States in Southeast Asia are still classified by the three agencies. Consequently, verification of an official agreement between the United States and the Hmong from the United States perspective is unavailable to the Advisory Committee.

<sup>8</sup> Hmong veterans of the Second Indochina War who testified at the community forum held this opinion. See *inter alia*, statements of Way Kong (prologue), Norman Kong (chapter VIII) and Toua Yong (chapter VIII).

<sup>9</sup> The national Laotian army was now commanded by Kong Le, the commander who had formerly been in alliance with the Pathet Lao against the forces of Phoumi Nosavan.

dependent upon their major ally—the United States.

The United States—which began committing ground forces numbering several hundred thousand to South Vietnam—recruited the Hmong throughout the 1960s to assist in a front-line defense strategy against the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao. This military alliance between the Hmong and the United States would remain intact until 1973. Hmong men under arms and allied with the United States peaked in 1969, when nearly 40,000 Hmong soldiers operated in the Laotian highlands in collaboration with United States military operations in South Vietnam. By 1970 the only effective fighting force in Laos against the communist Pathet Lao would be the Hmong.

By 1970 the civil war in Laos had stalemated and the war in Vietnam had turned badly for the United States. Political pressure was mounting in the United States for a complete and unilateral withdrawal from all Southeast Asia. At the same time the clandestine operations of the U.S. military and State Department in Laos were becoming public, fueling additional pressure on the U.S. Government to end its involvement in the country. In 1972 the Pathet Lao made overtures to the government of Souvanna Phouma for a political settlement. The United States Government, anxious to extricate itself militarily from Southeast Asia, urged Souvanna Phouma to accept, threatening a reduction in aid if a peace accord could not be reached. Souvanna Phouma acceded to U.S. pressure, and in February 1973 the two warring factions signed a peace agreement. The accord specified the expulsion of all foreign troops and operatives from the country, and created a new national government open to all political factions in a parliamentary body, the National Political Consultative Council (NPCC).

In April 1974 the new government came into existence. Souvanna Phouma was named prime minister, and Souphanouvong became chairman of the parliament. Three Hmong held high level positions in this government: Pouby Lyfong—allied with the Pathet Lao—served as deputy minister for posts and telegraphs, Lo Fong served as vice chair of the Culture and Education Committee of parliament, and Yang Dao—allied with Phoumi Nosavan—served as vice chair of the economy and finance committee of the NPCC.

## Hmong Resettlement Outside of Laos

The peace accord in Laos, with the expulsion of all foreign interests, disbanded the Hmong as an independent fighting force. The major ally and sole supplier of the Hmong, the United States, had extricated itself from the country. Coincident with the new political situation in Laos was the military disengagement of the United States from South Vietnam. With its military withdrawal from South Vietnam, the United States had no further need of an alliance with the Hmong, and abruptly the military and logistical support from the United States to its former Hmong allies was stopped.

In 1975 the neighboring countries of South Vietnam and Cambodia fell under the control of communist forces. These events unraveled the fragile peace in Laos. A series of worker and student strikes broke out in the country, which escalated into renewed fighting between the Pathet Lao and the national government forces now commanded by the Hmong general, Vang Pao. When Pathet Lao forces advanced on the capital city of Vientiane, Vang Pao ordered air strikes on the advancing units. Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, committed to a peaceful restoration of the coalition government, opposed the air strikes, considering it a precipitous escalation in the fighting. Vang Pao resigned and fled to Thailand.

Unimpeded, the Pathet Lao slowly consolidated power and moved into the capital and seized power, establishing the Lao People's Democratic Republic.<sup>10</sup> The Hmong, who comprised most of the government's forces, fled the capital and gathered at Long Chen, a staging area for U.S.-backed military operations in Laos. The prevailing sentiment among the Hmong was that the situation was untenable and their only viable option, in the wake of the Pathet Lao takeover, was to flee the country.

More than 10,000 Hmong swarmed into Long Chen hoping to be evacuated from the country. Amid utter chaos, two old U.S. C-47 cargo planes were employed to evacuate the Hmong people to Thailand. In one incident, one plane was so overloaded it could not take off until 20 people were pushed out of the plane. In all, only about 1,000 Hmong escaped before Pathet Lao forces converged on the site three days later.

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<sup>10</sup> The Lao People's Democratic Republic has remained the ruling government in Laos to the present time.

Hmong captured by the Pathet Lao were disarmed and sent to "reeducation" centers, where many died from malnutrition and hard labor. Thousands of other Hmong allied to the United States scattered throughout the countryside; some tried to escape to Thailand while others retreated back to their ancestral highlands and continued an armed resistance against the Pathet Lao. In all more than 40,000 Hmong managed to flee on foot to Thailand, where they were interned in refugee center camps to await resettlement to other countries.<sup>11</sup> Beginning in 1976 and continuing until 1979, the new communist government sent Lao and Vietnamese troops to attack Hmong strongholds. Official estimates put the number of Hmong dissidents killed in the military operations of 1977 at 1,300 and thousands captured in heavy fighting. According to some Hmong refugees who managed to escape, biological and chemical poisons were used on them.

Hmong resistance against the Lao People's Democratic Republic continues today as Hmong refugees in Thailand cross the border attacking and harassing Laotian government troops. Some of this activity in the past was reportedly encouraged by Thai officials interested in obtaining military intelligence. Other Hmong are reported to have made their way to Hmong settlements in southwestern China, there receiving some initial support from the Chinese to continue liberation struggles against the Laotian government. In 1981 former generals Vang Pao and Phoumi Nosavan announced the formation of a United Lao National Liberation Front to liberate Laos.<sup>12</sup>

Estimates of the total number of Hmong who have fled Laos since the mid-1970s is 150,000. A similar number of Hmong are still believed to live in Laos. Of the thousands of Hmong who escaped to Thailand from Laos, most spent years in harsh refugee camps before being resettled in a third

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<sup>11</sup> Not all Hmong suffered at the hands of the Pathet Lao. A number of Hmong had remained in alliance with the Pathet Lao throughout the First and Second Indochina Wars, and several of these Hmong gained high office in the new government. Faydang Lobliayao became vice president of the Supreme People's Assembly, and his younger brother became a member of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party.

<sup>12</sup> General Vang Pao now resides in California and operates the United Lao National Liberation Front from this locale. There are reports that the front is funded in large part from the donations of Hmong refugees living in the United States.

country. Most of these Hmong refugees from the camps in Thailand have come to the United States, with smaller numbers going to France, Australia, and Canada. In 1987—more than 10 years after the departure of the United States from Laos—the United Nations High Commission for refugees reported that more than 50,000 Hmong were still confined in refugee camps at Ban Vinai and Chiang Kham in Thailand.

Barbara Biebel, director of Refugee, Migrant Worker, and Hispanic Services (hereafter Refugee Office), Green Bay Catholic Diocese, spoke to the Advisory Committee about the diocese's role in the migration of the Hmong to Green Bay.

In the spring of 1975, as many of us sat watching scenes of the collapse of Vietnam on television, a call went out from the administration in Washington to a network of national voluntary agencies [to assist in the resettlement of refugees from Southeast Asia.] For the Church and the Diocese of Green Bay, there was never a question whether or not we should be involved in refugee settlement; under moral law and Catholic social teaching we could not do nothing. . . . The President directly asked the chairman of the Catholics Bishops Conference for their support in managing an unprecedented refugee resettlement effort from Southeast Asia. The Bishop of Green Bay, Aloysius Wycislo, immediately pledged his support and assigned two diocesan staff persons to the task.

The diocese undertook a sponsorship-model of refugee resettlement. Churches, Catholic and non-Catholic, came forward in impressive numbers to assist the newcomers. Over the next two decades 80 percent of the Catholic churches in the Green Bay-De Pere area sponsored refugees, and many sponsored several times.... From 1975 through to the present [the Diocese of Green Bay] has had the only onsite, staffed resettlement office in northeastern Wisconsin.

By the end of 1975 the first wave of Vietnamese had been resettled, but there still were five church sponsors available which had collected money, clothing, household goods, and in one case, rented a house. The Green Bay diocese asked the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) if there were any refugees left. The diocese was told that perhaps early in 1976 some Hmong refugees would be in need of resettlement. [The Refugee Office] asked who they were? What were they like? What language did they speak? Nevertheless, the diocese did agree to take five cases since—after all—they were refugees and needed a home.

Three of the first five Hmong families the diocese accepted were resettled in the city of Green Bay. The

diocese subsequently filed family reunification papers and a few more families arrived. By 1978, there was a dramatic increase in Hmong secondary migration to Wisconsin. One contributing factor was that the first wave of refugees had included civil, military, and clan leaders—traditional leaders around whom other Hmong wanted to cluster.

For 20 years now the Diocese of Green Bay has continued to assist Hmong families to [relocate and] be reunited through the filing of necessary papers, by acting as the local contact to expedite arrival details, and by providing followup services. The number of refugees resettled by the diocese since 1975 is 5,257. Of these about 4,713 are Hmong, and of these about 1,500 have been resettled in the city of Green Bay.

Over the years [the Refugee Office] has provided many direct and indirect services to the Hmong. First, the office always provided initial resettlement services as required by the contract between the United States Catholic Conference and the U.S. Department of State. Second, followup services have also been provided as needed for as long as a former refugee feels a need. These services may include: information, referral, ongoing orientation, translations, advocacy, immigration applications and advice. Third, Refugee Office staff made connections between people wishing to make donations and those with needs, matching volunteers with those wanting to be tutored or those wishing to have a new friend.

Finally, as advocates, this office has made preparations to service providers and other groups to inform them about the Hmong people and encourage their recognition of the gifts the Hmong people bring to the community. To schools and service agencies this office provides arrival data and passes along international news which may affect local programs. The Office of Refugee and Migrant Worker Services has also helped form networks of service providers for coordination and planning, writing letters promoting just and humane policies.

Funding for this effort has come from several sources. The United States Catholic Conference has provided a budget for about 18 of our 21 years. From the Federal Government, the Refugee Office has received CETA money to hire outreach workers, and later the diocese received Federal grants to hire case managers. Currently the diocese receives KEYS [Keeping Education Among Youth for Success] funds to reduce truancy, early marriages, school dropouts and encourage continuing education and employment for youths grades 6 through 12. In addition, the diocese has provided a budget [for the Refugee Office]; in the last 21 years the Green Bay Catholic Diocese contribution [to the Refugee Office] has totaled about \$945,000 in direct budget monies and in-kind donations.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Barbara Biebel, testimony before the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Nov. 21, 1996, Green Bay, WI, transcript, pp. 134-37.

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## IV. The Hmong in Green Bay

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Research on the Hmong community in Green Bay has been conducted by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (UWGB). The studies examined Hmong life in the city since 1989. Ray Hutchinson, chair of the Urban Regional Studies Program at UWGB, designed and supervised the research. He told the Advisory Committee that the Hmong in northeast Wisconsin have encountered a persistent pattern of discrimination.

Individual and institutional discrimination against the Hmong is prevalent in northeast Wisconsin and in Green Bay. . . . Individual Hmong confront substantial prejudice and discrimination in their everyday interactions within the local community, whether this occurs in the hallways and classrooms of local schools, or when they are looking for housing and are told the apartment has already been rented, or when they are at work and are confronted with [derogatory] statements . . . from their coworkers, or when they are shopping in the local community. It is difficult to find a Hmong person who cannot relate examples of these sorts of things.

Discrimination also occurs at the institutional level. . . . When we consider discrimination at the broader community level two factors that should be kept in mind. These are figures that have been reported by the U.S. Census Bureau in the last several years. First, Wisconsin has the highest rate of residential segregation for Asian Americans of any State in the country. Second, a larger proportion of Asian children live in households below the poverty line in Wisconsin than in any other State in the country.

. . . . Many of the Hmong families [in Green Bay] have been here for 15 years or longer. When [the Urban Regional Studies Program] did its interviews [with the Hmong community] in 1990, about 60 percent of the Hmong households that were interviewed had come to Green Bay before 1980. That is significant, because it shows the families have been here for a very long time. One of the kinds of folklore one sometimes hears [about the Hmong] is "they're all new here and they don't know how to adapt, and that's why they don't have jobs. . . ." But that is not true for most of the [Hmong] families that are in the

community. The fact that the community was so large and had been established here so early is very significant.

The Hmong came to the United States following the collapse of American war effort in the second Indochina War in 1975. The first of the Hmong immigrants came to the United States early in 1976, and those were all from families of people who had been very high up in the Hmong military, fighting with, alongside, and for the CIA for 10 to 15 years in Southeast Asia. The origins of the [Hmong] community [in Green Bay] and a number of the early families here are situated in this group of people who were very important to the United States during that period of time. This is striking because one will, from time to time, see letters to the editor in the newspaper . . . from someone saying, "Why are the Hmong here? They have no reason to be here. Why don't they go back home? . . ."<sup>1</sup>

### City of Green Bay Demographics

Best known for its professional football team, the city of Green Bay encompasses an area of 43.8 square miles and is situated in the northeastern part of Wisconsin along the south shore of the Green Bay. The Fox River flows through the middle of the city, dividing it into an eastern section and a western section.

In 1992 the city's estimated population was 100,459, an increase of 4 percent since the 1990 census.<sup>2</sup> The racial and ethnic composition of the city is predominantly white. The 1990 census reported 96,000 residents in the city; 89,825 (90 percent) non-Hispanic white; 2,448 (3 percent) Asian; 2,234 (3 percent) American Indian; 1,063 (1 percent) Latino; and 453 (0.5 percent) African American.<sup>3</sup>

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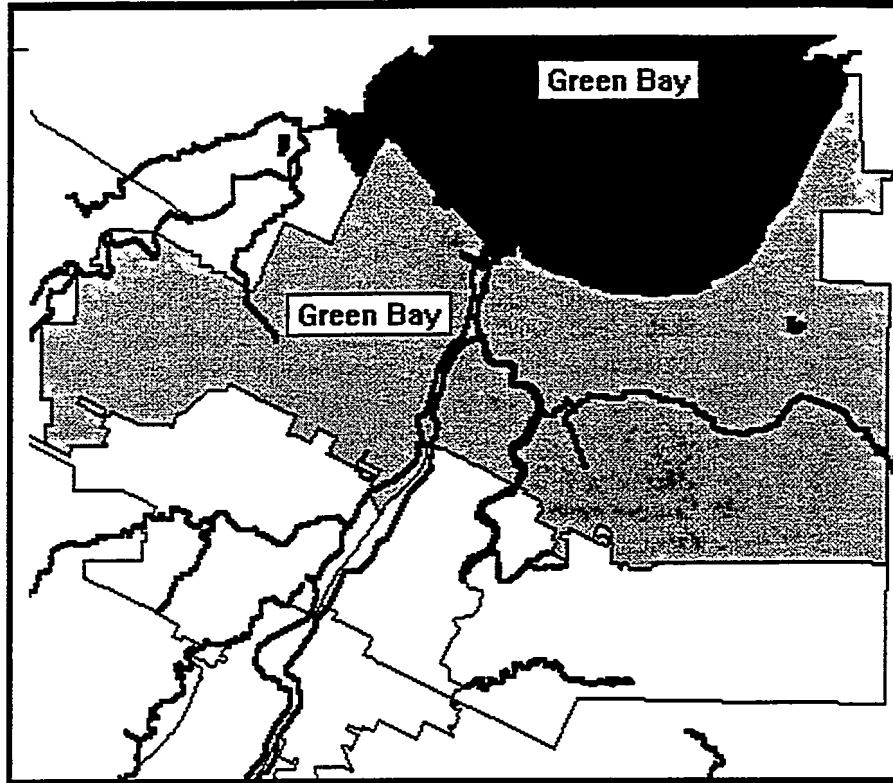
<sup>1</sup> Ray Hutchinson, testimony before the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Green Bay, WI, Nov. 21, 1996, Transcript, pp. 78-81 (hereafter referred to as Hmong Transcript).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1994 County and City Data Book*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



**FIGURE 2**  
**Green Bay, Wisconsin**



Source: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Midwestern Regional Office.

**TABLE 2**  
**City of Green Bay Demographic Information**

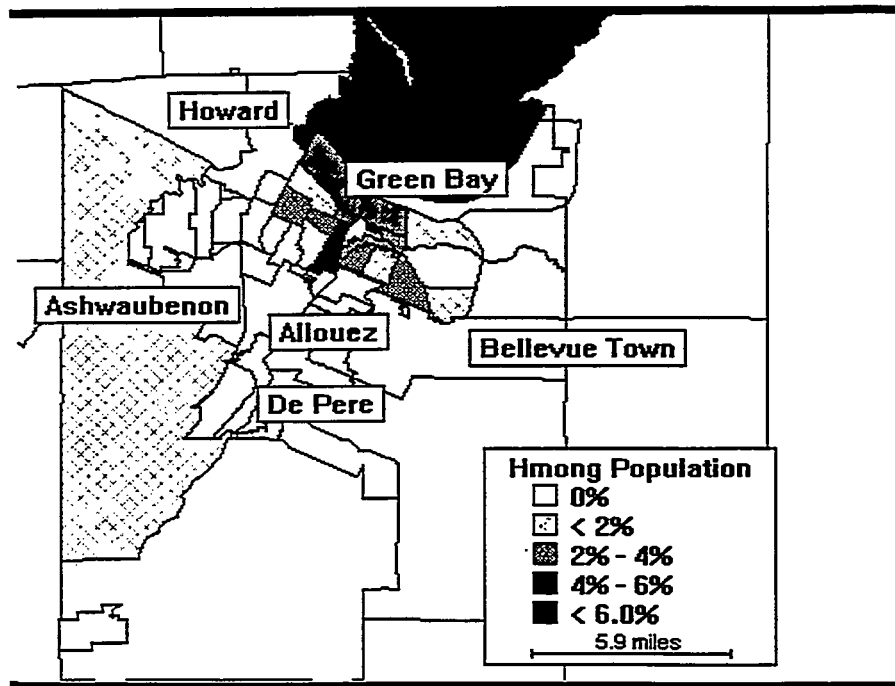
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Population .	95,570	
White (non-Hispanic)	89,825	94.0
Asian	2,448	2.5
American Indian	1,063	1.0
Asian	2,234	2.5
African American	453	0.5
Median HH income	\$26,770	
Labor force	50,422	
Employed	47,666	94.5
Unemployed	2,756	5.5
Adults over 25	60,721	
w/ H.S. diploma	49,184	81.0
w/ college degree	10,140	16.7

Source: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Midwestern Regional Office.

In the city of Green Bay there are 24,689 households; an average of approximately four individuals per household. Median household income is \$26,770. Approximately 10 percent of the city's households (2,462 families) are below the poverty level, a rate equal to that of the rest of the Nation. The labor force in the city is 50,422, of whom 47,666 are employed. The resulting unemployment rate is 5.5 percent, which is similar to that found in the State and nationwide. Among the city's residents over the age of 25, 81 percent have a high school diploma and 17 percent hold a college degree.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Hmong Population in Green Bay and Surrounding Area**



Source: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Midwestern Regional Office.

### Hmong Settlement in Green Bay

A significant concentration of Hmong have settled in more than a dozen communities in Wisconsin, with eight cities each having more than 1,000 Hmong in their communities. The Hmong population in the State is growing; in the 5-year period, 1983–1988, the Hmong population in Wisconsin increased fourfold. A large proportion of the present Hmong population in Green Bay is the result of resettlement of the Hmong from other parts of the country.

According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, three factors account for a large part of the differences in Hmong populations in different States: local economic conditions, the size of the Hmong community, and the resettlement philosophy of the Hmong leadership. In areas of high Hmong employment, refugees are

able to get jobs that provide health benefits and wage levels that enable their families to support themselves. Areas with high rates of Hmong employment are also characterized by a relatively low cost of housing. The housing problem is especially critical for the Hmong, because their families tend to be larger than those of other refugee groups.

Many Hmong communities—and all large Hmong communities—have three kinds of leaders: (1) traditional, kin-based, (2) military leaders who emerged during the war years, and (3) community leaders elected to represent the Hmong community to the American public. The extent to which all levels of leadership in a Hmong community support the goal of economic self-sufficiency is an important factor in a community's success. In some areas, the influence of younger community leaders to this end has been undermined by older and powerful leaders,

TABLE 3

## Refugee Arrivals Sponsored by Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, 1975-1996

1975	155 individuals
1976	454 individuals
1977	44 individuals
1978	120 individuals
1979	385 individuals
1980	414 individuals
1981	125 individuals
1982	51 individuals
1983	62 individuals
1984	117 individuals
1985	64 individuals
1986	151 individuals
1987	335 individuals
1988	369 individuals
1989	368 individuals
1990	228 individuals
1991	262 individuals
1992	417 individuals
1993	426 individuals
1994	340 individuals
1995	037 individuals
1996	233 individuals

Source: Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, Office of Refugee, Migration & Hispanic Services.

some of whom see successful resettlement as secondary—even detrimental—to the dream of returning to Laos.<sup>5</sup>

Barbara Biebel stated that a significant contributing factor for the secondary migration of Hmong to Green Bay was that the first migration to Green Bay included traditional civil, military, and clan leaders, and subsequent Hmong refugees moved to Wisconsin to cluster around those leaders.<sup>6</sup> By 1990 there were 410 Hmong families and over 2,300 Hmong living in Green Bay, a city with one of the heaviest concentrations of Hmong in the State. In 1996, the Hmong population in the city was estimated at 3,500.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau for Refugee Programs, *In America—Perspectives on Refugee Resettlement*, November 1988, pp. 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Biebel, statement for the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Green Bay, WI, Nov. 21, 1996.

TABLE 4

## Hmong Population Distribution in Wisconsin, 1990

	Number of families	Number of people
Appleton*	375	2,000
Eau Claire	425	2,160
Fond du Lac	25	200
<b>Green Bay*</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>2,300</b>
La Crosse	340	2,390
Madison	125	750
Manitowoc*	160	1,150
Milwaukee	650	3,250
Oshkosh*	150	930
Sheboygan	350	1,800
Wausau	335	2,040
Other	145	830

\* Communities in the Green Bay Catholic Diocese.

Source: Simon Fass, "The Hmong in Wisconsin: On the Road to Self Sufficiency" (Wisconsin Policy Institute).

The Hmong population in Green Bay is very young and has a very high birth rate. Hmong families average 3.8 children, even though nearly half (45 percent) of the adult women are under the age of 30 and have not completed their child-bearing years. This results in a child/woman fertility ratio of more than 1,200 children per 1,000 women aged 14-45. This is several times greater than the 380 children per 1,000 women aged 14-45 reported in the general population. Although intergenerational households are common in traditional Hmong society, available research suggests that fewer than 20 percent of the households in Green Bay include persons other than nuclear family members (mother, father, and children); only about 5 percent of the Hmong households include an older parent; and 15 percent include a brother or sister of one spouse.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ray Hutchinson, *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay: Center for Urban and Public Affairs, 1992, p. 25 (hereafter referred to as *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*).

## Comments of the Mayor of Green Bay

Paul Jadin, mayor of the City of Green Bay, spoke to the Advisory Committee on the Hmong community and some of the problems facing that community:

I think there are problems within the city of Green Bay that pose problems [for the Hmong community], . . . but by and large it is something that we have addressed and will continue to address. I am satisfied that we are making strides, and I am satisfied that we will be well equipped to assimilate this culture without eliminating what is good about this culture. That kind of diversity is something that we celebrate in Green Bay.

My relationship with the Hmong community...does not date back much farther than the time that I was elected mayor [in 1995] . . . . I am quite aware of some of the things that have occurred since the [Hmong] migration . . . . The Green Bay Diocese has been instrumental in locating [Hmong] families to the Green Bay area, and also to other areas in Wisconsin and Minnesota, particularly Wausau, Appleton, and even over into La Crosse and Eau Claire. Green Bay is one of the predominant communities in terms of the resettlement of the Hmong . . . . At this time we have about 400 Hmong families in the Green Bay area, and the average family is about eight people. We had, about 15 years ago, an unemployment rate within the [Hmong] community of about 80 percent. We are now down to about 10 percent, and that considers only those people who are seeking employment as opposed to the general population.

I believe, [the city administration] has a very good relationship with the leadership of the [Hmong] community. Norman Kong, the director of the Southeast Asian Center, for instance, I regard to be a good friend and someone that I see quite regularly with respect to the needs of his family and community. I also have served on various panels or have appointed people to speak to various panels with respect to the cultural diversity within the city of Green Bay, and that includes the Hmong/Laotian community . . . .<sup>8</sup>

The Hmong community, of course, has had some difficulties in assimilation. [To assist them] there is a Southeast Asian Community Center on Broadway Street in Green Bay. [In the past] it has been funded with Federal funds and some degree of community involvement. There has been some divisive discussion

and debate within the [Southeast Asian] community as to how to run that center, and that debate has impacted and influenced the funding. Over the course of time there have been accusations within the community—one clan to another, or one segment to another—alleging that there is still an element of communism in one faction.

These types of things make it difficult for the larger community to adequately address the needs of the Southeast Asian community, because we are not aware at all times whether those in the community [doing the] speaking are speaking for the group as a whole, or whether there are factions that are still doubting the sincerity of the leadership of one group or another.

Still, we have attempted to fund various projects for the Southeast Asian community. Just recently Hmong [from the Southeast Asian Center] applied for a grant, the 1996 Community Development Block Grant Cycle. This was an application for \$30,000 to fund a variety of educational programs. The [City's] redevelopment authority indicated that that funding would be available, provided the Hmong could come up with some matching fund. That was done simply to encourage a more stable administrative environment.

The center only was able to come up with \$5,000 in matching funds, and, therefore, did not receive the \$30,000 . . . . [However], in the [center's] grant application for 1997 they requested funds for a gang abatement program. I indicated to the redevelopment authority that I [preferred to] free up the \$30,000 that was devoted last year without [any] strings attached, and add [the community's] \$5,000 [in matching funds] so that the [center] will in fact have \$35,000 available to address gang problems and general juvenile education. The [center], then, because of that \$35,000, will have a better ability to go out . . . and seek matching funds, and, hopefully, we will once again have staff available for the community center.

The gang problem was funded because it is one of our biggest concerns. It is in an area . . . that we also addressed through the creation of the Hmong/Laotian liaison officer in our police department. That individual has been on board for about 2 years now, and has yielded significant assistance to our police department in terms of eliminating some of the cultural gaps that had existed [between the police department and the Hmong and Southeast Asian community]. Clearly, there is a significant difference between what is expected of a police force in Green Bay and what may have been assumed of a police force in Thailand. That is something that I think we

<sup>8</sup> Paul Jadin Testimony, Hmong Transcript, p.2.

are making significant strides in. We are hoping we will soon have the opportunity to hire a sworn police officer of Southeast Asian ethnicity, and be better able to serve the community that way.<sup>9</sup>

Responding to Advisory Committee questions about the integration of the Hmong with the mainstream community, the mayor responded that it depended upon the context. He noted that the amount of integration was minimal in housing and that affected the amount of integration in the schools; but integration on the job site was common.

There are a variety of . . . primarily minority schools at this point. That is a product of the fact that residentially, there still is little integration. Pockets of Hmong families live in certain neighborhoods, and they are going to attend the schools in those neighborhoods. That is why you will see some schools that have a high population of Hmong, and other schools where you see virtually none. I think in terms of employment, we are seeing significant improvements in integration.<sup>10</sup>

## Research and Stereotypes of the Hmong

There is a growing body of research on the Hmong and their immigrant experience in this country. The research is conflicting, and some characterizes the Hmong in simplistic, negative stereotypes. Though there are some unique aspects to the Hmong emigration to this country, in most ways this ethnic group is not all that dissimilar from other ethnic immigrant groups. The new Hmong immigrants do bring with them a cultural heritage that is different from the dominant culture, but as with other groups the first group of Hmong immigrants have struggled to maintain some facets of their cultural identity while at the same time achieving economic success and social acceptance.

One reported opinion concerning the Hmong experience in the United States is that there exists a vast cultural chasm separating the Hmong community from the native mainstream. This view is found in numerous expressions and in a variety of publications. For example, in one

1991 document, *The Hmong in Wisconsin: On the Road to Self-Sufficiency*, it is reported:

Rarely in its history, if ever, has the U.S. welcomed a group so culturally distant from the native mainstream. Rarely has it absorbed a population with so little inkling of the meaning or purposes of labor force participation, wage employment and income, public transfer payments, or self-sufficiency as these concepts express themselves in U.S. culture. Rarely has there been an inflow of people, even if they understood the concepts and earnestly tried to live up to expectations about what constituted development, who were more ill-prepared to do so upon arrival.<sup>11</sup>

Another persistent view of the Hmong is the belief that this group has a cultural propensity for migration. This belief is sometimes juxtaposed with discussions of welfare and dependency, with arguments made that the Hmong have become dependent on welfare and use their cultural tendency to migrate to regions offering the highest welfare benefits. One report reads:

Before [the Indochinese] war made defensive movement mandatory, agriculture, especially for opium production, required families and clans to shift from place to place as they exhausted the productive capacity of low-nutrient soils (Cooper, 1986). Hmong were traditionally "footloose" and both willing and able to migrate rapidly . . . from sites promising little income-generating potential (and safety) to sites promising more.<sup>12</sup>

In April 1982 . . . the [Federal] Government announced that it would reduce Refugee Cash Assistance from 36 months to 18 months of coverage . . . . The change in policy encouraged many [Hmong] to move from their places of initial resettlement to other States.<sup>13</sup>

Hutchinson's study on the Hmong immigration experience in Wisconsin, *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*,<sup>14</sup> recounts several other early stereotypes and misconceptions about the Hmong that continue to persist in the popular

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<sup>11</sup> Simon Fass, *The Hmong in Wisconsin: On the Road to Self-Sufficiency* (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Policy Institute, 1991) p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Simon Fass, "Economic Integration of Hmong Refugees in the United States," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Mar. 19-22, 1989, Baltimore, Maryland, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Simon Fass, *The Hmong in Wisconsin: On the Road to Self-Sufficiency* (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, 1991) p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

media, in scholarly publications, and among some social service professionals. He cites some of the more common stereotypes.

There exists a common stereotype of the Hmong. . . . The Hmong people are illiterate; their culture is primitive; they are unprepared for life in [the] modern world. This is the mythology of the Hmong. It consists of a series of logical but unsubstantiated statements as to the history of the Hmong people, the nature of Hmong culture and the subsequent experience of the Hmong in the United States. In some instances this mythology results merely from an inaccurate statement of fact . . . ; in other cases the mythology reflects particular ideologies and political agendas (the Hmong are welfare migrants, moving from State to State when benefits run out).<sup>15</sup>

The study *Acculturation in the Hmong Community* challenges this assertion on several grounds. First, other immigrant groups have arrived in this country "with little more than basic agricultural skills. They were viewed as backward and primitive even by other immigrant groups of the same period."<sup>16</sup> Second, though the Hmong did not participate in an industrial labor force while living in Laos, "Hmong farmers traveled to regional markets each year to sell [their produce]. . . . This indicates at least some familiarity with labor markets and commercial enterprise."<sup>17</sup> Finally, most adult Hmong males had extensive military experience in Laos and "were exposed to modern bureaucratic institutions—first through their military experience during the Indochinese War, followed by their resettlement in refugee camps in Thailand."<sup>18</sup>

One researcher of the Hmong in Wisconsin<sup>19</sup> offers that some of the misunderstanding of Hmong migration patterns may emanate from an early book on the subject, *Migrants of the Mountains: The Cultural Ecology of the Blue Hmong (Hmong Njua) of Thailand*.<sup>20</sup> This work suggests the Hmong have the outlook of speculators and transitory migrants, rather than permanent settlers. Hutchinson disagrees with this assessment of the Hmong, and concludes the Hmong only migrate out of necessity, not out of preference.<sup>21</sup>

Hutchinson argues that the belief that the Hmong migration in Laos and Thailand and the movement of Hmong households in the United States reflects a cultural phenomenon, "as if the Hmong are somehow born with a genetic propensity to pick up and move several times during their lifetime," is fiction. Instead, a more satisfactory sociological explanation for Hmong migration both in Asia and the United States "would look to changing economic opportunities, intermarriage among clan members from different communities, and continuing efforts to reconstruct a kinship system which was badly splintered during resettlement in the United States."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> William Robert Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains: The Cultural Ecology of the Blue Hmong (Hmong Njua) of Thailand* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1976.

<sup>21</sup> *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

## V. Language Patterns and Educational Opportunities for the Hmong in Green Bay

Similar to other immigrant groups, first generation Hmong in Green Bay still use their native language extensively. Approximately 30 percent of Hmong adults communicate exclusively in Hmong in all interactions, and nearly all Hmong adults in Green Bay speak Hmong or mostly Hmong with their spouse and relatives. Although Hmong is used almost exclusively between adults, the use of English is significant and widespread among Hmong children and their friends. In one-fourth of Hmong families, the children speak mostly English or only English with one another.

Currently in the Green Bay area public school system, there are 1,150 students of Hmong descent. Eight of the 27 elementary schools have more than 10 percent enrollment of Hmong students, and those schools account for 80 percent of all Hmong students in the elementary grades. The concentration of Hmong in the Green Bay schools is comparable to that found in other Wisconsin communities. Hmong are also attending the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay; in the fall 1996 semester, 30 Hmong males and 19 Hmong females were enrolled as full-time students.

### Language Patterns

The Center for Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay conducted a survey of the Hmong population in Green Bay. As part of that study, individual adults in the Hmong Green Bay community were asked two sets of questions focusing on literacy and language.<sup>1</sup> The first set of questions inquired about Hmong literacy and their ability to speak English. The survey found that the majority of Hmong are literate, and two-thirds of the adult Hmong population in Green Bay are able to

<sup>1</sup> Source: Ray Hutchinson, *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (1992), presented by Ray Hutchinson as an exhibit at the Nov. 21, 1996, community forum.

speak English. Fully half of those able to speak English can speak, read, and write in English. In addition, 65 percent of the Hmong indicated that they spoke a second language, usually Laotian. Of this group, 50 percent could speak, read, and write in the second language. Twenty-five percent reported that they speak a third language, usually Thai. The results indicate a high level of literacy among a group of immigrants assumed to come from a preliterate culture which had little contact with the outside world. The report noted a number of factors that may account for the high level of language literacy found.

**TABLE 5**  
**Hmong Literacy in Green Bay**

	Percent
Literate	60
Able to speak English	65
Literate in English	33
Speak second language	65
Literate in second language	33
Speak third language	25
Literate in third language	8

Source: Ray Hutchinson, *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, Urban and Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

First, 20 percent of the Green Bay Hmong households said they had previously lived in the Laotian capital city of Vientianne. Exposure to Laotian culture in this setting would likely lead to the acquisition of a second language. Second, nearly half of the Hmong households interviewed had lived in Green Bay for 10 or more years; and other studies of immigrant groups find an association between time of arrival/length of residence and English language proficiency. Third, a majority of Hmong households have children in the public schools, where exposure to English results in rapid language shifts. Fourth, most households have television

**TABLE 6**  
**Language Use in Hmong Green Bay Households**

Language use when...	Hmong	Mostly Hmong	Both	Mostly Engl.	Engl.
Speaking with spouse	52.8	36.8	8.0	—	—
Speaking with relatives	64.0	33.6	2.4	—	—
Speaking with friends	44.0	27.0	28.0	1.0	—
Speaking with children	31.0	35.0	27.0	6.0	1.0
Children with one another	19.0	20.0	37.0	18.0	7.0
Children with friends	16.0	17.0	33.0	21.0	13.0

Note: Figures represent percent of responses to individual questions.

Source: Ray Hutchinson, *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, Urban and Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

sets that broadcast only in English. Finally, and perhaps most important, 75 percent of the Hmong adults interviewed reported they participate in English as a secondary language (ESL) classes, and 60 percent of these persons indicated that they had participated in ESL classes for a full year or longer.

The second part of the survey asked which language was usually spoken, with choices being: (1) Hmong, (2) both Hmong and English, (3) mostly English, and (4) English. In addition, the survey differentiated among situations, including: (1) speaking with spouse, (2) speaking with relatives, (3) speaking with friends, (4) speaking with children, (5) children speaking with one another, and (6) children speaking with friends.

Approximately 30 percent of the Hmong surveyed are monolingual in Hmong, i.e., Hmong is used in all language interactions with adults in the household.<sup>2</sup> The survey shows that Hmong is clearly the preferred language for adults; nearly all respondents indicated that they speak Hmong or mostly Hmong with their spouse and relatives. But the study also points out that although Hmong is used almost exclusively between adults, there are significant levels of English-language use among children and their friends. One-fourth of those interviewed said that their children speak mostly English or only English with one another. Hutchinson

reports that English language use is correlated with several measures of cultural integration, e.g., such as number of American friends and participation in the labor force. It is not, however, correlated with demographic variables, e.g., respondent's age and family income. The strongest correlation among the variables examined is length of residence, i.e., increased length of residence.

Research on Hispanic immigrants reports the "pivotal shift" from Spanish to English occurs in the second generation.<sup>3</sup> From the evidence of the language patterns of the Hmong in Green Bay, a similar shift is being observed in Hmong households. The study adds that if the development of English-speaking networks is an indicator of social mobility and assimilation to American culture, then it is likely that there will be an observable shift in social status for the next generation of Hmong in Green Bay.

## Education

Barbara Schaal, director of literacy development and support in the Green Bay Area Public School District, Fay Boersinger, also with the Green Bay Public School District, and Ray Hutchinson, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, addressed the Advisory Committee about educational opportunities for the Hmong in the Green Bay public school system. In general, the Hmong experience in

<sup>2</sup> This corresponds to the first part of the survey in which 65 percent of the respondents indicated that they were able to speak English.

<sup>3</sup> See *inter alia*, David Lopez, "Chicano Language Loyalty in an Urban Setting," *Sociology and Social Research*, 62, pp. 267-68.



the Green Bay area public school district has been one of growth and adjustment for everyone, the children, teachers, and staff. As the Hmong children have had to learn and adjust to Western culture and the American system of schooling, the non-Hmong population has been afforded the opportunity to learn about the Hmong culture and history. The presence of the Hmong has caused an increase in multicultural awareness and encouraged a global perspective. The district has come from a point in the late 1970s where teachers struggled to help Hmong children recognize just the names of objects and basic cultural differences, such as needing to turn a door knob to get into a room, to being able to meet the children's specific instructional needs. The district has moved from having no information about the Hmong culture and their oral tradition, to a high school club that is now preparing readings of Hmong stories for younger children as a service project.<sup>4</sup>

### **ESL and Bilingual Programs**

The English as a second language (ESL) program began as an elementary program in the spring of 1978 with 20 students of Southeast Asian descent. At the program's inception, half the students were Vietnamese and half were Hmong. By the mid-1980s the number of students of Southeast Asian descent was at 490, 2.9 percent of the district's total enrollment. Growth in the enrollment of Hmong students in the public schools continued through the 1980s and early 1990s. Today the number of students of Southeast Asian ethnicity is 1,860, 9.1 percent of the total public school enrollment.<sup>5</sup>

Of the 1,860 students in the Green Bay public schools of Southeast Asian ethnicity, 1,150 are Hmong students who need ESL services. These services are provided by 37 licensed teachers, 21 teacher aides, a Hmong bilingual counselor, and administrative personnel. Hmong students represent approximately 68 percent of the district's total ESL program enrollment. To meet this need, services to

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<sup>4</sup> See, Testimony of Barbara Schaal before the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Green Bay, Wisconsin, Nov. 21, 1996, transcript, pp. 16-30 (hereafter referred to as Hmong Transcript).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Hmong children now begin with a prekindergarten program and extend through the high school level.<sup>6</sup>

Figures for the 1995-1996 school year indicated 117 Hmong students at level one proficiency, i.e., beginning to learn English; 228 at level two; 406 at level three; 316 at level four; and 86 at level five. Just over 100 students attained the skills necessary to be exited from the program between March of 1995 and February 1996.

The budget for ESL services has grown from \$170,000 in the mid-1980s to just over \$3 million today. These are the costs above and beyond the regular educational costs for other students. During this same period, from the mid-1980s to today, the reimbursement rate from the State and Federal governments dropped from roughly 70 percent to only 25 percent for 1995-1996 school year. Maintaining a quality level of service has required a commitment on the part of the district to provide the extra support and enrichment necessary to help its language minority students function successfully within the school environment. Last year the portion left to be funded by the local budget was \$2,263,333, an amount higher than the usual per pupil cost.

To augment other distinctive services to Hmong students in the district, the district provides translations of many district materials, such as its behavioral expectations booklet, newsletters, and announcements for parents. The district will routinely schedule bilingual professionals to assist with parent conferences where language barriers may be a factor. Special events are held to support parent involvement, such as schoolwide conferences, open houses, and multicultural activities.<sup>7</sup>

### **Poverty, Segregation, and Achievement of Hmong Students in the Public Schools**

The Green Bay district is especially concerned about the incidence of poverty among the Hmong children as evidenced by participation in the free and reduced lunch program. The overall average within the Green Bay dis-

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

strict for participation is 31.7 percent, but among those of Asian descent, the rate is 95.5 percent.

**TABLE 7**  
**Free and Reduced Lunch Rates Among Hmong Students**

	Participation rate
Students of Asian descent	95.5
General student population	31.7

Source: Green Bay Area Public Schools

Representatives from the school district commented that although no definitive conclusions can be drawn from the student participation rate in free lunch and reduced lunch programs, it is likely that the children from such homes probably do not have access to the resource literacies, such as books, newspapers, and magazines, available to other children.<sup>8</sup>

Hutchinson told the Advisory Committee that of the approximately 4,000 Hmong living in Green Bay, most are concentrated in older neighborhoods on both the east and west sides of the city. The largest concentration of Hmong is along the west side of Green Bay running north and south along the river, and what is usually referred to as the northeast side of Green Bay as well.<sup>9</sup>

The residential concentration of Hmong families is most clearly observed in the enrollment figures for elementary schools in the Green Bay area. There are slightly more than 1,000 Hmong students in the elementary school grades in the school district in 1996, and they account for slightly more than 10 percent of the total elementary school age population. There are 27 elementary schools in Green Bay. Seventeen of those schools have less than 5 percent Hmong enrollment. Only eight schools in the school district have more than 10 percent enrollment of Hmong students, but those schools account for 80 percent of all of Hmong students in the elementary grades.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ray Hutchinson, *Hmong Transcript*, pp. 77-92.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Using an indepth scale of dissimilarity, a measure from zero to 100 used by sociologists to study the segregation of ethnic and racial groups in American cities, the Hmong in Green Bay show a dissimilarity of around 70. This essentially means that 70 percent of the Hmong students in the public schools would have to switch schools in order to get in a situation where there is an equal distribution of the Hmong students across all schools in the community.<sup>11</sup>

The concentration of Hmong students in a relatively small number of schools in the community is largely the consequence of residential segregation, and that is largely the consequence of economic segregation. Many Hmong households have incomes at or below the poverty line, and the only housing that they can afford is located in the community's older neighborhoods, within Green Bay's central or inner city area.<sup>12</sup>

Fay Boerschinger told the Advisory Committee that among Hmong students the graduation rate is very high, noting that in the most recent academic year only one student who was Southeast Asian dropped out of school. In addition, she testified that the attendance rate of Hmong students is also very high.<sup>13</sup>

**TABLE 8**  
**Green Bay Area Public School Graduation Rates for Asian American Students**

	Graduation rate
Asian female	77.2
Asian male	63.6
General student population	78.4

Source: Green Bay Area Public Schools

Hutchinson argued that in Green Bay a variety of public programs has been very successful in enabling Hmong youth to succeed. Those among the younger Hmong generation who have chosen to stay in school—which is almost all—simply could not have done so without public support, given typical Hmong family circumstances, i.e., high levels of pover-

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Fay Boerschinger, *Hmong Transcript*, p. 23.

ty and unemployment. Hutchinson noted that the Hmong in Green Bay can be viewed as an example of being very successful and very much replicating the immigrant model of the second generation moving up and being able to accomplish things that perhaps their parents were not able to do.<sup>14</sup>

### Postsecondary Education

Kayoua Kong, an administrator at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (UWGB) in the American Intercultural Center and admissions office, addressed the Advisory Committee on issues affecting the Southeast Asian students at the university. She told the Advisory Committee that for the fall 1996 semester, 30 Hmong males and 19 Hmong females were enrolled as full-time students. Many of them were not born in the United States; 95 percent of all Southeast Asian students at UWGB are not citizens.<sup>15</sup>

Kong told the Advisory Committee that one of the biggest problems facing Hmong students, not only at UWGB but elsewhere in a college setting, is that English is their second language. Many students are very successful in most classes, but a few Southeast Asian students struggle with literature and writing classes. For the most part, however, Kong did attest that most Southeast Asian students at UWGB are fluent in English.<sup>16</sup>

The American Intercultural Center at UWGB is a special effort by the university to offer services to the Hmong and other Southeast Asian students. It is a place where the students can associate with other students of their own ethnic or national background so they feel more comfortable at the university. The center has four groups: the Southeast Asian, the American Indians, the African Americans, and the Hispanics. Within those four groups are smaller clubs that provide

multicultural programs to the entire community, such as Southeast Asian heritage month, Hispanic heritage month, American Indian month, and black history month.<sup>17</sup> The center also monitors students' grades. If needed, Hmong and Southeast Asian students at UWGB are provided tutors to work on proofreading and writing skills and also on math and science. There is also a mentoring program, where a junior or a senior student is matched with an incoming freshman starting at UWGB.<sup>18</sup>

Kong told the Advisory Committee that discrimination in housing against Southeast Asian and Hmong students is a real problem. Some encounter overt discrimination. She gave an example of a Hmong student who had moved into a new apartment and was harassed by her neighbor who told her, "Go back to where you came from." In another example, a student was reported to the health department by his neighbors, who alleged he was eating cats and dogs. Kong further testified that it is not uncommon for Hmong and Southeast Asian students, when replying to an advertisement or an ad out in the newspaper for housing, being told by the landlord, "Oh, it's been taken," or at other times when they inquire and ask, "Can we see it, can we view the place to see if it's going to fit?" The response is, "Well, no."<sup>19</sup>

Kong told the Advisory Committee that the Center also had in place a mentoring program with Washington Middle School and East High School in Green Bay to talk to the students of color at those schools about different topics. These students are out in the community being role models to the students at those two schools with the ultimate goal of the program of encouraging these youth to consider a college education.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ray Hutchinson, Hmong Transcript, pp. 77-92.

<sup>15</sup> Kayoua Kong testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 102-13.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

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## VI. Employment and Welfare Issues of the Hmong in Green Bay

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Issues of employment, job training, self-sufficiency, and welfare affecting the Hmong community were discussed at the community forum. According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the percentage of Southeast Asian refugee immigrants in Brown County dependent on welfare has declined dramatically in the last ten years.<sup>1</sup> In 1998 the dependency rate of Southeast Asian refugees in Brown County was 78 percent. At the beginning of 1997, the dependency rate was 24 percent. The Southeast Asian refugee dependency rate in Brown County is shown in table 9.

In January 1997 there were 189 Southeast Asian refugee households receiving AFDC benefits. Total recipients numbered 972, out of a county population of 4,097. In Brown County, the Southeast Asian Refugee community—which is approximately 2 percent of the population—accounted for 17 percent of the county AFDC case load and 28 percent of all AFDC recipients.

### Employment and Jobs Programs

Representatives from the Housing Assistance Office<sup>2</sup> and individuals from the Hmong community spoke to the Advisory Committee. Craig M. Fitzgerald, supervisor at the Housing Assistance Office, explained current employment and welfare programs and the mission of the office.

Fitzgerald told the Advisory Committee that under welfare reform there has been a shift in employment and welfare programs from dependency to self-sufficiency. Such reforms heavily impact the Hmong community, as the num-

ber of unemployed and those on welfare is high in the Hmong community.<sup>3</sup>

Two examples of this new emphasis are the KEY State Initiative and the Targeting Assistance Program. These are voluntary programs designed to assist refugee families in moving from welfare dependency to self-sufficiency. The two programs provide a broad range of services, including motivational counseling and training, vocational English as a second language, short term skills training, job development, job retention, and translation services.

The Housing Assistance Office also operates the Jobs Program in Brown County, an employment training program mandatory in the State for AFDC recipients. Participants in the program receive all of the previously listed services, and, in addition, they are required to engage in work acquisition and training services, including: work search, community work experience, and accept available employment. Support services offered under this program include transportation, initial work-related expenses, and child care.<sup>4</sup>

Fitzgerald said that in the last 2 years under the Jobs Program in Wisconsin, there have been significant changes in the operation of the program. The first major change was the 86D change. For families with two unemployed parents, both parents are now required to be involved in jobs activity, whereas previously only one of those parents was required to be involved.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The city of Green Bay is located in Brown County, Wisconsin. The State maintains its employment and welfare data at the county level.

<sup>2</sup> The Housing Assistance Office, located in Green Bay, WI, operates the State of Wisconsin Jobs Program for Brown County and other employment and housing programs.

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<sup>3</sup> Craig M. Fitzgerald, testimony before the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Nov. 21, 1996, Green Bay, WI, transcript, pp. 63-76 (hereafter referred to as Hmong Transcript).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

**TABLE 9**  
**Southeast Asian Refugee Dependency Rate**

	1988	1995	1996	1997
Brown County	78%	67%	35%	24%
Statewide	n/a	44%	34%	23%

Source: State of Wisconsin, Refugee Services Office.

**TABLE 10**  
**Housing Assistance Office Refugee Caseload, November 1996**

Caseload	Regular AFDC	Special AFDC	Full-time Emp	Part-time Emp	W.S. Emp	W.E. Emp
141	67	73	50	24	8	11

Regular AFDC: AFDC payments to household with absent parent.

Special AFDC: AFDC payments to households with two parents present, both parents unemployed.

W.S. Emp: Work supplementation program that provides incentives to employer.

W.E. Emp: Work experience program, recipients work off AFDC grant at nonprofit and government agencies.

Source: Housing Assistance Office, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

A second change made within the past 18 months is the "Work First" initiative of the Housing Assistance Office. Under this program, individuals applying for AFDC must first interview with a financial planning and resource specialist of the Housing Assistance Office. A third reform implemented in March 1996 is called "Self-Sufficiency First," and requires 60 hours of employment-related activities prior to an individual's being approved and identified as eligible for AFDC.<sup>6</sup>

Fitzgerald admitted that these changes caused some negative reaction in the Southeast Asian community. There were allegations that these changes were made because of local political motives or for personal reasons. However, due to the mandated 5-year limit on welfare under the recently enacted Federal reform legislation,<sup>7</sup> Fitzgerald said these changes are part of the Housing Assistance Office's commitment to aggressively attaching Southeast Asian families to the work force as soon as possible.<sup>8</sup>

Fitzgerald also testified to the presence of little overt discrimination against the Hmong

experienced by his staff in their dealings with companies in the area. He added, though, in certain situations there is some reluctance in certain industries to hire the Hmong because of concerns regarding language and the ability to communicate with coworkers and the public. The current employment reality in the Green Bay area, however, is that jobs and technology are changing and expanding rapidly, and firms are having trouble finding any workers, let alone trying to avoid workers with limited language problems.<sup>9</sup>

Moua Xiong, an outreach worker at the Housing Allowance Office, told the Advisory Committee of his experiences working with the Hmong community. Xiong noted several sets of problems facing Hmong immigrants to Green Bay area regarding employment and welfare. These included: low levels of formal education, poor job skills, language barriers, financial difficulties, cultural differences, and mental health issues. Xiong said that he regarded education is the key issue for the Hmong community to successfully assimilate, because, for many Hmong, their skills are predominantly agricultural and not conducive to those needed to work and sur-

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2262, 2263 (to be codified as 8 U.S.C. §1612).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

vive in an industrialized, urban country such as the United States.<sup>10</sup>

## Health Care

Xiong maintained that the lack of health care, particularly mental health care, was a serious problem affecting the Hmong community. He testified that the majority of Hmong who go to clinics and hospitals do not obtain the highest care possible because health care professionals are often unable to diagnose their illnesses because of language barriers. Additionally, the Hmong have residual pressures built up from years of living in refugee camps and moving from place to place, similar to post-traumatic stress disorder. Many doctors are unable to diagnose this, and that in itself is a barrier to many Hmong in their attempts to be self-sufficient.<sup>11</sup>

Xiong said the issue of mental health among the Hmong is a real problem, and the government must address it in order for the Hmong to become self-sufficient. At the present time, however, funds are not available to address the specific mental health needs of the Hmong community.

Hutchinson also reported on mental health and psychological well-being issues as part of his 1992 study and survey of the Hmong in Green Bay. His findings vary from Xiong's observations. Hutchinson's questionnaire of the Hmong included twelve questions measuring depressive affect and psychological well-being, with each question asking the respondent to indicate on a scale of one to ten the frequency with which he/she had felt or experienced specific symptoms in the past month.<sup>12</sup>

The Hutchinson study found psychological well-being negatively correlated with two measures of stressful life events: (1) separation from family members in Laos, and (2) inability to communicate with family members in Laos. The survey did not find that either loss of family members or escape and movement to the United States was associated with lower levels of psychological well-being. Psychological well-being

was also found correlated with two measures of cultural integration: (1) facility with the English language and (2) participation in the work force. Psychological well-being was also correlated with the respondent's age, but not with other demographic variables, such as household income or length of residence in the United States. In summary, certain factors such as separation from family members, increased age, and not being employed were found associated with lower levels of psychological well-being; participation in the labor force and English language use were found associated with higher levels of psychological well-being.<sup>13</sup>

The study noted, though, that Hmong on the research team did not think this portion of the survey necessary or relevant. Although these Hmong were aware of mental health problems affecting certain individuals in their community, they did not feel that there was a more general "mental health crisis" among adults in the Hmong community.<sup>14</sup>

Further, Hutchinson's research noted that because of translation problems between the Hmong and English languages, the data in his study and in other studies measuring psychological well-being may not meet required standards of reliability and validity. Measurement scales are regularly used as a diagnostic test in mental health centers and research, but, in the case of the Hmong, such tools probably do not accurately capture the group's state of psychological well-being. Hutchinson concluded that although responses to psychometric scales may be useful for some general analytic purposes—examining differences among generational cohorts in the Hmong population, or factors associated with increased positive or negative well-being—they cannot provide accurate comparisons to sample norms from the general population, and should not be used to estimate the frequency of mental health problems in the Hmong community.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Moua Xiong Testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 67-71.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, p. 32.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

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## VII. Public Safety Issues and the Hmong in Green Bay

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Testimony before the Advisory Committee on public safety issues affecting the Hmong community in Green Bay addressed two major topics: community outreach to the Hmong community by the police and involvement in gang activity by the Hmong youth. Chief Jim Lewis, chief of the Green Bay Police Department, Tom Hinz, assistant police chief, and Nao Tou Xiong, a liaison officer to the Hmong and Southeast Asian community, and Ray Hutchinson, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, spoke to the Advisory Committee on these issues.

Chief Lewis said there was some tension between the Southeast Asian immigrant community and the other groups in the city. However, overt acts of intimidation are the exception, and there have not been any recent incidents of hate crime against the Southeast Asian community. Nevertheless, to reduce group tensions and possible conflict, the police department is working in a variety of efforts in the community and in the schools to educate both sides and allow the Southeast Asian community to peacefully assimilate into society.<sup>1</sup>

### Outreach to the Hmong Community

Assistant Police Chief Tom Hinz told the Advisory Committee that the police department recognized a few years ago that the ethnic and racial makeup of the community was changing. The department decided there was a need for the police to change if it wanted to represent and serve the community better. Plans are now in place to expand its nonsworn community officers to better address the ethnic and racial needs of the community, and to hire minorities as sworn police officers.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than bury our heads in the sand, we...formed a committee called The Coalition for Mutual Respect, which is a group of citizens in our community who work with the police department to address community needs. As part of this, we looked at our hiring process within the Green Bay Police Department, and extended our hiring procedures to get more minorities into the department. . . .

We have almost 5,000 Southeast Asians here. [As part of this community outreach effort] the department put together a grant request . . . for a Hmong liaison officer . . . . As a result, the department hired Nao Tou Xiong as a Hmong/Lao non-sworn liaison officer. If the department would have had taken the opportunity as a police agency to do this 20 years ago when the Hmong were first being resettled into our community, we could have had much more success . . . , but it's better late than never.<sup>3</sup>

Hinz defended the department's decision to hire a liaison officer to serve the Southeast Asian community, when the department does not have similar other liaison officers for the other minority communities in the city.

I think the Hmong are in a unique position. When they came to this country they...had tremendous cultural and language barriers. In the resettlement process they were split up from their homes and they spent years in refugee camps in northern Thailand, where most of our refugees came from.

Because of the intense, quick resettlement of the Hmong, the transition is made much smoother by having the community reach out and help and assist in this transition. We have not seen any resentment from the rest of the community for what has been done in the assistance. The Hmong are a very hard-working group of people, but...they are making the transition. In the next 4, 5, 8 years, there won't be a particular need for a person like Nao Tou Xiong.

This is not to say that we do not need an Hispanic individual that would be emulating Nao Tou's position with the Latino community; we could use that. But we thought the immediate need for our commu-

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Lewis Testimony before the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Nov. 21, 1996, Green Bay, WI, transcript, p. 44 (hereafter referred to as Hmong Transcript).

<sup>2</sup> Tom Hinz Testimony, Hmong transcript, p. 42. At the present time there are 185 sworn police officers in the Green Bay Police Department, all are nonminority.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-47.

nity was to have somebody in Nao Tou's position to help address an immediate concern.

I also believe that this country particularly owes something to the Hmong for what they did for us in the Vietnam War. A lot of people do not understand the whole dynamics of that.<sup>4</sup>

Nao Tou Xiong, a nonsworn liaison officer of the Green Bay Police Department, explained his duties and activities to the Advisory Committee. Among his duties, he: (1) holds meetings with members of the Hmong community and educates them on police procedures and services; (2) provides cultural training for the department's police officers; (3) acts as a crime prevention and school liaison officer, particularly to the Hmong/Laotian youth; and (4) does communication translation for Hmong and Laotian community members in their dealings with the department and other social service agencies.<sup>5</sup>

Nao Tou Xiong noted several issues of concern facing the Hmong community in Green Bay:

The Hmong are from Southeast Asian and their culture is much different from the Western culture. An example of that difference is early marriage or connecting marriage. This is the traditional marriage rite practiced by the Hmong or Southeast Asian back in Asia. But it is in conflict with the Western cultural . . . The [Hmong also] have a tradition of hunting . . . that comes of the Hmong way of life back in Laos.<sup>6</sup>

## Gang Activity and the Hmong

Local newspaper accounts have reported on criminal activity and shootings in Green Bay allegedly linked to Hmong gang activity.<sup>7</sup> Earlier in 1996 a shooting in the city involved two Hmong youth, one who had come down from St. Paul and shot a Hmong youth who was a resident of Green Bay. Other accounts maintain that Hmong youth are forced to form gangs to protect themselves from other youth gang groups.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Nao Tou Xiong Testimony, Hmong Transcript, p. 44-46.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., "Burglary suspect accused in beating," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, Dec. 28, 1996; "Some Asian teens turn to crime, gangs," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, June 26, 1995; "No Direction: It leads straight to trouble," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, June 25, 1995; "Slaying thrusts new officer into his job," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, Aug. 25, 1995; "Murder frightens community," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, Jul. 25, 1994.

Chief Lewis stated that much of the talk of Hmong gang activity in Green Bay needs to be put into perspective. The chief said that he deplored all acts of violence in the city, but realistically there will be some violence in a city the size of Green Bay:

This is a community of a 100,000 people. There was a shooting in the city last night; the second shooting we have had this year in this community. So we have had two shootings this year. Now...that is two shootings in an entire year in a community of 100,000. We would like to eliminate both of those. But I am not so naive to think that we will never have any shootings in the city of Green Bay. I think we are doing an excellent job of keeping those down. Crime rate here is very low.

There are guns out there, certainly. This is a hunting community. You could break into any house in this community probably and find a hunting rifle. The guns are out there, but we do not seize that many guns from the youth. We had had a number of gun stores broken into and a number of guns were taken and not recovered in the community. So we assume they went outside of the community. But we are working on all those programs as far as closer connections to the community.

We have a police citizens academy now that has gotten good minority representation, and the idea behind that was a 13-week program to bring the community into the police department, show them everything we do. It is every Wednesday night for 13 weeks, and 40 people are going through the class right now. So part of the process is opening up the community.<sup>8</sup>

Nao Tou Xiong explained that the types of group activity and clannish behavior associated with gang involvement in this country are not unlike traditional Hmong association conduct observed among the youth in Asia.

For the Southeast Asian youth back in Laos, there was a thing called a "gang" in the Hmong community in Laos. So the Southeast Asian youth gang did not start to surface within the Hmong community in the U.S. just in the late 1980s, but has been a problem existing within the Hmong community in the U.S. all along and has become one of the top issues of concern between the Hmong and Laotian refugees in particular communities.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Jim Lewis Testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 45-6.

<sup>9</sup> Nao Tou Xiong Testimony, Hmong Transcript, p. 46.



Ray Hutchinson, professor at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, studied gang activity in Appleton and the Fox Valley for the Community Strategies Committee.<sup>10</sup> Speaking to the Advisory Committee, Hutchinson acknowledged that gang activity is a major concern in the local community, as in other communities around the State, but reports of gang activity—particularly that of Hmong gang activity—are often exaggerated.

Gang activity is a major concern in the local community as you would quickly pick up from comments of both police officials and representatives of the Hmong community as well. At a recent public forum the police department reported that they currently are monitoring 23 active street gangs in Green Bay and more than 600 gang members in the community. They also reported there were more than 700 gang incidents reported in the previous year and that there were even more reported this year.

In a number of other public forums police have stated there are 200 Asian gang members in Green Bay, and this figure has been reported in the local newspapers, and reported on television, and radio on more than one occasion. There are gang members in the local community and there have been a small number of very serious incidents involving Hmong youth and Laotian youth, including, for example, a drive-by shooting earlier this year.

But I believe that there's something very wrong with the numbers that are given for Asian gangs. At the present time there are 203 Hmong males enrolled in high schools in Green Bay, and there are another 210 Hmong males enrolled in the middle school in Green Bay. If these are the figures that are given for gang membership are meant to apply to high school students, then we are being told that every Hmong and Asian male in this group is a gang member. If the figures are meant to refer to middle school and high school students then we are being told that half of all the Hmong and Asian male population in that age group belong to a gang. The figure declines only slightly if we extend the age range to include younger adults.

I know there are gang members in Green Bay. I have interviewed them and talked to them. I know that there are serious gang incidents which have taken place and will take place. But I believe there is something wrong about the message that is being presented about the Hmong youth in our community. I am concerned about this because it feeds into some common community stereotypes about the Hmong.

In our study of gang activity in the Fox Valley,<sup>11</sup> we were told by police officials and school administrators that their number one concern was with Asian gangs in the community and within the schools. There was supposed to be a lot of gang members and conflict between Asians and white students in high school.

During the year that we were involved in the study there were no reported incidents in any of the schools involving an Asian gang member. There were no reported activities to the police departments in those communities involving an Asian gang member, even though I was shown books containing photographs of dozens of Hmong kids who were suspected of gang activity.

At one high school the principal told me he was very concerned about the situation because it seemed to him that white students had come to think that all Asian students were gang members, and that he could see the white students avoiding Hmong students who were talking to one another in the hallways.

In recent interviews I've done with school officials across the State not one felt—I asked the question specifically about this—that gang problems involving Hmong kids was a problem in their middle school or high school.

I hope that we have not told the local community that all Hmong teenagers are gang members because there are too many people in the local community who are likely to believe a statement such as that. I think my main concern with the various examples of discrimination in both the personal and institutional levels in the workplace and housing and other areas of community life is that many of these persons in the local community have had such an ambivalent attitude toward these issues.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Appleton, Wisconsin, is 45 miles south of Green Bay with similar demographics.

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<sup>11</sup> See, Ray Hutchinson and Karen Dalke, "Gang Activity in Appleton and the Fox Valley," Preliminary Report, Community Strategies Committee, Appleton, Wisconsin, February 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Ray Hutchinson Testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 84–87.

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## VIII. Perspectives of the Hmong on their History and Migration, Welfare, and Employment Opportunities

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Individuals from the Green Bay Hmong community spoke to the Advisory Committee. Speakers included Norman Kong, executive director for Southeast Asian Community Center; Mary Xiong, a community resident with two decades of service in Hmong community service organizations; Koua Yang, the first Hmong living in Green Bay to work in community outreach; Tau Xiong, an employee of the Green Bay public schools; and Toua Yong and Way Kong, residents of Green Bay and war veterans who fought in Southeast Asia for the United States.<sup>1</sup> They commented on: (1) promises made to the Hmong people for supporting United States military operations in Southeast Asia; (2) lack of funding to the Hmong community for the autonomous management of Hmong social service programs; (3) employment opportunities and job training programs; and (4) welfare reform and its elimination of income subsistence programs to the Hmong community.

Some of the comments of the Hmong contrast sharply with the viewpoints and perspectives of government and program officials who spoke to the Advisory Committee. As much as possible, the words of the Hmong are presented as completely as possible, without commentary. Some of the testimony was given in response to questions from the Advisory Committee.

### **The Hmong Alliance with the United States in Southeast Asia and Their Migration to the United States**

The Hmong in Green Bay are veterans, family members of veterans, or descendants of veterans who fought in alliance with the United States in Southeast Asia. It is unclear what exact promises were officially, or unofficially, made to the Hmong by United States officials for their support. Regardless, the Hmong did fight as soldiers and operate as organized military units

under the direction of the CIA and U.S. military personnel in operations against the communist forces in Laos and Vietnam. The Hmong who spoke to the Advisory Committee maintained that promises of land and autonomy were made to them if the United States and the Hmong prevailed against the communists; and permanent support and assistance if the United States and the Hmong did not win the war.

*Norman Kong:* I do not know how many Hmong people in Green Bay are veterans of the Vietnam War. But I do know most of the parents—not my generation, but like my father and the older generation—most of them were involved in the Vietnam War and have been a veterans for the CIA.

I know my father's story. When the U.S. [United States] pulled back its troops, my father met some group of the CIA over in the capital of Laos. My father came back and mentioned to his older brother at that time that we were going to the United States because now the United States lost the war to Vietnam, and they wanted to pull back.

I was not a person who was involved in the CIA war. But what I heard from the elderly and from some important people who were involved with the CIA during the Vietnam War and the war in Laos, that there was a certain promise that if the Hmong people served in the CIA and they lost the war to the other parties there would be an opportunity for them to come to the United States. Also, there would be support for the people until they will have an opportunity to get back into their homeland, or otherwise the CIA would help the Hmong people find a place to live, but not for a permanent basis, but only temporarily in the United States.

So in 1973 the CIA asked my father to move into the United States. And my father had an identification of the service for the CIA during that time. And my father said they promised to help our family and help our people when we arrived in United States. But I did not understand. My father came into United States for more than 15 years now. He did not receive any amount of pension or any amount of veteran pay for something he did; all he received was only SSI and

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<sup>1</sup> The comments of Way Kong are in the introduction.

AFDC. So I believe all the people who served for the CIA or service for the United States government, they should receive some special funding, not just only AFDC, but a source of funding for people who served as a veteran.

I have some other concerns about Hmong people involved in the CIA war. When they arrived in the United States they were placed in the AFDC. Several years ago there was some news report that Hmong people are a welfare people. That is something that is totally discrimination. I believe that the law, the United States laws, been changed back and forth and have not stayed a law, and the Hmong people have been committed to the U.S. and supported the CIA during the Vietnam War. I have talked to a lot of elderly Hmong, and they believe they helped the wrong group of people and the wrong government, and are now not acknowledged forever.<sup>2</sup>

*Toua Yong:* I feel one thing, that we, the Hmong, ask you not to act like we are not human and like we are animals you just used for something and when you are done using you just throw away. I was born in 1943. In 1961 I served for the US government for the CIA. During that time the government of Laos told us we have to serve because we have the responsibility of the country of Laos. I served for two generations of war; first I serve in French Colonial Laos, and I serve after the French for the US CIA. After the time of the French, the U.S. did not have supplies for us, so we used the French equipment still left during that time. My mission was to close the Ho Chi Minh trail, the one which went to North Vietnam. I was a soldier during that time. I got shot two times, once in my stomach and once in my leg. During that time, our company's region is not very strong and it was taken over and we hide in the jungle. Since the U.S. government was not supporting Laos and helping during that time.

After that time, the United States provided the weapons and equipment to the Laotians, and we took over the fight with the North Vietnamese. We got the support from the U.S. government during that time. I have lost friends and family relatives—about 50 of my family were killed by the Communists. Only one lived, and that person right now is in Green Bay. All the children and women were killed by the Communists.

At that time it was not recognized by the U.S. public that we supported the U.S., or the U.S. was supporting Laos government. But later on the U.S. people

recognized that we supported the U.S. mission in South Vietnam. Since 1975 we lost the country. The U.S. mission was withdrawn from my country and many thousands of people lost their lives by the communists.

Now, I have one question to ask you and to bring to the U.S. government. Since you brought us to this country, you did not say we have to be a U.S. citizen or ever become one. We already served for the U.S. Right now, since we have come here, with welfare reform all our benefits like a social security or SSI that affect our family are being cut off.

I would like to ask the U.S. government to allow us to get to be U.S. citizens without a test, because we cannot learn to read and write. During the past, we served for the U.S. We came to this country, and now we are losing SSI and AFDC. We cannot go without SSI. If more people of this country died in the war, the burial costs would be a couple thousand dollars for each.<sup>3</sup>

## **Welfare and Social Service Issues Affecting the Hmong**

Of particular concern to the Hmong community is the issue of welfare reform and its impact on subsistence payments to some in their community. Under welfare reform legislation enacted in 1996 by the U.S. Congress,<sup>4</sup> legal immigrants who have not become citizens are limited to 5 years of benefits. This impacts many Hmong in Green Bay, because a large segment of the population has been in the United States for more than 5 years, and many have not become citizens.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services moved to implement the legislated welfare changes in early 1997. In March 1997, legal immigrant residents receiving Supplemental Social Security (SSI) and/or Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) assistance from the Federal government—including the Hmong—were required to verify that they were in one of three categories to forestall the termination of benefits: (1) now a United States citizen; (2) had worked in this country for 10 years without seeking benefits; or (3) had served in the United States Armed Forces. Although the Hmong fought with and supported military operations of

<sup>2</sup> Norman Kong Testimony before the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Green Bay, WI, Nov. 21, 1996, pp. 31–40 (hereafter referred to as Hmong Transcript).

<sup>3</sup> Toua Yong Testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 150–53.

<sup>4</sup> Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104–193, 110 Stat. 2262, 2263 (to be codified as 8 U.S.C. § 1612).

the United States, they technically did not serve in the United States Armed Forces and, therefore, do not qualify for the third category.

*Norman Kong:* I have been a volunteer to provide service for the Southeast Asian community and the Hmong community at the Southeast Asian Center for 2 years. Currently the Southeast Asian Community Center does not have much funding; it only receives some small funding, about a couple thousand dollars—enough to pay for lights. I remain in my office from 9 o'clock in the morning until two in the afternoon. After that I have to go into work at a different company to provide for my own family financial needs. During the morning I provide the service for the Hmong community and Southeast Asian community.

Last year people came into the center all the time asking for service. Since the center lost funding and the funding—before the center was named the Hmong Association. After the center lost the funding through the state, all funding was transferred to Housing Assistance Office. This caused a break in the relationship between the Hmong community and Southeast Asian community. Right now we have a lot of people coming into the center asking for service. I have told the Southeast Asian and Hmong people that we will no longer be providing general translation. All we do right now is just to help a person who gets in trouble.

[When funded, the service the center] provided to the Southeast Asian community and the Hmong people was mostly employment placement. We also provided general counseling, such as we provided advice on how to settle problems. For example, like a family gets into trouble because their children are involved in gangs and they have to go into court, or the family needs some settlement of AFDC or other family problems, whatever occurs. We only really responded to critical problems which happen to a family or an individual. General service and general translation services, we didn't provide that.

My understanding of why [the Southeast Asian Center closed in the past is that] around 1991, 1992 and before, the Hmong people involved in the center was of a different political party than other Hmong in this town. The certain party involved in the center was involved with General Vang Pao, the Hmong leader who had been involved with the CIA in the Laos War in Vietnam a long time ago. They still had some belief that they were going back to the country of Laos, back to freedom. We also have had another group of political species they call Laos government, which is trying to get Laos back, but in a different direction of the other group. I strongly believe that the center in the past was ruled by some persons who were involved in

politics, and they caused the breakup of the relationship among the Hmong. Then also, some persons from the State and Indigent Poverty Refugee Service were involved with that Hmong group at that time too. So one leader was in one of the parties, and the other leader was in the other party, and there was conflict with one another. One had power and one didn't have power, and one without power tried to take away all the funding.

After all the funding was lost, it caused a communication and relationship breakup. All the people were split into different political organizations in town. Finally, one of the political parties never came back and never called the center anymore. So that has caused a breakup.<sup>5</sup>

*Mary Xiong:* We have a Hmong woman's organization that is 5 years old. Since the organization was started, we have worked with the youth to provide some activity, and adults to provide some parenting skills training, and some job training for others, and some classes in English and other education for the Hmong. We do not have much support, and we need lots of things.

I was appointed as a project director for the organization, and we did quite a number of projects and were busy during the first 3 or 4 years. But this year we do not have many supportive resources, only a small budget, so we only have some small activities to keep communication between the communities.

In the past we had a contract with the county human services for the Youth Asian Program to help person with the counseling, and family problem, conflict, the way the kids involving in gangs. And also that we have some support or donations from churches, such as Presbyterian church or anything, you know, like that. That's it. And small budget is under \$20,000, and this year we have very small amount, not as much. So just to keep the services alive that's it. And we wanted to not get any pay for anything so it a full-time job.

I had meetings all over Wisconsin cities and found information and how they are doing. The other cities have lots of program activities. In Green Bay we do not have much activities for the Hmong and Laotian people community here. I wonder what is going on. I just do not know how to do it by myself, so I am wondering if can get more programs into this community to help those Hmong and Laotian children and parents, in education and to blend into the community and get along with each other as nonsegregated.

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<sup>5</sup> Norman Kong Testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 31–40.

I was hurt when I asked for money, because the [government agency] said that they are not only going to support the Hmong women organization because the Hmong and Southeast Asian community have problems. So they cannot help us until the other problems have been solved.<sup>6</sup>

*Koua Yang:* I am a resident in Green Bay and I would like to address the welfare reform. As said earlier, we were involved with the CIA and with this government. We, the Hmong, came here. We had no choice, and no plan to ever come to this country. We come here, because we had no choice.

Everything has not run smoothly since we came here, but the welfare reform issue is a particular issue and a factor for the elderly and for persons not able to work, but not U.S. citizens. I would like to request for this committee to write to the State or the Federal Office and say that we are political refugees. We are permanent residents, but we not economic refugees who came here for economic reasons.

The other welfare issue is that families living in Wisconsin get cut off if they are not citizens, and according to my understanding Wisconsin and Michigan the two States to be first. Wisconsin, I think, has the larger Hmong population, and these money changes affect a lot more Hmong families in Wisconsin. I do not know who the right person to talk to, but this Committee is very important to me and to the Hmong community to discuss this issue.

The other thing that I would like to return to that others earlier talked about is gangs. Some Hmong people might be in gangs, but the white people feel in Green Bay that all Laos/Hmong are in gangs. But I feel gang activity is not just the Hmong, but with all the groups. The United States should make one set of good laws. The laws today are not the only laws; as politics goes back and forth. But if you have good laws, good people never do anything bad. In all their history, the Hmong never did anything bad, we just get these ideas from here. I think the laws have to be changed and to make good laws.<sup>7</sup>

*Tau Xiong:* I have lived here about 3½ years in Green Bay. At this meeting I want to say I think for the Hmong community in Green Bay there are problems with the new law changing welfare and SSI. There are new families just arrived from Thailand to this country. They are having a hard time. The people in my community keep complaining and talking about suicide all the time. They also talk about how they are not citizens and will they become U.S. citizens?

How do they pass? How do they learn how to speak English? They are having a hard time.

Another thing is that in the Hmong and Laos community in Green Bay, they do not understand the new law. They do not know where to go. They do not know how to find the services. Every day they call the center, and they hear that they will no longer receive assistance or SSI. I think it is very hard for the community.

It is hard for the Hmong and Laos person to become a U.S. citizen. I understand they are required to speak English. This will be difficult for some in the community. For the young, there is no problem. They are going to school and getting an education. But the elderly and the old people cannot go anywhere to learn, write, or spell their name. So it is very difficult for them.

The Government should think about the many culturally different people in this country. They share the same house, live in the same city, share the same government. We should find another way for our people to get along.

The Government cannot just make one house for all of them. They have to find different rooms for different people in order for everyone to live together. I, myself, think if the Government finds a way to solve the problem for the next 30 years, the Hmong community and the families who come from the other countries as refugees will speak more English.

We should understand that we are all the same; we are all human. But we are different as people, with different colors, different personalities, everything is different. So the Government should find a way for the people to understand, to live, to share. I understand that education is equal to anyone, everybody, but living in new country and making a new life, that's very difficult and very hard for the family.

Compare the Hmong in this country to the American who is born and lives in the United States and then goes to Laos and Thailand. They will have the same problem. They cannot speak Hmong, so they have to speak English in order to understand. If that government forces the Americans to speak only Hmong, then that person have the same problem that we do. So the government should think about that and find a way that we can share, and understand, and live in the same house and in the same place. Since we lost our country and our homeland, it seems like we have nothing now. We just share your house, and we just speak your language. It makes it very difficult for our

<sup>6</sup> Mary Xiong Testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 56-63.

<sup>7</sup> Koua Yang Testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 121-27.

**TABLE 11**

**Hmong Placements by the Hmong Association of Brown County, 1989–1992**

	Full-time number	Avg. \$	Part-time number	Avg. \$	S.S.	G.R.
1989	45	\$5.33	18	\$4.72	18	12
1990	34	\$4.96	23	\$4.72	24	21
1991	30	\$5.56	13	\$4.62	20	13
1992	35	\$5.74	9	\$4.81	17	13

S.S.: Self-sufficiency (off public assistance for 3 consecutive months).

G.R.: Grant reduction (having public assistance grant reduced for 6 consecutive months).

people. It does not matter where we live, in California, or in Wisconsin, we have the same problem.<sup>8</sup>

### Education and Employment Issues Affecting the Hmong

The State of Wisconsin jobs program is operated in Green Bay by the Housing Assistance Office.<sup>9</sup> Until 1992, the Green Bay Hmong Association of Brown County, the predecessor organization to the Southeast Asian Community Center, received State and Federal funds to operate a job placement program for the Hmong. Hmong operated and controlled the organization, and, similar to the Housing Assistance Office, had a contractual goal with the government of moving refugees from welfare to work, i.e., getting refugees self sufficient. Funding from the State and Federal government for employment services to the Hmong community are now provided to the Housing Assistance Office.

Listed in table 11 are the Hmong placements and the wage rate of those placements made through the Hmong Association of Brown County between 1989 and 1992. Also included are the numbers of clients who attained self-sufficiency and the number of grant reductions. The number of placements ranged from 63 in 1989 to 43 in 1991, and the wage rates for the jobs in each year averaged less than \$6 per hour.

Individuals from the Hmong community complained about not having community control over the jobs program that serves their community and the low wages that are paid to the

Hmong through current employment programs. Comments made about changes to the State's job service program. In the 1980s the jobs program was statewide, with many offices serving the community. In the early 1990s the job service was decentralized and consolidated, in part because the State had had its funding reduced from the Federal Government for many employment programs. In response, the State cut back on personnel positions and services, and these cuts affected services provided to the refugee community.

Koua Yang: Before in Green Bay in the 1980s we asked for 1 percent of the placements. If the agencies placed 100 people, one person has to be Hmong. We also wanted placements to the Hmong people for the good positions. But we never get the chance for the \$8 or \$10 per hour job. The Hmong only get temporary work for three months; when the 3 months are over, they lose the job. That is the circle around these people; they get placements, but they never are able to get self-sufficient.

If the placement is for 3 months, the family loses its AFDC benefits. But after the Hmong family loses the benefits, the job is not continued. The employment agency sends another person to the job and gets another report. But there is no permanent retention in employment for the Hmong. We should get that from the Housing Assistance or from the State, and it should be substantiated.

I feel that it is politics from the local agencies or politics from the State agencies that is causing this. I feel right now in Green Bay that you might see a jobs report, the state might see a jobs report; and everyone sees agencies that have Hmong placements of about 200 cases, but the 200 cases are back on welfare at the end of the year. I feel it is not right for the Hmong people here, because we are the only minority in large

<sup>8</sup> Tau Xiong Testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 127–33.

<sup>9</sup> See, in this report: section 1, "Employment and Jobs Programs," in chapter V, "Employment and Welfare Issues of the Hmong in Green Bay".

numbers here in Green Bay, and we get all the difficulty of this problem.

And the other issue I would like to address is the job program.... In Green Bay we only have one job service. We ask the local community if the Hmong people can do the placement work. The agency can do the placements for the Americans and other group. We can place several Hmong people for any position.<sup>10</sup>

Tau Xiong: Compared to our homeland country, this is strange. Our older population in our country had freedom; they could go hunting without a license, could go anywhere they wanted, and hunt and kill any animal they wanted. They could make their house anywhere, in the mountains, anywhere. They could do anything they want. If they did not want to go to school, the government could not force them to go to school.

When they came to the United States, it is totally different and opposite from their country. They have to learn how to live; they have to learn how to write; they learn how to go to school, to write their name; they have to learn how to pass the test in order to get a driver's license, things like that. They have to learn how to get the money, how to support a family, and things like that.

So they lost their power. In our country, for example, they were leaders, like a general or a captain or those, persons of position. After they come to the United States, they lose their position, everything. So they feel like, for example, they are not the same person they were in Laos. That make their lives more difficult.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Koua Yang Testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 121-27.

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<sup>11</sup> Tau Xiong Testimony, Hmong Transcript, pp. 127-33.

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## IX. Advisory Committee Observations

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The scope of this inquiry was limited to the Hmong living in Green Bay, Wisconsin. The opportunities, problems, and experiences of the Hmong community in Green Bay are not necessarily those of Hmong living in other parts of the State or the Nation.

The Hmong emigrated to the United States and to the city of Green Bay, Wisconsin, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Prior to America's involvement in Southeast Asia, the Hmong lived and prospered in the highland areas of Laos as an independent people. It was the Second Indochina War and the Hmong's alliance with and assistance to the United States that permanently fractured their autonomy, their way of life, and their society.

When the United States began active military operations in Southeast Asia, the Hmong were recruited as allies. In this capacity, they provided logistical support to United States military personnel, fought as organized military units against the communist forces of the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese, and were the principal rescue forces for American pilots shot down over communist territory.

Most Hmong immigrants to the Green Bay area have lived in the city for more than 15 years, as 60 percent of the Hmong immigrant community came to Green Bay prior to 1980. This is important to realize for two reasons. First, it shows that many Hmong in Green Bay are now second generation. Second, it implies a permanence to the Hmong presence in Green Bay.

Despite the length of their settlement in northeast Wisconsin, first generation Hmong in Green Bay—similar to other immigrant groups—still use their native language extensively. Approximately 30 percent of Hmong adults in Green Bay communicate exclusively in Hmong in all interactions, and nearly all Hmong adults in Green Bay speak Hmong or mostly Hmong with their spouse and relatives. Although Hmong is used almost exclusively between adults, the use of English is significant

and widespread among Hmong children and their friends. In one-fourth of Hmong families, the children speak mostly English or only English with one another.

In the course of its community forum on the Hmong in Green Bay, the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights heard from the mayor of Green Bay, members of the Green Bay Hmong community, officials of State and local government agencies, leaders of community organizations, officials from the Green Bay Police Department and the public schools, and academic researchers. The Advisory Committee finds it tragic that so few people in this country know of this immigrant group, their service to this nation, and the circumstances behind their migration from Laos to the United States. The Committee offers the following observations on the Hmong experience in Green Bay, Wisconsin, to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the public.

**1. The Wisconsin Advisory Committee reports that unfavorable stereotypes of the Hmong in Green Bay are still prevalent, and discrimination against the Hmong in housing and employment continues to occur.**

By color, physical characteristics, and language, the Hmong in Green Bay are clearly distinguishable from the majority community. These observable differences, coupled with their recent arrival into northeast Wisconsin, have subjected the Hmong to many forms of stereotyping. Many of the stereotypes are negative and result in discrimination in housing, employment, and personal interaction.

The Hmong living in Green Bay are concentrated into a few census blocks of the central City. The apparent separation of the Hmong observed in the City's public schools depicts the residential patterns of the Hmong. There are 27 elementary schools in Green Bay, and 17 of those schools have less than 5 percent Hmong enrollment. Only eight schools in the school dis-



trict have more than 10 percent enrollment of Hmong students, but those schools account for 80 percent of all of Hmong students in the elementary grades.

Using an indepth scale of dissimilarity, a measure from zero to 100 used by sociologists to study the segregation of ethnic and racial groups in American cities, the Hmong in Green Bay show a dissimilarity of around 70. This essentially means that 70 percent of the Hmong students in the public schools would have to switch schools in order to get into an environment where there is an equal distribution of the Hmong students across all schools in the community.

Some of the Hmong residential concentration is economic, i.e., the availability of affordable housing, and some social, i.e., the desire to live and be near other Hmong. The Advisory Committee, however, believes part of the observed housing concentration persists because of overt acts of discrimination against the Hmong as well as the existence of institutional barriers. This will only be overcome when area residents choose to welcome Hmong into their neighborhoods, and government entities vigorously enforce equal housing opportunity statutes, acting to eliminate overt acts of discrimination and dismantle systems of discrimination.

Though overt acts of employment discrimination against the Hmong appear to be diminishing and the employment of Hmong appears to be increasing, it is the opinion of the Advisory Committee that the Hmong tend to be relegated to the hardest, lowest paying, and least permanent forms of employment. There does not appear to be a real effort by area employers to recruit, train, and promote Hmong for more lucrative types of employment.

It is a misperception that the Hmong and their culture are so alien to this country that there is a legitimate reason for their exclusion from certain sectors of the labor force. In virtually every respect, Hmong immigrants to Green Bay resemble other immigrant groups--toiling in society's least desirable jobs. Yet, because of the Hmong's distinctiveness and separation from the larger community, the Advisory Committee is concerned that the present inequality in the labor situation may perpetuate itself unless there is an effort by civic and business leaders and local officials to eradicate and dismantle all forms

of discrimination and include Hmong in the crafts, the trades, and the white-collar sector.

**2. The Wisconsin Advisory Committee reports that the Hmong community in Green Bay is significantly affected by recent changes in the welfare laws. The Advisory Committee believes the Hmong should receive special consideration under any State or Federal welfare legislation that reduces or terminates benefits.**

Although it can not be documented authoritatively due to the secrecy surrounding many of this country's military operations in Laos, from the testimony and background information available to the Advisory Committee, the record shows that those within the Hmong community are convinced the United States and its operative agents made promises to the Hmong people before and during the American involvement in Southeast Asia. These promises included a place to live and support should the United States and its allies not prevail militarily in Southeast Asia, and the evidence before the Advisory Committee is that the Hmong believe they entered into their alliance with the United States with this understanding.

By the mid 1970s the United States had removed all military personnel from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The Hmong remaining in Laos were forced to flee to neighboring Thailand, many living for years in impoverished refugee camps. Only slowly did the U.S. State Department begin to organize resettlement of the Hmong into this country.

If it is possible to verify that promises of future support were made to the Hmong by the United States Government, the subsequent Hmong resettlement into the Green Bay area and other parts of the country and the welfare assistance afforded to the Hmong over the past 20 years should be considered this Nation's compliance with promises made to the Hmong for their services and assistance during the Vietnam War.

In 1996 changes in welfare laws were enacted affecting legal immigrants' rights to Supplemental Security Income (SSI), medical care, Federal housing assistance, and food stamps. The 1996 legislation mandated that SSI payments be terminated to legal immigrants who have lived in this country for more than 5 years and have not

become citizens unless the individual shows: (1) he/she is now a United States citizen, or (2) he/she worked in this country for 10 years without seeking benefits, or (3) he/she served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Under the 1997 balanced budget agreement, SSI and Medicaid eligibility have been restored for all disabled legal immigrants who entered the United States prior to August 1996.

A tragic irony of the recent changes in the welfare laws is the exemption to those individuals who served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Many adult Hmong men still carry identification cards showing they were part of the armed forces recruited by the CIA to fight in support of this country's objectives in Southeast Asia. Yet the Hmong--arguably the group who suffered the highest number of casualties in the Second Indochina War proportionate to their numbers--are not considered "veterans" of the U.S. Armed Forces.

In lieu of their military service to the United States, the Wisconsin Advisory Committee believes first generation Hmong should receive special consideration under any State or Federal welfare legislation that would reduce or terminate their benefits.

**3. The Wisconsin Advisory Committee reports that there is considerable concern in the general community about involvement of Hmong youth in gang activity. Some of this concern is valid, but a great deal of the public perception is wrong and prejudicial to the Hmong youth.**

Local newspaper accounts have reported on criminal activity and shootings in the Green Bay allegedly linked to Hmong gang activity.<sup>1</sup> In early 1996 a shooting occurred in the city that involved two Hmong youth, one who had come from St. Paul and shot a Hmong youth who was a resident of Green Bay. Other accounts report that Hmong youth are forced to form gangs to

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<sup>1</sup> See this report, chap. VII, note 7., e.g., "Burglary suspect accused in beating," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, Dec. 28, 1996; "Some Asian teens turn to crime, gangs," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, June 26, 1995; "No Direction: It leads straight to trouble," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, June 25, 1995; "Slaying thrusts new officer into his job," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, Aug. 25, 1995; "Murder frightens community," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, July 25, 1994.

protect themselves from other youth gang groups.

The talk of Hmong gang activity in Green Bay needs to be placed into perspective. First, during 1996 there was one murder recorded in the city, and according to police it was not gang related. The city--according to the Green Bay Police Department--is not awash in criminal gang activity. Second, in interviews with school officials regarding gang problems involving Hmong youth, no school official indicated such a problem existed in their middle school or high school. Finally, if the exaggerated estimates of Hmong youth allegedly engaged in gang membership that are offered to the public were accurate, then every Hmong male in the city would be a gang member.

There are Hmong youth who are gang members in Green Bay, and there are serious gang incidents that have taken place and will take place in the city. However, the Advisory Committee believes it is wrong and prejudicial to generally impugn the Hmong youth in the Green Bay community as gang members, prone to violence and antisocial behavior. This is clearly not the case, and such exaggerated stereotyping only serves to perpetuate tensions between the Southeast Asian immigrant community and the other groups in the city.

**4. The Advisory Committee reports that although in the past there have been Federal, State, and local government community service funds awarded directly to the Hmong community in Green Bay, today, virtually all government money for community services goes through non-Hmong service providers. The Advisory Committee considers it regrettable that Federal and State service provider money is not given directly to the Hmong community in Green Bay, and commends the mayor of the city of Green Bay for his commitment to give community service grant money directly to the Hmong community.**

The Southeast Asian Community Center operates in Green Bay and serves the city's Lao-tian and Hmong community. The present director is a member of the Hmong community, but serves without compensation. Prior to 1992 the center was the Green Bay Hmong Association of Brown County, and operated a variety of em-

ployment and community service programs for the Hmong community in Green Bay with Federal, State, and local funding.

Currently, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for Refugee Programs provides money for services to the Hmong in Green Bay through both the State of Wisconsin's State Refugee Office, and the Green Bay Catholic Diocese's Office of Refugee, Migrant Worker, and Hispanic Services. Federal and State money for employment and welfare programs for the Hmong in Green Bay are awarded to the Housing Assistance Office. These agencies employ Hmong as service providers, but the Hmong community in Green Bay does not have an indigenous agency with control over Federal and State money for the provision of services to the Hmong community.

Until 1992 the Green Bay Hmong Association of Brown County received funding from the State and Federal government to operate a job placement program. Hmong operated and controlled the organization, and, similar to other employment service organizations operating with State money, had a contractual goal with the State to move Hmong immigrant refugees from welfare to work. Its success rate, controlling for changes made to the employment program since 1992, was similar to that of the Housing Assistance Office.

While the Green Bay Hmong Association of Brown County operated with the assistance of Federal, State, and local government funding, there was openly divisive rhetoric and debate

within the Hmong community over the operation of the center. Accusations of impropriety among the Hmong were made against one another, from one clan to another clan, and from one segment to another segment. These internal conflicts made it difficult for the majority governing community to adequately assess the needs of the Hmong community because it could not be accurately determined whether those in the community doing the speaking were speaking for the Hmong community as a whole, or whether factions existed still doubting the sincerity of the leadership of one group or another. Ultimately, government funding levels for the center were reduced.

Recently, however, the mayor of the city of Green Bay has proposed that \$30,000 be given the center to address gang problems and general juvenile education in the Hmong community. The city hopes that with this initial funding, the center will be able to attract matching funds and once again have staff available for a viable community center.

The city of Green Bay's commitment to the Southeast Asian Center with this initial funding is a gesture of respect to the Hmong community. It also allows the local Hmong community to have some determination and control over programs affecting their community. The Advisory Committee believes it appropriate for the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for Refugee Programs and the State of Wisconsin to examine ways to undertake similar initiatives with the Hmong community.

## Appendix

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