Americans generally remember images of the Vietnam War through newscasts of U.S. soldiers in combat, Hollywood’s plethora of war movies and the references to it as America’s longest war (1945-1975) and first military defeat. These popularized images often elide the more complex human dimensions and consequences of the war.

The U.S. incurred tremendous losses, including approximately 58,000 soldiers who died or remain missing in action and virtually all of the 2.2 million soldiers who fought in Vietnam were exposed to chemical defoliants, such as Agent Orange. Researchers believe that these chemicals cause major physical and psychological ailments. Financially, the U.S. spent well over a hundred billion dollars to finance the war.

The Vietnam War struck an even greater blow to the Southeast Asian region. Although the U.S. labeled it the Vietnam War, it actually involved three primary countries that comprised what many know as Indochina, a former colony of France: Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. With the withdrawal of U.S. troops in the region in 1975, masses of people there suffered persecution, imprisonment and even genocide. For instance, over 2 million Cambodians (one-third of the country’s population) died from torture, execution or starvation, over 4 million Vietnamese soldiers and civilians lost their lives, while hundreds of thousands experienced similar treatment in labor and re-education camps after the war. In the mid-1980s, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam remained in the bottom five percent in terms of per-capita economic rankings.

Moreover, over 2 million refugees have fled this region since 1975, primarily by land and sea. Many, known as “boat people,” fled in the late-1970s through the 1980s. Large numbers of boat people died of drowning and dehydration, faced rapes and robberies by pirates and experienced immeasurable psychological scars. Those who perished at sea count in the hundreds of thousands. Those who escaped by land, such as many from Cambodia, in addition to dying from dehydration and starvation, lost their lives to land mines.

The 2000 Census indicated that 1.22 million Vietnamese live in the U.S., while over 200,000 Cambodians, over 198,000 Laotians and over 186,000 reside here. Given that many Indochinese arrived as refugees with little, if any possessions, they struggled to adjust to American life. Refugees, in contrast to immigrants, did not even know where they would eventually land after they escaped. One book about these refugees aptly displayed the title, “Transition to Nowhere.”

Uprooted from their homelands and transplanted to a place they did not choose, they struggled to survive in America. Their adaptation includes quite serious issues: suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder due to migration and wartime trauma, unemployment and underemployment, poverty, poor-English fluency and increased barriers to acquiring citizenship (stemming from language difficulties).

These refugee adaptation issues exacerbate interactions between older and subsequent generations of Indochinese Americans, which compound the generational divides experienced by almost all Asian American immigrant groups. Many Indochinese youth suffer from low educational achievement, high dropout rates, high gang
involvement and breakdowns in intergenerational communication. In addition, issues of existing racial discrimination in America increase the difficulties of daily struggles.

Despite these barriers, some Indochinese Americans have successfully attained high educational degrees, positions of social prominence, English-language proficiency and economic stability. Others have gone to contribute to American society through such arenas as political involvement, community service, science and the arts.

Nonetheless, as the documentary demonstrates, skin color remains one significant obstacle towards life for peoples of color in the U.S. For Indochinese Americans, matters of race and refugee rigors continue to play a major role in their daily lives.

**Bibliographical Resources:**

These internet resources contain bibliographies, community news and research information that prove extremely helpful to those interested in Indochinese Americans, as well as other Southeast Asian Americans, whether as a beginning reader or an advanced researcher.

**Southeast Asian Americans and the Vietnam War**

The Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine:

Edwin E. Moise, Vietnam War Bibliography:
http://hubcap.clemson.edu/~eemoise/bibliography.html

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center:
http://www.searac.org/

**Cambodian Americans**

Asian Studies Virtual Library:
http://iias.leidenuniv.nl/wwwvl/southeas/KH_Info.html

Beauty and Darkness: The Odyssey of the Khmer People
http://members.aol.com/cambodia/

**Hmong Americans**

Hmong Cultural Center:
http://www.hmongcenter.org/

Hmong Nationality Archives:
http://www hmongarchives.org/index.php

Hmong Studies Journal:
http://members.aol.com/hmongstudies/
Laotian Americans

Laonet:
http://www.global.lao.net/

Lao Studies Review:
http://www.global.lao.net/laostudy/laostudy.htm

Laos WWW Virtual Library:
http://www.global.lao.net/laoVL.html

Vietnamese Americans

Vietgate: Gateway to the Online Vietnamese Community:
http://www.vietgate.net/

Vietspace:
http://vietspace.kicon.com/page/gen.jsp?dir=/account/site/vietspace

Vietnamese Studies Internet Resource Center:
http://site.yahoo.com/vstudies/