which she means an awareness of common, local experiences and a drive to organize around them.[10] Through documentary photographs and sociological text, Camilo José Vergara (1997) documents the "new American ghetto," the belt of inner-city enclaves across the nation that have been left behind by industry and the working families they once supported. Meanwhile, the exclusive gated suburbs and "privatopias" to which the nation's most affluent families have retreated—severely regulated miniworlds in which the preservation of property values is a top priority—have become the only definition of community or place that many middle- and upper-class people know.[11]

Vietnamese American community-building and place-making occurs against a backdrop that is heavily littered with complex questions about the creation and preservation of community boundaries, the relationship between community and the various elements of place, and the equation of community with public spaces versus private property. As a collective project, staying Vietnamese bumps against the prevailing expectations that Vietnamese refugees and immigrants become American by letting go of both community and place. Instead of letting go, in many instances Vietnamese Americans have fortified their ties to both community and place.

The Power and Experience of Place

In early January 2005, grateful for a few glimpses of sun after days and days of pounding rain, I climbed into my rental car outside a friend's apartment in the San Fernando Valley and embarked onto the Ventura freeway. I headed south through Los Angeles, switching to the Glendale and the Santa Ana freeways, cruising past Disneyland. After about an hour and a half, I drove across the "Orange Curtain"[12] and entered Little Saigon. My destination was Phuoc Loc Tho, a site known more commonly to English-language speakers as the Asian Garden Mall.

When I arrived, pedestrian and automobile traffic were at their height. Finding no better space, I parked at the farthest possible end of the several-city-blocks-long lot and then joined throngs of working people—along with their parents, children, friends, and colleagues—in a lunchtime stroll around the mall. A blind Buddhist monk, barefoot and wrapped in a bright orange robe, stood absolutely motionless just outside the entrance. Most of us slowed to look at him, as if to check for a pulse, before entering the mall.

Suddenly, a plethora of distinctive sights, sounds, and smells enveloped us, re-creating perhaps for some visitors a semblance of life in Viet Nam, pre-1975. A freestanding cart displayed lucky bamboo plants, tiny Buddha

trinkets, and assorted curios in fake gold and jade. From a restaurant and nearby bakery flowed the steam of beef noodle soup and the sugary scent of crusty French pastries. Nonstop videos danced on a gigantic flat-screen television at one of several music shops, accompanied by what sounded like unbearably tragic love songs. Amid the din, shoppers and vendors eyed one another, haggled, and exchanged money. At the central food court, old men sat alone sipping dark sweet coffee; their sad and distant gazes seemed full of memories.

As an architectural anchor and geographic focal point of the tourist/business district, Phuoc Loc Tho/Asian Garden Mall is unique. This is not an ordinary California-style strip mall, although Little Saigon is replete with those. Its symbolism is huge, not only for the visitors who seek a connection to Vietnameseness. Several leaders told me that the mall represents the "center" and the "heart" of the Vietnamese American community. Despite the fact that the mall's intended use is commercial and therefore it is essentially a private, exclusive, and highly regulated space, its role in generating and shaping Vietnamese American community life is significant.

The Asian Garden Mall is one of those structures whose symbolism exceeds its physical stature.[13] This symbolism is the outcome of efforts by various social actors to transform the place from a mere collection of storefronts to a cultural and political zone spanning the Vietnamese American community, city, county, state, nation, and globe. The mall is often a target for politicians hoping to collect the Vietnamese American vote. For example, on September 13, 2000, a crowd of mostly Vietnamese Americans awaited presidential candidate George W. Bush in the parking lot of the mall. Bush was nearly two hours late. To keep spirits high in the scorching heat, Republican leaders offered their chants, pledges, and prayers. "Welcome to America's most Republican county!" beamed the local party chairman. "This is Bush country!" yelled a state assemblyman. When Bush finally appeared, he made an immediate gesture to the racial demographics of his audience: "I love the wonderful fabric of this state." Then, prompted by a campaign aide, he continued, "You can move to England and not be an Englishman. You can move to France and not be a Frenchman. But if you move to America, you're an American." Sixteen minutes later, people cheered, confetti flew in the air—yellow and red, the colors of the flag of South Viet Nam—and Bush was gone. In that brief and simple moment, the soon-to-be president of the United States turned Phuoc Loc Tho/Asian Garden Mall, and Little Saigon in general, into Republican territory and also into an exemplar of the nation's social and spatial mobility. The actual

complexity of activities inside the mall and elsewhere disappeared, and with the turn of a phrase, Little Saigon became instant "proof" of the nation's presumed commitment to diversity, freedom, and democracy (Moxley 2000).

The mall is a site of multiple individual and collective histories and visions. Places like this mall are powerful because they generate an infinitely complex range of experiences and social, cultural, or political meanings. For example, through the arrangement of people's movement and action, the multilingual signage and other audiovisual references to language and culture, and the constant surveillance of hidden cameras and armed security guards, the mall ensures a regular flow of shoppers. Meanwhile, the mall is also a site of social activity. I have seen adults dropping off their aging parents here to let them spend the day sipping coffee and chatting with other elders. I have seen men in their fifties and sixties while away the hours playing Chinese chess on tables in front of the mall. Despite rules around loitering, these noncommercial uses of the mall seem to be tolerated by the security patrol. For my own friends, I have designated the mall as an initial meeting spot before we go to an event or another restaurant elsewhere in Little Saigon. Because of its easy access and recognizability, the mall functions as an orienting device. Several of the leaders I interviewed describe this mall as the "heart" of the Vietnamese American community, but then go on to explain that they try to avoid coming here because of the crowds and the constant "fender benders" in the parking lot. In this sense, the mall has become a mental destination whose meaning is possibly even bigger than if it were just a shopping venue.

Tony Hiss (1990) and Winifred Gallagher (1993) describe the emotional and psychological dimensions of the environment, pointing out the ability of place to affect our innermost thoughts. Hiss observes that places organize our senses into moments of "simultaneous perception," and he argues that as public citizens we have a responsibility to create places that enhance those moments. However, as an urban sociologist I am less interested in making a deep analysis of these sorts of personal perceptions than I am able to describe and explain the impact of place on public, social, especially community, life. I have spoken at length with people who are much more familiar and invested in these places than I am. Certainly I am in no position to describe either everyday life in southern California or a Vietnamese American's insider experience of Little Saigon. The point is not, after all, to explain what it feels like to be Vietnamese American living in these spaces; instead, we are exploring the manner in which place bolsters community by eliciting a sense of group identity and belonging among Vietna

refugees and immigrants in the United States. I am particularly interested in the collective thoughts and feelings behind efforts to make place as a foundation for community. To the extent that place becomes a resource in and of itself—a self-contained universe, a lived world, a symbol of Vietnameseness—place and place-making turn out to be crucial and persistent elements of Vietnamese American community and community-building.

Place-Making and Place Makers

When the first Vietnamese refugees arrived, they did so into places whose purposes and meaning had already been defined. Their place-making involves taking apart the existing elements of place and reformulating them so as to engage and promote certain forms of Vietnamese American community. In Little Saigon and Fields Corner, I identify three distinct kinds of place-making activities: territorializing, regulating, and symbolizing.

Territorializing means establishing the scale, boundaries, and "imageability" of place. For example, in his classic study *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch (1960) pointed out that each city acquires its image through a different use of physical structures including paths, districts, edges, nodes, and landmarks. Territorializing creates regions within space to which purpose and meaning may then be attached. While city planners are obviously paid to design these regions, city residents may develop their own understanding and perceptions of the regionalization of the built environment. Thus, territorializing is not only a professional activity but can be the work of ordinary people. Sanjoy Mazumdar et al. study the quiet, individual acts of territorialization among ordinary Vietnamese Americans who "make pilgrimages" to Orange County's Little Saigon (2000, 328); Joseph Wood focuses on suburban Vietnamese Americans who have "configured a labyrinthine geography for themselves" in northern Virginia (1997, 70). But in this book, territorialization is a public act by Vietnamese American business and community leaders who want to make the scope and purpose of their places clear not only to accommodate Vietnamese American social life but also to gain clout and recognition not just for themselves but also for their constituencies in city hall. Turning the Asian Garden Mall into a spot on George W. Bush's 2000 campaign trail also territorializes Orange County's Little Saigon, enlarging its scale from a local to a national site for the Vietnamese American vote.

Regulating sets up rules for who belongs and who does not belong in a particular place. Regulating is a hegemonic activity that seeks to maintain the status quo of a place. The state monitors and controls the movement of people across the boundaries of public and private places—parks, hotel lobbies, government offices, corporate plazas, shopping malls, residential neighborhoods—through its lawmakers, the police, trained security guards, and the court system. For example, requiring special identification tags or fingerprint scans for entry into a corporate or government workplace regulates traffic in and out of place.

Regulating can also be an informal activity. In her classic defense of urban neighborhoods and street life, Jane Jacobs (1961) reminds us of how city streets are sometimes safer than suburbs because neighbors often know each other and can look out for one another. When people are excluded and marginalized from a place, they can attempt to counterregulate. Neil Smith (1993) offers the example of an artist's invention of a vehicle that would allow a homeless person to sleep, wash, store belongings, and avoid bad weather. The artist's point was practical and political: designed in collaboration with homeless men and women, the vehicle made a wider range of movement more visible, thus "retaliating" against efforts to make a disturbing social reality invisible. Obviously this retaliation comes from a place of relative powerlessness, but the fact that even homeless people can oppose state regulations is an important aspect of place-making.

In the Vietnamese American context, the most powerful acts of regulation happened before, during, and shortly after the war. But at a more recent and smaller local scale, Vietnamese American community leaders also help to regulate the boundaries of place through commerce and through political ideology, namely anticommunism. My earlier discussion of the Asian Garden Mall in Little Saigon illustrates some ways that "public" activities in a privately owned shopping area are controlled and monitored by security guards and by social norms about other acceptable activities, for example, playing chess in the outside courtyard. The rules of mass consumerism and the acquisition of private property mesh neatly with the rules of political ideology. The Hi-Tek incident of 1999 provides a memorable instance in which Vietnamese Americans in Orange County took to the streets in the hundreds of thousands to regulate the political boundaries of place by ousting a shopkeeper who insisted on displaying an image of Ho Chi Minh in his store. Vietnamese Americans in Boston have not had opportunities of the same scale to publicize their hatred of communism, although I have been told that a reign of fear keeps people from vocalizing political opinions that might be misconstrued as "communist."

Symbolization gives meaning to place through the attachment of symbols, metaphors, memories, and even myths. Putting up monuments is the

quintessential act of symbolization, casting into stone the history and identity of a group or nation (N. Johnson 1995). Just as the writing of history is a contested act, so making monuments to honor certain heroes or events—and not others—can be interpreted as an act of power (Harvey 1979). Because they are physical objects, monuments that symbolize also act as landmarks that enhance the territorialization of place.

The built environment is fraught with contested memories and other ideological messages (Boyer 1996; Wright and Hutchison 1997). David Hummon (1992) elaborates upon the ways that community residents use place imagery to define "self" and "other." Usually, otherizing involves some kind of moral or political commentary. For example, in the symbolization of West Hollywood, California as a place representing gay men, Benjamin Forrest (1995) notes that place is also tied to a narrative about gay men as good citizens who should not be stigmatized or marginalized. So, too, the symbolization of Vietnamese American places emphasizes the perilous journey of refugees to America, and their positive economic and cultural contributions once settled here. This narrative counters prevailing ideas of Vietnamese as gangsters, welfare cheats, or violent and obsessed war veterans.

A crucial impulse toward place-making in Vietnamese America comes from the transition from mutual assistance associations (MAAs) focused on social services for refugees to community-based organizations focused on jobs, housing, and economic development. This transition was made necessary by the decline in federal and local funding for refugee services and the changing needs of their growing communities. But whether or not place-making is seen as a practical or useful activity depends on your perspective.

Lincoln Le arrived in New Jersey in 1975 when he was just out of his teens. His family moved to Florida and then Boston a year later. By flipping through the phone book, he discovered there were about thirty Vietnamese already in the greater Boston area. He called one of the numbers and ended up living with the person who answered for six months. A few weeks later, he moved to Chinatown. He spent many years teaching bilingual Vietnamese classes in the Boston public schools then became a lawyer. I interviewed him in 1997, just as the Vietnamese American community was beginning to make this shift from services to community-building.

LINCOLN LE: Most Vietnamese communities in the United States have a so-called, what is that? Vietnamese community of Massachusetts, Inc.?

A CBO?

LINCOLN LE: Right. Most of the communities have that official social system that are supposed to gear their activities toward creating coalition, political awareness, advocating for services, things of that nature. But these CBOs are not very effective since their inception. Just pick Massachusetts. What has that organization done to help the community? I haven't seen nothing.

Well, they have commemorative events against the war, and those kinds of things.

LINCOLN LE: You think those are practical? May have some cultural values behind it. But in terms of providing some iota of security of members of the community—there's none.

You don't think even the symbolic significance is important?

LINCOLN LE: It's important. Once the people is self-sufficient. You cannot live on symbols. You have to live on rice and vegetables. The majority of those Southeast Asian CBOs have been focusing on symbolic events: April 30, Tet, cultural events. But the real social support, the real educational support are not there. . . . How do you call that? The organizing drive to make sure the ability and the interest somehow merge into action is not there.

What Mr. Lincoln identifies as a lack of ability and interest merging into action was in fact a broader issue facing MAAs nationwide. In 1992, the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) launched a year-long "MAA-Sparkplug Leadership Training" project to help shift the focus of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese MAAs from a service-oriented approach to organizational development and leadership team-building. The project, funded by the W. R. Kellogg Foundation, promoted "intergenerational and inter-cultural leadership mentoring" and established three-person teams consisting of the executive director of the MAA, a board member of the MAA, and a community resource person designated as a "sparkplug."[14]

Whether leaders function as professional "sparkplugs" in the fashion of this foundation-sponsored project or as mere "mouthpieces" for various factions within the community, their efforts to territorialize, regulate, and symbolize place have important ramifications for community-building. Through the 1990s, Vietnamese Americans in Boston struggled to make this shift from refugee services to community development and to do so without alienating an older generation whose views about place would be outmoded. I interviewed Hoa Nguyen several times over the years from 1994 to 2005, during which he held a number of influential positions in Vietnamese American community organizations. Mr. Hoa is still considered one of the younger leaders in the community. In one conversation, we spoke about how difficult it is to define "community," and with some exasperation Mr. Hoa listed for me all the community organizations he could think of.

HOA NGUYEN: Let me tell you about the national community. Each city or state have its own Vietnamese "community" that not classify as CBO

> [community-based organization]. They have their own elections. They have the Vietnamese Community of Springfield, the Vietnamese Community of Worcester, the Vietnamese Community of Boston, the Vietnamese Community of Massachussetts. Of Northeast region, West, and Northwest, and then the whole entire country! And then they have their own conventions, their own conference every number of years. They reach over to Europe to unite with France, England, Switzerland. Whatever. Their interest is to have an umbrella community. Sooner or later, they're going to call the Earth: Vietnamese Community of Outside Viet Nam. But what is it for? Not the purpose to help Vietnamese life, but to deal with Viet Nam. That's the interest. It's all exile community. I'm not saying it's a waste of time. But we can learn lessons from that. People should have seen a long time ago whether this kind of thing is doable or leads us anywhere.

Seen through the lens of exile, community-building requires claiming bigger and bigger territories that can ultimately cover the entire globe. The desire on the part of displaced exiles to "jump scale" from the city to the planet makes sense if one frames one's entire sense of self and community on the loss of homeland.[15] When Mr. Hoa suggests that this approach to community is not doable and does not lead anywhere, he speaks out of a professional viewpoint that values realistic options. Given the parameters of community-building and place-making in Boston, he has accepted the project of staying Vietnamese within an American context.

Placing Vietnamese America

Until recently, the concept of place has been taken for granted and thus has been severely undertheorized with regard to Vietnamese Americans—despite what seem to be obvious references to the need for a critical spatial analysis of the forced exile and resettlement of refugee populations. The very notion of a refugee, after all, represents the "tragic phenomenon of displacement," a phenomenon that is not new but which multiplied beyond all historical precedent in the last century (Smyser 1987). Drawing from sociology, geography, and other fields, this chapter brings into plain view the centrality and power of place in everyday life, thus setting the stage for a critical and in-depth discussion of the relationship between community and place in Vietnamese America.

This book joins a long tradition of examining spatially bounded Asian American communities; it is certainly not the first time anyone has "placed" an Asian ethnic group in a specific urban or suburban location, or alongside another racialized group. Chinatown, of course, has received the most

scholarly attention, and continues to be the basis for excellent scholarship on class conflict, globalization, and suburbanization.[16] Koreans in New York and Los Angeles have provided fascinating, if somewhat disturbing, analyses of the origins of conflict and cooperation within the Korean community, or with blacks and Jews.[17] In all of these recent works, scholars make us think about U.S.-based Asian ethnic groups not just as wannabe-citizens but as key players in larger regional and national formations. Asian ethnic groups exist in relation to others, and in the existing scholarship those relationships are often expressed in specific terms of geography, territory, region, or location: in other words, place. But as far as I know, no scholar has yet taken an Asian American community as the basis for formulating a critical theory of space or place.

This discussion of community and place in Vietnamese America needs to be "critical" in the sense that spatial assumptions need to be surfaced and examined; in fact, these assumptions influence social scientific scholarship regarding the Vietnamese American experience. When scholars do address space, they rarely explain how space itself—that is, the spatial arrangement of populations but also the creation of spatial scale that results in boundaries between and among neighborhood, community, and nation—is actually the outcome of sustained struggle and conflict between and among various social actors, social institutions, and the state. Where things are in space, including the location of particular neighborhoods, is not just the random effect of individual actions. A critical, or active, approach to space attends to this complex, and always ongoing, process.

To think "platially" adds another level of inquiry to spatial theory. Now, not only are we asking questions about the wide geographic implications of social life—that is, what Henri Lefebvre called the "production of space"—but we are also attending to the "humanistic epistemology" that is attached to place-making.[18] Platial theory requires that we ask about the interweaving of meaningful narratives to spatial forms, the very act of which turns space into place. By moving analytically from space to place, we make possible a tricky shift from an outsider/objective analysis to a participatory/experiential one. It is not so much that anyone loses objectivity but that as researchers and as people in the world, we gain "positionality" by acknowledging and validating specific experiences and relationships.

Spatial-assimilation is the central theory that mainstream social scientists employ to think about where immigrants live and work and why location affects them. In this theory, "space" refers simply to location, a point on a map, a specific place that if devoid of the people and objects currently

in it would be described as "empty." In thinking of space this way, we are not asked to consider the complex social and historical processes that had to occur prior to our moment of observation in order for these areas to evolve into the places we now see. Nor are we meant to think about the experience of actually being in these places; the perceptions and sensory aspects of place are not important, so that one place ends up the same as any other, except for its location on the map. Space in the spatial-assimilation theoretical framework is by and large a reference to distance and proximity between and among people and community resources.

In observing and measuring the residential integration of immigrants, spatial-assimilation theorists are reminding us that the location of one's home indicates, and to some degree determines, one's access to material resources such as jobs, services, or public amenities. Their explicit assumption is that the more that immigrant settlement patterns resemble those of middle-class whites, and the more immigrants are integrated into white neighborhoods, the more incorporated they will become into mainstream society. The movement of whites from inner-city ghettos to outer-ring suburbs is taken as normative and as a given rather than as an uneven historical process involving the state. Thus, spatial-assimilation theory as it is applied to immigrants conceals from view many assumptions about the racialization of metropolitan space in general and about the construction of white privilege specifically.

The closer one remains to an economically disadvantaged neighborhood, of course, the more difficult it is to escape the long-term impact of those disadvantages: poorly funded public schools, drugs and crime leading to street violence, and exposure to pollution and toxic wastes are the examples that come instantly to mind. For those reasons, living in a wealthy suburb is surely better in many ways than living in a poor area of a city. Unfortunately, the development of metropolitan regions creates inequality, so that what appear to be the separate fates of the suburbs and the cities are in fact linked and interdependent. In truth, the advantages enjoyed by people in rich places are carved out of the disadvantages suffered by people in poor places.

The association of suburbs with whiteness is neither accidental nor the result solely of hard work and a desire to assimilate on the part of whites. Nor is it entirely accurate as middle- and working-class people of color, including immigrants, also suburbanize. In *Place Matters: Metropolitics for the Twenty-first Century*, Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom explain how a series of "stealth urban policies" created the suburbs

as enclaves for privileged whites while the abandoned inner cities became home to native-born and immigrant minorities (2001, 102). Stealth urban policies have been the primary engine behind the settlement patterns of whites, yet spatial-assimilation theory frames immigrant residential patterns outside of the context of such policies by focusing instead on the characteristics of immigrant populations themselves.

The emergence and growth of Vietnamese America as a "community" depends on, and in many ways constitutes, the production and construction of places such as Little Saigon and Fields Corner. Vietnamese American place-making is not only a matter of Vietnamese American people congregating in particular spots on the map; indeed, in certain cases, the actual number of people located in a place is irrelevant to the social significance attached to a place. Moreover, Vietnamese American place-making must contend with the features of already existing places, rearranging and reformulating them to meet Vietnamese American community needs. The challenges and opportunities of staying Vietnamese in Orange County versus Boston are distinct not only because of the different characteristics of the Vietnamese American population, but also because Orange County and Boston are different places to begin with.

The Architecture of Vietnamese America

Borrowing terms from other disciplines is always a risky business. I use the term "architecture" full well knowing that readers who expect a full-blown, professional analysis of the built environment, in this chapter or elsewhere in the book, will be disappointed. Unfortunately, from the perspective of physical geographers and architects, my gestures toward the physical form of place will seem half-baked, even as they pose a more serious challenge to sociologists and others who are unaccustomed to giving space their unswerving attention. In applying a sociospatial lens to the problem of staying Vietnamese, I walk a fine line between these disciplinary approaches. But the risk of disappointing some is worth the possibility of convincing others that the spatial dimension of the Vietnamese American experience needs to be taken seriously. In the passages below, I describe the social and historical context for Vietnamese American community-building and place-making. Then, I compare Orange County and Boston as contrasting settings for the production and construction of Vietnamese America. In all of this, the already existing architecture with which Vietnamese Americans must deal is understood also to be a production and construction rather than a set of naturalized facts.

The End of the War

Vu Pham (2003) presents a historiography of the thousands of Vietnamese students and professionals who lived and worked in the United States from 1945 to 1975. This historiography challenges the idea of 1975 as the birth year of Vietnamese America, and also questions the conception of Vietnamese Americans only as forced exiles whose primary concern was to adapt to U.S. society and become Americans. South Vietnamese students and advanced scholars, for example, were financed and supported by the U.S. government in the hopes that later they would advance U.S. foreign interests through their American-based education. At the end of 1974, nearly fifteen thousand Vietnamese were already living in the United States.[19] Of these, some did not return to Viet Nam as planned, becoming instead "silent refugees" in the United States.

Thus, even before April 30, 1975—the date to which exiled Vietnamese refer as their "Day of Mourning"—the U.S. federal government and its military attachés in Viet Nam had already earmarked spaces, materially and discursively, for Vietnamese Americans as political refugees who would serve as a "showcase for U.S. democracy."[20] In the last weeks of the war, the communists gained territory and thousands of people moved toward the shrinking, U.S. government–controlled areas. The reasons for moving were surely complex. A *New York Times* reporter found that fear of crossfire, not fear of communism, motivated the flow:

> When people are asked why they join the human tide, abandoning home, possessions, and livelihood, the typical reply was "Because everyone else is going." . . . Not one said it was because he or she feared or hated Communism.[21]

In the mainstream media coverage about the flight from Viet Nam, refugees were often portrayed as "voting with their feet" against communism, but what is often overlooked is that "forced-draft urbanization" was a U.S. military strategy that encouraged massive population displacement from the countryside as a way to degrade the Viet Cong. As Richard Nixon put it, "The enemy will be denied all but the most limited and furtive access to the people."[22]

In the first weeks of April 1975, the Ford administration's plans to rescue the eighteen thousand orphans remaining in South Viet Nam most certainly represented a political maneuver on the part of the United States, not a children's vote against communism. Operation Babylift was denounced by the communists as "kidnapping on a vast scale."[23] Observers around the world saw Operation Babylift as an illustration of American hubris. For example, an editorial in England's *Manchester Guardian Weekly* stated:

> The evacuation of Vietnamese orphans, while emotionally understandable, can rightly be described as cradle-snatching. But its real significance, so far as Americans are concerned, is that *it starkly reveals how many Americans still implicitly believe it is better for Vietnamese to become Americans that [sic] to remain Vietnamese*, as is their birthright, if it means living under a government which America does not like. (italics added)[24]

The idea that Vietnamese refugees in the United States should become American rather than stay Vietnamese—an idea wrapped up in complex layers of political and cultural assumptions—serves as the most basic fodder for this book.

Even within the U.S. Congress, Operation Babylift had its detractors, some of whom described the evacuation of the first two thousand babies as a "guilt trip" that saved the children but failed to end the war. One black administrative aide pointed out the irony that while blacks had not yet been accepted as full citizens in this country, the U.S. government was trying to rescue Vietnamese children and make them into Americans.[25]

Bill Ong Hing notes that although many policy makers saw refugee parole as a humanitarian endeavor, between 1948 and 1979, "the ideological bias of refugee policy [was] to accommodate refugees fleeing Communist countries" (1993, 124). Between April and December 1975 alone, about 125,000 Vietnamese were paroled into the United States by the discretionary authority of the attorney general. From 1975 to 1979, an additional 169,000 Vietnamese entered the country. Between 1975 and 1980, over 400,000 Southeast Asian refugees were thus "paroled" into the United States; the vast majority of these were Vietnamese. Hing states, "These figures betray any claim that refugee policy was based solely on humanitarian considerations" (124).

At this time, some U.S. lawmakers expressed anxiety about the potential social instability caused by the influx of refugees, but restrictions on refugee admissions were seen as "morally treacherous" given the political controversies surrounding U.S. actions in Viet Nam (Hing 1993). The Refugee Act of 1980 came about partly as a response to widespread dissatisfaction with the ad hoc nature of discretionary parole. The act defined a refugee as someone with a "well-founded fear of persecution." In practice, persecution was most often taken to mean persecution by communist regimes.[26] Between 1980 and 1990, about 307,000 Vietnamese came to the United States, the majority of them officially designated by the act as "refugees."

Three other programs ushered in the rest of the Vietnamese who came to the United States in that period: the Orderly Departure Program (ODP),

the Amerasian Homecoming Program, and the Special Released Reeducation Center Detainee Resettlement Program (more commonly referred to as "HO"). ODP was established in 1979 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in order to facilitate the migration and permanent resettlement of the individuals and families who were fleeing their homelands. The Amerasian Homecoming Program, enacted by Congress in 1988, allowed children of Vietnamese mothers and U.S. soldiers into the country. Many of these children hoped to find fathers who had abandoned them.[27] The HO program was implemented in 1989 to enable former political prisoners and their families to enter the United States. Many of these individuals had served prison sentences of anywhere from eight to fifteen years because they had worked for the South Vietnamese government or military and were unable to flee when the war ended. In the future, new immigration is not likely to play much of a role in the growth of the Vietnamese American population.

The 2000 census lists 1,122,528 Vietnamese in the United States, making Vietnamese the fifth largest U.S. Asian ethnic group. This is nearly double the figure of 614,547 listed on the 1990 census. The increase was due to new refugees, to new immigrants coming to be reunited with their families, as well as to U.S.-born children (Table 1). Steven Gold (1992) describes three subgroups within the Vietnamese American population that correspond roughly to three "waves" of refugees: the pre-1975 elite, the boat people, and the ethnic Chinese. Each of these waves has had different patterns of assimilation and acculturation based on the economic and political circumstances in which they left Viet Nam and arrived in the United States. Amerasians and ex–political detainees did not come in a separate wave although they represent two additional subgroups within the population. There are, of course, many other ways to describe the composition of the Vietnamese American population; throughout the following chapters, community-building and place-making reflects and enacts these various divisions and perspectives.

Migration and Settlement

Richard Alba and Victor Nee note that the geographic concentration of immigrants is guided primarily by social networks, whereas for refugees, at least upon arrival, their original destination is determined by government agencies and private sponsorship (2003, 248–60). In the first few years of U.S. resettlement, federal agencies purposefully dispersed Vietnamese refugees across all fifty states. The intent of this "scatter policy" appears to be a

Table 1. Refugees and immigra

FISCAL YEAR
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Total

Source: South Asian American Statistical P
http://www.searac.org.

matter of interpretation: some
facilitate assimilation, lessen
resources might be easily drain
urban planner, the point was
concentration of Cuban refug
the wish to prevent a second M