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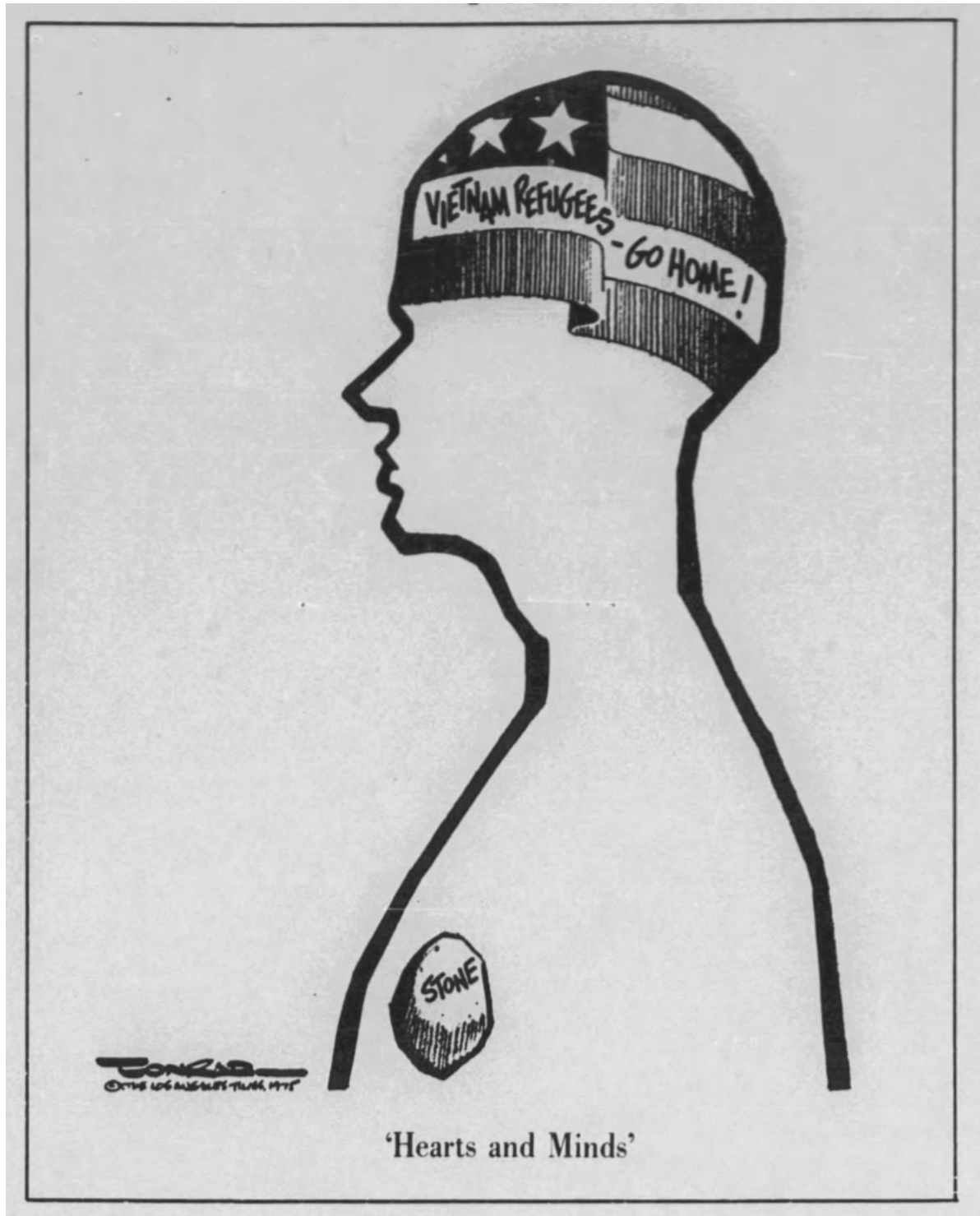
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How Does the Los Angeles Times Represent Vietnamese Refugees from the Evacuation of Saigon Compared to Subsequent Vietnamese Boat People?



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Masters thesis by Jørgen Mæland Gabrielsen

## Preface

The work on this master's thesis has at times been demanding. However, the work has also been a lot of fun. I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to write about a subject I am truly interested in. This has made the process of writing a blast.

I would like to thank all the amazing people who made this master's thesis possible. First, I would like to thank my supervisor on this thesis Linn Anne Margrethe Normand, whose go-getter attitude and positive outlook towards my project has made his process truly wonderful. Without her dedication of talent and time, this project would have remained in its infancy.

I would also like to thank my girlfriend Marie for proofreading my paper and listening to me talking about my project even though she has no interest in history. You have made my time as a student great, and I will always be grateful for your kind and encouraging words when I needed them the most.

Lastly, I would like to thank my dear friend Lars who has contributed more to my understanding of history, through many long and interesting discussions, than any book. My time as a student would not have been this easy without your help.

Jørgen Mæland Gabrielsen

Stavanger, May 2021

## Abstract

This thesis examines how the Vietnamese are represented in the Los Angeles Times, during the Fall of Saigon and the start of the Vietnamese boat people phenomena. This thesis uses the theoretical framework of Critical Theory to analyze representations and compare the two groups with each other. Critical Race Theory and Critical Media Theory is used to supplement the analysis which utilizes a Qualitative Content Analysis.

The master's thesis seeks to answer the following thesis question: How Does the Los Angeles Times Represent Vietnamese Refugees from the Evacuation of Saigon Compared to Subsequent Vietnamese Boat People?

The analysis concludes that the representations of the Vietnamese can mostly be determined by the specific political goals the author wishes to achieve. The newspaper utilizes a large variety of different voices and techniques to seem neutral, however through the analysis the patterns of "helpless," "good" and "bad" emerged as the dominant categories of representations. To achieve the political goals of the author, several of the articles utilize racism and othering, as well as assigning worth through the use of worthy and unworthy victims. The last finding is that the way the refugees are represented drastically changes between the two groups of Vietnamese refugees, with the Vietnamese evacuated from the Fall of Saigon being represented generally more favorably, compared to the boat people who are treated with suspicion and disdain among other representations.

This thesis' contribution and relevance is first and foremost connected to the importance of historical knowledge with regards to othering and racism by the mainstream media. It seeks to establish the discourse surrounding the Vietnamese upon first arrival in the U.S. and by extension how this view has changed. By doing so the discourse defining aspects among all Asian immigrants in California is addressed.

## Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven undersøker hvordan vietnamesere er representert i the Los Angeles Times under fallet av Saigon og starten av det vietnamesiske båtflyktning-fenomenet. Oppgaven bruker det teoretiske rammeverket til Critical Theory for å analysere representasjoner og sammenlikne de to gruppene med hverandre. Critical Race Theory og Critical Media Theory blir brukt for å utfylle analysen som baserer seg på bruken av Qualitative Content Analysis.

Problemstillingen masteroppgaven skal svare på er følgende: Hvordan fremstiller the Los Angeles Times vietnamesiske flyktninger fra evakueringen av Saigon sammenliknet med de vietnamesiske båtflyktningene?

Analysen konkluderer med at representasjonene av vietnamesiske flyktninger for det meste kan bli funnet ved å se på de politiske motivene til forfatteren. Avisen bruker en rekke ulike stemmer og teknikker for å fremstille seg selv som nøytral, men gjennom analysen kommer kategoriene “hjelpeløs,” “god” og “dårlig” frem som dominerende markører for representasjoner. For å oppnå sine politiske mål bruker forfatterne rasisme og othering, samt kategoriseringer som worthy og unworthy victims. Det siste funnet i oppgaven er den drastiske endringen i representasjonene av de to gruppene vietnamesiske flykninger, hvor vietnameserne som ble evakuert fra Saigon fremstilles mye bedre sammenliknet med båtflyktningene, som blir fremstilt med større avsky og suspekt i tillegg til mange andre lignende representasjoner.

Denne masteroppgavens bidrag og relevans er først og fremst i viktigheten av historisk kunnskap knyttet til begrepene othering og rasisme i massemedia. Oppgaven søker å etablere diskursen rundt vietnamesernes ankomst til USA og videre hvordan denne diskursen har endret seg. Ved å gjøre dette blir alle aspekter rundt asiatiske immigranter i California nøyere undersøkt.

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# 1. Introduction

*“I am sick to my stomach seeing our Navy planes and ships wasting our taxpayers’ money searching for boat people. We welcomed the Europeans who have similar life styles, but let the Chinese go where they can eat a raw fish, rice, ride bicycles, live 20 in a room and smoke opium!”<sup>1</sup>*

Los Angeles Times, 24.09.1979

This anonymous letter was written as a response to an editorial published in the Los Angeles Times, where the paper suggested that the boat people of Vietnam was disserving of America’s help once more. The quote is from 1979, at the height of the Vietnamese boat peoples’ exodus from Southeast Asia. This quote highlights the extreme opinions that can be found in such a mainstream newspaper as the Los Angeles Times. The quote also highlights the extremely racist rhetoric present in one of Americas largest newspapers in the not-so-distant past. The recent #StopAsianHate campaign in America today illustrate how Asian-Americans have a long and complicated history with the United States, from the many immigration acts in the 1910s to 30s barring Asian immigrants’ entry to the country, to the complicated history of the Japanese internment camps during WWII. In both examples California finds itself at center, being the state that historically has been home to the majority of Asian Americans.<sup>2</sup> The almost ten-year devastating Vietnam War, expanded the exodus of Vietnamese to American, as the population of Southeast Asia was forced to migrate to avoid the war. As a result, the evacuation of Saigon and later the phenomena known as the Vietnamese boat people took place in the 1970s. The Los Angeles Times is host to a multitude of opinions on the events surrounding Vietnamese immigration to the U.S., not only by its authors but also by readers and editors alike. With the historical event that was the U.S. exodus out of South Vietnam, the question of how the media treated the new arrivals is a complex issue.

Historical representations deal with a lot of complex issues, compounded by the way in which they are presented. As such the research into the representations of the Vietnamese as seen

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<sup>1</sup> Abigail Van Buren, “Readers Line Up With ‘America First,’” the Los Angeles Times, 24.09.79, 3, Part ii.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine A. Luther, “Reflections of Cultural Identities in Conflict: Japanese American Internment Camp Newspapers during World War II,” *Journalism History*, Vol. 29, 70, 73, DOI: 10.1080/00947679.2003.12062623



through the lens of the many actors within the Los Angeles Times, shape our understanding of these people today, as is the case with many of the representations within the Los Angeles Times.

## 1.1 Why Research Representations of Vietnamese Refugees in the Los Angeles Times?

This is a multifaceted question and as such the question has a multifaceted answer, in particular the question of why this paper is of such importance. The answer lies within the diaspora of the Vietnamese within the United States, as 40 percent of the Vietnamese population lives in California.<sup>3</sup> Within California the Vietnamese populations of Orange county, Los Angeles county and Santa Clara county make up for around 26 percent of the total American Vietnamese population.<sup>4</sup> The question of their representation thus becomes how these people are represented by their local newspaper, and by extension are depicted by a major influence in their local community. Therefore, this thesis looks at the largest newspaper in California at the time, to get a better understanding of how the largest distributor of news, not only in California, but by extension among the Vietnamese in California, represents its constituents. This thesis examines representations in particular because they influence popular attitudes towards a particular group of people.<sup>5</sup> This can be seen when describing otherness, a feature in the representation of the Vietnamese, where “Otherness is due less to the difference of the Other than to the point of view and the discourse of the person who perceives the Other as such.”<sup>6</sup> This quote reveals some harsh facts about representations and who gets to represent a certain group with or without their consent. It thus stands to reason that the Los Angeles Times, as an illustrative case study, can reveal a great deal of how Southern California presented some of their new countrymen. Time and context also play an important role in answering this question as the comparison of the evacuees with the boat people happens four

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<sup>3</sup> Elijah Alperin, Jeanne Batalova, “Vietnamese Immigrants in the United States,” *Migration Policy Institute*, accessed, May 1, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/vietnamese-immigrants-united-states-2017>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Maxwell McCombs, Sebastian Valenzuela, “Setting the Agenda: Mass Media and Public Opinion” Polity Press: Cambridge, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-François Staszak, “Other/Otherness,” *Kitchin & Thrift: International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, Vol.12, 2009, 1, <https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:77582>

to five years apart. Accordingly, the historical context of each event will have to be considered.

Another important question to ask is why look at the Vietnamese? When looking at any minority group this question will undoubtedly be asked. This thesis' justification lies within the two distinct waves of Vietnamese immigration to the U.S., namely the Fall of Saigon and the boat refugees 5 years later. As the research question suggests there is a difference between the representations of the evacuated refugees from Saigon and the subsequent boat refugees. While at first glance the two groups look similar, since both are from Vietnam, yet an important difference between the two is in the timeframe and historical context in which they arrive. This thesis thus becomes a way of researching how the difference of migrants from the same country, just a few years, can affect the representation in a national newspaper. It thus becomes important to examine how the two groups are differentiated within the paper over time. This research also has broader implementations as the power and alternating opinions vastly change how people are represented. As such, the way in which news are created and their ultimate outcome is also a subject to this thesis. The news media wields tremendous power, and as a result the way the paper seeks to use this power is also subject of the analysis.

An additional reason for this thesis' decision to stay within the confines of California, is the state's long history with, not only immigration in general, but specifically Asian immigrants. Consequently, the resulting inquiry into the Los Angeles Times will thus have a more layered historical context with Asian immigrants, than for example Texas, who has the second largest population of Vietnamese immigrant in the U.S.<sup>7</sup> To further the importance of this thesis, the 2020 and 2021 hate crimes against Asian Americans further the need for knowledge and understanding surrounding the discourse that Asian minorities face in the U.S.<sup>8</sup> To better understand this discourse, historical context is needed. Thus, this thesis highlights the history of a large subgroup of Asian-American history, combined with the important role media plays today as in the past. Moreover, this research into their depictions in a mainstream media highlights the importance of knowing past discourse to understand the present and cannot be understated. This thesis will thus contribute to the documentation and understanding of the

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<sup>7</sup> Elijah Alperin, Batalova, "Vietnamese Immigrants in the United States."

<sup>8</sup> "Stop Asian Hate," *Governor of New York*, accessed, May 13, 2021, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/programs/stop-asian-hate>

impact that mainstream media coverage has on the representation of immigrants in general, and Vietnamese immigrants in particular.

## 1.2 Research Status

There are multiple studies tied to the field of historical representation, and the Vietnamese in particular have been extensively covered by different academic disciplines. A lot of this research is tied to other research done on the Vietnam War. As far as media representations goes, significant attention is given to the media's impact on the Vietnam War, some going as far as blaming America's loss in the conflict on the media's reporting of the conflict.<sup>9</sup> This is where this thesis' originality fits into the research, given that to my knowledge, no research has been done into the representation of the Vietnamese by the news media after the Vietnam War ended.

To emphasize this point, three articles have been selected that exemplifies the current research into the Vietnamese and their representations. The first article discusses the representations of South Vietnamese soldiers during the Vietnam War. The second discusses the impact of news media in general. While the third article presents the lived experiences from those who fled the country as boat people.

*The Invisible ARVN: The South Vietnamese Soldier in American Representations of the Vietnam War* is relevant to the study of representations because the author Philip Beidler tells the story of how South Vietnamese soldiers (ARVN) were represented by American soldiers serving in Vietnam.<sup>10</sup> The article uses discourse analysis and focuses on the lived experience of the ARVN soldiers, telling the story of their many nicknames as a way of discerning their representation. The article more importantly features how the ARVN are represented in American media and uses Time magazine as evidence for this. The article has thus been of great importance for this thesis as it not only looks at a marginalized group that cooperates with the United States but also cover their representation in the media. This article is also

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and the Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3-5.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Beidler, "The Invisible ARVN: The South Vietnamese Soldier in American Representations of the Vietnam War," *War, literature, and the arts*, 2007, Vol.19, 2.

emblematic of the larger focus within the studies of Vietnam, namely the focus on the war and wartime years. It is also typical as it focuses on the Vietnamese representations in American fiction, something that is covered extensively by several other papers.<sup>11</sup>

The main way in which academic research focuses on representations is through its use in mainstream media. The book *Bad news* by the Glasgow Media Group and authors Peter Beharrell et al. tackles the news media specifically. More specifically, it confronts this industry by comparing their stated goals with their actual reporting. Their method is based on data collection and discourse analysis, which is then combined with a critical analysis of the aforementioned disparity between stated goals and actual reporting.<sup>12</sup> Their findings are very important in understanding the news media as creator of discourse and not just neutral conveyer of facts. Their method, as well as critical approach, has been a great influence on this thesis.

Another important influence in contemporary research is the use of memories from the Vietnamese themselves as seen in *salt | water: Vietnamese Refugee Passages, Memory, and Statelessness at Sea*, by Patricia Nguyễn. Nguyễn, a second-generation Vietnamese American, interviews her mother and other Viennese people as a part of understanding their experience.<sup>13</sup> The article, while not dealing with the media or representations, nevertheless tells the stories of the boat people as presented by themselves, as opposed to other research where the Vietnamese experience is left out. This type of research is a large part of the more modern-day historical documentations on the Vietnam War, and is important in the understanding of the boat people phenomena. This article and others like it, such as the PhD: *Anticommunism as cultural praxis: South Vietnam, war, and refugee memories in the Vietnamese American community*, which deals with the memories of Vietnamese Americans, have been important research into how the field of Asia studies deal with the trauma of the Vietnam War.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John Kleinen, "Framing 'the Other.' A critical review of Vietnam war movies and their representation of Asians and Vietnamese," *Asia Europe journal*, 2003, Vol. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Beharrell, Et al., *Bad News: Volume 1*. New York: Routledge, 1976, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Nguyễn, "salt | water: Vietnamese Refugee Passages, Memory, and Statelessness at Sea," *Women's studies quarterly*, 2017, Vol. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Vo Dang, Thanh Thuy, "Anticommunism as cultural praxis: South Vietnam, war, and refugee memories in the Vietnamese American community," PhD diss., UC San Diego, 2008.

This research and a lot more like it have been the inspiration for this thesis. All the subjects presented here have been extensively researched and while thematically similar to this master thesis, no paper includes the representation of Vietnamese by the news media. Therefore, the focus on how the contemporary sources represented the Vietnamese is needed to not only understand their past representations, but also the current. With this in mind, this paper seeks to define the role of the Los Angeles Times in Vietnamese American representations.

### 1.3 Historical Context

Providing some context surrounding the Vietnam War is important in understanding the discourse that is presented. The Vietnam War or the American War as it is known in Vietnam, was a morally questionable war.<sup>15</sup> It threatened to disturb the World War II narrative of U.S. military intervention to stop tyrannical governments and reform them “into free and advanced citizens of the postwar democratic world.”<sup>16</sup> The war ended with the evacuation of Saigon, where the U.S. evacuated all Americans and their collaborators involved with the South Vietnamese regime. With this action the war was over, and the United States emerged neither victorious nor as liberator, creating the “difficult” memory of the war.<sup>17</sup> This change in narrative and the questionable “casus belli”<sup>18</sup> that the United States employed to become involved in Vietnam, serves as the backdrop for the split in U.S. politics, seen in the 1970s, where on one hand you got “hawks” who want intervention and on the other “doves” who want the war to end.

Another important piece of historical context is the immigration history and deindustrialization in the United States seen in the 1970s. This thesis highlights these two factors as important, not based on any extensive research done when writing this thesis, but rather as a possible explanation that contemporary sources point to as the reason for treating immigrants a certain way. One historical event is the Mexican American farmworkers known as Braceros, who from 1917-21 and 1942-64, worked as migrant laborers, living in Mexico

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<sup>15</sup>, Yen Le Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-If-We-Lose’ Syndrome: U. S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the ‘Fall of Saigon,’” *American Quarterly*, 2006, Vol.58, 329.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 329.

<sup>17</sup> Robin Wagner-Pacifici, Barry Schwartz, “The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 1991, Vol. 2, 3.

<sup>18</sup> An event or action that justifies or allegedly justifies a war or conflict.

and working in the United States.<sup>19</sup> The program ended due to fears that the cheap labor from Mexico would result in wage stagnation for American farm workers.<sup>20</sup> The problem with this ban was that many of the workers who were dependent on farm work to earn a living had to settle or stay unauthorized within in the U.S., starting the issue of unauthorized immigration to the U.S. Further compounding this issue was the similar fear that that U.S. jobs would be lost to unskilled laborers within industry and manufacturing, as the United States gradually deindustrialized. The same rhetoric and problems were adopted within manufacturing. All this making for the anti-immigrant sentiment that can be observed in the 1970s. It is worth noting that the even though unauthorized immigration more often associated with Latin American countries the discourse surrounding immigrants as a whole does not seem to distinguish between different groups of immigrants.

#### 1.4 Thesis Question and Research Questions

This thesis is rooted within the research discipline of critical theory, dealing with historical representations. This research discipline is used to analyze relevant articles about Vietnamese immigration to the U.S., found in the Los Angeles times, between 1975 and 1980. The data collected from this time period forms the basis for this master thesis.

This masters' thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

“How Does the Los Angeles Times Represent Vietnamese Refugees from the Evacuation of Saigon Compared to Subsequent Vietnamese Boat People?”

To answer this thesis question, the use of additional research questions is used to narrow down the wide scope that the thesis question poses. The thesis question is thus answered using four additional research questions, which are the following:

- How is representation of the Vietnamese used in this timeframe?
- How does the presence of orientalism and racism effect Vietnamese representation?

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<sup>19</sup> Philip Martin, “Mexican Braceros and US Farm Workers,” accessed May 1. 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/mexican-braceros-and-us-farm-workers>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

- How does the coverage change between the two categories of refugees?
- Why are the refugees covered this way?

## 1.5 Outline

This master's thesis consists of five parts with underlying chapters, including the introduction. The first part establishes the relevance of this thesis and show why it is of important to not only the academic field of history, but also in a larger social context. This is done by displaying the reasons for choosing this subject as well as presenting some of the research that precedes this thesis. Some historical context is also presented in this chapter to provide the necessary context to understand the historical events and by extension the discourse presented.

Part two provides the theoretical framework for this thesis, where central theories surrounding critical theory will be given and tied in with the relevant themes. Of particular importance is the theoretical framework surrounding critical theory's representations, in which the use of orientalism and racism is discussed. These concepts are described and defined so as to clearly state their differences and establish a framework for their identification. Furthermore, this part introduces the methodological approach to the analysis where, due to transparency, the way in which the data is analyzed is described. Finally, the empirical data is discussed to show what choices were taken when finding, selecting and sorting the relevant articles. In describing this process some history on the Los Angeles Times is discussed to better understand some of the patterns present in the data.

In the third part the findings of the analysis will be categorized and shown evidence for. The structure of this analysis is thematically based, and the categorization is based upon the methods stated in the second chapter. The data is analyzed with the aim of answering the research questions as well as the thesis question through the methods described in part two.

In the fourth part the findings of the analysis will be discussed. This analysis of the themes present will function as a way of connecting theory and analysis. The main reason for doing so is also to clarify the findings so as to be able to present them in the conclusion.

The fifth and final part concludes the thesis, where central points of the thesis is presented as a way of connecting all the pieces in the thesis. When this is done, a conclusion that answers the thesis question can be reached. As a final note some suggestions for further research, within the field is presented, based on the findings during this research.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1 Representations

Representation is defined by Hall in his book *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, as “using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people.”<sup>21</sup> This definition may at first seem simple but is far more complex than its simple phrasing. The work with representations has its origins in critical theory and bases its merits on the linguistic turn. The linguistic turn describes the postmodern understanding of language as something more than just words, but rather complex systems with many different variables.<sup>22</sup> Integral to this understanding of language is Foucault, who can be seen as a precursor to critical theory. He uses the example of a rock thrown in war is a projectile. Whilst a rock in a museum is a sculpture.<sup>23</sup> This quote illustrates the power of discourse. Moreover, the importance of discourse is the foundation of all representations as one cannot be understood without the other.<sup>24</sup> This is especially true when looking at the media’s portrayal of the refugees from Vietnam, as not only will the historical discourse matter, but also the motives of the authors. An example of this, is the distinction between the refugees from the fall of Saigon and the boat refugees, who fled similar circumstances yet are presented as two completely different types of refugees. As such representations will be used to discern what the author truly means by their representation.

The importance in using representations as theoretical background is as the definition states “to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people.” The emphasis on the word

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<sup>21</sup> Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, Thousand Oaks: Sage 1997, 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power” in *The Foucault Reader: An introduction to Foucault’s thought*, Ed. Paul Rabinow, London: Penguin, 199, 73 -75.

<sup>24</sup> Hall, *Representation*, 27-30.



meaningful, in this instance, means having or experiencing a similar interpretation of what is being presented. As such discourse plays an important role, and the role of representations as a part of critical theory is to expand upon this notion of meaningfulness. This is achieved by arranging and describing categories like othering. Othering in particular can be further subdivided into smaller units of representations. This means that when studying the representations of the Vietnamese, an interpretation of the narrative as for instance “less worth than Americans” may show up, the use of othering will explain some of the mechanisms behind this representation.

## 2.2 Racism

When discussing racism, this thesis bases its interpretation and theoretical framework on *critical race theory* (CRT). CRT concerns itself with “studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the theory places the issue of race in a “broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interests, and emotions, and the unconscious.”<sup>26</sup> To understand CRT two central aspects of the theory needs to be discussed, the first being that racism is “normal.” The concept however is hard for the dominant ingroup to understand and address because of “color-blind, or ‘formal’ concepts of equality.”<sup>27</sup> This means that only the most blatant forms of racism is addressed in the mainstream, yet the lived experience by people of color is vastly different than that of the formal law-oriented approach to racism. With this in mind the analysis of racist representations in the Los Angeles Times will thus, only in the most extreme of times, include directly stated racism, making the actual racism more subtle. Representations as a concept aids in the understanding of how this more subtle racism may take form.

The second concept within CRT is that race is a social construction produced through social thought and relations.<sup>28</sup> This part of the theory addresses that while some outward characteristics are present in people with common origins, such as skin-color, physique and hair texture, these all dwarf in comparison with the innate human characteristics we all share. As such racism can be seen as not only social construct, but also the use of racism is anti-

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition): An Introduction*, New York: NYU Press, 2017, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 9.

scientific and often derives the “implications of pseudo-permanent characteristics.”<sup>29</sup> In the case of this thesis’ analysis the construct of the “racial other” happens when certain traits are attributed to the Vietnamese, in a negative way. The analysis of representations will once again aid in the discovery of racism, as it will be apparent in the labeling and implied negative attitude towards the Vietnamese.

To understand what racism is in the context of CRT, a clear definition is needed. Although racism is easy to understand, its many forms and outlets can be hard to comprehend. One definition given by Audre Lorde is “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance.”<sup>30</sup> This definition of racism shows the essence of what racism truly is, yet the nature of racism is far more complex than this seemingly simple definition. As such Lindsay Perez Huber et al. seeks to amend the definition to fit the more nuanced picture of what lived racism is. This is done by addressing: “(1) the belief that one group is superior; (2) this ‘superior’ group has the power to carry out racist acts; and (3) various racial/ethnic groups are affected.”<sup>31</sup> This definition includes several more aspects of the power structure and also highlights the notion of superiority. As such the study of Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. warrants an analysis of racism, not only because of their status as people of color, but also their dual status as the other outside the U.S. and within the U.S. Studying racism in the discourse will tell what the native population think and feel about the Vietnamese, and as such will represent them accordingly.

## 2.3 Orientalism

Orientalism, like racism, is a part of the larger field of representations known as othering. Othering as a concept can be defined as “a discursive process by which a dominant ingroup constructs one or many dominated outgroups real or imagined.”<sup>32</sup> This broad concept can be further subdivided into several different forms of othering, such as racism, gender or

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<sup>29</sup> Delgado, Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Audre Lorde, “Age, race, class, and sex: Women redefining difference,” In *Race, class, and gender: An anthology*, edited by, M. Anderson & P. Hill, Belmont: Wadsworth, 1992, 496.

<sup>31</sup> Lindsay Perez Huber Et al., “Getting beyond the ‘symptom,’ acknowledging the ‘disease’: theorizing racist nativism,” *Contemporary Justice Review*, vol. 11. 2008, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Staszak, “Other/Otherness,” 2.

orientalism. Of particular interest is orientalism which as an academic term is defined by Judy Tzu-Chun Wu as:

“Orientalism as a system of knowledge that the West developed about the East. This way of seeing and understanding the ‘Orient’ emerged as Occidental imperial powers engaged in colonization. Within this framework, the East historically serves as a contrasting and not coincidentally inferior image to the West. While the Occident is associated with modernity, science, and masculinity, the Orient is perceived as tradition-bound, fanatical, and feminine. This polarization not only constructed an image of the East in the Western imagination but also served to define the West. The Occident became the opposite of the Orient.”<sup>33</sup>

Jean-François Staszak elaborates on this further stating that “The West thereby gains the right, if not duty, to dominate the Orient, to save it from despotism, superstition, misery, vice, slavery, decadence, etc.”<sup>34</sup> The use of the term is thus largely based on the power dynamic and colonization of “the west” in the east. Consequently, another reason for using the term orientalism is the North Vietnamese view of the Vietnam War, as an extension of French colonialism in Southeast Asia.<sup>35</sup> This definition also fits some of the criteria used as reasoning behind the Vietnam War, such as defending South Vietnam from communism and by extension despotism. Orientalism sees “the west” as a savior to the racial other. The way in which this is done comes in two forms: otherness and exoticism. Otherness can be seen as the leading ingroup depicting the racial other as someone who needs help from their own savageness, exoticism functions as a way of fetishizing parts or rather the differences between the ingroup and outgroup. A fitting definition of exoticism is “not separating the foreign from the foreigner.”<sup>36</sup> In the case of the ending days of the Vietnam War, an illustration of orientalism would be someone representing the Vietnamese as lucky or grateful for being saved from their savage home country, or in this case communism. Another example is making out the Vietnamese as more foreign than they truly are. One such example being sensationalizing trivial acts in a manner that says: “look at the Vietnamese doing American activities.”

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<sup>33</sup> Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Staszak, “Other/Otherness,” 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the other side: the Vietnamese communists' perspective*, Abingdon: Oxon, 2002, 53.

<sup>36</sup> Staszak, “Other/Otherness,” 4-5.

In the case of the analysis of the Los Angeles Times a very important distinction needs to be made. A question to ask is “why is orientalism not just racism?” To answer this question this thesis proposes a distinction between the two categories, based on the definitions of the two concepts. Racism explicitly deals with the discrimination of people of color. As discussed, this takes several different forms and as such orientalism fits into this narrative as being a form of racism. The distinction however is based on the discourse surrounding the representation, making a case for whether the representation is in favor or against the Vietnamese. An example to highlight the difference, is someone responding to the statement that the Vietnamese needs to be saved. If the response is “no, these people should not be helped because they carry disease,” it is clearly an example of racism. If the response is “yes, we should save these people, they do not have indoor plumbing in their home country, and are therefore even more deserving of help,” it is a case of orientalism. Thus, the discourse will decide if a representation is a case of orientalism or racism. With this distinction it becomes clear that although orientalism features dehumanizing racism, there is a difference between the two. Racism can primarily be seen as a way of communicating negative traits, while orientalism sometimes features the same negative traits these traits are spun to be a positive. As such the distinction between the two categories are fluid, but largely based upon the overall discourse presented.

## 2.4 Critical Media Theory

*The theoretical background regarding critical media theory (CMT) is like representation rooted in language and critical theory. The theory uses relevant terms from these theories and apply them to the media, and news media in particular. CMT comes from of a postmodern understanding of language and is used in, among other things, representations. CMT’s role within critical theory is to not only look at what the media is stating, but rather to research what it actually does with its public mandate, and as such it is used as a demystifying force when faced with media analysis. One example of this, relevant to this thesis, is the media’s coverage of Vietnam, where American news media for instance in an effort to not describe the*

horrors of war, rather describes the way war is waged.<sup>37</sup> This is highlighted by Peter Beharrell et al. in *Bad News*, who through their research show that:

“Contrary to the claims, conventions and culture of television journalism, the news is not a neutral product. For television news is a cultural artefact; it is a sequence of socially manufactured messages, which carry many of the culturally dominant assumptions of our society. From the accents of the newscasters to the vocabulary of camera angles; from who gets on and what questions they are asked, via selection of stories to presentation of bulletins, the news is a highly mediated product.”<sup>38</sup>

The notion of the news media as a neutral product or just a conveyer of information, devoid of any bias, is a common claim made by the media themselves to legitimize their actions. However, the fact that the information available to the public, historical or recent, is a manmade product, is an important one. This fact is the same as when pointed out by Hall, that context supplements language and understanding.<sup>39</sup> The news in particular often positions themselves as a watchdog for all government activities, increasing their legitimacy in the public’s eye and with this mandate serve a vital and important function in a free and democratic society. One important finding Eldridge points out in his article is that producers of news media take their social mandate very serious. Despite this sincerity they were not however aware of their own role in creating discourse, firmly stating that they were able to produce neutral reporting.<sup>40</sup> The result of this finding is that articles may seem vague and unopinionated in their efforts to stay neutral, this further highlights the importance of focusing on representations as they will serve as a gateway into understanding the content.

The news industry wields its influence over the public through discourse, thus an important question is to ask how they use representations to achieve their goals. While not directly dealing with representations Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s propaganda model, can be used to answer this question. Propaganda is defined by Merriam-Webster as:

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<sup>37</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent; The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, New York: Vintage, 1994, 201-202.

<sup>38</sup> Beharrell, Et al., *Bad*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Hall, *Representations*, 27-30.

<sup>40</sup> John Eldridge, “The Contribution of the Glasgow Media Group to the Study of Television and Print Journalism,” *Journalism Studies*. Vol.1, 115, DOI: 10.1080/146167000361203.

“The spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person” or “ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one’s cause or to damage an opposing cause.”<sup>41</sup>

The model outlines four filters that mass media is subjected to, however only two filters are relevant for this thesis. These function as the name implies, as filters on the information that gets mediated through the newspapers discourse. The two filters used in this thesis from this model will be used to explain some of the trends that are present in the analysis. The four filters are as follows:

**1. Sourcing mass media news.**

**2. Flack and enforcers.**

3. Size, ownership and the profit orientation of the mass media.

4. The advertising license to do business.

In the analysis in this thesis only points one and two are used, as point three is not relevant to the analysis of representation and point four’s information is not available. The first filter concerns itself with the sourcing of mass media, this is particularly important in the case of the Indochina wars, as who is providing the information is of utmost relevance. The demand for news is high, and as economics will dictate, if you offer the most product or exclusive product your profits will be the highest. The same goes for offering of something your competitor has, just to “get customers in that door.” This preoccupation with quantities has not gone unnoticed by several different entities, leading to the creation of large media sourcing companies. The economics of scale dictates that not every newspaper can have journalists present in every corner of the world, leading to the creation of wire services.<sup>42</sup> Another aspect of this information is the creation of official and often bureaucratic entities who serve the public news. These entities such as, but not limited to, the Pentagon or the White House, often hold press releases where they give out their version of the news, and thus sets the stage for the relevant discourse. This means that the news agencies will have to rely on a highly mediated product in a setting that does not produce critical discourse.<sup>43</sup> Another aspect is the use of bureaucratic language to make the discourse sound more factual.<sup>44</sup> These

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<sup>41</sup> Merriam-Webster, “Propaganda,” accessed, May 1. 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/propaganda>

<sup>42</sup> Herman, Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 18-19.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 19-22.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

are all traits that can be observed in the Los Angeles Times, as it frequently features articles that are almost transcripts of official statements, as well as wire services such as Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI). As mentioned earlier, this is done to make the end product appear more neutral than it truly is. All the above-mentioned factors result in press releases that are held at the official entities' own locations, who all function as a way to make criticisms very hard fought.<sup>45</sup> This is furthered by the use of experts in the field making any criticism even more difficult as a media outlet would have to challenge someone at their home turf. Combined with the around the clock news cycle, the market does not demand any hard criticisms on what is being mediated.

In the second and final filter it is worth mentioning what the flack and enforcers refer to. Flack can be represented as backlash for writing something unpopular. After all, the newspaper caters to the public but also the vast financial entities controlling the news cycle.<sup>46</sup> Enforcers refers to people or organizations that check news content for dissent and provide feedback to the newspapers on their product. An example of this is seen in the opening quote of this thesis where the editorial team is lambasted with hate-mail for suggesting that the Vietnamese should be saved. And again, it is important to express that this would not incite "flack" from the U.S. government but rather for other groups that value these ideals. The mass media thus presents a system in which it produces news and by extension representations. This system consistently produces representations favorable to the government, which provides its materials, as highlighted in the quote:

"A propaganda system will consistently portray people abused in enemy states as worthy victims, whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by its own government or clients will be unworthy"<sup>47</sup>

This means that in order to understand the representations of the Vietnamese, a larger context of "why are the Vietnamese being saved in the first place?" has to be considered to understand the discourse surrounding their representations. It is worth mentioning that when surmised in this manner, some may draw the conclusion that journalists are stupid or cowardly, this is not the case that is being fronted in this chapter. Rather it brings to light the immense difficulties that are faced by a single individual to be able to wield their own

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<sup>45</sup> Herman, Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 26-27.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

discourse. The fact that the production of news is a highly mediated and collaborative product makes for an interesting analysis of its contents. But unfortunately, at the newspaper's or individual journalist's expense, should they dissent.

### 3. Empirical Data and Methodology

#### 3.1 Empirical Data

This thesis sources its data with regards to its main thesis question, namely the representation of Vietnamese evacuees and boat people. The main reason for selecting the Los Angeles Times is its relative proximity to the Vietnamese refugees within the U.S., as California was the first state to be settled by the Vietnamese. The paper also contains a multitude of voices and today it is the largest newspaper outside the west coast. This means that the paper to this day continues to influence people in the state of California. As such, a look into their previous endeavors is a relevant inquiry into such a newspaper. The paper's history is also important as the present-day media landscape is vastly different from that of the 1970s. Thus, some history is relevant to understand the newspaper, as in the 1960s the Los Angeles Times was taken over by the fourth-generation family publisher Otis Chandler. Chandler is responsible for the newspaper's structure during the 1970s, as he hired more journalists and started several bureaus around the world.<sup>48</sup> This expanded the staff and by default expanded the number of opinions voiced in the newspaper. This is also said to have made the paper into the nationwide newspaper it is known as today. Subsequently, this information is relevant to this thesis as it states that the paper deliberately expands its journalism staff, as stated by Eldridge, this is done to seem neutral and fact oriented.<sup>49</sup>

The Los Angeles Times is by number of articles and distribution, a huge newspaper and is ranked among the largest in the United States.<sup>50</sup> The paper routinely hosted more than 100 pages daily, as well as seven parts, in addition to a morning and late paper edition.<sup>51</sup> The

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<sup>48</sup> Joe Mozingo, "A brief history of the Los Angeles Times," accessed, May 1. 2021, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/la-me-los-angeles-times-history-20180617-story.html>

<sup>49</sup> Eldridge, *The Contribution of the Glasgow Media Group to the Study of Television and Print Journalism*, 114.

<sup>50</sup> "Top 10 U.S. Newspapers by Circulation," accessed, May 1. 2021, <https://www.agilitypr.com/resources/top-media-outlets/top-10-daily-american-newspapers/>

<sup>51</sup> The Los Angeles Times, "Front Page," 06.08.75, 1.



newspaper is, as of writing this thesis, archived in full at the website Newspapers.com, which is where this thesis sources its data from.

This thesis utilizes the keyword search function available at the website Newspapers.com, as opposed to searching for content by date. This greatly increases the accuracy in which data can be collected, as a more traditional approach of manually searching for relevant terms would not have been possible for this thesis without this search function. This results in other issues due to the massive amount of data available. This finding led to some restrictions on the scale of this thesis having to be implemented, in particular with regards to the coverage of the boat people. As opposed to the evacuation of Saigon which was extensively covered by the Los Angeles Times for little over a month, the coverage of the Vietnamese boat people can be categorized into three waves of coverage. This coverage starts in 1978 and does not end until 1995, within this time-period three different waves of reporting can be observed in the data, as well as two distinct waves of immigration from historical events. The first wave is from 1978 to 1980, coinciding with the Sino-Vietnamese War. The second wave is from 1987 to 1990, and coincides with the Amerasian Homecoming act of 1988, and the Humanitarian Operation program of 1989. The third distinct wave is from 1990 to 1995 and is something only observed with the search terms “boat people”, “boat refugee(s)” and “Vietnamese refugee(s)” in the Newspapers.com search engine. This has no correlation with any significant rise in Vietnamese immigration to the U.S., as seen in fig. 1.

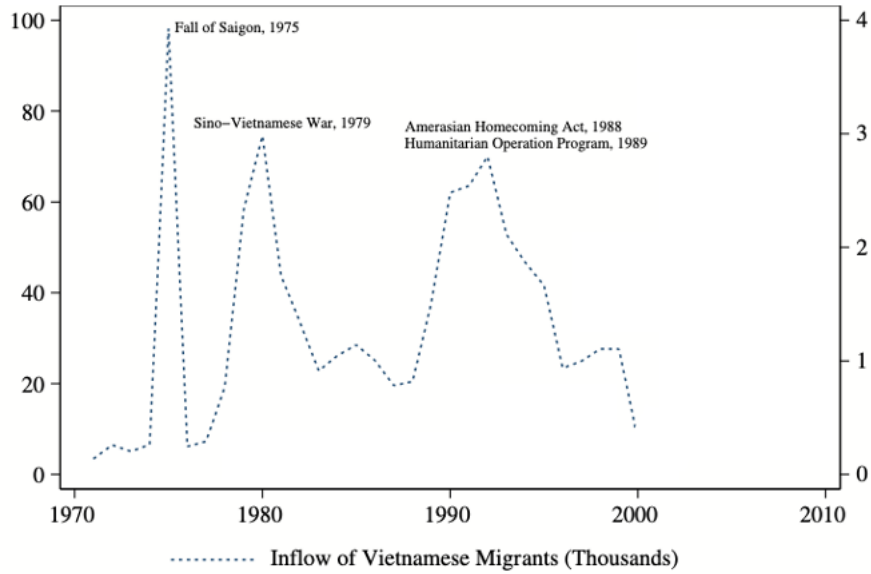


Fig. 1: Vietnamese Inflow to the U.S.<sup>52</sup>

Based on this information, one restriction in the empirical data collected, is the exclusion of waves two and three. This is because the thesis uses comparative analysis on the two groups of refugees. As such, the thesis concerns itself with comparing the introduction of the Vietnamese refugees through the evacuation, compared to the introduction of the boat refugees. Waves two and three would then pose a problem as the American public has already been introduced to the boat refugees. The other waves are also connected to humanitarian programs by the United States and would therefore be subject to the same discourse as the evacuees from Saigon, with regards to the theory of worthy and unworthy victims. Thus, in order to answer the thesis question more accurately and in depth, the thesis omits the last two waves, and will focus entirely on the first wave.

The process of collecting data started with reading relevant articles on the topic at hand. In sourcing this data, the next step was to get an impression of the discourse and through this make a list of relevant search terms. This was done to ensure that the terms that were used actually matched what the newspaper was using, as there is no guarantee that the terms used today is the terms used in the 1970s. An example of this is the word “waif” to describe Vietnamese orphans. This led to the use of the search terms “Vietnamese refugee(s)”, “waif” and “orphan” being used when collecting articles from the evacuation of Saigon. “Orphan”

<sup>52</sup> Christopher Parsons, Pierre-Louis Vézina, “Migration Networks and Trade: The Vietnamese Boat People as a Natural experiment,” *Economic Journal*, DOI: 10.1111/eoj.12457, F212. (Graph edited by author.)

was selected because the first evacuees from Vietnam to the US were orphans. These terms were selected during the research phase as they exclusively describe the evacuees from Saigon in the timeframe April to May 1975. The goal with using these relatively open terms was to be able to collect every article mentioning the Vietnamese and sorting them later.

The sourcing of data on the Vietnamese boat people was a little harder as the term “boat people” does not get adopted as a moniker by the news media until around 1978. This term also refers to regular people who use boats for recreational purposes and is heavily featured in advertising. To further complicate the matter the term is also used when referring to people of other nations fleeing by boat. The term in the Los Angeles Times at this time is also used indiscriminately to refer to any persons or people fleeing in Southeast Asia, of particular note is the inclusion of Cambodian refugees. The search term thus becomes too broad. To supplement this, the inclusion of the terms “Vietnamese refugees” and “Vietnamese boat people” was necessary. The addition of “Vietnamese” added another problem, being that articles that may only contain “Vietnamese” in the text and nothing about the boat people showed up as results. In the end this did not become a big issue, as in the process of selecting articles these articles were quickly weeded out through manual screening. In the end a total of 717 articles were collected where 260 of the articles were about the evacuees from Saigon, 70 were about the Vietnamese orphans and 387 mentioned the Vietnamese boat people.

<b>Vietnamese refugee subgroup</b>	<b>Number of articles collected</b>
Evacuees from Saigon	260
Orphans	70
Boat people	387
<b>Total number of articles:</b>	717

### 3.2 Method

The analysis of the Los Angeles Times will be limited to articles about the relevant subject, published in the relevant timeframes, meaning articles from April to May 1975 for the refugees from Saigon, and 1979 to March 1980 for the boat people. The thesis uses qualitative

analysis as its methodological approach to analyze the data collected. This was done by using NVivo to perform a qualitative analysis of the selected articles. As such, the goal of this thesis is not to retroactively “fact check” the Los Angeles Times, but rather to analyze its contents based on the theoretical framework outlined earlier.

The methodology used in this thesis is historical qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA is defined by Margrit Schreier as “A method for systematically describing the meaning of quality material. It is done by classifying material as instances of categories of a coding frame.”<sup>53</sup> The use of QCA is partly due to the amount of data collected as this methodological approach is systematic, flexible and reduces data, something that had to be done with 717 articles.<sup>54</sup> The way the data was reduced was through the systematic building of a coding frame. This was done by combining a concept driven and data driven strategy. This means that the initial phase of the categorization was based on the thesis question and previous research on the subject.<sup>55</sup> This meant that statements from research like We-Win-Even-If-We-Lose, describing how the Vietnam War challenged the narrative of the U.S. as a transformer of dictatorships into democracies had failed, was used to make the first categories.<sup>56</sup> Thus, a theoretical approach to how information like this, and countless other contextual clues, was used when representing the Vietnamese, had to be considered. Lastly the actual research into the data was done and as such a data driven approach was used. This meant coding and generating subcategories based on the actual concepts present in the newspaper.<sup>57</sup> This resulted in the categorizations based on initial theory, supplemented by the data findings. Moreover, this resulted in initial categories being broad and vague like “likes the Vietnamese” and “doesn’t like the Vietnamese” to eventually include subject specific data point like “too many Vietnamese” or “bureaucracy will solve this crisis.” As such some of the articles collected were not relevant, as they did not contain any representations of the Vietnamese. An example being articles that discuss how X entity will solve some problem associated with the refugees. These articles could then be discarded and the process of reevaluating the coding frame.

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<sup>53</sup> Margrit Schreier, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*, London: Sage, 2012, 1-2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 84-85

<sup>56</sup> Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-If-We-Lose’ Syndrome,” 329.

<sup>57</sup> Schreier, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*, 87- 92.

The process of evaluating the coding frame resulted in the merger of several different categories. Furthermore, the process included segmentation of the material to ensure that each article fits into a segment of coding form.<sup>58</sup> This is done by taking the narrow descriptive categories and fitting them into the larger categories provided by the theoretical knowledge of the subject. This meant that the broad categories of representation became the main way of segmenting the data. As such, some of the larger categories had to be combined, such as “Anti-Communism” being subdivided by whether the article expressed this trait as “good” or “bad.” This meant that the data set was divided into “helpless,” “good” and “bad” representations. This also meant that the three categories were further subdivided into segments, see 1.6 Type of Representation, Explanation and Examples.

Another part of this process was also identifying the speaker in each and every article. The Los Angeles Times is host to a multitude of different speakers. As such the narratives presented comes from a multitude of different speakers. Consequently, a part of the QCA process was dedicated to categorizing speakers. As such three different distinct entities emerged:

1. Public statements made by official entities.
2. Statements or articles written by the newspaper itself.
3. Statements made by the public or the reader of the newspaper (e.g. op-eds)

Official entities in this context refers to government institutions giving press releases, examples being the Pentagon or the White House, giving statements on different matters. Official entities may also include excerpts from interviews or press conferences made by representatives of organizations. Statements made by the newspaper itself refers to interviews with people associated with the topic at hand. A distinction is made between a press release from the White House, compared with an interview with the President, as the latter would count as a statement made by the newspaper. Their statements made by the public is any feedback or input that does not come from the payroll of the newspaper. These can be op-eds but also include editorials from other newspapers. This was done to categorize the frequency of who actually gets to express their opinions in the newspaper, something that can tell us

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<sup>58</sup> Schreier, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*, 126-128.

what voices are emphasized in this issue, as this remains a matter of selection by the newspaper's editors.

As the main coding of data was completed, the analysis of the categorized content was next. This was done through the use of three questions posed to the articles collected. These questions were asked to supplement QCA as the categorization only tells what type of representation is used. To achieve the goal of answering the main thesis question as well as the four research questions, some parts of discourse analysis and critical theory was used. The three questions asked were as follows:

1. What words and phrases are used to assign meaning?

This question lends its merits from discourse analysis, which states that the discourse used is largely a matter of assigning meaning through words and phrases.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, this serves as the main evidence for the claims of representations seen in the analysis. The words or phrases in this instance will function in tandem with the main representation as one cannot function without the other. This being said words and phrases are time specific, meaning that a certain word or phrase in use in the 1970s, may be considered racist by today's reader but was not back then. This is important to note, as stated earlier, this thesis does not serve the role as "fact checker." An example of this is the word "Asiatic" being used in the 1970s, where as today the word "Asian" would be used, and "Asiatic" would be improper. However, this does not mean that the use of the word "Asiatic" in the 1970s is a case of racism, as discourse has to decide this.

2. How does the discourse change?

While QCA can tell us precisely what representation is used, it does not tell us something about its changes over time. As such, the inclusion of how the discourse changes from one instance to another is essential to answer this research question, which is time specific. This question also serves as a way of documenting change and also highlighting the particulars of each discourse presented.

3. Why is the material presented this way?

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<sup>59</sup> James Paul Gee, *An introduction to discourse analysis: theory and method*, London: Routledge, 2014, 17-20.

This question seeks to answer why the findings presented in the analysis is presented in a certain way. With this in mind, analytical theories like the propaganda model, as well as racism and othering, are used to analyze the patterns present, in order to understand why. An important aspect in answering this question is to look at how the representation of the Vietnamese is used to achieve certain goals.

By using QCA to categorize and reduce the overall extent of the data present and supplementing this research with the analytical questions asked, this thesis seeks to create a complete analysis within the restraints set by the outline of this thesis. The categories and questions asked remain relatively open so as to not impose itself on the data, but rather present a more complete and true picture. The analysis will thus include three dominant representations as “helpless,” “good” and “bad,” being analyzed by the three subgroups “orphans”, “evacuees from Saigon” and “boat people”.

## 4. Analysis of the “Helpless” Vietnamese

### 4.1 The “Helpless” Orphans

The first exposure to Vietnamese refugees that Americans could read about in the Los Angeles Times was the evacuation of the many orphanages located in South Vietnam. As the U.S. presence in Vietnam diminished, the South Vietnamese army was slowly losing the battle against the North Vietnamese. This culminated in a series of defeats in the 1975 spring offensive, leading to in the collapse of South Vietnam and the withdrawal of the United States.<sup>60</sup> The first article on the subject in the Los Angeles Times was written by the Associated Press and the Times staff writers, and chronicles Ed Daly, the World Airways chief’s heroic savior of 52 Vietnamese orphans. The article is a biographical piece and little interest is directed towards the orphans themselves. Instead, the focus is on Daly and his heroic or vigilante actions. The article sets Daly up as the classic American cowboy or outlaw folk hero as a: “Pistol packin’ and dollar-totin’ 53-year-old.”<sup>61</sup> Daly is portrayed as a “no

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<sup>60</sup> Joe Allen, *Vietnam: the (last) war the U.S. lost*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008, 191-192.

<sup>61</sup> Sam Jameson, “Ed Daly - - - He’s a believer,” the Los Angeles Times, 03.04.75, 7, part i.

nonsense” character with his demeanor and way of describing the relentless bureaucracy involved in flying out the orphans, is used as a way of conveying a deep sense of urgency. An example of this “Vietnamese Air Force Maj. Nguyen Duc Tan Was offered \$2,000 ‘to look the other way,’ as Daly describes it.”<sup>62</sup> The impression of Ed Daly as an all-American hero is the main focal point of the piece. However, the article is the first in a series of pieces constructing a narrative of urgency and the need for a new American hero to rescue Vietnam. The reason for the articles framing become an issue of not only urgency, but also to convey the need for U.S. involvement once more, this time to end the conflict in Vietnam. By sidelining the orphans, and focusing on the narrative of the American hero, the article conveys a discourse of urgency making the first exposure the American people got through the Los Angeles Times, that of the American hero saving the helpless orphans in Vietnam.

The next significant event in the evacuation of Vietnamese orphans took place from April 8<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup>, in 1975, and is known by the military operation name “Operation babylift.” The babylift exposes some crucial aspects of the early discourse surrounding orphans being airlifted out of Vietnam. Despite its heavy-handed use in the article about Ed Daly, the narrative of the vigilante hero is quickly dropped and instead replaced by a short-lived effort, by several different people, to capitalize on the event. An example of this is shown in the article “Executive Vows Continued Airlift,” were “a New Canaan businessman”<sup>63</sup> vows to send more airplanes to evacuate orphans from Vietnam, despite not being able to charter more planes.<sup>64</sup> Also numerous official entities use the crisis to promote other issues or to gain political capital: for instance in one article President Ford uses the babylift as an insurance to all the other allies of the United States, guaranteeing that despite South Vietnams imminent collapse, the U.S. will honor its commitments to its allies.<sup>65</sup> The representation helpless orphans is part of this reassurance as Ford states in the article “[...] to provide humanitarian aid to the helpless civilian victims- including orphan children [...]”<sup>66</sup> Compared to the New Canaan businessman both articles use the helplessness of the orphans to promote their own agenda whether it is to promote airline investments or foreign policy goals.

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<sup>62</sup> Sam Jameson, “Ed Daly - - - He’s a believer,” the Los Angeles Times, 03.04.75, 7, part i.

<sup>63</sup> Associated Press, “Executive Vows Continues Airlift,” the Los Angeles Times, 08.04.75, 7, part i.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Rudy Abrmson, “Ford Studies Plan for Early NATO Talks,” the Los Angeles Times, 08.04.75, 14, part i.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



Another important aspect in the representation of the orphans is the use of numbers as a signifier of helplessness. Whenever an airlift is planned or estimated, the inclusion of the number estimated saved or actually saved is always reported. For example, in an article written by the Washington post, reprinted in the Los Angeles Times the title reads “3000 to 4000 More Viet orphans Expected in U.S.”<sup>67</sup> Whilst not outright stated in the article, the use of phrases like “the growing crisis” and “last resort”<sup>68</sup> combined with use of these large numbers, all contribute to the already existing notion of helplessness regarding the orphans.

Compared to the Ed Daly article all the above-mentioned articles contribute to change the discourse surrounding the orphans. While their representation as helpless remain, the way in which their helplessness is presented is changed. This change can be observed as the image of the American hero exemplified by Ed Daly and the New Canaan businessman is gradually replaced with other more political entities, such as Fords statements, using the orphans to achieve their goals. This is best exemplified by the change in focus from individual heroes to a more collective effort to save the orphans. This changes the representation of the orphans as the more formal approach, as seen in articles by the president and the use of numbers, the orphan’s situation gets a more serious treatment. This is most likely a consequence of the growing complexity of the operation, thus removing the relevance of the singular American hero and in its stead a discourse of official action is presented whilst maintaining the representation as helpless to active this goal.

From the end of Operation babylift to April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1975, the discourse regarding the Vietnamese orphans changes little, and by the beginning of May the focus is entirely on the evacuation of Saigon. However, the only voice of concern comes, from the editorial section of the newspaper. In the editorial “Evacuating Refugees: More Self-Deception?,” the author describes the evacuation of orphans as “cradle-snatching” and incorporate a multitude of anti-war and anti-American imperialism rhetoric, describing the war as “a case of empire building.”<sup>69</sup> The first comment makes this article interesting as the Vietnam War was never a popular war, at least in the public consciousness.<sup>70</sup> This article uses the helplessness established in the media the past couple of weeks and equates it to the Vietnamese condition

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<sup>67</sup> Richard L. Lyons, “3000 to 4000 More Viet orphans Expected in U.S.,” the Los Angeles Times, 09.04.75, 17, part i.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> T.D. Allman, “Evacuating Refugees: More Self-Deception?,” the Los Angeles Times, 20.04.75, 1,3, part vi.

<sup>70</sup> Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-If-We-Lose’ Syndrome,” 329-30.

during the height of the war by invoking the image of “cradle snatching” rather than savior from communism. In this instance the whole of the anti-war movement is used as a form of non-interventionism rhetoric prevalent among anti-Vietnam War activists. Further evidence that the Los Angeles Times aligns itself with being as “neutral” or inclusive as possible, can be seen in the inclusion of the article “Please, America, Help My People” published just two days later, written by Nguyen Thi Anh. This article is the polar opposite of what the previously discussed article presents. It begs for U.S. intervention to save South Vietnam and depicts the situation as dire, with phrases like “You don’t want to be killed without reason” and “Now you try to flee again. To where?”<sup>71</sup> While radically different both articles frame orphans in this case as helpless victims and both use them as a means for their political agenda. The main difference thus becomes: who do the orphans need to be saved from, the North Vietnamese or the United States? The article by Anh who is a U.S. educated Nurse appeals to the U.S. sense of freedom with quotes like “I am from the people: the only difference is that I had the means to seek my freedom, while other do not.”<sup>72</sup> Comparing this to the previously mentioned article who states “[...] Americans still implicitly believe it is better for Vietnamese to become Americans rather than remaining Vietnamese, [...] if it means living under a government which America does not like.”<sup>73</sup> The noteworthy aspect in this regard thus becomes how this representation is used in two opposite matters. This shows how the issue of representation can be used in multitude of ways. The reason for both articles representing the Vietnamese orphans as helpless is not only the diverse use of the helpless victim, but also to elevate their own status by using helplessness to show empathy, even if the two articles disagree on how this empathy should be performed. Anh becomes the perfect proponent for a pro-interventionist stance in the Vietnam War, where you could justify, based on Anh’s article, that interventionism in this case would be help that was asked for, rather than forced upon Vietnam. As these events unfolded, the larger operation to evacuate not only orphans but everyone associated with the U.S. was ongoing, creating the evacuated refugee.

## 4.2 The “Helpless” Evacuated Refugee

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<sup>71</sup> Nguyen Thi Anh, “Please, America, Help My People,” the Los Angeles Times, 22.04.75, 7, part ii.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> T.D. Allman, “Evacuating Refugees: More Self-Deception?,” the Los Angeles Times, 20.04.75, 1,3, part vi.

While the Los Angeles Times first exposed the American public to the refugee crisis in Vietnam through the evacuation of orphans, the rapidly advancing communist forces to the north would force the evacuation of not only orphans but also anyone associated with the South Vietnamese regime. As a result, the evacuation of South Vietnam was greenlit by President Ford on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1975. In an article provided to the Los Angeles Times through the times wire service titled “Red Tape for 50,000 ‘High Risk’ Vietnamese Waived,” the author tackles the bureaucracy associated with immigration to the U.S. The article depicts the many different agencies as unrelenting in their formal requirements to let more Vietnamese refugees into the U.S. as seen by the quote “U.S. Embassy officials in Saigon will determine which endangered South Vietnamese are eligible for evacuation.”<sup>74</sup> The representation of the Vietnamese refugees as helpless in this situation is different from the orphans evacuated earlier. Whilst the helplessness of orphans does not bare mentioning since they are orphans, one of the most vulnerable demographics around, the paper has to assign new meaning through new terms to convey the same representation. In this article for instance, it uses the phrase “high risk.” The article states “-Up to 50,000 “high risk” Vietnamese refugees, and their families, [...]”<sup>75</sup> This label as high risk becomes a signifier for the helplessness these people are in. It is also worth mentioning that the continuation of using numbers to signify haste and scale is also present in this article with uses such as previously mentioned 50,000 in the headline and “-Between 10,000 and 75,000 Vietnamese refugees, and their families [...]”<sup>76</sup>, as was the case with the orphans as well.

In the days before the fall of Saigon the narrative of the helpless Vietnamese continues. But as the pressure and number of refugees increase, we see a slight change in the way Vietnamese refugees are represented as helpless. The first priority of the evacuation was to evacuate Americans and those affiliated with the South Vietnamese government in Saigon. One way in which the helplessness of the Vietnamese is highlighted, is by putting the emphasis on them being the second priority. An article written by the Los Angeles Times writer Oswald Johnston, sets the stage for this narrative. In the article Johnston explains:

“Armed with approval from Congress and the Justice Department to waive immigration restrictions, embassy officials in Saigon are evacuating “high risk”

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<sup>74</sup> Times wire service, “Red Tape for 50,000 ‘High Risk’ Vietnamese Waived,” the Los Angeles Times, 22.04.75, 1, part i.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Vietnamese Associated with the United States at the rate of several thousand a day. Meanwhile the departure of Americans has slowed to only a few hundred a day.”<sup>77</sup>

This way of comparing the fleeing Americans with the native Vietnamese really shows the reader that despite the month-long coverage on refugees in Southeast Asia, only now with the North Vietnamese threatening the capital of South Vietnam, does the evacuation of Vietnamese people become a concern. The article presents the statement as the U.S. being in control of the situation, but now it owes the people of South Vietnam to save them from communism. The reason for creating this narrative is likely as all U.S. citizens have been rescued, the newspaper aligns itself as a source of information on the people left behind or threatened to be left behind during the exit.

On the April, 23<sup>rd</sup> to November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1975 the Vietnamese refugees being airlifted out of Vietnam were transported to the U.S. overseas territory of Guam. Once again, the narrative of the helpless refugee changes, only this time the way helplessness is illustrated is by conveying the chaos of the situation. To highlight this, two articles are of particular interest. The first is an article written by Gaylord Shaw for the Los Angeles Times, who sums up the political chaos present with the header for the article: “Tops 20,000 Evacuee Mark but Charges of Paralysis, Chaos fly.”<sup>78</sup> The article continues with the criticism leveraged against the Ford administration, who are described by senator Ted Kennedy as being “Bogged down in a mass of administrative chaos and indecision.”<sup>79</sup> Again the reason for the Vietnamese helplessness is bureaucracy and indecision from the U.S. For the first time the term “high risk” is defined as persons likely to be executed by the North Vietnamese government. The article establishes the victimhood of the Vietnamese evacuees outright, on such instance is when the secretary of state replies: “[...] to relieve this kind of human misery and take care of the people...,”<sup>80</sup> when asked what they are doing with the situation. The second article’s, also written by Shaw, the previous day, focus is on the evacuation in Saigon, but seen from the perspective of The Pentagon. This results in the article focusing on the security of Saigon’s airport as this is the most important infrastructure available to the U.S. to evacuate the refugees.<sup>81</sup> Naturally, since the information in the second article is from The Pentagon the focus is mainly on the U.S.

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<sup>77</sup> Oswald Johnston, “U.S. Evacuation Now Centering on Vietnamese,” the Los Angeles Times, 24.04.75, 1, part i.

<sup>78</sup> Gaylord Shaw, “Viet Airlift Hitting More Turbulence,” the Los Angeles Times, 26.04.75, 1, 8, part i.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Gaylord Shaw, “Evacuation of Saigon Speeded Up by U.S.,” the Los Angeles Times, 25.04.75, 1,13, part i.

military capabilities. The article uses the threat of communism as a way of illustrating the helplessness of the Vietnamese as seen in the quote: “Pentagon officials said that massed communist forces could attack the city ‘at any minute’” and “When a civilization collapses, all sorts of things go on.”<sup>82</sup> While not referencing the helplessness of the situation directly, the descriptions of the dangers serve as a way of depicting helplessness. Meanwhile the blame is shifted toward the North Vietnamese, as the U.S. represents itself as a competent savior, this can be seen in the article when discussing the amount of people, the U.S. will be able to save before the collapse.

“The number of essential U.S. personnel in the threatened capital was cut to 1,100 and officials said they were seeking to nearly double the 5,000-per-day rate of evacuation for South Vietnamese refugees”<sup>83</sup>

This is in stark contrast to the first article who relays information about the U.S. plan to help South Vietnam as sluggish and incoherent. Thus, the question of why the narrative in the two articles, published by the same newspaper and same author only two days apart, show the U.S. as either: 1. a competent savior, or 2. a non-competent savior? Both articles agree on one aspect, the fact that the Vietnamese cannot help themselves and need help or rescue. Yet the discourse on how this is achieved is radically different. One possible answer lies in the sources used in the manufacturing of the articles, as the first article raises criticism about the opposition and the second article is just military information relayed by the media. Both serve very different purpose, as both justify their arguments with the helplessness of the Vietnamese refugees. This can be seen in the example of Kennedy saying the operation is “bogged down” versus Shaw who reported only a day earlier that U.S. would try to “double the 5,000-per-day rate of evacuation” In this example we can see some key behaviors of journalists outlined in the theory chapter, that the idea of the news media as a neutral conveyer of facts and not a conveyer of discourse. This would explain the contradicting information given by the same journalist, only two days apart.

A fascinating aspect of the representation of the Vietnamese as helpless is the continuation of this representation even after their rescue. As mentioned earlier, a number of Vietnamese refugees were evacuated to the U.S. overseas territory of Guam. With this in mind, the emphasis on the helplessness not only of the refugees but also of the situation that the

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<sup>82</sup> Gaylord Shaw, “Evacuation of Saigon Speeded Up by U.S.,” the Los Angeles Times, 25.04.75, 1,13, part i.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

refugees are in, continue. For example in the article “Guam Refugee City Emerges Amid Confusion” by the Los Angeles staff writer David Lamb, the chaos of handling more than 16 000 Vietnamese refugees is described. It mentions sparingly the lackluster facilities offered by the U.S. and focuses instead on the great ordeal that the people in the camp have narrowly escaped.<sup>84</sup> Here the focus is on things getting better with the help of the U.S. government. As the article writes “Their initial steps on U.S. soil hardly seemed headed toward the American dream, but life could have been far grimmer.”<sup>85</sup> This quote shows that the same sort of dependance on the U.S. for help that has been the most prolific discourse thus far, is also present in the reporting in Guam. While earlier reports on the refugees have focused on the need for intervention this article changes the discourse in a way that the U.S. becomes the promised land for these people. Once again, the outright statement of earlier subtext is an interesting aspect in the creation of the discourse. This article can be compared with an interview of the former senator of South Vietnam Tran Ngoc Nhaun. The article displays the representation of helplessness in a new way, namely “what is next?” While not the first to point out the peculiar situation these people find themselves in, the interview is the first to correlate this to helplessness. The article depicts how Nhaun and his family struggles to adapt to his new home country saying: “You know, starting a new life at age 43 is very difficult.”<sup>86</sup> The article uses the helplessness not only to highlight the difficulty starting anew but also to point out the uncertainty associated with arriving in the U.S. This is best exemplified when the article talks about American attitude towards Vietnamese people:

“The refugees do not know what to expects here and some, [...] said they had read newspaper reports in which California officials expressed alarm that the South Vietnamese would add to the states welfare burden and unemployment problem.”<sup>87</sup>

While the two articles convey two very different feelings it is notable that the sentiment of seen in the interview with Nhaun does not change the main discourse in later articles, which is very much in line with Lamb’s notion of America as the only savior in this situation.

The phenomena of the evacuated Vietnamese refugee ended with the fall of Saigon April 30<sup>th</sup>, as the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam and the country was reunited. Whilst the evacuation of

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<sup>84</sup> David Lamb, “Guam Refugee City Emerges Amid Confusion,” the Los Angeles Times, 26.04.75, 1, 5, part i.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Larry Stammer, “Refugees in Los Gatos Brin Only Their Lives,” the Los Angeles Times, 26.04.75, 1, 14, part i.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

Saigon was over, the struggle of the Vietnamese was not, as the refugees continued their journey towards the United States. The end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam might have ended an era in U.S. history but the narrative does not change much even after the Vietnamese refugees had been evacuated. Jerry Choen's article exemplifies this is best with a quote by a 46-year-old Vietnamese neurosurgeon proclaiming, "America spells freedom."<sup>88</sup> And another refugee shouting "God bless America."<sup>89</sup> While not explicitly stating that the refugees are helpless the use of their enthusiasm at being saved by the U.S. aids in their representation as helpless. The article uses this as confirmation that not only are these people excited about the U.S. saving them but also presents the U.S. as the promised land for these people. Therefore, by emphasizing the goodness of the U.S. the representation of the Vietnamese as helpless continue, with the help from previously established discourse. Similarly, to the article by Stammer, as mentioned earlier, the representation of helplessness is also continued through the emphasis on material loss. This notion is expanded upon in the article "Pendleton Arrivals Are Confused, Anxious." The article continues to document the loss of property sustained by the Vietnamese evacuees. Although grateful for their escape the article sheds light on the fact that even their money is useless, "It's South Vietnamese money and I don't think it will be any good in the United States."<sup>90</sup> Combined with the descriptions of overcrowding, this article unlike Choen's article, represent the Vietnamese as truly helpless without the optimism of being saved, as exemplified in the article "Well, very few of the will be rich, now. It's going to be a different world for them."<sup>91</sup> The article thus sheds light on an important issue that to this point has almost only been raised by the opposition of the rescue, that of what comes next for these people. However, the article yet again do not change any discourse regarding refugees but merely expands on it.

Lastly one new discourse arrives from the end of the evacuation, and that is the notion of the temporary fix that the evacuation was. While this discourse has been alluded to in the past, the end of the evacuation has created a whole new set of circumstances to reflect on the issues these refugees face in their new home country. Nowhere is this more present than in the article "Number of Destitute Refugees Increasing" by Richard West. The article describes how a lot of the Vietnamese refugees seek rehabilitation once entering the United States. It

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<sup>88</sup> Jerry Choen, "Flow of refugees swells," the Los Angeles Times, 05.05.75, 3, part i.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Charles Hillinger, Steve Harvey, "Pendleton Arrivals Are Confused, Anxious," the Los Angeles Times, 30.04.75, 3, 5, part i.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

also focuses on the many medical and recreational needs of the refugees, going as far as quoting one spokesperson for the immigration office saying, “We’ll try to keep them busy.”<sup>92</sup> While at first glance the article may seem critical towards the new refugees, the article carefully creates a “what if”-scenario in its representation of the many needs of the refugees, modifying the existing discourse. This in turn is used to convey the notion that the evacuation was not a permanent fix and the “scars” from U.S. involvement in Vietnam, will remain. The material presented thus becomes a clever goodbye to the whole situation, as coverage of the refugees is reduced by the middle of May 1975. The change in discourse is thus not continued by any other article as the coverage largely shifts away from the representation of the Vietnamese as helpless and focuses more on the pros and cons of these new Americans.

### 4.3 The “Helpless” Boat People

While the refugees previously discussed is tied to the collapse of South Vietnam, the boat people cannot be tied to one such singular event. The Vietnamese boat people consisted of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees fleeing the instability in Southeast-Asia and arriving at the shores of neighboring nations, such as Thailand, Philippines and Malaysia. The Los Angeles Times gives context to the situation through numerous articles about the Vietnamese refugees’ ordeal in escaping Vietnam by boat. The paper gives context to what would become known as the Vietnamese boat refugees in the 1979 article “650 Refugees at Manila Accepted by 3 Nations” written by UPI, Manila. Interestingly the representation of the Vietnamese as helpless has continued from 1975 to 1979 as this article details how the refugees were only accepted by four countries (one being Vietnam), and framing their situation as truly desperate as no other countries in the world was willing to receive them.<sup>93</sup> One way the article represents the Vietnamese as helpless victims in the same way as the Vietnamese orphans, is by focusing on the children. The article states that out of the 650 refugees, “about one third of them children.”<sup>94</sup> By focusing on their hopeless situation and rejection by the international community the article paints a Grim picture, that even those who manage to escape, face rejection. This framing of the boat people as “stranded passengers”<sup>95</sup> instills a sense of

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<sup>92</sup> Richard West, “Number of Destitute Refugees Increasing,” the Los Angeles Times, 05.05.75, 3, part i.

<sup>93</sup> United Press International, “650 Refugees at Manila Accepted by 3 Nations,” the Los Angeles Times, 04.01.79, 3, part i.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.



compassion and by using the same discourse as seen with the Vietnamese evacuees from Saigon who were described as “destitute refugees”<sup>96</sup>, the same feelings and associations arise from reading this article. This article is one, among many similar articles on the matter, detailing the hardships and harrowing escape across the sea as seen in the quote: “The Philippines threatened to tow the cargo ship Tung An back out to sea [...]”<sup>97</sup> And although it has been four years since the Vietnam War, rarely does any of the articles seek to explain why the Vietnamese fled from their homeland. Those who do, puts the blame on other countries than the United States. This is illustrated in the article “Vietnam Pays Price of Cambodia War.” The article outlines how the war between Vietnam and Cambodia is to blame for the refugee crisis. The article focuses little on the war itself, but instead interviews refugees in Thailand who in turn give their reasons for the refugee crisis. Among the most common reasons is the cruelty of the communist Vietnamese regime. As the article explains:

“If refugee reports can be believed, the Communist do not trust the southerners. At least half a dozen refugees reported that former South Vietnamese army officers and government officials who served at least three years in “reeducation camps” were being picked up for detention so as to “prevent disorder.” If this is true, this report indicates considerable insecurity in southern Vietnam.”<sup>98</sup>

This is also a continuation of the narrative of the “evil” communist regime that is Vietnam. While the article itself does not carry the representation of the helpless Vietnamese, the discourse that it creates aids in the reasoning behind many other articles who take it for granted that the reader knows “how bad” the new Vietnamese government is. This is a deliberate act to delegitimize the communist Vietnamese government and is a prime example of Hermann and Chomsky’s worthy and unworthy victims. An example to illustrate this point is the bombing of North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. While public outcry against the bombing was rampant, the leading narrative propagated by leading figures such as Henry Kissinger, emphasized the bombing as strictly necessary to achieve “peace with honor” in Vietnam.<sup>99</sup> By representing the Vietnamese as helpless due to the actions of the North Vietnamese rather than the actions of the U.S. the representation aids in delegitimizing the Vietnamese government, whilst diminishing the U.S.’ own impact in the matter.

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<sup>96</sup> Richard West, “Number of Destitute Refugees Increasing,” the Los Angeles Times, 05.05.75, 3, part i.

<sup>97</sup> United Press International, “650 Refugees at Manila Accepted by 3 Nations,” the Los Angeles Times, 04.01.79, 3, part i.

<sup>98</sup> Keyes Beech, “Vietnam Pays Price of Cambodia War,” the Los Angeles Times, 17.02.79, 19, part i.

<sup>99</sup> Theo Sommer, *Die Zeit, Interview of the honorable Henry A. Kissinger Secretary of State, United States Department of State*, 1976, PR#336.

In 1979 the start of the boat people phenomenon was in its early stages of development, and the first refugees from Vietnam to enter the United States did so by mid 1979. With this context in mind, it becomes important to research how the representation of helplessness is used when the refugees arrive in the U.S. The discourse in the early parts of the immigration of boat people is largely the same as before, with the major themes being the oppression faced by the people in communist countries, combined with the lust for freedom. While the major theme of helplessness is still there, one aspect that is excluded in several news articles at this point is the discourse of helplessness as a means for U.S. intervention. This is replaced with a more laissez-faire attitude towards the problem. This point is illustrated in the article “500 Refugees Arrive in L.A. From Southeast-Asia.” In this article struggle and utter despair is conveyed through interviews with escapees “No matter how bad it was, life in camp was still better than Laos.”<sup>100</sup> This is used propagating and expanding upon the already fierce anti-communist rhetoric present in the Los Angeles Times. Thus, the communist countries in Southeast-Asia are represented as totalitarian dictatorships. One way this is accomplished is by reframing the refugees in this article as survivors, as the many ways of escape is detailed like “flee across the China Sea” and “swim or cross the river, a kilometer wide at some points.”<sup>101</sup> Therefore representing the Vietnamese as helpless and in need of aid, however where the discourse changes is in who is aiding the refugees. While in previous examples, particularly those associated with the evacuation of Saigon, the protection of refugees should happen through interventionism. Now four years later this narrative is dropped and rather the allure and freedom of the United States is enough help in itself. This is seen in the article motioned earlier, as a Laotian man is quoted when arriving in Los Angeles: “I am happy, excited.”<sup>102</sup> One reason for this more relaxed attitude may be the fact that news from Southeast-Asia in general is no longer front-page news, making the effort of writing comprehensive articles unnecessary. Another aspect is that this can largely be considered an issue that the U.S. has already dealt with, making this news not so “new.” It is worth mentioning that this is, as always, not the only discourse surrounding the boat people. One notable example is the church, more specifically Bishop Robert C. Rusack of the Los Angeles Episcopal Diocese, who is mentioned in an article in the Los Angeles Times, alongside the

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<sup>100</sup> Times Wire service, “500 Refugees Arrive in L.A. From Southeast Asia,” the Los Angeles Times, 23.01.79, 10, part i.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

Southern California Board of Rabbis, pleading for more support for the new refugees. In this instance the Mayflower is also used as an example, whilst also quoting the “Jewish tradition of refuge for the homeless.”<sup>103</sup> While this article pleads for aid, it bases its merits on the harsh conditions mentioned in previous articles, such as the Philippines threatening to return the refugees to sea. The article’s main message is in stark contrast to the laissez-faire attitude mentioned earlier. Although the article urges aid, it does not promote interventionism, rather it urges the U.S. to provide aid in the form of sponsorship from the local community. Another aspect is the way the Jewish rabbis use history to justify their claims, depicting America once again as the “city upon a hill.” If compared, the two articles want the same thing, the only difference is in the means of which to achieve the result.

During the summer of 1979 the conditions became more and more stressed in Vietnam’s neighboring countries and as such many lashed out against the refugees. A noteworthy example to provide some context is the Malaysian government’s threat to shoot Vietnamese or return any refugees that try to enter Malaysia, out to sea.<sup>104</sup> This threat combined with the horrible conditions faced by the refugees forced a UN resolution to help the boat people in Southeast-Asia and as a result, an influx of refugees reached other nations within the remainder of 1979 and 1980. This period before 1980 is largely dominated by one type of article and by default one discourse, the plea for help. The plea for help is largely based upon the well-established representation of the Vietnamese as helpless victims, this is demonstrated in the article by Times region writer Russel Chandler, titled: “Mercy Ship Standing By to Help ‘boat people.’”<sup>105</sup> One aspect regarding this article is the way the author frames the discourse to strictly include the humanitarian aspects of the mission. As seen in past articles, the plea for help has often been met with skepticism, as this could be an extension of the Vietnam War or enthusiasm for the same reasons. This article shows no such concerns thus leaving behind a large portion of context heavily used in discourse earlier, regarding anti-war rhetoric, an example of this is when the ship’s mission is described as “going to save human lives.”<sup>106</sup> The representation of the Vietnamese boat people in this instance is not one of the helpless refugees on the run from communism, but rather that of the hungry and downtrodden,

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<sup>103</sup> Los Angeles Times, “Church Urge Boat People Aid,” 20.01.79, 27, part i.

<sup>104</sup> Reuters, “Malaysia Returns 800 Refugees to Sea, Source Say,” the Los Angeles Times, 18.06.79, 1, part i.

<sup>105</sup> Russell Chandler, “Mercy Ship Standing By to Help ‘Boat People,’” the Los Angeles Times, 21.06.79, 6, part i.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

as the ship is described as “carrying food for the hungry.”<sup>107</sup> One reason that this is done is to leave “the ghost of Vietnam” behind, as it has been almost 11 years since the height of the Vietnam War in 1969.

One article containing official statements pertaining to the rescue of the Vietnamese boat people is the Associated Press article “Navy to Aid ‘Boat People’ - Carter.”<sup>108</sup> The article presents Carter as an impulsive man who without any plan has made promises to rescue what the article presents as “helpless boat people.” The discourse in this article shows the level of government skepticism that has been present in earlier articles about government interference. While Carter uses the boat people’s helplessness to set an example of what America ought to be, the article frames his statements as erratic and spontaneous as seen with the quote “Powell said Carter made the decision to address the demonstrator on the spur of the moment after hearing the crowd singing,” to further this he is described as “in shirt sleeves.”<sup>109</sup> This again makes it look like Carter’s plan is not such a good idea. The contrast between the two articles is remarkable as the first article is largely positive to helping and the other frames his attempt at help as foolish. While the discourse of previous intervention in the refugee matter has been one of skepticism towards the U.S. furthering their war involvement, the new modified discourse is one of incompetence by their leaders and not the military. This can be seen later when in the article: “Coming to the Aid of the Boat People,” who tells of the U.S. navy’s noble mission to save the boat refugees, and the rescue of women and children, from the sea.<sup>110</sup> This focus on the navy as competent and Carter as incompetent may be due to Carter’s anti-war appeal making it hard for the media to cast skepticism surrounding his motives. Moreover, the articles use this method to attack Carter’s competence as a way of decreasing his legitimacy as a competent leader. As such the helplessness of the Vietnamese people is once again used for political means, and in this string of articles it is used to highlight the competence of private charities and the navy whilst criticizing the government’s slow reaction time, lackluster response and success rate. Thus, the narrative has switched from strong leadership versus weak military to weak leadership versus strong military.

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<sup>107</sup> Russell Chandler, “Mercy Ship Standing By to Help ‘Boat People,’” the Los Angeles Times, 21.06.79, 6, part i.

<sup>108</sup> Associated Press, “Navy to Aid ‘Boat People’ - Carter,” the Los Angeles Times, 20.07.79, 8, part i.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Paul Dean, “Coming to the Aid of the Boat People,” the Los Angeles Times, 23.07.79, 1, part iv.

In the end of 1979 and beginning of 1980, the UN resolution and pleas for the international community meant that the reporting on boat refugees slowly but surely decreased. While the representation of helplessness had been prevalent thus far, the discourse was changed once again in early 1980. As the phenomena that was the Vietnamese boat people slowly came to an end, for now, the opportunity to reflect on what has transpired is used by the Los Angeles Times. This leads to the discourse presented during the boat people crisis being used to make several different political statements regarding other political matters. An example of this is the reprinted article “‘Black Boat People’: a Test for Carter” by Calvin Zon, a journalist for the Washington Star. The article is about refugees from Haiti who fled from poverty and entered Florida.<sup>111</sup> The article does not concern itself with the Vietnamese boat refugees but instead uses their already established discourse to further their political goals. By calling the Haitian Refugees “black boat people” the author implies that the situation of the Haitians fleeing Haiti is similar to the struggle of the Vietnamese boat people. A key aspect in this representation is the representation of the Haitians as helpless in the face of U.S. bureaucracy. The discourse that the author presents is the well-established discourse of the Vietnamese in need of help, which is implicitly stated in quotes like “Discriminated against the Haitian boat people while favoring those from Southeast Asia.”<sup>112</sup> This is in no doubt done to invoke a similar outcry for the Haitians in this matter as was done with the Vietnamese boat people. The Vietnamese boat people had to this point garnered a lot of media attention and the article draws a parallel between the two groups. Thus, the representation of helplessness can be shown to have been a mainstay for the whole duration of Vietnamese refugees’ ordeal.

The use of representations of the Vietnamese as helpless is not only used in retrospect to establish a similar discourse surrounding another issue, but also to enhance one’s own standing within society. This can be seen in the reprinted article “Irish – Americans, the First Boat People, Move On,” by Pete Hamill. The article features the main points of Irish American history with an emphasis on how good things have become for the Irish in America, all be it because of Irish American resourcefulness.<sup>113</sup> As the title implies Hamill uses the discourse and retroactively fits it into an already existing discourse. The way this is done is by stating that the Irish Americans have endured similar struggles to that of the Vietnamese boat

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<sup>111</sup> Calvin Zon, “‘Black Boat People’: a Test for Carter,” the Los Angeles Times, 27.02.80, 5, part ii.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Peter Hamill, “Irish – Americans, the First Boat People, Move On,” the Los Angeles Times, 17.03.80, 5, part ii.

people. Again, the representation of helplessness is used to garner sympathy, as the reader would have been exposed to the time relevant struggles of the Vietnamese more so than that of the Irish. Hamill takes this notion one step further by invoking the representation of helplessness that was the original struggle and then pride himself on so many Irish American achievements. An example of this is: “The saga of John F. Kennedy – his rise to power, his martyr’s death- is as crucial to the American Irish story as the Great Famine was to the Irish everywhere.”<sup>114</sup> The irony in this statement is that John F. Kennedy was the first president to start America’s involvement in Vietnam, which almost 15 years later would create the Vietnamese Boat people. This irony is, however, lost on Hamill, as seen by his glorification of Kennedy. Nevertheless, the use of the Vietnamese refugee’s struggle and representation as helpless serves, as stated earlier, to enhance the position of Irish Americans. This shows yet again how the struggles of the Vietnamese boat people are used by several different people and groups to invoke feelings of sympathy.

Looking at the main features of the Vietnamese as helpless, the use of this representation is very diverse. One of the main ways in which this is done, is by presenting the savior of the Vietnamese as a hero, as can be seen with Ed Daly and the mercy ship, this is later replaced by the notion that the allure of America itself will be the boat peoples saving grace. The representation is often taken for granted is seldom stated outright, but rather communicated through the needs and wants of these Vietnamese. This is also used to legitimize certain actions, but no discernable pattern to active political goals can be found. Overall, the Vietnamese evacuees are most commonly represented as helpless.

## 5. Analysis of the “Good” Vietnamese

This chapter focuses on the representation of the Vietnamese as “good.” Some of the most important ways this is done is by presenting them as “almost American” or having internalized American values. Another important aspect is the use of the “cute” or “innocent” Vietnamese, their presence as a of highly skilled workforce good for the United States or holding of good Christian values. This is extended to the abstract notion, that some articles bring up, showing the Vietnamese as good not only through their actions but also in their

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<sup>114</sup> Peter Hamill, “Irish – Americans, the First Boat People, Move On,” the Los Angeles Times, 17.03.80, 5, part ii.

being, as seen with the stereotype of the withdrawn and respectful Asian. As such this part problematizes the good representations by emphasizing the orientalist nature in much of this reporting, as can be seen in the following table.

<b>Type of “good” representation</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Examples from the Los Angeles Times</b>
Almost American	Given typical American attributes.  Seen or described doing American activities.	“He just kept playing catch with a basketball.”  Picture of a Vietnamese boy drinking milk.
Internalized American values	Partaking in American culture.  Expressed anti-communist sentiment.	“They have discovered American steaks, cherry pie, the Pittsburg Steelers and Pirates”  “He had to leave Vietnam because he killed three Communists who threatened him.”
Cute and/or innocent	Not fully comprehending a situation.  Being good of heart with a strict moral undertone.	“Tom asked them what ‘weed’ was.”  “we never saw snow before.”
Good for the United States	Emphasizing how Vietnamese people will add something of value to U.S. society, other than material or skills.	“To save one child, you save the whole world.” -mother’s enthusiastic exclamation when adopting a Vietnamese orphan
Highly skilled	From upper echelon of South Vietnamese society.  Possessing skills or education that is sought after.	“They are educated with Professional skills”  “The United States is the beneficiary of a brain drain”  “Some were described as ‘part-time physicians,’”
Christian	Showing or partaking in Christian activities that highlight one or more areas of the religion.	“Scores of the refugees tried to ‘cash’ little packets of gold wafers about the size of a business card.” – This describes the Vietnamese get rid of their worldly possessions for a chance at American life.

Withdrawn and respectful	Seen as withdrawn and being out of the way of the native population	<p>“Tend to not complain and to put up with more than the average tenant.”</p> <p>“Vietnamese have not yet learned the art of making noisy demands.”</p>
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## 5.1 The “Good” Orphans

A discourse that becomes apparent in the Los Angeles Times in April, 1975, which corresponds with the orphans airlift is that of the “welcoming native” blessed by the immigrant child. This positive attitude towards orphans is illustrated in the article “Viet Children Spreading Joy in U.S. Homes.” The article chronicles the first arrivals and adoption of Vietnamese orphans, in particular that of Robyn Lan Kolinsky who appears in the article as a proud new mother, being quoted exclaiming “I love the world” and “To save one child, you save the whole world.”<sup>115</sup> The article clearly sets up Vietnamese children as something good. This is done by documenting the utter bliss that the new mother finds herself in when their new child arrives. The article also includes “Dave a former marine who fought in Vietnam, handed out cigars to his neighbors to celebrate the arrival of the Vietnamese brothers.”<sup>116</sup> By framing Kolinsky as a happy new mother, she becomes a vessel for presenting just how happy adoption could make a person and with this presenting the idea that saving these children is a good act, for oneself and others. While the Vietnam veteran Dave can be seen as a token of acceptance in this article, giving legitimacy to the act of bringing Vietnamese into the United States. This ultimately culminates with a new narrative being presented for the first time, namely that of the good refugee child.

Following coverage portrays the act of an adoption as a patriotic calling for all Americans. Articles representing the Vietnamese orphans as “good, new citizens” soon followed suit: in an interview with American family about their newly adopted Vietnamese son for example, the father shares his bliss of having welcomed a new family member. Blake Tan “screams

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<sup>115</sup> United Press International, “Viet Children Spreading Joy in U.S. Homes,” the Los Angeles Times, 05.04.75, 1,7, part i.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.



every time I put him down,”<sup>117</sup> the father Ian Bankester explains as he justifies his newly adopted son’s behavior: “They’d had a long ride and been handed to so many people enroute [sic.] that they were very confused.” Meanwhile the article gives context to the conflict by stating that “The center (orphanage) was evacuated with the approach of North Vietnamese troops,”<sup>118</sup> showing the reason for the evacuation.

The motives of the article can be discerned through the narrative style, which features the description of the Bankesters as “very happy” upon the boy’s arrival. This subsequently aids in the representation of the Vietnamese as good for the American family. Moreover, the inclusion of the child wanting to be held all the time, and including the evacuation and the advancing North Vietnamese, portrays the act of an adoption as a patriotic calling for all Americans. The focus thus becomes one of duty, where it can be seen as America’s duty to save these children, not only from communist dictatorship, but also for the good of the American family. Therefore, by framing the Vietnamese orphans as a good addition to the family, the discourse of America as the savior of these people becomes apparent, as the leading discourse. This opportunity to start a family is also expressed by the Bankesters as they are quoted saying “A lot of red tape was cut during the crisis.”<sup>119</sup> The couple explains how they had tried for years to adopt another American child, but were unable to, until they could adopt a Vietnamese child. Drawing on the same conclusions as stated earlier, this point further enhances the notion of the Vietnamese orphans as a gift to the American family.

The orphans are not only represented as “good” new citizens, but also as almost “being American”. This leading discourse becomes apparent in “The Orphan Airlift: War’s Human Side.” Of particular note in this article is a Vietnamese boy named David, who upon being asked whether he likes the United States, is quoted answering: “it’s a good place to live.”<sup>120</sup> The article also supplies more information about David saying “On his first day in his adopted homeland Thursday, he just kept playing catch with a basketball. It’s his favorite sport.”<sup>121</sup> The narrative in this article thus sets up the orphans as almost American (i.e., giving them attributes that any American child could be expected to possess). The use of basketball and

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<sup>117</sup> Marilyn Fisher, “New Arrival’s Screams Thrill Arcadia Family,” the Los Angeles Times, 10.04.75, 1,2, part vii.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>120</sup> Daryl Lembke, “The Orphan Airlift: War’s Human Side,” the Los Angeles Times, 04.04.75, 1, 4, 32, part i.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

excitement at arriving in the U.S. expands the already existing discourses of the orphans as being good American children. There is no doubt that this is done to garner sympathy for the orphans and by giving the orphans U.S. qualities, as a way of appeasing any criticism that these children are from another culture and would not fit into U.S. society. David, as an example, is also interesting as the name is not a typical Vietnamese name- consequently, enhancing the Americanness on the orphans. This is also evident when the article includes a picture of a boy drinking milk upon his arrival to the U.S.<sup>122</sup> The boy drinking milk remains nameless, unlike David. This picture of a boy drinking milk also ties in with the use of orientalism to represent these children as good Americans. Comparing that to David's case, where the boy is described as being very interested in basketball, it becomes apparent that the article's fascination with Vietnamese orphans doing American things is a case of orientalism. This orientalism is expanded upon when David is interviewed and "When asked through an interpreter how he liked the United States, David replied with an enthusiastic flurry of words in Vietnamese."<sup>123</sup> David in this interview serves two roles at once, all tied to his representation as a good refugee: on the one hand he is represented as a good new American, and another as the exotic new "cute" countryman.

## 5.2 The "Good" Evacuated Refugee

As the reporting on the orphans came to an end with the end of the "babylift," the implementation of a new discourse that included the more diverse Vietnamese evacuees emerged. One way in which the evacuees were represented as good is by focusing on what they could add to the U.S. economy. For instance, in an article titled "Many Refugees Highly skilled" by David Lamb, a Vietnamese family is praised for having "perfect English."<sup>124</sup> The article states outright how beneficial these refugees would be to U.S. society, stressing:

"But many, if perhaps not a majority, of the 21,000 refugees here, like the Hungs, are from the upper echelon of Vietnamese Society. They are educated with Professional skills. As a result, the United States is the beneficiary of a brain drain probably unequaled in a history that has given entrance to 46 million immigrants and refugees since 1903."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Daryl Lembke, "The Orphan Airlift: War's Human Side," the Los Angeles Times, 04.04.75, 4, part i,

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>124</sup> David Lamb, "Many Refugees Highly skilled," the Los Angeles Times, 28.04.75, 1, 8, part i.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

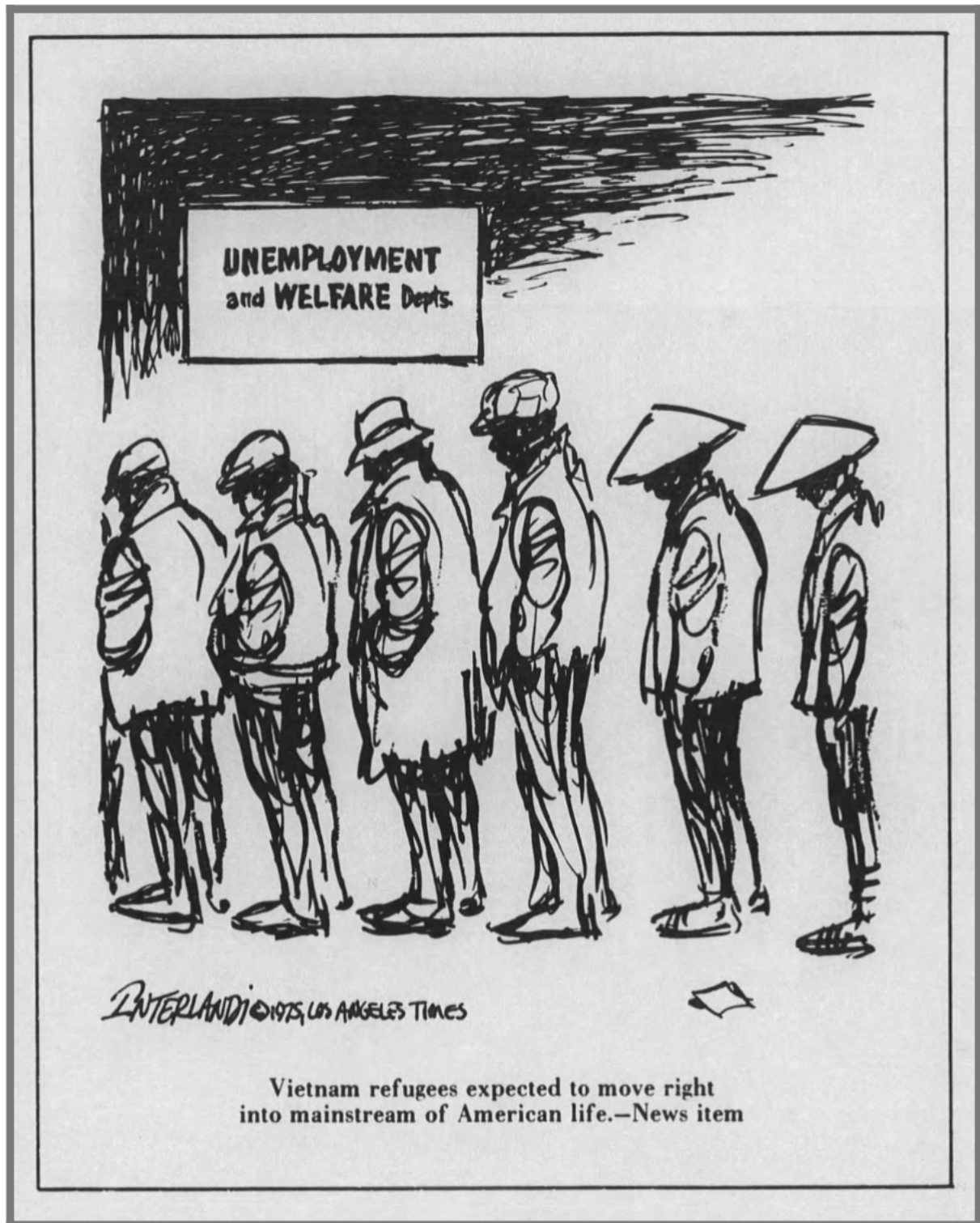
There is no doubt that this article views the refugees as a net positive for US society. The article hinges this discourse with use of words and phrases like “upper echelon” and “brain drain” to communicate just how important these people were in Vietnam, and by extension will be for the United States. The article aims to counteract the anti-immigration sentiment that existed in the 1970s. During this period as the U.S. gradually deindustrialized, a massive wave of unemployment hit the United States, exemplified by the 10% unemployment rate in California in 1975.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, inflation from the Vietnam War had also created a weaker economy, thus the American people, particularly those working in manufacturing were finding themselves without steady jobs.<sup>127</sup> With these problems and no apparent solution, the mass immigration that came from the collapse of South Vietnam stirred some anxiety that this would make the problem of unemployment worse. A political cartoon was published in the Los Angeles Times illustrating this sentiment. As a line to the unemployment office is drawn, with the people at the back wearing traditional triangle shaped southeast Asian hats, thus, alluding to their future as unemployed Americans.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Harry Bernstein, “Jobless Rate Is 8.9% in U.S., 10% in State,” the Los Angeles Times, 03.05.75, 1, 17, part i

<sup>127</sup> Tom Riddell, “Inflationary Impact of the Vietnam War,” *The Future of the Past: Revisionism and Vietnam*, vol. 1, 58-59.

<sup>128</sup> Frank Interland, “Political cartoon,” the Los Angeles Times, 28.04.75, 5, part ii.



Frank Interland, "Political cartoon," the Los Angeles Times, 28.04.75, 5, part ii.

Unlike the cartoonist's illustration, the article becomes a way of counteracting this discourse by representing the Vietnamese refugees as highly skilled. The article also includes some clever use of U.S. immigration history to underline the point of how the country is a nation of immigrants, justifying the savior of the "good" Vietnamese.

The notion of everything American being new to Vietnamese immigrants can be seen as orientalism. By framing the refugees as highly educated and skilled people David Lamb's article counteracts this orientalist notion. Moreover, the article seeks to change some of the stereotypes. For instance, in one example countering the traditional framing as "poor" immigrants, explaining about one recent immigrant family: "Their children went to private school, there were three cars in the garage at the airconditioned villa, there were TV sets and servants."<sup>129</sup> By focusing on the amenities, Lamb draws a parallel between American life and life in Saigon, and without outright stating the fact, addresses just how well suited these people would be for U.S. society.

The article is unique in that it presents the refugees' competency in stark opposition to the representation of helplessness discussed earlier. Indeed, by framing these people as highly resourceful and highly skilled the article comes at odds with the well-established narrative of the helpless refugee. One way in which the article counteracts this difference is by including the statements made by Duong Thien, recalling the horrors of war such as "Another time he was the only survivor of a mission flown by the Da Nang-based air wing he commanded."<sup>130</sup> Despite facing difficulties, the Vietnamese are framed as resilient and resourceful as opposed to helpless. Consequently, Thien recalling the horrors of war is used as justification for intervention in the conflict, ultimately not changing the discourse too much from the helpless. By doing this the article can represent the Vietnamese as good, even though this contradicts some of the previous points made regarding helplessness. Consequently, the horror of war becomes the good refugee's justification for intervention, as helplessness cannot justify this action in this article.

During the immediate aftermath of the fall of Saigon, the Los Angeles Times continued to represent the Vietnamese evacuees as good. This was done through the previously mentioned representation of the refugees as highly skilled. However, different variants of this discourse were printed in the newspaper. One example can be seen in the short article: "Firms Plan Relocation of South Viet Employes," where the article functions as free publicity for the companies involved, in this instance being the Exxon corp. The article tells the story of how:

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<sup>129</sup> David Lamb, "Many Refugees Highly skilled," the Los Angeles Times, 28.04.75, 1, 8, part i.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

“The Justice Department Monday issued a waiver to about 15 major corporations permitting them to evacuate Vietnamese nationals, and their families who have been working for many cases long-term employes [sic.]”<sup>131</sup>

This quote can be seen as a continuation of the trend, set by Lamb, representing the Vietnamese refugees as highly skilled and good for the U.S. economy. Where this article stands out, is in its reassurance to the reader that many of the incoming refugees already have jobs lined up, presenting a solution to the problem of high unemployment in the U.S. The article is most likely presented this way to reassure the public that it is in their best interest to save the Vietnamese refugees, whilst also serving as advertisement for the companies involved in this charity. While the article can be seen as free advertisement for the companies involved, it serves another purpose with regards to the representation of the Vietnamese. For instance the article remarks: “However, he said the corporation was unclear where the employes [sic.] would be placed ultimately. The refugees essential were in Exxon’s marketing operations in South Vietnam.”<sup>132</sup> Here the skills of the Vietnamese workers are not necessarily connected to one specific company. This results in the company not being represented as a savior, but rather the resourcefulness of the Vietnamese is emphasized. Consequently, this resourcefulness is highlighted as a solution to the Vietnamese becoming successful Americans. The emphasis put on their job as being in the marketing department is also a way of removing any suspicions that the Vietnamese would take any unskilled position within manufacturing.

While the positive representation of Vietnamese immigration continued, the use of this migration is also used as a way of framing the actions of the United States as noble and good. This was one of the leading discourses surrounding the representation of the Vietnamese as helpless. However the “helpless” is also featured when representing the Vietnamese as good. As such the main discourse being modified to include, not only the helpless, but also the “good” refugee. For instance an article from May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1975, only three days after the fall of Saigon, features the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees by the Protestant organization the Seventh day Adventists. Here the refugees are represented as highly skilled with statements like: “Some were described as ‘part-time physicians,’ others as students, writers and

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<sup>131</sup> Margaret A. Kilgore, “Firms Plan Relocation of South Viet Employes,” the Los Angeles Times, 30.04.75, 19, part i.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

editors.”<sup>133</sup> Thus the trend of focusing on the refugees’ skills as being beneficial to U.S. society continues. However, where this article changes the discourse in its inclusion and focus on the Christian aspects of the refugees. As stated earlier the resettlement of these Protestant refugees was undertaken by the Seventh day Adventists, who outright says “Most of these refugees are Seventh day Adventists.”<sup>134</sup> The notion of the Christian refugees is also furthered by the article that states that “Many of them worked for the dominations hospital near Saigon.”<sup>135</sup>

Under ordinary circumstances this would have been enough information from the article to state the fact that these refugees are good Christians, the article then goes on to prove it by telling of “Scores of the refugees tried to ‘cash’ little packets of gold wafers about the size of a business card.”<sup>136</sup> This was done to “get out of Pendleton and into the stream of American life.”<sup>137</sup> By telling how the refugees gave up their worldly possessions to be able to come to America the article invokes the image of the Protestant who does not embellish in worldly possessions. This sets the refugees up, not only as good Christians, but also as a good Protestants. This act of representing the Vietnamese refugees as good Christians is done to Americanize their identity. As in the 1970s Protestantism was a large part of the cultural identity of the majority in the United States. This makes the framing of the good Protestant an intentional use of something familiar to garner sympathy.

Another compelling aspect is the government’s role in the article. The government’s role is described as “bent over backwards” and “super cooperative.”<sup>138</sup> This framing of the government’s willingness and support for this project thus lends its legitimacy to the refugees. An additional aspect of this framing in this article is that whilst these South Vietnamese refugees are waiting for their new homes in the U.S., 12,000 people are still at camp Pendleton<sup>139</sup>. The discourse and motives in representing the Vietnamese as successful can also be a way of using the Vietnamese as victory trophies as one newborn girl is described as being “Born with a silver chopstick in her mouth.”<sup>140</sup> Changing the silver spoon to a chopstick

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<sup>133</sup> Richard West, Kathy Burke, “Resettlement of S. Vietnamese Refugees in Southland Begins,” the Los Angeles Times, 03.05.75, 1, part ii.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

highlights the orientalism and othering present in when representing the Vietnamese. This quote elevates the status of the United States whilst firmly maintain the Vietnamese as the other, despite the emphasis on their Americanness. This is done by showing the U.S. people and the world that the U.S. government has succeeded in relocating the refugees with great success and speed. The use of private organizations and minimal government involvement also lends itself in legitimizing the U.S. government in its approach in a broader sense. It also lends credence to the notion of private property, as an opposition to the communist states around the world. Thus, the use of the Vietnamese in this article can be seen as two-fold, one where they are portrayed as good new citizens and two where the prowess of these citizens is used to validate a larger aspect of U.S. foreign policy.

One last aspect that needs to be discussed regarding the Vietnamese evacuees being represented as good citizens is the article defending the refugees. In the article “Those Against Refugees Called Bigots by Riles,” Wilson C. Riles, California’s superintendent of public instruction is interviewed, where he denounces many of the letters he has received, “running 10 to 1 against the refugees.” Some of the letters are quoted “We have hundreds of unemployed people now” and “I haven’t worked for almost four months due to the recession.”<sup>141</sup> One noteworthy aspect in this article is the way that the Vietnamese is framed as good for the U.S. In this article Riles uses the fact that “Normally, the United States receive 400,000 legal immigrants a year.”<sup>142</sup> This can be seen as an attempt to normalize the otherwise unusual situation California finds itself in. this is done by emphasizing that the U.S. annually receives the same number of refugees as estimated Vietnamese evacuees. By sighting this fact Riles deescalates the hysteria present in a lot of the early reporting on the evacuation of Saigon. This argument also functions as a way of deflating claims of immigrants stealing jobs, as the U.S. regardless would accept 400,000 immigrants each year. The statement thus becomes a “colorblind” effort to normalize immigration no matter the county the immigrants are from.

### 5.3 The “Good” Boat People

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<sup>141</sup> Bill Boyarsky, “Those Against Refugees Called Bigots by Riles,” the Los Angeles Times, 03.05.75, 1, 6, part i.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.



The first positive representations of the Vietnamese boat people appear in the Los Angeles Times in a series of articles by the end of January 1979. The articles tell the story of the newest Vietnamese refugees to arrive in Orange County, California. In the article “One Odyssey Ends, Another Begins,” the celebration of the Tran family is documented during an interview with the family. The family is part of the newest arrivals to the United States from what the article describes as the “storm torn South China Sea.”<sup>143</sup> Moreover, it is quick to adopt the earlier discourse of these refugees being resourceful and intelligent people, fit for U.S. society. This is done by highlighting the family’s business roots in Vietnam. An example of this is:

“The Trans (the first name is the family name) are ethnically Chinese, part of several million that comprise an influential minority in Vietnam. (The Chinese are known for their finical expertise, and dominate the Vietnamese merchant class.)”<sup>144</sup>

As seen earlier the focus on the Vietnamese as resourceful and highly skilled is the main way the paper conveys their usefulness. Of particular note is the way in which several of these articles highlight their prominent social standing in Vietnam as if to signal that these people were important in Vietnam and thus they will be important people in the U.S. The framing of the Vietnamese as prominent business figures also ties into the notion that these people will participate in the economy, and not burden it. It becomes apparent that the early discourse is largely the same as with the Vietnamese evacuees from Saigon. Thus the early influx of boat people is presented in the same manner as the Vietnamese evacuees four years earlier.

Despite the early rendition of the Los Angeles Times presenting the boat people as only the very important members of Vietnamese society, the reality was that they also included a lot of less privileged people. As will be shown later, the boat people were the target of much racism and bigotry. However, despite the negative attention the boat people were given, one of the main sources of their representation as being good, were as seen with the Vietnamese evacuees, by defending them against such attacks and allegations. An example of a way in which this is done can be seen in the article “Refugees Who Fled Strife Face Neighbors’ Hostility.” The article is divided into two parts, where the first part documents Vivian Mortimer, a former tenant of an apartment complex in Linda Vista, San Diego, who is quoted saying “The landlords want to put in the Asians because they can jack up the rents. The rest of

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<sup>143</sup> Anne La Riviere, “One Odyssey Ends, Another Begins,” the Los Angeles Times, 25.01.79, 1, part iv.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

us are being pushed out.”<sup>145</sup> While points pertaining to the Vietnamese representation as bad, will be discussed later, the second part of the article functions as a counter to all of the arguments presented by Mortimer. The article then interviews a landlord who presents the Vietnamese as good tenants through an orientalist lens, as seen in the quote “Moreover, the Indochinese, because they do not speak much English, tend to not complain and to put up with more than the average tenant.”<sup>146</sup> This is expanded upon with the quote “The Laotian tribesmen figure all roofs leak when it rains” and “They had so little in their own country that they think they’ve really come up in life”<sup>147</sup> This presents the Vietnamese boat people as hard working and keeping to themselves, something that cannot be said about Mortimer, thus creating a contrast between the two. Also noteworthy is the article’s reliance on orientalism to represent the boat people as good, as seen with the leaking roof. Of particular note is the way the article uses parts of the propaganda model to totally and utterly discredit Mortimer. This can be seen through first and foremost the use of experts. As the landlord is made to comment about the Vietnamese refugees, he states “They’re very clean and pay rent on time.”<sup>148</sup> This makes Mortimer out as being the only one holding the beliefs that the boat people are stealing apartments from Americans. As mentioned earlier the discourse surrounding the Vietnamese refugees often sets them up as being good Americans. In this instance and with “evidentiary” testimony from landlords and community leaders, the Vietnamese are not only represented as good Americans, but better than Americans (better in the sense “easier to exploit”). The article makes for a truly interesting read as it staunchly defends the notion that the Vietnamese are good people, in an orientalist, and partly demeaning manner, whilst also reciting all the racist remarks made by the opponents of the Vietnamese immigration. This duality is yet another example of the effort put into the paper, trying to seem neutral to their reader with viewing a situation from both sides.

During the summer of 1979 the boat people were again in the media’s focus as the crisis in Southeast Asia became worse and the UN stepped in to rescue these people.<sup>149</sup> As such the media’s focus is largely directed towards the Vietnamese as helpless victims in this period. However, there are some exceptions to this portrayal and yet again the Vietnamese are

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<sup>145</sup> Phill Garlington, “Refugees Who Fled Strife Face Neighbors’ Hostility,” the Los Angeles Times, 12.01.79, 1, 12, part ii.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> “Flight from Indochina,” in *The State of The World’s Refugees 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*, UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, 2000, 84-85.

represented as good Americans. In the article “Vietnamese Hold a Quiet Rally for the Boat People,” for example, a crowd of approximately 1000 Vietnamese Americans came down to Los Angeles City Hall to supporting their fleeing countrymen. While the goal of the group was to spread the message “Free World Don’t Turn a Deaf Ear to Boat People,”<sup>150</sup> the article focuses mainly on the protesters themselves, describing “Los Angeles Vietnamese have not yet learned the art of making noisy demands.”<sup>151</sup> This enhances the notion of the respectful and quiet Vietnamese refugee, presenting them as someone who will not be in your way. They are quoted saying “How can we rest if we do not try to get food and medicine for those still trying to escape the communists.”<sup>152</sup> This shows how the Vietnamese Americans have adopted U.S. ideals and as such has become accepted members of their society. Their representation is that of action and resourcefulness, yet respect. This results in the article having an oriental view of the Vietnamese despite their adoption of U.S. values. The article thus leans heavily on the stereotypical Asian as a quiet, yet reflected person, motivated only by the goodness of their character. The oriental discourse is used as a way of conveying values and stereotypes without spelling them outright. With this in mind, and the focus on the people and not the message, the article uses the goodness of the already present Vietnamese to infer how good the boat people must be.

In the beginning of 1980, the focus on the Vietnamese boat people gradually fades from the Los Angeles Times’ view, however not before documenting some of the many accomplishments of the boat people. Of particular note is the focus on Vietnamese boat people learning English as seen in the article “The Boat People Become the Graduates.” Their accomplishments are framed through the lens of survival and being though. The article tells of their hardships with exerts like “One Vietnamese teacher said he saw 50 people in his boat die before it reached a safe shore,” and “Quam Pham, 27, said he had to leave Vietnam because he killed three Communists who threatened him.” He later “spent three days and nights on a boat, then nine months in a refugee camp in Indonesia before coming here.”<sup>153</sup> In the same matter, the act of getting an education and learning English is framed as survival for these people, as seen in the statement: “In Vietnam, English was just another subject; here, it’s a

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<sup>150</sup> Bella Stumbo, “Vietnamese Hold a Quiet Rally for the Boat People,” the Los Angeles Times, 20.06.79, 2, part ii.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Jerry Hicks, “The Boat People Become the Graduates,” the Los Angeles Times, 08.03.80, 12, 14, part ii.

matter of survival.”<sup>154</sup> The article frames their survivorship to relay the information that the refugees are hardened and motivated to become new citizens, making the discourse surrounding their achievements a positive representation. This is most likely done, not only to show how talented the Vietnamese are, but also to present the American school system who teaches these young adults, in a good way.

The representation of the Vietnamese as “good” often comes packaged with an orientalist framing. The use of orientalism in their representation is present even five years after their first arrival in the United States. One prime example of this representation can be seen in the article “‘Boat People’ Discover snow, Football.” The article is particularly noteworthy because it incorporates almost all the previously discussed aspects of Vietnamese representations as the good refugee. The article features an interview with the newly arrived Tom and Nhyet Pham, who tell their story of how their new life in Pittsburg is going. The article focuses on the cultural shock that the Pham couple have experienced, an example being when “Two men asked them if they wanted to buy some ‘weed.’ Tom asked them what ‘weed’ was. His brother hurried him away and explained all about marijuana.”<sup>155</sup> By showing that the immigrants are so innocent that they do not even know what drugs are, stands as a counter to the stereotype of the opium smoking Chinese, it additionally provides an image the immigrants as law-abiding citizens. By underlining their lawfulness, the common criticism of the criminal immigrant or minority is countered. Another instance being when “The Newcomers pretended to like pizza; they have the politeness of refugees and would never say no to a good Samaritans gesture.”<sup>156</sup> Without reproducing every instance this same point is made, the Pham couple is depicted in the article as subject to this type of cultural shock numerous times. Every time the couple is subjected to such an experience the article can be seen as a way of reorienting the refugees through the use of orientalism. The notion that the Phams have come to a strange land is ever present throughout the article, an example being “we never saw snow before.”<sup>157</sup> This may have been done to make the couple seem more exotic and highlight the contrast between the two countries even more. Their representation also serves as a way of presenting them as innocent and thereby not a threat but rather as good wholehearted people.

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<sup>154</sup> Jerry Hicks, “The Boat People Become the Graduates,” the Los Angeles Times, 08.03.80, 12, 14, part ii.

<sup>155</sup> United Press International, “‘Boat People’ Discover snow, Football,” the Los Angeles Times, 26.03.80, 7, part viii.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

The reason this article delves with orientalism and not outright racism is in the representation of the couple, not only as foreigners who have never experienced snow, but rather as excited, innocent, and inexperienced new Americans. One way in which the couple is seen as good hardworking immigrants is in their portrayal as good Christians who work hard. This is evident in the article's statement "They have discovered American steaks, cherry pie, the Pittsburg Steelers and Pirates, car pools and the sometimes unwonderful difference between take-home pay and rent."<sup>158</sup> The article thus used a lot of American signifiers to illustrate their efforts to become Americans and experience the United States. The family is thus not only represented through their oriental roots as mysterious foreigners, but also through their efforts to become and experience what it means to be American. This article thus encompasses the previously mentioned narrative of the hardworking, respectful, Christian, wanting to be American and the grateful Vietnamese refugee. It becomes apparent how the article uses the couple to represent the refugees as very good people, who just needs a chance. While there is no doubt that the article represents the boat people as good; the inclusion of orientalism merges the story. This can be seen in the label given to the couple by the article itself "the developing American," showing how the integration of these people will be no problem. What is noteworthy is that even after the influx of boat people has stopped, the discourse is continued, making no noticeable effort to distance the boat people from any other Vietnamese refugee, represented as good.

Looking at the chapter, the representation of the Vietnamese as good often manifest itself as the refugees having, going to have, or almost having, American ideals, mannerisms and taste. They are also presented as good through the representation as skilled or hardworking, and by extension an advantage for the U.S. Lastly the refugees are represented as good when defending the against people who disapprove of their immigration or ethnicity. The Vietnamese evacuees, then, is most often presented as good, compared to the orphans and boat people. This also manifest itself through orientalism as seen with the inclusion of the "cute", "exotic" and "quiet" Vietnamese.

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<sup>158</sup> United Press International, "'Boat People' Discover snow, Football," the Los Angeles Times, 26.03.80, 7, part viii.

## 6. Analysis of the “Bad” Vietnamese

The last representation to be analyzed is that of the Vietnamese as “bad.” This way of presenting the Vietnamese takes mainly different forms. Among these is the notion that Vietnamese orphans are replacing American orphans, whilst also more “traditional” sentiments are shown such as the Vietnamese stealing jobs, uneducated, disease ridden, economic burden, and not internalizing American values. These themes thus include articles that portray the Vietnamese as bad due to the context surrounding immigration. As such this analysis is not limited to the direct representation of the Vietnamese, but also includes other more blatant forms of racism such as dehumanization, and untrustworthiness. Examples can be seen in the table below.

<b>Types of “bad” representation</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Replacing American orphans	A notion that young Vietnamese children will be more attractive for adoption than American orphans.	“Some people who would normally take California kids have taken South Vietnamese children.”
Stealing jobs	A fear of losing or not being able to procure work, associated with cheap labor.	“There is something a little strange about saying, ‘Let’s bring in 500,000 more people,’ when we can’t take care of the 1 million we have who are out of work.”
Uneducated	A judgement based on mental capacity.	“The refugees coming in now, however are more ‘the boat people,’ who come from a far less sophisticated background.”  “But entry of poor, largely uneducated immigrants.”
Disease-ridden	A judgement on the risk of spreading infectious diseases due to insufficient medical care.	“Now it is fashionable to open up our country to Vietnamese who are bringing more diseases with them than we have cures for.”
Economic burden	A judgement on the ‘cost’ associated with immigration.	“This nation has sacrificed more than 50,000 American sons, countless arms and legs, billions of dollars.”

Dehumanization	A charter trait associated with being worth less than other humans.	“These Vietnamese run around in their underwear.”  “Are we going to let overbreeding Asiatic take over our country? We should help them only if they agree to be sterilized!”
Not internalizing American values	A judgement on not agreeing with or rejecting American values.	“South Vietnamese culture is totally different from Western culture.”  “I would like to go back to the simple and enjoyable life I had in Vietnam.”
Spies or untrustworthy	A judgement based on the perceived threat of foreign nationals.	“I think it’s a communist plot to destroy this country”  “Vietnamese posing as ‘boat people’ refugees have infiltrated the United States”

## 6.1 The “Bad” Orphans

The representation of the Vietnamese orphans as bad is not a common discourse. However, some examples can be found in the Los Angeles Times, best exemplified by the notion that the Vietnamese orphans were replacing American orphans, as seen in the article “Influx of South Vietnamese Waifs Stirs Concern for American Orphans,” by Greg Waskul. The article features an interview with the Quaker group American Friends Service Committee who has this to say about the Vietnamese orphans:

“We think only two types of children should be flown out of South Vietnam – children of a mixed GI heritage, or those who are physically handicapped and have no chance of survival in Vietnam.”<sup>159</sup>

While this may seem sympathetic towards the orphans, the focus on the children of American soldiers set the stage for the article’s main argument that: “Some people who would normally take California kids have taken South Vietnamese children.”<sup>160</sup> The article thus presents an

<sup>159</sup> Greg Waskul, “Influx of South Vietnamese Waifs Stirs Concern for American Orphans,” the Los Angeles Times, 12.04.75, 22, 23, part i.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

“us against them” narrative where it is clear that the ingroup is the American orphans. Consequently, the notion of adoption as a zero-sum game is also established, where one group cannot win without the other losing something. Even though it presents the orphan rescue as negative, it still features some concern for the orphans: While this way of reporting is most likely a way of trying to remain neutral, the first quote from the article is noteworthy in its focus on the most American of the Vietnamese orphans. It becomes apparent that the orphans are presented not only as helpless but also as “bad” for the United States because they are taking away opportunities for American children to be adopted.

Similarly, another article by Waskul, titled: “Viet Orphan Unable to Adjust, Wants to Return” tells the story of Son Minh Nguyen, a man with one arm who was adopted ten years earlier. The article, like the title suggests, explains how Nguyen, now 21 years old, struggles with American life and wishes he was back in Vietnam. Nguyen mentions several different grievances with U.S. culture and society, best summed up by himself in the quote “I cannot get accepted in America. They can’t accept me and I can’t accept them.”<sup>161</sup> While not a part of operation babylift it is stated in the beginning that:

“While hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese are desperately trying to get out of their country, a South Vietnamese orphan who has been living in Southern California for a decade wants to return home.”<sup>162</sup>

Despite the article being written sometime after the babylift, it becomes apparent that it is designed as a warning. Here it uses Nguyen as a glimpse into the future, making him into an eerie prophecy of what is to come for the numerous newly adopted Vietnamese orphans. This is highlighted not only through the many stories of not fitting in to U.S. society, but also Nguyen’s statements that “I would like to go back to the simple and enjoyable life I had in Vietnam. Whether it’s communist or not,”<sup>163</sup> signaling that Nguyen has not embraced American values in his ten years in the U.S. Looking back to the article ““Boat People’ Discover snow, Football,”<sup>164</sup> Waskul’s article is the exact opposite of this interpretation of America. As mentioned earlier, Nguyen’s case is used as evidence to deconstructs the

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<sup>161</sup> Greg Waskul, “Viet Orphan Unable to Adjust, Wants to Return,” the Los Angeles Times, 24.04.75, 3, 30, part i.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> United Press International, ““Boat People’ Discover snow, Football,” the Los Angeles Times, 26.03.80, 7, part viii.



discourse surrounding the “good” refugee, framing the orphans as not bad now, but bad for the U.S. at a later date. As such the indirect criticism of the orphans, through Nguyen, is done in this manner because direct criticism of orphans would not be tolerated by the public. Meanwhile the construction, yet again, of a “what if”-scenario serves the purpose of delegitimizing the future for these children, citing the evidence that they are simply incompatible. This is in no doubt a racist remark and is even addressed by Nguyen’s mother who says that “Of course, it was somewhat more difficult for him than other children, because South Vietnamese culture is totally different from Western culture.”<sup>165</sup> Thereby toning down the more blatant racial aspects of this article. Just like the other article written by Waskul the essence of any true meaning or political statement is absent, which in turn gives the article plausible deniability. However, the representation of the Vietnamese orphans as “bad” does not take the form of directly representing the orphans, but rather as displacing American orphans “more deserving” of adoption, thus creating a discourse where the circumstances make the Vietnamese orphans “bad.”

## 6.2 The “Bad” Evacuated Refugee

The representations of the Vietnamese evacuees from Saigon as “bad” can be seen in the Los Angeles Times almost immediately. In the article “State Fears Influx of Refugees,” fears regarding the economic impact of the refugees, illustrate other reoccurring representation of Vietnamese as “bad” immigrants. As mentioned earlier, the historical context of 1975 places the U.S. in the middle of a recession. The article mentions this by stating: “There is something a little strange about saying, ‘Lets bring in 500,000 more people,’ when we can’t take care of the 1 million we have who are out of work.”<sup>166</sup> Consequently the article presents the same zero-sum argument as was presented by Waskul when writing about the Vietnamese orphans. Therefore, the notion of the refugees themselves being bad is not present, but rather the inability to facilitate this many refugees is brought forward as an argument. The assumption that the refugees would be, as stated earlier, unemployed, unable to work or poor speaks volumes on the true perceptions of the Vietnamese. As seen earlier this article does not change the discourse surrounding the Vietnamese refugees, and constructs a hypothetical

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<sup>165</sup> Greg Waskul, “Viet Orphan Unable to Adjust, Wants to Return,” the Los Angeles Times, 24.04.75, 3, 30, part i.

<sup>166</sup> Richard West, “State Fears Influx of Refugees,” the Los Angeles Times, 24.04.75, 3, 30, part i.

scenario where the Vietnamese refugees will burden the U.S. The representation of the Vietnamese as a burden is conveyed mainly through their inability to work, and by extension being unproductive. The same notion is seen in the representation of the Vietnamese as sick as seen in the quote “‘We understand that as many as 100,000 refugees may be coming into this area (San Francisco) without health screening,’ he said. ‘They could bring polio, tuberculosis, virus dysentery and other communicable diseases.’”<sup>167</sup> While some points in the article may seem sympathetic towards the Vietnamese evacuees as seen with the quote, “The tragedy of Vietnam is felt deeply by all Americans. It would be a strange attitude, indeed if we were not willing to do our best,”<sup>168</sup> their representation as a burden shows the true intention of the article. The discourse is thus presented in such a manner that should the article be criticized for being anti-immigrant the author can claim plausible deniability, based on its use of both sympathetic and non-sympathetic rhetoric towards the Vietnamese. As argued before this is most likely done to present the article as neutral. Moreover, the article can align itself as thought provoking, instead of racist.

As more and more Vietnamese evacuees entered the United States, the discourse surrounding the Vietnamese as “bad” for the U.S. economy continued. For instance, in the article “State Moves to Bar Big Influx of Vietnamese.” This article is a follow-up on: “State Fears Influx of Refugees,” printed the previous day. Even though the articles are only one day apart some noticeable changes occur, particularly with regards to the questioning of racist motives behind the proposed ban. “Obledo was asked by a reporter whether a ‘yellow peril hysteria’ was creeping into the Brown ‘administration’s reaction to this situation.’ Obledo indicated it was not, [...]”<sup>169</sup> This is the first time racism is implicated in official decisions. What is noteworthy is that rather than defining the narrative themselves, the newspaper in this instance lets Obledo define what his actions are. Obledo’s explanation is the same explanation given by previous articles:

“The concern of the (state) administration is the fact that persons will be brought into the state that will only create additional problems in the job market, in the benefit payment sector, in areas of health and welfare. . .”<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Richard West, “State Fears Influx of Refugees,” the Los Angeles Times, 24.04.75, 3, 30, part i.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>169</sup> Richard West, “State Moves to Bar Big Influx of Vietnamese,” the Los Angeles Times, 25.04.75, 1, 13, 14, part i.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

This seemingly innocent and “true” statement represents the Vietnamese as unemployable and sickly in the process. This is yet another example of Hermann and Chomsky’s propaganda model, which suggests that one of the mechanisms behind official statements, as seen in this article, is the way in which the news media simply relays information provided to them, and by exertion in this case lets the Brown administration set the discourse.

Another key aspect in the Los Angeles Times’ discourse comes from its readers, through letters sent to the paper. As discussed earlier the paper has not only portrayed the refugees as “bad”, but also as “helpless” and “good.” Some outspoken readers take offence to the newspaper’s discourse and thus seek to create their own. For instance, in a response to the editorial “About Those Refugees ...” the author intentionally appears to imply immigrants are “bad”: “There goes the neighborhood... We owe these people nothing... We already have more economic problems than we can handle...”<sup>171</sup> This argument is then quickly turned around by presenting the article’s true meaning, namely how the Vietnamese are not a danger to the U.S. economy, by stating: “[...] they would add about one-tenth of one percent to the unemployment rate.”<sup>172</sup> This article angered a lot of people, and some wrote reader’s letters addressing the Los Angeles Times. One such response was the untitled letter written by Temple City, Los Angeles resident Mary M. Morabito. In the letter Morabito argues that “this nation has sacrificed more than 50,000 American sons, countless arms and legs, billions of dollars.”<sup>173</sup> She also describes Vietnam as: “a tiny Asian country about as far away as any can geographically be.” She also applauds the Brown administration in trying to prevent the influx of refugees.<sup>174</sup> Her argument is largely the same as the discourse presented before, namely that the U.S. economy cannot handle any more refugees, as seen in her statement “had the people not cried out, our depressed community would have broken under the weight.”<sup>175</sup> However, she also adds the notion that the U.S. does not owe any more to the Vietnamese people and frames the Vietnam War as a pointless war. In the response she uses this fact to address the pointlessness of meddling in other people’s affairs, yet as discussed earlier, Morabito also assumes the worst when it comes to the Vietnamese refugees, that all of the Vietnamese people will have to be on some sort of welfare, and thus will become a huge drain on society.

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<sup>171</sup> The Los Angeles Times, “About Those Refugees ...,” 29.04.75, 4, part ii.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Mary M. Morabito, “Letters to The Times,” the Los Angeles Times, 04.05.75, 2, part viii.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

While Morabito outright states that she is against immigration, other letters express more concern as seen earlier, an example of this is Elizabeth Penny-Tinoco from Pasadena, who in her letter to the Los Angeles Times expresses mixed feelings about the Vietnamese immigrants as she states: “[...] how far U.S. officials are going to accommodate the entrance of these people into American society, while my husband, a Mexican citizen, has been waiting since last July to get his visa [...]”<sup>176</sup> The notion of the zero-sum game is thus present in Penny-Tinoco’s letter as she fears that she and her husband will take a back seat due to the influx of Vietnamese. This type of previously mentioned discourse expresses the same notion that although these people are deserving of help, the United States cannot afford it, as it will come at the cost of American, and in some cases other immigrant groups, lives. This sentiment implies that the lives of American families are more important than that of the Vietnamese, and therefore presents the Vietnamese refugees as something “bad”.

One final note on the letters is given by the Los Angeles Times addressing the responses to the editorial, where out of 88 letters 57 were positive, 19 were opposed and 12 were mixed. Out of the 11 published in the Los Angeles Times, 3 are mixed, 1 is opposed and the remaining 7 is showing support for the Vietnamese refugees. This shows that there is a conscious effort by the newspaper to feature voices that are in favor of the Vietnamese refugees. The letters are a good indicator of the political climate surrounding this issue, yet the fact that the Los Angeles Times handpicks their responses also indicates the control they wield over this discourse.

The last way in which the evacuated Vietnamese refugees is represented as bad is through the amount of money it will cost to relocate them. This can be seen in articles like “Relocation Cost of Refugee May Hit \$605 Million.” The cost of resettlement is discussed with the White House secretary Ron Nessen, who is positive to the relocation in the interview, saying that negative attitudes towards resettlement “does not represent the thinking of a majority of Americans.”<sup>177</sup> Despite Nessen’s positive attitude towards the subject, the underlying fear of the Vietnamese as a burden lies within the articles questioning of the price tag. This is done through meticulously breaking down the particulars of the 605-million-dollar budget “\$132

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<sup>176</sup> Elizabeth Penny-Tinoco, “Letters to The Times,” the Los Angeles Times, 04.05.75, 2, part viii.

<sup>177</sup> Paul Houston, “Relocation Cost of Refugees May Hit \$605 Million,” the Los Angeles Times, 06.05.75, 1, 16, part i.

million for the refugee airlift, \$30 million for the sealift, \$35 million for setting up processing centers in the Pacific [...]"<sup>178</sup> The article continues for some time with this breakdown. As seen before, the negativity directed towards the Vietnamese cannot be seen outright, however their representation in this article shows the intended purpose. This line of reasoning carries the preconceived notion that the Vietnamese are a burden, despite any evidence of this. This leads to the Vietnamese yet again being depicted as an economic burden, not only for the local communities, but also for the federal government who will have to relocate all the refugees.

### 6.3 The "Bad" Boat People

In the representation of the Vietnamese refugees as good, the article "Refugees Who Fled Strife Face Neighbors' Hostility," was used as an example of how the Los Angeles Times used the grievances of one woman to contradict preconceived notions of the Vietnamese, through the use of "experts." Among these experts providing their testimonials, were the landlords praising their good behavior. The exact opposite representation can be found on the same page under the title "Refugees Find Trouble Making the Twain Meet," by the author Phil Garlington. After reading the article it becomes apparent why it is separated from the main article that represents the refugees as good, as it represents the boat people as savages, who struggle to adapt to American culture. It features an interview with a nameless Linda Vista landlord, who compares the Vietnamese evacuated refugees with the boat people, is quoted saying: "The refugees coming in now, however are more 'the boat people,' who come from a far less sophisticated background."<sup>179</sup> The article while explicitly racist, represents the boat people as maladjusted people who quite literally and who "Urinate in the street,"<sup>180</sup> this can be seen as bridging the gap between orientalism and racism. Whilst featuring copious amounts of racist representations of the boat people such as: "If Linda Vista residents see a tribesman do that they think he's a barbarian," and "These Vietnamese run around in their underwear,"<sup>181</sup> also goes out of its way to also praise the Vietnamese with quotes like "They

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<sup>178</sup> Paul Houston, "Relocation Cost of Refugees May Hit \$605 Million," the Los Angeles Times, 06.05.75, 1, 16, part i.

<sup>179</sup> Phil Garlington, "Refugees Find Trouble Making the Twain Meet," the Los Angeles Times, 12.01.79, 1, part ii.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

are goddam tough,”<sup>182</sup> albeit condescending, when seen together with the other statements. This creates a duality within the article representing the Vietnamese as savages without common life skills, while also praising their toughness in the same article. This is in no doubt done to lessen the burden of racist representations featured in the interview, serving the purpose of being able to have racist representations, while the latter part serves as a way to justify the statements made earlier. Here the question of why this segment of the same article is presented as its own article. This is done due to the stark contrast of the representations present in the two articles. The inclusion of this interview also warrants an explanation, due to its several racist representations. This separation is strange since even in the spirit of showing both sides of the argument, it is out of place due to its unapologetic anti boat people rhetoric. The discourse presented is thus a more direct and unapologetic form of representation, where bad abilities are not only implied but outright stated. Accordingly, for the first time the bad character of the Vietnamese is represented outright.

Up to this point the discourse surrounding the Vietnamese immigrant’s health has largely been a discourse surrounding the cost associated with the treatment of immigrants. However, this changes with the boat people as they go from being represented as a burden on the taxpayer, due to the cost of treatment for diseases, to being represented as a disease carrier. The first mention of this is the article “Influx of Refugees Brings Concern for Public Health,” by the author Evan Maxwell. The article seeks to change the discourse from cost to disease control. It is stated that the influx of “third world” or “illegal aliens” will send the U.S. back to the “19<sup>th</sup>-century standards of public health”<sup>183</sup> The article takes the notion of the disease-ridden boat people one step further as it states that the average American is under threat by these people. The article simply states facts about the situation, however the representational aspect of the article tells another story, as the boat people are described as “But entry of poor, largely uneducated immigrants – whether refugee or ‘boat people’ [...]” The inclusion of poor and uneducated is a discourse marker largely irrelevant to the informative aspect of the article. However, the discourse markers can be seen as an attempt to represent the boat people as more than just disease carriers, thus more negative traits are assumed to make the representation more in line with the intent of the story, namely, to represent the boat people as

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<sup>182</sup> Phil Garlington, “Refugees Find Trouble Making the Twain Meet,” the Los Angeles Times, 12.01.79, 12, part ii.

<sup>183</sup> Evan Maxwell, “Influx of Refugees Brings Concern for Public Health,” the Los Angeles Times, 23.07.79, 8, 18, part i.

a threat to the United States. As seen in previously mentioned articles such as, “State Moves to Bar Big Influx of Vietnamese,” this discourse is not new, from its first assumptions that the Vietnamese would be disabled to the outright statement that these people are dangerous disease carriers. It becomes apparent that yet again the more direct representation of the Vietnamese boat people as “bad”, is a more accepted representation. The article hides behind the concern for the American people much like the article preceding it, its racist representations however mirrors that of the landlord interview, as education plays no part in disease control and is thus purely a discourse marker for contempt.

To highlight the misrepresentation of the boat people regarding their representations as disease carriers, articles like UPI’s “High Rate of TB, Parasitic Diseases Found in Refugees,” were created. The story contains a lot of the same material concerning the boat people’s health and tackles the fact that a lot of the boat people are sick as seen in the quote: “The agency said parasitic infections were common among the refugees.”<sup>184</sup> Where the article stands out is in its representation of the Vietnamese, not as a danger to society but rather as victims. This is done through statements like “It will likely represent a personal rather than a public health problem.”<sup>185</sup> To further this point no mention of the immigrant’s education level or other irrelevant information is brought up. This article clearly highlights the malicious intentions of the “Influx of Refugees Brings Concern for Public Health,” as it clearly overstates the health risks associated with immigration. Furthermore, the article by UPI highlights how the diseases pose no danger to the public but rather “Most of the diseases are not contagious.”<sup>186</sup> Here it becomes apparent that the article by Evan Maxwell is not only against the boat people, but is also willing to misrepresent the Vietnamese refugees in order to achieve his political goals. The discrepancy in the two representations lead to the article “TB, Refugees: A Prescription for misunderstanding,” by the author Patt Morrison. The article tackles the misrepresented Vietnamese boat people in a similar way that the UPI does, only this time it debunks some of the false statements made earlier, by among others Maxwell. The article debunks a lot of the claims by using experts and doctors to point this out, something that was also seen in Maxwells story. However, where the article stands out is in its

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<sup>184</sup> United Press International, “High Rate of TB, Parasitic Diseases Found in Refugees,” the Los Angeles Times, 26.08.79, 13, part i.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

explanation of how “Medication for disease is inexpensive, effective,”<sup>187</sup> thus tackling one of the most longstanding representations of the Vietnamese as too expensive to save, due to the cost associated with their health care.<sup>188</sup> Although the article debunks a lot of the claims made earlier, article published later will show that the public does not care about the truth or more factual standpoint.

When discussing the letter sent to the Los Angeles Times on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1975, regarding the evacuees from Saigon, the paper included some information saying that the majority of the letters were in favor of saving the evacuees. The same concern is addressed regarding the boat people, where the paper this time states that the letters in response to a previous editorial is “200 to 1 in favor of AMERICA FIRST.”<sup>189</sup> Some highlights of the letters are present where the author states among other things “Are we going to let overbreeding Asiatic take over our country? We should help them only if they agree to be sterilized!”<sup>190</sup> and “Now it is fashionable to open up our country to Vietnamese who are bringing more diseases with them than we have cures for. I think it’s a communist plot to destroy this country.”<sup>191</sup> By suggesting that all Asians should be sterilized, the letter does not even try to mask their contempt towards all Asians. The quote knowingly promotes eugenics towards all presumably non-white people and by doing so promotes a discourse where one race is superior to the other. The true thought process behind this racist statement is difficult to discern, because its message is so xenophobic and racist that it may do more harm to the authors case than good. This however may ultimately be why it was selected to be printed by the editors of the Los Angeles Times. One noteworthy aspect in this article is how the public response has changed, while the evacuees largely held support from the readers of the Los Angeles Times, the same cannot be said for the boat people. It is noteworthy that the editors’ distance themselves from the letters sent to the newspaper, when they are responsible for publishing these opinions in the first place? The discourse of the Vietnamese as a financial burden has already been addressed. The same goes for the notion of the Vietnamese as disease carrying people. All these aforementioned discourses are subject to the Los Angeles Times at a previous point in time. It also shows how the paper tries to be neutral while its reader is not. This can be seen as a

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<sup>187</sup> Patt Morrison, “TB, Refugees: A Prescription for misunderstanding,” the Los Angeles Times, 17.10.79, 1, 4, part ii.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Abigail Van Buren, “Readers Line Up With ‘America First,’” the Los Angeles Times, 24.09.79, 3, part ii.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.



prime example of flack and enforcers, with the main focuses in this instance being the flack component of the theory. A point to be made is how the two groups of people, who are largely the same people, with the inclusion of some Cambodians with regards to the boat people, gets such differing treatment.

As a final note one possible answer to this question lies with the changing political landscape in the 1980s, where immigration becomes a politicized issue, and by extension the discourse surrounding immigration changes. This can be seen in the increased focus on illegal aliens and border defense towards Mexico. This sentiment can largely be said to be held against anyone of non-European decent and thus by extension the Vietnamese. The letters sent to the Los Angeles Times reflect the political sentiments held by some people at the time, making the statements made in these letters even more disturbing. The fact that the Los Angeles Times published these opinions have a legitimizing effect on the “fringe” opinions expressed in the paper.

During the analysis of the good refugee one of the main ways of showing how good the refugees were, was to represent the Vietnamese refugees as fully internalizing American values. Of particular importance was the value of anti-communism, which was seen as a strength in the people fleeing. However, during the boat people crisis, the narrative is questioned, and the opposite is proposed. This has been mentioned earlier in the article “Viet Orphan Unable to Adjust, Wants to Return,” where Nguyen stated that he did not understand or like American culture. This discourse is modified later with help of the boat people, where their loyalty as new Americans is questioned. The questioning of their loyalty is mainly brought up by the article “Spies Reported With Refugees.” The article tells how “Vietnamese posing as ‘boat people’ refugees have infiltrated the United States,”<sup>192</sup> and “Vietnamese infiltrators have been aboard nearly every boat that has left Vietnam in the last six months”<sup>193</sup> it is pointed out that the “real” Vietnamese boat people are afraid of the spies, due to the fear of reprisals, should they give up their identity. This leads to the article representing the Vietnamese as untrustworthy, this is done to cast doubt about the motives of the fleeing Vietnamese boat people, and while the article does not say that all boat people are spies, the accusations that comes fourth with this argument badly on all boat people. This is also a significant marker of discourse as it seeks to redefine the notion that the Vietnamese boat

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<sup>192</sup> Associated Press, “Spies Reported With Refugees,” the Los Angeles Times, 26.08.79, 13, part i.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

people are good Americans. The aforementioned way of casting doubt is a way to dislodge any and all positive statements made about the refugees. Interestingly the U.S. government addresses the issue saying that “The best way to handle this is to let them in, watch them and then pick up the whole nationwide ring.”<sup>194</sup> While this is done to monitor the situation and find out more about the agent’s mission, the overall effect is that of furthered suspicion, as the U.S. government has confirmed the entry of Vietnamese spies in the country.

While analyzing the many representations of the boat people as “bad”, one representation stands out as being more prevalent in late 1979, early 1980, and that is the representation of the boat people as a burden. One key aspect of this time period is the first integration of the boat people into U.S. society. The article about the boat people is more a reflection of how things are going to be in their new home, and not their motives for escaping. Of particular concern is overcrowding, the first article to state this problem is “Worse Crowding Expected in Schools.” The article tells the story of several schools in downtown Los Angeles who fear that the influx of boat people is going to, as the title suggest, overcrowd the local schools. While the article is sympathetic to the struggle of the Vietnamese, it also frames the issues of the community as the Vietnamese’s fault, as can be seen in the quote “She said the overcrowded community leads to a greater incidence of disease.”<sup>195</sup> This stamen illustrates how the use of disease becomes an important tool in framing the Vietnamese as the villain, while the reference to overcrowding is used to illustrate how local communities cannot handle any more people. The teachers and schools site safety, substandard classrooms as well as the poor living conditions of the Vietnamese resulting in some of them having to share a bed with so many people that the bed is slept in continually as a practice of “hot-bedding.”<sup>196</sup> However, this ultimately reveals a lack of sympathy, as the lack of critical questions posed to these practices by the schools, in turn make the representation of the Vietnamese as a burden to both house and educate. This is a practice shown several times in this thesis and is common when dealing with controversial topics. Similarly, this way of reporting is also present in the editorial: “Cities Swamped by Boat People’s Needs,” by Neal R. Peirce. In the editorial the same notion is expressed as seen in the quote:

“Racially tense U.S. cities, already fiscally strapped, are, without advance notice, being forced to cope with a fast-rising tide of largely uneducated, non-English

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<sup>194</sup> Associated Press, “Spies Reported With Refugees,” the Los Angeles Times, 26.08.79, 13, part i.

<sup>195</sup> Kevin Roderick, “Worse Crowding Expected in Schools,” the Los Angeles Times, 01.12.79, 9, part i.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

speaking, welfare dependent ‘Boat people’ and other destitute refugees from Southeast Asia.”<sup>197</sup>

The article thus hints at the “racial incompatibility” between boat people and Americans. This and other racists remark, such as uneducated and welfare dependent, represents the Vietnamese as a “bad” addition to U.S. society. This portrayal in turn represents the boat people as an enormous drain on local resources. The continuation of previously debunked narratives such as the boat people being sick is also carried over in these articles. This shows that the discourse of the sick boat people as well as the burdensome refugee carries over into 1980, confirming that the representation of the Vietnamese as bad continues, with the same aggressive rhetoric as seen before 1980.

To summarize this chapter the main features of the Vietnamese as “bad”, comes in the form of concern for Americans. This is seen with the discourse of a zero-sum mindset, as well as a concern for the economic impact immigration. While these features are most common with the evacuees and orphans, the boat people’s character is more heavily attacked, featuring accusations of disease spreading as well as being represented as poor and uneducated. All bad representations, apart from the orphans, feature racist representations illustrated by stereotypes used as evidence against the Vietnamese. Overall, the boat people are most commonly represented as bad.

## 7. Discussion

### 7.1 The “Helpless” Vietnamese

Most of the articles posted in the Los Angeles Times represent Vietnamese refugees as helpless. Indeed, helplessness was by far the largest representative category. This representation comes either as outright stated or is implicit in the discourse. A lot of the day-to-day discourse presented in this manner, regarding the refugees as helpless, is because most articles are mere summation of facts. Meanwhile, most articles surrounding, in particular, the evacuation of Saigon depict the United States’ role as a “great savior” of these people. One fact that need to be addressed is the many possibilities for why the articles choose to represent

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<sup>197</sup> Neil R. Peirce, “Cities Swamped by Boat People’s Needs,” the Los Angeles Times, 10.02.80, 5, part v.

the Vietnamese as helpless, and by far the most common is to achieve some political goal. The focus on their helplessness is used to promote interventionism in Vietnam, but also used by the opposition to promote non-interventionism. All this is a matter of discourse, making some political statements in favor of interventionism a matter of ending the conflict with honor. While others see the helplessness of the refugees as a sign that the U.S. has overreached and done enough to exacerbate the suffering of the Vietnamese people. However as shown in this thesis the non-interventionists take a back seat to the noble mission of saving the Vietnamese people. Another aspect of this is how the American public was first introduced to the refugees, namely the orphans. The noble mission of saving the orphans and the discourse surrounding it is thus extended to the Vietnamese evacuees, who undoubtedly had their discourse set by the orphans that preceded them.

One explanation of the enthusiasm shown in “saving people” from the fall of Saigon is that failing to do so would in turn mean an admission of defeat in Vietnam. If the articles are discussed and analyzed through this lens, it conveniently lines up with previous U.S. involvement in Indochina, as a savior from communism. This can also be extended to explain why the boat people got the lackluster response from the public compared to the evacuated refugees. Thus, the boat people had the opposite effect, tearing up old memories of Vietnam, and its complicated and difficult history. While the admission of guilt and moving on lends itself poorly in the boat people’s favor, their representation as helpless is also the dominant representation in the Los Angeles Times. As with the evacuated refugees and orphans, the boat people garnered a lot of sympathy through this representation. However, what is notable is although their representation as helpless was similar in discourse as the boat refugees, what is strangely absent is the enthusiasm to save these people, even though their hardships can be seen as exponentially more challenging than that of the evacuated refugees. This is not to say that the evacuated refugees were not in any peril, but rather to address that if the argument of endangerment is to be presented as reasoning behind the evacuation, the public outcry for the boat people could be ten times that of the evacuated refugees.

Another aspect of the Los Angeles Times is the use of helplessness as a way of delegitimizing the North Vietnamese. While the hardships endured under the Vietnam War and the years after are in no doubt truly horrifying, the sense that the willingness by the U.S. government to accept this large number of refugees serves a larger political purpose cannot be understated. As recently discussed, the rescue of the evacuated refugees can be seen as a way to end the

conflict without admitting defeat. While this paper is not concerned with other groups of immigrants, it is however noteworthy how the boat people are admitted to the United States meanwhile a border fence and increased border control towards Mexico is implemented during this same period. With this in mind, the admission of the boat people can be seen as a way of delegitimizing the communist Vietnam by showing its people fleeing, and in doing so the same narrative of helplessness is used to convey the importance of rescuing these people. Remarkably this way of framing the narrative also robs the Vietnamese of any say in their own representation, as the questions asked in interviews and the framing of the discourse all portray them as helpless to some extent. This being said it is also worth mentioning that the Vietnamese, if presented with a choice, would have had an advantage in playing along with this narrative. This can be first and foremost seen in the evacuation of Saigon and the immediate aftermath where the elite of South Vietnamese society is portrayed as having lost everything and struggling to start anew.

As for the discourse of the helpless Vietnamese orphans, while more helpless than any other group within society, their representation as helpless is not so cut and dry as it first seems. While the orphan's role as softening the stance of immigration from Asia is well documented, their status as needing to be saved is questionable as this as well as all the other refugees can be seen as a way of delegitimizing North Vietnam. Thus, the act of "saving" the orphans communicates (1) how much better the United States is and (2) how dangerous and bad the communist North Vietnamese are. While used in several ways, most of the time the representation is implicitly stated, and no other particular marker of discourse is used other than framing the situation as bad, as the Vietnamese are unable to help themselves and thus by default require help. This is mostly a continuation of the previous discourse that led the U.S. to engage in the Vietnam War in the first place.

## 7.2 The "Good" Vietnamese

The representation of the "good" refugee is first and foremost used when representing the Vietnamese evacuees and the Vietnamese orphans. The way this is done is by presenting the Vietnamese as American. This takes several different forms throughout, some noteworthy instances being when it is combined with orientalism to show how the Vietnamese are

struggling to understand everything American, but in doing so shows a tremendous will to learn and understand their new country. However, this representation as “almost American,” is challenged when articles try to represent the Vietnamese as highly skilled. The reason for this being that the Vietnamese refugees, in their representation as highly skilled, is presented in a way that does not create any conflict in the existing job market. Thus, a duality within the representations as good is created where on one hand the Vietnamese are represented as easily integrated, and by extension an active part of U.S. society, and another where they are presented as merely filling in the voids in the American job market without any interference. A consequence of the heightened media attention given to the evacuees is the revelation that the evacuation is largely an evacuation of South Vietnam’s elites, with prominent figures of the South Vietnamese regime being featured in the newspaper as one of the first arrivals to the U.S. mainland. This is also highlighted in the article discussing refugee skills revealing that the evacuees are highly educated.

The orphans on the other had get a more complex representation as “good.” This is done by showing how the act of adoption is a way of saving children from the communist North Vietnam. Consequently, the act of adoption here is seen as good, and implicitly the orphans must be represented as “good” for this argument to work. This argument is discussed in detail with the Bankester family and their adoption of the Vietnamese orphan, who is traumatized by his journey to the United States, but is presented by the family as a great gift. With this in mind, it becomes apparent that the use of Vietnamese orphans, compared to the boat people, is a way of highlighting further involvement in Vietnam.

The lack of excitement surrounding the boat people can be seen in the extremely limited number of articles representing them as good. Even when the boat people are represented as good this is done through the use of orientalism and bordering on racism, though this is avoided with the addition of some positive elements, often attributed to their character. Of particular note is the way they are represented as quiet and sticking to themselves. This is presented as a positive attribute in the Vietnamese boat people, but regardless is the opposite to the positive representation seen with the Vietnamese evacuees.

The defense of the Vietnamese refugees also becomes a way of presenting them as “good.” This argument is noteworthy as it features the Vietnamese being defended, and thus in the process the Vietnamese as “bad” must be included to make this statement. With this in mind

the “good” refugee is largely hinged on the argument that these people are good for the United States or these people are misrepresented. This shows how even when the refugees are represented as “good” there is an underlying sentiment that you have to prove yourself to be able to access the United States. This is also ironic as without the United States’ involvement in Vietnam none of this would have happened, making the act of the evacuating South Vietnam’s elites before ultimately asking “why should I save you?,” an act of kindness with conditions.

### 7.3 The “Bad” Vietnamese

When discussing the Vietnamese orphans as “bad” one notable aspect is their lack of “bad” representations in general. As shown in the analysis only two articles, during operation babylift, represents some aspect of the orphans as “bad.” While this is notable, especially compared to the number of “bad” representations of the boat people, the notion of the immigrants as taking something away from the United States is present in the discourse surrounding the orphans as well. Exactly what is removed or lost is then just a matter of what flavor of xenophobia you prefer, as time and time again the Vietnamese are presented as a massive burden to U.S. society. The most prevalent of this last discourse is the Vietnamese as an economic burden. This discourse can partially be explained by the fact that the U.S., and especially California, was in the middle of a recession. This also explains the focus when representing the Vietnamese as “good”, as a lot of the discourse in representing the Vietnamese as “good” is dedicated to showing that they will be good for the economy and not burden it.

One of the most crucial aspect in the Vietnamese representation as bad is the introverted focus. While the representations of “helpless” and “good” often has a foreign policy focus surrounding the articles, as this discourse often manifests itself as “these people need to be saved from communism.” Their representation as “bad” is strictly limited to what this would mean for the United States. Moreover, this is exactly the opposite of what the other articles convey, as their message is often that this situation needs to be seen in a larger context. Additionally, it is worth pointing out that despite the U.S.-centric focus the article still

manages to not stand at odds with the foreign policy goals of the U.S. This is best exemplified as the attitude of “enough has been done for these people and they can help themselves.”

Explicit racism, as far as this thesis is concerned, only reveals itself when representing the Vietnamese as bad, as opposed to implicit racism that takes the form of “polite” or “sweet” yet condescending narratives that are implicitly racist. This is most obvious in the blatant misrepresentation of the Vietnamese as disease carriers endangering American lives. This argument was falsified in the analysis part of the thesis, yet the notion of the disease spreader is nothing new as far as immigration goes.<sup>198</sup> The question thus becomes why the Vietnamese are represented this way, and the answer to this lies in the broader representation of the Vietnamese as “bad.” The continued discourse concerning itself with the Vietnamese as a burden uses the same arguments as presented earlier when presenting the Vietnamese as an economic burden. This representation bridges the line between critical discourse and racism in its inherent belief that all Vietnamese people, particularly those of lower education, pose a health risk. Combined with the fact that this argument is false, the way in which some articles insinuate that these people are inferior for being “disease ridden” can only be categorized as racism.

The last finding in this thesis is the prevalence of the Vietnamese boat people represented as “bad.” The boat people get the harshest treatment and toughest rhetoric aimed at not only themselves but also their motives. The boat people are often viewed with suspicion, and while this is nothing new compared with the Vietnamese evacuees, the boat people does not have the luxury of being represented in a good way to counteract this bad representation. Even when the boat people are presented as “good” it almost always includes the use of orientalism. Furthermore, their education level is also scrutinized, this aids in representing them as uneducated and stupid. All these factors are combined in some way when the Los Angeles Times presents articles about the boat people, representing them as the worst of the three subgroups discussed.

## 8. Conclusion

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<sup>198</sup> Patt Morrison, “TB, Refugees: A Prescription for misunderstanding,” the Los Angeles Times, 17.10.79, 1, 4, Part ii.



This thesis' stated goal was to address how the Los Angeles Times represented Vietnamese Refugees from the Evacuation of Saigon Compared to Subsequent Vietnamese Boat People. Four research questions were outlined in the introduction to develop a deeper investigation into the representation of different groups/types of immigrant groups within the same geographic area over a specific period of time.

- How is representation of the Vietnamese used in this timeframe?
- How does the presence of orientalism and racism effect Vietnamese representation?
- How does the coverage change between the three categories of refugees?
- Why are the refugees covered this way?

*The first finding in this thesis was in the data collection period were using NVivo and the QCA method led to the use of the “helpless”, “good” and “bad” representation, further analysis could be extrapolated from the relevant articles.* The analysis of the three categories were used to establish a discourse that would be further used to either make a point or political message. This way of using the Vietnamese refugees to make a political statement is used both against them and to support them, it is also used to make political statements against other groups. Most of the discourse surrounding the Vietnamese present them as either someone to be saved or cast aside, this discourse is also present when the Vietnamese is used as comparisons, to the same effect.

As defined in this thesis no positive representations can include racism, thus the inclusion of racism is strictly reserved for the negative portrayals of the Vietnamese. Racism in the Los Angeles Times against the Vietnamese at this time, never explicitly takes the form of skin-color, but rather as a series of implied weaknesses appear in representation of the fleeing Vietnamese. This is, as stated multiple times, most observed when discussing disease among the new arrivals. The effect, however, can be seen in the response letter to the newspaper where this discourse is repeated, albeit with a harsher rhetoric. In the instances where orientalism is used, the representations can be positive, however to the modern reader the phrasing and discourse presenting the oriental may seem dated. Context becomes a clue in this representation as the U.S. to this point had been involved in Vietnam since the 1950s, and the use of orientalism is therefore redundant but is nevertheless often used. Orientalism thus becomes a double-edged sword where it is used to garner sympathy but, as the response letters show, also highlight some of the things that those against the Vietnamese despise. This

led to the conclusion that even though this representation is meant to be good, the representation of the Vietnamese through orientalism, and especially racism, has a negative effect on the discourse surrounding the refugees.

When discussing the change between the three categories of refugees, this thesis deals with historical context as an important factor to consider. This being said, just how much these characterizations of the three categories differs is also an interesting find in itself. Out of the three groups the orphans are discussed most favorably, and they are also allotted the least print time. The second most favorably mentioned is the Vietnamese evacuees, who feature some voices who seek to define them as “bad” but the positive and helpless outnumber this representation. The evacuees and the orphans being in the same timeframe is predictably treated equally, the only difference being in their appearances in the Los Angeles Times. The positive and sometimes welcoming discourse is dropped when five years later the boat people arrive. While the orphans and evacuees are also subject to orientalism and racism this is balanced out with the leading discourse, that these people need to be saved. The boat people however never establish this discourse and combined with the harsher, more racist and dehumanizing representations truly shows them being treated the worst out of the three. Therefore, a noticeable change in the leading discourse is present as not only more, but also harsher critic is levied against the boat people. To sum up the differences in representation the evacuees and orphans are met with enthusiasm, while the boat people are met with skepticism and criticism, despite being victims of the same conflict that the Vietnamese evacuees fled from. This change in narrative is something that can be observed with the hate crimes against Asian Americans today, showing similarly how quickly opinions can change.

When discussing why the newspaper represents the Vietnamese in this way, the historical context provides some of the most important clues. The evacuation of Saigon features heavily the portrayal of the helpless refugee. This is done so as to instill a sense of compassion for the fleeing Vietnamese. This narrative also fits with the overarching narrative of the North Vietnamese communist being so bad you must flee from them. This enthusiasm is also the result of the Vietnam War finally being over, and by doing so includes a broad political spectrum who all serve their political goals by rescuing the refugees. The dissenting voices are concerned with the economic situation in the U.S. and as such do not share the enthusiasm with those who care about the foreign policy. With this in mind we see the main discourse line up with the dominant discourse presented by those in charge of U.S. foreign policy. This

also explains that even though the economy was “better,” the leading discourse surrounding the Vietnamese boat people was not one of enthusiasm, but rather that of skepticism. This can be seen as an extension of the Braceros ban that created the modern conflict with the U.S., as the discourse present in that conflict coincides with the first wave of Vietnamese boat people.

Finally, as the Los Angeles Times expanded the number of journalists, and by extension the number of voices that can be heard within the paper, the overall majority opinion can still be found in the analysis. Regardless of this fact the representation of the Vietnamese largely coincides with some other political issues present at the time. One example being how President Ford uses the refugees as a way of signaling to other NATO allies that the U.S. can be trusted. To answer the main thesis question, the representation of Vietnamese immigrant representation is varied, something that is expected within such a large newspaper. However, the trends seen in their representation is largely determined with what issue the Vietnamese are connected to, making their representation largely politically motivated. The narrative of the “freed refugee” fit with the sense of U.S. freedom from tyranny and by extension a victory in the Vietnam War. This narrative is no longer needed when the boat people arrive and thus their treatment is significantly harsher than that of the evacuees from Saigon.

## 9. Further Research

During the events discussed in this thesis, the Los Angeles Times often use broad strokes to describe ethnicities in Southeast Asia. Of particular note is the Cambodians who often get grouped in with particularly the Vietnamese boat people. The Cambodians fleeing their country often had to deal with other hardships than the Vietnamese. Despite the Cambodians being a different ethnic group, they too fled a war-torn country that was subject to U.S. involvement in the region. During the research phase of this thesis, I discovered that they often get grouped together with the Vietnamese and in some cases are represented in worse manner than the Vietnamese. Additionally, this thesis only deals with the first instance of the boat people arriving in the U.S., even though the boat people phenomena continued until 1995. With this in mind, some further research could be done into their representation after 1980, which is this thesis’ cut-off point.

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