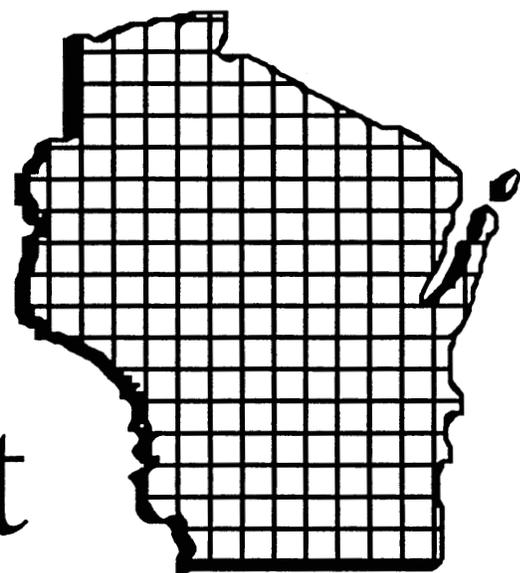


Wisconsin

Policy
Research
Institute

Report



April 1991

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THE
HMONG
IN
WISCONSIN

ON THE ROAD TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Report from the President:

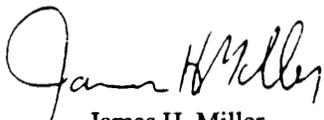
This study came about because the Institute was interested in the Hmong as a welfare migration population in Wisconsin. The author of this study, Simon Fass, was selected based on a national literature search. Simon Fass is a Professor of Political Economy at the University of Texas-Dallas. He has written several reports and articles dealing with the Hmong population in the United States. Fass has also visited the Laotian countryside, from which the Hmong originate, and has an excellent working knowledge of their condition not only in Wisconsin but throughout the rest of the country. His report paints a picture of one of the most interesting people ever to come to the United States. One fascinating part of this report is understanding who the Hmong are. It is extraordinary to find an ethnic group who had no written form of language for over four thousand years. When one thinks about them as a people, Fass's point is well taken--there has never been a group quite like them to immigrate to this country.

Another point made in this report is the likelihood of Hmong children to eventually pull themselves and their adult family out of welfare by their educational achievement. Fass makes a very interesting observation that the Hmong have no history of education nor parental involvement in education in the popular sense of the term. Yet the Hmong, as other immigrant children in the past, have been able to do extraordinarily well in Wisconsin schools. One wonders what this means to the notion that you must have parental choice to improve education!

Another noteworthy point is that the Key States Initiative added flexibility to the current welfare system which enabled the Hmong to improve economically in Wisconsin. While no one would consider a fifty percent welfare rate to be acceptable, considering how far they have come over the last several years there is certainly reason to believe that the Hmong in Wisconsin will become an extremely productive group.

There is a major lesson to be learned from this study. Welfare, when given flexibility and when properly administered, can be a positive force for helping poor people to integrate into American society. The Hmong may be proof that people can go on welfare and improve their lives for the next generation. It is certainly clear that few groups have ever come to the United States with less chance of succeeding, but as this report indicates the Hmong in the next century may very well be as successful as other immigrant groups were in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the support of the Norman Bassett Foundation, which gave us funding specifically for this project.



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THE HMONG IN WISCONSIN

ON THE ROAD TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

by

Simon M. Fass, Ph.D.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Indochinese Refugee Resettlement	2
The Hmong In Wisconsin	15
Table 1: Hmong Population in Wisconsin	16
Table 2: Hmong Employment & Income in Wisconsin	18
Table 3: Hmong Use of Public Assistance	19
The Key States Initiative	21
Conclusion	27
Appendix	30

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Acknowledgment

This report draws to a very considerable extent upon information provided by staff of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), the Wisconsin Office of Refugee Assistance and Poverty Programs (Department of Health and Social Services) and refugee Mutual Assistance Associations located around the state; by researchers who work with Hmong; and by ordinary citizens who have a keen interest in their well-being. These individuals include: Toyo Biddle, Robert Buchanan, Jules Bader, Carol Compton, David Doyle, Roger Ebner, Pat Eldred, Linda Gordon, Richard Hamilton, Tou Her, Ray Hutchison, Nancy Kobs, Viluck Kue, Jenny Jensen, Melvin Morgenbesser, Eugene Niewoehner, Nancy Nakkoul, Yai Lee, Ying Lee, Teng Lo, Hoa Luu, Patcharin Peyasantiwong, Dorie Steffen, James Tout, Dennis Tucker, Choj Vang, Chou Vang, Ger Vang, Gray Williams, Khua Yang, Koua Yang, Pao Yang, Song Yang and Kou Xiong.

The author wishes to thank these individuals for their willingness to take time from their busy schedules to talk with him. He especially appreciates their frankness in discussing sensitive issues and their patience in guiding him away from his often too-evident ignorance of basic matters.

Executive Summary

The end of the United States' military involvement in Indochina marked the beginning of a tide of refugee immigration from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos that would accumulate to almost one million individuals between 1975 and 1990. Tucked away in this flow of immigrants was a people from Laos tracing their origins as far back as 2700 B.C. who called themselves Hmong. Over 90,000 of them have come to the United States. Between 17,000 and 20,000 now live in Wisconsin.

Compared to other Indochinese refugees and to disadvantaged minorities within the native population, Hmong have had considerable difficulty integrating themselves into the economic mainstream. Though most have lived in Wisconsin for more than five years, more than half the adults remain unemployed today and half the families continue to receive public welfare assistance from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Unemployed Parent (AFDC-UP) program.

These figures are disturbingly high, but they are not surprising. This country has rarely, if ever, welcomed a group of immigrants so culturally distant from the native social and economic mainstream. Rarely have we absorbed a population that had so little initial understanding of the meaning or purposes of basic things such as participation in a labor market, income production from wage employment, public assistance, or self-sufficiency as our society defines these concepts. Rarely has there been an inflow of people, even if they grasped these things and earnestly tried to live up to our expectations about the attributes of productive citizenship, who were as ill-equipped to do so when they arrived. Yet after an interval of 15 years since the first family arrived in the state, a period during which Hmong and natives helping them sometimes despaired at the possibility of their ever joining the mainstream, there is now a solid basis for hope that this will eventually prove possible for the vast majority.

In part, this hope springs from the observation that rates of unemployment and welfare use have dropped substantially in recent years. Helped by the expansion of employment opportunities in the state since the end of the last recession in 1982, these declines largely resulted from a joint effort by federal and state refugee resettlement agencies and Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs)--self-help organizations that refugee communities establish for themselves wherever they live--to help families take advantage of the opportunities. In operation since 1987, this effort is the Key States Initiative (KSI). In action if not in word, it is a voluntary family economic development program that seeks only one objective: self-sufficiency.

Toward this end KSI adopts a family-focused approach in which staff members design strategies for self-sufficiency to fit the particular circumstances of individual households. It uses a combination of job development and placement services, short-term skills training, on-the-job training, and after-placement follow-up support services to produce a combination of workers, wages, and hours of work in each family sufficient to make total earnings from employment greater than welfare income. KSI also taps funds available in other federal and state programs to extend Medical Assistance for one year beyond termination from welfare and to support transportation and child care costs when necessary.

Because these services are unable to make a difference unless families are willing to take advantage of them, a crucial component of KSI is its reliance on MAAs to carry out its objectives, and on Hmong leaders to encourage families to seek self-sufficiency by volunteering to participate in the program. KSI is thus a public-private partnership through which responsibility for making the program work rests with the Hmong themselves. This community "ownership" of the program seems to have been a key factor in helping more than 600 families, or almost one third of those receiving AFDC-UP when the program began, to move off of welfare during the last three years.

KSI is now working with families that contain adults who are very difficult to employ, that have too many dependents in relation to the earning power of the adults in them, and that have adults who--unlike their predecessors--are not as motivated to become self-sufficient. Progress in the future appears likely to be slower than in the recent past. Yet hope for improvement over the longer term remains high because Hmong children are doing extraordinarily well in school: Grade scores are usually 40% higher than for native Wisconsin students, the high school dropout rate is negligible, the graduation rate is close to 100%, and the share of graduates going on to technical school and college is also very high. If this standard of performance sustains itself, self-sufficiency of the vast majority of the next generation of Hmong adults seems almost guaranteed. Hmong children on welfare today seem to have every likelihood of taking their parents off of welfare tomorrow.

Extending beyond the Hmong, the KSI experience seems to offer at least two messages for future immigrants with similar characteristics and for natives who find difficulty breaking the bonds of welfare support. One is that many reforms introduced into the welfare system in recent years have been long overdue. Some of these changes--accommodation of two-parent families in the system through the AFDC-UP program; case management to address specific constraints faced by different families; more attention to training, child care, and health care needs; and greater allowances for part-time work earnings--now make it possible for the welfare system to do more than it could before. Additional changes might be helpful. Even without them, at the very least the system now contains the flexibility it needs to function as a child protection and income insurance program (welfare's traditional purposes), as a family economic development program, or both.

The second message is that there is room to experiment with different ways of transferring "ownership" of programs and responsibility for their execution to the communities that are to benefit from them. Role modeling and peer-group pressure are much more effective in cultivating a will to seek self-sufficiency than are imposition of mandatory participation in programs or haranguing by government employees. African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans may not have organizations or leadership structures comparable to those of Hmong, but they do have an existing infrastructure of local organizations--such as church-based groups--that present themselves as potential foundations for determining whether a people-centered approach to self-sufficiency similar to KSI can prove helpful.

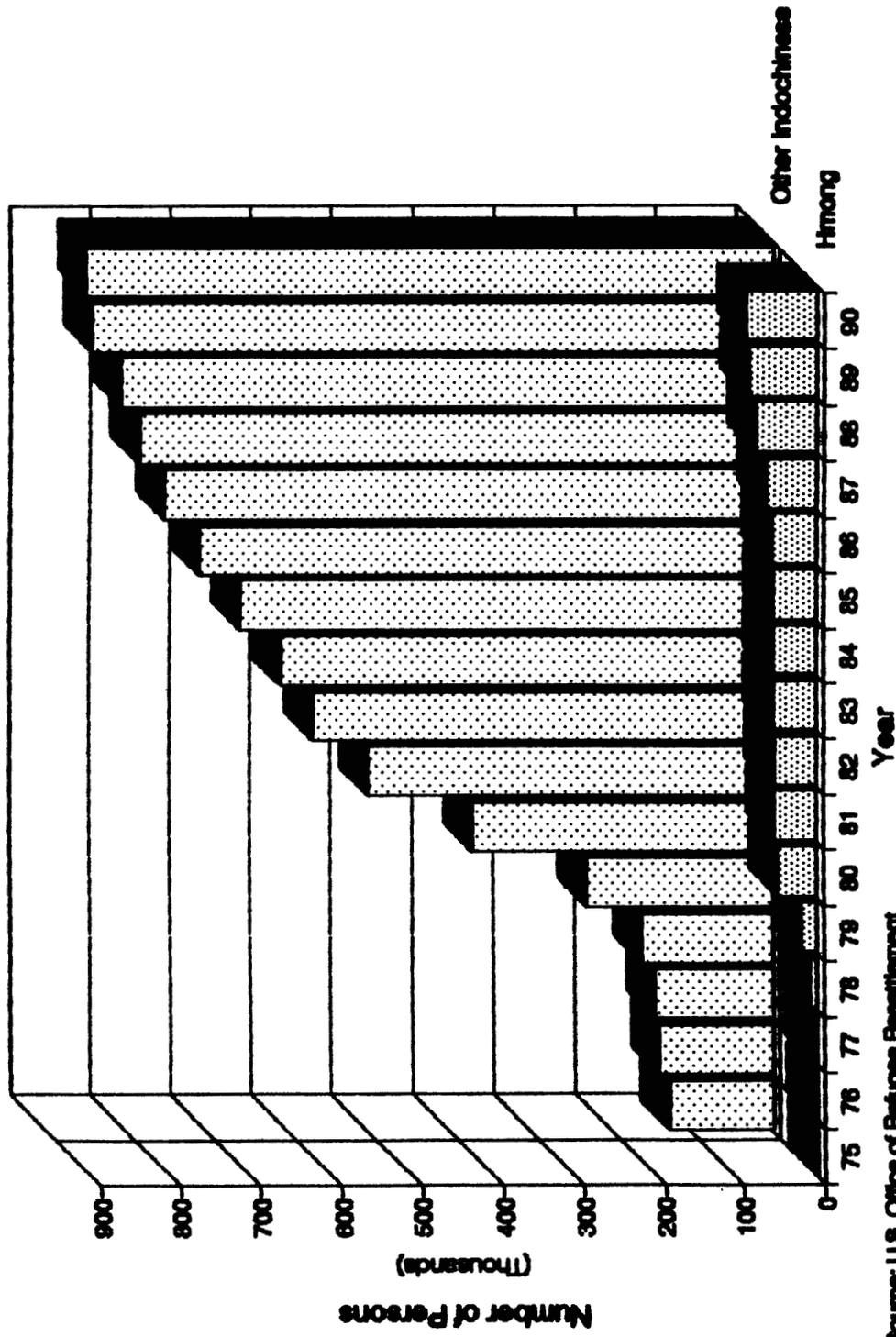
Indochinese Refugee Resettlement

The fall of Saigon, followed by the arrival in the United States of 4,000 Vietnamese per week in May 1975, marked the beginning of a massive exodus and refugee resettlement process that would, over the next 15 years, involve 950,000 persons from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (Figure 1).¹

Confronted with large population inflows for which it had made little preparation, the federal government made several policy decisions between 1975 and 1979 that it hoped would speed the pace of refugee adjustment to U.S. society. With respect to relocating newcomers who did not have family ties in the U.S., government officials believed it advisable to settle them in locations that offered good prospects for absorbing large numbers of unemployed people. They also thought it preferable to select locations where state and local government and private social service agencies seemed willing to provide assistance, particularly employment-related services. Looking

¹The number of non-refugee, legal immigrants to the U.S. since 1975 is about nine million (United States, 1990a). Indochinese refugees thus represent 10% of the total flow. Unless otherwise indicated, all numbers in the text referring to refugees are drawn from information compiled by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Figure 1 Indo-Chinese Refugee Admissions to U.S.
Cumulative, 1975-1990



Source: U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement

to the longer term, officials expected that the spatial distribution of subsequent streams of refugees would be shaped largely by family reunification considerations and by the presence of viable Indochinese communities. This dispersal strategy thus seemed to hold promise for establishing many such communities. With these communities in place, it was hoped that the burden of resettlement would be more rapidly transferred from public and private service agencies to individual families and refugee self-help associations.

This strategy resulted in a scattering of refugees across many states by 1979, with heaviest concentrations in California (32.6%), Texas (8.7%), Washington (4.4%), Illinois (3.7%), Minnesota (3.4%), New York (2.9%), Oregon (2.9%), Pennsylvania (4.1%), and Virginia (2.8%). Population growth rates would vary somewhat, leading to changes in the shares of Indochinese in each state and to the addition of Florida, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin as major receiving areas. However, the spatial distribution of 1979 remained essentially intact through the next decade. The twelve states mentioned contained about 70% of Indochinese refugees in 1979 and 75% in 1990 (Figure 2). Though ranking twelfth in terms of numbers, the share that refugees represent in Wisconsin's total population was and remains small: less than 0.5%. At 3.7 refugees per 1,000 state residents, their density in the state is about the same as the U.S. average of 3.8 (Figure 3).

To temper effects upon state and local jurisdictions, to encourage jurisdictions to provide essential assistance, and to stabilize refugee populations at their points of first resettlement, the federal government introduced a series of policies by which it would cover all resettlement costs for the first 36 months after a refugee's arrival. This included reimbursements to states for their contributions to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Unemployed Parent (AFDC-UP) program, the basic instrument of public support for low-income families; Supplementary Security Insurance (SSI); Food Stamps; Medicaid; and provision of special Refugee Medical Assistance and Refugee Cash Assistance programs for people who met income eligibility criteria for federal programs but could not meet family composition criteria.²

The federal government also provided states with social service grants to cover costs of language training, counseling, and job placement. Later, several states received special program grants to finance endeavors that fell outside the normal range of social service activities. More often than not, these were experimental training and employment programs--such as the Key States Initiative described later--oriented to speeding up the rate at which refugees became self-sufficient.

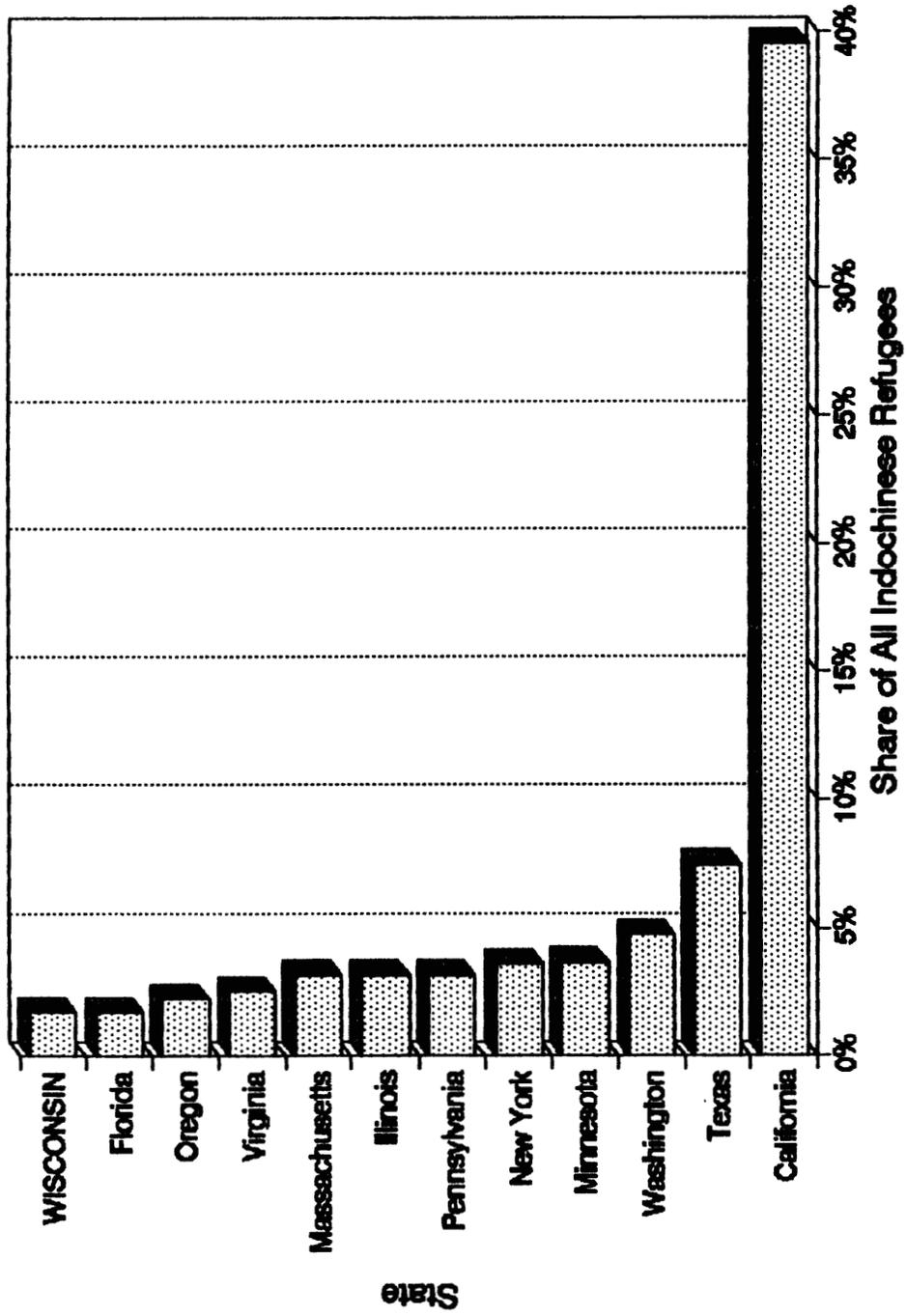
Lack of comparable data makes it difficult to say whether the combination of spatial dispersal and support services accelerated or impeded progress in achievement of self-sufficiency, but early indications seemed promising.³ In 1982, for example, average rates of unemployment and use of

²That is, it covered needs of families living in states that did not have AFDC-UP programs. At the time, most states offered only the traditional version of AFDC, oriented to families with only one adult "caretaker" (of the dependent children). Without the federal government's coverage, one or more adults would have had to abandon their families in order that those left behind would qualify for AFDC. This prospect was more theoretical than real; most families would simply have left the state. Federal coverage was therefore essential to the dispersal strategy.

³The weight of available evidence indicates that most newcomers to the U.S., or at least those who leave their homelands voluntarily, equal or surpass the labor-force participation rates, employment rates, and income levels of comparable, native-born Americans (i.e., natives with similar levels of educational attainment, years of work experience, and other pertinent attributes) within 10 to 15 years of arrival. (Chiswick, 1977, 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1982; Featherman and Hauser, 1978; and Martin, Poston, and Goodman, 1980.)

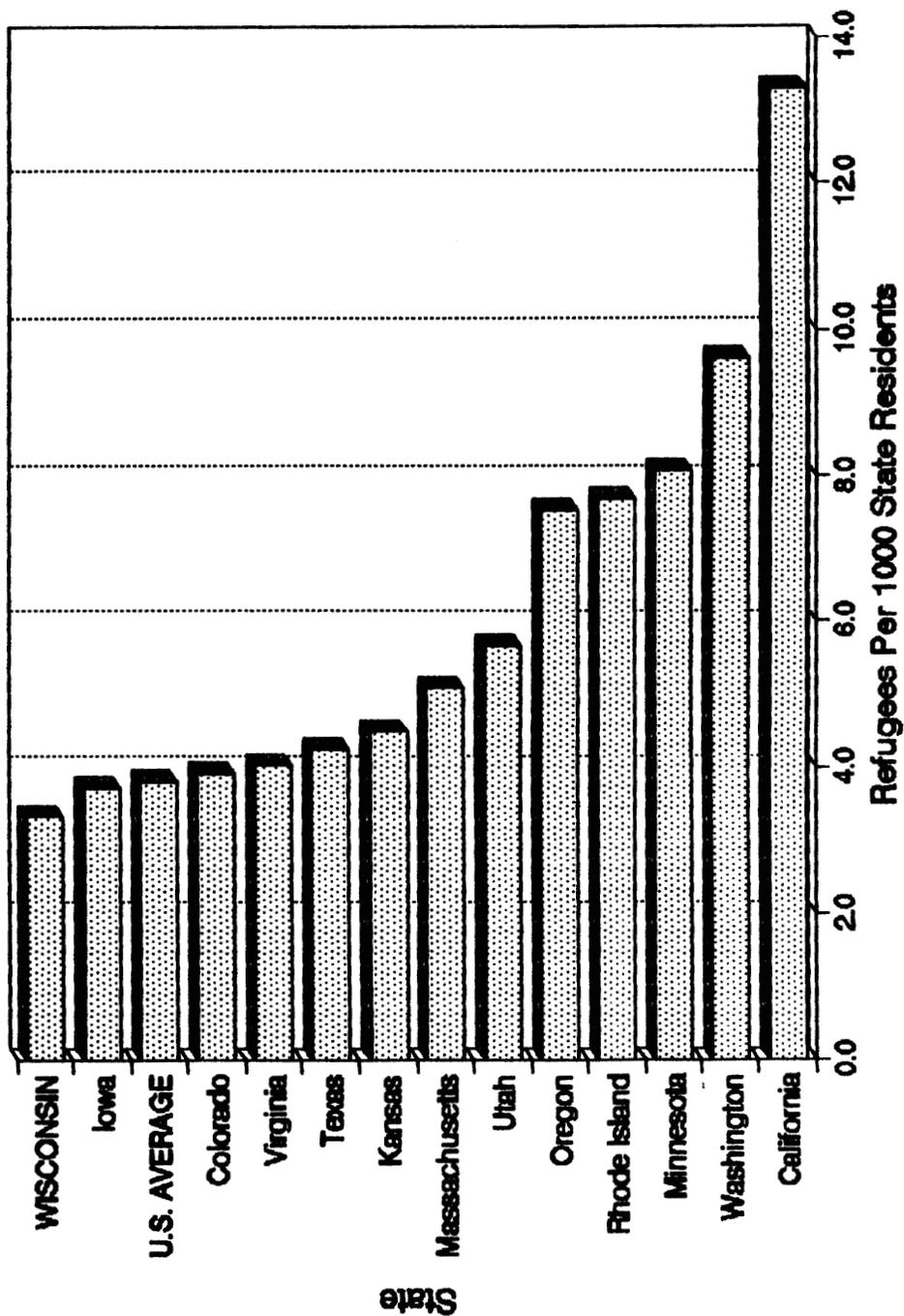
The record is less clear for persons who leave their homes because of actual or perceived threat of harm if they remain, or "true" refugees (i.e., excluding individuals, such as Soviet citizens, who wish to emigrate under little or no threat of harm but who are classified as refugees by the federal Immigration and Naturalization Service for

Figure 2
Indochinese Refugee Population
In 12 States With Largest Numbers, 1990



Source: U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement

Figure 3
Indochinese Refugee Population
In States With Highest Densities, 1990



Source: U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement

public assistance showed a tendency to decline rapidly with length of time in the country (Figure 4). Refugees already in the U.S. for 37 to 60 months (i.e., those who arrived during the years 1975 to 1978) had an average unemployment rate of 15% while 23% of families were receiving some form of public cash assistance. Though both rates appeared high, they were much lower than for individuals who were in the country for less than 36 months. There was hope that if the relationship between self-sufficiency and time in the U.S. remained constant, the vast majority of refugees would soon become productive members of society.

Unfortunately, by 1984 the pace of progress was clearly slowing down. Almost 40% of families already here for 37 to 60 months (i.e., those who arrived during the years 1979 to 1981) were receiving public assistance in that year (see Figure 4). True, unemployment among them was less than 10%, but this was mostly the result of a much larger share of individuals who were not actively seeking work.⁴ Even among those looking for work, the data showed that individuals who arrived during the years 1979 to 1981 were not doing nearly as well as earlier arrivals. Their unemployment rates in 1984 were two to three times higher than those of their predecessors (Figure 5).

The economic recession of 1981 to 1982 and its lingering effects on employment were important factors in explaining this slowdown. Differences in the characteristics of refugees also played significant roles. The basic difference was that earlier arrivals contained much greater numbers of well-educated and "westernized" people than the groups that followed them. Early arrivals had occupational experiences and work-related skills that blended readily with their new social and economic environment. Progress for later arrivals was slower because they had more obstacles to overcome in producing the means to become self-sufficient. Among these later arrivals were a people from Laos who called themselves Hmong.

The Hmong People

Hmong, a term meaning "free man" in their language, are an old people. Presently numbering about six million, with over 90% residing in China, their area of origin is uncertain.⁵ Their presence in the Yellow and Yangtze river plains was apparently first recorded by the Chinese (who refer to them as Miao) almost 5,000 years ago, around 2700 B.C.

Pressed by circumstance, they are also a migratory, pioneering people. Coming off the worse in perpetual competition for land with Chinese peoples moving into the plains from the north, by 2300 B.C. Hmong had abandoned the plains for mountainous areas further south. There,

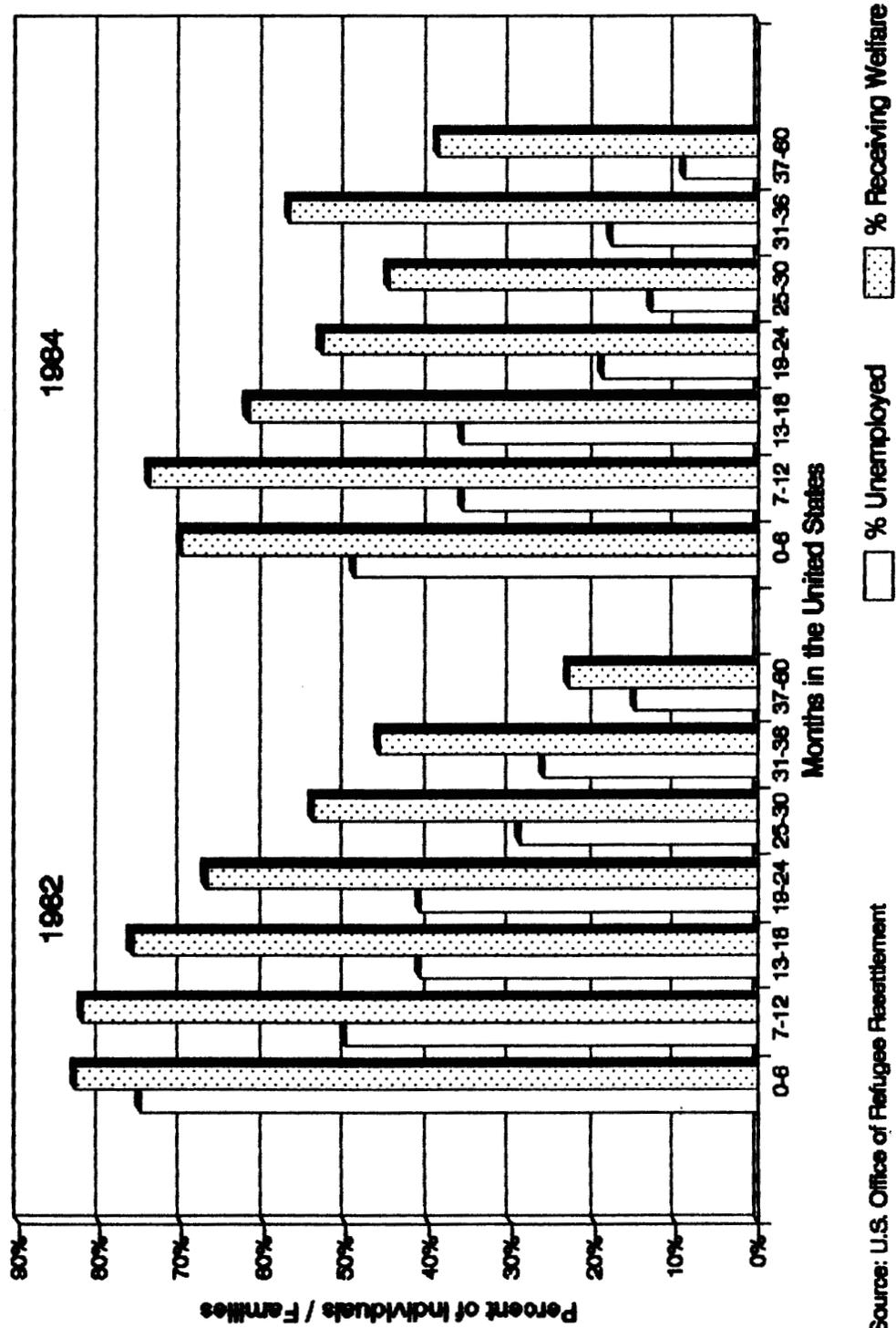
administrative or policy reasons). In theory, refugee progress toward self-sufficiency should be slower because their populations contain larger proportions of people who do not have the youth, education, resources, occupational experiences, motivation, and other characteristics that are generally associated with voluntary migrants. (Cafferty et al., 1983.)

Although it is still too early to judge whether all Indochinese refugees will eventually match the performance of voluntary immigrants in achieving self-sufficiency--one would have to wait until about 1995 before arriving at an unequivocal conclusion--early evidence suggested cause for general optimism. (Bach and Bach, 1980; Grossman, 1978, 1979; Marsh, 1980; Ragas and Marrugi, 1978; and Sin and Rubio, 1980.)

⁴Unemployment rates measure the share of people who are actively seeking work but cannot find it. They ignore what is called "disguised" unemployment, or those people who ordinarily should be working or looking for jobs but for one reason or another have withdrawn from the labor force.

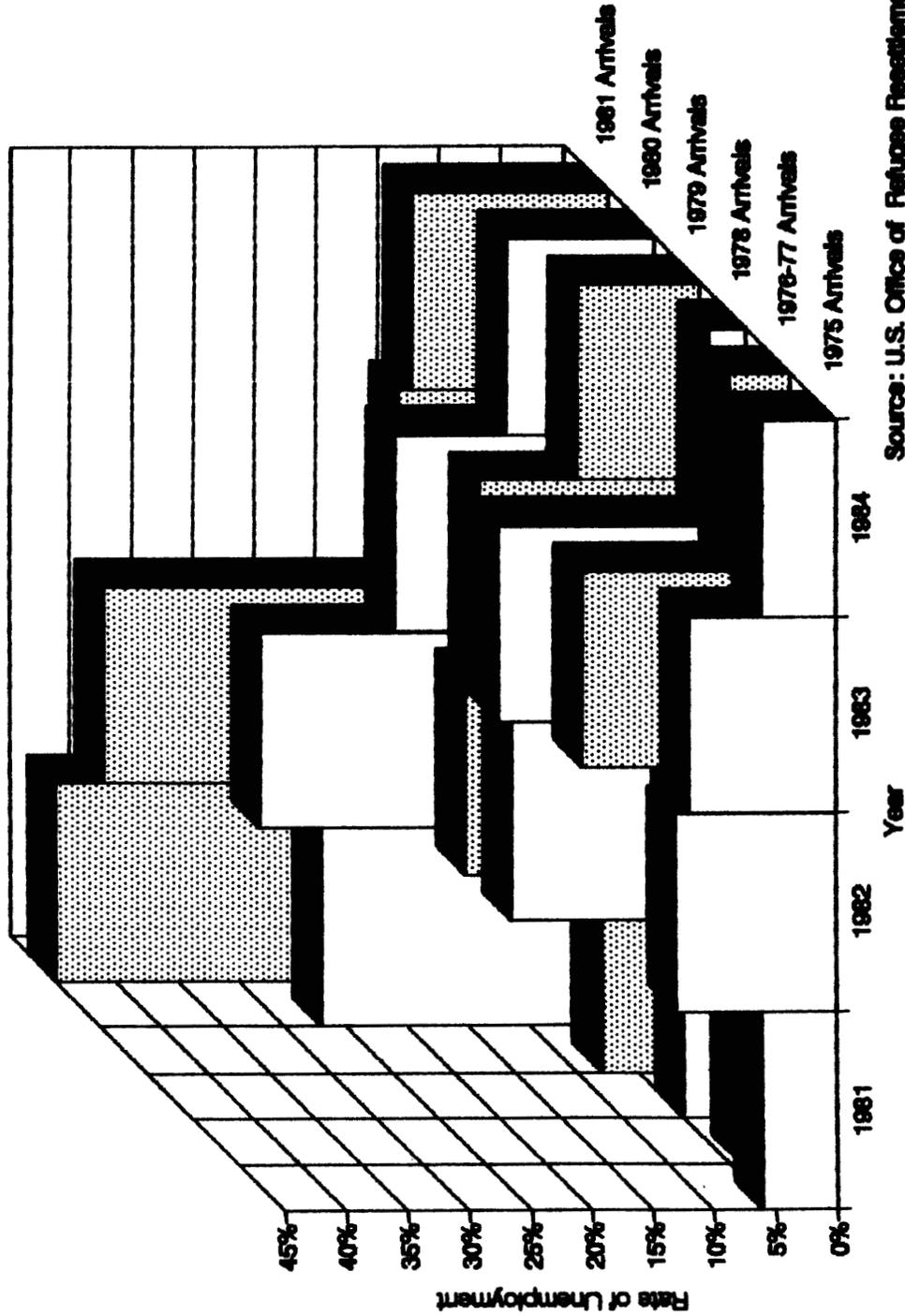
⁵The last estimate of Hmong in China dates back to the late 1950s. At that time there were approximately 2.6 million (Geddes, 1976). Allowance for population growth there and in Indochina yields a rough current estimate of six million.

Figure 4
Indochinese Self-Sufficiency
By Time in the U.S., 1982 and 1984



Source: U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement

Figure 5
Indochinese Unemployment Rates, 1981-84
By Year of Arrival in the U.S.



Source: U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement

extracting livelihoods from crop production on less fertile soils through "swidden" farming (i.e., clearing openings in the forest, growing crops until fertility gives out, and then shifting to another location), they moved about and spread themselves across several regions, creeping further southward as they went.

Again in conflict with the Chinese, unsuccessful rebellions against the government during the years 1735 to 1740 and 1795 to 1806 led small numbers of Hmong into what is now Indochina. After yet another failed uprising during the years 1855 to 1872, followed by severe political repression, there was a much more noticeable migration into the hill regions of Thailand, Vietnam and, most especially, Laos.⁶ In the mountains of Laos, Hmong supported themselves much as they had always done. They produced rice, maize, and poppies (for opium) as principal crops, and led pastoral lives largely separated from the mainstream of Laotian society living in lowland areas of the country.

Unlike the lowland Lao, Hmong did not have a written form of language until the 1950s. Also, in contrast to the Lao who had long since developed a hierarchical form of social and political organization that placed royalty at its pinnacle (easing development and diffusion of writing), Hmong organized themselves into clan groupings tied to each other through patriarchal family lines. Though families respect and defer to their clan and subclan leaders for guidance in many matters, Hmong were and remain an essentially democratic people.

Unfortunately, the dominant Laotian society saw illiteracy, clan-based social organization, democratic practice, and other differences--such as lack of a formal religion (e.g., Buddhism)--as signs of social and cultural inferiority. They viewed Hmong as primitive people and, accordingly, excluded them from political participation, from administrative positions in government, and from basic public services such as schooling. It was not until the late 1920s, after a revolt called the "War of Pa Tchai," that the French colonial administration (as distinct from the Lao administration that functioned in its shadow) hired a few Hmong administrators and expanded access to education for a few Hmong youth.

Relations between Hmong and the French grew stronger during the Japanese occupation of Indochina in World War II when Hmong served as guerrillas in the fight against the Japanese. During the war of independence (1946-1954) that followed, many more Hmong fought with the French against the communist forces. The number of Hmong in schools and in administrative posts increased during this period, but the share of the total population that received formal education and obtained non-agricultural occupational experiences (i.e., other than in the art of making war) remained small.⁷

Further progress toward joining the Laotian mainstream stopped in 1962 when approximately 100,000 Hmong joined with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the royal Laotian government to fight the communist Pathet Lao during the civil war. The war slowed efforts to broaden access to education and to non-military employment.⁸ Also, Hmong were driven into

⁶This historical material on the Hmong draws heavily from Geddes, 1976; Hassoun, 1988; and Tollefson, 1989.

⁷In 1959 there were about 20 Hmong primary schools in Laos with an enrollment of 1,500 students.

⁸To be sure, there was some progress. Information provided by Carol Compton (University of Wisconsin-Madison) indicates that there were 100 village schools containing about 10,000 primary students in 1968, and that in 1971 there were 340 Hmong high school students in Laos and 37 college students worldwide.

"safe villages" where populations were too large to feed exclusively from nearby fields. To survive, they increasingly depended on food supplied by aircraft and trucks, and on soldier's pay earned by adult males; consequently, they became less self-sufficient.

In hindsight, some analysts view these supplies and salaries as the first instance of "welfare" that Hmong families received from the U.S. government.⁹ But at the time, such supplies and salaries were no different than what the U.S. supplied its own personnel; they were essential inputs to the war effort. The difference was that unlike U.S. or other soldiers who could return home and pick up where they left off with work or schooling, the better part of an entire generation of Hmong grew up without the opportunity to learn much about farming or other trades, or to go to school.

When the U.S. abruptly pulled out of Indochina in 1975 it abandoned a population of over one hundred thousand Hmong who feared retribution by the Pathet Lao victors, a fear perhaps amplified by memories of Chinese retribution a century earlier. Within this population there were also many who were at something of a loss regarding how to sustain themselves through farming or other kinds of employment. For many more, disastrous rice harvests in the years immediately following the end of hostilities, exacerbated by the new government's attempts to collectivize farming, meant that survival became extremely precarious.

Political and economic circumstances being what they were, Hmong resumed their southward migration. In a stream that would eventually accumulate to more than 150,000 persons by 1990, they moved into refugee camps in Thailand. Some, in the early years at least, expected this to be a temporary move. They believed in eventual return to Laos or, alternatively, in resettlement in the mountains of Thailand. With the new Laotian government less than enthusiastic about encouraging the return of former enemies, and with the Thai government showing similar disinterest in either absorbing Hmong as new citizens or allowing the number in camps to grow beyond a restricted limit, an increasing number of Hmong came to the conclusion that they had to resettle elsewhere to survive as individuals and as a people.

Building on their relationship with France, many families chose to go there. Flowing out of the long association with the U.S. and encouraged by what seemed to many as an American promise to clan leaders that the U.S. would "take care of them" if the war ended unsuccessfully, a much larger number--over 90,000 through 1990--eventually came to our shores (Figure 6).

Hmong in America

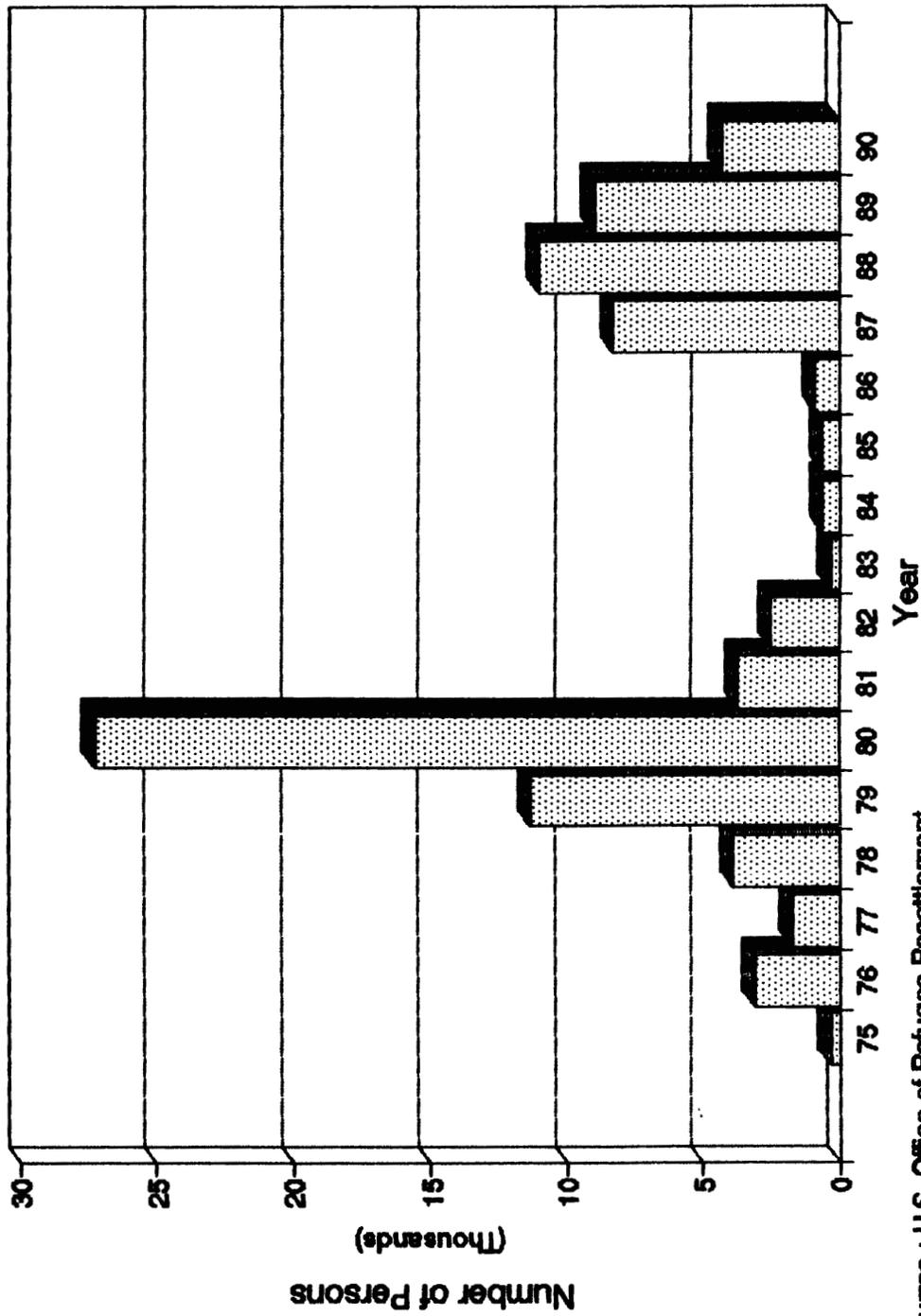
The first group of Hmong refugees, about 9,000, arrived during the years 1975 to 1978. As was the case with other Indochinese who arrived during this period, this group contained many individuals, including many clan leaders, with social and economic characteristics that made it easier for them to blend into the mainstream and to become self-sufficient members of American society. The 43,000 who followed during the years 1979 to 1981 were very different.

For one thing, most were unprepared for the world of salaried employment: Adults were illiterate in their language; they had little prior vocational skill and experience to draw upon beyond home embroidery, swidden farming, and warfare; and they had negligible exposure to western society and culture.

Family size was another complicating factor. With an average of six members in a range of three to nine, nuclear families were large and contained many unemployable elderly and young

⁹For example, see Cooper, 1986.

Figure 6
Hmong Refugee Admissions to the U.S.
By Year, 1975-1990



Source : U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement

dependents.¹⁰ Also, given their situation in Laos as a people that had yet to begin the long, multi-generational transition toward smaller families--a transition perhaps delayed by population replacement needs during almost 40 years of war--these Hmong carried with them a propensity to marry early, to maintain high fertility rates, and to reproduce high ratios of dependents to adults. Whereas the average child-woman ratio in the U.S. in 1983 was about 300 children aged 0-4 per 1,000 women aged 15-44, for example, and 575 children per 1,000 non-Chinese Vietnamese women, it was over 1,750 children per 1,000 Hmong women.¹¹ Substantial narrowing of these differences might take a generation or more to run its course.

The combination of low adult employment and earnings potential on the one hand and high dependency ratios within families on the other was a major handicap with respect to finding means of livelihood. As a group, the Hmong arrivals of 1979 to 1981 needed more time than their predecessors to come to grips with the culture of wage employment, to compete for and secure wage-paying work, and to develop work habits that would assure job retention.

Even if they could find jobs, work did not always represent a solution to financial difficulties. One minimum-wage worker in a small family, or with older children, might suffice; two would be better. If the one or two workers had younger children, however, then for equivalently low wages a job without employer-provided family health insurance was much inferior to a job offering this coverage. Such a job was sometimes even inferior to public assistance with its (often) automatic access to no-charge health services. For families with six or seven mouths to feed and bodies to clothe, even three workers with health coverage would not always produce a satisfactory level of income. Then there was the problem of paying for child care.

Complicating the situation were factors that had less to do with Hmong themselves than with what happened to them during the process of acculturation in the United States. These factors often conspired to make public assistance look like a more viable means of sustenance than work; absent the opportunity to obtain either, for example, Hmong in Laos were no better at acquiring welfare than they were at getting salaried jobs. But because all refugees benefited from 36 months of federal government support immediately upon arrival, Hmong became acquainted with public assistance before learning about work. With this initiation into American culture it may often have seemed easier, though not necessarily preferable, to stay with or to return to public assistance than to master the challenges of employment.

Similarly, before arrival Hmong did not have any particular attitudes toward welfare or toward its merits compared to wage employment. These attitudes had to be learned through socialization with Americans whom they trusted and in whose hands many placed their destinies. However, socialization for Hmong was a group process that worked its way through the clan structure. Opinions of nuclear families were a function not only of their contacts with natives but also of their relationships with the larger groupings of which they were a part. In principle, well-being of the family was subsidiary to well-being of the group, as determined by one or more acknowledged leaders that families deferred to for guidance.

Views of leaders, in turn, were shaped by their individual experiences before and after leaving Laos. Most of them believed that U.S. officials would keep their promise and that the government would take care of Hmong as recompense for their alliance during the war. Some, extracting from

¹⁰Family size figures are from CZA, 1988.

¹¹Rumbaut and Weeks, 1986. Subsequent work by Gordon (1989) suggests that the Hmong fertility rate, though still much higher than for other refugee groups, is generally lower than the rate reported by Rumbaut and Weeks for San Diego.

the experience of complete dependence on parachuted supplies in Laos and relief in camps in Thailand, may have concluded that this compensation would take the form of continued government support. In contrast, other leaders tried to remain faithful to the oath they made to U.S. consular officials before departure from the camps: to eschew welfare at all costs. For them the promise of "care" meant something other than welfare.

Whatever they might have been upon departure from the camps, views of leaders could change after arrival in the United States. No matter how committed to the principle of self-sufficiency, for example, it made little sense for leaders to encourage clan members to seek jobs and abandon welfare when this course of action would result in a substantial lowering of family income. In addition, because leadership demanded responsiveness to constituent needs, views could also change depending on the strength of opinion among clan members. Staff of refugee self-help organizations in Wisconsin (i.e., Mutual Assistance Associations [MAAs]) suggested that there were (and remain) many members who believed that their stay in the U.S. was temporary; thus, they saw no purpose in acquiring American habits. For other members, welfare was a permanent military retirement pension and they did not understand the need to work. Still others were simply content with what welfare provided though they could earn more by working.

But the most important factor that influenced the course of progress for the Hmong arrivals of 1979 to 1981 was timing. They could hope and struggle for self-sufficiency, but in 1981 and 1982 the economic recession had created more joblessness than at any time since the 1930s and would continue having effects for several more years. Hmong would have been hard to employ under the best of circumstances. The challenge was exceedingly difficult when they had to compete with experienced natives and other refugees for the same entry-level jobs. Not surprisingly, measurable progress appeared painfully slow. Indochinese arrivals of 1979 showed average unemployment rates of 19%, 18% and 10% in 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively. The 1980 arrivals had rates of 32%, 21% and 12% in these same years (see preceding Figure 5). The unemployment rate for Hmong, in contrast, hovered steady at 80% to 85%.¹² Welfare was not the path of choice for most Hmong, but there did not seem to be an alternative to it.

The problem was not just unemployment. Whatever may have been the independent effects of factors such as support in Laos, support in the camps, automatic support upon and after arrival, low employability, family size, and leader attitudes, the inability of most adults to find work after several years of trying led many of even the most motivated Hmong to conclude that the dream of self-sufficiency was impossible in the United States. Many became deeply discouraged and lost their determination to maintain the struggle. Self-sufficiency was fine in principle but it had to make sense in practice to sustain continued effort to reach this goal.

In any event, while the federal government continued to support them, lack of progress toward self-sufficiency was not an urgent problem. It became urgent in April 1982 when the government announced that it would reduce Refugee Cash Assistance from 36 to 18 months of coverage, effective the following June. This put a large share of the Hmong who had arrived during the years 1979 to 1981 at serious risk. The change in policy encouraged many to move from their places of initial resettlement to other states.¹³

Surprised, and armed with a cultural tradition of shifting from sites with lower to sites with higher economic opportunity, Hmong who lived in states that did not offer significant AFDC-UP or General Assistance programs (i.e., state-sponsored emergency assistance for those ineligible for

¹²Downing et al., 1984.

¹³Finck, 1986.

AFDC) searched about for places that might increase their chances of finding work before expiration of their 18 months (or less) of coverage. Some were successful and did find employment. Many more, concluding that suitable jobs would be long in coming, looked to places offering both adequate AFDC-UP income and flexible interpretation of eligibility rules.¹⁴

Most migratory paths led to California's central valley. Fresno, for example, contained only 2,000 Hmong in 1981.¹⁵ With large inflows from places with heavy Hmong populations, such as Santa Ana, Portland and Minneapolis-St. Paul, the population grew to 10,000 in 1983 and, adding flows of new arrivals directly from Thailand, to 24,000 in 1988.¹⁶ Fresno was not alone. Stretching the entire length of the central valley, from Redding in the north through Merced, Modesto, Sacramento, Stockton, Yuba and to Visalia in the south, the Hmong population expanded from handfuls in 1981 to almost 51,000 in 1988. The valley was home to almost half the Hmong in the country. The rest spread themselves thinly across 44 communities in over 25 other states, or concentrated in Minneapolis-St. Paul, a few cities of southern California, and Wisconsin.

Hmong in Wisconsin

Hmong first came to Wisconsin in 1975 and 1976 as part of the federal government's original refugee dispersal plan. Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, and individual dioceses and churches served as their sponsors. They settled in Appleton, Eau Claire, Green Bay, La Crosse, Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Oshkosh, and Sheboygan. From a base of about 2,000 to 2,500 persons in 1978, population in these communities expanded by another 5,000 during the large influx from Thailand during the years 1979 to 1981. New communities established themselves in Madison and Wausau at this time. The main surge of population occurred during the great migration of 1982 to 1985 when many arrivals of 1979 to 1981, and later ones, moved in from their initial resettlement areas in 18 other states. The rate of population growth eventually declined as this process of secondary migration wound down after 1985. Since 1988 it has stabilized at an annual increase of about 350 families, or 2,000 individuals, composed mainly of people coming directly from camps to reunite with kin already in the state.¹⁷

The net effect of inflows exceeding outflows since 1975 yielded a state total of about 16,000 Hmong in 1988, concentrated in the ten towns mentioned above (Table 1).¹⁸ Current estimates place the 1990 figure at somewhere between 17,000 and 20,000, or 13% to 18% of the national

¹⁴As Bach (1988) points out, among the several states with AFDC-UP programs at the time, only a few took a flexible approach to interpreting the rule that recipients prove that they had worked for six of the previous thirteen quarters in order to be eligible for support. Few if any Hmong could offer this proof. It was therefore to the refugees' advantage to look to the few states, such as California and Wisconsin, that took the position that refugees had worked even if they could not document it. Also, these states were more flexible than others in allowing refugees to participate in training programs while receiving welfare and, within certain limits, to earn income from work.

¹⁵Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL,) 1984.

¹⁶CZA, 1985 and 1988.

¹⁷Verbal communication from ORR and RAPP officials.

¹⁸In addition to Fond du Lac and Wisconsin Rapids, shown in the table, small numbers lived in 21 other counties. The more important among these were Washington, Dunn, Portage, Rusk, Green Lake, Marquette, Calumet, Green, Jefferson, and Chippewa.

**TABLE 1:
HMONG POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN WISCONSIN, 1988 AND 1990**

	1988			1990		Annual Growth Rate 1988-90	Share of Total Town Population
	Number of Families	Number of People	Persons per Family	Number of Families	Number of People		
Appleton	350	1,850	5.3	375	2,000	4%	3.1%
Eau Claire	365	1,860	5.1	425	2,160	8%	3.9%
Fond du Lac	15	120	8.0	25	200	29%	0.6%
Green Bay	280	1,570	5.6	410	2,300	21%	2.5%
La Crosse	270	1,900	7.0	340	2,390	12%	5.0%
Madison	110	660	6.0	125	750	7%	0.4%
Manitowoc	110	800	7.3	160	1,150	20%	3.6%
Milwaukee	600	3,000	5.0	650	3,250	4%	0.5%
Oshkosh	105	650	6.2	150	930	20%	1.8%
Sheboygan	230	1,180	5.1	350	1,800	24%	3.8%
Wausau	295	1,800	6.1	335	2,040	6%	6.4%
Other	125	710	5.7	145	830	8%	nd
Total/Average:	2,855	16,100	5.6	3,490	19,800	11%	1.6%

Sources: CZA, 1988; and MAA estimates.

Hmong population. Wisconsin now ranks second after California in size of Hmong population.¹⁹ Although Milwaukee contains the largest community, Hmong distaste for living in large towns (most especially within their low-income areas) and the seemingly better opportunities for promoting family self-sufficiency elsewhere are currently producing highest growth outside Milwaukee, particularly in and around La Crosse, Eau Claire, and Wausau.

As in other states, self-sufficiency has high priority for Hmong and for government and private individuals and institutions helping them. In 1988, for example, less than 1% of Hmong families operated businesses (Table 2). Most of these enterprises were restaurants or grocery stores operating as food-purchasing cooperatives for community members. In contrast to the experiences of other immigrant groups where entrepreneurs among them provided many jobs for new arrivals, the scarcity of businesses has served as a constraint on the ability of Hmong to find employers willing to hire them.²⁰

The number of businesses is perhaps not as important as other obstacles. The issue of employment or, more precisely, earnings, is central. Within a range of 18% in Fond du Lac to 50% in Milwaukee, only one third of Hmong families had one member with a full- or part-time job in 1988 (Table 2); only 18% had two or more workers. Average hourly wages, \$6.20 for men and \$4.10 for women, tended to be reasonable given the types of jobs for which Hmong were eligible; though one should note that half or more of the workers earned less than the average. The same may be said for the average annual incomes they produced: about \$13,000 in families with one worker and \$21,000 in those with more.

Though low and often very close to the official poverty standard, these earnings may have been satisfactory for households with few members. With increasing family size or at incomes below the averages they became progressively unsatisfactory, especially in relation to the level of tangible income provided by public assistance. Between a monthly grant of \$830 from AFDC-UP, \$375 in food stamps, and \$275 in housing rental subsidies, in recent times a family of seven could obtain a welfare income of almost \$18,000 per year in Wisconsin excluding the value of Medical Assistance.²¹ These figures make evident that larger families with one prospective worker, often even those with more, or smaller families with workers unable to earn much because of low wages or few hours of work each week, would have been better off financially with welfare than with employment earnings.

Not surprisingly, from a low of 50% in Milwaukee to a high of 89% in La Crosse, almost three quarters of families (2,080) contained one or more individuals receiving public cash assistance in 1988 (Table 3). This was 16% higher than the average of 63% for all Hmong in the U.S. at the time.²²

¹⁹The ORR's estimates of total Indochinese refugees in each state suggests that there were 15,900 Indochinese refugees in Wisconsin in April 1990, almost all of them Hmong. Since this estimate excludes natural population growth, which should be an important factor in the case of Hmong, it may be too low. During meetings with the author in June 1990, a number of ORR and state officials reported a figure of 17,000. Estimates provided by MAA representatives during the same month came to a total of 19,800. For simplicity, if not accuracy, this report adopts the MAA total of 19,800 for 1990. It is at least consistent with the 1988 figure of about 16,000 derived from MAA estimates by CZA (1988).

²⁰Wilson and Portes (1980) highlight the important role of immigrant-owned businesses as key providers of employment for immigrant workers of the same ethnic group.

²¹These figures were supplied by MAA representatives for 1990. They may have been lower in 1988.

²²CZA, 1988.

TABLE 2:
HMONG EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME IN WISCONSIN, 1988

	% Families With Own Business	% Families With:			Average Hourly Wage for		Income with:		% Families with: Health Insurance (1988)
		1 Worker	2 + Workers	Any Workers	men	women	1 Worker	2 + Workers	
Appleton	1.4	24.3	4.3	28.6	5.00	3.70	10,400	18,100	nd
Eau Claire	0.8	14.2	4.9	19.2	5.00	4.50	10,400	19,800	5.0
Fond du Lac	0.0	17.6	0.0	17.6	7.00	nd	14,600	nd	17.6
Green Bay	1.4	16.3	5.3	21.6	6.00	5.00	12,500	22,900	17.7
La Crosse	0.7	31.7	7.0	38.7	7.50	4.00	15,600	23,900	10.0
Madison	0.0	12.7	10.9	23.6	5.00	5.00	10,400	20,800	13.6
Manitowoc	1.8	19.6	7.1	26.8	9.00	4.00	18,700	22,000	19.6
Milwaukee	0.3	2.5	47.5	47.5	6.50	4.00	13,500	21,800	7.5
Oshkosh	1.9	21.0	18.1	39.0	8.00	4.00	16,600	25,000	19.0
Sheboygan	0.4	17.8	26.5	44.3	6.00	4.50	12,500	21,800	34.8
Wausau	1.0	18.5	10.1	28.6	6.50	3.40	13,500	20,500	13.1
Other	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Average:	0.9	16.1	17.6	33.7	\$6.20	\$4.10	12,900	21,200	12.7

Source: CZA, 1988.

**TABLE 3:
HMONG USE OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE IN WISCONSIN**

	% Families Receiving Public Assistance		% Decline
	1988	1990	
Appleton	72	49	32
Eau Claire	86	70	18
Fond du Lac	82	78	5
Green Bay	78	60	23
La Crosse	89	70	21
Madison	50	44	12
Manitowoc	73	56	23
Milwaukee	50	40	20
Oshkosh	61	57	7
Sheboygan	56	37	33
Wausau	71	59	18
Other	75	65	13
Average:	73	54	26

Source: CZA, 1988; and MAA estimates.

Sources of public cash assistance included SSI, Refugee Cash Assistance (now provided by the federal government to refugees only during their first 12 months in the country) and General Assistance. The bulk of it came from AFDC-UP, which covered 85% to 90% of the families receiving welfare benefits. If as many as 1,900, or 90% of the 2,080 families with assistance, obtained AFDC-UP support in 1988, they represented approximately 2.2% of the state's average monthly caseload of 86,000 families in the total AFDC program and 18% to 20% of the 10,000 or so within the AFDC-UP segment. Because of above-average family size, they absorbed perhaps 3% to 4% of the state's \$500 million in annual AFDC outlays.²³

Small as their share of total public assistance payments may have been, the extraordinarily high proportion of Hmong families reliant on AFDC-UP and on other income-support mechanisms was and remains worrisome not only to officials and interested citizens concerned about short- and long-term prospects for self-sufficiency, but also to the Hmong. A proud people carrying with them a cultural legacy of fierce independence does not view the prospect of mass dependency with calm.

Still, the welfare utilization rate in 1988 constituted a major improvement over what it had been just a few years earlier; it looked even better in 1990. In a brief period of two years the statewide total of families receiving assistance declined by 10%, from 2,080 in 1988 to 1,885 in 1990. This decline is even more significant because the total population increased by over 600 families during the same period that the statewide rate of welfare usage dropped from 73% to 54%.

Several factors underlay this improvement. An important one, no less for Hmong than for other people, was the general increase in employment opportunities for which Hmong could compete. The economic recession of 1981 to 1982 was long since over, but for several years afterward there remained a residual pool of natives--those laid off earlier and new entrants to the labor force--who looked better to prospective employers than Hmong applicants. That is, for a long while there were still too many unemployed natives competing against Hmong for the same jobs. Competition was especially intense for those jobs paying wages or offering benefits that could make employment seem more attractive than welfare. Moving through the decade, the level of competition lessened and more doors opened.

Helping with this, outside Milwaukee especially, was continuing evolution of a more sensitive and productive understanding of Hmong by native employers, their employees, local officials, and townspeople in general. Originally perceived as Vietnamese and thus as responsible for dragging the U.S. into a war that cost many Wisconsin lives, there was much animosity toward Hmong. Hostility increased further when unemployed natives learned about the share of families benefiting from public assistance. Even if an employer wanted to hire a Hmong, he or she had to contend with potential disruption that might follow from antagonism between refugees and natives in the work place.

Efforts by MAAs and sympathetic natives to build better community relations, by explaining that Hmong were not Vietnamese and that the U.S. government had asked them to serve as allies against the communists, for instance, eventually removed this obstacle.²⁴ The tide of discrimination has turned and Hmong are now more welcome in the work place.

²³AFDC figures for Wisconsin as a whole are from United States, 1989b; and United States, 1990b.

²⁴The process of building better community relations also included production and diffusion of interesting publications designed to educate natives about the history and culture of the Hmong (Roop and Roop, 1990) and, for those working with them directly, about preferable means of rendering assistance (McInnes et al., 1990).

This welcome extends beyond inter-tribal relations. Hmong are becoming accepted because more of them are now better prepared to function in the U.S. work place. Many adults who arrived during the years 1979 to 1981, and most of their children, who have since reached adulthood, have learned enough of the language and of how to deal with natives to get by reasonably well. Also, since 1982, refugees in camps have benefited from an ongoing orientation program. This program teaches them English and introduces them to American culture and society's expectations about performance in wage employment. Newcomers are thus better equipped to take and hold jobs than were their predecessors.

An important aspect here is what one could label the long-delayed emergence of a "chain" of employment. This is the process through which the securing of work by one member of a social network (be it made up of people from the same ethnic group, from the same class at school, from the same church or just some regular drinking partners) opens job possibilities for other members. This is the way most people find work; among immigrants it is also a principal means by which they can overcome the usual obstacles to employment. A firm with a refugee employee to act as an intermediary between Hmong and the employer, supervisors, and workers is often less reticent about hiring Hmong than if it did not have an in-house person to serve as a go-between. The same thing applies when the employer and employees respect the work performance of the refugee in question. If this individual recommends another for a job, the firm's inability to assess directly the likely performance of the recommended individual will often lead it to defer to the Hmong employee and thus attach less risk to employing the new person.

With so few Hmong employed until recently, and with fewer still in types of firms where they could take advantage of the chain of employment, probabilities for obtaining jobs--not to mention at wages that made sense vis-à-vis welfare--were low. With more people now finding work, the probabilities have increased. But new opportunities can have only limited impact if prospective workers cannot find them or do not seek them out. A key factor in the decline of welfare use has been the effort of public agencies and MAAs to identify opportunities and, at the same time, to re-energize the determination of families to succeed in reaching self-sufficiency. This venture is the Key States Initiative.

The Key States Initiative

Designed in early 1987 and initiated in Wisconsin in October of that year with an initial grant of \$814,000, the Key States Initiative (KSI) is a federally-funded, voluntary program. Through it the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), in partnership with the Wisconsin Office of Refugee Assistance and Poverty Programs (RAPP) and similar agencies in four other states, supports a set of coordinated actions to increase self-sufficiency of Hmong and other severely disadvantaged refugees.²⁵ Although federal and state personnel involved in KSI never use the phrase, the essence of the approach is what one could best describe as a family economic development program.

Subject to the constraint that it not take liberties with rules and regulations concerning welfare eligibility, KSI's guiding idea is that the program should adapt itself to the characteristics of the target population. The KSI staff then focuses only on removing the most critical barriers to self-sufficiency, and measures the program's success exclusively in terms of numbers of families that take themselves off of welfare through employment or have their AFDC-UP grants reduced for an extended period. Set up this way, KSI cannot attain its objectives by simply placing individuals in

²⁵The other four states participating in the KSI are Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington (United States, 1989a).

jobs of any kind. Nor can it judge its own performance by documenting numbers of "entered employments" in the same manner as have other federal and state employment programs.

Families contain different numbers of dependents and adults who vary in age, sex, education, and work experience. They also face different local labor market conditions and exhibit different levels of motivation to leave public assistance. Each family therefore requires a somewhat unique approach to deal with its economic situation. In this context, self-sufficiency requires that the total income likely to be produced by any combination of workers, wage rates, and hours of work in each family be higher than that provided by public assistance. It also requires that families seek to take advantage of job opportunities to leave welfare and then to maintain economic independence (or, for reductions in welfare grants resulting from employment, to assure that the amounts not rise again). For evaluation purposes a family has to be working and off of welfare for at least 90 days before KSI defines it as self-sufficient; it has to be working and off of welfare for 18 months before KSI treats it as a fully successful case.²⁶

Within this framework KSI concentrates its energies on two things: job development and placement for multiple wage-earners, and motivating families to take advantage of new opportunities. The first part involves efforts to find full- and part-time work for as many employable adults in each family as possible; on maximizing the number of job placements that pay at least \$5.00 per hour, including use of on-the-job training (OJT) funds to help the process; on providing short-term skills training to qualify individuals for these jobs; and, to lower chances that illness forces workers to quit work and return to welfare for Medical Assistance (MA), on maximizing the number of jobs offering employer-provided health insurance. In addition, KSI tries to assure that Hmong not find themselves in unstable work situations. Wherever possible, it places workers deficient in English or in work experience with other Hmong who can act as translators and counselors on the job. Where this is impractical, KSI administrators arrange after-placement follow-up visits by other Hmong to meet both employee and employer at the work site on a regular basis.

Unlike operations in the other four states with KSI, the Wisconsin branch of RAPP uses ORR social-service grant funds to supplement KSI resources. Where appropriate, the RAPP office also draws upon funds available through the federal JOBS program and the Wisconsin Employment and Job Training (WEJT) program to add service components not available in KSI. For example, because jobs for which Hmong qualify do not always offer health insurance, linking of KSI participants with services offered by another program allows many of them to be covered by MA for 12 months beyond their termination from welfare. This added incentive to take the jobs in the first instance also increases the chances that people will accumulate at least one year of work experience and thus improve their chances for finding other jobs later. Similar linkages provide help with transportation and child care costs.

Because none of this can make much difference if people are unwilling to help themselves, KSI provides added encouragement to participate by tapping funds from other programs to offer training stipends that are conditional upon the recipient finding employment and more generous

²⁶A minimum of three months may seem too short a time period to use for defining self-sufficiency. As a practical matter, however, it is a reasonably good indicator for the general population receiving AFDC. Once off welfare for three consecutive months there is a relatively low probability of return to the welfare caseload. Among those who do return after three months, there is also a low probability that it will be for a long time. What are sometimes called "persistent" users of welfare--those who rely on it continuously or recurrently for many years (usually less than 10% of the general caseload at any one time)--are usually unable to stay off for as long as three full months.

earned-income disregards.²⁷ But the cornerstone of the motivational component flows from a decision by the ORR and RAPP to have KSI carried out by MAAs in each town. For KSI to be effective, its designers believed that families had to view it not as just another heroic attempt by one part of government to get them off of welfare while another part of the same government seemed to encourage them to stay on, but as an effort by the Hmong community as a whole to help itself attain economic independence.

Because MAAs were serving, in part, as extensions of county social service departments; because clan and subclan leaders were often MAA board or staff members; and because these leaders influenced family decisions concerning work and welfare, one of KSI's early challenges was to transform MAAs from social service providers into what one might call family economic development agencies. Accordingly, after the ORR convinced RAPP staff of the merits of the KSI approach, program personnel invested considerable energy in persuading MAAs and leaders to commit themselves to the KSI strategy for self-sufficiency and to motivate families to participate.

It being counterproductive for these leaders to serve as role models while themselves unemployed and recipients of public assistance, the program encouraged them to join KSI, find jobs, and leave welfare. When some MAA leaders showed themselves especially reluctant in this regard, others in the MAA persuaded them to depart and to make room for individuals with more productive attitudes.

The exact manner in which these different parts of KSI and its links to other programs conspired to produce results is uncertain, but outcomes to date have been impressive. Through March 1990 almost 1,300 families, or 37% of the state's current total, joined the program (Table 4). Of the 1,970 employable adults in these families, KSI placed 920 (47%) in full-time jobs and another 320 (16%) in part-time jobs. As a consequence, 472 families, or 36% of those participating, became self-sufficient; another 188 (14%) earned enough to lower the size of their welfare grants. By the end of September the cumulative number of participants increased to 1,500 families and 2,386 employable adults.²⁸ The number of adults in full- and part-time jobs rose to 1,128 and 395, respectively, with 616 families reaching self-sufficiency while another 231 obtained a lowering of their welfare grants.

A first-year assessment of KSI performance showed that the 500 participants involved at the time had been in the U.S. and on welfare for an average of six years.²⁹ The report also showed that most adults kept their jobs; that two thirds of those who did not found other, better jobs; and that less than 10% of families who left AFDC-UP returned to it. It was still too early to tell whether these initial results would prove durable, but the situation seemed promising. According to federal and state staff, through January, 1990 KSI spent \$2 million to produce a gross benefit of \$2.8 million from welfare terminations and grant reductions, or a net saving of \$800,000.

It is probably fair to suggest that the impact of KSI would not have been as large with only limited expansion of job opportunities in the state. But with welfare reductions much higher after KSI

²⁷In order to determine the size of the AFDC-UP monthly grant for a family that obtains some employment earnings, or to determine whether it should be "terminated" from AFDC altogether, program administrators add up each month's earnings, deduct \$75 for work expenses (e.g., transportation), deduct another \$30, and then deduct one third of the remaining amount. This last amount is the "disregard." The AFDC-UP grant is then the difference between the amount remaining and the amount the family would have received if there were no work earnings. If it is equal to or more than the maximum grant the family is terminated from the program.

²⁸Verbal communication from ORR and RAPP staff.

²⁹Touche Ross, 1989.

TABLE 4:
KEY STATES INITIATIVE PROGRAM IN WISCONSIN, OCTOBER 1987 - MARCH 1990

	Participating Families	Employable Adults	Full-Time Placements		Part-Time Placement		Families Made Self-Sufficient		Families With Welfare Reduced
			Number	Average Wage (\$)	Number	Average Wage (\$)	Self-Sufficient	Welfare Reduced	
Appleton	109	213	54	5.80	15	4.30	36	7	
Eau Claire	138	113	86	6.40	106	4.40	47	33	
Green Bay	104	193	72	5.30	50	4.50	39	31	
La Crosse	65	83	72	5.80	34	3.90	37	13	
Madison	95	148	66	5.10	10	4.90	29	11	
Manitowoc	82	128	13	6.70	6	4.50	10	2	
Milwaukee	374	600	249	5.20	32	5.20	142	68	
Oshkosh/Fond du Lac	73	120	78	5.80	5	3.70	35	6	
Sheboygan	96	173	119	5.80	16	4.60	55	6	
Wausau	163	196	111	6.30	46	4.50	42	11	
Total:	1,299	1,967	920	-	320	-	472	188	

Source: U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement

began than before while economic conditions remained about the same, with these reductions significantly greater for Hmong than for the state's general welfare population, and with little comparable impact on refugee welfare use in the four other KSI states where economic conditions have also been good, the evidence implies that the idea of KSI and the federal, state, and MAA personnel attached to the program were very significant factors.

The Future

Unfortunately, KSI's impact on families that have resided in the state for a long time is unlikely to continue at the same level. Besides negative repercussions on employment opportunities that may result from an economic recession, until now KSI has dealt with highly motivated adults who have the best chances for finding jobs that could make their families self-sufficient. Their success has caused a dramatic change in attitudes and motivations among families that earlier were reticent about joining the program and skeptical about what it might do for them. Still, there are many families making very slow progress in KSI, or not yet participating in KSI, that present a much more difficult challenge. These families include adults with considerable motivation, but caught between very large families and absence of marketable skills or experience that can secure jobs paying wages anywhere near the level required for self-sufficiency, they need more education and training than did their predecessors before finding themselves in positions to enter the labor market.

There are also some individuals with requisite skills who are not yet motivated. Besides those who think of themselves as retired and think of AFDC-UP as their pensions, or those who still believe that they will soon return to Laos, there are many who lack interest because, in their view, the cost of self-sufficiency is too high. Some MAAs report, for example, that although Hmong women have a tradition of working hard, in Laos they usually could combine income-producing labor with parenting; young children were always close by. Wage employment, in contrast, drives a wedge between remunerative work and a mother's parenting for half or more of every waking day. In these instances it is not a matter of choosing between work and welfare; it is a choice between serving one's children as a producer of income or serving them as a mother. To the extent that welfare takes care of basic income needs, there really is no compelling reason to give up the important job of mothering. Hmong women who reason this way are no different from the native-born women who, as single heads of their households, comprise the bulk of the state's general AFDC population. When self-sufficiency requires these women to find jobs, its achievement must usually wait until children grow older, the women change their minds, or both.

Nonetheless, economic conditions constant, the rate of welfare use by Hmong should continue to decline in the near term even if the total number of families relying on assistance remains unchanged. New arrivals from Thailand, as mentioned earlier, are better equipped to compete for jobs. Also, they now have available to them the services of many MAAs that have accumulated considerable expertise in helping families toward self-sufficiency in a brief period. Unless levels of public assistance and services drop so precipitously in California, Minnesota, and other states as to cause another major migration into Wisconsin, most current and future arrivals from the camps should not become what some resettlement officials call "hard core" welfare cases. If the number of families receiving assistance remains stable or at least expands more slowly than the total population, the share of Hmong families receiving welfare will drop.

Even if the share rises over the near term, longer-term prospects now seem very promising. This optimism flows from the performance of Hmong children in school. In the early 1980s there was considerable worry among resettlement officials that by housing Hmong in low-income areas of large cities such as Milwaukee, young people would become socialized by the immediate environment and acquire many self-defeating habits of mind and action that tend to be over-represented in inner cities. There was also worry that the propensity to marry early and to have many children would lead to a high dropout rate and a low post-secondary education rate among

youth. And there was concern that with so many parents illiterate or lacking more than just a few years of formal primary education, children would not do well in school. None of these concerns seem to have been warranted--at least not in Wisconsin.

There have been and continue to be problems associated with such things as gangs and drugs. The percentage of Hmong implicated by these problems, however, seems not only lower than in other ethnic groups of the inner city but also lower than for the population as a whole.³⁰ In fact, a few MAAs reported that living in the inner city represented something of an advantage. More so than might have been possible in suburbs or smaller towns, it served to highlight the superior attributes of Hmong culture and to show youth what could happen to them if they strayed too far and adopted the same proclivities as their neighbors. Similarly, although early marriages and children did lead to a high dropout rate for girls, the combination of willingness by most of them to return to studies and willingness of schools to welcome them has made the matter less one of dropout and more one of interruption of studies.

Most encouraging, it has become evident that the formal educational qualifications of parents have little to do with the scholastic achievements of their children. As suggested earlier, illiteracy and limited schooling among adults were the results of scarce opportunities in Laos. Nothing in their history suggests that Hmong adults discount the value of learning, of formal education, or of its utility in helping the next generation to achieve more than they did and to have more than they do. Parents in Wisconsin may not be able to help their children with their homework, but they can and do encourage their children to work hard and to do as well as possible so that they can reach self-sufficiency on their own.

The effect, analogous to that produced by several other immigrant groups now and in the past, has been a standard of scholastic performance that should be something of an embarrassment to Wisconsin natives. In Green Bay, as in Minneapolis-St. Paul and San Diego, Hmong children are obtaining scores that are almost 40% higher than the average for all schools in the city.³¹ Beyond the primary level, MAAs in every Wisconsin community report that the vast majority of high school graduates, often as high as 100%, are going on to vocational and community college and to university.³² Some MAAs even worry that there will not be enough jobs available in the smaller towns for Hmong college graduates. The next generation of adults, they believe, may be overqualified for local labor markets and may present a new kind of challenge to self-sufficiency. Time will tell.

In any event, these tendencies imply that though it may take a long time, there is a very good chance that welfare usage by Hmong can drop to less than the current statewide average of 6% to

³⁰Westermeyer, 1987; Westermeyer et al., 1989; and Yee and Thu, 1987.

³¹Information about Green Bay and Minnesota was provided by Ray Hutchison (University of Wisconsin-Green Bay). See Rumbaut, 1989, for data on San Diego. Generally, however, Hmong students in the country for a longer period of time do better than recent arrivals. It is possible, though not necessarily probable, that the recent arrivals will not do as well in the future as did their earlier counterparts. One should also note that the superior scores of Hmong and other Asian Americans across the country include a "behavior premium." Asian-American students are generally more obedient, more respectful of authority, and less disruptive in the classroom than others. They also look more serious and hard working. These youth epitomize proper student behavior in the eyes of teachers. Accordingly, teachers reward them with higher grades. But even making allowances for this factor, the difference between scores for Asian Americans and for others remains significant.

³²This high rate of passage to post-secondary studies is unusual. Ranard (1988) reports that, nationwide, relatively few Hmong youth proceed beyond high school.

7% of the general population.³³ The process may take as few as 10 or as many as 30 more years. Along the way, assuming no dramatic changes in welfare policy, current children will reach adulthood and form their own families. Some will choose to continue to live with their parents, adding themselves to the pool of employable adults through which the household might get to self-sufficiency more quickly. Others will move out. In doing so they will lower the size of AFDC-UP grants that their parents and siblings receive. As before, this will make it more feasible for the parents to produce more income from work than from welfare. Eventually, current and future "hard core" parents unable or unwilling to work will reach the age of retirement. Strong family bonds being what they are, most parents will ultimately become dependents of their children. For the long term it is the children receiving welfare today, if they continue to do as well as they have in school, who have every likelihood of taking their parents off of welfare tomorrow.

Conclusion

Commenting on the remarkable economic progress that Asian Americans, as a group, are making in our society, several observers have opined that certain key cultural habits contribute importantly to their accomplishments.³⁴ These habits, common to several European groups that became prosperous within a generation or two, include a strong sense of ethnic identification and loyalty; deep respect for parents; mature behavior; faith in the supreme importance of education; and firm belief in advancement of oneself and one's children.

Compared to other Asian Americans or to the population as a whole, Hmong are not what one could call successful. With more than half their number still unemployed, receiving public assistance, and living near or below the official poverty standard, they have a considerable distance yet to travel before approaching achievement levels of other disadvantaged minorities (e.g., African Americans). But on their terms, especially for those who came to this country during the years 1979 to 1981 with less preparation than just about any other group of immigrants in our history, they are making good progress. This progress is most noticeable in the educational accomplishments of the next generation of adults. To the extent that Hmong seem to share the same beliefs as mentioned above for successful Asian Americans, it may seem reasonable to suppose that their culture, notwithstanding high fertility rates, is proving more of a help than a hindrance for longer-term self-sufficiency.

This supposition, at the very least, would be an overstatement. If culture were the most important determinant of economic advancement one would be hard pressed to explain how other minorities, especially minorities with cultural attributes different than those of Asian Americans, have come so far in recent years. Among African Americans, for example, high school graduation rates rose from less than 40% nationally in 1960 to over 85% in 1990.³⁵ The share of families earning more than \$34,000 (the national median for white households) increased from 28% in 1980 to 34% in 1989 (i.e., a 22% increase in less than a decade). Also, notwithstanding a level of media and academic attention completely out of scale with its significance, the percentage of the total African-American population in what some observers call the "underclass" of inner cities is now about 6%. If culture is a prime factor then differences between Asian- and African-American culture may not be as great as some commentators seem to imply.

³³The 7% figure represents the share of all families receiving AFDC and SSI in 1988 (United States, 1990b).

³⁴Rose, 1985; and Whitmore et al., 1989.

³⁵These figures on African Americans, derived from various sources, are reported in Cannon, 1990.

Culture is, in any event, mutable. It shapes and is shaped by the social, economic, and political worlds in which people live. If worlds change in a significant way, change in pertinent parts of culture usually follow. The factor that may have had greater importance for Hmong in this regard, and perhaps also for African Americans over the last several decades, was emergence in their worlds of opportunities to speed the pace of progress.

First among these opportunities was the autonomous increase in the general supply of jobs over the course of the decade. This expansion made it more feasible for Hmong to find work and more sensible for them to look for it in a family's current home or further afield. Within this improving environment another opportunity presented itself through gradual change in federal and state welfare and related programs. These changes made it possible for personnel of public agencies and MAAs to break the constraining bonds of institutional habit that have guided the programs since their beginnings and to concentrate resources on promoting what I have called family economic development (see Appendix).

The notion that this promotion should adapt itself to the characteristics of the target population was crucial in this regard, as was the idea that success be measured only in terms of numbers of families that reach sustained self-sufficiency. It is not possible to say whether one effort borne of these guiding principles was more or less significant than another. One may suppose that they all served appropriate purposes at different times and in different places for different families. Extensive use of training--whether of the "on-the-job" variety through which wage subsidies to employers serve as incentive for them to hire someone that they would ordinarily reject, of the "culture-modification" variety through which individuals learn how to behave in manners consistent with mainstream expectations, or of the "skill-enhancement" variety through which trainees get what they need to apply for better-paying jobs--simultaneously lowered obstacles to securing work and opened the way for the chain of employment to produce its effects. Timely exertions to deal with hostile discrimination in the workplace and in residential areas, and to provide intermediary "intercultural communication" services for both employer and worker as the need arose, did the same.

Use of the multiple wage-earner strategy to generate total earnings greater than welfare, the juggling of funds from different program sources to meet child care and transportation costs, the extension of Medical Assistance coverage to lower risks of quitting work and returning to welfare because of health emergencies, and other components of the self-sufficiency effort all seemed to make sense as well. To the extent that welfare reform efforts are making it increasingly feasible for governments to engage similar approaches for welfare families in other disadvantaged groups, there is an increased likelihood that the welfare system can become more of a help than a hindrance to all motivated families with potential to reach self-sufficiency.

New efforts made possible by reforms may not have the same impact for other groups as did KSI for Hmong. Hmong are atypical members of the general welfare population. Most families in the general population use AFDC as an income insurance mechanism to deal with the consequences of childbirth among single parents too young or too unqualified to work, and with the consequences of loss to a family of its primary breadwinner. Even under these circumstances, the majority of AFDC families use it for no more than a year. Less than 10% depend on it for as long as have the Hmong (i.e., six years or more).³⁶ That is, if there is a welfare "dependency" problem in

³⁶In Minnesota, a state quite similar to Wisconsin, between 30% and 40% of all families that receive AFDC support for the first time are headed by young women with children born out of wedlock (Minnesota, 1985). Many or most of these women are under the age of 19. By Wisconsin law, they are supposed to go to school. The other first-time welfare families are headed by older women who have been widowed, divorced or abandoned (sometimes solely in order to allow the family left behind to receive AFDC) by income-producing spouses. Many of these women have low levels of school attainment and no prior work experience. As new entrants to the labor force they

Wisconsin it is a problem that affects somewhere between 10% and 20% of the 6% to 7% of the total population receiving AFDC, or around 1% of the state population. This is small in relation to the 73% of the Hmong population on welfare in 1988. In addition, many or most of the 1% are "hard core" cases who lack the capacity or motivation to become self-sufficient.

Even if significant reductions in welfare use prove elusive, there is still a good case to be made for efforts to help families that are not hard-core cases to become self-sufficient more quickly than has previously proven possible. Every welfare family is a poor family and every departure from welfare represents movement out of poverty. If means can be found to increase the rate of turnover in the general AFDC population (i.e., to shorten the length of time families remain poor), this would be of considerable benefit to them and to society even if the share of the total population using AFDC at any point in time seems constant.

In this respect it seems important to point out one idea that welfare reform has not dealt with extensively--transferring "ownership" of self-sufficiency efforts to the community that is to benefit from them. Reformers do sometimes speak of "privatization" of services, by which they usually mean a transfer of direct implementation from the public sector to private contractors. Though there seems to be no shortage of vague talk about "community participation," the idea of actually shifting responsibility for implementation to African-American, Hispanic or Native-American self-help groups within inner cities or rural areas does not often surface.

Whatever the reasons for this may be, the experiences of Hmong and their MAAs in Wisconsin suggest that there is something to be said for experimenting with ways to build upon the institutional infrastructure of various kinds of community associations that already exist to serve other ethnic groups and to promote among them the idea of family economic development along lines pursued through KSI. Out of this it may prove possible to develop new public-private partnerships of the kind that seems to have held Hmong in good stead in recent years.

are unable to earn more than the minimum standard of income set by the state. Similarly, for women who had been working prior to loss of their spouses, their earnings alone are less than the state's minimum. That is, the bulk of the AFDC population at any point in time consists of families that need temporary assistance in making ends meet. Accordingly, in most instances use of AFDC is a relatively short-term affair that offers benefits in much the same way as unemployment insurance. Of all Minnesota families that first received AFDC in December 1977, for instance, 40% accumulated a total of six months or less of support in the 86-month period through February 1985, and 75% accumulated no more than 42 months. Less than 7% received welfare for the entire period.

Through a process of completing school or some other form of training before entering or re-entering the labor market, of simply finding a job with appropriate earnings characteristics, or of waiting until a child reached the age where he no longer qualified for support (thus making earnings from work more remunerative than welfare), many of the women heading these families "earned" their way off of AFDC. But they were not the majority. National studies indicate that between 1968 and 1983 the most important reasons for leaving the program involved marriage to or reunion with a working spouse that raised family income above state standards (35% of cases), and transfer to another program such as Social Security (14%) (Ellwood, 1986). Increases in the work earnings of the single head of household to a level higher than that offered by AFDC applied in 21% of cases.

That only a small share of families were able to earn their way off of welfare should not be surprising. In an economy where wages have been driven down to where an ever-increasing proportion of families require multiple wage earners in order to maintain their standards of income, the probability that a single parent with little education can support a young child at the state's income standard, let alone two or three children, is low. And to the extent that until recently efforts to assist families toward self-sufficiency were not attuned to the labor market and the financial realities of households, prospects for assistance programs to increase these probabilities were also low.

Characteristics and circumstances of welfare families in other ethnic groups being different from those of Hmong, an exact duplicate of KSI is unlikely. Other minorities have longer and more complex histories of racial and ethnic discrimination to contend with. They also lack acknowledged leadership or other bases for motivating families toward self-sufficiency and children toward higher school achievement. These and other important differences indicate that family economic development programs for these groups cannot have exactly the same properties as KSI. What they should have in common, though, are the same guiding principles.

Appendix: A Note On AFDC and the Welfare System

The main AFDC program (i.e., excluding the smaller and more recent "unemployed parent" (UP) segment) originated during the period immediately following the Civil War. By making up the difference between a household's own earnings and a minimum standard established by politics in each state, it operates as an income supplementation program for families with children under the age of 18 and headed by a single adult (usually the mother). To the people who administer it, the program is primarily a means through which the benevolent interest of the general community protects women and children who would otherwise suffer harm as a consequence of parental irresponsibility or other catastrophes leading to extreme destitution. AFDC thus operates as an income insurance mechanism or "safety net" that sustains families until they get back on their feet.

Although it throws up a number of barriers to access, such as demanding that recipients give up their privacy and engage in an onerous monthly process of paperwork and interviews with case workers, AFDC contains few formal mechanisms through which families might shorten the length of time that they require support. This responsibility falls to other, so-called "employment and training" programs in which AFDC recipients, unless granted a waiver, are required to participate.³⁷

Unfortunately, these employment and training programs have been slow in orienting themselves to the full range of constraints faced by welfare families because dealing with such families was not their primary mission. That mission was to help unemployed individuals locate, apply for, and secure jobs of any kind. Accordingly, the programs measured their performance in terms of successful placements ("entered employments" per dollar of program outlay) and, for people on AFDC, in terms of welfare terminations ("exits" per dollar of outlay). It did not matter if the characteristics of wages and related benefits matched those of AFDC or if the grant termination was short or long. By judging performance this way, there was also a natural tendency for the programs to select mostly those cases with high probabilities of being able to find their own jobs and their own way off of welfare within a short time span. And then there was the perpetual constraint of under-funding relative to expectations of what the programs were supposed to accomplish in lowering welfare use.

Slow and ponderous as many critics suggest it is, the welfare "system"--here referring to AFDC, related employment and training programs and other local, state, and federal efforts attached to them in some way--has slowly changed in response to persistent calls for "reform." In potential, if not always in action, the system has moved closer to providing the wherewithal through which it can serve as both a "safety net" *and* as a means of speeding self-sufficiency. Evidence of this movement over the years includes: more attention to child care needs and expenses; more appropriate allowances for transportation costs associated with work; greater scope for training;

³⁷These programs, such as the Work Incentive Program (WIN) and JOBS, fell under a series of federal legislative actions that started with the Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) in the 1960s and then followed with the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) in the 1970s and the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) in the 1980s.

closer attention in the JOBS program to the match between wages, related benefits and AFDC income, and the duration of grant terminations; garnisheeing of wages of working fathers who abandon their families; establishment and expansion of the AFDC-UP segment permitting parents to remain together while receiving support; removal of limitations on the hours of work and earnings that "secondary" income-earners in AFDC-UP families may generate; accommodating pregnant girls or young mothers in school in order to lower the rate of permanent dropout; and adoption of a family-focused "case management" approach to assistance.³⁸

The soundness of very recent ideas such as providing a cash incentive for fathers to return to their families and tying AFDC to school attendance of dependent children (i.e., "learnfare") remains to be seen. Even so, the fact that these ideas have surfaced to generate heated debate signals a broadening awareness of shorter- and longer-term issues pertinent to self-sufficiency. The same thing may be said of ongoing discussions of the practicability of extending MA coverage to all families that seem to have good prospects of earning their way off of welfare, and of the feasibility of eliminating the rule under which "primary" breadwinners in the AFDC-UP program cannot work for more than 100 hours each month. If there is still a major weakness in the welfare system today, it does not rest with program details such as those mentioned above. The more compelling and urgent matter is reform of the system as conceived by those responsible for it and by those who criticize it.

Given its original intent, responsibility for administration of AFDC and its predecessors fell logically to a self-selected group of individuals who were once labeled charity workers and who are now associated with what are often called "helping" professions, such as social work, mental health care, psychology, and counseling. As is the case for most people, these administrators tend to view the world through lenses shaped by their training. Adopting metaphors used by "professions," especially the medical profession, they define welfare families as "clients" with "problems" that require "diagnosis" and then "treatment."

Unfortunately, between extensive training in fields providing unlimited possibilities for imputing social and psychological problems, little or no training in matters pertinent to financial difficulties or means to address them, and a cultural habit of viewing welfare as a solution to poverty rather than as a problem of inadequate earning power, AFDC administrators usually have neither an interest in assisting families to leave welfare more quickly nor the skills required to do so. Many of them work on the assumption that poverty is a symptom of other problems (social or psychological) requiring priority attention and that the problem of poverty can take care of itself (which it eventually does in most instances). One may imagine that AFDC would look quite different, though not necessarily better, if it were administered primarily by people trained in business, accounting, economics or, extending into the realm of what the federal government does with respect to poverty overseas, the profession of "economic development work."³⁹

³⁸Bach (1988) provides an interesting overview of how these and other changes have helped Indochinese refugees in other states that offer relatively high welfare benefits.

³⁹By way of contrast, the field of foreign aid from which the notion of family economic development emerged during the last several decades attracted mostly individuals who called themselves sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and economists. Their approach to poverty is the exact inverse of the one that currently dominates the welfare system. For them, promotion of higher income is the only thing that really matters. Social and psychological problems do not exist for poor people or, if they do, increased income will usually take care of them.

For these and other reasons welfare administrators often have difficulty understanding relationships between social, psychological, and economic problems of families, and in identifying courses of action that might be able to treat all three areas at once. In fairness, one should note that most families on welfare are headed by single parents either too young to work or too inexperienced or unqualified to earn more than what AFDC provides.⁴⁰ There may not be as much room for investing in programs such as KSI that aim at rapid achievement of self-sufficiency through employment. Moreover, the perpetual curse of having to defend themselves and the women and children under their responsibility from harm caused by unnecessary "welfare-bashing," other forms of scapegoating, and budget cutting--all of which usually occur during economic downturns when demand for welfare support is highest--has hardly been conducive to cultivation of an ideal atmosphere for constructive discussion and experimentation with the system. If administrators show a tendency to resist proposals for change or to defeat new program initiatives by means of lackluster implementation, they may have good reason for it.

Whatever may be the causes, the problem remains that administrators do not focus as much as they might on using what the system provides to shorten the length of time that families, specifically those with good prospects of becoming self-sufficient within a reasonable amount of time, rely on welfare. In this context it seems important to mention that it was not all that easy for ORR staff to convince their counterparts in RAPP of the merits of KSI. During interviews state personnel told me that they would have preferred funds to be used in much the same way as they used social service grants before KSI began (e.g., support of additional family counseling to deal with inter-generational problems within Hmong families).

In 1987 it was not obvious to state staff that perpetual use of scarce resources for activities that could have no impact upon self-sufficiency was perhaps not the best way to proceed. This idea did not occur to them because, as suggested above, in the culture of their professionalized view of things, economic problems did not have as high a priority as social and psychological problems. One may also suppose that limited prior training and experience in experimenting with efforts to promote self-sufficiency was an important constraining factor.

To their credit, personnel of RAPP eventually agreed to accord self-sufficiency highest priority and, with enthusiasm, to risk doing something that they had never done before. Especially noteworthy was their decision to use ORR social service grants to supplement KSI. No other state did this. The same credit applies to refugee and native-born staff and board members of MAAs. Their original reactions to the KSI idea were similar to those of RAPP personnel. This kind of enthusiastic risk-taking behavior was probably critical to KSI's success in Wisconsin. Its absence in earlier years may have been important in keeping Hmong welfare rates higher than they might have been otherwise. But overdue or not, the KSI experience seems to show that the welfare system still offers considerable potential for doing much more for a great many families than is the case at present.

⁴⁰This larger share of adults in the AFDC population who should not work or who cannot earn anywhere close to the state's minimum standard is an important factor in explaining why there is only a weak relationship between welfare rates, the availability of earnings opportunities, and the level of welfare benefits. To be sure, there is a relationship between benefit levels and welfare utilization rates for families headed by adults who can work but who cannot earn quite as much as what AFDC provides. But at any one time such families represent only a small proportion of the total welfare population.

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ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute is a not-for-profit institute established to study public policy issues affecting the state of Wisconsin.

Under the new federalism, government policy increasingly is made at the state and local level. These public policy decisions affect the lives of every citizen in the state of Wisconsin. Our goal is to provide nonpartisan research on key issues that affect citizens living in Wisconsin so that their elected representatives are able to make informed decisions to improve the quality of life and future of the State.

Our major priority is to improve the accountability of Wisconsin's government. State and local government must be responsive to the citizens of Wisconsin in terms of the programs they devise and the tax money they spend. Accountability should be made available in every major area to which Wisconsin devotes the public's funds.

The agenda for the Institute's activities will direct attention and resources to study the following issues: education; welfare and social services; criminal justice; taxes and spending; and economic development.

We believe that the views of the citizens of Wisconsin should guide the decisions of government officials. To help accomplish this, we will conduct semi-annual public opinion polls that are structured to enable the citizens of Wisconsin to inform government officials about how they view major statewide issues. These polls will be disseminated through the media and be made available to the general public and to the legislative and executive branches of State government. It is essential that elected officials remember that all the programs established and all the money spent comes from the citizens of the State of Wisconsin and is made available through their taxes. Public policy should reflect the real needs and concerns of all the citizens of Wisconsin and not those of specific special interest groups.