

Hmong: Background and Description of Area

The Hmong immigrants come from a tribal culture indigenous to areas of Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Burma and China. Between 1975 and 1991, more than 500,000 people fled Laos and became international political refugees. The Laotian and Vietnamese governments were hostile toward the Hmong because the Hmong fought for the Americans during the Vietnam War. Most of the Hmong spent several years in refugee camps in Thailand. In the data we study, more than 20% of the 1,170 individuals living in Hmong families were born in Thailand. Eventually, nearly all of the Hmong were resettled in third countries with most of them coming to the U.S. In 2001, there were approximately 300,000 Hmong living in the U.S., concentrated in Minnesota, Wisconsin and California.

Because of in-country migration, Minnesota's Hmong population has soared over the past decade. Approximately one quarter of the nation's Hmong population (41,800) lives in Minnesota. St. Paul is home to more than half of all Hmong living in Minnesota, with an approximate count of 24,389. Minneapolis has the next largest population, with 9,595 Hmong residents. The Minneapolis-St. Paul area is the largest Hmong community in the world outside of Thailand.

The largest concentrations of Hmong households and businesses are located in the St. Paul neighborhoods of Payne-Phalen and Thomas-Dale and in the Penn Avenue North corridor of Minneapolis. These neighborhoods are well-established commercial strips comprised of aging commercial, industrial, and mixed-use buildings surrounded by older housing stock. Businesses in these neighborhoods range from small service-oriented businesses, restaurants, and retail to large industrial and manufacturing operations.