ARTICLE APPEARED ON PAGE 169

WASHINGTON QUARTERLY
Fall 1985

Vietnam 1975–1982: The Cruel Peace

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BY JULY 1, 1942 over one million Jews had been exterminated in Eastern Europe. Yet, during the first one and one-half years of the Holocaust, newspapers were reluctant to give credence to what the U.S. Department of State referred to as "wild rumors inspired by Jewish fears." Even after *The Times* and other major British newspapers had finally headlined, in July 1942, "One Million Jews Die," the British Foreign Office, the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. public remained steadfast in their disbelief. The Holocaust only became a reality for them when U.S. soldiers and photographers actually marched into the death camps.

Walter Laqueur's study, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's Final Solution*, contains a wealth of examples of the difficulties that rational, democratic and, most of all, pragmatic government officials, journalists, and scholars had in accepting as fact the psychologically unacceptable truth. Could a government of supposedly civilized men intentionally mount a program which would result in the deaths of many of its most talented and formerly respected citizens? Laqueur recounts Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter's open disbelief when confronted in late 1942 with the existence of Hitler's extermination program by a Polish representative who had just witnessed trainloads of Jewish corpses fresh from the gas chambers in one of the Polish extermination camps. Justice Frankfurter heard Karski out but stated, "I can't believe you." After a further exchange he said, "I did not say this young man [Karski] is lying. I said I cannot believe him. There is a difference.[1]

During the course of the last four decades the world has witnessed violent transitions in a number of Asian countries: land reform campaigns in China and Vietnam involved considerable brutality; in 1965-1966, reprisals against the Communist Party of Indonesia were widespread in Central and East Java and Bali; violence attended the decolonization of East Timor; and postrevolutionary Democratic Kampuchea was beset by autogenocide. In each of these instances serious controversy has emerged over exactly how many people lost their lives. In China, for instance, the numbers put forward range from 800,000 to 3 million.[2] In Indonesia, it is estimated that between 78,000 and 1.2 million died.[3] Estimates of the number of people exe-

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cuted in the Tonkin land reform fluctuate between 3,000 to 50,000.[4] Twenty-five to one hundred thousand persons probably died in the aftermath of the decolonization in East Timor, out of a total population of 550,000.[5] The government of Democratic Kampuchea, through both its misguided policies and its program of liquidating all real, as well as imaginary, social and political enemies, did away with 1.2 to 2.5 million of the 1975 population of 7.7 million.[6]

There are obviously serious difficulties involved in attempting to estimate the magnitude of these events with anything approaching scientific precision. By definition, dead men tell no tales. In addition, such acts are intentionally concealed by their perpetrators—with the exception of extraordinary displays of candor, such as Mao's admission that 800,000 people lost their lives during land reform. Furthermore, clever, albeit ruthless, governments dispose of their enemies in small groups, in places that are far removed from the prying eyes of the international press. Estimating the magnitude of violence in the Third World is usually left to seat-of-the-pants "guesstimates" by well-meaning but untrained observers. What becomes historical fact is in reality a consensus which is often without any empirical foundation. Finally, the political ideology of the estimator frequently plays a large role, making it all the more difficult for serious scholars to reach sober conclusions.

It is important to exercise caution against accepting as historical fact the absence of reports, especially from closed societies. It is imprudent to apply standards of proof befitting open societies to those societies where bad news are not allowed to travel fast. In closed or semi-closed societies, the normal tools for acquiring information fail. First, in closed societies, journalists and scholars are either shut out or given the kind of guided tours that led some Red Cross officials to conclude that allied prisoners of war were being well taken care of in Germany during World War II. Second, Western intelligence services often are not very helpful. They are often uninterested in non-military intelligence and are usually incapable of forming statistical impressions of whole populations from representative samples; the forte of intelligence services remains the style of information collection developed before the rise of modern public opinion research. Intelligence services interview colorful or important individuals often at the expense of more typical and statistically representative persons. Third, those outside the society in which terrible things are taking place often have too much to lose if they acknowledge and divulge the facts; new information can invalidate old positions (for example among adherents of the anti-war movement) or prompt renewed guilt for having abandoned an ally in a time of need. These powerful motives favoring disbelief often lead observers to dismiss as exaggeration the reports of the only persons who know what is going on and are also able to tell the truth—refugees. A paradox of refugee research is that the data of the most knowledgeable informants are often dismissed as exaggerations, even in cases where there is no evidence whatsoever indicating that exaggeration is indeed taking place.

The findings presented in this paper are unprecedented in the post-1975 literature about Vietnam and may be difficult for some to accept. These findings represent more than three years of research among representative samples of Vietnamese refugees in Chicago, San Francisco, Orange

County (California), Paris, Lyon, Toulouse, and Nice. Many serious scholars today, like equally well-intentioned men of affairs in the 1940s, may say that refugees exaggerate, become hysterical, and sometimes tell lies. As authors we can only ask our readers to suspend disbelief until they have taken a close look at the hard evidence derived from the testimony of more than 800 refugees in two countries and seven cities, who span the social length and breadth of the adult overseas Vietnamese population.

Setting the Record Straight

Establishing the existence and extent of a bloodbath is no mere academic exercise. Accurate estimates of political repression are useful guides for the formulation of refugee admission policies. Additionally, foreign policy decisions should depend on accurate monitoring of human rights violations. Finally, setting the historical record straight at least in part fulfills the scholar's duty toward the victims.

An individual will be declared a refugee if he demonstrates a "well-founded fear of political persecution."[7] Determining the likelihood that any particular refugee will be subjected to persecution is the crucial decision facing immigration authorities in countries of first asylum and of final resettlement. The decision can be relatively straightforward when well-known political figures flee a country and are subsequently condemned to death in absentia by a successor government. Well-founded fear of political persecution is more difficult to prove for a mass of refugees. For these, it is difficult, if not impossible, to point to direct personal threats. Therefore it is necessary to rely on statistical estimations that particular groups will be liable to political persecution.[8] Victims are not only individuals defined by their political opinions, but also persons singled out because of their membership in a specific group: ethnic, religious, social, or occupational. Three essential questions must, therefore, be answered. First, how large must the probability be before one can talk of well-founded fear of persecution? Second, what is the risk to any particular individual of becoming a victim? Third, which social and political categories are the most exposed? That these decisions can be trying is shown by the immediate execution of a whole group of individuals who had been denied asylum and were forcibly returned to Pol Pot's Cambodia in 1977. In spite of the life-or-death nature of these decisions, methods have not yet been devised for estimating the statistical probability of persecution. This paper represents a first attempt to use refugee data to derive statistical probabilities of various types of persecution in Vietnam, such as long-term incarceration or political execution.

Decisions on foreign assistance increasingly depend on the human rights situation existing in the potential recipient country. Congress requires the U.S. government, for instance, to monitor human rights throughout the world in order to decide whether a particular regime should receive foreign assistance. It is obvious that human rights problems exist throughout much of the world, particularly in the Third World, where justice and protection against arbitrary actions by the state have not attracted widespread support within either political elites or mass publics. The very generality of human rights abuses, when combined with the limited attention span of U.S. governing institutions, means that only the most serious instances, examples involving mass deprivation of

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human and political rights, will receive adequate attention. For this reason, whenever the possibility of massive human rights violations exists, it behooves us to marshal the sharpest information-gathering tools possible in order to assess the situation accurately and to supply policymakers with the raw materials required for making rational decisions.

In the early 1970s, numerous claims were made that the withdrawal of U.S. military support in Vietnam would lead to a bloodbath. High level policymakers in the Johnson, Nixon, and Ford administrations, including both President Richard Nixon and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, stated categorically that a large bloodbath was inevitable if North Vietnam and its supporters inside South Vietnam took power. As Saigon was falling, former CIA analyst Samuel Adams predicted that 100,000 people would be murdered in the event of a communist victory.[9] These predictions were based, in part, upon an earlier study.[10]

Since 1975, not only the Hanoi government but also U.S. government officials, journalists, and academics of various political persuasions have repeatedly stated that the oft-predicted blood bath did not occur. A retrospective on predictions has been made and the predictors have been lampooned.[11] Virtually every person who has written on postwar Vietnam—even those emphasizing the miserable nature of internal conditions—has begun by saying that there has been no bloodbath.

> There has apparently been little retaliation on any level and virtually none against former members of the Thieu government or army.[12]
>
> . . . The bloodbath theory was one of the great false alarms of all time.[13]

Indeed, the only bloodbath of which there is so far any evidence in Vietnam was the massacre of civilians by the disintegrating South Vietnamese army. . . .[14]

At the end of the Vietnam war in April 1975 there was no bloodbath as some of the more harsh antagonists of North Vietnam had predicted.[15]

At any rate, there appears to have been no bloodbath, to the surprise of some of those who had feared that they might be among the victims.[16]

In Vietnam and Laos, members of the former enemy officer corps, the upper echelons of the civil service, bourgeois intellectuals, and professionals have been incarcerated in reeducation camps. There has been no evidence of systematic executions of former enemies in Vietnam or Laos.[17]

There has been no bloodbath, so far as is known.[18]

While no bloodbath followed the 1975 victory in the South as U.S. officials predicted. . . .[19]

Four years after the last American helicopter fled from the roof of the Embassy in Saigon there has been no 'bloodbath' of reprisals and killings by the Communist government in Vietnam.[20]

To be sure, the 'bloodbath' that had been feared by supporters of the war did not occur. . . .[21]

Although the Government admits that some war criminals were executed in the wake of the 1975 take-over, execution for purely political acts is not accepted policy. Several executions for organizing refugee escape attempts

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have been announced, and former reeducation camp inmates have reported executions for escape attempts and resistance to camp authorities.[22]

Certain disturbing facts contradict these reassuring statements. Refugees speaking and writing about conditions in Vietnam, after having themselves experienced some of the harsher forms of political repression, maintain that political executions are quite common: "Another witness, Nguyen Cong Hoan . . . said that he himself knew about 300 cases of executions in his own province of Phy Yen. . . ."[23] In addition, several other refugees have published detailed accounts of executions in the context of the reeducation camp system.[24]

Further credence is given to the possibility that there may have been a bloodbath after 1975 by the work of demographers knowledgeable about Vietnam's official vital statistics. These demographers suspect that the crude death rate of seven per thousand reported for the country as a whole in the vital registration system and in the 1979 census is an underestimate. A method devised to reconstruct likely population trends separately for North and South Vietnam reveals that the South Vietnamese death rate remains consistently half a percentage point above the rate for North Vietnam. The underestimate of the death rate for the South is attributed to underreporting of deaths on both the census and the registers.[25]

What is clear from the protestations of protagonists on both sides is that there is an important controversy. Whatever else one might say about the bloodbath question, it remains clear that the subject will rouse strong opinions on both sides and that the discussion itself will bring forth the ghosts of the ideological battles of the 1960s and 1970s. In many ways it might seem preferable to some to avoid delving into such unpleasant matters because reopening old wounds cannot bring the victims back to life and raising the whole topic will further complicate the history of Vietnam and cloud its future diplomatic relationship with the United States. The aforesaid notwithstanding, we believe that professional social scientists cannot shrink from controversy and that the matter must be confronted in a serious and objective manner.

Anyone working in the human rights field has a responsibility to those who may have fallen victim to capricious governments, be they on the Left or on the Right. The single most dramatic impact of the human rights movement worldwide may be that few governments today, regardless of the inclinations of their leaders, can ignore world public opinion in its entirety. Publicizing the fate of those who have been unjustly treated may make such treatment less probable in the future; conversely, failing to publish such results probably encourages governments with arbitrary inclinations to indulge themselves, assuming that the outside world will neither know nor long remember. Clearly, responsibility to the victims requires that their deaths not go unreported. Even in moments of darkness, history needs to know.

Estimating the Size of the Bloodbath

We will present results pertaining only to victims of intentional executions in Vietnam from 1975 to 1982. We have not included those who died by accident (such as clearing mine fields), those who died from malnutriton, disease, or exhaustion, those who com-

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mitted suicide, or those who simply disappeared.

The method utilized depends upon refugee accounts as the basic source of information. In the spring and summer of 1982, 615 randomly selected adult Vietnamese refugees were interviewed in Chicago, and in northern and southern California. The sample is representative of the U.S. Vietnamese refugee population on major sociodemographic characteristics. As part of a larger series of questions, the respondents were asked questions about both their personal experience and their indirect knowledge of political repression after 1975. The forms of political repression that are considered here include incarceration in a political jail, detention in a reeducation camp, and executions.

Twenty percent of the respondents had spent time in a reeducation camp and six percent had been incarcerated in a political jail. Sixty percent of the respondents answered that they had a relative or friend who had been sent to a reeducation camp, and 28 percent personally knew one or several persons who had been jailed. Fifty-seven percent gave detailed information about at least one camp internee (his name, camp location/s, period/s of detention, reason for detention, effect of reeducation on the person) and 23 percent gave detailed information about political prisoners. On the average, each knowledgeable respondent provided details about two or three internees or prisoners. Altogether, the respondents gave some detailed information about 905 friends, relatives, and acquaintances who had been placed in a reeducation camp or a jail since 1975.

For many of our respondents who had been interned in a reeducation camp, in a prison, or both, the difference between the two types of institutions is a difference in degree rather than in quality. The amount of political indoctrination taking place in camps may vary from a perfunctory one hour a day to periods of full-time indoctrination, that is, approximately ten hours a day of lectures, self-criticism sessions, and confession writing. Generally, the longer the stay in a reeducation camp, the less intensive the political indoctrination classes. Instead, much reliance is placed on the reeducating value of forced labor, constant hunger, general discomfort, as well as arbitrary, extremely painful, and life-threatening punishments.

More than half of the twenty percent of our respondents who had experienced reeducation spent periods varying between several months and several years in one or more reeducation camps. For these long-term inmates the emphasis was on forced labor, eight to ten hours a day felling trees, digging ditches, and other types of agricultural labor. Inadequate food rations was the complaint most frequently voiced—a posteriori—about camp conditons: 300 to 500 grams of starchy food a day, usually steamed rice mixed with corn, or noodles, sweet potatoes, manioc, or an undigestible sorghum cereal called *bobo*. Maybe once a month, this was supplemented by a few grams of fish or meat. Perpetual hunger was the predominant condition. Even with the irregular supplement of the food parcels that the prisoners were occasionally allowed to receive from relatives, this diet was clearly insufficient: "The majority of us did not have enough food to eat and too much hard labor to the point of passing out while working" (Respondent # 479); "I ate banana leaves to survive" (Respondent # 247). Others ate frogs, rats, or insects for protein. Many became sick with beri-beri.

Respondents also stressed the arbi-

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trary nature of the punishments, distributed more or less randomly, sometimes for trivial or imaginary faults. The most dreaded of these were being shackled in a connex box, being put in a compression cell, or being tied with barbed wire. "If any complained or said something improper he would be punished by handcuff or footcuff. It is a very terrible punishment to be chained 24 hours out of 24" (Respondent # 34). "If one is punished, he will be put in a compression cell. Once out from the compression cell, nobody can walk" (Respondent 201). "A form of punishment for those who attempted to escape is the Japanese sword: Two arms are cross-tied in the back and the person beaten up until he passes out. After the cuffs are removed the arms are unable to move" (Respondent 479). "I myself have not been punished. But others have been beaten and tortured. Some were even placed in water-filled trenches" (Respondent # 71).

The treatment reserved for political prisoners was worse than for camp inmates, because they were not allowed to be fed and cared for by their families. "Myself and eighteen others were chained for five months and 20 days in a completely dark cell. We were fed the leftovers of the Communist soldiers. The food was always spoilt and foul smelling. But we had to eat it to survive" (Respondent # 53). With respect to the jails, the recurrent theme was the extremely cramped conditions in cells built for 30 or 40 but accommodating at times up to 100 prisoners, where it was often impossible to lie down. In some jails, the prisoners were regularly shackled at night.

The phrase that comes back most consistently with reference to both camps and jails is "slow death." Ironically, many of our respondents insisted on the deviousness of a regime that protects its international reputation by letting people die a slow death in camps, jails, and New Economic Zones, rather than by killing them outright. Actually, the information on political executions supplied by the very same respondents in the last part of the questionnaire has convinced us that the regime does both.

The ultimate form of political repression is death by execution. Our purpose here is to determine whether a bloodbath took place after April 30, 1975, and to estimate the number of persons executed. The data we collected revealed facts that are as shocking as they were unanticipated. Thirty-five percent of the respondents acknowledged that they knew or had heard of several persons who were executed for political reasons. Twenty-nine percent gave detailed information (name, date of execution, place, reasons for execution, etc.) for one or more victims of execution.[26]. Thirty percent of the executions were reported by eyewitnesses. Those who had spent some time in a reeducation camp were twice as likely to be aware of executions as those who had not been reeducated. Respondents of Vietnamese ethnicity were more likely to report victims than were Sino-Vietnamese respondents.[27] Most of the reported execution victims were males. Over two-thirds of all executions occurred in 1975–1976. Half of the victims were allegedly guilty of anti-government resistance. In 1975, the most common victims of executions were high-ranking officers of the former regimes. After 1975, they were anti-government resistants. Two-thirds took place in the Saigon and the Mekong delta areas. In 1975, Saigon and the towns of the delta were the major sites of these executions although the coastal areas north of Saigon became more important after 1976. Executions

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of resistants were widely spread geographically, but the delta area had a concentration of high-ranking officers. Most of the executions motivated by escape attempts happened in areas north of Saigon.

Just because approximately 35 percent of the refugees questioned gave information about executions does not necessarily mean that large numbers of persons were killed. Taking a hypothetical example, all of the respondents conceivably might have been reporting on exactly the same, relatively small number of victims whose executions happen to be well known. This is why obtaining the names of the victims was crucial, even though the act of asking for names tended to frighten some people into silence.

A substantial number of our fully identified victims were named by more than one respondent, and were therefore duplicates. That diverse respondents independently reported the execution of the same individual gave us confidence in the reliability of our data. To take an extreme example, when the same individual's execution was independently reported by twelve different respondents interviewed in three different cities in two different countries, this established beyond any doubt that the particular person was indeed executed.

The existence of duplicates—executions reported by more than a single respondent—however, creates statistical problems when one tries to estimate the total number of individuals who might have been killed for political reasons in Vietnam. We assumed that, as the samples became a larger and larger proportion of the total world refugee population, the duplication rate would increase so much that we would probably reach a point where we would not be told about any execution that had not been previously reported by other respondents. For this reason, we have not directly extrapolated from knowledge of executions found in our samples to the knowledge levels that would have emerged had we been able to interview all refugees. Instead, we devised a means of deflating the estimated death count by utilizing the comments of Vietnamese officials to determine the true duplication rate that would have been found if all refugees had actually been interviewed.

A second major problem exists in utilizing refugee interviews. Refugee samples do not directly reflect the rate of persecution that one might encounter among the general population that remained behind in Vietnam. Following the advice of critics of refugee research, we explicitly rejected the assumption that the rate of persecution found among refugees would be the same as among the population that stayed behind in Vietnam. We have not assumed, for instance, that the same percentage of the home and refugee populations would have been sent to reeducation camps and prisons.

The logic of the method makes the following assumptions:

- that Prime Minister Pham Van Dong was telling the truth in 1978 when he stated, "In over three years, we returned to civilian life and to their families more than a million persons who in one way or another had collaborated with the enemy";[28]
- that people truthfully reported whether they themselves had been sent to reeducation camp or jail for political reasons;
- that people who reported in convincing detail about persons who were incarcerated or executed were probably telling the truth; and
- that our U.S. sample of 615 respon-

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dents was representative of the Vietnamese refugee population throughout the world.[29]

Combining the data from our study with the above assumptions, we are confident that 150,000 out of the worldwide population of adult refugees experienced either reeducation camp or imprisonment for political reasons. Extrapolating from Pham Van Dong's admission, it is clear that another 850,000 persons still residing in Vietnam must have shared the experience of incarceration. This means that the rate of victimization among the adult population of Vietnam was approximately one-quarter of the rate found among refugees.[30] We also found through our investigation of the prisons and reeducation camps that when we ask different people independently to name inmates, there is a substantial duplication rate. Although our own sample manifested a duplication rate of five percent for the names of inmates, we instead assume a duplication rate of 500 percent, which brings our estimate in line with Pham Van Dong's admission.[31]

In estimating the number of executions we assumed that the high incidence of reports on executions among the refugees would need to be divided by five to account for duplication, and additionally, it needed to be reduced by a factor of four to reach a final figure for the home population. After adding these correction factors, we estimate the total number of persons executed in Vietnam during 1975–1982 to be at least 65,000.[32]

It should be emphasized that this estimate may well be quite low, because we erred on the side of conservatism in evaluating what refugees told us. For instance, when making our estimates, we discarded two-thirds of the names of execution victims, preferring to use only names that were provided by eyewitnesses.

The number of named victims used in this estimate already reflects a prior conservative decision to use only reports which were detailed enough to convince us that they were not simple exaggerations. For instance, one of our respondents told us about 200 executions in one evening at a single reeducation camp. Yet, because he did not provide names—only giving us the date, place, and reason for the executions—we considered this to be firm evidence of only one execution. Our rationale was that the respondent could conceivably have supplied names for all those executed. The amount of detail supplied by this single respondent was not sufficient to convince us that he was not exaggerating. Therefore, we conservatively counted this as evidence of a single execution only. Interestingly, we obtained independent confirmation of this particular incident, albeit with lower numbers, but this evidence came from a refugee who was not in our sample, and therefore, we did not alter our original coding decision. Finally, since it was the respondent's uncle, rather than the respondent himself, who had seen the executions, the entire report of 200 deaths was removed from the projection process altogether because it did not emanate from an eyewitness.

Statistics do not begin to convey the quality of this experience. Our respondents were eyewitnesses to 30 percent of the executions that they reported, and their words give a pattern of execution that was often as arbitrary as it was vicious.

> Respondent # 91, a former high school student, interviewed in San Francisco: "The chief of a village who disliked the Com-

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munists treated them badly whenever he caught a Vietcong (VC). So when the VC took over the south of Vietnam and caught him, they took him through the village and let anyone beat him. Finally, the VC disemboweled him."

Respondent # 92, a former noncommissioned officer in the Vietnamese Air Force, interviewed in San Francisco: "Three of my friends were soldiers of the former government. They participated in anti-government resistance. One day, they were caught by the Communists as they were distributing leaflets. They were executed in front of the public court. Also the brother of one of my friends in Go Cong got drunk and shouted words against the Communist government. The Communist soldiers heard him, followed him to his house, and shot him right in front of his house."

Respondent #96, a former housewife interviewed in San Francisco: "I witnessed the execution of a district chief in Rach Gia in 1975. He opposed the Communists fiercely. But when the Communists took over South Vietnam, he did not manage to run away and was caught. Before executing him, the VC lacerated his skin and cut off his nose and his ears."

Respondent # 202, a former soldier interviewed in Chicago: "I knew four persons who were put to death between 1975 and 1978. One was shot to death and another tortured to death because of escape attempts. Another was shot because he had sent his family a letter expressing his discontent. The fourth one was executed because he had violated camp regulations."

Respondent # 273, a former civil servant interviewed in Orange County: "A lieutenant colonel tried to escape from the Lang Son reeducation camp by bribing one of the guards. His plan was revealed, he was shot in one leg and caught. On the next day he was buried alive. He died after four days."

Respondent # 269, a former fisherman interviewed in San Francisco: "Two people in the same reeducation camp as me were allowed to be released from the camp. But when they just got out at the gate of the camp, they were shot to death."

Respondent # 328, a former airport security guard, interviewed in San Francisco: "I witnessed the execution of a congressman, a leader of the Hoa Hoa religion in the fourth zone, who was imprisoned in the same barrack as me. His head was cut off in public and he was stabbed in the belly."

Respondent #429. a former fisherman interviewed in San Francisco: "In 1980 in Con Xom Bong, in Nha Trang province, 20 people were caught as they were trying to escape from Vietnam by boat. They were shot to death when they were on the boat. One of these twenty people was brought upon the shore and shot to death there."

Respondent # 460, a former supervisor in a French factory, interviewed in San Francisco: "By 1975, the Communists executed everywhere. They established the People's Court, accused summarily, and executed."

Conclusion

When this research project began, we expected high estimates on the pop-

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ulation of jails and reeducation camps and virtually no positive responses on political executions. When the first 100 interviews from Chicago contradicted the prevailing wisdom that there had been no widespread executions, we hypothesized that virtually the entire phenomenon resulted from sampling error; we thought we simply might have touched a pocket of extreme right-wing respondents on the north side of Chicago. To test this reasoning, we next drew fairly large, statistically representative samples of the Vietnamese population of the entire city of San Francisco as well as Orange County, California. The results on the execution question remained remarkably consistent with the earlier snowball sample from Chicago, in spite of the insertion of new interviewing teams at each locale: 37 percent of the respondents in Chicago gave details about victims of execution, 31 percent in San Francisco, and 35 percent in Orange County.

Over a year of interviewing in three different metropolitan areas in the United States convinced us that the phenomenon was real. Nonetheless, we decided to delay release of the U.S. results until we had tested yet another reason for skepticism—namely that there was something peculiar about the refugee population that had reached the United States. The middle and left wing of the South Vietnamese political spectrum might have well have fled elsewhere (perhaps to France), leaving the United States with a disproportionate share of army officers, police operatives, and government officials, who would logically have had a higher probability of being exposed to the harshest forms of political recrimination. Nine additional months of research in France have invalidated this hypothesis; although we have only scratched the surface of the data yielded by the French sample, it is clear that the number of persons knowing about reeducation camps, jails, and executions is slightly higher than among the U.S. samples. Two additional years of research in two countries and six cities have been sufficient to exhaust our skepticism about whether or not widespread killing took place in Vietnam after 1975.

This project recounts the consequences of a revolution that replaced a corrupt, right-wing, autocratic regime with a corrupt, left-wing, mobilization regime. The method used to part the veil of secrecy is not designed exclusively for carnage accompanying Communist revolutions. The same method can and should be used on transgressions wherever they occur; with refugees from El Salvador as well as from Nicaragua; with refugees from Iran as well as from Kampuchea. The point here is not to pillar either the Left or the Right but to provide a more accurate record on which to base refugee policies, human rights decisions, and perceptions of history.

The fact that a bloodbath occurred in Vietnam after April 30, 1975 may be startling to some and unacceptable to others. Just as reasonable men doubted the reports of the escapees from Auschwitz, reasonable individuals will respond to these findings about Vietnam with a combination of shock and disbelief. Some will dismiss the research as an attempt to rehabilitate the political reputations of the mighty who have fallen (Johnson, Nixon, Dean Rusk, Rockefeller, etc.) Others may prefer to ignore the findings because it is psychologically more comfortable to forget the consequences of what was popularly viewed as a far-off Asian war in which the United States should never have been involved. Still others may say that estimates are only

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approximations, that refugee eyewitnesses exaggerate, and that nothing short of photographic or documentary evidence will do—thereby dismissing the testimony of hundreds of statistically representative Vietnamese. Finally, many will say that the Vietnamese are a methodical and rational people and that they would never have become involved in large-scale reprisals because "any attempt at a bloodbath would have outraged relatives and friends of the victims and would have isolated the People's Revolutionary Government from the population whose support it needs to consolidate control and run the country."[33] Such commentators would do well to remember that in excess of one million Vietnamese have fled from Vietnam precisely because they could not accept the legitimacy of the new political order whose performance since 1975 has featured war rather than peace and tight coercive control rather than anything approximating "socialism with a human face."