Life in a New Land: Montagnard Cultural Identity and Adaptation in the United States

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OUTLINE

• Background: Who are the Montagnards?
• Fleeing Vietnam: When and why did they come to the U.S.?
• Adaptation: linguistic, economic, and socio-political challenges in the U.S.
BACKGROUND
Montagnard
- Montagnard: “mountain people”
- nguoi thuong: “highlanders”
- nguoi dan toc: “ethnic people”
- Jarai, Koho, Ede, Bahnar, Mnong
- Dega
Vietnam War

- recruited by U.S. Special Forces
- fled to the jungles of Vietnam and Cambodia
- In mid-1980s, surrendered weapons to U.N. peacekeeping forces
FLEEING VIETNAM

Migration

• 1986: 200 refugees resettled in North Carolina
• 1992: 400 more resettled in N.C.
• 1986 to 2001: family reunification program, Orderly Departure Program (or ODP)
• 2001 demonstrations in the Central Highlands
• over 10,000 Montagnards in the U.S.
Sponsorship

- Vietnam veterans, church groups, family members
- Resettlement agencies:
  - Lutheran Family Services (LFS)
  - Catholic Social Services (CSS)
  - Montagnard-Dega Association (MDA)
  - Montagnard Human Rights Organization (MHRO)
  - Interfaith Refugee Ministry (IRM)
ADAPTATION
Language
- Jarai, Rhade, Bahnar, Koho, Mnong tribes
- Rhade language used as a lingua franca
- Difficulties in acquiring English
Economic / educational challenges

- Jobs
- Extended family-households
- Education
Socio-political activities

- Montagnard leaders
- social/cultural misunderstandings
- Inter-tribal interaction
Conclusion

Ongoing migration

Challenges in the U.S.

Bɔni kɔ gih lu
(Thank you very much!)