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## **AN ANALYSIS OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PATTERNS IN THE GREAT PLAINS**

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**ABSTRACT**—Great Plains communities have been experiencing an influx of refugees but many communities are unaware of the international and national context for refugee resettlement. This article explores patterns impacting US Great Plains communities. This leads to three specific questions: (1) How many refugees have been resettled since 1983 in the US, in comparison to the Great Plains region, and where are they? (2) What are the patterns of the refugees resettled in the US versus the Great Plains region? And, (3) What are some of the economic benefits that can be anticipated in the resettlement of refugees in the Great Plains? The goal of this article is to answer these three questions in order to get at the larger question of how Great Plains communities can make sense out of the migration of the world's refugees to their communities.

**Key Words:** multi-ethnic economic enclave, refugee resettlement

### Introduction

The migration of refugees into the United States, and into the Great Plains, has increased in numbers, as well as in popular recognition, in the past several years. Between 1975 and 1997 the United States resettled more than two million refugees (US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration 1998, 2). Great Plains communities have been experiencing an influx of refugees, but many communities are unaware of the international and national context for refugee resettlement. This article explores refugee resettlement patterns impacting US Great Plains communities. Understanding the patterns of refugee resettlement is useful to adequately plan for the integration of refugees into Great Plains communities. This leads to three specific questions: (1) How many refugees have been resettled in the United States since 1983, in comparison to the Great Plains, and where are these refugees locating? (2) What are the characteristics of the refugees resettled in the United States versus the Great Plains? And, (3) What are some of the economic benefits that can be anticipated in the resettlement of refugees in the Great Plains? Our goal in this article is to answer these three questions in order to help Great Plains communities better understand the migration of the world's refugees to their communities.

In this article we use two different data sets and ethnic economy theory to answer the three questions. The first data set is longitudinal secondary data of national and regional demographic information about refugees resettled in the United States provided by the US Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Refugee of Resettlement (ORR). We use the longitudinal data to answer the first two questions. The second data set is a case study of refugees resettled in Lincoln, NE. In the case study we utilize a mixed-method research strategy that integrates field research, statewide longitudinal resettlement patterns, and Geographic Information System analysis. The Lincoln case study answers the third research question regarding economic benefits that can be anticipated in the resettlement of refugees. In it we look at the resettlement of refugees in Lincoln, drawing on the ethnic economy literature, with a specific emphasis on the "ethnic enclaves."

Ethnic economy research looks at ethnic self-employed businesses that use unpaid family helpers and as co-ethnic employers (Light 1972; Bonacich 1973; Portes and Manning 1986; Waldinger 1989; Light and Bonacich 1988, x; Model 1992). The demand for "immigrant entrepreneurs arises within the immigrant community itself: the immigrant community has a special set of needs and preferences that are best served, and some-

times can only be served, by those who share those needs and know them intimately, namely, the members of the immigrant community itself” (Waldinger 1989, 20). The supply of immigrant entrepreneurs is often the result of hardships and frustrations experienced by immigrants in their attempts to break into the mainstream economy (International Migration Policy Project 1992, 2).

Portes expanded on Light and Bonacich’s ethnic economy research with his investigation of Cuban immigrants co-locating their businesses in “Little Havana” in Miami, Florida. Portes calls the spatial clustering of co-ethnic businesses an “ethnic enclave” (Portes and Manning 1986; Portes 1987). Ethnic enclaves evolve with the primary goal of immigrant entrepreneurs wanting “to serve their own ethnic market and secondarily the general population” (Portes and Bach 1985, 203). Three distinct geographic benefits for the entrepreneurs are associated with the geographic concentration of ethnic businesses: (1) proximity to ethnic customers; (2) proximity to co-ethnic businesses, which facilitates the exchange of information, access to credit, and other support services; and (3) proximity to co-ethnic labor market (Portes and Manning 1986, 63). The resettlement of refugees in Lincoln, NE, has created an ethnic enclave with a unique twist that is indicative of the resettlement process in the Great Plains.

Before exploring the three questions, we first provide background on the international refugee resettlement process.

### **Background: International Refugee Resettlement Process**

Refugees are different from immigrants because immigrants “more or less voluntarily choose to move, [but refugees] are by definition involuntary newcomers” (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001, 27). The resettling of contemporary international refugees (since 1951) is a detailed process requiring coordination among international, national, and nonprofit organizations. The internationally recognized definition of “refugees” is “persons who are outside their country and cannot return owing to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group” (Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951, article 1 in UNHCR 2001, 4). This language provides the charge for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which manages the worldwide priority system that sets guidelines for the orderly management of refugee applications for admission to host countries (US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration 1998, 1). The UNHCR

was created in 1951 by the United Nations General Assembly to settle European refugees left homeless after World War II (UNHCR 2001, 1).

The UNHCR helps refugees who cannot return home “to find them homes, either in the asylum country where they are living or in third countries where they can be permanently resettled” (UNHCR 2001, 2). After identifying refugees who need to be resettled, the UNHCR then works with various countries who are willing to resettle the refugees. Currently, only nine countries accept quotas for refugees on an annual basis: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, and the United States (UNHCR 2001, 7). The remaining countries that participate in resettling refugees do so on a year-to-year ad hoc basis.

### **Resettlement of Refugees in the United States**

The United States resettles the largest percentage of refugees among countries that accept quotas of refugees on an annual basis (Mayadas and Segal 2000, 198). In 2000 the United States resettled a little over 74% of all refugees designated to countries with annual quotas in the world (UNHCR 2001, 7). The United States formally adopted a permanent refugee policy with the Refugee Resettlement Act of 1980. Prior to this, the United States had been handling the resettlement of refugees on an ad hoc basis. The 1980 Refugee Act established the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which is part of the US Department of Health and Human Services. The ORR is responsible for maintaining the country's refugee database. More importantly, it provides each state with funds to help refugees make the transition to their new life in the United States. “States then allocate the federal ORR funds to private organizations that assist in the resettlement of refugees for the purpose of promoting economic self sufficiency” (Gaber 1999, 9; US Bureau of Population, Refugee, and Migration 1998, 1).

Eligibility for refugee status in the United States is determined on a case-by-case basis by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), now called the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCI) (US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration 1998, 1). After being found “eligible” by the BCI, each refugee case is assigned a private volunteer agency (for example, Church World Service or United States Catholic Conference) that provides sponsorship and initial resettlement assistance into a host community.

Between fiscal year (FY) 1983 and FY2000, the United States resettled 1,729,377 refugees. If all the refugees resettled during this period constituted a separate state, according to 2000 census data, the refugee state would

be the 38th most populous state in the country. Persons from 72 different countries of origin have been resettled in the United States since FY1983. However, the vast majority of the refugees that came to the United States came from a fraction of that number. Closer inspection of the data reveals that at least 90% of all refugees who have resettled in the United States were from these 17 countries of origin: Afghanistan, Cambodia, Cuba (in both categories of refugees and “entrants”; see Table 1), Ethiopia, Haiti (in both categories of refugees and entrants), Iran, Iraq, Laos, Liberia, Poland, Somalia, Sudan, former USSR, Vietnam, Vietnam Amerasian, and Yugoslavia. Of these, four countries—Cuba (entrants), former USSR, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia—constitute more than 60% of all refugees who have come to the United States since FY1983 (Table 1). The two largest countries of US refugees’ origin are the former USSR and Vietnam, making up a little more than 48% of all refugees resettling in the US.

The influx of refugees coming into the United States has ebbed and flowed in the last 18 years (see Table 1). There are three distinct periods in the flow of refugees into the country: (1) FY1983 to FY1988, (2) FY1989 to FY1995, and (3) FY1996 to FY2000. In the first period the number of refugees coming into the US gradually increased from 60,040 in FY1983 to 76,930 in FY1988. Average annual resettlement in the US during this time was 65,715 refugees. Most of these refugees came from Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Iran, Laos, Poland, and Vietnam. The majority of US Cambodian and Polish refugees came between FY1983 and FY1988: 92.8% of all Cambodian refugees and 79% of all Polish refugees came during that period. The largest wave of refugees that came to the United States came between FY1989 to FY1995. Average annual resettlement of refugees between FY1989 and FY1995 was 124,220 refugees. The majority of refugees who came to the US during this time were from Afghanistan, Cuba, Ethiopia, Laos, former USSR, Vietnam, and Vietnam Amerasian. Interestingly, 69% of all former USSR refugees and 95% of all Vietnam Amerasian residents came to the US between FY1989 and FY1995. From FY1996 to FY2000 the United States experienced decreasing numbers of refugees entering the country in comparison to the previous years of refugee resettlement. Average annual resettlement during this time was 92,934 refugees. Most of these refugees came from Cuba (both refugee and entrant categories), Iraq, Liberia, Somalia, former USSR, and Yugoslavia. Over 86% of the Yugoslavia refugee population came to the US between FY1995 and FY2000.

The number of refugees that came into the United States is largely determined by a combination of events: world events, the number of refugees the US president determines for the upcoming fiscal year, and resources and

TABLE 1  
REFUGEE ARRIVALS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, FY1983-FY2000

Fiscal Year	Afgan-istan	Cam-bodia	Cuba	Cuba entrants*	Ethiopia	Haiti entrants*	Iran	Iraq <sup>#</sup>	Laos
1983	2,790	13,041	617	0	2,544	0	902	1,583	2,907
1984	2,023	19,727	156	456	1,989	3	2,852	162	7,181
1985	2,198	19,175	181	3	1,735	0	3,421	232	5,195
1986	2,418	9,809	143	0	1,265	0	3,204	304	12,313
1987	3,161	1,786	292	0	1,800	0	6,625	196	13,394
1988	2,161	2,897	3,130	236	1,514	0	6,216	82	14,653
1989	1,714	2,158	3,879	291	1,723	0	4,835	224	12,439
1990	1,595	2,328	4,606	92	3,114	0	3,100	66	8,715
1991	1,443	179	4,018	170	4,085	0	2,648	873	9,114
1992	1,465	162	3,844	2,812	2,927	10,397	1,965	3,385	7,308
1993	1,237	250	3,111	3,902	2,710	724	1,155	4,565	6,945
1994	24	15	2,685	12,785	297	1,579	859	4,922	6,211
1995	72	3	6,351	30,747	195	1,034	969	3,472	3,681
1996	11	5	3,517	16,985	170	346	1,249	2,691	2,203
1997	4	8	2,915	5,284	204	42	1,340	9,365	915
1998	88	7	1,587	13,492	188	590	1,585	1,620	9
1999	361	0	2,019	20,728	1,879	1,270	1,737	1,962	19
2000	1,712	0	3,186	17,871	1,340	1,569	5,099	3,145	64
Total	24,477	71,550	46,237	125,854	29,679	17,554	49,761	38,849	113,266
Total (%)	1.42	4.14	2.67	7.28	1.72	1.02	2.88	2.25	6.55

Source: Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) 1983-2000.

\* Cuban and Haitian "Entrants" are considered "refugees" by ORR and receive benefits, although they have not entered the country through the UNHCR process, provided that they (1) are Cuban or Haitian national; (2) have not acquired any other status under the Immigration and Nationality Act; (3) have applied for asylum; and (4) are not subject to legal deportation (US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration 1998).

+ Amerasians are Asian children fathered by American military personnel in Asian countries that receive ORR refugee assistance (Section 584 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1988).

# Northern Iraqis are asylees.

TABLE 1 continued  
REFUGEE ARRIVALS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, FY1983-FY2000

Liberia	Poland	Somalia	Sudan	USSR	Vietnam	Vietnam Amer- asia <sup>+</sup>	Yugo- slavia	Other	Total
0	5,508	0	4	2,017	22,173	0	10	5,944	60,040
0	4,302	1	0	909	24,598	0	26	6,219	70,604
0	2,821	0	3	647	25,222	0	22	6,311	67,166
0	3,587	0	0	868	21,604	0	2	5,042	60,559
0	3,406	2	2	3,698	19,451	3	2	5,045	58,863
4	3,191	6	1	20,029	17,570	370	3	4,867	76,930
0	3,577	45	6	39,387	21,924	8,723	2	6,005	106,932
0	1,628	17	50	49,741	27,789	13,895	0	6,199	122,935
1	371	119	6	38,493	28,380	16,572	1	7,507	113,980
620	165	1,527	393	61,473	26,204	16,739	3	3,570	144,959
946	208	2,695	253	48,316	31,399	11,220	1,876	2,167	123,679
590	43	3,508	1,288	43,094	34,100	2,885	7,417	4,129	126,431
55	25	2,524	1,693	35,493	32,254	946	9,869	2,243	131,626
42	9	6,440	583	29,270	16,116	906	12,020	523	93,086
223	6	4,948	281	26,748	6,611	833	21,374	681	81,782
1,637	2	2,952	1,287	23,257	10,266	375	30,823	1,067	90,832
2,493	2	4,321	2,389	16,913	9,622	241	38,620	2,436	107,012
2,616	1	6,022	3,831	14,577	2,839	979	22,548	4,562	91,961
9,227	28,852	35,127	12,070	454,930	378,122	74,687	144,618	74,517	1,729,377
0.53	1.67	2.03	0.70	26.31	21.86	4.32	8.36	4.31	

capabilities of private charitable organizations in accommodating new refugees. For example, events in Poland that precipitated a huge influx of Polish refugees to the US (5,508 in FY1983) were at their peak in the early to mid-1980s. World events that were impacting Poland in the early 1980s had largely subsided by the late 1990s as evidenced by only two Polish refugees coming to the US in FY1999.

### Resettlement of Refugees in the Great Plains

Though not typically thought of as a refugee relocation focal point, the Great Plains is receiving moderate rates of refugee in-migration. The US



Great Plains states (Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming) constitute a little over 13% of the US total population in 2000, but they resettled only 147,772 refugees, roughly 9% of all the nation's refugees resettled between FY1983 to FY2000 (see Table 2). This is not a particularly striking statistic when compared to California, Florida, and New York, which have individually resettled more refugees during the same time than the Great Plains states combined. The most significant reason for the small number of refugees being resettled in the Great Plains is the rather small population base that exists there (see Table 2). Large numbers of refugees tend to go to states with large populations. Such states have large cities that contain a critical mass of organizations interested in the resettlement of refugees in their communities.

Among Great Plains states, Texas has resettled the largest number of refugees (88,339) between FY1983 to FY2000 (see Table 2). In fact, Texas has the fourth largest number of resettled refugees after California, Florida, and New York. Texas's share of the total number of refugees resettled in the Great Plains ranges from a high of 67% of all refugees resettled in the Great Plains in FY1983 to a low of 55% of the total number of Great Plains refugees in FY1991. A distant second to Texas in resettling refugees in the Great Plains is Colorado, which resettled 17,287 refugees during the same time. A distant third is Kansas, which has resettled 9,660 refugees in the past 18 years. The states least often hosting refugees in the Great Plains states are Montana, with 916 refugees, and Wyoming, with 155 refugees resettled between FY1983 to FY2000.

Does the US Great Plains resettle a larger number of refugees per capita of total population than the United States? As Table 2 illustrates, from FY1983 to FY2000, Great Plains states, with a rate of refugee per capita resettlement of 0.39%, are less likely to have a higher per capita resettlement rate than the national average of 0.61%. With the exception of North Dakota, the remaining nine Great Plains states have a lower than the national average per capita rate of resettling refugees. North Dakota is the only noticeable exception. After disaggregating the refugee data in relation to the total state population in 2000, North Dakota is sixth in the nation in per capita resettlement of refugees, while its total state population ranks the state at 48th in the nation! It is interesting to note that although Texas has resettled the most refugees per state in the Great Plains, it is ranked fourth in per capita resettlement of refugees in the Great Plains, behind (1) North Dakota, (2) South Dakota, and (3) Nebraska. Thus, North Dakota, South

TABLE 2  
PER CAPITA DISTRIBUTION OF US REFUGEES, FY1983-FY2000

	State	2000 Population	Total number of refugees FY 1983-2000	Refugees per capita %
1	District of Columbia	572,059	12,144	2.1229
2	Washington	5,894,121	74,181	1.2586
3	New York	18,976,457	231,068	1.2177
4	California	33,871,648	401,414	1.1851
5	Florida	15,982,378	185,341	1.1597
<b>6</b>	<b>North Dakota</b>	<b>642,200</b>	<b>5,592</b>	<b>0.8708</b>
7	Minnesota	4,919,479	41,894	0.8516
8	Oregon	3,421,399	28,836	0.8428
9	Massachusetts	6,349,097	52,320	0.8241
10	Utah	2,233,169	14,252	0.6382
11	Vermont	608,827	3,842	0.6310
12	Rhode Island	1,048,319	6,059	0.5780
13	Iowa	2,926,324	16,778	0.5733
<b>14</b>	<b>South Dakota</b>	<b>754,844</b>	<b>4,257</b>	<b>0.5640</b>
15	Idaho	1,293,953	7,108	0.5493
16	Illinois	12,419,293	67,443	0.5431
17	Arizona	5,130,932	27,614	0.5382
18	Connecticut	3,405,565	17,865	0.5246
19	Missouri	5,595,211	28,781	0.5144
20	Georgia	8,186,457	42,077	0.5140
<b>21</b>	<b>Nebraska</b>	<b>1,711,263</b>	<b>8,714</b>	<b>0.5092</b>
22	Maryland	5,296,486	26,495	0.5002
23	Virginia	7,078,515	32,154	0.4542
<b>24</b>	<b>Texas</b>	<b>20,851,820</b>	<b>88,339</b>	<b>0.4237</b>
25	Pennsylvania	12,281,054	50,067	0.4077
<b>26</b>	<b>Colorado</b>	<b>4,301,261</b>	<b>17,287</b>	<b>0.4019</b>
27	New Jersey	8,414,350	33,485	0.3980
28	New Hampshire	1,235,786	4,766	0.3857
29	Nevada	1,998,257	7,603	0.3805
30	Michigan	9,938,444	37,450	0.3768
<b>31</b>	<b>Kansas</b>	<b>2,688,418</b>	<b>9,660</b>	<b>0.3593</b>
32	Wisconsin	5,363,675	19,177	0.3575
33	Kentucky	4,041,269	14,068	0.3481
<b>34</b>	<b>New Mexico</b>	<b>1,819,046</b>	<b>6,182</b>	<b>0.3398</b>
35	Maine	1,274,923	4,285	0.3361
36	Hawaii	1,211,537	3,984	0.3288
37	Tennessee	5,689,283	17,581	0.3090
38	Louisiana	4,468,976	11,616	0.2599
39	Ohio	11,353,140	25,823	0.2275
40	North Carolina	8,049,313	15,576	0.1935
<b>41</b>	<b>Oklahoma</b>	<b>3,450,654</b>	<b>6,670</b>	<b>0.1933</b>
42	Alaska	626,932	704	0.1123
43	Indiana	6,080,485	6,761	0.1112
<b>44</b>	<b>Montana</b>	<b>902,195</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>0.1015</b>
45	Alabama	4,447,100	4,211	0.0947
46	Delaware	783,600	581	0.0741
47	Arkansas	2,673,400	1,834	0.0686
48	Mississippi	2,844,658	1,343	0.0472
49	South Carolina	4,012,012	1,840	0.0459
<b>50</b>	<b>Wyoming</b>	<b>493,782</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>0.0314</b>
51	West Virginia	1,808,344	387	0.0214
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,729,377</b>	

Source: US Bureau of Census 2003; Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) 1983-2000.

**Bold** = Great Plains States

Dakota, and Nebraska have been able to receive a significant number of refugees in comparison to their small population bases.

Longitudinal analysis of refugee resettlement in the Great Plains states shows little significant thematic trends (see Table 3). Between FY1983 and FY2000 there was an increase in the annual number of refugees resettled in five out of ten Great Plains states (Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, and South Dakota) and a decrease in resettlement numbers in the other five states (Kansas, Montana, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wyoming). One small distinction in the longitudinal resettlement numbers is that the proportion of refugees resettled in Texas declined slightly from its high of 67% of all Great Plains refugees in FY1983 to 58% in FY1999. Filling the void of declining refugees numbers in Texas are the Great Plains states of Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, which steadily stepped up their resettlement numbers (see Table 3).

The real story in resettling refugees in the Great Plains is not in the absolute number of refugees resettled in the region. Instead, it is the immigration from diverse countries of origin that marks the social and economic impacts refugees are having in Great Plains communities. The top four countries of origin of refugees resettled in the Great Plains are (1) Vietnam, (2) former USSR, (3) Vietnam Amerasians, and (4) Yugoslavia. The primary countries of origin of refugees in the US Great Plains states are the same (in a slightly different order) as the most prominent countries of origin of refugees resettled in the US as a whole (see Tables 1 and 4). The only difference between the Great Plains states and the United States is that the US has Cuban entrants in the top of four countries of origin while the Great Plains states have Vietnam Amerasians rounding out the top four.

As in the United States as a whole, the influx of refugees coming into the Great Plains states has ebbed and flowed in the last 18 years (see Table 3). Using the same three distinct time periods to evaluate the US influx of refugees, that is, (1) FY1983 to FY1988, (2) FY1989 to FY1995, and (3) FY1996 to FY2000, the US Great Plains has a unique evolutionary history of refugees resettling in the region. Twenty-seven percent of all refugees resettled in the region came during the first period, FY1983 to FY1988. Most of the Great Plains refugees from Poland (92%) and Cambodia (96%) came during this time. The largest number of refugees (41%) that were resettled in the Great Plains came between FY1989 to FY1995. As in the United States as a whole, most of the former USSR refugees (72%) and Vietnam Amerasian refugees (94%) were resettled in the Great Plains between FY1989 and FY1995. Great Plains states resettled more refugees

**TABLE 3**  
**REFUGEE ARRIVALS BY STATE OF INITIAL RESETTLEMENT IN THE GREAT PLAINS, FY1983-FY2000**

STATE	Fiscal Years																		Total
	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	
Colorado	601	771	633	693	675	479	1,055	1,216	1,282	1,131	1,153	1,204	1,150	1,036	1,120	1,018	1,115	955	17,287
Kansas	563	720	826	529	416	270	525	805	690	700	698	635	759	490	372	259	236	167	9,660
Montana	35	51	33	28	72	56	61	100	106	88	46	40	58	59	62	6	0	15	916
Nebraska	244	204	126	187	197	166	365	660	1,032	789	563	592	754	520	504	594	665	552	8,714
New Mexico	206	217	282	153	136	57	255	341	479	491	512	698	775	510	161	266	356	287	6,182
North Dakota	118	193	209	121	34	79	113	166	256	483	380	370	425	341	517	537	614	636	5,592
Oklahoma	571	732	603	446	246	219	340	452	549	354	537	409	397	217	152	152	192	102	6,670
South Dakota	160	135	135	122	95	94	132	247	311	280	253	285	242	287	278	377	446	378	4,257
Texas	5,119	5,659	5,043	4,280	3,091	2,686	4,050	5,758	5,834	6,024	5,632	6,235	5,597	4,224	4,180	5,022	5,551	4,354	88,339
Wyoming	31	19	7	13	5	4	28	12	18	11	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	2	155
Total	7,648	8,701	7,897	6,572	4,967	4,110	6,924	9,757	10,557	10,351	9,774	10,468	10,157	7,684	7,346	8,236	9,175	7,448	147,772
US Total	60,040	70,604	67,166	60,559	58,863	76,930	106,932	122,935	113,980	144,959	123,679	126,431	131,626	93,086	81,782	90,832	107,012	91,961	1,729,377

Source: Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) 1983-2000.

between FY1996 and FY2000 (32%) than between FY1983 and FY1988 (21%) but less than between FY1989 and FY1995 (41%). Just as in the United States as a whole, the majority of the refugees that came to the Great Plains between FY1996 and FY2000 were from Cuba (both refugee and entrant categories), Iraq, Liberia, Somalia, former USSR, and Yugoslavia. During this time most of the refugees from Yugoslavia (70%) and Somalia (79%) were resettled in the Great Plains.

As shown in Table 4, there is a fairly wide distribution of the top three countries of origin among the Great Plains states. Three states in particular—New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Wyoming—have a unique distribution of refugees in comparison to the Great Plains and the US as a whole. New Mexico has a much larger number of Cuban refugees and Cuban entrants, representing almost half (49%) of all refugees being resettled in the state. This may reflect the fact that New Mexico has a large Spanish-speaking population, making it easier for Cuban refugees to assimilate in a New Mexico community than in another community, for example in North Dakota, which has a much smaller Spanish-speaking population. Oklahoma has an unusually large distribution of refugees from Pacific Rim countries. Between FY1983 and FY2000, the top four countries of origin in Oklahoma (Vietnam, Vietnam Amerasian, Cambodia, and Laos) represent 85% of all refugees resettled in the state. Finally, Wyoming has a high concentration of Afghanistan refugees. Almost a quarter of all Wyoming's refugees (23%) came from Afghanistan between FY1983 and FY1989.

Despite the distribution of countries of origin among the Great Plains states, the vast majority of the refugees resettled there come from only a handful of countries. With the exception of South Dakota, during FY1983 to FY2000 the remaining nine states received at least half of their refugee population from three countries of origin (see Table 4). Even more significant is that in half of the Great Plains states (Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), at least 48% (Texas) to a high of 78% (Oklahoma) of the refugee population during FY1983 to FY2000 came from one country.

### **Potential Economic Benefits of Refugee Resettlement in a Great Plains Community: Case Study of Lincoln, NE**

Resettling refugees in the Great Plains provides a new opportunity for a group of people who ostensibly had nowhere else to go. Although resettling refugees is done in the spirit of international goodwill, the host country/state who resettles the refugees also benefits from the diverse human

TABLE 4  
TOP FOUR REFUGEE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN  
AMONG GREAT PLAINS STATES, FY1983-FY2000

State	Country of Origin	% of Total State Refugee
Colorado	former USSR (29%) Vietnam (26%) Yugoslavia (11%) Laos (9%)	75%
Kansas	Vietnam (57%) former USSR (11%) Vietnam Am. (8%) Laos (8%)	84%
Montana	former USSR (54%) Laos (27%) Vietnam (8%) Yugoslavia (4%)	93%
Nebraska	Vietnam (38%) former USSR (13%) Vietnam Am. (12%) Iraq (10%) Yugoslavia (10%)	83%
New Mexico	Cuba En. (28%) Vietnam (22%) Cuba (21%) Vietnam Am. (8%)	79%
North Dakota	Yugoslavia (31%) Iraq (12%) Vietnam Am. (9%) former USSR (7%) Vietnam (7%)	66%
Oklahoma	Vietnam (60%) Vietnam Am. (11%) Cambodia (7%) Laos (7%)	85%
South Dakota	Yugoslavia (18%) Sudan (15%) Ethiopia (14%) former USSR (13%)	60%
Texas	Vietnam (42%) Yugoslavia (10%) Vietnam Am. (8%) Cambodia (6%)	66%
Wyoming	Afghanistan (22%) former USSR (21%) Vietnam (18%) Vietnam Am. (15%)	76%

Source: Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) 1983-2000.

resources that the refugees provide. In this section we address the third question of the paper: What economic benefits can be anticipated by the Great Plains communities that have resettled refugees? To answer this question, we explore the case of Lincoln, NE, which has experienced an influx of refugees and concomitant economic benefits.

### **Lincoln, NE, Case Study**

Since 1998 we have investigated the influx of refugees in Lincoln, NE. Lincoln is a medium-size city that serves as the capital of Nebraska. In Nebraska, the two cities of greatest population, Lincoln and Omaha, typically resettle at least 70% of all refugees entering Nebraska and often resettle close to 90% annually. Contrary to national resettlement trends in which refugees resettle in the largest metropolitan areas, in Nebraska the relation of city size to the number of refugees is inverse. Omaha, with its 2000 metropolitan population of 390,007, receives far fewer refugees than Lincoln, with a 2000 population of 225,581 (US Census Bureau 2003). From 1997 to 2000 over 80% of all refugees resettled in Nebraska were resettled in Lincoln. In 2000, 91% of all refugees resettled in Nebraska (501) were resettled in Lincoln, while only 9% (55) were resettled in Omaha. The reason for this is that all of the state's agencies responsible for resettling refugees (with the exception of one Omaha organization that intermittently resettles refugees) are located in Lincoln (closer to the state capital) than in the more populated Omaha.

According to the US Office of Refugee Resettlement, 21 different countries of origin were represented by refugees resettling in Nebraska between FY1983 and FY1995 (see Table 4). The greatest numbers came from Vietnam (45%), the former USSR (10%), and Laos (4%). In a span of five years, between 1995 and May 2000, 11 new groups of refugees came to Nebraska. During the FY1995-FY2000 period, the greatest numbers of refugees came from Vietnam, Iraq, Bakongo (Africa), Ukraine, Russia, and Cuba.

### **North 27th Street Multi-Ethnic Economic Enclave**

A two-part mixed-method research strategy was used to get a more holistic perspective of the economic refugee situation in Lincoln (Gaber and Gaber 1997). First, a spatial analysis of Lincoln's refugee population was undertaken using information supplied by Catholic Social Services, the

largest resettling agency in Nebraska. Second, Catholic Social Services refugee data were combined with field research data documenting the location of ethnic-owned business.

The vast majority of refugees resettling in Lincoln have been initially resettled in the downtown section of the city. A total of 85% of all refugees initially resettled in Lincoln are concentrated in the four-square-mile (10.36 km<sup>2</sup>) downtown area within the city that is over 76 square miles (196.84 km<sup>2</sup>) in size. Consistent with the ethnic enclave research, the most visible location of ethnic-owned businesses in Lincoln is on North 27th Street, which constitutes the spine of the 41% refugee resettlement area (see Fig. 1). The area along North 27th Street contains 30 ethnic businesses. These ethnic businesses are strategically located next to each other and are in easy walking distance of their co-ethnic customers. Most of the business owners interviewed said they located on 27th Street because it was where most of their ethnic customers lived. According to one business owner, they located on 27th Street because "a lot of Vietnamese people live around North 27th Street."

What is unique to Lincoln's North 27th Street is the development of a *multi-ethnic economic enclave* in both composition of businesses and clientele served by these businesses. In contrast, much ethnic-economy and ethnic-enclave research has been mono-ethnic in focus: Koreans in "Koreatown" in Los Angeles (Light 1972; Light and Bonacich 1988) and Cubans in "Little Havana" in Miami (Portes 1987). North 27th Street ethnic businesses do not segregate themselves along ethnic lines. For example, Vietnamese retailers do not geographically keep their businesses away from Iraqi retailers. Of the 30 businesses on North 27th Street, half are Vietnamese owned, and these include restaurants, pool halls, nail salons, law office, doctor's office, jewelry store, clothier, retailer, deli/grocery store, and a video store. Another 25% of the ethnic businesses are owned by Spanish-speaking refugees/immigrants, while the final 25% are owned by Middle Eastern entrepreneurs. Of particular interest is a stretch of shops located at "Vina Plaza," a multi-ethnic mini-mall on North 27th Street which consists of six businesses: Alwaha Asian Food (Middle Eastern), Cannon Law Office (Vietnamese), Lincoln Billiard and Game (Vietnamese), Rose Hair and Nails (Vietnamese), Vinh-Thinh Movies and Market (Vietnamese), and Vina Market (Vietnamese).

The existence of a multi-ethnic enclave in Lincoln, NE, provides a unique multicultural economic resource to Lincoln's consumers and to the city. Three benefits can be delineated from the North 27th Street multi-



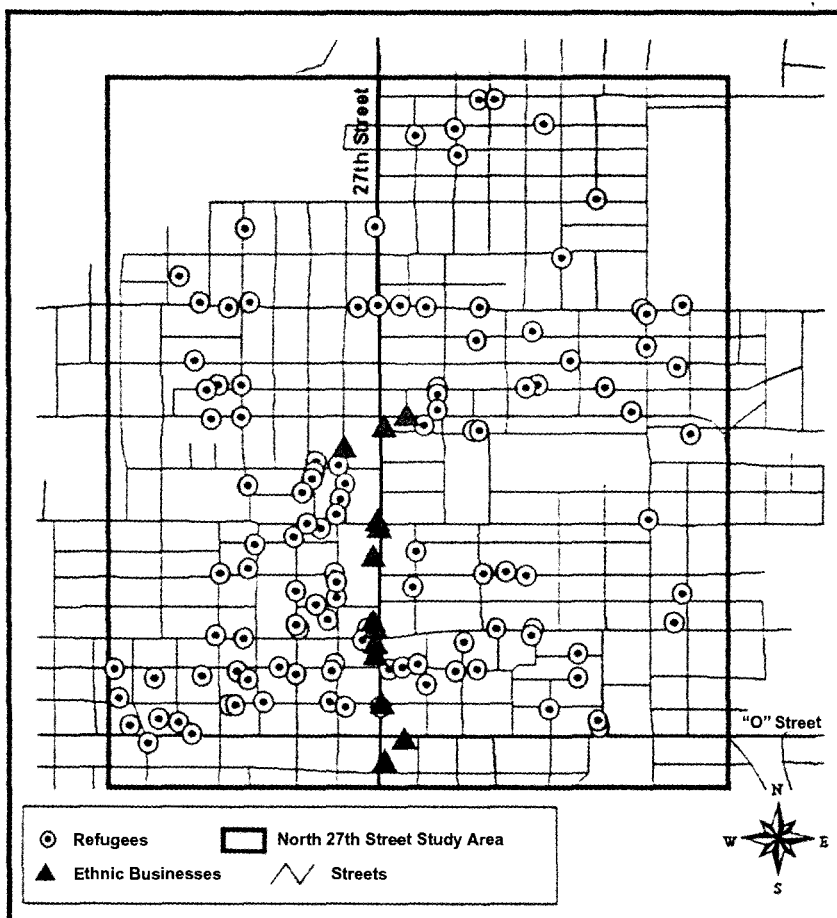


Figure 1. Distribution of Refugees and Ethnic Businesses on North 27<sup>th</sup> Street.

ethnic economic enclave. First, multi-ethnic entrepreneurs supply needed goods and services to newly resettled refugees in the community. Many of the newly resettled refugees in Lincoln have limited command of the English language and few have a driver's license to access the suburbanized grocery and retail stores in the city. The North 27th Street multi-ethnic economic enclave is within easy walking distance of its ethnic customers, which is especially convenient during cold weather.

Second, the multi-ethnic economic enclave on North 27th Street has created a vibrant international marketplace experience for nonethnic citywide consumers. Nebraska residents are now experiencing people, tastes, and cultures from around the world as the result of the resettling refugees in the area. North 27th Street has become a popular destination for city residents largely because of the international foods and products sold there. Lincoln's transition to a more cosmopolitan city has not been easy. The city's service community (fire, police, health, education, etc.) has had to adjust to a new array of international norms and customs. However, after several years of resettling refugees, Lincoln residents have increased their international awareness of how people outside the United States live. One example of this adjustment is the Lincoln Police Department actively recruiting qualified new Vietnamese residents to join the police force to help ensure the safety of the growing Vietnamese population.

Finally, the multi-ethnic economic enclave has revitalized an older and dying retail corridor on North 27th Street. It is an example straight from the pages of Jane Jacobs's classic book on urban revitalization, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), of cities that "need old buildings to incubate new primary diversity." The new ethnic businesses have brought life and diversity to North 27th Street. The best example of this is the old, abandoned, Pizza Hut, with its red, pitched roof, sitting idle for years, before being recently taken over by a Vietnamese restaurant. The City of Lincoln embraces the ethnic entrepreneurial activity on North 27th Street and is looking into ways of supporting the strengths of the North 27th Street ethnic enclave with a "special overlay zone or designated district" (Gaber 1999, 9).

More research is needed to learn more about the internal workings of the multi-ethnic enclave. The question of integration among ethnic businesses in a multi-ethnic enclave needs to be addressed. In particular, how do different ethnic businesses integrate goods, services, labor, and information among themselves? Interviews with local business owners provide evidence that business owners from different ethnic groups are conversant with each other. One business owner stated, "I'm friends with the guy at the other store [same type of business] down the street." However, there still seems some coalescing of dissimilar businesses along ethnic lines. For example, the same business owner who stated that he talks with "the guy . . . down the street" also mentioned that all of the Vietnamese business owners knew all the other Vietnamese business owners in Lincoln.

### Conclusion

The US as a whole and the Great Plains states have actively participated in the resettlement of international refugees in the last 18 years. The US has resettled the lion's share (over 74%) of the world's refugees in the last 18 years, from 72 different countries of origin. However, the absolute numbers of refugees being resettled in the Great Plains are relatively small at 9% of the entire US refugee population. The vast majority of all Great Plains refugees (over 60%) resettled between FY1983 and FY2000 are in Texas. Interestingly, although Texas resettles the most refugees in the Great Plains, it is not the largest per capita resettling state in the region. Instead, North Dakota is ranked sixth in the nation in the per capita resettlement of refugees.

The intense migration of international refugees to the US Great Plains in the last 18 years is a unique chapter in this region's history. As evidenced by the growing number of refugees resettling in the Great Plains, it appears that refugees are able to put down roots and thrive economically. One of the more interesting positive impacts the resettlement of refugees has had in the Great Plains, as evidenced along North 27th Street in Lincoln, NE, is the development of multi-ethnic economic enclaves. These international marketplaces provide positive economic growth for the host community as well as a new international variety of goods and services to local residents. It will be the test of time to determine how the resettlement of the world's refugees will change the face of the Great Plains in the future.

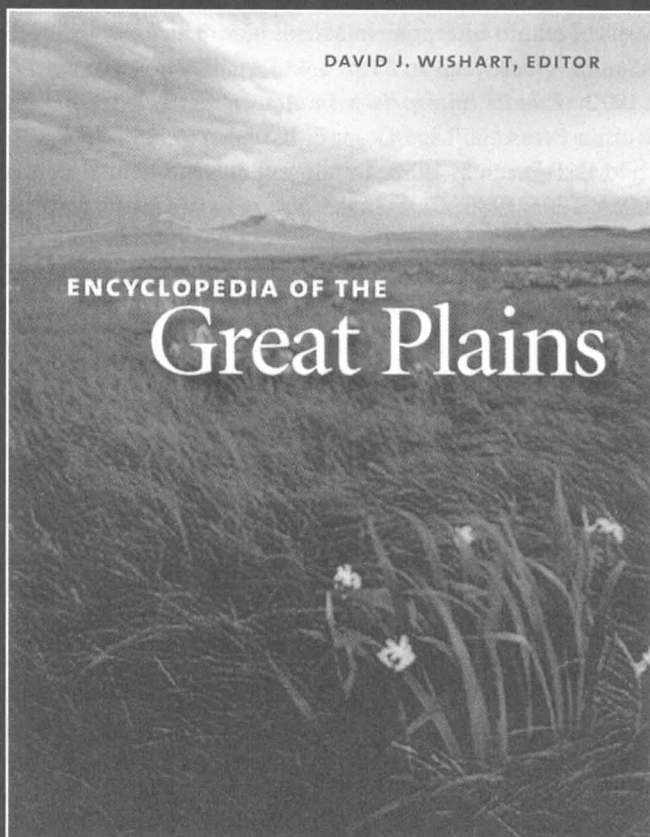
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