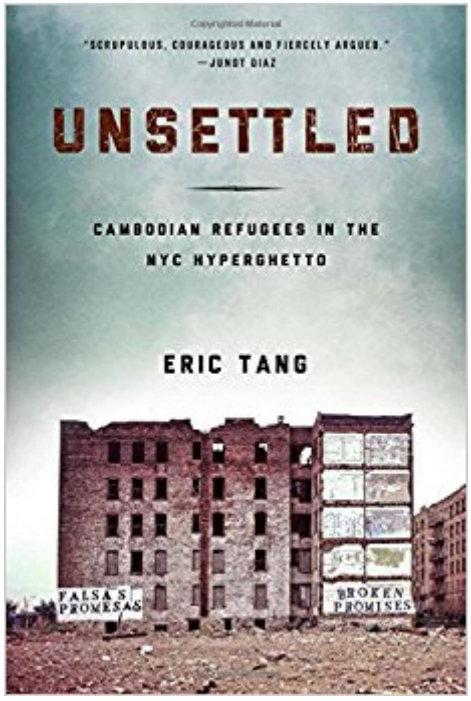
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Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees In The New York City Hyperghetto (Asian American History & Cultu)



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Synopsis

After surviving the Khmer Rouge genocide, followed by years of confinement to international refugee camps, as many as 10,000 Southeast Asian refugees arrived in the Bronx during the 1980s and Ã¢â ¬Ëœ90s. Unsettled chronicles the unfinished odyssey of Bronx Cambodians, closely following one woman and her family for several years as they survive yet resist their literal insertion into concentrated Bronx poverty. Ã Â Eric Tang tells the harrowing and inspiring stories of these refugees to make sense of how and why the displaced migrants have been resettled in the Ã¢â ¬Å“hyperghetto.Ã¢â ¬Â• He argues that refuge is never found, that rescue discourses mask a more profound urban reality characterized by racialized geographic enclosure, economic displacement and unrelenting poverty, and the criminalization of daily life.Ã Â Unsettled views the hyperghetto as a site of extreme isolation, punishment, and confinement. The refugees remain captives in late-capitalist urban America. Tang ultimately asks: What does it mean for these Cambodians to resettle into this distinct time and space of slaveryÃ¢â ¬â„¢s afterlife?

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“Scrupulous, courageous and fiercely argued, Unsettled is an ethnographic revelation. . . .Ã Â Tang, a former organizer, brings to light the political ecology of a community that has survived war, genocide, and displacement and is now struggling to remake the BronxÃ Â hyperghetto, exposing in the process the Ã¢â ¬ËœimpossibleÃ¢â ¬â„¢ condition that may be the fate of all

refugee communities in the neoliberal city.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Junot DÃƒÂ- azÃ¢â ¬Å“Scholar-activist Eric Tang has written a brilliantly moving account of how politics, community dynamics, and family relationships shape life for Cambodian refugees who settled in the Bronx in the 1980s and 1990s. Unsettled is at once a stunning ethnography, a superb critical cultural studies project, and an outstanding example of engaged scholarship that will inspire new understandings about the movement of people and the creation of particular kinds of contested spaces.Ã Â TangÃ¢â ¬â„¢s riveting account of struggle, change, and resistance is a remarkable achievement.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Beth Richie, Professor of African American Studies and Criminology, Law and Justice at University of Illinois at ChicagoÃ¢â ¬Å“UnsettledÃ Â is a contribution to the emergent field of Ã¢â ¬Ëœcritical refugee studies,Ã¢â ¬â„¢ and documents a story of Cambodian refugee itinerancy and survival. Not an account of a transition from refugee hardship to redemptive U.S. citizenship, it is rather a description of uprooting, captivity, poverty, displacement, and fugitivityÃ¢â ¬â •and the ever elusive project of Ã¢â ¬Ëœarrival.Ã¢â ¬â„¢Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Lisa Lowe, Professor of English and American Studies at Tufts UniversityÃ Â

Why Cambodian refugees experience life in the U.S. as a form of captivity, since self-sufficiency remains an elusive goal

Most memoirs and social histories that focus on Cambodia focus on the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge era, but Tang's book provides a new, original perspective by offering an intimate, sympathetic account of Cambodian refugees whose imprisonment has continued in America. I truthfully could not put this book down as it is written in a riveting, accessible style and tells a heartbreaking story of one Cambodian American family's extraordinary resilience. This book could not be more relevant in the context of the current global refugee crisis taking place. Tang's book reveals that there is still so much we don't know or understand about the hardships that refugees and migrants endure, even generations after their arrival. If you read only one book this year, I highly recommend this one.

Sensitively written and reported, and of interest to those delving into the immigrant/refugee experience, keeping in mind it's very specific to a) Cambodians and b) New York City. A far better read id Usha Welaranta's Beyond the Killing Fields.

This is a well-crafted and beautifully-told story of the travails of a Cambodian woman and her family

who came to the U.S. as refugees in the early 1980s. Eric Tang's prose is crisp, direct, and at times poetic.The author makes a number of important contributions, and I will mention three. First, this book is a powerful and long-overdue critique of the fictions of resettlement and of the U.S. refugee programs that often exacerbate the problems of displacement and hinder refugees from rebuilding their lives. Tang demonstrates this through skillful ethnography of the quotidian struggles of Ra Pronh and her family, the subjects of the book, who constantly negotiate and try to find ways to survive the seemingly endless displacements and who deal with daily issues of impoverishment, abandonment, and violence. Second, the book is a wonderful model in how to conduct research with refugees and displaced communities. Tang's care for and ethical engagement with the Cambodian families he worked with show how scholarship and activism can be both productive and empowering for both the researcher and the people and communities one "studies." Third, the book is innovative and bold in making the argument that the experiences of racialization, exploitation, living in enclosures, and abandonment in New York City's poor neighborhoods intersect with the experiences of enslavement, impoverishment, and neglect of African Americans. This is the work of a public intellectual, and this book deepens our understanding of what it means to be displaced and living in precarious situations. As a teacher who has taught this book in my college classes, and as someone who does research in the field of migration and refugee studies, I highly recommend this eye-opening book.

At a time when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees declares that the global number of people displaced because of war and persecution has reached an all time high of almost 60 million people, we need analysis that dispenses with the celebration of rescue. Instead, we need work that examines the systemic forces of U.S. liberal warfare which create and maintain the condition of displacement and perpetual conflict. At a time when nearly 1 in 3 African Americans lives in poverty and African American male youth are more than 20 times more likely to be killed by police officers, we need analysis that expands our understanding of black racialization beyond mere discrimination. Instead, we need work that builds an historical understanding of the war waged by the U.S. government on African Americans in the wake of civil rights reform in the 1960s. Good ethnographies provide the reader with an intimate view of human life that might not otherwise be known to the reading public or readily observable. Great ethnographies, on the other hand, tell the story of lives lived in broad daylight that change the way we think about the world. This is such a book. Unsettled not only tells the story of Cambodian refugees in the United States but locates their presence within the racial divides found in the Bronx and elsewhere in the U.S. Through the stories

of several Cambodian refugees, Tang takes us on a journey from the war in Vietnam, to the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, to the anxieties of refugee camps, to relocation in the Bronx defined by deplorable housing with isolation, crippling welfare dependency and super-exploitation. The genius of Tang's story telling is not just the incredible details of survival but the meaning of life lived at the edge of rescue/settlement and never arriving. With more than a decade of work with the Cambodian community in the Bronx, Tang refers to this subjectivity as "refugee temporality" where the conditions of previous episodes of violence are reactivated in different contexts. Refugee temporality is important to unpack because it allows readers to observe several obscured linkages between: wars abroad and wars at home; old methods of violence and new versions of that violence; waging war for liberty and killing those purported to be its beneficiaries; and welfare reform with punitive dependency and captivity. The most impressive part of the book is the moment when you realize that by reading the story of Cambodian refugees in the Bronx you are coming to terms with the global interconnections of U.S. war making that tie an imperial war in Southeast Asia with the creation of hyperghettos in the U.S. Readers come to understand the impact of simultaneous war in Southeast Asia and the deconstruction of urban African American communities when Cambodian refugees find little difference in their circumstances from authoritarian dictatorship to refugee camp to resettlement in U.S. slums. Tang is quick to point out that Cambodian refugees aren't merely incorporated in the US forms of racialization in the hyperghetto as black subjects, rather Tang shows how they are continually remade as refugees within the US. They remain refugees because they support the means of maintaining the hyperghetto while also sustaining the mythology of the ghetto as a black problem. For this reason Tang argues for an interpretation of "refugee exceptionalism" in which refugees do not become subsumed under other racial formations but rather become instrumental to maintaining a certain architecture of relationships that preserve and maintain the conditions of racialized warfare abroad and at home. Lastly, the most surprising parts of this book are the moments when the author reveals his own misconceptions and how working with Cambodian refugees gave him new insight. Unsettled is a compelling and enjoyable read that will change how you see the world.

This is the best ethnography IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve read in a long time. Through the story of one woman, her family, and community, TangÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s beautifully written book opens up questions related to U.S. imperialism, racial formation, patriarchy, urban abandonment, refugee resettlement, and neoliberal restructuring. Tang asks us to think about these questions, and the complicated ways that they play out in the life of Ra and her family. A gifted storyteller, Tang follows

what Ra has to teach him (and us), and in doing so, demonstrates and the best of engaged and reflexive scholarship. I incorporated this book into both my undergraduate and graduate classes this past semester. Based on student feedback, itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s definitely a keeper!

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