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Cambodian Political Succession in Lowell, Massachusetts

Jeffrey Gerson, Ph.D.

This article asks, What factors have in the past affected and will continue to affect the degree of Cambodians' participation and representation in Lowell politics? Gerson argues that five key factors, three internal — coming to terms with the legacy of mistrust resulting from the holocaust wrought by Pol Pot's murderous regime; lacking a tradition of democratic participation in their home country; and generational differences between those who regard themselves as Cambodian and the American-born — and two external — Lowell's two-tiered political system and the response of the city's elected officials to the influx of Southeast Asians that began in the early 1980s. The author believes that oral history is an indispensable tool for studying ethnic and urban politics.

Since its 1826 founding as an industrial city on the banks of the Merrimack River, Lowell, Massachusetts, has continued to attract immigrants. The Irish arrived before the Civil War, the French Canadians during and after it; from the late 1800s through the early 1920s, the Greeks, Lithuanians, Portuguese, Swedes, Jews, and Poles came to the city and established ethnic communities. In the decades after World War II, as the once mighty Lowell textile mills fell all but silent, the most recent stream of immigrants and migrants made their way here. First, from the Hispanic Caribbean came Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Colombians; following the Vietnam War, Southeast Asians, mainly Cambodians, fleeing the horrors of civil war.

Demography

The most remarkable change in the mosaic of Lowell's ethnic population has occurred over the past fifteen years. In 1980 Southeast Asians comprised less than one percent of the city's population (604 of 92,418); today that number hovers around 24 percent, or 24,148 of 105,000. Eighty percent of Lowell's Southeast Asians are of Cambodian ancestry. The only rapid demographic change comparable to the past decade and a half was the growth in Lowell's population during the first half of the nineteenth century, thanks to the boom in textile manufacturing and Irish immigration. The "city of spindles" grew from 2,500 to 33,000 between 1826 and 1850.¹

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Theory and Literature: A Survey

Succession as a concept was first developed by sociologists. Political scientists came late to the study of ethnic groups. In the 1920s, the Chicago School of sociologists, led by Robert W. Park, argued that ethnic groups move through various stages in their relations with dominant ethnic groups. Some of these processes are described as conflict, accommodation, and assimilation — groups that have lived in one area for extended periods frequently become dispersed and are finally assimilated. The pluralists believe that ethnic groups coexist peacefully while holding on to some of their culture. While Park's model considered conflict as part of the succession process, it saw an orderly, irreversible sequence of change.

Based on models of plant ecology, Chicago School succession is defined in demographic terms. Michael J. White of Princeton University explains: "Succession is the dynamic process by which the population composition of small areas (neighborhoods) within cities changes. We can define succession as the replacement of one identifiable population subgroup by another within the boundaries of a given neighborhood."² Succession is seen as a basic process of urban ecological change.

White continues: "Succession proceeds as the new group (often newcomers to the metropolis) replaces the previous group. The rate of replacement and the amount of resistance offered by the original group are elements of the process that may vary with circumstance."³

Economists also use succession theory to study urban housing and spatial location of ethnic groups by income. Along with sociologists they see succession as a series of stages, beginning with initial penetration, proceeding through invasion and consolidation, and concluding with piling up. In sum, succession has been useful to scholars studying geographic, socioeconomic, and housing characteristics as well as the ethnic composition of neighborhoods. However, few political scientists have studied succession and minority group relations together.

One of the few works by a political scientist to address the phenomenon of political succession was a book by a sociologist and a sometime political scientist who doubles as a U.S. senator from New York. In the early 1960s Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan collaborated on a study of ethnic groups in New York City, *Beyond the Melting Pot*.⁴ In it they argued that ethnic political succession, though not a main theme of the study, was "a central dynamic of the city's organizational life."⁵

In an article reviewing succession since *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Moynihan observed that the Irish had dominated the political life of New York City for decades but by 1977 not one Irish person served on the city's major government boards. Succession by Jews and Italians had been achieved. One of the chief reasons for this accomplishment was the persistence of ethnicity in general and ethnic groups' role in American life as interest groups making claims for benefits from the state. The state in turn found it helpful to organize claims made on it through ethnic lines.

Succession is defined by Moynihan as a dynamic process consisting of "the displacement of established groups (established in a neighborhood, a profession, a church, a sport, a trade union) by another group and also . . . the attainment of one group to the condition of another."⁶ By this Moynihan means that in a mixed ethnic group in which one faction is dominant, its norms appear to be normal for everyone. Attainment to the condition of the other means that the designated inferior ethnic group achieves the norms of the dominant group. According to Moynihan, the latest wave of migrants and

immigrants that he and Glazer studied, blacks and Puerto Ricans, were acting according to their theory of political succession, by both challenging and emulating the norms of previously dominant groups.

The glass-half-full optimism of Moynihan's analysis is shared by pluralist theorists. The most current example of a theoretical model that views ethnic politics through a pluralist lens, one that addresses the latest group of immigrants and refugees in America, is Lawrence Fuchs's *The American Kaleidoscope*.⁷ This brief review of the literature singles out Fuchs because he epitomizes the pluralist ethnic political model of succession, which is the underpinning of this article.

The debate of the elite versus pluralist models in urban politics has centered on the role of the urban political machine. Did the machine incorporate or exclude new ethnic groups in city politics? Studies by Steven Erie and Diane Pinderhughes argue that the machine tried its best not to share the spoils of patronage for a number of reasons.

Erie, who surveyed a dozen cities around the nation that experienced Irish control of the party apparatus, found some of the main reasons to be the machine's limited resources as well as pressure from middle-class homeowners to keep property taxes low. For Pinderhughes, who studied the Chicago machine under Daley, blacks achieved symbolic or descriptive representation only because a monopoly of political power prevented substantive issues such as discrimination in employment, housing, and education from reaching the political agenda.⁸ Generally speaking, as Roger W. Lotchin has written, elite theorists find machine leaders partial to a strategy of limited ethnic mobilization; a smaller electorate, which is more manageable, was preferable.⁹

Pluralist theorists view the role of the machine more favorably. Their concern is the rate of succession, not whether it occurs. They believe that the speed at which an ethnic group moves up the ladder of political power depends on a number of factors. Among these are the rate of demographic change within a political jurisdiction, the size and distribution of the group, the intensity of political party competition for the ethnic vote, the degree of independence of the new ethnic voters, the quality of ethnic group leadership, and legislative reapportionment.¹⁰

Fuchs's View of Ethnic Political Succession

Lawrence Fuchs considers succession a three-stage process.¹¹ The first stage witnesses the forming of associations for religious and fraternal solidarity, the second organizing for economic success, and the third achieving political power. I argue that the first and second parts of the process are well under way in the Cambodian community of Lowell, as they have been for other Southeast Asians across the country. For example, such religious and civic organizations as Buddhist temples and mutual assistance associations, in addition to such communication outlets as newspapers, radio and cable TV programs, and public ceremonies, serve the same purpose they did for earlier immigrants and refugees: to "express their sensibilities, protect their interests, or promote some public good through organized activity."¹² Moreover, they help newcomers to "keep in touch with each other and to cope with loneliness, vulnerability, and fear that immigrants often experienced."¹³ Economically, newcomers form small businesses and business associations that benefit the community, for example, beauty salons, auto repair shops, jewelry stores, and so forth. Lowell already has a hundred small businesses run by Southeast Asians, most of whom are Cambodians. Cambodians concerned about the health of small businesses have formed groups like the Cambodian League of

Lowell to help obtain bank loans, mortgages for first-time home buyers, and so on. Interestingly, Cambodians in California have found a niche in the doughnut business, running 20 percent of all such shops there.

In the third stage of succession, new ethnic groups call for greater ethnic power, which is usually threatening to established groups. Fuchs believes that those in the latest wave have joined the older wave immigrants in exercising their right to express themselves. New groups catch on to the fact that public expressions of ethnicity through group action are legitimate in the United States. Even resident aliens, without the vote, are active because they were encouraged to be so by foundations and corporations' providing the training ground for leadership development. "Newcomers have [also] followed the pattern of older groups . . . in mobilizing their claims and defending their interests."¹⁴ Disagreements about old country politics occur among all groups, new and old, who are often divided by class, region, ideology, and generation.

In response to the advocacy of immigrant ethnic interests, local and state governments create citizen advisory groups concerned with immigrant affairs, which, Fuchs writes, encourages the creation of immigrant and refugee advocacy groups and their participation in politics. Many of these organizations reach out to newcomers, which is especially important in places where the political machine has withered.

Even such refugee groups as the Southeast Asians, "who, much more than immigrants, tended to be preoccupied with old country politics, moved with remarkable ease to participate in American politics."¹⁵ Fuchs argues that refugee groups in particular have great potential for political mobilization because of their sheer numbers (in 1985 there were 634,200 Vietnamese, 218,400 Lao, and 160,800 Cambodians in the United States). Moreover, refugees are in a better position to become mobilized than immigrants because settlement programs organized by voluntary agencies with the assistance of state and federal government agencies are enormously helpful. This argument is supported by literature in the field of political socialization. Gillian Cohen notes, "Refugees experience a different kind of political incorporation process than other immigrants, have more frequent and in-depth interaction with government and migrate involuntarily."¹⁶ While hard times, lack of language skills, and poverty have retarded their political incorporation to a degree, like other immigrant ethnic groups, they are starting to naturalize in large numbers once they realize they cannot return to their homeland. "Once naturalized, they feel empowered in American politics."¹⁷ Fuchs reports a burgeoning of political clubs and citizen/voter leagues within the refugee community.

Finally, the latest wave of refugees also have several other advantages over second wave (1880–1920) immigrants: a higher proportion of persons with education and financial resources and a larger proportion of people who wish to reunite with close family members already in the community.

Fuchs concludes by taking note of one of this study's chief findings: their experience with genocide may slow the succession progress of Cambodians. Fuchs writes that among the Southeast Asians, "the Cambodians were most passive, possibly because of their persecution under the Khmer Rouge dictatorship in Cambodia, but some of them became active in local politics and even in the Dukakis presidential campaign. It was only a matter of time until the Laotians and the Cambodians became more active."¹⁸

My thesis is that Cambodians have begun the process of political mobilization. However, while my study of Cambodians in Lowell concurs with Fuchs's argument generally, I am fully cognizant of the pitfalls in Fuchs's rosy analysis of ethnic and racial

history. As April Schultz accurately points out, Fuchs tends to ignore “the pain, the ambivalence and multiple identities of those living at the confluence of ever-changing borders” of ethnic power in America.¹⁹ Moreover, adds Jesus Salvador Trevino, “in his zeal to demonstrate the impressive ways in which Americans of all backgrounds have made the American civic culture work for them, he tends to downplay the human price paid for these gains.”²⁰

Therefore, while I concur with Fuchs that the process of succession is indeed under way among the Cambodians in Lowell, they comprehend that the road is full of inequalities, struggles, and contradictions.

The Literature of Cambodian Politics in America

A survey of the literature about Cambodian politics in the United States reveals a paucity of research on the subject. One reference work on Asians in America describes Cambodians as inactive in U.S. politics.²¹ A work on the political socialization of Southeast Asians in Lowell, however, critiques this notion and lends support to Fuchs. Gillian Cohen argues that Southeast Asian refugees in Lowell quickly “acquired the political knowledge necessary to successfully force the Lowell city government to acquiesce to demands concerning their children’s educational needs.”²² She further asserts that the special resources Southeast Asian refugees received from federal and state governments, as well as the establishment of a dense network of voluntary agencies, international, national, and local, which assisted particularly with the establishment of local mutual aid associations, allowed Southeast Asian activists to gain an important political education that may serve them well in future political activity.

Cohen acknowledges that the success of the Southeast Asians was largely the result of an alliance created between Puerto Rican activists in Lowell and an outside legal advocacy group, Multicultural Education, Training, Advocacy, which filed the federal lawsuit that was instrumental to a compromise settlement which ended discriminatory and segregated conditions in Lowell’s public schools.

Though political participation in the schools’ struggle was led by a small group of well-educated Southeast Asian professionals, nearly one hundred parents attended meetings to protest unequal conditions. Cohen’s is a limited study, however, examining the years 1984–1988. In the years following 1988, the Cambodian Mutual Aid Association experienced internal upheaval, and the Lao Mutual Aid Association closed its doors. These events raise doubts about whether the skills Southeast Asian activists learned during the school conflict will translate into “potentially learned strategies and gained knowledge that they can apply in new political contexts.”²³

Given the limited material and the difficulty hypothesizing just how active Cambodians are in American local politics, I have undertaken an audio and video oral history of the community’s political experience.

Research Methods

The lack of meaningful papers, diaries, photographs, memoirs, and letters relating to Lowell politics, and urban politics in general, requires that the serious scholar of political history resort to oral history. Political leaders in particular rarely keep documents because they conduct most of their business in person or on the telephone.²⁴ As an oral historian, I hope to give voice to those whose stories have not yet been told.

The late labor historian Herbert Gutman understood the value of oral history and argued that immigrants especially must be understood in terms of how they deal with large social forces, making deliberate choices among perceived options. Though their choices may be limited, they must never be reduced to being merely passive victims.²⁵ C. Wright Mills, too, saw an important place for oral history, stating that social science must be “the study of biography, history, and of the problems of their intersection within the social structure. To study these problems . . . requires that our work be continuously and closely related to the level of historical reality — and to the meanings of this reality for individual men and women.”²⁶

I believe that oral history is the best tool for capturing the human struggle of political life, intimate views of political relationships, and stages and periods in the process of individual and political development. As a method, it holds in esteem the way people view their life and times. It asks researchers to inject less of their own perceptions of it. The people’s views, critically assessed, provide the greatest understanding of history.

Oral historians realize that people’s accounts may be several steps removed from actual occurrences. Impressions have their own biases; all memory is selective and fallible. The potential for fabrication, prejudice, and exaggeration is always present. Oral history must be approached open-mindedly and with skepticism. A scholar must remember that nothing recounted can be cavalierly dismissed nor uncritically embraced.

To prepare for the oral histories, I reviewed scholarly articles on the political history of the city, an oral history collection of ethnic group impressions of Lowell, and examined the clipping files of the city’s sole newspaper, the *Lowell Sun*, for the years 1985 through 1995.²⁷

I interviewed eighteen community activists and scholars, most of them current and former city government officials and social service workers. Language was not a barrier to these interviews with Cambodian participants because the community’s activists have a solid grasp of the English language. There were, however, cultural hindrances to this study.

The Cambodians I interviewed regarded me, a college professor of non-Cambodian heritage, as an outsider, and initially a few of them were reticent about talking with me. My inability to speak Khmer barred me from employing a familiar and comfortable means of communication. I considered hiring a Cambodian research assistant to remedy this condition but recognized that it was important for me to meet face to face with community leaders to establish a rapport. At the start of the interviews, it was tough to pierce the Cambodian community’s inner workings partly because Cambodian culture places great value on courtesy and indirectness; individuals were always outwardly polite and refused to be critical of one another. I soon learned to change my manner of questioning. It is understandable that a vulnerable immigrant group would not wish to reveal its internal divisions and tensions to a potentially hostile world.

While my outsider status at first inhibited me, it soon proved to be an enhancement to the study. My position as a university professor was a big plus, given the Southeast Asian community’s deep respect for education and educators. Furthermore, the community leaders see the university as one of the city institutions that has come to their aid. For instance, the university, through its faculty, obtains grants that are of some benefit to community social service agencies. Several professors have worked closely with the community. For example, political science professor Hai B. Pho, an immigrant from Vietnam, who was instrumental in assisting the resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees

in Lowell during the early 1980s, is well respected by the community.²⁸

My desire to win the confidence of Cambodian community leaders is evident in the conditions I established for the interviews. I offered the interviewees a cassette tape of the interview along with a written transcript, giving them the opportunity to negotiate any desired editing. Oral historians generally frown on allowing interviewees the power to alter their initial conversations. As trust develops between the community leaders and me, this condition may no longer be necessary.

Before interviewing the community leaders on audiocassette, I requested permission to interview them on camera as well. Most were pleased to learn that they might appear in a videocassette and may have cooperated to guarantee their participation in the endeavor. This documentary film is a complement to my article.

Cambodian Political Succession: The Early Stages of Political Mobilization

Throughout American history, ethnic tension followed the move of a new immigrant or refugee group into an established community. It is only natural for older, well-rooted groups to feel ill at ease when there is an abrupt tear in their community's fabric. The key question remains: How do they manage the transition and juxtaposition of power and culture?

To date, following a trend in the immigrant and refugee political experience, no Southeast Asians are represented in Lowell's elective institutions, the City Council and the School Committee. Political succession takes time. Though the first Irish arrived in Lowell during the 1820s, the first Irish mayor, John J. Donovan, was not elected until 1882. The French Canadians waited even longer for one of their own — Dewey Archambault became mayor in 1936. Although 20,000 Greeks immigrated to Lowell before World War I, they waited until 1951 to see George C. Eliades elected the first mayor of Greek descent in Lowell — and in the United States.²⁹

The process of Cambodian political succession is under way in Lowell and Massachusetts. More than seventy-five Southeast Asian-owned businesses have been established in Lowell, and five Cambodian officers have been added to its police force. The campaign to end school overcrowding and create well-funded bilingual and multicultural educational programs resulted in the state's paying \$131 million to build ten new schools, refurbish six others, and establish bilingual education programs. In the electoral arena, a Cambodian community activist has campaigned for the Lowell School Committee. In what can only be viewed as a pioneering effort, Sambath Chey Fennell ran for office in 1995 and again in 1997. His poor showing in both races — twelfth place finish in 1995, eleventh in 1997 — reveals how long a row Southeast Asian candidates must hoe in the city.³⁰ An encouraging sign did appear in the town of Randolph, where Daniel Lam became the first Cambodian-American elected to a local office, as a selectman, in Massachusetts. Moreover, Revere's mayor, Bob Hass, credits his 283-vote margin of victory in November 1997 to the Revere Cambodian community of 3,500. Roughly three hundred new voters were registered by the Hass organization.³¹

At the national level, ironically, succession received a boost from anti-immigrant sentiment in Washington. The Immigration Reform Act of 1995 dramatically cut benefits for legal immigrants, rendering many Southeast Asians ineligible for several crucial federally funded programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income. According to the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition,

applications for citizenship in the state skyrocketed in 1995 and 1996. Nationally, in 1995, the Immigration and Naturalization Service received nearly one million applications for citizenship, three times the annual average of 300,000. In a survey conducted by the Federal National Mortgage Association, 84 per cent of immigrants who acquired citizenship cited the ability to vote as a reason for doing so.

So great was the movement toward citizenship that the Clinton administration was repeatedly taken to task by the Republican Congress for making it too easy for newcomers to become citizens. Evidence of the growing power of immigrant voters can be found in the 1996 election of Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez and the defeat of incumbent Robert K. Dornan in California, the nearly break-even Clinton vote in the Cuban-American community, once a Republican stronghold, and in Massachusetts, which witnessed the defeat of the state's only two Republican congressmen.

Apparently the Republican congressional leadership recognized the folly of its anti-immigration measures. On November 12, 1997, Congress undid two key provisions of the 1996 Immigration Act, a law that severely harmed immigrants' rights and sped the deportation of hundreds of thousands of people who had lived in the United States for many years. Likewise, Clinton and the Congress agreed to ease the suffering caused by the 1996 Welfare Reform law, which also spurred successful movements in the states, most notably Massachusetts, New York, and California, to pressure legislatures to partially restore funds for programs that were cut at the federal level.

As the result of a complex set of factors, including but not limited to language, their refugee status, and the brutal destruction of their culture at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, many Cambodians are not yet citizens and therefore cannot participate in local elections. The exact number of Lowell Southeast Asians who are citizens, and of that group the number that are registered to vote, is unknown. One estimate was made in 1994, before welfare reform was announced, of 700 citizens and 300 registered voters — the Cambodian American Voter League (CAVL), the only group actively seeking such information, is the source for these figures.³² In a city of 46,000 registered voters, it's no wonder that their community lacks political clout. One thing of which those who are active in city politics are certain is that, with a fifth of the city's population Southeast Asian, half of whom are under 18 years of age, and an average family consisting of 5.03 people as compared with 3.06 for white families, this group's numbers will continue to grow and Southeast Asians will be a political force to be reckoned with in the coming years.³³

The central question I pose is: What factors have affected and will affect the degree of Cambodian participation and representation in Lowell politics? My answer is that five key factors, three internal and two external to the community, help explain the seeming absence of an active local political community as well as elected or appointed Cambodians in Lowell city government. The first three, deemed internal because they are largely within the control of the Cambodian community, are most crucial for understanding the succession process. These are (1) coming to terms with the legacy of fear and mistrust that resulted from the holocaust wrought by Pol Pot's murderous regime; (2) the lack of a tradition of democratic participation in their home country and therefore little familiarity with American political institutions; and (3) one of the key divisions within the Cambodian community: the problem of generational differences between those who consider themselves Cambodians, and perhaps speak only Khmer, and the American born, who have no recollection of Cambodia and think of themselves as American. These factors make the establishment of an organized political effort to en-

courage citizenship, registration, and capturing elective office in Lowell very difficult.

The two relevant factors that are considered external, or outside the immediate control of Cambodians, are (1) the structure of Lowell's political system, which has two important components, the city's political party organization and the electoral system of representation; and (2) the response of the city's elected officials to the influx of South-east Asians that began in the early 1980s.

Internal Factors

The Legacy of Fear

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge invaded the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh and Lon Nol's five-year government fell. Hours later a forced evacuation and relocation of the city's residents to the countryside began. Former members of the Nol regime were executed. Reeducation labor camps were established to wipe out any remnants of Cambodian culture and ancient traditions, including religion. Resisters were killed.

Not enough can be said about the impact of the next four years of Khmer Rouge "killing fields" on the lives of Cambodians. It is estimated that between two and four million Cambodian men, women, and children were killed, the reason Cambodians have come to the United States. They see it as the time that has changed all time.

Two interviewees describe how they believe Cambodia's history of regime change, civil war, and the tragic events that followed created a deep distrust of politics and politicians.³⁴

Samkhann C. Khoeun, the executive director of Lowell's Cambodian Mutual Aid Association, had served in that capacity for a year and a half at the time of the interviews. He addressed the issue of grave mistrust and fear in the Cambodian community.

In Cambodian history, there have been a lot of invasions from neighboring countries. Cambodian leadership itself has been completely neglected. If we don't train our leaders, someone else will train them. The same problem will befall us here as happened in Cambodia. A history of Cambodian politics reveals that in 1970 we had a change in government to a republic under Lon Nol from the royal government under Prince Sihanouk; in 1975 another change: the Khmer Rouge came to power; in 1978 the Vietnamese military invaded Cambodia and took control. Connections to former governments was a liability; death under the Khmer Rouge. It was not safe to be active in politics. It is hard to take sides, to know who to believe. It is dangerous to be educated.

In Cambodia, Cambodians were taught that education was the key. Then the Khmer Rouge came to power and sentenced the educated to death. A mixed message. To be a better person, education is still believed important but there is ambivalence about it. Education was a weapon to kill you. Mistrust exists.

There is a real fear of death, real concern; they don't want to jeopardize their family; they've lost so much, family members, village, homeland. They're not ready to lose another member of the family; if they can do without confronting anything they will choose to be in the back seat, to be outside, as long as they survive. Maybe their children can do something to change that . . . They are most likely not to trust someone just because they claim to do something for them. They have to see for real that that person or those persons will really do something for them. They are also interested in benefits, if they help them right away. They can't wait for the next five to ten years.³⁵

Khoeun is echoed by Michael Ben Ho, cofounder of the Cambodian Mutual Aid Association (CMAA) in 1984, the area's first Cambodian Buddhist temple in 1985, and the Cambodian American Voter League in 1990. Trust, Ho says, is the key to community empowerment.

Who would want to teach them to become involved, given the past? They are afraid that the leaders draw you to the river, to the hole, again. The people feel the leaders just use them to get the power for themselves. Suppose I try to educate the people to do something, they will say that I want the power for myself. They don't trust anyone, even their own people. . . . You have to build the trust and the relationship back.³⁶

In sum, it appears that one legacy of the Cambodian holocaust is that Cambodians in America are reluctant to engage in local political activity until they are able to trust leaders from within and without their community.³⁷ There is little to indicate that sufficient trust has been forged between the community and its leaders to build an electoral movement in Lowell. If anything, the lack of trust has grown, in light of School Committee candidate Sambath Chey Fennell's political blunders.³⁸ Still, even with their reservations, many Cambodians backed Fennell for the same reason previous newcomers have given: he was the first of their people to seek office.

Another result of the brutality of the Pol Pot regime is the mental health problems that have been diagnosed among Cambodians who lived under the Khmer Rouge. Michael Ben Ho, who is still enduring nightmares, is not alone. Khoeun said many have nightmares, bad memories, post-traumatic stress syndrome, and other emotional problems. Some social service workers refer generally to these illnesses as Pol Pot syndrome.

[It] includes insomnia, difficulty in breathing, loss of appetite, and pains in various parts of the body. . . . 84 percent of Cambodian households in California have reported that at least one household member was under the care of a medical doctor, compared to 45 percent of Vietnamese households and 24 percent of Hmong and Lao households.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, a delayed reaction to extreme emotional stress, has also been found among Cambodians in the United States. It is a malady that plagues numerous Vietnam veterans.³⁹

Cambodia's Lack of a Democratic Tradition

Activists and scholars have noted that Asian-Americans have roots in societies with little tradition of political participation. Daphne Kwok, executive director of the Organization of Chinese Americans, a Washington-based lobbying organization, states that political participation in America "is a very new concept for most Asians who are immigrants. In their home countries, political participation was not done or was looked on with skepticism and sometimes fear."⁴⁰

David Chandler, a scholar of Cambodian history, has written that whether it was the colonial French or Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk's government, Cambodia's time-honored political practice was paternalism between patrons and client, government and the masses, with "the one providing protection and cash, the other delivering loyalty and votes." After 1945, the "French and high-ranking Cambodian officials shared the view that Cambodia's 'little people' were not ready for self-government or for civil

rights." Moreover, when efforts were made, through a small but growing democracy movement in the legislature, to allow for greater political participation, the French and royal governments cracked down hard on them.⁴¹

Another student of Southeast Asian politics and history, Hai B. Pho, argues that this is a crucial point for understanding Cambodian participation in Lowell. He believes that, unlike Western nations, Southeast Asian countries have no experience with democratic institutions. Southeast Asian power was centralized either in the nation's capital or in regional centers. Village life did not train or socialize the people for decision making in government.⁴²

The following interviewees confirm the experts' opinion regarding the importance of one's political heritage for local participation. Vesna Nuon has worked for the Middlesex County district attorney's office as victim advocate and cultural consultant since 1990. He also is a member of the CMAA Board of Directors.

There was little political participation in Cambodia and that might be responsible for the tendency to believe we are here in the U.S. for survival purposes only; that we shouldn't ask for more than basics. We learned from the Khmer Rouge [that] we have to accept what is given to us. Say yes, don't ask for more; that is the legacy from the king and his puppet, to go along; we can't use that as an excuse as to why we are not politically active here in the U.S.; even back home there were a lot of educated students who were ready at the moment to voice their concerns, knowing that voicing that concern could affect their and their family's welfare.⁴³

Michael Ben Ho agrees

Yes, we believe in Cambodia [that the person] who is born king is a gift from God to manage the whole population. . . . We feel everything belongs to him and believe that he should direct the country. We need to teach people how to make decisions for themselves and not expect people to do [it] on [your] behalf. . . . We need to organize with the middle-age generation, age thirty to fifty, because they can still learn.⁴⁴

Cambodians have been in the United States a relatively short time. One should not assume that individuals whose political socialization process did not include learning about the fundamentals of representative government and civil liberties and civil rights can step easily into the American political process. Millions of Americans have not been socialized to political efficacy, the notion that what they think and do really matters in public life. Political efficacy is tied to class, education, race, and many other important factors.

Generational Differences

Political activity is less likely in those who view themselves as Cambodian, not American — usually the older Cambodian population. As Tem Chea sees it, these people are more interested in the politics of their homeland than their younger counterparts. Meanwhile, the younger, American-oriented generation, who may find politics a route to social mobility as past immigrant and refugee groups have, show little interest. Vesna Nuon asserts that the younger folk are hesitant to participate in community organizations because they feel that the older generation does not treat them with respect and is out of step with American cultural and political traditions.

In Tem Chea's opinion, two-thirds of Cambodians think that Cambodian homeland politics is their first priority, which makes it very hard to organize and interest Cambodians in Lowell politics. Factions fiercely debate Cambodian politics.

[One group] have in their own mind to go back to Cambodia to help establish and rebuild the country. The other group would like to do that but feel it is beyond their capacity, so they think it is better to organize and survive in this country by being involved in politics at this time. If we are strong here, we may contribute that to help rebuild our country back home, they believe. . . I should say that we as a community are not divided by age or education or financial background as much as we are divided into two groups by the issue of Cambodia.⁴⁵

The divisions over Cambodia have boiled to the surface over the local Cambodian-language newspaper, the *Cambodian Press*, which is published twice a month and distributed free of charge in stores and restaurants around the country. The paper's publisher, Eang Bunthan, has been severely criticized by Lowell refugees for supporting the Khmer Rouge, whom he calls nationalists, as he characterizes himself.⁴⁶

Noun believes that there is a genuine cultural divide between the old and the young.

It leads back to Cambodia where the belief is that [because] they are older than you . . . you have to bow to them. You have to listen to their advice and oftentimes you have to accept it. Which is not true. We came here and we went to Western schools and we learned the importance of it is that each one of us has a voice. If the other voice did not really apply in this case you just reject it or somehow reject it in a polite and constructive way. I ran into that a couple of years ago when I first became involved in the community . . . A lot of young people are not involved in the community. I was told, "You are too young," "You were just born yesterday." "You're too young, you don't know what you're talking about and not mature enough to give your own voice or to run this organization or to do this or that." My question to them is: How long do I have to listen to you? It's a compromise, so to speak.

That same thing happened in the community, the old versus the young. An example of that is when parents pull their kids in one direction, to come home and be Cambodian kids. You have to be polite, nice. If you are a girl, you have to be shy, timid. If you like a guy, don't show him that. You are shy, stay in your room. When the kids go to school, their peers then would say to them, "Why are you so shy?" Their teacher would say, "You have to raise your voice up, I cannot hear you." All of those things confuse the kid. Should I stay in school and act like my mother said at home or stay at home and act like what my teacher said to me?⁴⁷

Khoeun adds supports to Nuon.

The older generation hope to go home. Stronger feelings among older adults, forty years and older, that they want to go back. But they also have the feeling, after visiting, that their homeland is not theirs anymore. Parents gone, children gone . . . to find out their environment is just not suitable for them. The weather. Living conditions. They are used to living in an apartment. Running water. TV. Electricity. Gas to cook their meals. Everything is within reach. In Cambodia it's not. There is insecurity. Corruption. No running water. No phone. It's hard for them. They're older. They don't have the energy to farm, to gather water. It's not a life that's possible to them. The people there are completely different people. Their mentality is

different from before the war. People don't look each other straight in the eye. They're more dishonest. They only care about today. Some want to go for a month but come back in a week. Can't eat the food there. No clean water. Even food that was cooked still makes them sick in Cambodia. If forced to go back, they will go. And they will adapt, but it will be hard.⁴⁸

Furthermore, young people are confused about their role in society. Dr. Sam-Ang Sam, a Cambodian musician, scholar, and activist, currently director of the Cambodian Network Council in Washington, D.C., believes that "many young people are plagued by identity problems, leading them to discard their Cambodian first names in favor of English first names, and they must often deal with racism from classmates and with being teased about their foreignness."⁴⁹

Additionally, many young men have lost their fathers to the civil war, and some of them have found that gangs are an attractive means of acquiring a sense of belonging that they cannot develop at home. Will many of these youngsters who are leading troubled lives find a way out of despair through participation in the political arena?⁵⁰

External Factors

Political Structure: Party Organization

During the early part of the century, immigrant groups who settled in northeastern American cities were often greeted by a local political party organization, which came to be known as a political machine. The name has both a negative and a positive connotation. Those who were critical of the "machine," the self-labeled reformers, were unhappy with the party organization's mechanical efficiency in winning the immigrant vote in exchange for support to the fledgling immigrant community, usually in the form of much appreciated jobs, contracts, and city services. Political machine supporters, known as regulars, took pride in their helpful relationship with the newcomers, who would surely fall prey to powerful business interests, among other hostile city institutions. Machines were created in large and small cities by members of both the Republican and the Democratic parties.

The once potent political machines are largely a thing of the past. The latest wave of immigrants has arrived in cities with no strong political party present to assist their succession into local office, and as a result, they are worse off than their historical counterparts. Boston-based political consultant Michael Goldman believes:

Political power is harder for new ethnic groups to gain than it was at the turn of the century, when Irish and then Greeks and French moved up the ranks in government. It's totally different since there are no parties out there the way there used to be. In the past, in cities like Lowell, the Democratic party bosses came from the ethnic groups in their neighborhood, making sure their group got a piece of the government jobs. The party system bred competitors for political office that kept whole neighborhoods politically active. But that system has been replaced by TV ads and primaries. Either of two things could get minority voters into the booth and convert population strength into political strength: a charismatic leader or a coalescing issue.⁵¹

It's interesting that there is a parallel to the Russian Jews when they first came to this country. They were terrified of the political process and thought that being invisible

was the way to stay out of trouble. In fact, after a short period of time in America, they realized that the way to gain power was to use the political parties that were then in play. In particular the large ethnic communities such as Italians, Greeks, Jews, Irish. They all understood that by controlling neighborhoods, controlling votes, they would access government jobs which were plentiful.⁵²

The absence of political parties in Lowell is in part attributable to the turn of the century municipal reformer's success in creating local nonpartisan elections — or elections in which party labels do not appear alongside candidates' names. Instead, reform Lowell style has given birth to elections dominated by family and friendship networks organized along ethnic lines. To win a local election in Lowell a candidate must develop a personal following of family members, friends, and acquaintances, who then carry out the numerous laborious tasks that are required in campaigns, from stuffing envelopes to raising money. In return, the candidates reward the faithful, just as the political machine did, with jobs, contracts, and municipal services. It is reported that the Lowell School Department is rife with political appointees.⁵³

An important difference between partisan and nonpartisan elections is that, traditionally, parties were decentralized. Organized through ward or district boundaries, new immigrants were often able to capture pieces of patronage commensurate with their organized voting strength. These "submachines" allowed immigrants to bargain votes for symbolic and substantive rewards. According to those who are in a position to know, the nature of Lowell's familial political system closes the door to newcomers and has entrenched certain ethnic groups, such as the Irish, French, and Greeks, in a seemingly impenetrable wall of protection from Hispanics and now Southeast Asians desirous of acquiring greater political clout.

Michael Conway, who owns an insurance company in Lowell, has run for Congress and the state Senate as a Republican. His family owns one of the oldest continuously operating businesses in the commonwealth. Conway might be the last person likely to claim that Lowell's political scene is closed, even to those with connections like his.

When I first got involved in politics back here in Lowell in 1979, the Democratic Party was very much in control and it was stifling. There was no room for anyone else to participate in the system unless you were a Democrat, and then only if you were part of the machinery that was in place at the time. In a sense you could almost make the case that Lowell is a feudal society. There are only certain groups and certain people who participate in politics, social circles, different things, and then everybody else who is excluded from that is angry or doesn't participate in the system and that is what a feudal system is. There is a certain segment of the population who are very politically involved . . . make sure that it runs to their benefit. Those who are excluded become very angry. They're motivated eventually to do something. At what point and what event sparks that motivation always remains to be seen.

When the Cambodians started becoming politically involved in the community, they found that there really wasn't much room for them in the Democratic structure because the Democrats didn't need the votes. . . . One of the stories is that Southeast Asians definitely feel excluded from a lot of things here, and I think at some point the city is going to have to accept them and open up the doors because it's like a banquet hall and there is a banquet going on inside and the Southeast Asians are banging on the door trying to get in. And they're mad and they want to get in. Once they get in they are going to knock that banquet table over because they're so mad.

It's a good story and I think that people ought to pay attention to it and let them get involved and help them along their way.⁵⁴

Traditionally, there are a handful of older, ethnic group leaders who are wise enough to see the handwriting on the wall and make efforts to reach out to the newest immigrant group. Conway stands all alone in this category, one reason being the perception among elected city officials that their constituency would be extremely angry with them if they sought out Southeast Asian votes. Those constituents understand that there are only so many patronage positions to go around. Sharing the spoils of victory with Southeast Asians means fewer resources for the incumbents and their faithful, needy communities.⁵⁵

Political Structure: At-Large versus District Elections

I believe that Lowell's at-large election system also makes it difficult for Southeast Asians to move swiftly into elective office. Political scientists and federal courts have long found that district-based elections enhance immigrant opportunities to win office while at-large systems limit chances for capturing elections.⁵⁶

Another feature of machine rule was a decentralized electoral system. Voters chose candidates for local office from district or ward boundaries, often created during reapportionment to fit the contours of the latest immigrant group population. Ward-based elections allowed immigrants to parlay their population density into electing local ethnic leaders to party posts and, soon after, city councils and school boards.⁵⁷

During the Progressive era of the early 1900s, reformers successfully implemented changes in electoral systems of representation. To weaken machine rule, reformers made it harder for immigrant groups, largely working class, whom they viewed as the grease that made the machine run smoothly, to win office. District-based electoral schemes were overturned in favor of at-large or citywide districts. To capture local political office, immigrant group leaders would have to campaign citywide. Reformers felt that this would shift the machine politicians' focus away from caring for their own ethnic group first, to the detriment to the public good of the city as a whole. In effect, established groups, with many resources to draw on, such as money, education, and professional qualifications, and with allies throughout the city, would be favored to win. Not surprisingly, it was the reformers, largely middle- and upper-class Republican Yankee Protestants who were well placed to take full advantage of the at-large plan. Today, Lowell's entrenched old guard, the Irish, Greek, and French groups, are the beneficiaries of the system.⁵⁸

Federal courts have thrown out the at-large system in numerous cities, ruling it an unconstitutional form of government violating the one-person, one-vote standard of the U.S. Constitution. The courts have recognized the effect of at-large electoral systems in reducing the representation of geographically concentrated minority populations. They argue that smaller districts within cities ease access to elective office and increase representation for minority ethnic groups.

The most recent Massachusetts case involved the city of Holyoke, in the western part of the state, where an underrepresented Hispanic population won a federal lawsuit to overturn the city's at-large electoral system.⁵⁹ Daniel J. Gleason of the Boston firm Nutter McClennen and Fish argued the complaint of the city's Puerto Ricans.

The eight at-large seats were used as a permanent majority for the white establishment, and ward lines were drawn to dilute the voting strength of Hispanics . . . We

sought a compromise with the city, but they refused to acknowledge there is a correlation between the city's political structures and the dramatic underrepresentation of Hispanics in local government. . . . Hispanics in Holyoke can't win citywide elections because Hispanics account for 20 percent of the voting-age population, and they don't vote. Yes, there is Hispanic voter apathy; in 1993, only 2 percent of the Hispanic voting-age population voted, but that apathy is the by-product of exclusion from public life. Moreover, whites as a bloc haven't voted for Hispanic candidates under any circumstances The real fear of old-line ethnic leaders is that district-based elections will open politics to new groups, meaning patronage, in the form of municipal jobs, a valuable commodity in a city stuck in economic decline, will have to be shared.⁶⁰

Politicians' Response to the Southeast Asian Migration

Another key ingredient for an effective succession is assistance from leaders of the city's older, established ethnic groups. The response of those in power can run the gamut of possibilities: at one end, they have the ability to welcome and accommodate new groups; at the other, they can exhibit hostility and attempt to exclude them from political participation.

In Lowell, the response has been mixed. During the middle to late 1980s, some leaders, albeit a vociferous minority on the School Committee, expressed open disdain for the migration of Southeast Asians to the city and through school board policy exerted every effort to make the newcomers unwelcome. During this time the schools were the scene of great ethnic conflict over the still controversial issues of bilingual education and school busing. A group, dubbed the gang of four by the *Lowell Sun*, was hostile to Southeast Asians in the city and refused to act quickly to remedy the overcrowding that developed in the Lowell public school system.

Granted, by all accounts the city was overwhelmed by the massive influx into the schools. Still, the schools' leaders were unprepared and inflexible to change. Moreover, they felt that the city was unfairly being asked to take in the Southeast Asian refugees, while neighboring communities were not asked to share the burden, and the city's already poorly funded school system was strapped for resources.

Paul Sullivan, host of a morning talk show on Lowell's WLLH radio station, echoes what many social service workers and Cambodian leaders have reported: that succession is proceeding apace, and that several city leaders, particularly city manager Jim Campbell, mayors Richard Howe and Robert Kennedy, and district attorney Tom Reilly, did reach out to the Southeast Asian community and helped them settle into Lowell. The near absence of hate crimes and the hiring of four Cambodian police officers are two prominent achievements of the city to date. Moreover, the defeat of one of the more vociferous gang of four School Committee members, Sean Sullivan, was a sign to many that the city, at the very least, felt uncomfortable with bigoted officials representing them.

We're talking about the largest influx of change in a community, probably in the history of this nation, and in three to four years, 30 percent of the city's ethnic population changed. And [the city] absorbed it without riots, no fights, very little discord, and still were criticized by the liberal press . . . and it wasn't fair. People were thrilled, in my opinion, to have youngsters of all colors coming into their classes. They would have accepted Southeast Asians coming into their neighborhoods to go to school with their youngsters, shoulder to shoulder out in the playground, but they didn't want their kids going from one end of the city to an-

other end of the city. And again, the characterization that that is not inclusive and has racial overtones somehow is unfair. And frankly, I think it deflects the real issue: Why do cities have to do it, why do cities have to bear the whole brunt of integrating society?

"Look at what the Irish went through and the Greeks went through in the city of Lowell and how long it took for them to achieve what they achieved versus the Southeast Asians, who in less than fifteen years are accepted and in some cases thriving, and certainly their issues are being addressed by the city. I don't think they've got a lot to squawk about. And the truth is, I don't hear a lot of squawking. Now maybe I'm not in the right circles, but I think anything that has to be done is fine-tuning. I don't think there is racial discord in the city. I think the white crowd is concerned with whatever issues of color in the city. And that's why we have spent so much time on the gang situation, which is really an intramural fight that is taking place in the Cambodian community. Somebody that was insensitive would ignore it and they aren't. Cambodians, Vietnamese, and Thai communities have done very well under that system. And . . . in fifteen years they've done very well in what they've achieved. And that's not because they've had a helping hand.⁶¹

Sullivan's perspective, that the city has reached out to the Southeast Asian community and deserves a lot of credit for doing so, is a position that is supported by the oral histories I collected for this article. Even the U.S. Immigration Commission, under the leadership of the late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, marveled at Lowell's succession achievements compared with other cities that experienced great demographic change in the 1980s.⁶²

An expanded version of this article will explore in greater detail the city, state, and federal government's response to the settlement of Southeast Asians in Lowell. Preliminary evidence indicates that Lowell sought to accommodate the needs of Southeast Asians. There were, however, interest groups that pressured the city to live up to its commitments.⁶³

The preliminary findings of this study revealed that Cambodians have begun the political mobilization phase of the succession process. Nevertheless, there remains a long road ahead for Cambodian political succession in Lowell. Even with all the obstacles before them, there is no reason to believe that the process will be a longer one for Cambodians than it was for the various ethnic groups that settled in Lowell before them. What has emerged is the importance of both internal and external factors in the challenging endeavor of political succession. However, the internal factors seem a little more important than the external ones. The special legacy of the Cambodian holocaust, the absence of a Cambodian tradition of participatory politics, and generational differences all work against the development of an electoral movement that might challenge or overcome the city's at-large representative system and the lack of active political parties.

Interviewees suggested other areas for research that will undoubtedly shed greater light on the succession process. Class divisions: 70 percent of Cambodians living in Lowell are at or below the poverty line at the same time that a solid middle class has been established. Gender: women's participation in politics is frowned upon in Cambodian culture though there are signs that young women are poised for leadership roles. Religion: the monks of the Cambodian Buddhist temple are the most revered figures in the community. Lowell's two Buddhist temples are at odds on Buddhist practices as well as the proper place of religion in American politics; one of the temples has shown signs that it may indirectly lend a helping hand to political education and organizational

efforts.⁶⁴

While external factors appear to be less important than internal factors, matters of political structure are still relevant. A number of questions remain unexplored at this time. To overcome the obstacles to minority empowerment that at-large elections represent, it seems that Cambodians must form alliances with the city's other sizable minority group, Hispanics, and a bloc of sympathetic white ethnic voters to win election citywide. Because a structural change of the electoral system is unlikely anytime soon, coalition building is of the highest order. Still, a failure to elect Southeast Asians to local office in the coming years could lead to a lawsuit similar to the one filed by Hispanic residents of Holyoke.

While local elections are nonpartisan, state and federal elections are not. Even with a mere 500 registered voters, Cambodians have it within their power to tip the scales in favor of either the Democrats or Republicans in closely fought state and national races. Successful bloc voting would force the powers-that-be to show the Cambodians greater political respect. Michael Conway's efforts on behalf of Southeast Asian Republicans represent just the kind of interethnic cooperation that has sped succession in other cities. Efforts by Republican and Democratic candidates for the 1998 governor's race to reach out to Cambodian activists is evidence that state politicians have taken notice of their potential.

Finally, a word about method. Oral history was extremely useful in uncovering the political conflicts within the Cambodian-American community. Knowing more than ever how reluctant Cambodians are to reveal internal squabbles, it is imperative for students of Cambodian politics to seek corroborating testimony from those who work closely with the community. Also, while more in-depth interviews are essential to the further exploration of succession in Lowell, an examination of the growing effort to increase citizenship, voter registration, and voting levels among Cambodians through the scrutinization of voting records and voting behavior is necessary. The campaigns to elect Sambath Chey Fennel to the Lowell School Committee must be assessed; the University of Massachusetts Lowell's Center for Immigrant and Refugee Community Leadership Empowerment (CIRCLE) program, a university-community collaboration seeking to develop sustainable leadership, which is in its third year, should also be evaluated. ❀

Notes

1. *Massachusetts Municipal Profiles* (Lowell, Mass.: Middlesex County, Lowell Public Library, 1992), 162. The latest population figure is from the Lowell Public Schools, "Enrollment by Race," October 1, 1996, 1, Table 3. A total of 4,644 Southeast Asian children attended Lowell schools in 1996. Using a widely accepted formula for projecting community population created by the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants, 4,644 is multiplied by 5.2 (estimated average family size) to establish the population figure of 24,148. The largest growth spurt occurred between 1985 and 1990 when Lowell experienced a secondary migration pattern of Southeast Asians from within the United States. A variety of reasons account for it: family reunification, available jobs and job training, and the establishment of a Buddhist temple and a mutual assistance association in the city. Interview with Hai B. Pho, October 2, 1995, audiocassette, and Jean Larson Pyle, "The Impact of Immigration Policy on Local Economies: The Importance of the Phenomenon of Secondary Migration," unpublished paper prepared for testimony at a public hearing of the U.S. Commission on Immigration

- Reform at the Boott Cotton Mills, Lowell, August 1, 1994. The source for Lowell's nineteenth-century population is Mary Beth Norton, David Katzman, Paul Escott, Howard Chudacoff, Thomas Patterson, and William Tuttle, Jr., *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States, Volume 1: To 1877* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 281.
2. Michael J. White, "Racial and Ethnic Succession in Four Cities," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (December 1984): 165.
 3. *Ibid.*, 166.
 4. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963).
 5. *Ibid.*, 4.
 6. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Patterns of Ethnic Succession: Blacks and Hispanics in New York City," *Political Science Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 1.
 7. Lawrence Fuchs, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity, and the Civic Culture* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1990). Fuchs, the Meyer and Walter Jaffe Professor in American Civilization and Politics, Brandeis University, served as executive director, Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee in 1981.
 8. Steven Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840-1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 320, and Diane Pinderhughes, *Race and Ethnicity in Chicago Politics: A Reexamination of the Pluralist Theory* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 64.
 9. Roger W. Lotchin, "Power and Policy: American City Politics between the Two World Wars," in *Ethnics, Machines, and the American Urban Future*, ed. Scott Greer (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1981), 6.
 10. See Jeffrey Gerson, "Building the Brooklyn Machine: Irish, Jewish, and Black Political Succession in Central Brooklyn, 1919-1964" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York Graduate School, 1990). Some earlier pluralist writers on the subject include: Wallace S. Sayre, "The Immigrant in Politics," in *Our Racial and National Minorities*, edited by Francis J. Brown and Joseph S. Roucek (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967), 643-660, and Lawrence H. Fuchs, "Some Political Aspects of Immigration," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 21 (Spring 1966): 270-283.
 11. Fuchs, *American Kaleidoscope*, 343. Fuchs's supporters include Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs: Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); Elmer Cornwell, "Party Absorption of Ethnic Groups: The Case of Providence, R.I.," *Social Forces* 38 (July 1961): 87-98; and "Bosses, Machine, and Ethnic Groups," *Annals* 353 (May 1964): 27-39.
 12. Fuchs, *American Kaleidoscope*, 343.
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. *Ibid.*, 346.
 15. *Ibid.*, 349.
 16. Gillian Dara Cohen, "Knowledge of How to Combine: The Political Socialization of Southeast Asian Refugees in Lowell, Mass.," bachelor's thesis, Department of Social Studies, Harvard University, 1994. Cohen cites Jerome Black, "The Practice of Politics in Two Settings: Political Transferability among Recent Immigrants to Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, December 1987, 731-753, and "Government as a Source of Assistance for Newly Arrived Immigrants to Canada," in *Education for Democratic Citizenship: A Challenge for Multi-Ethnic Societies*, edited by Roberta S. Sigel and Marilyn Hoskin (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 167-192.
 17. Fuchs, *American Kaleidoscope*, 353.
 18. *Ibid.*, 554, fn 52.
 19. April R. Schultz, "Searching for a Unified America," *American Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (December 1993): 642.
 20. Jesus Salvador Trevino, "The *Pluribus* That Makes the *Unum*," *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, February 10, 1994, 11.
 21. *The Asian-American Almanac: A Reference Work on Asians in the United States*, edited by Susan Gall and Irene Natividad (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), 29-39, 105 (the most up-to-date survey of the status of Cambodians in the United States), and Peter Nien-chu Kiang, "When Know-Nothings Speak English Only: Analyzing Irish and

- Cambodian Struggles for Community Development and Educational Equity," in *The State of Asian American Activism and Resistance in the 1990s*, edited and introduced by Karin Aguilar-San Juan (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 125-145.
22. Cohen, "Knowledge of How to Combine," 7.
23. *Ibid.*, 106.
24. Ivan D. Steen, review of "Don't Call Me Boss: David L. Lawrence, Pittsburgh's Renaissance Mayor," *Oral History Review* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 183.
25. Herbert Gutman, "Labor History and the Sartre Question," *Humanities* 1, no. 1 (September/October 1980): 189.
26. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 134.
27. Useful background information was found in Mary H. Blewett, "The Mills and the Multitudes: A Political History," in *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts*, ed. Arthur L. Eno, Jr. (Somersworth: New Hampshire Publishing, 1976); 161-189; Brian Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps: The Irish of Lowell, 1821-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); and the archival collections, *The Working People of Lowell*, Lowell National Historical Park, Mary Blewett and Martha Mayo, University of Lowell, Center for Lowell History, Mogan Center, 1987.
28. Professor Hai B. Pho of the University of Massachusetts Lowell ran a program, under the aegis of the Indochinese Refugee Foundation, that provided job training and placement as well as education programs to Southeast Asian refugees in Lowell from 1980 to 1985. He has also written on Southeast Asians in Lowell; his latest work on the subject is "The Impact of Recent Southeast Asian Immigration on Lowell and Lawrence," a paper prepared for a round table discussion, Multiculturalism and Transnationalism: An International Conference, October 14-16, 1994, University of Massachusetts Lowell. Pho interview.
29. Not until the 1850s, thirty years after the Irish first arrived in Lowell, did Benjamin F. Butler organize the Irish into a bastion of the Lowell Democratic Party. See Blewett, "The Mills and the Multitudes," 168, 174. On Franco-Americans, see Ann MacGibbon's paper, "The Franco-Americans of Lowell, Massachusetts: Ethnic Politics in a New England Industrial City," 1996. The most prolific author of Greek life in Lowell is Nick Karas; see his *Greek Immigrant Chronicles* (Lowell: Lowell Hellenic Heritage Association, 1991), 120.
30. See Cohen, "Knowledge of How to Combine," and Kiang, "When Know-Nothings Speak English Only."
31. In what can only be described as a pragmatic and opportunistic strategy for winning, Fennell ran on a conservative ideological plank: eliminate school busing and bilingual education. It is reported that one of his advisers is a longtime School Committee member, George Kouloheras, who made a name for himself in the 1980s as a staunch opponent of busing and bilingual education. Fennell is also backed by a small group of Southeast Asians who consider themselves Republicans. Interview with Michael Conway, August 18, 1995, audiocassette. Craig Sandler, *Lowell Sun*, October 11, 1995, 4; *Lowell Sun*, November 8, 1995, 1. Lam showed the importance of persistence, winning election on his third try. Interview with Daniel Lam, October 9, 1997, audiocassette. Mayor Hass is quoted in Kay Lazar and Mark Arsenault, *Lowell Sun*, "Cambodian Vote Seen as Untapped Force in Lowell," November 9, 1997, 15, 17.
32. Interview with Tem Chea, August 8, 1995, audiocassette. In May 1990, the CAVL was cofounded by Tem Chea and Michael Ben Ho. Its goal is to encourage Cambodians to become citizens and registered voters. He is a school social worker in the Special Education Department of the Lowell public schools. I am investigating the latest figures for Southeast Asian citizenship and registered voters in Lowell.
33. See *The Asian-American Almanac*, 33, for figures on family size.
34. I have edited some oral histories in the interest of clarifying language.
35. Interview with Samkhann Khoeun, June 14 and 21, 1995, audiocassette, August 4, 1995, videocassette; interview with Michael Ben Ho, August 1, 1995, audiocassette. Ho, who was born March 29, 1942 in Cambodia, is a supervisor in the Massachusetts Department of Social Services in Lowell. He is highly respected as an elder statesman in the Cambodian community.

36. Ho, August 1, 1995, interview.
37. One federal government study suggests that Southeast Asians, African-Americans, and Latinos view leadership differently. Southeast Asians, for example, believe the development of trust is instrumental for political participation. See "Providing Leadership," in *The Future by Design: A Community Framework for Preventing Alcohol and Other Drug Problems through a Systems Approach* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991), 60. My experience confirms this study. I have facilitated a political leadership workshop for immigrant and refugee activists in Lowell since 1995. Trust is a recurring issue in the discussions with all the Cambodian participants.
38. Although it is not possible to present here a full explanation of the events that have set back the development of trust among Cambodians, a few words on the subject are in order. Fennell engineered a coup d'état against the CMAA in 1991, forcing out the executive director, Vera Godley. The manner in which it was carried out reminded many Cambodian activists of the worst political traditions of Cambodia. Fennell was dictatorial, acting without the support of the community and its leaders. CMAA was able to stabilize itself in the fall of 1996, when a new board of directors that opposed Fennell was voted in. Fennell, because he is the only Cambodian who has run for political office, remains a force in the community even though his ability to garner votes from the white ethnic or minority communities of the city is extremely poor.
39. *The Asian-American Almanac*, 37. Also, for a moving and harrowing story of the war trauma some Cambodian women refugees have experienced as a result of witnessing unimaginable horrors, see Alec Wilkinson, "A Changed Vision of God," *The New Yorker*, January 24, 1994, 52-68.
40. Steven A. Holmes, "Anti-Immigrant Mood Moves Asians to Organize," *New York Times*, January 3, 1996, A1, A11.
41. David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 29.
42. Pho interview.
43. Nuon was born in Phnom Penh and lived through the holocaust. When the Vietnamese Army took over the country, he and his family fled to Thailand, through fear of again being placed in concentration camps. Nuon was fourteen when his father and mother and he and his seven brothers and sisters made it to the United States in 1982. He serves on the board of the Cambodian American League of Lowell. Interview with Vesna Nuon, June 12, 1995, audiocassette, and September 7, 1995, videocassette.
44. Ho interview.
45. Chea interview. Chea points out several other obstacles to organizing: older Cambodians cannot read or write English, and younger Cambodians have no interest in applying for U.S. citizenship because of their perceived lack of an immediate benefit. The latter point has lost some of its strength since the 1996 passage of national welfare reform. The fear of losing Supplemental Security Income, public assistance, and food stamps led many immigrants and refugees to apply for citizenship in record numbers.
46. Ashley Dunn, "Cambodians in the U.S. Say the Dark Shadow of the Khmer Rouge is Back," *New York Times*, August 14, 1995, A10-11.
47. Nuon interview.
48. Khoeun interview.
49. *The Asian-American Almanac*, 38.
50. It appears that some of Lowell's Cambodian youth are not faring well in this regard. James Higgins and Joan Ross, photographers, film makers, and authors, have traced the development of a group of Cambodian children whom they photographed for *Southeast Asians: A New Beginning in Lowell* (Lowell, Mass.: Mill Town Graphics, 1986). Higgins found that many of the children are troubled; several found their way into local gangs, a continuing problem in the Southeast Asian and Latino communities. Interview with Higgins, Lowell, April 22, 1995. See Higgins and Ross, *Fractured Identities: Cambodia's Children of War* (Lowell, Mass.: Loom Press, 1997).
51. Goldman, quoted in Craig Sandler, "For Minorities in Lowell, There'll Be Little Impact at the Polls," *Lowell Sun*, September 18, 1994, 22.
52. Interview with Michael Goldman, Boston, July 27, 1995, videocassette.
53. Interview with Sean Sullivan, August 8, 1995, audiocassette. Sullivan, who was

elected to the Lowell School Committee in 1987, served until 1989, when he failed to win reelection. He was elected on an anti-immigrant, antibusing, and antibilingual education platform. He was defeated for his vocal opposition to the school desegregation plan designated as central enrollment and his support for an extension for Superintendent Henry Mroz by an active parent-supported school reform group and a larger than usual minority voter turnout.

54. Conway interviews.
55. Interview with Larry Martin, April 3, 1996, audiocassette. Martin, a Lowell City Councilor from 1993 until his defeat on November 7, 1997, was also the director of admissions at the University of Massachusetts Lowell for many years.
56. Frank J. Mauro and Gerald Benjamin, eds., *Restructuring the New York City Government: The Reemergence of Municipal Reform* (New York: Academy of Political Science, *Proceedings* 37, no. 3, 1989), 16-30.
57. Gerson, "Building the Brooklyn Machine." I maintain that, owing in part to the district-based election units of Brooklyn's Democratic Party organization, Jews and later blacks of the borough were able to effect a relatively fluid political succession. Other factors that assisted succession were rapid demographic change, favorable reapportionment of districts, astute ethnic group leadership, and a history of great competition from within and without the party for the new ethnic vote as well as independent voting on behalf of Jews and blacks.
58. The classic statement of this thesis is in Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 55 (1964): 157-169.
59. The First Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston ordered federal district court judge Michael Ponsor to review his findings in the voting rights case brought by Latinos against the city of Holyoke. "The ruling set aside Ponsor's order reducing the number of at-large seats on the 15 member City Council from eight to two"; *Boston Globe*, October 1, 1995, 26. In the fall of 1997, Judge Ponsor reversed his previous ruling, which held that Holyoke was discriminating against Latino voters. The city did, however, settle, favorably to the plaintiffs, that part of the suit alleging violation of section 203, which sets forth the legal requirements for bilingual elections. *The Docket, ACLU of Massachusetts* 27, no. 2 (November 1997): 3.
60. Gleason is quoted in Kevin Cullen, "Judge's Ruling Divides Holyoke," *Boston Globe*, April 24, 1995, 1. Also, interview with Daniel J. Gleason, Boston, July 27, 1995.
61. Paul Sullivan interview, videocassette, August 3, 1995; Diane MacLeod interview, July 29, 1995, audiocassette; Jeffrey Davidson interview, July 30, 1995, audiocassette. MacLeod was Lowell's affirmative action officer from 1982 to 1994. Davidson has been with the Lowell Police Department for twenty years. Both served on Lowell's Southeast Asian Task Force and are well respected by Southeast Asian activists. Both believe that several of the city's political leaders during the 1980s, from the mayor to the city manager to the police chief, are deserving of praise. MacLeod cited the establishment of a revolving housing court that meets in Lowell, as well as in Salem and Lawrence, Massachusetts.
62. U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, "Summary of Public Hearing, Local Impacts of Immigration," hearing held in Lowell, Massachusetts, August 1, 1994.
63. Paul Hudon, "The Ethnic Covenant," paper prepared by this VISTA volunteer at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, Office of Community Service, May 1996.
64. Terry Tun interview, August 8, 1995, audiocassette. Tun offers a Cambodian woman's perspective on the expected role of women in the community. In the fall of 1995, Tun left her position with a Cambodian community organization to become congressman Martin Meehan's liaison to the Southeast Asian community. This is yet another indication that ethnic political succession is proceeding. I thank Pov Ye for her wisdom in this regard, as well as her research assistance for this article. Interview with Pov Ye, September 22, 1995. I hope to interview many more Cambodian women. For insight into the division among the Cambodian temples, see Samkhann Khoeun interview, June 21, 1995.