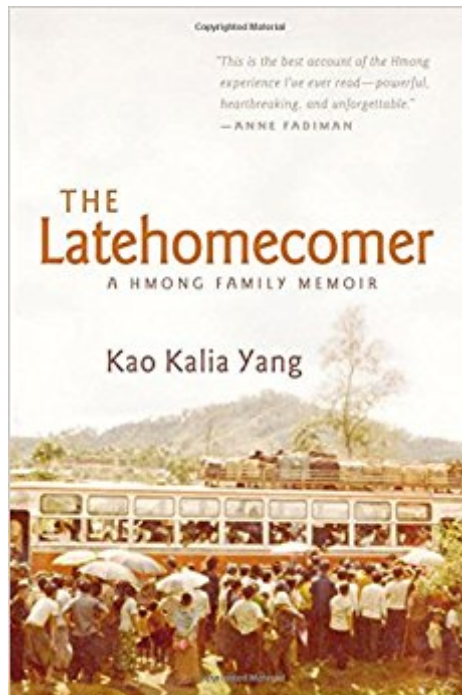




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The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir



Synopsis

In search of a place to call home, thousands of Hmong families made the journey from the war-torn jungles of Laos to the overcrowded refugee camps of Thailand and onward to America. But lacking a written language of their own, the Hmong experience has been primarily recorded by others. Driven to tell her family's story after her grandmother's death, *The Latecomer* is Kao Kalia Yang's tribute to the remarkable woman whose spirit held them all together. It is also an eloquent, firsthand account of a people who have worked hard to make their voices heard. Beginning in the 1970s, as the Hmong were being massacred for their collaboration with the United States during the Vietnam War, Yang recounts the harrowing story of her family's captivity, the daring rescue undertaken by her father and uncles, and their narrow escape into Thailand where Yang was born in the Ban Vinai Refugee Camp. When she was six years old, Yang's family immigrated to America, and she evocatively captures the challenges of adapting to a new place and a new language. Through her words, the dreams, wisdom, and traditions passed down from her grandmother and shared by an entire community have finally found a voice. Together with her sister, Kao Kalia Yang is the founder of a company dedicated to helping immigrants with writing, translating, and business services. A graduate of Carleton College and Columbia University, Yang has recently screened *The Place Where We Were Born*, a film documenting the experiences of Hmong American refugees. Visit her website at www.kaokaliayang.com.

Book Information

Paperback: 277 pages

Publisher: Coffee House Press; 1 edition (April 1, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1566892082

ISBN-13: 978-1566892087

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.8 x 8.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 132 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #17,496 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Asian American Studies #15 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military > Vietnam War #27 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Emigration & Immigration

Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Yang, cofounder of the immigrant-services company Words Wanted, was born in a Hmong refugee camp in Thailand in 1980. Her grandmother had wanted to stay in the camp, to make it easier for her spirit to find its way back to her birthplace when she died, but people knew it would soon be liquidated. America looked promising, so Yang and her family, along with scores of other Hmong, left the jungles of Thailand to fly to California, then settle in St. Paul, Minn. In many ways, these hardworking refugees followed the classic immigrant arc, with the adults working double jobs so the children could get an education and be a credit to the community. But the Hmong immigrants were also unique—coming from a non-Christian, rain forest culture, with no homeland to imagine returning to, with hardly anyone in America knowing anything about them. As Yang wryly notes, they studied the Vietnam War at school, without their lessons ever mentioning that the Hmong had been fighting for the Americans. Yang tells her family's story with grace; she narrates their struggles, beautifully weaving in Hmong folklore and culture. By the end of this moving, unforgettable book, when Yang describes the death of her beloved grandmother, readers will delight at how intimately they have become part of this formerly strange culture. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Most Americans are relatively ignorant of Hmong history and culture. In fact, many have a negative perception of this immigrant group. For example, few are aware of the fact that the Hmong fought on the American side during the Vietnam War. In this beautiful memoir, Yang recounts the harrowing journey of her family from Laos to a refugee camp in Thailand to the U.S. Eventually settling in St. Paul, Minnesota, their struggle was not over. Adapting to a new community that often did not understand nor want them was difficult. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that the Hmong, despite possessing a rich folkloric tradition, have no written language of their own. Determined to tell the story of both her family and her people, Yang intimately chronicles the immigrant experience from the Hmong perspective, providing a long-overdue contribution to the history and literature of ethnic America. --Margaret Flanagan

This is a wonderful story that really helped me gain a better understanding of the history of the Hmong people. For many, this book is likely to be quite the crash course in that topic. Miss Yang manages to paint a picture in your mind the whole way through yet writes in a way that's very comprehensible.

I had the privilege of reading a pre-publication manuscript of this book. I cannot recommend it highly

enough. Kao Kalia Yang tells the story of her family--which in Hmong culture extends far beyond one's parents and siblings. From the jungles of Laos, where her family lived before she was born, across the treacherous Mekong River, into Thailand's Ban Vinai refugee camp, and ultimately here to the United States, Yang tells us of the alliance her Hmong people made with the US, the dangers they experienced as a result of America's withdrawal from Southeast Asia, their harrowing flight from the only country they had ever known, and the indignities suffered and hopes and dreams shared while living an uncertain life in a refugee camp. At the center of this unforgettable tale is Yang's grandmother, who struggles to keep her family together in the camp, but must ultimately surrender to the inevitability of their parting. Through Yang and her family we are connected to the challenges, pains, joys, and triumphs of the refugee/immigrant experience and the love and dedication of a family unlike any we have met before, yet as familiar and comfortable as any we are likely to know. We are drawn into Yang's seductive prose, the poignancy of her family's and her own circumstances, and the hope that their suffering, including that of her grandmother, who ultimately comes to America, will somehow be redeemed in this new country that in many ways necessitated their flight from Laos. This irresistible and moving debut--and its author--deserve a wide and appreciative audience.

I had to read this for a class this semester. This book is very well written and incredibly easy to read. I find myself wanting to read ahead of the class just to finish it. I ordered a used copy off of that came in great condition and also happened to be a signed edition. I will be keeping this one for my personal collection.

Thank you Koa Kalia Yang, from the bottom of my heart for writing this book. Every picture that you painted with your words, came floating back to me. My family was in the processing refugee camp right after yours left for America. Thank you for writing our Hmong people into history. The tears of relief poured out of me as I cherished every word on every page, finally I was not alone in what I went through.

This is a beautifully written story of a remarkable family who escaped from the Pathet Lao, survived a refugee camp and successfully made the transition from the jungles of southeast Asia to a modern society. Their sense of family and its importance is remarkable. The story of the Hmong who became refugees because they had helped U.S. forces in the Vietnam War deserves a wide audience.

Really a great book at a really great price. It arrived on time, I give the seller AAA+++. The book is a memoir and is a story about the Hmong people who were forced out of their homeland. It tells fascinating details of how many of the Hmong people ended up in the United States. Most happened in the 1980's. That wasn't even that long ago. Was I so busy with my own life at that time that I didn't even realize that these people were a population without a country to call their own. Kao Kalia Yang did a beautiful job of accounting of the Hmong experience. I love memoirs to start with. If you do too, you will really enjoy this book.

I gave this to my mom to read and she enjoyed it too. Yang is the daughter of Hmong parents who move to Minnesota when she is very young. I didn't know anything really about the Hmong people before reading this and I still feel pretty in the dark about most of their culture but this did shed quite a bit of light on some things. I read this book for a class, but it was a great choice by the professor. Yang tells the very interesting story of how her parents came to be and gives many interesting stories about her childhood and growing up as well. this book is well worth the time and money.

Capture the heart and spirit of the Hmong people's journey to the United States!

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