



Exploring the Political and Cultural Underpinnings of Vietnamese American Conservatism



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Introduction

Many refugees who arrived in the United States in the wake of the Vietnam War came with a trauma-laced and deeply religious vision of hope for their new future. The development of Vietnamese American conservatism is incredibly nuanced and has been complicated by the rise of polemic national leaders in recent years. My research attempts to contextualize the events and experiences that influence this particular worldview.

Research Question

How did the Vietnamese American conservative movement develop during the post-war diaspora, and what does this worldview look like today?

Methods

Primary Sources

I conducted virtual interviews with three prominent members of the Vietnamese American community to better understand the nuances of this phenomenon. Over the course of five weeks, I spoke to Dr. John Pham, Rep. My-Linh Thai (WA), and Rep. Khanh Pham (OR).

Secondary Sources

I consulted a wide breadth of existing scholarship on right-wing conservatism and the Vietnamese Catholic experience. Few scholars have explored this intersection in depth, so I decided to find relevant material and extrapolate my findings from there.

Results

Political Motivations

Experiences of displacement—from country, culture, and community—are significant to the narratives created by members of the Vietnamese diaspora. Conservative worldviews in the Vietnamese American community today emerged from these traumatic war experiences, layered with visceral reactions toward communism as a political and economic system.

Cultural Influences

Confucian philosophy is an integral part of Vietnamese society and defines the parameters of its construction. Social norms in the Vietnamese American community emphasize the importance of respect, obedience, and a deference to political and familial authority. This commitment to family values (in addition to the gender norms associated with this kind of structure) enables conservatism to thrive.



<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/why-defunct-south-vietnam-flag-was-flown-capitol-riot-n1254306>

Discussion

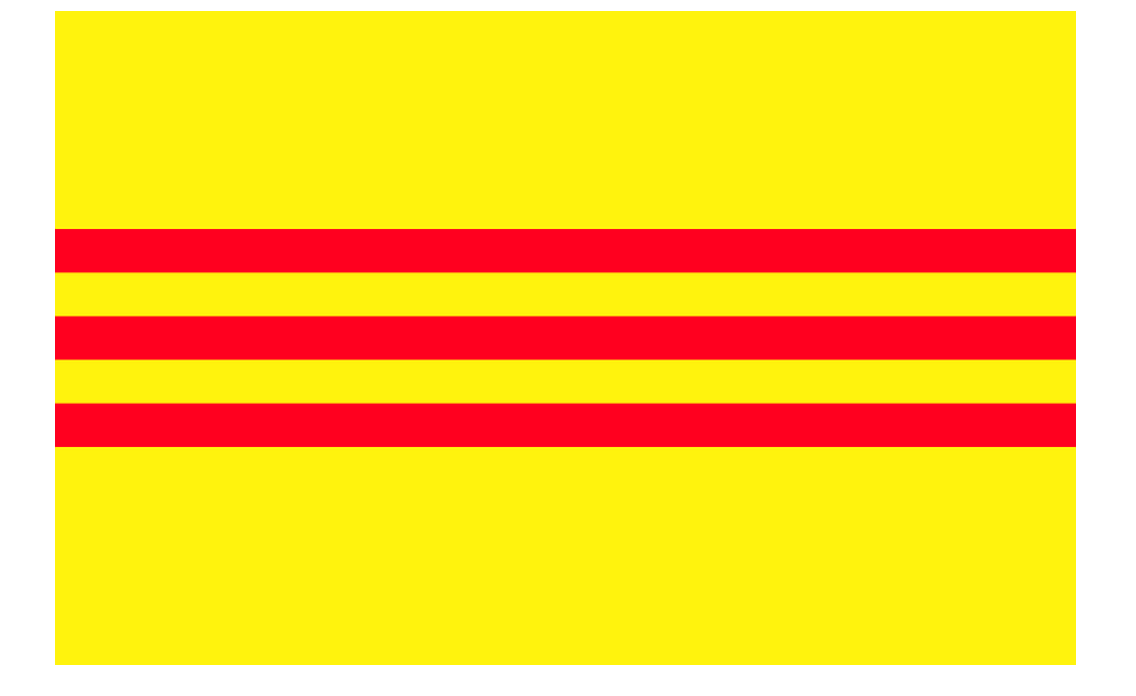
Vietnamese American Conservatism Today

Analyses of Vietnamese American politics today are complicated by the rise of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Because younger Vietnamese Americans have better access to higher education and employment opportunities than their parents, they tend to hold more liberal views. As this generation ages and gives way to the rise of even younger Vietnamese Americans, these liberal perspectives may persist. On the other hand, right-wing conservatives like Andy Ngo could potentially represent a simultaneous political shift in the opposite direction.

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic unsurprisingly catalyzed another wave of Sinophobia in the United States, which triggered an uptick of anti-Asian violence across the nation.

A deeper understanding of these events and how they relate to the Vietnamese community first demands a confrontation with significant levels of anti-communist sentiment present in areas of professional and personal discourse. Hope for intergenerational unity in the face of this extreme adversity is promising and exists as one way forward for Vietnamese Americans and the Asian American community at large.



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