



Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto (Asian American History & Cultu)

By Eric Tang

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After surviving the Khmer Rouge genocide, followed by years of confinement to international refugee camps, as many as 10,000 Southeast Asian refugees arrived in the Bronx during the 1980s and '90s. *Unsettled* chronicles the unfinished odyssey of Bronx Cambodians, closely following one woman and her family for several years as they survive yet resist their literal insertion into concentrated Bronx poverty.

Eric Tang tells the harrowing and inspiring stories of these refugees to make sense of how and why the displaced migrants have been resettled in the “hyperghetto.” He argues that refuge is never found, that rescue discourses mask a more profound urban reality characterized by racialized geographic enclosure, economic displacement and unrelenting poverty, and the criminalization of daily life.

Unsettled views the hyperghetto as a site of extreme isolation, punishment, and confinement. The refugees remain captives in late-capitalist urban America. Tang ultimately asks: What does it mean for these Cambodians to resettle into this distinct time and space of slavery’s afterlife?

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Editorial Review

Review

“Scrupulous, courageous and fiercely argued, Unsettled is an ethnographic revelation. . . . Tang, a former organizer, brings to light the political ecology of a community that has survived war, genocide, and displacement and is now struggling to remake the Bronx hyperghetto, exposing in the process the ‘impossible’ condition that may be the fate of all refugee communities in the neoliberal city.” —Junot Díaz

“Scholar-activist Eric Tang has written a brilliantly moving account of how politics, community dynamics, and family relationships shape life for Cambodian refugees who settled in the Bronx in the 1980s and 1990s. *Unsettled* is at once a stunning ethnography, a superb critical cultural studies project, and an outstanding example of engaged scholarship that will inspire new understandings about the movement of people and the creation of particular kinds of contested spaces. Tang’s riveting account of struggle, change, and resistance is a remarkable achievement.”—Beth Richie, Professor of African American Studies and Criminology, Law and Justice at University of Illinois at Chicago

“Unsettled is a contribution to the emergent field of ‘critical refugee studies,’ and documents a story of Cambodian refugee itinerancy and survival. Not an account of a transition from refugee hardship to redemptive U.S. citizenship, it is rather a description of uprooting, captivity, poverty, displacement, and fugitivity—and the ever elusive project of ‘arrival.’”—Lisa Lowe, Professor of English and American Studies at Tufts University

About the Author

Eric Tang is Assistant Professor in African and African Diaspora Studies and the Center for Asian American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

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