There are more than two million Americans who trace their ancestry to the Mekong River region of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Yunnan, China. A vast majority of these immigrants and refugees arrived in the United States between 1975 and 1995.

The conflict known in the United States as the Vietnam War (1965–1975) caused the dislocation and death of millions of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. During the uncertain years that followed the war and the barbaric rule of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, hundreds of thousands of refugees came to the United States, where they were settled by government agencies, churches, and nongovernmental organizations. As they have adapted to their new life in America, many of these refugees actively work to keep their cultural traditions alive. Buddhist temples, community cultural centers, and annual celebrations serve to pass on long-held community traditions to the second generation of immigrants. In the past decade, thousands of refugee families have returned to the region to reconnect with the villages and towns of their birth. Many of these new Americans have also developed economic and cultural ties with the countries they fled only decades ago.