



The Cultural Fabric of Philadelphia

**An Intimate Look at
Philadelphia's Immigrant Communities**

Photography by Dave Lakatos

VOLUME ONE: CHINESE · DOMINICANS · GERMANS · INDONESIANS · LIBERIANS · VIETNAMESE



FOREWORD

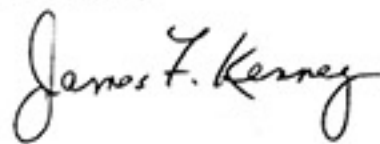
The City of Philadelphia prides itself on being a World Heritage City, welcoming to all people who choose to call it home. From the first immigrants who founded this City in 1682, to those that continue to join our community today, Philadelphia is better for its diversity and inclusiveness.

Philadelphia is often referred to as a city of neighborhoods, where communities of many different cultures put aside their differences and work together to create a better place for their families to live. Our neighborhoods are also home to the many unique cultural traditions that bring life to our city.

Immigrant communities contribute to Philadelphia in many ways—sharing their values and traditions, religious practices, food, music, customs and arts which broaden and strengthen our communities. Their work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit also helps drive our local economy.

The Cultural Fabric of Philadelphia, Volume One photo book provides a glance into six immigrant communities and highlights their contributions to the cultural and economic development of our great city. More importantly, this photo book illustrates the commitment of these six immigrant communities to our city and will provide all of us with a unique opportunity to see the world from one another's point of view.

In Service,



James F. Kenney
Mayor
City of Philadelphia

LEFT: Mayor Kenney during the naturalization ceremony held during halftime of the 2016 Philadelphia International Unity Cup Soccer Championship Game at Citizen's Bank Park.



INTRODUCTION

Philadelphia has a rich immigrant past. Based on the increasing numbers arriving in Philadelphia, the City will also have a rich immigrant future. Philly's immigrant communities add not only cultural but monetary wealth, contributing considerably to the City's economy.

Immigrants and their communities are now experiencing a challenging time throughout the country. Greater education about and awareness of immigrant communities is now necessary, nationally as well as here in Philadelphia. People need to recognize the value of immigrants as people, as neighbors, and as economic drivers.

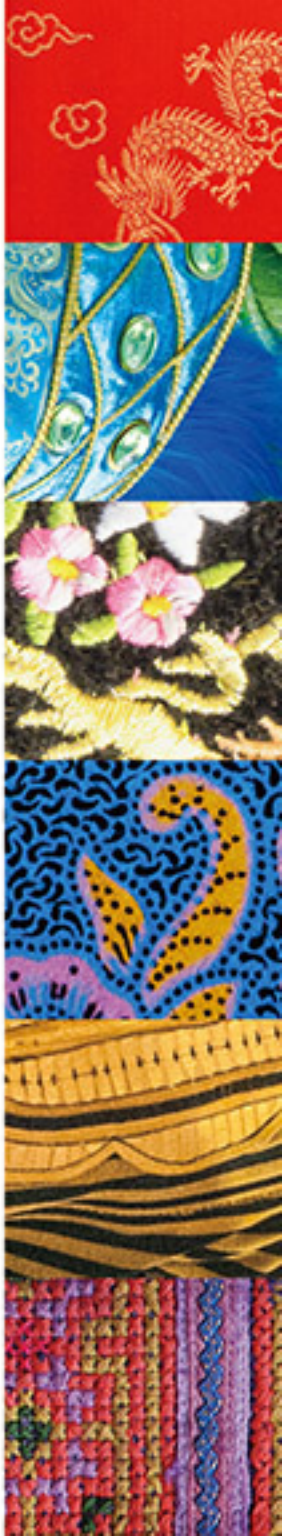
The Cultural Fabric of Philadelphia, Volume One photo book project was designed to highlight the stories of these selected communities. It seeks to increase awareness and understanding of these immigrants, to show who they are and what they bring to the City of Philadelphia.

The purpose of the overall Cultural Fabric of Philadelphia program, however, is two-part:

1. the preparation of the "coffee table"-type photo books that tell Philly's immigrant community stories; and
2. building community pride, self-respect and empowerment through community outreach and engagement in the book-building process, using community (and cross-community) meetings that foster cultural development and problem solving.

The overall goal of the Cultural Fabric of Philadelphia's program is to increase the understanding and awareness of Philly's immigrant communities—in all Philadelphians.

LEFT: Part of a Vietnamese Flag and Heritage event at City Hall in April 2016.





ABOUT THE BOOK TEAM

This photo book project was community-led. This means that the cultural stories in this photo book were told by the community, spearheaded by the following committed and passionate leaders.

COMMUNITY LEADERS

- Chinese Community:* **Jackie Wong**, Community Advocate; **John Chin**, Executive Director, Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation; **Stephanie Sun**, Project Coordinator, Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians
- Dominican Community:* **Dante Sanchez**, CEO, Cognitive Behavioral Services, Inc.; **Pedro Rodriguez**, City of Philadelphia, Director of Human Resources
- German Community:* **Tony Michels**, President, German Society of PA; **Lydia Sarson**, Executive Director, German American Chamber of Commerce, Philadelphia; **Al Taubenberg**, Councilman-at-Large, City of Philadelphia; **Fred Hess**, Chief of Staff, City Councilman Taubenberg's Office
- Indonesian Community:* **Hani White**, Indonesian Economic Development Professional and Co-Founder of Feed The Barrel; **Indah Nuritasari**, Program Manager, Women's Opportunities Resource Center
- Liberian Community:* **Voffee Jabateh**, CEO and Executive Director, African Cultural Alliance of North America (ACANA); **Portia Kamara**, Executive Director, Multicultural Community Family Services
- Vietnamese Community:* **Vicky Ung**, President, The Greater Philadelphia Vietnamese American Community; **LeQuyen Vu**, Executive Director, Indochinese American Council; **Cecelia Vo**, Program Manager, Indochinese American Council

PROJECT DIRECTION AND SUPPORT

Peter Gonzales, President and CEO, The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians



Chinese

IN PHILADELPHIA

In Philadelphia, the history of Chinatown began in the 1870s, when Chinese immigrants first came to that part of the City. Chinatown started with laundrymen and small merchants, but quickly added many other types of businesses, like medical, law, and financial. Professional businesses were usually on the upper floors of the restaurants and small storefronts.

THIS PAGE: The head of a lion dance costume. Learn more about lion dances on page 30.

These businesses initially served Chinese clients from Philadelphia, but then drew customers from the larger region (e.g. New Jersey and even Baltimore). The 2000 census showed over 17,000 Chinese-Americans in Philadelphia. According to *The Metro Chinese Weekly*, this population grew to over 29,000 in 2010, and 150,000 in 2011. In 2011 it was estimated that most Asians in the Philadelphia area were living outside Chinatown.

Many Chinese immigrants moved into the early Chinatown to acclimate to American life. They used events like the Lunar New Year to maintain their traditions. Nowadays, the Chinese New Year celebration in Chinatown is an exciting spectacle enjoyed by all Philadelphians.

The dramatic growth in Chinatown led to a need to effectively manage its development. This led to the start of the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC). PCDC has a vision of a “living community” for Chinatown. This vision includes housing as well as family and community institutions. The Chinese Friendship Gate, at 10th and Arch Streets, is a physical embodiment of this vision. PCDC has also recently held a groundbreaking for a major new cultural and business center right in the heart of Chinatown.

Chinese-American entrepreneurs have also integrated into the broader Philadelphia. No matter where you go in the City, you can find a Chinese-owned business. Entrepreneurship and a strong work ethic run deep in Chinese culture, fueling immigrants’ success.

RIGHT: The Chinatown Friendship Gate, a 40-foot tower that was built by Chinese artisans in 2008, provides an appealing entrance to Philadelphia’s Chinatown.









ABOVE: These men are dressed to participate in one of the many festivals and parades that take place in Chinatown.



Dominicans

IN PHILADELPHIA



The first Dominicans came to Philadelphia more than 100 years ago. The main immigration period for Dominican immigration to Philly, though, was the 1960s to the 1990s. The primary reasons for Dominicans coming to Philadelphia during this period were less expensive housing and an opportunity for a better life.

Many Philadelphians were leaving the City in the 1960s, resulting in vacant and deteriorating buildings. These structures became a hazard, increasing the City's liability.

Philadelphia welcomed the newly arrived Dominicans. One important way that the City showed this was to offer deteriorating or vacant houses to persons willing to repair them—for only \$1. The Dominican immigrants enthusiastically embraced this offer; Casa Dominicana, a Dominican community association, got its first office for \$1.

Talk of this opportunity made its way to New York City, which had the largest Dominican population of any U.S. city. NYC Dominicans came to Philadelphia in greater numbers, since home ownership in Philadelphia cost less than renting in New York City. As the community's numbers swelled, the Dominican government opened a consulate in Philadelphia to support them.

Dominican-American entrepreneurs began to provide neighborhoods with important services. One of these was the corner bodega, or grocery store. In New York City, many Dominicans worked in bodegas—but in Philadelphia, Dominicans could afford to *own* a bodega.

By the late 1990s, Dominicans were the main owners of bodegas in Philadelphia. Other small businesses, like barber shops, auto repair, and money forwarding, grew in the wake of the bodegas' success.

These new Dominican Philadelphians worked hard to maintain their culture and traditions, aided by the Dominican Cultural Center and Casa Dominicana. These organizations also provided ESL, Citizenship, and other necessary services.

15-20 years of community building and outreach efforts are now bearing fruit for Philadelphia Dominicans. Organizations like Casa Dominicana continue their mission of coordinating and maximizing the impact of the various Dominican programs in the City.

LEFT: Dominicans show their pride for the traditions that are on display at the annual Dominical Parade in north Philly. This celebration attracts many Philadelphians and teaches them about Dominican culture.

BELOW: Dominican dancers at an outdoor event show the merengue, sometimes called the national dance of the island.





TIRE THAT IS LEFT AT THIS SHOP

OPEN

A Dominican Republic Independence Day flag-raising celebration held at City Hall in February 2017.

LEFT: Dominican students watch the event.

RIGHT: Benito Bravo displays the Dominican flag.









Germans

IN PHILADELPHIA

When the first German immigrants came to the British colonies of North America, they sought an opportunity to exercise religious freedom and escape laws which limited their ability to own land in their home country.

LEFT: The Philadelphia Christmas Village held each year around City Hall and in Love Park gives visitors a bit of German Christmas cheer.

Many of these early arrivals were Mennonites, a much-persecuted wing of Europe's Protestant Reformation. Under the leadership of Franz Daniel Pastorius, the first group of 39 settlers came from the town of Krefeld in the lower Rhine River area. They arrived in Philadelphia in 1683 and founded Germantown.

During that time Europe also experienced several disruptive wars, and taxes to support these wars weighed on many. Economic opportunity and religious freedom motivated many Germans to immigrate to America in the late 1600s. By 1710, German immigration to Pennsylvania was steadily increasing and, between 1727 and 1775, approximately 65,000 Germans settled in the Philadelphia region.

German immigrants to Philadelphia tended to come in family units and were often artisans or farmers. Farming required a strong labor force, and though most colonial agricultural labor was performed by slaves, some early Germans played a leading role in opposing slavery. In fact, in 1688 the first Mennonite and Quaker immigrants from Krefeld, along with Franz Daniel Pastorius from Frankfurt, created and signed the first declaration against slavery in this country. This dedicated activism is not surprising, as some of the German leaders in the American abolitionist movement were political refugees who had fled the many failed European revolutions of 1848.

The history of Germans in America is not so different from that of immigrants from other countries. All came, and still do, for various reasons during the more than 335 years of Germans in America. Regardless of whether they sought economic opportunities, religious freedom, or escape from political suppression, they came for a kind of individual freedom that they could not find in their home country. The desire to come to this land of opportunity and freedom was greater than their fear of the unknown.

In the 1990 U.S. census, 58 million Americans claimed to be solely or partly of German decent. A realistic picture of German culture today



ABOVE: Mayor Jim Kenney and Councilman Al Taubenberger at a Juneteenth celebration in Germantown with descendants of its first settlers. At left is a replica of a late 17th-century banner used by early German-Americans in their campaign against slavery. Juneteenth is an African-American holiday that celebrates the end of slavery, and Germans were among the earliest abolitionists in America.

differs in many ways from that presented in the popular media. Beer mugs, sausage, sauerkraut, Lederhosen, and Dirmdls are certainly part of German heritage, but modern Germans and German-Americans are a diverse group.

The photos on the following pages show contemporary Germans in Philadelphia and their influence on the culture and economy of the city. There are nearly 30 German-American organizations in the Philadelphia area. The oldest such group in the United States, the German Society of Pennsylvania, was founded in 1764 "for the relief of distressed Germans" who traveled to Philadelphia to start a new life. This organization has supported German-Americans and German culture in Philadelphia with special programs for over 250 years, and will continue to do so.





Indonesians IN PHILADELPHIA

The history of Indonesian immigrants in the US began as early as the mid-1950s. Early arrivals went to New York City or San Francisco, but Philadelphia eventually became home to one of the largest concentrations of Indonesian-born immigrants anywhere in the U.S.

THIS PAGE: A young Indonesian woman, from the Modero Dance Company of South Philadelphia, prepares for a traditional dance exhibition before a Philadelphia Phillies game spotlighting Southeast Asian communities in Philadelphia.

RIGHT, ABOVE: Friends meet at Café Pendawa on Morris Street in South Philly. These corner stores sell pre-cooked meals so that Indonesians working long hours or two jobs can still get traditional food for themselves and their families.



ABOVE: Indonesian Muslims participating in a traditional hair cutting ceremony at the Masjid Al-Falah in South Philadelphia. The hair will be weighed and the equivalent of that weight in gold is then given to charity.



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INDONESIA





Liberians

IN PHILADELPHIA

Liberians have been in the United States since the mid-1800s and have been living and doing business in Philadelphia since the 1920s. The major influx of Liberian immigrants in Philadelphia happened as a result of a military coup in their homeland in the mid-1980s. The violence associated with the coup forced many to leave Liberia as refugees.

THIS PAGE: A young Liberian girl, dressed in traditional garb, waits her turn to perform a dance routine at a Bartram Gardens event in West Philly.

Liberian immigrants in Philadelphia started small businesses and carried on traditional cultural events; their tightly knit community bonds helped preserve Liberian ways in their new homeland.

Liberia has many ethnic groups. One of these is the Mandingo, who make up a large part of Philadelphia Liberians. Liberians in general value entrepreneurial skills, and many Liberian neighborhoods in the City have Mandingo-owned small businesses.

In the late 1990s, southwest Philadelphia in general and Woodland Avenue in particular were in decline. Moses Barquoi decided to take the risk and opened a small grocery store on Woodland Avenue. This was the first of what turned into a plethora of Liberian stores on this once-blighted street. In addition, Woodland Avenue has attracted businesses run by immigrants from other African countries, making it a recognized commercial corridor in the City for African-American business in general.

Woodland Avenue is convenient for Liberians and other African-Americans to shop and attracts them in large numbers, aided by the convenience of public transportation. The district also attracts many other Philadelphians, immigrants and non-immigrants, because of the rich shopping experience it offers, with African items that are interesting and desirable to all.

One of the greatest strengths of the Liberian business community is its diversity. Liberians own medicine, law and financial services businesses, located throughout the City and its suburbs. Their widespread influence makes a significant positive impact on Philadelphia's economy.



ABOVE: Voffee Javateh, President of the African Cultural Alliance of North America (ACANA) and Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell at the 2016 ACANA Festival at Penn's Landing. Councilwoman Blackwell is a committed supporter of immigrants in her district.





LEFT: Sheikh Mohammed Jomandy, of the AICC Masjid, leads a prayer service in West Philly.

RIGHT: Pastor Kau Dolopei leads a circle of prayer at the Church of the Living God Interssory Ministry in West Philadelphia.

BELOW: A Christian parishioner pauses for a time of reflection at a Christian church service in West Philadelphia.







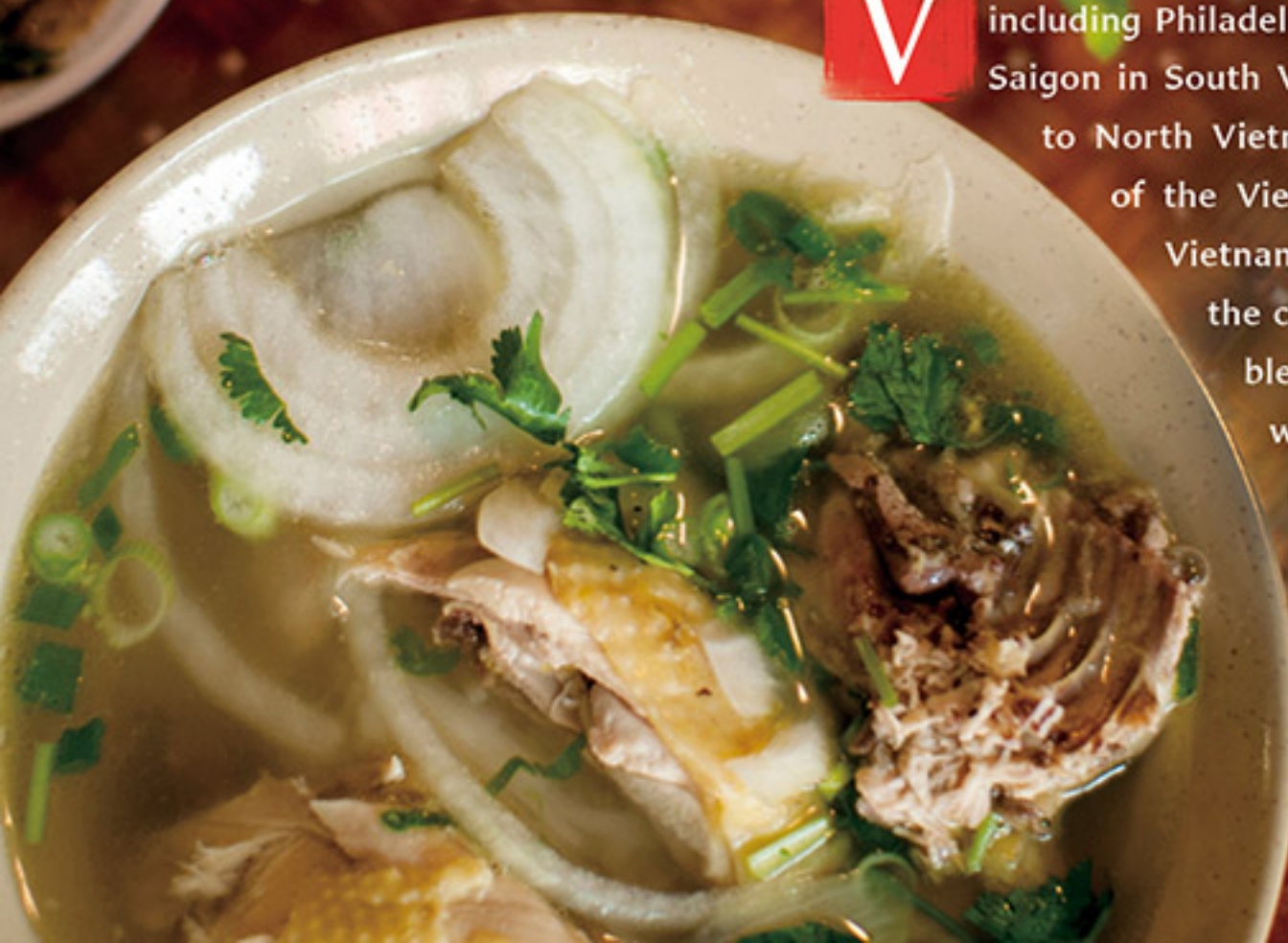


Vietnamese

IN PHILADELPHIA



Vietnamese migration to the United States, including Philadelphia, followed the fall of Saigon in South Vietnam in April of 1975 to North Vietnamese troops—the end of the Vietnam War. Many South Vietnamese people had to flee the country as soon as possible after that event, as they were persecuted or feared persecution due to their ethnic, religious, or political affiliations.



Many early Vietnamese immigrants were part of a U.S.-sponsored evacuation and consisted mainly of military personnel and urban, educated professionals associated with the U.S. military or the South Vietnamese government. Other south Vietnamese escaped their country by boat, so they were called "boat people."

Some of the south Vietnamese refugees came from rural areas. Lacking education and speaking little English, many of these immigrants opened small businesses in their new homes in places like Philadelphia in order to survive and take care of their families. Their entrepreneurship took the form of small family businesses, as factory jobs were on the decline at that time and they were otherwise unable to find work that fit their skills.

With an estimated 20,000 Vietnamese in Philadelphia and the surrounding areas, the Vietnamese community upholds its traditional values of family, freedom, and democracy. Vietnamese social and cultural organizations are working to blend the Vietnamese community with American society while preserving its cultural character.



LEFT: Pho and Summer Roll are two significant dishes in every Vietnamese restaurant. Pho originated in North Vietnam and Summer Rolls are from South Vietnam. This photo shows Pho Ga from the Thanh Thanh Restaurant in Kensington.

ABOVE: Vietnamese youth performing a Fan Dance for homeless mothers and their children during a Thanksgiving event at Visitation BVM church at Lehigh and Kensington Avenues.



ABOVE, LEFT: From the very beginning in the late 1970s, Vietnamese immigrants settled in the Kensington section of the City.

ABOVE, RIGHT: Pho 75 and Pho Ga Thanh Thanh are two famous pho restaurants in Philadelphia. Pho 75, on Washington Avenue in South Philly, is part of a large chain of pho restaurants in the Philly and Washington, D.C. areas.

LEFT: The owner of the Pho Ga Thanh Thanh restaurant on Kensington Avenue greets customers at the door.

RIGHT: Alex Luong is a Vietnamese pharmacist who has opened a successful drugstore on Washington Avenue in South Philly. He represents the new generation of Vietnamese-American immigrants, well-educated and working hard to start new businesses.





Many Philadelphia Vietnamese are Buddhists.

LEFT: The Vu Lan Festival honors Vietnamese parents and grandparents.

RIGHT: This Lantern Festival celebrates a year of success with balloons and the release of birds. It is one of many family picnics throughout the summer.

BELOW: A young child with her lantern at the Lantern Festival. This festival was celebrated in September, following the lunar calendar observed by many Vietnamese. Lanterns are often built as family projects.



THE CULTURAL FABRIC OF PHILADELPHIA: An Intimate Look at Philadelphia's Immigrant Communities

VOLUME ONE: CHINESE · DOMINICANS · GERMANS · INDONESIANS · LIBERIANS · VIETNAMESE

A lack of understanding of immigrant communities—their traditions and their values—has led to an intense, often negative, national dialogue about immigrants in America.

It is easy to criticize the unfamiliar and unknown. Education and awareness leads the way to understanding, and understanding immigrants will help people make more informed decisions about welcoming them.

The Cultural Fabric of Philadelphia, Volume One is the first of a series that shows Philly's immigrants from the inside, using photography to immerse the reader in these smaller worlds within the City.

Most photo books are “photographer-led,” meaning the photographer determines what to shoot, where and how. This book was built using a “community-led” approach, in which committed and passionate community leaders tell the stories. They identified the important cultural features to be photographed, wrote the captions, and prepared each community's cultural summary.

This is the story of Philly's immigrant Americans, told in their own words.

USD \$20.00



Additional copies of *The Cultural Fabric of Philadelphia, Volume One* Photo Book can be purchased online at lifeworkphoto.org/shop.

