

Title: The Latehomecomer
Editor: Kao Kalia Yang
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Hopeful travelers over the decades have laid down their roots in Middle America; resiliently interweaving their past lives within the local culture. Throughout American history, the Midwest has been a platform for people to pursue a better life. The memoir, *The Latehomecomer*, by Kao Kalia Yang is about her family's story of sacrifice and survival as Hmong refugees adapting to a new way of life in Minnesota.

The book poetically reads like a love letter to her family. Yang recollects all that her parents and grandmother went through in order to offer their children a chance at a better future. The author's heritage comes from the Southeast Asian ethnic group, the Hmong. Southern China was the original homeland for this ethnic minority until many were pressured to relocate to the countries further South, like Laos and Thailand. During the Vietnam War, many of the male Hmong were recruited by the US to fight against communism; however when the American troops left, the Hmong people were hunted and massacred - primarily in Laos. Yang retells her family's journey from a cherished, vibrant life in the mountains to the dangerous years on the run in the jungle. A beautiful story of people who are united by a deep devotion to family but displaced from their homeland and separated from the souls of their ancestors who would watch over them. After a narrow escape to Thailand from Laos, the extended family eventually made their way to the United States as refugees. Here the book becomes a narrative of immigrants, trying their best to succeed in a world different from the one they loved.

The memoir is split in half between life in Southeast Asia and in America, signifying the two sides of the author's personal identity. Throughout this story, the reader gets to learn about the unique history, culture, and tales of the Hmong people as well as contemplate what it means to be an immigrant in the United States. While Kao Kalia Yang is an American, her and her family learn to attempt to perfect the balance between being American and being Hmong, "in the food and in the stories, our home emphasized America indifferent Hmong ways" (Yang 203). As a group of people who historically had no country, there is something powerful in them settling in the lands of the Midwest; a place where seekers from all around the world have sought for a place that can be made a home. While this may not appear to be the most typical of Midwestern books, I would argue creating a new home in the pursuit of a better life is the most defining quality of the Midwestern's collective history.

Reviewed by Andria Weyrich.