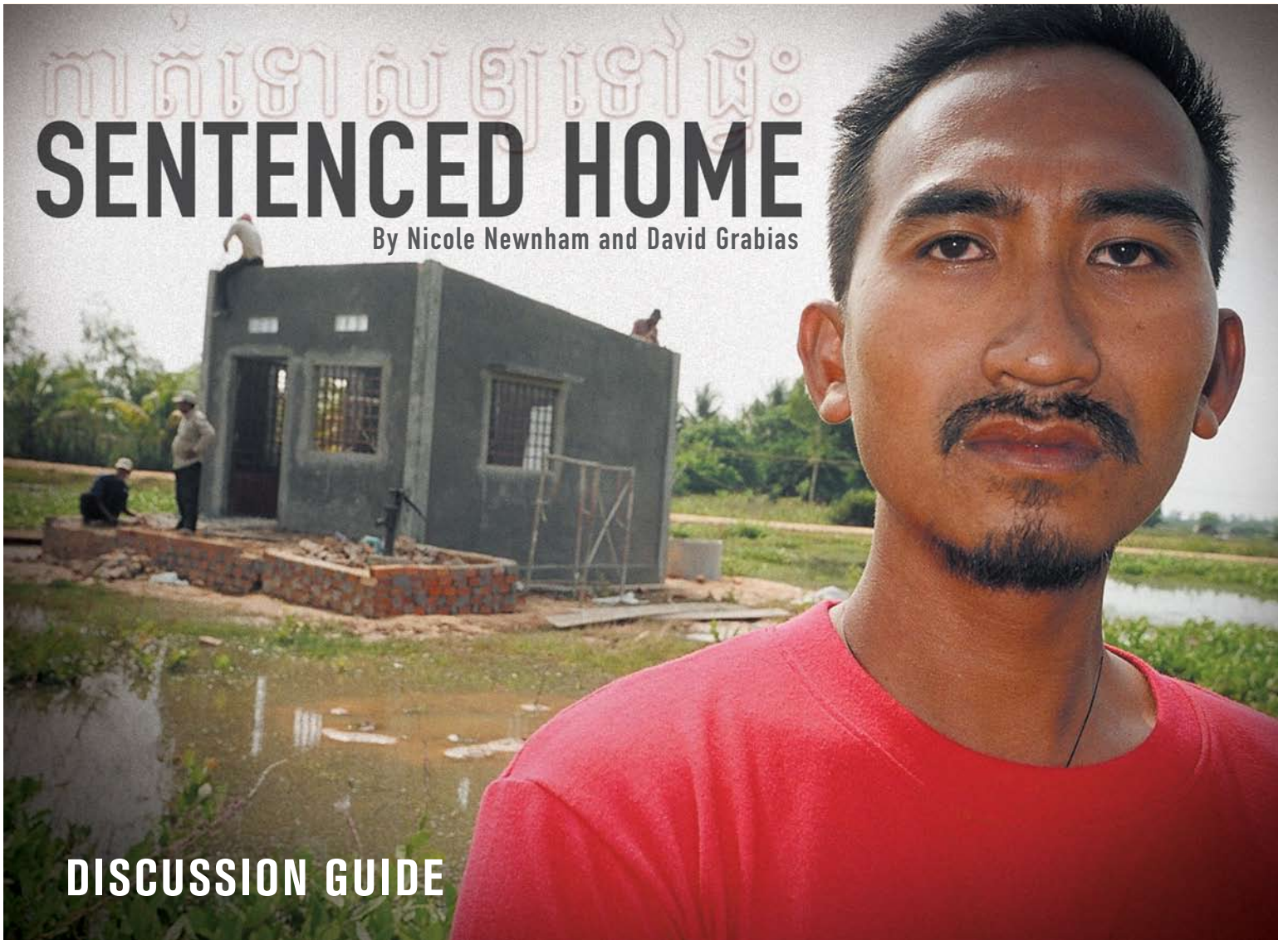


SENTENCED HOME

By Nicole Newnham and David Grabias



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Raised as Americans in inner-city projects near Seattle, three young Cambodian refugees each made a rash decision as a teenager that irrevocably shaped their destiny. Now facing deportation back to Cambodia years later, they find themselves caught between a tragic past and an uncertain future by a system that doesn't offer any second chances.



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INDEPENDENT LENS

FROM THE FILMMAKERS

We first heard that Cambodian Americans were going to be deported back to Cambodia in the Summer of 2002 while working on another project in the Khmer community of Lowell, Massachusetts, and were immediately gripped by the breaking story. At that time, the Cambodian American community had just become aware of the United States' newly signed repatriation agreement with Cambodia, which meant that almost 1,500 Cambodian Americans would be forcibly returned.

Terror swept through this refugee community, which still bears the scars of the Khmer Rouge trauma they endured decades ago. People feared imprisonment and execution in Cambodia. Some thought they would be thrown overboard into the sea en route. But for the young men with deportation orders whom we encountered, their biggest concern was separation from their family, culture and country—the United States. "I'm not Cambodian, I'm American," we were repeatedly told, in Boston accents, Southern drawls and West Coast street slang. "I don't remember anything about Cambodia."

Their situation raised fundamental but difficult questions about immigration law, human rights, our societal treatment of immigrants and refugees and how we decide who is an American. We realized how uninformed most refugees were about the tenuous nature of their "permanent resident" status. As Loeun Lun's wife told us, "No one said we had to come here and lead more perfect lives than other Americans, never making a mistake." We also realized how uninformed we, and most Americans, were about the 1996 immigration law and its devastating impact on individuals and families. We were moved to make a film about what we saw as the injustice of deporting refugees back to the country that had tortured and murdered their families; refugees who had already served a full sentence for their crimes, refugees who were raised in America.

It took us over three and a half years to make SENTENCED HOME. We strove to make an intimate, largely cinema-verité documentary that would show the human side of deportation as much as possible from the point of view of the individuals experiencing it. From the outset, we intended to tell the story through three different individuals, each with different personalities and different kinds of felonies, so as to portray the broad range of people facing deportation. We also aimed to capture different phases of the deportation process, from the legal struggles to win release from immigration detention, to the waiting game of not knowing when you would actually be deported, to the experience of arriving and trying to make a life for yourself in a country you don't remember.

Through Public Defender Jay Stansell we were introduced to our first subject, Kim Ho Ma. It was after only two brief preliminary trips to Seattle to meet and film with Kim Ho that we received a sudden phone call that he had been ordered to report to the INS building for deportation. Witnessing his deportation was a deeply sad and overwhelming experience that solidified our determination to finish this film.



Through Jay Stansell we also found our other two subjects: Loeun Lun, a family man locked in INS detention as a result of his quest to obtain citizenship, and Many Uch, an introspective young man from Kim Ho Ma's tough neighborhood of White Center. We felt that keeping the film's domestic location centered in the Seattle area helped to focus the American setting, making the differences between the subjects more about their personalities and situations rather than their geographical location.

Over the following years, we made five trips to Cambodia to follow the progress of the deportees trying to make a life for themselves there. We were continually moved by the difficulty of their situation and the challenges they faced, and with them we traveled from one end of the country to the other, welcomed by long-lost family and together learning about the culture and traditions of a place that was as foreign to them as it was to us.

An INS attorney featured in the film acknowledges that the laws "sometimes do seem harsh." But, she reminds us, laws are made by a Congress elected by the American people. New immigration legislation continues to be proposed that would expand deportation proceedings and dramatically affect not only Cambodian Americans but all immigrants and refugees. We hope that this film will play a part in forcing people to stop and think about the human cost of some of our immigration laws, and to deeply consider the toll that they take on so many deserving individuals who are denied a second chance, on their families, and ultimately, on all of us.

Thank you for taking the time to watch SENTENCED HOME,

David Grabias and Nicole Newnham

THE FILM

Raised as Americans in inner-city projects near Seattle, Washington, three young Cambodian refugees—Kim Ho Ma, Many Uch and Loeun Lun—each find themselves caught between a tragic past and an uncertain future by a system that doesn't offer any second chances. SENTENCED HOME, an hour-long documentary, tells their stories.

All three of the men are from families who fled genocide when the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia in 1975. They arrived in the U.S. as small children and struggled to fit in. As teenagers, they each joined a gang, committed a crime and served a sentence. No one could have predicted that their youthful mistakes would result in deportation to a country they barely knew, but that is exactly what happened.

The men featured in SENTENCED HOME are among tens of thousands of Cambodian refugees who were granted permanent resident status, but who never became U.S. citizens. When changes in U.S. law required mandatory deportation of permanent residents convicted of certain crimes, these men faced a drastic new punishment for events that they assumed were settled long ago.

In telling their stories, the film asks viewers to consider the very personal consequences of separating families and sending people into unfamiliar countries and cultures. It questions the ethics, as well as the ultimate public benefit, of a deportation policy based on the assumption that ethnic identity determines "home."

Selected People Who Appear in SENTENCED HOME

Many Uch – youth baseball coach

Kim Ho Ma – first to be deported

Loeun Lun – family man

Sarom Loun – Loeun Lun's wife

Patricia Vroom – Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE is the new name of INS under the Department of Homeland Security)

Jay Stansell – Attorney representing deportees

Bob Huppe – Many's former teacher



Loeun Lun



Kim Ho Ma



Many Uch

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the midst of the Southeast Asian conflict that Americans know as the Vietnam War, the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia. The brutal regime used genocide to establish control, killing more than a million people. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees, between 1975 and 1985, more than 130,000 Cambodians fled their homeland and settled in the United States. As refugees they were granted permanent residence status, but many never became citizens.

In 1996, Congress changed the immigration laws by expanding the list of crimes that could trigger deportation for an immigrant. The expanded list now includes hundreds of new offenses, even minor misdemeanor crimes where the person did not serve any time in jail. At the same time, Congress eliminated the power of judges to consider granting a “pardon” or “a waiver” of deportation to a longtime legal resident whose crime now fell into this new expanded list, no matter how long the person has been in the U.S., how long ago or how minor their criminal offense was, what their family ties are here, or any other good things they have done since their criminal conviction. The judge is simply forced to order them deported.

This meant that hundreds more young Cambodian men like Many Uch, Kim Ho Ma and Loen Lon would now be deported back to Cambodia. However, Cambodia initially refused to accept them back, leaving many people in legal limbo.



Many Uch in a Cambodian Refugee Camp

As part of efforts to tighten security in response to September 11, the U.S. government pressured Cambodia to change its policy. In March of 2002, the Cambodian government agreed to accept Cambodian refugees who were being forcibly deported. The agreement limits the number of deportees accepted each year, however, creating the delays experienced by people in the film. Currently, approximately 1,500 Cambodian Americans await deportation.

RECORD OF DEPORTABLE ALIEN

Family Name (Capital Letters) Given Name
UCH, Many Chout

Country of Citizenship
Cambodia

Passport Number and Country of Issue
N/C

U.S. Address (Residence) (Number) (Street)
C/O WSCC, Shelton, WA

Date, Place, Time, Manner of Last Entry
04/84 SFR REF.

Number, Street, City, Province (State) and Country of Permanent Residence
N/C A-File (I-181) indicates Philippines

Birthdate
01/15/76

Date of Arrest
12/09/94

City, Province (State) and Country of Birth
Battambang Cambodia

THINKING MORE DEEPLY

General

- Describe a scene from the film that you found disturbing. Describe a scene that you found inspiring.

U.S. Deportation Policy

- What does the U.S. gain by deporting people like Many Uch, Kim Ho Ma and Loeun Lun? What does it lose? If you could re-write U.S. deportation policy, what factors would you want the government to consider when it decides whether or not someone should be deported?
- In your view, is deportation just punishment for the different types of crimes committed by the men in the film? Why or why not? Should citizens and non-citizens be sentenced differently for the same crime? Why or why not?
- What is the difference between a refugee and an immigrant? Should people who flee violent persecution be granted special consideration under deportation law? Why or why not?
- Towards the end of the film, Many Uch asks whether or not U.S. policy is fair. How would you answer him?
- What are the effects of deportation on the family in the United States? What is the impact on our social services and society?
- Discuss how the path to integration and citizenship is impacted by these laws. How are these laws affecting the way that refugees and their families integrate into American society.

Cambodian Refugees

- What is the importance of being able to have a meaningful deportation trial for people like Many Uch, Kim Ho Ma, or Loeun Lun? Should judges have the power to review every single case individually? If not, why not? What factors should be considered in such a decision?
- Many Uch points out that many Cambodian refugees did not understand the importance of citizenship or know how to prepare for it. Who is responsible to provide that kind of information? In your community, where could a refugee go to get information about citizenship or help related to their legal status?
- Cambodian Americans who have been deported pose a significant social problem for Cambodia. They often don't speak the language, can't find a job and don't fit in culturally. Should the U.S. take some responsibility for creating this problem? If so, what should the U.S. government do?
- How are the Cambodian families you see in the film similar to and different from families you know? What do you think it would feel like to be told that someone close to you was being forced to permanently leave the country?
- When someone says "Cambodian," what picture comes into your head? How did the people in the film reinforce or contradict that picture? Prior to viewing Sentenced Home, what were the primary sources of your information about the Cambodian community? How accurate were those sources?



SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

Together with other audience members, brainstorm actions that you might take as an individual and that people might do as a group. If you need help getting started, you might begin your list with these suggestions:

- Join in the efforts of agencies or organizations in your community that provide young people with an alternative to gang activities and/or work to prevent juvenile crime.
- Organize a group to learn about Khmer culture. Work with Cambodian refugees in your community to tell their stories.
- Host a debate on the current immigration law that mandates the deportation of young Khmer men like those featured in SENTENCED HOME. Invite members of your Congressional delegation to attend as well as those affected by the law.
- Find out if any organizations in your community provide information on current immigration law to refugee and immigrant communities. If resources are not available, volunteer to work with a local mutual assistance association to educate community members. Visit www.searac.org for a list of mutual assistance associations in your community.
- Research immigrant and refugee services available in your area. Find out what new immigrants and refugees need and how you can help them integrate into their new community.

For additional outreach ideas, visit itvs.org, the website of the Independent Television Service. For local information, check the website of your PBS station.

Before you leave this event, commit yourself to pursue one item from the brainstorm list.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

Immigrant and Refugee Rights

www.immigrantjusticenetwork.org – The Immigrant Justice Network (IJN) works to build an organized effort to eliminate unjust immigration penalties for immigrants entangled in the criminal justice system and to end the criminalization of immigrant communities.

www.detentionwatchnetwork.org – Detention Watch Network (DWN) is a national coalition of organizations and individuals working together to reform the immigration detention and deportation system so that all who come to our shores receive fair and humane treatment.

www.rightsworkinggroup.org – The Rights Working Group (RWG) is a national coalition dedicated to ensuring the U.S. Government will put into practice America's fundamental values of liberty and justice.

<http://www.aaldef.org> – The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) is a national organization that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. AALDEF engages in community education and outreach, conducts advocacy at the federal, state and local level, and offers legal representation to individuals whose rights have been violated.

<http://www.hatefreezone.org/knowtheissues/immreform.htm> – Hate Free Zone works at the local and regional level against injustices perpetuated in schools, workplaces and in society against immigrants, and is leading national efforts to develop a comprehensive campaign to restore and protect civil liberties and human rights, regardless of citizenship status. The website provides background information on immigration reform issues.

http://www.searac.org/cambrepbak6_02.html – The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) is a national advocacy organization working to advance the interests of Cambodians, Laotians and Vietnamese Americans through leadership development, capacity-building, and community empowerment. The website provides background information on deportation of Cambodian American refugees and resources for community members facing deportation.

Immigration

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5147608> – This NPR radio broadcast features a similar story of another man facing deportation.

<http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Oct2003/stansell1003.html> – Link to a magazine article, "Letter from Phnom Penh" by attorney Jay Stansell which gives more details about Kim Ho Ma's experience.

<http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/glossary.htm> – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, an agency in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, organizes official government documents related to immigration

SENTENCED HOME WILL AIR NATIONALLY ON THE EMMY AWARD-WINNING PBS SERIES *INDEPENDENT LENS* ON TUESDAY, MAY 15, 2007 AT 10 PM. CHECK LOCAL LISTINGS.

SENTENCED HOME was produced by Sentenced Home Productions in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS) and the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The Emmy award-winning series *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

ITVS COMMUNITY is the national community engagement program of the Independent Television Service. ITVS COMMUNITY works to leverage the unique and timely content of the Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* to build stronger connections among leading organizations, local communities and public television stations around key social issues and create more opportunities for civic engagement and positive social change. To find out more about ITVS COMMUNITY, visit www.itvs.org/outreach.

