

American Dreamer: How I Escaped Communist Vietnam and Built a Successful Life in America

Tim Tran

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American Dreamer is a must-read memoir and a quintessentially American immigrant's story.

Tim Tran's memoir *American Dreamer* is a testament to the power of positive feeling and goodwill, even in the face of incredible odds.

Tran was born with something close to historical bad luck. He and his family lived in North Vietnam during its prolonged conflict with Indochina, which first entangled the French, and then the Americans and their allies, in an intricate web of insurgencies inspired by nationalist communism. Wanting to break from the smothering totalitarianism of North Vietnam, where the good days of his wealthy and well-educated family were numbered, Tran and his family relocated to South Vietnam, which was then protected by the American military colossus. When South Vietnam fell in 1975, Tran and his family made the hard decision to emigrate to the United States.

Just getting to the US was an exercise in perseverance, but once in America, Tran and his family found no golden road or garden path. The Tran family faced resentment and hostility from their neighbors and from a country that wanted to forget all about its awful and divisive war in Southeast Asia.

The trajectory of Tran's narrative follows a linear path: it first talks about Tran's time in North Vietnam, then transitions to South Vietnam and to the United States. Along the way, the writing remains clear-eyed, focused on details, and humane. There are few academic discussions about why Vietnam was a battleground for a generation, or whether or not America's entry into the conflict was justified. The deepest the book gets into political theory or philosophy is in its honest portrayal of life in a communist state, where politics, class warfare, and endemic corruption could not be escaped. The American portion of Tran's story, which forms a slight majority of the narrative, is more familiar, but also humanizes immigrants' tales with its accounts of facing bigotry and trying to find success in an unfamiliar culture.

This memoir is a prolonged examination of Tran's brave resilience. It is crammed with scenes of incredible difficulties and terror—the type of experiences that could swallow a person up. Through it all, from the blood-soaked fields of Vietnam to the rough waves of the Pacific Ocean, Tran maintains an upbeat sensibility and a never-say-die attitude, making reading his harrowing story an uplifting experience. The conclusion makes a general case for hard work, family bonds, and determination.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (January 11, 2021)

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