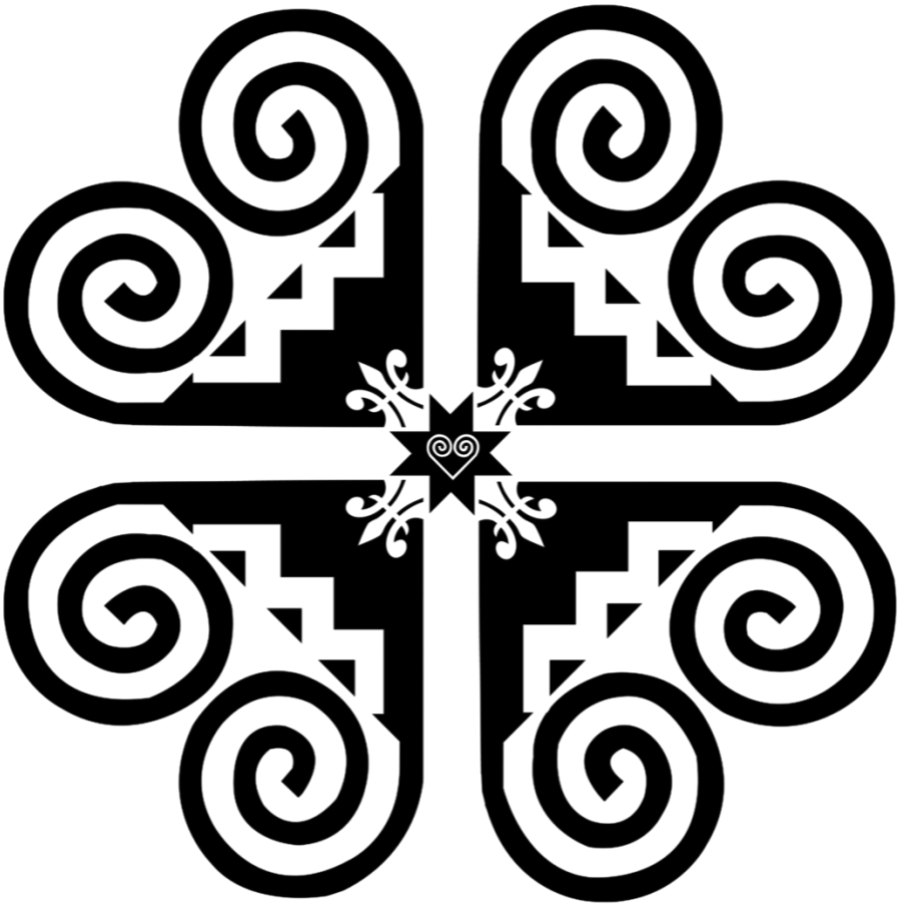
TRACING HMONG AMERICAN HISTORY:

Looking at Hmong American History Through Critical Race Theory &
Critical Race Feminism Lenses



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Purpose

Equip facilitators with the depth, theory, trauma-awareness, and pedagogical tools to teach Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Feminism to Hmong elders in a culturally respectful way.

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Module 1: Foundations

1.0 Purpose & Philosophy of This Toolkit

This curriculum prepares facilitators to teach Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) concept to Hmong elders through narrative-based methods. The toolkit assumes that elders possess experiential knowledge of structural racism, war, displacement, gender hierarchy, and institutional paternalism, even if they do not have the academic vocabulary for these concepts.

CRT and CRF provide naming power. Elders provide lived history.

Facilitators must balance:

- Academic Theory
- Cultural Competence
- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Intergenerational Dynamics
- Active Listening

This toolkit serves as a:

- Pedagogical manual
- Theoretical grounding
- Cultural humility guide
- Trauma-informed handbook
- Repository of strategies & scripts

1.1 Guiding Principles for Facilitators

A. Elders are epistemic authorities.

Their experiences in Laos, the Secret War, refugee camps, and early U.S. resettlement offer primary source insights into structural violence.

B. Facilitators are translators.

Facilitators convert theory → culturally meaningful frameworks.

Elders convert memory → system pattern recognition.

CRT/CRF concepts should emerge organically from stories rather than being imposed abstractly.

C. Allow complexity.

Avoid flattening Hmong identity into a single narrative. CRT warns against this.

D. Prepare for emotional responses.

War, displacement, gender trauma, and intergenerational wounds may surface.

1.2 The Role of the Facilitator

Facilitations in this context sits at the intersection of:

1. Adult learning theory

Elders learn the best through:

- Stories
- Reflection
- Contextualized examples
- Shared memory

Knowledge emerges from lived experience, not top-down teaching.

2. CRT/CRF counter story methodology

Stories are analytic tools that expose systems.

3. Culturally responsive pedagogy

Teaching must be culturally encoded:

- Honorific/kinship language
- Relational hierarchy
- Avoiding direct confrontation
- Pacing based on comfort and trust

4. Intergenerational facilitation

Young facilitators must navigate:

- Deference norms
- Gender expectations
- Power gradients

1.3 Trauma-Informed Facilitation

Remember to create emotional safety throughout. Teaching CRT/CRF to Hmong elders requires a trauma-informed lens because:

- Forced displacement

- Violence
- Family separation
- Rapid resettlement
- Language loss
- Institutional racism
- Poverty
- Gender roles

These experiences have left layered trauma.

TRAUMA FRAMEWORK TIPS

A. **Predictability is protective.**
   Outline the session at the beginning and do not dramatically shift topics without signaling.
B. **Avoid graphic content unless elders introduce it.**
   You are not presenting war histories; you are facilitating reflection.
C. **Use invitational language:**
   Examples:
   - "If you feel comfortable…"
   - "Only if it feels right for you…"
   - "You are welcome to pass."
D. **Monitor physical cues of emotions:**
   - Shallow breathing
   - Silence
   - Sudden withdrawal
   - Trembling hands
   - Tearful eyes
   - Agitation
   - Change in tone

   If present, slow down.
E. **Avoid retraumatizing.**
   In Hmong culture, elders may feel obligated to tell stories even when painful. Make refusal culturally acceptable.

1.4 Culturally Humility

Cultural humility is ongoing self-reflection on:

- One's positionality
- Potential biases
- Power as a facilitator

- Relationships to clan, gender, age
- Historical trauma inheritance

Below are the professional practice expectations.

A. Positionality awareness
    a. Are you younger?
    b. Are you female teaching older males?
    c. Where were you born?
    d. Are you educated in Western systems?
B. Avoid cultural prescription.
    a. Do Not:
        i. Assume knowledge of rituals and practices
        ii. Idealize Hmong culture
C. Honor historical context.
    a. Wartimes pressures
    b. Survival frameworks
D. Communicate through relational respect.
    a. Use:
        i. Softened tone
        ii. Indirect suggestions
        iii. Storytelling
        iv. Humility in language and body language
        v. Honoring titles (yawg, niam tais, pog)

1.5 Storytelling as Knowledge

Story is not supplemental. In CRT/CRF, story is method, data, and analysis. Hmong storytelling traditions mirror academic counter story methodology:

Hmong Oral Tradition	CRT Counter Story Function
Kwv Txhiaj	Encodes identity under oppression
Zab Dab Neeg	Reveals political structure
Clan Memories	Preserves erased histories
Paj Ntaub	Visual Storytelling
War Stories	Expose state violence

→ Facilitators must learn to translate story into theory.

Sample Translation:

Elder Story:

"I remember when the caseworker told us we could not celebrate New Year the way we used to."

Facilitator Analysis:

- This is paternalism.
- Cultural normalization under white supremacy
- Assimilation pressure
- Loss of autonomous cultural space

Your job as a facilitator is not to lecture this analysis, but to use the story to anchor and introduce the concept when appropriate.

Module 2: Critical Race Theory for Facilitators

2.0 Why CRT Matters for Hmong Elders and Facilitators

CRT helps individuals to understand the deeper forces that shaped Hmong refugee experiences. This covers not just discrimination from individuals, but from the systems that structured their resettlement, education, healthcare, employment, and family dynamics.

Elders lived through:

- Surveillance and welfare mistrust
- Language barriers treated as incompetence
- Schools that underestimated their children
- Healthcare systems that dismissed cultural practices
- Workplaces that assumed refugees had "no skills"

These experiences were not random or personal failures. They were predictable outcomes of structural racism.

A CRT foundation allows facilitators to:

- Reframe elder memories with compassion and clarity
- Connect individual stories to larger patterns
- Reduce shame by naming systems
- Translate theory into culturally safe storytelling

2.1 What is CRT

CRT analyzes how racism operates within institutions, laws, policies, and norms.

Core Tenets:

1. Racism is ordinary.
2. Racial inequality benefits dominant groups.
3. Race is socially constructed.

4. Groups are racialized differently depending on political needs.
5. Institutions maintain racial hierarchies.
6. Storytelling and lived experiences reveal hidden truths.

For Hmong communities, CRT is a natural fit because Hmong refugee history itself is a counter story.

2.2 Racism is Ordinary

Theory

- Racism is part of everyday system design
- It feels "invisible" to those not affected
- Colorblindness allows systemic harm to continue

Hmong-Specific Patterns

- Resettlement: surveillance, intrusive home visits, welfare mistrust
- Education: tracking into low-level classes, language equating to "low ability," disciplinary bias
- Healthcare: lack of interpreters, dismissals of cultural practices
- Employment: assumptions about "unskilled" refugees, inflexible policies, credential barriers

2.3 Interest Convergence/Material Determinism

Theory

Racial progress occurs only when it benefits dominant groups. Racial inequality persists because it serves economic and psychological interests.

Hmong-Specific Patterns

- Secret War: U.S. support was strategic, not relational
- Refugee Admissions: Expanded or contracted based on geopolitical image management
- Social Services: State "care" lasts only as long as federal funds do

2.4 Social Construction of Race

Theory

Race is not biological. It is created and reshaped by society.

Hmong-Specific Patterns

- "Asian" as a broad category erases Hmong identity

- Model minority stereotypes were never based on Hmong experiences
- Government labels change based on convenience

2.5 Differential Racialization

Theory

Groups are racialized differently depending on political and economic needs.

Hmong-Specific Patterns

- 1970s-80s: "Helpless refugees" → paternalistic policies
- 1990s-2000s: "Model minority" → erased disparities
- Post-9/11: "Foreign threat" → suspicion of immigrants

2.6 Paternalism

Theory

Domination framed as "helping" by controlling others' choices "for their own good."

Hmong-Specific Patterns

- Caseworkers dictating daily life
- Sponsorship groups controlling behavior and assimilation
- Schools treating Hmong parents as uninvolved or incapable

2.7 Dominance Theory

Theory

Systems maintain racial hierarchies through norms, laws, institutions, and cultural expectations.

Hmong-Specific Patterns

- White cultural norms define "professionalism," parenting, communication
- Hmong elders lack political, linguistic, and legal access
- Cultural devaluation of communal decision-making and ritual knowledge

Module 3: Critical Race Feminism

3.0 Why CRF is Essential in Hmong Contexts

Discussions about gender in Hmong communities can be emotionally charged. Many elders carry:

- Memories of war
- Refugee camp trauma
- Expectations of survival
- Deep commitments to cultural continuity
- Silence around violence, emotional labor, and sacrifice

Critical Race Feminism (CRF) gives facilitators a sensitive, culturally grounded lends to understand these dynamics without:

- Blaming Hmong men
- Shaming Hmong culture
- Imposing Western feminism
- Erasing history

CRF centers Hmong women's stories as structural experiences shaped by race, gender, refugee status, and language.

CRF is not about telling elder what to believe, but it is about giving facilitators a framework to:

- Reframe women's suffering as structural, not personal
- Understand intergeneration conflict
- Support difficult conversations
- Create safety for stories that rarely get voiced

3.1 What is CRF

CRF builds on CRT but centers women and particularly women of color.

It critiques:

- Mainstream feminism for ignoring race
- CRT for overlooking gender
- CRF emphasizes that Hmong women's experiences sit at the intersection of race, gender, citizenship status, class, and culture.

3.2 Intersectionality

Oppression is not simply "racism + sexism." It is the interaction of multiple systems.

Hmong-Specific Intersections

- Asian racialization
- Refugee poverty + trauma
- Clan-based male authority
- Daughters carrying translation labor
- Domestic work expectations
- "Ua siab ntev" emotional endurance norms

Together, these form a distinct experience unique to Hmong women.

3.3 Gendered War Labor in the Secret War

CRF widens war history:

- Carrying elders/children during escapes and across the Mekong River
- Food gathering, ritual work, maintaining households
- Risk of sexual violence
- Emotional labor under extreme pressure

Patriarchal wartime expectation intensified:

Men fight → women endure, protect, maintain culture

3.4 Gendered Violence in Refugee Campus

Women faced:

- Sexual assault
- Harassment
- Ration dependence
- Silence driven by shame and clan pressure

CRF identifies this as racialized, gendered violence shaped by displacement and power asymmetry.

3.5 Patriarchy & Clan Structures

Clan systems assign:

- Men→ authority, ritual, public roles
- Women → domestic lahor, emotional burden, conflict management

These structures historically functioned for survival, but under U.S. systems, they create new burdens.

3.6 Essentialism vs. Anti-Essentialism

Avoid saying:

- "Hmong women are oppressed."
- "Hmong culture harms women."

CRF rejects universalizing (essentialism).

Use nuance:

- Experiences differ by class, clan, generation, migration history
- Gender expectations came from survival needs, not inherent inferiority

3.7 The Emotional Burden of "Ua Siab Ntev"

Means to "be patient" and to endure silently.

This often:

- Silence women
- Burden daughters
- Hide trauma
- Pass down intergenerational expectations

3.8 Facilitation Challenges Around Gender

Defensiveness around patriarchy → emphasize historical function

Fear of cultural loss → frame CRF as simply explaining lived experience

Trauma about gendered violence → use indirect, optional prompts

Men feeling attacked → shift focus to structure, not individual blame

3.9 How to Teach CRF to Elders

Use the method: **Story → Pattern → Concept**

Example:

Story: "My daughter handled everything with the social worker."

Pattern: gendered translation labor

Concept: intersectionality

Module 4: Facilitator Scripts and Activities

4.0 Script Ideas

Opening Script:

"Welcome. Today we gather to honor our journey; what we lived through, what we carried, and what we survived. Your stories are powerful teachings. Shre only what feels right for you. There is no pressure and no judgment. We learn together."

> *"Zoo sab tog txais txhua tug. Nub nua peb tuaj uake lug ncu txug peb lub neej yaav tag dhlau lug, txhua yaam kws peb khaws tau hab txhua yaam kws peb tau dlim lug lawm. Mej lub neej yaav taag lug yog ib yaam kev qha kws tseem ceeb heev. Qha yaam kws koj xaav qha xwb, yaam kws koj qha tsis tau los tsis ua lecaag. Tsis txhob nyuab sab hab ca peb kawm uake."*

Pattern Recognition Script:

"I'm noticing that many of us had similar experiences. When so many families face the same challenges, it means the issue wasn't individual. It was a part of the systems around us."

> *"Kuv pum tau hastas peb coob leej tau taug txuj kev kws sib xws. Thaum kws muaj ntau tsev tuabneeg raug cov teeb meem zoo ib yaam, nwg qha tau hastas teeb meem nua tsis yog tim tug tuabneeg hov xwb tabsis nwg yog tim cov txheej txheem kws nyob puag ncig peb."*

Gender Reflection Script:

"Our community survived because women and men carried heavy burden in different ways. Today we honor all those contributions both seen and unseen."

> *"Peb cov moob muaj yeej vim yog muaj cov quas yawg and quas puj kws tau rig lub nra heev ua ntej. Nub nua fwm txug taag nrho txhua tug kws muaj feem paab cuam txhua txuj hau kev."*

Troubleshooting & Crisis Response Script:

Challenge: Elder becomes overwhelmed

Response: "Take your time. We can pause. You do not need to share more."

> *"Siv sij hawm teb. Peb nreg ib plag los tau. Koj tis has ntxiv los tau."*

Challenge: Elders minimize systemic issues

Response: "Yes, you worked incredibly hard and many faced the same barriers. That means it was bigger than any one person."

> *"Yog kawg, koj yeej siv zug kawg lawm hab raug tuab txuj kev kws lwm tug tau raug. Txhais tau hastas yaam nua luj tshaaj le qhov kw ib tug tuabneeg raug."*

Challenge: Male elders feel defensive

Response: "We are talking about systems, not individuals. Everyone sacrificed in different ways."

> *"Pen has txug txuj cai, tsis yog ib lee gib tug twg xwb. Txhua tug yeej ntsib kev txi sib txawv."*

Closing Script:

"We honor your courage, your strength, and your legacy. Your stories guide our community. Thank you for teaching us."

> *"Peb fwm txug mej lub peev xwm, lub dhlag zug and hab keeb kwm. Mej txuj lug nruag coj peb txuj hau kev. Ua tsaug rov mej txuj kev qhuab qha peb."*

4.1 Activity 1: "First Years in America"

Purpose: To surface shared memories of resettlement and prime elders to identify structural patterns later

Materials:

- Chairs in a circle
- Whiteboard or butcher paper
- Markers

Time: 20-25 minutes

Directions:

1. **Open gently.**
   Script: "Think back to your early years in America. What is one memory that you remember clearly"
   "Xaav rov qab moog rua thaum mej nyav tuaj tebchaw meskas. Koj puas muaj ib txuj kev ncu txug yaav tag lug uas koj ncu tau tseeb tseeb?
2. **Invite voluntary sharing.**
   Do not call on individuals directly.
3. **Record exact phrases**
   Write the elders' wording verbatim.
4. **Do not interpret.**
   Simply collect stories.
5. **Thank contributors.**
   Affirm each memory.

Expected Themes:

- Language barriers
- Confusing systems
- Racism or dismissal
- Financial hardship
- Children translating

Debrief Script:

"When we see these stories together, we notice many similarities. This tells us these struggles were shared. It was not just individual experiences or failures, but patterns many families faced."

"Thaum peb muaj cov lug nruag kub sib piv, penpum tas muaj ntau yaam kws sib xws, Qhov nua qha tau tas peb raug txuj kev sim sab, kev nyuaj sab zoo tuab yam nkaus kws tag nrho peb cov moob tau raug."

4.2 Activity 2: Memory Map Timeline

Purpose: To visually map Hmong history and gently introduce the idea that structures shaped each era.

Materials:

- Butcher paper
- Marker
- Stickers/dots

Time: 15-20 minutes

Setup:

Draw this timeline:

Laos → Secret War → Escape → Camps → Arrival → Resettlement → Today

> Laos → Tsuv Rog → Tsim Dim → Thaj Chaw Nyob Rua Cov Tuabneeg Poob Tebchaws → Hloov Chaw Nyob → nub nua

Directions:

1. Ask elders to place stickers or write memories anywhere on the timeline
2. Encourage group movement and quiet discussion
3. Avoid explaining theory to let patterns emerge

Debrief Script:

"What do you notice when you see our whole journey laid out? Did the way people treated Hmong families change depending on the time or place?

> *"Koj pum dlaabtsi thaum koj pum peb txuj kev taug yaav tag lub tag nrho ua ib ke. Mej puas xaav hastas txuj kev xaav ntawm tuabneeg rua peb cov moob puas hloov nrug lub sijhawm lossis thaaj chaw."*

*This opens the door to differential racialization and interest convergence.

4.3 Activity 3: Systems Map: "What Made this Hard?"

Purpose: To shift from personal memory → institutional pattern

Materials:

- Whiteboard listing these categories: Schools, Hospitals, Welfare, Employers, Landlords, Police (*Tsev Kawm Ntawv, Tsev Khu Mob, Tsev Thov Nyaj, Cov Tswv Haujlwm, Cov Tswv Tsev, Tub Ceev Xwm*)

Time: 10-15 minutes

Directions:

1. Script: "Which of these places made life difficult for your family?"

   "Cov chaw nua, qhov twg ua nyuaj tshaaj rua mej tsev neeg."

2. Elders call out examples; facilitator lists them
3. Validate responses, do not analyze yet

Debrief Script:

"Look at how many stories connect to these same systems. That means the challenge was not personal but was structural."

> *"Muab cov neejneeg nua lub sib piv qha tau hastas tej kev nyuaj nua tsis koj ib leeg ib tug xwb tabsis yog ib kab ke rua peb txhua tug."*

*This prepares elder for CRT/CRF concepts

4.4 Activity 4: Case Studies

Purpose: To illustrate CRT/CRF concepts through relatable scenarios

Case Study A – School Misplacement

- **Scenario:** Hmong boy placed in special education classes due to English language barrier.
  - *Muab ib tug mivnyuas tub tso rua hoob tshwj xeeb qha cov mivnyuas poob qaab vim nwg tsis paub has lug meskas zoo.*
- **Facilitator Talking Points:**
  - Ordinary racism
  - Language dominance
- **Questions:**
  - "How did school treat your children? Did they understand your family?"
    - *"Cov tsev kawm ntawv coj zoo lecaag rua mej cov mivnyaus xwb? Puab puas muaj kev totaub txug mej tsev neeg"*

Case Study B – Welfare Surveillance

- **Scenario:** Caseworker demands family change cultural practices.
    - *Muab ib tug mivnyuas tub tso rua hoob tshwj xeeb qha cov mivnyuas poob qaab vim nwg tsis paub has lug meskas zoo.*
- **Facilitator Talking Points:**
    - Paternalism
    - Power imbalance
- **Questions:**
    - "What misunderstandings did you face from welfare offices?"
        - *"Yaam kev tsis totaub twg yog yam kwm tos chaw thov nyaj ua nyuaj rua koj?"*

4.5 Toolkit Closing Reflections

This toolkit reflects our people and elders. Our elders already carry the knowledge that CRT and CRF seek to name. Their stories reveal how racism, gender, displacement, and survival shaped our community. As facilitators, or goal is to honor our elders' lived experiences and connect their experiences to larger patterns.

END OF FACILITATOR TRAINING AND TOOLKIT PACKET

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