PROJECT MUSE®

Ichiro is a Punk, and other Lessons from Teaching “The Immigrant Experience”

James Davis

Radical Teacher, Number 84, Spring 2009, pp. 50-61 (Article)

Published by University of Illinois Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/rdt.0.0034>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/262642>

Ichiro is a Punk, and other Lessons from Teaching “The Immigrant Experience”

By James Davis

During the fourth week of the semester, one of my students in *The Immigrant Experience in Fiction, Film, and Photography* posed a confusing question to me in the hallway after class. “This is really interesting stuff about the 1920s,” Shabana began, “but when will we have a chance to talk about how it relates to what’s going on today?”¹ It was confusing because, while I agreed wholeheartedly that we ought to be making connections between immigrant experiences past and present, I thought it was the students that had been resisting making these connections. This student was the daughter of Pakistani immigrants, a mother herself and the wife of a Pakistani diplomat living in Karachi. Raised in Brooklyn, she intended to move to Karachi with her two children after graduating. In some ways, the complexities of her cultural identity and transnational affiliations distinguish her from earlier generations of immigrants and their children. Yet she saw in the caricatures we studied in popular magazines a hundred years ago and in the polemics roiling post-WWI America significant similarities to contemporary debates, policies, and hostilities. Her question only surprised me because I had been wondering something so similar: when *would* my students start talking about how this historical material relates to what is going on today? It forced me to realize that what-

ever resistance they showed to discussing recent experiences, I harbored my own resistance as well. I was reluctant to turn the course into a current events discussion at the expense of examining the historical materials themselves. My students were attuned to that reluctance, and Shabana was questioning it.

One aim of this article, then, is to explore the stakes, in pedagogical and political terms, of how we approach the “pastness” of the past in teaching about immigration. How might we teach the history of immigration and its representations in a way that is alert to the specificity of various times, places, and peoples, yet also suggests the commonality of experiences that illuminate the present moment? I will discuss my students’ reaction to one text in particular, John Okada’s 1954 novel *No-No Boy*, because of the almost uniform hostility of that reaction. And I will examine how my students’ location, at Brooklyn College and at a critical juncture in their lives, shaped their learning about immigration and its representations. What I wish to argue is that radical teaching about immigration ought to resist normative accounts of both the immigrant experience and the student doing the learning, since both are very much situated in history. That latter notion may sound self-evident and uncontroversial, but its significance becomes

clearer when we consider recent efforts on the Right to construct and circulate normative accounts of “the immigrant experience.”

Immigrant Experiences: Teaching the Tension between Similarities and Differences

The experiences of recent immigrants to the United States, similar as they often are to those of previous generations, diverge in significant ways as well. In today’s political climate it seems critical that students reflect on both sides of this duality: to identify common patterns across time but also to resist conservative notions of a normative immigrant experience and a Manichean encounter between American culture and its Others. It is instructive and empowering to trace continuities among immigrant experiences, but students should become alert to the ways in which “the immigrant experience” has been transformed by decisive shifts in the U.S. economy, in the discourse of immigration, and in the significance of race and ethnicity, to name a few factors.

My course is an interdisciplinary survey whose materials included standard literary fare such as fiction, poetry, and essays, as well as documentary photographs, cartoons and caricatures, three films, and a few analytical essays by historians and film scholars. A web-based discussion forum supplemented our two meetings a week. Two-thirds of my students were English majors while the others were pursuing degrees in everything from Business to Religion to Speech Pathology. More to the point, of my twenty-five students, five had emigrated from other countries

ANASTASIA MOUYIS

and fifteen were children of immigrants. In other words, only five students (20 percent) were removed from the immigrant experience of the course's title by more than a generation. One gauge of the vitality of the students' connection to other countries was the number and range of languages they spoke. On a survey administered on the first day of class, ten students listed a language other than English as either their native language or the language spoken in their homes, and twelve students (nearly half the class) considered themselves bilingual or multilingual. I was especially struck by the fact that although many of my students spoke a foreign language few of them spoke the *same* foreign language; only Russian, Greek, and Creole appeared on more than one survey, while the others included Cantonese, Spanish, Urdu, Hebrew, Japanese, and Korean. The linguistic and ethnic diversity reflected in my classroom is typical of the City University of New York (CUNY) and of Brooklyn College in particular. Located at the nexus of a largely West Indian neighborhood and a largely Jewish neighborhood and easily accessible from the borough's many other immigrant-rich neighborhoods, Brooklyn College boasts a student body that hails from one hundred different countries and speaks ninety-five different languages. Its reputation as a springboard for generations of immigrants from working-class ethnic identity to mainstream American identity constitutes a complex legacy for today's students, an issue to which I will return below.

As I noted, my students seemed reluctant early in the semester to make connections I thought were self-evident between the historical material and more recent immigrants' experiences. Reading Anzia

Yeziarskia's 1925 novel *Bread Givers* would, I thought, inevitably provoke observations about today's conditions in the family and work lives of immigrants, intergenerational tensions, and contemporary standards of beauty, for example. Similarly, I assumed that an examination of the restrictive 1924 Johnson-Reed Act would present obvious parallels to the present debates over "illegals," border control, the Patriot Act, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, and other such developments.² In fact, I was so convinced that students would readily draw these parallels that I found myself almost guarding against it. I did not want the materials to be only so much window dressing for a current-events discussion. I wanted close reading and attention to historical specificity! I told myself that this approach honored the integrity of the past and guarded against anachronism, that there would be time later for thinking about the present. I devised a culminating project that would invite students to make explicit connections between past and present and to draw upon personal experiences if they wished. To be sure, this approach yielded excellent results, but they came at the expense of some vitality in the classroom along the way. The sense of community that emerged when the students presented their work on their final projects was palpable. Much of this work was deeply personal, and even in cases in which it was not, many students exhibited clear emotional and intellectual investments as they spoke about their research and asked each other questions. For this reason, some felt this assignment should have come earlier, perhaps as the first assignment of the semester.

One advantage I had envisioned to making this the final assignment was that students could take retrospective account of

all the materials they had studied and put their observations into dialogue with that work. And indeed many of their oral histories crackled with analytical insight into the connections between their interview subject and the materials on our syllabus. In the process, they articulated on their own some of the key debates in recent immigration scholarship without any formal exposure to it. For instance, one student compared the experiences of her coworker, a young Russian émigré named Irina, to the heroine of *Bread Givers*. “Like Sara,” she noted, “Irina came from a low-income family” and found at the end of the summer of 2003, when she was supposed to return to Russia, that she had saved only \$1,500.

So she applied for a student visa and decided to work in America for one more year to send cash back to her mother in Russia. Irina said she did not want to return without that money because her mother was very poor and gave her “everything they had.” She had to make new living arrangements and bounced between many different apartments and roommates, [much like] Sara Smolinsky, who struggled when she began living on her own with trying to find a room and pay[ing] rent. At one point, Irina even stayed with ten Polish strangers who did not speak English or Russian because she had nowhere else to go. She said they all sat around a dinner table and ate in front of her without offering her any food while she was very hungry.

Taking a page out of Yeziarskia, this student cast Irina as the embattled heroine of her oral history, plotting her struggles along a narrative of progress in which Irina triumphs over adversity, like others before her.

However, it was the novelty of contemporary immigrants’ experiences that concerned many students in their oral histories. In *Becoming New Yorkers*, sociologists Philip Kasinitz, John Mollenkopf, and Mary Waters take up the question of assimilation for pre-1965 and post-1965 immigrants. They note that despite the ways in which recent arrivals continue to assimilate to American culture and society, assimilation’s contexts, its likelihood, and its very meaning have changed. Prior to 1965, they maintain, the promise of assimilation “was by and large made good in the mass upward mobility of postwar America. Today, against a background of falling real wages, rising income inequality, and continuing racial conflict, belief in both the possibility and value of assimilation seems considerably less pervasive” (9). This observation was borne out by my own students’ work on their friends and families’ experiences. Kenny, whose parents moved here from China before he was born, shrewdly attributed his mother’s inability to assimilate to her lack of economic opportunity.

She had come here thinking my father would be able to make a lot of money, and that she would enjoy a higher standard of living than back home. Instead, she found that work is even harder to find for people of her and my father’s background here, and life more of a confusing struggle in a foreign land. . . .By the time I was grown, she had become too old to find decently paying jobs among the limited opportunities available to her as a person who speaks only Cantonese (read: mainly sweatshop labor), and thus chooses not to work. . . .Because she no longer works, she has less ready opportunities for prolonged contact with people, and economic con-

straints have long kept her from going out to socialize much. . . . My mother thinks that her experience as an immigrant is probably fairly common among Chinese women of her generation, who would have come here as housewives and, like her, not been much encouraged by their situations to assimilate into American culture. Indeed, she has known several immigrant mothers of schoolchildren in my generation who have gone through a similar experience to hers.

Like the rest of the working class to which most recent immigrants belong, they face monumental challenges from our neoliberal economy. While worker productivity has risen in recent years, compensation for that work has declined. The median wage in New York City increased steadily through the late 1990s to 2002, but its real value adjusted for inflation was lower in 2006 than it was in the early 1990s (Parrott). A thoughtful treatment of immigration and its representations ought to take such fluctuating material conditions into account, for they serve to check some of the more facile popular arguments about where the United States “went wrong” on immigration or which immigrants are to blame for our social ills.

A more abrupt shift in the conditions under which immigrants negotiate the terms of assimilation came with the advent of the Patriot Act after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the corresponding rise in hostility toward South Asians, Arabs, and Muslims, and the broader campaign against “illegals.” Many of my students’ interview subjects distinguished between the pre- and post-9/11 eras. “Prior to September 11, 2001,” wrote Shabana, whose parents came from

Pakistan in 1970, “Mother says she never felt like an ‘immigrant.’”

That is, the process of assimilation, especially in New York City, was very smooth. She felt that she was able to hold on to her own identity and meld with the new identity offered by the US. However, after 9/11, she felt for the first time a stranger in her home of 30 years. According to Mother, this was the first time she felt like an immigrant, or the Other, despite the fact that when she first moved to Brooklyn there was hardly a Pakistani community here. . . . She was fortunate to not have experienced any discrimination of any kind or issues with the authorities. However, the stories she heard definitely made her anxious. Questions of national identity were probably never this pressing.

Of course, this Pakistani community is not alone. Since the Immigration and Naturalization Service was subsumed by the Department of Homeland Security in 2003, similar responses have been heard from California’s immigrants who are subject to draconian state legislation and from the Latin American workers who are targeted in ICE raids across the South and Midwest.

Sudden changes such as those that occurred after the 9/11 attacks combine with more gradual developments such as the fitful transition to a service-oriented economy, rendering the conditions in which immigrants navigate assimilation in a dynamic state of flux. This is a starting point for challenging generic notions of the immigrant experience. It is especially urgent that radical educators mount this challenge now, as a problematic view of normative immigrant experience advances neo-conservative immigration policy. Duke University economist

Jacob Vigdor published a widely cited Manhattan Institute study in May 2008 purporting to measure “the degree of similarity between native- and foreign-born adults in the United States” in order to track assimilation in three areas: economic, civic, and cultural. While Vigdor’s report is quick to note that the Assimilation Index “reveals great diversity in the experiences of

individual immigrant groups, which differ from each other almost as much as they differ from the native-born,” these differences should be judged normatively, it suggests, in relation to a single, composite standard: “Some groups have done far better or worse than the Index as a whole.” One of its chief conclusions—the one with which neo-con journalists have made the most hay—is that the new immigrants of the early 21st century are on average achieving lower rates of assimilation than their early 20th century counterparts. Despite gains in the 1990s, Vigdor writes, “the current level of assimilation remains lower than it was at any point in the early 20th century wave of immigration.”³

Who is to blame? In a word: Mexicans. The report contends that while Mexican immigrants assimilate culturally at the same rate as those from other countries, they lag dramatically behind in economic and civic assimilation. Praising Vigdor’s study in *The New York Sun*, the Manhattan Institute’s Howard Husock fanned the flames of anti-Mexican anxiety:

MANY OF MY STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF THE SO-CALLED 1.5 GENERATION WHO WERE BORN ABROAD BUT RAISED HERE, HOLD IN TENSION A MYTHICAL IDEA OF AMERICA THAT THEY NEVER SEE OR EXPERIENCE...ALONGSIDE AN IDEA OF AMERICA GROUNDED IN THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE IN NEW YORK.

On the zero-to-100 scale, Mexicans—11 million emigrated to America between 1980 and 2006—score only 13.

Although Mexican assimilation does occur, it’s extremely slow. Mexicans who arrived in 1995 started out with Index scores around five and increased only to around 10 by 2005. In other words, our largest immigrant group arrived with little education and even less knowledge of English, and they have stayed that way for an extended period. (Husock)

It is not legality or illegality we ought to be worried about, Husock argues, it is the assimilation factor, and right now the immigrant group that is our largest by far is faring very badly.

For all the apparent neutrality of its quantitative analysis, this study and other such projects have deeply ideological premises and implications. For one, the civil rights and liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s threw into question the supposition, fundamental to our national culture since its inception and implicit in this study, that the melting pot model of assimilation is possible or desirable. To be sure, no one interested in the welfare of immigrants favors a low “assimilation factor” when it means immigrants are suffering, but we ought to contest any valorization of assimilation as an a priori good. Further, by focusing exclusively on the assimilation question—casting American culture and its Others in binary oppositions—such projects obscure what

Kasinitz et al. refer to as “the real cultural ‘action’” of contemporary immigration, at least in urban areas:

[M]any of the children of immigrants in New York today interact with each other and native minorities far more than they do with native whites. This has important consequences, of course, for the patterns of prejudice and intergroup conflict experienced by different groups. But this intergroup contact also has positive dimensions. . . . [T]he children of immigrants are creating a new kind of multiculturalism—not of balkanized groups huddled within their own enclaves but of hybrids and fluid exchanges across group boundaries. And the real cultural ‘action’ may not be in the interplay of immigrant cultures with a homogeneous and dominant American culture but in the interactions between first- and second-generation immigrant groups and native minorities. (*Becoming* 16)

Finally, projects such as the Assimilation Index ignore the changing fabric of the cultural mainstream itself. Many of my students, especially those of the so-called 1.5 Generation who were born abroad but raised here, hold in tension a mythical idea of America that they never see or experience—call it the Norman Rockwell version—alongside an idea of America grounded in their own experience in New York. This generation “differ[s] from prior immigrant generations,” Kasinitz et al. write in the recent book *Inheriting the City*, “in that they have more pride in their own biculturalism, keeping some elements and discarding others as they go along. Yet this biculturalism in no way prevents their joining the ‘mainstream.’ Indeed, in their cultural, economic, and social activities, the children of immigrants increasingly

are the mainstream among young adult New Yorkers.”²⁴ Vibrant processes of transculturation are overlooked, deliberately I think, by the emphasis on acculturation in projects like the Assimilation Index.

Ichiro the Punk; or, The Limits of Working Class Sympathy

The text that provoked the most resistance from my students was *No-No Boy*, in which a young Japanese-American man struggles with an existential crisis just after World War II. Ichiro Yamada returns to his hometown Seattle having served a two-year prison term for refusing to forswear his loyalty to any nation other than the United States and refusing to serve in the U.S. military (the two No’s of the novel’s title). Every chapter in the long, brooding novel finds Ichiro beset with grief and anxiety, not at having been mistreated by his country but at his own failure to have recognized himself as an American, to have answered those questions “correctly,” and therefore enlisted in the U.S. military. A searing critique of the anti-Japanese racism that characterized U.S. culture in the early 1940s, the novel nevertheless does not allow its protagonist to use this critique to assuage his own guilt. Though he is infuriated by anti-Japanese prejudice in others, Ichiro has internalized it himself and wishes, above all, to be treated as the American he feels himself to be.

My students expressed a great deal of impatience with Ichiro’s struggle. Of course, they were outraged to learn that the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II was not only carried out in direct contradiction of the findings of military intelligence officials but was also facilitated through the pandering

of the sensational press to rising nativist sentiment. Still, my students' sympathetic identification with interned Japanese-Americans was tested by Okada's novel. Its angst-ridden account of Ichiro's post-war blues wore them out. This student's comment on the course blog was typical:

There was so much self pity and weakness. . . .that it left no room for sympathy. It was like I had no choice but to dislike him. Every time I thought I found a reason to be on his side, he overwhelmed me with disgust. Ichi had all the reason to be angry, but every single thing that came out of his mouth had to do with how bad off he was, all that he thought of was himself. As an adult he should have realized that there are injustices in the world, we all experience them, and only the weak let that devour him.

Another student wrote pointedly, "Excuse me for how informal I am about to sound but Ichiro is one big ole PUNK. Now for a grown man he could have had a little more backbone and whole hell of a lot less self pity. . . .I mean big deal when he came out he could of moved on with his life and stopped complaining." There may be a textual explanation for the students' resistance: it is striking that a novel about the psychological fallout of having to choose between two competing cultural identities and serving time in military prison devotes no space at all to the internment camp or the military prison. In effect, readers are deprived of those originary moments of trauma from which Ichiro's despair emanates. Although my students learned a bit about the internment camps from secondary reading, perhaps they needed Okada to provide a novelistic account of Ichiro's particular experiences to justify the subsequent "251

pages of ranting and raving about his terrible situation," as one student put it.

But I think the more significant source of my students' resistance to *No-No Boy* was not textual but ideological. They were refusing a fundamental premise of the novel: that structural conditions can affect someone so deeply that they may not be overcome by the force of individual will. Fully identifying with Ichiro means accepting the deterministic idea that individuals can be crushed by material circumstances, particularly by racism and discriminatory state policies. My students are at an especially ambivalent stage in their lives in relation to this question. On one hand, they are experienced enough to recognize that social structures matter, to look with suspicion on the mythology of the immigrant who pulls himself up by his bootstraps. Pluck and determination, they know, are necessary but not sufficient to make it in this country. On the other hand, they encounter this novel as college students, poised in almost every case between a working class background and a hoped-for bourgeois affluence. Too keen an adherence to a deterministic account of social structures threatens their conception of the U.S. class system as permeable and threatens their self-conception as agents within that system.

At CUNY this tension is particularly charged. An institution founded on the principle of offering a quality education to working-class young people, CUNY built its reputation on serving New York's immigrants and their children. Brooklyn College has been a springboard for many generations out of an ethnically marked working-class identity understood as provincial to a relatively unmarked middle-class identity understood as cultured, cosmopolitan, and marketable. To some

extent, this reputation is well deserved and the cultural process I have described is no mere myth. The number of illustrious Brooklyn College alumni from immigrant families of modest means is legion. But as CUNY “modernizes” to better compete in today’s higher education marketplace, the story it tells about itself grows threadbare. More than ever before, CUNY’s students are among the working poor whose numbers are rising in New York City generally. Among the demands on their earnings is tuition, which was first instituted at CUNY in 1975 and has increased incrementally ever since.⁵ Unlike previous generations, their educations are not well subsidized; the operating budget for their education is funded not primarily by the city or the state but by the students’ own tuition. In this respect, CUNY’s status as a “public” institution has become something of a misnomer. Not only does attending CUNY now cost more than it used to in real dollars adjusted for inflation, it also officially banished remedial, non-credit bearing courses, such as most ESL courses, from its four-year colleges to its community colleges, effectively denying many of New York’s immigrant and 1.5 Generation students admission to the senior colleges.⁶ Other recent and widely touted initiatives, such as the creation of a CUNY Honors College and the raising of minimum SAT scores the senior colleges, do not discriminate overtly against the immigrants and working people whom CUNY has traditionally served but in their effect serve to segregate “high-performing” and “low-performing” students within the university as a whole.⁷ The senior colleges are increasingly trading on the brand of CUNY as an elite university without the elitism – “the poor man’s

Harvard”—while sacrificing the commitment to educating the working people of the city. The mythology of CUNY as an immigrant-friendly institution is now fraught with contradictions.

As a result, a conflict has emerged between the expectations engendered by the CUNY mythology and the challenging circumstances students confront during and after college. Because of the force of the mythology, however, it is difficult to articulate this conflict or to experience it as anything but an individual inadequacy. How does a child of immigrants who has managed, against the odds, to obtain both a high school diploma and a Brooklyn College degree navigate what sociologist Herbert Gans called “second-generation decline”? The overwhelming expectation is that this young person improves upon her parents’ situation, and of course her college degree plays an enormous function in this expectation. It runs aground, however, on the downward mobility scenario that Gans contends is increasingly prevalent among the second generation.⁸ To be sure, downward mobility occurs with less frequency and severity among the college educated, but it indexes a structural problem exacting an enormous toll on recent immigrant families who labor under a mythology that no longer matches the times in which we live. No wonder, then, that Ichiro Yamada comes off as a “punk.” Removed though my students may be from the particulars of his cultural conundrum, his failure to thrive strikes a nerve, for it raises that specter—intolerable among students at this particular stage and in this particular place—of the immigrant who, possessed of all the right tools and granted all the right opportunities, still cannot manage to advance appropriately.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the most radical components of my course were not the readings on Japanese internment or on the incarceration of U.S. Muslims and South Asians after 9/11, however powerful these were at challenging some shibboleths of American democracy. Rather, they were the apparently milder but more active exercises in which students explored the individual lives of immigrants they knew, for in the process of synthesizing and analyzing the stories these immigrants told about themselves my students made a range of personal connections to issues that otherwise stood comparatively inert and abstract.

For several students the assignment provided a pretext for asking questions of family members that had long been on their minds. Melinda knew almost nothing about her father's experiences of moving to the United States from China despite the fact that she had been living with him for over twenty years. It just wasn't something he spoke about. One can hear in Melinda's final project her struggle both to respect her father's reticence about his past and to make her interest in that past sufficiently safe and urgent that he would be willing to discuss it. As a result, his existence seems to take on an extra dimension for her. As she brings the contours of a young man's life out of the shadows in which they have been enshrouded, he becomes more than just a function of Melinda's own life—the father without whom she wouldn't exist and without whose hard work she would not prosper as she has—but also a full person in his own right.

In other cases, my students' oral histories complicated in the most produc-

tive way some received notions about immigrants' experiences. Kenny pointed out, for example, that his mother's story is ordinary yet for precisely that reason deserves our attention as much as do the stories of accomplished immigrants that tend to show up in literature. "Though not as commonly explored in fiction as the more dynamic stories of immigrants of greater ambition," he wrote, "hers is a tale common to another large and often overlooked subset of immigrants." Two other students documented the lives of their mothers in a way that challenged our conventional wisdom about economic class and immigration. Raquel's mother came from Jamaica, and while most West Indian immigrants in Brooklyn come from modest means, Raquel's mother knew that moving here meant stepping down in class and social status. In fact, that was one of her reasons for moving. "I had expected to experience life without being privileged," she told Raquel. "From youth to young adulthood, I lived a fortunate and sheltered life. I grew up always having helpers around the house when I was in Jamaica. I wanted to experience life without all of these services. I was prepared to clean, cook, wash, and do basically everything for myself." Similarly, Shabana's mother came from enormous privilege: her own father, a Nairobi businessman, attended Oxford University and gave her a classic colonial education in Pakistan; one of her uncles was a Pakistani Supreme Court Justice during the first Bhutto presidency and another the Home Secretary during the 1960s. "Belonging to an elite exclusive class in Pakistan meant having many privileges," Shabana writes. "Mother grew up with a driver, a gardener, a cook, ayahs and nannies, and a butler. Domestic work was

taken care of by the domestic staff and so mother had hardly any responsibilities per se and never really had to think about money.” Among other things, then, moving to New York meant doing such work for herself. “[S]he had never in her life taken the garbage out. Cleaning the bathroom was probably one of her hardest obstacles upon her move here. And when she mentioned this, she was almost ashamed, yet she recognized that it wasn’t her being aloof, it was just how things were.” These accounts worked powerfully in the presentations that concluded the semester to unsettle the assumption that immigrants to the United States are always pushed here by poverty or otherwise “disadvantaged” circumstances in their home countries. However common this scenario is, it is also important to resist the tendency to imagine all immigrants, particularly nonwhites, as provincial, ignorant, or otherwise benighted prior to their arrival.

This was the most powerful and empowering idea to emerge from the course: that although the commonalities among immigrants’ experiences through history may inform and embolden today’s struggles for social justice, the divisive uses to which a monolithic ideal of “the immigrant experience” are put also demand an alertness to the distinctiveness of immigrant experiences—to their location in time and place, and likewise to our students’ location in relation to their developing knowledge of immigration.

Notes

1 All names have been changed to protect students’ identities.

2 The Johnson-Reed Act severely curtailed immigration to the United States

by excluding Asians completely and limiting the number of immigrants from any non-Asian country to 2% of the number of people from that country living in the United States in 1890. Besides Asians, the 1924 Act most affected Southern and Eastern Europeans who had arrived in large numbers in the years since 1890. ICE refers to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, a federal agency that conducts raids on workplaces suspected of employing undocumented immigrant labor.

3 Vigdor’s report, “Civic Paper No. 53: Measuring Immigrant Assimilation to the United States,” may be accessed on-line at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_53.htm.

4 <http://www1.cuny.edu/news/news-releases.html?p=2446>.

5 Tuition currently stands at \$4,600/year at the four-year colleges—a fraction of the cost at many other colleges, to be sure, but a stark turnaround nevertheless from the principle of accessibility on which CUNY was founded.

6 Granted, many who complete remedial coursework advance to the senior colleges (in fact the senior colleges are compelled to accept any applicant with a CUNY associate’s degree), but attrition rates are extraordinarily high at the community colleges, so the tiering of the remedial curriculum places English language learners in a more precarious position than their native-born peers.

7 A high profile endorsement of these recent CUNY overhauls appears in *The Economist*, “Rebuilding the American Dream Machine,” 19 Jan 2006. See also, Karen Arenson, “CUNY Plans to Raise Its Admissions Standards,” *New York Times*, 28 Jul 2007.

8 Contrary to conventional wisdom about assimilation, Gans observes a tradeoff between “becoming American” and making economic advances: “The people who have secured an economically viable niche are acculturating less than did the European 2nd and 3rd generation and those without such a niche escape condemnation to dead end immigrant and other jobs mainly by becoming very poor and persistently jobless Americans” (188).

Works Cited

Gans, Herbert. “Second-Generation Decline: Scenarios for the Economic and Ethnic Futures of the Post-1965 American Immigrants,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15:2 (April 1992): 173-193.

Husock, Howard. “Immigration: Bring Back Assimilation,” *New York Sun*, 13 May 2008. <http://www.nysun.com/opinion/immigration-bring-back-assimilation/76347>.

Kasinitz, Phillip, John Mollenkopf, and Mary Waters, eds. *Becoming New Yorkers: Ethnographies of the New Second Generation*. New York: Russell Sage, 2006.

----- . *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age*. New York: Russell Sage, 2008.

Okada, John. *No-No Boy*. University of Washington Press, 1978.

Parrott, James. “Jittery Wall Street, Calm City?” *Gotham Gazette*, 16 Apr. 2007. <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/issueoftheweek/20070416/200/2146>.

Immigration Filmography for Educators

Compiled by Linda Dittmar

A web search yields long lists of films about immigration—many more than can be included here. National and international, feature length and short, fiction and documentary, video and film, big budget and small, the lists go on even as new films enter into circulation. If anything, this quantity of titles calls for an encyclopedic treatment like Tom Zaniello’s *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds, and Riffraff: An Expanded Guide to Films About Labor* (Cornell: URL Press, 2003). Clearly this brief filmography cannot do justice to the complex issues at stake, including some basic questions about what constitutes immigration as a subject matter: Are we talking here about *immigration* or *migration*? Do *exile* and *refugee status* count as kinds of immigration? And what about collective *expulsions* (ethnic cleansings and mass *transfers* of population) born of violent conflict—are they modes of immigration, or is immigration a personal choice quite apart from collective coercion?

The following list, then, barely skims the surface. It leans towards major “hits”—that is, films that had substantial theatrical exhibition and should therefore be easily available on DVD. It also stresses U.S. films. That some of the titles