

## Immigration Related Films

by [Bao Lo](#)

This list provides some initial suggestions of films related to immigration. These were primarily culled from syllabi of instructors teaching immigration, race and ethnicity.

[Immigrant and Refugee Issues](#)

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[Immigration, Globalization and Economics](#)

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### Immigrant and Refugee Issues

*"Abandoned: Betrayal of America's Immigrants" (2000, 55 min)*

Looks at the most recent wave of anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States and at the personal impact of new immigration laws, focusing on the severity of current detention and deportation policies. Legal residents find themselves torn away from their American families and sent to countries they barely know while political asylum seekers are kept for years in county jails that profit from their incarceration.

*"Death of a Shaman" (2003)*

A young Mien woman from Sacramento, California (Fahm Saeyang) undertakes an emotional and moving personal journey retracing her family's immigration to America from the mountains of Southeast Asia.

*"Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary" (1996, 53 min)*

A documentary by Los Angeles teacher Laura Angelica Simon, exploring the impact of California's Proposition 187 on the immigrant community. The subject is Hoover Street Elementary School, where Simon candidly explores the attitudes and emotions of teachers, students and parents, focusing on a ten year old Salvadorian girl.

*"Home is Struggle" (1991)*

Using interviews, photographs, and theatrical vignettes, the film explores the lives of women who have come to the United States from different Latin American Countries for varying political, economic, and personal reasons.

*"Lost Boys of Sudan" (2004, 87 min)*

Lost Boys of Sudan is a feature-length documentary that follows two Sudanese refugees from Africa to America. Orphaned as young boys in one of Africa's cruelest civil wars, Peter Dut and Santino Chuor survived lion attacks and militia gunfire to reach a refugee camp in Kenya along with thousands of other children. From there, they were chosen to come to America. Safe at last from physical danger and hunger, a world away from home, they find themselves confronted with the abundance and alienation of contemporary American suburbia.

*"Well-Founded Fear" (2000, 119 minutes)*

This documentary provides an in-depth look at the asylum process in the United States. Foreigners that are already in the United States, having fled their home countries, have the opportunity to apply for asylum if a person establishes a "well-founded fear" of persecution in his/her home country. A close-up examination of the way that the United States decides the cases of those applying for political asylum, sometimes with careful consideration, but often with personal prejudices, cynicism, and naiveté.

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## **The U.S./Mexico Border**

*"Death on a Friendly Border" (2001, 26 min)*

The border that runs between Tijuana and San Diego is the most heavily militarized border between "friendly" countries anywhere in the world. Since the U.S. instituted the "Operation Gatekeeper" policy, an average of one person a day has died crossing the border. This documentary puts a human face on this tragedy, examining the hardships imposed by heat and thirst and abusive border guards. Includes interviews with a border guard, human rights activists and Mexicans who have attempted the crossing.

*"New World Border" (2001, 28 min)*

Documents the rise in human rights abuses along the U.S./Mexico border since the implementation of border blockades (Operation Gatekeeper), which have been erected in populated areas throughout the border region during the last decade. Includes interviews with immigrant rights organizers, testimony from immigrants, analysis of "free trade" policies and current efforts to build a vibrant movement for immigrant rights.

*"Patrolling the Border: National Security and Immigration Reform" (2004, 22 min)*

This ABC News program studies the connections between 9/11, the American economy, and the workforce of undocumented labor on which that economy increasingly depends. Interviews with Arizona border patrol agents evoke their frustrations and reveal the perils faced by many Mexicans who attempt desperate wilderness crossings. Contrasts between President Bush's proposed guest worker program and the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to crack down on the influx of illegal aliens highlight the complexity of the situation. Originally broadcast on 07/14/04 as a segment of Nightline.

*"Performing the Border" (1999, 43 min)*

Set in the Mexican border town Ciudad Juarez where U.S. industries assemble their electronic and digital equipment, this film examines the socioeconomic problems of the Mexican-American border region, focusing on hardships faced by women in newly urbanized areas.

*"Señorita Extraviada, Missing Young Woman" (2001)*

Tells the story of the hundreds of kidnapped, raped and murdered young women of Juárez, Mexico. The murders first came to light in 1993 and young women continue to "disappear" to this day, without any hope of bringing the perpetrators to justice. Who are these women from all walks of life and why are they getting murdered so brutally? The documentary moves like the unsolved mystery it is, and the filmmaker poetically investigates the circumstances of the murders and the horror, fear and courage of the families whose children have been taken.

*"Wetback: The Undocumented Documentary" (2004, 92 min)*

Follows several migrants from Central America and Mexico on their journey to North America. The film begins in Nicaragua and takes the viewer through five borders. Border control tightens as the migrants move North. Gangs in Mexico and vigilante groups in the USA are some of the perils the migrants might have to face on their way to the American Dream. Of the more than 3,000 Latin Americans who embark upon this journey every day, less than 300 make it to their destination.

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## **Immigrants and Race Relations**

*"Punjabi Cab" (2004, 20 min)*

Since September 11th 2001, turban-wearing Sikhs in America have endured harassment and violence because they are mistaken for the stereotypical Middle Eastern terrorist. This documentary looks at the treatment that Bay Area Sikh taxi drivers have endured since 9/11 and

their resilience in overcoming these hardships through faith, compassion and pride in their culture.

*"Raising Our Voices: South Asian Americans Address Hate" (2002, 25 min)*

A film developed to raise awareness about hate crimes and bias incidents affecting South Asians living in America, with particular reference to their increase since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

*"Sa-I-Gu" (1993, 41 min)*

Explores the embittering effect the Rodney King verdict rebellion had on a group of Korean American women shopkeepers. It underscores the shattering of the American Dream while taking the media to task for playing up the "Korean-Black" aspect of the rioting. This film provides a perspective that is essential to discussions of the L.A. riots, ethnic relations, and racism in the United States.

*"Wet Sand: Voices from LA Ten Years Later" (2003, 59 min)*

A follow-up to "Sa-I-Gu". Looks into the past and present to question how much has changed in the last ten years following the 1992 L.A. riots. Interviews with a multi-ethnic set of first-hand witnesses reveal that living conditions have deteriorated and that few remedies have been administered to the communities most stricken.

*"Who Killed Vincent Chin?" (1989, 83 min)*

Video on racism in working-class America focuses on the murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese-American, in a Detroit bar. Interweaves the murder with social concerns and questions about justice.

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## **Immigration, Globalization and Economics**

*"Behind the Labels" (2001, 46 min)*

Lured by false promises and driven by desperation, thousands of Chinese and Filipina women pay high fees to work in garment factories on the pacific island of Saipan, the only U.S. territory exempt from labor and immigration laws. The clothing they sew, bearing the "Made in the USA" label, is shipped duty and quota-free to the U.S for sale by The GAP, J. Crew, Polo and other retailers. Powerful hidden camera footage, along with the garment workers' personal stories, offers a rare glimpse into indentured labor and the workings of the global sweatshop where 14 hour shifts, payless paydays, and lock-downs are routine.

*"Blood, Sweat & Lace" (1994, 18 min)*

Examination of the working conditions of Asian American women garment workers who sew piece work in Oakland, California. Focuses on attempts by the workers to extract back wages from Jessica McClintoch Corporation, designer/distributor of the fashions they sew, after their subcontractor declared bankruptcy.

*"Chain of Love" (2001, 50 min)*

Chain of Love is a film about the Philippines' second largest export product - maternal love - and how this export affects the women involved, their families in the Philippines, and families in the West.

*"A Day without a Mexican" (2004)*

This film is built on the premise that one day Californians wake up to find all Hispanics in the state gone. The film looks at the economic consequences of this disappearance, as well as social and political implications.

*"Life and Debt: Jamaica and the IMF" (2001, 86 min)*

Set in Jamaica, this film is a case study of how contemporary free trade policies and global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization affect the economies of developing nations. Includes interviews with IMF Deputy Director Stanley Fischer, Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Jamaica's former Prime Minister Michael Manley as well as tourists, farmers, Rastafarians, factory workers and others.

*"Maquila: A Tale of Two Mexicos" (2000, 55 min)*

This documentary presents the pros and cons of the maquiladora (or maquila) an export manufacturing program established by the Mexican Government and looks at industrialization in Mexico after NAFTA, considering low wages, working conditions, environmental and cultural impact.

*"Maid in America" (2004, 58 min)*

An intimate look into the lives of three Latina immigrants working as nannies and housekeepers in Los Angeles, three of the nearly 100,000 domestic workers living in that city today. Judith hasn't seen her four daughters for the two years since she left Guatemala, but hopes to give them a better future by sending half her income back home. Telma, from El Salvador, has cared for the now six-year-old Mickey since he was a baby, essentially becoming his 'mom' so his mother can keep her career on track. Eva, one of the thousands of college-educated immigrants who have fled Mexico's unstable economy, is attending night school to improve her skills, and views housekeeping as a necessary transition. These women's stories vividly reveal how immigrants are redefining their roles, and underscores the vital role they play in many American households.

*"Secrets of Silicon Valley" (2001, 60 min)*

The film chronicles the lives of two young activists grappling with rapid social change and the meaning of globalization on their own doorsteps. Magda Escobar runs Plugged In, a computer training center in a low income community just a few miles from the epicenter of high-tech wealth. Raj Jayadev is a temporary worker who reveals the reality of an unseen and unacknowledged army of immigrant workers. Throughout the film, high tech CEO's and moguls comment on Magda and Raj's stories with revealing insights on time, technology, greed, and globalization. Presents an illuminating view into the hidden world of high tech sweatshops and a critical look at the social impact of the new millennium's high technology.

*"The Empire's New Clothes" (2000, 40 min)*

Investigates the situation in sweatshops in New York City where thousands of women, primarily recent immigrants from Chinese and Latino communities, are sewing garments under dangerous and unfair labor conditions, which often lead to psychological exhaustion, permanent disability and even death.

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## **Second Generation Issues**

*"A.K.A. Don Bonus" (1995, 55 min)*

This documentary is a self-portrait of a young Cambodian immigrant growing up in America today. Shot by Sokly Ny himself, it shows his struggles to graduate and survive his complicated life during his senior year of high school.

*"Among B-Boys" (2004, 5 min)*

The flourishing of an underground Hip Hop culture in the farming oriented Central California valley seems anything but likely. But its adoption by dispossessed and oppressed peoples of not only America's inner cities, but around the world, makes it a natural fit for this crew of Hmong B-Boys (or breakdancers). They see it as something that's fun, and makes them more unique, but also something to keep them away from the troubles many other Hmong youth face. It is also a way for them to relate to the world around them outside of their culture. This is a small glimpse at Velocity, an all Hmong B-Boy crew from Merced County.

*"Bui Doi: Life Like Dust" (1994, 28 min)*

Life, for most young Vietnamese gang members in the U.S., is Bui Doi, "a life like dust." Interviews Ricky Phan, currently serving an 11-year sentence for armed robbery in a California State prison. Expansion of the award-winning short film.

*"Kelly Loves Tony" (1998, 57 min)*

Seventeen year-old Kelly Saeteurn has a dream--she calls it her "American dream." As a fresh high school graduate on her way to college she envisions a rosy future for herself, full of exciting opportunities granted by a college education. Kelly is the first in her family of Lu Mien refugees from Laos to have accomplished as much as she already has, but her dreams exist in sharp contrast to her reality. She is also pregnant. Her boyfriend Tony is a junior high drop out and ex-con whom she had met three months earlier at a shopping mall in Oakland, California. The honesty of this film's footage and dialogue offers viewers a rare glimpse into the lives of two young people struggling to make their relationship work in the face of overwhelming obstacles like parenthood, gender issues, cultural and educational differences.

*"Letter Back Home: Cambodian/Lao youth in Tenderloin" (1994, 14 min)*

A rare and uncompromising look at life in the United States for some Laotian and Cambodian youth. Shot in San Francisco's "inner city" Tenderloin District, this video letter contains topics of concern for all in this American democracy.

*"Monkey Dance: Cambodian Refugee Children" (2004, 64 min)*

Film presents the lives of three Cambodian-American teenagers who come of age in the United States while holding on to some aspects of their Cambodian culture such as Cambodian dance.

*"Silent Sacrifices: Values of Filipino American Family" (2001, 28 min)*

Explores the Filipino American first and second generation immigrant experience. Frank discussions between teens, young adults and their parents reveal how issues of ethnic identity and opposing Filipino and American values contribute to youth's bouts with depression, parenting difficulties and intergenerational misunderstandings.

*"The Bhangra Wrap" (1994, 20 min)*

An energetic documentary about a vibrant South Asian youth subculture that fuses hip hop, rap and Bhangra music. Based in Toronto, Canada and New York City, Bhangra is a mix of old and new, and is symbolic of universal cultural transformation for new generations.

*"Vietnamese American: New Generation" (2001, 33 min)*

Through candid interviews with first- and second-generation Vietnamese Americans, this program documents the process of assimilation into American culture of refugees from the former Republic of Vietnam. Topics include stresses on the family unit caused by cultural and generational differences, gang membership and drug abuse among the young, anti-Vietnamese racial bias, and feelings about relations between the U.S. and Vietnam.

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## About The Author

[Bao Lo](#) is currently a fourth year graduate student in the Ethnic Studies Graduate Program at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research interests include immigration, youth and families, and race and ethnicity. Her current research focuses on understanding the processes that impact Hmong youth adaptation. In particular, her work highlights the myriad ways that race, ethnicity, class, culture and gender inform the process of "Americanization" for racially and ethnically diverse immigrant groups such as the Hmong.