

Random People's Productions Submission

Title: Immigrants

Marcia Mendels

5 actors, 4 representing different groups who have settled in Southern Humboldt, and 1 moderator (all names of characters can change, depending on sex, etc. of actors)

Author's Note: I realize this piece can tap into some emotions, and it is tempting to let yourselves get into “lecture mode.” I ask the director and actors to please avoid that. It is my personal belief that no one's mind was ever changed by lecturing them or indulging in an angry rant. This piece is meant to help the audience think about how they react to immigrants through humor. If you have any questions, I'll make myself available to help in each characterization. Thanks for working with this philosophy!

Setting: conference table with 5 chairs and name tags. Chair set at an angle to the table for the moderator, with cell phone lying on edge of the table next to him.

Moderator walks onstage and addresses the audience:

Moderator: Hello and welcome to the first Southern Humboldt Symposium on Immigration. Our panel is going to discuss the effects of immigration on our community and how best to work with newcomers. We are fortunate to have an excellent panel—let me introduce them: (actors come on as introduced)

First, Ms. Anna D'Angelo, a seasonal agricultural worker, and newcomer to our area.

(a colorfully dressed young woman strides to her chair, waving at audience, surreptitiously whips out a “scissors sign”) from behind her back, and then sits down.

Moderator: Next is Mr. Green Summer Light-at-Dawn, who moved here during the back-to-the-land movement in the late 60s.

(Actor comes on, bowing, saying “**namaste**,” and making expansive, inclusive gestures.

Moderator: And we have Mr. Jeff Jefferson, whose family has lived here for 4 generations...

Jeff bigger than life character, stalks in, (interrupts to say): **“FIVE generations,”** (very proudly), swaggers to chair.

Moderator: Right....indeed....and we have Ms. Julia Reed, a member of the Pomo Nation.”

(A dignified woman walks in gracefully and silently and sits down, serene smile on her face.)

Moderator: "We seem to be missing one of our panelists, Mr. Borislav...um... Smith, representing our recent wave of landowners."

(Just then his cell phone rings, and he answers it on speaker phone:)

Moderator: "Hello? Oh yes, Mr. Smith, (lots of excavation noise over the phone) "You what?" (audience hears man yelling, "level that field over there next!" over the phone) "you're too busy to come?...tell everyone you're *improving* as much land as possible? Right...." (He puts his phone away, shaking his head)

Moderator: Looks like we will just go ahead with the speakers we have. Ok, Ms. D'Angelo, why don't you tell us a bit about yourself?

Anna: (*addressing audience*): Hello, I am a newcomer to this beautiful area. My boyfriend and I came here to...work....but now we have fallen in love with the beauty and the open space. We hope to save enough money to buy a little place to live and become part of your community, though the prices here are very high! It seems to me that you have so much money and land....surely there's enough to share...and you need us! Who is going to get all of this work done for you, if not us? You want us to come, and then complain that we are cluttering up your streets! Exactly where is it that we are supposed to go? Or stay, while we are waiting for employment? There are no hostels or public facilities, as there are in the rest of the civilized world.

It is we who take the risk of coming here, and hoping we find work with good, honorable people. I understand that some of our fellow workers aren't so....nice...and I can see that there are a LOT of us, but if you'd take the time to get to know us, you would see that we are just people, like you. Weren't you all new here once, too?

Green (*jumps into conversation*): Well now, Anna, if I may call you Anna....and you can call me Green Summer (*smiles and shakes hands with her*)...no one welcomed us back in the 60s, that's for sure! (*laughs derisively*) They called us dirty hippies, and said we had no respect for tradition and government. (*shakes his head sadly*) We moved here,

looking for a simpler, less stressful way of life...a way to connect ourselves back to the land and spirituality, and get away from all the commercial nonsense in the cities.

We added SO MUCH to these dusty little towns. Why, they were blowing away before we got here and revitalized...everything! And what did we get in return? The county government and sheriff's office harassed us constantly, and then they called us outlaws....just for growing a little bit of medicinal weed. Some of us even went to jail for that, or lost our crops to Feds in helicopters....man, I used to hate that sound....And if we did manage to harvest a crop, we worried about getting ripped off or busted. Now all of you folks want to come here and cash in on the green rush, after we paved the way! You expect us to house you, feed you, pay you....and then you want to set up your own grows in competition with us? Who's going to buy all of this pot?? So, you tell me, why should we welcome you?

Jeff: *(leans in toward the first two)* Excuse me folks, Jeff Jefferson here....these are right quaint little stories you two are telling, but that's not exactly the way I remember things! My family has lived here for five, count 'em, FIVE generations, and I remember when you so-called back to the landers arrived. Back to the land, my sweet fanny! The only land you knew anything about was the yard around your parents' houses in suburbia! You people came here with no skills, no money and no respect for our lifestyle. We grew crops for food and feed, and cattle, sheep and horses roamed these beautiful hills.

You all moved in, divided up the land, and built unpermitted houses and unsafe septic systems. You bought land in the spring and early summer, when the creeks and springs were running high, and then didn't know what to do when the water ran out. And when the rains came in the fall, and your poorly-made houses leaked like sieves, you weren't all "love and light" then, now were you? And of course, you ALL ran out of firewood, and wanted us to help you. *Sighs* I miss the wild, open land.....

Anna: *jumps in, addressing Green Summer:* Aha! So you weren't such a perfect addition to this community, either, were you, Mr. Hippier-than-thou!

Green: We may not have known **EVERYTHING** we needed to know...

Jeff: ...roads that fell into the creeks...building on sliding hills....

Green: ...but we worked our butts off...

Jeff: What? None of you wanted to work—you just wanted to kumbaya in the woods with your drum circles....

Green: *glaring at Jeff* : we just didn't want to do **YOUR** work!

Moderator: *(breaking in):* **OK, ok, this is great!** *Everyone looks at him in disbelief* **No, really...see, we're getting all of these issues out in the open where we can discuss them!** *Everyone retreats into their chairs, looking disgruntled and rolling eyes.*

Ms. Reed, we haven't heard from you. Would you like to address the panel and audience?

Julia: My name is Julia, and my family has lived here for as far back as our elders remember. *Addressing Jeff:* So you miss the wild, open land? You were the ones who carved it up first. *Smiling* : We didn't believe anyone owned the land. We were its caretakers, its guardians. We changed with each season, and the only noise we heard was that of the birds and animals, wind and rain...until you came with your guns and hammering. You built houses and towns...and we had to move, again and again....

Jeff: now wait a minute, it wasn't all peace and harmony. There were several tribes around here and you all fought each other. We brought justice and you stopped fighting each other. But you didn't try to make us feel safe—we had to protect ourselves!

Julia: You brought violence, disease and disharmony into our world.

Anna, Green Summer, Jeff and Julia all jump up, and start talking loudly at each other.

Moderator: Wait, wait....**this isn't helping!** *He gets their attention, and they all reluctantly quiet down, though remain standing with mutinous looks on their faces.*

Moderator: You're focusing on all of the negatives. As we know from history, there are so many positive things that immigrant groups have brought to their new communities. Let's discuss those.

Green: *does a little centering ritual and takes a deep breath : I'll start. He turns to Anna*

Yes, I feel a little overwhelmed by so many strangers coming here...and some of them scare me, maybe offend me...but you're right, we do need help with all of this work. Smiles And I get a kick out of hearing off of these different languages in the stores. Gets warmed up And I heard an amazing music jam at one of the bars the other night—music I've never heard here before...and then there's the food! Glares at Jeff You can't deny we could use a little more diversity in the food around here! Jeff shrugs, agreeing So yes, I love that glimpse into other cultures, and those of you who do stay could add diversity to our kids' lives...we don't have much of that here, either. He smiles, and offers a hand to Anna, who shakes it, smiling back. Then Green Summer turns expectantly to Jeff

Jeff: *frowning, and shuffling a bit* **Ok, ok...I guess you guys weren't all bad. We might have been a *tiny bit* set in our ways. Some of us...not me...but some of us thought you'd brought a spark we'd been missing. Our schools got better, we had a lot more music and gatherings in town....though I'm glad you got over those drum circles....and the money you made from your "farming" kept the community going when timber and fishing were failing. So yeah, you did add something to the community. He turns to Julia, expectantly:**
So what about you? What did we add to your lives?

Julia has a deer in the headlights look on her face. She looks helplessly at the audience and then back at the others, and then laughs and raises her hand in an "a-ha" attitude and wags a finger at Jeff: **You're kidding, right?**

blackout