

dhli Dolores Huerta Labor Institute

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To Whom It May Concern:

From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks is an outstanding one-man-play written by and starring Ian Ruskin. Ian wonderfully depicts the immigrant narrative that is so relevant in our current political climate through the story of Harry Bridges coming to a new land and searching for the American dream. Ian not only tells this story of courage and heroism, but also of the character flaws and human failures that every human experiences. Ian's performance is magnetic and humorous as he presents the story of a man that undeservingly has largely been left out of American history books.

Ian's reincarnation of Harry Bridges provides an excellent educational vehicle to acquaint students with American labor history. By painting the story of a man, an immigrant, a rank-and-file worker, history can be brought alive in a way that students can easily and welcomingly digest. This form of education breaks from the traditional classroom lecture, and pulls the students into the story where we witness a regular human being change the course of history in what would become the most powerful economic and military country of the 20th century.

This play is especially impactful for community college student audiences as it depicts Harry Bridges not as a superhero or a specially gifted nor privileged individual. Instead, we learn of a man that simply stood by his convictions, valued the potential of every worker, and wanted to see them and their families live decent lives.

Most students know very little about the labor figures and events that shape our lives and the rights that have been won through the sacrifice of generations past. Through this play, students are presented a window into these sacrifices and heroism that built the labor movement and consequentially the strong middle class that America established. The impact of the play is not only effective because of the information it conveys, but also through the themes of immigration and working class struggle it employs. These two themes are especially important for community colleges in southern California and other geographical areas with high representations of immigrant, working class, students of color.

Educators will find *From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks* to be an efficient vehicle to open discussions about the history of class struggle for our students. The play is a multi-media production with 40 easy to run cues of archival footage, photographs, sound effects and rare labor songs that bring an added dimension to Ian's words. It is also helpful that Ian takes the time for questions and answers after the play is over. This is all supplemented by the Lesson Plans that the Harry Bridges Project has created. Faculty and students would greatly benefit by taking advantage of these free educational packages.

Because of its great merits, careful production, and resounding message of courage and compassion, the Dolores Huerta Labor Institute is proud to have planned three different performances across the Los Angeles Community College District by Ian Ruskin in the 2013-14 academic year. We find this to be useful in different disciplines including history, political science, sociology, English, philosophy and more. It is difficult to think of a more creative and enjoyable form for our students to learn about labor history and its heroes.

Sincerely,

Shigueru Tsuha, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Dolores Huerta Labor Institute
Los Angeles Community College District

