

EAST LOS ANGELES COLLEGE

Department of Social Sciences
African American Studies, Asian American Studies,
Economics, History, Political Science, Sociology

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Ian Ruskin as Harry Bridges

The pallid hagiographies of documentary film often leave students sensing that historical figures are other worldly and irrelevant to contemporary struggle. In welcome contrast, Ian Ruskin's mesmerizing live performance as labor leader Harry Bridges presents a man far removed from my students by time and culture, yet identifiable. While textbook lives are inevitably stultifying and bloodless, Ian reveals Harry's personal and professional entanglements in vibrant conversation as the man himself. After the play, several of my students said they wanted to go up and talk to Harry.

Many of my East Los Angeles College students had never seen live theater before watching Ian's play and they became fascinated with the dramatic process. Judging from comments later in the semester, this inspired students to expand their own investigations in labor history. They implied that the drama on stage helped them visualize the drama of real lives. From this one event they were able to better intuit the purpose of art and the value of History. Thankfully, it all seemed to translate into more animated, engaging essays.

As I'm writing up my syllabi with Ian's play in mind, I'm imagining the possibilities of live performance and re-evaluating the dramatic potential of my lectures. Our student body is constantly changing and while we often leap to technology to satisfy the need for pedagogical currency, revisiting ancient forms like great live drama can re-energize an often underestimated student body.

We hope to have Ian back for performances every semester.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael College".

Michael College
Professor of History
Chair, Social Sciences
East Los Angeles College