

Americans. He also points out many similarities between Asian and European immigrants, although this perspective unfortunately deemphasizes significant economic, legal/political, and social differences due to the racial discrimination and hostility directed against Asians. Daniels' discussion of the past three decades could have been more extensive. This period deserves more than an "epilogue" if for no other reason than it encompasses the coming of age of new native-born generations (Sansei and Yonsei among the Japanese) and the development of different patterns of family, community, and economic life. In addition, Daniels' discussion here only begins to touch upon the experiences of recent Chinese immigrants, the emergence of social and political activism, the current socioeconomic status of Chinese and Japanese Americans, and contemporary social problems and issues.

The preceding critical comments notwithstanding, *Asian America* is an impressive, landmark work. Daniels expresses the hope that his book will help scholars and others understand and appreciate the significance of the Asian experience in the U.S. for American history and society. I have no doubt this will happen.

—Russell Endo  
University of Colorado

**Diego Echevarria (Producer/Director), and Fernando Moreno (Associate Producer). *Los Sures*. The Cinema Guild, 1697 Broadway, Room 802, New York, NY 10019. Color, 16mm film/video, 58 minutes (1984). Rental: \$100. Purchase price: \$895, 16mm film; \$595, video. 212-246-5522.**

Perhaps one of the more perplexing, yet also intriguing aspects of Diego Echevarria's film, *Los Sures*, is the illusion that he creates of isolation and disconnection from the larger world that shapes and engulfs his subject—a Puerto Rican community in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, New York. The way Echevarria presents the *Los Sures* community gives one the sense that it sits alone and apart in a land of unknown origin. Yet it is located only a stone's throw away from one of the most affluent urban centers in the world. Not even the Hasidic Jews, who share the larger community with Puerto Ricans, African Americans and others are allowed to intrude into this filmic portrayal of a Puerto Rican community cut off in the midst of urban America.

Despite this Buñuel-like illusion of isolation and some of the problems I will mention, *Los Sures* holds up as an interesting film, worthy of our attention and use in the ethnic studies curriculum. The film's tone and point of view allow the filmmaker to get many important points across, but which might have been better served by the addition of a continuous

or interspersed narration throughout the film. With the exception of one brief narrative statement at the beginning of the film, all that we learn about this community and the lives of the people within it, comes from the words of the five individuals whose spoken and visual profiles serve as our lens into this urban reality (Tito, Marta, Cuso, Ana Maria, and Evelyn).

The first thing that comes to mind as we view this film is that we seem not to be inside the U.S. at all, but rather that we may well be inside a third world country. And, in many ways we are. The cinematic approach used conveys the same message that one gets from writers who use the theoretical construct of “internal colonialism” in their analyses of Puerto Rican and other ethnic barrios and ghettos in urban centers scattered throughout America. These analysts contend that these poor Puerto Rican, Chicano, African American, and Native American communities are indeed colonial enclaves within the legal boundaries of the United States. So the vision that one gets from *Los Sures* as a third world community and experience is actually not at all that far fetched.

For those already familiar with this kind of urban reality, it is an opportunity to take a deeper, more penetrating, and unalloyed look at those social and economic conditions that accompany poverty and oppression in America’s peripheral communities—a view and understanding that is rarely captured in the written texts of social scientific analyses filled with data, tables and charts. However, for the person who knows absolutely nothing about this kind of American reality, this film can produce a very negative experience, precisely because the director chose to present such a narrow and restricted vision. His documentary portrayal, often accurate and unsentimental, at other times seems to be manipulative of his subjects and sometimes results in unintended distortions. Nonetheless, there is a powerful texture here that comes from his strong visual images and auditory cues. The sights and sounds which make this film a palpable reality for the audience, also pack an artistic cinematic “wallop.”

Despite the power of the images presented, I still find the isolation and disconnection somewhat disturbing and potentially misleading. It is as if Echevarria purposely decided to cut all ties with the formal agencies of the “other” country. In point of fact, living in these kinds of communities is tantamount to being trapped in places that have been all but abandoned by the metropolis that surrounds them. The police are an occupying force, garbage is rarely collected, housing code violations result in death, and in many communities where burned out tenements become the playgrounds of the children, the only conclusion one could arrive at is that it really is another country. Analytically, however, the missing connections that fail to position the community within the larger socioeconomic environment make Echevarria’s vision a somewhat ecologically flawed one. But beyond these problems of an instructional nature, this film does manage to give the viewer insight into the bitter

struggles of survival of these five courageous individuals.

You learn about Cuso, the hard working, self-employed contractor, but you never know who he is working for. Who are the people paying him to renovate those houses? Because real estate is gold in New York, one should know which sector is responsible for funding the mining of these particular community properties. One never hears about the “gentrification” process nor of the ultimate threat of community dispersal and impending homelessness.

If you want to tell the story of these courageous individuals to the outside world, you must help the audience interpret the parables. For example, Tito, who sells stolen car parts to make loose change, tells us much about his struggle to survive in a language that most outsiders may not understand. His business sense is in the true spirit of American capitalism. He says, “you’ve got to move it, move fast, get your money and get out of there.” If this doesn’t sum up the activities and credo on Wall Street these days, I don’t know what does. While Tito steals cars and sells the parts, financiers across the East River buy huge conglomerates, break them up, and sell off their subsidiaries. Tito, without any explanation or analysis, simply comes across as a petty street criminal, a manchild who ends up doing time on Rikers Island. What I am suggesting here is that Echevarria squandered a wonderful opportunity to teach something about the links that tie poverty to racism, and racism to the socioeconomic structure in American life.

Similarly, he relies on the good works of the social worker, Evelyn, to let the audience know that there are good people in these neighborhoods. Evelyn, a college graduate who cares for her clients and her community, although somewhat burned-out professionally, continues to struggle to raise her children in her old neighborhood. This “Mother Teresa” image is quite admirable, but it fails to communicate larger questions about the welfare system, poverty, health care, and education.

While I was able to understand the importance of the intense religious practice of Anna Maria and its role in her struggle to overcome adversity, tragedy and pain, I wonder whether or not the casual uninformed observer would understand what spiritualism is all about and how it fits into other forms of religious expression.

Martha’s profile is very interesting. A welfare recipient with five children, three marriages behind her, and a limited education, Martha is, nevertheless, able to reinforce and sustain certain values and beliefs. Caring about her children, frustrated and humiliated because of her position in society, Martha in many ways fits the statistical profile of far too many Puerto Rican women—a woman of about twenty-five years of age, who has dropped out of school, is the head of a household, is unemployed, and has an average of two children to maintain. Nonetheless, as the head of the household, Martha, like many other Puerto Rican women in her position (33%), is keeping her family intact and struggling to maintain values, beliefs and traditions.

Despite some of the film's shortcomings, I will continue to use *Los Sures* in my courses, and would recommend it for other ethnic studies, sociology and anthropology courses. Careful interpretation, follow-up discussion, and supplementary readings are a must for this powerful, complex portrayal of a Puerto Rican community in transition.

—Jesse M. Vazquez  
Queens College, City University of New York

**Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed. *The Classic Slave Narratives*. (New York: New American Library, 1987) xviii, 518 pp., \$4.95 paper.**

At last here is a compact, inexpensive paperback that presents the major black autobiographies of the slave era. It is easy now for teachers of literature, history, or sociology to have their students reading the full texts of the classic slave narratives, instead of just reading bits and pieces of them in anthologies. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., provides an informative introduction to the volume, which consists of works by Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacobs. Gates notes that these texts “span nearly three-quarters of a century (1789-1861); the authors, two men and two women, include one African, one West Indian, and two African Americans, thereby helping us to understand the full range of the black experience in slavery.”

Most readers of African American literature are familiar with Frederick Douglass's 1845 *Narrative*, and they probably have his work in mind when they think about the slave narrative content and form. They recall Douglass's graphic descriptions of his wretched condition as a slave, his physical fight with the overseer, Mr. Covey, that marked the turning point in Douglass's life from a slave to a man, and his strong desire for freedom and eventual escape to the North, which allowed him to develop as a person despite the prejudice he encountered in the free states. Few people know, however, that Douglass's *Narrative* owes its existence to the first great slave autobiography published in 1789 in Great Britain and soon after in America. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* was a two-volume work that became the prototype for the genre that developed in the nineteenth century and culminated in the fine achievement by Douglass.

Equiano combined the spiritual autobiographical form with the secular personal writing exemplified by Benjamin Franklin, and added ideas of social protest current in the emerging humanitarian movements of the late eighteenth century. Following these structural patterns and thematic elements, Equiano wove a fascinating but disturbing tale of personal striving for freedom that was tied to the social, historical,