

# Teaching and Discussion Guide

**A. NAOMI PAIK**

## **BANS, WALLS, RAIDS, SANCTUARY**

**UNDERSTANDING  
U.S. IMMIGRATION FOR THE  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**



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### **About the Book**

Days after taking the White House, Donald Trump signed three executive orders—these authorized the Muslim Ban, the border wall, and ICE raids. These orders would define his administration’s approach toward noncitizens. An essential primer on how we got here, *Bans, Walls, Raids, Sanctuary* shows that such barriers to immigration are embedded in the very foundation of the United States. A. Naomi Paik reveals that the forty-fifth president’s xenophobic, racist, ableist, patriarchal ascendancy is no aberration, but the consequence of two centuries of U.S. political, economic, and social culture. She deftly demonstrates that attacks against migrants are tightly bound to assaults against women, people of color, workers, ill and disabled people, and queer and gender nonconforming people. Against this history of barriers and assaults, *Bans, Walls, Raids, Sanctuary* mounts a rallying cry for a broad-based, abolitionist sanctuary movement for all.

### **About this Guide**

In this guide, you’ll find a series of discussion questions that can help guide your reading of the book on your own or in groups, like a class, community organization, community read-in, and so on.

You can find additional resources, including an interactive timeline, animated map, and video discussions with the author at [www.naomipaik.com/bookresources/](http://www.naomipaik.com/bookresources/)

## Discussion Questions

### General

- How is anti-Black racism central to U.S. immigration history and policy?
- What is settler colonialism? How has the U.S. worked to destroy Indigenous peoples and replace them with a white settler society? Why is settler colonialism central to U.S. immigration history and policy? (See pages 6-9)
- What's the difference between a "good" immigrant versus a "bad" immigrant? What is the history of this difference? Why does this distinction not make sense? In other words, why should we not categorize immigrants as either "good" or "bad"?
- Trace the different ways immigration policy intersects with issues of work and labor. How does immigration relate to U.S. businesses' needs for workers and profit? How has the relation between immigration and labor issues changed over time? How has the U.S. deployed immigration law as a means of labor discipline and control?
- How have laws innovated against one group been deployed against other groups? For example, how have methods to exclude, deport, and detain Chinese immigrants been used against non-Chinese immigrants over time? For another example, how have methods used to exclude and deport Haitian migrants been used against Mexican and Central American migrants? The U.S. has shown its ability to shift and expand who gets targeted for exclusion and deportation. What does this mean for resistance and organizing?

### Introduction

- How has U.S. settler colonialism affected Indigenous people? How does it also affect non-Indigenous people of color? Why are gender and sexuality also central to settler colonialism? How does that affect women and queer, trans, and nonbinary people?
- The book focuses a lot on the United States' increasingly harsh and inhumane treatment of immigrants. But this is not the whole story. We also have historical examples of resistance and organizing that can guide work today. As you read through the book, mark moments where these historical riches wash onto the shore. What examples of community building and resistance stand out to you?

- Can you think of ways neoliberalism’s cultural project has affected your environment or shaped the ways that you see yourself and the world around you (see pages 9 and 16)? It could be around taxes, education, public transportation, health care, or other social areas, or it could be more individual. (For example, I feel guilty when I don’t work at least one day on the weekend and scold myself for being unproductive.)
- How do free trade agreements like NAFTA end up leading to more migration?
- How are neoliberal economic policies, like tax cuts, related to mass incarceration? How does criminalization work? Can you think of a specific criminalized action and chart out the process that made that offense a crime over time (like using false papers or crossing the border without authorization)? Why does criminalization benefit state power and capitalist growth?

## **Chapter 1: Bans**

- How can we trace the origins of U.S. immigration control to Chinese Exclusion? Once the U.S. started banning certain people from immigrating, what policies and infrastructures did it have to create? How have immigration bans worked through multiple categories--like race, gender, and class--from the very beginning?
- What is plenary power? Why is it important to understand this jargony word in order to understand U.S. immigration policy? (Looking to the Epilogue, how does plenary power connect immigrants and Indigenous people?)
- Why is it important to remember the “Tribal Twenties” when thinking through contemporary immigration issues?
- Why is anti-Muslim racism incoherent (and stupid)? Why does it still make sense to people?
- Map out the development of anti-Muslim racism over time. What kinds of examples have you seen and heard that draw on anti-Muslim racism?
- Why is it important to relate U.S. immigration policy to U.S. foreign policy? What are some examples where this relation becomes especially visible?
- How and why is the Supreme Court’s decision in *Trump v. Hawai’i* (2018) more dangerous and troubling than the “Muslim Ban”? Why is the Supreme Court’s repudiation of *Korematsu* so ironic?

## Chapter 2: Walls

- What are the different tactics and strategies the U.S. has used to control the movements of people across its borders over time?
- Track how the U.S. has increasingly criminalized migrants and immigrants for moving across the border over time. Identify the justification or rationale for each escalation.
- Why has border enforcement consistently failed to achieve its goal of controlling human movement across national borders? What alternatives to increased policing, criminalization, and blockades might be more effective (think creatively and expansively)?
- Trace the movement of U.S. borders over time from the Declaration of Independence through the present. How do these changes show the effects of U.S. settler colonialism and imperialism?
- How is border control connected to U.S. labor needs? For example, there had been no quotas or bans on Mexican migrants across the U.S.-Mexico for most of the country's history. Why is that the case?
  - How did Senator Coleman Blease's compromise offer a "solution" that balanced demands for cheap labor and for control over Mexican migrants?
- How was the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act both a liberal immigration law *and* a more restrictive one?
- Why is it important to look at border control policies that targeted Caribbean migrants? What innovative migrant control tactics did the U.S. devise in response to Caribbean migration?
- How are NAFTA and the "prevention through deterrence" strategy related? (See also the introduction)
- What was new about the "zero tolerance" border policy instated in April 2018? What was not new, but built on old foundations?
- The long history of border enforcement shows that border policing has not only failed entirely to prevent migrants and black market commodities from entering U.S. territory, but has also exacerbated problems of violence it purports to solve. What would a proposal that sought to "grasp things at the root" and grapple with root causes of migration look like? What are those root causes?
- How does border enforcement pose a threat not only to migrants and communities living in border areas, but to all people living in the United States? Relate this question, for example, to the use of CBP equipment (predator drones)

and agents to subdue protests against the police violence following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, among many others.

### **Chapter 3: Raids**

- What, again, is plenary power? How does the history of plenary power in federal court cases connect Indigenous and immigrant histories?
- How and why is immigrant detention not considered “imprisonment in legal sense”? Parse out the Supreme Court’s rationale in making this determination in *Wong Wing*.
- How did possessing the proper immigration documents come to outweigh all other factors for immigrants? Mark notable moments or turning points over time. What conditions lead to those turning points?
- How does the escalating criminalization of immigrants intersect with the criminalization of citizens? Examine the convergences that occur in the mid- to late-1980s under Reagan (IRCA, Anti-Drug Abuse Acts) and in the 1990s under Clinton.
- Examine the 1996 Illegal Immigration and Immigrant Responsibility Act.
  - Unpack the title of this law. How do the title keywords speak to the neoliberal ideologies at its foundation, like law and order, individualism, and small government? (See the Intro and page 9 for more on neoliberalism)
  - Looking back, why were Rahm Emmanuel’s strategic policy proposals for the Democratic Party really stupid?
  - Chart out IIRIRA’s elements that criminalize immigrants. How do many of the immigration “crises” we face today trace their roots to this law?
- Explain how the “felons not families” binary of the Obama Administration was not unimportant. Now explain how that binary understanding of immigrants nevertheless inflicted damage and harm on immigrant communities.

### **Chapter 4: Sanctuary**

- How did the rise of the modern state (rather than feudal fiefdoms) lead to the demise of sanctuary in the early modern period? How does sanctuary challenge the sovereignty of the modern nation-state? Why is it important to remember this history in understanding contemporary forms of sanctuary?
- How does the consistent reemergence of sanctuary practices shine light on the fiction of equality before the law and political liberalism?

- How did the U.S. sanctuary movement of the 1980s connect U.S. foreign policy and U.S. imperialism to immigration issues? What lessons can we learn from these connections for contemporary movement-building?
- How have practices of U.S. sanctuary movements during the 1980s and in the contemporary moment diverged from traditional practices of sanctuary, for example in medieval times?
- Take a generous or kind view of the New Sanctuary Movement and how it has provided sanctuary to immigrant communities. Then, take a more critical or harsh view of the NSM and examine how we can learn from these limits for immigrant justice.
- Abolition and sanctuary are two different concepts. How are they different? How do they overlap?
- What lessons do the history of resistance to the Fugitive Slave Acts and of Reconstruction give us for an abolitionist sanctuary movement today?
- Reflecting on the previous chapters, what are some examples of “reformist reforms” in immigration policy? If you could go back and change things, how might you reformulate these “reformist reforms” into “non-reformist reforms”?
- What would your own vision for a new society based on an abolitionist sanctuary look like?

## **Epilogue**

- The fact that the Trump regime has deployed such explicit and brutal forms of violence against immigrants and other vulnerable people has woken more people to the unjust systems and structures his regime relies on. How might organizers use this moment to bring more people, even those who are not ready to support all abolitionist principles, into social justice organizing?
- How might the fact that the United States is not the sole sovereign authority in this land affect organizing principles and strategies? Why and how should Indigenous sovereignty be essential to an abolitionist sanctuary? What is the responsibility of immigrants and immigrant justice organizers to Indigenous people and nations?

## **Additional Reading, Watching, Learning**

The following websites have collected fantastic sets of resources--readings, media, organizing guides, and more--for anyone interested in going deeper than *Bans, Walls, Raids, Sanctuary*.

### **For more on immigration history**

- The [#ImmigrationSyllabus](#) offers a robust reading list, organized by chronology and theme, on U.S. immigration history. It is the work of leading immigration historians and the Immigration and Ethnic History Society.
- This [#Microsyllabus on Immigration Enforcement and the U.S.-Mexico Border](#) offers a more selective set of readings on **border enforcement**. It was compiled by The Abusable Past and Radical History Review.
- This [bibliography](#) offers another selective reading list of resources on the history of **immigration detention** in the United States. Historian Carl Lindskoog compiled it.

### **For more on abolition**

- Abolition Journal created this [Study Group Guide](#) for anyone new to abolition. It's a fantastic resource for sharing and learning together, even if you're already familiar with abolition.

### **For more on sanctuary**

- This [Sanctuary Syllabus](#) brings together readings that respond to the questions, "why sanctuary," "who needs sanctuary," and "how do we organize in precarious times"? NYU Sanctuary and Public Books compiled it.

**For more resources, teaching tools, and readings, please visit**  
[www.naomipaik.com/bookresources](http://www.naomipaik.com/bookresources)