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“What We Bring: New Immigrant Gifts”

A Commemoration of 50 Years of Immigration Reform

BY TOM VAN BUREN

Over the past four years, City Lore, in partnership with the Center for Traditional Music and Dance, presented a series of programs to commemorate the passage of the 1965 Hart–Celler Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. For public sector folklorists and ethnomusicologists working over the past half century in the United States and New York State, in particular, the significance of the reform to US immigration policy cannot be overstated. The act was written to correct a century of discriminatory immigration policies and, over the subsequent half century, led to a significant diversification of many communities across New York State as well as across the United States. In the field of public sector folklore, it is well known that immigrants have often brought their cultural traditions with them, and many folklorists have taken the opportunity to expand and diversify cultural documentation, education, and public programs that have featured such immigrant artists.

The three-year commemoration of the immigration reform was, in essence, an appreciation of what we had thought was a settled matter: that discrimination based on country of origin, race, or gender should end.¹ That was before the rise of anti-immigrant politics, which has accelerated since 2001. The presidential election of 2016 put this issue into stark relief, as the words of welcome on the Statue of Liberty have been eclipsed by draconian border protection and immigration and refugee policies involving denial of refugees, family separations, and now mass incarcerations in for-profit detention centers. Principles of human rights and

sympathy for refugees have given way to the courting of dictators and the denial of climate change, which is a major driver of migration. Nevertheless, folklorists can and do continue to celebrate immigration as a rejuvenating force in American society, recognizing that the skills, knowledge, and ambition of recent immigrants continue to offer great gifts toward intercultural dialogue and the appreciation of diverse voices in American society. New immigrants affirm, in many ways, the experience and legacy of older immigrants, whom many of us revere as ancestors and teachers.

The Exhibition—“What We Bring: New Immigrant Gifts”

A celebration of the immigrants’ gifts to American society was the spirit in which City Lore organized the traveling exhibition of portraits and stories of recent immigrant artists titled, “*What We Bring: New Immigrant Gifts*.” The exhibition highlights the contemporary value of immigrant contributions to wider society. In the popular narrative of immigration, the driving force of immigrant contributions is usually framed in economic terms, symbolized by labor power, innovation, and entrepreneurial ambition. Folklorists and ethnomusicologists have essentially argued that cultural knowledge and practice, coupled with education, both formal and informal, applied to community-building efforts, are positive contributions as well.

To illustrate this point, 33 individuals from 25 countries of origin were selected through a consensus of the curators and consulting colleagues to represent a number

of the largest new immigrant communities in New York City,² with a range of fields of expertise and practice, including performance of music, dance, language, and poetry, as well as craft and food traditions. In addition to Steve Zeitlin and me acting as co-curators, Elena Martínez did major work on the project: identifying and interviewing potential artists, organizing public programs, and administrative work in all phases of the project.

All of the featured artists were interviewed and invited to suggest objects that they brought with them when traveling from their country of origin to their new homes in the United States. These objects were displayed to illustrate both a physical aspect of the artists’ stories and a metaphorical aspect representing a wider theme of the artists’ contributions to culture and community development. Portraits of the artists were made by photographer Tom Pich, who has worked extensively documenting recipients of the National Heritage Fellowship program of the National Endowment for the Arts. Each artist was represented with his or her object, and the ensuing exhibition featured the photo portraits, displays of the objects themselves, and text panels with a distillation of the interviews, within the design concept of an immigration screening area, complete with an airport security gate. The artists’ statements discussed their cultural backgrounds, an aspect of their journeys through immigration, and how they developed their work in performance, documentation, teaching, or community organizing in the new context of life in America.

Each artist offers a perspective on the dynamics of the immigrant experience, both in terms of their individual migration path, as well as the manner in which their cultural identity is expressed through the process of immigration and settlement. These examples illustrate myriad roles of individual agency in the migration of cultural traditions and in their continued development in immigrant communities. On one end of that range are traditional master artists, strongly rooted in one culture, who bring their practices and teach them to others, usually of the same cultural community. There are others whose life experience is one of confronting and transcending physical, social, professional, and national barriers, but who have succeeded and are making new lives in the United States. And, there are some whose national origins and personal circumstances have enabled or required a reinvention of

their personal roles and identities, and even the very art forms with which they are associated.

Of the 33 project participants, four that I nominated are presented below. I had collaborated with three of them since the late 1990s, as a producer of performance and educational programs for the Center for Traditional Music and Dance. With the “*What We Bring*” project, I was able to focus on their personal narratives of immigration and to explore deeper themes of how music and performance play a role in their self-conception and negotiation of a cultural life as immigrants. Their biographies and their statements accompanying their portraits in the exhibit follow:

Leonardo Ivan Dominguez

A folk researcher, musician, dancer, and scholar, Ivan has worked for more than

four decades in the field of Dominican folk culture. He was born and grew up in a working class neighborhood of Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. He was raised by his Haitian grandmother, who inspired him to acquire a deep knowledge of folk religion, music, and dance. He also learned to play various traditional Dominican drumming styles from elder musicians in his neighborhood.

In the early 1970s, while attending the *Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo*, Ivan joined the university folk dance troupe as a drummer, and traveled

throughout the country to study local traditions and give regional performances. During that time, he also studied academically with Dominican scholars of folklore, music, and dance, including Isabel Aretz, Edna Garrido, Fradique Lizardo, Héctor Díaz-Polanco, Luis Felipe Ramón, and Dagoberto Tejeda, and visiting scholars June Rosenberg and Ralph Boggs. Later, he joined *Convite*, a groundbreaking performance ensemble of *La Nueva Canción* (“New Song”) movement of Latin American musical activism, through which he continued to tour and study regional folk music as a vehicle for cultural organizing and development.

Weathering waves of political repression, endemic to 20th-century Dominican history, Ivan went to work for the city of Santo Domingo in a division that oversaw public markets and cultural events. In 1995, he encountered increasing problems with civic corruption in his work and decided to emigrate, joining family members in New York City, where he taught science, math, and global studies in a bilingual program for the public schools.

In 1996, he began working for *Alianza Dominicana*, a social service organization in Washington Heights, where he founded the *Conjunto Folklórico* education program to teach Dominican folk culture, music, and dance to young people of the Dominican community.³ From 2000 to 2010, he produced 10 annual festivals of Dominican culture with the students of the *Conjunto Folklórico* at Hostos Community College in the Bronx. In 2006, he was recognized by the Cultural Ministry of the Dominican Republic for his long career as a folklorist and researcher and for his contributions to the dissemination of Dominican folklore in the United States. The following statement from his interview accompanied his portrait in the *What We Bring* project:

I used to play bongos with the old ones. The group was called *Los Soneros de Borojol*, [after] the neighborhood where I grew up in Santo Domingo, close to the port. I was a founding member of the *Ballet Folklórico* of the *Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo*. In 1973, I



Ivan Dominguez with *balsié* drum. All photos by Tom Pich Photography/NYC.

was invited to be part of a group called *Convite*, with the most versatile guitar player Luis Díaz, and the poet José Rodríguez, who wrote the most beautiful songs. In *Convite*, I played the *balsié*. It is a drum similar to the *tambora*, but with only one skin. The *balsié* is used for the *pri-pri*, a rhythm from Villa Mella. It's also sacred and is used in the *salves* and the rite of the *Espiritu Santo*, to the north of Santo Domingo.

Convite was more than a music ensemble. It was a research project. "*Convite*" was the name for a collective labor party. This is what we did, collective work. We were brothers and sisters with a passion for Dominican culture and folklore, and for a new life in the Dominican Republic. During the time of the President Balaguer [1966–1978], there was great repression. They were killing young people. We were jailed more than 10 times to try to stop us from performing because of the message of our lyrics.

From 1990 to 1994, I was the director of all the public markets in the city of Santo Domingo. We tried to have more efficiency, but some people were looking for money. They told me I could not be part of the team, because I didn't use the *batea*—a sink that you can move from place to place. They said, "I didn't wash." It's a metaphor that means I did not take money and I did not allow anyone else to take money. So, I resigned and decided to come to the United States. My whole family was already here. (Dominguez 2017)

Sidiki Conde

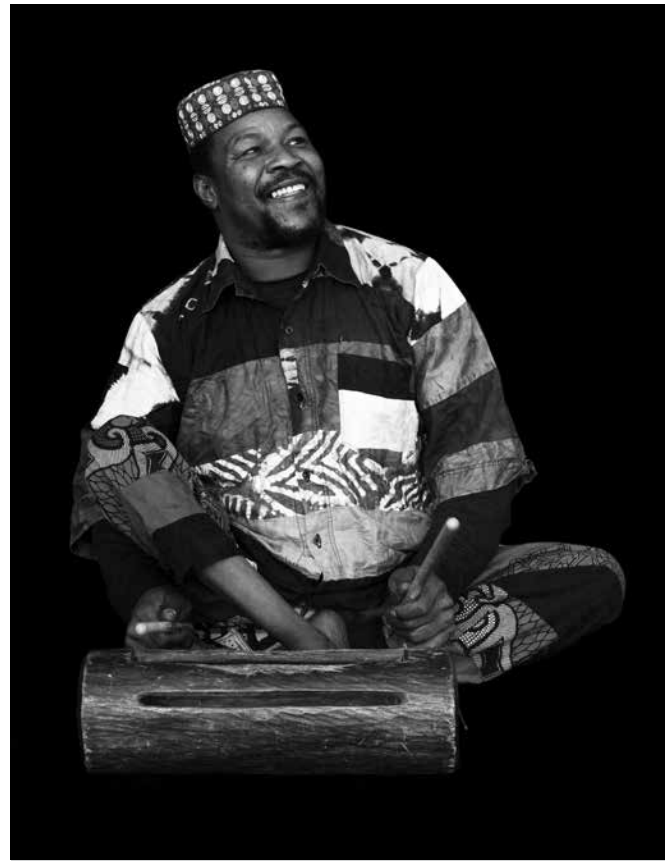
Sidiki Conde is a dancer, drummer, and singer from Guinea, West Africa, who, despite losing the use of his legs from polio at the age of 14, became an accomplished dancer, musician, and choreographer. When he was stricken with the disease, his family sent him from the capital city of Conakry to live with his blind uncle in the remote village of Mansalia in southern Guinea. His family was following local custom that considered disability to be an ill omen and mark of shame, to be hidden or banished. Despite this misfortune, he persuaded his uncle, an accomplished drummer and singer, to teach him the *djembe* drum and a wide repertoire of rhythms and songs. He was drawn to dance, however, and taught himself to dance

on his hands. He and his uncle formed an ensemble and gained local renown.

Sidiki was recruited by the leader of a regional dance company and eventually found his way to national attention in the capital of Conakry, where in 1986, he founded *Message d'Espoir* (Message of Hope), a music and dance ensemble with other artists with disabilities. In 1987, Mohamed Kemoko Sano, a co-director of the national dance company, *Les Ballets Africains*, recruited Sidiki and soon promoted him to the role of rehearsal master for his second ensemble, *Les Merveilles de Guinée*. During this

time, he also worked in the field of disability rights with the National Association of the Republic of Guinea for the Handicapped. After a tour of the United States with *Les Merveilles de Guinée* in 1998,⁴ Sidiki settled in New York, where he founded his own dance company, Tokounou, and began working extensively with programs for people with disabilities in New York, but also nationally with programs for arts as well as athletics. In 2007, the National Endowment for the Arts named him a National Heritage Fellow, the highest national honor for traditional artists.⁵ In his exhibition statement, he says:

All my education was in traditional music and dance. I lost the use of my legs when I was 14. Because of my disability, my father sent me to his village, Mansalia, near the city of Kankan. One day, there was a big dance festival in the town that inspired me and opened my mind. I forgot my pain and was full of happiness. One day, my uncle Nam Famoroko asked me what I wanted to do. He was blind but played the *djembe* so well. He played and I danced on my hands,



Sidiki Conde with *krin* log drum.

beating the rhythm on the ground. He taught me how to play the drum. We played for the people, and they gave us rice and money, and so I came into my job. We formed a group to play for baby-naming ceremonies and festivals.

And then someone from the city of Kankan came to see us play and invited me to join the *Orchestre National de Kankan*. I was with them for five years, and then we performed at the national festival in Conakry. So, that is how I traveled, group by group, all the way to the United States. I met Kemoko Sano and joined *Les Merveilles de Guinée*. He was my teacher about art and dance, and he gave me hope. First, we toured in Guinea, and after that, we went to Mali. Then, we had a chance in 1998 to come to New York City to perform at Lincoln Center.

Kemoko Sano's tribe used the *krin*. They transmit messages like the telephone. When I first saw this, I asked him how they played it, and he explained it to me. Before *Les Ballets Africains* would perform, they would use the *krin*. He gave it to me. Every time I play, I think of Mr. Sano. (Conde 2017)

Paula Sánchez-Kucukozer

Paula Sánchez-Kucukozer is a Mexican educator and teaching artist based in New York City. She was born in Guadalajara. Her father was a pianist and organist, who gave her early training in music. However, it was only several years after coming to New York that she encountered her first *Son Jarocho fandango*, a celebration of the music and dance of the Mexican eastern coastal state of Veracruz. The music, played on various sizes of *jarana*, a four-stringed, lute-like instrument, and sometimes the harp, accompanies spirited improvised song and call-and-response choruses, with percussive footwork of the *zapateado*, danced on a raised wooden platform, or *taríma*. Paula and her husband are founding members of the *Jarocho* ensemble, *Son Pecadores* (from “*son pecado*,” or “music of sinners,” a reference to the marginality of a music often banned by the Catholic Church and civil authorities in past centuries). Paula



Paula Sánchez with *calaveras* folk skull.

is a member of the *Encuentro de Soneros en New York*, a collective that creates local community events and organizes travels to Mexico to research and learn more about cultural traditions of Veracruz. She also collaborates with a social media-based network, SonJarocho.MX, to promote and educate about *son jarocho*, to bring master *soneros* from Mexico to perform and teach, and to foster the exchange of knowledge between New York and Mexico. Her exhibition statement reads:

I come from Guadalajara, Jalisco, in Mexico. I met my husband there while I was in college, and he was studying for a Master's degree. We got married and decided that, to further our education and professional opportunities, we had to come to New York. His family was already here, and he had a network of friends. Before that, I never entertained the idea of coming to the United States. I studied for a Master's in Language Education at NYU, and after the program, I started teaching, because that was what I did in Mexico. I taught Spanish as a second language.

When I came here, I got a feeling of nostalgia for my country, and I wanted to learn more. I joined the *Ballet Folklórico Mexicano de Nueva York*, and then Calpulli Mexican Dance Company, and I attended my first *fandango*. That is when I started getting involved with *son jarocho*. From that, I learned that the purpose of the dance in *son jarocho* is percussion. I had to relearn everything. It's hard at the beginning for someone with a dance background to make that step.

I am very attached to traditional folk crafts. That is something I brought with me. I have a huge collection of masks and *calaveras* from different states of Mexico. People who

visit my house think it is Halloween all year long. The crafts tell wonderful stories about the people who made them, but also about their culture. In Mexico, they are very nationalistic about certain traditions. They might say that *son jarocho* is purely from Veracruz, but really it has roots from Africa and Spain and the Middle East. It's the same with any object I have. It gives me a sense of belonging not only to Mexico, but to the whole world. (Sánchez-Kucukozer 2017)

DJ Rekha Malhotra

DJ Rekha Malhotra pioneered the merger of *bhangra* and Bollywood sounds with contemporary electronic dance music. *Bhangra* has become an international culture in nightclubs, as well as on the Internet. This modern South Asian intercultural expression is based in the music of traditional rural farmers' drumming and dance in agricultural celebrations in the Indian state of Punjab. It blends rhythms and collective dance from this celebration with modern electronic DJ dance music. Rekha was the first of the four artists represented here to immigrate to the United States, arriving as a child with her family from England in 1980. Rekha grew up in the multicultural and interracial milieu of Long Island and Queens, New York. In 1997, at the invitation of the Sounds of Brazil music club in Tribeca, Manhattan, she initiated a series of DJ dance events, titled *Basement Bhangra™* that became a landmark in New York City's South Asian cultural life for 20 years. She was also cofounder of a series at another venue named *Mutiny Club Nights*.⁶ At the 10th year of this activity, she released an album, *DJ Rekha Presents Basement Bhangra* on the E1 Music label. In a review of this album at its release event, she was named “Ambassador of *Bhangra*” in the *New York Times* (Ryzik 2007). In addition, she created sound remixes for innovative performing artists, including Meredith Monk and Priyanka Chopra. Rekha has received numerous community awards and in 2009, was inducted into City Lore's New York City Peoples' Hall of Fame. She has curated events for the New York City parks-based concert series, Celebrate Brooklyn and Central Park Summer Stage and has performed



DJ Rekha Malhotra with a vinyl LP that represents her life as a DJ.

at the White House for President Obama, as well as internationally. DJ Rekha was a Grand Marshal of the 9th Annual NYC Dance Parade in 2015. In January 2017, she was one of the official DJs for the historic Women's March on Washington. Her exhibition statement reads:

My parents were born pre-Partition in what is now Pakistan and grew up in New Delhi, India. They moved from India to London where I was born. I was just shy of five when we arrived in the United States, first living in Bushwick. Drawn to the emerging Indian community, we moved to Flushing, Queens, and then to Long Island. I am now based and have a lot of connections in Queens, including having graduated from Queens College.

Growing up in the 1980s, in the predominantly African American suburban neighborhood of Westbury, I was fortunate to experience the birth of hip-hop. When I was fifteen, my mom visited

family in London and brought me back a cassette tape by a Punjabi singer, Malkit Singh. A few years later, I heard that same voice on a remix track spliced with different hip-hop and reggae elements by a Birmingham, UK-based DJ/producer, Bally Sagoo. It blew my mind and sparked me to find a way to engage with the music.

In the early 1990s, several DJ crews, including my cousins and me, formed in the South Asian community. The core of our sound was music sung in Punjabi, but produced with a *bhangra* and contemporary Jamaican dance hall and hip-hop aesthetic, that would come to be known as *UK Bhangra*. It synthesized genres I loved but that were not embraced by others in the emerging South

Asian club scene. They were read as too black and too low class. This resistance prompted me to start the monthly "Basement Bhangra" dance night in 1997. I devoted my love of hip-hop and *bhangra* music to create a dance space infused with activism and politics. This 20-year run included lecturing about the music, recording an album, touring, and producing remixes. (Malhotra 2017)

What We Learn

These four stories all share the experiences of musical migration, either as a direct importation with the immigrant, such as in the examples of Ivan Dominguez and Sidiki Conde, or in the experiences of Paula Sanchez and DJ Rekha, who essentially reinvented themselves and helped to create new transnational musical cultures, which are built solidly on music that has itself also migrated. Indeed, all four musical cultures have become, to varying degrees, transnational cultures in their own right.

Dominican popular music, which is based on folk rhythms and forms (the best known of which is *merengue*), has a long transnational history. The first commercial recordings in the genre were made in New York in the 1920s, because recording technology was not available in the Dominican Republic. Since that time, but especially since 1965, the Dominican community has grown continuously to its current position as the second largest immigrant community in New York City (held since the late 1990s). Second- and third-generation Dominicans often had little or no direct experience with the roots of their culture. To address this problem, Ivan drew upon his research: "I put together a model in which the kids were able to see some photos, videos, and sound recordings from my collection. I tried to recreate the (rural) environment and teach them everything, and they were able to understand" (Dominguez 2017). Ivan's contribution to Dominican culture in New York City has been to teach about the regional complexity and diversity of his students' homeland and to create for them a model for a transnational practice of their rural culture.

The music and dance of Guinea and the larger Mandinka cultural world has been a major influence internationally, and certainly in New York. During the 1990s, the veterans and castaways from numerous performance troupes, including *Les Ballets Africains* and *Les Merveilles de Guinée* went on to teach *djembe* drumming and Guinean dance. In addition, a significant group of these and other musicians from Mali, Guinea, Gambia, and Senegal have participated in cross-cultural collaborative ensembles, finding common ground with diverse genres such as jazz, Latin music, and even Appalachian folk music. Sidiki's role as rehearsal master in *Les Merveilles* empowered him as a keeper of the repertoire, composer, and choreographer. Yet, as a person who has heroically overcome his physical disability to excel in his artistic practice, he has powerfully demonstrated how all of us need to work as hard to overcome our own mental and, especially, cultural barriers.

Reflecting on his experience of overcoming disability, he notes the shift of attitude that he shares with others: “Don’t think too much about your disability. Think about what you can do for society. Show what you can do about society, and be grateful for this life. Enjoy yourself. Disability, yes, you can have it, but don’t let it block your life” (Conde 2017). That Sidiki is the only representative of the Mandinka African musical tradition in the United States to have been honored with the National Heritage Fellowship is a powerful testament to his abilities.

The *Son Jarocho* community of New York has taken a genre of Mexican music and dance, which embodied the confluence of Spanish, African, and Arabic cultures on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico since colonial times, and reinvented it as a contemporary transnational and intercultural medium for virtual community placemaking. Members of that community—including *Veracruzēños*, other Mexicans such as Paula Sánchez, North Americans, and persons of other national origins who are interested in *Son Jarocho*—are connected through social media and are adapting this performance genre to a transnational setting. Paula has written, “The challenges of recreating a tradition in a new context offer opportunities to rethink these traditions and adapt them to new needs” (Sánchez-Kucucozer 2016). The New York *Son Jarocho* community congregates in a wide range of public spaces to create a highly participatory experience of the *fandango*. Paula Sánchez’ role is one of participant–organizer and advocate. Her training as a language teacher places her comfortably in the role of translator, moderator, and organizer. Her enthusiasm for the spirit of the *jarana* strumming, improvisatory lyrics, and *zapateado* percussive dance inspires others and helps open the way for this collective art form to thrive in New York City.

While *bhangra* has been known as an international culture of nightclubs, as well as on the Internet in the UK, its ascendancy in New York is due in no small part to DJ Rekha, whose unique contribution

has been to meld it for the first time with North American DJ culture of hip-hop and contemporary electronic dance music. She has also been uniquely gifted at making the music accessible across cultures and to academia and the mainstream media. In her self-described role as “explainer,” she has not only created event-based environments, which are movable meeting grounds for a wide and dynamic community, but also has worked tirelessly to cross the boundaries between North American, South Asian, and European cultures through this music. As she stated: “The work I’ve done is part of a larger movement for visibility and dissemination of South Asian culture. “Basement *Bhangra*” has been instrumental in that, but there has also been an emergence of *bhangra* dance groups at universities and [dance] competitions, which I think are really important. South Asians do have more visibility in broader cultural communities. While I think that is great, there is still work to be done in a broader understanding among folks of color” (Malhotra 2017).

Conclusion

The “*What We Bring: New Immigrant Gifts*” exhibition seeks to articulate some of the voices and cultural experiences represented in modern immigration to the United States. Created under the auspices of an organization devoted to urban cultural diversity, the exhibition represents artists from various disciplines, including many devoted to teaching, organizing, and advocacy. In this paper, I have focused on four who are performing, producing, or teaching musicians. Perhaps, more than with other media, music has provided an exceptionally effective medium for both intra- and cross-cultural communication, especially in the urban immigrant context. Each of these four artists’ musical practice has not only helped to strengthen their own community, but also affirmed the spirit and resolve of persons of various cultures to cherish their own traditions and to better understand one another. Each of these cultural leaders has also engaged in collaborative efforts with

folklorists and ethnomusicologists, who have documented their art and work, produced public concerts and festivals showcasing new immigrant talent, sought funding to support their work, and in one case, helped to secure visas to maintain legal residency until more permanent arrangements could be made. While the research and documentation of music in settings of their origin will go on around the globe, the constructive interaction of immigrant artists and practitioners of public sector folklore and applied ethnomusicology is a vital partnership, in the effort to affirm the value to all of immigration as a force for better intercultural understanding. ▼

NOTES

1. The Hart–Celler Act did not include a ban on discrimination based on religion.
2. In order of population size in New York City, the communities with the largest foreign populations are: the Dominican Republic, Mexico, China, Jamaica, Guyana, Ecuador, Colombia, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago, India, Russia, Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, and the West African nations (see <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics>; Lobo and Salvo [2013]).
3. It was during this period that Ivan worked with me as a key advisor to the *Quisqueya en el Hudson* festival project of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance, which I directed from 1996 to 1999, and as a co-editor and compiler of an audio album of same title, featuring Dominican music in New York for Smithsonian Folkways Recordings (Dominguez and Van Buren 2004).
4. Members of *Les Merveilles de Guinée* were already in residence in New York by 1996, when they performed on tour with *Les Ballets Africains*. I produced three major annual concerts entitled, *Badenya* (Mandinka for “Heritage”) of African music and dance, featuring them for the Center for Traditional Music and Dance, with Sidiki participating for the first time in 1998.

Immigration Law and Background: “A Nation of Immigrants”

The current anti-immigrant politics in the United States represents a recurring theme in American history. The question of who is an American has dominated the political debate for almost two centuries.^a From the founding of the republic, the United States actively encouraged Northern European immigration, but also welcomed and recruited labor migration from other regions to feed the needs of territorial expansion, industry, and agriculture. The past 140 years have seen a legal struggle between the exclusion of groups on racist and prejudicial grounds and efforts to reform and counter such restrictions. For the first century after the Declaration of Independence, immigration to the United States was largely unrestricted, although fears of immigrants dated back to before the founding of the republic, famously illustrated by Benjamin Franklin’s warnings about German immigrants’ perceived refusal to learn English or to assimilate with the prevailing Anglo-Saxon culture in the then Pennsylvania colony (Franklin 1993 [1753], 336).

At the conclusion of the American Civil War in 1865, the 14th Amendment to the Constitution established citizenship as a right to anyone born in the United States. However, socially and economically, US political and economic power was based on racial terms that underscored European colonization of the Americas. In the latter part of the 19th century, the United States cemented its control across the continent to the Pacific coast, developing railroads and agriculture in the West. This would not have been possible without Chinese labor, but resentment of the Chinese led to the first openly racist, anti-immigrant movement and the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The act denied citizenship to any Chinese person and barred Chinese women from entering the United States at all, thus preventing the establishment of viable Chinese communities.

In the Midwest and on the East Coast, between the 1890s and the outbreak of the First World War, waves of new immigrants arrived from Eastern and Southern Europe and Russia, pushed by poverty, and social and political unrest, and drawn by the thirst of US industry for cheap labor. In the early 1900s, at the peak of US immigration proportional to population, the notion of the “melting pot” entered popular discourse.^b This term, which persisted well into the 1960s, implied an expectation that in the United States, immigrant cultures would and should gradually meld into a dominant Anglo-American culture.

However, as demographic shifts within the US population became more visible, leaders of industry, government, and the press reacted to the high rate of immigration. Fear, fueled by the rise of the Progressive movement, the growing power of organized labor, and the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, led to a backlash. Even as the United States was entering the First World War, the 1917 immigration law, also known as the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, excluded broad classes of persons deemed undesirable for political, health, or moral reasons, as well as any person from Asia other than the US colony of the Philippines, and for diplomatic reasons, Japan.^c Following the war, new efforts were made to restrict immigration, culminating in the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, which set hard quotas based on the census records of 1910, ensuring that for the next three decades, 70 percent of immigration to the United States was restricted to persons from England, Germany, and Ireland.

During the Second World War, and especially during the Cold War, America’s widening global role as self-proclaimed defender of liberty and equality for all clashed increasingly with its discriminatory immigration policies. As the United States entered into an alliance with the nationalist Chinese government against Japan, the Chinese Exclusion Act was finally rescinded in 1942. After the war, there were increasing efforts to reform immigration laws. In the face of postwar refugee resettlement, and as the Cold War intensified, President Harry Truman pressed for an end to the discriminatory quotas. However, isolationist forces regained control of the US Congress, and in 1952, they passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act, which established most of the administrative framework and categories of current immigration law, but which maintained the quota system of the 1920s.

It would take another decade to turn the tide in favor of a more pluralistic, international, and less discriminatory vision. In 1958, then Senator John F. Kennedy released *A Nation of Immigrants*, one of his two books, that set out a more pluralistic vision of the country he sought to lead. Yet, it was not until the mid-1960s that enough political momentum had built up for true reform. In August 1965, following the passage of the Civil Rights Act the previous summer, Congressional Representatives Philip Hart (Michigan) and Emanuel Celler (Brooklyn, NY) successfully introduced a bill to end discrimination in immigration quotas. In a symbolic ceremony at the base of the Statue of Liberty on October 3rd of that year, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law what became known as the Hart–Celler Act. The provisions of the Act were to be phased in over a three-year period, coming into full effect by June 30, 1968. The Act itself was a 10-page amendment to the 1952 Immigration and Naturalization Law. It struck down legal discrimination against immigrants based on race, gender, national origin, and place of residence. An equal number of immigrant visas were authorized for every country of origin. There were obvious problems with setting the same quota for immigrants from small and large nations, effectively making it more difficult for immigrants from more populous nations to apply, but the Act did increase substantially the diversity of who could enter the United States legally and apply for citizenship in the first place.

Notes

^aThe background on immigration law in the United States is deeply informed by the writing of immigration law scholar Bill Ong Hing (2012), who framed his analysis around the question of the legislation of national identity.

^bThe term “melting pot” has been used in the United States since the early 19th century, but its emergence in popular discourse followed the 1909 theater production in Washington, DC, of a play by English author Israel Zangwill, celebrating the need or desire of immigrants to abandon their former cultures and embrace that of their new home. The enthusiasm expressed by President Theodore Roosevelt, who attended the opening night, brought wide attention to the play and the sentiments expressed in it (Rochelson 2018).

^cImmigration Act (*An act to regulate the immigration of aliens to, and the residence of aliens in, the United States*) H.R. 10384; Pub.L. 301; 39 Stat. 874. 64th Congress; February 5th, 1917.

5. Sidiki is the subject of a 2013 documentary film directed by Alan Govenar, titled *You Don't Need Feet To Dance* (Conde 2013).
6. In an interview, Rekha credited the initiation of her *Bhangra* DJ career to an invitation to stage a DJ music set at a major concert of contemporary Indian dance at Hunter College in 1997, organized by the Center for Traditional Music and Dance and titled, "Dance India," a part of the South Asian Community Cultural Initiative.

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Internet Resources

Sidiki Conde:

https://www.facebook.com/pg/Sidiki-CondeTokounou-Dance-Company-126188474000-community/?ref=page_internal
<http://www.youdontneedfeetodance.com/>

Leonardo Ivan Dominguez:

<https://www.facebook.com/ADCC530>

DJ Rekha Malhotra:

<https://www.facebook.com/DJRekha/>
<https://www.basementbhanga.com/>
 "Bhangra and Beyond" podcast:
<https://www.btrtoday.com/listen/bhangraandbeyond/>

Paula Sánchez Kukukozer:

<https://www.sonpecadores.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/sonjarocho mx/>

City Lore:

<http://citylore.org>

Tom van Buren, PhD, is an ethnomusicologist specializing in migration studies and transnational culture. He has worked in public sector folk arts programs in New York City and Westchester County since 1994, producing concerts, festivals, and documentary recordings. Since 2009, he has served on New York Folklore's Board of Directors. Photo by Kyla van Buren.



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