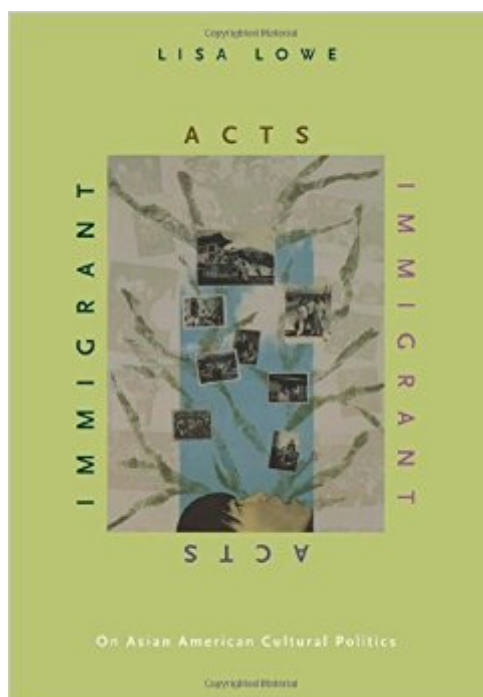


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# Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics



## Synopsis

In *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe argues that understanding Asian immigration to the United States is fundamental to understanding the racialized economic and political foundations of the nation. Lowe discusses the contradictions whereby Asians have been included in the workplaces and markets of the U.S. nation-state, yet, through exclusion laws and bars from citizenship, have been distanced from the terrain of national culture. Lowe argues that a national memory haunts the conception of Asian American, persisting beyond the repeal of individual laws and sustained by U.S. wars in Asia, in which the Asian is seen as the perpetual immigrant, as the "foreigner-within." In *Immigrant Acts*, she argues that rather than attesting to the absorption of cultural difference into the universality of the national political sphere, the Asian immigrant "at odds with the cultural, racial, and linguistic forms of the nation" displaces the temporality of assimilation. Distance from the American national culture constitutes Asian American culture as an alternative site that produces cultural forms materially and aesthetically in contradiction with the institutions of citizenship and national identity. Rather than a sign of a "failed" integration of Asians into the American cultural sphere, this critique preserves and opens up different possibilities for political practice and coalition across racial and national borders. In this uniquely interdisciplinary study, Lowe examines the historical, political, cultural, and aesthetic meanings of immigration in relation to Asian Americans. Extending the range of Asian American critique, *Immigrant Acts* will interest readers concerned with race and ethnicity in the United States, American cultures, immigration, and transnationalism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

With so many negative reviews of this book, I feel the need to give some context. About the difficulty of the language: first, those reading this text should note that you will be entering mid-stream into an academic conversation already taking place between marxism, poststructuralism, feminism and Asian American cultural politics (among other strands of thought). Academic language at its best helps us conceptualize in new ways, and like any language, we need to learn it. Second, as readers we should also be careful to not project what might be our own anti-intellectualism onto the texts we read. There are reasons why this book is a classic Asian American Studies text. Stick with it, and familiarize yourself with the different theoretical frameworks that are woven into it. There are many theoretical and practical insights to be gained from Lowe's work that are relevant to thinking about Asian American cultural politics.

Personally, I feel that Professor Lowe is very insightful about theory, the Asian American experience, colonialism, identity politics, cultural criticism. etc. I learned a lot from her as a student and after reading this book, I continue to learn from her. I think Immigrant Acts deserves a 5 star rating for academic merit. BUT, it has been 5 years since I taken one of her courses and I have forgotten how jargon filled her language can be. After being away from academia, reading this book was a daunting task. As much as I respect this text, I feel that it is unfortunate that Professor Lowe cannot relate to a general audience. She is definitely (intentionally or unintentionally) catering to fellow scholars. She has a lot to say and offer her reading public. Its too bad that most people can not understand her. I give only one star for writing style and being reader friendly. Sorry, Professor Lowe.

Lowe is clearly a talented scholar with an expansive range of analytical capabilities. Importantly, she shows that Asian American culture reveals the racial contradictions of "American" ideologies that posit such notions of "abstract citizenship" and "abstract labor." Put another way, the Asian American experience cannot be "read" or approached in the same way as the normative white experience. However, this book is of questionable relevance because it is not at all clear who her audience is. My hunch is that she is specifically addressing Asian American scholars, and this often reads as an advocacy to bring a certain sensibility and form to the scholarship. While Lowe seems convinced to have her finger on the pulse of the Asian American experience and culture, the language is rather pretentious and inflated, and her chosen texts for analysis are of questionable value leading one to question whether or not Lowe really understands the "Asian American

experience" (if such a thing can be captured as a totality) or is merely an ivory tower pedant producing ethnic literature whose readership and resonance will not extend beyond her scholarly clique.

Immigrant Acts performs its own multiple acts of immigration, assimilation, suabltternization in sophisticated and probing ways that would unite a Gramscian problematic of class and place with a more professional concern with identity politics in ethnic studies and Asian American racialization patterns. While I might want to argue with the will to theorize and include diverse forms of decolonization and resistance that do not fit this racial calculus of abjected othering, still, this book is an indispensable text of US identity politics in this era of maximal globalization and localization for the Pax Americana. The chapter on beloved T. Cha remains incredibly good, the historicized reminder of immigrant acts of rejection directed against the Chinese then and Mexicans and Vietnamese now haunts any easy vision of US liberal tolerance and multicultural peace. I need this book, Mr. President, even when I hate it and love it and get locked into its hyper-textual terms (one sign of textual power, that, the displacement of the reader). I am no immigrant act myself, just a Scottish Italian half-poet, but am working overtime out here in Asia/Pacific waters off the coast of California and Taiwan and need to study the main moves. My praise is superfluous at this point, and the indigenous struggles go on far from the immigrant acts of assimilation textual resistance. The US nation wobbles, not a bit.

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