GROUP A

Erika A

The City is a series of stories about immigrant workers in the United States working hard in an attempt to attain the American Dream that so many desire. The film takes a look into the lives of three different people and their struggles to survive in America.

The most prominent commentary that the film makes regarding society is that despite the United States being the ‘Land-of-Plenty’, for many it is a wasteland filled with lost dreams, hopes, and aspirations. People are denied fundamental rights to a safe work place, basic health care, education, and, in one instance, employees are even denied their wages. The film presents a complete disregard for workers’ rights and safety, which is exemplified in the first story when the men are picking out bricks from a pile of rubble. There are no safety measures taken to protect the workers, instead they are left to their own devices. In the second story, the film presents a homeless man and his daughter, who is denied education simply because the father cannot present a rent or phone bill receipt. There is a complete disregard for the lack of education that the girl has a right to have. Instead, the main argument is that if there is no proof of living in the city, then no education can be had. In the last story the audience is introduced to a seamstress who is denied wages despite the fact that her daughter is severely ill. The woman is forced to beg for money from anyone and everyone in order to get money to her sick daughter. Ultimately, this is a commentary on the capitalist system and its lack of concern for social welfare and the well-being of the labor force.

Roshni B

The City is a heart wrenching wake-up call of the poverty that immigrants struggle to survive in each day. The film opens with the images of Mexican workers chasing cars in pursuit of an opportunity at employment. The work they are committing to complete is a mystery to them; all they know is that they will be paid. The story shifts to a young man trying to woo a young lady at a wedding. He mentions that, “the city has disappeared,” and that all he can feel is the spirit of Mexico in the sound of the music. Quickly, we are swept away to a homeless single-father trying to get his daughter into a school.

The vignettes share a common trend, the never-ending fight for survival. These immigrants all want – and need – to find a way to support their families. Sadly, they all lack a high level of human capital. The jobs they are able to obtain are considered to be dirty; no educated individual would voluntarily accept such a position. The most touching story was that of the mother who could not afford medical attention for her sick daughter. She worked long, hard days in what appeared to be a cleaning/alterations sweatshop. During a dire time, she was unable to receive a paycheck from her employer.

The film followed a Marxist trend in reference to labor. The workers were dehumanized, pushed to work quickly, and keep machines occupied. The safety of the workers was not taken into consideration. In the first scene, Jose is left to die because no medical attention was available for him. Although it is hard to imagine, this world still exists. Workers line up outside the local Home Depot. We, as a country, have not escaped this yet.
Devina K
The American Dream. The hope of a new land where the streets are paved gold, and opportunities spill from every doorstep. Through The City, four stories are told of Latin American immigrants rudely awakened from their dreams, fighting to find a place in the American workforce. These stories represent the countless immigrants who arrive everyday, sacrificing everything to support their families back home. They soon discover how difficult it is to find opportunities because of unemployment and high supply of workers in cities.

In America’s capitalistic society, Latin American immigrants are not competitive because they are low skilled, uneducated, and do not have access to resources to move up from their social class. In each story, I noticed that the Latin Americans had formed communities to support one another. The characters from the stories of the men fighting for a day’s work, and the women in the factory, bring up the need for worker protection rights. Indirectly, they bring up the concept of forming unions.

Though the seamstress had enormous pressure to support her family and her ill child, she still smiles showing her hope and idealism for success in America. The last scene from the film, the most powerful scene, showed the faces of those hopeful and optimistic for economic prosperity.

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Paul K

The film, “The City,” can be described as emotional and powerful. It takes place in New York City during the early nineteen-nineties. It is a story about four immigrants’ lives and how difficult it is to adapt into a new society. The big city casts a dehumanizing element on anyone who is different from the norm. The needs for human existence are food and shelter and these immigrants are forced to find a way to survive. Metaphorically, the view of immigrants is to put our sunglasses on and shade them away, as if they never existed in America.

One prime example is an immigrant woman working at a laundry factory, who has the reality of dealing with a sick child. She is without funds, and her paycheck has been delayed for a month. Eventually, she catapults against her employer, and demands her pay. In this case, the employer represents a neo-classical perspective and the woman represents a Marxists liberal perspective. The woman with this much suffering must strike, similar to a good Marxist. The employer is trying to maximize profit while minimizing the cost of labor. By minimizing the cost of labor the employer has caused misery to their workers.

The American story of immigration has been a bitter and sweet theme through much of the twentieth century. My grandparents were immigrants from Poland after WWII and settled in Los Angeles. Similarly, they spoke no English; however, my grandmother had three brothers who provided them with their human necessities. Soon after arriving, my grandfather was able to locate a job as a short order chief, working double shifts, and my grandmother found a job on an assembly line. They learned English, became citizens, saved money, and opened up their own business. From my perspective, the American dream is still there.

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In *The City*, independent filmmaker David Riker depicts the struggles of Mexican immigrants living in present day New York City. He does this through four short stories, shot entirely in black and white, each illustrating various aspects of the hardships of living abroad in search of a better life.

The first story begins with a group of men standing on a street corner, crowding any car that approaches them with a possible job. One man comes with a truck and calls for ten workers. He shouts out a price and when one of the men tries to barter for a higher wage, another is quick to accept the original offer. This scene depicts the cutthroat nature of searching for labor. Especially when one depends on their next paycheck to put food on the table.

This movie highlights the struggles endured by immigrants in the United States, an issue that is relevant not only in New York City, but in every major city. The third story is about a man who is living out of his station wagon with his young daughter. When he is asked why he doesn’t go to the shelter, he expresses that everyone is sick there, and he would not put his daughter in such a place. This brings up the question of weather or not they are actually improving their life in a new country. The majority of the immigrants were there in hopes of earning a better living so they can support their families back in their country of origin. Although the film was a bit dull, it did a good job of capturing an authentic point of view of what it would be like to come to the United States with nothing more than hopes and dreams of a better life.

David Riker's *The City* is a film about economics. Despite this fact, there's no mention of inflation or externalities. In fact, it's hard to find any claim about academic theory or public policy. What is left of economics when these things have been removed? What remains is a set of questions about humanity. It is from such philosophical questions from that economics first arose. Thinkers like Thomas Hobbes wanted to know how the desires and motives of the individual translated into the behavior of large organizations and institutions. While early answers were more political in nature, a group of intellectuals led by Adam Smith added early market theory to their analysis. Nonetheless, these works had a decidedly "human" understanding of the way markets function.

Riker takes a similar approach in *The City*. However Riker's subject is vastly different the economies that Smith discussed in his classic. Instead of examining the motivations of the breadmaker or blacksmith, Reiker turns his lens to the modern economy. Specifically, Riker focuses on four stories of economically driven immigration. By doing so Reiker is able to make important points about trade, migration, global inequality, exploitation, and poverty. He does all this with no supply and demand curves. Instead Riker let's his actors deliver unfiltered human emotion. This emotion is exactly what is lacking in modern economics. In an effort to describe markets of continually increasing complexity, economists developed intricate models which borrowed more from mathematics than philosophy. While such complicated work has added enormously to the discussion, artists like also Riker have an important role to play. Films like *The City* remind viewers of the human cost of modern capitalism. As viewers watch the homeless man read Sleeping Beauty to his daughter, they are reminded of what is at stake when economic policy is decided.
Janet L

The film, *La Ciudad*, immerses the viewer into the eye opening realities of four interconnected stories centered in Manhattan’s bleak and neglected Latin American neighborhoods. As the film follows these four separate stories, touching on many different areas of immigrant life, the central focus is revolved around the alienation and exploitation these contributing members of society become victim to in a concentrated capitalist system.

The development of exploitation and conflict progresses immensely throughout the film. In one instance, immigrant workers who came to America to establish better lives for both themselves and their families, wait at the sidelines of opportunity and hope on the bleak streets of New York City while begging for jobs in an animalistic manner. In another instance, immigrant workers have no choice but to succumb to the capitalistic nature of the sweatshops and experience exploitation and discrimination through low wages and inhumane working conditions. Further, the film also depicts the relentless attempts of the workers to fight against the oppressive “money bags” for fair wages and treatment, as would ideally occur in Marxist thought. However, the conflict over exploitation through surplus value and the increase in the concentration and centralization of capital causes the workers to relieve their own frustrations not only on the system, but also against one another. The need to eat, breathe, and sleep motivated these people to comply with the constant injustice brought upon them.

The loss of an imagined reality and the struggle to survive in an unjust system becomes a reoccurring theme between these subsequent stories. The persistence and heroic strivings of these immigrants become outweighed by the environment and harsh working conditions of the city. The notion of “mobility” and it being a human capital decision for improving one’s economic well-being is overruled by a racial and discriminate society.

Max G

*La Cuidad*, titled *The City* in English, is a series of four vignettes set in the slums of New York City. Director David Riker attempts to illustrate the hardships Latin American immigrant workers faced in an uninviting economy.

Despite following the lives of Latin American immigrants, *La Cuidad* says very little about immigration itself. Each vignettes follows immigrants, but makes no commentary on immigration itself. The film is about despair and struggle in a city without enough jobs. If anything, *La Cuidad* is a commentary on the lack of labor regulation.

The first and last vignette, Bricks and the Seamstress, focus on the perils of working in unregulated environments. Bricks showcases the perils of uneven bargaining power in the labor market. The Italian man is able to get away with pricing trickery because his temporary workforce is easily replaced. This is only feasible due to the lack of regulation for the immigrant workforce. The Seamstress is similar, focusing on immigrant workers’ inability to gain job security. Once again, because the workers are easily replaced, the sweatshop manager can hire workers for merely the promise of money.

The film’s greatest strength is its ability to tell years of story with only a handful of words. Dialogue in each of the four vignettes is sparse. The real content of *La Cuidad* comes
from the heavy and somber music David Riker chose to accompany the film. The soundtrack allows Riker to capture years of immigrant struggle in his film without relying on the plot. This is apparent in Riker’s other decisions as director. Black and white film offers a grim ambiance to the film. Non-professional actors create encounters that are both awkward and somber. By carefully crafting this atmosphere, La Cuidad is a story about not only four immigrant workers, but about every immigrant worker.

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Michael J

Ceaseless clatter of sewing machines, air heavy with the steam of over bleached blouses, stinging reprimands from an owner’s flattened hand. This is not a depiction of a Dickensian factory, an East Asian sweatshop, nor the plight of a Lowell girl. This is the reality of life for many Latin American immigrants to the US who must take dangerous, low wage jobs bereft of workplace protections. David Riker’s “The City (La Ciudad),” a compilation of four inter-related vignettes, is a beautifully captured and honestly moving portrayal of life in New York City for Latin American immigrants.

The film begins with a sustained shot of a street where tens of Latino day laborers wait, calling out to the pickups and the vans that pass, desperate for the short-lived security of a day’s wage. Because there are many hopeful laborers and never enough jobs, the workers directly compete with each other for employment—driving meager pay further below the living wage. Ten men are hired on the promise of fifty dollars a day, only to have their arrangement changed once they reach the job site. Some of the men wish to refuse to work for the new wage, but their actions are undermined by men who are willing to work for the pittance. It is precisely for this reason that the capitalist seeks to subvert worker solidarity. Marx saw that a fragmented, factionalized workforce served the owner of the means of production by preventing the realization of a common struggle.

It is in the final vignette of “The City” that abysmal working conditions, discrimination, and a lack of voice all come to a head. A hopeful, but tempered conclusion is reached when the victimized garment workers all stop their production in protest of their gross mistreatment.

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Jon B

We have grown accustomed to sharing the world with countless strangers; people who come in and out of our lives in a daily blur. In many ways this has numbed us to the plight of those around us. We see them, but we do not acknowledge them; we hear them, but we do not listen. La Ciudad shows us what we’re missing.

The film presents us with the struggles of Hispanic immigrants from four distinct cultures, but the messages these stories present are all quite similar: a city can be a harsh and unforgiving place to live. In each of the four stories we are introduced to people who have migrated to a city from rural Latin countries with the hope of a better life. Yet in each case their hopes and dreams are lost in the fray.
Although each story contains a potent message: the brick cleaner’s demise, the lover lost, an uncompromising system, and rebellion against the torment; I found the third story, about the girl and her father struggling to fit in, to be the most emotionally moving. Whereas the first and fourth stories (about the brick cleaner and seamstress) show clear exploitation of immigrant workers by native employers, the evils which torment the girl and her father are far less explicit, if no less sinister. It is fairly easy to recognize active prejudice and injustices caused by the actions of unscrupulous men, but it is rather difficult to recognize, or even notice, the suffering which results of an unfair, prejudicial system. In a world where we are increasingly aware of active prejudices, and increasingly vigilant in our efforts to quash them, we now must learn how to navigate the murky waters of a system that is inherently unjust, and discover ways in which we might put it rig

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GROUP B

Amamuel T

The negative upshots of capitalism are especially inimical to immigrants. Through four unrelated narratives, *The City* depicts an array of misfortunes encountered in a capitalist state. *Bricks*'s Marxist perspective is best seen through the contractor’s actions. Upon promising $50 for a day’s work, the boss instead pays the Mexican workers 15 cents per brick, stripping surplus value from his workers. The contractor also leaves the workers bereft of any assistance, ultimately costing the life of their comrade.

In *Home*, the neoclassical perspective of immigration is perceptible. Since Francisco migrated to the United States, it is apparent that his utility in the U.S. is greater than his utility in Mexico plus his migrating costs; the same principle applies to Maria. Their parents may have been deterred from migrating because of their old ages or low education levels.

A father’s plight in the U.S. is superlatively exhibited in *The Puppeteer* through the Marxist paradigm. In accord with the Marxist tenets, institutions like education are peripheral to the economic structure. Dulce is deprived of an education because her father’s finances can’t provide the requisite proof of residency or telephone number to enroll in public school. It appears that pecuniary matters have the power to deprive children of their indefeasible right to an education.

*Seamstress* emanates capitalism’s spiteful nature through the Marxist perspective. Dehumanized by the factory, Ana’s payment is inexplicably deferred for four weeks. When Ana exacts her check in order to finance her daughter’s treatment, the factory owners disparagingly refuse. After being accosted by her boss for not sowing, Ana’s quandary becomes a realized common plight and her co-workers stop working in solidarity. In a liberal sense, the factory is depicted as denying Ana’s human motives of love. This supposition that capitalism is unnatural effectively unifies the heterogeneous stories of the film.

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Clarissa Z

Desperation, confusion, outrage, and hopelessness. The four stories in the film “The City” depict different types of struggles Latino immigrants have faced in the New York City in 1990s. The four parts—“Bricks,” “Home,” “The puppeteer,” and “Seamstress” are connected to each other by the photographer, who takes pictures of the people in the community.

According to the neoclassical theory, migration is simply a human capital investment. The migrant workers make their decisions based on the employment opportunities available in each alternative labor markets. This notion is implicitly demonstrated throughout the film, especially the first part. The opening story starts with a group of workers fighting for jobs on the street. The labor supply exceeds demand in the city, which drives down the wages and allows the employers to hide information from the workers. However, the fundamental reason for the workers to stay in the city is that, they still have better opportunities to earn money there than staying in their hometown. It is also the reason for more workers, for instances, Jose’s cousin and Francisco, to migrate into the city, despite the hardship of find jobs.

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Georgia O
Beautifully, honestly and realistically shot, David Riker’s *The City* is a raw portrayal of the realities of Latin American immigrant life in NYC. This *film noir’s* success is in its simplicity. As a composition of four vignettes, solidarity, love, anger and desperation are all powerfully expressed, without over dramatizing or glamorizing the stories and lives on display; while the loneliness, and economic hardship of immigrant life persists throughout all four films.

In the first and the last of the short films, “Bricks” and “Seamstress”, workers' solidarity is explored. In “Bricks” the desperate workers are at odds with one another. Pushed to work in dangerous conditions for disgustingly low wages, the immigrants fail to unite, ultimately resulting in one of their deaths. The glittering New York skyline presents a dramatically contrasting setting, which serves as a constant reminder as to the hopes and dreams that lured these immigrants to NYC in the first place. Prepared to work hard, for anybody and anywhere, yet now *The American Dream* seems a faded goal. This presents a Marxist perspective - to begin with the workers compete and fight, however they can only take so much. Finally, after the death of one of the laborers the misery is too much: “The problem is we are working separately! We should work together!” The film ends, panning out on the dead body surrounded by his piles of bricks on a derelict New Jersey construction site. I have little faith the workers were able to fulfil Marx’s projections however.

“Seamstress” portrays immigrants in a similar position, yet able to unite and form a powerful community in their new surroundings. It is through their cooperation and acknowledgment that, even though they are individuals, they share a common plight, and as Marx predicted they can instigate change together.

Anna P

*The City*, a collection of four short stories that exhibit heartbreak in every sense of the word. Whether new love or old love, the film’s director, David Riker, found a way to parallel each of the devastating stories to liberal economist theory.

Workers are brought to a job under false pretenses, isolated, and unable to communicate a location. Frequently exploited immigrant workers could not access help for an injured coworker-a coworker who ultimately ended up dead. Perhaps had they been given a voice, been able to afford walking away after realization of their exploitation, this coworker could have lived.

Desperate to find a reminder of home in a vast city, a man wanders to familiarity, only to find himself lost again. Literally bringing to light the construct capitalism systems are unnatural; in Polanyi’s view, a city would only grow so large to support a capitalist economy.

A man’s last hope to give his daughter a shot at a better life by sending her to school-shot down because he could not provide proof of residence in the city. Constrained by his four-wheeled home, fault is placed on corporate greed that has denied altruistic motives, potentially giving him the means to change his life.

A mother cannot support her daughter, a daughter that is sick and miles away. Because of her inability to collect paychecks from profit-driven management, Riker demonstrates how government standards should be able to protect workers.

*The City* portrays difficulties faced by those seeking a better life. The message hits home by making every story relatable to watchers. Everyone has responsibilities to loved ones, but most do not face these obstacles while trying to fulfill them. Profit-driven markets lead to inhumane treatment of workers; an inexcusable price to pay for an extra buck.

Neel P
Black and white cinematography, accompanied by somber instrumental notes, established a dark tone for David Riker’s film, *The City*. Four short stories portray the struggles of four immigrants fighting to stay afloat in New York’s urban lifestyle. From each short film, a central theme is evident: immigrants are fleeing to America in search of freedom, luxury, and well-paying jobs. However, Riker’s film illustrates the reality of life for immigrants and bolsters Marxist theory on today’s issue of globalization.

Marxist belief that the rich get richer while the poor get poorer resonates with the unnatural construct of capitalism. The self-interested sweatshop exploited female workers by neglecting to pay them on time. Capitalism suggests that immigrant workers fear deportation and thus are less likely to revolt. As a result, surplus value is extracted for the sweatshop managers at the expense of the immigrant workers.

Coincidentally, Karl Polanyi’s argument of the ‘commodity function’ reveals that people are treated like commodities, not social human beings. Never the less, capitalist firms institute low wages, enduring hours, and treacherous working conditions. By paying immigrants less than their value of production, ‘bread winners’ face difficulty sending money to families back home.

*The City* successfully demonstrates the Marxist theory on government intervention. Riker captures the maltreatment of immigrants to stress the need for institutional regulation. Establishing immigration laws favoring discriminated workers can mitigate capitalism’s harsher effects. Without education on the rights immigrants possess, capitalist nature will exploit their vulnerability.

Transitions between short stories captured the innocence of immigrant faces. However, the immigration facility did not represent hopes and dreams but rather showcased a flood of immigrants into a discriminating society. In the end, it became evident that capitalism’s ability to flex power over immigrants due to a lack of government role resulted in endless turmoil for the workers.

Scott W

Struggle and perseverance are dominant themes in David Riker’s *The City*. The film is comprised of four vignettes (*Bricks, Home, The Puppeteer* and *Seamstress*), each documenting various Latin American immigrants as they begin a new life in New York City. The stories are dramatically portrayed in a neo-realist fashion, giving the film a unique authenticity. Although they each face their own predicament, the characters are united under a struggle that many immigrants face. While each narrative can be analyzed according to a specific political paradigm, I will focus on *Bricks* and *Seamstress*.

Employing the Marxist paradigm, *Bricks* can be viewed from the standpoint of a class struggle. A group of immigrant men fight for a chance to work. They later realize, however, that they earn less money than they were initially promised. Conflict arises when the workers argue over possession of the bricks, until one man says, “we are stronger when we work together…look what happens when we are split.” A Marxist would view this quote as a symbol of class struggle, of worker v “moneybags.” Although the workers do not literally come together to revolt (as Marx predicts), I believe the film is foreshadowing what lies ahead.

*Seamstress* is a disheartening account of one migrant worker’s fight against an unjust employer. As Marx suggests, Ana and her co-workers are dehumanized - viewed as machines and constantly reprimanded by their boss. Ana hasn’t received a paycheck in over four weeks.
However, when her daughter becomes sick in the hospital, Ana finally breaks her silence and confronts her boss, only to be told that there is no money to pay her.

*The City* is a powerful film about the injustices that countless immigrants experience. The characters realize that their dream of a new life was just that, a dream.

Daniel N

The film *The City* powerfully depicts the conflicts Latin American immigrants face in America. The film portrays their struggles through four small stories: *Bricks*, *Home*, *The Puppeteer*, and *Seamstress*. These stories magnify each immigrant’s trials with capitalism, eliciting compassion for immigration – an issue many Americans take for granted.

The Marxist view of the reserve army is apparent in the stories of *Bricks* and *The Puppeteer*. In *Bricks*, floating Latin American immigrants dominate in this reserve army. Large groups of immigrants advertise their willingness for work on sidewalks bordering small shops. In *The Puppeteer*, the homeless father is a stagnant worker in the reserve army who is too old and unskilled to find employment.

Additionally, the Marxist standpoint of the role of peripheral institutions supporting capitalism can easily be identified. In *Bricks*, an immigrant in the reserve army proclaims that police are working with the shop owners to relocate the prospective workers. A Marxist would argue that the government is protecting the interests of the shop owners at the expense of the reserve army that which capitalism created.

In *Seamstress*, one of the sewers had two pictures of Jesus and her daughter at her work station. A Marxist would argue that both religion and family are components to support the system of capitalism. Religion helps immigrants accept their disadvantaged situations amongst the capitalist world. Comparably, family justifies the immigrant's sacrifice to the capitalistic system. Although immigrants will only be paid a fraction of the surplus value, the little money generated will improve the family’s standard of living.

*The City* provides a realistic opportunity for policy makers to better understand the perils many immigrants go through. Ideally, a liberal outlook to preserve the humanity that capitalism is destroying will increase the utility of immigrants in America.

Michael M

David Riker’s *The City* is a heart-wrenching series of short stories, highlighting the lives of four individuals as they struggle to get by in New York City. These stories feature an array of social and economic problems as they relate to immigration and undocumented workers. The film provides a window into the lives of those who are forced to leave their homes and families in order to find work and the results are eye-opening.

The first story involves a man named Jose who fights everyday with other undocumented workers for low-paying, menial labor. This reflects both a Neoclassical and Marxist view. The employer is looking to maximize profit and to complete a job for as little as possible. It is only rational to use the advantage he has over immigrant workers and exploit them. Marx refers to this as the stripping of surplus value from the worker. As a result of their desperation for work, Jose and a few others accept the hazardous conditions that come with salvaging and cleaning bricks.
from old buildings. Unfortunately, Jose is killed after being buried under a collapsed wall and no ambulance comes to his rescue.

The other story that illustrates Marx is the last one, involving a young woman who works in a garment factory. This factory perfectly represents the greedy and oppressive boss, squeezing any and all productivity out of his workers. These workers are exposed to unpleasant working conditions and are not even paid. Not only is this blatant exploitation, it is outright illegal. The story ends when the workers decide to shut off their machines, an ode to Marx’s worker revolution.

*The City* effectively tells these stories with a beautiful use of the Spanish language. This film puts names and faces to those people most economists and politicians would consider just statistics.