MEDIA

Richmond, CA, was the home to Kaiser Shipyards, the largest shipyard in the world from 1942 to 1945. Many warships were designed and built there, and 60 percent of the workers were women. This film tells the stories of five surviving and active Richmond Rosies (nicknamed after Rosie the Riveter) who were electricians, welders, and draftswomen. Most of the women interviewed traveled west, after their husbands were drafted, to find jobs, with kids in tow and having little money. Kaiser trained and hired them quickly, and they worked side by side with their male counterparts for equal pay and opportunity. When the war ended, ship production stopped, and the women were let go, their skills no longer needed or valued. It was another battle to readjust to a world that favored men as the primary bread winner. VERDICT The Rosies are upbeat and charming, full of sappy stories and honest insights about their time during the war years. Great for collections interested in a different take on America in the 1940s.—Ellen Druda, Half Hollow Hills Community Lib., Dix Hills, NY

Rabin: The Last Day. 156 min. In Hebrew w/optional English subtitles. Amos Gitai, dist. by Kino Lorber, www.kinolorber.com. 2016. DVD UPC 738329205980. $29.95; Blu-ray UPC 738329205997. $34.95. INT AFFAIRS
The 1995 assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a right-wing Jewish extremist at a Tel Aviv peace rally shocked the nation and the world. The events of that November day, as well as those that led up to the shooting and the ensuing investigation, are the subject of director Gitai’s film, which fuses archival footage with reenactments. The filmmaker’s scrupulous attention to authenticity is commendable and apparent throughout, but the mix of historical and staged material raises serious issues about whether this is meant to be a documentary or a docudrama (and a somewhat speculative one at that), especially early on in the production. This overlay presentation is also in need of some judicious editing, particularly in the sections on the hearings, which tend to get bogged down by needless procedural dialog. VERDICT An important story—one that some might say ranks on par with the John Kennedy assassination—that, regrettably, deserves better treatment than it receives here.—Brent Marchant, Chicago


Jose Anzaldua is a cute California third grader who dreams of growing up and becoming a firefighter or a policeman. He is smart and loves school. He is also a child born in Mexico whose parents are undocumented immigrants who came to the United States for a better life. We’ve all heard of children who were brought into and grew up in this country and might be sent home with their parents. One of the strengths of this film is that we get to meet and know José, to understand how so much of his life is working against him. His parents are agricultural workers who follow the crops and face struggle and poverty. Fortunately, José has a mentor and role model, his teacher Oscar Ramos, whose story is very similar. Ramos studied hard, was given opportunities, graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, and came back to help children like himself. The carefully controlled tone of this film makes José’s story even more poignant as he and the children like him become more than blank faces in a political debate. VERDICT A realistic picture of the plight of migrant workers and their children as they struggle to advance in America. Recommended for public library collections and education collections focusing on immigration.—Ernest Jaeger, formerly with North Plainfield Schs., NJ

Can We Take a Joke? 75 min. Ted Balaker, dist. by Tugg Edu, edu.tugg.com. 2016. DVD $75; acad. librs. $350; streaming available at edu@tugginc.com. SOC SCI
The question of what limits, if any, should be set on freedom of expression has always been open to debate. This documentary considers it from the viewpoint of working comedians, including Gilbert Gottfried, Penn Jillette, Jim Norton, Lisa Lampanelli, and Adam Carolla, who wonder whether comedy frequently contains elements that may be offensive to particular individuals or groups, a comic can be a target of criticism. In addition, public shaming via social media exacerbates the situation. Just one bad joke, even if intended as satire, can be misinterpreted, go viral, and destroy a person’s reputation. Pressure to avoid offensive language comes from many quarters, but most surprisingly and sadly today it comes from colleges and universities, many of which have banned controversial speakers including comedians for fear of offending anyone. Ironically, considering the topic, one must be warned that this video contains excerpts from actual performances and freewheeling interviews that include language that may be offensive to many and is unsuitable for children. VERDICT This documentary makes a persuasive case for the position that freedom of speech should be as unlimited as possible.—David R. Conn, formerly with Surrey Libs., BC


SOC SCI

Diego Echeverría’s 1984 film Los Sures introduced viewers to the south side of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. After its original PBS debut, the film gradually fell from view, and when interest revived in 2015, the only copies available were ones in the archives of the New York Public Library (NYPL). Now that film has been lovingly restored and added to, with contemporary shorts that show the startling contrast between what was the poorest area of Brooklyn and the gentrified neighborhood it is today. The original movie follows a sampling of residents’ lives, how mothers, teens, single men, workers, and children handle what New York City dealt them: poverty, profiling, drugs, and a stifling sense of frustration. The intimate views inside their apartments and on their streets tell their stories in a powerful way. VERDICT A fascinating view of a community then and now. Sure to please audiences fascinated by the way urban areas change over time.—Ellen Druda, Half Hollow Hills Community Lib., Dix Hills, NY

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY


After the Spill follows Bowermaster’s earlier documentary SoLa: Louisiana Water Stories. Here, the director revisits the aftermath of the 2010 BP drill rig blowout and oil spill into the Gulf of Mexico. He interviews Louisiana cleanup workers, fishermen, a parish biologist, a lawyer, a journalist, Houma natives, and a former general leading a “green army.” For them, the disaster is not over. The crude has officially been collected or “dispersed” to the ocean floor but is shown still fouling beaches and clogging wetlands. Fishers say Gulf sea life has not recovered and describe paltry compensation from the oil company. Meanwhile, offshore drilling activity has actually expanded, while Louisiana’s shoreline is losing an acre of land per day owing to frequent petroleum exploration or digging for pipelines. VERDICT Louisiana and its people got hit with a double whammy from Hurricane Katrina and then the oil spill only five years later. Per those interviewed here, the individuals and the region are also being degraded in more insidious ways.—David R. Conn, formerly with Surrey Libs., BC