

"a view from the
bridge explores the
difficulties migrants
face in adapting to
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The heart of conflict in Arthur Miller's *A View From the Bridge* is the struggle to reconcile the array of conflicting social, moral and legal laws to which an individual is bound and to determine which of those deserves one's primary allegiance. This struggle exists, to a greater or lesser extent, in all individuals, yet becomes far more apparent and problematic for those encountering the challenge of trying to acclimatize to a new culture. In this play, that new culture is the complex one of Red Hook and its new inhabitants must "settle for half," learning to accommodate Sicilian tradition with US law. Alfieri represents the successful negotiation of such a combination, understanding the balance between American legislation- a "specific," rational law- and Italian customs, which value loyalty, integrity, honour and, above all, community. However, the play demonstrates that adapting as Alfieri has is not such a simple task, and much conflict arises between Marco and Eddie, both of whom are inextricably bound to Italian traditions and seek indiscriminate punishment, which the law of the land has not been designed to provide. It is this inability to "settle for half," to become "civilized, quite American" and accept US law over primal justice that spurs the two men on towards a tragic conclusion. Alfieri firmly dictates that "it is better to settle for half- it must be!" As a man of Italian descent, he understands and respects the rich traditions of Italian society, remembering a time when people were "justly shot by unjust men," acknowledging the seedy mishaps that occur on the docks (with cases of whisky "slipping" from the nets as they "are inclined to do") and turning a blind eye to the illegal smuggling of submarines that the community supports. Yet Alfieri has studied and practices American law- he is firm that this must be the overruling authority in society, declaring that "there is no

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other law," and tries to coerce Eddie to accept that " the law is very specific;" it is based on rationality rather than emotion. At the same time, Alfieri seems to acknowledge that US law can never really achieve justice in the traditional sense- " only God makes justice," he explains, " I'm only a lawyer." He has found a balance that allows him to be " quite civilized, quite American," and he " likes it better." While Eddie initially seems to have successfully negotiated the combination of roles of being an Italian and an American, a husband and an uncle, and a family man and a longshoreman, it soon emerges that he is inherently unable to reconcile the conflicting moral and social laws that simultaneously demand his allegiance. As an American citizen, Eddie is bound by the law of the nation, including laws in which he does not believe, but he is comfortable with pushing the boundaries of such legislation, clearly viewing authority as the enemy as he asserts " this is the United States government you're playin with, this is the Immigration Bureau." Indeed, Red Hook is a society in which " the law has not been a friendly idea," an attitude stemmed from a rich history of " three thousand years of distrust," and both petty and organized crime are an accepted part of daily life, as reflected as Eddie supports the captain's right to be " pieced off" and promises to " bust a bag" of coffee for his family from the ship that he is unloading. For Eddie maintains an intense commitment to an unwritten subcultural law demanding communal conduct, a tradition that values loyalty and honour and takes pride in supporting illegal immigrants. Eddie demonstrates his fervent belief in such traditions through the parable of Vinny Bolzano, asserting that the boy deserved to be treated so harshly for his betrayal- " a guy do a think like that? How's he gonna show his face?"

This is emphasized later as Alfieri reminds Eddie that the only legal issue
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regarding the cousins is "the way they entered the country," and Eddie's emphatic reaction "oh Jesus, no, I wouldn't do nothing about that," reflects how strongly he values his allegiance to subcultural laws. In addition to this, Eddie endorses traditional familial values, a domestic law that binds him to his wife and niece, illustrated through the way in which Eddie has "worked like a dog...walked plenty of days hungry" just to provide for his family, and he respects a natural law, which prevents him from acknowledging his improper feelings. The conflicting demands of all these laws, each fighting for his primary allegiance, create such intense confusion that Eddie ultimately succumbs to the law for which he has the least regard. As he reports Marco and Rodolpho to the Immigration, the very institution that he views as the enemy, Eddie ultimately betrays every other law that he values. Marco exists as a symbol of primitive justice, dissatisfied with American law and refusing to accept that "if (Eddie) obeys the law, he lives." He is in complete disbelief that US legislation cannot provide justice, asserting bitterly "I do not understand this country" and challenging bellicosely "all the law is not in a book!" although Alfieri firmly assures him that "there is no other law." Marco, like Eddie, feels that justice is inextricably intertwined with honour, and the Italian values entrenched within him dictate that honour is worth killing or dying for. He considers it "dishonourable" to allow Eddie to live, but he has given his word not to kill. Marco finds a loophole in this agreement in the ensuing fight with Eddie, and the older man dies by his own knife, restoring "justice" in Marco's eyes yet allowing him to keep his word. Rodolpho, in contrast to his older brother, is eager to embrace American culture; he is enthralled by "all those lights" and enthusiastically spends his hard-earned money on records, movie magazines and American

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clothes, which Eddie scorns as “ a snappy new jacket...a pointy pair of new shoes.” He declares “ me, I want to be an American!” and his language leans towards the flamboyant, lyrical expression that he admires, likening Catherine to a little bird. However, Rodolpho’s enthusiasm for a new culture inculcates much suspicion in Eddie, who views such extreme and rapid adaptation to America as inappropriate, for this is something that even he, who has lived here all his life, has been unable to do. Thus Eddie uses Rodolpho’s zeal for America as a base for a campaign against the younger man, claiming that he is “ only bowin to his passport” and suggesting that he is using Catherine simply to gain the rights to be an American citizen. His enthusiasm for New York is turned against him- his desire to visit Broadway causes Eddie to later accuse “ he’s got bright lights in his head, Broadway... he’s lookin for his break, that’s all.” In reality, it appears that Rodolpho’s enthusiasm is simply his way of making the most of the little opportunities that he has. In an uncharacteristically somber and candid outburst of emotion, Rodolpho shouts “ only work we don’t have!...That is the only wonder here, work!, but his unusual zest for life and his overflowing optimism, claiming that he will “ start to be something wonderful here” are enough to cause suspicion and contempt in the jaded inhabitants of Red Hook, who are resigned to their hard, monotonous lifestyle, no longer aspiring for romantic dreams of a better life as Rodolpho does.