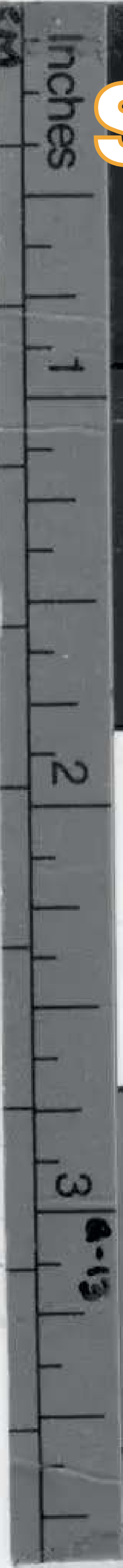
Scope and Sequence: *United States History*



THE LOCALIZED HISTORY PROJECT
@AAARI-CUNY

The Localized History Project, housed at the Asian American/Asian Research Institute@CUNY, is a youth led and community driven participatory history collective working to uplift working class, solidarity-oriented, and peoples' history of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian New Yorkers. We are funded via City Council's Educational Equity Action Plan to help produce New York City's first ever Asian American Studies program!

Within our digital archive, we published exhibits researched, created, and written by New York City youth researchers ages 16-22. These exhibits cover the histories of New York City's specific and emergent Asian American history. We uplift intersectional communities, including the Chinese Latino diaspora, and the Indo-Caribbean diasporas of NYC. See our exhibits at **www.localizedhistoryproject.org**, and follow us **@LocalizedHistory!**

LOCALIZED HISTORY PROJECT TEAM

Shreya Sunderram (Director and Founder)
Shreya is the founder and director of the Localized History Project, and a former NYC high school history teacher of six years. She founded LHP in response to her experiences in the history classroom and to create a space for teachers and youth to produce more just, anti-colonial curricula. In addition to LHP, Shreya is a PhD Candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center; her dissertation traces South Asian Diasporic counter-schooling movements in the US and UK. Outside of LHP, Shreya loves reading fantasy and sci-fi books, and dog-watching in Prospect Park.

Ravi Vora and Clarissa Kunizaki (Co-Youth Directors)
Ravi is a high school senior and has been a member of LHP for over a year. He enjoys collaborating with fellow researchers and learning about AAPI political movements. As Youth Co-Director of Policy Research & Advocacy, he looks forward to working alongside policymakers and teachers to ensure that the archival projects are taught effectively and critically. **Clarissa** is a high school senior and has been part of LHP since its inception. She enjoys researching local histories centering AAPI diasporic identity and cross racial solidarity. As Youth Co-Director of Community and Historical Research, she hopes to foster joy and exploration with fellow youth and community members to uncover radical histories.

Ana Serna (Assistant Director, Community Organizing)
Ana is LHP's Assistant Director of Community Organizing. Ana is a former labor organizer and grassroots archivist in Jackson Heights and East Elmhurst. Her scholarly and community work focuses on domestic worker organizing, transnational solidarity movements, and activist storytelling in the Filipino diaspora of NYC.

Eva Schmidt (Assistant Director, Youth Programming)
Eva is LHP's Assistant Director of Youth Programming. Entering her third year with the project, she is excited to continue to find ways to amplify histories of AANHPI communities and peoples with our youth researchers. Relocated from the Sonoran Desert, she is a CUNY alum and is involved in the dance and theatre community here in NYC!

Josie Naron (Archivist)
Josie is LHP's Archivist. She received her MA from NYU's Archives and Public History program. Her work is interdisciplinary and draws on oral history and public history, often focusing on the intersections of social movements and the arts. Josie is a transplanted Midwesterner who has called Brooklyn home for almost 8 years. In her spare time, she loves watching the Mets (mostly lose), caring for her adopted alley cat, and making zines.

....and most importantly

22 New York City public school student Youth Researchers ages 16-22 from four boroughs, representing South Asian, East Asian, Southeast Asian, Indo-Caribbean, Central Asian, and Pacific Islander identities.

A NOTE FROM THE YOUTH DIRECTORS:
WHY TEACH THIS HISTORY

Hi! Our names are Ravi and Clarissa. We are the Youth Directors of the Localized History Project. The Localized History Project ethos is grounded in a love for inclusivity and community. It centers young people as pedagogues and as agents of transformative change. **We define localized history as histories drawn from archives—both traditional and intimate, family oral histories, and the memories of our neighborhoods, friends, and elders.**

Specifically, by learning histories relevant to students' neighborhoods, families, and identities, we are encouraged to challenge oppressive systems and build equitable ones that better serve us all. Localized history challenges us to be more connected to each other, and encourages us to participate in the world around us.

More than ever, we need to learn localized Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander history. As ethnic studies remains under attack, implementing local Asian-American Pacific Islander studies into New York City classrooms is essential. However, we do not believe in teaching a version of AAPI Studies that pits us against other communities of color, or working class New Yorkers. Thankfully, AAPI History has always been that of labor organizing, solidarity building, and collectivity. Be it the 1998 Taxi Workers' Strike, exchanges between B.R. Ambedkar and W.E.B. Du Bois, the Chinatown Art Brigade, labor of Filipino nurses and Vietnamese nail salon workers, or the musical beats of Richmond Hill's Indo-Caribbean communities, we've continued to make waves of influence locally and within broader global lineages of resilience.

Thus, New York City is a historic site of critical AAPI history, and we want this history taught in our schools. Uplifting these struggles for justice provides all of us models for collective liberation. Moreover, illuminating vibrant contributions of AAPI's combats notions of otherness and omission of marginalized narratives.

The AAPI community has and will continue to be a powerful force in our nation and city. We hope you will join us in honoring our stories by bringing our youth-driven, community led histories to life in your classrooms.

Thank you!

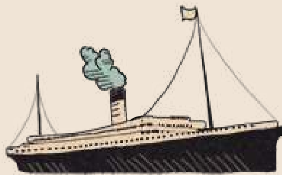
Clarissa and Ravi

Localized History Project Excerpts: *LOCALIZING US HISTORIES*

The exhibits included in this booklet draw from frameworks and standards in US history curriculum, particularly those dealing with immigration and migration, US imperialism, and the formation of ethnic enclaves. Each of the exhibits trace global phenomena like colonization, but end with a localized history connection. The excerpts provided center the US History, but we encourage a deep dive into the entire exhibit to learn the localized NY connection.

19th Century

Foundations of Exclusion: A Timeline of AANHPI Immigration in the Late 18th-20th Centuries

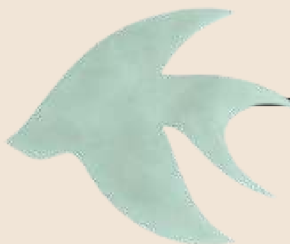


19th and 20th Century

Behind Hospital Doors: The Systems That Shaped Filipino Nurse Migration

20th Century

Everyday Resistance, Cultural Preservation, and Neighborhood Identity in Doyers Street



20th Century

Shipyards, Kitchens, and City Streets: Finding Belonging in South Asian Harlem

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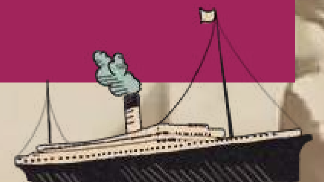
Foundations of Exclusion: A Timeline of AANHPI Immigration in the Late 18th-20th Centuries

GRADE 11 US History

11.6 THE RISE OF AMERICAN POWER (1890 – 1920): Numerous factors contributed to the rise of the United States as a world power. Debates over the United States' role in world affairs increased in response to overseas expansion and involvement in World War I. United States participation in the war had important effects on American society. (Standards: 1, 2, 3, 4: Themes: GEO, SOC, GOV, ECO)



Foundations of Exclusion: A Timeline of AANHPI Immigration in the Late 18th-20th Centuries

By: Arun Nayakkar

Excerpt from: "Naturalization Act of 1790"

Arun Nayakkar is an incoming high school senior at Scarsdale High School in Westchester County. He has been a member of the Leadership Board at the Localized History Project since February 2025. His research focuses on tracing how law has affected the inclusion and exclusion of certain communities from the United States.

Foundations of Exclusion: A Timeline

In 1790, President George Washington delivered the first-ever State of the Union address, highlighting some of the most pressing issues facing the newborn nation. Among them, he articulated the need for a "uniform rule of naturalization" for foreigners who were to be "admitted to the rights of citizens." In the address, he defined this "uniform rule" as an "object of great importance" from Article III of the recently ratified United States Constitution. Significantly, there was no mention of race, ethnic background, or any other specified qualifications dictating who could receive citizenship status in the entire speech.

The Constitution grants Congress the ability to establish a "uniform rule" as described by Washington, and so they did. Almost three months after Washington's address came the first piece of legislation that defined the citizenship process for foreigners to the United States: the Naturalization Act of 1790. Alternately known as the Nationality Act, the purpose of this law was, as its name suggests, to establish guidelines on how to become a naturalized citizen of the United States. Notably, the Act limited citizenship on racial grounds: only "free white persons" who had resided in the United States for at least two years were eligible for naturalization. What it meant to be "white" at that time, although seemingly clear in today's language, would become a major detail of contention. Debate over interpretation of the law's text would inspire more significant and direct actions by the government in its admittance and acceptance of South Asian immigrants.

Early South Asians in America

The Naturalization Act of 1790 reflected the racial anxieties of the leadership of a newly emerged nation. The first bicameral Congress formed in 1789 — the same two-branch system we have today — and it is notable that among their first priorities was to establish racialized immigration protocols. The Act was passed to regulate and process immigration; this included some of the earliest South Asians to the Americas.

Perhaps the best-known 18th-century example of early South Asian immigration to the United States was a Bengali Muslim by the name of Sick Keesar, believed to be an anglicization of the name Sheikh Kesar. Keesar came to the United States as a conscripted lascar, or sailor, from British India. He and his shipmates experienced abusive treatment on their long journey, were forced to sail far past their initially-stated destination, and were eventually abandoned, penniless and without support, when the ship finally docked in Baltimore. Keesar then filed a petition of redress to the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council, headed by Benjamin Franklin.

His legal challenge — primarily intended to register his grievance and receive appropriate compensation and safe passage home — is a case study in the contradictions of the new nation. Franklin did support Keesar's petition, on the grounds that "these people should not be permitted to carry home with them any well-founded prejudice about either the justice or humanity of these United States." His anxieties over the global perception of the United States are clear; the opponents of the petition, on the other hand, primarily wanted to maintain their ability to mistreat conscripted, indentured, or enslaved labor in the name of forging global economic connections. It's impossible to say whether the controversy over early South Asian Americans like Keesar directly led to the passing of the Act, but their presences certainly had an impact.

Lascars on board the British ship "Dunera."

Foundations of Exclusion: A Timeline of AANHPI Immigration in the Late 18th-20th Centuries

By: Arun Nayakkar

Excerpt from: "1870: Expanded but not for All"

Various tweaks to the Naturalization Act would be made over the following decades, but the most notable revision came in 1870, where the wording for the racial eligibility criteria was modified to "aliens being free white persons, and to aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent." This change was not drastic by any means, but the ambiguity of the term "white" led to a flurry of cases at the appellate level by "aliens" from countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey, and India. The legal ambiguity over what "whiteness" actually meant allowed immigrants from many countries, including those from South Asia, to come to America and petition the United States government to claim whiteness for themselves.

In 1870, the population of documented residents of Indian origin was 586, with this number more than tripling to 1,707 by the 1880s. Many of these immigrants argued they were white purely by their physical skin color — favoring lighter-skinned and upper-caste individuals — and ancestral connections. A hyperfixation over this specific criterion of color led to far-fetched and "ethnologically based" theories about the nature of one's race. Opposition to these cases cited the necessity for decisions to be rooted in social grounding rather than science, and called for the "common understanding" of the "average man on the street" to determine what being "white" meant.

Caste and Whiteness

Caste often framed why, and in what manner, South Asian migrants came to the United States. Caste is an internal system of oppression and stratification in the subcontinent, and whose tendrils exist today in all of the places the South Asian diaspora lives today (Yengde, 2025). Caste shaped structures like indenture and the Coolie Trade, which impacted which laborers were on British ships coming to the UK and US. Beginning around the 1880s, Muslim ship workers would jump ship from British ships in the New York harbor, and found jobs as peddlers selling "Oriental goods," including cotton and silk, perfumes, and rugs, to middle-class American consumers. Many of these laborers were of different caste backgrounds. Some believed their caste status would be washed away by the "Kala pani," or black waters that took them away from the subcontinent. Others found ways to maintain caste status even in the West (Bahudar, 2013).

Three graduates from the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, c. 1885.

There were also immigrants, often upper caste, who came to the United States for the express purpose of education and career advancement. One such example was Anandibai Joshi, a Brahmin Marathi woman from Bombay who was the first Indian woman to receive a degree in medicine in the United States. Joshi expressed her interest in studying medicine in a letter that ended up in the hands of a Presbyterian minister stationed in India. The letter was reprinted in a Presbyterian magazine and was there read by a New Jersey woman named Theodocia Carpenter, who wrote to Joshi and ultimately sponsored her stay in Philadelphia. She was admitted into the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania at the age of 19 and graduated at 21, much to the admiration of advocates of women's education who had followed her journey. Though Joshi tragically died at the young age of 22 after contracting a persistent case of tuberculosis in the United States, she is regarded as a proto-feminist icon for her efforts to break both racist and sexist barriers in higher education.

Foundations of Exclusion: A Timeline of AANHPI Immigration in the Late 18th-20th Centuries

By: Arun Nayakkar

Excerpt from: "20th Century South Asian Migrations and NYC"

By 1900, just over 2000 South Asian "Indians" were documented residents of the United States, although there may have been more. 408 of these initial South Asian Americans resided in New York, laying the foundation for the diverse New York South Asian population present today in areas like Queens. Some lived in segregated urban centers like Chicago and Detroit, while the West Coast's agricultural workforce offered opportunities for others. However, citizenship and the full realization of the "American Dream" were unobtainable to many of these South Asian immigrants. These early South Asian Americans defined the foundational steps into an era of significant change in immigration and naturalization policies throughout the 20th century, particularly involving South Asian immigrants. Ultimately, it is their initial strides that exist as the pillars of the modern South Asian American identity and status in the United States.

The "Hindoo" Invasion

The sudden uptick in South Asian immigrants within the United States coincided with broader resentment toward Asian immigrants as a whole. The nativist movement of this century saw immigrants from India in a similar light to those from China and, to a lesser extent, Japan: a group of people who look different than WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) with an unfamiliar culture who worked back-breaking jobs for menial pay. Such immigrants were believed to be spreading immorality and disease and taking away jobs that should be reserved for White Americans. Numerous anti-Indian riots across the country manifested from these sentiments, with nativists coining South Asian immigration to the United States as a "Hindoo invasion."

Two South Asian men arrive at New York's Ellis Island, c. 1890.

One of the best known race riots organized specifically against South Asians took place in Bellingham, Washington, just after Labor Day in 1907. A relatively sizable South Asian population had grown in the area as a result of expanded railroad access within the Pacific Northwest and available contract work in Bellingham's lumber mills, much to the displeasure of many white workers. A similar race riot — against Chinese migrant workers in the fishing industry — had taken place in Bellingham some years prior, and in the ensuing years, a large chapter of the Japanese-Korean Exclusion League had taken root. Explicitly organized to defend the West Coast "against Oriental invasion," the Japanese-Korean Exclusion League's chapter in Bellingham boasted over 800 members. Utilizing racist, fearmongering stories of immigrants stealing white jobs and committing violence against white women — tropes that have been invoked time and time again, regardless of the time period — white rioters roamed the streets of Bellingham with the goal of ridding the town of its entire South Asian population. Observing indiscriminate beatings, arson, destruction of private property, and other tactics of intimidation, Bellingham citizens and police officers did little to nothing to protect their South Asian neighbors.

WHITE MOBS DRIVE OUT HINDUS OF WASHINGTON

Bellingham, Wash., Sept. 6.—Six badly beaten Hindus are in the hospital, 400 frightened and half naked sikhs are in jail and in the corridors of the city hall, guarded by policemen, and somewhere between Bellingham and the British Columbia line are 750 natives of India, beaten, hungry and half clothed, making their way along the Great Northern right-of-way, bound for Canadian territory and the protection of the British flag.

The long expected cry, "drive out the Hindus," was heard thruout the city and along the water front last night.

The police were helpless. For five hours a mob of half a thousand white men raided the mills where the blacks were working, battered down doors of lodging houses and, dragging the invaders from their beds, escorted them to the city limits, with orders to keep on going.

"White Mobs Drive Out Hindus of Washington"

After the riots ended, their secondary utility became clear. Press accounts and written accounts of the white workers' testimonials demonstrate that the riots were used to stress the dangerous, unassimilable nature of these "foreign" workers. In many cases, the victims of the riots were blamed for the violence itself, or at least for introducing such chaos into a "peaceful" town. The rioters' intentions, in protecting the white supremacist foundations of their town and its economy, went largely unquestioned. Within 10 days of the riot, every South Asian resident of Bellingham would leave town, moving on to other seasonal or migratory work in the Pacific Northwest and hoping for a safer environment to call home. The Japanese-Korean Exclusion League would eventually become the Asiatic Exclusion League, bundling in the newest target of its xenophobia under a more expansive umbrella. And such organized outbursts of explicitly anti-South Asian racism would become more common as the early 20th century progressed onward.

Foundations of Exclusion: A Timeline of AANHPI Immigration in the Late 18th-20th Centuries

By: Arun Nayakkar

Excerpt from: "A Century of Challenges"

The race riots that took place on the West Coast are one example of how white civilians chose to police race and citizenship on a social level, through organized campaigns of fear and violence. On a parallel level, challenges over race and who "counted" as a citizen were also being waged on a different stage: in court.

As the numbers of South Asians attempting to immigrate and become naturalized citizens increased in the early 20th century, the ambiguous racial legal standards that had been developed to exclude large swaths of non-white immigrants became one arena in which to challenge the existing order. Among the first South Asians to succeed in this battle was a man named Bhicaji Balsara, a Parsi Zoroastrian from Bombay who fought and won a battle in court over his status as a "free white person." Balsara arrived in the United States around 1900 as a cotton buyer for the Tata Group and settled in New York. He petitioned for citizenship in 1906, and his case was heard before the District Court in the Southern District of New York.

Objections to Balsara's admittance as a citizen lay largely upon the "free white persons" standard in the Naturalization Act of 1870, but Balsara's argument was that his "color [was] white and his complexion dark." He argued that his Parsi ancestry was an indication that he belonged to an "Aryan" race, as Parsis hailed originally from Iran. In the Circuit Court's ruling, however, serious concerns were raised over accepting "white persons" as a broader category, including Aryan, Caucasian, and Indo-European groups, which, at the time, were seen as distinct from categories of white people in the United States and Europe. At this time, Eastern Europeans, Italians, and Irish had also not "become white," both on social and legal levels, in the American context. To expand the acceptance to all white persons, the Court stated, "will bring in not only the Parsees… which is perhaps the purest Aryan type, but also Afghans, Hindus, Arabs and Berbers." Newspaper coverage at the time publicly mused their fears that a precedent set in Balsara's favor would create a "loophole for little brown men and big brown men." At the same time, the Court identified Balsara's "high character" and "exceptional intelligence," stating that a higher court must examine this issue.

As this debate took place, the Department of Justice released a 145-page brief explaining why Parsis would not be considered as "free white persons." Their brief cited multiple first-hand accounts of Western travellers in Persia and India describing the inhabitants as "swarthy of complexion," and argued broadly that the Naturalization Act's racial standard was intended to only include Europeans and people of European descent. The Circuit Court of Appeals eventually heard Balsara's case in 1910, and ultimately ruled against the argument laid out in the DoJ's brief. Their ruling ultimately stated that Parsis were not to be mixed up with other Indians, singling out "Hindus" as the "swarthy" population. Parsis, on the other hand, could be considered as white and as constituting a community "as distinct from the Hindus as are the English who dwell in India." Many interested parties watched as this ruling came down, including New York's Syrian-American community, who hoped that a positive ruling in Balsara's case could help establish a precedent to be used in their own naturalization cases.

Portrait photograph of a young Parsi girl in traditional clothing, c. 1902.

SCIENTIFIC BATTLE OVER PARSEE'S RIGHTS

Government Goes Deep in Ethnology to Oppose Balsara's Contest for Citizenship.

BROWN SKIN RACES AID HIM

Furnish Money to Fight Test Case — Principal Question the Meaning of "Free White Persons."

[illegible]

Newspaper coverage in the New-York Tribune of Balsara's case, c. 1910.

Indeed, United States v. Balsara did have a profound legal impact on the question of South Asian naturalization in the 20th century. The Court's decision left myriad other ethno-religious communities in South Asia — Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians, and Jews — in a legal gray area. Were they to be accepted only if they could demonstrate ancestry from a "white race"? What was even more confusing was that the decision over the status of Parsis was not definite. Twenty years after the Balsara decision, the same New York Circuit Court rejected the petition of another Parsi man from Bombay, Rustom Dadabhoy Wadia, who came to the United States in 1923 and lived on New York's Lower East Side with his American wife, Gladys Voorhees. In their ruling, the Court insisted that the "common understanding" of "white person" be applied in such cases as Wadia's, thus establishing that a common-sense interpretation of whiteness would exclude any South Asian heritage. This, combined with severely tightened national immigration quotas, created barriers toward naturalization that would require years of struggle to undo.

Foundations of Exclusion: A Timeline of AANHPI Immigration in the Late 18th-20th Centuries

By: Arun Nayakkar

Excerpt from: "Bhagat Singh Thind vs. United States."

By far the most noteworthy case to come out of the South Asian legal struggle for citizenship was Bhagat Singh Thind v. United States. This case articulated clearly the way in which whiteness, caste, and immigration were interlaced systems in the United States (Shankar, 2023).

Bhagat Singh Thind was born in 1892 in Punjab, India, then a part of the British Raj. In 1913, he immigrated to the United States, settling in Seattle to pursue graduate studies. Thind was one of approximately 7,000 Indian men, many of them Punjabi Sikhs, who came to the Pacific Northwest around that time seeking economic and educational opportunities while fleeing unrest and British colonial repression in India. Thind worked summers at lumber mills in Oregon while also studying religion and literature at the University of California, Berkeley, He became involved with the Ghadar Party, an Indian independence movement organizing immigrants in North America to overthrow British colonial rule in India.

Bhagat Singh Thind with his battalion at Camp Lewis, c. 1918.

When the U.S. entered World War I in 1917, Thind enlisted in the U.S. Army, becoming the first turbaned Sikh soldier in the American military. During his military service, Thind applied for U.S. citizenship. Under the 14th Amendment, all freed Black persons could become citizens. While there was no language in the amendment that specified that citizenship could only apply to white or Black people, this is how the courts had thus far come to understand the law. Therefore, Thind's initial petition for citizenship was initially approved but quickly overturned after opposition from the Bureau of Naturalization. In 1920, Thind applied again for citizenship in Oregon. The judge granted it based on arguments that Indians could be considered "Caucasian" and thus "white," as well as in recognition of Thind's military service. However, the Bureau of Naturalization appealed this decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The two questions that faced the Supreme Court were as follows: "Is a high-caste Hindu, of full Indian blood, born at Amritsar, Punjab, India, a white person within the meaning of § 2169, Revised Statutes [referring to the revised Naturalization Act]?" and "Does the Act of February 5, 1917 (39 Stat. 875, § 3) disqualify from naturalization as citizens those Hindus now barred by that act who had lawfully entered the United States prior to the passage of said act?" Thind extended the argument from his appeal in Oregon: he considered himself a "free white person" and was thus eligible for citizenship.
One of the most important precedents this argument, and overall this case, was based upon was the Ozawa v. United States case. Argued just months prior, Ozawa established that a "white person" referred to anyone of the Caucasian race as commonly understood. A "common understanding" of who belongs to what race opens up the debate to numerous interpretations of what understandings are correct and incorrect, and this was where Thind's argument hinged. He described himself, a full-blooded Hindu from Punjab, as a "Caucasian": "The applicant contends that the words 'white persons' are synonymous with the words 'Caucasian race, and that the Hindus are included therein." Thind relied on the caste hierarchies of the South Asian subcontinent to make his argument about whiteness. The court was not convinced. They rejected any anthropological definitions of a "high-class Hindu" being a member of the "Caucasian" or "Aryan" race. Instead, the Court's understanding of Thind's argument was solely based on language alone and the Ozawa "common understanding" of language. The Court seemingly confused itself, with Justice Sutherland noting that the term "Caucasian" was "a conventional word of much flexibility." At the same time, the common understanding of "Caucasian" was to be white, and Thind, to the common man, was not white.

Thus, the case of Bhagat Singh Thind is an important reflection of the shifting relationship between whiteness and citizenship in United States legal history. It is also an important lesson for South Asian folks: relying on caste and proximity to whiteness did not serve Bhagat Singh Thind well.

Endnotes

Naturalization Act of 1870
Vivek Bald, Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America (2013)

Neilesh Bose ed., South Asian Migrations in Global History: Labor, Law, and Wayward Lives (2020)

Rajender Kaur, "The Curious Case of Sick Keesar: Tracing the Roots of South Asian Presence in the Early Republic" (2017)

Taylor McNeil, "The Long History of Xenophobia in America" (2020)

1870: Expanded—But Not for All
Gaiutra Bahadur, Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture (2013)

Reece Jones, White Borders: The History of Race and Immigration in the United States from Chinese Exclusion to the Border Wall (2021)

Beth Lew-Williams, The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America (2018)

Nishant Upadhyay, Indians on Indian Lands: Intersections of Race, Caste, and Indigeneity (2024)

Suraj Milind Yengde, Caste, A Global Story (2025)

20th Century South Asian Migrations and NYC
Amy Bhatt and Nalini Iyer, Roots and Reflections: South Asians in the Pacific Northwest (2013)

Erika Lee, America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States (2019)

Nayan Shah, Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West (2012)

Seema Sohi, Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America (2014)

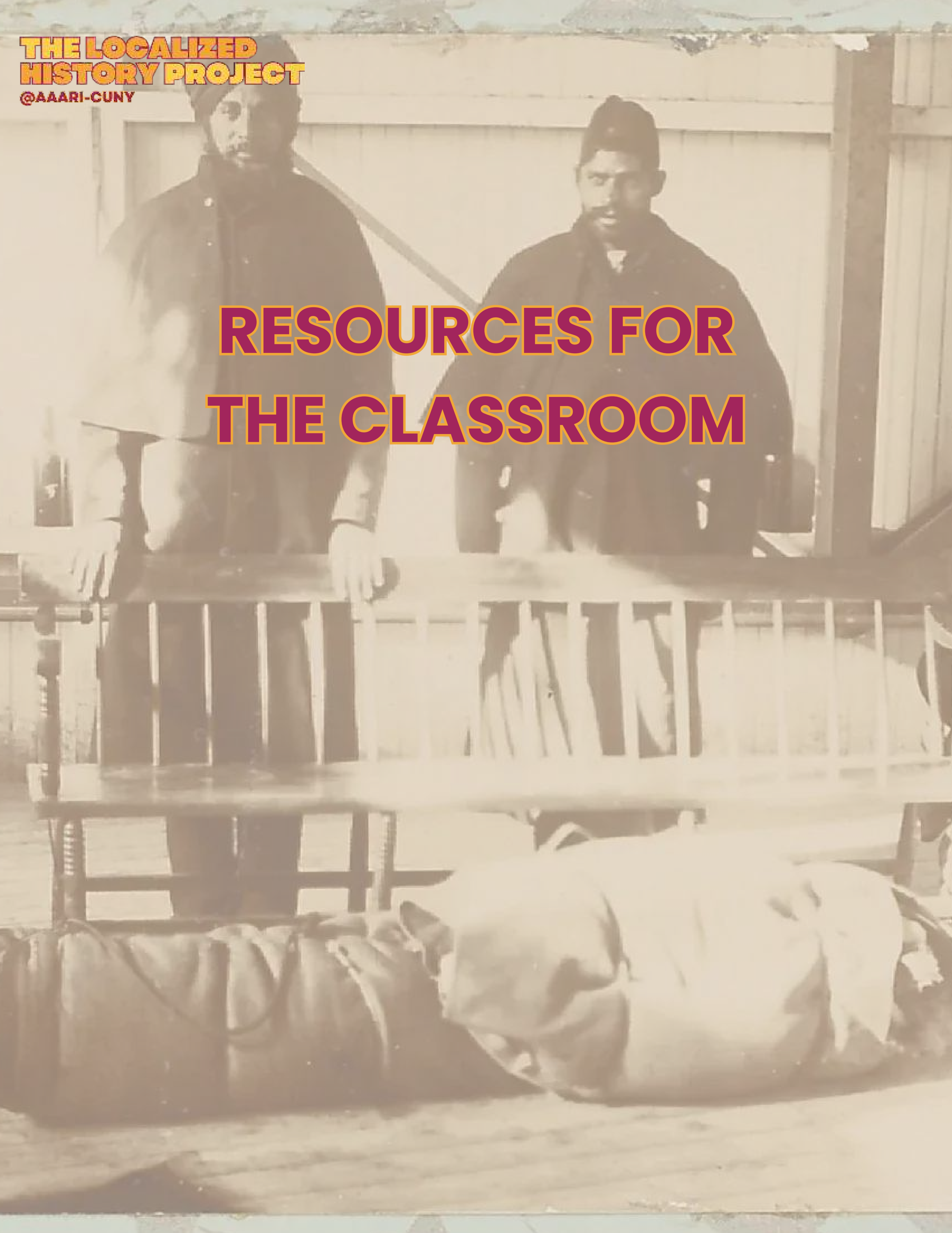
A Century of Challenges
Doug Coulson, Race, Nation, and Refuge: The Rhetoric of Race in Asian American Citizenship Cases (2017)

Hardeep Dhillon, "The Making of Modern US Citizenship and Alienage" (2023)

Maia Ramnath, Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism (2011)

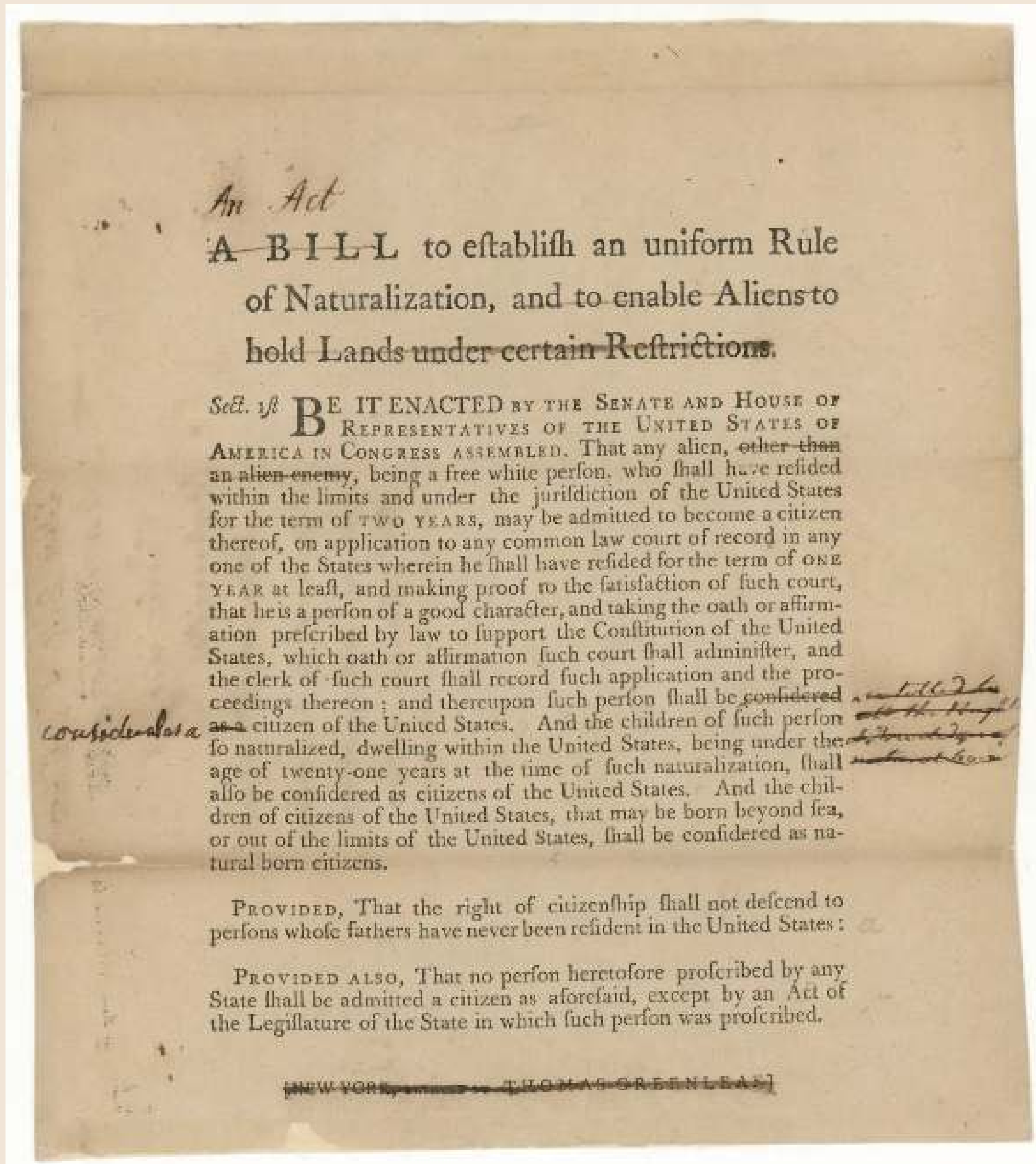
Bhagat Singh Thind v. United States
Arjun Shankar, "On Brown Blood: Race, Caste, and the Bhagat Singh Thind Case" (2023)

Ian Haney Lopez, White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race (2006)



RESOURCES FOR THE CLASSROOM

primary sources:



An Act

~~A BILL~~ to establish an uniform Rule of Naturalization, and to enable Aliens to hold Lands ~~under certain Restrictions~~.

Sect. 1st BE IT ENACTED BY THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN CONGRESS ASSEMBLED. That any alien, ~~other than an alien enemy~~, being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of TWO YEARS, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof, on application to any common law court of record in any one of the States wherein he shall have resided for the term of ONE YEAR at least, and making proof to the satisfaction of such court, that he is a person of a good character, and taking the oath or affirmation prescribed by law to support the Constitution of the United States, which oath or affirmation such court shall administer, and the clerk of such court shall record such application and the proceedings thereon; and thereupon such person shall be ~~considered as a~~ citizen of the United States. And the children of such person so naturalized, dwelling within the United States, being under the age of twenty-one years at the time of such naturalization, shall also be considered as citizens of the United States. And the children of citizens of the United States, that may be born beyond sea, or out of the limits of the United States, shall be considered as natural born citizens.

PROVIDED, That the right of citizenship shall not descend to persons whose fathers have never been resident in the United States:

PROVIDED ALSO, That no person heretofore proscribed by any State shall be admitted a citizen as aforesaid, except by an Act of the Legislature of the State in which such person was proscribed.

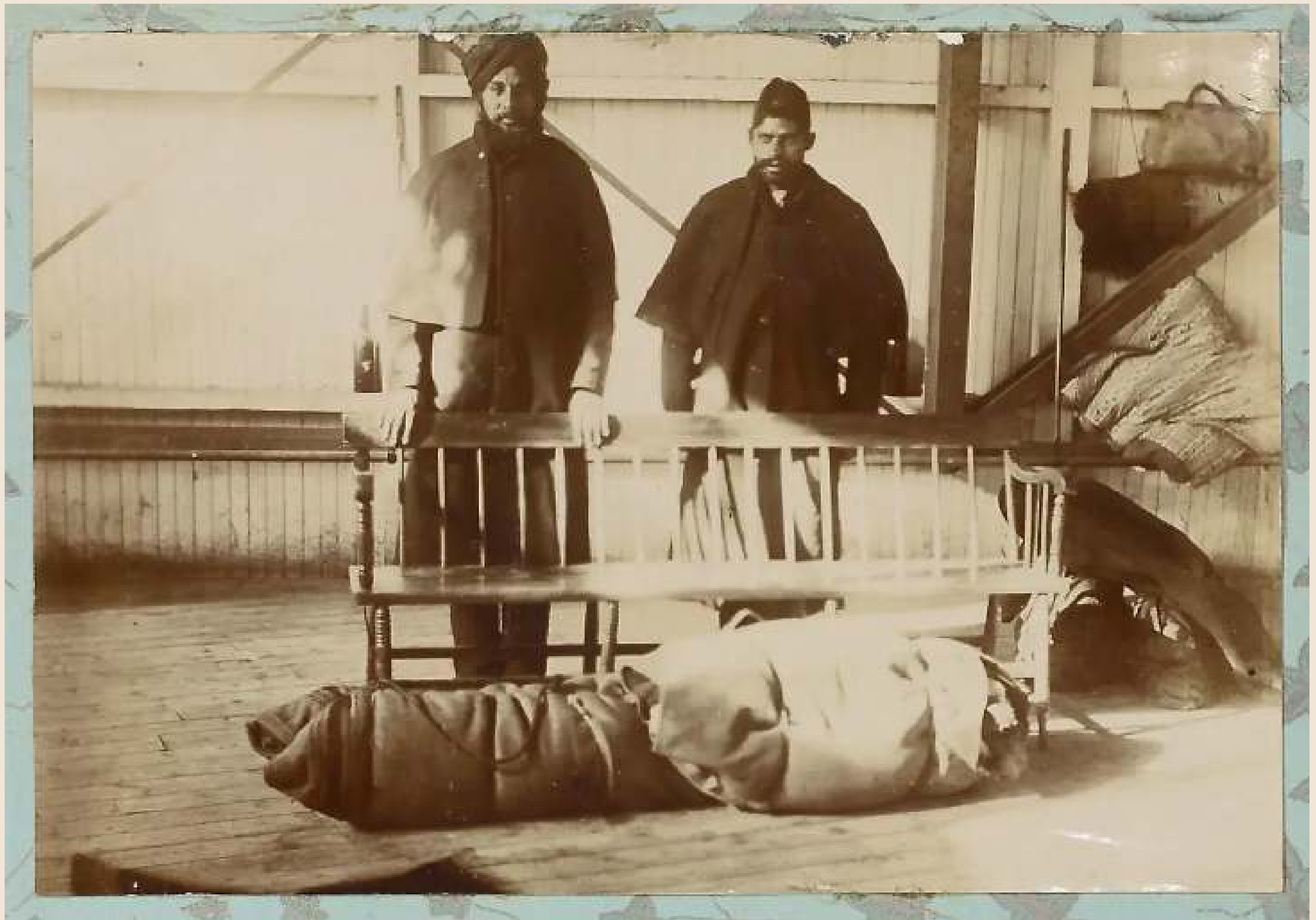
~~[NEW YORK, printed by THOMAS GREENLEAF.]~~

"A Bill to Establish an Uniform Rule of Naturalization, and Enable Aliens to Hold Lands under Certain Conditions," or the text of the Naturalization Act of 1790.

Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, held in the National Archives.

A photograph of lascars, sailors from South and Southeast Asia, contracted to work on the British ship *Dunera,* c. 1910.

Image courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.



Two of the earliest known South Asians to immigrate through New York's Ellis Island, Noran Single [Singh] & Koran Bazurka, c. 1890.

Original photograph by Eugene W. Austin. Unrestricted image use provided by the National Park Service, Statue of Liberty National Monument.

WHITE MOBS DRIVE OUT HINDUS OF WASHINGTON

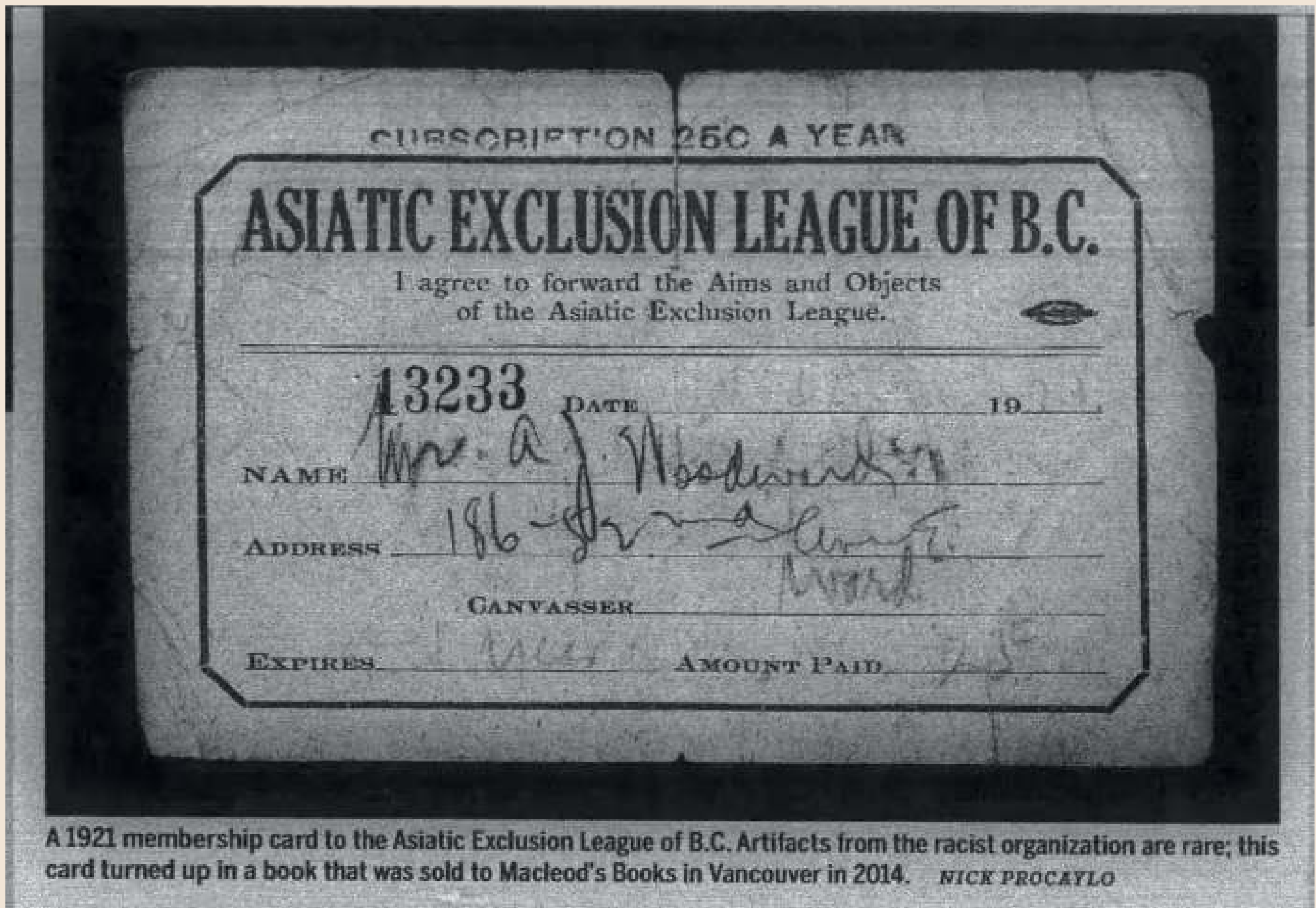
Bellingham, Wash., Sept. 6.—Six badly beaten Hindus are in the hospital, 400 frightened and half naked sikhs are in jail and in the corridors of the city hall, guarded by policemen, and somewhere between Bellingham and the British Columbia line are 750 natives of India, beaten, hungry and half clothed, making their way along the Great Northern right-of-way, bound for Canadian territory and the protection of the British flag.

The long expected cry, "drive out the Hindus," was heard thruout the city and along the water front last night.

The police were helpless. For five hours a mob of half a thousand white men raided the mills where the blacks were working, battered down doors of lodging houses and, dragging the invaders from their beds, escorted them to the city limits, with orders to keep on going.

An article covering the race riots in Bellingham, Washington, in 1907.

Article originally published in *The Minneapolis Journal* on September 6, 1907. Accessed via newspapers.com.



SUBSCRIPTION 25C A YEAR

ASIATIC EXCLUSION LEAGUE OF B.C.

I agree to forward the Aims and Objects of the Asiatic Exclusion League.

13233 DATE 19

NAME

ADDRESS

CANVASSER

EXPIRES AMOUNT PAID

A 1921 membership card to the Asiatic Exclusion League of B.C. Artifacts from the racist organization are rare; this card turned up in a book that was sold to Macleod's Books in Vancouver in 2014. NICK PROCAYLO

A membership card to the Asiatic Exclusion League of British Columbia, c. 1921.

Reprinted in *The Vancouver Sun* in 2017; accessed via newspapers.com

SCIENTIFIC BATTLE OVER PARSEE'S RIGHTS

Government Goes Deep in Ethnology to Oppose Balsara's Contest for Citizenship.

BROWN SKIN RACES AID HIM

Furnish Money to Fight Test Case — Principal Question the Meaning of "Free White Persons."

Whether Bhicaji Franyi Balsara is a "free white person" and hence entitled to citizenship will come up before the United States Circuit Court of Appeals this week at the Federal Building on an appeal by the government from a decision of Judge Lacombe on June 9 of last year. Judge Lacombe admitted Balsara to citizenship. The government determined to make a test case of it, and the research of Addison S. Pratt and Carl E. Whitney, of the staff of Henry A. Wise, the United States Attorney, to establish their case took them to the Congressional Library at Washington, where they delved for a week into ancient and modern ethnological works.

Newspaper coverage in *The New-York Tribune* of Balsara's case, c. 1910.

Originally published in *The New-York Tribune* on May 23, 1910. Accessed via newspapers.com.

A posed portrait of a young Parsi girl in Bombay (Mumbai), c. 1902.

Photo originally taken by Bourne & Shepherd and housed at the Sedgwick Museum. Accessed via The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library.

Bhagat Singh Thind (back row) with his battalion at Camp Lewis, Washington, c. 1918.

Photographer unknown. Donated to SAADA (the South Asian American Digital Archive) via David Thind, and accessed via Wikicommons.

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EXCERPTED CHAPTERS AND SELECT RESOURCES FROM:

Behind Hospital Doors: The System That Shaped Filipino Nurse Migration

GRADE 11 US History

11.4 POST-CIVIL WAR ERA (1865 – 1900): Reconstruction resulted in political reunion and expanded constitutional rights. However, those rights were undermined, and issues of inequality continued for African Americans, women, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Chinese immigrants. (Standards: 1, 4, 5; Themes: ID, TCC, CIV, ECO)

11.5 INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION (1870 – 1920): The United States was transformed from an agrarian to an increasingly industrial and urbanized society. Although this transformation created new economic opportunities, it also created societal problems that were addressed by a variety of reform efforts. (Standards: 1, 3, 4, 5; Themes: TCC, GEO, SOC, CIV, TECH)

11.7 PROSPERITY AND DEPRESSION (1920 – 1939): The 1920s and 1930s were a time of cultural and economic changes in the nation. During this period, the nation faced significant domestic challenges, including the Great Depression. (Standards: 1, 4; Themes: ID, TCC, SOC, CIV)

MABUHAY

Behind Hospital Doors: The System That Shaped Filipino Nurse Migration

By: Sean Cera

Excerpts From: Foundations of Filipino Migration

Sean Micheal Cera is a high school senior who joined The Localized History Project in 2025. He is interested in uplifting Filipinx stories of migration, labor, and resistance from his home community of Little Manila, Woodside, Queens. In his free time, he enjoys playing basketball.

To understand how Filipino nurses emerged as a major labor force in the 1960s and beyond, we must first understand the complex history of US colonialism in the Philippines.

On December 10, 1898, the Treaty of Paris was signed, marking the end of both the Spanish-American War and over 300 years of Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines. The Spanish-American War began in 1898 after tensions rose between the US and Spain over contrasting ideas about Cuban independence and American economic expansionist ambitions in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Through yellow journalism, American newspapers vastly exaggerated Spanish acts of military aggression (such as the explosion of the USS. Maine), shaping public opinion against Spain and constructing an image of the US as noble, benevolent, and antagonized.[1]

Escalating territorial tensions between the declining Spanish empire and ever-expanding American one, all fueled by media propaganda, pushed US Congress and President William McKinley to declare war in April 1898. In 1898, the Philippines also found itself in the midst of conflict with the Spanish empire as it approached the close of the Philippine Revolution, a two-year long armed struggle for Philippine sovereignty and independence. Emilio Aguinaldo, the first president of the Philippines and a key architect of the Philippine Revolution, frames this struggle as the inevitable product of centuries of colonial domination, writing:

"Spain maintained control of the Philippine Islands for more than three centuries and a half, during which period the tyranny, misconduct and abuses of the Friars and the Civil and Military Administration exhausted the patience of the natives and caused them to make a desperate effort to shake off the unbearable galling yoke on the 26th and 31st of August, 1896."[2]

Thus, during the eight month period of overlap between the Philippine Revolution and the Spanish American War, US expansionist ambitions coincided with the Philippine struggle for national liberation, creating a temporary (and brittle) alliance between the two nations.

MAINE DESTROYED IN HAVANA HARBOR.

THE SHIP IS BLOWN UP AT ANCHOR

Four Hundred and Twenty of Uncle Sam's Brave Boys Are Killed.

One of the Most Awful Disasters That Have Ever Overtaken the American Navy, and Spain is Open to Suspicion.

1. Richard Cavendish, "The Sinking of the Maine," History Today 48, no. 2 (February 1998), https://www.historytoday.com/archive/sinking-maine.
2. Emilio Aguinaldo, "The Revolution of 1896" in True Version of the Philippine Revolution (Tarlak, Philippine Islands, 1899).

Behind Hospital Doors: The System That Shaped Filipino Nurse Migration

By: Sean Cera

As Aguinaldo later accounts, the US's desire to establish a monopoly over Pacific trade routes and labor markets eclipsed any possibility for true Philippine independence from any colonial power. In the final months of the Philippine Revolution and Spanish-American War, "Americans openly commenced hostilities against [Aguinaldo's army], especially in the respect of the conduct of Admiral Dewey, who, without any reason or justification, one day in the month of October seized all [Philippine] steamers and launches."[1] The US's strategic disarmament of the Philippines at the end of these wars laid important groundwork for the latter's annexation and, eventually, assimilation into American labor markets.

On December 10, 1898, the Treaty of Paris was signed, ending the Spanish-American War and, importantly, requiring Spain to cede its overseas territories, including the Philippines, to the US for $20 million.[2] Instead of bringing the independence that Filipinos so desperately fought for two years prior, the US ruled over the Philippines as one of many colonial acquisitions, alongside Puerto Rico and Guam. The US justified its takeover through the idea of benevolent assimilation, claiming it would simultaneously prevent government collapse and introduce democracy in the Philippines. In reality, this idea served to reveal the truth of American imperial ambitions: to control the Pacific Ocean with their military, gain access to Asian markets, and increase overseas economic expansion.

On a global scale, the Treaty of Paris was incredibly significant for the US, showing its shift from a somewhat isolated nation to a sprawling overseas imperial power. The Treaty also showed how imperial nations like the US could create extractive political and institutional connections within their new territories. In this broad territorial transfer, the US gave itself clear authority to build systems – including mass educational institutions like nursing schools – that directly served its own political and economic needs following the conclusion of the short but bloody Spanish-American War. As I will explore in my next section, the imperial roots of nursing institutions in the Philippines would shape patterns of migration well beyond the end of US imperial rule in the Pacific.

As a public school student and Filipino-American, I was taught to see the Philippine-US relationship as progressive for the Filipino community, a necessary transition phase from Spanish occupation after the conclusion of the Spanish-American War. However, US education systems often depict imperial power and colonization as development rather than domination to disguise the violence of imperialism in the Philippines.

Viewing this history critically challenges that common nationalist narrative portraying the United States as a benevolent country at the peak of its imperial expansion. By exploring the US's betrayal of the Philippines during the Spanish-American War and Philippine Revolution, we can understand the reality that benevolent assimilation acted as an excuse to limit Filipino independence and benefit American expansion. This side of history also matters because it helps the Filipino diaspora of the US to understand migration patterns better, including how and why Filipino nurses were positioned to meet US labor demands following the conclusion of the Spanish-American War.

1. Aguinaldo, "First Clouds" in True Version of the Philippine Revolution.
2. "Treaty of Paris," US Department of State, December 10, 1898.

Behind Hospital Doors: The System That Shaped Filipino Nurse Migration

By: Sean Cera

Excerpts From: Training Filipino Nurses for U.S. Work

Under the American colonial rule that followed the Spanish-American War and Philippine Revolution, Filipinos were forcibly assimilated into Western traditions, language, and government systems through the importation of American schooling systems. The "benevolent" tool of education served to produce Filipino laborers and citizens that could easily fit into the American economy.

In the early 20th century, the United States established hospitals and nursing schools in the Philippines, such as the Philippine General Hospital School of Nursing. These institutions trained Filipino nurses according to US medical standards, teaching Western medical practices almost entirely in English.

In addition to building mass training facilities for nurses in the Philippines, the US passed legislation like the Pensionado Act of 1903 to further solidify systems of Americanized Education by Filipinos themselves. The Pensionado Act created a scholarship program for pensionados – literate, educated, and largely upper class Filipinos – to travel to the US to get degrees in government and administration. After receiving American training in the States, pensionados would then return to the Philippines to restructure governmental, educational, and public health institutions in the American image. Many of these pensionados were nursing students, who brought American training and national sympathy back home with them as they founded nursing schools in the Philippines between 1903 and 1940.

"Senior class receiving instruction in operating-room techniques, Philippine General Hospital" from Philippine General Hospital School of Nursing, Ninth Annual Announcement and Catalogue, 1925–1926. U.S. National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

Produced by a combination of direct and indirect American presence in the Philippines, this Americanized education system worked to construct a workforce that was both compatible with and portable to US hospitals. In practice, this workforce of American-trained Filipino nurses would be used to fill growing hospital staffing shortages in the US after WWI and WWII, when reduced government funding for hospital staffing left many hospitals severely under-resourced and under-staffed.[5] The US had a need for nurses, and decided to fill this labor shortage outside of its country borders.

In ***Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History***, historian Catherine Ceniza Choy argues that the process of Americanized nursing education was actually part of a longer tradition of labor extraction from the Philippines to the US.[6] In fact, the creation and mass export of Filipino nurses was one of many systems put in place after 1898 to train and prepare Filipinos to meet hyper-specific labor demands across the American empire. Filipino farmers were trained and recruited as cheap, expendable agricultural labor in California and Hawaii, for instance, where they were perceived as reliable and trustworthy laborers. This racial archetype of the passive, hard-working, and trustworthy Filipino migrant laborer across many different sectors of the American workforce also paved the way for Filipinos to be seamlessly recruited into US hospitals.[7]

1. "Richard Cavendish, "The Sinking of the Maine," History Today 48, no. 2 (February 1998),
2. Emilio Aguinaldo, "The Revolution of 1896" in True Version of the Philippine Revolution (Tarlak, Philippine Islands, 1899).
3. Aguinaldo, "First Clouds" in True Version of the Philippine Revolution.
4. "Treaty of Paris," US Department of State, December 10, 1898.
5. Where They Came From: A Historical and Political Context," Kanlungan, n.d.,
6. Catherine Ceniza Choy, Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
7. Ibid.

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Resources

MAINE DESTROYED IN HAVANA HARBOR.

THE SHIP IS BLOWN UP AT ANCHOR

Four Hundred and Twenty of Uncle Sam's Brave Boys Are Killed.

One of the Most Awful Disasters That Have Ever Overtaken the American Navy, and Spain is Open to Suspicion.

The Maine was commanded by Captain Charles D. Sigsbee.
Her other officers were:
Lieutenant-Commander Richard Wainwright.
Lieutenants G. F. Holman, John Hood and C. W. Yungen.
Lieutenants (junior grade) C. W. Blow, J. T. Blandin, F. A. Jenkins.
Cadets J. H. Holden, W. T. Cluverius, Amos Bronson, D. F. Boyd Jr.
Surgeon L. G. Heneberger.
Paymaster Ryan.
Chief Engineer L. G. Howell.
Passed Assistant Engineer E. C. Bowers.
Assistant Engineers J. R. Morris and D. R. Merritt.
Cadet Engineers Pope, Washington and Arthur Crenshaw.
Chaplain J. P. Chadwick.
Lieutenant of Marines A. W. Catlin.

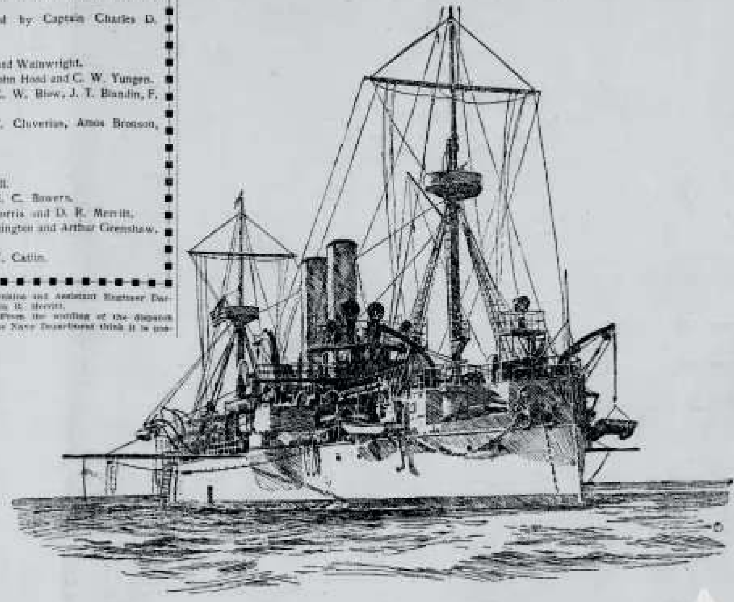
...the arsenal, others said it was a bomb, and it was not until 11 o'clock that the real cause was known.

Consul-General Lee, who was at the Hotel Inglaterra, received a telephone message from General Blanco telling him that the Maine had been blown up.

Lee hastened to the palace, where the Cabinet is now assembled.

Admiral Manterola ordered that boats of all kinds go to the assistance of the Maine and her wounded. The Havana firemen also gave aid, tending carefully to the wounded as they were brought on shore. It was a terrible sight. General Solano and the other generals were ordered by Captain-General Blanco to take steps to help the Maine's crew in every way possible. The correspondent went close to the Maine in one of the boats of the cruiser Alfonso XII, and saw others of the wounded who corroborate the statement of those first interviewed that they were asleep when the explosion occurred.

Captain Sigsbee said the explosion occurred in the bow of the vessel. He...

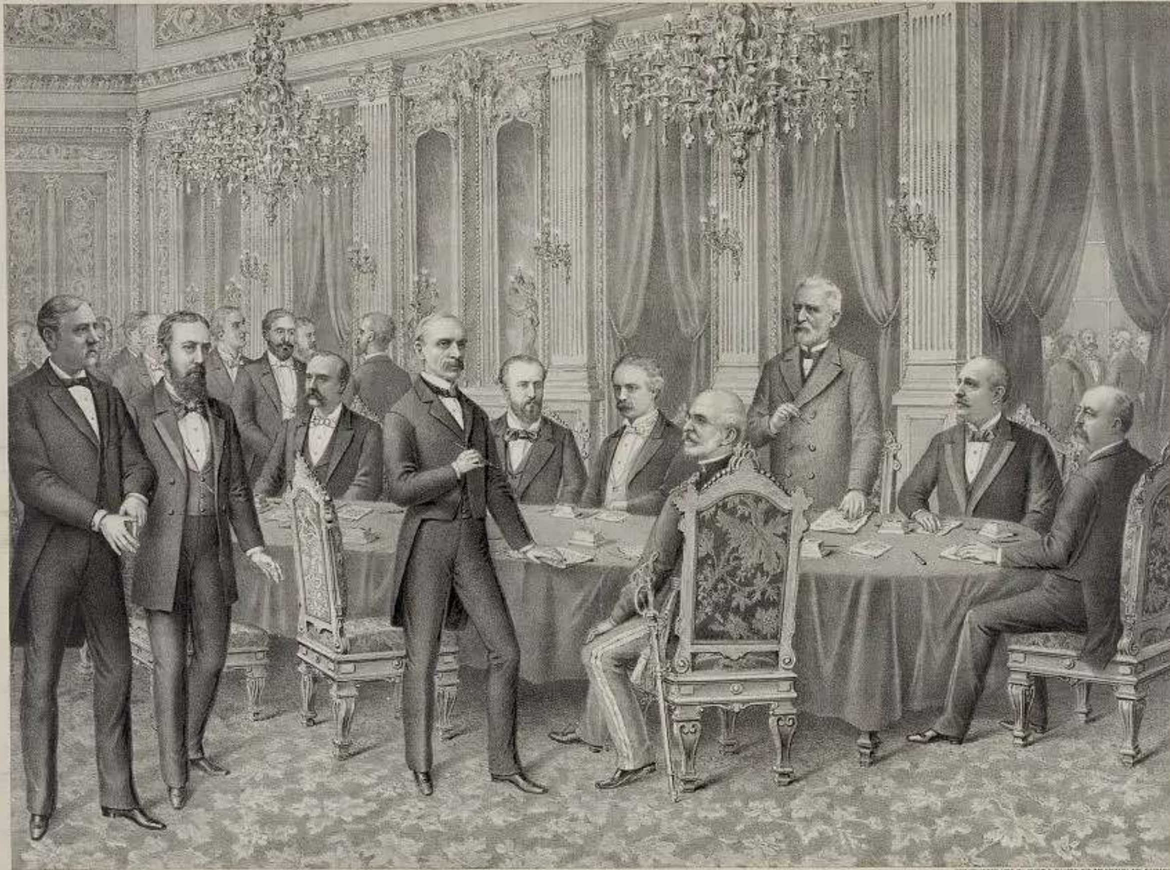


THE UNITED STATES BATTLE-SHIP MAINE.
From a Photograph Taken for the New York Herald at Key West on January 16.

A newspaper article covering the sinking of the USS Maine, stating that the incident killed over four hundred US soldiers and that “Spain is Open to Suspicion."

A Newspaper from the San Francisco Bulletin, February 16, 1898

Filipino diplomats in Paris, France, around the time of the signing the Treaty of Paris, c. 1898-99.



Politicians and military officials — from all appearances, all white — sign the negotiated peace treaty between Spain and the United States, which transferred the Spanish colonial territories of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the US.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division
Line Drawing from 1898.

A political cartoon satirizing American President William McKinley's policy of "benevolent assimilation." The cartoon mocks McKinley's hypocritical declaration of the United States as a "civilizing influence" over the Philippines, while the curtain of justice reveals the rot of American racism in the background.

Created by Charles Bush Green, sourced via Funk & Wagnalls and General Research Division, The New York Public Library, c. 1890

A group portrait of the St. Paul's Hospital nursing school student body, Manila, Philippines, November 1927.

Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, published by the University of Southern California Digital.

"Senior class receiving instruction in operating-room techniques, Philippine General Hospital" from Philippine General Hospital School of Nursing Ninth Annual Announcement and Catalogue, 1915–1916. U.S. National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

The senior class at the Philippine General Hospital School of Nursing observes a lesson on operating room techniques, c. 1915-1916, Published in the U.S. National Archives, College Park, Maryland

A Catholic school boy has his ear irrigated by three young nurses at St. Paul's Hospital, Manila, Philippines, October 31, 1927, Published by the University of Southern California Digital Library

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EXCERPTED CHAPTERS AND SELECT RESOURCES FROM:

Everyday Resistance, Cultural Preservation, and Neighborhood Identity: Doyers Street as a Site of Struggle Against Racial Capitalism in Chinatown's Urban Revitalization

11th GRADE US HISTORY

11.4 POST-CIVIL WAR ERA (1865 – 1900): Reconstruction resulted in political reunion and expanded constitutional rights. However, those rights were undermined, and issues of inequality continued for African Americans, women, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Chinese immigrants. (Standards: 1, 4, 5; Themes: ID, TCC, CIV, ECO)

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Everyday Resistance, Cultural Preservation, and Neighborhood Identity in Doyers Street

By: Ruiyu Tang

Excerpt from: "Introduction"

Ruiyu Tang is a senior at Hunter College High School in New York City. His research interests include Asian American history and literature, community organizing in ethnic enclaves, and urban revitalization. In addition to archival and oral history research, Ruiyu enjoys documentary filmmaking and other creative outlets like drawing and photography.

Once known as the bloodiest street in America, home to gang wars, and Hollywood style ambushes and shootouts, Doyers Street, or the "Bloody Angle," exemplifies how New York City's Chinatown has changed throughout the 20th century.[1]

Now, street seating, colorful murals, restaurants and barbershops define Doyers Street. Located at the heart of a vibrant, and bustling Chinatown, Doyers Street's transformation begs the question of how Chinatown became what it is today. The narrative of Chinatown as a slum and underdeveloped neighborhood led city planners, entrepreneurs, and merchants to consistently attempt to urbanize and reform Chinatown in an effort to sterilize the area and spur economic activity through tourism and business.[2]

However, the urban renewal plans of the twentieth century were rooted in orientalist stereotypes of exotic Chinese culture, and were catered towards tourists, benefiting outsiders while displacing longtime residents already struggling in poverty.[3] These revitalization projects toe the line of cultural exploitation and the destruction of authentic culture and tradition. While traditional narratives of rejecting exploitative plans overlook the agency of residents, acts of everyday resistance by individuals like cultural storytelling, the operation of family-owned businesses, activism, and artistry have played significant roles in preserving authentic cultural identity by resisting negative stereotypes and Western conceptions of Chinatown. Instead, they supplement larger movements of activism and the operations of community organizations, and attract the same economic growth and tourism that historical urban renewal projects have targeted, without ceding the right of self-determination for neighborhood identity.

With that, we'll head back in time to the birth of New York's Chinatown, and the larger phenomena of ethnic enclaves across America. Chinatowns were initially formed as an act of resistance. They were formed as safe havens from racial violence, and an ethnic enclave that would shield Chinese immigrants from discrimination, racial violence and hostility, and structural violence in policy.[4] Indeed, policies like the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the Court decision People v. Hall legalized the discrimination and exclusion of Chinese people, and spurred violence against hate crimes, with 153 anti-Chinese riots following the Exclusion Act.[5] Thus, because they lacked protection and legal asylum, residents moved to Chinatowns to seek safety in numbers, creating networks of ethnic solidarity, despite strong homeowning restrictions and lack of citizenship.[6] But, it was also in these early origins that Chinese residents established laundries, opened family-owned restaurants, secured their first homes, and planted their roots. Now, Chinatowns still remain as cultural epicenters.[7]

1. "Doyers Street – Museum of Chinese in America," Museum of Chinese in America, 2019
2. Greg Umbach and Dan Wishnoff, "Strategic Self-Orientalism: Urban Planning Policies and the Shaping of New York City's Chinatown, 1950-2005," Journal of Planning History 7, no. 3 (February 12, 2008): 219,
3. Kartik Naram, "No Place like Home: Racial Capitalism, Gentrification, and the Identity of Chinatown," Asian American Policy Review 27, no. 1 (June 29, 2017): 35
4. Xiayu Chen et al., "Aging in Chinatowns: The Meaning of Place and Aging Experience for Older Immigrants," Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology 37, no. 4 (November 19, 2022): 377
5. Naram, "No Place like Home: Racial Capitalism, Gentrification, and the Identity of Chinatown," 33.
6. Ibid, 34.
7. Domenic Vitiello and Zoe Blickenderfer. "The Planned Destruction of Chinatowns in the United States and Canada since C.1900." Planning Perspectives 35, no. 1 (September 25, 2018): 5-7.
8.

Everyday Resistance, Cultural Preservation, and Neighborhood Identity in Doyers Street

By: Ruiyu Tang

Excerpt from: "Urban Destruction in Chinatown" and "Third Spaces as Sites of Preservation"

Historian Domenic Vitiello identifies three periods of planned destruction in New York City's Chinatown. Starting in the 1890s, the City Beautiful period lasted until the 1930s, followed by the Urban Renewal period from the 40s to the 70s, and finally, downtown revitalization, which has continued to the present day.[1] In these periods, Chinatowns are often destroyed to make room for infrastructure projects like roads, highways, and office buildings. Across the board, landlords, police, and health departments advocated for the removal of Chinatowns, and the press and public opinion generally supported these proposals as well.[2]

A 1906 article directly advocates for the destruction of Chinatown, characterizing it as a slum for "Chinamen." There seems to be a "unanimous" idea that Chinatown should be demolished in order to remove the bad energy and immoral atmosphere of the area. The source believes that the neighborhood is a corruptive force, turning good people into criminals, and as such, makes the case for necessary urban renewal and Chinatown's destruction. Further, the article suggested that this was a notion supported by Progressive Chinese, stating,

"No crimes of violence are committed by the Chinese outside of those limits. The disorderly element inhabits that slum and congregates there to prey on the peaceable and law-abiding... Progressive Chinese merchants are in favor of tearing down that slum."[3]

Secondary sources explain that urban planning initiatives view neighborhoods as places of monetary opportunity, and projects like the China Village plan in the 1950s believed that demolishing buildings in central Chinatown would better the neighborhood's economic state, and create a positive image of Chinatown that would boost investment.[4] Indeed, during this period, the State Commission on Housing declared Chinatown a slum, advocating for a neighborhood that was urban, modern, and sanitary.[5] Although Chinatowns were able to avoid these projects on a larger scale, forces like racial capitalism and a strong economic pressure to attract tourists and investment led many businesses to embrace Western, oriental conceptions of Chinese tradition and culture, showcasing exoticism instead of authenticity.

The Chinese Tuxedo was a very popular Chinese American restaurant that emerged in 1897, and a modern bar of the same name exists today on Doyers Street! In order to beat out the competition and attract wealthy customers who wanted an exotic experience, the Chinese Tuxedo's outside decorations were in a Chinese style with a wooden dragon. The self-orientalization of the restaurant was ultimately a concession, allowing wealthy outsiders to infiltrate the ethnic enclave of Chinatown.[6]

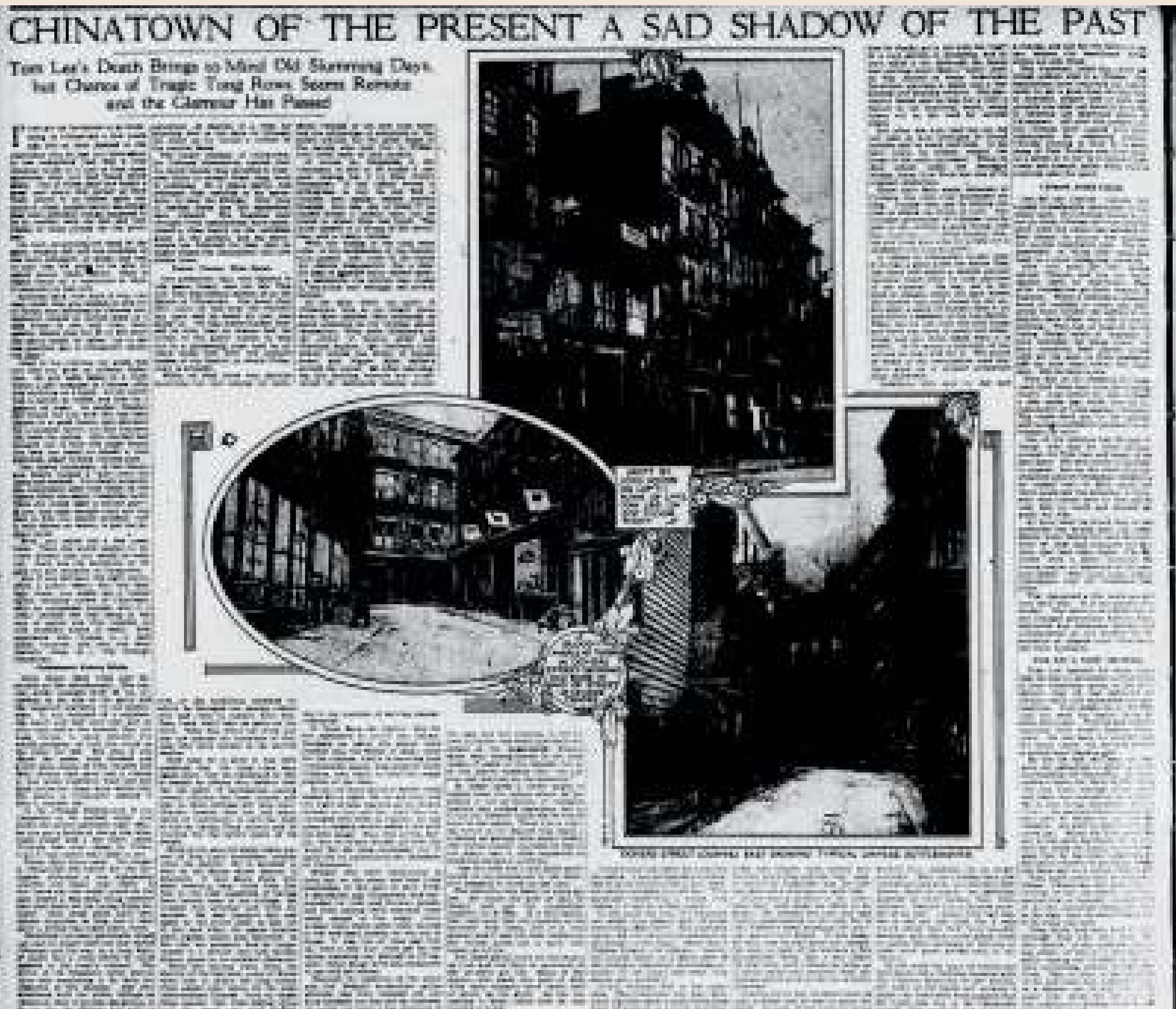
On the same street, The Nom Wah tea parlor is the longest, continuously running restaurant in New York and in Chinatown. Starting in 1920, the dim sum restaurant opened for the first time at 13-15 Doyers Street, where it operates at 11-13 Doyers today. Serving as a neighborhood staple, the restaurant endured years of harmful urban planning projects, gang violence, and economic instability. Contemporary historian Diane Wong argues that discussions generated in stores, restaurants, and other community spaces in neighborhoods like Chinatown can create intergenerational dialogue.[7] Instead of attracting tourists through oriental embellishments, authenticity in stores are places for knowledge sharing, and the development of shared understandings and insight around present-day economic struggles like gentrification and rising Asian hate.[8] Informal dialogue or as Wong terms it, "shop talk," in public spaces can also be key to strategize and resistance against gentrification, and mobilizing grassroots action through organizations like the WOW project and Basement Workshop, which are community based-initiatives centered around intimate and authentic dialogue.[9]

1. Vitiello, "The Planned Destruction of Chinatowns," 3-5.
2. Ibid, 8-12.
3. The Evening World. "Chinese Endorse Plan to Wipe out Chinatown." March 9, 1906.
4. Chuo Li, "Commercialism and Identity Politics in New York's Chinatown," Journal of Urban History 41, no. 6 (January 30, 2015): 1118–21,
5. Umbach, "Strategic Self-Orientalism,"217.
6. Daniel Ostrow, Manhattan's Chinatown (Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 59.
7. Diane Wong, "Shop Talk and Everyday Sites of Resistance to Gentrification in Manhattan's Chinatown," Women's Studies Quarterly 47, no. 1 & 2 (2019): 132-5
8. Diane Wong, "Shop Talk and Everyday Sites of Resistance to Gentrification in Manhattan's Chinatown," Women's Studies Quarterly 47, no. 1 & 2 (2019): 132-5
9. Ibid, 137.

primary sources:

A photo-postcard showing a street view of Doyers Street in Chinatown.

Date unknown; photographer unknown. Part of the Eric Y. Ng collection at the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA). Permissions for use granted by MOCA.



CHINATOWN OF THE PRESENT A SAD SHADOW OF THE PAST

Tom Lee's Death Brings to Mind Old Slumming Days, but Chances of Tragic Tong Rows Seem Remote and the Glamour Has Passed

An article in the *New York Herald* titled "Chinatown of the Present, A Sad Shadow of the Past," discussing crime and gang violence in the "Bloody Angle."

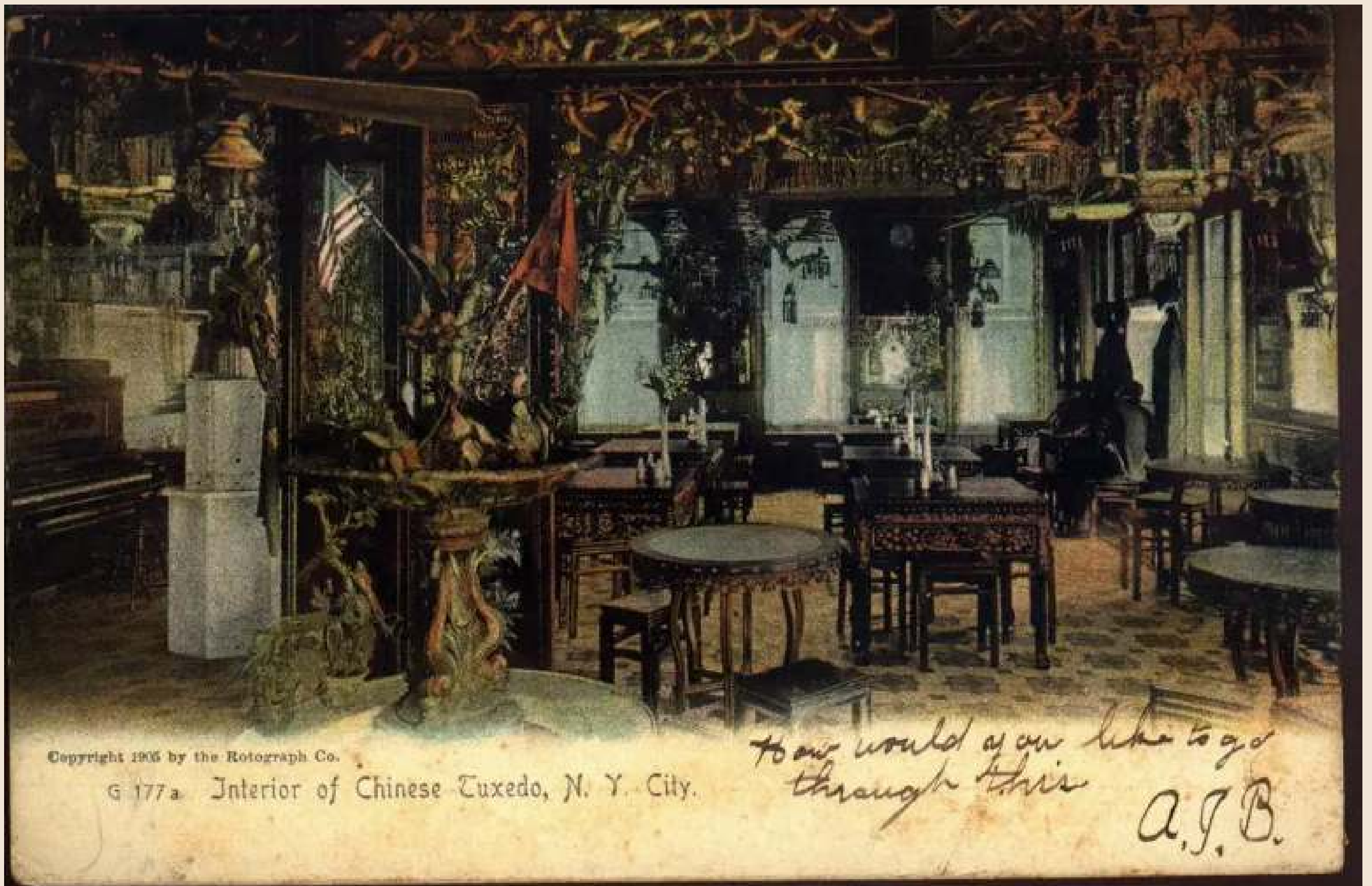
Originally published January 27, 1918, in the *New York Sun* and made digitally available in the *New York Herald* archives via newspapers.com: *Chronicling America*. Available in the public domain.

A novelty postcard of the streets and buildings of Chinatown, c. 1910.

Created by the Illustrated Postcard and Novelty Co. Accessed via the Tenement Museum and made available in the public domain at the New York Public Library.

A promotional postcard depicting the storefront of the Chinese Tuxedo restaurant on Doyer Street, c. 1904.

Originally created by the Rotograph Co. Made available via the Joe Covino collection at the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA). Permissions for fair use granted via MOCA.



A promotional postcard depicting the luxurious interior of the first fine dining restaurant in Manhattan's Chinatown, Chinese Tuxedo, c. 1905.

Created by the Rotograph Co. Made available for fair use via Columbia University Digital Library Collections.

A photograph of "Stories in Flight," a 4,800-square-foot asphalt mural on Doyers Street in Manhattan’s Chinatown, c. 2024.

Mural conceptualized and created by Colleen Kong-Savage. Photograph of installation made available via the artist’s web portfolio; used under the terms of Fair Use Doctrine, but artist reserves all rights.

A mural dedicated to the life of iconic Asian-American photographer, Corky Lee, on Doyers Street in Chinatown, c. September 2021.

Mural created by Marisa Molina and photographed by the ChinatownMural Project in September 2021. Used under the terms of Fair Use.

A mural, "Chinatown Warriors," created by Gian Galang on Doyers Street in 2023.

Mural by Gian Galang and made digitally available via the artist’s digital portfolio. Used under the terms of Fair Use.

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Excerpts and Select Resources From:

Shipyards, Kitchens, and City Streets: Finding Belonging in South Asian Harlem

11th Grade US History

11.5 INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION (1870 – 1920): The United States was transformed from an agrarian to an increasingly industrial and urbanized society. Although this transformation created new economic opportunities, it also created societal problems that were addressed by a variety of reform efforts. (Standards: 1, 3, 4, 5; Themes: TCC, GEO, SOC, CIV, TECH)

11.7 PROSPERITY AND DEPRESSION (1920 – 1939): The 1920s and 1930s were a time of cultural and economic changes in the nation. During this period, the nation faced significant domestic challenges, including the Great Depression. (Standards: 1, 4; Themes: ID, TCC, SOC, CIV)

Shipyards, Kitchens, and City Streets: Finding Belonging in South Asian Harlem

By: Columbia University's South Asian Diasporas Seminar Students +The Localized History Project

Excerpt from: "The SS Khiva and Amir Haidar Khan"

> ***"In January 1918, in the dead of a severe New York winter, the SS Khiva docked on the Westside waterfront of Manhattan. The Khiva was a British steamship carrying goods from colonized India to the United States. The ship was manned by a crew of laborers from what is now Pakistan and Bangladesh. Maritime work was some of the most arduous labor of the early industrial age, and in the case of British trade and transport ships, it was labor performed by men from the colonies. South Asians comprised the largest group among colonial laborers on British steamships. That night in January, two young workers took leave from the Khiva to explore the docks of New York City. One, a Kashmiri named Amir Haider Khan, was just eighteen years old and already a four-year veteran of the maritime trade. He and his friend eventually wandered into a waterfront provisions store, whose Jewish proprietor put the idea into their heads of deserting their ship. Khan and his friend took shore leave again, "telling our shipmates we were going for a stroll," but they did not return."***
>
> ***— Excerpt from Vivek Bald's Bengali Harlem***

In the 1920s and 1930s, South Asian seamen known as lascars began "jumping ship" at New York ports. These newly arrived lascars found blue-collar jobs all across Manhattan: as peddlers, line cooks, or factory workers. Lascars lived in clandestine networks in neighborhoods stretching from the Tenderloin to the Lower East Side. Such men were likely to end up in a boardinghouse, typically inhabited by single men and African Americans, and run by women. Here, they got provisions, clothing, a safe haven, and community in a new, strange country. One such lascar was Dada Amir Haider Khan. Khan boarded a ship at the age of 14 or 15 from Bombay on the S.S. City of Paris, a British steamship that sailed along British-controlled routes of the Atlantic. On his initial journeys, he met various crew members who were from different parts of the British empire. These encounters awakened his critical consciousness and helped him come to terms with his own experiences of colonial violence. He wrote of his early journeys in his memoir:

"Without any political background or formal school education, my national sentiment had begun to grow under diverse experiences and surroundings through which I had been passing. The first symptom of it I can trace back to the time of my contact with Joe. Subsequently it continued to grow and was stimulated by the post-war happenings in India which caused the greatest upheaval in modern Indian history. Finally, my contact with the old Sikh of the Ghadar Party and other nationalist Indians in America…inspired my enthusiasm for India's freedom to such an extent that all these various influences had created a passionate burning patriotic feeling in me."

Dada Amir Haider Khan anchored himself in history through experiences with other colonial subjects, like Joe, who was the son of an Irish revolutionary. His interactions with Ghadar Party members — who he met after jumping ship and settling in New York City — were also politically and intellectually significant for him. He wrote of how, during his time in the United States (when he was in his 20s), he spent all of his free time attending "political, social, or educational meetings" to learn the history of the United States, build a stronger understanding of Marxism and labor rights, and to better understand the unique contours of racism in America.

Khan wrote, "The national colonial problems, the interconnection and interdependence of the national movement for emancipation of the colonial people with the working class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries, the role of the Communist International and the Soviet Union in the world revolutionary movement for the ultimate emancipation of humanity as a whole. It stirred my imagination."

Khan left the United States to study proletarian revolutionary strategy in Moscow. He ultimately returned to India in 1928, marking the end of the period in his life where he would frequently stay in America. Khan's time in New York would remain a deeply influential period in his political development. It shaped his political activism around the world in the decades to come, though his anti-colonial views would forever be refracted through his unique experiences as a seaman.

"Khan was clearly moved by the fact that American activist Agnes Smedley could shift her political energies from pursuing the lofty goal of Indian independence to addressing the everyday difficulties and concerns of Indian ex-seamen in the United States—and that she could see… that both efforts were part of the same struggle." — Vivek Bald

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Excerpt from: "Crafts, Carts, and Restaurants"

In a still-segregated New York City, South Asian men were often classified as "colored," "Mexican," or as Black. Thus, by the 1940s, Harlem had become an unlikely home to South Asian migrants. Many of them were Bengali Muslim seamen, whose presence led to the development of a politically engaged working-class community. Harlem became increasingly multicultural, as these migrants intermarried and built families with Black, Hispanic, and other minority groups that resided in the neighborhood. On streets like 110th, 116th, and Lexington Avenue, there were a few gruff, bearded, Brown faces positioned behind hot dog carts, sticking out amongst the crowd. These streets and the vendors who worked on them were important parts of everyday life for residents of Bengali Harlem. Those hot dog carts, in addition to being one of the many ways Bengalis found to make a living for themselves in 1930s Harlem, were also community institutions. In Bengali Harlem, author Vivek Bald writes about how the carts were places where South Asian Muslims could be sure to grab a halal meal and engage in some daily gossip.

By the 1940s, these streets were still a place for Bengali Harlemites to gather. But by now, they were also important inter-communal areas for newly-forming mixed-race families. Felita, the Puerto Rican sister-in-law of Bengali seaman Saad Ullah, speaks about how the South Asian-owned pushcarts became touchpoints for her, where she knew "that her brother-in-law Saad's friends would keep a watchful eye on her." Saad himself ended up marrying his Puerto Rican wife, Jackie, after repeat encounters on a train he boarded from 110th Street. In the late 1940s and beyond, places like Lexington Avenue between 102nd and 116th Street became a place for many Bengali-Puerto Rican families like Saad and Jackie's to settle down.

Restaurants were the most common business ventures for a South Asian immigrant in the twentieth century. By the middle of the twentieth century, Hell's Kitchen and Times Square had a high concentration of Indian restaurants. For example, the famous Ceylon India Inn opened in 1915 on 49th Street, while the Taj Mahal Hindu Restaurant opened in 1918 on 42nd Street. Bengal Garden was also a central part of the community of Bengali Harlem and greater New York, where the Pakistan League of America regularly held their meetings. Peddlers and community members could pool money, and perhaps get advice from seasoned experts Victoria and Habib Ullah, owners of Bengal Garden, on how to open their own restaurants. Many of the new restaurants were located in the Theater District, if not right in Times Square. Further down the East Side, 6th Street between 1st and 2nd Avenue had become a "Little India" by the 1960s, as many restaurants and shops serving South Asian cuisine and goods had popped up there. Today, on 6th Street, there are two Indian restaurants. It is a far cry from what was once a haven for the community looking for a bit of home in New York City.

Khan left the United States to study proletarian revolutionary strategy in Moscow. He ultimately returned to India in 1928, marking the end of the period in his life where he would frequently stay in America. Khan's time in New York would remain a deeply influential period in his political development. It shaped his political activism around the world in the decades to come, though his anti-colonial views would forever be refracted through his unique experiences as a seaman.

In July 1913, Bhimarao Ramji Ambedkar, a young man from a marginalized Dalit community in British India, arrived at Columbia University on a Baroda State scholarship. Born into the "untouchable" caste, Ambedkar had already defied overwhelming odds to receive a degree from Bombay University. As a graduate student at Columbia, he immersed himself in economics, sociology, history, and philosophy, surrounding himself with progressive thinkers who shaped his vision of social justice and equality for marginalized groups. His time in New York, particularly the exposure to African American struggles in Harlem, deeply influenced his political thinking and lifelong fight against caste oppression in India.

To learn more about Ambedkar's time in the US, explore Ravi's exhibit on "Ambedkar in America."

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Excerpt from: "The Harlem Ashram"

Upon his return to India, Ambedkar would become the father of the Indian Constitution and an intellectual rival to Mahatma Gandhi, whose footprint is also found in Harlem. The Harlem Ashram was founded by two white, Methodist missionaries as a dedication to Mahatma Gandhi. These missionaries were Ralph Templin and Jay Holmes Smith, the latter of whom is pictured here with Jawaharlal Nehru a year prior to the Ashram's founding. Gandhiji, as he is known, was a deeply religious man who advocated for the dissolution of violence in society. Notably, Gandhiji's activism overlooked caste abolition, despite caste being a violently oppressive system in Indian society that sentenced millions to economic immobility and social exclusion. On this topic, Ambedkar and Gandhi were diametrically opposed in their political philosophies. Ambedkar believed caste abolition was a necessary tenet for the propulsion of a post-colonial Indian subcontinent, as argued in his 1936 paper "Annihilation of Caste." As the aforementioned Immerwahr noted, Ambedkar "believed the greatest obstacle to the full flourishing of Untouchables was the Mahatma himself." Gandhiji is quoted "The poor Harijans [Untouchables] have no mind, no intelligence, no sense of difference between God and not God." This is in deep contradiction with not only Ambedkar's academic theses, but Ambedkar's Dalit identity itself.

Despite these two political figures' clashing perspectives on caste, the Ashram in Harlem brought together both of their ideas in a practical sense. The Ashram was modeled on the tenets of ahimsa and satyagraha, ideas of nonviolence put forward by Gandhi that contributed heavily to Indian independence in 1947. Simultaneously, organizers within the Ashram prioritized economic mobility and poverty alleviation for Harlemites. These efforts included, but were not limited to, targeting workplace discrimination, addressing housing discrimination, confronting segregation in social spaces such as hotels and restaurants, finding housing and employers for Black and Puerto Ricans, investigating police brutality, and creating local credit unions. If the experiences of Untouchables and Black and Brown Americans are analogous, as asserted by Ambedkar, the labor of organizers within the Ashram tangibly broke down caste barriers in NYC. Before its closure in 1948, the Ashram was an important place of religious and social connection in Harlem, and formed an intersecting network with the institutions of Bengali Harlem.

"We want untouchability to be abolished. But we also want that we must be given equal opportunities so that we may rise to the level of the other classes. Mere washing off of untouchability is of no consequence. We have been carrying on with untouchability for the last 2,000 years. Nobody has bothered about it. Nobody has bothered about it."

"...that [untouchables] should have the same status in the country and that they should have the opportunity to hold high offices so that not only their dignity will rise, but also they will get what I call strategic positions from which they could protect their own people, Mr. Gandhi was totally opposed. Totally opposed. He was content with things like temple entry. Temple entry. That was all the thing that he wanted to do. Which is a very, nobody cares for Hindu temples now. The untouchables have become so conscious of the fact that temple going is of no consequence at all."

-Excerpted Quotes from Ambedkar on Gandhi

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The S.S. Khiva, a ship carrying many lascars, at sea.

"Forgotten Seafarers of the First World War," contributed by Asif Shakoor to the Historic England Blog. Rights Unknown.

Posed portrait of Dada Amir Haider Khan, c. 1965.

Held by the Amarjit Chandan Archive, published on Wikimedia Commons.

A portable hot dog and soft drinks cart, parked at Bowling Green, c. 1942.

Kodachrome slide of a photo by Charles W. Cushman, held by the Indiana University Digital Collections. Rights unknown.

Taj Mahal Hindu Restaurant

Under New Management

243 West 42nd Street

Specialty: Hindu and Persian Food

Advertisement for the Taj Mahal Hindu Restaurant in New York City, from the February 1920 issue of Young India.

Created by Young India and held by the South Asian American Digital Archive.

Ambedkar at Columbia University. c. 1916

Photographer unknown, held by Wikimedia Commons.

The Rev. and Mrs. Jay Holmes Smith with Jawaharlal Nehru (center) at the Harlem Ashram. c. 1939.

Photographer unknown, published in the J. Holmes Smith papers, 1939-1940. Held by David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University

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