

Sample Lesson 30: ~~South Asian~~Indian American Diaspora, Myths of the Model Minority

Theme: Ethnic Identity and Diversity

Disciplinary Area: Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 2, 5, 6

Standards Alignment:

CA HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Chronological and Spatial Thinking 3; Historical Interpretation 1

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RH.9–10.1, 4, 5, 9; WHST .9–10.1, 2, 4, 9

CA ELD Standards: ELD.PI.9–10.1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11a

Lesson Purpose and Overview:

~~South Asian~~Indian Americans are thought to be relatively new immigrants to the United States and California, but their story in California starts much further back in history. In the time that they have lived in California, the contributions of ~~South Asian~~Indian Americans to STEM fields and arts and culture encompasses a rich and diverse breadth and depth.

Students will be introduced to the history of ~~South Asian~~Indian American migration, focussing on immigrants from the South Asian subcontinent between the late 1800s and early 1900s. and will highlight the diversity of the ~~South Asian Indian-American~~ community with respect to religion and geography. It is important to note that the reason we are referring to the South Asian subcontinent and not just India, is because the time period is pre-partition. For example, the geographic region of Punjab, where many of the immigration stories originate from, was divided between present-day and Pakistan.

Commented [1]: Our recommendation is to title this lesson plan to be about the South Asian community to increase its inclusivity and accuracy. Due to the partition of India in 1947, it is not correct to label Punjabi or Sikh communities as Indian, since Punjab was split during partition between India and Pakistan. This also applies to other communities from the Punjab. We are line editing this lesson plan to reflect this suggested change throughout.

Key Terms and Concepts: Immigration Act, model-minority, Bollywood, media literacy, intercultural relations

Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to...):

1. understand the diversity inherent in the [South Asian](#)~~Indian~~ American community with respect to language, religion, and geography;
2. understand [South Asian](#)~~Indian~~ American migration to Northern California;
3. articulate the contributions of [South Asian](#)~~Indian~~ Americans to the information technology and telecommunications lexicon, and the fields of STEM, arts and culture; and
4. further develop their oral presentation, public speaking, and analysis skills via the cultural analysis assignment.

Essential Questions:

1. What is the history of [South Asian](#)~~Indian~~ American migration to the United States, and in particular, to California?
2. What role did opportunities for education and gender equality play in decisions to emigrate to California?

Lesson Steps/Activities:

Day 1

1. Introduce the first group of Indians who landed on Angel Island in the early 1900s, how they settled in Northern California and created a farming community. Also provide an introduction where a second generation of Indians

who came to the United States in the later 1900s mainly seeking education, career opportunities and gender equality.

2. Following the introduction, screen a YouTube lesson, “Sikh Pioneers and their Contributions to California’s History.” Before starting the video, tell students that they are responsible for taking thorough notes (refer to the graphic organizer or note taking tool) and will be expected to have a discussion around the following questions:

- a. Why did the first ~~South Asian~~~~Indian~~ Americans settle in Northern California?
- b. What crops did these ~~South Asian~~~~Indian~~ Americans specialize in?
- c. What US laws negatively affected their liberty and freedom?
 - i. Law of 1913, Foreigners without the option of citizenship
 - ii. Immigration Act of 1917, restricting the entry of more Asians into the country, preventing immigrants from bringing their families
- d. How did these laws affect the social changes of these communities?
- e. How have current immigration and naturalization laws changed since 1917?

3. Provide the following key terms for students to define using context clues from the film

- a. Punjabi
- b. Sikh
- c. Immigration Act

d. Naturalization

e. Indian-Mexican marriages

4. Following the video, divide the students into groups of four to five. Each group is given 20 minutes to read the excerpt below, discuss the video, respond to the questions like the ones above,

a. *The origins of the Punjabi-Mexican community lie in the Imperial Valley along California's southern border. Men from India's Punjab province stood out from the start among the pioneers who flocked there to work the newly arable land. Their fortunes, their legal status, and local opinion of them varied over the years. At first, South Asians could obtain American citizenship, but later they lost that right. Then not only the physical landscape but the political landscape and their place in it struck the Punjabi men as decidedly similar to their status in British India. They fought hard for their rightful place in society, and particularly for a place on the land, a very important component of Punjabi identity. The Imperial Valley was being transformed from a barren desert to a major center of agricultural production in California at the time the Punjabis arrived; the pioneer Anglo settlers there did not easily accept the Punjabis' claims to membership in the community they were building. Legal constraints and social stereotypes based on race and national origin helped determine the opportunities and working conditions the Punjabis encountered as they worked alongside others to develop the valley.*

5. While students are working in groups, write down the key terms on the white board, leaving plenty of room between each. After the time has expired, signal to students that it is time to come back together. Facilitate a discussion where students are able to respond to each of the guiding questions aloud. Finally, ask one member from each group to go to the board. Each student is

assigned a word and is expected to write their definition of the word with their group's effort. After completing the task, the class talks through each term. Provide additional information, examples, and support to better clarify and define the terms.

6. Close with student and community reflection.

Day 2

1. Watch excerpt from Episode 1 of Asian Americans "Breaking Ground" about Bhagat Singh Thind. Additionally, ask students to read an excerpt from "Roots In the Sand" that discusses the ruling of the Circuit Court of Appeals of United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind
2. 261 US 204 (1923). Ask the students to pay special attention as to why he was not considered to be an American citizen.
3. After watching the film, optionally, split the class into smaller groups or stay as a complete class to discuss the following questions
 - a. Community Builder/Cultural Energizer: Identifying our biases (5 min)
 - i. Ask the question, "how do you (or your family members) answer the race question on a form? What are the options listed?"
 - ii. How is the term "white" defined racially?: (10 min)

b. From US vs Bhagat Singh Thind: The court conceded that Indians were “Caucasians” and that anthropologists considered them to be of the same race as white Americans, but argued that “the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences.”

i. What do you think of the argument that courts made about people from Indian origin? What do you know about people from Indian origin today?

4. Provide the following key terms and concepts for students to define using context clues from the film

a. “Caucasian” vs “white”

b. Aryan

Additional Material and Resources to support Day 2

Pre 1800

Beginning in the 17th century, the East India Company
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_India_Company) began bringing indentured Indian servants to the American colonies.[11]
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Americans#cite_note-Thakur-11)

The Naturalization Act of 1790
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalization_Act_of_1790) made Asians ineligible for citizenship.[12] (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Americans#cite_note-12)

19th century

The first significant wave of ~~South Asian~~~~Indian~~ immigrants entered the United States in the 19th century. Emigration from India was driven by difficulties facing Indian farmers, including the challenges posed by the British land tenure system for small landowners, and by drought and food shortages, which worsened in the 1890s.

At the same time, Canadian steamship companies, acting on behalf of Pacific coast employers, recruited Sikh farmers with economic opportunities in British Columbia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Columbia).

Racist attacks in British Columbia, however, prompted Sikhs and new Sikh immigrants to move down the Pacific Coast to Washington ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington_\(state\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington_(state))) and Oregon (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oregon>), where they worked in lumber mills (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lumber_mill) and in the railroad industry.[14] (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Americans#cite_note-ReferenceA-14). Many Punjabi (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjabis>) Sikhs who settled in California, around the Yuba City (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuba_City) area, formed close ties with Mexican Americans.[11] (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Americans#cite_note-Thakur-11). The presence of ~~South Asian~~~~Indian~~ Americans also helped develop interest in Eastern religions in the US and would result in its influence on American philosophies such as Transcendentalism (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendentalism>).

Swami Vivekananda (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swami_Vivekananda) arriving in Chicago at the World's Fair led to the establishment of the Vedanta Society (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedanta_Society).

20th century

Between 1907 and 1908, Sikhs moved further south to warmer climates in California, where they were employed by various railroad companies. Some white Americans, resentful of economic competition and the arrival of people from different cultures, responded to Sikh immigration with racism and violent attacks.[14] (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Americans#cite_note-ReferenceA-14)

The Bellingham riots (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bellingham_riots) in Bellingham, Washington on September 5, 1907 epitomized the low tolerance in the US for Indians and Sikhs, who were called "hindoos" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindoos>) by locals.

In the early twentieth century, a range of state and federal laws restricted Indian immigration and the rights of Indian immigrants in the US. In the 1910s, American nativist organizations campaigned to end immigration from India, culminating in the passage of the Barred Zone Act (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barred_Zone_Act) in 1917.

In 1913, the Alien Land Act of California prevented Sikhs (in addition to Japanese and Chinese immigrants) from owning land., it was legal for "brown" races to mix. Many Indian men, especially Punjabi men, married Hispanic women and Punjabi-Mexican marriages became a norm in the West.[14] (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Americans#cite_note-ReferenceA-14) [16] (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Americans#cite_note-Oxford_University_Press-16)

Bhicaaji Balsara (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhicaaji_Balsara) became the first known Indian to gain naturalized US citizenship. As a Parsi (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parsi>), he was considered a "pure member of the Persian sect" and therefore a "free white person." In 1910, the Circuit Court of Appeal agreed that Parsis (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parsis>) are classified as

white.[17] (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Americans#cite_note-auto-17). Between 1913 and 1923, about 100 Indians were naturalized.

In 1923, the Supreme Court of the United States (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States) ruled in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_v._Bhagat_Singh_Thind) that Indians were ineligible for citizenship because they were not "free white persons".[14] (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Americans#cite_note-ReferenceA-14). Over fifty Indians had their citizenship revoked after this decision, in 1927. However, no other naturalization was permitted after the ruling, which led to about 3,000 Indians leaving the United States.

1993 and 1994 *Sandhu vs Lockheed Missiles and Space Co.* (California Superior Court (1993) and California Sixth District Court of Appeals (1994) (Sandhu had sued his employer, Lockheed, for discrimination based on race. Lockheed's position was that they did not discriminate against Sandhu, a Punjabi Indian, because he was considered Caucasian (Lockheed argued that the "common popular understanding that there are three major human races—Caucasoid (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caucasian_race), Mongoloid (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongoloid>), and Negroid" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negroid>). This comes from a nineteenth century classification of races). In 1993, the court ruled in favor of Lockheed. In 1994, the Californian Sixth District Court of Appeals overturned that decision and ruled in favor of Sandhu, stating that Indians were a distinct ethnic group of their own.)

Bhicaaji Framji Balsara court case:

Hughey, M.W. (2016). *New Tribalisms: The Resurgence of Race and Ethnicity* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=aITeCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA135>). Main Trends of the Modern World. Palgrave Macmillan UK. p. 135.

1923 *United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind*:

From History Matters: The US Survey Course on the web

Developed by American Social History Project/Center for Media & Learning (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/>), University of New York, and the Center for History and New Media (<https://rrchnm.org/>), George Mason University.

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5076/>

PBS Documentary Asian Americans Episode 1 “Breaking Ground”

<https://www.pbs.org/weta/asian-americans/episode-guide/>

1994 Sandhu vs. Lockheed Missiles and Space Co.

<https://law.justia.com/cases/california/court-of-appeal/4th/26/846.html>