

## Whither the “Hindoo Invasion”? South Asians in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, 1907–1930

Manish Chalana

To cite this article: Manish Chalana (2021): Whither the “Hindoo Invasion”? South Asians in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, 1907–1930, International Journal of Regional and Local History, DOI: [10.1080/20514530.2021.1908719](https://doi.org/10.1080/20514530.2021.1908719)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20514530.2021.1908719>



Published online: 23 Apr 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



## Whither the “Hindoo Invasion”? South Asians in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, 1907–1930

Manish Chalana

Urban Design and Planning, College of Built Environments, University of Washington, Seattle, USA

### ABSTRACT

The first decade of the twentieth century saw several thousand men migrate from India to the North American West Coast. While most settled in British Columbia or California, a smaller number moved to the US Pacific Northwest states of Washington and Oregon. A series of violent riots in 1907–8 drove many from the region. The basic contours of this population in the region after this time remain unclear. I uncover evidence that Indians persisted for a longer time period, and in more varied locations and occupations than some previous research suggests, but that ultimately violent exclusion led them to disappear almost entirely from the region. I investigate the conditions in which these men lived and toiled, and the ways in which they were viewed by the larger society, particularly in terms of evolving concepts of race and assimilation.

### KEYWORDS

South Asians; Indians; Pacific Northwest; Punjabis; immigration; Washington; Oregon; Sikh

On 5 September 1907, a mob of 500 white men crying “Drive out the Hindus!” began raiding the mills and lodging houses in Bellingham, a canning and lumber town in Washington State. The town had seen a recent influx of several hundred Indian men arriving to work in the lumber mills, some from India directly, and some from nearby British Columbia, Canada, which had experienced its own wave of Indian immigration in recent years. As the mobs descended upon the Indian residences and places of work, they hounded the men out on the streets, and began trying to physically force them to leave the town.<sup>1</sup> The police arrived, and took over 400 Indian men and four women into “protective custody”, filling up the jail and corridors of City Hall. The following day, as news of the riot spread along the West Coast, the Mayor of Bellingham deployed additional police officers.<sup>2</sup>

The Indians quickly realized the precariousness of their situation, and agreed to leave town. Seattle received forty refugees, who found shelter in the city’s Pioneer Square district,<sup>3</sup> and some ended up in Tacoma in the short term. Some headed north to British Columbia, or south to California, where there was also a large and growing population of Indians. However, the destinations of many remain unknown, as do their long-term fate.<sup>4</sup>

A number of works focusing on the later South Asian population in California or British Columbia – discussed below – imply that the Bellingham Riot and subsequent events effectively drove out all of these men from Washington and Oregon. On the other

hand, a 2005–6 exhibit at Seattle’s Wing Luke Museum of the Asian American Experience, titled “The Sikh Community: Over 100 Years in the Pacific Northwest,” imagined a continuously existing population in this region over the subsequent century, even as many of the later details and images they included actually focused on California and British Columbia.<sup>5</sup> Other works – also detailed below – mention the experiences of individual South Asian men in the region in the subsequent decade or two, or at most address a single community like that of Astoria, Oregon. However, it appears that no work of scholarship has engaged in detailed investigation to determine how many South Asians remained in the US Pacific Northwest overall beyond the tumultuous events of 1907, and for how long, and whether indeed the population persisted in continuity until later waves of South Asian migration began in the mid-twentieth century. Such are the goals of this paper. To do so, I turn to a variety of archival documents, including the US Census, city directories, immigration reports and newspapers. I rely primarily on digitised versions of the 1910 Census, perfectly timed to provide a snapshot of this population at the tail end of the riots,<sup>6</sup> along with the subsequent two digitised censuses.

One fact is already very well documented: in terms of violent exclusion, the Bellingham Riot was just the beginning. Communities of Indian immigrant workers had been established up and down the West Coast in the previous few years, and whites in other communities followed Bellingham’s example. An even larger riot occurred in Vancouver, B.C. just a few days later, although there the focus on the more numerous Chinese and Japanese immigrants overshadowed the attention given to the Indians. The next day, white and Indian workers in Aberdeen, Washington broke out into fighting. Six weeks later, an attack on Indian workers in Boring, Oregon (near Portland) left one Sikh man dead. A large demonstration against the Indians occurred in Everett, Washington three days later, and the thinly veiled threats caused the entire population to leave, as in Bellingham. Another three months later, the one riot to strike in California drove out dozens of Indian men from Live Oak, near Sacramento. A quiet peace endured for over two years, until the outbreak of a “race riot” involving “[t]hree hundred Hindus and 200 whites” in St John’s, near Portland, which only ended when the Indians agreed to leave.<sup>7</sup>

Recent decades had been filled with similar riots and expulsions of Chinese workers. Both the anti-Chinese and anti-Indian riots reflected efforts in which “white laborers sought to uphold imagined racial, economic, and political boundaries against the perceived incursions of Asian immigrants.”<sup>8</sup> The anti-Hindoo riots occurred specifically in the context of a long year of stock market downturns that had the country apprehensive; at the time of the Bellingham Riot the economy had fallen 30% from a year before. This culminated in the Panic of 1907, which unfolded while the riots were taking place. Moreover, the riots themselves led almost immediately to a series of informal policies by immigration officials to keep more Indians out, policies that became official by 1917. Collectively these events led to a general exodus of Indian men out of Washington and Oregon to California and British Columbia, and some back to India.

Here is where existing historical accounts of South Asian men in the region become murkier. One line of work indirectly helps to create the impression that the population essentially died out in the Northwest US: the large and growing number of works on the persisting (and in many cases growing) South Asian communities in California and British Columbia over the subsequent decades.<sup>9</sup> Both regions are adjacent to the Pacific Northwest, and share intertwined histories, yet discussion of the US Northwest

in these are generally limited to at most individual footnotes or paragraphs. This absence of evidence can easily be taken as evidence of absence, and indeed this impression has filtered into more recent broader works. In his landmark history of American immigration, for instance, Spickard declares that “South Asian immigrants worked first in eastern [*sic*] Washington State. Driven from there, they moved to California”.<sup>10</sup> In his own recent history of Indians in Western North America, Shah summarises their trajectory in the region, saying that “South Asian men had left the sawmills of the Pacific Northwest for the irrigated farms, orchards and vineyards of California, Arizona and New Mexico.”<sup>11</sup> One partial exception to this narrative has been the community of Astoria, Oregon, where there was growing documentation that Indians worked for another decade, and were instrumental in founding the Ghadar party, a branch of the Indian independence movement.<sup>12</sup>

More recent scholarship has begun to uncover more cases of men remaining in the region through the 1910s and highlights some of their efforts to overcome a host of legal challenges. This includes further work on the Ghadar party and other anti-colonial efforts, which move beyond Astoria to Seattle and elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> An additional intertwining theme entails efforts to challenge the growing legal and extra-legal barriers being placed to block immigrants from India. One notable case involves Indians arriving from Manila to Seattle in the early 1910s, at a time when the Philippines were an American territory; the route should not have involved any immigration procedures at all given the Philippines’s status as a U.S. territory, but led to dozens of Indians on multiple ships being taken into custody and denied immigration.<sup>14</sup> A third theme, seemingly more distantly related, revolves around a growing number of cases of Indian men in the Northwest being convicted of sodomy, although in wider perspective this fits into the theme of placing Indians into a category of deviance and thus justifying their exclusion.<sup>15</sup>

Even with this growing awareness, however, the overarching picture remains obscured, in terms of the extent to which South Asians persisted in the region, in terms of duration and number. Indeed, some works focusing on California attempted to estimate the South Asian population in the Northwest states, and these numbers range over nearly an order of magnitude, demonstrating just how much uncertainty this question entails.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, even as the historians’ focus within this population has recently shifted to documenting cases of resistance, both in terms of Indian independence and American immigration law and civil rights, we are still left wondering what stories remain, lying in between the image of the hard-working but largely powerless lumberman and railroad worker on the one hand, and the radical anti-colonial activist on the other.

My goals in this work are to answer these questions. I seek to uncover the geographic and sociodemographic features of this population through time, and to determine the long-term endurance (or not) of South Asians in the Northwest, upon which additional scholarship can build. In doing so, I hope to provide a window into whether small immigrant communities are able to persevere in the face of violent persecution, or whether the types of events these men experienced ultimately led to their complete abandonment of the region and dissolution of whatever communities they had managed to build here. The work has the more specific potential to further shape our knowledge of the early history of South Asians in the United States, a people who are now clearly integral to the nation’s demographic and cultural future.

In the process, I will frame the experiences of early South Asians in terms of the models that Paul Spickard, in his landmark review of American immigration, highlight as fundamental in shaping the immigrant experience in the United States, most especially for non-European immigrants. These include the traditional assimilationist or “Ellis Island” narrative that pervades American popular perceptions of ourselves as a people – that immigrants all become Americanised in the end. Although Spickard find some truth in this enduring tale, he balances it with two additional considerations, all the while drawing upon the work of countless other immigration scholars. The first is the perspective of the transnational diaspora – the idea that immigrants retain some connection to their country and culture of origin, in contrast to a purely assimilationist paradigm. The second is the issue of evolving concepts of ethnic identity, and of “race-making.” That is, the ethnic and racial identities through which immigrant groups to the US are defined by others and themselves are rarely fixed, and these perspectives change how they are seen to fit within the context of American society. Early South Asians in the Pacific Northwest, although small in number, display these themes with clarity.

A note on terminology: throughout this paper I use the word “Indian” to refer to everyone with sub-continental roots migrating to North America in the early twentieth century, the so-called “first wave” of Indian immigration. Most came from the Punjab region, divided between present-day India and Pakistan, but in the time period covered here all of this land fell within British India. The Americans and Canadians among whom they settled typically referred to them as “Hindoos,” after their native Hindustan, but this term is inaccurate in that majority were of the Sikh faith, while a smaller number were Hindu or Muslim. When discussing more contemporary topics, I use the terms “South Asian” and “Indian” as appropriate.

### Indian Immigration to Western North America Before the Riots

The arrival of small numbers of Indians to the United States can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, but prior to 1900 their numbers were negligible. The US immigration records from 1871 to 1899 show a total of 491 people born in India, but the 1900 census reported 2,050 residents throughout the contiguous US who had been born in India, a figure four times larger than the immigration records. Both numbers would include some Indian-born British, as the records were based on birthplace and not on ethnicity; sources differ on the size of this population.<sup>17</sup> Many of the Indians were students, but the number also included some travellers, merchants and political refugees.<sup>18</sup> In addition there were some brought by sea captains to eastern port towns as indentured servants, and still others as objects of eastern mysticism, circus performers and mendicants.<sup>19</sup> Little is known of these people, including how many came temporarily and how many stayed. Given the sporadic and dispersed nature of their migration, the role that this group played in stimulating the imminent wave of migration for their fellow countrymen remains conjectural.

A more coordinated migration of Indians to the West Coast specifically began in 1899, with settlers first appearing in British Columbia. The majority were men from the province of Punjab, which during the British Raj included three states of present-day India and much of northern Pakistan. The area is the homeland of the Sikh faith, but with large Hindu and Muslim populations as well; all three groups were represented among the

immigrants, although Sikhs predominated, as has been widely pointed out.<sup>20</sup> At the dawn of the century, the largely rural and agricultural Punjab suffered from drought and famine, exacerbated by low wages and high taxation by the Colonial administration.<sup>21</sup> This forced men, and especially younger sons, to migrate in search of better prospects. Many joined the Indian Army; the Sikhs in particular served in large numbers and were favoured by the British for their superior martial skills and loyalty.<sup>22</sup> Some heard tales from U.S. and Canadian soldiers, with whom they interacted during the Boxer Uprising, about job prospects in Western North America, which was then undergoing rapid population expansion and integration into the national economies of the US and Canada.<sup>23</sup> Other Sikh soldiers of the British Indian Army were already familiar with North America, having travelled through Canada on their way home after Queen Victoria's jubilee celebration in 1897.<sup>24</sup> As a result of these encounters, some men decided to migrate to Canada, since as subjects of the Queen, Indians were legally free to travel among the various British dominions.

The pioneers who arrived into British Columbia served as a catalyst for subsequent groups. This process was accelerated by labour recruiters of Indian origin and their relatives who enticed men in Punjab with "opportunities of fortune making in the province of British Columbia."<sup>25</sup> Recruiters sometimes even provided job contracts as well as assistance with passage. Without direct recruitment, the numbers migrating on their own accord would undoubtedly have been more limited.<sup>26</sup> Although they were peasant stock, they were relatively prosperous members within that class, given their ability to afford the journey. Rather than escaping outright deprivation, many were seeking economic advantage through immigration to accumulate wealth and social status.<sup>27</sup> This cycle – an increasing wave of employment-based immigration, consisting mostly of adult men – continued uninterrupted until 1907. At this point, the population growth led to increasing resentment among the white population of Vancouver against both East and South Asian immigrants and resulted in more stringent immigration policies. London made it clear to Ottawa that they should not unilaterally declare Indians to be officially barred, fearing a backlash and an increase in Indian calls for independence.<sup>28</sup> Instead, Canada enacted a regulation in 1908 that required immigrants to take a "continuous journey" from their country of citizenship, which allowed for those parts of the globe farthest from Canada to be effectively disbarred, without having to specifically name any country or people.<sup>29</sup> This and subsequent regulations including the 1913 order prohibiting all labour immigration into British Columbia due to labour market contractions, put a stop to immigration from India to Canada for decades; their numbers dropped from 2,623 in 1908 to merely six in 1909. The 1913 order did not single out South Asians, but applied more broadly to labour migration from all regions including from Europe and America; however, these two groups were in practice not strongly affected, as they rarely arrived into Canada via British Columbian ports. Like the 1908 continuous journey regulation, the 1913 order was "another ingenious and seemingly impartial manipulation of transportation, circumstance, and space."<sup>30</sup>

The population already in Canada found employment in a variety of industries, including the railroads, fishing, lumber, dairy, farms and orchards; they were largely common labourers, with a smaller number in skilled trade in the lumber mills. Some regarded them as the "cheapest grade of labor," earning from 80 cents to \$1.25 a day without board; by comparison, whites typically earned \$1.75 and over.<sup>31</sup>

Even before the implementation of tighter immigration regulation, Indians had started heading south into the US states of Washington, Oregon and California. Their migration from Canada to the United States was undoubtedly fuelled by the growing hostility of white Canadians. Pull factors included a shortage of labour that created more jobs and higher wages in these states.<sup>32</sup> In Washington and Oregon, those who had been working in the lumber mills in British Columbia would find ample work in a now-familiar industry, while California held appeal for those seeking to return to the agricultural occupations they had known in Punjab, with a more similar climate as well.

By this time, the American Consul in Calcutta reports receiving inquiries from men about job opportunities in America, with direct immigration to the US picking up shortly thereafter.<sup>33</sup> Of the 1,072 Indians who were admitted to the United States in 1907, only 89 reported British North America (Canada) as their last permanent residence, with the remaining reporting India. For intended destination, 475 reported Washington and 31 reported Oregon.<sup>34</sup> Canada's implementation of anti-Asian immigration policies in 1907 led the United States Bureau of Immigration to also adopt stricter entry regulations, making it difficult for Indians to enter.<sup>35</sup> By 1909, Commissioner General of Immigration Daniel Keefe was admitting that it was the unofficial policy of the Immigration Service to find ways to exclude Indians; when no reason could be found to define an individual as unfit to enter, they should be declared "likely to be a public charge" on the ground that local hostility to their presence would make it difficult for them to find employment.<sup>36</sup> For instance, in 1908, 438 potential immigrants were debarred, including 118 deemed "likely to become a public charge" and 107 determined to have some mental or physical impairment that would prevent them from making a living.<sup>37</sup> By this logic, then, the xenophobia of whites alone made them unfit to enter the country.

Throughout the West Coast, the Indians "unwittingly proved to be a disturbing element" by exacerbating simmering conditions of racism and labour unrest.<sup>38</sup> The American Federation of Labor and the Asiatic Exclusion League, already angered by the Chinese and Japanese presence, were now faced with another "strange" creature who had landed on their shores. As one contemporary Indian observer expressed it, "as the tide of immigration from India gained in strength, visions of a 'Hindoo invasion of America' began to torment the minds of excitable Americans".<sup>39</sup> The West Coast newspapers of the day in the US and Canada carried numerous editorials on the topic of the "Hindoo problem," citing both economic impacts on the existing workforce and openly racist concerns for keeping their respective nations white. It was in this context that the anti-Indian riots broke out.

## Pan-Asian Resentment and Exclusion

The sequence of events that led to the anti-Indian riots was, in fact, broadly similar to that surrounding Chinese and, to a lesser extent, Japanese immigration in the preceding decades. A small but growing number of immigrants from an unfamiliar culture arrive on the West Coast; for the most part, they work in large gangs at back-breaking, menial and low paying jobs, and live and socialise together in poor conditions; surrounding whites find them "exotic" and assume they are inassimilable, are spreading ill morals and disease, and are taking away jobs and contributing to lower wages; and the whites agitate for their removal.<sup>40</sup> As with some of the massive anti-Chinese riots that had

rocked Western cities twenty years earlier, the newspapers of the time claimed that “[r]acial feeling has played but a small part in the affair”.<sup>41</sup> Rather, the violence was prompted by the low wages that Indians accepted for work, reasoned the press, as many white workers who demanded more wages were losing employment. Further, the Indians had become “bold and insolent” and had started to disrupt social mores, including allegedly misbehaving with white women on streetcars and in other public places.<sup>42</sup> Of course, these authors’ protestations stand at odds with the much more prevalent tales of explicit racial hostility.

The eventual outcome was the same, too. Immigrants from China and Japan were restricted through the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” of 1907, respectively. Now, the growing distrust of Indian immigrants contributed to the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917, which declared most of the rest of Asia, including India, as part of an “Asiatic Barred Zone” to be off-limits for emigration to the United States. As a result labour migration from India came to an abrupt halt; however, those from the non-labouring classes, including government officials, professionals and tourists were allowed entry.<sup>43</sup> Indian immigration only picked up again after another half century, when the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (aka the Hart–Celler Act) abolished the national origin quota system, replacing it with a preference system based on employment through labour clearance and family reunion.<sup>44</sup> Thus began the second wave, which is still growing over half-century later.<sup>45</sup>

### Indians in the Northwest After the Riots

The overall fate of the Indian population in the Northwest following the riots remains somewhat unclear. We already know that they did not all leave immediately, despite what some authors like Spickard suggest. The high-profile cases of the Ghadar party in Astoria tell us that at least some stayed on, at least for a few years. Other anecdotes – such as the cases of fights and sodomy convictions uncovered by Shah<sup>46</sup> – provide additional clues, as does the case of political organising and legal challenges in Seattle in the face of the detention of Indian immigrants arriving from Manila. But as a whole, it remains unclear how many men stayed in the area, how many more were continued to be let in thereafter, where these men lived, what they did for a living, what their range of experiences were, and ultimately, how long they stayed in the region.

Recent scholarship argues that early South Asian immigration to the US Pacific Northwest has received limited scholarly attention due to the problem of historiography resulting from scarce and incomplete records.<sup>47</sup> The authors argue that the South Asian immigration history discusses the Pacific Northwest as a port of entry, but not as a site of settlement. These authors seek to rectify this problem by compiling oral histories of South Asian immigrants to the region to gather a range of experiences; however, their work necessarily focuses on the post-WWII decades, coinciding with the second wave of immigration resulting from the Hart–Celler Act.<sup>48</sup>

To return to the earlier part of the century and answer questions about this community’s fate, I instead turn to a variety of archival documents, including the US Census, city directories, immigration reports and newspapers helped answer some questions about South Asian’s fate in the region. Two census questions in digitised versions of the 1910 Census – one on birthplace and one on race – seem as if they should provide



clues, but each presents intractable problems.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the investigation begins by relying on three facts: most (one contemporaneous estimate says 85%) of Indian immigrants during this period were Sikh men;<sup>50</sup> most Sikh men had Singh as their surname; and the immigrants generally lived in large clusters, such that almost all clusters would contain at least one man named Singh. These men were then used as seeds in the digitised census to identify other Indian bunkmates or neighbours, with each additionally uncovered surname used as a seed for its own investigation.<sup>51</sup> A variety of sources other than the census allowed for identification of other individuals, with their surnames added to the census investigation.<sup>52</sup>

This method likely misses some Indians living alone or in very small groups. It would also miss any group that lacked a Sikh presence, and other recent research indicates that at least one such grouping existed at the time: the dozen or more Indian students at the University of Washington, who were disproportionately Bengali, and who included some of the main leaders of the Ghadar movement in the region.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the approach is tractable and guarantees a lower bound on the number of Indians living in the area at the time.<sup>54</sup>

### *Populations and Locations*

As a first check, the 1900 census and all previous censuses reveal no individual with the surname Singh in either Washington or Oregon. Census exploration leads to identification of a minimum of 98 Indians in Washington and 268 in Oregon in 1910.<sup>55</sup> The 1907 immigration report cited earlier showed that in that year, of the men heading for the Pacific Northwest, 93% were planning to settle in Washington and only 7% in Oregon. Now, a mere three years later, most Indians in the area were in Oregon. The riots had ultimately hit both states, but their magnitude was greater in Washington, and clearly their impact was too.

The most striking demographic fact of this population is that it consists entirely of adult males.<sup>56</sup> However, just under a third reported being married, presumably to wives back in India. Probably a fair number more were also married; it appears some census takers simply assumed they were all single, since, for instance, not even one of the eighty-one men at the Monarch Lumber Company Bunkhouses in St. John's, Oregon was listed as married.

Some sizeable proportion of these men, then, had wives and probably children back in India who they were supporting, in line with what Spickard calls the "transnational diasporic" form of immigration, with material connections to their homeland remaining vitally active long after migration, despite massive distances and limited economic means. These remittances were indeed noted by authorities, with mixed consequences. On the one hand, the U.S. Immigration Commission argued that "without permanent interests in this country and with need at home, they [Indian immigrants] usually send their surplus earnings as soon as possible and frequently do not make adequate provision for themselves if work is not available."<sup>57</sup> Their need to support families and, in some cases to repay loans for their travel, was seen as permanent barriers to their integration; the government was already conceiving of them as voluntary sojourners, to use Siu's famous terminology, or as "perpetual immigrants" and "foreigners within".<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Shah discusses the case of a man whose conviction as an accomplice to a

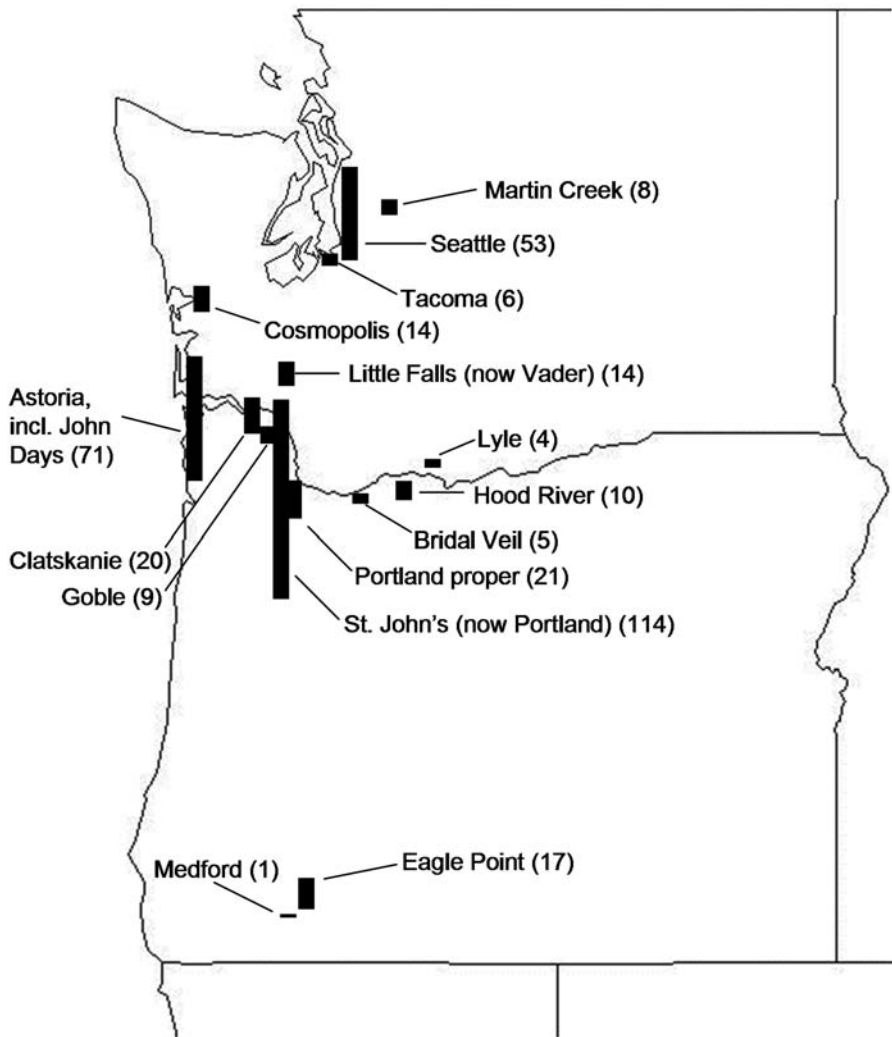
case of forced sodomy in the lumber town of Gate, Washington, was overturned in part because he was seen as a devoted husband who worked hard to support his wife back in India.<sup>59</sup>

There was one female named Singh in the region, however, although she herself was not South Asian: Ruth Anna Singh was a 17-year-old Washington-born white woman, and the wife of one S.H. Singh, the only Indian man in the region living with his wife. The presence of this one woman begs the question, then, of why so few Indian men married locally. Certainly, miscegenation laws played some role. Oregon's law at the time did not explicitly mention Indians among those banned from marrying whites, and the racial classification of the Indians themselves was ambiguous, as explored below. Nevertheless, it seems likely that Indian men here would be reasonable in predicting a legal uphill battle to attempt to marry a white woman.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, Washington had no miscegenation law at all at this time; in theory, the single Indian men there were free to marry if they could find a willing bride. Given the intense social segregation in place for these men, and the xenophobia and racism that prevailed, especially in smaller towns, it is perhaps no surprise that only S. H. Singh had married locally. Mr. Singh was unique in another way that was surely not coincidental: his mother was from Germany.

The breakdown of Indians by specific location in 1910 is shown in [Figure 1](#). Not a single man is found in either Bellingham or Everett, so it is indeed the case that the Indians were completely driven out of these communities by the riots. However, there are numerous other clusters of men throughout the region. The largest corridor of these was along the Lower Columbia River, from Lyle, Washington in the east down through Portland and to Astoria at the river's mouth, along both sides of the river, and thus in both states. A second cluster appears in the South Puget Sound area around Seattle, and a third small group is to the south near Medford, Oregon. A small group is in Cosmopolis, a twin city to Aberdeen, where some of the agitation had occurred. Most notably, the largest grouping of all was in St. John's, at the time just outside Portland (and now part of it). The last riots had occurred here on March 21, 1910, and ended with the Indian men agreeing to the demand that they leave. Census enumeration occurred in the Portland area in April and early May of the same year; that is, four to six weeks later. Yet, over a hundred Indian men were still living and working at the mills there.

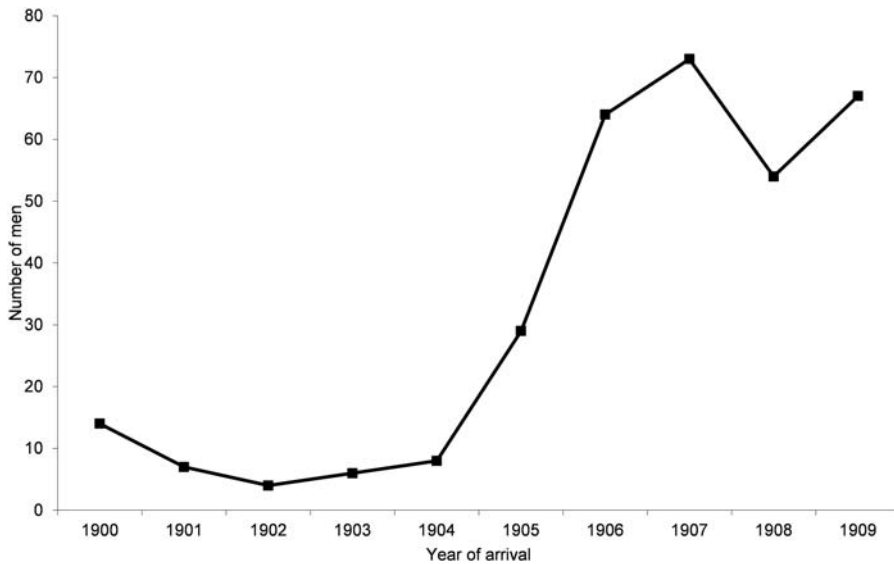
Since the census also reports on year of arrival, we can get a sense of who was potentially a refugee of the riots, and who was not. [Figure 2](#) shows that, while the rapid growth in immigration to the Northwest did slow after 1907, immigration certainly did not stop. In fact, more than 40% of the men in the region in 1910 had arrived in 1908 or later, and thus after the riots had begun. The economic downturn, and the riots and increasing restrictions on immigration that followed, collectively stemmed the tide, but did not stop it.

Of those present in 1910, the men who had arrived in the US in 1907 or earlier (and thus the ones most likely to be riot refugees) were disproportionately found in lumber and railroad camps like Astoria, St John's, or more remote areas. On the other hand, Seattle and Portland proper were mostly home to men who had arrived in the country after the riots. Thus, even though many men appeared to head for the major cities in the immediate aftermath of the Bellingham Riot, they did not stay there, but headed elsewhere, to be replaced by new arrivals.



**Figure 1.** East Indians in the Pacific Northwest in 1910, by location.

As is to be expected, most (87%) of the men identifiable in the census were working in lumber industries, and a smaller number for the railroads. The exceptions are notable, however. In Portland proper, fourteen men worked in rope factories, five were farmers, and two were telegraph operators. In Seattle, one was an electrician, one a butler, and one did “odd jobs.” Other jobs in the two main cities that can be identified from additional sources include self-employed street vendors, peddlers, sewer diggers and – most intriguingly – tamale sellers.<sup>61</sup> Although the occupational opportunities for Indians were indeed extremely narrow – due to competition, discrimination and hostility from working-class whites – they appear to have been somewhat broader in the two major cities, and broader than common perception suggests. Newspapers also reveal that at times, large numbers of the men were unemployed; for example, in December 1907, of the thirty men who lived in the heart of Tacoma’s Business District, twenty-nine were unemployed and lived on the earnings of the one who sold tamales.<sup>62</sup> Given the timing, these men are



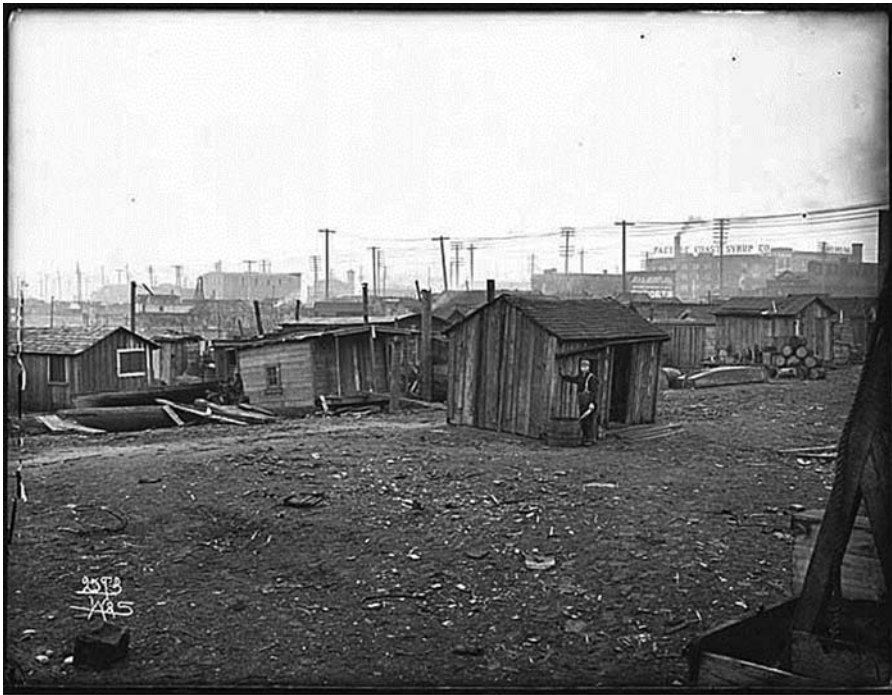
**Figure 2.** Year of immigration, for Indians in the Northwest in the 1910 census.

Note: 1910 is excluded from the graph, since the census was taken only a few months into that year.

very likely to be refugees from the riots, only newly arrived in town. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the number of Indians in Tacoma in the census three years later had dwindled to six.

In 1910, in most locations the Indian men continued to work for the same employer, and live in one or a small number of boarding houses or bunkhouses, often with many men to a single house.<sup>63</sup> In other words, their living conditions were similar to those in Bellingham. Even in the largest communities, the men lived in dense clusters. In St. John's, dozens lived together in the Monarch Lumber Company Bunkhouse; nineteen more were "bunking at Charleston" and fourteen resided at the "shipyard at John." In Portland proper, a score of men lived in three houses in close proximity along Fourteenth Street West, surrounded by numerous other immigrants from Italy, Croatia, and Scandinavia. In Astoria, most men lived in huts belonging to the Hammond Lumber Company, but an additional five shared a house in downtown Astoria. In Seattle, most men lived on the industrialised tide flats between the Duwamish River and a cluster of train tracks (Figure 3), in what is now the city's SoDo area. Just four lived elsewhere, scattered around the city.

The lives, habits and homes of the men fell under increasing scrutiny by the exposé journalism of the Progressive Era. Most newspapers presented them as dirty people living deplorable lives in decrepit conditions. The main narrative, of course, was how these men were unable and unwilling to assimilate, with no sense that existing policies or white xenophobia may have any role to play in the men's conditions. For example, it was reported that in Tacoma's "Hindu District" in 1907, some seventy-five Indians lived in eight "dirty, condemned buildings." One health officer was shocked to find many men sharing rooms, some in dark basements, and some even in a barn behind one house, and ordered them all to vacate.<sup>64</sup> In the same year, in Seattle, a "band of dark-skinned strangers" were found living in a shack in Rainier Valley.<sup>65</sup> In



Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle

**Figure 3.** Seattle’s tide flats in 1910. The location of the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Co. building in the background, on 8th Avenue near Spokane Street, places the scene of this picture in the immediate vicinity of where dozens of Indian men were living that year.

the midst of the squalor and scrutiny, one comfort for the men, noted by a *Seattle Times* reporter, was their ability to maintain some familiar aspects of life in India, including a traditional Punjabi diet of vegetables, lentils, occasional meat and *roti* (unleavened wheat bread).<sup>66</sup> However, multiple sources reported on other aspects of their consumption that were deemed more problematic: hashish<sup>67</sup> and excessive beer and whisky.<sup>68</sup> Given the sensationalist anti-Indian sentiment of the time, the early South Asians were considered unsanitary, inassimilable and unsuited for the climate of the Pacific Northwest. As Wallace explains, the common belief was that they “suffered from racially attributed medical conditions that impaired their productivity and/or endangered community health,”<sup>69</sup> providing justification for increased hostility towards immigration.

### South Asians and “Race-making”

South Asians have long sat uneasily within concepts of race articulated by Europeans, an issue that continues to the present day. Early typologies placed populations at the three poles of the Afro-Eurasian landmass – Northern Europeans, sub-Saharan Africans, and East Asians – into separate races. Such a typology, of course, requires defining places in between where one race ends and another begins. For those spatially central populations, like South Asians, this typology led directly to ambiguity and to the perception that they

were somehow genetically “degenerate”; their very existence was a direct challenge to the beauty and elegance of simple race typologies.

The prevailing American racial typology grew out of this framework, but was initially made simpler by the fact that the populations brought together by the nation’s founding came from three non-contiguous geographic locales: Native North America, Western Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa. A century later, members of another racialized category would begin to arrive on the West Coast of the US, in the form of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos.<sup>70</sup> Into all of this, in the first decade of the twentieth century, stepped the immigrants from India. Clearly, during the riots, Indians were viewed by whites as decidedly “other” – definitely not white, and like East Asian groups, not assimilable to White American society. But who exactly were they?

The question about race in the 1910 census is revealing on this point. The question was filled out by the census taker, not by the individual, and enumerators were provided relatively few options: White, Black, Mulatto, Chinese, Japanese, Indian (i.e. Native American), and Other.<sup>71</sup> Individual census takers were consistent in their assignment of Indians to a given race, but there was wide variation among them. Eight enumerators considered them White, and an equal number considered them Other. One considered them to be Black, one Mulatto, and one Indian (the last presumably because of confusion caused by the two meanings of the word Indian). One ignored the instructions and wrote in “Hn,” presumably for “Hindoo.” This confusion over the Indians’ race is most poignantly reflected by one enumerator in Seattle, who first wrote in something, then erased it and left the entries blank (Figure 4). In short, Indians in the Pacific Northwest were identified with every possible option on the census’s list except for Japanese and Chinese. This is especially ironic, since in the present day, the U.S. Census and much of American society classifies Indians, Japanese, and Chinese as all belonging to the same race: Asian.

This race perception is also intriguing in light of two subsequent developments. The first is the Supreme Court case *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923). Thind arrived in Seattle from India in 1913, and lived and worked in Astoria and elsewhere in Oregon over subsequent years. In 1917, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and fought in World War I. He then applied for U.S. citizenship in Oregon. He was hopeful of his prospects after

Name	Occupation	Sex	Age	Birthplace
Anderson E P	lodger	M	W 47	D Australia
Barde Molly	lodger	F	W 22	S " Eng
Johnson Joe A	lodger	M	W 35	S Calif
Germany Louis	lodger	M	W 49	Ind
Stafford Walter	lodger	M	W 44	Ind
Woods Albert E	lodger	M	W 48	S New York
Nahy Agat	lodger	M	W 30	S India
Singh Hara	lodger	M	W 20	S India
Sobally Wm	lodger	M	W 18	S New York
Thompson Dave	lodger	M	W 42	S Australia
Davis R L	lodger	M	W 22	S India
Dionchon Bettie	lodger	M	W 22	S New York
Watson Will	lodger	M	W 20	S Eng

Figure 4. The ambiguity of race.

another Indian, A. K. Mozumdar, successfully convinced a judge in Spokane that Indians were Caucasian, and thus eligible for naturalisation. Another judge in Los Angeles had also decided that some Indians were Caucasian, although using a caste-based definition that shows just how liminal Indians were perceived to be: Brahmins were likely to be “pure Caucasian”, while other castes were not.<sup>72</sup> Although Thind’s initial application was approved, the Bureau of Naturalisation appealed, and the case rose to the Supreme Court. There it was denied, on the basis that, while some anthropologists considered Indians to be of the “Caucasian or Aryan race,” Indians were self-evidently *not* white, and it was the latter criterion that was recognised by immigration law. Justice Sutherland’s majority opinion reads: “It is a matter of familiar observation and knowledge that the physical group characteristics of the Hindus render them readily distinguishable from the various groups of persons in this country commonly recognized as white.” Yet thirteen years earlier, about a third of the census takers in the Pacific Northwest who encountered Indians in their districts chose to categorise them as white, even when an option for “other” was available.<sup>73</sup> The identity of Indians was never clear and never stable; from early years in which they were seen by some as Caucasian and others not; by some as white and others not; they very quickly became the “other.” As Spickard would say, race-making was in progress; despite what anthropologists or census takers may say, the general public saw Indians as outsiders, needing to be lumped with some group other than Europeans. The long process of Indians becoming racially “Asian” was in full swing.

The Thind case affected the naturalisation opportunities for immigrants who were already in the US. A parallel process had already taken place a few years earlier in denying who could immigrate in the first place. The Immigration Act of 1917 banned the arrival of “natives of any country, province, or dependency situated on the Continent of Asia west of the 110th meridian of longitude east from Greenwich and south of the 50th parallel of latitude north.” The text of the bill was framed in terms of geography and not race, thus avoiding the vexing question faced in the Thind case of where in South Asia the “Caucasian” race ended and the “Mongolian” race began. Nevertheless, the merging of Indians with their neighbours to the east in terms of immigration law was but one step in the long process of “Indians” becoming “South Asians.”

All of these developments simply codified in law the on-the-ground reality Indians had been facing for a decade: regardless of how anyone else defined them in terms of the prevailing racial typology of the day, they were clearly recognised as foreigners, not to be trusted. As with earlier immigrants from Asia, employers knew how to exploit this division with native whites and the relative precariousness of the immigrants’ status, hiring them for lower wages and using them as strike breakers.<sup>74</sup> The American labour organisations were particularly apprehensive, since Indians were seen as a threat to the “wages of the members of other races in those industries in which men of low efficiency can be employed.”<sup>75</sup> Their success in retaining employment despite their “strange appearance” was attributed to a willingness to migrate and to board themselves if necessary, as well as their extreme persistence. The latter is vividly described: “in some places where they seemed to be desperate in their needs they have attempted to force employers to hire them and have entered the fields to begin work so that they had to be driven off.”<sup>76</sup> Opinions about their work ethic by employers were more varied, and often contradictory; one employer, reflecting common sentiments, considered them both “strong” and

“industrious,” but simultaneously “unadaptable” and “unprogressive.”<sup>77</sup> At opposite extremes, one employer ranked them as tied with Montenegrins for the “least desirable of the many races”, while another ranked them just behind Americans, Scandinavians and Germans in desirability.<sup>78</sup>

### Indians After 1910

Although the arrival of new immigrants from India was slowed by 1910, and completely blocked by 1917, those who were already here were allowed to stay, although denied citizenship after the 1923 Thind case. To obtain some sense of the overall durability of this population in the Northwest, I repeat the earlier exercise for the 1920 and 1930 censuses, the only subsequent ones currently available and digitised at the individual level.<sup>79</sup> [Table 1](#) provides this information for the population in the Northwest from the 1910, 1920 and 1930 censuses. In the decades following 1910, the Indian population of the Pacific Northwest continued to move around the region and then gradually dispersed. The only group that appears to have remained sizeable and stable – at around 30 men – through 1930 was the tri-city region of Aberdeen, Hoquiam and Cosmopolis; this most enduring group was indeed in the location of one of the original riots. Only a few men from the census appear to have married in the Northwest and remained there with their wives: three such men appear in the Aberdeen area,<sup>80</sup> and one in Portland.<sup>81</sup>

In terms of the destinations for those who left, we know some hundreds returned to India from across the West Coast at the outbreak of WWI as part of the Ghadar movement; indeed, at the time the Portland Telegram reported that “if the exodus keeps up much longer, Astoria will be entirely deserted by the East Indians.”<sup>82</sup> Most other works highlight California or British Columbia.<sup>83</sup> We can get a rough sense of the accuracy of this hypothesis, at least for within the US, by simply counting the number of Singhs by state in 1920 and 1930. This obviously includes only a subset of the Indian population, but provides a tractable rough comparative measure for the size of this population by state and year. [Table 2](#) reveals that, indeed, while their population is shrinking in the Northwest, it is simultaneously growing slightly in the US as a whole over this period. This pattern occurs despite the fact that few new immigrants were arriving, and some unknown number of men were either returning to India or dying. Indeed, the population over this period

**Table 1.** Locations of South Asians in the Pacific Northwest by census year.

	1910	1920	1930
<b>Cosmopolis/Aberdeen/Hoquiam</b>	14	<b>36</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Seattle</b>	53	5	3
<b>Tacoma</b>	6	4	1
<b>Other</b>	25	15	3
<b>Washington total</b>	99	60	36
<b>Portland/St. John's</b>	135	27	<b>15</b>
<b>Astoria/John Days</b>	71	34	--
<b>Eagle Point</b>	17	--	--
<b>Bridal Veil</b>	5	7	4
<b>Mill City</b>	--	13	--
<b>Vernonia</b>	--	--	5
<b>Other</b>	40	4	3
<b>Oregon total</b>	268	85	27

**Bold** = plus at least one non-Indian or mixed family member.



**Table 2.** Census entries for surname Singh, by year and state for the Western US.

State	1910	1920	1930
California	830	812	995
Oregon	147	65	16
Washington	32	17	12
Idaho	11	6	0
Hawai'i	1	2	0
Alaska	0	1	0
Nevada	7	0	5
Montana	0	4	1
Arizona	0	0	15
New Mexico	0	0	15
Utah	0	17	14
Texas	0	9	48
Colorado	0	5	3
Other	3	206	87
US Total	1031	1144	1211

becomes more and more concentrated in California, reflecting a growing number of Indian men marrying (and passing their surname to) Mexican women, building lives and communities together despite vast differences in language, religion and all other aspects of culture (see Footnote 56). In addition, a non-trivial number of Sikh men appear to have been moving to the states of the Interior Southwest.<sup>84</sup>

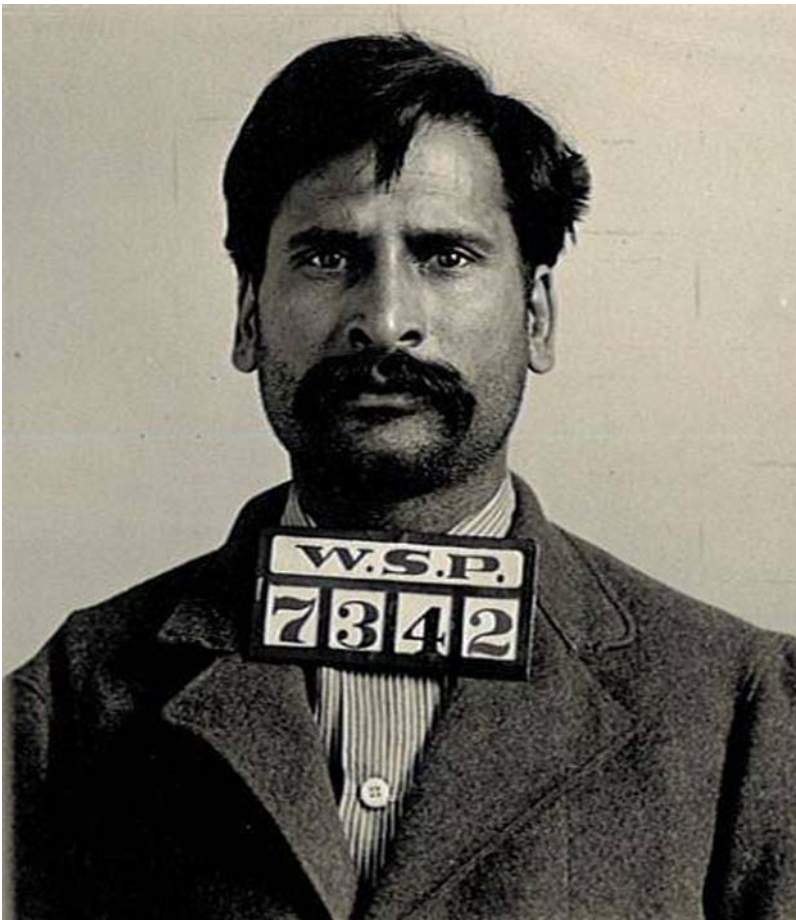
City directories provide slight glimpses – but little more – beyond 1930. The Aberdeen area saw a small group of men hang on for nearly two more decades in the lumber industry, dwindling down slowly, until the last man disappears after 1949. For Seattle the city directories show at most one or two men named Singh each year through the 1940s, with no continuity in specific individuals. Portland, however, is unique; one finds a small group of Indians there for every year in which city directories are available. There also appears to be considerable continuity in those present; they represent a single family or group of families, with names and occupations repeating throughout the years; the latter include popcorn and cigar vendors. Thus, as far as can currently be ascertained, Portland is the only location in the northwestern US that can lay claim to a continuous presence of South Asians of any size – albeit a minuscule one for much of the time – since their original arrival in the region over a century ago.

Despite the dwindling numbers, a few of the men who remained in the region through the 1920s and 1930s achieved a slightly wider array of experiences beyond the commonly discussed lumberman, railroad worker, student, and/or political organisers. In 1920, two men owned their own restaurant (Duka and Gaffor's), in Seattle's Pioneer Square. One man, Abdul Singh, was born in Australia, had a black South African mother, and lived in a boarding house with Southern blacks. Four men in Oregon were now popcorn vendors, while one ran his own farm in Corvallis. There were also more men living alone in boarding houses, away from other Indians. In 1930, the popcorn vendors are still present, joined by an entertainer named CFB Saldana; a janitor with the very Americanised name "Joe Maharaj"; a philosophy lecturer; and a Bengali minister named Swami Vivideshanander in Portland.

Those are the seemingly positive stories, reflecting both aspects of assimilation, and, for the ministers and lecturers, of bringing some aspects of Indian culture to America. However, the archives also reveal individual stories of men continuing to struggle

through hardships, depredations, and misunderstandings. Two ended up in the state insane asylum in Salem, Oregon, where they spent at least a decade – from the 1920–1930 census. Shah reveals multiple cases of Indian men being sent to prison for sodomy. One of these – Chenam Singh<sup>85</sup> – was arrested in a rooming house in Seattle’s Pioneer Square in 1914 for having sex with a 16-year-old white male. The 33-year-old Singh pled not guilty, but was ultimately charged and sentenced to up to ten years imprisonment in the state penitentiary in Walla Walla (Figure 5).<sup>86</sup> He was issued parole in July of 1915, and by September had gained permanent employment with the Elliot Bay Lumber Company; he received a full discharge five months later on account of good conduct.

The tamale seller R.W. Joseph of Seattle met with perhaps the most tragic end: he was shot dead by his Syrian housemate when he eloped with that man’s wife to Victoria, BC. The Syrian was not charged with the crime, as eyewitnesses claimed that he had shot Joseph in self-defence. Indeed, while Joseph’s story may be the most tragic, it is not entirely unique; the most common way for Indian men of the day to make the news seems to be to engage in some form of public argument, often being portrayed as



**Figure 5.** Mug shot for Chenam Singh, who was convicted of sodomy in Seattle in 1914.

comical or dangerous or both. The *Seattle Times* in particular seems to have had a penchant for tracking down and sensationalising such instances. In one case, four Hindu men who were enraged by their white foreman at the Columbia River Lumber Company Mill, were described as “half crazed with anger” as they unsuccessfully attempted to throw him on the saw.<sup>87</sup> In another, a quintet of “Hindoos” (who were presumably actually Muslim) refused to buy the mutton that a butcher had prepared for them in a downtown Seattle meat shop because some pieces had touched pork-chops. Without knowing much English, they “broke forth into a Babel of protest ... singly, in duets, and in trios.” But alas, they could not make themselves understood until a translator arrived, since “Hindustan-dee [*sic*] was Greek to the American”.<sup>88</sup> And Charles Pebucas and Samuel Kahn, two tamale men, had a late-night argument over tamale-selling territory behind a dance hall in what is now Seattle’s Chinatown.<sup>89</sup> The episode apparently devolved into a food fight, with the men hurling what one amused reporter described as their “hot hunks of husk-covered missiles” at each other. They were taken to jail.

### Perseverance and Prejudice

The idea of the early Asian immigrant as sojourner, unique in the intention to leave America in large numbers after earning sufficient money, has long since lost much of its traction in immigration studies. Nevertheless, immigrants from all continents did (and still do) often need to balance two objectives – adapting to their adopted country, while retaining active connections to their country of origin, with major constraints placed on their ability to do either. Indeed, contemporaneous power structures saw the Indians of the Pacific Northwest in this light, using their connections to India to argue for their lack of ability to assimilate and to contribute directly to American society. The Immigration Commission’s assumption, cited above, that the men were “without permanent interests in this country” is one example.

The evidence already uncovered by scholars in other regions makes clear that the idea of a lack of permanent interest there is simply inaccurate for many, if not most, men. The Indian-Mexican communities that emerged in California are one major testament to this. In addition, some with families in India sent for their wives and children, but many of those who arrived were not allowed to land.<sup>90</sup> Some farm workers attempted to pool their shared savings in order to buy property in partnerships. Later they would evade the Alien Land Laws by buying property in the name of their native-born mixed race children, and register in the probate court as guardian of the minors to manage the land.<sup>91</sup> These acts of survival demonstrate a desire on the part of Indians to establish roots in the United States and to seek paths to upward mobility.

But Indians did persist in California, and ultimately this work makes clear that they did not in the Pacific Northwestern states in any significant numbers. Were the efforts to settle in the country made by men in Washington and Oregon any less? The 1920s census would suggest not. Of the sixty men in Washington State, three were married to American women, three were naturalised, and an additional thirteen had naturalisation cases pending at the time of the census. In Oregon, one man was naturalised and twenty-three reported cases pending. However, the effects of the Thind case reverberate through the historical records; in 1930, only one man in the region reports himself as naturalised, and nobody has a pending case. Many men

had clearly come with the intent to stay, and faced roadblock after roadblock in achieving that goal.

In short, white racial hostility, evident from the series of anti-Indian riots and the subsequent increasing legal barriers, strongly shaped the broader experience of Indian men in the Pacific Northwest. This work makes clear that the South Asian men persisted in the northwestern US in declining numbers for at least two decades, and reflected a wider range of experiences during that time than previous scholarship suggests. They found multiple ways to adapt, economically, politically and socially. Perhaps most importantly, they revealed numerous ways in which they attempted to integrate themselves into their new home, even as they had to contend with xenophobia and racism in both occupations and living situations. Yet, in the end, the population could not survive in the face of persistent legal and social exclusion, and disappeared almost entirely. In the words of Nihal Sing [*sic*], the South Asian “haunted by painful penury sought the new world, expecting to find it his much-dreamed-of heaven, a land of plenty, immune from plagues and free from famine.” However, “instead of being received hospitably, and quietly allowed to be absorbed in the motley population of the great American West,” he “found the main entrances jealously barricaded.”<sup>92</sup>

Yet, despite all of the violence, ostracism and legal barriers placed in their way, the early South Asians managed to survive – permanently in California and British Columbia, and for a few decades in the US Pacific Northwest, the centre of the riots sometimes described as having driven them out of the region earlier than now appears to be the case. Indeed, a very small number – perhaps just a family or two – appear to have stayed in the region permanently as well. In the process, although the story of the pioneers has largely been forgotten by recent generations, they helped pave the way for the millions of South Asian Americans who have followed in their path.

## Notes

1. ‘Hindus Hounded from City’, *Bellingham Herald*, Sept. 5, 1907, 1.
2. ‘Mob in Bellingham Drives out Hindus’, *San Francisco Call*, Sept. 6, 1907, 5.
3. ‘Hindu Refugees Here’, *Seattle Daily Times*, Sept. 10, 1907, 8.
4. The Bellingham Riot was covered by most local newspapers of the day, including *The Seattle Daily Times*. It received a mention in various works on Indian immigration, including H. Brett Melendy, *Asians in America: Filipinos, Koreans, and East Indians* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 192; Joan M. Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigration in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 45–9; Gary R. Hess, ‘The Forgotten Asian Americans’, *Pacific Historical Review* 43 (1974): 576–96. Secondary scholarship includes Gerald M. Hallberg, Bellingham, ‘Washington’s anti-Hindu riot’, *Journal of the West* 12 (1973): 163–75.
5. These patterns could also be seen on the Online Exhibit, now no longer accessible: <http://www.wingluke.org/pages/sikhcommunitywebsite/mainpage.html> (accessed September 30, 2012).
6. I access this and later censuses through Ancestry Library Edition, which allows for expanded searches with relative ease. Ancestry Library Edition (<http://ancestrylibrary.proquest.com/>) is a subscription database that includes the US censuses up through 1930 in a scanned, online, searchable format. This makes historical censuses far more useful for small-scale sociodemographic research than in the past. The more typical tool for conducting historical demographic research – the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) Database – was not of use in this case, as it represents only a one percent random sample of the population,

and thus picks up only a very small number of Indians per census year for the time period of interest.

7. 'Hindus Beaten by Enraged Laborers', *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* Mar. 23, 1910, 1.
8. David Atkinson, 'Out of One Borderland, Many: The 1907 Anti-Asian Riots and the Spatial Dimensions of Race and Migration in the Canadian-US Pacific Borderlands', in *Entangling Migration History: Borderlands and Transnationalism in the United States and Canada*, eds. B. Bryce and A. Freund (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015), 122.
9. This literature is wide-ranging; the review here is limited to an overview to contextualise the population in Washington and Oregon. Some items focus explicitly on British Columbia or California; many cover a wider geographical area in theory, but in practice focusing on these areas. See Jogesh C. Misrow, 'East Indian Immigration on the Pacific Coast' (thesis, Stanford, CA, 1915); Rajani K. Das, *Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter & Co, 1923). S. Chandrasekhar, 'Indian immigration in America', *Far Eastern Survey* 13 (1944): 138–43; Gary R. Hess, 'The 'Hindu' in America: Immigration and Naturalization Policies and India, 1917–1946', *Pacific Historical Review* 38 (1969): 59–79; Melendy, *Asians in America*; Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra, and Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985); Hugh J. M. Johnston, *The East Indians in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984); Sucheta Mazumdar, 'Punjabi Agricultural Workers in California, 1905–1945', in *Labor Immigration under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States before World War II*, eds. L. Cheng and E. Bonacich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 549–78; Bruce La Brack, *The Sikhs of Northern California* (New York: AMS Press, 1988); Jensen, *Passage from India*; Hugh J. M. Johnston, 'The Sikhs', in *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*, ed. P. R. Magosci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).
10. Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
11. Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
12. Astoria receives a mention in many texts, mostly in the context of the Ghadar Party, an association formed there in April, 1913. Officially the "Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast," they were commonly called Ghadar (meaning "revolt") after their newspaper. The group consisted of expatriate Indians protesting British rule in India, and was driven to some extent by the racist conditions they encountered in North America. See Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Party Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Seema Sohi, 'Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in the Transnational Western U.S.-Canadian Borderlands', *Journal of American History* 98 (2011): 420–36; Mark Juergesmeyer, 'The Gadar Syndrome: Ethnic Anger and National Pride', in *From India to America*, ed. S. Chandrasekhar (La Jolla, Calif.: Population Review Publications, 1984). Additional works include social history and documentaries based on personal interviews, including *Turbans*, a film based on the memoirs of Astoria resident Kartar Dhillon, written and directed by her granddaughter, Erika Surat Andersen.
13. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*; Sohi, 'Indian Anticolonialism'.
14. Sohi, 'Indian Anticolonialism'; Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 127.
15. Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*.
16. For instance, Das cites the 1910 census as his source for the statement that there were 1,414 Indians in Washington State (Das, *Hindustani Workers*). On the other hand, Melendy cites the US Immigration Commission Report of 1911 to place the number at 161 (Melendy, *Asians in America*, 204). The 1911 Immigration Commission Report also implies a number a bit under 1,000 for Washington and Oregon: "At present perhaps four-fifths of the 5,000 or more are found in the one State [California], and none are found elsewhere than in the three Pacific Coast States and Nevada." See: U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports of the Immigration Commission, Vol. 1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911).

17. Padma Rangaswamy, *Namasté America: Indian Immigrants in an American Metropolis* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 42. There are varying views on how many of these people were ethnically Indian. For example, Das argues that the majority of individuals in the 1909 census from India were “other races born in India” (Das, *Hindustani Workers*, 9). In contrast, the U.S. Immigration Commission Report claims that the “greater part of these were East Indians” (U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports Volume 23*, 325).
18. Rangaswamy, *Namasté America*; Das, *Hindustani Workers*, 9.
19. For example, Chicago’s 1893 Colombian Exposition featured a “Hindoo” village with camels, jugglers and street performers.
20. Arthur M. Helweg and Usha. M. Helweg, *An Immigrant Success Story: East Indians in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 16; Jensen, *Passage from India*, 24.
21. Erika Lee E., and Judy Yung, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Jensen, *Passage from India*, 24.
22. Rajit K. Mazumder, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003). Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 67.
23. Misrow, *East Indian Immigration*, 2.
24. Jensen, *Passage from India*, 26.
25. William L. Mackenzie King, *Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Methods by which Oriental Labourers Have Been Induced to Come to Canada* (Ottawa, 1908), 76. Cited in U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports Vol. 23*, 329.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Archana B. Verma, *The Making of Little Punjab in Canada: Patterns of Immigration* (New Delhi: SAGE India, 2002).
28. Great Britain remained largely responsible for Canadian external affairs until 1931.
29. Additionally, beginning in 1908, Indians were required to possess \$200 upon arrival, an eight-fold increase from 1907. Another regulation from 1913 prohibited the entry of any “laborer not needed,” which could be used arbitrarily for deportation. These regulations culminated in the *Komagata Maru* incident, in which a steamship with 376 South Asians was kept in Vancouver harbour for two months in 1914, before being sent back to India. See David C. Atkinson, *The Burden of White Supremacy: Containing Asian Migration in the British Empire and the United States* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2016); Hugh J. M. Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada’s Colour Bar* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989).
30. Atkinson, *The Burden of White Supremacy*, 136; Jensen, *Passage from India*, 82.
31. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports Volume 23*, 330.
32. *Ibid.*
33. John R. Commons, *Races and Immigrants in America* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920). Commons reported that among the men inquiring with the Consul were “ten sturdy Punjab Mohammedans” who “already had friends working on dairy farms in America,” and whom the Consul found to be “stronger and more intelligent than the Chinese coolies” (*Ibid.*, 103).
34. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports Volume 23*, 327–28.
35. *Ibid.*, 326.
36. Sohi, ‘Indian anticolonialism’, 426.
37. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports Volume 23*, 326.
38. Sant N. Sing, ‘America’s New Immigrant: The Hindoo’, *Pacific Monthly* 20 (1908): 109.
39. *Ibid.*, 111.
40. Sarah Isabel Wallace, *Not Fit to Stay: Public Health Panics and South Asian Exclusion* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).
41. ‘Mob Drives Out Hindus’, *Los Angeles Herald*, Sept. 6, 1907, 1.
42. *Ibid.*
43. U.S. Dept. of Labor, *Reports of the Department of Labor, 1919* (Washington, 1920), 251–52.
44. Prior to this, the Luce-Celler Bill of 1946 had restored naturalisation rights for Indians and Filipinos, and re-established immigration from these countries with a quota of 100 visas yearly.

45. Pew Research Center, *Indians in the U.S. Fact Sheet*. 2017. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/fact-sheet/asian-americans-indians-in-the-u-s> (accessed September 16, 2020).
46. Shah discusses the case of three South Asian men being arrested for sodomy and rape after a drunken evening in the railroad and lumber town of Gate, Washington in 1912. (p. 79), as well as other sodomy cases from Seattle (p. 148) and Cosmopolis, Washington (p. 149). Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*.
47. Amy Bhatt and Nalini Iyer, *Roots and Reflections: South Asians in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).
48. Even as the introduction of this work lays the foundation of the first wave of immigrants in the Pacific Northwest (1890s–1920s), the narrative focuses on the Bellingham riot, the Ghadar Party and other stories of struggle and resistance through the writings of the non-working class South Asian activists, visionaries and students that contributed to the discourse on the anti-British colonial movement.
49. Although a search for those with a birthplace of India yields a long list, almost all of these people were in fact born in Indiana; the former was frequently abbreviated ‘Ind.’ by census takers, and miscoded as India during transcription. On the other hand, many people listed on the original census sheets as being born in India do not show this information in the available database. The race question is similarly of no help in identifying Indians, since the newness of this population to the US meant that the American racial typology prevailing at that time did not include them as a distinct category, as discussed in depth later in the paper.
50. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports Volume 23*, 337.
51. Unfortunately, the relative homogeneity in surnames is echoed (to a lesser extent) in given names, making it impossible to track individuals from census to census, or between any other data sources, with any certainty.
52. Additional sources used include the US Immigration Commission Report of 1911, prepared by Millis and containing a section on “The East Indians on the Pacific Coast.” The data in this report were gathered in 1910 from thirty-six groups of Indians comprising 159 members, and from 395 additional men employed in farms and other occupations. However, of these, only seventy-nine were from Washington and Oregon. Another useful report is “Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast” by Das, a Special Agent of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics who was charged with studying the social and economic conditions of this population. The centres of Indian populations that Das identified were all located in California and British Columbia; although he discussed the overall population in the Pacific Northwest under “miscellaneous localities.” While the census and the immigration and labour reports provide snapshots of the population at specific points in time, newspapers provide additional ongoing information. I searched newspapers published in Washington and Oregon prior to 1925 using the America’s Historical Newspaper Index by Readex, which contained three newspapers from Washington (*The Morning Olympian*, *The Seattle Daily Times* and *The Tacoma Daily News*) and one from Oregon (*The Democratic Standard*). Of the four, *The Seattle Daily Times* yielded the majority of results. Finally, I used City Directories for additional insight on communities that appear to persist beyond 1930. These precursors to the modern-day phone book include address and name of employer, making it somewhat easier to link individuals from year to year.
53. Researchers in the University of Washington libraries have found records for twenty or more Indian students at the university in the years in and around 1910. See Linda di Biase. *New, Thinking, Agile, and Patriotic: “Hindu” Students at the University of Washington, 1908–1915*, <https://www.lib.washington.edu/specialcollections/collections/exhibits/southasianstudents> (accessed May 9, 2019). None of these students was identified through my inspection of the census, since only one was named Singh and they presumably did not all live together. Moreover, as foreign students they would have been reasonably likely to go unenumerated. Judging by surnames, they came from a broader geographical range of India, especially Bengal. A number were highly active in the Ghadar Party, particularly Taraknath Das, who is discussed in more detail in Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*. They also include Jogesh Misrow,

who later produced one of the contemporaneous reports on the U.S. East Indians, the topic of his thesis research at Stanford. As these men were largely distinct from the rest of the local Indian population culturally, linguistically, and economically, and since their work with the Ghadar party has been recently explored by Ramnath, I have not focused on them here.

54. An additional source of underestimation – and probably a much larger one – is the exclusion of some Indian men from the census, either because their remote lumber or railroad camps were skipped altogether, or because the census-taker did not take the extra effort needed to include those who often spoke little English and lived in marginal environments. Indeed, in 1911 the agents of the Immigration Commission charged with collecting data on East Indians in the Pacific West found that many simply

could not be reached by the agents in person, and it was found impossible to secure the data otherwise because of the inability of the majority of these immigrants to read and write English, and because of the disinclination of the foremen under whom they worked to devote the time necessary to secure the desired information and to record it. (U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports Volume 23*, 323)

They estimate that they only contacted about 15% of the men. The census takers would undoubtedly have faced similar problems.

55. Some of these additional men also have the surname Singh, but were either missed during database construction, were mistyped, or were mistakenly given Singh as their first name. Excluded from this list is a man from China named Ah Singh (likely a mis-spelling of Sing).
56. The Indian population in the US was clearly overwhelmingly male, but it does not appear to be exclusively so. For instance, the US Immigration Commission Report compiled reports from the Commissioner General of Immigration to show that 109 of the 5,762 Indian immigrants recorded in the first decade of the twentieth century were women, or a little less than 2% (U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports Volume 23*, 327). Thus, the completely male nature of the population in the Pacific Northwest is mildly surprising.
57. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Report Volume 23*, 349.
58. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).
59. Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 83.
60. In California's Imperial Valley, an altogether different, and fascinating, phenomenon occurred. California's anti-miscegenation law was on the books until 1948. The men who moved ever southward, to this area with a Punjab-like climate on the Mexican border, married Mexican immigrant women, creating "Mexican-Hindu" households. They produced a hybrid culture, along with children and grandchildren, and some of their descendants remain in the Valley today. This community has seen interest in their unique piece of the American story, including a PBS documentary, *Roots in the Sand*, by filmmaker Hart (1998). For a thorough investigation of this community, see Karen I. Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).
61. Some refugees of the Bellingham Riot in Seattle were at one time employed in "digging a sewer" (*The Seattle Daily Times*, November 21, 1907, 5). The Indian-run tamale business appears frequently in the newspapers. For example, one individual sold "hot tamales" in Tacoma and supported his thirty unemployed countrymen from those earnings (*The Seattle Daily Times*, December 15, 1907, 30).
62. Cheap Living at Minimum by Hindus, *Seattle Daily Times*, December 15, 1907, 30.
63. The one exception is a lone man in Medford, Oregon, who was in the hospital at the time; likely he was more typically resident with the nearby cluster at Eagle Point.
64. Cheap Living at Minimum by Hindus, 1907, 30.
65. Hindus Hurrying Southward, *Seattle Daily Times*, November 21, 1907, 5.
66. Ibid.
67. Cheap Living at Minimum by Hindus, 1907, 30.
68. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports Volume 23*, 342.
69. Wallace, *Not Fit to Stay*, 3.



70. Filipinos faced their own form of racial ambiguity, in that scientists had long differed as to whether or not “Malays” (i.e. southeast Asians) were a distinct race from East Asians (“Mongolians”) or not, and where Filipinos fit into this distinction. This played out in a number of legal debates in the US, particularly around miscegenation. See, e.g. Rachel F. Moran, *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
71. The text, and more information on the 1910 census, can mostly easily be accessed from the University of Minnesota’s Integrated Public Use Microdata Center, at <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/voliii/inst1910.shtml>.
72. Andrea Geiger, *Subverting Exclusion: Transpacific Encounters with Race, Caste and Borders, 1885–1928* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 150.
73. Even in a 1978 survey, when asked whether they considered Indians to be white, black or something else, eleven percent of Americans answered white, and thirteen percent did not know how to classify them. See Peter Xenos, Herbert Barringer, and Michael J. Levin, *Asian Indians in the United States: A 1980 Census Profile* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 1989). Moreover, in the 1970 census Indians were assigned to the Caucasian race, before being redefined as Asian by 1980. Note also that an earlier case in the United States circuit court of appeals in New York had determined that Parsees from India *could* become naturalised citizens, since their Persian ancestry made them white, in contrast to Hindus (U.S. Immigration Commission, *Report Volume 23*, 348).
74. Hindus Attacked by Italians, *Seattle Daily Times*, Aug 22, 1908, 4. It was reported that forty Hindus were attacked by the striking Italians whom they had replaced on the Northern Pacific Railroad, Tacoma yards.
75. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Report Volume 23*, 349.
76. *Ibid.*, 337.
77. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Report Volume 25*, 331.
78. *Ibid.*, 332.
79. Although the 1940 census individual results have been made public, they are not indexed by name and can only be browsed or searched by address.
80. Shada Ram, a lumberman, who in 1920 was living with his white, Indiana-born wife Gertrude, their four-year-old Washington-born son William, and five other Indian lumbermen. In 1930 they were in nearby Aberdeen, living with three children (Marvel, William and Nola). This latter residence was in the “Bay City Barracks” along with many other Indian lumbermen, and a second family: that of Chaffie Khan, his white, Oregon-born wife Pearl, and their two Oregon-born children Gaylord and Thelma. The same year there was a third couple living in Cosmpolis: Ara and Fannie Singh; Ara was a forty-ish Indian sawmill worker, and Fannie was his fifty-ish, Oklahoma-born wife.
81. Paul Singh, his wife Melissa, her two children Helen and Melissa, and their son Paul Jr. were all living together in Portland in the 1930 census. Given the anti-miscegenation law still in effect in Oregon, it is possible that the couple married in Washington prior to relocating to Oregon.
82. Sohi, ‘Indian Anticolonialism’, 433.
83. E.g. Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*. Even at the time, a Congressional hearing on Hindu exclusion in 1914 referred to the “very large number that worked their way down to California” from Washington State as a result of “a local agitation commencing four or five years ago.” See United States Congress, House Committee on Immigration and Naturalisation, *Hindu Immigration: Hearings before the Committee on Immigration, House of Representatives, Sixty-Third Congress, Second Session, Relative to Restriction of Immigration of Hindu Laborers* (Washington, 1914), 105.
84. A full search for all Indians might reveal others in these interior West states, yet the experiences of these (admittedly very small) communities have not received any documentation by historians. Indeed, one of very few states that appear to have specifically mentioned South Asians in their miscegenation laws at any point was the interior West state of Arizona, suggesting a growing presence there; “Hindus” were added to the list of groups that could not marry whites there in 1931; see Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*:

*Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 118. Other states with similar laws include Georgia and Virginia, although this appears to stem not from a growing Indian population there, but rather from a particularly zealous effort on the part of officials in the heart of the former Confederacy to define exactly who was “white,” and keep them pure. (Ibid, 144–5).

85. Shah spells his first name “Channan,” and indeed the spelling does vary among trial documents, although Chenam appears more commonly.
86. Washington State Penitentiary, Case File #WSP 7342.
87. Hindus Wanted to Kill Their Foreman, *Seattle Daily Times*, June 2, 1908, 5.
88. Religion Hands One to Callous Business, *Seattle Daily Times*, Dec. 10, 1911, 18.
89. Tamale Vendors in Fight Mess Up Hall, *Seattle Daily Times*, Aug. 3, 1910, 7.
90. Das, *Hindustani Workers*, 109.
91. Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 135.
92. Sing, ‘America’s New Immigrant’, 109.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).