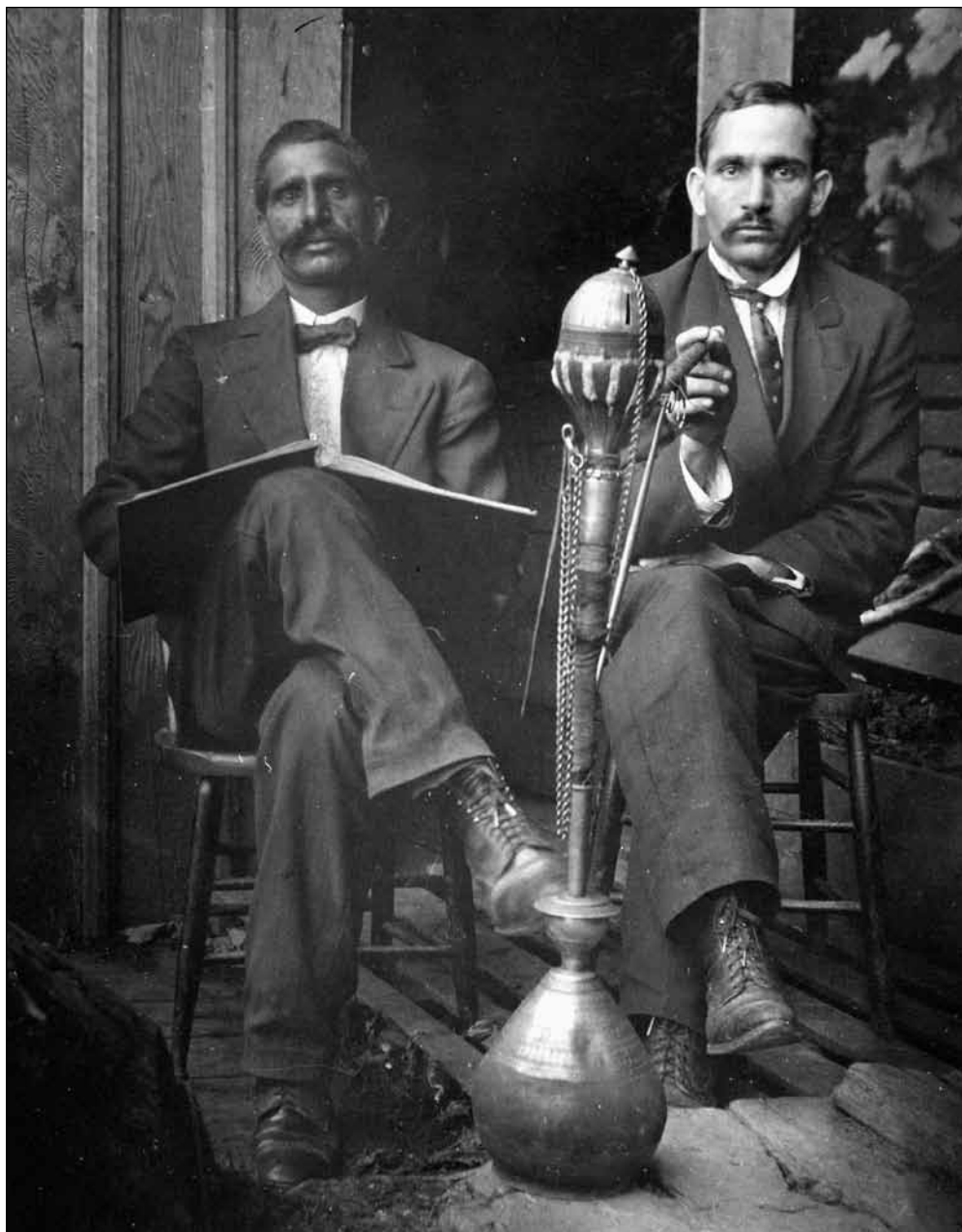


# Ghadar, Historical Silences, and Notions of Belonging

## *Early 1900s Punjabis of the Columbia River*

ON MAY 30, 1913, the *Astoria Budget* printed a notice from “Munsii [Munshi] Ram, Secretary of the Hindu Association, Astoria, Oregon.” It was an invitation to hear Har Dyal, a Stanford professor and “noted philosopher and revolutionist in India,” deliver a special “lecture on India for the American residents of Astoria” at the local Finnish Socialist Hall.<sup>1</sup> That a Hindu Association and a Finnish Socialist Hall existed in remote, 1913 Astoria is its own startling news for many. But this was far more than a lecture in a “red” hall arranged by a surprising organization. Dyal’s 1913 speech in Astoria was the keynote at the founding of the revolutionary nationalist Ghadar Party, an uncompromising and radical new direction in Indian nationalist politics.

Created by the Asian Indians (or Hindus, as they were referred to at the time) of the U.S. West Coast, Ghadar’s aim was nothing less than the armed overthrow of British rule in India.<sup>2</sup> The group included intellectuals such as Dyal as well as students, but its ranks were the laboring Punjabi men who worked the region’s mills and farms. Men from the length of the Columbia River and beyond filled the hall that May in Astoria. Within a year of the meeting, hundreds of Punjabis, overwhelmingly laborers from the West Coast led by Sohan Singh Bhakna from Portland, returned to India with the hope of sparking an insurrection against British rule. Most were promptly captured, detained, tried, or executed; Ghadarites were the target of conspiracy trials in Lahore, India, and San Francisco, California, the latter at the time the most costly trial in U.S. history.<sup>3</sup> These setbacks aside, Ghadar’s secular politics united an unprecedented combination of social



*Two unnamed Punjabi men, of the hundred or more living and working in early 1900s Astoria, often as millworkers, pose for a photograph. At the time, Punjabis were often called “Hindus,” in reference to Hindustan on the Indian subcontinent, sometimes in a mistaken notion about the men’s religion. Many of the Punjabis in Astoria were Sikhs and wore turbans as a mark of their faith, while others, for a variety of reasons, opted for a western style of dress.*

castes and religious backgrounds and made an indelible mark on the Indian imagination and politics. For that, Indian historiography views Ghadar as an opening salvo in the Indian nationalist endeavor. Ghadar Party memorials exist in Jalandhar, Punjab (India), and San Francisco, California.<sup>4</sup> Yet, this major political accomplishment and link to Indian independence is largely unknown today in the American West, and its birthplace in Oregon stands in mute anonymity.

Men from British Columbia to California accomplished the formation of Ghadar despite facing numerous legal proscriptions and extra-legal mob violence, frequently perpetrated with government backing or an official blind eye. Oregon was perhaps more nuanced in its treatment of the migrants because prominent figures in the state — for their own self-serving reasons — openly championed the economic usefulness of the Punjabi men's presence and stridently opposed violence against them. But while they were not physically driven from the state, the Punjabis have been run out of Oregon historically. There are no identifiable vestiges of them in Oregon's landscape, little recognition of their lives or accomplishments exist in our collective memory, and the watershed founding of Ghadar is largely forgotten. If remembered at all, Ghadar's Oregon story is eclipsed by that of San Francisco, the later home of its office and press.<sup>5</sup>

The story of Ghadar in the Pacific Northwest is, without a doubt, intriguing. For me, its historical importance lies in the realities it reveals about the transnational making of the region and the historical downplaying, if not silencing, of that very process. The erasure of Asian Indians in Oregon is rooted in myths that have privileged settlement over transience and rigid nationalist fables over stories of global peoples — whether Chinese, Japanese, or Hindustani — who were, and are, intrinsic to the region. Those myths have shaped our archives and stories, and they continue to haunt us through their impact on the notions of belonging and otherness in post-9/11 America. Re-remembering the Punjabis of Oregon — communities of laborers and political activists stretching the length of the Columbia River — prompts one to consider the process of their erasure.

The Punjabis' story also unearths a history of transnational collaboration and divergent outlooks among diverse and often underestimated peoples that, if not a cause for optimism, is at least a reminder that with respect to religious, ethnic, and political tolerance and inclusion, social habits and beliefs can be more of our own making than we might assume.

#### THE COLONIAL VORTEX OF PUNJABI MIGRATION

The populations of Asian Indians who came to North America were small, especially as compared to Chinese or Japanese migrations, and temporally



*The S.S. Minnesota arrives in Seattle, Washington, on June 23, 1913. The term “tide of turbans” was a common pejorative used when speaking of migration from India, with the turban itself becoming a symbol for, and target of, anti-immigrant sentiments.*

compressed, beginning roughly in 1905 and ending in 1914, the apex of Ghadar. The causes of and reactions to their migration provide a lens onto global colonial politics.<sup>6</sup>

Some thirty million people left India between 1830 and 1930. By choice, economic imperative, or force, Indian men left home to work as merchants, policemen, soldiers, plantation workers, or laborers, largely in other Crown colonies in Asia, South Africa, and Australia. For most of those migrants, no matter the distance traveled, the British colonial story of Indians’ supposed inability to self-rule, despite centuries of having done so, followed and branded them as second-class, colonized subjects.

In the years around 1906, several elements came together to push Indian migration toward North America. First was the growing anti-colonial unrest in Bengal and its spread to the Punjab, which deepened in 1907 with an outbreak of the plague and the resulting deaths of over a million people.<sup>7</sup> Second was the development of colonial exclusionary policies against Asian



*This photograph of Pacific Northwest millworkers from the early twentieth century, likely including a number of Sikhs, captures the regional mix of workers the industry relied on and recruited from around the world.*

Indians in Australia and South Africa, persuading some to seek new opportunities in the booming economies of western North America. Furthermore, attempting to quell Bengali and Punjabi unrest, the British colonial regime expelled numerous nationalist students and leaders and increased surveillance of established European émigré-nationalists, prompting a number of organizers and newly exiled Indian activists toward the American East Coast.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, some fifteen thousand to thirty thousand Hindustanis landed in North America and provided the elements for the historic mix of radical intellectuals and laborers that became so critical to Ghadar.<sup>9</sup>

While most students and intellectuals initially landed in the East, the booming economies of the West attracted the mass of migrant laborers, farmers, and former military men. British Columbia was the earliest migration site, attracting some eight thousand men. But after 1908, when Asian Indian immigration was essentially banned in British Columbia, nearly seven thousand migrated to the United States from Canada and other parts of the globe.<sup>10</sup> Most were from the Punjab. They were Muslims and Hindus, but overwhelmingly they were Sikhs, often easily identified by their turbans

and beards.<sup>11</sup> Once in North America, they formed a community of laborers that stretched and moved through the West from British Columbia to California, working in mills, at land reclamation, and on farms. Hundreds lived and worked along Oregon's Columbia River from Astoria to The Dalles.

Drawn by and landing in the midst of the frenzied building of the West, it should come as little surprise that the region was a political ground zero for how and under what social terms it would be constructed, with the rhetoric and promises of American democracy and the realities of American colonial expansion often violently clashing on the bodies of migrant men.

On the one hand, these were times of radical labor activism, like that of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies); socialist organizations dominated by German, Italian, and Jewish migrants; and immigrant nationalist groups such as the Irish Sinn Fein, who all argued that the fruits of industry should be shared by labor. Those organizations were often established with a belief in the equality of all nationalities and races. Cross-fertilization was frequent in factories, mines, mills, and conferences as well as through the many radical presses of the day.<sup>12</sup> Indian émigrés such as Har Dyal jumped into that mix, making common cause with Irish revolutionists and labor radicals, and the international uprisings of the day provided ready inspiration.

On the other hand were organizers of a different sort — those who believed the American West was meant for whites only. The arrival of the Punjabis spurred a frenzy of anti-Asian activity. The Punjabis were hardly the first such target. The nativist movement had begun with the arrival of Chinese migrants during the 1850s California gold rush and raged over forty years. Its tactics included riots, round ups, expulsions, and murder at a level described by some historians as ethnic cleansing. The on-the-ground violence was accompanied by legislative restrictions against Chinese on everything from immigration to laundry operations, land ownership, voting, and marriage. This was not simply a misguided popular movement but was hailed, if not fomented, in the California legislative halls.<sup>13</sup>

In many ways, the West was a last stand: politicians had promised it to those whites who had yet to enjoy the “American dream,” pushed ever westward in hopes of securing the reality. Since Thomas Jefferson's days, the white yeoman farmer, with his family at his side, had been touted as the backbone and ideal of American citizenry. Yet, since the nation's founding, its democratic ideal had its parallel reality of slavery and the colonization of indigenous peoples. By the close of the nineteenth century, the Carnegies, Rockefellers, Mellons, and others were rapidly transforming real and still aspiring yeomen into industrial wage slaves. The West was held out as the last frontier for those whites left out of the American dream.<sup>14</sup>

The furnace of westward colonial expansion was not stoked simply by domestic migration but also by infusions of men from every corner of the globe. As late as the first three decades of the 1900s, 80 percent of the West's population growth was comprised of single men from the world over. That mix created any number of political and social tensions, many related to accepted domestic arrangements and the relative rights and privileges of whites versus other laborers. As historian Nayan Shah argues, the "United States and Canada responded to this immense plurality of human mobility and the demands of industrial capitalism" with a series of "local and federal laws to deny any political voice or social status to transient workers" and "by developing a system of democratic government in which large swaths of their residents were proscribed from full participation," with race a crucial divide.<sup>15</sup> The Punjabis arrived in the midst of this western moment and became for a time its political lightning rod, simultaneously indispensable labor *and* indispensable political fodder.

Like the Chinese and Japanese before them, Punjabis were utilized for work by land, factory, and mill owners but barred by law from citizenship.<sup>16</sup> Although there were tactical differences between the United States and Canadian governments, there was essential agreement between their respective governmental policies and exclusionist movements: each nation was to be white and Christian. In the American tradition of African chattel slaves and indigenous laborers, Asian laborers became part of a highly racialized continuum of peoples whose labor and land were used but who were outside the pale of political inclusion.<sup>17</sup> In this way, Punjabis and Asians generally helped define the meaning of Canadian and U.S. citizenship by what it was not. Attitudes in both countries were captured in the popular bar song and on-the-ground movement of the day, "White Canada Forever":

For white man's land we fight.  
To Oriental grasp and greed  
We'll surrender, no, never.  
Our watchword be "God save the King,"  
White Canada forever.<sup>18</sup>

### RIOTS AND CHANGE

By 1905, the Asiatic Exclusion League (AEL), the latest permutation of Asian exclusionist organizing, born and centered in San Francisco, had an organizational influence and core message — of the West belonging to whites — that infected the entire coast. The Punjabis, with their telescoped arrival and identifying turbans, quickly became nativist targets.<sup>19</sup> In 1907, a year of sharp economic downturn, the rising racial tensions of the entire

West Coast exploded in a watershed moment: the anti-Indian riot in Bellingham, Washington.

Bellingham was a booming mill town with active labor organizations and a vocal anti-Asian faction affiliated with the AEL. By 1906, Punjabis who had left Vancouver's increasingly hostile atmosphere had found ready work in nearby Bellingham. In September 1907, however, job insecurity in Bellingham combined with anti-immigrant hatred. Several hundred white workers and some of Bellingham's municipal and commercial leaders mobbed and beat many of the roughly two hundred Asian Indians in town and ransacked their living quarters. In the riot's wake, no Chinese, Japanese, or Asian Indians remained. Support for and approval of the Bellingham riot spread throughout the West via the mainstream press and AEL papers. Outbreaks of violence followed in numerous other Washington towns, as well as in Alaska and California. Euro-American workers established a hold over lumbering in Washington that would not be broken until World War I.<sup>20</sup>

Fleeing Bellingham, Punjabis scattered throughout the West, many crossing back into Vancouver. A few short days later, with the encouragement of local leaders and Seattle AEL organizers, a riot broke out in Vancouver with a mob marching on city hall, then Chinatown. Armed Japanese finally stopped them. Order was not restored for several days, and the riot made international news. The riots resulted in a turning point in Canadian immi-



*Published on August 13, 1910, in the San Francisco Call, a popular press of the day, this cartoon expresses the powerful attitudes towards Asian Indian migration to the United States.*

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gration history. Fearing that continued Asian immigration would weaken the remote province's allegiance, the Canadian federal government backed the province's effort to make a "white Canada forever."<sup>21</sup> The federal government imposed quotas on Japanese emigration, created "continuous voyage" regulations requiring that Asian Indians travel directly to Canada from their country of origin and possess a \$200 landing fee, enforced head-tax laws against the Chinese, and, later, created the Chinese Exclusion Act.<sup>22</sup>

Immigrant communities fought back in myriad ways. But unlike the Chinese and Japanese, who came from countries with national reputations at stake, the Asian Indians received no backing from the British colonial government. Instead of assisting their subjects, the British, concerned about the effect of such race politics on their global empire, instituted their own measures to restrict Punjabi migration: passport controls by the Raj in Hindustan; cancellation of direct travel between Canada and India, making it impossible to meet Canada's continuous journey provision; and for those Punjabis already in North America, establishment of a global police network, particularly strong in Vancouver, to monitor and disrupt any organizing.<sup>23</sup>

Punjabis responded in a variety of ways to the tremendous change in conditions following the Bellingham and Vancouver riots. Some simply left for India, although most stayed on, working in Northwest mills and on rural California farms. Some turned inward, cultivating religious and purity movements, while others, especially in British Columbia and despite its heavy police surveillance, also began to develop more radical outlooks.<sup>24</sup> Where could such politics flourish? Oregon's community of Punjabis was hardly the largest and outwardly was the least successful. Compared to California and British Columbia, they built little that was tangible, such as temples, businesses, or farms. Nevertheless, several critical factors conducive to radical sentiments and the founding of Ghadar coalesced in Oregon.

First, unlike California and Washington, the AEL had little political and organizational sway in Oregon. The state was not free of anti-Asian animus, but key political and business leaders, while still opposing the social and political inclusion of Asians, lobbied Oregonians to shun the violence occurring throughout the West. Their success resulted in little hold for anti-Asian activity, less communal violence, and when violence did occur, less tolerance for it, especially by public officials.<sup>25</sup> This provided some measure of breathing room.

In addition to Oregon's relative racial peace were the cosmopolitan and radical currents of Astoria and its stable community of Punjabis. Moreover, Oregon's and Astoria's remoteness was likely a plus because it provided some distance from British Columbia's political police and hostilities, yet was not so far, especially with rail and ship connections, to prevent ties to Vancou-

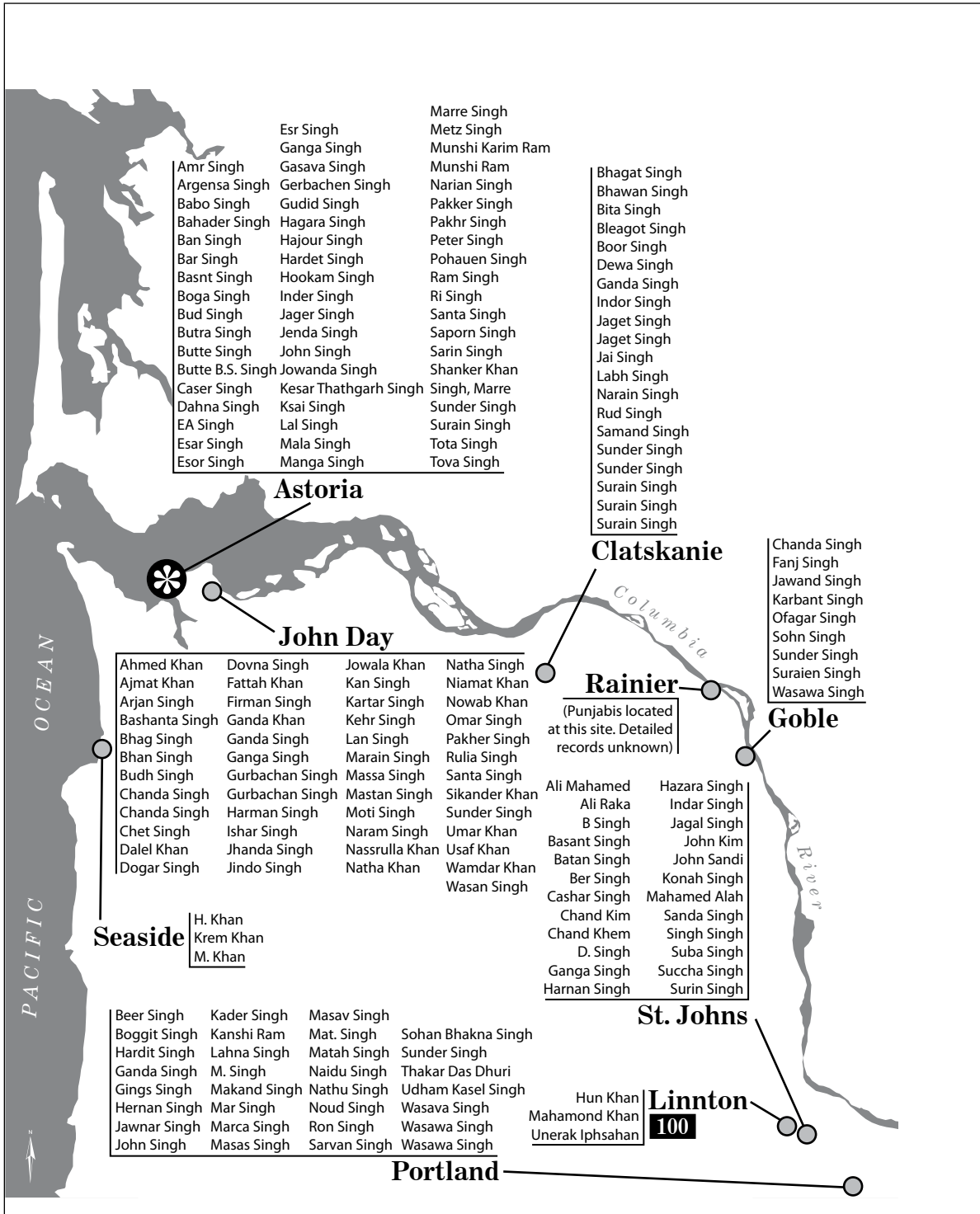
ver's political ferment and organizers. Finally, in Portland were key leaders, particularly Sohan Singh Bhakna and Kanshi Ram, who had the astuteness to recognize political openings, the ability to bridge the laboring and intellectual communities, and the strength of political vision to make Ghadar a reality.

Punjabis began arriving in Oregon through direct immigration to the United States and through the fluid border with Canada. It is easy to imagine that Punjabis displaced by the Bellingham and Vancouver riots found their way south, swelling existing Punjabi settlements or creating new ones. It is also easy to envision mill operators in out-of-the-way towns along the Columbia River greedily hiring these newly arrived men, as labor was chronically short in this land rich with trees. The largest community of Punjabis developed in Astoria but was amplified by others in The Dalles, Hood River, Bridal Veil, Winans, Portland, St. Johns, Linnton, Goble, Clatskanie, Rainier, John Day, and Seaside.<sup>26</sup>

Oregon was not free of hostility toward Asian Indians. Newspapers in both Portland and Astoria ran their share of stories promoting the exclusionist myth of the "Hindu invasion," along with reports on the riots against the Punjabis in Bellingham, Everett, and Vancouver.<sup>27</sup> In Boring, just outside Portland, an Asian Indian man was shot to death on Halloween 1907, the victim of a hate crime.<sup>28</sup> Asian-exclusion societies gained some coverage in the daily press and took some nominal organizational forms in both Portland and Astoria.<sup>29</sup> Communal violence occurred as well, most notably in St. Johns. On March 24, 1910, nearly three hundred men moved on Punjabi laborers' homes, ransacked them, beat and robbed the men, and drove out those still at work in the mill. All the Punjabi men left St. Johns that night.<sup>30</sup>

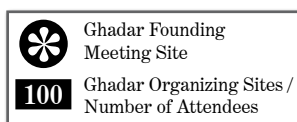
The following day, however, the Punjabis were back in St. Johns with the county district attorney (D.A.) in tow, identifying those who had participated in the riot against them: the mayor, police chief, a newspaper reporter, two volunteer firefighters, some shop owners, and numerous laborers from the local mills. The D.A. convened a grand jury to investigate the riot, which issued 190 warrants for beating and robbing thirty-eight "Hindu workmen." Moreover, the D.A. charged the mayor, city attorney, and police chief with dereliction of duty.<sup>31</sup> The mill, the main employer of the Punjabis in St. Johns, continued to employ the men despite threats.<sup>32</sup> Most of the Punjabis returned to work immediately, but several were arrested for carrying revolvers, stating: "We have no protection."<sup>33</sup> Besides arming themselves, the Punjabis stayed active throughout the long course of the St. Johns riot legal battle, unsuccessfully attempting to involve the British consulate and testifying in many court cases.

That in their fight the Punjabis had the considerable backing of the District Attorney of Multnomah County is significant and demonstrative

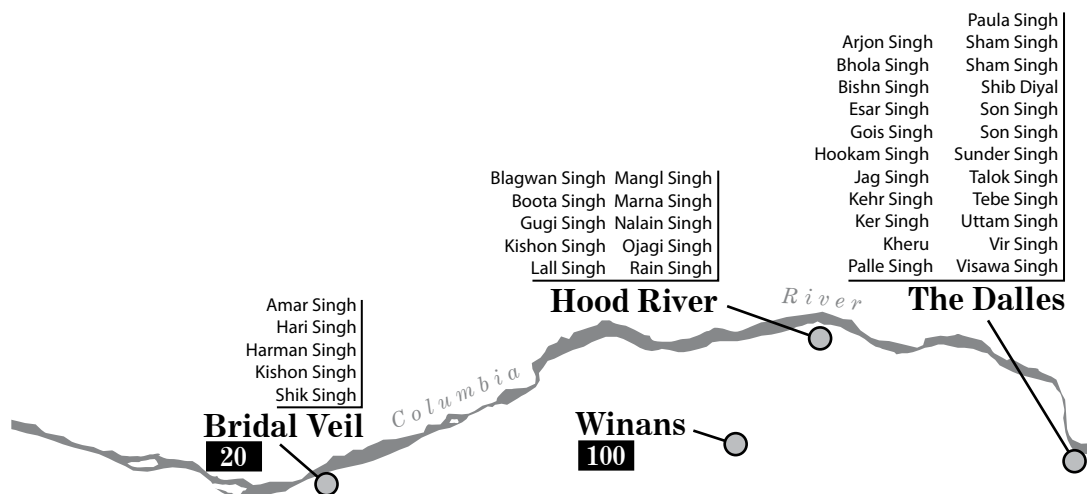


# RE-MARKING THE IMAGINATIVE LANDSCAPE

## 1910 PUNJABIS AND THE COLUMBIA RIVER



This map is compiled by the author from a number of sources, including: the 1910 census, various city directories, legal records, and Ghadar historical accounts. It does not presume to be complete or historically accurate. Its purpose is to begin to imaginatively place the men — as individuals and as a community — in the landscape of the area's history.



of the larger racial policy regarding Asian laborers that shaped Portland and much of the state.<sup>34</sup> In 1859, Oregon was the first state admitted to the union with an explicitly anti-Chinese constitution, which legislators in California, the heart of the anti-Chinese movement, envied. Barred from citizenship, Chinese were also explicitly excluded from both the right to vote (as were “Negroes and Mulattos”) and from property ownership. Yet, Oregon’s Chinese population increased from 1880 to 1910, and Portland was home to the second largest Chinatown in the West. This seeming contradiction was due, as historian Marie Rose Wong argues, to two critical factors. First, a key framer of the Oregon constitution (including its anti-Asian stance) was also a law-and-order judge, Matthew Deady, who was concerned by the spread of vigilante violence and, with Portland’s mayor, took strong stands against it. Second, Portlander Harvey Scott, the *Oregonian’s* leading journalist and editor for fifty years, penned editorials on the issue.<sup>35</sup>

Scott’s was a bully pulpit. Although he openly supported Oregon’s Chinese Exclusion Act and opposed Chinese citizenship, he lobbied against Oregonians imitating the vigilante violence of Washington and California, scoffed at the notion that Chinese labor was draining the country of wealth, and excoriated newspapers that claimed otherwise. Scott, in short, promoted the “good sense” of Oregon growing rich by utilizing Asian laborers driven out elsewhere, while also assuring their departure once that work was done. Especially in western Oregon, those views gained considerable currency among local businessmen, politicians, and ordinary citizens during Scott’s tenure and created a notable, if self-serving, counterweight to the violence that engulfed so much of the West.<sup>36</sup> Thus, backwater Oregon, judged by the times, was relatively safe for Punjabis and wanted their labor.

Arguably, Scott’s views influenced Astoria, ninety miles west of Portland and a town where no anti-Asian communal violence ever occurred. Other factors distinguished the town. From Astoria’s inception, it had been markedly international, and by 1910, near the height of the Punjabi community there, nearly half of Astoria’s 9,600 residents were foreign-born, including large communities of Chinese and Finns.<sup>37</sup> Those groups shaped the town, some giving it strong currents of radical nationalism. While Astoria was not the only Oregon town without anti-Asian riots, it was home to a large, visible Punjabi settlement and was the birthplace of Ghadar.

#### ASTORIA AND “HINDU ALLEY”

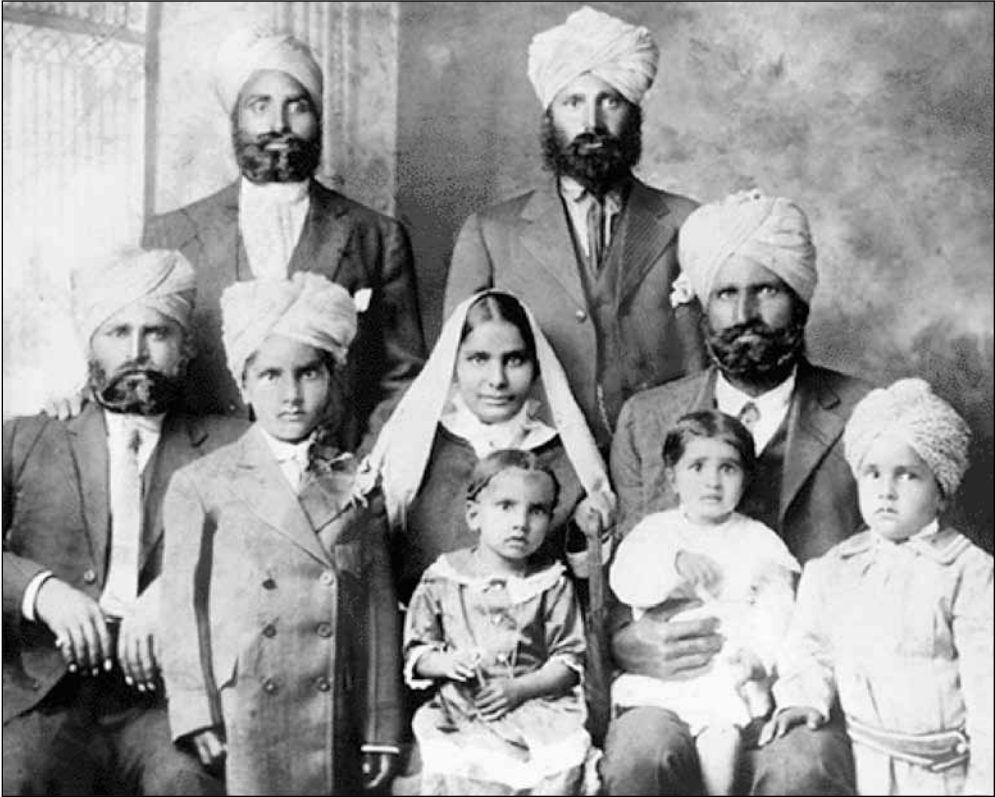
Astoria and its environs seemingly had the most diverse community of Asian Indians in all of Oregon, estimated at around a hundred people at its peak, with most employed at the Hume Lumber Mill. Having established the hugely profitable salmon-canning industry centered in Astoria, the Humes



*This undated photograph of Astoria's Hammond Lumber Mill may depict what was known as "Hindu Alley," the living quarters of a number of Punjabi workmen employed at the mill, in the foreground.*

expanded and diversified their holdings, starting a lumber mill in 1903.<sup>38</sup> The mill was bought by A.B. Hammond, who employed some six hundred people of different nationalities: Italian, Greek, Japanese, and Middle Eastern. Initially, Hammond traveled to India to recruit laborers, but such direct recruitment was short-lived as Punjabi migrants began arriving in Astoria on their own. Many lived in a row of bunkhouses along the waterfront near the mill that came to be known as "Hindu Alley."<sup>39</sup>

The Punjabis were overwhelmingly single men ranging in age from nineteen to fifty. There was, however, one family. Bakhshish Singh Dhillon and his wife Rattan Kaur built a house in Astoria and sent their four children, Kartar, Budh, Kapur, and Karm, to the Alderbrook public school.<sup>40</sup> The Punjabi community was predominantly Sikh, but there were also Hindus and Muslims. Bhagat Singh Thind, a college student from the University of California, Berkeley, worked some summers in the mill and went on to both serve in the U.S. military and challenge the racial bar on citizenship in a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case.<sup>41</sup> Leading intellectuals such as Rama Chandra spent time among the laborers. An important propagandist for the soon-to-be-formed Ghadar press, Chandra visited, talked politics with millworkers, and briefly convalesced in Astoria with his wife.<sup>42</sup>



*The photograph of the Dhillon family and friends shows Rattan Kaur, one of the few, if not the only, Punjabi women in Oregon. The children pictured — Kartar, Budh, Kapur, and Karm — attended the Alderbrook public school in Astoria. Descendants note that family stories speak of radicals of varying nationalities coming to visit with their grandfather, Bakhshish Singh Dhillon.*

During their years in Astoria, the Punjabis were involved in wage strikes, taught wrestling and fielded competitive wrestlers such as Dodam Singh and Basanta Singh, opened bank accounts, sued one another in court, got arrested for drinking and fighting, filed for citizenship, celebrated a cross-cultural wedding, played with the few Punjabi children in town, cared for one another, buried one another, talked, and otherwise entertained themselves during the times they were not working.<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that life in Astoria was idyllic. Their neighbors, employers, and sometimes the town's presses used racist and anti-immigrant justifications to argue for the Punjabis' expulsion from the mill, to cut their wages, or to justify individual acts of physical violence. Schoolmates taunted the children in their turbans.<sup>44</sup> Still, during times of

widespread ethnic violence, a stable and relatively diverse community succeeded in Astoria. Punjabis undertook a major exodus in 1914, as the local paper explained, “for the purpose of joining in the revolution that is expected to ensue, while England is involved in the war with Germany.”<sup>45</sup> This was a sign of Ghadar’s influence. But it was the Hammond Mill fire in 1922 that finally ended their tenure. It is impossible to understand the Punjabis’ lives in Astoria, including their political lives, without considering the entwined histories of the Finnish and Chinese communities.

### FINNS AND CHINESE

In many ways Astoria, a contested ocean port at the edge of a contested U.S. empire, was founded on a diverse group’s dream of growing rich via ties with China. During the early 1800s, the dream involved selling pelts to China and attracted French and Canadian trappers as well as Hawaiian shipmen and gardeners, all living among, and often dependent on, the Chinook communities of the area.<sup>46</sup> By 1900, the continuation of that dream lived in Astoria’s salmon-canning industry, reliant on Finnish fishermen, Chinese cannery crews, and international millworkers.

The salmon-canning industry was important not only to the nation’s food supply but also as a major source of wealth for the Pacific Northwest, trailing only timber and wheat in value. Chinese laborers made it possible and profitable and were essential to the town’s and the region’s wealth production. Industrialists such as the Humes depended on, recruited, and attracted laborers from around the world, especially Asia, to fill their crews. These ties between remote Astoria and a global system of people and goods underscores the centrality of migrants from the global East to wealth creation in the North American West.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the Chinese standing in the community expressed a tension between personal acceptance and structural estrangement.

The Chinese were integral to Astoria’s commercial and social life.<sup>48</sup> By 1880, more than a third of Astoria was Chinese, overwhelmingly men employed in the cannery. Additionally, they operated stores and gardens as well as gambling and prostitution quarters and provided various domestic services to the town’s better-heeled.<sup>49</sup> They also faced a racialized world. There were speeches, press articles, and fights against the Chinese; they lived in poor and segregated housing; they were allowed only the most menial cannery jobs; and, given the state’s laws, they were unable to own property or gain citizenship.<sup>50</sup> But there also seemed to be acknowledged limits to the racism. In 1886, the *Weekly Astorian* commented, “they [the Chinese] congregate here [Astoria] in the same fashion [as San Francisco] because they are driven off elsewhere and have no place else to go” and reasoned that “many





*Astoria's Chinatown was located on Bond Street. Chinese residents accounted for roughly one-third of Astoria's population at the turn of the twentieth century and were integral to the town's life and industries. Chinese nationalist activist Sun Yat-Sen visited Astoria on a fundraising junket.*

Astorians refrained from anti-Chinese activities because they believed the laborers might abandon the canneries, thereby causing the collapse of the local economy.<sup>51</sup> Whatever the source of the article's reasoning, its conclusion that Astoria benefited greatly from the Chinese was well founded. On some level, the townspeople of Astoria understood that their prosperity was based on tolerance.<sup>52</sup> This fact, along with the Finns of Uniontown, helped ease the entry of Asian Indians.

The Finns made their own mark on Astoria and affected the Punjabi experience there. Called the "Helsinki of the West," Astoria had the largest Finnish community west of the Mississippi, comprising almost 20 percent of the town in 1905. Astoria's Finnish community was sharply divided between the more conservative, or so-called "Church Finns," and the radicals.<sup>53</sup> While the Church Finns were numerically dominant, the radical Finns had an influence well beyond their numbers. The peak of the radicals' activity and influence tightly coincided with the presence of the Asian Indians in Astoria, from roughly 1904 through World War I.

In 1904, a small group of Finns formed the Astoria Finnish Socialist Club (ASSK); a third of its members were women and the rest largely bachelor fishermen. It became “the most active Finnish-American organization in Astoria” and was one of the largest and most influential locals within the national Finnish Socialist Federation (SSJ).<sup>54</sup> The Finnish socialists shaped the story of the Punjabis in Astoria in two very concrete ways: their press and their hall.

Remarkably, there were two weekly socialist Finnish papers produced in Astoria. Besides suggesting the vigor of these circles, having two papers also extended the socialists’ influence across Astoria and the country. The largest Finnish newspaper in town, the *Toveri*, was often the main source of news for both the Church Finns and socialists alike. Furthermore, given the papers’ prominence, editors and contributors from around the country were drawn to Astoria. Those men and women were talented organizers and propagandists, schooled and experienced in the broader socialist politics of the United States and arguably a critical counter to the parochialism of a small town. In April 1911, moreover, the Finnish Socialists unveiled their five-story hall, the second largest hall in Astoria and a hub of the town’s, and the socialists’ social life.<sup>55</sup> The Asian Indians used that hall for the foundational meeting of Ghadar.

In short, the Finnish socialists of Astoria were a force beyond their numbers, through their presses, the talent those presses attracted, and their social hall. At the core of that influence were their beliefs in a nation’s right to



Clatsop County Historical Society

*Finns made up about one-fifth of early 1900s Astoria, with many radicals among them. Built in 1911, the five-story Finnish Socialist Hall was the second largest building in Astoria and became a major social center in Astoria with its bowling alley, dance floor, theatre, athletic events, and numerous lectures and events. In 1913, it was the site of the founding conference of Ghadar.*



*Bhagat Singh Thind poses for a photograph in his U.S. Army uniform in about 1918. Thind enlisted in the Army and trained at Camp Lewis, Washington. After World War I, an Oregon court granted him U.S. citizenship. In United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind, (261 U.S. 204 1923), the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the ruling, defining a “white person” by the “popular” sense (that is, by appearance), and thereby revoked Thind’s citizenship.*

self-rule and in the unity of laborers regardless of national origin.<sup>56</sup>

That radical message likely resonated across many of Astoria’s communities. Chinese nationalist Sun Yat-Sen’s fundraising visit to Astoria suggests one quarter.<sup>57</sup> Descendants of the Bakhshish Singh Dhillon family recount tales of Finns and IWW representatives meeting in their grandfather’s house.<sup>58</sup> British surveillance files describe then-student Bhagat Singh Thind as “ke[eping] company with a bunch of socialistic I.W.W. anarchistic Finns.”<sup>59</sup> Both stories evidence the explicit affiliations and affinities with other revolutionary groups for which both the Finnish socialists and Punjabi nationalists were known. Astoria, then, can be imagined as a place with strong currents of explicit radical sympathies and of relative social ease for its international community of workers.<sup>60</sup> And people had the ability to express these affinities. In the rich mix of newspaper editors and writers, merchants and labor contractors, visiting scholars, literate laborers, and laboring students were many avenues for English becoming the *lingua franca*.

It is hard to imagine that people were not alert to the like-minded around them. Pressed between the hills on the south and the river to the north, Astoria was not large. Men — mostly bachelors, whether fishermen, cannery workers, or millworkers — frequented bars, pool halls, and wrestling matches; bought groceries and staples; rode

busses and trains; and walked the town. While largely inhabiting ethnic enclaves, lives nonetheless overlapped. So far, no record tells us exactly what happened between the Ghadarite organizers and the radical Finns, but the very fact that Ghadar’s meeting was held in the Finnish Socialist Hall implies a connection. We know the Punjabis utilized Astoria and its socialist hall to launch a movement that reverberated around the world.

## GHADAR

Some push us around, some curse us.  
Where is your splendor and prestige today?  
The whole world calls us black thieves,  
The whole world calls us “coolie.”  
Why doesn’t our flag fly anywhere?  
Why do we feel low and humiliated?  
Why is there no respect for us in the whole world?<sup>61</sup>

Ghadar, like the men who formed it, sprang from and existed in a close and continual interplay between local and global conditions. In our age of hyper-connectivity, it is perhaps easy to underestimate the degree of communication among earlier communities, which historians refer to as “migrant networks.” With startling reach, speed, and detail, news traveled the globe through letters, telegrams, newspapers, religious services, and word of mouth by those traveling via ship, rail, and their own two feet. The Punjabis of Oregon were wired into a global migrant community, including that of the North American West, that was growing increasingly restive against British colonial rule.

Ghadar was formed by men who, as the poem said, felt “low and humiliated” and without respect “in the whole world” and who laid the cause of their disrespect at the feet of their colonizers. Asian Indians confronted colonial and exclusionary policies the world over, underscoring that simply leaving India was not enough to escape their second-class status.

Furthermore, while their experience in North America was as targets of police networks, mob violence, and restrictive laws, for some, life in the United States also provided critical new perspective. In the United States, Punjabi migrants witnessed previously unknown freedoms, such as a broad, if unequally held, political franchise, the right to bear arms, and a self-ruled land where wealth was not extracted by an imperium. By contrast, as Dyal explained in a June 1913 Astoria talk, “England has applied to India with success and in every detail the ‘Colonial System,’ which cost her [England] the allegiance of the American colonies.”<sup>62</sup> Dyal’s political conclusion was that Hindustan needed to do what the United States had done: overthrow British rule and establish a “United States of India.” Many began to interpret the taunt of being “Indian slaves” as true and as a challenge to establish an independent, self-ruled, secular state.<sup>63</sup>

It is outside the bounds of this article to analyze Ghadar’s political program, let alone the international revolutionary movement of which it was a part. But it is worth noting here the irony of Ghadar’s call for the establishment of a United States of India. Ghadar and Dyal called for the emulation of a nation that persecuted and excluded Punjabi migrants. They attributed

Punjabis' bad treatment to the United States being unduly influenced by the British. Ghadar's attitude toward the United States is partially understandable given that the defeat of England was pivotal to U.S. independence. It was also a strategic appeal to an American audience and an attempt to avoid the wrath of the U.S. government.<sup>64</sup> But it also illustrates the Ghadarite conception of the problem: Ghadar sought to overcome *the British*, not imperialism or nationalism. Ghadar's opposition to British rule, while completely understandable as a counter to great-nation chauvinism (such as that of the United States, Canada, and Britain), nonetheless remained within nationalist confines, and therefore included all of nationalism's inherent inequalities. In this sense, there is a question of whether the story could end in any way other than problematically, if not tragically. In 1947, the dream of an Indian nation was realized, years after the practical defeat of Ghadar but armed nonetheless with its historical contributions. That dream produced two separate countries, the partition of the Punjab, and horrific dislocations and violence. The partition enhanced and ossified divisions among Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus, because the definition of the new states of Pakistan and India were based on essentialized differences — akin to American racial theories — between historically intertwined and largely cooperative peoples.<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, the years of Ghadar's gestation were years of great hope and optimism. Nationalist strivings charged the air from the Japanese expulsion of Russia to the Mexican and Russian revolutionary preambles. Disillusioned by their status and influenced by the many movements of radicals and nationalists they encountered, many Punjabis began to dream less of making it somewhere new and more of remaking their homeland under self-rule. Such change never happens overnight and is rarely the product of a single event or person. Ghadar was the political culmination of numerous efforts, false starts, and dead-ends across the West, all notoriously difficult (and outside the bounds of this article) to trace in detail.

Broadly speaking, the Sikh temples and cultural and religious organizations, especially in Vancouver, B.C., became increasingly politicized centers of protest and publicity regarding the people's mistreatment and desire for respect and self-rule. In 1909, a particularly significant foreshadowing of Ghadar occurred outside the gurdwara, or Sikh temple, in Vancouver. Bhai Bhag Singh, a former Bengali Lancer and a Vancouver leader, "made a bonfire with his certificate of 'honorable discharge'" from the British military service. His act was accompanied by the Temple's Executive Committee's condemnation of any further wearing of British military medals.<sup>66</sup> News of this and other actions spread throughout worldwide networks.

The importance of Bhag Singh's public burning of his Indian military papers is hard to overstate. Since the annexation of the Punjab by the Brit-

ish in 1849, Sikhs had played a critical role in the Indian army, including saving British rule during a mutiny by Indian troops in 1857. A decorated veteran burning his military papers was a renunciation of this tradition of loyal fighting service and destroyed all personal claims to future benefits that service guaranteed in India.<sup>67</sup> Bhag Singh's protest also gives pointed meaning to *ghadar* as the name of the movement and press that activists soon developed. Translating both as 'mutiny' and 'revolution,' the group's central strategy became calling on the troops of India to take exactly those actions.

While burning military papers represented a significant political turn against British rule, this act of *ghadar* was not yet an organization or movement. The critical bridging of Vancouver's political ferment to the broader laboring migrants of the West and its gelling into an organization of unapologetic revolutionary action took place in the United States. Several key individuals were Dyal, the Stanford, California professor, along with Sohan Singh Bhakna, a Sikh mill worker, and Kanshi Ram, a Hindu labor contractor, both of Portland, Oregon. In 1912, Ram and Bhakna met with G.D. Kumar, an activist from Vancouver, and later with Dyal.

Dyal, an activist Hindu from Delhi who left for the émigré activist circles of Europe and finally the United States, was the group's most visible public spokesman and propagandist. He associated with radical circles of all kinds, especially in the greater San Francisco area.<sup>68</sup> Bhakna was a farmer working at the Monarch Lumber Mill in Portland, largely to earn money to save his family's landholdings in the Punjab. Living outside a colonial setting for the first time was an eye-opening experience for Bhakna, who witnessed the rights even many common citizens enjoyed along with the exclusion and violence of the North American West.<sup>69</sup> He was in St. Johns during the anti-Punjabi riot and likely played a role in seeking justice. He was attuned to Canada's increasing exclusion of Punjabis and, like others, was outraged that Asian Indians were the butt of British colonial policy the world over. Kanshi Ram, a successful labor contractor in the lumber industry, was a major driver in both organizing and funding the political organizing. Like Bhakna, Ram was involved in the opposition to the St. Johns riot, a plausible signifier of the growing resolve to no longer be treated like "black thieves everywhere."<sup>70</sup> If Dyal was Ghadar's most prominent spokesman, Bhakna and Ram were its critical bridges, connecting organized politics with the Hindu laboring community.

For his part, the British Columbia activist G.D. Kumar had by 1909 attempted to bring his anti-colonial politics to the laborers of the region.<sup>71</sup> A former college teacher in India, he made his living in Canada as a shopkeeper, while organizing and producing publications that circulated in Canada

and India. As the British stepped up measures against Indians everywhere, Kumar's paper called on Sikh troops to rise against the British, and his paper was promptly banned in India. Kumar and others also secretly met with groups of working men in Vancouver. All of this caught the attention of authorities, including Vancouver's daily papers, and Kumar felt compelled to leave the country around 1911. He joined Taraknath Das, a Bengali radical and important propagandist then publishing *Free Hindustan*, a nationalist paper in Seattle. The two established and ran the press and United India House in Seattle, which attracted a small group of laborers and students to its weekly lectures. Kumar visited laborers around the Pacific Northwest, and in early 1912, he went to Portland.<sup>72</sup>

On March 12, 1912, a meeting was held in Ram's rented house in Portland and resulted in the formation of the Hindustani Association of America. Bhakna was elected president, Ram treasurer, and Kumar the general secretary. Later that year, a second chapter was formed in Astoria. The groups held Sunday political meetings and produced a short-lived press in Urdu, the latter ending when Kumar was hospitalized soon thereafter.<sup>73</sup> Beyond the production of a newspaper, the groups' stated aims were: "receipt of vernacular papers from India, importation of youth from India to America for education and with a view to devoting their lives to 'national' work in India and weekly meetings to discuss politics."<sup>74</sup> While notable, such activities lacked a focus on power.

On the evening of March 25, 1913, Ram gathered workers in his house in St. Johns for a historic meeting. With Kumar's sudden illness, and presumably to help catalyze the movement, Ram, Taraknath Das, and Bhakna had sent for Dyal, who met with the men that night.<sup>75</sup> After great debate, the laborers rejected Dyal's suggestion of sponsoring Indian students to the United States as a necessary precondition for obtaining Hindustan's freedom. Instead, they decided on immediate, direct, and radical political propaganda directed to the thousands of men of the West Coast. The group also voted to carry a proposal for the Asian Indian workers to "gird their loins to liberate India and work on revolutionary lines."<sup>76</sup> Other key decisions of that meeting affirmed that British rule was the cause of all suffering in India; that youth educated in India under British rule were incapable of fighting for independence; that overseas workers in the United States were key to liberation because they had gained political consciousness and money; and that they now needed an organization to end British rule in India through armed revolution, with the aim of establishing an American-type democratic government, a so-called United States of India. To propagate these goals, it was decided they needed an organizational center and press (*Ghadr*), both

based in San Francisco, where Ghadar could utilize the general politicized atmosphere of the area, along with the larger population of Asian Indian farmers, laborers, students, and intellectuals, as well as the greater financial resources amongst them.<sup>77</sup> The political turn towards Ghadar was made, and the men set to the task of establishing it.<sup>78</sup>

Within two weeks of the gathering, Bhakna, Ram, and others organized meetings in the mill towns scattered along the Columbia River, working to establish chapters united by the March 25 resolutions of the Hindustani Association of America, commonly known as Ghadar. From March 31 through April 14, 1913, local men and others traveling from Portland and St. Johns gathered in Bridal Veil (twenty men), Linnton (one hundred men), and Winans, a whistle stop in the woods south of Hood River (one hundred men). By late spring, they were ready for the culminating meeting in Astoria.<sup>79</sup>

That meeting was the May 30, 1913, public gathering announced in the *Astoria Budget* and keynoted by Dyal. It was attended by the Punjabis of Astoria and by delegates from along the river and beyond. Here the official program of Ghadar was proposed and passed. Those attending looked to England's engagement in World War I as their opportunity to realize their dream of ending British rule. Central to their revolutionary analysis and strategy was convincing the armed forces in India, still dominated by Sikhs, to turn their guns against the British colonizers. That action, they believed, would be spontaneously and ineluctably followed by a general uprising among the broader Indian population.<sup>80</sup>

From these beginnings in Oregon, the movement established a weekly press published out of San Francisco in numerous languages — Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, and occasionally English. Dyal oversaw the office and publications in San Francisco. The first issue of *Ghadr*, carrying news of the organization's formation, garnered great interest among Punjabi farmers in California, and a second organizational conference was held in Sacramento in December 1913. Chapters spread throughout North America and on to India and the far-flung communities of Punjabis in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Manila, Siam, and Panama, weaving thousands of men across the globe into a movement for power.<sup>81</sup>

For his role in Ghadar, including leading hundreds back to India to fight, Bhakna spent some twenty years in Indian prisons. He remained deeply involved in politics throughout his life, and his stature in Indian radicalism was such that one author described him as being "an institution by himself."<sup>82</sup> Ram was hanged after his conviction in India in 1915.<sup>83</sup> Dyal, threatened with deportation, left the United States for Europe and shortly thereafter recanted his revolutionary views.<sup>84</sup>



## HISTORICAL SILENCING AND HISTORICAL PATHS

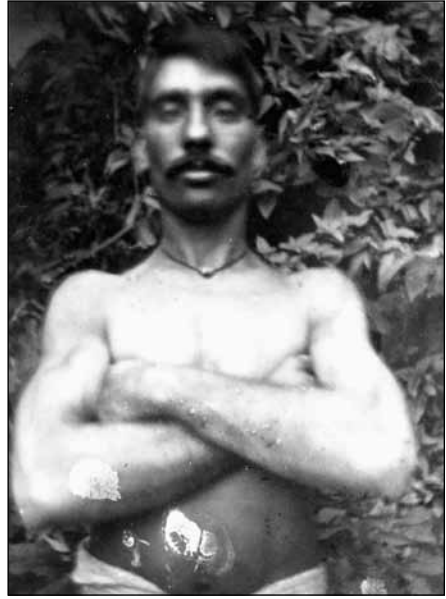
Despite their historic accomplishments, these men and this community are largely unknown in Oregon.<sup>85</sup> I find the difference between the magnitude of their story and its regional obscurity stark. In their time, these were not unknown men. In India they were heroes. In Oregon they worked in mills side-by-side with other men. Storekeepers sold them produce and bank tellers took their money. They were listed in city directories and state censuses. People sold them land, and title clerks recorded their purchases and sometimes their marriages. Wardens listed them as prisoners. There were public matches with Punjabi wrestlers. Newspapers reported on riots against them and on Punjabis' desire to return home and overthrow the British. Wobblies and socialists wrote of their collusions. But in a classic Catch-22, to find such records today I first had to know to look for them. In this I am indebted to Indian historical works that, from the other side of the globe, provided a road map to tiny towns such as Winans, Bridal Veil, and Astoria.<sup>86</sup> The puzzle is: if Oregonians then were aware of the Punjabis' presence, why are we not today? How and why does this happen?

The key lies in seeing how a set of shared social assumptions function in devastatingly simple, effective, and largely transparent ways to shape the history we know. On one level, history is a fairly simple process. A person or a group decides something is important to remember, whether it be oral tales, photos, news articles, or other memorabilia. People put them in a shoebox or an archive or recite the memories to their circle, and from such things we weave further tales. But historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot stresses a critical feature of this process we call history. Trouillot highlights the conceptual duality embodied in history between *what happened* and *what is said to have happened* — the irreducible distinction and the irreducible overlap between the two. His point works to explain how our cultural assumptions and beliefs affect our collection and narration of events and navigate the divide between that conceptual duality.<sup>87</sup> Otherwise said, what we believe affects what we remember and what we tell.

Think, for example, of how a family gathering can become one relative's dark tale and another's triumphalist clan lore, whether using identical or differing "facts." Assuming one narrative is not complete fabrication, the story likely to gain credence is affected by the status of the storyteller and his or her interpretation's resonance with existing family stories. The family memory will be embedded in a story because, whether as a family, town, or nation, we humans ultimately relay and remember stories, not lists of facts. Such narratives are where history lives, believes Trouillot, who argues that "history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives," which have very real stakes.<sup>88</sup> His approach is to examine our narratives as

an insight into our beliefs and relations of power. Applying that perspective here, what is the narrative that has supplanted the Punjabis and Ghadar from our collective memory? What are the stakes of this narrative omission in the present?

That erasure perhaps begins with the early-nineteenth-century maps that depicted Oregon country as empty despite extensive and longstanding Native communities.<sup>89</sup> It continues with ledgers of “pioneer” names or of local deaths that never list the name *Singh* despite the presence of people with that name. It resides in sheriff arrest ledgers that under the heading “nativity” contrast American with Jew, Negro, or Indian.<sup>90</sup> It is the recording of marriages, but not the many other domestic associations and liaisons among laboring men.<sup>91</sup> It is the leaving of newspapers and ephemera of radical laborers out in barns, never translating them to tell us of the multi-ethnic efforts that occurred in mills and camps everywhere. It is a thousand seemingly benign acts of overlooking and erasure that undergird and feed the persistent foundational myth of Oregon as a land of white, pioneer families and foster that reality through a continual retelling of the myth.<sup>92</sup> Papers, photos, or the ephemera of the myriad who do not fit the narrative often never find their way into our archives or our stories, due not to conspiracy but to social assumptions about who counts or belongs. Of the many immigrants from the “East” — whether from the Punjab or Missouri — whose labor made the West, one is the pioneer and citizen, the other the perpetual outsider, a historical sidebar or simply forgotten altogether, making all



*Astoria was the home of several “Hindu” wrestlers who competed in the town and region, including Basanta Singh, featured in this handbill, and Dodam Singh; one of the two is the likely subject of the photograph, taken in Astoria. Wrestling was a relatively common site of cross-ethnic mixing both among competitors — such as Basanta Singh’s matchup with Nels Jepson — and among spectators.*

the easier America's enduring acceptance of laborers working without the hope of legality, let alone the promise of permanence.<sup>93</sup>

Citizenship in America has always involved conferring legal rights on a select, worthy few, defined by gender and race.<sup>94</sup> It did not trump cultural assumptions but instead sprang from and codified them. Focusing on race, citizenship laws concerning indigenous peoples, African slaves, or Asian laborers were not simply exclusionary. They were also constitutional. The bestowal of citizenship on the "right people" imaginatively and practically established Americans as white, Christian, family men in contradistinction to the non-white and non-Christian peoples, with varied interpersonal relations, who have been in and built up North America from day one. Exclusion, then, has been an American value and it has shaped our archives and our stories.

Some might argue that these prejudices have been overcome. Punjabis, Chinese, and Japanese were all, eventually, granted access to citizenship in both Canada and the United States, and increasingly their contributions to the West have been recognized. But such changes in status have also proven to be socially and legally tenuous if not revocable. During World War II, Japanese-American citizenship was stunningly negated based on ethnicity. It is difficult to argue we have left this legacy and logic far behind when considering the treatment of and outlook toward Muslims and Arabs in post-9/11 America. Hate crimes skyrocketed in the wake of the attack on the Twin Towers, with the first fatality being Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh, seemingly shot to death for the crime of wearing a turban. Campaigns from Middle America to Ground Zero have opposed the building of mosques and promoted Quran-burning. In April 2012, four Associated Press reporters were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for exposing the widespread surveillance of Muslim communities throughout the eastern United States by the New York Police Department (NYPD). As summarized by journalist Amy Goodman:



Hundreds of mosques, businesses and Muslim student groups were investigated, monitored and, in many cases, infiltrated. Police monitored and cataloged daily life in Muslim communities, from where people ate and shopped to where they worked and prayed. Police used informants, known as 'mosque crawlers,' to monitor sermons, even without any evidence of wrongdoing. Also falling under the NYPD's scrutiny were imams, cab drivers, food cart vendors.

Despite being banned from spying on Americans, the NYPD was aided in this campaign by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), most concretely in the form of its top spy and enduring employee, Larry Sanchez. In Portland, Oregon, this year, area residents Jamal Tarhuni and Mustafa Elogbi, both long-time, naturalized, Muslim-American citizens, in separate incidents,

Courtesy of the Oregon State Archives, Oregon Penitentiary Records

Height	5-9	Build	MJSC	Received	11-29-58
Previous Record:					fu
Taken by	J.S. Murray	Date	11-17-51	Signature	Brahm Singh

			
Impressions taken by	J. S. Murray	Date	Brahming

*These fingerprints and signatures are emblematic of the mere trace that remains in the historical record and memory of the Punjabis' presence in Oregon. While garnered from an Oregon State Prison record, the author in no way believes, or wishes to promote, that Punjabis comprised a criminal population.*

were barred by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from returning to the United States for over a month after visiting friends and family in their native Libya, and in Tarhuni's case, delivering medical supplies for Medical Teams International. The FBI detained and then interrogated each man about his faith, contacts, and extremism in Libya.<sup>95</sup>

The list of similar events in the ten years since 9/11 is long and cannot be done justice here. But arguably, there remains a menacing, stubborn undercurrent in America that "immigrants are aliens, not citizens," as historian Mae Ngai so aptly puts it. It is little wonder that Japanese Americans were among the first to denounce the official and unofficial targeting of Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians in the wake of 9/11.<sup>96</sup> From bitter experience, they recognized the lurking danger that remains with us: the thread and threat of "otherness" and the ugly lengths it can travel.<sup>97</sup>

The story of Punjabis, among others, begs for a renewed and critical look at our historical constructions of belonging, or what Foucault termed "an historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute

ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.”<sup>98</sup> This story is one window into the entwined creation of “us” and “them,” and argues for the recognition that the constitution of the “alien others,” the “non-citizens” is equally the construction of “the citizen” or “the included.” More simply, to ask who *they* were or are one must ask who *we* were or are.

Historicizing ourselves in this way — even our most personal selves — takes the onus off nature and leaves the possibility for humans to do things differently. Joan Scott eloquently expresses this theme as embedded “in the way different epochs posed problems and found solutions to them; the way in which some solutions came to seem inevitable and necessary while others were overlooked or rejected. In what he called ‘the profusion of lost events,’ Foucault called into question the self-proclaimed inevitability of any moral or social system.”<sup>99</sup> For me, this story of the radical Punjabis in Oregon holds one such lost event: the unexpected, real-life experience of so-called common people — Chinese, Punjabi, Finns, Socialists, or Sikhs — stepping outside traditions of rigid nationalism or Balkanized thought. Their experience argues that who we are, far from inevitable, has involved choice and different forks in the road. My hope is that knowing such alternatives exist not just in theory but in our lived past will provide perspective and mettle for our difficult present.

## NOTES

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important local stories alive. Finally, I would like to thank Branden and Mona Mayfield for inspiration.

1. *Astoria Budget*, May 30, 1913, Clatsop County Historical Society [hereafter CCHS] “Hindu” archive file. I rely on the Astoria press’ reported meeting date, but Ghadarite scholars give differing dates for this meeting.

2. Hindoo or Hindu was the term widely used on the Pacific Coast, in both Canada and the United States, to describe immigrants from India. It is a corruption of the term Hindustan. I use the alternative terms Asian Indians and Punjabis, as Punjab was the region from which most of these immigrants came. I also use the term *migrants*, not immigrants, given the latter’s implication of an intention to relocate permanently.

3. Jan-Paul Shason, "Evolving Utopias: An Overview of Three Representative Punjabi Works from 1890s, 1910s & 1930s" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 2009), 75.

4. See, for example, Dr. T.R. Sareen, *Select Documents on the Ghadr Party* (New Delhi: Mouto Publishing House, 1994), 1–14.

5. Harish K. Puri notes one nationalist organizing effort involving five men in 1912 in California's farmlands. It failed to generate any further traction, but the men involved went on to play prominent roles in Ghadar. Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation [sic] & Strategy* (New Delhi: Communist Party of India, 1997), 52.

6. See also Joan Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 2–3.

7. For a more detailed account of the Indian nationalist movement in the early 1900s, including its relationship to the broader nationalist upsurges in China, Russia, and Japan, see Jensen, *Passage from India*, 1–22; Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, particularly 11–20 and 104–116; and Arun Coomer Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905–1922: In the Background of International Developments* (Allahabad: Indian Press Private, 1971), 1–36. See also Johanna Ogden, "Oregon and Global Insurgency: Punjabis of the Columbia River Basin" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 2010).

8. See, for example, Jensen, *Passage from India*, 20–22; Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, 32.

9. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 2, and Jensen, *Passage from India*, 22–23, both argue the uniqueness of Ghadar's merging of intellectuals and laborers. Estimates range from 10,000 to 15,000 men (Jensen) to 30,000, as argued by Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 2. For comparison, 25,000 Chinese were estimated to be in Vancouver alone in about 1906 (Jensen, *Passage from India*, 1, 62).

10. For the United States, the official number entering was 6,600. Thus, perhaps 10,000

to 15,000 men arrived in the West. Jensen, *Passage from India*, 60, 62, 65.

11. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 16. Understanding the turban's relationship to Sikhism is critical. It is part of the practice of the "Five K's" (unshorn head and facial hair, the wearing of a sword, steel bangle, comb, and garment of modesty) and the taking of the name *Singh* for men and *Kaur* for women. These can denote those Sikhs identifying with the heritage of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and final Sikh prophet, and their membership in the Khalsa he founded. Singh's legacy is also linked to the origin of the so-called "martial qualities" of Sikhs, born in their fight with the Mughals of the time. It is also a heritage much promoted by the British, especially in its use of Sikhs in the colonial army, a topic in its own right. There are, however, many practicing and self-identifying Sikhs, past and present, who do not either identify with this strain of Sikhism or choose not to adopt its outward signs. In the context of migration to North America, the turban frequently operated as an identifier and thus a target of nativists. Furthermore, wearing the turban was both a strategic decision and point of controversy for Sikh individuals and the broader migrant community. Their complexion and hair, without the turban, could have enabled many to "pass" as Mexicans, Portuguese, or Italian — groups still low in the racial hierarchy but above the "Oriental" Punjabis. Adopting western dress was a choice and/or strategy pursued by some migrants for varying reasons and/or at various times while many others strictly maintained their turban. For these many reasons, and in short, the turban is not equivalent with Sikhism. It should also be noted that Muslims also wear turbans

12. On IWW, see Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987), 118–19.

13. See, for example, Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 29–33; Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington

Press, 2004), 6, 22–23, 28n21, 33, 36–39, 62, 229–37, 293n106; Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 19; and Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 262–68.

14. See, for example, Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 58, 94–95, 124–29, 135–52, 262, 268–273; and Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 12–14, 16, 21–28.

15. Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 2–3.

16. Ali Kazimi, *Continuous Journey* (Peripheral Visions Film & Video Inc., 2004). Even being allowed to enter as laborers was not consistently available.

17. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 5, 7, 25. I use *Asian* as a convenient, if problematic, term to define people from the many countries loosely referred to as Asia — Japan, China, Korea, etc. — but not to indicate agreement with the existence of an “Asian” race, as nativists and Orientalists were fond of arguing.

18. Jensen, *Passage from India*, 62.

19. *Ibid.*, 44.

20. *Ibid.*, 30, 44, 42–56. I realize that a thread in this article argues against Jensen’s “driving out” of Punjabis from the Pacific Northwest to California, and yet, here I seem to embrace that outlook. A finer look at the history of Punjabis in Washington may reveal that they were not just “driven out.” Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 43–47.

21. Jensen, *Passage from India*, 57. Asian immigration in Canada, as in the United States, was overwhelmingly confined to western regions.

22. See Chinese Canadian National Council, [www.cnc.ca/redress/history.html](http://www.cnc.ca/redress/history.html) (accessed May 16, 2012).

23. Jensen, *Passage from India*, 75. Puri also discusses these same points, noting that Canada and the Crown hatched a plan to send the migrants from Vancouver to British Honduras in 1908, making clear that migration *per se* was not the issue, but the country to which they were migrating. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 34–36.

24. Ali Kazimi, informal conversation with the author, April 2009.

25. In this I am indebted to the argument put forward by Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 29–74.

26. G.S. Deol, *The Role of the Ghadar Party in the National Movement* (Deli and Jullundur: Sterling Publishers, 1969), 56–60.

27. Examples include: “Driven from Bellingham Washington,” *Oregonian*, September 7, 1907, 1; “Everett Police Prevent Serious Riot,” *Oregonian*, November 3, 1907, 1; “North is Accused,” *Oregonian* May 16, 1910, 2; and “Hindu Menace Is Serious,” *Astoria Daily Budget*, December 11, 1907.

28. *Oregonian*, November 6, 1907, 6.

29. For Portland, see “Local Branch Organized,” *Oregonian*, December 7, 1907, 10; and “Arranges for Mass Meeting,” *Oregonian*, December 21, 1907, 13. For Astoria, see *Astoria Daily Budget*, “Chinese Exclusion: Astoria Central Labor Council is in Favor of It,” April 10, 1906, 5; “A Whopper!! The People’s Verdict is that ‘The Chinese Must Go!’,” October 3, 1893, 1; “Do Not Delay: The Chinese Must Go beyond Any Question of Doubt,” October 4, 1893; and March 7, 1894, 1.

30. This riot sketch is drawn from numerous press articles other than those directly quoted. See, for example, *Oregonian*, March 24, 1910, 4, March 25, 1910, 4, and March 26, 1910, 6; and *St. Johns Review*, March 25, 1910, 1 and 5.

31. *Oregonian*, April 19, 1910, 4.

32. *St. Johns Review*, March 25, 1910, 1 and 5.

33. *Oregonian*, March 25, 1910, 4.

34. “Asian labor” is inclusive of Chinese, Japanese, Asian Indians, and populations of Filipinos and others who came later. This was more the case in the northern and western portions of Oregon, as the southern and eastern districts, with their mining interests, had a somewhat different trajectory.

35. Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 6, 31, 33, 34, 47, 49–50.

36. *Ibid.*, 51–60.

37. “Interesting Figures in Population Survey,” *Daily Astorian*, May 10, 1914, from CCHS “Hindu File.”

38. *Daily Astorian*, April 26, 1973, 9B.

39. Karen L. Leedom, *Astoria: An Oregon*

*History* (Pittsburgh: The Local History Company, 2008), 119.

40. CCHS, Photo 10,506-00D. In speaking of Astoria's Punjabi population, I include other population centers such as John Day just slightly upriver from the town.

41. Email correspondence from David Bhagat Thind to Liisa Penner, archivist at CCHS, March 6, 2006. Singh Thind is known for his spiritual leadership and his legal case challenging citizenship standards for non-Europeans. See: [http://www.pbs.org/rootsinthesand/i\\_bhagati.html](http://www.pbs.org/rootsinthesand/i_bhagati.html) (accessed May 2, 2012); and *United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind* (261 US 204).

42. UC Berkeley, Bancroft Special Collection, BANC MSS, 2002/78 CZ box 4, transcript of interview of Padma Chandra, November 18, 1972, 34, 41.

43. *Astoria Daily Budget*, May 3, 1909, 6; *The Daily Astorian*, March 16, 1988; *The Morning Astorian*, January 11, 1920, 2; CCHS "Hindu file" records, *Singh v. Lall*, Clatsop County Circuit Court Complaint dated February 28, 1920; CCHS, City of Astoria Police Ledger, July 1910–July 1916, unpaginated; CCHS, "Hindu File," "Declaration of Intent" of Amin Chand Sherma, March 2, 1911, Behari Lall Verma, August 31, 1910, [illegible] Singh, July 26, 1910; Behari Lal, July 13, 1910, and S. Chhajju, June 15, 1921; Kartar Dhillon, "Astoria Revisited: A Search for the East Indian Presence in Astoria," *Cumtux* 15:2 (Spring 1995), 7. Interestingly, Puri argues that wrestling was one of the means of training Ghadarites (Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 129).

44. Denise Alborn, "The Hindus of Uppertown," *Cumtux* 10:1 (Winter 1989): 15; *Turbans*, directed by Erika S. Andersen (2000).

45. *Astoria Daily Budget*, August 6, 1914, 4.

46. See James P. Ronda, *Astoria & Empire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1990) for an interesting examination of Astoria and empire.

47. Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870–1942* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 2, 6.

48. Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, throughout, but especially 8–9.

49. CCHS, County Archives of Oregon,

no. 4, Clatsop County Oregon, prepared by Oregon Historical records Survey Division, WPA, Portland, Ore., September 1940; Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 56, 57. Wives of Chinese laborers were barred from entering the United States.

50. See, for example, *Astoria Daily Budget*, April 10, 1906, 5; October 3, 1893, 1; October 4, 1893; March 7, 1894, 1; January 9, 1894, 4; April 3, 1906, 6; October 8, 1907, 2; and "Astoria Labor Council Petitions Astoria Water Commission and Public Library to Replace Chinese Janitors with White Men," *Astoria Daily Budget*, February 20, 2007. The Finns also lived in ethnically segregated housing. Additionally, the national anti-Chinese campaigns eventually affected Astoria's canning industry negatively, if indirectly. See Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 2–3, 18–19, 82–87.

51. Quoted in Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 58.

52. Historians Chris Friday and Alexander Saxton argue that a distinction can be made between industries whose employment of Asian laborers directly displaced Euro-Americans and industries where the employment of Asian laborers, especially where labor was in short supply, expanded the opportunities for Euro-American laborers, primarily in the upper and more stable tiers of the industry. The latter was, as Friday argues, the case with the salmon-canning industry. Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 74–77; and Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 9–21.

53. Paul George Hummasti, *Finnish Radicals in Astoria, Oregon 1904–1940: A Study in Immigrant Socialism* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 3, 19–20.

54. *Ibid.*, 36.

55. *Ibid.*, 40, 44, 50, 57, 70–74. The first was the *Toveri*, launched in 1907. The second was a separate woman's press called the *Toveritar*, which began in 1911.

56. The Finnish community as a whole had reasons to distance itself from some anti-Asian rhetoric. Many throughout the Finnish diaspora considered their country's ruin to be caused by Russia's occupation. Thus, Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905 was viewed positively, and the war's coverage was extensive in the



mainstream press of Astoria. The *Astoria Daily Budget*, from roughly December 1904 through March of 1905, had almost daily front page coverage of the conflict. See, for example, January 4, 1905,<sup>11</sup> and January 23, 1905, 1.

57. Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 60–67.

58. Author's discussion with family members, May 2010. On the centrality of internationalism to the Finnish socialist movement, see The Tyomies Society (Photographs) Records, Finnish American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

59. Quoted in Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 242.

60. Jensen's examination of the typology of the Bellingham riot, highlighting the importance of organizations in the development of such movements, might apply to progressive movements, making the existence of Finnish Socialists in Astoria critical to fostering a movement of radical nationalism and/or socialism. Jensen, *Passage from India*, 42.

61. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 301.

62. "Conditions in India — Hindu lecturer tells of oppression of people," *Weekly Astorian*, June 5, 1913, 5.

63. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 20, 46.

64. Sohan Singh Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna: Life of the Founder of the Ghadar Party* (New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1970), 14; Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 110.

65. See David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

66. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 46.

67. Kazimi, informal discussion with the author, April 2009.

68. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 57, is one of many references to Dyal's broad political ties and involvement.

69. See Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 1–4, 13, and throughout. The mill employed an array of workers from around the globe:

China, Japan, Turkey, India, and Russia.

70. Puri seems to argue similarly regarding the importance of the resistance to the St. Johns riot. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 52.

71. Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, 55n4.

72. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 43–45, 52, 56.

73. *Ibid.*, 59.

74. Deol, quoting from Lahore Conspiracy trial documents, 56.

75. Sending for Har Dyal was evidently the suggestion of Thakar Dass, a revolutionary exile from Punjab who had worked with Madam Cama in Paris before arriving in Portland in 1912. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 59.

76. Deol, 56–57.

77. *Ibid.*, 57–58. The different spellings of Ghadar/Ghadr reflect a transliteration issue.

78. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 60. Ghadar was the first Indian overseas organization to join intellectuals, students, and workers, and the nature of that relationship has been hotly debated. See Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 53–54; and Jensen, *Passage from India*, 22, 23. The dynamics of this Portland meeting provide some insight on key dynamics of the later organization. Intellectuals were critical in articulating the party's conscious political agenda and more literate and experienced in some of the practicalities of political organizing, such as newspaper production. But in many ways the laborers dominated the movement numerically and shaped it politically. Bose, however, seems to argue the intellectuals were simply filling an empty vessel or utilizing "raw material" of the laborers (Bose, *Revolutionaries Abroad*, 48). This debate according to scholars also relates to the debate regarding the site of Ghadar's founding; those more focused on the role of intellectuals tend to view San Francisco as the original organizing center given it was home to Dyal and other intellectuals, along with many students.

79. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 61; Deol, 59–60.

80. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 68, 146.

81. Deol, 60, 61.

82. Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*, xxi.

83. Letter from Puri to the author, July 2011.

84. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 103.

85. One notable exception is Clatsop County Historical Society, which has attempted a retroactive fix of sorts to its archive, largely due to the herculean efforts of Liisa Penner to make this story known.

86. While utilizing many sources and authors, I am particularly indebted to Puri for his details of Oregon, much of which was drawn from oral histories in Indian of men who had worked in Oregon, and to Professor Ghanea Bassiri of Reed College, who initially alerted me to the presence of Punjabis in early Oregon.

87. See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing The Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), specific reference to duality is at page 2.

88. Trouillot, *Silencing The Past*, 25.

89. See James V. Walker, "Henry S. Tanner and Cartographic Expression of American Expansionism in the 1820s," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 111:4 (Winter 2010): 416–43.

90. Research at The Dalles Public Library pioneer registries and arrest records at Wasco County Courthouse.

91. See Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*.

92. One example is drawn from my frustrated efforts to locate Finnish Socialist records from Astoria from this period and learning that much of them had been destroyed from, yes, being stored in a barn. I have obviously found some records regarding the Punjabis' presence in Oregon. Overwhelmingly, these have been the result of a governmental need to track ownership (such as land titles where Asian land ownership was legal), keep a count on population numbers (census records), or maintain law and order (arrest or prison records). Astoria provided some exception to this as the Asian Indians received more attention in the local mainstream press than anywhere else I have found in the Columbia River communities, including Portland. I believe the relatively more extensive and informative information regarding the Punjabis in Astoria's press articles from the times is indicative of the larger argument I am making regarding that town's more cosmopolitan atmosphere.

93. I employ the "making of the West" with

great qualification given that that phrase in turn elides the indigenous peoples and history of the region. On the persistence and power of the western "origin myth," see Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 322.

94. For an important analysis of the necessity of considering the intersection of race and gender in constructing belonging, both legal and social, see Nayan Shah.

95. Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, April 17, 2012, available at [http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/17/ap\\_wins\\_pulitzer\\_for\\_exposing\\_growth#transcript](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/17/ap_wins_pulitzer_for_exposing_growth#transcript) (accessed May 2, 2012). The U.S. government detained and interrogated over a thousand Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians in the wake of 9/11, irrespective of their citizenship status or activities. See Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 269. On the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi, see "US 9/11 Revenge Killer Convicted," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3154170.stm> (accessed May 16, 2012). See also "Stories Put Spotlight on NYPD Surveillance Program," *Fresh Air*, WHYY, available at <http://www.npr.org/2012/04/18/150805767/stories-put-spotlight-on-nypd-surveillance-program> (accessed May 2, 2012); Is America Islamophobic?," *Time Magazine*, August 30, 2010; "Across Nation, Mosque Projects Meet Opposition," *New York Times*, August 7, 2010; and *Oregonian*, February 15, 2012, C1, C3; *Oregonian* April 13, 2012, A1, A5.

96. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 229, 269, is one example among many who have spoken against and documented the hate crimes after 9/11 (see p. 269).

97. Patricia Limerick expressed this succinctly, describing Japanese interment as "longstanding Western prejudice and immediate wartime panic made a perfectly tailored fit" (*Legacy of Conquest*, 273).

98. Foucault quoted by Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 180. I owe a real debt to historians Joan Scott and David Scott whose use and/or explication of Foucault managed to penetrate my often stubborn mind.

99. Joan Scott, quoting Foucault, "History Writing as Critique," in *Manifestos for History*, ed. Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 27.