

# Teaching history from **DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES:** High School Lesson on the Ghadar Party

GA Social Studies Standards

**SSUSH16 Investigate how political, economic, and cultural developments after WW I led to a shared national identity.**

The Ghadar Party exemplifies the longstanding efforts of U.S. empire in suppressing activists perceived as radical. Educators can highlight transnational resistance to colonialism and white supremacy by sharing the story of the Ghadar Party.

From 1858 until 1947, Great Britain ruled the Indian subcontinent. Most of the first Indian immigrants to the West Coast of North America were Sikhs from the Punjab region who faced racial discrimination similar to their experiences with colonial subjugation in their homeland. Frustrated by their unjust treatment in their new homes, Sikh immigrants along the Pacific Coast of North America began to organize and resist the ongoing dehumanization that they attributed to colonialism.

Sikh immigrants in North America printed and circulated several different anti-colonial newspapers, which detailed the restrictive immigration laws and discrimination faced by Indian immigrants in the U.S. and Canada, as well as the need for revolution in the motherland. In 1913, Punjabi migrant workers and Bengali and Punjabi intellectuals and students came together to form the Ghadar Party. Ghadar, Urdu for “revolt”

or “rebellion,” represented the coalition’s name and their goal to attain racial equality in the U.S. and Canada (and beyond) alongside an independent India. The Ghadar Party focused on unity and secularism among those of Indian descent to establish a collective national identity. Months after the Ghadar Party’s creation, it had over 5,000 members and branches across the world, from Stockton, California to Panama and Shanghai. The party published a newspaper called Ghadar which was banned immediately in India when the first issue arrived on December 7, 1913. By 1914, nearly 5,000 copies were circulated weekly for free. Readership spanned east Asia as well as Africa and South America. The Ghadar Press also published a collection of poetry and protest songs that were often performed at Ghadar gatherings. These two publications connected and mobilized



Indians worldwide as they exposed the exploitation and brutality of British imperialism in the Raj and beyond.

Concerned by the Ghadar Party's anti-colonial efforts, British officials worked closely with immigration offices in San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland to exclude and expel individuals they considered political radicals. U.S. diplomats tried to forbid any Indian with anticolonial leanings from leaving India and, if successful, from landing at U.S. immigration stations.

In an important show of cross-racial solidarity, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) published reports in its magazine *The Crisis* about the Indian independence movement and efforts by the Justice Department to deport six Indians. Consequently, U.S. intelligence officials increased their surveillance on both Black and Indian communities for decades. The Ghadar Party dissolved after Indian independence was finally achieved in August 1947. The surveillance of Indian immigrant activists by U.S. immigration, justice, and state department officials parallels programs like COINTELPRO, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's counterintelligence program from 1956 to 1971 that targeted groups like the Black Panthers, the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, and the American

Indian Movement, in addition to Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks. Surveillance and suppression are tactics of empire that have been deployed for centuries and continue today.

For more about the Ghadar Party, read Seema Sohi's *Echoes of Mutiny* or [her shorter description of it at the South Asian American Digital Archive](#).



### Complete Article and Lesson Plan



#### Photo credit:

(Top to Bottom, Left to Right)

1. 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. Photo from Washington State Historical Society in Ogden (2012), p. 167
2. Five Indian immigrants at Angel Island in 1910. Courtesy of California State Parks
3. Indian migrants at the Stockton Gurdwara in the early 1920s. Courtesy of Wikipedia
4. The Ghadar, via Found SF
5. Ghadar Party Headquarters via Found SF

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