

---

## Mormon, Muslim, and Sikh Migration to the West

*Empire and Religion in Federal Immigration Law*

---

**ABSTRACT** In 1891, the federal government excluded polygamous migrants from entering the United States. This clause, originally designed to stop Mormon migration to the West, had a strange career that filtered diverse religious migrants at American borders in the early twentieth century. Imperial expansion across the Pacific elided racial and religious undesirability in those who traveled to the American West. Inspectors brought these cultural assemblages with them when they asked migrants about their relationships with polygamy, and migrants navigated these encounters with various strategies of passing through the border. Drawing on numerous Boards of Special Inquiry, this article compares Mormon, Muslim, and Sikh migrant experiences with the polygamy question at the border and argues that, even though imperialists and immigration restrictionists policed the movement of insular and foreign people, religion facilitated imperial pathways for migrants to travel along to the American West. This article is part of a special issue of *Pacific Historical Review*, "Religion in the Nineteenth-Century American West." **KEYWORDS** Polygamy, religion, immigration, Boards of Special Inquiry, Mormon history, Muslim history, Sikh history

---

On August 25, 1913, the U.S. Bureau of Immigration detained an Indian migrant for questioning at San Francisco's immigration station, Angel Island. Most of these questions, as historians have argued, placed migrants into civilizational hierarchies based on race and class.<sup>1</sup> The question that led to Shumunda Singh's extended detention, however, had to do with religion and

1. For discussions of immigration restriction and race, see Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018). For discussions of class and pauperism, see Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004); and Hidetaka Hirota, *Expelling the Poor: Atlantic Seaboard States and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of American Immigration Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

marriage. Upon being asked whether he believed in polygamy, the record of questioning indicates that Singh answered: “Yes, I do.”<sup>2</sup> One month later and from detention, Singh explained that if the interpreter answered yes then “a mistake has been made. I do not believe in having more than one wife at a time.” He clarified, “I am not a Mohammedan and my religion does not permit us to have more than one wife at one time.”<sup>3</sup> Singh was Sikh.

Singh’s detention came through a border mechanism designed to catch religious migrants to the American West. The inspectors’ question about polygamy stemmed from the 1891 Immigration Act, in which Congress made polygamist an excludable identity to stop Mormon migration to Utah.<sup>4</sup> Through his personal experience, though, Singh understood the question in relation to Muslims. He distanced himself from them by claiming a different religious identity.

Singh’s experience reflected transnational geographies in the midst of American imperialism. By imperialism I mean efforts at economic, territorial, and cultural expansion through what historian Paul Kramer calls “geopolitics.”<sup>5</sup> Singh’s path to Angel Island wended through American and British imperial spaces—first from British Colonial India, to extraterritorial protection in Shanghai, to American-occupied Manila, and finally to the U.S. national border at the edge of the American West. The polygamy question at Angel Island, too, echoed concerns that followed these same imperial geographies—as immigration officials debated Chinese marital practices, the U.S. federal government legislated against Mormon polygamy in the American West, American imperialists found Muslim polygamy in the Philippines, and British and American missionaries dealt with polygamist converts in India.

Scholars have written about the connections between imperial spaces and immigration policy through mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the

2. Board of Special Inquiry No. 12865/13–9, Shumunda Singh, Department of Labor, Immigration Division, Angel Island Station, San Francisco, California, September 4, 1913. Alien Files (A-files), 12865 13–9, National Archives and Record Administration, San Francisco, Calif. (NARA SF).

3. Affidavit of Shumunda Singh, Department of Labor (DoL), Immigration Bureau, September 26, 1913, A-files, 12865 13–9, NARA SF.

4. Julian Lim, “Mormons and Mohammedans: Race, Religion, and the Anti-Polygamy Bar in US Immigration Law,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 41, no. 1 (2021): 7.

5. Paul Kramer defines geopolitics as “contestations over the organization of political power, economic relations, and social life that take the globe as both their scale and their object.” He argues that migration controls are fundamental to geopolitics, which he terms the “geopolitics of mobility.” Paul A. Kramer, “The Geopolitics of Mobility: Immigration Policy and American Global Power in the Long Twentieth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 2 (April 1, 2018): 396.

movement of people.<sup>6</sup> Kramer calls these global conditions that shape population movements the “geopolitics of mobility,” while historian Kornel Chang argues that “surveillance principles and apparatuses of the modern state were forged in the crucible of empire.”<sup>7</sup> The federal government’s surveillance of polygamous migrants, I argue, ebbed and flowed with American imperial encounters. Kramer believes that these surveillance mechanisms “were often forged ad hoc, in response to sudden shifts, such as international crises or the advent of unforeseen migrations, especially migrants that threatened to cross U.S. borders or the borders of states critical to U.S. projects of power.”<sup>8</sup> This article brings these imperial geographies in conversation with one another through one mechanism of surveillance—the polygamy question. Singh’s travels, like federal concerns over polygamy, followed imperial paths to the American West.

This article asks how a border question designed for Mormons from Europe in the late nineteenth century confronted a multitude of religious migrants in the early twentieth century. Historian Julian Lim writes, “While religious difference alone provided an insufficient basis for exclusionary immigration laws, the polygamous tenets of each group offered a ready platform on which restrictionists could transform powerful ideas about religion, race, and sex into immigration policy.” Historian Natalia Molina’s term “racial script” is a way to understand the “imperial implications of polygamous reproduction” in this process of implicating polygamy in federal immigration law. Polygamy thus became one secular signifier for co-constituted religious and racial undesirability by conflating religious stereotypes and ignoring religious difference. The first proposed bill to ban Mormon migrants in the 1880s specified that Mormons were the target. Likely due to possible infringements upon the Establishment Clause, subsequent bills did not

6. See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898–1946* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Madeline Y. Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); David C. Atkinson, *The Burden of White Supremacy: Containing Asian Migration in the British Empire and the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); and Robert C. McGreevey, *Borderline Citizens: The United States, Puerto Rico, and the Politics of Colonial Migration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

7. Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 3–4.

8. Kramer, “The Geopolitics of Mobility,” 404.

identify Mormons as the objective but rather used polygamy as a proxy to catch Mormon immigrants.<sup>9</sup> Yet, as inspectors used the polygamy question over time, they applied its exclusionary capability toward a host of religiously and racially undesirable migrants like Ottoman Muslims, Chinese women, Indian Sikh and Muslim migrants, and Mormons.<sup>10</sup> Though this study tracks the latter of these migrant groups, it nevertheless suggests that others caught by the polygamy clause were similarly tied to the West through this process of conflating religious undesirabilities. Yet, at a secularizing and individualizing border, the polygamy question played out differently for each of these migrant groups. The iterations of the polygamy question that westward traveling Mormons faced were different than those that eastward traveling Sikh and Muslim migrants faced. Both directionalities revealed the ways that the federal government engaged in religion-making through conflating religion, race, and desirability across the distance of religious difference within American empire.

Singh, like other religious migrants, first faced the polygamy question in initial inspections and Boards of Special Inquiry at American ports. Decisions at these Boards of Special Inquiry determined a migrant's entrance, deportation, or detention. Border questions, though, are only part of the story. Migrant responses often depended on inspector questions, which shaped the kinds of answers they could give. In response to polygamy questions—migrants could simply answer “no” without reference to religion. However, migrants participated in border religion-making with responses that became counterscripts to the religious concern Congress embedded within the 1891 Immigration Act. By conflating religious undesirability and migrant threat, the immigration inspectors left untouched the particular ways that religion could help migrants navigate the border. This article argues that the efficacy of migrant religious reasoning at the border depended on race, social support, and the pathways to which individual migrants had access. Migrant

9. Lim, “Mormons and Mohammedans,” 8–9, 21; Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

10. See Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Kerry Abrams, “Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law,” *Columbia Law Review* 105, no. 3 (April 2005): 641–716; Martha Mable Gardner, *The Qualities of a Citizen: Women, Immigration, and Citizenship, 1870–1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Deirdre M. Moloney, *National Insecurities: Immigrants and U.S. Deportation Policy since 1882* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

movements to and responses at the border highlight difference in the ways that they constructed their own religious identities and used religious networks to try and pass through the border on their ways to the American West. Scholars have highlighted the importance of religious freedom as a part of individual agency in the face of American imperial expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>11</sup> Though these religious freedom scripts provided some protections, a comparison of the transcripts of Boards of Special Inquiry between Sikh and Muslim migrants in San Francisco and Mormon migrants in Boston after the turn of the twentieth century reveals different strategies for migrant religion-making at the border. Singh's experience, then, can help historians see constructions of religion and race in the American West, but within the contexts of federal immigration policy and the geopolitics of mobility.

### POLYGAMY AND RELIGION AT HOME AND ABROAD

To understand Singh's detention, it is first necessary to understand the way that the polygamy question co-constructed race and religion in federal immigration law. Legal scholar Kerry Abrams notes the 1875 Page Law as the first moment when federal immigration policy became concerned with polygamy and sexuality in Chinese women.<sup>12</sup> Even then, though, congressmen juxtaposed foreign Chinese polygamy with domestic polygamy through religion. In a congressional report reviewing the efficacy of the Page Law, a reverend noted to California Senator Aaron Sargent that if Chinese migrants "become American citizens, if they become christianized, in the first place, they would not be allowed to have their polygamy and their second wives." He continued, "We are not proposing to turn any part of California into a Salt Lake."<sup>13</sup> The reverse was true, too. Later, in the Supreme Court's opinion in *Reynolds v. United States*, Chief Justice Morrison Waite ruled against domestic polygamy by relating it to foreignness and racial degradation. Polygamy, according to Waite, had "always been odious among the northern and western nations

11. See Anna Su, *Exporting Freedom: Religious Liberty and American Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); and Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Faking Liberties: Religious Freedom in American-Occupied Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

12. Abrams, "Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law."

13. Testimony of Rev. Augustus W. Loomis, November 9, 1876, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, Senate, 44th Congress, 2nd Session, 465.

of Europe, and, until the establishment of the Mormon Church, was almost exclusively a feature of the life of Asiatic and of African people.”<sup>14</sup> Throughout the 1880s, comparisons between Mormons and Chinese aliens grew.<sup>15</sup> When the House of Representatives debated what later became the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, New York Representative Charles Skinner questioned the logic of Chinese migrant exclusion through comparison to Mormons. If the exclusion of Chinese migrants operated on the logic of morality, then “by what standard shall we draw the line? Shall our officers stand on the docks as the foreign ships land and ask each emigrant his religion?” He asked, “have we legislated against Mormon immigration? No such legislation has been suggested, and yet more Mormons than Chinese come to our country every year. We hear nothing said about shutting the gates to these subtle enemies of our country, whose false religion is a stench upon us.”<sup>16</sup> Though his demographic information was false, Skinner’s focus on morality highlighted his conflation of Mormon and Chinese migrants.

By 1891, Congress consolidated regional, racial, and religious concerns into federal immigration law. The law excluded polygamists through the form of a question: “are you a polygamist?” The question became referential language in federal immigration law that bled together the religious and racial undesirabilities of migrant groups in the American West. Concern for both Chinese polygamy and Mormon polygamy were never just domestic, and never only foreign.

Imperial expansion, too, augmented connections between polygamy in the West and polygamy abroad. As Americans debated the legacies of Mormon polygamy within the United States, they simultaneously encountered polygamists across the Pacific. Consider the seating attempts of two Mormon congressmen, one in the House in 1898 during the start of the Spanish-American-Philippine War, and the other in the Senate beginning in 1904. At the start of the Spanish-American-Philippine War, American officials communicated with the Sultan of Sulu, a leader of Moro Muslims in the Philippines.<sup>17</sup> Though the practices and cultures differed from Mormons in

14. *Reynolds v. United States* (1879), 98 US 153, 161–68.

15. See W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), chapter 8.

16. Charles R. Skinner, *Chinese Immigration*, House of Representatives, *Congressional Record*, 47th Congress, 1st session, March 18, 1882, 2041.

17. Victor Román Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies: Fantasy, Racial-Sexual Governance, and the Philippines in U.S. Imperialism, 1899–1913* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015).

America, Moro Muslims represented threats to American governance because they participated in slavery and polygamy.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, congressmen in the United States debated the election of Mormon polygamist B.H. Roberts to the House of Representatives. One speech indicated that they “expelled Mr. Roberts from this House because he was a polygamist.” But, they satirically “needed him here to help us legislate for the Sulu Islands, for he and the President’s polygamous postmasters in Utah are the only men in this country who know how to govern harems.”<sup>19</sup> Such comments drew on a long American tradition of comparing Mormons to Muslims and finding both groups wanting.<sup>20</sup>

The federal government debated whether overt control of the Philippines was necessary to stem polygamy and slavery there, but decided upon a policy of indirect rule.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the polygamy clause began to exclude Muslim migrants at the U.S. border.<sup>22</sup> Imperial expansion through warfare also deployed religious and racial tropes centered on polygamy to create different geographies of legal concern and connect imperial and domestic spaces as foreign and fearful.

Six years later, the Senate investigated monogamous Mormon apostle Reed Smoot to decide if he should be allowed to retain his seat. By 1907, they again conflated domestic polygamy with imperial encounters across the Pacific. Illinois Senator Albert Hopkins, for example, used India as a case study to inform the Senate’s discussions about Smoot. Hopkins appealed to the “problem of plural wives and polygamous cohabitation” which Protestant missionaries encountered in their “fields in the Orient.” He cited a 1904 book by missionary Harlan P. Beach, where the author indicated that polygamists either “Hindoo or Mohammedan” married multiple women “in good faith” and asked, “if a man puts away all but one what provision shall be made for the rejected and on what principle shall he decide as to the one to be retained?” The solution, according to the author, was to convert the proselyte in order to legitimize his families, but to restrict any eligibility “to any church

18. Wenger, *Religious Freedom*, 84–85.

19. Appendix: Speech of Hon. John J. Lentz, Of Ohio in the House of Representatives, March 27, 1900, *Congressional Record*, 56th Congress, 186.

20. See J. Spencer Fluhman, *A Peculiar People: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*; and Lim, “Mormons and Mohammedans.”

21. Wenger, *Religious Freedom*, 90.

22. “SIX POLYGAMISTS SHUT OUT.: THE BOARD OF INQUIRY ORDERS MOHAMMEDANS TO BE DEPORTED,” *New York Times* (1857–1922), Nov 18, 1897.

office.” Indian converts required “the doctrine of charity” that should similarly apply to “the people of Utah and other Western States where polygamy once held sway as a part of the doctrines and teachings of the Mormon Church.”<sup>23</sup> Hopkins thus connected foreign and domestic polygamies by suggesting civilizational uplift through tolerance.

Such concerns forged rhetorical links between polygamy in the American West and polygamy across American and British empires. Congressmen shared ideas about the similar undesirability between Mormons in the American West and their imagined eastern counterparts: Chinese, Muslim, and Indian migrants. The polygamy clause in federal immigration law provided one mechanism for not only “how the United States should interfere in international affairs, but also how it should control the intrusion of imperial forces at the nation’s borders.”<sup>24</sup> As a gatekeeping mechanism between nation and empire, polygamy reveals the connections between colonized spaces in the American West and across the Pacific, and the embeddedness of religion within those imperial histories.

#### THE POLYGAMY QUESTION IN IMPERIAL SURVEILLANCE

Singh’s encounter with the U.S. Bureau of Immigration began long before he reached the shores of the American West. The Bureau of Immigration employed networks of spies and informants to produce knowledge about undesirable migrants’ movements. Up until this moment, the polygamy question only excluded a handful of migrants per year. Covert surveillance, increased migration from Asia, and a broadening of the immigration law in 1907 to not only ask about polygamous identity, but to add whether migrants were “believer[s] in the practice of polygamy” helped guide inspectors’ use of the polygamy question as a sharper tool for exclusion in the twentieth century. The questions that border inspectors asked Mormon migrants from Europe and Indian migrants from Asia offer important lenses into the different assumptions about race and religion that animated Americans’ self-identity in the early decades of American imperial expansion.

On May 31, 1908, a U.S. immigrant inspector in Canada talked to Mormon migrants. The 107 Mormons left Liverpool ten days earlier and traveled in second cabin—a higher class of comfort than the more typical steerage. The inspector, Ralph P. Harrison, oversaw their landing in Montreal and

23. *Congressional Record*, 59th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate, January 11, 1907, 944.

24. Lim, “Mormons and Mohammedans,” 34.



“gathered the information from several of the Elders, United States citizens, who were returning with this party of Mormons.” He reported the landing to his superiors.<sup>25</sup>

After receiving Harrison’s letter, the Commissioner-General of Immigration Frank P. Sargent wrote to Carrie Wise, a spy employed by the Bureau of Immigration. He included communication from Harrison and suggested that “the Bureau feels that a careful discreet investigation should be conducted in Liverpool.”<sup>26</sup> The Commissioner instructed Wise to “obtain all possible data” about Mormon migrants in Liverpool and “submit a full report.”<sup>27</sup> Two months after Harrison’s encounter, Wise sent a report back to the Commissioner-General that detailed Mormon activity in Europe. She wrote that missionaries converted “about a 1000 a year of which more than half are families, leaving about 300 single individuals of which half a year are single girls and widows (without children generally).” She observed that migrants gathered in Liverpool once a month and took a steamship that “allow[s] them second class passage for steerage rates. They prefer to go to Boston.”<sup>28</sup>

In particular, Wise informed the Bureau that a ship would leave on August 15th with ninety Mormons. She suggested that the immigration inspectors in Boston ask about the process through which migrants purchased their tickets. Wise’s suggestion came from a history of institutional financing for Mormon migrations. The defunct Mormon Perpetual Emigrating Fund was a nineteenth-century micro-loan system for converts to finance their migrations and later pay back the institutional church. Though the federal government disincorporated the micro-loan system in 1887, inspectors still translated some concern about Mormon migration through fears of financing. As a solution, immigration officials relied on questions related to the public charge clause. The public charge clause was a capacious immigration measure designed against assisted migration and future dependency

25. See Brynlee Emery, “Those Who Admit Their Belief: Latter-day Saint Immigrants and the Polygamy Restriction in U.S. Immigration Law (B.A. thesis: Georgetown Univ., 2019). Ralph Harrison to the Commissioner of Immigration at Montreal, June 1, 1908 (Harrison to Commissioner at Montreal), 53015/011 (Mormon Immigration), Subject and Policy Files 1906–1957 (SaPF), Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1787–2004, Record Group 85 (RG 85), National Archives Building, Washington, D.C (NARA DC).

26. Harrison to Commissioner at Montreal, June 5, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85; NARA DC.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Carrie Wise to Commissioner General of Immigration, Cursory Outline, August 4th, 1908; Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

on societal welfare. It was also one which inspectors used as a catch-all when specific exclusionary clauses—like the polygamy clause—were ineffective.<sup>29</sup> Wise procured a letter from a father of “two daughters, Margaret and Kate Roe” that stated it “is impossible that these girls can have paid their own passages.”<sup>30</sup> The letter wondered whether the church was financing the girls’ migration to obscure the poverty of the migrants. At the behest of Wise, inspectors asked about missionaries “influencing” women to migrate. Wise implied that the girls had a potential to become public charges, a concern that revealed the ineffectiveness of only asking about polygamy at the border. Yet, polygamy may have also been at the heart of Wise’s concern over the two young daughters. It certainly echoed an old stereotype that Mormon missionaries preyed on gullible women who were then sent to Utah to become polygamous wives.<sup>31</sup> Inspectors’ questions about whether Mormon missionaries offered any “influence” or “any inducement” for migrants like Margaret and Kate Roe reflected both economic and polygamous concerns.<sup>32</sup>

Six months later, inspectors stationed in Canada warned the Bureau of Immigration about radical Indian migrants. In January of 1909, Canadian and U.S. inspectors in Vancouver alerted Harrison’s same superiors in Montreal of Indian migrants traveling to the United States “for the purpose of promoting sedition,” and suggested that “officers make an investigation at Seattle and elsewhere.”<sup>33</sup> These suggestions stemmed from the work of William Hopkinson, a spy for both the British and American empires, who tracked migrant movement from India to the West Coast through a network of informers. Eventually the operation monitored mail between India, San Francisco, and Berkeley. Hopkinson’s and other inspectors’ fears were that

29. For discussions of the capacious nature of the public charge clause, see Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door*; Gardner, *The Qualities of a Citizen*; Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Moloney, *National Insecurities*; Hirota, *Expelling the Poor*; and Adam Goodman, *The Deportation Machine: America’s Long History of Expelling Immigrants* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

30. J.S. Roe to Carrie Wise et al, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

31. See W. Paul Reeve, “All ‘Mormon Elder-Berry’s’ Children: Race, Whiteness, and the Attack of Mormon ‘Anglo-Saxon Triumphalism,’” in *Directions for Mormon Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Patrick Q. Mason (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016).

32. This particular wording comes from BSI, Berte Amman, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC. There are similar lines of questioning in other Boards of Special Inquiry when Mormon migrants on the same ship.

33. Everett Wallace to Commissioner of Immigration at Montreal, January 6, 1909, Proposed Transfer of East Indians in British Columbia to Honduras, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC. As quoted in Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America*, 1st edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 41.

anticolonial rhetoric and international connections between North America and India would foment Indian revolution against British occupation of India.<sup>34</sup> The Vancouver inspectors suggested that American immigration officials “very closely” interrogate migrants and “documents in [their] possession.” Such surveillance, historian Seema Sohi argues, augmented the politicization of Indian anticolonialism. Though this surveillance stemmed from fear of political radicalism, it also fostered greater surveillance of Indian migrants coming to the United States, overall. Inspectors in Seattle in 1910 used the polygamy clause to exclude Hindu migrants, reasoning that since they understood Indian migrants as Muslim, then their religion “sanctions polygamy” and were excludable on that ground.<sup>35</sup> In addition to polygamy exclusions, these migrants to Seattle were also charged with exclusion based on the public charge clause—though their public charge labels likely reflected concerns about race and class, rather than polygamous tropes.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, surveillance policed the movements of Sikh and Muslim migrants broadly, who in 1910 and 1911 traveled from India through the Philippines to enter the West through San Francisco.

Both surveillances reflected concern for migrants traveling to the West. They facilitated different kinds of questioning that are typical for various immigrant inspectors in a diversity of regions throughout the United States. For Mormons in Boston, the polygamy clause and public charge clause reflected one narrative of polygamous migration through missionaries who financed and duped plural wives. For Muslim and Sikh migrants in San Francisco, the polygamy clause became one mechanism among many since “at least 1909” when “it has been the general policy of the Immigration Service to exclude” Indian migrants who threatened imperial rule through revolutionary political activism.<sup>37</sup> Though broader concerns about these groups folded into different imperial concerns—to prevent assisted migration and to prevent anticolonial revolution—polygamy nevertheless followed their movements and became a tool for exclusion at the American border.

34. See Joan M. Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); and Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*.

35. *Bulletin*, August 10, 1910, enclosed in American Consulate-General Calcutta, India to the Secretary of State, Washington, D.C., August 11, 1910; Hindu Immigrants to San Francisco (Hindu Immigrants), SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

36. See, for example, the cases of nineteen migrants to Seattle who landed in 1910, in 53154/2, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

37. Memorandum from the Commissioner General of Immigration, April 7, 1913, Hindu Immigrants, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

## ENCOUNTERS AT THE BORDER

For Mormons in Boston, inspectors asked specific questions about assisted immigration, family relations, and migrant coaching. Since these Mormon migrants largely traveled in family groups, inspectors sometimes interrogated whole families and sometimes asked individuals questions in front of the rest of a family. Inspectors allowed all but two Mormon migrants through the border in August of 1908. They held many in detention until Senator Smoot involved himself in the situation. European Mormon migrants exercised privilege through their whiteness, Christianity, and class. Until Wise's report in 1908, European Mormons largely skirted Boards of Special Inquiry by traveling in second cabin, carrying enough money, being racialized as proto-American migrants, and presenting as non-Mormon.<sup>38</sup>

Muslim and Sikh migrants in San Francisco faced a different set of circumstances. Since the 1907 Immigration Act left migration to and through territorial spaces ambiguous, Sikh and Muslim migrants shifted their travels through insular space, mainly through the Philippines, to gain entry when they arrived in San Francisco. They encountered a diverse set of inspectors wrought with internal political strife over excluding "Asiatic" migrants.<sup>39</sup> Some inspectors resisted bureaucratic demands to exclude "Hindu" migrants, while one appeased anti-Asian exclusionists and advocated for the removal of more lenient inspectors. Since Indian migrants traveled mostly as male laborers, inspectors' questions about their likelihood to become public charges took prominence, and exclusions fomented in a region of intense anti-Asiatic prejudice.<sup>40</sup> Roughly half of these migrants passed through the border, and half were deported. Sikh and Muslim migrants experienced cultural illiteracy, religio-racial undesirability, and depended on the mediation of translators.

When Mormon, Muslim, and Sikh migrants understood the polygamy question through religious implications, their answers positioned their own

38. As a response to the 1891 Immigration Act, Mormon leaders encouraged migrants to stand physically apart from missionaries, label luggage to cities before Salt Lake City, answer no to the polygamy question, and carry enough money to pass through border inspections. See Scott G. Kenney Collection, First Presidency Correspondence, Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Ut.

39. Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*, 31–32.

40. See Chang, *Pacific Connections*; and Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

religious identities through different kinds of distance from polygamy. For Sikh migrants like Shumunda Singh in detention, the question about polygamy prompted a response that identified Sikh religious culture and practice as monogamous. This was also the case for Karam Singh in 1913. He answered, “Amongst the Sikhs there is no such custom; no I wont do it.”<sup>41</sup> The same year, Narain Singh responded that it “is not allowable,” and Dial Singh clarified “No, our custom is to marry one wife.”<sup>42</sup> These responses positioned Sikh migrants away from polygamy by identifying themselves and Sikhism as strictly monogamous. For Shumunda Singh, this meant identifying Islam as a polygamous religion and othering that practice.

Mormon responses to the polygamy question highlighted historical distance. In 1908, Christopher Tanning responded to the polygamy question with “No, sir, we don’t believe in it.” When inspectors asked about believing in the practice of polygamy, he said “No. It has not been practiced for about 18 years.”<sup>43</sup> This date, eighteen years, referenced the promulgation of the 1890 Manifesto which publicly stated that Mormons would “submit to the laws” of the United States and Supreme Court. Though rumors of continued Mormon polygamy persisted, in the case of Boards of Special Inquiry, historical distance mattered. Jacob Rittgen said, “No. Not one of the whole gang believes in polygamy . . . That is a fairy tale of former years.”<sup>44</sup> Some iterations of the question highlighted the polygamous baggage that Mormonism carried in American culture, like the questions Elizabeth Bradshaw faced in 1908:

Do you know that the Mormon Church formerly practiced polygamy in this country? Why did you embrace the faith? Did any one tell you to say that you didn’t believe in the practice of polygamy before this Board? And that there are Mormons living with plural wives today. Suppose you should go there and see that for yourself. Would you then believe? Did the Mormon elders say that it was wrong? Did you believe it wrong and still embrace the faith? Don’t you believe in the practice of polygamy?

41. BSI, Karam Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, September 19, 1913, A-files, 12907 10–2, NARA SF.

42. BSI, Narain Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, September 4, 1913, A-files, 12865 13–11, NARA SF; BSI, Dial Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, September 4, 1913, A-files, 12865 13–5, NARA SF.

43. BSI, Christopher Tanning, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

44. BSI, Jacob Rittgen, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

Many of Bradshaw's responses denied any personal connection with polygamy: "No . . . I dont believe in it . . . Well I don't know. I don't believe in it (practice of polygamy) . . . I dont know, tis nothing to do with me." Some of their questions prompted her narrative of the religion's polygamist past. When Bradshaw heard, "How long ago since they cast aside the practice of plural wives?" she responded, "18 years ago," because "It wasn't legal."<sup>45</sup> For many Mormons who landed in Boston in 1908, the polygamy question prompted responses that positioned their church's relationship with polygamy through historical terms, and identified Mormonism as a modernly monogamous religion.

For Muslim migrants in San Francisco, some inspectors similarly equated believing in Islam as believing in polygamy. This assumption resulted in hundreds of deportations across multiple ports of entry.<sup>46</sup> It also caused international uproar from representatives of the Ottoman government. In 1913, Commissioner General Anthony Caminetti issued a statement in which he specifically advised immigrant inspectors to ask about polygamous belief without asking about whether a migrant was Muslim.<sup>47</sup> Inspectors in San Francisco, however, did not abide by this directive. In 1914, for example, inspectors asked Munshi Khan if he "believe[d] in the Koran." He responded, "Yes." The inspectors' subsequent question connected Islam with polygamy: "The Koran teaches that it is right for a man to have more than one wife. Do you believe in those teachings?" Khan's response dictated both that polygamy "is not compulsory according to [the] Koran" and also that he didn't "believe in it."<sup>48</sup> In response to the same question in the same year, Maushi Khan responded: "I am not even married. How would I get more than one wife." When inspectors prompted the hypothetical of having multiple wives if he were "well fixed," Khan responded with a simple "No."<sup>49</sup> These experiences are representative of the ways that inspectors had used Muslim identity to exclude migrants under the polygamy clause well before and well after 1913. These two Muslim responses created distance between religious text and belief, though many Muslim responses were not enough to prevent their

45. BSI, Elizabeth Brashaw, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

46. See Jensen, *Passage from India*; Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*.

47. Moloney, *National Insecurities*, 142–44; Lim, "Mormons and Mohammedans," 30.

48. BSI, Munshi Khan, DoL, Immigration Bureau, May 27, 1914, A-files, 13445 5–2, NARA SF.

49. BSI, Maushi Khan, DoL, Immigration Bureau, August 25, 1914, A-files, 13668 13–1, NARA SF.

exclusions and deportations. Whether cultural, historical, or scriptural, questions about polygamy at Angel Island and in Boston prompted responses that distanced migrants' religions from various associations with polygamy.

Subsequent questions about identity in these Boards of Special Inquiry revealed the ways that religion and race elided together. In interspersed moments, inspectors asked questions about religious identity that were disconnected from polygamy. Religious identity, though, looked different between Boston and San Francisco. For Sikh migrants in San Francisco in 1913, religious identity came through questions about caste or race. In 1914 when inspectors asked Lal Singh "Of what caste" he belonged, he responded "I am a Sikh, sir."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, when inspectors asked Gurzara Singh "Of what race or tribe of people" he belonged to "in India," he responded, "I belong to the Sikh race of the warrior caste."<sup>51</sup> While these responses did not prompt further questioning about religious identity or belief, they did seem to provide a sense of peopling—that "Sikh" labeled a group in which migrants belonged. This label emerged when migrants responded to questions about community in India and America. In 1914 Churhar Singh talked about finding his "Hindu student friends" at the University of California, Berkeley. He said: "I don't know their names, but I know there are lots of sikhs there; I came from a Sikh community." If he didn't first go to Berkeley, then he would "go to Stockton in my Sikh temple first."<sup>52</sup> Inspectors did not ask about categories that typified American Protestant conceptions of religion for Sikh migrants: belief, practice, and text.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Sikh migrants denoted themselves as ethnically Sikh in relation to caste, race, and community.

In a unique encounter, responses to questions about one migrant's identity hid her Mormonism and instead presented her as Catholic. In 1908, Herminia Walser entered a Board of Special Inquiry, and as a part of the process refused to take an oath due to her Catholicism. When inspectors asked about the oath to make sure she identified as Catholic, she responded "Yes, I am that still." Inspectors asked if she believed "in the principles and doctrines of

50. BSI, Lal Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, March 10, 1914, A-files, 13292 3-1, NARA SF.

51. BSI, Gurzara Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, June 18, 1914, A-files, 13484 2-22, NARA SF.

52. BSI, Churhar Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, February 28, 1914, A-files, 13273 5-5, NARA SF.

53. Looking at British perceptions of Hinduism, Michael Altman describes a different dynamic, writing that "British colonial power in India constructed 'Hinduism' by locating the core of Indian religion in Sanskrit texts." Michael J. Altman, *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xviii.

the Mormon faith.” She responded: “Yes; I believe in the baptism and forgiving for the sins.” After answering questions about polygamy, the inspectors asked if she “intend[s] to forsake [her Catholic] religion to become a Mormon.” Herminia responded that she “came to the United States so as to find out whether it is really worth while to give up my Roman Catholic church” for a Mormon one. She migrated to discover for herself whether Mormons still practiced polygamy in Utah. If not, then she implied that she might become Mormon. The board moved “that this alien be discharged, as she being a Roman Catholic, comes here to investigate the Mormon religion, not saying definitely whether or not she will embrace that religion, and not believing in polygamy or the practise of polygamy.” According to family history sources, Latter-day Saint missionaries had baptized Walser months earlier. Walser was already Mormon and had lied to the inspectors about not being so. Perhaps this encounter represented distance between an act of baptism and an individual’s religious self-understanding, or perhaps it was part of a desire to hide her religion from her Catholic family and Swiss culture, and interpreted the border similarly. Regardless, Walser’s encounter situates her religious identity as chosen, and also as dependent upon the presence of polygamy in the West.

For Mormon migrants more broadly, inspectors followed the polygamy question with additional questions about belief. Inspectors asked questions like “What do you believe as to the Mormon faith?” Responses varied. In 1908 Berte Amman said: “the real truth; there are many churches but there is not one of them the real church.”<sup>54</sup> Melde Martha Deckart stated “I believe only the bible as it is written.”<sup>55</sup> Others, though, extended religious belief into their migratory journeys to Utah: “I just come on account of my belief,”<sup>56</sup> “One of our articles of faith is that we believe the little [sic] gather shall go together to Zion and live on the Mormon continent That’s the reason most of us come out—for the Gospel’s sake,”<sup>57</sup> and “Well, I wanted to be in the Promised Land. That is why I came here.”<sup>58</sup> For some, migration to and across the American border was itself an act borne from religion—part of historical migrations that Mormons called “the Gathering.” Questions about

54. BSI, Berte Amman, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

55. BSI, Melde Martha Deckart, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

56. BSI, Adolph Hoffman, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

57. BSI, William Robson, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

58. BSI, Walter Bowsfield, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.



religion, for Mormons, resulted in inspectors asking about belief and Mormons referring to scripture and sacred movement.

In Boston, inspectors asked Mormon migrants about their Gathering. Beatrice Debbige was engaged to her fiancé in England, but traveled alone to Utah. After skeptical questions about her decision to leave her “intended husband,” and how she knew he would follow her to Utah, inspectors asked if “there [was] any influence brought to bear upon you by the Mormon Missionaries or Elders to accompany them at this time?” Her response was clear: “None whatever; they had nothing to do with me.” They responded: “Isn’t it peculiar that you have just enough to pay for your passage and what the Mormons term it ‘landing money’?” She replied that she had spent some money, and that she had heard from friends how much she should display at the border to not become a public charge.<sup>59</sup> Inspectors commonly asked whether women had “been instructed by the Mormon missionaries what to say on [their] arrival;” whether they had “been coached by the missionaries to say certain things before [the] Board[s].”<sup>60</sup> For single women, inspectors sometimes asked whether missionaries lent “any assistance in the way of paying [their] passage or furnishing [them] money.”<sup>61</sup>

Though responses in Boston denied any brainwashing, coaching, or financing, missionaries did occasionally fund the migrations of Mormon converts, and frequently coached them in the early twentieth century. Since border questions focused on migrants as individuals, since their suspicions came from assumptions about Mormon polygamy and missionary influence over gullible women, and since Wise’s investigation did not provide evidence of assisted migration, inspectors could do little to prove the existence of communal religious support and thereby exclude Mormon migrants en masse.

For Indian migrants, communal religious institutions gave means to the American border through imperial spaces. Temples provided important places to house migrants, and Sikhs established *gurdwaras* throughout the Pacific. For Baboo Singh, who traveled through Hong Kong, inspectors asked questions about specific migrants whom Baboo Singh might have seen in Hong Kong. Baboo Singh responded that he saw them “all in the Sikh

59. BSI, Beatrice Debbige, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

60. BSI, Berte Amman, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC; BSI, William Robson, August 23, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

61. BSI, Johanna Rommerling, August 24, 1908, Mormon Immigration, SaPF, RG 85, NARA DC.

Temple where forty or fifty people were staying.” The gurdwara in Hong Kong provided food and lodging for migrants traveling through the Pacific. “Everybody,” he continued, “that come from India to Hong Kong goes and stops at the Sikh Temple. I saw them there.”<sup>62</sup> Muslim migrants, too, had opportunity for housing in Hong Kong through “a mosque,” where Abdool Karim Khan “lived there free” for around “20 days.”<sup>63</sup> For Gori Shankar, interactions in Sikh Temples provided networks and transpacific migratory knowledge. He traveled to Manila from Shanghai because a migrant wrote to the temple in Shanghai, stating “that the prospects here were very good for Hindus and that he had done well since he arrived here and his health was very good.” Other migrants at the Sikh Temple in Manila first left for the United States, which led Shankar to take “passage on the same boat.”<sup>64</sup> Because they arrived in insular territory, they were subject to immigration inspections in the Philippines that should have granted them passage through San Francisco under the 1907 Immigration Act.<sup>65</sup> Sikh Temples and mosques in Hong Kong and the Philippines provided places for migrants to stay and built networks of knowledge that connected routes to the West through colonized spaces.

Upon arrival, the Sikh Temple in Stockton, California, provided support for Sikh and Muslim migrants arriving on American shores. For Bir Singh’s Board of Special Inquiry, the temple represented potential supports against becoming a public charge in the form of friendship networks and affidavits.<sup>66</sup> For Sondara Singh, it meant a network through which he could find his brother who had traveled to America earlier.<sup>67</sup> For Inder Singh, it facilitated documentation about medical inspection and supporting evidence that indicated the migrant’s student status.<sup>68</sup> While the Bureau of Immigration found ways to minimize these supports, community advocates nonetheless provided

62. BSI, Baboo Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, November 7, 1913, A-files, 13013 14–6, NARA SF.

63. BSI, Abdool Karim Khan, DoL, Immigration Bureau, February 16, 1915, A-files, 14122 14–2, NARA SF.

64. BSI, Gori Shankar, DoL, Immigration Bureau, November 14, 1913, A-files, 13035 10–3, NARA SF.

65. Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*, 125–34.

66. BSI, Bir Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, September 24, 1913, A-files, 12924 4–17, NARA SF.

67. BSI, Sondara Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, September 24, 1913, A-files, 12924 4–8, NARA SF.

68. BSI, Inder Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, September 16, 1913, A-files, 12907 10–3, NARA SF.

evidence in Boards of Special Inquiry and took advantage of loopholes in immigration law through travel in the Pacific.

Sikh religious institutions used federal immigration law to help some migrants pass through the border. The Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society, a society formed by Sikh migrants to organize along the West Coast of Canada and the United States, used legal acumen to pass Sikh migrants through the border as “Sikh priests.”<sup>69</sup> This, as far as I can tell, was a unique strategy that Mormon and Muslim migrants did not adopt. The Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society took advantage of a different clause of the same 1891 Immigration Act that barred polygamists from entering the country. Section Five of the act added exceptions for “ministers of any religious denomination” to potential excludable categories, like becoming a public charge. Congress debated the wording of this clause in 1890: “whether this amendment would exclude the ministers of the Chinese religion, those who conduct joss services, or the Mormons, or the ministers of anything else called religion.” The fear was that “a Chinese minister conducting the services in their temple, worshiping at the shrine of their joss, could come in under this provision, and also a Brahman, or a Mormon—and a great many Mormons are coming in now—and Mussulmans, or anything of the kind.”<sup>70</sup> Eventually Catholic seminaries on the East Coast successfully lobbied for the clause’s inclusion in the act. The Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society took advantage of this clause twenty-two years after its becoming law.

The Sikh Temple in Stockton sometimes protected Sikh migrants through the border by providing documentation that they would teach religion at the Sikh Temple. Kakan Singh’s arrival in San Francisco in 1913 brought with it two mismatching narratives about his intent in coming to America. His first recorded encounter with immigration inspectors in his Board of Special Inquiry indicated that he wanted “to start a store here” selling silk.<sup>71</sup> In a re-hearing six days later, the transcript reads that Kakan Singh did not stray from this first story. After these two encounters, though, the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society sent affidavits to a lawyer representing Kakan

69. The language of “priest” is specific for the 1891 Immigration Act and was likely a conscious use of language for protection under that act. Altman argues that British colonialism defined “Indian religion according to Judeo-Christian assumptions.” This language is a moment when those assumptions offered legal protection under immigration law. Altman, *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu*, xviii.

70. Alien-Labor Contracts, *Congressional Record*, 51st Congress, 1st Session, September 26, 1890, Senate, 10466.

71. BSI, Ka Kin Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, August 7, 1913, A-files, 12830 6–9, NARA SF.

Singh. These documents began Singh's second narrative, that he was a "Sikh priest" coming to the United States as a minister of Sikh religion. Singh's lawyers wrote that he "is to become an instructor and spiritual adviser in the Sikh Religious Literature for the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan (Free Divine Communion) Society."<sup>72</sup> An affidavit from a bankruptcy lawyer validated the society's legal existence, and that they had been looking for an instructor and had communicated with Singh multiple months prior.<sup>73</sup> An affidavit from the leadership of the society, President Dharm Singh, Secretary Tara Singh, and Treasurer Hari Singh, stated that "the trustees of the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society being satisfied of the fitness of Kakan Singh to act as teacher and spiritual adviser . . . hereby appoint, engage and employ Kakan Singh as instructor in Sikh Religious Literature" for two years with a monthly salary, board, and room.<sup>74</sup> Tara Singh provided the society's articles of incorporation which included "appointing missionaries and ministers," promote the wellbeing of "all Sikhs and Hindoostani Students on the Pacific Coast," and improve "the moral, social and religious condition of the laboring classes of all nationalities, but particularly of Sikhs."<sup>75</sup> Singh's brother also testified regarding the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society's communication with Kakan Singh. In the span of a few days, the Bureau of Immigration had to navigate how they gave weight to one, both, or neither of these stories.

Responses to Kakan Singh's narratives revealed a Bureau of Immigration without a mechanism to exclude Singh before he could mount an adequate argument for admission. The Commissioner of Immigration at San Francisco wrote to the Commissioner General of Immigration in Washington, D.C. five days after Kakan Singh's lawyers submitted their documents to the Bureau of Immigration. The letter notes these two conflicting narratives, and that the "showing on the part of the alien is exceedingly strong. It inherently seems to remove him from the class of persons likely to become a public charge." The letter then argues that Singh's employment as a religious teacher came to fruition after his arrival and that if his job failed, for whatever reason, then he would become a public charge. The Commissioner General

72. Brief on Behalf of Alien, DoL, Immigration Bureau, A-files, 12830 6-9, NARA SF.

73. Affidavit of Fred A. Copesteke, DoL, Immigration Bureau, August 15, 1913, A-files, 12830 6-9, NARA SF.

74. Affidavit of the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society, DoL, Immigration Bureau, August 3, 1913, A-files, 12830 6-9, NARA SF.

75. Affidavit of Tara Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, August 13, 1913, A-files, 12830 6-9, NARA SF.

did not respond. Lawyers pressed for Singh's release on bond one month later, and one month after that the Commissioner General replied to land Singh.

The Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society likely used the strategy before, and used it at least three more times afterward: once in 1913 and twice in 1914.<sup>76</sup> These landings did not contain the same documentation that established the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society's existence, but did have affidavits from the secretary of the society supporting each landing. By 1914, the Bureau of Immigration received notification that "the society by which" each migrant "has been employed as a preacher 'is actively engaged in furnishing funds for Hindus to come to the United States in order that they may be educated and return to India for the purpose of engaging in revolutionary movement against the British Government.'"<sup>77</sup> Though the British government argued that the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society was a front for fomenting revolution, the Bureau of Immigration encountered the organization as religious—which gave the society a legal pathway to bring Sikh migrants through colonized space into the American West.

## CONCLUSION

Shumunda Singh's encounter with the polygamy clause in federal immigration law in 1913 reflects a history of entanglements. The Bureau of Immigration used the cultural assemblages that American imperialists crafted about race, religion, and polygamy within their encounters with Mormon, Muslim, and Sikh migrants at the border. Their concerns echoed the "closing" of the frontier when Americans created national borders around the American West for the first time. It was in relation to trans-pacific empires that Americans elided Mormon, Chinese, Indian, and Muslim migrants as polygamous religionists and polygamous races—an act of religion-making. But expansionist endeavors left imperial pathways back to the American West. Religious institutions facilitated migrant movement along these pathways, sometimes under religious protections in immigration law. When they faced the polygamy question at American ports, migrants

76. See files: Inder Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, A-files, 12924 4–6, NARA SF; Inder Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, A-files, 12973 14–1, NARA SF; and Hakem Singh, DoL, Immigration Bureau, A-files, 13233 3–7, NARA SF.

77. Letter to the Secretary of State from "Acting Secretary," DoL, Immigration Bureau, February 12, 1914, A-files, 12973 14–1, NARA SF.

faced the same cultural assemblages that Americans constructed along the paths they traveled and they, too, made religion. But those differences manifested in different geographical ports with different religious migrants. In Boston, Mormons largely passed as monogamous, white, and civilized, whereas in San Francisco Muslims and Sikhs found polygamy and religion as a racializing mechanisms that scripted them into undesirable migrants. Future scholarship, perhaps incorporating Mormons across the Pacific and Muslims through the Atlantic, might expand the geographies through which the polygamy question and religious migrants flowed.

---

JEFFREY J. TURNER is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Utah.

#### NOTE

Thank you to Ruth Chan at the National Archives in San Francisco for your charity, brilliance, and hard work dealing with an embryonic project, finding numerous sources, and communicating clearly and kindly. And thank you to Bill Creech at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., for your lively conversation, deep knowledge of RG 85, and for your source suggestions.