
Reporter's Quick Guide to the Sikh Community

Sikhism Overview

- Sikhism (also called Sikhi) is a monotheistic religion that originated out of the Punjab region of South Asia over 500 years ago. The Punjab region includes areas of eastern Pakistan and northern India.
- Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world with over 25 million followers worldwide.
- Sikhs believe in the equality of all humankind. Sikhism rejects discrimination based on caste, faith and gender.
- Three core practices of Sikhism are 1) meditation on God; 2) earning an honest living; and 3) sharing with others.
- Sikhs hold as sacred the spiritual teachings of ten successive Sikh gurus, starting with Guru Nanak in the 15th century. After the death of the tenth guru, the Sikh scripture called the Guru Granth Sahib became the central spiritual guide for Sikhs.
- Observant Sikhs keep five articles of faith with them, which bind Sikhs together and remind them of their religious commitments. These articles are known as the "5 K's" in English (because they each start with the letter "k"),

Sikh American Community Overview

- An estimated 500,000 Sikhs live in the United States and the community has been an integral part of the American fabric for over 125 years.
- We estimate that approximately 50% of Sikhs live in California, but that the largest urban population lives in the greater Tri-State (NYC) area.
- In the gurdwara, the Sikh house of worship, participants regularly recite and sing prayers from the Guru Granth Sahib, the central sacred Sikh scripture, and vegetarian food is regularly served for free. People of all faiths and backgrounds are welcomed to attend sessions and partake in the meals in any gurdwara. We estimate that there are approximately 120 gurdwaras in the United States.
- Sikhs helped build the U.S. railroads and were some of the first to migrate to the West Coast, becoming an invaluable part of the American farming community in California. Today, Sikh Americans are doctors, farmers, truck drivers, engineers, etc. Sikhs are your neighbors, colleagues, and classmates across the United States.

Profiling and Discrimination Overview

- Sikhs have been targeted since they came to the United States over a century ago. For example, in the early 1900s in Bellingham, Washington, lumberjacks attacked hundreds of Sikh mill workers in their homes, beating them, stealing their valuables, and forcing them out of the city (Bellingham Riots).
- Though Sikhs have seen discrimination, harassment and violence leveled against them ever since they have lived in the United States, the community has seen a steady upticks in incidents since September 11, 2001.

- The first deadly hate crime in America post 9/11 occurred against a Sikh American gas station owner in Mesa, Arizona. On September 15, 2001 the gunman told friends that he was going to go out and shoot some “towel heads” and proceeded to murder Balbir Singh Sodhi at his gas station.
- On August 5, 2012 a white supremacist with Neo-Nazi ties, walked into a Sikh gurdwara (house of worship) in Oak Creek, Wisconsin and murdered six while wounding several others. At the time, it was the most violent attack on an American house of worship since the 1963 Baptist Church bombing.
- Only since 2015 has the FBI started tracking hate crimes specifically against the Sikh community. This came in response to the Sikh Coalition’s advocacy in the wake of Oak Creek. For this reason, there is no comprehensive data set on how many hate crimes have occurred against Sikhs. However, in a Sikh Coalition 2008 report, we calculated that “Sikhs may be thousands of times more likely than their fellow Americans to suffer a hate crime.”
- We estimate that a Sikh American is thousands of times more likely to be the victim of a hate crime than your average American.