



THE
SIKHCOALITION

**UNVEILING
BHAGAT SINGH THIND'S
JOURNEY**

Grade Level(s): 11

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: (1, 4, 5)

- Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)
- Critique empire building in history and its relationship to white supremacy, racism, and other forms of power and oppression such as, but not limited to, patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, exploitative economic systems, ableism, ageism, anthropocentrism, xenophobia, misogyny, antisemitism, antiBlackness, anti-Indigeneity, Islamophobia, and transphobia
- Challenge racist, bigoted, discriminatory, and imperialist/colonial beliefs and practices on multiple levels

Standards Alignment:

[HSS-11.5.2](#) United States History and Geography: Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century, Grade 11

Overarching Standard: HSS-11.5 Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s.

Standard: Analyze the international and domestic events, interests, and philosophies that prompted attacks on civil liberties, including the Palmer Raids, Marcus Garvey's "back-to-Africa" movement, the Ku Klux Klan, and immigration quotas and the responses of organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Anti-Defamation League to those attacks.

Lesson Purpose and Overview:

- Students will explore the Supreme Court Case, [United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind](#) in the context of attacks on civil liberties and immigration policies in the early 20th century.
- This will give them an opportunity to understand the relationship between immigration quotas, racial restrictions on naturalization, and the broader social and political climate of the time.
- The case, linked to citizenship, will illustrate wider issues of xenophobia, white supremacy, racism and colonialism.
- It will also enable a deeply nuanced examination of racial identity, and will open up discussions about who determines these definitions, and the systemic, structural and institutionalized racism that seeks to preserve discriminatory and exclusionary immigration policies

Key Terms and Concepts:

- **Sikh** - An adherent of Sikhi or Sikhism, a religion originating in 15th century South Asia which is now the fifth largest organized world religion.
- **Hindu** - In modern usage, an adherent of Hinduism. The term was incorrectly used in the 1920s, however, as an overarching label to refer to anyone of South Asian descent.
- **Punjab** - A state in South Asia, divided between India and Pakistan since 1947. The Sikh religion was founded in the Punjab, and the remainder of the Punjab in Northern India is still home to many Sikhs.
- **Punjabi** - The language spoken in the Punjab. Also refers to a person from the Punjab or the culture of the Punjab.
- **South Asian** - Someone from South Asia. The majority religions in this region are Hindu, Sikh and Muslim.
- **Caste** - A social construct of class in India, which Sikh teachings of equality sought to abolish.
- **Brahmin** - A high-caste Hindu.
- **Caucasian** - A term (now criticized) for its use in the United States to refer to someone who is white or of European ancestry.
- **Aryan** - A term at the center of the controversial Indo-European language theory, which contended that diverse languages (including Punjabi and English) all have a common place of origin. Theories about who lived in that place inspired a racist ideology alleging that the original speakers of the language were a white supreme race that colonized Europe and Asia thousands of years ago. The name Aryan went beyond its original linguistic confines, and many Europeans claimed the Aryan conquerors were light-skinned people who spread their language and culture through large parts of Europe and South Asia, including India. This was one of the origins of white supremacy (see definition below).
- **Discrimination** - The unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on certain characteristics.
- **Exclusion** - The act of leaving someone or something out.
- **Xenophobia** - From the Greek xenos (foreign) and phobos (fear), an irrational or intense fear or hatred of 'foreign' individuals or groups.
- **Racism** - Discrimination or exclusion based on race.
- **White supremacy** - An ideology in which the ideas, lives, values, desires and actions of white people are deemed as more valuable, better normal and good (than non-white people). (From the Center for Urban and Racial Equity).
- **Colonialism** - The takeover of territory, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labor, and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation.

Lesson Objectives:

- 1) I will be able to understand what happened in *United States v Bhagat Singh Thind*
- 2) I will be able to understand how and why Bhagat Singh Thind's legal arguments were constructed and constrained by the discrimination, xenophobia, and colonialist principles of his time
- 3) I will be able to understand the consequences and significance of the *United States v Bhagat Singh Thind* ruling
- 4) I will be able to understand how Bhagat Singh Thind's immigration story relates to that of other contemporary Asian Americans

Essential Questions:

- 1) Who is an American?
- 2) Who gets to decide who an American is?
- 3) How is race linked to citizenship?
- 4) How are definitions of race linked to colonialist principles?
- 5) How and why do racist and colonialist power structures pit marginalized groups against one another?
- 6) What are the human stories behind citizenship stripping?

Lesson Steps/Activities:

- Introduce Bhagat Singh Thind in slide #2
- Community Builder / Cultural Energizer in slide #4
- Go through slides #5+6, explain the immigration acts on both slides, then ask questions labeled in red with the entire class through a group discussion
- Discuss how the naturalization act of 1906 was an amended version of the naturalization act of 1790. Use questions labeled in red by grouping students and writing thoughts to share out with the class in slide #7
- Watch videos summarizing the Ozawa and Thind case in slide #8 (hyperlinked at the bottom of the lesson plan under materials section) and discuss the questions that were arising of their cases on slide #9
- Go through outcome of Bhagat Singh Thind's case on slide #10
- Go through activity slides #11-12 → handout for quotation bank hyperlinked below.
- Discuss new immigration policies that were put into place following Bhagat Singh Thind's ruling on slide #13, and the consequences that followed right after on slide #14 for broader South Asian communities
- ***GIVE TRIGGER WARNING FOR SUICIDE*** → Read through excerpt left by Vaishno Das Bagai, and how immigrants were left questioning their identity on slide #15
- Discuss and explain how long the consequences lasted on slide #16
- Activity slide #17 → give students a few minutes to note down thoughts
- Conclusive dialogue (student and community reflection) via slides 18+19

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection (can be adapted depending on time or used as extension activities):

- **Slides 11+12**

Students to reflect on lesson knowledge and apply it to wider concepts of colonialism, xenophobia, white supremacy and racism.

Students can be assessed on their application of knowledge to these concepts and the presentation of their reasonings accordingly.

- **Slide 17**

1. Students to reflect on the lesson knowledge and apply it creatively to consider questions they might pose to Bhagat Singh Thind.
2. Students to reflect on the lesson knowledge and apply it summatively and critically in their choice of article title and written summaries of the case and its impact.
3. Articles can also be presented in plenary and oral presentations assessed if time permits.

Students can be assessed on their responses and written articles.

- **Slides 18+19**

Students have the opportunity to write their own reflections as homework / extension activity based on the prompting questions on the slides (focussing on reflection and action).

Students can be assessed accordingly.

Materials and Resources:

- [Lesson PPT on Bhagat Singh Thind](#): **Primary source for the lesson plan.**
 - *Note - additional scripting for teachers when delivering the lesson, and further knowledge for students in the speaker notes. Referencing of sources is also included.*
- YouTube links (in slide #8 of Lesson plan PPT):
 1. [United States vs Ozawa](#) → video link for slide #8 of Lesson Plan PPT
 2. [United States vs Thind](#) → video link for slide #8 of Lesson Plan PPT
- [United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind](#) → case link
- Handout quotation bank to go with activity on slide #11 of Lesson Plan PPT → [here](#)

Ethnic Studies Outcomes:

- (1) Pursuit of justice and equity
- (2) Working toward greater inclusivity
- (4) Developing a better understanding of others
- (5) Recognizing intersectionality
- (6) Promoting self-empowerment for civic engagement
- (7) Supporting a community focus
- (8) Developing interpersonal communication

Quotation bank for Activity

- **The construction of a vast number of people as inferior, or ‘other’, was crucial for constructing a European ‘self’ and justifying colonialist practices.**
Colonialism/Postcolonialism by Ania Loomba.
- **Racial, ethnic, tribal, and caste groupings are social constructions that have served to both oppress people and radicalize them. Colonial regimes manipulated as well as created such identities.** *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* by Ania Loomba.
- **Every colonized people--in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality--finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.** *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon.
- **African Americans, Native Americans, and Asians dominated the lowest rungs of America’s racial hierarchy, with southern and eastern Europeans right above them. They were white, but not white enough.** *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* by Erika Lee.
- **Xenophobia has become an institutionalized form of racial discrimination and racial domination.** *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* by Erika Lee.
- **Race is the single most important factor in determining which foreigners are targeted for xenophobic discrimination and which ones are not.** *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* by Erika Lee.
- **Racism identifies certain groups as good and superior to others. In the early 20th century, it was considered a matter of biology. Today, we often talk about it as being a matter of “culture.” There are “good immigrants” and there are “bad immigrants” who are a threat to “us.” The dividing line between “good” and “bad” has been marked by religion, national origin, class, gender, and sexual orientation. But especially race.** *The Long History of Xenophobia in America* by Taylor McNeil (interview with Erika Lee).
- **This relationship between xenophobia is a legacy of the racism that justified slavery and settler colonialism. In fact, early immigrants were always judged in relationship to their place on that spectrum of whiteness and blackness.** *The Long History of Xenophobia in America* by Taylor McNeil (interview with Erika Lee).