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# Historical Constructions of Ethnicity: Research on Punjabi Immigrants in California

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IMMIGRANTS FROM the Punjab province of India came to California at the turn of the twentieth century and settled in the state's major agricultural valleys. About five hundred of these men married Mexican and Mexican-American women, creating a Punjabi Mexican second generation which thought of itself as "Hindu" (the name given to immigrants from India in earlier decades). This biethnic community poses interesting questions about the construction and transformation of ethnic identity, and the interpretations of outsiders contrast with those of the pioneers and their descendants. These interpretations direct attention to the historical contingency of ethnic identity and to the many voices which participate in its definition.

## **Punjabi Immigrants and the Punjabi-Mexican Families**

The community of immigrants from South Asia has changed dramatically over time. Table 1 shows the small numbers of Asian Indians and their concentration in rural California in the first half of the twentieth century. While the figures do not indicate place of origin in South Asia, the overwhelming majority of the pre-1946 immigrants were men from the Punjab in northwestern India.<sup>1</sup> This table also shows the effect of later changes in citizenship and immigration laws: a large increase in numbers, diffusion throughout the United States, and a shift to urban centers. In 1946, the Luce-Celler Bill made Asian Indians eligible for citizenship, and the oldtimers were allowed to sponsor a small number of new immigrants (the 1924 National Origins Act, applicable once Indians could become citizens, established an annual quota of 100 for India). In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act opened up immigration to all Asians, and Asian Indians responded dramatically. Since 1965, the South Asian immigrant population has become very diverse, representing the subcontinent's many distinctive regional cultures.

Table 2 and Exhibit 1 (the map of California counties) show the

TABLE 1  
Asian Indians in the U.S., 1910–1980

	No. in U.S.	No. in Calif.	% in Calif.	No. in Calif. rural areas*	% in Calif. rural areas*
1910	2,544	1,948	77	1,875	96.25
1920	2,544	1,723	69	1,648	95.65
1930	3,130	1,873	59	1,751	93.49
1940	2,405	1,476	60	1,387	93.97
1950	2,398	815	34	566	69.45
1960	8,746	1,586	17	864	44.48
1970	13,149	1,585	16	1,039	65.55
1980	387,223	57,901	15	3,454	6.00

Source: H. Brett Melendy, *Asians in America* (New York, 1981), Tables VII, VIII, IX; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population 1980*, IB, General Population Statistics, PC80-10B6 California, 160–170.

\*The rural area figures were derived by subtracting the California city figures from the totals. All city figures include Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Stockton. In 1950, Oakland is included as part of metropolitan San Francisco; in 1960, Oakland and Long Beach are included as part of metropolitan San Francisco and Los Angeles; in 1970, Census inadequacies do not permit comparable figures for the metropolitan areas, thus the apparent decline in urbanization. The 1980 figure includes the standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSAs) of Anaheim, Garden Grove, Santa Ana; Fresno; Los Angeles, Long Beach; Modesto; Oxnard, Simi Valley, Ventura; Riverside, San Bernardino, Ontario; Sacramento; San Diego, San Francisco, Oakland; San Jose; Stockton; Vallejo, Napa Valley; and Yuba City. In 1980, Asian Indians were not tabulated in SMSAs where their numbers fell below 400.

settlement areas and the patterns of family life for the early Punjabi immigrants. Most were married men in India—the age at marriage for Punjabi men in the early twentieth century ranged between thirteen and eighteen—but only a handful had brought their wives to the United States before the immigration laws prevented this.<sup>2</sup> Many of the men who remained in the United States remarried and their choice of wives was strongly affected by the anti-miscegenation laws in effect at the time.<sup>3</sup> Asian Indians were technically Caucasians, but they were not generally regarded as “white,” and this meant that they were prohibited from marrying “white” women. As Table 2 shows, most of the women they married were Hispanic, particularly in the southern counties where the flow of Mexican immigrants across the border increased after 1910, driven by the disruptions of the Mexican Revolution. Marriages between Punjabis and Hispanics began in 1916, and on the marriage licenses, the blank for “race” was most often filled in for both bride and

**TABLE 2**  
**Spouses of Asian Indians in California, 1913–1949**

Counties	Race/Ethnicity of Spouses											
	Hispanic*		Anglo		Black		Asian Indian		Native American		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yuba Sutter Sacramento San Joaquin	45	50.6	25	28.1	9	10.1	8	9.0	2	2.3	89	23.6
Fresno Tulare Kings	38	76.0	11	22.0	0	0	1	2.0	0	0	50	13.2
Imperial Los Angeles San Diego	221	92.5	12	5.0	6	2.5	0	0	0	0	239	63.2
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.5</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>100</b>

Sources: Karen Leonard, family reconstitution from county records (vital statistics, civil and criminal records) and interviews.

\*These wives were Mexican, Mexican American, and (only three) Puerto Rican.

groom with “brown,” although the entries varied according to the county clerk’s perception of the applicants.<sup>4</sup>

The chief characteristics of the biethnic community can be noted briefly; a detailed analysis of these Punjabi Mexican marriages and the families they produced appears elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> A majority of the men were uneducated peasants from farming castes in the Punjab; many had served in the British Indian military or police services, often overseas in China’s port cities. Most were Sikhs, adherents of a sect developed in the Punjab from both Muslim and Hindu roots in the fifteenth century, but some were Muslims or Hindus. Most came from three densely populated Punjabi districts (Jullunder, Hoshiarpur, and Ludhiana), and many were from the same villages. Blood ties between them were less frequent, since most families in the Punjab sent only one or two men at a time to work overseas. In the United States, relationships formed as shipmates, as fellow passengers on the long voyage to the west coast, also proved

**EXHIBIT 1**  
**California Counties and Major Agricultural Valleys of Punjabi Settlement**



important bases of the partnerships and crews formed for agricultural work.

The women the Punjabis married were predominantly Spanish-speaking Catholics, about half of them Mexican American and half immigrants from Mexico. The early marriages characteristically involved sets of sisters, or a mother and daughters, and several Punjabi partners. Punjabi attempts to marry white women were actively resisted by Anglo society, and Mexican men sometimes retaliated against the biethnic couples.<sup>6</sup> But the numbers of such biethnic couples grew steadily, and children were born whom outsiders called “Mexican-Hindus,” “Mexidus,” or “half and halves.” The families were large, and the birth of children drew the Punjabi men into new relationships with each other as godparents to each others’ children in the *compadrazgo* system associated with the Catholic church. The men participated in this, although none converted to Catholicism (three who allegedly did so “also remained Sikh”).<sup>7</sup> The marriages were not conflict-free, and the frequent occurrence of divorces and remarriages (in the Imperial Valley especially) involved the Punjabi men and Hispanic women in complex relationships through stepchildren and ex-spouses.

It was the men who represented the families to outsiders, and it was the stereotyping of them as “Hindus” (and later as “old Hindus”) that determined the community’s image in rural California. Although the different backgrounds of the wives of the Punjabi immigrants meant that the community varied by region in California—for example, English was spoken at family gatherings in the north rather than Spanish—generally the men’s networks dominated community life. The Punjabi farmers formed strong links with local lawyers and bankers, particularly after the 1923 United States Supreme Court decision which denied them access to United States citizenship. This decision was based upon the “fact” that although Asian Indians were Caucasian, they were not “white” in the popular meaning of the word.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, this meant that the Punjabis were affected by California’s Alien Land Laws that prohibited the leasing and ownership of agricultural land by “aliens ineligible to citizenship.” (Originally these laws were aimed at the Japanese farmers in California who were doing very well.) After that 1923 decision, the Punjabis were forced to rely upon Anglo lawyers, bankers, neighbors, and friends to lease and hold land for them.<sup>9</sup>

Within the biethnic families, the domestic culture was more strongly Mexican than Punjabi. The children’s names reflected their biethnic heritage—Jose Akbar Khan, Juanita Singh, Manuela Chand, Roberto



Singh—but the home language was usually Spanish and the children were raised as Catholics. Some families spoke English at home, but very few wives and children learned Punjabi. The men used Punjabi with each other, in Punjabi-bossed field crews and in meetings. The men met daily for work breaks in their rural towns, and they met more formally at political meetings to rally against British rule in India or for United States citizenship. The Sikhs had founded a temple at Stockton in northern California in 1917, and this was the central institution for Punjabis throughout California for many decades; annual meetings not only served religious purposes but also political and social ones.<sup>10</sup> (In the late 1940s, the Sikhs in the Imperial Valley established a temple in El Centro, buying a Japanese Buddhist church after the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II and the non-return of many of them to the valley afterward.)

The Punjabi Mexican families played prominent roles in the Punjabi immigrant community. Punjabi urban men, many of whom had arrived as students or professional men and married Anglo women, outranked the rural men with Mexican wives, according to some views, but the model for family life in rural California was the Punjabi Mexican family. Punjabi men who were bachelors in the United States visited the family men and gave gifts to their children; they were commonly called “Uncle” by many fictive nieces and nephews. The wives cooked chicken curry, *roti* (bread), and other Punjabi dishes, and dinner guests were frequent. The families routinely visited the Stockton temple and took part in its activities. As the Punjabi-Mexican daughters came of age, some agreed to marry older Punjabis, reinforcing the orientation towards the men and their networks.<sup>11</sup>

Given the legal prohibitions on immigration from India and the constraints on marriage choices, California’s Punjabi Mexican community developed “naturally” in those early decades. Later on, when the immigration laws were liberalized (slightly in 1946 and dramatically in 1965), new immigrants from India and Pakistan arrived. While table 1 reveals their numbers, it does not show two significant facts about the newcomers. First, they came as families, that is, married couples with children; second, several thousand of them were new Punjabi villagers who settled in rural California, particularly in the Yuba City area. With these developments, the Punjabi Mexican families became “unnatural” and controversial, their identities challenged by the newcomers from South Asia and in particular by the villagers from the Punjab.

### Review of the Research on Punjabi Immigrants, 1923–1988

The Punjabis and the Punjabi Mexican community have attracted scholarly attention since the early 1920s, and these “outsiders” have written in interesting ways about the Punjabis as an ethnic group. Earlier scholars who did field research on the Punjabi immigrant experience in California were strongly influenced by their own backgrounds and historical contexts. Working with an implicit model of “American society,” that of the dominant Anglo culture, most measured the Punjabis against that Anglo-centric model to draw varying conclusions about their cultural adaptation.

The earliest “outsiders” who observed the Punjabis in California first hand were Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Rajani Kanta Das, and William Smith. Mukerji, a non-Punjabi, was one of many students from India who earned summer money by working short stints with “Hindu crews” in California. He has a chapter entitled “In California Fields” in his book. His social distance from the other Indian workers is evident: “What used to disgust me so with these men was their love of work. They worked longer hours than any other laborer would dream of working,” he said, and he sympathized with American union laborers for wanting to exclude the Punjabis! He rather impressionistically described the Punjabi men as working too hard to be able either to preserve Indian cultural values or adapt themselves constructively to their new environment.<sup>12</sup>

Another non-Punjabi Indian observer was Rajani Kanta Das, who had a Ph.D. in Economics and taught at New York University. He carried out a special study for the United States Department of Labor on the Hindustani workers on the west coast. Das’s book, like Mukerji’s, was published in 1923, but Das formed a very positive opinion of his informants’ ability to adapt themselves to American society.<sup>13</sup> He found that prejudice and discrimination precluded much meaningful social intercourse between the Punjabis and others, but that “a large number of the Hindustanees have, however, changed their customs.” He saw no serious obstacles to their assimilation, which he defined as cultural adaptability, or to their amalgamation, which he defined as physiological unification, with other Caucasians.<sup>14</sup>

The third early observer, William Smith, worked as an interviewer for a “Race Relations Survey” undertaken in the early 1920s. Smith had visited India himself and clearly liked the men he was interviewing. While he left no systematic analysis, a few of his “life histories” contain lengthy, lively quotes from Punjabi immigrants, and he commented mat-



ter of factly on the marriages with Mexican women, which were increasing rapidly as he did his research.<sup>15</sup>

The next set of close observers, Allan Miller, Yusuf Dadabhay, and Harold Jacoby, worked in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Their interest was probably stimulated by the Luce-Celler Bill of 1946, that allowed for naturalization to citizenship and opened up Indian immigration slightly. All three of these investigators saw the Asian Indian immigrants as a declining, aging population, but they viewed the men and their "acculturation" quite differently.

Allan Miller's ethnographic study of the Yuba City/Marysville Sikhs was completed in the fall of 1947.<sup>16</sup> Miller lived at the Van Tiger Sikh Labor Camp near Yuba City for six weeks, that is, until his project was cut short by the Punjabis' suspicion that he was an agent for the Immigration and Naturalization Service. He felt that the predominantly bachelor farmworkers' "primary interest in life was to make money."<sup>17</sup> While not interested in "acculturation problems," Miller reported that few of the men had maintained strong ties with kin in India and that few were returning to India with their money. Miller's research was conducted just after the passage of the Luce-Celler Bill; yet his informants apparently did not speak of the opportunity it offered to bring their wives and children from India.

Dadabhay, who conducted his research in northern California in 1951 (San Jose, Mountain View, Sacramento, and Stockton), was primarily interested in cultural change and assimilation. His theory of "circuitous assimilation" proposed that the Punjabi men were assimilating into American society by way of a "sub-culture."<sup>18</sup> He thought that discrimination drove Asian Indians to participate in the Mexican-American sub-culture, which readily accepted them; the next step was intermarriage with Mexican Americans. According to Dadabhay, the Punjabis came into contact with Mexican culture through residential propinquity and through agricultural work "side by side." He also commented on the similar placement of Punjabis and Mexicans in the color hierarchy and the fact that both came from patriarchal family systems that subordinated wives and children. He saw intermarriage as evidence of mutual acceptance and stopped short of declaring it "the final test of assimilation"; yet he saw the Punjabis' assimilation into the dominant American culture as henceforward "bound up with the assimilation of Mexican-Americans." Furthermore, Dadabhay believed that the American educational system was orienting immigrant children successfully to the larger

society; he thought there were “no ethnic schools.”<sup>19</sup> (He was wrong—California schools were segregated by race and ethnicity then, and there were also segregated classrooms within schools.)

Harold Jacoby’s 1954–1955 research focused on the extent to which the Punjabis had become “a part of the American scheme of things.” Concentrating on Indian political leaders, he conducted interviews all over California and eventually obtained data on 451 men. In his view, the men were acculturating well in several areas (material culture, personal habits, to some extent in food and drink) and less well in others (language, religion, and “crime and delinquency”).<sup>20</sup> Even though his work occurred almost a decade after the passage of the Luce-Celler Bill, Jacoby found no large surge of immigrants from India. He thought there were few men with the resources to bring brides from India and few with wives and families in India to be brought over. Of his 451 men, 56 percent of them (251) had spouses in the United States, 77 Mexican Americans, 68 East Indians (he included the mixed-parentage children in this category), and 65 European Americans.<sup>21</sup> (His study included many urban non-Punjabi men, thus the high proportion of European-American wives). He thought that instead of amalgamation with Mexican Americans or European Americans, the Punjabis were heading toward “a stabilization of their biological separateness.” At the time of his work, some 15 to 20 American-born daughters of Punjabis were marrying older Punjabis, and he also found one third of the sons marrying others like themselves. He predicted that the trickle of new immigrants would add to the pool of half-Indian children and form an endogamous East Indian community.<sup>22</sup> (This prediction was upset by the dramatic increase in South Asian immigrants after 1965 and the failure of the new immigrants and the descendants to accept each other as kin.)

Several studies in the middle and late 1960s still found an aging, declining population of Punjabi pioneers, with the second generation increasingly overlooked by outside observers and analyzed as somehow separate or no longer “Hindu”; few members of this group were interviewed. Furthermore, religion and religious institutions loomed large on the research agenda. Scott Littleton conducted field work in 1959 and outlined four immigrant Punjabi communities in California, three Sikh-dominated and one Muslim-dominated: Marysville-Yuba City, the Central Valley from Stockton to Fresno, the Imperial Valley, and Sacramento.<sup>23</sup> While his investigation of status criteria for social stratification centered on first-generation immigrants, he did interview enough Punjabi

Mexican teenagers to opine that they were losing their ethnic and religious identification as Punjabis. Littleton was bothered by a “problem” with their religious identification—the children attended mass and then went along to the *gurdwara* (Sikh temple), but they “expressed no strong attitudes about religious matters.” Terming Sikhism and Roman Catholicism “two radically different religious systems,” Littleton felt that exposure to both had resulted in an apathetic attitude toward religion in general.<sup>24</sup> He concluded that since the first generation was dying out and the second and third ones were assimilating, the Punjabi communities were not “viable” unless new immigrants, both male and female, appeared (and he thought the likelihood of that rather remote).<sup>25</sup>

Lawrence Wenzel’s 1963–1965 published work on the Marysville/Yuba City community is largely descriptive.<sup>26</sup> To him, the most visible characteristic of the Punjabi immigrants was the establishment of Sikh religious institutions and practices in northern California at the time. The “religio-ethnic” Punjabi group he described was quite visible; yet Wenzel felt that membership in it was voluntary because he observed second-generation offspring participating in the dominant American culture and maintaining only nominal contact with the East Indians.<sup>27</sup> He concluded that acculturation was underway.<sup>28</sup>

In 1964, Ann Wood studied the Punjabi men’s organizational activities and focused on the Stockton temple in the pre-1947 period. She did not take an acculturation/assimilation approach but maintained that the Punjabis themselves pursued pluralist aims, promoting economic and political assimilation but maintaining social and religious separation and a strong group identity.<sup>29</sup> Wood did not investigate family life, and other than citing Jacoby’s figures for the ethnicity of spouses before 1947, reported only that “of the children from Mexican-East Indian marriages, not much can be said. . . . unless they are married to an Indian directly from India, one does not encounter them in the general run of community affairs.”<sup>30</sup>

Work on the Imperial Valley Punjabis in the 1960s gave a uniform impression of their decline. Leonard Greenwood’s 1966 *Los Angeles Times* story, “El Centro’s Community of Sikhs Dying Out,” reported that some men had been drawn away from their religion by non-Sikh wives and children, while others had merged with the Americans around them. The leaders of the El Centro Sikh temple told him that new immigrants were settling in the north and the Imperial Valley Sikh community was dying.



Robindra Chakravorti's 1967 study of the Sikhs of El Centro put it more academically: "the most crucial feature of the community was the rapidly declining influence of its ethnic subsystem." Both these observers confined themselves to the Sikhs affiliated with the El Centro temple,<sup>31</sup> thereby overlooking the expanding biethnic families. Chakravorti, however, interviewed some members of the second, chiefly Punjabi-Mexican generation. His tables, based on twenty-two interviews with members of each generation (first-generation men, second-generation men and women), illustrate the clear differences in language, naming patterns, religion, and other characteristics between these groups; he termed the second generation's "actual" identification with the Sikh subculture as "at best tenuous." Yet Chakravorti reported that members of the second generation preferred to identify themselves as Hindus. He interpreted their preference for an "identification with the Indian subculture from which they were divorced to identification with the Mexican subculture to which they were close" in light of sociological theory about marginality and status anxiety and hypothesized that members of the second generation were seeking a better status in the eyes of the majority community. Adhering closely to the sociological literature, Chakravorti concluded that the first generation had accommodated, the second had acculturated, and the third generation would be assimilated.<sup>32</sup>

As the flow of new immigrants from South Asia increased and the Yuba City population in particular grew dramatically, scholarly attention shifted from the old to the new immigrants.<sup>33</sup> Two studies, Bruce La Brack's in 1974–1975 of the Yuba City Sikhs and Salim Khan's in 1980–1981 of the Pakistanis in the American West, used both archival and interview materials and included sections on Punjabi Mexican families.<sup>34</sup>

However, others have used limited sources and as a result have come to incorrect or misleading conclusions. In 1972 a young Sikh student at Chico State University (just north of Yuba City) wrote that "the rules of endogamy and exogamy have been carefully adhered to among California Sikhs. In the entire community there are only about ten to twelve marriages involving a Punjabi and a non-East Indian."<sup>35</sup> In 1986, another scholar wrote that the Sikh pioneers were "unable to produce a second generation of American citizens" and that the "Sikh-Mexican" children were "lost to the Sikh community as potential harbingers of assimilation."<sup>36</sup> While one sees the perspectives from which such statements can be made, they ignore or contradict what the Punjabi pioneers and members

of the second generation themselves have said about their lives and their ethnic identity. Recent scholarship on Asian Indians and Pakistanis in the United States is even further from acknowledging or examining the experiences of the early Punjabi immigrants and their families.<sup>37</sup>

### Self Concepts of Ethnic Identity

It is difficult to reconstruct fully self-images in the past from oral evidence collected only over the last ten years;<sup>38</sup> yet it is clear that members of the biethnic families saw themselves as working with elements of three different ethnic identities. They were not just biethnic, they were triethnic: Hindu, Mexican, and American. In early childhood, members of the second generation seemed comfortable with their mothers' Mexican culture. The children were socialized into a Spanish-speaking, Catholic community by virtue of their assignment to predominantly "Mexican" schools; Mexican Americans were their schoolmates and Mexican-American culture was familiar to them. Yet the Punjabi Mexican children and their mothers were not really part of the larger Mexican-American communities around them.<sup>39</sup>

Thus as they grew older, most members of the second generation moved towards a "Hindu" self-identity. This movement was the result of several factors, including not only prejudice against Mexican Americans by members of the dominant group, but also because of the prejudice directed against them by Mexican Americans. Although there were tensions between fathers and their children,<sup>40</sup> "being Hindu" had many positive components for the wives and children of the Punjabis. "Being Hindu" meant being a good farmer, working hard to lease and buy agricultural land; it meant taking pride in the men's political battles for India's freedom and American citizenship. The Punjabi men were honest, tenacious, and fiercely loyal to each other, and those who stayed in the sometimes stormy marriages were strong fathers who transmitted their values of hard work, pride, and independence to their children. "Being Hindu" meant eating chicken curry and *roti* (bread), lemon pickles and Punjabi vegetables, and having a reverence for the "holy book," whether the Granth Sahib of the Sikhs or the Quran of the Muslims. It meant a social life based on the men's activities, going to the "Hindu store" downtown, to wrestling matches, and to the Stockton temple. And "being Hindu" had meant opening one's home to other South Asians, Punjabi bachelor uncles and others, providing Hindu food and hospitality.

Added to the Hindu component of identity was the American compo-



ment, emphasized as the Punjabi Mexican families defended themselves against the “new Hindus” by claiming to be both Hindu and American. This component had been present from the beginning within the marriages. In the early decades, the women saw themselves as marrying foreigners, men more different from Americans than they themselves were, and some spoke of “Americanizing” their husbands. The men saw themselves as permanently cut off from the Punjab and their relatives. Many explicitly discouraged their wives and children from learning about India or speaking the Punjabi language, clearly viewing themselves, and certainly their children, as Americans.<sup>41</sup>

Many Punjabis spoke approvingly of the greater equality and education of women in America compared to India. Two of the “reforms” they made in the Stockton temple practices reflected their changing views: they abolished segregated seating by sex and instituted chairs so that women (and others) would not have to sit on the floor. Many became advocates of love marriages instead of arranged marriages, and they recognized divorce as an American phenomenon related to the importance of love in marriage. One farmer, a man who had left a Punjabi wife behind and married three Mexican women in succession in California, said:

You can't force love here, women go where they want to, even if they're married, even with three or four kids. In India, you could only get a divorce after India got freedom. Here, women go away, here it's different. The woman is the boss in this country. A woman can have four husbands, a man can have two or three women. What you gonna do, that's the way with love. . . . Yes, I knew about divorce. In this country, I no sleep. Everybody was divorced, I could see what they were doing. It's only normal, you see the customs of the country, and so you have to do that.<sup>42</sup>

There is also evidence that men and women alike regarded marriages made in the United States as superseding all previous marriages, and one termed the civil marriage in California an “American marriage,” implying a commitment to a new nation as well as to a new partner.<sup>43</sup>

The commitment to the new nation was reflected in the Punjabi men's efforts to gain United States citizenship. Many had applied for citizenship and fifty-nine became citizens before the 1923 Supreme Court decision denied them that privilege; they then lobbied actively for two decades to regain it. When citizenship was extended to them in 1946,

hundreds of aging Punjabi men became citizens, and Dalip Singh Saund was elected a United States congressman in 1956 from the Imperial Valley.<sup>44</sup> Some of the men went back to India or Pakistan immediately after 1946 for visits or with an eye to retiring there, but most remained in California insisting on their identity as Americans.

Members of the second generation, American citizens by birth, took pride in an ethnic identity as "Hindus" in rural California until new immigrants from South Asia challenged their claim to that identity. Their "Hindu" identity, developed over time in the United States, necessarily differed sharply from that being constructed by the more recent newcomers from South Asia.<sup>45</sup> By example and comment, the newcomers made the Punjabi Mexican descendants feel their lack of experiential knowledge of Punjabi culture as it existed in India and Pakistan. When new immigrants were few in number, they appreciated the hospitality of the Punjabi Mexican families, but as their numbers grew, particularly in the Yuba City region, they no longer needed the "not really Indian" families. Members of the second generation who had grown up visiting the Stockton temple and helped establish a new Sikh temple in Yuba City when new immigrants first began settling there no longer felt welcome at the temples. Attempts by self-identified "Hindus" to greet recently-arrived South Asians sometimes were greeted with confusion and rejection. One second-generation "Hindu" offered to show South Asian newcomers around Disneyland but gave his obviously Muslim name and was rebuffed. In another instance in a local grocery store, a newcomer who was approached did not respond because "he looked Mexican to me."<sup>46</sup>

Relations between the descendants of the early immigrants and the new immigrants became strained. More consequential encounters between newcomers and members of the second generation involved inheritance cases. Some of the oldtimers died and left money or land to Indian relatives; in other cases, Indian relatives tried to claim part or all of the inheritance left to Punjabi Mexican family members. After 1946, many of the old men had sponsored the immigration of nephews, sons, or grandsons, and these relatives posed the most immediate threat.<sup>47</sup>

And while the newcomers were critical of the Punjabi Mexican descendants, they in turn began to criticize the newcomers, emphasizing their slowness to "become Americans." Descendants stated that the chicken curry cooked by their mothers was as good or better than that prepared by the South Asian immigrant women. They also advised the newcomers to wear skirts and dresses. In places where the newcomers

outnumbered the longer-established families, the strain was most severe. The quote below, written in response to a series of newspaper stories featuring the new immigrants in the Yuba City region, illustrates this.

I also wanted to let you know that the first generation of Hindus that came here married Mexican women and there are a large amount of half-breed children born from the marriages. The East Indian of today would like to forget we exist, because they are ashamed that their people came to this country and found the Mexican women very compatible with them. . . .

Our fathers and mothers lived a very rich life. They raised us to be very proud, and gave us the best and the finest quality of life that one could ask for. . . .

Our fathers with the help of our mothers became well-to-do in our community and were well known for what good people they were. They could take a piece of ground, and turn it into a rich farmland. . . .

Our mothers allowed their husbands to bring their brothers, sisters and nephews in the 1950s and helped them to adjust to our way of life, and the cycle has repeated itself over and over and over. But the new breed did not keep the quality up.<sup>48</sup>

While the descendants of the pioneer Punjabis in the several regional contexts responded somewhat differently to the new immigrants' challenges chiefly because of demographic factors, everywhere they emphasized their identity as Americans, and as both Hindus and Americans.<sup>49</sup> Their self-perceptions changed over the life cycle, moving from an early identification with Mexican-American culture to one with "Hindu" culture and finally to an overriding one with American culture. Their experiences highlight the process of identity formation, the flexibility and relational nature of culture and ethnic identity, and the importance of context.

### **Interpretations of Ethnic Identity**

The current debate in anthropology about culture and the process of sociocultural change is highly relevant to historical constructions of ethnicity. Anthropologists have characteristically talked about cultures as more or less bounded units which could be located in time and space and sometimes ranked with respect to one another. These older notions are giving way to a recognition of the difficulty of defining and analyzing such units. Now, many anthropologists are looking at processes of transformation and transition affecting not "cultures" but "connected

social fields.”<sup>50</sup> Earlier, the Punjabi immigrants might have been analyzed as archetypal natives,<sup>51</sup> men drawn from their own place by capitalist needs for labor, experiencing social disorganization<sup>52</sup> in their new place. The problem of finding women legally eligible for marriage and of working around the Alien Land Law might have been seen as forcing them to accommodate, adapt, or assimilate to the dominant American culture.

Yet the Punjabi immigrants themselves and their descendants tend to talk about their history in terms of the choices they made over the decades. They do not deny or disguise the ways in which their “Hindu” identity brought discrimination, but they view their ethnic identity as a resource which they employed flexibly over the life cycle. Their changing conceptions of ethnic identity have served Punjabi Mexican Americans well, permitting cultural flexibility for both individuals and collectivities in what they clearly conceive of as a plural society.

Scholarly discussions of ethnic pluralism have tended to shift from an emphasis on culture to an emphasis on power in recent decades, and there has been a deprecation of the celebratory tone of much of the work on “ethnic persistence.”<sup>53</sup> Yet the voices of the Punjabi immigrants and their descendants testify to an underlying consensus that pluralism means equality and diversity rather than repression and delusion.<sup>54</sup> It is important to emphasize this, to forestall a possible alternative interpretation of the Punjabi Mexican experience which would continue to impose labels like “marginal” and “subcultural,” or their current equivalents, “borderland” and “periphery.”<sup>55</sup> Certainly most Punjabi Mexican Americans now stress the centrality of the American component in their history and experience.

The work of three American historians of ethnicity, John Higham, David Gerber, and Victor Greene, helps interpret the ways in which the early Punjabi immigrants and their descendants developed both Hindu and American identities. Higham relates the localization of power in the United States (in contrast to its centralization in Europe) to the observation that ethnic groups acted differently in different contexts in the United States,<sup>56</sup> thus underlining the flexibility of ethnicity and its contextualized development and expression. Gerber, rather than assuming the existence and continuity of ethnic groups from the homeland, delineates a process of “ethnicization,” the formation of ethnic groups; engagement in democratic party politics was important to this process in the case of the Irish and German immigrants in Buffalo, New York.<sup>57</sup>



Similarly, Greene shows immigrant groups moving from “ethnic naïveté” to conscious political mobilization. In his study, these were peasants from Poland and Lithuania who moved from attachment to village and province to political nationalism through intragroup conflict centered on the Catholic church.<sup>58</sup> Gerber and Greene studied European-American immigrants who participated directly in American urban politics, and the Catholic church played a major cultural and political role in their studies. In the Punjabi Mexican case, the Punjabi immigrants fought for political rights in both India and America but could not exercise them directly until the final decades of their lives (that is, after 1946); conflict among them centered more on these political battles and on the acquisition of land than on religious issues. (The Stockton Sikh temple in the early decades was a center of unity for Punjabi families and did not involve them in wider religious arenas.)

It was the Punjabi Mexican second generation who, building on the experiences of their fathers and mothers, developed and embraced a concept of “Hindu” ethnicity. They originally welcomed the post-1965 immigrants from South Asia, seeing themselves as both Hindu and American. However, the new South Asian immigrants saw them as representing neither India nor America. There was little congruence between the California-grown image of an India composed overwhelmingly of Punjabi-speaking farmers from villages and an India composed of urban professionals from a wide range of linguistic, religious, and caste backgrounds.

Ironically, it has been the new South Asian immigrants, particularly the Punjabi peasants among them, who pose the most serious challenge to the “Hindu” ethnic identity in California, and that is largely out of fear of “losing” their own “culture.” Even the pioneer Punjabis were confronted by challenges to their identities and by greatly-changed concepts of their homeland and together most of the pioneer men and their families moved to claim a stronger identity as Americans. There had been successful challenges when Punjabis claimed citizenship and American identity earlier, but by the late 1940s these claims were recognized, not only in federal law but in various local contexts. The men had reached accommodation, most importantly with respect to access to farmland, and their children were citizens by birth, participants in local events such as high school athletics, dances, and county fairs (albeit sometimes through an ethnic vehicle, such as the “Hindu Queen” of the Imperial County Midwinter Fair). The Punjabi men and their families



had secured a place in California's rural landscape as Hindus and as Americans. Probably they are among the growing proportion of the population claiming to be simply "American" or "white" or otherwise "distorting" the census by choosing among various ancestries.<sup>59</sup>

The early Punjabi pioneers and their non-Indian spouses have important things to say to scholars ready to impose identities on them, and to the post-1965 South Asian immigrants who have turned out to be "other" as well. For the pioneer families, changes have occurred in many domains once considered crucial to cultural and ethnic identity, particularly those of religion and language. Their experience dramatizes the changing content and form taken by ethnic identity as it crosses oceans, continents, and years. Avoiding the fallacy of viewing immigrants as inhabitants of "zero culture" transition zones, people without culture as they became adapted to a new place,<sup>60</sup> we see that immigrants are the creative producers of new identities,<sup>61</sup> important agents in the shaping of past, present, and future worlds. We need to recognize the historical contingency of ethnic identity and listen carefully to the many voices participating in its definition.

## NOTES

1. See Bruce La Brack, *The Sikhs of Northern California 1904–1975: A Socio-historical Study* (New York, 1988) and Joan Jensen, *Passage From India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven, 1988).

2. For the immigration practices and laws, see Harold Jacoby, "Administrative Restriction of Asian Indian Immigration into the United States, 1907–1917," *Population Review*, 25 (1982): 35–40.

3. California's anti-miscegenation laws were repealed in 1948, while those of the United States were repealed in 1967.

4. It was possible to get married in another state or at sea, where such laws did not apply or the county clerk was more permissive.

5. Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia, 1992).

6. In the Imperial Valley, some Mexican men shot at a Punjabi whom they blamed for marrying a Mexican woman. *Holtville Tribune*, 9, 10 March 1922. The Hispanic women who married Punjabis were often called names by Mexican men, and in one case two sisters were kidnapped and beaten by Mexican men who objected to their marriages. Interviews with Mary Garewal Gill, Holtville, 1982, and Janie Diwan Poonian, Yuba City, 1982.

7. Sometimes the Punjabi men were represented by an Hispanic name in the Church records, for example, Miguel Singh instead of Maghyar Singh. There are several instances of a Sikh being godfather to a Muslim's child and vice versa. Why these non-Catholics were accepted by the Church as godparents is not clear.

8. For the so-called Thind decision (Bhagat Singh Thind was the appellant), see Harold Jacoby, "More Thind Against Than Sinning," *The Pacific Historian*, 11:4 (1958): 1–2, 8.

9. See Karen Leonard, "Punjabi Farmers and California's Alien Land Law," *Agricultural History*, 59:4 (1985): 549–562, and "The Pahkar Singh Murders: a Punjabi Response to California's Alien Land Law," *Amerasia Journal*, 11:1 (1984): 75–87.

10. An annual meeting was held to commemorate Guru Gobind Singh's birthday, but many remembered it as "a reunion" or "the annual meeting." The women and children often saw movies and went for ice cream while the men met together.

11. The Punjabi-Mexican daughters' marriages with older Punjabis did not necessarily fare well as many ended in divorce. See Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, chap. eight.

12. Dhan Gopal Mukerji, *Caste and Outcast* (New York, 1923), pp. 269–282; quote, p. 270.

13. Rajani Kanta Das, *Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast* (Berlin, 1923), p. v. Das wanted to establish "that the life of the working classes is pervaded by the same spiritual and intellectual ideals which are found among the so-called upper classes," but was unable to accomplish this fully because of lack of time and the restricted scope of the Bureau of Labor Statistics investigation (p. vi). His systematic, detailed study had two purposes. First, "Although the Hindustanees in America are insignificant in number, they represent a great nation. The interpretation of their life to the American people is one of the objects of this study." Second, "India stands today on the threshold of a new epoch. . . . The Hindustanees on the Pacific Coast offered a splendid opportunity for the study of their latent faculties as compared with those of the other people and for the ascertainment of their ability to respond to the new social, political and economic conditions."

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 115–117.

15. William Smith interviews, "Survey of Race Relations," documents 232, 237, 273-A, 46. This sociological project published little of the material collected, which can be found at the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California.

16. Allan P. Miller, "An Ethnographic Report on the Sikh (East) Indians of Sacramento Valley" (unpublished manuscript, South/Southeast Asia Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1950). Miller was an undergraduate student of David Mandelbaum's at the University of California, Berkeley.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

18. Yusuf Dadabhay, "Circuitous Assimilation among Rural Hindustanis in California," *Social Forces*, 33 (1954): 138.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 141. Dadabhay interviewed fifty Hindustanis, and twenty-six of them were married in the United States, twenty-two of them to Mexicans. His conclusions seem to be based on similarities between members of the two groups and evidence of mutual contact. Had Dadabhay done his research in southern California, with more couples and an even higher proportion of Punjabi-Mexican marriages, and looked at the *compadrazgo* system too, his behavioral data would have been even stronger. Even in the south, and for the time period Dadabhay was considering, the Punjabi men clearly viewed Mexicans as a group as "other"; neither they nor their descendants saw participation in Mexican-American culture as a necessary way to become American. For California's Americanization efforts through the public educational system, see Gilbert G. Gonzalez, "The Americanization of Mexican Women and Their Families during the Era of De Jure School Segregation, 1900–1950," in *Social and Gender Boundaries in the United States*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Lewiston, Maine, 1989), pp. 55–79.

20. Harold Jacoby, *A Half-Century Appraisal of East Indians in the United States* (Stockton, Calif., University of the Pacific Faculty Research Lecture, May

23, 1956), saw the offending behavior as largely intramural, due to the all-male nature of the group and to the violence used to maintain secrecy as protection against immigration and land laws (p. 17).

21. Jacoby, *Half-Century Appraisal*, pp. 9–10, for the lack of new immigrants and the assessment of the men's resources and families in India; also from Jacoby, "East Indians in the United States," figures on marital status and region published in La Brack, *Sikhs of Northern California*, pp. 179–183. The origins of some spouses were not known.

22. Jacoby, *Half-Century Appraisal*, pp. 30–32. In fact, most members of the second generation married out. Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, chap. eight.

23. He estimated that the Marysville-Yuba City Punjabi community was the largest but the one in the Imperial Valley was the wealthiest, and he thought that well over 70 percent of the California Punjabis were land-owners in 1959. C. Scott Littleton, "Some Aspects of Social Stratification among the Immigrant Punjabi Communities of California," in *Culture Change and Stability*, ed. Ralph L. Beals (Los Angeles, 1964), p. 109.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–14. Littleton's attention to religious differences is also evident in his terming the Punjabi concentrations in California "Sikh" and "Muslim."

25. *Ibid.*, p. 115. He felt that "present U.S. immigration policies" precluded new immigrants. He published in 1964, just before the changes in immigration policy.

26. Lawrence Allen Wenzel, "The Identification and Analysis of Certain Value Orientations of Two Generations of East Indians in California" (Ed.D., University of the Pacific, 1966), and his subsequent publication "The Rural Punjabis of California: a Religio-Ethnic Group," *Phylon, The Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture*, 29 (1968): 245–256. Wenzel saw the community growing slowly as a result of the 1946 Luce-Celler Bill; he estimated that some 80 percent of the new arrivals in northern California were non-quota immigrants admitted as relatives of naturalized citizens. He interviewed families with non-Indian wives but noted a preference for wives from India, p. 245.

27. Wenzel, "Rural Punjabis," p. 245.

28. Wenzel's optimism about acculturation was supported by his investigation of value orientations among the students and their parents. Interviewing students aged fourteen to twenty who were participants in formal East Indian religio-cultural activities with a modified F. Kluckhohn questionnaire, he found that the value orientations of both parents and students had important similarities to the dominant value orientations in American society. Wenzel, "Identification and Analysis," pp. 133–135. Harwant Kaur Khush's more narrowly focused study done at the same time, "The Social Participation and Attitudes of the Children of East Indian Immigrants" (M.A. thesis, Education, Sacramento State College, 1965), used a questionnaire and structured interviews to compare the acculturation of native-born and India-born junior and senior high school students. All but four of her thirty students were Sikhs and she excluded students of mixed parentage. Using the "marginal man" concept to explain the position of the India-born students, she still found that assimilation was proceeding and that they had no serious problems which required counseling.

29. Ann Wood, "East Indians in California: A Study of their Organizations, 1900–1947" (M.A. thesis, Anthropology, University of Wisconsin, 1966), p. 3.

30. Wood, "East Indians," quote, p. 34. She remarks on the Stockton *gurdwara's* loss of centrality as other social and political organizations were begun after 1947 (epilogue) and on a tendency to bring wives from India after 1947 (p. 22). Like Wenzel, she anticipated only slow population growth through new immigration.



31. Leonard Greenwood, "El Centro's Community of Sikhs Dying Out," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 December 1966. Robindra Chakravorti, "The Sikhs of El Centro: A Study In Social Integration" (Ph.D. diss., Anthropology, University of Minnesota, 1968), p. 111. Their focus on the temple is probably connected with the leadership of Bagga Singh Sunga (the main source for Greenwood's article and a major informant for Chakravorti) in temple and community affairs then. Sunga, who did not marry in the U.S. but brought his wife from India in 1949, fought for citizenship and other causes.

32. Chakravorti, "Sikhs of El Centro," pp. 122–129.

33. Helen Bradfield did field work in Marysville/Yuba City in 1968–1969: "The East Indians of Yuba City: A Study in Acculturation" (M.A. thesis, Anthropology, Sacramento State College, 1971). She broke the first generation men into four categories: those arriving before 1924, illegal immigrants and students arriving from 1924 to 1946, those arriving from 1946 to 1965, and those arriving from 1965 on. Incorrectly assigning Indian wives to the first group, Mexican or Anglo wives to the second group, and Indian wives to the third and fourth groups, she found only the children of Puna Singh and Nand Kaur for the first group and about ten second-generation children for the "mixed marriage" second group (pp. 81, 88). Immigrants arriving since 1965 at the rate of some three hundred a year constituted the largest group in the Punjabi community, and despite their recent arrival and the parents' lack of facility in English, Bradfield concluded that the children of these immigrants too were irreversibly on their way "to virtually complete acculturation" due to the public schools, "the chief force for cultural change within the community" (p. 96). Studying the same new immigrant community about a year later, Richard Shankar was also interested in the assimilation of East Indian school children, but he arrived at a different conclusion. "Integration Goal Definition of the East Indian Student in the Sutter County Area" (M.A. thesis, Sociology, Chico State University, 1971). A high incidence of "traditional" responses to his questionnaires and interviews (despite certain values shared by the immigrants and the larger community as demonstrated by Wenzel), persuaded Shankar that assimilation had been very limited. He suggested not only that the existence of a strong ethnic community helped negate the effects of being educated in the United States, but that prejudice from the dominant culture encouraged withdrawal into a closed community (pp.72–74). Just after Shankar, Elizabeth J. Carroll used a questionnaire and interviews for "A Study: East Indian (Sikh) Women Students at Yuba College," University of Southern California, class paper, Ed.He.690, May, 1973. While aware of the Punjabi-Mexican families, she seemingly did not include any mixed parentage students in her study of some seventeen to twenty East Indian students. Interested in the college's furthering of assimilation (besides founding a Department of East Indian studies at Yuba College, the only community college in California with such a department then), Carroll advocates weakening the arranged marriage system, which she sees as the key to family control (pp. 41–42). Finally, Margaret Gibson's fine study of Yuba City high school students in 1980–1982 confirmed the prejudice found by Shankar, showed that the educational aspirations of the Punjabi students and their parents in fact exceeded those of the Anglo students and parents, and emphasized the reluctance of the new Punjabis to "assimilate" fully as expected by the majority community: Margaret A. Gibson, *Accommodation Without Assimilation: Punjabi Sikh Immigrants in an American High School and Community* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988).

34. Bruce La Brack, "The Sikhs of Northern California: a Socio-Historical Study" (Ph.D. diss., Social Sciences, Syracuse University, 1980), subsequently published as *Sikhs of Northern California*; Salim Khan, "A Brief History of Pakistanis in the

Western United States" (M.A. thesis, History, Sacramento State University, 1981). Khan drew upon the history of his wife's family to argue that Dadabhai was wrong, that the Hindustanis did not assimilate into Spanish-American culture but that the opposite was true, p. 44.

35. Lal Singh Chima, "Sikhs Marriage in India and California" (paper presented at the Southwestern Anthropological Association, Long Beach, California, March 29–April 1, 1972), p. 7.

36. Juan L. Gonzales Jr., "Asian Indian Immigration Patterns: The Origins of the Sikh Community in California," *International Migration Review*, 20:1 (1986): 46–57. I have not discussed here works by S. Chandrasekhar, Joan Jensen, Gary Hess, Mark Juergensmeyer, Emily Brown, Sucheta Mazumdar, and others who worked chiefly from written sources. Other recent researchers on the Yuba City Sikhs have minimized or completely missed the Punjabi Mexicans. Working from written sources, Patricia Santry outlined the factors "preventing Sikh assimilation" in California from 1906 through 1946. She minimized the intermarriages and evinced great faith in the effectiveness of legislation in blocking the Punjabis' economic, political, and social participation. About the Alien Land Law, she says, "Forced to relinquish their land, many (Sikhs) became migrant farm workers, thus negating any possibility of becoming stable members of American society." Patricia Josephine Santry, "An Historical Perspective of the Factors Preventing Sikh Assimilation in California, 1906–1946" (M.A. thesis, History, California State University, Fullerton, 1981), p. 113. Carol Kurtz's 1984 ethnic geography of the Yuba City Sikhs and their impact on the cultural landscape documented economic and religious activity but found social isolation; she overlooked the earlier intermarriages and families. Carol Cameron Kurtz, "The Sikhs of Yuba City, California: A Study in Ethnic Geography" (M.A. thesis, Geography, California State University, Hayward, 1984).

37. Thus "there were a few Indian immigrants. . . farmers who were not well-off financially." Iftikhar Haider Malik, *Pakistanis in Michigan: A Study of Third Culture and Acculturation* [sic] (New York, 1989), p. 50. Malik sees Pakistani immigration starting with students in the 1950s (p. 52). Prakash N. Desai and George V. Coelho similarly view students as the first important group of immigrants from India, in "Indian Immigrants in America: Some Cultural Aspects of Psychological Adaptation," in *The New Ethnics*, ed. Parmatma Saran and Edwin Eames (New York, 1980), p. 364.

38. See Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, chap. one on methodology. Samuel Schrager's discussion of "experience narratives" proved the single most useful guide here: "What is Social in Oral History?" *International Journal of Oral History*, 4:2 (1983): 76–98.

39. See Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, chaps., seven and eight, for development of these themes. Some said that prejudice against them from Mexican Americans was stronger than from Anglos.

40. See Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, chaps. eight and nine.

41. These conclusions come from about eighty interviews, twelve with "Old Hindus," fifteen with their wives, thirty-three with their sons, and twenty-seven with daughters (there is some overlap between wives and daughters).

42. Interview with Mola Singh, Selma, Calif., 1982.

43. Interview with Norma Saikhon, Brawley, 1981 (interviewed by Ernesto Vargas).

44. For the citizenship petitions, Office of the County Clerk, Imperial County; and see Dalip Singh Saund, *Congressman From India* (New York, 1960).

45. See Karen Leonard, "Ethnic Identity and Gender: South Asian Identity in



the United States,” in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Migration*, ed. Milton Israel and N.K. Wagle (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

46. These incidents were reported by Joe Mallobox, *El Centro*, 1982, and Mohammed Afzal Khan, *Willows*, 1988.

47. Court cases abounded. See Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, chap. nine.

48. Isabel Singh Garcia, “They are too Hindus,” *Valley Herald and Independent Herald* (Yuba City) April (date cut off) 1983.

49. In cosmopolitan Phoenix, Arizona, the Punjabi Mexican (or Spanish-Pakistani or Mexican-Hindu) identity has been discarded for “ethnic” or “multibreed”; the earlier terms are still used in the Imperial Valley (with pride) and in the Yuba City area (defensively).

50. The latter phrase is from Sally Falk Moore, *Social Facts and Fabrications* (New York, 1986), pp. 4–5; See also Eric R. Wolf, “Inventing Society,” *American Ethnologist*, 15:4 (1988): 752–761; James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, “Beyond Culture: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” *Cultural Anthropologist* 7:1 (February 1992): 6–23.

51. Akhil Gupta, “Space and Time in the Politics of Culture” (paper presented at the 87th annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Phoenix, 1988) p. 5 (“the peasant is the archetypal native, inhabiting a sedentary space that is distinguished by its boundedness, whether that boundedness is due to its purported economic self-sufficiency or the enclosure of its moral universe”; also Arjun Appadurai, “Putting Hierarchy in its Place,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 3:1 (1988): 36–40.

52. Thus the whole tradition in American sociology stemming from William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, vols. 1–2 (Chicago, 1918); vols. 3–5 (Boston, 1919–1920); and vols. 4 and 5 especially, discussed by Eli Zaretsky in the introduction to his edited and abridged volume (Chicago, 1984), pp. 25–31.

53. Some have charged that ethnic pluralism and democracy are not really compatible, since ethnic pluralism in America evolved from systematic inequalities: see Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America* (New York, 1981); Howard N. Rabinowitz, “Race, Ethnicity, and Cultural Pluralism in American History,” in *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History*, ed. James M. Gardner and George Rollie Adams (Nashville, Tenn., 1983), p. 28; and John Higham, *Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, Md., 1984), pp. 198–230.

54. Higham, *Send These to Me*, refers to the 1960s tendency toward “interpreting pluralism as a repressive condition and a delusive theory,” (p. 229), and the opposing group of American intellectuals “still desirous somehow of upholding both equality and diversity,” (p. 228). Higham ends with the assertion that an underlying consensus about basic values is indispensable to a decent multiethnic society and exhorts scholars to help “revitalize a common faith amid multiplying claims for status and power” (p. 232).

55. See the work of Dadabhay, Chakravorti, and others discussed earlier, and also, Gargi R. Sodowsky, “Marginality of Ethnic Immigrants,” *Zone*, 2 (1988): 123–129. The mediating role played by many of the Hispanic wives makes this alternative somewhat tempting—following the lead of Gloria Anzaldúa, people have written about women as the inhabitants of borderlands, women speaking from the margins, alienated and deterritorialized beings who can move in the interstices between groups. The Punjabi Mexican discourse could be categorized as “minority literature,” viewed as essentially political and created for a non-hegemonic audience. Such an

analysis would claim that because of their "multiple positionality," women and minorities sustain contradictions, invent themselves, and transform their sense of individual oppression into collective resistance. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, 1987), especially pp. 78–80. Judith Nagata, "What is a Malay? Situational Selection of Ethnic Identity in a Plural Society," *American Ethnologist*, 1:23 (1974), argues against the "situational selection of ethnic identity" being associated with "personal insecurity or marginality," seeing it instead as positive adaptation to fluid situations, (pp. 343, 346).

56. Higham, *Send These to Me*, pp. 183–184.

57. David A. Gerber, *The Making of an American Pluralism: Buffalo, New York 1825–60* (Urbana and Chicago, 1989).

58. Victor R. Greene, *For God and Country: the Rise of Polish and Lithuanian Ethnic Consciousness in America, 1860–1910* (Madison, Wis., 1975).

59. Stanley Lieberson and Mary C. Waters, *From Many Strands: Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America* (New York, 1988), pp. 249–250, 264–268; idem, "The Rise of a New Ethnic Group: The 'Unhyphenated American,'" *Items*, 43:1, (1989): 7–10.

60. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston, 1989), chap. 9, "Border Crossings."

61. Salman Rushdie, defending *The Satanic Verses* in *In Good Faith* (London, 1990), pp. 3–4, says "it is a migrant's-eye view of the world. . . . written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity. . . . Melange, hotch-potch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*." See also Dorothy Angel Rutherford, "Bengalis in America: Relationship, Affect, Person, and Self" (Ph.D. diss., Anthropology, American University, 1984) on new identities; and Gerber, *Making of an American Pluralism*, for his emphasis on the transformative power of immigrants in American society.