

**THE LOCALIZED  
HISTORY PROJECT**  
@AAARI-CUNY

# EDUCATOR GUIDE

**Foundations of Exclusion: A  
Timeline of AANHPI  
Immigration in the Late  
18th-20th Centuries**

# A NOTE FROM THE YOUTH RESEARCHER:

## WHY TEACH THIS HISTORY

**Hi, my name is Arun!**

My project focuses on the foundations of exclusion fundamental to the United States' immigration system. In particular, my project traces the history of immigration legal structures, particularly impacting South Asian communities. Intrinsic to studying the evolution of the American legal system is the impact this system has had on America's longstanding racial dialogue. After all, the law is often considered the "social consciousness" codified. Therefore, this project seeks to address a central question: how did the evolution of American naturalization law reflect and affect the common understanding of what it means to be "American," particularly for South Asian immigrants? My project references specific cases within New York, but more so focuses on the broader national phenomenon of the co-evolution of naturalization law and socio-racial norms, which had far-reaching extensions beyond just New York.

My own parents hail from India and navigated systemic legal challenges of their own while attempting to establish themselves as "American" in the early 2000s. Growing up in Journal Square, less than five miles away from central New York City, I found community within the neighborhood's deeply embedded ethnic enclaves that thrived there, particularly from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The area was aptly dubbed "Bombay" due to the pervasive presence of these South Asian communities. The question of citizenship and "fitting in" always arose in my mind, as I became curious about how such communities established themselves as "American" while retaining their indigenous roots, and whether citizenship was the only route to such a status. As I began reading about the roots of naturalization in the U.S. since the Founding, I uncovered many details about how deeply intertwined legal citizenship status for foreigners was with America's race situation.

Designing this lesson, I sought to tell a story. Without a doubt, the main point I wanted to showcase was how the law evolved alongside social norms toward status and identity for South Asian Americans. Still, I also hoped to describe this history alongside the general evolution of the South Asian American community. Using historical court documents and Congressional census reports, I wanted to examine the evolving prevalence of naturalization arguments alongside the growth of the South Asian American community, which has yielded increasingly interesting cases. Names like Sick Keesar (Sheikh Kesar), Anandibai Joshi, Bhicaji Balsara, Rustom Dadabhoy Wadia, and Bhagat Singh Thind are often glossed over in history, so I wanted to highlight their individual cases as I told this story. I sincerely hope that all students find interest in the telling of this story, can draw connections to today, and are inspired to investigate their own identity and story in America.

The earliest language of the Naturalization Act of 1790, Congress's first law defining the naturalization process for foreigners to the United States, limited naturalization to "free white persons." From this initial piece of legislation came an extensive legal and social evolution of "whiteness" and swaths of battles in courts and in the streets about qualifying as "white." Henceforth, a long-drawn history of cases, including across New York City, reaching as high as the United States Supreme Court, arose, with South Asian communities seeking naturalization under subsequent revisions of this law appealing to drawn-out, quasi-scientific, ethnological arguments—efforts to prove their "whiteness" under the repressive system designed by America's forebearers. Today, this history shares parallels with ongoing issues with immigration and naturalization in the United States. Who is considered "American" and the danger of race becoming a factor in this question highlights the significance of this history.

# PEDAGOGICAL REVOLUTIONS

## HOW TO TEACH THIS HISTORY



**Study original documents of the Naturalization Act** and its wording as it evolved from its original 1790 draft, and have a class discussion centered around how we view race socially, what “whiteness” actually means, and how we can make sense of a “common understanding” view of race and color. Consider how the evolution of its provisions toward race-based naturalization reflects the social and political contexts it evolved within.



**Study the case documents** in the pivotal cases argued over the naturalization status of South Asian Americans in New York City, notably *United States v. Balsara* (1910) and *Rustom Dadabhoy Wadia v. United States* (1939). Note the disparity in the Court’s decision in each.



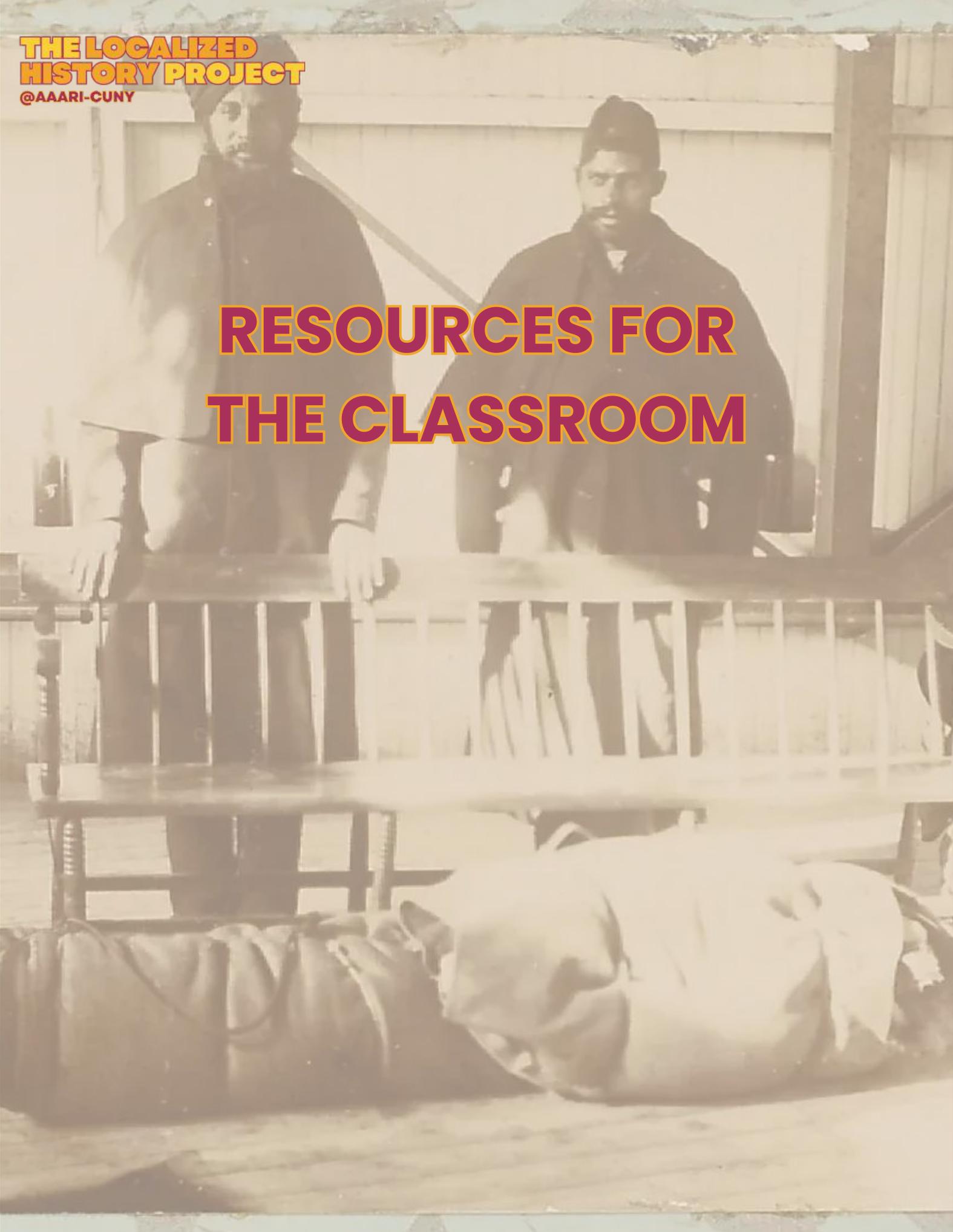
**Conduct an oral history interview project** with South Asian members of one’s local community. Identify their struggles with assimilating into American society, whether due to legal barriers or social pressures barring them from doing so.



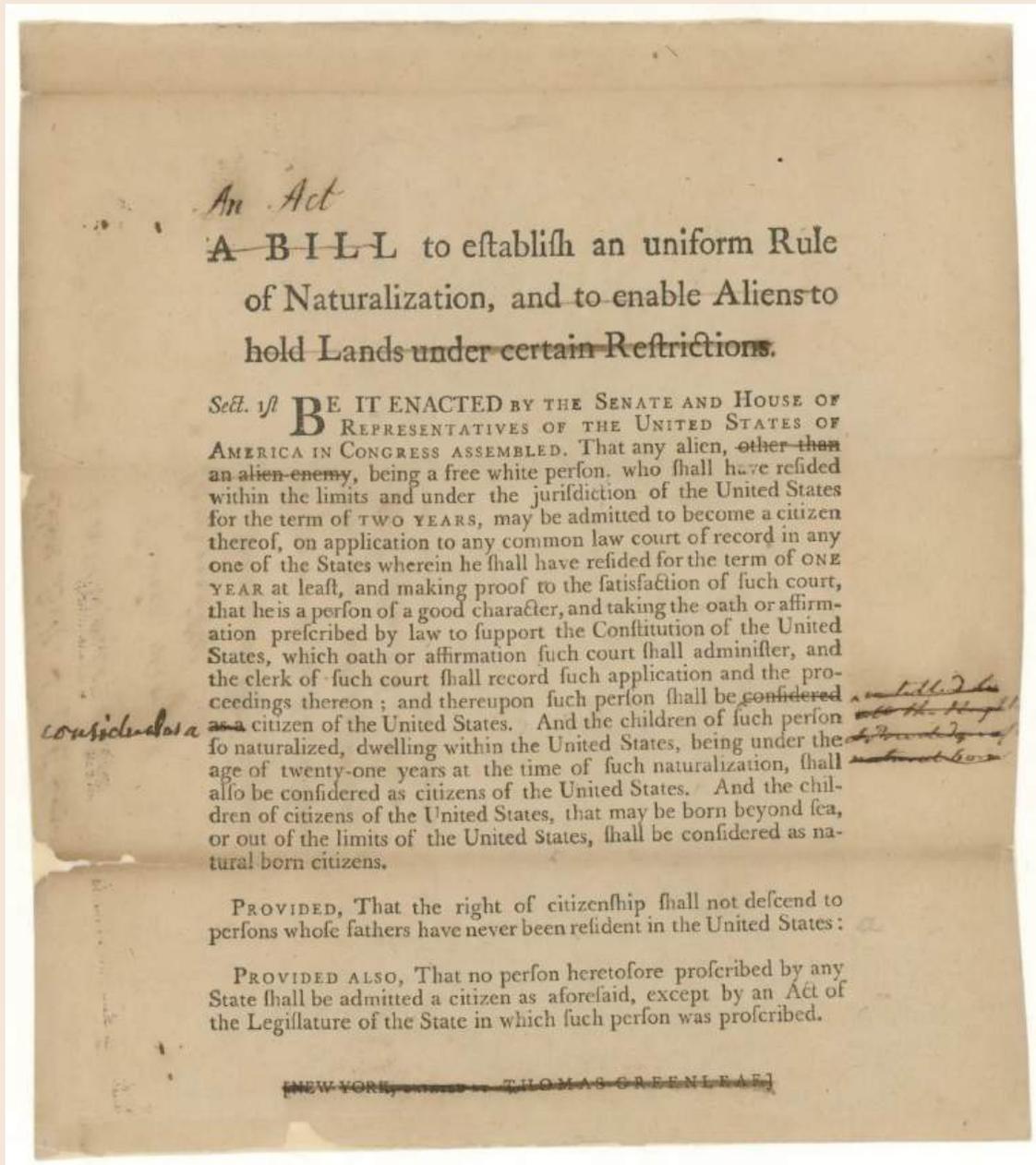
**Mock Trial** conduct a mock trial using the document analysis above, but from the perspective of those advocating for citizenship. How might you re-write the arguments of Thind and others to uplift cross-racial solidarity? How do you define the purpose of citizenship, and who is deserving of it?

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# **RESOURCES FOR THE CLASSROOM**



# primary sources:



**"A Bill to Establish an Uniform Rule of Naturalization, and Enable Aliens to Hold Lands under Certain Conditions," or the text of the Naturalization Act of 1790.**

Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, held in the National Archives.



**A photograph of lascars, sailors from South and Southeast Asia, contracted to work on the British ship *Dunera*, c. 1910.**

Image courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.



**A portrait of three medical graduates at the Dean's Reception at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, c. 1885.**

Image courtesy of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania Photograph Collection, Drexel University Archival Collections.



**Two of the earliest known South Asians to immigrate through New York's Ellis Island, Noran Single [Singh] & Koran Bazurka, c. 1890.**

Original photograph by Eugene W. Austin. Unrestricted image use provided by the National Park Service, Statue of Liberty National Monument.

# WHITE MOBS DRIVE OUT HINDUS OF WASHINGTON

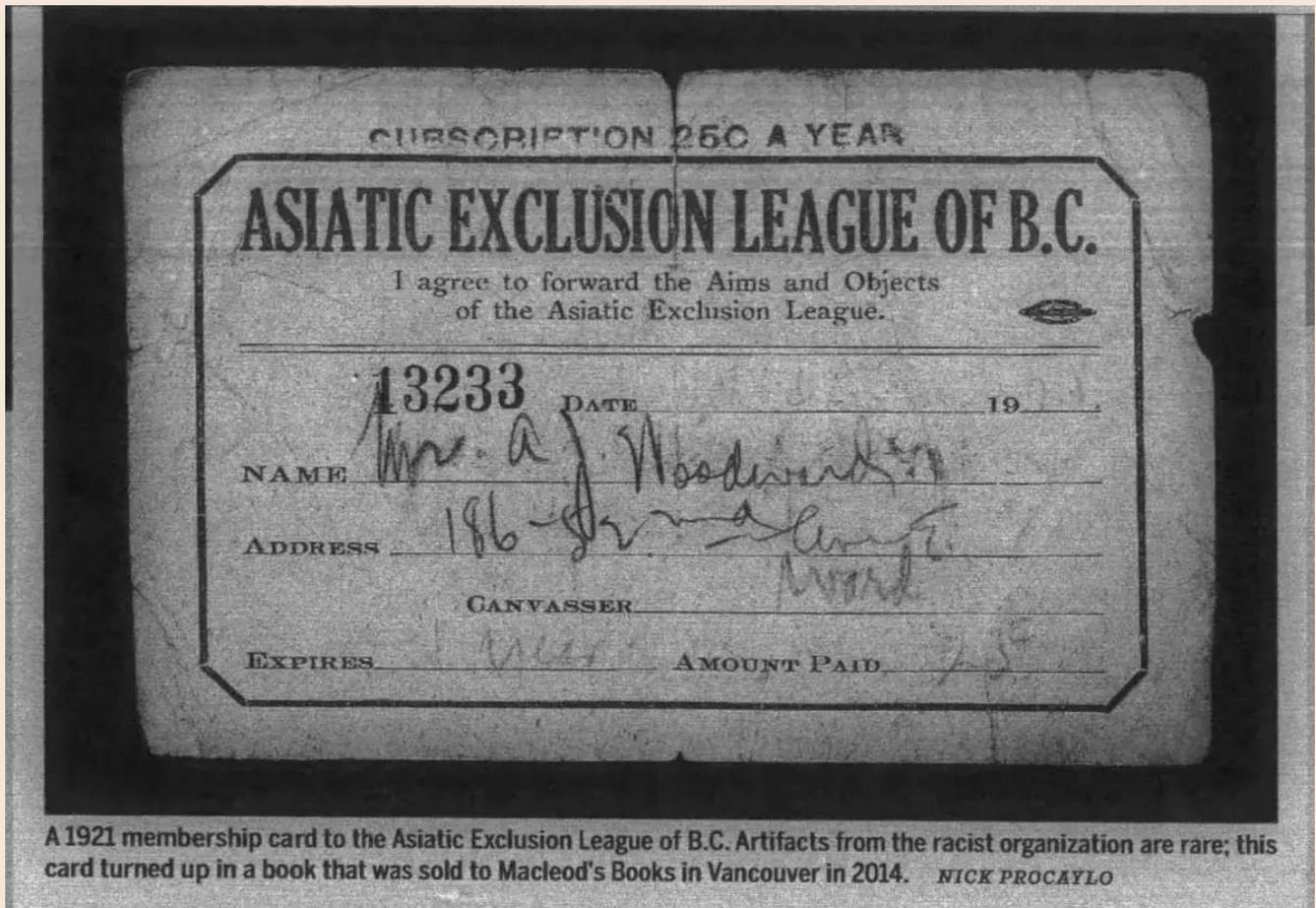
Bellingham, Wash., Sept. 6.—Six badly beaten Hindus are in the hospital, 400 frightened and half naked sikhs are in jail and in the corridors of the city hall, guarded by policemen, and somewhere between Bellingham and the British Columbia line are 750 natives of India, beaten, hungry and half clothed, making their way along the Great Northern right-of-way, bound for Canadian territory and the protection of the British flag.

The long expected cry, "drive out the Hindus," was heard thruout the city and along the water front last night.

The police were helpless. For five hours a mob of half a thousand white men raided the mills where the blacks were working, battered down doors of lodging houses and, dragging the invaders from their beds, escorted them to the city limits, with orders to keep on going.

**An article covering the race riots in Bellingham, Washington, in 1907.**

Article originally published in *The Minneapolis Journal* on September 6, 1907. Accessed via [newspapers.com](http://newspapers.com).



**A membership card to the Asiatic Exclusion League of British Columbia, c. 1921.**

Reprinted in *The Vancouver Sun* in 2017; accessed via [newspapers.com](http://newspapers.com)

# SCIENTIFIC BATTLE OVER PARSEE'S RIGHTS

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Government Goes Deep in Ethnology to Oppose Balsara's Contest for Citizenship.

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## BROWN SKIN RACES AID HIM

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Furnish Money to Fight Test Case — Principal Question the Meaning of "Free White Persons."

Whether Bhicaji Franyi Balsara is a "free white person" and hence entitled to citizenship will come up before the United States Circuit Court of Appeals this week at the Federal Building on an appeal by the government from a decision of Judge Lacombe on June 9 of last year. Judge Lacombe admitted Balsara to citizenship. The government determined to make a test case of it, and the research of Addison S. Pratt and Carl E. Whitney, of the staff of Henry A. Wise, the United States Attorney, to establish their case took them to the Congressional Library at Washington, where they delved for a week into ancient and modern ethnological works.

**Newspaper coverage in *The New-York Tribune* of Balsara's case, c. 1910.**

Originally published in *The New-York Tribune* on May 23, 1910.  
Accessed via newspapers.com.



**A posed portrait of a young Parsi girl in Bombay (Mumbai), c. 1902.**

Photo originally taken by Bourne & Shepherd and housed at the Sedgwick Museum. Accessed via The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library.



**Bhagat Singh Thind (back row) with his battalion at Camp Lewis, Washington, c. 1918.**

Photographer unknown. Donated to SAADA (the South Asian American Digital Archive) via David Thind, and accessed via Wikicommons.

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**THANK YOU FOR READING!**