

**THE LOCALIZED
HISTORY PROJECT**

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EDUCATOR GUIDE

***Claiming Belonging: Uzbek Migration
during the 21st Century***

A NOTE FROM THE YOUTH RESEARCHER: *WHY TEACH THIS HISTORY*

Hi, my name is Durdona!

Growing up, it was hard for me to find a narrative that I would feel connected to. This is often due to the lack of Central Asian history present within school curricula coupled with previous attitudes towards minority Central Asians in other nations and communities around the world. My project explores Uzbek immigration to Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn while addressing the difficulties my family faced navigating xenophobia, discrimination and social belonging throughout different experiences with religion, societal norms and labor exploitation during the post-Soviet Union era. For the majority of my life, I was taught to conceal my identity based on what my parents faced. I even started to associate myself as the White or Russian race because I felt uncomfortable with describing my Asian race. This is also often due to the way my parents faced challenges with being Uzbek under harsh governmental oppression of religion and race.

I first started to question if I were truly white when I got into high school. My late realization that I had in fact been Asian was often due to the Central Asian classification not existing in many applications: whether filling out forms for school, programs or even employment, the Central Asian term did not inherently exist. Even under the US census identifications, it was not there.

A NOTE FROM THE YOUTH RESEARCHER:

WHY TEACH THIS HISTORY

From extensive research in digital archives and oral histories to reaching out across borders, I have learned an incredible amount about my family's history and the daily Uzbek life under oppression. On many occasions, it became difficult to find a concrete story. Uzbek stories consistently became left ambiguous: there became no message behind many stories. However, by slowly uncovering more of my family's stories, I became inclined to continue researching even such difficult topics in hopes that it has become the first of its kind. Not only have I learned about Uzbekistan's history, I have also learned how these stories have transformed into a larger, small-knit community here in the Sheepshead Bay area in Brooklyn. From expression in cultural food to building supermarkets thousands depend on, Uzbek stories continue to persist. I am proud to say my project clearly depicts this continuity over time.

Teaching and embedding Uzbek history in schools ultimately allows students to confidently claim belonging and recognize that their familial stories facing political turmoil, corruption and social change are what shape American history. The everyday, localized places also become part of this narrative: places like supermarkets, local bodegas, and even restaurants become a sign as to why Uzbek history must be uplifted.

Thank you for engaging with my work!

Durdona Melisova is a 16-year-old junior at Brooklyn Technical High School. There, she is a Law and Society major, focusing on her passion of making education more accessible and equitable. Born and raised in Central Asia, Durdona takes pride in her Uzbek heritage and identity as a fellow Asian American. However, growing up, she struggled to grapple with an identity that fit both societal expectations and Uzbek traditions. This prompted her interest in The Localized History Project and contributing to NYC's first AAPI curriculum as a Youth Researcher. Her research focuses on exploring Uzbek migration during the 21st century to address the gap between Uzbeks and their identity when it comes to understanding race and classification of Asian Americans. Through the Localized History Project, she hopes to uplift the stories of AAPI that often go overlooked throughout history. Outside of LHP, her hobbies include reading, baking and learning to play the guitar. She also loves to spend her time playing the New York Times games on the daily and debate nationally.

PEDAGOGICAL REVOLUTIONS

HOW TO TEACH THIS HISTORY



Neighborhood Project:

Let students observe and make small projects based on local areas. This can include a project on one location students find meaningful or a place students have not observed before in their neighborhood. This can include restaurants, small bodegas or even larger supermarkets. Have students conduct a small research project on the history behind the location. This allows students to learn more about their neighborhood while also understanding the historical tie to it.



Oral History:

Much of this project revolves around learning through oral histories. Let students learn more about the process of conducting oral histories and the way they can use oral histories to explain broader historical situations. For many histories that involved political turmoil, the best source comes from the people who experienced it firsthand. Encourage students to explore a historical topic that involves people directly facing hardships and let them conduct an oral history to fully understand the gravity of the historical event.



Exploring Identity:

Many students, like myself, don't understand or question their own identity due to narratives that are often taught early on. However, identity is something crucial to building and exploring further narratives and communities students often find when moving onto college and or the work field. Let students explore their racial and/or ethnic identity by helping them explore their family's history. This can be done in various formats such as creating a family tree, doing photo or primary source analysis, and more.

primary sources:



Worker's rally in the courtyard of a textile mill in Tashkent, c. 1930–1940s. Photograph by Max Penson, one of the foremost photographers of Soviet Uzbekistan.

Photograph by Max Penson, accessed via Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Exact rights status unknown, but likely available in the public domain.



Farm workers in Soviet Uzbekistan drive a tractor with a portrait of Joseph Stalin prominently mounted on the front, c. 1930s–1940s.

Photograph by Max Penson, accessed via Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Exact rights status unknown, but likely available in the public domain.



Young women seated in a classroom in Tashkent, located at the time within the Uzbek SSR, c. 1930s-1940s.

Photograph by Max Penson, accessed via Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Exact rights status unknown, but likely available in the public domain.



Authoritarian Uzbek President Islam Karimov (right) talks with Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian in 1991.

Photographer unknown. Available from Qishloq Ovozi (Archive) and accessed via Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Exact rights status unknown, but likely falls under Fair Use doctrine.



Babur Square (now Navoi Square), the site of the 2005 protests and violent police repression in Andijan, photographed in 2012.

Photograph by Adam Jones. Made available via Wikimedia Commons. Used with a CC BY-SA 2.0 license.

Uzbek police rounding up opposition activists in crackdown

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan (AP) — Uzbek police are rounding up activists in a new crackdown, opposition leaders said Monday, as Sen. John McCain repeated demands for an inquiry into this month's violent uprising, calling it a "massacre."

The protest in the eastern city of Andijan exploded into violence when militants seized a local prison and government headquarters and thousands of people demonstrated in the streets.

Uzbek authorities say 173 people died in the May 13 violence, and deny they opened fire on unarmed civilians. Human rights advocates say up to 750 people were killed.

President Islam Karimov — viewed as one of the most authoritarian leaders still in control of a former Soviet republic

— has rejected U.N. and Western calls for an international inquiry, saying Uzbek authorities would conduct their own probe.

"Karimov must understand that this kind of activity has no place in the 21st century," McCain said in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek after he and two other U.S. senators met with U.S.-funded humanitarian organizations. "We repeat our demand for a full and complete investigation ... of the massacre that occurred just a few days ago."

Karimov blamed the unrest on Islamic extremists, accusing them of killing hostages and of using civilians as human shields.

Uzbekistan became a key U.S. ally after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, offering use of Khanabad air base near the Afghan border — instrumental for U.S. forces who ousted the hardline

Taliban from power in Afghanistan.

The United States and Uzbekistan signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2002 and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld has praised Uzbekistan's support in the war on terror.

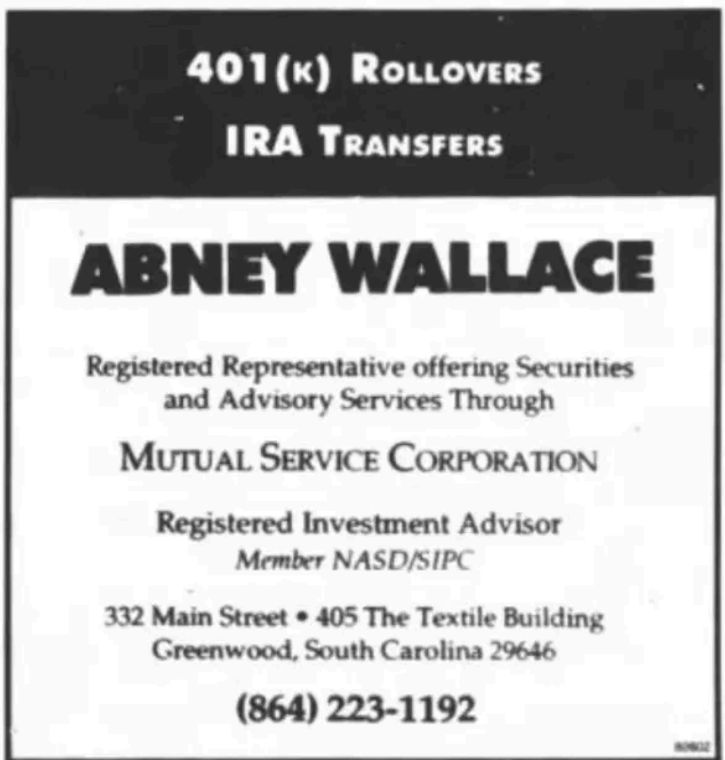
But McCain, R-Ariz., warned that the Uzbek government's failure to allow an international

probe of the events in Andijan, Uzbekistan's fourth-largest city, would jeopardize U.S.-Uzbek ties.

"I think the United States' relationship is directly related to the actions taken by President Karimov," he said, sitting next to two other Republican senators, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and John Sununu of New Hampshire.



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An Associated Press wire article from 2005 describing the American political response to Uzbek police rounding up opposition activists post-Andijan Massacre.

Originally written for the *Associated Press* and reprinted in *The Index-Journal*, May 31, 2005. Exact rights status unknown, but likely usable under Fair Use doctrine.

ground shake and then saw a woman crying over the motionless body of a child.

An eerie calm remained over the capital for much of Monday as officials declined to give many details about the attacks, which went unmentioned on state-run TV until evening. Bazaars and shops were closed, and soldiers armed with Kalashnikovs were on guard outside Tashkent's central department store and across the capital.

The tiny opposition, banned by Karimov's authoritarian regime from working openly, feared the bloodshed would deepen a widespread crackdown against dissent and independent Islam that has led to the jailings of thousands and evoked international condemnation.

The U.S. Embassy in Tashkent warned that "other terrorists are believed still at large and may be attempting additional attacks."

The violence began Sunday night with a blast that killed 10 at a house used by alleged terrorists in the central region of Bukhara, Kadyrov said.

EXTREMIST GROUPS

Uzbek authorities blame terrorist attacks and an explosion at a bombmaking factory Sunday and Monday on Islamic extremists, specifically followers of the Hizb ut-Tahrir party and the Wahhabi sect. Here is a look at the major militant groups in the region.

HIZB UT-TAHRIR, whose Arabic name means Party of Liberation, was founded in 1953 in the Middle East. It disavows violence to win believers, but its organizing principles don't rule out violence to achieve the final aim of creating a worldwide Muslim state. The group is banned across formerly Soviet Central Asia, where its most visible activity has previously been to distribute leaflets calling for a world ruled by *sharia*, or Islamic law.

WAHHABIS are adherents of the austere Islamic sect dominant in Saudi Arabia, which is believed to have inspired terrorist leader Osama bin Laden. Based on a literal translation of the Koran, Wahhabism casts the adherents of even other Muslim sects or religions as atheists, polytheists or infidels. It has attracted many followers in formerly Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus region, including Chechen rebels.

The **ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF UZBEKISTAN** is a group that seeks to overthrow the secular government of the former Soviet republic. The group allegedly orchestrated a failed 1999 bombing attack on Uzbek President Islam Karimov that killed at least 16. It was declared a terrorist group by the United States in September 2000 after the kidnapping of four American mountain climbers in the Central Asian nation of Kyrgyzstan. However, it is believed to have been seriously weakened by U.S.-led antiterrorism operations in Afghanistan. The group's political leader, Tahir Yuldash, was reported wounded in recent fighting with Pakistani government forces near the Afghan border.

Source: Associated Press

An Associated Press wire article that lists "extremist groups" in Uzbekistan, c. 2004.

Originally written for the *Associated Press* and reprinted in *The Tampa Bay Times*, March 30, 2004. Exact rights status unknown, but likely usable under Fair Use doctrine.



The author's parents in Russia in the early 2000s. Photo likely taken between 2003-2005.

Photographer unknown. Permissions for use granted via the Melisova family.

Russians sentenced for 19 hate killings

MOSCOW — Seven young men who murdered 19 people in a series of hate crimes were sentenced to prison Monday amid a surge in racist assaults, xenophobia and neo-Nazism in Russia.

Fears of an explosion in violent racism were further heightened earlier this month with the gruesome beheading of a Tajik migrant worker near Moscow.

Prosecutors charged that the group sentenced Monday preyed on Central Asians, Caucasians and other non-Slavs with distinctly dark skin or Asian features, attacking them on the streets and in pedestrian tunnels with hammers and other weapons. The group videotaped many of the attacks and posted the clips online.

An *Associated Press* wire article describing hate crimes committed by Russian Neo-Nazis against Central Asians in 2008.

Originally written for the *Associated Press* and reprinted in *NBC News*, December 15, 2008. Exact rights status unknown, but likely falls under Fair Use doctrine.



The author's grandparents and their classmates pose for a seated portrait in Uzbekistan, c. 1950s.

Photographer unknown. Permissions for use granted via the Melisova family.

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THANK YOU FOR READING!