

“The deportation of the Hindus from British Columbia will be a blessing to all concerned.”: Intersections of class and race in the British Honduras Scheme.

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In the fall and winter of 1908, the Canadian Government developed the British Honduras Scheme, a plan to transport all South Asian immigrants from British Columbia to British Honduras. To justify this relocation, the Canadian Government argued that British Honduras needed cheap labour to maintain sugar plantations, railroads and that these immigrants could not survive in Canada because they faced unemployment, starvation, and they were not suited for harsh winters. This attempt was well received by many white Canadians of British descent. Many agreed that this transportation would benefit the South Asian community and white Canadians.

The government sent two South Asian representatives Sham Singh, a Hindu, and Hagar Singh, a Sikh, to Honduras in order to get the opinion of who the government believed represented the majority of South Asian immigrants in British Columbia; they reportedly had a high opinion of the place.¹ However, when they came back to Vancouver both representatives rejected the plan. In fact, they accused William Charles Hopkinson, their interpreter and immigration inspector of the Canadian Immigration Branch in Vancouver, B.C, of bribing them.²

Analyzing this scheme in the context of the way newspapers represented it at the time demonstrates how class and race intersected in popular understandings of South Asian people in Canada. Primary sources also reveal how South Asian immigrants resisted the scheme. They

¹ Canada, Department of the Interior, "The East Indians in British Columbia: A report regarding the proposal to provide work in British Honduras for the indigent unemployed among them," 11, July 29, 1908, <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/11114>

² Andrew Parnaby and Gregory S. Kealey with Kirk Niergarth, "'High Handed, Impolite and Empire-breaking Actions': Radicalism, Anti Imperialism, and Political Policing in Canada, 1860-1914," in *Canadian State Trials Volume Three*, ed. Barry White and Susan Binnie. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009):493.

show that despite popular views of South Asians being hapless, hopeless, and inferior “hindoos” who could not survive in the northern hemisphere, the South Asian community recognized and advocated for their own interests, while resisting discrimination. These sources depict a community who at times possessed significant agency within Vancouver while challenging attempts to force them out.

Little has been written on the British Honduras Scheme. Historians, Andrew Parnaby and Gregory S. Kealey with Kirk Niergarth have written on the British Honduras Scheme through the lens of policing in Canada; their work focuses on the surveillance of “agitators” who opposed the scheme and other political movements.³ Hugh Johnston, in his article on Indian nationalists, discusses the British Honduras Scheme briefly.⁴ While the scheme gets mentioned in texts concerning Sikh diaspora, more comprehensive study is merited because of the ways it exemplifies broader historical patterns. The framing of the scheme and its popular reception illustrates how class and race intersected to create a perceived hierarchy within the British Empire with White British Canadians understanding themselves to be superior to South Asians. As we shall see, South Asian populations contested this perception and did not passively accept their subordinate status.

The Honduras Scheme needs to be understood in the social context of its historical moment. This paper will begin by first explaining societal conditions that gave rise to the government’s views of South Asian immigrants as a burden to the province. Then press coverage of the scheme featuring the reoccurring theme of paternalism towards South Asian Immigrants will be analyzed. Finally, the paper shifts its focus to document South Asian resistance to the

³ Andrew Parnaby and Gregory S. Kealey with Kirk Niergarth, “‘High Handed, Impolite and Empire-breaking Actions’: Radicalism, Anti Imperialism, and Political Policing in Canada, 1860-1914,” in *Canadian State Trials Volume Three*, ed. Barry White and Susan Binnie. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009):493.

⁴ Hugh Johnston, “The Surveillance of Indian Nationalists in North America, 1908-1918”, *BC Studies*, 78, (1988):6.

scheme. At the outset, a brief note on terminology: in the press and official documents of the day, the term “Hindoo” was used to describe Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim immigrants, which is why the term “South Asian” will be used instead to better represent the people affected by this scheme.

Between 1904 and 1907 an estimated five thousand South Asian men immigrated to British Columbia.⁵ While some worked in sawmills, railway construction, or on farms, about seven hundred to a thousand of these immigrants faced unemployment.⁶ The labour was often short term, working many odd jobs with no stable income.⁷ Most of the employers of these men were white men, probably of British descent, who usually did not keep South Asians as employees for an extended period of time.

As a result, many of these South Asian men were seen as people that could only perform lowly work. Many white Canadians believed that these immigrants did not deserve to earn the wages normally given to South Asians, which would not have amounted to much. Not only did South Asian men become the brunt of many Canadians’ prejudices, but they also faced job instability and low wages. These conditions might have led to these immigrants being seen by many as a group of people that did not belong in Canada and could not hope to compete with white labour.

The white working class of Vancouver viewed South Asians as a weak race that would become a burden.⁸ Most white men in British Columbia held anxieties about other immigrants

⁵ Isabel Wallace, “Komagata Maru Revisited: ‘Hindus,’ Hookworm, and the Guise of Public Health Protection,” *BC Studies* 178, no.1, (2013): 35.

⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior, “The East Indians in British Columbia: A report regarding the proposal to provide work in British Honduras for the indigent unemployed among them,” 6, July 29, 1908.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Peter W. Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd edition, (Montreal: McGill University Press: 2002):56.

from Asia taking their jobs, expressing concerns that companies like the Canadian Pacific Railway had beaten “its Canadian employees into submission by the use of Japs” and that it would “have a hard time in making people believe that it cannot afford a decent wage to white employees without employing any Japanese or Hindoo.”⁹ Many major companies employed Japanese and South Asian laborers because of their willingness to work for low wages, which enabled them to generate large profits.

Anxiety about the so-called “yellow peril” was widespread. An article from *The Prospector* asked how long it would be “before western Canada will be dominated by the yellow races?”¹⁰ *Boundary Creek Times* urged Martin Burrell, a farmer, to stop using “Hindoos on his property to the detriment of the white man.”¹¹ Anxieties about South Asian immigrants became known as the “Hindoo Problem” and white populations debated this “problem”. One measure taken against the South Asian population was the Continuous Journey Legislation initiated in January of 1908, which prohibited entry of immigrants who were believed to have not come from their country of birth by a continuous journey.¹² Its aim was to prevent “this class of people from coming to Canada.”¹³ This made immigration difficult for people coming to Canada from India and the blatant discrimination against them was made even more apparent after the refusal to allow the passengers on the Komagata Maru to enter Vancouver in 1914.

After restricting the number of South Asian immigrants to the province, the government decided that it might deal with the ones who had already arrived by transporting them to British

⁹ Unknown, 1908, “Omineca Herald,” *Omineca Herald*, Hazelton, B.C.: DeVoin and Coyle, September 19, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0082748>.

¹⁰ Unknown, 1908, “The Prospector,” *The Prospector*, Cranbrook, B.C., A.B. Grace, October 3, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0304729>.

¹¹ Unknown, 1908, “Boundary Creek Times,” *The Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood, B.C., Boundary Creek Printing and Publishing Company, October 30. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0171197>.

¹² Harold A. Gould, *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies: The India Lobby in the United States 1900-1946*, (New York: Sage Publications, 2006) 101.

¹³ Unknown, 1908, “The Golden Times,” *Golden Times*, Golden, B.C.: T.H. Conner, November 11, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0081674>.

Honduras. There they would work in the sugar plantations or build railways because they were “of a class suitable” for the work.¹⁴ *The Daily News* claimed that the government offered to cover the travel costs required to take the South Asians to British Honduras and that “ninety five percent of the East Indian resident in British Columbia will accept the liberal terms...”¹⁵

In the fall and winter of 1908, newspapers depicted South Asians in a pitiful light with one article saying that “The country had been misrepresented to these poor, unfortunates, and had they known the severe climate they would have to contend with, and the sufferings...owing to the severe winters...they would not have come.”¹⁶ Many newspapers claimed South Asians could not survive winter to justify taking them to British Honduras. *Boundary Creek Times* expressed anger at “sections of the B.C. press” for putting obstacles in the way of taking the “Hindoo coolies to a more congenial climate for them.”¹⁷ These articles depicted these immigrants as ignorant of what was in their best interest. It was a way of denying prejudice against South Asians, because instead of claiming that the government and its white citizens did not want them there, they could claim that they were simply looking after that group of people.

These newspaper articles reveal interesting trends in the attitudes of the time. First, the decision to transport the South Asians to British Honduras was depicted as being beneficial, not only for the white Canadians, but for the “Hindoos” as well. The way the press coverage framed this transportation presented a hierarchy that depicted white British Canadians as superior to the “Hindoos” to justify the Honduras Scheme. This hierarchy suggested that when it came to work for “Hindoos” railway construction or sugar plantation was better for them where they would be

¹⁴ Unknown, 1908, “The Daily News,” Newspapers, *New Westminster Daily News*, November 16, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0316653>.

¹⁵ Unknown., 1908, November 12, *The Daily News*, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0316595>

¹⁶ Unknown, 1908, “The Golden Times,” *Golden Times*, Golden, B.C., T.H. Conner, November 11, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0081674>.

¹⁷ Unknown, 1908, “Boundary Creek Times,” *The Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood, B.C.: Boundary Creek Printing and Publishing Company, December 4, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0172259>.

looked after by white landowners. There is a shift from describing the South Asian immigrants as a burden to people to be looked after. These papers also argue that South Asians were ill suited for the Canadian winter and therefore, could adapt better to the weather in Honduras.

Nativist arguments are present in these newspapers. By 1908, people still wanted Canada to be known as a white man's country as evidenced by the Vancouver Riots in 1907 in which Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian immigrants experienced violence and destruction to their homes.¹⁸ In these arguments about the weather, the newspapers suggested that South Asian immigrants had no knowledge of the conditions of Canada before arriving. Therefore, they could not hope to survive in the winter. Numerous papers inspired by scientific racism said that their skin color doomed them when winter came. Not only were South Asians ignorant of what Canada was like, but they were unsuitable for the country from birth for biological reasons.

Meanwhile, the proposed destination for Canadian South Asians was perceived to be, in terms of class and race, a more hospitable environment. The economy of British Honduras underwent drastic changes when families from the United States arrived on the colony after the US Civil War and introduced large scale sugar production, which British Honduras relied on heavily in the early twentieth century.¹⁹ Transportation of the South Asians was presented as being beneficial to the economy of British Honduras. Newspapers suggested that British Honduras desperately needed the labour, saying that "plantation owners in Honduras, who have promised employment to these people if they are not sent thither, are anxious to have matters

¹⁸ Peter W. Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd edition, 64.

¹⁹ Donald C. Simmons, *Confederate Settlements in British Honduras*, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Publishers, 2001): 44.

closed up...”²⁰ All of these newspapers conveyed the image that British Honduras needed the immigrants and the immigrants needed British Honduras.

Other primary sources such as an official communique concerning proposals to work in British Honduras used many similar arguments to justify relocating South Asians: “Prospect for winter for Hindus very unfavorable. Consensus opinion Hindus physically and mentally unfit to compete successfully in Canada.”²¹ Class and labor also appeared to be a concern for British officials: “though a private employer picks and chooses those he considers most likely to make good, the replies on the whole indicated that while the Hindu might in most cases earn the comparatively low wage paid him, he could not class with white labour.”²² Whoever drafted these proposals believed these immigrants stood no chance in succeeding in British Columbia. The tropical weather of British Honduras was believed to have been better suited for these immigrants because of their dark skin and the work, such as railway construction and sugar fields, was considered work that they could do well in.

This shows the belief that white British Canadians were superior to the immigrants through their ability to earn more money than these immigrants. South Asian immigrants would find themselves working indentured labor for up to three years in British Honduras, working nine hour days, fifty hours of work a week, and eight dollars per month with rations.²³ The evidence shows that these people would not be able to make much money if they were sent to British Honduras, ensuring that the economic class structure of British Colombia would remain the same

²⁰ Unknown, 1908, “Keremeos Trumpet,” Newspapers, *Keremeos Chronicle*, Keremeos, B.C. : J.A. Brown, November 20. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0310045>.

²¹ Canada, Department of the Interior, “The East Indians in British Columbia: A report regarding the proposal to provide work in British Honduras for the indigent unemployed among them,” 4, July 29, 1908. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/11133>

²² Ibid., 6.

²³ Canada, Department of the Interior, “The East Indians in British Columbia: A report regarding the proposal to provide work in British Honduras for the indigent unemployed among them,” 12, July 29, 1908. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/11133>

Problems with the scheme emerged when popular perceptions were put to the test and actual South Asian immigrants needed to be convinced that their deportation served their best interests. When Sham Singh and Hagar Singh came back from their reconnaissance trip, they changed their opinion of British Honduras. They accused their interpreter of trying to bribe them.²⁴ Sham and Hagar Singh had also reached out to a number of prominent individuals such as Teja Singh, who the press described as a “Hindoo Leader” who “cast suspicion on the good faith of the government commissions...it is not likely that many will take advantage of the generous offer of the Dominion Government to take them to Honduras...”²⁵ Born in west Punjab, Teja Singh developed animosity towards the British Empire.²⁶ After attending Khalsa College, he became deeply religious and immigrated to Canada where he became known as an “agitator” against the British Empire.²⁷ After hearing of this attempt to relocate South Asians to British Honduras, Teja Singh led the opposition to this effort in 1908.

A diary of the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society’s activities contains more in-depth information on Sham Singh and Hagar Singh’s opinion of the colony. This diary was written by Arjan Singh Brar, an active member of the South Asian Canadian community, and contains two volumes worth of information concerning the activities of the South Asian community from 1906 to 1924. It also shows South Asian perspectives of the British Honduras Scheme and other events that have been overlooked in previous accounts. Arjan Singh Brar’s diary also highlights how the South Asian community challenged the British Honduras Scheme.

²⁴ Arjan Brar Singh, *Khalsa Diwan Society Diary Volume 1 English Translation*, (Vancouver, B.C.): 25," <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/15901>

²⁵ Unknown, 1908, “Boundary Creek Times,” *The Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood, B.C. : Boundary Creek Printing and Publishing Company, December 18, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0171257>.

²⁶ Hugh Johnston, “The Surveillance of Indian Nationalists in North America,” *BC Studies*, no. 78, (1988): 9.

²⁷ Unknown, 1908, “Boundary Creek Times,” *The Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood, B.C. : Boundary Creek Printing and Publishing Company, December 18, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0171257>.

This diary is valuable for a number of reasons. Sources like this diary give a voice to the people whom the British Honduras Scheme affected. So much of what Canadian historians know concerning perceptions of minority groups comes from what those in power, who were often white and British, wrote about the period. As a result, there is not much written on how groups such as Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, perceived events and acted in these periods of Canadian history, giving them an agency often denied by newspapers written by white Canadians. These sources complicate the study of South Asian experiences in early Canadian history and they stop historians from relying on one sided accounts of these events.

Sham Singh and Hagar Singh visited the Gurdwara, a place of worship for Sikhs, and the evidence suggests that the “entire Khalsa community, Hindu, Muslim brethren” gathered adding up to around five hundred or six hundred people.²⁸ This implies that the community was highly aware of the proposal to transport them to British Honduras and the opinions of Sham Singh and Hagar Singh. The two men told everyone at the Gurdwara that in British Honduras “labour jobs are available on a contract basis...” with little personal freedom and that “fresh milk or butter is not available at all.”²⁹ Wages were also very low ranging “from eight dollars to a maximum of twelve dollars, which is not enough to buy food.”³⁰ There was also only salt water, which was not ideal for Sikh men who washed their hair every day, and several diseases that mosquitos carried in the area.³¹ The conditions of the colony did not meet the expectations of Sham and Hagar Singh. It seems that the immigrants would have found themselves working indentured labour in harsh conditions.

²⁸ Arjan Brar Singh, *Khalsa Diwan Society Diary Volume 1 English Translation*, (Vancouver, B.C.): 25," <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/15901>

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

The Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and other groups opposed this relocation. Written in the diary is a mention that the “entire congregation...expressed the opinion that we would not go to British Honduras and would organize to make arrangements for our brethren who are jobless by seeking help from brethren from Japan, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and India as many of our brethren who have jobs.”³² Clearly, the South Asian community opposed the scheme and was willing to engage a wide network in order to combat it. It provides evidence they were highly organized and motivated to fight back against this effort to transport them.

Teja Singh believed Sham and Hagar Singh’s claim of bribery. An article of the *Vancouver Daily Province* discussing the alleged bribery wrote that “three thousand dollars in greenbacks is the amount alleged to have been offered...”³³ Teja Singh said that “this talk of the numbers unemployed is unfounded. Most of my people are at work and doing well. They are fast adapting themselves to local conditions.”³⁴ Evidence suggests the immigrants did not want to leave Canada and had put together seven thousand dollars to build a temple, which “ought to indicate they are here to stay.”³⁵ This shows how immigrants challenged popular perceptions of South Asians as being unemployed, starving, and a burden, which was used to justify excluding them from Canada. Teja Singh’s statements also refute the claims that these immigrants struggled to adapt to the climate of British Columbia. As a result, the claims that many of these newspapers made about “Hindoos” being doomed to die in Canada appear to be more motivated to carry out an agenda as opposed to accurately reporting the conditions of these immigrants.

³² Ibid.,26.

³³ *Vancouver Daily Province*, “Bribes were offered to Hindus to go to Honduras,” November 23, 1908.
<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/13921>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

There were unemployed South Asian immigrants, but Teja Singh said they were looked after by other members of the community and were not a hindrance to British Columbia.³⁶ Newspapers such as *The District Ledger* claimed that Teja Singh had dealt the “death blow to the British Honduras Scheme” by negotiating the purchase of 250 acres of property near North Vancouver where unemployed South Asian laborers could live, so they “in one respect benefitted white laborers.”³⁷ *The Golden Times* also agreed that the purchase of land in North of Vancouver signaled the “death blow” to the scheme.³⁸

Another article from *The District Ledger* provides evidence of the South Asian Immigrants not being interested in moving to British Honduras.³⁹ Discussing the visit to Vancouver by governor of the British Central American colony, they wrote that many immigrants reported recent improvement in the job market, so they had no interest in leaving Canada and that even the unemployed had enough to survive.⁴⁰ This raises questions pertaining to the general wealth of South Asian immigrants and the actual aims of this scheme. If they were a burden, then how could they raise seven thousand dollars to build a temple in Vancouver, while looking after unemployed people of their own community? Did the government believe that British Honduras benefitted them or did they grow afraid of the possibility of these immigrants rising in economic status in Canada?

Other newspapers were still motivated to convince people that the British Honduras Scheme benefitted South Asians. These writers most likely wanted to find reasons to remove the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Unknown, 1908, “The District Ledger,” *The District Ledger*, Fernie, B.C. : W. S. Stanley, December 19, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0182737>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Unknown, 1908, “The District Ledger,” *The District Ledger*, Fernie, B.C. : W. S. Stanley, December 5, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0182721>.

⁴⁰ Unknown, 1908, “The District Ledger,” *The District Ledger*, Fernie, B.C. : W. S. Stanley, December 26, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0182729>.

South Asian presence from Canada. *The Orchard City Record* wrote that these people had been “misled by agitators anxious to ferment trouble for the imperial and Canadian Governments,” and they suggest that “seditious hindoo organizations in Chicago and Seattle” backed them.⁴¹ The newspaper claimed that continued opposition to the scheme would lead to “many more... deported to India.”⁴² This newspaper article supports earlier claims that the South Asian community engaged a wide network in opposing the British Honduras. This is significant because it suggests that knowledge of the British Honduras Scheme was not confined to Canada and British Honduras.

This fear of these immigrants as being “unpatriotic” was reflected in a newspaper written for the *B.C. Trades Unionist* where the author claimed that “Hindoos” were not only lazy workers, but they “evidenced a desire to throw the yoke off of the British Capital in India.”⁴³ Another article suggested that once the “Hindoos” became “unprofitable” that there was a “sudden change of front. The ‘poor’ Hindoo is climatically unfit; the government must at once become paternal and ‘assist’ the Hindoo to Honduras- or any other place...peculiar are the workings of working class rule.”⁴⁴ This evidence shows that people began growing more aware of the paternalism used by the government towards South Asian populations. It would also seem that opinions of this attempt to transport South Asian immigrants began to be seen in a less flattering light by many people living in British Columbia in this time.

Once the British Honduras Scheme failed, newspapers voiced more critical opinions of it: “Neither ‘Sentimental rubbish’ nor ‘sympathetic piffle’ will fittingly describe the Victoria

⁴¹ Unknown, 1908, “The Orchard City Record,” *Kelowna Record and The Orchard City Record*, Kelowna, B.C., Chas H. Leathley, December 17. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0184689>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Unknown, 1909, “The B.C. Trades Unionist,” *BC Trades Unionist* Vancouver, B.C., Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, January 1. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0309345>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Colonist's allusions to the endeavors of the dominion government to remove the turbaned Hindoo to Honduras."⁴⁵ It seems that people began realizing that this attempt at relocation would be unlikely to be put into practice. A newspaper article discussing the opposition to the scheme describes an event on December 6th, 1908, when Teja Singh refused to accept the report on the conditions of Honduras from James B. Harkin, private secretary to the Minister of the Interior, "unless he would deliver it in the inner, sacred recess of their temple...."⁴⁶

The Khalsa Diwan Society diary gives more detail on Harkin's attempt to give a report on the conditions of British Honduras. The week before December 6th, James B. Harkin promised to visit the Gurdwara to ask the people what they thought about the colony.⁴⁷ A week later, Harkin arrived at the Gurdwara, but refused to go to the prayer hall to speak to Teja Singh while he was with other people, wishing only to speak to him alone.⁴⁸ Harkin told a person at the entrance of the Gurdwara to explain to Teja Singh that he wanted to meet in private; this person went to Teja Singh and explained Harkin's demands, to which Teja replied, "Brother! I am sitting in the august presence of Guru Sahib...the instructions of Guru Maharaj for someone who is sitting in the congregation is also that he should not leave the congregation. So what they should do is...come up here and decide whatever they want because it was they who had written about gathering the people."⁴⁹ Harkin did not meet Teja Singh.

This is another account that directly refutes the claims made by these newspapers suggesting that Teja Singh was luring him into the temple, and it provides further proof of why

⁴⁵ Unknown, 1908, "Boundary Creek Times," *The Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood, B.C., Boundary Creek Printing and Publishing Company, December 18, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0171257>.

⁴⁶ Unknown, 1908, "Keremeos Trumpet." N. Newspapers - Keremeos Chronicle. Keremeos, B.C.: J.A. Brown, December 11, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0310013>.

⁴⁷ Arjan Brar Singh, *Khalsa Diwan Society Diary Volume 1 English Translation*, 27.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

historians must try to look for alternative sources in these periods to develop a more complicated understanding of this event. The author of this diary wrote that they recorded what Hagar and Sham Singh said about British Honduras and sent the information “to Punjab to Bhai Diwan Singh Jallupurkherha, district Amritsar...”⁵⁰ This suggests that knowledge of the British Honduras Scheme and the way South Asian immigrants had been treated in Canada had spread to other parts of the British Empire.

Other newspapers suggest that Harkin entering the temple was a controversial move. Teja Singh urged him to enter the temple; according to *The District Ledger*, Harkin’s advisors told him not to enter the temple because “such actions would lead to reports in India that Canadian officials had entered the holy precincts to force the Hindus to emigrate.”⁵¹ *The Mail Herald* reported that the immigrants “had a telegram sent to the Secretary of State of India and a copy to Sir Wilfrid Laurier in which they say that the Sikhs in Victoria protest against possible removal.”⁵² Contrary to claims of unemployment, Teja Singh started a business called the Guru Nanak Mining and Trust Company, while other wealthy South Asian immigrants created labour unions to keep immigrants off the streets.⁵³ Such efforts encourage a cautious reading of those newspapers that described South Asian immigrants as being jobless and a drain of economic resources.

Eric John Eagles Swayne, Governor of British Honduras, visited Ontario on January 3rd in 1909 to discuss if transporting the immigrants to British Honduras was still possible. He spoke

⁵⁰ Ibid., 30.

⁵¹ Unknown, 1908, “The District Ledger,” *The District Ledger*, Fernie, B.C. : W. S. Stanley, December 12, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0182727>.

⁵² Unknown, 1908, “The Mail Herald,” *Mail Herald*, Revelstoke, B.C. : The Interior Publishing Co, Ltd, October 21, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0310837>.

⁵³ Eric J. E. Swayne, “Information as to Hindu Agitators in Vancouver [Confidential Memorandum on Matters Affecting the East Indian Community in Vancouver by Colonel Eric J. E. Swayne, Governor of British Honduras, Original, Page 4,” Komagata Maru Journey, December 1, 1908, <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/1250>

to the Canadian Club, a club in Toronto where prominent figures in law, politics, business, and the arts gave speeches on various subjects, to explain the “Hindu problem.” He claimed that in Vancouver “work started in the mills and that nearly all were employed, while those without work were looked after by wealthy Hindus and Mohammedans who feared forcible deportation to Honduras.”⁵⁴ Resentment against Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and other religious minorities began to diminish according to Swayne writing that “now that the numbers coming in have decreased and labour conditions have improved, the feeling against Hindus has died down. It is however strong against the Japanese, who are considered to be the real competitors of white labour...”⁵⁵

Swayne claimed that the opposition to the British Honduras Scheme transcended the boundaries of the caste system, writing that they “have coalesced from the common need of protection against the hostility of white labour, and Punjabi Mohamedans, Sikhs, and Hindus from the Punjab, and Brahmins from the N.W. and from lower Bengal, have been brought together in a way that could not have happened in India.”⁵⁶ This shows that the people the scheme targeted were not just Sikhs, but came from a wide variety of faiths. It also illustrates connections created in British Columbia because of the diaspora.

However, Swayne still desired regulating immigration from India, stating that “the terms of close familiarity, which competition with white labour has brought about, do not make for British Prestige.”⁵⁷ He claimed South Asians had no desire to stay in Canada and that their primary goal was to “accumulate money and return to India to free their farms from mortgages,

⁵⁴ Ibid.,3.

⁵⁵ Eric J. E Swayne, "Information as to Hindu Agitators in Vancouver, Confidential Memorandum on Matters Affecting the East Indian Community in Vancouver by Colonel Eric J. E. Swayne, Governor of British Honduras. Original, Page 7," *Komagata Maru Journey*, December 1, 1908, <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/12522>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.,9.

or to purchase others.”⁵⁸ Many of these immigrants were men banned from bringing their wives or families and the government feared that they would have no incentive to stay in Canada. Officials did not want these immigrants going back to India and telling others about labour conditions in Canada, which “would be exploited.”⁵⁹ What this could suggest is that the British Honduras Scheme was a way of ensuring these people would never go back to India, since information concerning how they had been treated could have led to instability in that colony. Despite these efforts to conceal, the evidence suggests that this scheme reached people in various parts of the British Empire and that people actively opposed it.

By analyzing the British Honduras Scheme, historians can see how race and class intersected in constructing the arguments for transporting South Asian Immigrants. Conditions shortly before this attempt were not ideal towards these immigrants with measures such as the Continuous Journey Legislation taken to restrict their immigration to Canada as well as a desire among many white Canadians to drive those who had moved here out of the country. This paper has shown that newspaper articles justified taking these immigrants to British Honduras by claiming that their dark skin prevented them from surviving winter and that they could not hope to earn as much as white, Anglo-Saxon men. Similar justifications were used in the proposals for British Honduras. Therefore, ideas around class and race intersected in the claims that these immigrants were unsuitable for Canada.

However, there is another reason why this subject deserves more attention. In terms of writing Canadian history, the British Honduras Scheme is a prime example of how much of what historians know comes from one sided, caricatured portrayals created by white, British

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.

Canadians. The Khalsa Diwan Society diary and interviews with Teja Singh contradict the popular narratives of this period depicting the “hindoos” as a poor, starving people doomed to die and instead present a people who managed to gain significant wealth and managed to engage a wide network across the British Empire to fight back against this attempt to remove them. Not only did they fight back, but their resistance foiled this scheme. These sources complicate historians’ understanding of this period and it gives the victims of nativism agency often denied in other accounts.

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