

# The east indian presence



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The last name Thompson is one of Scottish descent. But the person who owns the name has absolutely nothing to do with the Scottish, This is a common scenario for the many that inhabit the small Island of Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad, where the population of " just over a million people," as it is colloquially recited, is a large mosaic of different ethnicities from different parts of the world, and immigrants from each ethnicity came many different reasons.

These reasons, over time, have come to include slavery, indentured servitude, slave ownership, better lives, private businesses, and eventually leisure. The majority of the Trinitarian population is comprised of people from East Indian parentage. I, along with my maternal side of the family fall into this category. East India refers to the country on the Asian continent where many know the natives for exotic spices, colorful tapestries, and art crafted by hand that creates a sense of the far and mystical land of India many imagine as unreachable.

But in the United States they are reachable, for almost 100 years now, and today we share the America we all love with them as friends, colleagues, business partners, and neighbors. But it was not so in the beginning. East Indians came to the United States to create a foothold in the American dream of all. Instead of welcomes, though, they were met with the prejudices of the " white men" that rule the land with their unjust and racial hands. They were accused of being lethargic and detrimental to the country despite their contributions to the economy of the Pacific Coast.

The East Indians began their movement out of India by first landing in British Columbia. The immigrants came from many different areas of India such as Bengal, Gujarat, and the United Provinces. The propaganda pushed by Canadian employers created the impression of opportunity and success in working on the railroads. The treatment the Indians received in British Columbia, however, was less than suitable for a hardworking employee. Many arrived there with verbal contracts for work that were never acknowledged, and living conditions unsuitable for the severe winters they encountered.

From there, around 1907, they found their way down to the Pacific Coast of the United States in search of friendlier employers and better wages and weather. They settled largely in Bellingham, Washington, and parts of Oregon, working in lumber mills. In these areas, it was easy for Indians to feel more comfortable at work since mill owners were indifferent to their turbans or their skin color. Soon, there were around 1,072 Indian immigrants in the United States. When eventually Euro-Americans caught on to how Indians may be endangering their jobs, hundreds of them complained to the mill owners about being replaced and workers.

As a result of these actions, Euro-Americans were able to convince employers that it was dangerous and unpredictable to have the "rag-heads," as they called them, working for them and taking jobs away from white workers. One can see the hypocrisy in the situation if one revisits the lethargic and volatile nature of these Euro-Americans themselves. In response to these injustices, the East Indians were forced to move further

south into California. 5 As Indians entered California, in about 1907, their numbers again increased to around 1, 782.

Many moved to the port of San Francisco and the small city of Chic, just north of San Francisco, because of the favorable treatment they received. Many set to work with the West Pacific Railway where eventually there were as many as 2, 000 Indians working on the Pacific Railroad. As more time went by, less Indians worked the railroads after 1908 but they completed the construction of many bridges, tunnels, and railroad section work between 1907 and 1909. The Indians then turned their attention to agriculture in 1910, during Californians agriculture boom.

This provided many jobs for the Indians. 6 But in another unjust response to their hard work, Indians were now faced with opposition by different organizations. One of the organizations that proved determined to keep out Indians was the Asiatic Exclusion League. The Asiatic Exclusion League used their influential status to write Congress on several occasions about the "detrimental" effect that they believed Indians had on the American people. These "detrimental" affects included everything from industrial effects to moral effects.

The Asiatic Exclusion League worked to its fullest to inhibit success for the "Asiatic" (Asiatic also included the Japanese, Korean, and Filipino people of Eastern Asia) as much as possible in order to ensure their removal and deportation if possible. In 1910, the Asiatic Exclusion League further propelled the removal of Indians by describing the way they live as a disregard for "the decencies of life". 7 In the later months of 1910, the

number of Indians admitted into the United States began to decrease and by June 1910, some were turned away and had to find ways around the main ports to get into the country.

Indians tried alternate routes through Hawaii, Mexico, and even hiding until they could go unnoticed with those who were not deported. 8 When one thinks about what the "American Dream" means, is what the Indians experienced what comes to mind? For most it is not so difficult. Many may see a definite struggle, until a great opportunity presents itself that can set one's destiny on the perfect path that one can be successful and pass that success onto further generations.

But what Indians endured in coming to the United States, seems to be more difficult than one usually anticipates in trying to live out the "American Dream." What can be said for the Indians and their so-called "American experience," is that they accomplished what they needed to in order to push past all the injustices encountered and move forward. But I cannot say that they were able to enjoy the results of all their efforts. Nearly 100 years later, not many are aware of either their efforts on the Pacific railroads or the hardships they endured before and after that time in the United States.

While many other ethnicities are able to look back at history books and read about their ancestors' endeavors and contributions to the United States, those of East Indian descent are unable to do so as easily. East Indian efforts of the other Asiatic who came in search of the same work. Only they are outwardly credited, while the East Indian presence in United States history seems almost nonexistent. However, as one walks down the diverse

and multicultural street of Devon Avenue, one encounters many different cultures and peoples.

But one culture in particular that is prominent and well-known is the section known as " Little India. " This section is filled with many different places that one might hope to only see in India itself. Shops that sell saris, the traditional clothing worn by women, and salary zamia, the rotational clothing worn by men, restaurants that advertise their many Indian foods, and even Jewelry stores with the most precious and elaborate Indian gold. These shops line the avenue in the most ornate way. This section of Devon Avenue in Chicago, Illinois, is a good example of the presence and story of the East Indian peoples. Devon Avenue is home to many different cultures and ethnicities on several streets, but where the Indians mostly inhabit is on and around Mohammed Ali Zinnia Way and Mahatma Gandhi Mark. This section is also known as " Little India". Here one sees an entirely new environment, one that completely envelopes the culture, lives, and surroundings of native India. I have been to India before and was surprised to feel as though I had returned. Everything looked real and authentic. As I looked around I expected to see Indians who may look and dress as though influenced by the American society, but this was quite the contrary.

There were men, women, and children walking around dressed as if they just arrived from India. Women wear brightly colored saris, ones that, according to Mrs... Patella, a woman I stopped outside one of the sari-selling stores, "... Re exactly, if not better than those in India. And the jewelry is some of the most wonderful there is. " 10 Redcap, author of Ethnic Routes to Becoming

an American: Indian Immigrants and the Cultures of Citizenship describes the exact same scene in the sass's when she first comes to America.

There are, surprisingly, also many video stores that proclaim their Plywood contents and vociferously advertise with " film tunes" and, as Redcap illustrates, " window-hung Indian movie posters, featuring red-lipped, voluptuous women leaning against bare- cheated, brooding men in skin tight leather pants. 11 One man, Visual Ramparts, went so far as to say that " Devon is like an India away from India... When my mother misses India (my father) takes her here and lets her spend the day, then she feels better. " 12 All this and more contributes to the Indian story here in America.

The story of the Indian peoples is an arduous one. They had to fight for a long time so that America could hear their voices. And when eventually they did, the Indians could feel more comfortable and accepted in their surroundings. Because they were now comfortable and more of them had better reasons to stay and bring heir families, in 1985 they accounted for more than 500, 000 within the United States population. 13 Many of the immigrants settled in urban areas like New York , Miami, Anaheim, Washington D. C. , Houston, San Francisco, and of course Chicago. 4 With the settlement of these immigrants in these areas, they created sections with great diversity which attracted many other ethnicities, or encouraged them to create sections for themselves. But over time, some of these cities' diversity has dwindled diverse neighborhoods in the country such as Brooklyn and Queens in New York and Rogers Park in Chicago. 5 And in these communities, Indians play a significant part. These communities have helped make their presence known to the American people, because now there are <https://assignbuster.com/the-east-indian-presence/>

people who are willing to speak out and educate the American people about their culture, lifestyle, and history.

In the world today, people want to know more about them and are genuinely interested because of the diversity of the culture. As Helsel so puts it, " In the early sass's one could count on his or her fingers the number of articles and books about Asian Indians.... By 2003, the number had increased to more than 300. 16 Therefore, the evidence presented clearly supports and enhances the story of the Indian ethnicity making it more interesting and fascinating to others. It creates a will to understand their culture among others from different backgrounds, especially when one exposes themselves to an environment like Devon Avenue.

It sparks curiosity as to where these people came from, what their customs are, and what are the foreign things seen in the shop windows of Devon. When the East Indians came to the United States, looking for the American Dream, they found close to none of it. Though as time went on, some of those who were not deported in 1910, found ways of living in hiding while working at the same time. And quite some time after that, they began to find work more easily in the United States. While still being part of a group plagued by prejudice for a long time, many soon came to accept them and their culture. 7 Many decided to move to other states that offered a lot of opportunity like New York, New Jersey, and Illinois. These places offered many job opportunities like factories and other industrial work. New York was also a place where they could settle and await the arrival of their Emily who might immigrate later. In these places, Indians established small communities where they could all find comfort in one another. Soon these communities



became known as " Little Indians," like on Devon Avenue. 8 Today, there are East Indians in all fifty states. But the most populated are still New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Texas, Florida, and of course, California where it all began. 19 Today, the East Indian presence in the United States is quite noticeable, but their presence is not enough to say that they have truly influenced the American fabric or the essence of America. They are here, and many know of them, but they and their culture are still seen as significantly different from what many know the average American culture to be.

In closing, East Indians have made it into the American society and today fit in very well. They live alongside us everyday in workplaces, schools, and businesses. But as the presented evidence supports, this was not an easy goal to achieve. East Indians do not get the credit they deserve for their role in the construction of modern America and their part in United States history. History reedits many other ethnicities that worked beside East Indians on the railroads with its construction and omit the existence of the East Indian presence.

This creates the illusion that East Indians are part of the groups of immigrants that moved to the United States in fairly modern times and did not contribute to making America what it is today. The goal of history is to educate others about different peoples and who they influence different times and places. This courtesy is not shown to those of the East Indian parentage in the United States history, although they, much like many muggy into the modern United States. They do not deal with a lot of prejudice, and many find their culture interesting and exotic.

If anything, many more Americans are more interested in knowing about their culture and practices rather than bashing or belittling it. In the America we live in today, a lot in the culture is commonplace and Americans are always trying to find something new and attractive to create a hybrid of to fit into the American lifestyle. One can see an example of this back in the sass's with the artist Gwen Stefani. She marketed her style with an East Indian flare wearing the decorative "bindi" on her forehead and sporting henna tattoos on her body.