MILITANT BODIES: POLICING RACE, RELIGION, AND VIOLENCE IN THE U.S. SIKH DIASPORA


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"Militant Bodies" explores the long history of the Sikh as a racialized and religionized figure that violently troubled imperial, postcolonial, and national fantasies of security. From the British colonial period, to the Indian nationalist movements of the early twentieth century, to the era of decolonization and India/Pakistan Partition, to the genocidal pogroms of 1984, and finally to the global war on terror: the Sikh was simultaneously a nebulous and disruptive force to U.S. racial, religious, and gendered normative orders. Through close readings of English and Punjabi language texts and artifacts drawn from North American, British, and South Asian archives, this project illuminates how Sikhs were related to other "Asiatic" migrant figures by anxious authorities and publics. By combining historical, literary, and cultural studies methods, this project demonstrates how anti-Asian discourses continue to haunt contemporary liberal efforts to paint the Sikh diasporic body as a docile "model minority" and patriotic American citizen. More broadly, "Militant Bodies" argues that late nineteenth century techniques of inter-imperial security developed by British, Canadian, and American authorities have mutated into new interlocking forms of policing and surveillance: multicultural "tolerance" and global counterterrorism. At the same time, this project shows how Sikhs have creatively and militantly struggled against policing to represent themselves and their collective political and ethical desires. In this "Militant Bodies" demonstrates that Sikhs have, at various historical moments, radically allied themselves with others in anti-colonial, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and interfaith movements.

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