

# The limits of imperial incorporation: Alternative sociological frameworks to study Asian American subjects

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## Abstract

This paper argues existing scholarship on Asian American communities is limited by an assumption that incorporation into the US can productively address racial and economic precarity. As an alternative, we offer “Extinguishing Asian (American) Insurgency”, a theoretical framework that incorporates histories of colonialism, imperialism, and postcolonial politics of incorporation into contemporary sociological analyses of Asian subject formation. Applying Du Boisian sociology alongside Frantz Fanon and Joy James, the framework adopts a global, relational analysis of Asian Americans and the US state. We demonstrate the framework’s utility through two case studies: anti-colonial Sikh diasporic politics through the Gadar Party and US state efforts to tie diasporic South Vietnamese identity to an anti-communist politic. As such, we encourage the study of alternative possibilities of Asian subject formation that are extinguished by state incorporation, particularly through imperialism and military service. Specifically, we address sociologists who extinguish the insurgent Asian American subject in their scholarship by assuming incorporation and pro-state politics as a natural end goal of migration, or those who simply do not name the US as the institutional force extinguishing possibilities of Asian Americans’ insurgency.

## KEYWORDS

colonialism, comparative and historical sociology, imperialism, postcolonialism, race, race and ethnicity, racism, W.E.B. Du Bois

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Traditional sociological research on Asian Americans focuses on measuring migrant incorporation through economic mobility, with a recent turn towards explaining why groups still fail to achieve social and cultural incorporation (Kao, 2004; Lee & Zhou, 2017; Watkins, 2017; Zhou et al., 2008). Such studies receive criticism for assuming an “oppositional culture” to a Black underclass, explicitly and implicitly advocating for assimilation into a white middle-class standard and ignoring structures of inequality and domination (Ang et al., 2022; Jung, 2009). Additionally, these theories of migrant incorporation discount that race and ethnicity are historically contingent categories that change for the benefit of state political and social control (Kim, 1999; Treitler, 2013). Considering recent *Sociology Compass* articles on Asian Americans, analyses of anti-Asian racism remain locked in an intellectual binary of “model minority” and “forever foreigner” without acknowledging how the US state constructs selective inclusion for the project of white settler nationalism (Li & Nicholson, 2021; Quisumbing King, 2019).

This paper intervenes in these frameworks of Asian American-US state relationalities by demonstrating how sociologists' selective focus on incorporation has crafted pro-state relations as a natural outcome of migration. As we will later demonstrate, state-centric frameworks falsely articulate state violence through domination as the sole manifestation of power, which then removes resistance as a possible response to state violence (James, 1996). As a result, normative sociological scholarship on Asian Americans has extinguished the possibilities for an insurgent Asian (American) subject who rejects state incorporation as the only signal of successful migration. Of note, we use the parenthetical in Asian (American) to indicate when we are discussing the process of *becoming* Asian American—an intentional push against a universalized Asian American category (discussed without parentheses) and a reclaiming of alternative subjects that can form in the process of settlement from Asia to the US. While we name both communities and scholars responsible for extinguishing insurgent Asian subjects, our audience are primarily scholars who can write/right the formal record of Asian insurgency.

We start by analyzing the limitations of current sociological race and ethnicity frameworks on Asian Americans, such as racial formation theory, critical race theory (CRT), and tri-racial stratification. Then, we present our theoretical framework—extinguishing Asian (American) insurgency—which uses Du Boisian sociology to recenter histories of colonialism, imperialism, and postcolonial politics of incorporation in contemporary Asian subject formation. After detailing the three framework components, we demonstrate its application to two transnational, but US-based, case studies: (1) Sikh political radicalization through the anti-colonial Gadar Party and (2) US state efforts to tie diasporic South Vietnamese identity to an anti-communist politic. While seemingly incomparable, especially in their pre-migration histories of imperialism, we use “critical juxtaposing” (Espiritu, 2014) to trace the origins of two communities who presently have remarkably similar political and social attachments to serving in the US military as a primary tactic of belonging in the US. We close by offering pathways to recall the role of the global color line and postcolonial imperialism in studying contemporary Asian (American) subject formation. We directly address sociologists who extinguish the insurgent Asian (American) subject in their scholarship by assuming incorporation as a natural end goal of migration, or those who simply do not name the US as the institutional force extinguishing possibilities of Asian (Americans)' insurgency.

## 2 | CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORKS OF ASIAN AMERICAN INCORPORATION

Sociologists developed racial formation theory to highlight how state-sanctioned racial projects define meanings of race and ethnicity (Cheng, 2014). Studying the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created and transformed, racial formation theory analyzes how Asian American groups face shifting experiences of racialization and citizenship depending on the historical moment (Laybourn, 2021; Omi & Winant, 2014). Research on anti-Asian violence after COVID-19 argue that race remains a prominent factor in the failed assimilation of Asian Americans, who are still treated as “forever foreigners” (Li & Nicholson, 2021). These studies, however, overlook a larger analysis

of how the state benefits from the continued social and political precarity of Asian American populations. Thus, even in grappling with restrictions of incorporation-focused frameworks, newer scholarship on Asian Americans reiterates subject formation as a process of recognition by the state, while ignoring strategies of racist incorporation (Jung, 2009).

Within Bonilla-Silva's tri-racial US stratification system, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Laotian Americans are grouped under the "collective Black" category while most Asian American groups are categorized as "honorary whites" (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). Although this framework begins to pull apart differential economic and social trajectories within the Asian American category, it fails to analyze Asian American groups outside of the black-white binary nor explain how varying migration histories shape the differential outcomes he identifies.

A CRT framework shows how contemporary Asian American subjects' identities are shaped by a legacy of state-sanctioned, anti-Asian discrimination and violence (Curammeng et al., 2017). While CRT emphasizes how racism is an ordinary aspect of society, its application focuses on how elite whites perpetuate anti-Asian racism without a deeper interrogation of the role of historic social and economic relationalities (Chou & Choi, 2013). As a result, CRT largely overlooks how the state uses racism as a tool of state incorporation, how migrant communities themselves perpetuate racism as a means of belonging, and how pre-migration and historic diasporic experiences of racism greatly shape migrant communities' notions of belonging through the nation-state (Mamdani, 2020).

Building on race and racism frameworks that emphasize such global, historical, and colonial dimensions of race relations (Christian, 2019; Fields & Fields, 2012; Go, 2018; Tilly, 1985), we offer an anti-imperial theoretical framework for studies on the color line and global geopolitics. Reconceptualizing colonial histories alongside contemporary subject formation, we problematize incorporation into the US, specifically via its military apparatus, as a strategic response to racial and economic precarity (Hammer & White, 2019; Nopper, 2020). As an alternative to current scholarship, we understand the selective incorporation of "good" immigrants as further bolstering the state's imperial forces for extracting and maintaining capital rather than an act of American benevolence (Dhamoon, 2013; Glenn, 2011; Ngai, 2014). A sociological incorporation of imperial-colonial studies allows us to better trace how subject formation has been constituted by the needs of empire and conditions around the state's migrant incorporation (Go, 2009). For Asian (American) subjects, whose conditions for migration to imperial lands were shaped by the state's economic and political needs, a transnational analysis of racism clarifies contemporary pathways of incorporation.

### 3 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: EXTINGUISHING ASIAN (AMERICAN) INSURGENCY

This framework draws from the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, Joy James, and Frantz Fanon to illuminate the central role of imperialism in Asian (American) subject formation, which we argue is elided in sociological frameworks of racism and immigrant incorporation. Where an internationalist, Black radical Du Bois contributes that global, interconnected histories of colonial conquest are vital to understanding the contemporary experiences of previously colonized people, Fanon emphasizes that such experiences are marred by the nationalist bourgeoisie's internalization of colonial desires. While not often discussed together, Du Bois and Fanon develop a postcolonial sociology that resists analytical bifurcation and instead turns towards relational analyses of "social units, processes, and practices across space" (Go, 2013, p. 25). Sociologist Michael Burawoy also offered a recent reflection on possible synergies:

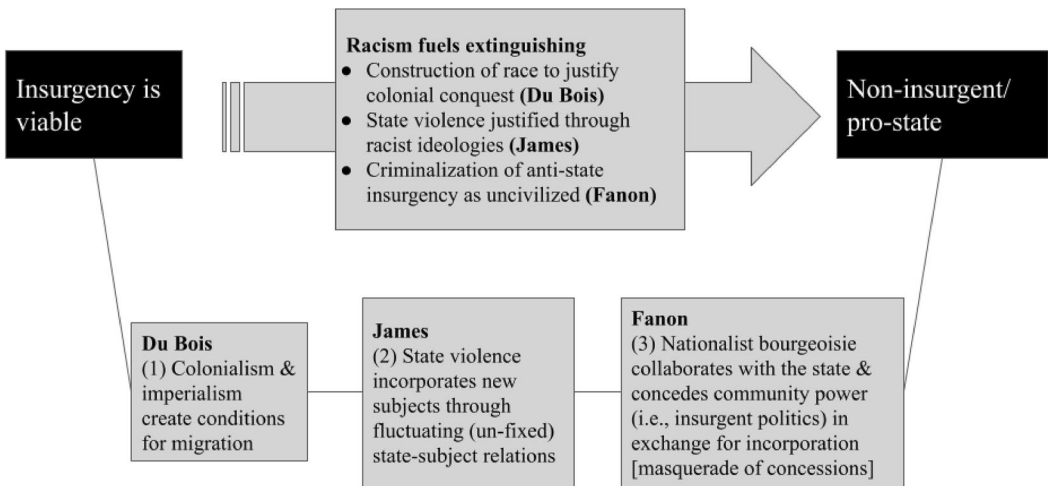
If Fanon's strength lies in his analysis of internal struggles, his weakness lies in his underestimation of international forces. The genius of [Du Bois's] *Black Reconstruction* is the bringing together of the national and the global—internal struggles shaped by and simultaneously shaping international capitalism. And yet, when it comes to studying the rest of the world—Africa, Latin America, Middle East, Asia—[Du Bois] is guilty of downplaying internal divisions and giving credibility to the perspectives of the dominant classes (2022, p. 582).

In addition to synthesizing Du Bois and Fanon to fill these gaps, we incorporate political philosopher Joy James to identify the social categories constructed to rationalize the state's economic and political violence. While Fanon distinguishes strategies towards incorporation between and within diasporic groups, Du Bois and James offer historical analyses of national and global forces and their influence on state-subject relationalities. Engaging in a historical-relational analysis of pre-migration colonization through Du Bois shows how imperialism predetermined the types of relations that many migrant communities would learn to expect from the Western nation-state.

The first step in identifying how Asian (American) insurgency is extinguished is inquiring, *how did colonial and imperial relations motivate migration?* We theorize based on materials from the second half of Du Bois's career, marked by his active participation in the Pan-African Conferences, ostracization from academic and civil rights spaces alike, and the globalization and destruction witnessed during both World Wars, which transformed Du Bois into a scholar of global and colonial racial capitalism (Itzigsohn & Brown, 2020; Morris, 2015). We develop a Du Boisian sociology of Asian (American) subject formation that centers imperialism's role in the construction of global and colonial racism (Du Bois, 1947). As Du Bois puts it, "There was not a single year during the nineteenth century when the world was not at war....at least one hundred and fifty separate wars can be counted during the heyday of the peace movement. What the peace movement really meant was peace in Europe and between Europeans" (1947, p. 12). For Du Bois, the main consequences of the World Wars are the (1) degradation of human labor distinguished through the construction of race and (2) subjugated positionality of the colonized to the nation-state, where in a "war over spheres of influence in Asia and colonies in Africa...both Asia and Africa were called upon to support Europe" but did not gain any tangible power (1947, p. 5). While colonized nations expected increased autonomy from imperial service, colonizing forces strengthened capitalism and industrialization to further enhance racist subjugation, making the interaction between previously colonized migrants and colonizing empires a crucial part of pre-migration relations.

The second step in tracing the process of extinguishing is using Joy James to specify how and when racism justifies state violence. James (1996) articulates state violence as a mechanism of maintaining universal US hegemony based on the predetermined evaluation of bodies through ideologies of racism, sexism, and classism. In this way, bodies placed in different relation to the state—relations which are also always shifting to benefit US capital production—are at the mercy of state violence and carceral punishment doled out based on these constructed categories. According to James, because racism is obscured as a tactic of the state to justify and rationalize state-sanctioned violence against civilians and subjects, US imperialism is transformed into a moral project despite its symbolic and physical violence. We theorize with James to ask, *how does the state use violence as a mechanism of diasporic incorporation?*

The third step in identifying the process of extinguishing Asian (American) insurgency uses Frantz Fanon's theories of postcolonial concessions and the nationalist bourgeoisie to clarify how state violence is also facilitated at the community level. Fanon argues colonial violence permanently transforms the colonial subject, whose primary interaction with the colonial regime is through constant and direct interaction with the soldier tasked with legitimizing the empire by carrying out its anxieties for social control (1963, pp. 3–4). This transformation initiates "a servitude that is not only more discreet, but also more complete" through what Fanon calls the colonized subject's "masquerade of concessions" to colonialism (1963, pp. 91–92), but it does not end with the postcolonial state. Fanon details how leaders of the newly independent nation move into the structures left behind by their colonial predecessors and adapt them to a framework of national consciousness that *appears* more representative of local communities. In doing so, the nationalist bourgeoisie—generally those who have benefited from colonial rule—will not act in service of the people's liberation, "but instead try to regiment the masses according to a predetermined schema" that recreates colonial rule through local political ideologies (Fanon, 1963, p. 68). The adaptation of colonial schemas in the post-independence state retroactively humanizes the colonizer's use of violence against its subjects, while legitimizing the continued practice of incorporation into state institutions through regulation and violence. As James argues, this also falsely articulates state violence through domination as the sole manifestation of power, which then removes resistance as a possible response to state violence. Through Fanon, then, we contextualize our final framework question: *how and why do certain members of the community collaborate with the state?*



Du Bois 1947, Fanon 1963, James 1996

FIGURE 1 The process of extinguishing Asian (American) insurgency.

Core to the process of extinguishing is the simultaneous and ongoing re-construction of racism and racist tropes, which further justify the state's disparate violence and extinguish any insurgent politics (Collins, 2002; S. Hall, 1989). As seen in Figure 1, racism is the *force by which* insurgency is extinguished. Racism allows what is otherwise known as cruel and unjust to be rationalized into “what one deserved” through racist tropes like criminality, anti-democratic, and, of course, insurgent. The benefit of racism to the state is that its use of violence becomes justified by patriotic nationalism to protect the state against insurgent subjects, as the bodies of impact are not recognized as fully human (Wynter, 2003). Civilians also take up these projects of patriotic nationalism to protect their own communities from violence and legitimize their incorporation, mostly facilitated by nationalist bourgeoisie. Although Fanon writes specifically about former colonies, we apply his theories to analyze postcolonial subject formation in the colonizing empire through James' study of state violence justified through racism. We do so using Du Bois to theorize how colonized groups entering colonizing states undergo new forms of racism and subject formation for the purpose of incorporation. We push back against normative scholarship on class mobility for racist belonging by recentering how both racism and classism are state-structured and enforced.

## 4 | CASE STUDIES

To demonstrate an application of our theoretical framework, we transition to our case studies; first, the anti-colonial Gadar Party, followed by US-based South Vietnamese politics. In our case study selection, we draw from sociologist Y n L  Espiritu's method of “critical juxtaposing”: the bringing together of seemingly different and disconnected events, communities, histories, and spaces to illuminate what would otherwise not be visible about the contours, contents, and afterlives of war and empire” (2014, p. 21). We identified Sikh and Vietnamese Americans as important cases of critical juxtaposition given their distinct migration stories but similar contemporary political and social attachments to US military service. Applying the framework, we unpack the imperial and colonial histories that suture Sikh and Vietnamese American belonging to the US military, recover a different understanding of these communities' positionalities in the US, and pursue a rewriting against the current way of doing sociological scholarship on Asian Americans.

## 4.1 | Sikh (American) politics: Subversion to subservience

Although understudied in the social sciences broadly, existing literature places Sikh Punjabis within a standard south Asian trajectory of upward class mobility, where post-1965 US immigration laws greatly favored highly educated Indian immigrants (Ngai, 2014). Within south Asian sociopolitical hierarchies, this meant dominating-caste migrants were prioritized due to greater access to higher education in India (Omvedt, 1982). Thus, while casteism and racism operate differently, the two have fused for diasporic south Asians into a global hierarchy of white supremacy and increased casteism (Mooney, 2020; A. Singh, 2014). Newer scholarship disrupts these tropes of assimilated and educated south Asians through the experiences of working-class south Asians (Mitra, 2020), but most scholarly depictions of Sikh subject formation still place the community within incorporation frameworks of thriving American life (Judge & Brar, 2021). Most contemporary scholarship on US-based Sikhs falls within three realms: post-9/11 surveillance and anti-Sikh hate crimes (Joshi, 2006; Sian, 2017; B. K. Singh, 2019), attempts for recognition within popular culture despite exclusion based on hypervisible markers of Sikh identity (Gibson, 1988; K. D. Hall, 2004), and grappling with ongoing anti-Sikh violence in Punjab as a diasporic subject (Bhogal, 2011; Devgan, 2018; Thandi, 2014). While acknowledging the continued struggle Sikhs have with racist exclusion, studies on US-based Sikhs still center incorporation where the state has and will continue to dictate viable Sikh subject formation. An application of our framework to study how contemporary Sikh Punjab subject formation is tied to colonial and imperial histories clarifies how Sikh insurgency was extinguished through transnational state violence, post-migration surveillance, and the selective incorporation of pro-state Sikhs who would collaborate against insurgent possibilities.

A Du Boisian analysis of pre-migration colonial and imperial relations begins with the annexation of Punjab into British India in 1849 after two consecutive Anglo-Sikh wars in 1845-6 and 1848-9. When Hindu and Muslim soldiers revolted in the 1857 Sepoy Uprising, British India persevered due to its new Sikh Punjabi soldiers who largely did not participate. Rather than understanding colonized subjects as acting according to unique political interests, the British rationalized the disparate behavior by marking Sikh Punjabis as a “martial race”—a categorization rooted in Victorian ideologies of gender, race, and power to classify certain communities as biologically predisposed for military service (Streets, 2004). While British-constructed, this racial categorization of martiality took hold as a narrative account of self and was used by Sikh elite to double Sikh recruitment into the British Imperial Forces by World War I (Das, 2018). Here, the construction of racist tropes to justify colonial and imperial relations are strengthened through the collaboration of a nationalist bourgeoisie.

In the late 1800s, thousands of Sikh Punjabi men migrated to the western US and Canada, assuming they would be recognized as equal British subjects and experience the social mobility they witnessed while serving as British soldiers (Puri, 1983; Tatla, 2004). But a Du Boisian framework points to the state needing a global color line to validate Eurocentric colonial and capitalist domination. Accordingly, these illusions imploded as Sikh Punjabi men were pushed out of town after town by mobs of white working-class men; hypervisible through their turban and beard, Sikhs were marked unassimilable through their competition with a white labor force, threat to US racial purity, and moral distance from Christianity (Lewis, 2017; Ogdan, 2019).

Through James, we recognize Sikh Punjabi men were excluded from the privileges of the colonial racial contract via state-sanctioned violence enacted through racism (Mills, 1997). Instead, Sikh Punjabi men found community in working-class labor movements. Many were radicalized in fields and factories through their interactions with the Industrial Workers of the World and other unions, which connected transnational labor rights to an anarchist struggle against capitalist wage labor (Ramnath, 2011). The Gadar Party emerged as a result. An amalgamation of anti-colonial and Indian nationalist political organizing in the diaspora, Gadar politics were invested in immigrant liberation through the end of global colonization and an ultimate return to India, in which Gadarites would militantly overthrow British colonial rule and reinstate the independence of Indian people (Gill, 2014). Given the overwhelming presence of Sikhs in the Gadar Party, gurdwaras (Sikh community centers) functioned as a site for mass education and mobilization. From Vancouver to San Francisco, all the way to Hong Kong and Shanghai, gurdwaras allowed Gadar Party leaders to speak to already-gathered community members, collect funds for disseminating

anti-colonial material, and meet to discuss strategy (Sohi, 2014b). Returning to our framework, it was only a matter of time before the state criminalized such anti-state and insurgent gatherings. Although their movement to end British rule failed, the question here is, what did the Gadar Party do for Sikh Punjabi subject formation and state relations?

The Gadar Party's lasting impact was manifesting fear and anxiety in local colonial governance in Punjab and the British Raj as a whole (Condos, 2017). In fact, "in the recollection of [Punjab's] Lieutenant-Governor Michael O'Dwyer [it was] "by far the most serious attempt to subvert British rule in India"" (Gill, 2014, p. 24). Through her study of Gadar Party surveillance, postcolonial scholar Anjali Gera Roy notes two larger phenomena of state-subject relations: (1) imperialism functioned through an "immobility regime", where Sikhs could only migrate without threat so long as it was through British orders as imperial servants and (2) the 1915 Gadar Party conspiracy trials set a lasting precedent for the subsequent Red Scare and other suppression of anti-US political sentiment (Gera Roy, 2016a, 2016b). As the Gadar Party gained in popularity and mobility, the German Foreign Office and Russian communists offered financial support and political refuge, validating the Party's threat to the British Empire. This silencing of Gadar politics demonstrates how the fear of violence originating outside of the state must be studied as a clear factor in developing US immigration policy and, thus, impacting immigrant subject formation. Canadian and US officials engaged in joint surveillance to identify and deport radicalized Sikhs and created restrictive immigration policy driven by the vulnerability US and Canadian political elite felt around rising global anti-state radicalism (Sohi, 2014a, 2014b). US and Canadian officials also shared surveillance reports on anti-colonial efforts from within their borders to British administration, effectively ending Gadar Party efforts within British India (Mazumder, 2011).

The second lasting impact was an increase in violence against Sikh colonial subjects. In the years following the Gadar Party's transnational resistance to the colonial racial contract, the British Raj used multiple instances of extreme violence to quell further possible insurgency. Most notable is the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre, during which Brigadier-General Dyer led Indian troops to shoot for 10 consecutive minutes into a large crowd gathered for an anti-colonial rally. These uses of excessive force and violence against unarmed people reminded Sikhs of the fluctuating relationship with the British Raj, placing the onus on Sikhs' cooperation for peaceful living under colonial rule (Mazumder, 2011). While racism radicalized Sikh diasporic politics, the lack of subjugation based on physical difference in Punjab allowed experiences of colonial violence to be classified as responses to anti-state versus pro-state politics, not racism, and maintained colonial solidarity amongst Sikh leaders in the region.

Part three of the framework, or Fanon's theories on the masquerade of concessions and nationalist bourgeoisie, contextualizes the transformation of US-based Sikh diasporic politics in response to anti-Gadar surveillance and violence. The transnational surveillance of Sikh Punjabi politics alongside increased violence against Sikhs in Punjab initiated a state-forced shift from a diasporic presence that was largely radical and anti-colonial to one that, today, ranges from moderate to conservative and is largely pro-state (Falcone, 2006; Judge & Brar, 2017). Simultaneously, mid-1900s political instability drove US immigration policies that were both protecting against the threat of communism while also attempting to hold onto highly educated immigrants to further develop US global capitalism through burgeoning technology (Davis, 1998; Hsu, 2015). This concurrent exclusion and selection of Asian immigrants sutured a new relationship between the diasporic nation-state and Asian immigrants, including Sikh Punjabis. While the "good immigrant" trope is typically studied as a racial project that helps craft the model minority narrative, it also maintains a pro-state politic, extinguishing insurgent alternatives (Bassett, 2009). For contemporary Sikh Punjabis, this has translated into the wealthiest community members developing advocacy projects for further incorporation into and "protection" by the nation-state, such as additional hate crime bills, an end to employment discrimination, and, most popularly, arguing for Sikh identity markers as integral to US military uniform policy (Judge & Brar, 2021; Kaur, 2020). Without a clear discussion of the state and its role in extinguishing insurgent Sikh subjects, contemporary scholarship on Sikh Punjabi subjects largely claim amnesia towards the Gadar Party as an origin point of US Sikh history.

## 4.2 | Vietnamese (American) subjects: Anti-communism as a cultural heritage

The sociological study of the Vietnamese diaspora has painted contradictory renderings of the group's economic and social mobility. Some sociologists focus on the social capital Vietnamese groups brought to the US that facilitated their economic ascent, while others use the higher rates of poverty among southeast Asians to challenge the model minority myth (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Espiritu, 2006a; Zhou & Bankston, 1994, 1998). Focusing on the achievements of Vietnamese refugees locates the problem of incorporation "within the bodies and minds of the refugees rather than in the global historical conditions that produce massive displacements" (Espiritu, 2014, p. 5). An application of our framework to study Vietnamese contemporary social identity clarifies how these narrative contradictions were state-created while being upheld by Vietnamese American leaders, and how fluctuating group identities amongst Vietnamese Americans have both supported and undermined the US's attempts to reposition their relationship to Vietnamese Americans and the Vietnam War.

First, applying Du Bois' global color line highlights how Vietnamese migration to the US has been contingent on their role in reframing US imperialism after failed wars. For both defenders and critics of the Vietnam War, US military involvement remains a central cultural focus to analyze current military intervention. To re-position the US's role in the unpopular Vietnam war, two narratives formed: (1) Americans as benevolent warriors who spread democracy by rescuing non-whites from communism and (2) Vietnamese as "good refugees" whose culture of being hard-working, family-oriented, and anti-communist explained their assimilation in the US (Espiritu, 2006b). The presence of refugees enabled the US to recast its aggressive military strategy as necessary and benevolent and to use the failures of Vietnam to justify future invasions. Because the Vietnamese refugee was "key to the (re)cuperation of American identities and the shoring up of U.S. militarism" (Espiritu, 2014, p. 2), their political standing in the US has been sutured to their role in upholding US imperialism.

Central to our theoretical framework is how imperialism is transformed into a moral project to obscure its symbolic and physical violence and, as a result, migrant groups face continuously fluctuating relationships with the state to rationalize this state-sanctioned violence. For the Vietnamese American community, whose migration and further incorporation has been directly tied to the need to justify US militarization, the masquerade of concessions is presented as opportunities for incorporation so long as the group can play the role of uncritical beneficiaries of the US "gift of freedom" (Espiritu, 2014, p. 2). As this is a more contemporaneous history than the previous case, the framework elucidates how relations are still constantly fluctuating (as per James) and negotiated by the nationalist bourgeoisie (as per Fanon). An application of the theoretical framework to the Vietnamese American community will focus on the fluctuating relationship between citizens and the state in (1) the creation of a Vietnamese American cultural identity rooted in anti-communism, (2) the usage of Vietnamese refugees to justify US military invasion in Afghanistan, and (3) the contentious relationship between the Vietnamese American community and the immigration system. These examples illuminate how sociological scholarship on Vietnamese American incorporation would benefit from a framework that includes the role of transnational and imperial histories in contemporary political projects.

The first wave of Vietnamese refugees were primarily those with connections to the US military including Vietnamese military officers, government officials, and business owners (Tran, 2020); this selective immigration helped develop the tropes of Vietnamese as good-but-dependent refugees and the US as benevolent protectors against communism. Anti-communist organizing and a growing diasporic, bourgeoisie politic within the Vietnamese American community further supported state narratives to retroactively humanize US involvement in the war. Saigon nationalism, a form of Vietnamese diasporic political and social organizing, is rooted in a culture of stateless exile and gratitude to paternalistic receiving countries (P. T. Nguyen, 2017). This form of nationalism served to build social and cultural community and created a political community that pushed for recognition from the US as a distinct group with their own political demands (Collet & Furuya, 2010). War memorials, cultural performances, and community events centered on military history are used to both build community and bolster narratives of a strictly anti-communist Vietnamese diasporic identity (Collet & Furuya, 2010). Saigon nationalism became both a political organizing tool and a cultural identity for Vietnamese Americans.



Vietnamese American political demands were also deeply rooted in anti-communist ideology, rejecting the Vietnamese identity promoted by the Communist Party of Vietnam and aligning with US democracy and capitalism (Collet & Furuya, 2010; Dang, 2005). Politicians and community leaders further tied Vietnamese American identity to US nationalism through their tough-on-communism stance and legislation to restrict funding to Vietnam (Tran, 2020). This was done to gain political acceptance nationally and social acceptance locally where anti-communist demonstrations among the Vietnamese American community in Orange County, California allowed refugees to gain acceptance from local white conservatives (Tran, 2020).

Even today, politicians tie Vietnamese American identity to the military and anti-communism. In the most recent congressional election for the seat that represents Orange County, Jay Chen, the democratic Taiwanese American candidate, emphasized his military credentials to gain Vietnamese votes while the Korean American republican candidate sent out mailers suggesting that Chen had communist sympathies given his Chinese connections (Chan, 2022). The use of tropes based on national ties further supports James' theory of how subjects are indoctrinated into "patriotic nationalism to provide the glue of civilian acquiescence to state violence in a democracy" (James, 1996, p. 20).

Tactics that solidify anti-communist and pro-US military ideologies within Vietnamese American communities intimately link the group's potential for incorporation with patriotic nationalism and civilian acquiescence to state violence. However, a simplistic reading of the community ignores the tensions between a state-supported bourgeoisie politic upholding US empire and those who actively challenge this framework of incorporation. During the US military withdrawal of Afghanistan, popular media quickly began to compare the withdrawal to the fall of Saigon (Warren, 2021). Vietnamese American scholars began to highlight the US's moral obligation to evacuate Afghan refugees, evoking their own family history; these calls focused on the need to only evacuate Afghans deemed Allies (V. T. Nguyen, 2021). For Vietnamese American soldiers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, military service was a way to prevent future Vietnams and "to try to vindicate [their] family's past – to not let things fall apart again" (Philipps, 2021). The relationship between Vietnamese Americans and the US military becomes a form of militarized freedom, where their American identity is perpetually linked to benefiting from and serving in the military (Bui, 2018). The masquerade of concessions is tied to participation in the US military, where the Vietnamese American community's acceptance is continually tied to their physical and symbolic support of the military.

Vietnamese American military participation in Afghanistan allowed US military officials to re-interpret the US' active involvement in Afghanistan. When comparing Afghanistan to Vietnam, one US military leader equated the countries as both having "a corrupt and ineffective government," arguing that Afghanistan's success will depend on "whether [Afghanistan's] military will be willing to fight for it, or just take off their uniforms and disappear" (Philipps, 2021). By re-situating the US' role in these wars from active belligerents to democratic benefactors who were unable to surpass the country's corrupt internal government, US imperialism is repeatedly transformed into a moral project supported by refugees they had formerly freed from their own ineffective governments. South Vietnamese veterans themselves destabilize this interpretation of the war, criticizing the US for renegeing on promises for military and financial support (Philipps, 2021).

Fanon's critique of the nationalist bourgeoisie combined with James' analysis of how racism is obscured to justify state violence against its civilians helps explain the growing competing social movements within the Vietnamese diaspora in response to US immigration policy. When Tony Pham, a second-generation Vietnamese American, was appointed director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in 2020, he emphasized his family's "lawful path to citizenship," supporting the state's rearticulation of state violence into a discussion of good versus bad immigrants (Wang, 2020). Simultaneously, 15,000 Vietnamese, Cambodian, Indonesian, and Chinese refugees faced deportation (Southeast Asian Resource Action Center, 2018). Insurgent movements to organize against southeast Asian mass deportations highlight how the crimes supporting deportation occurred decades ago and were due to lack of support for refugees to find economic opportunity and social incorporation in the US (Gammage, 2021). These movements problematize the narrative of grateful refugees by nuancing the histories of those affected by the Vietnam War and US military involvement, including Laos, Cambodian, and other southeast Asian groups. Deportation activism also challenges the racist tropes used to accept and discard refugees when they no longer serve to uphold the

state-approved narratives of the US as the savior of refugees fleeing communism (L. Nguyen et al., 2020; L. Nguyen & Luu, 2018).

As both a political movement and a form of cultural and social organizing, Saigon nationalism enabled Vietnamese refugees to find political legitimacy in the US, preserve the South Vietnamese national identity separate from Vietnamese identity, and resist cultural assimilation (Tran, 2020). The South Vietnamese refugee as a global model of success obscures the limits of American incorporation by erasing the unfulfilled wishes of the South Vietnamese to become a self-governing people who now are continually indebted to the US for their militarized freedom (Bui, 2018). An over-reliance by both scholars studying the Vietnamese diaspora and Vietnamese American community leaders to Saigon nationalism erases the community's critiques of US militarism, conduct in South Vietnam, and immigration policy and any attempts to disentangle Vietnamese American futures from the US military (Espiritu, 2014).

## 5 | RELOCATING INSURGENT ASIAN (AMERICANS) IN SOCIOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP

This paper offers an overview of existing sociological frameworks on Asian Americans and a new framework of extinguishing Asian (American) insurgency through an analysis of US-based Sikh Punjabi and South Vietnamese communities. Through these case studies, we demonstrate how scholarly depictions of Asian American subject formation legitimate imperialism as the sole natural producer of relationality between the US and Asian American communities. For US-based Sikh Punjabis, British racial ideologies around cultural predisposition for military service facilitated contemporary incorporation through an ongoing attachment to US imperialism. For South Vietnamese refugees, conceptualizing the war as a benevolent intervention sutured the diasporic community to ongoing US imperial efforts by producing a culture of grateful refugees paying back dues to the country that rescued them. In both instances, due to US state policy to incorporate Asians via military service, Asian (American) insurgency has been obscured as a viable subject formation. The exploration of US surveillance, imperialism, and militarization through the case studies also shows how crucial the active policing of Asian (American) insurgency has been to upholding US imperialism.

As a framework, Extinguishing Asian (American) Insurgency brings together W.E.B. Du Bois, Joy James, and Frantz Fanon to explore how scholarly depictions of subjugated communities transform from insurgent possibilities to largely pro-state. More importantly, it demonstrates the role of the state, through imperialism, as motivating the extinguishing of possible insurgent politics (extinguishing as self-inflicted or state-induced). Last, it shows how such political transformation is done through the construction of a nationalist bourgeoisie in Asian (American) communities, who drive the negotiating of new relationalities with the state. Without a critical analysis of postcolonial subject formation, it is possible to emerge with a homogenized focus on nationalist bourgeoisie groups within the Asian (American) community who uphold colonial forms of domination to ensure their economic, political, and social gains, as much of mainstream sociology has done.

In relocating insurgent Asian (Americans) in sociological scholarship, we argue that Asian insurgency demonstrates the capacious possibilities of understanding the particularities of violences while also acknowledging shared experiences of colonization (Yazdih, 2021). Incorporating postcolonial theory and global histories to the study of Asian diasporic groups allows us to analyze how empire shaped racism in a way that does not treat these relations as natural, but still significant for understanding material realities and possibilities for coalition (Hong & Ferguson, 2011). Future scholarship can use Extinguishing Asian (American) Insurgency to bring out the role of the US in co-opting narratives of Asian (American) insurgency, such as depicting Japanese internment during WWII as an example of patriotic nationalism while minimizing the role of Japanese American draft resisters as an insurgent movement (Muller, 2001), or in analyzing how overlapping Spanish and US imperial histories in the Philippines and Guam have resulted in both illegible projects of racial and state incorporation for these diasporic communities (Gandhi, 2022; Ocampo, 2016). Understanding that Asian devotion to the state has directly and indirectly legitimized the US as an imperial power, we challenge future scholarship to not take these pro-state relations for granted and more rigorously incorporate a Du Boisian framework of a global color line constructed through histories of colonization and imperialism.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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