

UC Berkeley

UC Berkeley Previously Published Works

Title

Nursing and Empire: Gendered Labor and Migration from India to the United States

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/94b849fs>

Journal

Journal of American History, 103(3)

ISSN

0021-8723

Author

Choy, Catherine Ceniza

Publication Date

2016-12-01

DOI

10.1093/jahist/jaw430

Peer reviewed

Nursing and Empire: Gendered Labor and Migration from India to the United States. By Sujani Reddy. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. xvi, 274 pp. Paper, \$32.95.)

In her interdisciplinary study of contemporary Indian nurse migration to the United States, Sujani Reddy contextualizes their migration within a longer history of a U.S. global presence in India as well as a U.S. domestic history of racial segregation and gendered separate spheres. Her study builds upon the critical insights of the historiographies of nursing, Filipino American studies, and African American studies that have explored the impact of U.S. colonialism on Filipino nurse migration and that have shown how the professionalization of U.S. nursing furthered the racial segregation of health workers. This exciting global history documents the nineteenth- and twentieth-century development of the nursing profession in India, charts the Indian nurse diaspora in the second half of the twentieth century, and contemplates the opportunities and limitations of their mobility in the United States.

Reddy argues that increasing U.S. religious and medical influence in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shaped the development of the nursing profession in India. While white American women Protestant missionaries and health care workers migrated to India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by the mid-twentieth century, fellowship opportunities offered by American organizations—most notably, the Rockefeller Foundation—reversed these routes and facilitated migrations of Indian nurses to the United States. U.S. educational exchange programs and new immigration policies furthered this phenomenon, which Reddy calls a “diaspora of decolonization” and a “forced exile from the full promise of a definition of decolonization” (p. 11).

One of the analytical strengths of *Nursing and Empire* is the relational approach that Reddy undertakes to make visible the connections between Anglo-American capitalist expansion and medical institutions on domestic and international scales, and between the professional development of nursing in India and Afri-

can American nursing in the U.S. South. The in-depth investigation of these broad contexts in the first half of the book, however, makes the subjects of Indian nursing and nurse migration at times more tangential than central to the study.

The focus on nursing and migration from India to the United States is clear and compelling in the second half of the book. Reddy skillfully utilizes her in-depth oral interviews with nineteen Indian nurse immigrants to document the uneven promise of U.S. immigration. The recognition of the innovative work of Indian nurse immigrants, such as Aleyamma Eapen, who pioneered a technique of using music rather than sedatives to calm patients during angiograms, contrasts with other Indian immigrant nurses’ experiences of a racial glass ceiling. Reddy astutely illustrates the dual meaning of being “foreign” for immigrant nurses. On the one hand, it is a devastating consequence of racialization. On the other hand, Indian nurse migrants themselves redefine “foreign” to signify “contribution, collaboration, and a form of belonging” (p. 181). Reddy also finds that patriarchal structures persist in the United States, although some Indian nurse migrants are able to renegotiate marriage and kinship ties. *Nursing and Empire* will be of interest to students, scholars, and policy makers in nursing, Asian American, and immigration studies.

Catherine Ceniza Choy
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, California

doi: 10.1093/jahist/jaw430

Islanders in the Empire: Filipino and Puerto Rican Laborers in Hawai'i. By JoAnna Poblete. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014. xii, 227 pp. \$55.00.)

This book, as the author attests in the introduction, is intended as “a socio-legal labor history,” describing the “overreaching process and function of U.S. imperialism” (p. 5). As a nation originally established as thirteen colonies of the British Empire from which they violently revolted, the United States has historically avoided the terms *empire* and *colony*

Copyright of Journal of American History is the property of Oxford University Press / USA and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.