



Utathya Chattopadhyaya

Assistant Professor, History

Cooperation, Caste, and Commerce in South Asian Chicago

The city of Chicago, between 1965 and 1990, was the site of significant, and understudied, projects in cooperation that indexed histories of immigration, capital accumulation, and business practices among South Asian commercial caste groups all in one frame. Taking a business association of small shopkeepers and proprietors, a community service league, and a health and human services mutual aid donor network as three crucial nodes, this project explores the intersection of cooperation, caste, and commerce in Chicago. By unearthing actual practices of cooperation among immigrant communities, each with different levels of access to capital ownership, and their effects upon cooperative institutions and urban life, this project ultimately opens new windows onto future research on the history of capital-owning transnationally-linked South Asians in the mid-twentieth century United States.

Jake Dean

Graduate Student Anthropology

Ecotourism in Baja California Sur: Integrating Community and Ecological Needs in Pacific Gray Whale Conservation-as-Development



My research addresses the challenges and contradictions of Pacific gray whale conservation-as-development in Baja California Sur, Mexico, exploring how to integrate ecological science with the socioeconomic realities of local communities. While proponents have espoused the promises of whale-watching ecotourism for local development and the prevention of extraction, my previous research shows its benefits are often inequitably distributed and that habituation to anthropogenic disturbance can cause ecological harm. To investigate these complex socioecological dynamics, I will conduct ethnographic fieldwork in the communities of Puerto Chale and Guerrero Negro, utilizing semi-structured interviews and participant observation of whale-watching activities. My primary objectives as part of the cooperative economics award are to understand how local communities balance environmental goals with economic needs, how local ecological knowledge can be better integrated into conservation frameworks, and how ecotourism can be structured to support both communities and whale populations. This research is part of my broader dissertation's effort to understand Pacific gray whale-human relations at various sites along the cetacean's migratory path from Baja California Sur to Alaska.



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Ricardo Jacobs

Assistant Professor, Global Studies

Organizing Knowledges for Farmworker Organizing and Cooperative Farming

The project maps power and profits in California's Central Coast strawberry industry to strategically support farmworker-led organizing. We trace how value flows through the supply chain, revealing who profits and who bears the risks. The research will map the industry structure to understand wages and working conditions, identify strategic leverage points for effective collective action—building on initiatives like the Farmworker Living Wage campaign—and create accessible tools - data visualizations, reports, and training materials - to help organizations explore alternatives like farmworker cooperatives. By clarifying the strawberry sector's evolving operations, the project aims to strengthen farmworker communities and allied organizations' efforts in organizing for decent wages, dignified conditions, and sustainable, worker-owned agriculture.



Ramsha Usman

Graduate Student Anthropology

Labor Union to Socio-Economic Cooperation: How Workers Redefine Sustainable Work for Healthier Futures

Since 2014, Pakistan's Special Economic Zones have expanded industries producing textiles, tiles, and surgical goods, resulting in widespread worker injuries and chronic health issues. Under the EU Green Deal, corporations and NGOs have introduced "sustainability" programs focused on workplace safety and efficiency. Yet these initiatives often overlook workers' exhaustion and their need for autonomy over time and labor. This project examines how an industrial labor union in Pakistan redefines sustainability through worker-led cooperative enterprises. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, it traces the union's dual role in implementing NGO-based sustainability initiatives within factories and establishing worker-owned cooperatives, such as a tailoring business. By following union meetings, cooperative formation, and workers' negotiations over rest, value, and well-being, this dissertation project explores how social sustainability is reimagined from the ground up. It asks how workers' experiences of injury and fatigue inspire alternative economic models.



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