

Two months after the Atlanta spa shootings that killed eight people, most of whom were Asian female service workers, I could not help but wonder why—Why Asian women? This question later served as the foundation of my history thesis, “**The Undesirables:** The causes of selective federal and state surveillance on Asian women and their reproductive decisions in the 19th and 21st century.” By investigating the reasons why the government selectively policed Asian women’s right to immigration and abortion through the Page Act of 1875 law and the 2013 criminal trial of the *State of Indiana v. Purvi Patel*, I aim to identify the factors that make Asian women in the United States more susceptible to selective surveillance, punishment, and violence over time. In doing so, I hoped to uncover root causes of oppression subscribed onto Asian women’s bodies.

As a start to any research endeavor, I first sought secondary sources to understand the status quo: What has already been done? From checking out classics from IU Libraries to reading recent journal articles offered on IU Libraries’ subscription to JSTOR in the fields of Asian studies, history, law, gender studies, and sociology, I reviewed hundreds of works—and relied on 40 for my final paper—all of which that not only built the foundation of my research but also provided me with unique insights on finding what is missing. In the literature I reviewed, I could not help but notice the lack of interdisciplinary approach in current research trends. For example, legal scholars only care about implications of these two cases on the law; historians only care about the Page Act of 1875; and vice versa, gender studies experts only care about Patel’s abortion charges. Of course, narrow scopes are necessary for many reasons including research interests and resource constraints, but by reading widely across disciplines, I was able to reach a unique conclusion that two seemingly different cases actually demonstrated key similarities useful to uprooting social problems related to the Asian community in the United States. Thus, the scholarship provided through IU libraries in a critical, interdisciplinary lens was key for me to better understand the nuances in a complex problem such as selective policing on Asian women in the United States.

In order to build on this foundation and develop a comprehensive framework that answers the research question, I conducted a content analysis on primary sources obtained from the federal and state government. For the former, I relied on IU Libraries’ access to the Congressional Records collection. After utilizing key search strategies learned in IU Libraries’ workshops (i.e. placing quotations around exact phrases and using Boolean operators), I found dozens of transcripts that prove how the intersections of racial assumptions, gender bias, and undesirable class identity as assumed prostitutes placed an easy target on Asian women’s back to heighten surveillance as they attempted to enter the United States in the 19th century. For the latter—Indiana state government—the law librarians at Maurer helped me with the process of requesting documents from the Indiana Court of Appeals. Thanks to their help, I received thousands of pages of materials related to the Purvi Patel case, which, again, demonstrated how similar racial, xenophobic undertones and gender expectations intersected with assumptions about Patel’s class to justify her guilty verdict and unusually harsh sentence. Finally, the ProQuest newspaper database through IU Libraries provided helpful social context for the analysis of both cases.

As I reflect on my research journey, I am reminded by what a colleague once told me: Research is “me”search. While it is an honor to contribute to the body of knowledge of the world, it is also an opportunity to reflect on myself—my identity, my community, and my values. Because of my thesis, I developed the consciousness to recognize and resolve the problems facing those who look like me by working with scholars at IU and activists with the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF) through the Reproductive Justice Leadership Institute (RJLI) and NAPAWF Indiana. In the future, when I serve as a Teach for America corps member in Dallas, I hope to use my thesis to not only instill a love for interdisciplinary reading, problem solving, and learning in my students but also teach and advocate for them by better understanding the interactions between their intersecting identities and their environment.