

A History of Racism in Whatcom County

A brief overview

The below is copied verbatim from

The Bellingham Racial History Timeline Project

Which was created by “[WWU] university faculty, students, and community members – from diverse racial backgrounds – who care about the future of Bellingham. We hope to see this city grow into a vibrant inclusive community that is welcoming to all.”

The full project can be found at the following web address: “<https://wp.wwu.edu/timeline/>”

COAST SALISH INHABITANTS
1770'S INCURSION BY SEA
1830'S INCURSION BY LAND
1852 BELLINGHAM BAY SETTLERS
1855 RESERVATIONS ESTABLISHED
1858 NON-CITIZENS AND SLAVES
1860'S CHINESE WORKERS ARRIVE
1880'S RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS
1882 CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT
1884 LYNCHING OF LOUIE SAM
1885 CHINESE EXPELLED
1890'S CANNERY DISCRIMINATION
1906 FIRST BLACK STUDENT
1906 SOUTH ASIANS ARRIVE
1907 SOUTH ASIANS EXPELLED
1920'S RISE OF THE KKK
1926 KKK BELLINGHAM PARADE
1929 KKK CONVENTION
1930'S REAL ESTATE EXCLUSION
1942 JAPANESE INTERNMENT
1950'S SUNDOWNING
1960'S WWU STUDENTS PROTEST
1960'S & 70'S FISH WARS
1994 CROSS-BURNING
1995 SKINHEAD VIOLENCE
2000 RACIST INCIDENTS
2003 FLAGS, NOOSES, SLURS
2011 ANTI-MUSLIM RADIO STATION
2015 HATE SPEECH CLOSES WWU
2016 RACIALIZE FOOD DESERT
2016 ANTI-SEMITISM AT WWU
2017 ISLAMOPHOBIA AT WWU
2018 ATOMWAFFEN IN WHATCOM
2018 IMMIGRANT DETENTIONS
2018 RACIST GRAFFITI AT WWU
2019 RACIST PROPAGANDA
2019 MISSING NATIVE WOMEN
2020 RACIST FLYERS & THREATS
2020 RACISM AS HEALTH CRISIS

*For this summary we will be focusing primarily on the events in **red***

1840s Incursion by Land

Black Exclusion Laws in the Oregon Territory

June 18, 1844

“The Provisional Government passes Oregon’s first black exclusion law. It states that blacks who tried to settle in Oregon would be publicly whipped – thirty-nine lashes, repeated every six months – until they left Oregon.”

<https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/exhibits/black-history/Pages/context/chronology.aspx>

December 19, 1844

The exclusion law was changed from punishing blacks who stayed in Oregon from physical whipping to forced public labor.

September 21, 1849

“The Oregon Territorial Legislature enacts an exclusion law that prohibits’...negro or mulatto to enter into, or reside within the limits of this Territory’ ”

September 18, 1850

“Congress passes the Donation Land Act, giving free land to white settlers.”

<https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/exhibits/black-history/Pages/context/chronology.aspx>

The above were only some of the Exclusion Laws during this time period.



“The entire region of the Northwest... criminalized the presence of black people and the first black Exclusion Law included the Lash Law that said black people would be publicly whipped every six months until they left the territory.”

– Walidah Imarisha, educator and writer

<https://www.opb.org/television/programs/oregonexperience/article/oregon-black-pioneers-documentary/>

1860s - 1900s Coast Salish Children Sent to Residential Boarding Schools



“Coast Salish children were sent to residential schools with an explicit policy to strip them of their culture and language... Despite Bellingham's thriving and established public school system, Whatcom County's Lummi and Nooksack children attended the crowded Chemewa school and Stickney Home Mission School for Indians in Lynden.

Read more at: <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article22196544.html#storylink=cpy>”

Catholic mission boarding school at Tulalip

HeraldNet - Everett, Washington

<https://www.heraldnet.com/news/unearthing-the-horrors-of-the-tulalip-indian-school/>

“Some Lummi children were sent to a Catholic mission boarding school at Tulalip. Some were sent to the Stickney Home Mission School for Indians in Lynden. Some were sent to the Chemawa Boarding School in Oregon. Some were sent to other Indian residential schools.”



Stickney Home Mission School for Indians in Lynden

The Bellingham Herald

<https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article22196544.html>

(URL paywall)

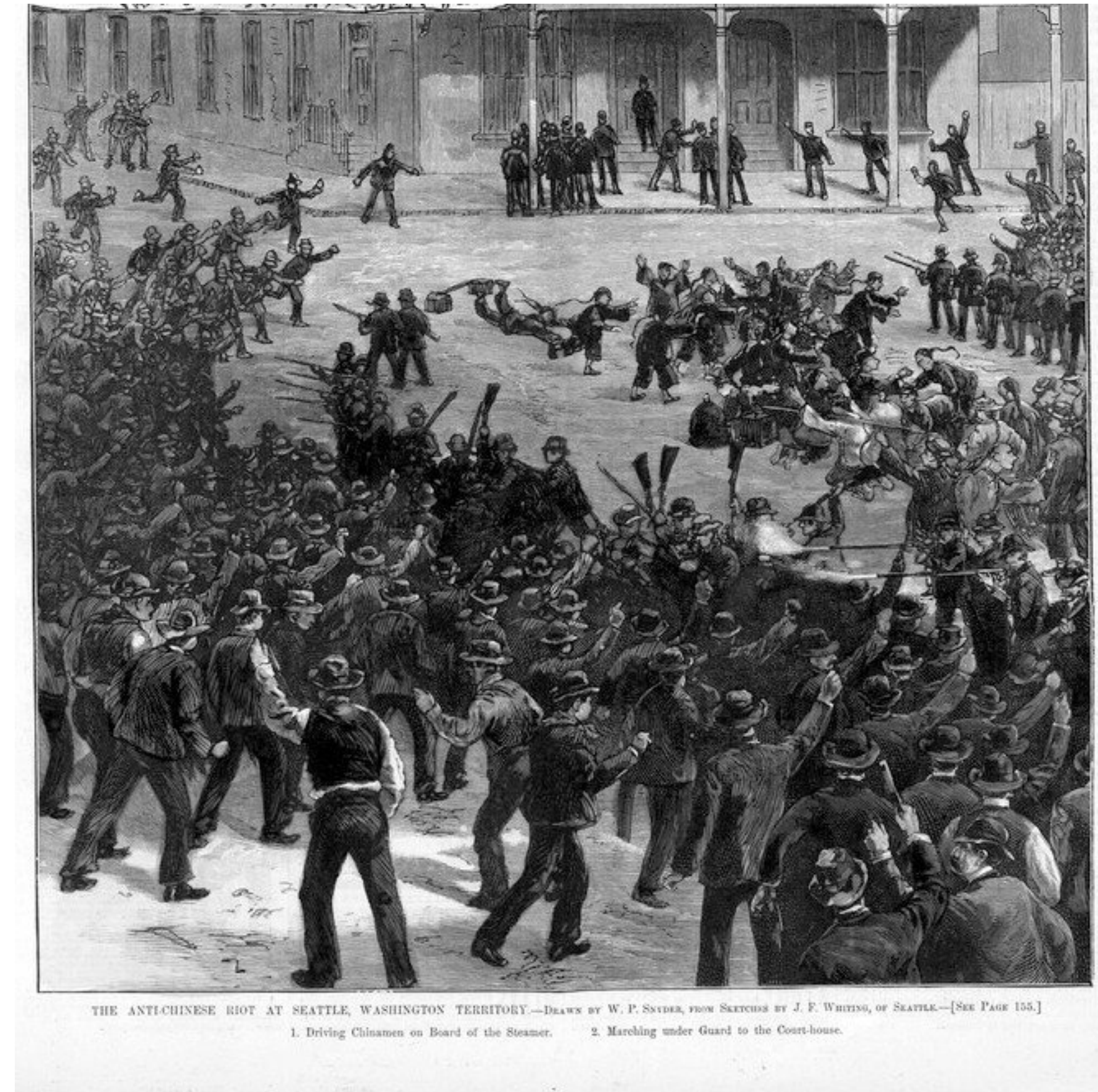
1882 Chinese Exclusion Act

May 6, 1882

“The **Chinese Exclusion Act** was a United States federal law signed by President Chester A. Arthur on May 6, 1882, prohibiting all immigration of Chinese laborers for 10 years...Building on the earlier Page Act of 1875, which banned Chinese women from migrating to the United States”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Exclusion_Act

Following this act many Chinese were forced out of communities in the West.



“The anti-Chinese riot at Seattle, Washington Territory”

There were riots in many towns across the West where “Chinese laborers were systematically driven out”

The above was featured in a two part series by Kolby La Bree

<https://bellinghistory.com/blog/2020/10/13/the-chinese-curse-of-bad-town-episode-2>

1885 Expulsion of Chinese Immigrants from Whatcom County

Local Whatcom newspaper “The Reveille” together with civic leaders launched a campaign to expel all Chinese out of Whatcom county. They accomplished their intended task late September early November of 1885 with local Chinese immigrant families and business owners leaving Bellingham forced out by threats and boycotts.

”Thousands of the immigrants were hounded out of towns in the Puget Sound during the fall of 1885 and winter of 1886. In places like Seattle and Tacoma, white residents burned the homes of Chinese, beat them and killed some of the immigrants as anti-Chinese activities hit a peak.

Read more at: <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article22202538.html#storylink=cpy>”

“In the Nov. 6, 1885, edition [of the Whatcom Reveille], they castigated those residents - they called them "white Chinamen" - who refused to take part in pushing the Chinese out of Whatcom County. "Everybody rejoices except for a baker's dozen of sycophantic maudlin sympathizers, whose sickening sentimentality has become as disgusting as it is absurd and idiotic," they wrote.

Read more at: <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article22202538.html#storylink=cpy>”

1907 South Asians Expelled

“Several hundred South Asian immigrants, most of them Punjabi had come to Bellingham to work in the lumber mills”. <https://wp.wvu.edu/timeline/south-asians-expelled/>

The Japanese-Korean Exclusion League, with 800 local members, demanded that the immigrants leave by Labor Day. When they did not 1,000 union members marched through the streets of Bellingham.

Tensions continued and on September 4, 1907 South Asian workers were pulled from the mills they were working in, entered their residences and destroyed their property. The South Asian workers were driven to city limits or to the jail in the Old City Hall. “The police housed those who made it to the jail, ostensibly for their protection, on the condition that they leave town shortly afterward.”

The Asiatic Exclusion League exploits the tension to work to exclude South Asians from U.S. citizenship. “The National Origins Act of 1924 entrenched and codified these new divisions.” <https://wp.wvu.edu/timeline/south-asians-expelled/>



“Some of the men rounded up by rioters and brought to the city hall”
<https://wp.wvu.edu/timeline/south-asians-expelled/>



“September 5th, 1907. The morning following the riot, crowds gather outside Bellingham’s city hall.”
http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/bham_history.htm



“Following the riot, South Asian workers wait to depart at the Bellingham train station. Crowds reportedly gathered to cheer as the South Asians left.”
Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project

http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/bham_history.htm

1942 Japanese Internment

May 22, 1942

Japanese residents of Bellingham were required to report for registration at a Western Defense Command control center in Burlington.

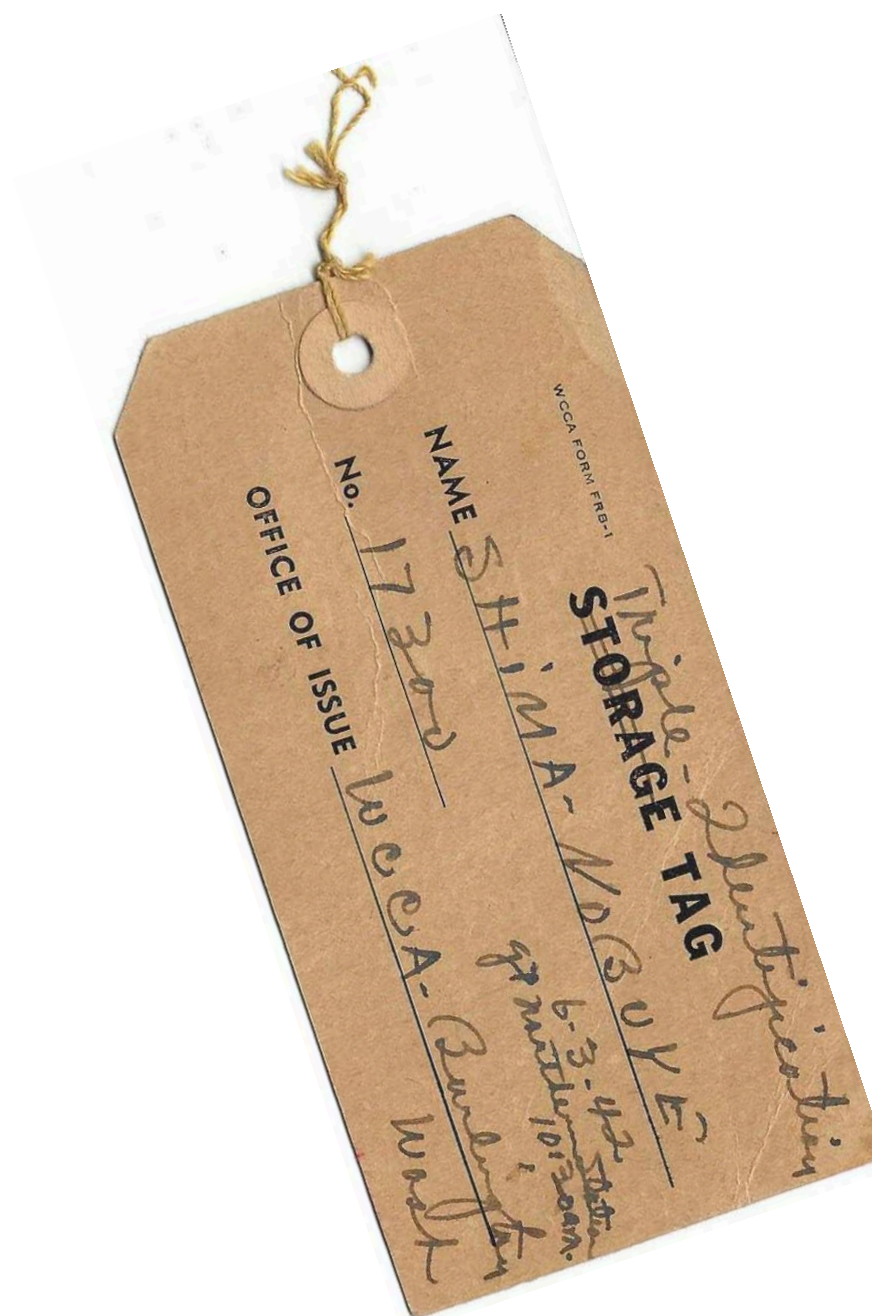
There were 33 Japanese Americans living in Bellingham at the time. On June 3rd any residents still remaining left by bus to Tule Lake.



Nobuye "Pat" Shima (6 years old) being expelled from Bellingham. (June 4, 1942, Bellingham Herald)

"Nobuye "Pat" (Shima) Kawabata was 6 years old when her family was taken to the Tule Lake Internment Camp in 1942. A photo published in the Bellingham Herald on June 4, 1942, shows her waiting with her doll at 1406 H St. for the bus. Pat and her family went to Tule Lake, and from there to an internment camp in Heart Mountain, Wyoming."

<https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article208368299.html>



The big bus that started Whatcom county Japanese on their way to the Tule Lake assemble center in Northern California Wednesday received many of its passengers at the Kenzo Okubo residence, 1406 H street. There several families had assembled their personal effects. The photograph shows the first of them boarding the bus for Burlington. There they boarded a train for Tule Lake. Okubo left his home with a "for sale" sign on the front wall. The government is storing heavy pieces of furniture and household furnishings for the Japanese until they return. The Burlington assembly of Japanese from Whatcom, Skagit, San Juan and Island counties, totaled ninety-seven. An additional fifty-seven were picked up at Everett, more at Seattle.— Herald staff photo.

Bellingham Herald June 3, 1942



Japanese Internment Camp - Tule Lake
<https://www.nps.gov/tule/index.htm>

September 4th, 2007 was the 100th anniversary of the 1907 Bellingham Riots and was declared a Day of Healing and Reconciliation



Joint Proclamation



WHEREAS, the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County are committed to promoting harmony between people of all races, creeds and denominations; and

WHEREAS, cultural and religious diversity is one of our community's greatest endeavors; and

WHEREAS, numerous individuals and organizations in our community are joining together to raise awareness of the importance of reconciliation between people of different backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, September 4, 2007 is the 100-year anniversary of the anti-Sikh and anti-East Indian riots that took place in Bellingham; and

WHEREAS, the purpose for a Day of Healing and Reconciliation is to celebrate a positive, collective healing and reconciliation movement within our families, communities, churches and government and to educate ourselves and others about our collective history of government policies which impacted Native communities and other ethnic groups; and

WHEREAS, a Day of Healing and Reconciliation can promote racial reconciliation and bring all community members together through the celebration of our common bond of freedom; and

WHEREAS, when we are judged by history and by our children, let it be said that we overcame our differences for the sake of our children and that we shared a common dream for the future; and

WHEREAS, our community continues to reaffirm our fundamental belief in human dignity and our unchanging reverence for human rights;

NOW, THEREFORE, DO WE, Tim Douglas, Mayor of the City of Bellingham, and Pete Kremen, Whatcom County Executive, proclaim Tuesday, September 4, 2007 to be a

DAY OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

in the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County, Washington.

Signed this 14th day of August 2007

Tim Douglas, Mayor
City of Bellingham

Pete Kremen, County Executive
County of Whatcom



The dedication of the Arch of Healing and Reconciliation ...
Photo: BellingHistory Good Time Girls.

<https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article208368299.html>

Why an Arch?

"An Arch is a reminder, "there is always another way". It is a doorway to step through certain perspectives to see what's on the other side. Walking through an archway represents disembarking from the old and moving into a new phase of life. The arch symbolizes our epiphany, confirming the plan of action after weighing the balance of choices available to us. It is the initiation and ceremony of renewal in Eastern Cultures."



<https://archofhealing.org/>

How might we.....?

How might we build on the work of the
Arch of Healing Foundation?

How might we.....?

How might we.....?

How might we.....?

How might we support education
concerning the history of racism in
Whatcom County?

How might we recognize September 4,
Whatcom County's Day of Healing and
Reconciliation?

Appendix

Additional Impactful Content:

“We Are Not Strangers” Documentary about 1907 Bellingham Riots

This documentary is funded by Guru Nanak Gursikh temple of Lynden WA in the memory & commemoration of the 100 year anniversary of the eviction of over 250 Sikhs and other Indian citizens from Bellingham WA in September 1907.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvn_LpXj694

“Racist Covenants Discovered in Bellingham” - King5

<https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/bellingham/racist-covenants-discovered-in-bellingham/281-68310974-9ae6-422b-9d93-846e13fadb73>

“This arch bears the weight of history against immigrant communities, and a hope for unity”

by Kie Relyea for the Bellingham Herald

<https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article208368299.html>

“Bellingham Racial History Timeline”

<https://wp.wvu.edu/timeline/>