

such as Sam Cooke scandalized the gospel world by secularizing church songs—inventing soul music along the way.

While jazz and soul were able to evolve and thrive midcentury, hip-hop, a more recent African-American musical genre, has been stymied by heightened copyright restrictions. Multiplatinum artists such as West can afford to pay \$50,000 or even \$100,000 for the use of a song snippet that may last only a few seconds. But the dense sonic collages produced in the late 1980s by experimental artists the likes of De La Soul and Public Enemy would be prohibitively expensive to distribute today.

Boyle persuasively maintains that we cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the harm that pervasive intellectual property law is doing. “A better intellectual property system certainly will not end world hunger;” or, for that matter, cure AIDS, fight malaria, or save the planet. “But,” he concludes, “overly broad, or vague, or confusing patents could (and I believe have) hurt all of those efforts.” Still, Boyle assures us that there is no need to succumb to doom or gloom. In the final chapters, he documents the ways ordinary citizens have successfully pushed back against the law’s expansionist tendencies—for example, by attaching generous terms of use to their own work. The future is still up for grabs.

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India’s Pilgrims

Reviewed by Vikram Johri

AMITAV GHOSH’S EXCELLENT 2008 novel *Sea of Poppies* acquainted readers with early-19th-century India, delving into the lives of “coolies”—indentured laborers—who were transported to islands as distant as Fiji and Mauritius to work on British plantations, even after slavery was

LEAVING INDIA:
My Family’s Journey
From Five Villages to
Five Continents.

By Minal Hajratwala.
Houghton Mifflin
Harcourt. 430 pp. \$26

outlawed in the British Empire in 1834. When I picked up Minal Hajratwala’s *Leaving India*, I was delighted at the prospect of reading a tale about a real family from the state of Gujarat that spread across the globe. The book did not disappoint. It is a fascinating study of a few of the emigrants whose tentative steps eventually resulted in today’s Indian diaspora of as many as 30 million people.

Hajratwala, a journalist who currently lives in San Francisco, begins by drawing an elaborate portrait of her paternal clan, the Solankis. According to the *varna* system that designates social standing, Hindus descended from four distinct groups: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (artisans), and Shudras (laborers). The Solankis are Kshatriyas, and Hajratwala builds on this seemingly inconsequential fact to narrate an account, based on community lore, of how her ancestors turned from warriors to weavers, and how that dovetails with her paternal great-grandfather’s intrepid journey in 1909 to seek his fortune in Fiji. There he worked as a tailor—a first step on the way to building one of the South Pacific’s largest department stores.

Hajratwala’s maternal grandfather, Narotam, also left India to improve his lot. In 1930, he walked with Gandhi during the famous march to Dandi to protest a colonial salt tax. A year later, to support his young family, Narotam joined the Gujarati community in Fiji and began sewing women’s clothes. Eventually, he and his brother opened a store that sold ready-made clothing. His last child, Bhanu (the author’s mother), was born in 1946, a year before India gained independence from Britain.

It is a tribute to Hajratwala’s writing that she is able to coalesce the disparate factions of her family into a satisfying whole. And we are not even halfway there. It’s 1963, and a young man is about to make use of the recently relaxed U.S. rules for foreigners wishing to study in America. Bhupendra, the author’s father, enrolled at the University of Colorado, Boulder, to study manufacturing. He was among the first generation of Asian immigrants to come to the United States for skills

training—and permanently change the composition of the country.

The families arranged an alliance between Bhupendra and Bhanu, who was still in Fiji at the time. The two had nothing in common except the “Gujarati from Fiji” tag. He was stern and no-nonsense; she was sweet and artistic. The wedding was hastened so that Bhupendra could return to the United States in time for the start of the new school year. The newlyweds haltingly made their lives in America, which required numerous adjustments, large and small. When she first arrived, Bhanu, not a vegetarian, was nevertheless aghast at the bloody look of the meat on offer—especially beef, which she had never

tasted—and for a whole day ate nothing but *chevdo*, a traditional Indian snack mix.

When the author’s mother arrived in the United States, she was aghast at the bloody look of the meat on offer.

The day Hajratwala was born, in 1971, her father sent out three telegrams, one each to Fiji, Toronto, and Lon-

don. He also received a telegram offering him an academic position in New Zealand. And so this peripatetic family was again propelled to new shores. “Gain and loss, give and take: These are the fundamental tropes of migration, the ebbs and flows that are as certain as travel itself,” Hajratwala writes.

Perhaps the most prominent symbol of change in her family was the cultural openness in America that allowed Hajratwala to come out as a lesbian to her parents. It may be the limited scope of the book that prevents Hajratwala from fully exploring how immigrant communities handle the explosive subject of homosexuality. Yet her spirited and sympathetic representation of the rapidly expanding Indian diaspora testifies to the truth of the Indian adage, “What Destiny writes, neither human nor god may put asunder.”

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ARTS & LETTERS

National Subject

Reviewed by Matthew Battles

IN THE 18TH AND EARLY 19th centuries, many Americans saw no place for art in their new nation. The country lacked professional art academies, patrons who commissioned work for palaces and cathedrals, and

the leisure to appreciate art. In fact, however, this new land presented painters and sculptors with a host of opportunities. Wealthy colonists wanted their portraits limned; they lined their studies with paintings and ornaments. And, as Hugh Howard shows in *The Painter’s Chair*, post-colonial America’s political culture called on a generation of artists to develop new means of representing history, power, and achievement.

The painter’s chair of Howard’s title is no mere stool or Windsor armchair, but a technical apparatus—a seat on gimbal and screw—that permitted the artist to revolve a sitter without altering his pose as the light changed throughout the day. George Washington became intimately familiar with the chairs of many artists. By Howard’s count, Washington sat for at least 28 painters, several of them on numerous occasions. The resulting portraits were endlessly reproduced. Despite his frequent expressions of impatience, Washington keenly understood the manifold purposes of the visual arts in his time—to provide a record of people and events, mementos of loved ones, and the images that helped form public discourse and popular mythology.

Whether Washington was sitting for artists or presiding over the Constitutional Convention, his impassive countenance belied a sensitive apprehension of events. One of Howard’s most delightful scenes, in which Washington lies on a large table at Mount

THE PAINTER’S CHAIR:

George Washington and the Making of American Art.

By Hugh Howard.
Bloomsbury.
297 pp. \$30