Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America

Vivek Bald
Assistant Professor, MIT and Documentary Filmmaker

Date: March 28
Time: 3:30-5:00 PM
Location: 2110 Taliaferro Hall

Drawing from his recently published book, “Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America,” Bald will discuss two little-known populations of South Asian migrants who made their way to and through the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The first group consisted of small traders of embroidered silks who began selling their goods on New Jersey’s beach boardwalks in the 1880s and then built an extensive peddler network that was rooted in New Orleans and spread throughout the U.S. South and into the Caribbean and Central America. The second group were workers on British steamships, who began jumping ship in New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia during WWI to access factory and restaurant jobs onshore. Bald will trace out these early histories, exploring the ways South Asian migrants navigated both British colonial power and U.S. racialization, segregation, and immigration restrictions - and the ways African American and Puerto Rican communities provided these men with shelter and possibility at the height of the Asian Exclusion era.