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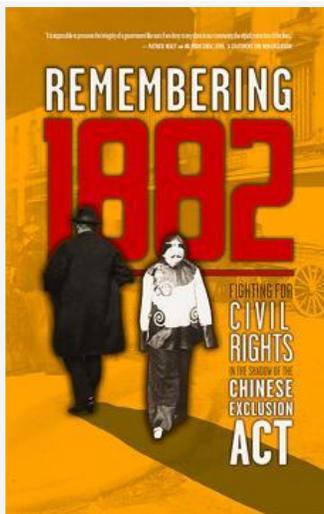
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Regret for Chinese Exclusion Laws Faces Uphill Battle in House - Part 1



When the Senate passed Senate Resolution 201, it came as a pleasant surprise. I was eager to read about it, but only belatedly discovered that it has yet to pass in the House. In May 2011, Congresswoman Chu had first sponsored House Resolution 282 "Resolution Expressing Regret for the Chinese Exclusion Laws." Her House speech was nationally televised <<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/MorningHour598>>.

Spurred to learn more about this bill, I visited websites and even the Library of Congress. According to *Asia World Media* in "Resolutions 201," the 1882 Project is a "non-partisan, grassroots effort of several prominent national civil rights organizations" which "focuses on educating lawmakers and the public on the Chinese Exclusion Laws and their impact on our history" (2). Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA) President Carolyn H. Chan states:

The education and public awareness that goes with such an effort will be worth the time and expense. As importantly, the successful passage of the resolutions honors and gives long overdue respect to our fathers and mothers who suffered under the Exclusion Laws and who struggled so that we can have the life we have today and that allows us to extend the promise of America to our children. It would be priceless if Congress could pass these resolutions in time to honor our forebears before the last of their generation passes. (3)

Nevertheless, the bill may face an uphill battle in the House. In "Congress Shouldn't Delay Justice Any Further," Nick Lephram states:

The resolution unanimously passed by voice vote in the Senate, but the House version introduced by Reps. Chu, Judy Biggert (R-IL), and Mike Coffman (R-CO) faces hurdles, as Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) refuses to bring it up for a vote. (2)

What could be the sources of negativity with regard to this bill?

Clues are provided by some negative comments written by visitors to the online articles. One such commentator yearns to compare the plight of the Chinese under the Exclusion Act with those of the Irish who endured mistreatment while employed by a canal company. To be certain, almost all 20th century immigrants endured their fair share of hard labor and discriminatory work conditions; nonetheless, no ethnic group has been so specifically and consistently discriminated against, aided and abetted by United States laws passed between 1882 and 1943, *sixty* years worth of laws that overlooked the Snake River Massacre; segregated and perilous working conditions in the Transcontinental Railroad construction through the Sierra Nevadas; arbitrary state and federal head taxes ranging from \$25 to over \$500 in both Canada and the U.S.; prolonged detention in unsanitary conditions at Angel Island; segregation in close confined neighborhoods in Chinatowns which aggravated slum-living conditions thus fulfilling notions that Chinese people were non-assimilable due to their filth; laws that also aided and abetted prostitution and gambling houses because men could not return to China (Scott Act), in effect, forcing them to live in exile; they could not bring brides over (Page Act); further local taxes and restrictions on free travel or residency were enforced by the Geary Act.

The above is only a partial list because it does not include spinoffs by college admissions or labor unions that also affected Asians in general. For instance, Japanese immigrants were similarly limited when in 1907 "President Theodore Roosevelt signed a 'Gentlemen's Agreement' with Japan to stop the importation of Japanese laborers to America" ("Summary of Immigration"); Japanese immigrants also could not bring wives over, and women were detained on Angel Island before being sent home.

These laws also affected African-Americans. According to the *Encyclopedia of Immigration*:

The official policy of the AFL [American Federation of Labor] was to represent all American workers, without reference to race, ethnicity, or gender. In practice, however, Japanese and Chinese workers were excluded, and after 1895, many affiliated unions began banning African-American workers. ("AFL-CIO")

This is why H.R. 282/ S.R. 201 still matters today. Can we really say that the civil rights struggles are over when there is no sense of closure? Can we really believe that equal opportunity and affirmative action quotas have taken place?

Collectively speaking, many activist minority groups would say "No". Karen K. Narasaki, president and executive director of the Asian American Justice Center (AAJC) stated: "The introductions of these resolutions during Asian Pacific American Heritage Month are very timely" ("AA News"). Stewart Kwoh, president and executive director of the Asian Pacific

She is doing a really great
1 year 29 weeks ago

Being a member of a community
1 year 31 weeks ago

These days everyone has to be
1 year 32 weeks ago

I am so proud of Janet in her
1 year 36 weeks ago

Greatly moved that Janet is
1 year 37 weeks ago

Coollest Members EVAR

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ebeh	1161
Madhuri	1145
erinjerri	1119
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- Users by points

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Check out our archives

- November 2013 (3)
- October 2013 (2)
- September 2013 (1)
- August 2013 (4)
- July 2013 (3)
- June 2013 (1)
- May 2013 (3)
- April 2013 (7)
- March 2013 (7)
- February 2013 (3)

1 2 3 4 5 6
7 8 next last »

American Legal Center (APALC) stated: "The Chinese are the only racial group ever specifically banned from the United States, and the impact of these exclusionary laws were profound..." ("AA News").

Throughout the history of this country, the various minorities, whether Indians, Negroes, Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, Polynesians, Hindus---had all shared arbitrary dislocation and disempowerment in contrast with the American Dream. My answer to a blog visitor who pointed out that the current economic crisis overtakes addressing historic oppressions runs something like: "It is precisely during times of extreme economic hardship (eg. after the Transcontinental Railroads were built, and during the Great Depression) that the worst kinds of laws and actions have flourished and multiplied."

The kinds of disparities endured have been both intimidating and disabling, affecting mind, body, and even the soul with regard to entertaining any kind of hope for even modest assimilation. Today, legislative disparities and discrimination is officially banned, but as the Chin, Chen, and Le cases demonstrate, prejudice has only gone undercover, thriving within acts of uncommon cruelty and violence. Asians also remain under-represented in fields such as sports, Hollywood, law, corporate media, law enforcement, advertising, and a variety of blue-collar unionized jobs.

Even here at the National Mall there is a microcosm representing persistent disparities between and among poor immigrants. Latino emigrant crews are hard at work performing handyman tasks, such as painting bollards. Newly arrived Caribbean emigrants land a variety of indoor jobs working at the museums or hospitals. Asian emigrants, however, strive in niche vending, selling snacks and souvenirs. Here the latter seem hardest hit when an ebb in tourist dollars cannot even pay for the lease.

The invisible walls of prejudice are still reinforced through repetition of Asians as the "Model Minority." The damaging myth supports the view that Asians don't need as much praise, recognition, financial aid, scholarships, or other college admissions handicaps because they are fully autonomous and gifted. Although I am not by any means an Asian Studies expert, the fact is that too many graduates are still unable to distinguish how Asians have arrived in waves, and in different groups under specific needs, and that within any particular grouping, subjects were often divided among all parts of the economic stratum, with the rich often being touted and noticed for their talents, while the poor continuing to suffer neglect, marginalization, and few opportunities to learn English.

Only through the collective efforts of Asian-American film, media, and lectures, can the public become better educated about the irreparable harm, indeed the double-whammy that myth and prejudice perpetuate. How can one possibly claim that a child whose days are filled with labor, whether at home tagging piles of merchandise, or at a fast-food restaurant serving patrons is "advantaged"? Are we to suppose that such a child just "naturally" does well in school, instead of sneaking in a few meager hours of study here and there, where normally, such hours might be enjoyed out in the sunshine?

Just this past week, our household opened the front door to discover that the person who has been leafleting our building for the local Chinese fast-food delivery was but a lad of ten years old. Surely, this is not being done for any other reason but to help his family survive, such being the uphill battle for business during tough times.

We cannot build a civilized nation without recognizing that "having our cake and eating it too" at the expense of other nations and peoples is wrong, and that this piece of legislation is therefore not dismissable under the shadow of other civil rights legislations. We need to fight for equal opportunity in promotion where affirmative action continues to be applied not as minimal but, often sadly, as the *maximum* quota in hiring practices. At the very least, full passage of H.R. 282/ S.R. 201 assures the public that if a historically reviled minority were offered such an apology, then such scapegoating may not happen again, regardless of the debt crisis.

In my view, the issue will never be dismissable until Asian-Pacific Americans have a suitable monument built to commemorate the thousands who suffered some form of abuse, whether murder, expulsion, detention, beating, robbery, harassment, or secondary impacts under the various Exclusions Acts. Until there are apologies and recognitions that targeted hazing, mobbing, bullying, and other forms of harassment are manifestations of segregation and human rights abuses, it will continue to merit notice.

Please read about bill <<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c112:H.RES.282>>. Contact your House Representative <<http://house.gov>> and ask him/her to support this upcoming legislation.

Poster credit to Chinese Historical Society of America (<http://www.chsa.org/2011/10/14/us-senate-measure-regrets-1882/>).

In the next part, I hope to contextualize the Exclusion Law time period through discussion of contemporary media and literary works. This article prepared by blu-geese.org.

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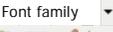
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