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Asian/Pacific American Week

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STATEMENT OF ACTING CHAIRMAN J. CLAY SMITH, JR.
before the
EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION
May 5, 1981

ASIAN/PACIFIC AMERICAN WEEK

Welcome to the EEOC for our commemoration of Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week, 1981.

President Ronald Reagan has proclaimed this week as Asian/Pacific American Heritage week. Before reading the official Proclamation, I would like first to give you some general information about the peoples we are honoring this week.

Asian and Pacific Americans are persons having their origins in Asia and the Pacific Islands. This area includes Burma, China, Cambodia, Hawaii, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Somoa, Singapore, Thailand, Trust Territories, Vietnam, and many more. Asian and Pacific Americans currently represent about 4 million persons or 2 percent of the U.S. population; and are concentrated mainly in urban areas such as New York, Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Honolulu.

Although Asian and Pacific Americans have all had to struggle in America, I will first focus on how Chinese Americans struggled in America in order to illustrate the suffering of Asian and Pacific Americans.

To the Chinese of the middle of the nineteenth century, San Francisco symbolized California and gold. About 20,000 Chinese arrived in 1852 alone and nearly 40,000 in 1882. Although they were drawn across the ocean by the lure of the gold diggings,

relatively few of them did much mining. A head-tax kept them out of the mines.

In California's relatively womanless world of the 1850's the Chinese found cooking, laundry work, household service, and hotel and restaurant keeping to be open fields which imposed no head-tax. Then it was discovered that Chinese would do hard work on railroad labor gangs. The result was that instead of coming to dig gold, they kept on coming in the 1860's and 70's to build railroads, work on ranches, cook, wash, raise and sell vegetables.

When the Chinese first arrived in this country they were separated from the native American population by a greater social gulf than any other group that has ever reached America, except the Negro slaves.

Chinese were segregated in separate areas in every city in which they lived. This Chinese quarter, universally called Chinatown, was not unlike the ghetto in which medieval Europe segregated the Jews. Chinatown has had a profound effect upon the psychology of the American Chinese. Like all such segregated areas, it invited exploitation by greedy landlords. In some communities it was intimately associated with the local red-light district. The Chinese did not choose these neighborhoods--they had no choice.

All of that is changed now. The new Chinatown in San Francisco is one of the city's chief tourist attractions, quaint, oriental and colorful. The old-time Chinatown "guide" showed you gruesome

sights. The new Chinatown guide is a young college graduate, or an elder in the Chinese Presbyterian Church, who shows you "a cross section of Chinese life," including a bank run entirely by Chinese women, a telephone exchange conducted entirely in Chinese by young Chinese women, shops where the most fascinating goods of the Orient are on display, schools where Cherubic, black-haired, beautiful children study both American and Chinese subjects, a Chinese Y.M.C.A. and a Y.W.C.A. which are two of the most artistic and beautiful in America, and finally a Chinese theater. Such a catalogue indicates the progress the Chinese have made.

The Philipinos

Philipinos began to migrate in significant numbers first to the Territory of Hawaii about 1906 and then to the mainland of the United States after the close of World War I. The sugar planters of Hawaii, ever on the lookout for supplies of "cheap labor," entered into arrangements with steamship companies to bring Philippino laborers to the Islands in slowly increasing numbers from 1906 to 1920. Beginning in 1920 the planters experienced increasing difficulty with Japanese laborers, and in 1924 the Japanese were excluded from entry to the United States (and hence to the Territory of Hawaii). Thus, during this period Philippino immigration increased considerably. From 1925 to 1930 there occurred a large influx of Philipinos into Hawaii.

The causes of Philippino immigration to Hawaii have been nearly all economic. The urge for wages that are distinctly higher than in the Philippines is the chief factor. The desire of plantation owners and operators in Hawaii for "cheap labor" is a concomitant primary cause.

The Japanese

Before the mid-eighteenth century, there were practically no Japanese on the Pacific coast. This was a result of the isolation policy of the Japanese Government, inaugurated in 1638 as a means of protecting Japanese against European imperialism. Even when the policy was abandoned in the 1850's and 60's migration to North America and Hawaii was very scanty and slow. At the urgent request of the Hawaiian sugar planters, weak attempts at migration to Hawaii were begun before 1868 with no results until 1884. It was not until 1896-1897 that migration to the United States assumed noticeable proportions. It increased rapidly to 12,635 in 1900. After a decrease due to discouraging measures by the Japanese Government, the number increased again to nearly 10,000 in 1907. In that year, the "Gentlemen's Agreement" between the United States and Japan was concluded, under the terms of which the Japanese Government ceased to grant passports to laborers bound for the United States.

The Japanese came to the United States for practically the same reasons which stimulated other immigrants--namely, to better themselves economically, to search for education or adventure, or to escape military service for the Japanese Government, as required by the conscription acts. Opposition to the Japanese

arose at critical points in time either because they threatened the economic, social status and security of other residents, or because other members of the population saw an opportunity to profit by enlarging upon the real or imagined injuries which they could link up with the presence of the Japanese.

History is replete with examples of overt discrimination against Asian and Pacific Americans:

- 1858 - Persons of Chinese or Mongolian races were prohibited by California law from entering the state.
- 1863 - California law prohibited the Chinese from being witnesses to actions or proceedings involving white persons.
- 1882 - Chinese Exclusion Act passed. This was the first U.S. law to bar entry to persons because of their race.
- 1912 - U.S. District Court in Pennsylvania declares Philipinos ineligible for citizenship.
- 1913 - Alien Land Act of 1913 forbid ownership of land to aliens "ineligible for citizenship."
- 1934 - Immigration from the Philippines limited to 50 per year.
- 1942 - 112,000 Japanese American citizens and nationals, incarcerated in American concentration camps.

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1943 - Chinese finally granted the right to citizenship through naturalization.

1946 - Philipinos finally granted right to citizenship through naturalization.

The immigration of Asian/Pacific peoples to America has enhanced the culture of America because their presence has added splended diversity to every aspect of American life. In my own community in Omaha, Nebraska there were few Asian/Pacific Americans. However, I was priviledged to grow up with two Philippine colleagues: Art and Honesto Simon. Art and Honesto came to Omaha in 1953 during seventh grade. At the time, they spoke no English. We all helped Art and Honesto learn to speak English. Within a year, they were honor students at Highland Grade School and later were honor students at South High School, where we all attended.

I feel that it is appropriate for the President to honor Asian/Pacific Americans with a special week. We, here at EEOC will continue our quest to eradicate discrimination on the basis of race and national origin in enforcing the provisions of Title VII.

This paper will be disseminated to all office heads in the agency so that they will be mindful of your history and concerns about employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors.

I will now read Proclamation 4837 of April 20, 1981 by the President of the United States:

Title 3—

Proclamation 4837 of April 20, 1981

The President

Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week, 1981

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The United States is a Nation comprised almost entirely of immigrants and their descendents. The interaction of different cultures, each of which has become a vital part of a culture uniquely American, constantly revitalizes our national spirit and heritage.

Among the most significant components of the American cultural blend are the ancient Asian-Pacific cultures. Asians have brought to the United States values and traditions that profoundly enrich American life. In a variety of fields that span the spectrum of human endeavor—including art, dance, agriculture, the sciences, medicine, commerce, government and philosophy—Asian and Pacific Americans have made outstanding contributions to the cultural and technological development of their adopted Nation. Their hard work, creativity and intelligence have inspired their fellow citizens, added new dimensions to our national life and strengthened the social fabric of our land.

Commonly, immigrants have come to American shores with few material possessions, relying on initiative, hard work and opportunity as the keys to success and prosperity in their new Nation. Asian and Pacific Americans have been squarely within this tradition. Overcoming great hardships, they have lived the American dream, and continue as exemplars of hope and inspiration not only to their fellow Americans, but also to the new groups of Asian and Pacific peoples who even now are joining the American family.

The United States owes a debt of gratitude to Asian and Pacific Americans for their contributions to the culture, heritage and freedom of the Nation we together love and serve.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby declare the seven days beginning May 4, 1981, as Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week, and call upon all people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 20th day of April in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-one, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and fifth.

