



December 1, 2021

Chairman Joe Neguse
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources
1328 Longworth Building
Washington DC 20515

Re: Support of H.R. 3525, the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture Act

Dear Chairman Neguse and members of the subcommittee:

I am pleased to testify on behalf of HR 3525, the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture Act.

I am a professor of Asian American Studies (AAS) at San Francisco State University, the birthplace of Ethnic Studies, as well as co-founder of Stop AAPI Hate, a coalition of Chinese for Affirmative Action, the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council, and AAS. Knowing Asian American history and researching the current surge of racism against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI), I can attest to how history repeats itself.

If we want the racist, dark periods of American history to end, our government and its institutions must bring to the light the varied sources of racism and xenophobia and their harm. They need to educate the public about the contributions of AAPIs in combating injustice and in building our nation.

Allow me to first discuss this period of collective racial trauma that AAPIs are now experiencing, and then I'll review the historic roots of anti-AAPI hate.

In our latest publication, Stop AAPI Hate documented a total of 10,370 self-reported hate incidents against Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) persons from March 19, 2020 to September 30, 2021. This qualitative data reveals clear trends since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic: women report twice as much as men, while youth and elders are also targeted in high proportions. We are being racially profiled. Even though people may blame China as the source of the disease, 57.3% of our respondents are non-Chinese. They are mostly East Asian, but others including Latinos and Indigenous persons have been told to "go back to China!" Indeed, in almost half of our incidents, perpetrators employ anti-Chinese and nativist remarks, demonstrating the source of their animus.

According to our data, AAPIs are experiencing collective, racial trauma. One out of five Stop AAPI Hate respondents, when surveyed, reports signs of trauma. These signs include three or more, long-term symptoms of issues such as anxiety, depression, hypervigilance, and avoidance of places. We collectively experience the trauma, in that when we see one AAPI member attacked, we can vicariously feel how we or our family members could just as easily and similarly be attacked. This trauma is also racial. We recognize that the violence perpetrated against us isn't because people dislike us as individuals, but because we possess certain racial features that represent foreignness. Unfortunately, this collective racial trauma will have intergenerational effects, just as Japanese American incarceration during World War II had.

Stop AAPI Hate also conducted a national survey, administered online from September 21, 2021 to October 8, 2021, of more than 1,000 people. One in five AAPIs (AAs= 21.2%; PIs=20.0%) report having experienced an incident of discrimination this past year. Worst yet, 8.3% of AAs and 9.4% of PIs respondents indicated that they have experienced multiple hate incidents in that period. These numbers indicate that AAPIs faced over five million acts of hate last year.

Unfortunately, as I have observed, this case of pandemic racism isn't new, but a repeat of history. In conditions of war, economic downturn, and pandemic, Asians in the United States have been scapegoated and blamed. Subsequently, they have faced racist interpersonal violence and xenophobic policies. Last year, of course, we had all three conditions—the US-China cold war, the worst recession since the Great Depression, and COVID-19. Thus, last year AAPIs in every state reported hate incidents, and we also saw exclusionary national policies that included bans of Chinese scientists and researchers, suspension of migration visas, and cuts to refugee and H1B visas. All these policies disproportionately harmed Asians, and portrayed us as the Yellow Peril—threats to the nation's health and national security.

This Yellow Peril stereotype, that Asians are perpetual foreigners who pose a threat to the United States, has been invoked repeatedly to justify racist mistreatment and legitimate exclusionary policies. I present three examples from Chinese American history that illustrate how the Yellow Peril has been employed by politicians and elected officials.

During the 1870 and 1880s, Chinese were portrayed as disease carriers and heathen coolies who stole white workers' jobs. These stereotypes became the rationale for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first legislation to exclude an entire ethnic group. At the same time, these fears of the Yellow Peril instigated so much mob violence that over 200 Chinese settlements were mass displaced in that era. My own family, who had settled in Monterey CA for over four decades, were driven out after a fire burned down the homes of 200 Chinese residents. My great grand-parents, who raised a family, built homes, and established a thriving business, had to retreat to San Francisco Chinatown as the only place of refuge from racism.

In 1900, health officials discovered the bubonic plague in San Francisco Chinatown. They quarantined the area and allowed whites to leave. They segregated, however, the Chinese and kept them in Chinatown with ropes, barbed wire, and armed sentries. The Santa Ana, CA and Honolulu, HI Chinatowns were burned down, leaving thousands homeless. An April 2020 headline from San Francisco Chronicle reads, "San Francisco's bubonic plague epidemic has eerie parallels to modern day," because of the historic pattern—a disease comes from China, Chinese are blamed, Chinese faced xenophobic policies, and Chinese meet racial violence.

This pattern continued at the Angel Island Immigration Station. On Ellis Island, arriving Europeans were processed within two to three hours and then allowed to disembark. On the other hand, at Angel Island, Chinese faced mass detention, often for weeks. Because immigration officials viewed Chinese as illegal immigrants and disease-carriers, the Chinese had to undergo lengthy interrogations and dehumanizing medical check-ups. Because of arbitrary health policies, over five percent of the Chinese who spent their entire family fortunes to pay for passage never made it to San Francisco. Instead, they were deported back.


From just these three historical examples regarding public health, my own family has had to deal with exclusion, mass displacement, segregation, quarantine, detention, and deportation. We did not have any hereditary health issues, but faced these experiences solely due to anti-Chinese hate and racist policies.

Chinese American history repeats itself with one other pattern—in each case of hate and discrimination, Chinese Americans have resisted. They engaged in civil disobedience to protest the Chinese Exclusion Act. They filed lawsuits against the City of San Francisco over its onerous policies. They went on strike at Angel Island. Stop AAPI Hate has built upon this legacy of resistance to call for policies that promote racial justice.

A National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture can serve to reflect on our histories and cultures, as well as to amplify how AAPIs have effected social change. Establishing a commission to study the potential of such a museum is a necessary first step so that we can keep history from repeating itself. With such a museum, perhaps Americans will be inspired instead to write new American narratives of a new history, one where AAPIs are included and treated with the dignity and respect that everyone deserves.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:



Russell Jeung

Russell Jeung, PhD

Professor, Asian American Studies

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