1882 PROJECT
A VOICE FOR PROTECTING AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS

1882 1884 1888 1892

1902 1904 1943 2012
For over 100 years, the violence and injustice of anti-Chinese laws in the United States has gone officially unacknowledged. The history has become largely forgotten and the Chinese American community has endured the scars of these laws for decades. The most infamous of these laws was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Finally, in July 2009, the California State Legislature expressed its deep regrets for the persecution and past discriminatory laws and constitutional provisions against Chinese living in California. One month later, the Chinese American Citizens Alliance declared its resolve to seek a Congressional apology for past discrimination against Chinese.

In May 2010, the Chinese American Citizens Alliance joined with the National Council of Chinese Americans to approach Congress with a petition signed by over a hundred Chinese American organizations and individuals asking for redress of the Chinese exclusion laws. Representative Judy Chu from California took the lead to sponsor a resolution in the House of Representatives. She was later joined by Senator Scott Brown from Massachusetts who welcomed the opportunity to sponsor a companion resolution in the Senate, because “it is the right thing to do.”
ORGANIZING THE COMMUNITY

On February 8, 2011, the 1882 Project coordinated with local organizers to launch events telecasted simultaneously at the Covington & Burling offices in Washington DC, New York and San Francisco. These events introduced the 1882 Project to community leaders, interested individuals and scholars. Their input and advice on the concept and direction of the 1882 Project were sought and incorporated into the developing strategic plan. National grassroots support and broad collaboration for the Congressional resolutions began to galvanize.

With critical help from passionate local organizers, steering committee members convened roundtable discussions to reach out to community leaders and stakeholders across the country in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Portland, Sacramento, San Francisco and Seattle. Press interviews, panel discussions and presentations were conducted in many additional locations, including Atlanta, Boston, New Orleans and Washington DC. A National Advisory Council was organized to broaden the engagement of stakeholders nationally.

While momentum grew, steering committee members worked closely with Representative Chu and her staff to draft the House resolution, and with Senator Brown and his staff to draft the Senate resolution.
DRAFT RESOLUTIONS:

- Recognition and synopsis of the history of the Chinese exclusion laws from the 1870’s to 1943;
- Expression of regret for the passage of Chinese exclusion laws and their impact on civil rights and equal protection of Chinese in America;
- Appreciation of the contributions that Chinese Americans and other immigrants have made and continue to make to the United States; and
- Affirmation of Congress’ responsibility to protect the civil rights of all people, regardless of race or ethnicity.

On May 26, 2011, at a press conference on Capitol Hill, Representative Chu and primary co-sponsors Representatives Judy Biggert and Mike Coffman announced to a large gathering of community leaders and Chinese and English press their introduction of House Resolution 282 and of Senator Brown and primary co-sponsor Senator Dianne Feinstein’s introduction of Senate Resolution 201. Organizational members of the steering committee mobilized their membership nationwide. Calls to action reached out to the general public to electronically register, write and visit their members of Congress to urge their support and co-sponsorship of the proposed resolutions.

Entries on H. Res. 683 were cut off at 291 as soon as the House passed the resolution. As reflected on the maps, our supporters came mostly from where our chapters and membership reside across the country.
ACHIEVING CLOSURE

On October 6, 2011, Senate Resolution 201 passed by unanimous consent. The Senate resolution acknowledged that the passage of the Chinese exclusion laws was incompatible with the basic founding principles of America, including the precept that all persons are created equal. It also expressed the Senate’s deep regret for passing six decades of legislation directly targeting persons of Chinese descent, and reaffirmed the Senate’s commitment to preserving civil rights and constitutional protections for all Americans.

Full text of Senate Resolution 201 appears on page S6352.

The House Judiciary Committee considered House Resolution 282 and, after extensive discussion, feedback was provided by the 1882 Project and the community. On June 8, 2012, Representative Chu introduced an updated version of the original House Resolution, with Judiciary Committee Chairman Lamar Smith as primary co-sponsor. House Resolution 683 was placed on the suspension calendar and passed unanimously by voice vote on June 18, 2012 – in the same chamber that saw the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act 130 years earlier.

Full text of House Resolution 683 appears on page H3715.
Why This Congress and Why Now?

• Only a sitting Congress has the power to acknowledge and make amends for the actions and laws that prior Congresses passed.

• When Congress repealed the laws in 1943 for military and political needs during World War II, it did not acknowledge the harm to people of Chinese descent and injustice of the Chinese exclusion laws.

• In the last quarter century, only four resolutions of apology have been passed. These resolutions concerned Japanese American internment, Hawaiian annexation, wrongs committed against Native Americans and slavery.

• In passing the resolutions, Congress brought a measure of closure to the last living generation directly impacted by the Chinese exclusion laws. Their struggles and commitments to the United States, despite the exclusion laws, should be remembered and honored.
What Can You Do?

• Learn about the Chinese exclusion laws and the stories of our fathers and mothers who struggled, suffered and triumphed despite these laws. Share these stories with your children, friends and community. Raise the awareness of the consequences and injustice of these discriminatory laws and of the personal successes, heroics and lasting contributions of Chinese Americans in building, enriching and defending this nation.

• Engage in civic affairs and knowingly evaluate laws being proposed and enacted at the local, state and federal levels so that this kind of injustice will not befall other people seeking the American dream.

• Examine your children’s text books. Speak with teachers and school officials about the Chinese exclusion laws and Asian American history. Ensure that these topics are adequately covered in curriculum.

The legislative history of Chinese exclusion laws is described in detail in a recent publication *Forbidden Citizens: Chinese Exclusion and the U.S. Congress* authored by Martin Gold.

More about the history of Chinese exclusion laws can be found in the booklet *Remembering 1882* by Connie Young Yu, published by Chinese History Society of America.
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THE 1882 PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE:
Chinese American Citizens Alliance
Committee of 100
Japanese American Citizens League
National Council of Chinese Americans
OCA
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OTHER SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS:
American Jewish Committee
Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation
Asian American Association of New Mexico
Asian American Federation
Asian American Institute
Asian American Justice Center
Asian Law Caucus
Asian Pacific American Legal Center
Association for Asian American Studies
Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs Association
Chinese Historical Society of America
Chinese Historical Society of Southern California
Chinese Students and Scholars Association
Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans of Virginia
East Coast Asian American Student Union
Federal Asian Pacific American Council
International Leadership Foundation
Museum of Chinese in America
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association
Southern Oregon Chinese Cultural Association
Wing Luke Museum
Xilin Chinese Community Center

Ultimately, the 1882 Project is about honoring untold thousands of individuals who made the history that this project seeks to remember through the Congressional resolutions. The successful passage of the resolutions would not have been possible without the countless support of hundreds of individuals throughout the country.