

美國 Epilogue

On May 26, 2011, in a hearing room at the Rayburn House Office Building, Representative Judy Chu (D-CA), along with two of her principal cosponsors, Representatives Judy Biggert (R-IL) and Mike Coffman (R-CO), held a press conference to announce introduction of House Resolution 282, which expressed the House's regret for passing legislation targeted at Chinese immigrants. Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) joined as an original cosponsor.

That same day, Senator Scott Brown (R-MA) introduced Senate Resolution 201, expressing regret on behalf of the Senate. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Patty Murray (D-WA), Daniel Akaka (D-HI), Marco Rubio (R-FL), and Ben Cardin (D-MD) were his original cosponsors. Shortly thereafter, Senators Tom Carper (D-DE), Chris Coons (D-DE), Mark Kirk (R-IL), and John Hoeven (R-ND) added their cosponsorship.

As the Senate was concluding its proceedings of October 6, 2011, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) secured unanimous consent to discharge the Senate Judiciary Committee from further consideration of Senate Resolution 201 and to bring it to the Senate floor. By unanimous consent that evening, the Senate agreed to the resolution.

Senator Brown upheld the traditions of his predecessors, Senators George Hoar (R-MA, Senate 1877-1904) and Henry Dawes (R-MA, Senate 1875-1893), who opposed exclusion from the first moment. He also stood in the shoes of another Massachusetts senator, Charles Sumner, who worked tirelessly to erase the stain of racial prejudice and discrimination in America.

Brown's prime co-sponsor, Dianne Feinstein, understood all too well the effects of a policy that germinated in her state. Long a champion of civil rights and a friend of the Chinese-American community, she worked with Brown to shine the light of truth on a sad historical record and to make things right.

On June 8, 2012, after discussions with House Judiciary Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX), Representative Chu introduced an updated text, House Resolution 683. Cosponsored by Chairman Smith, the new resolution was referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

House Resolution 683 was discharged from committee on June 18, 2012. Later that day, under suspension of the rules, it passed the House. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) stated to the press, “Throughout our history, America has been a country of promise and opportunity. While we have done much to fulfill that promise, we’ve also made serious missteps and we didn’t always get it right. More than a century ago, Congress enacted legislation that discriminated against people of Chinese origin and went against the very principles of liberty and opportunity for all that our country has always held dear. Today, as a sign of friendship to the many Chinese-Americans who are an essential part of the fabric of our nation, the House formally acknowledged these wrongs. I thank Representative Chu for submitting this resolution and I am proud that the House had the opportunity to consider it today.”

It is very rare for a sitting Congress to reflect on U.S. history and to pass resolutions evaluating the deeds of its predecessors. But the Chinese exclusion laws so strongly clashed with America’s values and national purpose that Congress was motivated to act.

Leaving the Capitol Building after passage of the Chu resolution, I stopped at the statue of Hannibal Hamlin in Statuary Hall, steps away from the House Floor. It was Hamlin who proclaimed that his vote against the 1879 Fifteen Passenger Bill would be a legacy to his children, that they might deem it the brightest act of his life. The resolutions of the House and Senate of the 112th Congress redeemed his foresight. “Thank you, Senator,” I said aloud.