

A CEREMONIAL RESOLUTION

24-40

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

May 4, 2021

To recognize the month of May as Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in the District of Columbia, celebrate the diversity within the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, appreciate the contributions of these communities in the District of Columbia and nationally, and reflect on their unique needs.

WHEREAS, in 1978 Congress passed a joint resolution and President Jimmy Carter signed the resolution proclaiming the first ten days of May as Asian-Pacific Heritage Week and in 1990, Congress passed, and President George H. W. Bush signed a bill extending Asian-American Heritage Week to the full month of May and the name evolved thereafter;

WHEREAS, May was selected to commemorate Asian American and Pacific Islanders because May 7, 1843, is the anniversary of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants to the United States, and May 10, 1869, marks the initiation of the First Transcontinental Railroad project, which was completed using Chinese labor;

WHEREAS, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have a long, difficult history in the United States, including their fight for the right to naturalization regardless of their race, which intensified in 1923 through United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind, in which an Asian Indian immigrant and U.S. Army World War I veteran's citizenship was rescinded pursuant to the Naturalization Act of 1906, which only allowed grant of citizenship to "free white persons" or "aliens of African nativity and persons of African descent";

WHEREAS, in Mr. Bhagat Singh's case, the Supreme Court's ruling created a new racial classification and finding that no person of Indian origin could become a naturalized American, resulting in citizenship and land purchase revocations for residents of Indian descent, restrictions on further immigration, and the Asian Indian population cut in half;

WHEREAS, shortly after, the 1924 Immigration Acts created the Asiatic Barred Zone, deeming Asians as 'aliens ineligible to citizenship';

WHEREAS, the passage of the 1935 Alien Veteran Naturalization Act made World War I veterans eligible for naturalization regardless of race, allowing naturalization for at least some Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants;

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WHEREAS, a number of eligibility expansion laws followed, including the repeal of Chinese exclusion laws in 1943, the Luce-Celler Act extending naturalization privileges to Indian subcontinent and Philippines natives in 1946, the McCarran-Walter Act further extending naturalization to Japanese immigrants in 1952, and ultimately the 1952 Immigration Act, which formally eliminated racial basis in naturalization;

WHEREAS, the trend toward extending eligibility for naturalization to all Asians and Pacific Islanders did not eliminate the mistrust of immigrant alliances and racial bias as demonstrated in the abhorrent internment of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II;

WHEREAS, in opposition to internment, Fred Korematsu, a young American born descendent of Japanese immigrants, refused relocation on the grounds that it violated the Fourteenth Amendment, an argument the Supreme Court denied in a racist opinion in *Korematsu v. United States*, only recently overturned in 2018;

WHEREAS, after the terrorist attacks on New York, Washington, DC, and in Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001, Asian and Pacific Islander Americans with brown skin, particularly those descended from the Indian subcontinent, experienced a surge in racially motivated attacks on individuals, community centers, places of worship, and small businesses;

WHEREAS, similarly, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States in early 2020, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, particularly those perceived to be descended from East Asia, have been the target of hate crimes nationwide, due to false and racist associations and the spread of the pandemic;

WHEREAS, a lack of knowledge about these cultures and a lack of representation in government and prominent positions of authority creates a breeding ground for abhorrent and inexcusable hate, as the Asian American and Pacific Islander community is facing today;

WHEREAS, Asia and the Pacific Islands includes over 30 countries and many cultures within those countries, including populations speaking over 3,000 different languages;

WHEREAS, the immense diversity inherent in the peoples categorized by the broad term of Asian American and Pacific Islander presents difficulty for these groups to come together and advocate for their diverse interests, leaving them all significantly underrepresented in government, their needs overlooked, and their populations underserved;

WHEREAS, the Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, created in 1987, is meant to advise the Mayor, the Council, and District of Columbia agencies on the views, needs, and concerns of this community;

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WHEREAS, the District of Columbia has benefited greatly from its Asian American and Pacific Islander populations through their contributions to the District of Columbia, by their sharing of their native cultures, traditions, religions, languages, foods, music, and art;

WHEREAS, the District of Columbia is home to many cultural centers and places of worship, which engage with and serve the District of Columbia community, through service, language classes, holiday celebrations, and festivals;

WHEREAS, the District of Columbia is home to embassies of Asian and Pacific Island countries, providing a tie between Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and the homeland of their ancestral cultures;

WHEREAS, in the District of Columbia, Chinatown was first established in the 1880s along Pennsylvania Avenue between 4 ½ Street and 7th Street NW, and as residency in Chinatown expanded, so did mutual aid organizations and associations to help the community flourish into a bustling economic quarter, including stores, restaurants, churches, temples and residences, and was later moved due to city redevelopment, to its current location along H Street NW;

WHEREAS, the annual Cherry Blossom festival in the District of Columbia is a springtime activity that commemorates the 1912 gift of Japanese cherry trees from the Mayor of Tokyo to the District of Columbia.;

WHEREAS, the District of Columbia is also home to Sikh Gurudwara DC, built between 2002 and 2005, just as the rise in inexcusable and misplaced hate against the religion's turbaned followers rose in the wake of September 11, 2001, allowing a place for adherents to gather safely in the District of Columbia and begin engaging with and educating the community; and

WHEREAS, this May, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month with a Vice President of Asian descent in office, a first for the community and a ray of hope for further inclusion and appreciation of Asian American and Pacific Islanders going forward.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the "Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month Recognition Resolution of 2021".

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Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia celebrates the contributions of the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in the District of Columbia, honors their history in this country and city, and stands against the racially motivated crimes targeted at this community, particularly over the past year after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall take effect immediately.