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Statement on the 80th Anniversary of the Repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act

December 17, 2023

Our Nation was founded on the fundamental idea that we are created equal and deserve to be treated equally. But for 61 years, the Chinese Exclusion Act failed to live up to that promise. It weaponized our immigration system to discriminate against an entire ethnic group and was followed by further discrimination against many in Europe and all of Asia. The act, along with racism and xenophobia in other parts of American life, was part of the anti-Chinese "Driving Out" era which included the Rock Springs and Hells Canyon massacres. In 1943, the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed, and it was followed by laws that led to an immigration system that better reflected our values as a nation of immigrants.

On this anniversary, we remember those whose lives, families, and communities were irreparably harmed. We remember the brave and diverse voices—from Frederick Douglass to Blanche Bruce to Pearl Buck to the American Jewish Committee and so many others—who spoke up in solidarity against that act and demanded a fairer and more just immigration system. And we recognize that despite the progress we have made, hate never goes away. It only hides. Today, there are those who still demonize immigrants and fan the flames of intolerance. It's wrong. I ran for President to restore the soul of America. To bring people together and make sure we give hate no safe harbor. To celebrate the diversity that is our country's strength.

For generations, people of Chinese heritage have enriched our country, from Chinese laborers who did backbreaking work to build the transcontinental railroad in the 1800s to the Chinese Americans who serve in our military, to the authors, artists, scientists, entrepreneurs, and scholars of today. We honor them, and all immigrants, who continue to make extraordinary contributions to our Nation.

Categories: Statements by the President : Chinese Exclusion Act, 80th anniversary of repeal.

Subjects: Chinese Exclusion Act, repeal; Racial discrimination.

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