



Department of Justice

REMARKS

BY

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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

AT THE

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
ASIAN/PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, DC
WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 1990
COURTYARD,
MAIN JUSTICE BUILDING

I am pleased that so many of you are here to help commemorate Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month. America's greatness stems from the contributions of people of many origins who come to our shores. An occasion such as this should remind each of us of the traditions and contributions of our ancestors -- whatever our heritage. We benefit daily from our multi-cultural background -- the legacy of all immigrants who, on reaching the shores of America, enriched our nation immeasurably.

In 1979, Congress approved the first Asian/Pacific American Heritage week. President Bush has decided to extend this celebration to a month-long observance. Who are these Americans we recognize today? Look across the country and around our Department of Justice. Asian Americans represent over 6.5 million of our total population. Within Justice, you constitute almost two percent of our permanent employee work force where you play an integral role in carrying out our mission.

Asian and Pacific Island Americans are represented in virtually all occupations and divisions here -- as attorneys, analysts, support staff, Special Agents, Immigration Inspectors, Associate Directors and Deputy Marshals.

The President, in proclaiming May as Asian/Pacific American Heritage month, has acknowledged not only the past contributions of Asian and Pacific Island Americans, but also the key role they currently play in helping the United States maintain its position

as a world leader. From newsanchor Connie Chung to Representative Norman Mineta -- who was instrumental in passing the 1988 Redress Bill -- Asian Americans are highly visible in the arts, science, education, industry, commerce and, of course, our federal government.

The group we recognize here today is not a homogeneous one -- it includes representatives of all those groups which have emigrated to this country since the 18th Century. Between 1966 and 1983, for example, a million and a half people emigrated from China, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea and the Philippines. During 1975 alone, 130,000 Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians who sought asylum in the United States after the war came to America as a land of hope, opportunity and freedom.

Other war periods were not so noble a time for the United States. The internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War was a particularly dark period in American history. To partially compensate those Americans, we have undertaken a meaningful measure of correction -- restitution to citizens of Japanese ancestry who were interned during this period. I am proud of our Civil Rights Division's efforts in this unique federal program.

Under the Civil Liberties Act, the Department of Justice has been tasked with identifying and locating United States citizens who were evacuated, relocated and interred during World War II. Time is a great healer, yet the United States must correct mistakes of the past if we are to carry out the tradition of American justice. In October we will present the first \$20,000 payment to the oldest surviving internee and begin to pay half a billion dollars to 25,000 Japanese Americans.

Today as a nation we welcome Asian immigrants from one war -- and we try to rectify the evils of another. Our Civil Rights Division is responsible for awarding damages, enacting safeguards and providing a lasting memorial to signal that the United States does carry out in practice the ideals embodied in our Constitution.

Today we honor our multi-cultural heritage. Events such as this commemorative program help to build bridges of understanding within our own society and from our society to other cultures. Don't let this program be the only time we bridge out to learn more about others. To quote the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu [lao-tzu] : "He who knows others is wise."

Thank you.