



Legislation Text

File #: Res 31605, Version: 1

CITY OF SEATTLE
RESOLUTION _____

A RESOLUTION expressing regret for the anti-Chinese legislation passed by the Washington Territory and previous Seattle City Councils, recognizing the past and continuing contributions of the Chinese to Seattle and reaffirming the City's commitment to the civil rights of all people.

WHEREAS, the Chinese presence in Seattle dates back to 1860; and

WHEREAS, many Chinese engaged in constructing the first railroads to and from Seattle, graded many of the city's roads in Pike, Union, Jackson and Washington Streets, worked at local canneries and sawmills, dug the earliest portion of the Lake Washington Canal, and worked as "domestic servants"; and

WHEREAS, a wave of anti-Chinese sentiment swept the United States, including Washington Territory, that fostered an atmosphere of racial discrimination depriving Chinese immigrants of civil rights and privileges afforded others; and

WHEREAS, Washington Territory passed anti-Chinese legislation including:

- A measure that denied Chinese the right to vote (1853).
- An "Act to Protect Free White Labor Against Competition with Chinese Coolie Labor and to Discourage the Immigration of Chinese in the Territory," which led to the "Chinese Police (poll) Tax" (1864).
- "An Act relating to Witnesses and Evidence," which prohibited Chinese from giving evidence in the courts in cases involving whites (1864).
- A law that prohibited Chinese from voting in school elections (1867).
- A law that prohibited Chinese from owning land; and

WHEREAS, this was followed by legislation passed by the United States Congress including the:

- Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), which prohibited immigration of Chinese laborers and prohibited Chinese from becoming U.S. citizens. This Act was the first time the U.S. restricted immigration based on race and nationality. Other Chinese Exclusion Acts were subsequently passed to extend the 1882 Act, which was not repealed until 1902.
- Scott Act (1888), which prohibited all Chinese laborers who left the U.S. from reentering.
- Geary Act (1892), which required all Chinese persons in the U.S.-but no other race-to register with the federal government in order to obtain “certificates of residence”; and

WHEREAS, there were widespread riots in many areas of Washington Territory spurred by the sentiment to get rid of the Chinese in Tacoma, Olympia, Bellingham, and other towns; and

WHEREAS, the Seattle City Council in 1885 passed three discriminatory ordinances that, while not mentioning the word “Chinese,” were aimed at the living conditions and occupations of the Chinese in Seattle:

- Ordinance 694 required 512 cubic feet of space for each person in a lodging, room, or hotel. Since the Chinese were not allowed to bring their wives or families, and worked long hours, these men often lived in small, overcrowded living spaces.
- Ordinance 705 required a license for auctioneers, peddlers and hawkers. United States citizenship was required for a license, and federal law prohibited Chinese from becoming citizens.
- Ordinance 710 required public laundries and wash houses to obtain a certificate from the City Health Officer and Fire Department, required buildings to be constructed of brick and stone with a metal roof, and prohibited washing and ironing between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.; and

WHEREAS, on February 7, 1886, an anti-Chinese riot ensued, and an angry mob of 1500 invaded the Chinese quarters in Seattle and forced some 350 Chinese on wagons, hauled them to the dock, and put them on the Queen of Pacific steamer. Nearly all of the Chinese who were removed from Seattle left on that

steamer and subsequent boats; and

WHEREAS, the community, despite this anti-Chinese sentiment and discriminatory laws established a Chinese settlement in Seattle known as Chinatown that has existed since the 1870s and provides a commercial, residential, and cultural base for the Chinese;

WHEREAS, despite decades of systematic, pervasive, and sustained discrimination, Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans persevered and have continued to contribute and play a significant role in the growth of Seattle; and

WHEREAS, racial and ethnic diversity are among Seattle's most important strengths and goals and Seattle's Chinese have positively added to the racial and ethnic diversity of the City; and

WHEREAS, the City of Seattle is committed to equal rights and social justice for all; and

WHEREAS, in 2004 the City established the Race and Social Justice Initiative, which is the City's commitment to eliminate racial disparities and achieve racial equity in Seattle;

NOW, THEREFORE,

**BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE, THE MAYOR
CONCURRING, THAT:**

Section 1. The City Council expresses its deep regret for the anti-Chinese sentiments and passage of discriminatory ordinances directed at the Chinese that led to the 1886 anti-Chinese riots in the city and the expulsion of the Chinese.

Section 2. The City Council recognizes the contributions the early Chinese made to the development of Seattle and the continuing contributions of Chinese Americans to this City.

Section 3. The City Council reaffirms its commitment to the civil rights of all people and celebrates the contributions that all immigrants have made to Seattle in the past and present.

Adopted by the City Council the ____ day of _____, 2015, and signed by me in open session in authentication of its adoption this _____ day of _____, 2015.

President _____ of the City Council

The Mayor concurred the ____ day of _____, 2015.

Edward B. Murray, Mayor

Filed by me this ____ day of _____, 2015.

Monica Martinez Simmons, City Clerk

(Seal)