



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

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Third Floor Conference Room

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11:00 A.M.

ASIAN/PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

MAY 1999

CELEBRATING OUR LEGACY

REMARKS BY ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

P R O C E E D I N G S

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is a privilege for me to be here today on this very special observance, and I would like to pause for just a moment in respect of the memory of a very wonderful person, Joyce Chang, who contributed so much to the Immigration & Nationalization Service. She was just a joyous force among so many and gave all of us as sense of can-do, of can-do with a bright smile and a positive attitude, and we will all remember her.

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you. This year's theme, Celebrating Our Legacy, calls on us to recognize our common human spirit. Today's commemoration gives us an opportunity to honor and reflect on the accomplishments, the contributions of past and present, and the dreams that Americans of Asian/Pacific ancestry have and have made to our nation.

Today, ten million Americans can trace their roots to Asia and the Pacific islands. The number of Asians has almost doubled since 1980, and according to the 1990 census, by the middle of the next century this population will have grown to five times its current size.

Our nation has achieved its greatness through the contributions and participation of all of its citizens, and yet, we continue to evolve into a nation of tremendous ethnic and racial diversity. It is this diversity that has played such a significant role in helping our nation maintain world leadership. As we approach the new millennium together, let us continually strive to fulfill the ideals of freedom and equality that originally attracted so many immigrants to our country.

Some of you have heard a story that I tell of Miami and how it was becoming a city so diverse with so many wonderful Hispanics coming to our shores. There was one little lady who was the queen of the condos. She was Jewish. She had something to say about people who spoke Spanish, but she said she'd like to meet a new politician come to town who was making a name for himself. He was Hispanic.

I had them together for breakfast at Essens Delicatessen in North Miami Beach. She looked up at him like this, and she wore fancy hats, and she shook her finger at him and she said, "You think I'm prejudiced, but I will tell you." She said, "I believe that I will never ever fear for this nation except when it is no longer a nation of immigrants."

I think what she says has a lot of merit. Throughout the

decades, the cherished values and traditions of Asian and Pacific Americans have helped strengthen and sustain our nation. They have been part of what immigrants have done for our nation, and in so many ways our way of life has been positively infused by the diligence and the determination of these brave new Americans. They prevailed over hardships, they prevailed over prejudice, they've prevailed and have made such an extraordinary contribution.

They've done so much in the Department of Justice. Byron has described what we have done in terms of improving recruitment, improving diversity in this department, but we've got a long way to go, and I am dedicated to doing everything I can and will constantly appreciate your contributions and suggestions of what we can do for the future. Within the Department, we are proud of all the people. They serve as attorneys, as special agents, as inspectors, as computer analysts, as a person responsible for doing the five-year terrorism strategy that has received such acclaim.

But one image sticks in my mind that occurred to me over this past year. For the last three or four years, a member of my security detail, a special agent of the F.B.I., has been a person that I obviously had to be around a great deal. He then became the supervisor of the detail. He told me this story:

His father was Chinese-American living in the North. The Chinese restaurants in New Jersey and New York some years ago selected him to go to Florida to farm Chinese vegetables to supply them to the Chinese restaurants in New York and New Jersey. He came and worked his fingers to the bone. He acquired more property, he was more successful, his children were successful, and when the football team went on the road and the band -- my supervisor played in the band -- when they arrived home late at night at two o'clock in the morning after the road trip, Mrs. Chin would be there with Chinese dinners ready for everybody, homemade Chinese dinners.

I walked into a room one night and someone said, "Oh, do you know Stewart Chin?" And I said, "Yes, he's right

outside. He's a member of my detail." And she told me of the joy that he brought to the people of that neighborhood. Stewart's father died this past year. I went to the funeral in Florida. It was so touching to see people from all walks of life: The banker, the farmer, the young girl, there to pay their respects to a man who had helped them, who had reached out to young people who needed help, who loaned people money, who forgave debts upon occasions when it was just.

To me, Mr. and Mrs. Chin represent what America is all about, and if you had seen that funeral that day, you would understand it in terms more eloquent than I can ever express. Joyce Chang, the Chins, so many people make up the wonderful mosaic of this nation, and we are all the stronger, the better, and the prouder for it. Thank you.

(Applause.)