

Lone Fir Cemetery Memorial Proposal

Dear Metro City Councilor,

You have already received some emails from the Chinese Community about this proposal: building a memorial garden for the unnamed Chinese pioneers who rest on Block 14, Lone Fir Cemetery. Thank you for considering our request and planning a meeting to discuss it. But we hope for more actions to be taken.

This proposal is no forceful demand.

This proposal is simply the voices of unpaid Chinese pioneers who built the infrastructural railroads of industrial America's foundations, silent mourns waiting to be heard through the writings of *us* - their living descendants and allies.

I am a high school student, aspiring poet, amateur pianist, so much more. But most importantly, *I* am Chinese. Not America-Born, but China-born Chinese. No one understands the price of assimilation more than first-generation immigrants like *I*.

I was once a boy, a man, a pilgrim seeking salvation in a land taking in *the tired, the poor, and the huddled masses* into its motherly embrace, *with liberty and justice for all*. Perhaps not permanent resettlement but a touch of gold, protruding from the mines.

We left our Mothers, Wives, Sisters, and Children back in the chaos of our homeland, where wars, warlords, and opium prevailed & hoping to return in the finest suits and boots, leaving behind days of watching our loved ones bathe in bloodshed, hunger, and plague.

Five thousand miles over the sea *we* sailed, through outrageous waves crashing against the ship hull, not once were we granted the permission to step on the deck for a breath of fresh air.

Run Chinamen run, as if your God called to us from distance, the New World welcomes you not.

But at this point, there was no turning back. The moment
light shed into an opening of the ship,
we stepped onto American soil thinking we were free to breathe.
But their towns, their strange men, strange ties, and strange beards crashed down
upon us with condescendence, hubris, and loathe.

Yes, loathe.

A loathing for *our* skin, *our* hair, *our* clothes, *our* foods, *our* holidays and
our everything that made us their heathens.

A wolf pup had been released upon *us* the moment *we*
set foot on their self-proclaimed nation.

First the mines, then the railroads. *We* worked senselessly
day and night; *our* hands calloused and bleeding, *our* knees
battered from all the kneeling, *our* souls beaten to the ground until
illness and starvation claimed *us*.

The wolf pup grew and grew, biting back upon *us* after *we* fed it with
our own flesh willingly, dropped along the railroad tracks *we* set with each
blood-trailed step.

*This is your pay, our bosses told us, minus the fees we spend on your shelter, food,
transportation, and living in our nation – handing us a wisp of air.*

Everything screams *we don't welcome you* in these foreign lands.

*Run Chinamen run, as if God called to us again from safe haven, the New World welcomes you
not.*

*No return at this point, we answered. How can we even afford the boat tickets
five thousand miles back home? And even if so, our family back there will
be ashamed of us returning empty-handed.*

*We thought we lost our names
in pursuit of the American Dream*

so we fed our own tears, blood, and flesh to

the railroads like *our* own child.
Even the Supreme Court banned *our* wives and family from
setting foot on the New World soil.

Most of *us* who built Chinatowns now lie in the
most concentrated and polluted parts of large cities.
The wolf pup grew into a full-fledged wolf, huffed and puffed
& finally released itself for a massacre anticipated for years and years.

May 1887 Deep Creek, OR., thirty-four Chinamen murdered, and bodies
mutilated, robbed of *our* hard-earned gold,
yet the murders fled, no justice served.
1871 Los Angeles, 1885 Rock Springs, victims left dead
without names in records.
Say their names. *Chinamen*.

I lay facing the sky in pools of blood, taking one last look at this dreadful world
dying with open eyes. How much *I* regret coming here while
Wife and Children at homeland, sending letters for
a reply never to come.

After years and years of struggle, some of *us* managed to settle
but not in peace.

We built a graveyard for *ourselves* in the present Lone Fir, but
our gravestones were torn down to construct another building.
Our bones crushed under the suffocating concrete while
the remains of mayors, governors, and representatives rest in peace.

Hark the sound of *our* silence!
When the houses built over *our* bones were taken down,
we face yet another potential disturbance of apartment buildings over *our* bones
for 20 years with whatever remains of *our* hearts held tight.

We have living legacies yet no names in *our* graveyard,
only a limp sign stating *unpaid Chinese railroad builders who built
foundations for the American economy*, to be blown away
by strong wind or taken down by the full-grown wolf,
at any moment.

And yes, the wolf is still alive.

The wolf not only preys on *us* but all those they deem heathens.

November 2020, the graves of our neighbor Mexican-American soldiers were vandalized with bleeding graffiti and unspeakable slurs.

Elsewhere in this nation, Chinese-Americans and Chinese immigrants were attacked and blamed for COVID-19, and even those who were born here, and those who hadn't left what they call *homes* in the States for decades.

It was slow assimilation across a multitude of generations.

It tore *us* hollow of Chinese blood and flesh, leaving only a shell of Chinese skin and hair.

The melting pot you call America burnt away *our* pride.

Though a day *our* Chinese souls remain, a day *we* will continue this fight.

I wake up every day seeing my Chinese face in the mirror. There is nothing to deny about the bruises on my heritage. As a high schooler living with my parents and depending on them for most finances, I merely have power over anyone's life. Not you, Metro Councilor.

But I cannot forget my name.

These words are my only weapon, in hopes of convincing *you* to honor my people, the *We* who *built your railroads as our own children*.

You may not be Chinese, Chinese-American, or have the slightest drop of Chinese blood running in your veins. But without *our ancestors*, there are no railroads to transport the goods of your ancestors' economy, thus no industrialized America.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, actually not that long ago. If you were too young to remember or weren't born at the time, your parents probably weren't very old either.

Racism is *real*. Racism is *alive*.

Please voice *our* silence in the Metro City Council meeting.

Sincerely,

A Chinese Immigrant