



The China Initiative

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION MUST IMMEDIATELY END FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S DISCRIMINATORY "CHINA INITIATIVE"

President Biden should exercise his full executive authority to stop the federal government's blatant racial profiling and scapegoating of Asian Americans and Asian immigrants in violation of its own principles of non-discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and national origin. The President, along with top administration officials, has repeatedly underscored a commitment to addressing structural racism and advancing equity. However, it continues to investigate, prosecute, and convict Asian Americans and Asian immigrants, who have been unfairly targeted.

WHAT IS THE "CHINA INITIATIVE"?

Established by then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions in November 2018, and continued through 2021 by the Biden administration, the China Initiative was launched purportedly combat economic espionage by the Chinese government. While the investigation of Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists did not begin with this initiative, both the level of scrutiny and legal action has intensified based on their ethnicity from a variety of federal agencies, including the Justice Department ("DOJ"), the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"), the National Institutes of Health ("NIH"), and the National Science Foundation ("NSF"). Under the China Initiative, federal authorities have sweepingly targeted thousands of Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists, researchers, and scholars, imperiling their reputations, resulting in job loss and livelihoods, and guilt by association, even when prosecutors lack sufficient evidence.

Despite often finding no evidence of economic espionage, prosecutors are instead charging many with federal crimes based on clerical errors or failure to disclose professional affiliations when accepting grant funding. These were previously handled by universities as part of administrative review processes, but are now criminalized, resulting in ruined careers and lives in shambles.

Even without a guilty verdict, some institutions and universities have chosen to distance themselves from the accused, forbidding

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access to labs and workspaces, denying contact with colleagues, even going so far as stripping salaries and threatening loss of tenure. In many cases, those affected are U.S. citizens of Asian heritage. But Asian researchers in the United States on visas have also experienced so many problems renewing their stay or finding supportive employers, that they've had no choice but to leave the country.

All of this is happening against a national backdrop of surging anti-Asian hate, with the organization Stop AAPI Hate [recording over 6,000 incidents](#) of discrimination in the last year alone. According to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, while the overall hate crime rate declined between 2019 and 2020, [hate crimes targeting Asians rose 150%](#).

Throughout U.S. history, Asian American communities have been repeatedly scapegoated and discriminated against based on race, ethnicity, and ancestry. The ongoing profiling of Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists under the China Initiative continues the trend of criminalizing immigrants and treating Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners. This racism has manifested itself at many points in our history, including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (extended multiple times until repeal in 1943), the removal and internment of Japanese American families and children during World War II, and the registration, detention, and deportation of Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian individuals following the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Furthermore, the use of generalizations based on impermissible grounds such as race, ethnicity, religion or national origin – rather than individual behavior or objective evidence – as the basis for suspicion in directing discretionary law enforcement actions is not only a counter-productive and ineffective form of policing, but also violates human rights. The right to be free from discrimination, including discriminatory policing, is enshrined in human rights treaties which the U.S. has signed and ratified. As such, the U.S. government has an obligation to address such practices wherever they occur.

In continuing the China Initiative, the Biden administration is endorsing and justifying a racial profiling program under the pretext of “national security.” Given the administration’s stated commitment to anti-racism and the parallel climate of rising anti-Asian violence, it is troubling to see our federal agencies unapologetically advancing a discriminatory program.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC sent to President Biden an April 2021 [petition](#) signed by over 29,000 directly impacted people. Amnesty International USA joins with AAJC and the petition signers in calling for:

- An immediate end to the “China Initiative” and the federal government’s racial profiling and targeting of Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists, researchers, and scholars



- A review of all prosecutions and investigations under the “China Initiative” for evidence of racial profiling
- Direction to federal grantmaking agencies, including the NIH, to stop using race, ethnicity, or ancestry as a basis to investigate Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists and provide redress to people who lost their funding or had their funding withheld due to discriminatory allegations

Furthermore, Amnesty International calls on President Biden to fulfill his executive order to bring a whole-of-government approach to racial justice for AAPI communities. Terminating the Trump-era “China Initiative” is an essential step in implementing the administration’s stated commitment to creating an inclusive, diverse, welcoming, and safe country for all.

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