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Petitioning Attorney General Lynch and President Obama

Exonerate our Mother, Ethel Rosenberg

Created by Robert and Michael Meeropol

Our parents, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, were executed on June 19, 1953 during the anti-communist hysteria of the Cold War Era. They had been convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage, in what was called "the crime of the century." We were six and 10 years old when they were killed.

Our mother was not a spy, and her execution was wrongful. Her conviction was based on perjured testimony and prosecutorial and judicial misconduct. The

charges against our mother and the threat of the death penalty were meant to intimidate her and our father into cooperating. The U.S. government wanted



Sign this petition

Tell President Obama to acknowledge that Ethel Rosenberg was wrongly convicted and executed.

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PROPOSED PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS: On June 19, 1953, Ethel Rosenberg was executed, along with her husband, Julius Rosenberg, by the Government of the United States of America after being indicted, tried and found guilty of Conspiracy to Commit Espionage in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York.

WHEREAS: Ethel Rosenberg, nee Greenglass, was born to Jewish immigrant parents in New York City, grew up, married and had two children there, and was a member of the American Communist Party and a labor organizer.

WHEREAS: The atmosphere of the Rosenbergs' trial was permeated by the anti-communist fervor that dominated domestic politics at the height of the Cold War and further affected by the ongoing Korean War, in which the United States faced a Communist enemy, and by overtones of antisemitism.

WHEREAS: Contemporaneous documents suggest that many of the government officials involved in the Rosenberg case – from the prosecutors to the trial judge to Justice Department officials – engaged in improper ex parte communications that call into question the fairness of the trial and sentence.

WHEREAS: Contemporaneous documents also confirm that the Government knew there was little or no basis to prosecute Ethel Rosenberg, but attempted to use her as a “lever against her husband.”

WHEREAS: The Government knowingly put before the jury testimony by its chief witness David Greenglass tying Ethel Rosenberg to the alleged conspiracy that was contradicted by his grand jury testimony and other statements.

WHEREAS: David Greenglass admitted in 2001 that his trial testimony against Ethel Rosenberg was fabricated, and his recently released grand jury testimony – in which he denies ever discussing espionage with his sister – supports that conclusion.

WHEREAS: The fairness of Ethel Rosenberg's trial was further impaired because prosecutors were not then, as they are now, obligated to turn over exculpatory evidence, such as David Greenglass's prior inconsistent statements, for use on cross-examination, and because prosecutors were permitted to question Ethel Rosenberg about having exercised her Fifth Amendment rights before the grand jury – a practice the Supreme Court soon thereafter ruled unconstitutional.

WHEREAS: Contemporaneous Soviet transmissions intercepted and deciphered by the National Security Agency and known to the Government at the time of the Rosenbergs' execution, but not released until 1995, show that the KGB gave all its agents, including David and Ruth Greenglass, code names, but gave none to Ethel Rosenberg, indicating they did not consider her to be their espionage agent.

WHEREAS: Consistent with the Government's knowledge that Ethel Rosenberg was not a Soviet agent, the FBI prepared a list of questions to ask Julius Rosenberg about his espionage activities if he agreed to cooperate on the eve of execution, but prepared no such list for Ethel Rosenberg and actually planned to ask Julius Rosenberg: "Was your wife cognizant of your activities?"

WHEREAS: The Rosenbergs were the only individuals ever executed for conspiracy to commit espionage, even though the information allegedly passed by David Greenglass was virtually worthless and the individuals who actually did pass vital atomic secrets, including physicist Klaus Fuchs, served only limited prison sentences or escaped prosecution entirely.

WHEREAS: The American people depend upon the strength, vitality and quality of their legal system.

WHEREAS: They recognize that all human institutions are imperfect, that the possibility of injustice is ever-present, and that the acknowledgement of fault combined with a resolve to do better are signs of strength in a free society.

WHEREAS: This President stated earlier this year, in cautioning against allowing anti-Muslim sentiment to skew public policy: "We've gone through moments in our history when we acted out of fear - and we came to regret it. We've seen our government mistreat our fellow citizens. And it has been a shameful part of our history."

WHEREAS: The trial and execution of Ethel Rosenberg should serve to remind all civilized people of the constant need to guard against our susceptibility to prejudice, our intolerance of unorthodox ideas, and our failure to defend the rights of persons who are looked upon as strangers in our midst.

WHEREAS: Simple decency and compassion, as well as respect for truth and an enduring commitment to our nation's highest ideals, require that the fate of Ethel Rosenberg, the mother of two children aged ten and six when she was executed, be pondered by all who cherish tolerance, justice and human understanding.

NOW, THEREFORE I, Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, hereby proclaim: that the climate of fear and prejudice against defendant Ethel Rosenberg, as well as improper acts by government officials, tainted Ethel Rosenberg's trial. That, therefore, Ethel Rosenberg's conviction was unjust and her execution wrongful. I further declare that any stigma and disgrace should be forever removed from Ethel Rosenberg's name, and from the names of her family and her descendants; and I hereby call upon all people of the United States to pause in their daily endeavors to reflect upon these tragic events and draw from their historic lesson the resolve to prevent the forces of intolerance, fear, and hatred from ever again uniting to overcome the rationality, wisdom and fairness to which our legal system aspires.