Civil Rights Attorney Dale Minami speaks at Northwestern University

by Ashley Kim

“But what is as important as the result is the process, and the process of trying your best and giving it your best is something really underrated,” said Dale Minami, one of the nation’s leading advocates for the preservation of civil rights and civil liberties of Asian Americans and other minorities.”

Certainly in Minami’s case, the process was just as important as the results, but the process he had to endure was a tedious yet rewarding one that ended up with results which will forever be remembered in Asian American History.

Minami is best known for being the lead attorney in overturning the 1944 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that upheld Executive Order 9066 as constitutional (Korematsu v. United States). The 1983 case led by Minami was a landmark coram nobis case which overturned the 40-year-old conviction of Fred Korematsu for refusal to obey exclusion orders aimed at Japanese Americans during WWII.

Minami gave his talk Thursday, February 19, a special day which marked the anniversary of the signing of executive order 9066 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This order authorized the relocation and the internment of tens of thousands of American citizens of Japanese descent and resident aliens from Japan.

This “Dale Minami event” was arranged... continued on page 8
Remembering Three Pioneers in Asian American Studies:

Ronald Takaki, 1938-2009
Him Mark Lai, 1925-2009
Richard Masato Aoki, 1938-2009

Ronald Takaki, professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, passed away on May 26, 2009. He was 70. He is a pioneering scholar in Asian American Studies and is the author of numerous books on Asian American history, including Pau Hana; Strangers From A Different Shore; A Different Mirror; and Iron Cages. He grew up in Hawaii as a third-generation Japanese American and was known as a fearless surfer. He started out as an African American history scholar before researching Asian American history. He was a mentor and an inspiration to many students, including those who are now professors.

Him Mark Lai, the internationally noted scholar, writer, and “Dean of Chinese American History” was born on November 1, 1925 in San Francisco’s Chinatown. His ten books, more than 100 essays, and research in English and Chinese on all aspects of Chinese American life are published and cited in the U.S., the Americas, China, Southeast Asia, and Australia. He graduated from Berkeley with a degree in mechanical engineering and worked at Bechtel Corp. until his retirement. Technically, his scholarship was an avocation and not his profession. Yet his scholarly achievements rival those of professional academics. Every scholar working on Chinese American history today is indebted to him pioneering scholarship, particularly his use of Chinese language sources from Chinese immigrant communities. He also served for more than 30 years on the editorial board of Amerasia Journal, the first scholarly Asian American studies periodical. The UCLA Asian American Center Press plans to publish his autobiography in 2009-2010.

Richard Masato Aoki passed away on March 15, 2009. Born November 20, 1938, Richard dedicated his life to the struggle for human rights — he was a warrior and a scholar in the truest sense. Best known as an Asian American ranking member of the Black Panther Party, Richard was also a leader in the 1969 Third World Liberation Front Strike at UC Berkeley. He became the first director of the new Asian American Studies program after the strike. He retired as a professor and administrator at Merritt and Alameda Colleges in the SF Bay Area continuing his strong ties to the community. He will be remembered for the personal impact he made on all whose lives he touched, and the social impact he made on the community movements of all people: “…Based on my experience, I’ve seen where unity amongst the races has yielded positive results. I don’t see any other way for people to gain freedom, justice, and equality here except by being internationalist.” — Richard Aoki

The faculty and staff of the Asian American Studies Program commemorate their lives and mourn their passing. May they rest in peace, and may we continue to be inspired by their scholarship and their leadership.

Former U.S. Senator at Northwestern

Fred R. Harris, member of the 1968 Kerner Commission on “The Kerner Report—40 Years Later”

By Heidi Kim

Members of the Northwestern community and Evanston residents participated in a roundtable on May 8 on the legacy of the Kerner Commission report, forty years after its publication. The keynote speaker was Fred Harris, co-author of the report and former Democratic senator from Oklahoma, now a political science professor at the University of New Mexico. Also featuring Professor Eric Tang from the Department of African American Studies at UIC and Ralph Martire, executive director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, a bipartisan think tank, the panel, moderated by NU Professor Martha Biondi, discussed the last several decades of racial and economic division in the United States.

The Kerner Commission (officially known as the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders) was created to discover the reasons behind the 1967 race riots across the United States. Harris spoke about the establishment of the Commission, throwing in a few colorful anecdotes about President Lyndon B. Johnson, whose dissatisfaction when the Commission failed to find mass conspiracy as a root cause of the riots led to its termination. Instead, the Commission detailed segregation, racism, and deep economic rifts, concluding, “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”

Discussion among the audience and panel focused heavily on the continuation of this rift, with Martire citing telling statistics to show that wealth is being increasingly concentrated in a smaller percentage of the population, and that in Illinois, education levels fail to account for the difference in unemployment and salary between white and black. Tang stressed the need for community organization and grassroots involvement, pointing to the example of the Miami group Take Back the Land (takebacktheland.org), which has been moving homeless people into abandoned foreclosed homes, a move which houses people in need and protects property from decaying beyond repair.
Recognizing Achievements & Contributions

Nitasha Sharma was awarded the WCAS Distinguished Teaching Award for 2005-2009, and was on the Associated Student Government’s Honor Roll. She will be a Woodrow Wilson Fellow next year as the recipient of the Woodrow Wilson Career Enhancement Grant for 2009-2010. This year she published, “The Sounds of Social Consciousness: South Asian Rappers Sound off on Capitalism, Racism, and Sexism,” published in “Studies in Inequality and Social Justice,” edited by Kiru Hall.

Nitasha Sharma was Diverse: Issues in Higher Educations top 10 Emerging Scholars of 2009.

Shalini Shankar gave an invited lecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign titled, “Translating Brands, Translating Lives: Producing Asian American Advertising” in April. She also presented a paper titled “Selling Expertise: Socioeconomic Challenges in Asian American Advertising” on the panel “Class Divisions and Social Justice Futures in Asian American Communities” at the Association for Asian American Studies Annual Meeting in Honolulu, HI.

James Zarsadiaz was recently invited to present research and attend the Futures of American Studies Institute at Dartmouth College in June. He will be presenting his History master’s thesis, “Negotiating Space, Forming Identity: Post-65 Filipino American Immigrant Nurses in Chicago.”

The 2009 Association for Asian American Studies Meeting in Honolulu had several participants from Northwestern University. Northwestern participants include: Ji-Yeon Yuh, From Barreto Zones to Autonomous Zones: Immigration and Minority Policies in China, Japan and the United States; Stephen Mak, Justifying Intervention on American Soil: The “Internee” as “Immigrant”.


Jinah Kim is an Advisory Board member for 2009-2011 of Impacto Foundation, which is dedicated to the empowerment of indigenous youth through hands-on training in photography, filmmaking and digital media.


Congratulations to Associate Professor Carolyn Chen on being granted tenure in Asian American Studies and Sociology.

The Undergraduate Coffee/Tea Series

Our inaugural Spring Quarter Asian American Studies Undergraduate “Coffee/Tea Series” featured these three stellar senior honors presentations:-

Christine Choi, recipient of Distinguished Honors “Rewriting the Mainstream: A Comparative Study of Intergenerationality in Asian and Latina/o Literature” (Jonathan Alba Cutter, advisor)

Biro Chen, recipient of Distinguished Honors “Transnational and Transracial Adoption from China to the United States, 1987-2007” (Jinah Kim, advisor)

Eunhiv Song, recipient of Honors, “Transnational Oral History of Two Generation of Korean Immigrants” (Ji-Yeon Yuh, advisor)

Interdisciplinary Workshop Series Rethinks Race and Diaspora

By Shuji Otsuka

At the inaugural session of the Kaplan Institute for the Humanities funded “East of California, Across Ethnic Studies: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Studies Workshop Series,” featured-speaker Naoko Shibusawa asked a provocative question: what if we replaced “modernity” with “imperialism” in our discussion of trans-Pacific histories? In her opening lecture, Shibusawa, an historian at Brown University and the author of the prize-winning America’s Geisha Ally, gave an overview of how Asian American Studies and Asian Studies evolved from different political and methodological concerns before offering ways to critically link the two fields. Her inquiry resonated with her three co-panelists and a mixed audience of about twenty undergraduate, graduate, and faculty members. Northwestern’s pioneering scholar of global modernity, Dilip Gaonkar, responded with a discussion of imperialism’s limits in framing movements of people at the margins of empire and nation. Amy Stanley, a historian of Tokugawa Japan, emphasized the need to specify which empire, Japan or the United States, not the least because of the differing ways racial categories developed in both countries. Our moderator, Ji-Yeon Yuh offered the comparative approach as a possible solution to Stanley’s dilemma, citing her recent research on diasporic Koreans in three different countries. Sarah Mara and Darline Clark Hine, the respective chairs of the History Department and African American Studies Department, deepened the conversation by examining the institutional constraints imposed by established disciplines even as issues of race, empire, and modernity continued to shape research and discussion. By this time, Shibusawa’s initial call for considering “across ethnic studies” seemed daunting but not intractable; during the final moments of the workshop, doctoral candidate Stephen Mak suggested multi-national archival research to counter nation-centered works that marginalize historical actors whose lives spanned the Pacific World.

Expanding the conversation from the trans-Pacific to the trans-hemispheric, the second workshop addressed where and how race intersects transnational studies, especially in reconceptualizing “America” beyond national boundaries. Featured-speaker, Sandhya Shukla theorized “The Global Inside the Local” using Harlem’s heterogeneous communities to reimagine a prototypically American place as a global one. An expert on diasporic cultures and the author of the acclaimed India Abroad, Shukla holds a joint position in English and American Studies at the University of Virginia. Her innovative research and interdisciplinary methodology sparked a lively discussion from both the audience, co-panelists Ramon Rivera-Servera and Ivy Wilson, and moderator and co-host of the series, Jinah Kim. At heart was the conflicting tendencies in diasporic and trans-hemispheric expressive practices toward “roots” or “authenticity” despite the mediated and mixed routes these cultural forms often take. In addressing this dilemma, the participants explored current theories of transculturation and translation as possible antidotes to neoliberalism’s rush toward interdisciplinarity and globalization.

Stretching national boundaries even further in the “Unlikely Crossovers” category, the third workshop moderated by Nitasha Sharma examined comparative race and diaspora studies outside the continental United States, workshop moderated by Nitasha Sharma. As such, featured-speaker, Shalini Puri, discussed the ethical and intellectual need for comparative area studies to engage non-U.S. based scholars of Oceanic and Caribbean studies. The author of The Caribbean Postcolonial, Puri brought her multilingual and multinational sensitivities to her nuanced reading of the Grenada Revolution and cultural hybridities in the Caribbean. Her varied methodologies include cross-national fieldwork and research in oral archives where ethno-graphic self-reflectivity and dialogue with indigenous knowledge production abound. Puri’s approach spoke to the work of her co-panelists, Sandra Richards and Ethan Caldwell. Richards examined how memory and the body in performance as well as beliefs, particularly in the context of trauma that often figures negatively in diasporic subjects, and how to document such findings for social scientists. First-year African American studies graduate student, Caldwell explored race mixing outside the U.S., pointing to how comparative racial formations often reveal tensions between local definitions and the applicability of race overs. He drew upon his forthcoming research on African American soldiers in U.S. bases in Asia as examples of how “unlikely” encounters may not be so “unlikely,” after all. Resolving such dichotomies of the particular and the universal that have plagued comparative race and diasporic studies will be ongoing and debated in the fourth and final session bringing together the themes of all previous workshops.
Book reception and celebration on the release of *Desi Land: Teen Cultures, Class, and Success in Silicon Valley* by Dr. Shalini Shankar

Left: Ji-Yeon Yuh welcomes! Above: Shalini Shankar reads from her new book. Below: Dr. Martin Manalansan, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign addressing the reception.

Right: Nitasha Sharma and her mother Miriam Sharma greet guests. Dr. Miriam Sharma and Dr. J.P. Sharma, both from the University of Hawaii-Manoa, graciously co-hosted the event at their home in Honolulu.

Mahalo! to the Sharma family.

“The Northwestern Reception” at the 2009 AAAS Meeting

“The Northwestern Reception” at the 2009 Association for Asian American Studies Conference in Honolulu.

Asian American Studies and Latina and Latino Studies Program Offices are often a “hub of activity”

Northwestern’s Vietnamese Student Association hosts annual “Vietnamese Interacting as ONE” Conference

Northwestern University’s VSA hosted the seventh annual Vietnamese Interacting as ONE Conference (VIA-1) on April 3rd - 5th, 2009. The conference highlights the Vietnamese communities of the Midwest and offers the opportunity for student leaders to connect and collaborate on issues pertinent to the region - ranging from cultural to political to organizational. This year, more than 250 students from schools and organizations throughout the region - from Minnesota to Ohio to Wisconsin to Kansas - attended VIA-1, and, through the efforts of 25 volunteers, this year’s fundraiser - the Polar Plunge - raised more than $13,000 for VietHope.

Duong Nguyen ("Z") who helped organize the VIA-1 Conference at Northwestern is seen here during the “Polar Plunge” fundraiser.
Dale Minami at Northwestern

continued from front page

by Asian American Studies Program Assistant Gregory Jue, who is a good college friend of Minami and invited him to come and speak to the students. Director of Asian American Studies and Professor Ji-Yeon Yuh, who had high hopes for what Minami would teach the students, hosted this event.

“I hope that students really get a sense of what it was like to be working in civil rights regarding Asian Americans and what it meant to be able to go back to the internment cases and do something about it, that sense of just doing something important, something to leave a mark,” Yuh said.

Many students, the majority being those taking an Asian American studies course, attended this event. The McCormick Tribune Center Forum was packed, and some students had to resort to sitting on the floor.

Students taking Introduction to Asian American history were notified of this event from the first day of classes. Publicity for the talk started early on, and as a result, the event was a great success.

For students such as freshman Julie Ma, these types of special speaker events help her to better understand and apply what she learns in class.

For me, personally, it’s very encouraging to hear Asian American speakers like Dale Minami because it helps me remember my culture and the power Asian Americans have as a “model minority,” Ma said. “His talk made Asian American history seem more real and relevant to me.”

This is exactly what Prof. Yuh had in mind for her students.

“I wanted the students to hear from somebody besides me why the internment and those internment cases were important and why we should still think about them today,” Yuh explained.

Minami’s talk centered around a power point presentation which had a “cast of characters” list that featured those he would talk about in order of appearance. The power point included images corresponding to key people he mentioned, such as Fred Korematsu, who refused to report for internment simply because he was in love and did not want to leave his girlfriend.

Eventually, Minami was able to successfully overturn the 40-year-old conviction by challenging the legality of Korematsu v. United States, the 1944 Supreme Court decision that legitimized mandatory internment of Japanese Americans.

“In the end, the courts agreed with us that there was no military necessity to intern Japanese Americans, that racial discrimination played a role, and that therefore, our clients’ convictions should be overturned,” Minami said.

Minami also described the day when the Korematsu case was resolved. He remembers it like yesterday and explained how it was one of the happiest moments of his life.

“At the original Korematsu argument, we had people crying during and after my argument. We have seen a lot of people cry because they bottle up these emotions that have been haunting them for years by being thrown into camps for no good reason and suffering horrible circumstances and now being able to talk openly about it and feeling vindicated that finally the court law has agreed with them that there was no good cause for them to be taken to prison,” Minami said.

But what made his talk interesting was the way Minami interwove all these little stories and events that explained the long and daring process that led to the final resolution of this case:

“He gave a very good talk. He went through the history of the internment and of the internment cases, and the background of just how in some ways, it was just sheer luck that they came to do and carry out those court cases,” Yuh said.

Minami not only talked about WWII Japanese American Internment camps but also civil liberties today in post 9/11 America and where Asian Americans as minorities stand today.

He mentioned that while the Japanese internship cases are behind us, it is still important to be reminded that case law precedent still stands and that a minority can still be targeted. In other words, while the fraudulent court decision has been overturned, we could help the redress movement and grant 20,000 Japanese Americans an apology. All of these are really satisfying.”

Minami has received numerous awards for his dedication to the cause of civil rights, including the American Bar Association’s 2003 Thurgood Marshall Award and the 2003 ACLU Civil Liberties. He received a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Southern California and received his J.D. from Boalt Hall School of Law at UC Berkeley. He was admitted to the California State Bar in 1972 and currently works in his own San Francisco law firm specializing in personal injury and entertainment law.

At the reception afterwards, visitors were able to meet Minami and engage in conversation. Many were pleased to meet someone who has been and is still playing such an important role in Asian American history.

“It [the talk] was very sobering. I’m really glad that there are still people like him out there to help and educate the public on what they need to hear,” Takada said.

But Minami believes he is doing only what he thinks is right and stressed the important of not only education, but also political activism.

“It’s funny because we only do what we think we should do and be thought of or getting acclaim or accolades seems a little bit strange because we’re only doing what we want to do and think we should be doing,” Minami explained. “But I think the fact that we were able to make some difference in both the legal and American history is really gratifying. We could help these three men get their convictions overturned. We could help the redress movement and grant 20,000 Japanese Americans an apology. All of these are really satisfying.”

Dale Minami (left) with Bill Yoshino, Midwest Director of the Japanese American Citizens League.

Theresa Mah (left), Ariissa Oh (center) and Diana Lin (right) at the reception.
May 7th Students Rally for Immigrant Rights at Northwestern

Students rallied at “The Arch” to celebrate a victory for undocumented immigrant rights at Northwestern. This was a result of student protest after NU Police turned Ramiro Sanchez-Zepeda over to immigration officials during a routine traffic stop. Following is the text of a speech given at the rally by Arianna Hermosillo, President of Alianza-The Hispanic/Latino Student Alliance.

By Arianna Hermosillo

My fellow students we stand here today to celebrate a victory. We celebrate the fact that because we took action and challenged the irresponsible practices of our University Police a change in policy concerning immigration detention is on the horizon. This is a direct result of student protest. We are here today to celebrate that because we took action and challenged an unreasonable policy, NU can do more to be a welcoming community for all students, of all backgrounds.

The rights of all immigrants continue to be threatened. Immigrants continue to live in fear because of raids and deportations. In just over a decade, immigration detention has tripled. More than 300,000 men, women and children are detained each year and families continue to be separated. Women and children are detained each night in fear because of raids and deportations. In just over a decade, immigration detention has tripled. More than 300,000 men, women and children are detained each night in fear because of raids and deportations. In just over a decade, immigration detention has tripled.

We are here to show our solidarity with Northwestern students about their relationship with University Police. One student admitted that he had been stopped and questioned by University Police, forced to show his wildcard as proof that he is a student here.

Above all this rally is a demonstration of student power. We are not apathetic. We care about these issues and will do what it takes to face them and effect change. We will not conform to the status quo. We will challenge it. We will show the world that we go to a school where our school newspaper does not call people illegal, where students aren’t questioned by their own police and where all human rights, those of immigrants, students and everyone, are important.

We are committed to gaining full acceptance of all rights, including those of immigrants, at Northwestern and to ensuring equal and nondiscriminatory treatment of everyone in all capacities. Understanding that an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, we want to ensure that human rights are always protected at Northwestern.

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Grading Minors in Asian American Studies

The Asian American Studies Program is proud to honor these 2009 graduates who have completed the minor in Asian American Studies

Christine Choi
Justin Jobity
Joseph Lee
Courtney Sharpe
Rachel Sun
Andrea Woods

Awards in Asian American Studies

We are proud to honor the following students who won awards this year

Joseph Lee
Outstanding Achievement in Asian American Studies

Christine Kim
Distinguished Undergraduate Essay
The Center Stage Theory of Race: A Different Approach to Race Relations

Christine Choi
Distinguished Undergraduate Essay
Rewriting the Mainstream: A Comparative Study of Intergenerationality in Asian and Latina/o Novels

Courtney Sharpe
Good Citizenship in Asian American Studies
The Asian American Studies Program

Asian American studies is a vital component of a liberal arts education that seeks to broaden awareness and appreciation of the world. Asian American studies deepens understanding of the multiracial history and character of the United States and also provides an opportunity to place the American experience within a larger global context.

Northwestern’s Asian American Studies Program aims to provide students with an understanding of Asian American experiences as fundamental to the ongoing development of American society and linked to the experiences of other racial minorities in the United States and of Asian migrants across the world. The program thus encourages students to develop informed, far-reaching perspectives that facilitate responsible participation in a rapidly changing world. As an interdisciplinary program, Asian American studies develops traditional investigative, analytic, and critical skills while also promoting the intellectual and creative powers students need to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Minor in Asian American Studies

The minor in Asian American studies offers an opportunity to pursue a coherent study of Asian American communities and the experiences of Asian Americans in the United States. It also provides a foundation for the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and migration within the modern global historical development of nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism.

Minor course requirements (7 units)

- 6 courses in Asian American studies, usually consisting of 1 survey in Asian American history or literature (ASIAN AM 214/HISTORY 214 or ASIAN AM 275/ENGLISH 275) in addition to topics courses (courses with significant coverage of Asian American issues may be approved at the discretion of the director; no more than 2 courses may be approved by petition)
- 1 course in a discipline other than Asian American studies that focuses on race and ethnicity. The course should provide conceptual and comparative breadth concerning a topic related to Asian American studies.
- 3 of the 7 courses must be at the 300 level

*Minor Application Forms are available in Kresge Hall 1-435*


We cannot understand where we are going unless we understand where we have been. Whether you are a science major, premed, etc., a major or minor in Asian American studies can open your eyes to a much broader perspective on who we are and where we are going. (My own parents never had the opportunity that you have to study Asian American history, and hence they were totally unprepared for the shock of being locked up in a relocation camp in Calif. during World War II. Only the tireless work of many Asian American activists have made sure that we don’t revisit that sad chapter in U.S. history.)”

—Dr. Michio Kaku
Prof. of Theoretical Physics City University of New York; co-creator of string field theory, a branch of string theory