Winter was a busy quarter for Asian American Studies.

During the Winter, we sponsored a public lecture by Professor Moon-Ho Jung, winner, the Merle Curti Award, Organization of American Historians, titled “We Were Not All Immigrants: Toward a Radical Vision of (Asian) American History”.

The following week over 100 people attended a forum on human trafficking organized by Asian American Studies along with KAN-WIN and the Northwestern University Conference on Human Rights.

The beginning of March saw us hosting Professor Laura Kina’s artist lecture, “Aloha Dreams: Hapa Heritage Tourism and the Quest for Racial Paradise”.

And upcoming in April is “Hiphopistan”, a 3-day showcase and forum with live performances and workshops on South Asians in Hip-Hop co-sponsored by departments from Northwestern University and the University of Chicago.

The Colloquium on Ethnicity and Diaspora, initiated this year by post-doc Shanshan Lan and PhD candidate Shuji Otsuka now meets once/month, and each time draws together a diverse group of scholars to discuss topics relevant to the field of Ethnic Studies.

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In This Issue

Human Trafficking Forum held at Northwestern University in February

by Jinah Kim

Panelists:
Rachel Durchslag (Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation)
Kaitlyn Lim (Polaris Project)
Heather Benno (National Immigrant Justice Center/Heartland Alliance)
Kavitha Sreeharsha (Legal Momentum)
Timothy Lim (Professor, Cal State Los Angeles)

February 7, 2008
Northwestern University

The Asian American Studies Program, KAN-WIN*, and the Northwestern University Conference on Human Rights hosted academics and activists in a panel called Our Sisters Are Not For Sale to help share experience and broaden knowledge about the global scourge of human trafficking. Experts estimate that 600,000-800,000 men women and children are trafficked across international borders each year, 14,500-17,500 into the United States, a criminal phenomena that extends into nearly every racial and ethnic community across the country.

Trafficked subjects are denied basic human rights, isolated and enslaved; their bodies are treated as an object to be owned and their labor imagined as the right of someone else. By taking the broader view of trafficking as “force, fraud, or coercion” these panelists enable a painful, but necessary realization of the multitudes of economies and lifestyles that depend on exploited trafficked labor.

Panelists also dispelled several myths about who is trafficked, what drives trafficking continued on back page
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Jung delivered a talk at Northwestern University on January 25, 2008, entitled, "We Were Not All Immigrants: Toward a Radical Vision of (Asian) American History." He also participated in a discussion of his book with graduate students and faculty from two reading groups, Critical Race Studies and the Colloquium on Ethnicity and Diaspora.

In the age of emancipation, he explained, plantation owners intended to replace slaves with so-called coolies so they recast these migrant workers as "voluntary immigrants." Thecoolie, however, remained as a racialized figure fueling the anti-Chinese movement, which culminated with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. According to this racial logic, slave laws were a precursor to anti-immigration laws of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The threat of thecoolie, therefore, transformed the United States into a (white) "nation of immigrants."

The idea for the book resulted from Jung’s long-standing interest in the links between Asian American and African American history. He credits the work of W.E.B. DuBois and Walter Rodney for providing "new ways of understanding the world." As an undergraduate at Cornell University, he majored in Government and took courses in Ethnic Studies. He stayed for graduate school where he worked with Gary Okihiro, one of the leading Asian American historians in the country.

By connecting "seemingly disparate histories," Jung said, we can see the "radical possibilities" of moving beyond binaries such as black and white, slave and free, alien and citizen. He also hopes we can "interrogate the naturalized borders of the United States." In his study, for example, the production of sugar connects Louisiana, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Asia. The so-called coolies were a "global migrant labor force," unworthy of "equal rights and opportunities." He suggests framing Asian American history as a "story of labor migrations and struggles," rather than as one of "immigration and assimilation."

Shuji Otsuka, a graduate student in history who teaches for Asian American Studies, raised some interesting theoretical points. He observed that Tye Kim Orr, featured in the book’s opening vignette, is not representative of the book’s main subjects, the so-called coolies. Orr, an ethnic Chinese born and raised in a British colony in Southeast Asia, traveled to London, where he persuaded missionaries to fund his work among the Chinese in British Guiana. After an affair with a "colored" woman, he fled to Trinidad, Cuba, and finally Louisiana, where he taught at a school operated by the Freedmen’s Bureau. He eventually found a niche recruiting laborers from Asia for plantation owners in Louisiana. To be sure, in terms of education, religion, and social status, he differed from many of these workers.

Orr’s story is nonetheless extraordinary. And we may very well lack a framework to understand his experience. Otsuka wondered, "How do we make sense of migrant subjectivity as they traverse national boundaries?" In other words, "how do we construct a narrative without reducing it to the larger framework of the liberal nation state and/or Chinese nationalism?"

Moon-Ho Jung, who recently received the Merle Curti Award from the Organization of American Historians for the best work in social, intellectual, and/or cultural history, smiled and modestly replied, "I wish I had spoken to you before I wrote the book." Indeed, re-conceptualizing Asian American history is no easy task. Jung’s work may only be the beginning of that "radical vision."
Shalini Shankar and her family

"Our Sisters Are Not For Sale! Examining the issue and implications of Asian trafficked victims into the U.S." — Feb 7

Laura Kina artist lecture "Aloha Dreams: Hapa Heritage Tourism and the Quest for Racial Paradise" — March 5

Laura Kina, painter, Professor of Art, Media and Design and Program Director of Asian American Studies, De Paul University, delivered an artist lecture at NU titled "Aloha Dreams: Hapa Heritage Tourism and the Quest for Racial Paradise". On the screen is one of her paintings "Loco Moco" after the popular Hawaiian dish of hamburger, eggs and gravy on a bed of white rice.

Shuj Otsuka (left) and Moon-Ho Jung at the special seminar.  Shuj Otsuka's book, Cookies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation which won the Marie Curt Award.

"We Were Not All Immigrants: Toward a Radical Vision of (Asian) American History" — Jan 25

Nitaasha Sharma and Ji-Yeon Yuh at the Winter potluck hosted by Ji-Yeon at her home.

Photo: Photo by Ricky Pai

Richard Aoki holds up the "Red Book" during the API Issues conference honoring the Asian American Political Alliance of 1968.

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A look at Winter Quarter classes

Professor Nitasha Sharma’s Asian/Black Relations in the U.S. has been increasingly popular since it was first offered in Spring 2007. It has since been approved as a permanent course by the Curriculum Review Committee and will be offered in 2 parts, Asian Am 218 and Asian Am 310 after this academic year.

Professor John Cheng delivers a lecture to his Asian American History class, Asian Am 214 which reached record enrollments this quarter.

Our Sisters Are Not For Sale! continued from page 1

industries, and where and for whom men, women, and children are trafficked. Kavitha Sreeharsha argued that while the sex worker is the predominant image of the trafficked subject, in fact many men, women and children are also trafficked to work in dangerous, degrading and slave like conditions as domestic, seasonal and factory workers.

Without oversimplifying the diversity of reasons and complex relations behind human trafficking, panelists targeted the demand for sex workers, patriarchal systems that devalue women’s worth and undercut economic opportunity at home, poverty, and the fact that many communities in the United States turn a blind eye to the coercive sex work occurring in their neighborhoods.

While the trafficked subject is most directly impacted by the cumulative and daily coercion by the traffickers, the panelists urged their audience to understand trafficking as a systemic problem that society as a whole needs to address. On the state and federal level, education of law enforcement agencies and social service providers, as well as re-framing of immigration laws, are necessary to protect — not criminalize — trafficked populations.

Thinking about trafficking systematically means also pressuring our own communities to truly commit to ending violence against women and children. By recognizing that trafficking is sustained in our own communities and by humanizing and connecting with trafficked subjects we can each play a small part in furthering global justice. As Ji-Yeon Yuh, the Director of the Asian American Studies Program urges, it is important that we “not ask how big of an impact we make but that we strive to make an impact no matter how small.”

Returning to Manzanar

Northwestern’s Special Collections in Deering Library houses a unique and under-utilized collection of documents from the Japanese American internment during World War II. Ranging from loose clippings to Born Free and Equal, a famous book of Ansel Adams photographs of the Manzanar Relocation Center, these documents shed light on one of the most infamous civil rights violations in U.S. history. Manzanar, located inland in southern California, held over 10,000 Japanese Americans within its barbed wire fences.

The original collection was kept by Thelma Kellesvig, who taught domestic science at Manzanar and who I also found a mention of in the camp’s newspaper as a member of the local draft board, showing that she must have had a large role in daily life at Manzanar. Her carefully kept scrapbook is currently in fragile condition but on the library’s list for restoration. It mostly consists of invitations and programs from camp entertainments, photographs of her students and the surrounding landscape, and clippings, including the famous 1944 Life magazine feature on the Japanese American internment. Kellesvig’s photographs are a rare commodity, because Japanese Americans were not allowed to keep their cameras during World War II (for fear of spying activity). Most unofficial internment camp photographs were taken by specially licensed visitors or, in rare cases, by Japanese American military servicemen visiting their families. The posed photographs show happy-looking teenage schoolgirls.

The university purchased the collection in the 1970s and has been adding to it piece by piece ever since. A full listing can be found by doing a search by call number in NUCat, the online library catalog, for “Manzanar.”

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