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 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

During Fall Quarter, Asian American Studies hosted a panel of three well-known Asian American Young Adult Literature authors: Linda Sue Park, Marie Myung-Ok Lee, and Ken Mochizuki.

Asian American Young Adult Literature explored in Fall Quarter Forum of Authors.

by Lindsey Gilbert

Growing up in Hibbing, Minnesota, author Marie Myung-Ok Lee frequently heard sentiments, such as, “go back where you came from,” even though she was born in America. Lee endured many hardships and internal conflicts growing up and painted a vivid picture of what it felt like to “wear the face of Asia.”

“People gave us double-takes wherever we went,” Lee said. “We were the objects of long, hard gazes and fit no one’s conception of a nice American family.”

Along with two other Asian American authors, Lee came to Northwestern University on October 16 to address her experiences as minorities. Each author told a compelling story.

Lee published five award-winning young adult novels and works as a writing professor at Brown University. She discussed the use of autobiography in Asian American fiction and how ethnicity is expressed in creative writing.

Lee said she believes many mainstream critics have certain assumptions about Asian American literature.

“If there’s an Asian person on the cover of a book, people would always ask ‘Is that you?’ It’s this assumption that if you are ethnic, you have no imagination and you write about whatever happens to you,” Lee said.

She wrote her first novel, Finding My Voice, in college and relates to the main character because she struggles to sort out her identity. Another novel, Somebody’s Daughter, tells the story of Sarah Thorson, an American girl trying to make sense of herself in Korea.

“In our house, Korea was not discussed,” Lee said. “My parents tried to seem more American and bury Korea. From this I inherited a sense of longing for a country I never knew.”

By writing books about the search for acceptance in America, Lee said she came to realize identity isn’t a goal to be achieved, but rather, a process that constantly evolves.

The second author, Ken Mochizuki, lives in Seattle. Before he began writing children’s books, he worked as an actor and later a journalist.

Mochizuki addressed the assumptions that come with being Japanese living in America:

“I don’t know any Japanese and I’ve never been to Japan. I don’t know martial arts, math was my worst subject, I’m not a computer nerd, I’m not a lousy driver and...
Asian American Young Adult Literature explored in Fall Quarter Forum of Authors

(continued from Front Page) when I go on vacation I don’t have five cameras around my neck.”

Even though Mochizuki always aspired to write adult novels, he started out writing children’s picture books. He wrote Baseball Saved Us, Heroes and Passage to Freedom: The Sugahara Story. His young adult novel Beacon Hill Boys reflects his high school and college days in Seattle. His most recent picture book, Be Water My Friend: The Early Years of Bruce Lee, tributes and chronicles the early years of the martial arts legend.

Mochizuki defies stereotypes by speaking to groups of people and attempting to bring awareness about Asian American literature. “I have a reason to write and bring awareness about these issues. If I don’t do it, who will?” Mochizuki said.

The final author, Linda Sue Park, grew up in the only Korean family in Park Forest, IL. As a young writer, Park wanted to know and write about what it meant to be Korean—not Korean American. She draws on her Korean ancestry for much of her work. The first four books she wrote took place in medieval, historic Korea. Park won the prestigious Newbery Medal in 2002 for her novel A Single Shard. Her first poetry book Tap Dancing on the Roof helped her realize “what was wonderful about being Korean” by expressing herself through poetry.

Park said her most recent novel, Keeping Score, remains true to many of her novels even though the main character is white. Maggie Fortini has Italian and Irish blood and lives in Brooklyn in the 1950s. She devotes her time rooting for the Brooklyn Dodgers and Park relates that to her own experience as a Chicago Cubs fan.

“Get yourself attached to a losing sports team and have a life cycle of hope and disappointment and that will be your life as a writer,” Park said. “I believe that with all my heart. Of baseball. My own love of baseball is really fitting.”

Park hopes when young people read her books they will take away the notion of ethnicity is always apart of the picture, but it’s never the whole of it. “It’s a part of you that informs your life without being your whole life,” Park said.

The Asian American Studies program sponsored the event “Asian American Young Adult Literature: A Forum of Authors.”
Shankar, Shalini  
*Desi Land: Teen Culture, Class, and Success in Silicon Valley*  

Desi Land is Shalini Shankar’s lively ethnographic account of South Asian American teen culture during the Silicon Valley dot com boom. Shankar focuses on how South Asian Americans, or “Desi” define and manage what it means to be successful individuals and community members in a place brimming with the promise of technology. Between 1999 and 2001 Shankar spent many months “kickin’ it” with a diverse range of Desi teenagers at three Silicon Valley high schools and has since followed the lives and stories of these teens. The diverse high-school students who populate Desi Land are Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs from South Asia and other diasporic locations; they include first- to fourth-generation immigrants whose parents’ careers vary from assembly-line workers to engineers and CEOs. Shankar uses this heterogeneity to illustrate how teens differently understand what it means to be “Desi” and accordingly organize themselves into social cliques. Whether discussing instant messaging or arranged marriages, “Desi bling” or the pressures of the model minority myth, Shankar foregrounds the teens’ voices, perspectives, and stories. By analyzing how Desi teens’ conceptions and realization of success are influenced by community values, cultural practices, language use, and material culture, she offers a nuanced portrait of diasporic formations in a transforming urban region.

Carolyn Chen  
*Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience*  

What does becoming American have to do with becoming religious? Many immigrants become more religious after coming to the United States. Taiwanese are no different. Like many Asian immigrants to the United States, Taiwanese frequently convert to Christianity after immigrating. But Americanization is more than simply a process of Christianization. Most Taiwanese American Buddhists also say they converted only after arriving in the United States even though Buddhism is a part of Taiwan’s dominant religion. By examining the experiences of Christian and Buddhist Taiwanese Americans, Getting Saved in America tells “a story of how people become religious by becoming American, and how people become American by becoming religious.”

Carolyn Chen argues that many Taiwanese immigrants deal with the challenges of becoming American by becoming religious. Based on in-depth interviews with Taiwanese American Christians and Buddhists, and extensive ethnographic fieldwork at a Taiwanese Buddhist temple and a Taiwanese Christian church in Southern California, Getting Saved in America is the first book to compare how two religions influence the experiences of one immigrant group. By showing how religion transforms many immigrants into Americans, it sheds new light on the question of how immigrants become American.

Recent Book Publications

Shankar, Shalini  
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Recognizing Achievements & Contributions


Jenny Korn was the organizer and moderator of the Mid-South Sociological Association (MSSA) graduate student roundtable on race in November 2008.  

James Zarsadiaz will be presenting at the April AAAS annual meeting in Hawaii. He will present from his paper “From Ethnic Enclave to Urban Oasis: Redevelopment in Washington, DC’s Chinatown, 1983-2003.”

Over the summer of 2008, Shuji Otsuka completed two articles on U.S.-Japan cultural relations for publication. In February, he is excited to participate in “TransPacific Histories: Migration and Diaspora,” the first of a four-part workshop series “East of California,” Across Ethnic Studies: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies” co-organized by Shuji Otsuka, Dr. Nitasha Sharma and Dr. Jinah Kim. This year, Shuji will also be presenting excerpts from his dissertation, “Ambassadors of Common Humanity: Japanese Fulbright Students and U.S.-Japan Relations,” at the Association for Asian American Studies, Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, and the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association.

Congratulations to Dr. Nitasha Sharma on being chosen by Diverse Issues in Higher Education magazine as one of the 10 “Emerging Scholars” for 2009. She is profiled in the January 8, 2009 issue. A copy of the magazine will be available to view in the Asian American Studies program office, or search for the article at http://www.diverseeducation.com
On the anniversary of the signing of EXECUTIVE ORDER 9066

The Asian American Studies Program is proud to host

DALE MINAMI

Lead attorney in the U.S. Supreme Court case korematsu v. United States which overturned a 40 year old conviction for refusal to obey exclusion orders aimed at Japanese Americans during WWII.

WW II Japanese American Internment Camps & Civil Liberties Today in Post 9/11 America

Thursday ~ February 19th
12:30 - 1:30 Talk/Q&A
1:30 - 2:00 Reception
The Hagstrum Room ~ University Hall 201
1897 Sheridan Rd, Evanston, IL

This event is free and open to the public  •  More info at http://www.asianamerican.northwestern.edu/events/

The Colloquium on Ethnicity and Diaspora

The Colloquium on Ethnicity and Diaspora (CED) seeks to attract undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, staff, and friends across various disciplines and departments who share active research interests in Asian American studies, African American studies, Latino/a studies, pan-ethnic studies, and related fields, such as globalization studies and other ethnic studies. Funded by the Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities, the Asian American Studies program, and other Northwestern University departments, the CED aims to foster a vibrant intellectual community and provide a safe space in which both faculty and students are peers, sharing insight into and probing questions about critical readings of the most recent, ground-breaking books and articles in our fields. When possible, the CED brings in the authors of pertinent research to speak firsthand about not just the results of their work, but also the processes behind generating such important research.

The CED also serves as a forum for students to present their ongoing thesis/dissertation chapters and receive constructive feedback from a cross-disciplinary audience. This year, the CED intends to act as a supportive testing ground for advanced doctoral students who desire to practice their job talk as they enter the market, a rite that every academic-bound PhD student goes through but one that is often overlooked. At least one graduate student leads every CED meeting.

We invite all students and faculty who would like to share their research in a supportive environment to contact us at j-korn@northwestern.edu to discuss presentation opportunities. Please see our web page at: http://www.asianamerican.northwestern.edu/events/ced.html

Schedule for Winter 2009

Wednesday, January 7, 12-1:00p @ Crowe 1-135: Stephen Mak, PhD candidate in history, presenting a shortened version of his job talk, “The Rights of Others: American Internment and the Emergence of Human Rights in World War II.” (No hand-out in advance.)


Wednesday, February 4, 12-1:30p @ Crowe 1-135: Ben Ruiz, PhD candidate in sociology, will lead our discussion of the two Omi/Winarant books.

Friday (not our usual Wednesday), February 20, 12-1:30p @ Crowe 1-135: Lisa Nakamura, professor in communication and Asian American studies from the University of Illinois in Urbana, presenting her upcoming new article out in 2009 on virtual labor, race, and online gaming in the World of Warcraft (article discussion).

Wednesday, March 4, 12-1:30p @ Crowe 1-135: Katie Zien, PhD candidate in theatre and drama, presenting her article entitled, “From Mimesis to Poiesis: Interrogating History and Pedagogy in De/From Barbados a/to Panamá” (article discussion).

Wednesday, March 11, 12-1:30p @ Crowe 1-135: Jesse Mumm, PhD candidate in cultural anthropology, presenting a chapter from his dissertation on the intersections between gentrification and race in three Chicago neighborhoods.