

**Society of American Law Teachers
2008 SALT Teaching Conference**

Teaching for Social Change

This Conference is
Dedicated to the Memory of



Chris Iijima
– poet, scholar, and freedom fighter
(1948 – 2005)

Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice
School of Law – Boalt Hall
University of California, Berkeley

March, 2008

Remembering Chris Iijima¹

Chris Iijima was born on December 19, 1948, in New York City, where he was raised by his activist parents, Takeru and Kazu Iijima. Takeru, his father, served in the famous 442nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team, and Kazu, his mother, had been sent to an internment camp during World War II.

Chris graduated from Columbia University in 1969, and participated as a “pamphleteer, organizer, speaker, and visionary” for the antiwar movement as well as for the “East Coast stirrings of the nascent Asian American movement,” as Phil Tajitsu Nash has recounted. Chris first became widely known for expressing his commitment to social justice through his songwriting and singing. In the early 1970s, “Yellow Pearl,” a trio consisting of Chris, Joanne Nobuko Miyamoto, and “Charlie” Chin, toured the country singing about Asian American identity while encompassing the struggles of minorities everywhere.

The trio recorded “A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle by Asians in America” as well as other albums. Chris and his friends performed on numerous college campuses and appeared on the Mike Douglas Show with John Lennon and Yoko Ono in 1972. The Smithsonian Institute commemorated their role as pioneers with a reunion concert and a reissue of “A Grain of Sand” on CD.

After working as a teacher at the innovative Manhattan Country School and as a bartender to support himself while in law school, Chris graduated at the top of his class at New York Law School, where he was an editor of the Law Review. He clerked from 1988-1990 for Federal District Judge Charles Stewart, Jr., in the Southern District of New York and worked as a litigator in the New York law firm of Friedman & Kaplan. He returned to his love of teaching and social justice work as a faculty member at New York University in the Lawyering Program, and then at Western New England Law School.

Chris was invited to join the faculty of the William S. Richardson School of Law at the University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa in 1998, and he became a tenured associate professor in 2001. He taught in the areas of Critical Race Theory, Equity, Legal Methods, Legal Research, and Professional Responsibility.

Chris was particularly loved and admired for his work as director of the Law School’s unique Preadmission Program. The Preadmission Program, established in 1975, admits and supports students from historically underserved communities with great promise as lawyers and community leaders. Chris was an inspiring, challenging, and greatly loved teacher in his role as the director of the program, as well as in the other legal subjects he

¹ From <http://www.hawaii.edu/cgi-bin/uhnews-arc?20060112111139>, and supplemented by information compiled by Marie Rehmar, Head of Reference Services, Cleveland-Marshall College of Law Library, Cleveland State University.

taught. Chris embraced people, and people embraced Chris. The program was renamed the Ulu Lehua Program in memory of Chris, quoting a song he co-wrote about the hardy trees that are the first to grow after a lavalava flow and that sport beautiful, multicolored blossoms.

He was voted Outstanding Professor of the Year by the UH Law faculty and students in 2000, and he was a 2001 recipient of the Board of Regents' Excellence in Teaching Award. In October 2005, he was awarded the Keeper of the Flame Tribute by the Na Loio Immigrant Rights and Public Interest Legal Center.

Chris wrote much-cited law review articles addressing the issues he sang and wrote about years earlier. With clarity, nuance, and the support of powerful and careful scholarship, Chris described vital issues such as "Race as Resistance;" "Separating Support from Betrayal: Examining the Intersections of Racialized Legal pedagogy, Academic Support, and Subordination;" "Swimming from the Island of the Colorblind: Deserting an Ill-Conceived Constitutional Metaphor;" and "Shooting Justice Jackson's 'Loaded Weapon' at Ysar Hamdi: Judicial Abdication at the Convergence of Korematsu and McCarthy."

As Georgetown Law Center Professor Mari Matsuda stated in her tribute to Chris in October 2005 when he received recognition from the Na Loio Immigrant Rights and Public Interest Legal Center, Chris's teaching, writing, and extraordinary example "produced an army of students who are re-making the profession, with Chris's voice in their heads as they go." Chris was unwavering in his conviction that "competence without compassion will negatively affect critical lawyering decisions... and compassion without competence will negatively affect how an attorney serves the interest of his or her client."

Dean Avi Soifer of the William S. Richardson School of Law described Chris as "a forceful but sweet and very funny challenger of settled expectations. Chris truly was incomparable as he pushed, prodded, and genuinely inspired everyone to struggle toward both clearer understanding and a better world."

In addition to his teaching, mentoring, and scholarly activities, Chris served on the board of directors of Na Loio and of the Society of American Law Teachers, on the Commission on Equal Access to Justice, appointed by the Hawai'i Supreme Court, and on the Special Advisory Committee on Diversity of the Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission.

Chris died peacefully in Honolulu, Hawai'i on December 31, 2005, after a long battle with amyloidosis, a rare blood disease. He reached the age of 57 the week before he died. He is survived by his wife, Jane Dickson, sons Alan and Christopher, his father, Takeru, and his sister, Lynne.

Selected Publications²

Shooting Justice Jackson's "Loaded Weapon" at Ysar Hamdi: Judicial Abdication at the Convergence of Korematsu and McCarthy, 54 SYRACUSE LAW REVIEW 109 (2004).

² Bibliography compiled by Marie Rehmar, Head of Reference Services, Cleveland-Marshall College of Law Library, Cleveland State University

New Rice Recipes: The Legitimization of Continued Overthrow, (Rice v. Cayetano Symposium), 3 ASIAN-PACIFIC LAW AND POLICY JOURNAL 8 (2002)

Race Over Rice: Binary Analytical Boxes and a Twenty-First Century Endorsement of Nineteenth Century Imperialism in Rice v. Cayetano, 53 RUTGERS LAW REVIEW 91 (2000).

Separating Support from Betrayal: Examining the Intersections of Racialized Legal Pedagogy, Academic Support, and Subordination, 33 INDIANA LAW REVIEW 737 (2000).

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Race as Resistance: Racial Identity as More than Ancestral Heritage, 15 TOURO LAW REVIEW 497 (1999).

Reparations and the “Model Minority” Ideology of Acquiescence: The Necessity to Refuse the Return to Original Humiliation, (A Joint Symposium by the BOSTON COLLEGE THIRD WORLD LAW JOURNAL: The Long Shadow of Korematsu), 40 BOSTON COLLEGE LAW REVIEW 385 (1998) and 19 BOSTON COLLEGE THIRD WORLD LAW JOURNAL 385 (1998).

Political Accommodation and the Ideology of the “Model Minority”: *Building a Bridge to White Minority Rule in the 21st Century*, 7 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA INTERDISCIPLINARY LAW JOURNAL 1 (1998).

When Fiction Intrudes Upon Reality: A Brief Reply to Professor Chin, (Symposium: A Duty to Represent? Critical Reflection on Stropnick v. Nathanson), 20 WESTERN NEW ENGLAND LAW REVIEW 73 (1998).

The Era of We-Construction: Reclaiming the Politics of Asian Pacific American Identity and Reflections on the Critique of the Black/White Paradigm, 29 COLUMBIA HUMAN RIGHTS LAW REVIEW 47 (1997).

Swimming from the Island of the Colorblind: Deserting an Ill-Conceived Constitutional Metaphor, (Symposium: Using Law and Identity to Script Cultural Production), 17 LOYOLA OF LOS ANGELES ENTERTAINMENT LAW JOURNAL 583 (1997).

Fictions, Fault, and Forgiveness: Jury Nullification in a New Context (with David N. Dorfman), 28 UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN JOURNAL OF LAW REFORM 861 (1995).

Music:

A GRAIN OF SAND: MUSIC FOR THE STRUGGLE BY ASIANS IN AMERICA

Chris Kando Iijima, Joanne Nobuko Miyamoto, "Charlie" Chin
Paredon Records, P-1020, 1973. Available from Smithsonian Folkways:

<http://www.folkways.si.edu/search/AlbumDetails.aspx?ID=252>

Album Details; Liner Notes from Smithsonian Global Sound:

<http://www.smithsonianglobalsound.org/containerdetail.aspx?itemid=252>

http://media.smithsonianglobalsound.org/liner_notes/paredon/PAR01020.pdf

Performed *Fine Weather* on **WHAT NOW PEOPLE, NO. 2**, A Song Magazine on a Record,
Paredon, P-2002, 1977.

<http://www.smithsonianglobalsound.org/containerdetail.aspx?itemid=258>

Liner Notes from Smithsonian Global Sound:

http://media.smithsonianglobalsound.org/liner_notes/paredon/PAR02002.pdf

And on **THE LEGACY OF HO CHI MINH: NOTHING IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN
INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM**, Paredon , P-1033, 1976.

Song to a Child, on **WHAT NOW, PEOPLE? #1**, Paredon, P-2001, 1975.

Note: Paredon Records was listed on the WHAT NOW, PEOPLE? #2 Liner notes as “in the
social change business, not just the music business.”

Dust Don't Fly Away, **BACK TO BACK** album, 1982.

Grain of Sand reunion concert in the “Made in the USA: Asian American Music Today”
series sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution’s Program for Asian Pacific American
Studies and the *Washington Post*, in Washington, D.C., April, 2000.

Photo on 1st page from <http://photos1.blogger.com/blogger/5199/894/1600/ijima.jpg>