

10-1-2000

Hopeful Words at the Students of Color Recognition Dinner

UB Law Forum

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum

Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (2000) "Hopeful Words at the Students of Color Recognition Dinner," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 13 : No. 2 , Article 12.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol13/iss2/12

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact lawscholar@buffalo.edu.

Law School Report:



Left to right: Robert O. Providence '00, Francisco S. Ayala II '00, Jenny Lancaster '00, Amod K. Choudhary '00 and Lorie M. Perrin '99 pass the legacy flame.

All photos by K. C. Kratt

Hopeful words at the Students of Color Recognition Dinner

A Cleveland attorney who is one of the most prominent Asian-American lawyers in the United States was the featured speaker for UB Law School's Students of Color Recognition Dinner. Held April 27, 2000, at the Statler Towers hotel in downtown Buffalo, the dinner featured Laura Kingsley Hong, president-elect of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association.

Hong's remarks drew on both history and current events as she made a twofold argument: that Asian-Americans face continuing suspicion and discrimination, and that a new generation of lawyers is stepping up to defend their rights – indeed, everyone's rights – against the forces of intolerance. It was a welcome message to those in attendance, including African-American, Latino, Asian-American and Native American students, faculty and practitioners.

Hong began with a reference to what is now widely acknowledged as a dark period for American civil rights: the forced in-



“The lawyers of the last 20 years are both male and female and are lawyers of color. They are you. They are diverse in language, country of birth, religion, skin color and physical ability. This new breed of lawyer is committed and dedicated. It is you, and I salute you.”

Guest speaker Laura Kingsley Hong

terment of more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans – U.S. citizens – in camps during World War II. President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066 ordering the internment was, she said, “carried out despite the fact that government intelligence reports did not support the notion that resident Japanese posed a threat to national security.”

Hong cited the cases of three internees – Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi and Minoru Yasui – who challenged the internment. In 1943 and 1944, the Supreme Court upheld their convictions.

“In the 1940s,” Hong said, “the legal community ignored its responsibility to protect the rights of the Japanese-Americans. In the 1940s, the legal community was silent. But in the mid-1980s, the convictions of Korematsu, Hirabayashi and Yasui were overturned. As a result of the dedication and hard work of literally hundreds of men and women of color, after thousands of hours, the United States Supreme Court vindicated Korematsu, Hirabayashi and Yasui. In their vindication, the Supreme Court held that the government had ‘deliberately omitted relevant information and provided misleading information’ to the Supreme Court on the crucial issue of ‘military necessity.’”

That victory, she said, was “the direct result of the work of hundreds of lawyers. Lawyers like you. Lawyers who accepted the responsibility of righting the wrongs.”

More recently, Hong said, allegations of campaign finance improprieties – charges that Beijing had secretly given money to the Democratic Party and received secret information in return – and the prosecution of Wen Ho Lee, a former government scientist at Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory, on charges of spying, have given evidence that “racial profiling”

is alive and well today just as it was in World War II.

“Despite the lessons learned,” she said, “the name of national security continues to permit our government to target individuals based solely on ethnicity.”

The National Asian Pacific American Bar Association works vigorously to prosecute hate crimes, and in her speech, Hong cited several such crimes in recent years.

“Just last year,” she said, “Korean Yoon Won-joon and Filipino-American Joseph Ito were killed because of their Asian faces. The legal profession responded swiftly, calling for the prosecution of Nathaniel Smith and Buford Forrow for their racially motivated hate crimes. In addition to the prosecution of the perpetrators, lawyers have devoted thousands of hours to the counseling, support and legal cases of the left-behind families.”

That legal support was not always the case, Hong said: “It was not until the 1990s that the legal community reached the level of diversity necessary to launch an effective and prompt response that challenges American policies when those policies infringe upon the rights of Americans. It was not until recently that the legal community had the strength and resources to assist others in protecting their own civil rights. The legal community is now wiser and stronger. In the last decade, the breadth of lawyers effectively challenging the destructive forces that threaten the civil rights of Americans has grown exponentially.

“In the last 20 years,” Hong said, “lawyers have accepted their responsibilities as lawyers and as Americans to enforce, preserve and protect individual rights and liberties and the American justice system. The lawyers of the last 20 years are both male and female and are lawyers of color. They are you. They are diverse in language, country of birth, religion, skin color and physical ability. This new breed of lawyer is committed and dedicated.

“It is you, and I salute you.”

One of the Law School’s most inspirational traditions was played out again at the end of the Students of Color Dinner, as graduating third-year students “passed the torch” to those who will follow in their footsteps. The solemn candle-lighting ceremony bathed the room in a flickering glow, a reminder of the attorney’s duty to shed light on the truth and an acknowledgment of the legacy these UB Law students pass on to the next generation. •



Sandra M. Clarke '00, top, and son Jermaine with Camille A. Flynn '01



Joe Lee Huang '00, Anthony Pendergrass '00 and Tiffany R. Perry '00



Zaira E. Juarez '00 and Kevin A. Hsi '00