
In Memoriam Professor Keith Aoki

Before this issue of the *UC Davis Law Review* went to press, our beloved Professor Keith Aoki passed away. Professor Aoki served as a panelist during the symposium “The Asian Century?” and published his article *The Yellow Pacific: Transnational Identities, Diasporic Racialization, and Myth(s) of the “Asian Century”* in this issue. During his short time with us, Professor Aoki made immense contributions to this Journal, to the UC Davis School of Law, and to the legal community at large. Above all, we appreciate how he touched our lives with his kindhearted spirit.

Professor Aoki was known to his colleagues and students as a caring and gentle — and brilliant — individual. He was an accomplished and respected scholar in civil rights, critical race theory, intellectual property, and local government law. He published in some of the highest-ranked law reviews, including the *Stanford Law Review* and the *California Law Review*. At the same time, as a comic book artist, he made complex legal concepts accessible with *Bound by Law*, *Pictures Within Pictures*, and the forthcoming *Theft: A History of Music*.

Professor Aoki was a favorite at the UC Davis School of Law. His courses always generated lengthy waitlists. Perhaps it was his sheer brilliance that attracted everyone to him. Perhaps it was because he was extremely generous with his time and was always available to meet and discuss with his students. Or perhaps it was the way he cheerfully smiled and greeted you with every passing in the hall, despite having a handful of books and papers tucked under his arm, to stop to ask how you were doing. Professor Aoki’s intelligence and creativity were remarkable, but his compassion and enthusiasm for his students was extraordinary.

I had the great fortune of taking his Critical Race Theory course where his generosity and passion for learning became evident. We used a classroom too small for the class — if the class remained at its twenty-five student cap for enrollment, the room would have fit the class properly. But Professor Aoki did not want to turn away anyone who wanted to take the course, so he allowed anyone who fit in the

classroom to enroll in the class. At times, he would give up his seat and sit on the floor. He began the course by discussing the major themes. Midway through the semester, however, he challenged us by giving us the podium, asking us to engage in discussions of our interest. Through this experience, he showed us the kind of professional we should be — those who challenge others to think critically about the world we live in and to do so with compassion and respect. He ended the Critical Race course by taking the students out to dinner. “Name the place and the time — the sky’s the limit,” he told us. This was all on his tab, and he did so eagerly, almost as if he had a duty to us students.

The day Professor Aoki passed away, Dean Kevin Johnson announced the devastating news of his passing during an event hosted by the King Hall Coalition for Diversity, for which Professor Aoki served as the faculty advisor. Dean Johnson had an opportunity to speak with Professor Aoki moments before he passed. During that conversation, Professor Aoki mentioned that he felt bad for not having been able to finish out his semester with his students. Professor Aoki’s concern and respect for his students will undoubtedly leave an everlasting impression on us.

Most professors impart their wisdom through their words. Professor Aoki imparted his wisdom through his actions. His generosity and kindhearted spirit have left a lasting impression on so many of us. Professor Aoki will be missed dearly, but more importantly, he will always be remembered.

Cheers, Professor Aoki!

Errol C. Daus
Editor in Chief
UC Davis Law Review, Volume 44