



## IN MEMORIAM

Ronald Takaki  
Professor of Ethnic Studies, Emeritus  
UC Berkeley  
1939 - 2009

The Asian American Studies program expresses its profound sorrow at the loss of Ronald Takaki, world-renowned Asian American scholar and public intellectual. He had retired in 2002 and passed away on May 26, 2009.

Born on April 12, 1939, in Honolulu, Takaki was the descendant of sugar plantation laborers who migrated to Hawaii from Japan in the late nineteenth century. His father died when he was five years old. His mother and his Chinese stepfather, who operated a Chinese restaurant in Honolulu, raised him and his two siblings. In his later years, Takaki would talk about how he had enjoyed surfing more than studying until a Japanese American teacher at Iolani High School encouraged him to apply to the College of Wooster in Ohio. At Wooster, he found himself regarded as a foreigner. Perhaps as compensation, he became interested in the study of American history. At Wooster, he met his wife Carol Rankin, who, together with his three children and seven grandchildren, survives him.

After graduating from Wooster with a major in history in 1961, Takaki came to the University of California, Berkeley, where in 1967 he earned the Ph.D. in American history with a dissertation on the history of slavery in the U.S. He was hired that year to teach African American history at the University of California, Los Angeles. After being denied early tenure there, in 1972 he accepted an associate professorship in the UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Program, which had emerged from the 1969 campuswide student strike. His classes were popular and well attended, and in 1981 he received a coveted Distinguished Teaching Award from the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate.

While serving as chair of the Department of Ethnic Studies from 1975 to 1977, Takaki helped craft an ethnic studies major. Later he worked toward the establishment of an American cultures requirement intended to broaden students' understanding of racial and ethnic diversity. In the early 1980s, he also helped develop the nation's first Ph.D. program in comparative ethnic studies. During the past two decades, about 130 graduate students have earned doctoral degrees in this program. They have gone on to become professors at virtually every UC campus. Ethnic studies alumni can also be found teaching at many state universities in California and in other states from Hawaii and Washington to Delaware and Tennessee. Graduates of the program can also be found in private universities around the country, from Cornell University and New York University on the east coast to Claremont Graduate University and the University of Southern California on the Pacific coast.

A prodigious scholar, Takaki authored almost a dozen books between the early 1970s and 2002, including the critically acclaimed *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th Century America* (1979). *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (1989) was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and was selected by the New

York Times as a Notable Book of the Year and by the San Francisco Chronicle as one of the best 100 nonfiction books of the twentieth century. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (1993) won the American Book Award. A revised and updated version of this book was published in 2008. *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (2000) is the first major study of the “Greatest Generation” from the perspectives of our nation’s diverse racial and ethnic minorities. Like many of Takaki’s other works, this book focuses on the voices and viewpoints of ordinary people whose stories are commonly ignored. Takaki also wrote books and conducted workshops for K-12 educators. Indeed, his work has changed the way American history is taught. In 2002, he received the Fred Cody Award for Lifetime Literary Achievement and was inducted into the Society of American Historians, and in 2009, he was recognized by the Association for Asian American Studies with its Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Besides being awarded the Goldwin Smith University Lectureship and the Distinguished Messenger Lectureship at Cornell University in 1988 and 1993, Takaki received honorary doctorates from Wheelock College, the College of Wooster, Macalester College, Northeastern University, the University of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts College of Art, and Whitman College. He was invited to lecture in Austria, the Netherlands, Armenia, Russia, South Africa, Japan, and New Zealand.

A prominent advocate of multicultural education, Takaki appeared on such national television programs as the NBC Today Show, ABC’s This Week with David Brinkley, CNN’s International Hour and Cross Fire, and the PBS NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, to discuss issues of race, diversity, multiculturalism, and affirmative action. In 1997, he was asked to advise President Bill Clinton on his major speech on race. Between 1980 and 2004, he faced Nathan Glazer in public debates on the issue of affirmative action at five different universities. In 1997, the Council on Foreign Relations hosted a debate between Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and Takaki at the opening plenary session of its conference on America’s diversity and America’s foreign policy. In March 2009, C- Span conducted a three- hour interview with him.

The Asian American Studies program was honored to have worked with Ronald Takaki.

Elaine  
Kim  
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