

Interpretive Methodologies and Methods Conference Group (APSA)
2018 Grain of Sand Award
Posthumously to Lee Ann Fujii

Citation

Given by the Interpretive Methodologies and Methods Conference Group (APSA) to honor longstanding and meritorious contributions to interpretive studies of the political.

Dr. Lee Ann Fujii passed away unexpectedly in March 2018, and if she would cringe at anything, it would be an award citation that begins with a long and detailed summary of her (vast) research accomplishments. As a gifted presenter who helped so many of us craft talks and manuscripts, Lee Ann always encouraged us to “Start with a good story!” and “Get people interested!” Taking her advice, this citation begins with a number of stories, because it is impossible to choose only one about someone as vibrant and brilliant as Lee Ann.

“...[L]ast Thursday, the day before her passing, we read Lee Ann’s second book on the relational approach in class. My students were captivated with her use of drama and theatre in social science methods. One woman explained that this was the first work that made her interested in methods. I told her that I knew exactly how she felt. Lee Ann had that effect on people. She was a force in political science, she had a lot more to give, and academia suffered a huge loss.”

- Izabela Steflja, via “Friends of Lee Ann” Google Group (March 9, 2018)

“It is with great pride that I can say I was one of the first recruits in her revolution,” [Lahoma] Thomas, also a woman of colour, wrote to *The Star*. ...’As a mentor and a friend, Lee Ann helped me navigate the isolation that comes with being the only woman of colour, particularly the only Black woman, in an academic space,’ she wrote.”

- ‘Classroom was like a stage’ for U of T Associate Professor Lee Ann Fujii. *Toronto Star* (Thursday, March 8, 2018)

“I am not part of academia in that I don't have the degrees (a B.S. in Geography doesn't cut it). My area is that of a local community historian, so working for Lee Ann was like being her student, though I'm older. But she treated me as an equal, never lording anything over me, she was so down to earth. She needed a local person to be her Maryland research assistant. ... We met a couple of times and she hired me. I had done lots of independent research, self-published a book on local African American history which I gave her and she devoured it, to my surprise. I did not think I was worthy or likely to be of much help, but I agreed simply because she was so much fun to watch and to talk to.”

- Linda Duyer via “Friends of Lee Ann” Google Group (March 9, 2018)

“She came over to do her laundry because she was flying out to see her mom; she then insisted on doing mine and FOLDED MY LAUNDRY. She loved folding laundry. I was horrified that Lee Ann Fujii, whom I had worshipped for nearly a decade, had folded my laundry. Because of course she did. She took care of people in more ways than most of us know are possible.”

- Sarah Parkinson, Aronson Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Studies, Johns Hopkins University (email correspondence, June 18, 2018)

Together, these stories capture who Lee Ann was to so many of us—a scholar, a mentor, and a friend—and so it is with a deep sense of honor and grief that we present her, posthumously, with the 2018 Grain of Sand Award. This award “honors a scholar whose contributions demonstrate creative and sustained engagement with questions of enduring political importance from an interpretive perspective,” and in her career, which ended too soon, Lee Ann Fujii exemplified this engagement.

In comparative politics, Lee Ann was an Africanist specializing in genocide studies and (post)conflict settings, and she expanded her research agenda to include the historical conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and in the U.S. south. In her 2009 book *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda* (Cornell University Press), in her posthumously forthcoming book *Show Time: The Logic and Power of Violent Display*, and in her other writings, Lee Ann developed fresh ways to investigate, conceptualize, and explain political violence in places as diverse as Rwanda, Bosnia, and the United States.

Among her methodological contributions, three innovations stand out: first, her path-breaking relational approach to the production of lying and truth-telling in interviews (in “Shades of truth and lies: Interpreting testimonies of war and violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47 (2): 231–241, 2010, and in her 2018 Routledge book on relational interviewing); second, the contributions of what she called “meta-data” in assessing the veracity of interview narratives (in “Five stories of accidental ethnography: Turning unplanned moments in the field into data,” *Qualitative Research* 15 (4): 525–539, 2015); and third, her novel dramaturgical approach to analyzing political violence and its display (in “The puzzle of extra-lethal violence,” *Perspectives on Politics* 11 (2): 410-426, 2013, and the forthcoming book).

Beyond her scholarly contributions, Lee Ann also demonstrated creative, sustained engagement with her students and colleagues. Following her passing, an article in the *Toronto Star* discussed how she brought her theater background to the classroom, making every lecture a show worth watching. She also encouraged and supported her students as they took on challenging and interesting research projects that pushed the boundaries of mainstream political science. And she challenged her peers to not only acknowledge that political science remained too white and too male, but also to *do something* about it. Last but not least, Lee Ann understood that advancing the cause of interpretive methodologies and methods in American political science would require organizational as much as intellectual efforts. She had been an active member of the IMM conference group’s executive committee since 2013 and served twice as the group’s APSA program chair. Shortly before her untimely death she assumed the executive committee’s

leadership and launched an effort to upgrade the status of IMM from a conference group to an official APSA section. Bringing this effort to fruition would be a fitting tribute to Lee Ann's legacy.

As she inspired and encouraged all of us to be more creative in our research, more inspiring in the classroom, and less accepting of longstanding disciplinary power structures and norms, Lee Ann was also our friend. Over the years, in places ranging from Sarajevo to New York City, many of us discussed with her not only our research projects, but our personal relationships, family dramas, and fashion dilemmas, often over cups of hot chocolate, plates of dessert, and delicious meals. This time spent with Lee Ann was always a reminder that academia is not always isolating, lonely, and alienating, and through our relationships with her, we all became better scholars and, probably, better people. Rest in power, dear sister, and thank you for being our grain of sand.