

A Citizenship Lost, a Legacy Restored: Court Program Honors Sau Ung Loo Chan’s Fight for AAPI Heritage Month



Participants in the “Love vs. Country” program gather in the Ceremonial Courtroom at the Dirksen Federal Courthouse.

Sau Ung Loo Chan had already broken barriers as one of the first Asian Americans to attend Yale Law School and later as the first Asian American woman lawyer in Hawaii. But under the laws of her era, she lost something deeply personal: her U.S. citizenship.

Her fight to regain it was the focus of **“Love vs. Country: How One of the First Asian American Lawyers Lost and Regained Her Citizenship,”** a program presented on May 28, 2026 by the Federal Bar Association Chicago Chapter, the Asian American Bar Association of Greater Chicago, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, and the Asian American Judges Association of Illinois.

Held in recognition of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, the program brought Chan’s story to life through a reenactment featuring Chicago practitioners and judges. The presentation explored how U.S. law at the time caused some American women to lose their citizenship when they married someone considered a non-citizen — and how Chan spent years fighting to reclaim citizenship for herself, her husband, and their child.

“Programs like this help bring history to life,” said **U.S. District Judge Sunil R. Harjani**. “Sau Ung Loo Chan was a trailblazer whose courage and persistence continue to resonate today, especially as we reflect on the role of the courts, citizenship, and the promise of equal justice under law.”

Chan's story did not end with her own case. She went on to become an advocate for immigrants and testified before Congress on immigration law reform, leaving a legacy that reaches beyond her personal legal battle.

The event brought together members of the federal court, including **Judge Harjani** and **U.S. Magistrate Judge Young B. Kim**, along with members of the legal community and the public, for a program highlighting an important chapter in Asian American legal history and the continuing relevance of Chan's story today.



Chicago practitioners and judges take part in a reenactment telling the story of Sau Ung Loo Chan's fight to regain her citizenship.

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