

Diversity Spotlight - Clara Shin



You might say that [Clara Shin](#) is an overachiever with a social conscience.

Born in South Korea, she was five years old when her family immigrated to Southern California. She went east to attend Smith College, where she forged her own intellectual path, double-majoring in government and psychobiopolitics—a self-designed, interdisciplinary major integrating social psychology, evolutionary biology and genetics, and political theory. Clara was also her class president, president of the Korean American Students Association, and formed an Asian American women’s literary journal.

Knowing that she did not want to go straight to graduate school, Clara took the Peter Pan Bus to Washington DC and landed an internship at the National Women’s Law Center. Her primary assignment was to work on the repeal of combat exclusion laws for women in the military, an effort that was recently rewarded with the expansion of combat roles open to women.

From there, Clara joined the start-up team that designed and launched AmeriCorps, the national service program established under President Clinton. “Starting with only the vision of a domestic Peace Corps program, a core team drafted regulations, created a new federal agency, set up state commissions, and launched AmeriCorps,” Clara says. She is proud that more than 80,000 Americans have served their communities through the program.

At Stanford Law School Clara remained involved, serving as an editor of the Stanford Law Review and president of the Asian Pacific Islander Law Students Association. During law school, she also worked for USAID’s Regional Legal Advisor in post-apartheid South Africa. Before going into private legal practice, Clara served as a White House Fellow and Special Assistant to the White House Chief of Staff. Among other projects, she managed an inter-agency Civil Rights Enforcement Task Force.

Clara is a partner in Covington’s San Francisco office and a member of the firm’s litigation group, representing clients in intellectual property and commercial disputes. Clara remains engaged in the community, serving on the boards of the National Partnership for Women & Families, the Smithsonian Institution’s National Portrait Gallery, the Center for Music National Service, the Rosenberg Foundation, and the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California Historical Society.

“Civic engagement is particularly important for attorneys,” Clara says. “The justice gap with respect to legal services is multiplying rapidly, especially during these tough economic times. We’re lucky enough to be in a position to help bridge that gap.” And, she adds, “I’ve met some of my favorite clients through volunteer work.”

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Clara continues to look for ways to level the playing field and bring her passion and energy to the causes she cares about. Her involvement with the National Portrait Gallery, for example, has dovetailed with her professional and personal interests.

Covington has “adopted” a portrait of Fred Korematsu—the first Asian American featured in the National Portrait’s Gallery permanent exhibition, “The Struggle for Justice.” Korematsu claimed his place in American history when he defied President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066, which authorized the relocation of Japanese Americans on the West Coast to internment camps, and was sent to federal prison. Covington was on the right side of history and represented Korematsu in the appeal of his conviction. While the legality of the internment order was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Korematsu v. United States*, his conviction was vacated decades later.

As Shin notes, “Covington’s representation of Korematsu then and commitment to honoring his legacy today is a wonderful reminder of the firm’s values and willingness to apply its tremendous resources to strengthening the ties that bind us together.”

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