**Ethnicity and Security: The Wen Ho Lee Case**

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Science & Justice Working Group  
Rapporteur’s Report: October 9th, 2012  
Rapporteur: Martha Kenney, History of Consciousness

Jeffrey Bussolini, spoke to the group about Wen Ho Lee, the Taiwanese-American physicist who worked at Los Alamos National Laboratory who was charged with espionage in 1999 and held in solitary confinement without bail for 278 days. Drawing on his ethnographic work at Los Alamos and in activist communities, as well as a study of the media representations of the Wen Ho Lee case, Bussolini argued that the circumstances of Lee’s presumed guilt and imprisonment can be read as a pre-history of September 11th and the War on Terror. Not only because of the focus on ethnicity in the context of national security but that Lee was subjected to what would become the Guantanamo Bay torture practices (orange jumpsuit, feet always shackled, sensory deprivation, cold temperatures, thin sheets, loud noise to keep him from sleeping). Drawing on Michel Foucault’s concept of the dispositive, Bussolini argued that “the techniques of the post-9/11 security state were not simply created out of whole cloth, but were the amplifications of practices that had already been developed within US security and justice systems.”

A key aspect Bussolini’s talk was narrating the shift from the beginning of the case when it was impossible to maintain Lee’s innocence to the end, when Lee was cleared of all but one of the 59 charges against him. He described how Asian American activists played a key role in transforming the public discourse by speaking truth to power. The Committee of 100, an organization of the one hundred most influential Chinese Americans, played a pivotal role by challenging the allegations by the FBI and the damning articles in *The New York Times*. But because of the fear of being associated with communism, their campaign was restricted and stopped short of declaring guilt or innocence. More radical political organizing, such as in the group Justice for Wen Ho Lee, was more adept at drawing attention to the racism and injustice in the media coverage and government conduct. Cecilia Chang, who is Chinese-American and worked at Sandia National Laboratory, was able to rally both scientists and Asian-Americans around Wen Ho Lee and the problem of being treated as an outsider and a threat in one’s own country.

Bussolini’s talk offered an important mix of philosophical and ethnographic analysis. It was at once a Focadoalian “history of the present” that provided insight into the post-9/11 dispositive, while at the same time accounting for the political agency of activists in changing the public discourse. Although the Wen Ho Lee case has ended, questions about national (in)security remain. During the question and answer period Bussolini recounted a story from his fieldwork where a Latino scientist and a Korean-American scientist were having a picnic near Los Alamos and were approached by government agents who accused them of being Iraqi and Chinese spies. Overall Bussolini’s talk gave a detailed picture of the troubling role that ethnicity in social and legal justice concerns for scientists with security clearance working for the U.S. government,
which bears on the larger issue of which bodies are subjected to practices of homeland security and what practices we find and make acceptable in the constitution of national security.