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*Resolute and Resilient:  
Celebrating 175 Years of  
California Women and the Law*

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# *Resolute and Resilient: Celebrating 175 Years of California Women and the Law*

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This booklet is a companion to the exhibition, *Resolute and Resilient: Celebrating 175 Years of California Women and the Law*, on display in the Archives Room on the first floor of the Ronald M. George State Office Complex in San Francisco's Civic Center beginning in the summer of 2024. Organized by the California Judicial Center Library, the exhibition features illustrated panels and primary source materials celebrating California women's contributions to the law and honoring the state's pioneering women attorneys, judges, and justices.

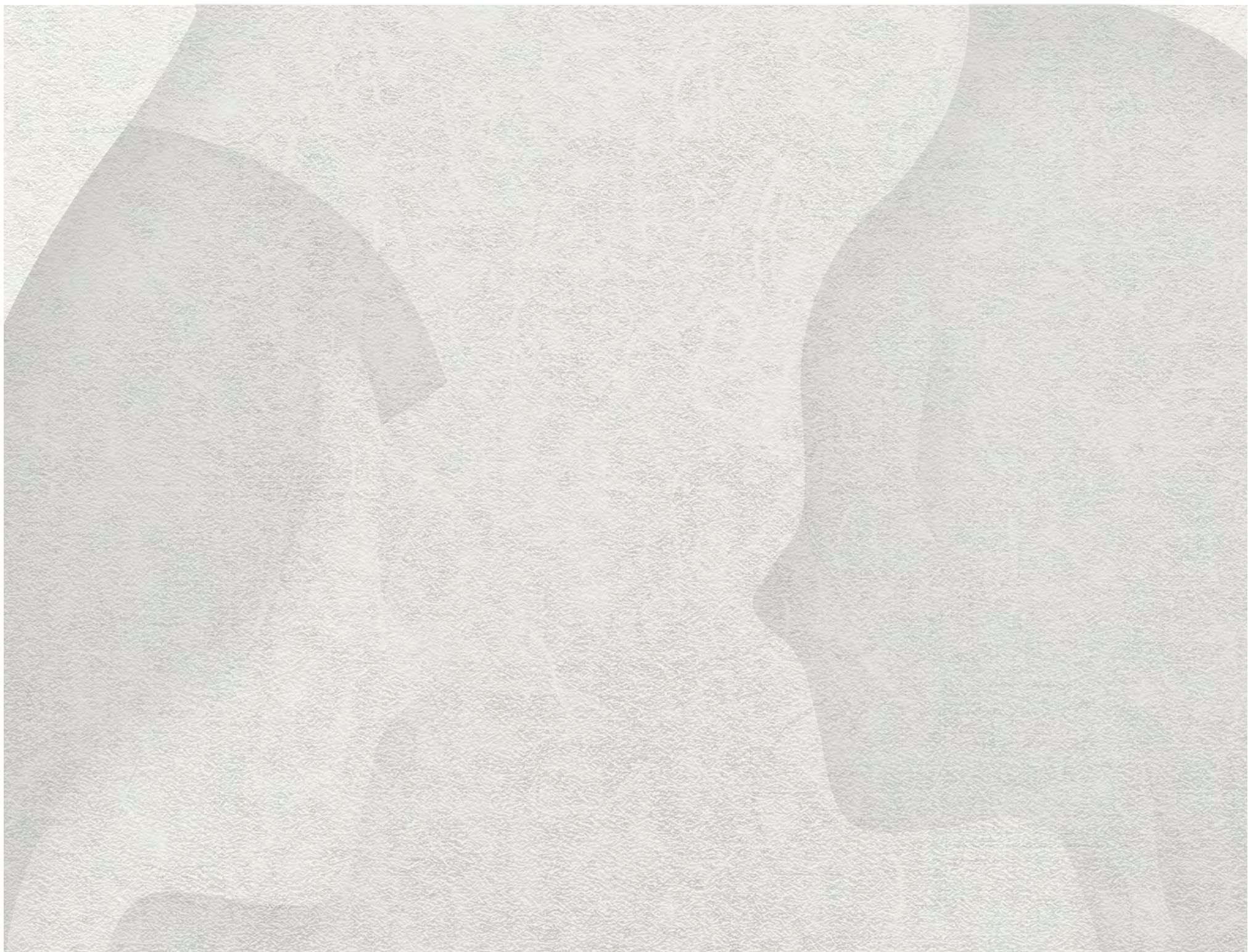


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# Women and the Conquest of California

On February 2, 1848, Mexico ceded 55 percent of its territory to the United States. Only nine days earlier, gold had been discovered in the Sierra Nevada foothills, triggering a mass migration of new settlers to California. Although the social world of the Gold Rush is often depicted as riotous, single, and male, California in 1848 was the ancestral home of an estimated 150,000 Native American people and had been settled by Mexican families for generations.

For Native American women, the Gold Rush was catastrophic. The newly established legal system failed to stop rampant settler violence against Native Americans, and

laws like the 1850 Act for the Government and Protection of Indians stripped Native people of due process rights, legitimizing forced labor and the kidnapping of Native children.

Mexican women faced the new U.S. legal system at a disadvantage. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo promised that the property rights of Mexican people living in California would be respected. Yet Mexican landowners—including a small number of women and Native people—were required to defend their claims in U.S. courts. Land litigation was costly and complicated, bankrupting many Mexican families.



*Habitants de Californie*, by Louis Choris, 1822, California Historical Society

Native American and Mexican women fought to defend their families, communities, cultures, and lands in this hostile new landscape.



*Mapa de los Estados Unidos de Méjico*, by J. Disturnell, 1847, David Rumsey Map Collection

*If I were to believe in “Manifest Destiny,” I would cease to believe in justice or Divine wisdom.*

—María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, 1869



# Abolitionists and Civil Rights Pioneers



VUE DE SAN-FRANCISCO VISTA DE SAN-FRANCISCO

*Vue de San-Francisco*, 1860, by Isador Laurent Deroy, Library of Congress

By 1852, approximately 2,000 African Americans lived in California. Many free African American families migrated to California during the Gold Rush, establishing churches, newspapers, and a local abolitionist movement. Although the 1850 state Constitution outlawed slavery, white Southerners brought enslaved people to California to work for them. Abolitionists provided shelter, legal aid, and a public voice to those enslaved people who fled their captors.

One of California's most prominent abolitionists was Mary Ellen Pleasant, who arrived in San Francisco during the

Gold Rush and amassed a fortune through savvy business ventures and real estate investments. She used her wealth to fund antislavery and civil rights causes, including, according to her own account, abolitionist John Brown's 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry.

In the 1860s, Pleasant was one of several African American women in San Francisco who challenged streetcar segregation in the courts. Pleasant and fellow activist Emma Jane Turner brought separate suits against the North Beach and Mission Railroad Company after each woman had been refused passage on the company's streetcars. In January 1868, the California Supreme Court ruled against Pleasant and Turner, holding that the damages they had been awarded were excessive. Importantly, however, the court affirmed the women's right to ride on public transit.



MARY ELLEN ("MAMMY") PLEASANT AT 87 YEARS OF AGE  
The first and only photograph taken since she was 13 years old

*Of the two, I would prefer  
to be a corpse than a coward.*

—Mary Ellen Pleasant, 1899

Mary Ellen Pleasant at age 87 years,  
1904, The Bancroft Library



# California's First Women Lawyers

California women won the right to vote in 1911 after five decades of struggle by suffragists. Two of these activists, Clara Shortridge Foltz and Laura de Force Gordon, were also the state's first women lawyers. Both women were famed orators, with Gordon honing her skills as a spiritualist lecturer and medium during the Civil War era. In the 1870s, Foltz and Gordon worked hand in hand, lobbying the state Legislature to pass the Woman Lawyer's Bill in 1878 allowing women to practice law in California. Fast on the heels of this victory, Foltz was admitted to the State Bar on September 5, 1878, becoming the first woman lawyer on the West Coast.

In January 1879, Foltz and Gordon entered the newly established Hastings College of the Law, only to be expelled a few days later because they were women. In response, Foltz, now a practicing attorney, and Gordon sued the board of directors. In November 1879, the California Supreme Court ordered the Hastings directors to admit Foltz. She returned to law school but, exhausted by the "heavy cares" of raising five children, did not complete her studies. Both women continued to practice law, with Foltz becoming a pioneering advocate for the establishment of a public defender system in California.



Laura de Force Gordon, 1886, J. C. Buttrey, engraver, Library of Congress



Clara Shortridge Foltz, 1901, California History Room, California State Library

*For as I look back over the hard journey and recall the difficulties which seemed insurmountable, and the obstacles that would have awed the heart of the stoutest man, I am amazed at my own temerity!*

—Clara Foltz, 1916



The Awakening, *Puck Magazine*, 1915, PF Mode Collection of Persuasive Cartography, Cornell University



# California Women Ascend to the Judiciary

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1920, promising that the right of citizens to vote would not be denied on account of their sex. This victory came at the end of the Progressive Era, a transformative period in which women gained political experience through involvement in clubs and other women's organizations. The 1910s and 1920s ushered in a new era of civic participation by California women, as voters and officeholders.

Georgia P. Bullock was the first woman to serve as a superior court judge in California, appointed to the bench in 1931. Her judicial career began in 1914, when she was assigned to the newly established Los Angeles Women's

Court as an assistant judge, serving for three years without pay. There, she saw her role as a maternal one, dedicated to the uplift of poor and exploited women.

California's first female appellate justice, Annette Abbott Adams, also rose to prominence in 1914, when she was sworn in as Assistant United States Attorney for the Northern District of California. In 1920, she was the first woman to become an assistant attorney general of the United States. She joined the Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District, as its presiding justice in 1942 after decades in private practice.



Annette Abbott Adams, 1920, National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress



Judge Georgia P. Bullock at her bench, Los Angeles, 1925, Los Angeles Times Photographic Collection, UCLA Library, Special Collections



Give Mother the Vote, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Harvard University

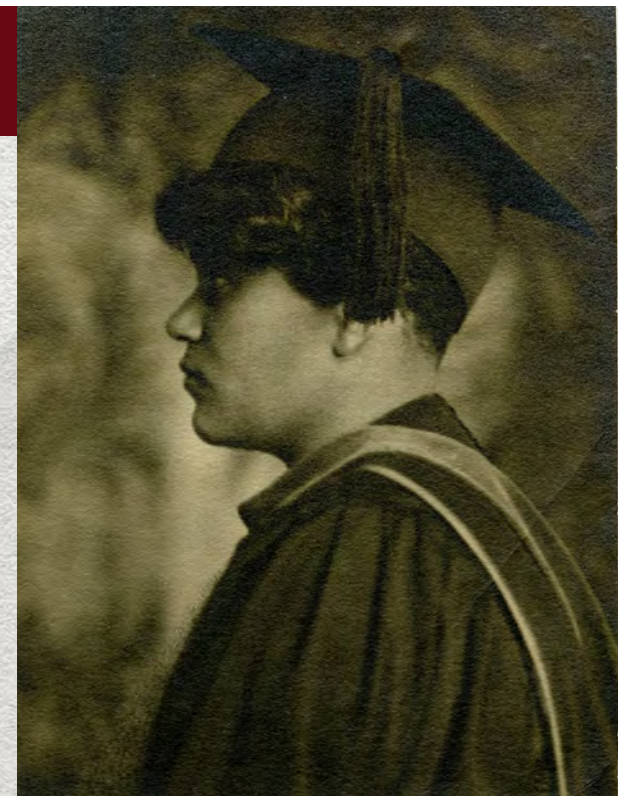


# Annie Virginia Stephens Coker

With the elegant words “Jewel City,” a 12-year-old African American student from Oakland’s Longfellow School won the *San Francisco Call and Post* competition to name the 1915 World’s Fair. This victory was the first of many firsts that would distinguish Annie Virginia Stephens Coker’s pathbreaking career. She entered the University of California, Berkeley, in 1920. There, she helped charter the Rho Chapter of the historically Black Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority under the

leadership of Ida Louise Jackson, who would go on to become Oakland’s first African American public school teacher. After graduation, Coker (then Stephens) enrolled in Berkeley’s School of Jurisprudence, one of only two women in her class. In 1929, she reached two historic milestones, becoming the first African American woman to earn a law degree from UC Berkeley and the first to be admitted to the California Bar.

After a decade-long stint in private practice in the state of Virginia, Coker returned to California, settling in Sacramento. There she began her 27-year career at the State Office of Legislative Counsel, rising through the ranks from law clerk to deputy legislative counsel. Coker retired in 1966, having courageously illuminated a new path for others to follow.



Graduation portrait of Virginia Stephens, 1929, Stephens Family Papers, African American Museum and Library at Oakland



Members of the Rho Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, University of California, Berkeley, 1921, Stephens Family Papers, African American Museum and Library at Oakland



A Pillar of Light, Panama-Pacific International Exposition, 1915, Keystone View Company, California State Library



# Chiyoko Sakamoto

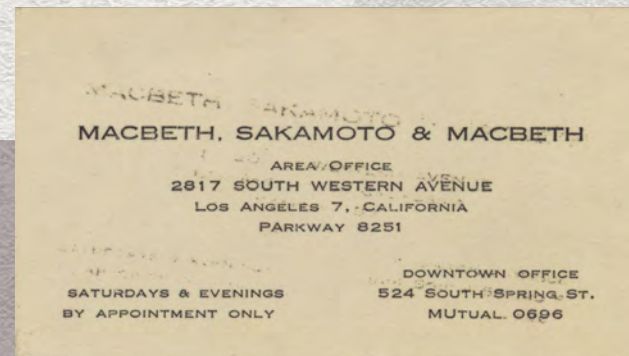


Chiyoko Sakamoto, October 25, 1938, *Los Angeles Times*  
Photographic Collection, UCLA Library, Special Collections

Chiyoko Sakamoto was born in Napa in 1912. Her parents and eldest sister, Japanese immigrants who came to California in 1903, were ineligible for U.S. citizenship because of racially discriminatory naturalization laws. Although second-generation Japanese Americans had more opportunities than their parents, they faced discrimination and mounting racial hostility during the years leading up to World War II. Despite these obstacles, Sakamoto—who attended law school by night while working by day as a secretary—was admitted to the California Bar in 1938, becoming the first Asian American woman attorney in California's history.

Sakamoto established a private practice in Los Angeles. In 1942, she and 120,000 other Japanese Americans were

forcibly removed from their communities and incarcerated in internment camps. Sakamoto was sent to Granada Relocation Center in Colorado, where she worked in the legal aid office. After the war, she and her husband returned to Los Angeles. There, she became a partner in the firm of Macbeth, Sakamoto & Macbeth, practicing law with pioneering African American civil rights attorney Hugh Macbeth and his son and future judge, Hugh Macbeth, Jr.



Macbeth, Sakamoto & Macbeth business card, Japanese American National Museum (Gift of Scott and Jennifer Yoshida, 2018.10.150)



Granada Relocation Center, Amache, Colorado, Amache summer carnival parade, July 10, 1943, National Archives at College Park



# *Presiding Justice Vaino Spencer and Judge Frances Muñoz*

The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s challenged racial discrimination against African Americans and inspired other social justice movements, including the women's liberation movement. Spurred by activism, sweeping social changes created new opportunities for women and people of color to contribute to the legal profession and the judicial branch. Yet those opportunities remained hard-won.

In 1961, Governor Edmund G. "Pat" Brown appointed Vaino Spencer to the Los Angeles

Municipal Court, making her the state's first African American woman judge. Spencer was the third Black woman to be admitted to the California Bar. After serving as a superior court judge from 1976 to 1980, she was elevated to the California Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District, as a presiding justice. When Justice Spencer retired in 2007, she was one of the longest-serving judges in California history.

California's first Latina judge, Frances Muñoz, was appointed to the Orange County Harbor Municipal Court by Governor Jerry Brown in 1978. One of 11 children born to Mexican immigrant parents, Muñoz earned her law degree in 1970 at the age of 40. After graduation, she joined the Orange County Public Defender's Office as its first Latina public defender. Widely admired as a compassionate and courageous jurist, she retired from the bench in 2001.



Vaino Spencer being sworn in as an attorney, September 4, 1952, photograph by E. F. Joseph Studios, Southwestern Law School



*When you feel good about yourself, not only are you going to be kind and understanding and decent to other people, but you're not going to let anybody who is other than that destroy you.*

Justice Vaino Spencer, photograph by Elson Alexandre, Southwestern Law School

—Presiding Justice Vaino Spencer, 1980



# Chief Judge Abby Abinanti



Judge Abby Abinanti in Yurok County, circa 2017, photograph by Anne Makepeace

*So long as they maintain control of the production of the historical record, the conquerors may portray themselves in glowing moral terms. However, so long as the conquered survive or exist in memory, they will demand moral accountability.*

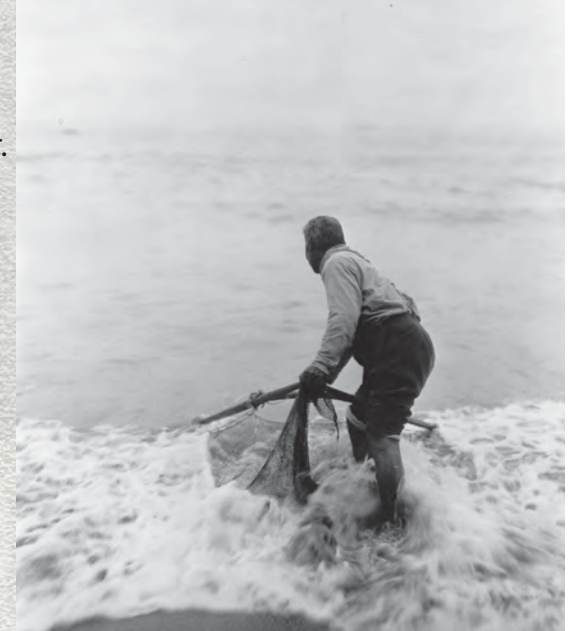
—Judge Abby Abinanti, 2004

California is home to more Native American people than any other state in the Union. Its Native communities are exceptionally diverse, including 110 federally recognized tribes and many other tribal communities seeking federal acknowledgement. Continuing a long tradition of resistance and resilience, California's Native peoples have made great strides in asserting their sovereignty and revitalizing their cultures, languages, and justice systems. There are 22 tribal courts in the state, more than half of which were established in the past 20 years.

The Chief Judge of the Yurok Tribal Court, Abby Abinanti, is the first Native American woman

to practice law in California. Born in 1947 and raised on the Yurok Reservation, Abinanti was encouraged to go to law school by tribal elders. She earned her law degree from the University of New Mexico Law School in 1973 and was admitted to the California Bar the following year. In 1994, Abinanti was appointed to the Superior Court of San Francisco County, becoming the first Native American woman to serve as a judicial officer in California. In 1997, she joined the Yurok Tribal Court, becoming Chief Judge in 2007. Judge Abinanti's restorative approach to justice is grounded in tribal values and has become a model for other courts both in and outside of tribal jurisdiction.

The smelt fisher—Trinidad Yurok, 1923, photograph by Edward Curtis, Library of Congress





# Chief Justice Rose E. Bird

The women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s challenged longstanding gender roles and propelled women into traditionally male professions, including the law. Rapid social changes also spurred a conservative reaction, coalescing in the 1980s around President Ronald Reagan. The career of the California Supreme Court's first woman justice—Chief Justice Rose E. Bird—reflected the conflicts of this transformative time.

Born in 1936 and raised by a single mother, Bird earned her law degree in 1965 from the University of California,

Berkeley, School of Law. At the time, only three percent of attorneys in the United States were women. After clerking for the Supreme Court of Nevada, Bird served as a deputy public defender and head of the appellate division for the Santa Clara County Public Defender's Office. She joined Governor Jerry Brown's cabinet in 1975 as Secretary of Agriculture. In that role, she advocated forcefully for farmworkers' rights.

In 1977, Governor Brown appointed Bird as Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court. At the age of 41, she became the first woman to serve as a justice (and Chief Justice) on the state's highest court. Chief Justice Bird faced immediate opposition from conservative groups centered on her anti-death penalty views. An anti-Bird coalition organized a political campaign against the Chief Justice and Associate Justices Cruz Reynoso and Joseph Grodin. In November 1986, all three justices lost their retention elections, ending Chief Justice Bird's historic tenure.



*We sometimes must stand in the way of the most powerful groups in our society—governments, presidents, governors, legislatures, special interests—in order to do what our oath of office demands of us.*

—Chief Justice Rose E. Bird, 1987



Chief Justice Rose E. Bird Court, circa 1984–1985, California Judicial Center Library, Special Collections & Archives

Chief Justice Rose E. Bird, circa 1977, California Judicial Center Library, Special Collections & Archives



## *Associate Justice Joyce L. Kennard*

The second woman to serve on the California Supreme Court—Associate Justice Joyce L. Kennard—was also the court’s first Asian American justice. Appointed by Governor George Deukmejian, she joined an all-male court in 1989, led by Chief Justice Malcom M. Lucas.

Born in Indonesia in 1941, Kennard experienced a childhood scarred by war. During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, her father was detained in a concentration camp and died. She and her mother spent the remaining war years in an internment camp in Java. After the war, mother and child immigrated to New Guinea and then to Holland. When Kennard was a teenager, the lower part of her leg was amputated, and she had to abandon her studies.

Undeterred, Kennard immigrated to the United States at the age of 20. After working for many years as a secretary, she was finally able to pursue her college education. She earned her bachelor’s and law degrees from the University of Southern California. Kennard served as a deputy attorney general in Los Angeles and,

later, as a senior staff attorney for the California Court of Appeal. She was appointed to the Los Angeles County Municipal Court in 1986 and was quickly elevated to the Superior Court of Los Angeles County and the California Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District.

Justice Kennard retired from the California Supreme Court in 2014 after 25 years of service, having earned a reputation as an independent, intellectually rigorous, and compassionate jurist.

*For judges, for lawmakers, and for individual lawyers, compassion provides the spark that illuminates our vision of justice and our hopes, our dreams, for a better world.*

—Justice Joyce L. Kennard, 1997

Associate Justice Joyce L. Kennard, photograph by Gabriel Moulin Studios, February 27, 2008, California Judicial Center Library, Special Collections & Archives

Chief Justice Malcom M. Lucas Court, 1991, photograph by Paul Latoures, California Judicial Center Library, Special Collections & Archives





# Associate Justice Kathryn M. Werdegar

Associate Justice Kathryn M. Werdegar was the third woman to serve on the California Supreme Court, appointed by Governor Pete Wilson in 1994. Born in San Francisco in 1936, she lost her mother when she was four years old, resulting in an unsettled childhood spent in boarding schools and living with relatives. Werdegar excelled in school and attended Wellesley College; the University of California, Berkeley; Berkeley School of Law; and George

Washington University. She was one of only two women in her Berkeley law school class and the first woman elected as editor in chief of the *California Law Review*.

After graduating first in her class from George Washington Law School in 1962, Werdegar accepted a position with the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. There, she drafted amicus curiae (friend of the court) briefs advocating for the release of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., from jail. Werdegar returned to California in 1963, eventually serving as a senior staff attorney for the California Court of Appeal and California Supreme Court. In 1991, Governor Wilson appointed her to the California Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, as an associate justice.

Justice Werdegar was widely admired for her collegiality, scholarship, and concern for the disempowered. On Justice Werdegar's retirement from the California Supreme Court in 2017, Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye said: "She has broken every barrier, every ceiling. . . . We watched it happen, and she did it quietly with dignity and with integrity and backwards in high heels."



*The role of the judiciary is to uphold the law for all, safeguarding the rights of individuals and minorities against the will of the majority.*

—Justice Kathryn M. Werdegar, 2008



Associate Justice Kathryn M. Werdegar with Governor Pete Wilson at her swearing in ceremony, 1994, Kathryn M. Werdegar Papers, California Judicial Center Library, Special Collections & Archives

Associate Justice Kathryn M. Werdegar, photograph by Gabriel Moulin Studios, 1999, California Judicial Center Library, Special Collections & Archives



## *Associate Justice Janice Rogers Brown*



*It may sound odd to describe a judge as both passionate and restrained, but it is precisely this apparent paradox—passionate devotion to the rule of law and humility in the judicial role—that allows freedom to prevail in a democratic republic.*

—Judge Janice Rogers Brown, 2005

In 1996, Justice Janice Rogers Brown achieved a historic milestone, becoming the first African American woman to serve on the California Supreme Court. Born in 1949 in the small town of Greenville, Alabama, Brown was the daughter of sharecroppers and experienced firsthand the injustices of segregation. She moved to California as a teenager, later attending law school at the University of California, Los Angeles, while raising her young son. After graduating in 1977, she embarked on her legal career in state government, working for the California Legislative Counsel, the Attorney General's Office, and the state's Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency. In 1991, Governor Pete Wilson appointed Brown as his legal affairs secretary. She served in the

Governor's cabinet until she was elevated to the California Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District, as an associate justice in 1994.

Justice Brown was confirmed to the California Supreme Court on May 2, 1996, after a contentious public hearing. She was regarded as one of the court's most conservative members, noted for her incisive and passionate dissents. President George W. Bush nominated Justice Brown to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in 2003, but her nomination was stalled in the Senate for nearly two years. She was renominated in February 2005 and confirmed in June of that year. Judge Brown served on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit until her retirement in 2017.

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Associate Justice Janice Rogers Brown, photograph by Sirlin Studios, California Judicial Center Library, Special Collections & Archives



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President George W. Bush introduces his judicial nominees, November 13, 2003, White House photograph by Eric Draper, George W. Bush Presidential Library



# *Associate Justice Carol A. Corrigan*



Former Board President Justice Carol A. Corrigan with children from Saint Vincent's Day Home, 2012, photograph by Jim Black

In 2005, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger made his first appointment to the state's highest court, nominating Justice Carol A. Corrigan to replace Justice Janice Rogers Brown. Born in 1948 in Stockton, Corrigan was the only daughter of a newspaper reporter and librarian who shared with her their love for the written word. She was the first person in her family to graduate from college, earning a bachelor's degree from College of the Holy Names in 1970. After studying clinical psychology for two years, she decided to pursue a career in the law, graduating from the University

of California, Hastings College of the Law, in 1975. Corrigan then joined the Alameda County District Attorney's Office, working as a prosecutor until she was appointed to the Alameda Municipal Court in 1987. She was elevated to the Superior Court of Alameda County in 1991 and to the California Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, in 1994.

Admired for her precise, understandable writing style, Justice Corrigan chaired the Task Force on Jury Instructions from 1997 to 2005. She was awarded the Judicial Council's Jurist of the Year award in 2003 for her important role in drafting plain-language jury instructions. She also chaired the Commission on the Future of California's Court System; has served as an adjunct professor at several prestigious law schools; and contributes to many community organizations, including Saint Vincent's Day Home in Oakland. As the longest-serving justice on the state Supreme Court, Justice Corrigan has built a judicial legacy of collegiality, fairness, and clear analysis, enlivened by a sparkling wit and informed by faithful adherence to the law.

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Associate Justice Carol A. Corrigan,  
Gabriel Moulin Studios, California Judicial  
Center Library, Special Collections & Archives



*Because of all we have been given, we have the chance to use our talents, our education, our accomplishments, to do a great many things: reduce conflict and uncertainty, protect our communities and keep them safe, to nurture a nonprofit, to help a lonely child find a family, and, oh yes, to do a little justice.*

—Justice Carol A. Corrigan, 2015



# Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye



Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye,  
photograph by Wayne Woods

*Democracy is a use-it-or-lose-it proposition. California is complicated, and there are challenges we must face every day to maintain a living, thriving democracy. Democracy is the key to perpetual freedom. In order to secure the rights to that future, we have to be civically engaged.*

—Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, 2013

When Chief Justice Ronald M. George announced his retirement in 2010, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger seized the opportunity to make history, appointing then-California Court of Appeal Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye as George's replacement. Sworn in on January 3, 2011, Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye became the second woman and the first Asian American to serve as California's Chief Justice. The new Chief Justice presided over a female-majority California Supreme Court for the first time in history. Her 12-year tenure was bookended by two national crises: the Great Recession of 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic. She navigated both with grace and fortitude, guided by a mission to improve access to justice for all Californians.

Born in 1959, Cantil-Sakauye grew up in Sacramento, the daughter of a Filipino-Portuguese father and a Filipina mother, both of whom had worked as farmworkers. When Cantil-Sakauye was nine years old, her family lost their home through an eminent domain eviction, a life-altering experience that inspired her approach to law. She attended Sacramento City College and the University of California, Davis, earning her law degree from UC Davis School of Law. After law school, Cantil-Sakauye served as a deputy attorney general, deputy legal affairs



Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye at bill signing, with Governor Jerry Brown and then-Assemblymember Rob Bonta, 2018, Judicial Council of California

secretary, and deputy legislative affairs secretary before joining the Sacramento Municipal Court at the age of 31. She was elevated to the Superior Court of Sacramento County in 1997 and to the California Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District, in 2005.

Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye retired from the California Supreme Court in 2022, after steering the state's court system through the COVID-19 pandemic. She leaves behind a powerful legacy of expanded physical, remote, and equal access to justice; improved civics education; and a more efficient, cooperative, and stable judicial branch.



# *Associate Justice Leondra R. Kruger*

In 2014, Governor Jerry Brown nominated Leondra Kruger to replace Justice Joyce Kennard on the California Supreme Court. Then 38 years old, Kruger was the youngest appointee to the court in modern history. She was sworn in on January 5, 2015, becoming the court's second African American woman justice. In 2016, Justice Kruger gave birth to her second child, achieving another milestone as the first person to give birth while serving on the California Supreme Court.

Born in 1976, Kruger was raised in the Pasadena area. She earned her bachelor's degree from Harvard University and her law degree from Yale Law School, where she served as the

first African American woman editor in chief of the *Yale Law Journal*. After law school, Kruger clerked for U.S. Circuit Judge David S. Tatel and United States Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens. She later joined the U.S. Department of Justice, serving in the Office of the Solicitor General and the Office of Legal Counsel from 2007 until 2014. As an attorney for the federal government, she argued 12 cases in the United States Supreme Court.

Governor Brown noted Kruger's deep appreciation for the intellectual tradition of the law when he appointed her to the state Supreme Court in 2014. At the court, she is known as a consensus builder who balances humility, reason, and respect for precedent.



Associate Justice Leondra Kruger, January 31, 2022, Judicial Council of California

Swearing-in of Associate Justice Leondra Kruger, January 5, 2015, photograph by Brad Alexander, Office of the Governor



*My approach reflects the fact that we operate in a system of precedent. I aim to perform my job in a way that enhances the predictability and stability of the law and public confidence and trust in the work of the courts.*

—Justice Leondra R. Kruger, 2018





Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero, 2023,  
Supreme Court of California

## *Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero*

Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero is the 29th Chief Justice of California. She was sworn in on January 2, 2023, making history as the state's first Latino/a Chief Justice. She first joined the California Supreme Court in March 2022 as an associate justice. Chief Justice Guerrero is the first Latina to serve on the state's high court. Governor Gavin Newsom nominated her for the offices of both associate justice and Chief Justice, praising her intellect, command of the law, and dedication to public service. "This is not just about firsts," he remarked, "this is about best." Jurists and community leaders celebrated Chief Justice Guerrero's historic achievement as a testimony to her extraordinary career and as an important step toward greater Latino representation in the state judiciary.

Born in 1971, Chief Justice Guerrero was raised in Southern California's Imperial Valley by Mexican immigrant parents. She attributes her work ethic to her father—who worked long hours as a cowboy, farrier, and feedlot foreman—and her love of learning to her mother, who filled their home with books. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1994 and her law degree from Stanford Law School in 1997. Guerrero worked in private practice before and



Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero at Maple Creek Elementary School, 2023, Judicial Council of California

*The experiences of both of my parents raising a family in Imperial Valley—living in an immigrant community with what on the surface appeared to be limited resources and opportunities—taught me the importance of caring for others, rather than just looking out for your own selfish interests.*

—Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero, 2023

after serving in the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of California. She was appointed to the Superior Court of San Diego County in 2013 and elevated to the California Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, in 2017. She is dedicated to providing legal assistance to people in need and has served on the Immigration Justice Project Advisory Board and as a pro bono attorney on immigration matters.

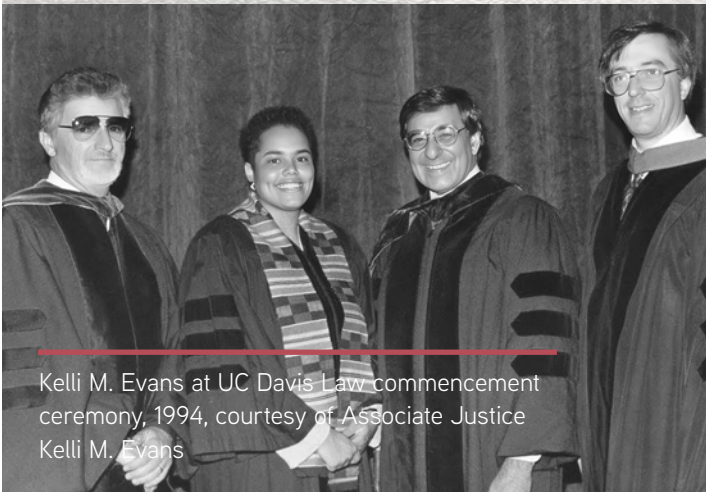
Chief Justice Guerrero is committed to advancing equal justice for all Californians and increasing public understanding of the critical role the judicial branch plays in our democracy.



## *Associate Justice Kelli M. Evans*

Associate Justice Kelli M. Evans, 2022, Supreme Court of California

On January 2, 2023, Justice Kelli M. Evans was sworn in as an associate justice on the California Supreme Court, filling the vacancy left by Justice Guerrero when she was elevated to Chief Justice. Justice Evans dedicated the swearing-in ceremony to her late grandmother, Alfreda Onita Cooper, who inspired her love of learning and passion for justice. Mrs. Cooper raised Evans and her sister in public housing in Denver. She fed Evans's insatiable appetite for reading, even scraping together enough money for a complete set of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Eventually the family moved into a government-subsidized apartment, allowing Evans to attend a well-resourced public high school. She earned her undergraduate degree from Stanford University in 1991 and her law degree from the University of California, Davis, School of Law in 1994.



Kelli M. Evans at UC Davis Law commencement ceremony, 1994, courtesy of Associate Justice Kelli M. Evans

After law school, Evans embarked on a wide-ranging career dedicated to civil rights and criminal justice reform. She served as a senior trial attorney in the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, a court-appointed monitor of the Oakland and Cleveland Police Departments, and the associate director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California. After working in the California Attorney General's Office, she joined Governor Gavin Newsom's cabinet as chief deputy legal affairs secretary. There, she played a leading role in crafting and implementing the Governor's 2019 moratorium on the death penalty, enacting historic reforms to strengthen police deadly force laws, improving indigent defense in California, creating a clemency initiative to pardon people prosecuted under discriminatory laws, and improving police response to protests and demonstrations. In 2021, Governor Newsom appointed Evans to the Superior Court of Alameda County, where she presided over civil and criminal cases.

Justice Evans is the third African American woman and first openly lesbian justice to serve on the California Supreme Court. She enriches the court with her diverse personal and professional experience and her profound commitment to equal protection under the law.



*I wouldn't have been a lawyer if it weren't for my grandmother and the opportunities she provided me. I wouldn't have been a judge, and today I wouldn't have been a justice, if it weren't for my grandmother.*

*I believe that my grandmother would have understood, as I do, that the law is not simply . . . an esoteric, ivory tower exercise. At its core, what is the law about? It's about real people and real communities.*

—Justice Kelli M. Evans, 2022