

MITSURU “MITS” KOSHIYAMA

Everybody of Japanese ancestry, including Mitsuru “Mits” Koshiyama (1924 – 2009) and his immigrant parents, had been forced from the West Coast under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 and Executive Order 9066 and then imprisoned in 75 confinement sites scattered throughout the country.

Mits knew he and his community had done nothing wrong and that these actions were in direct violation of the US Constitution. When the government started the military draft for those in the camps, Mits joined 62 others who were tried in one of the largest draft resistance trials in US history.

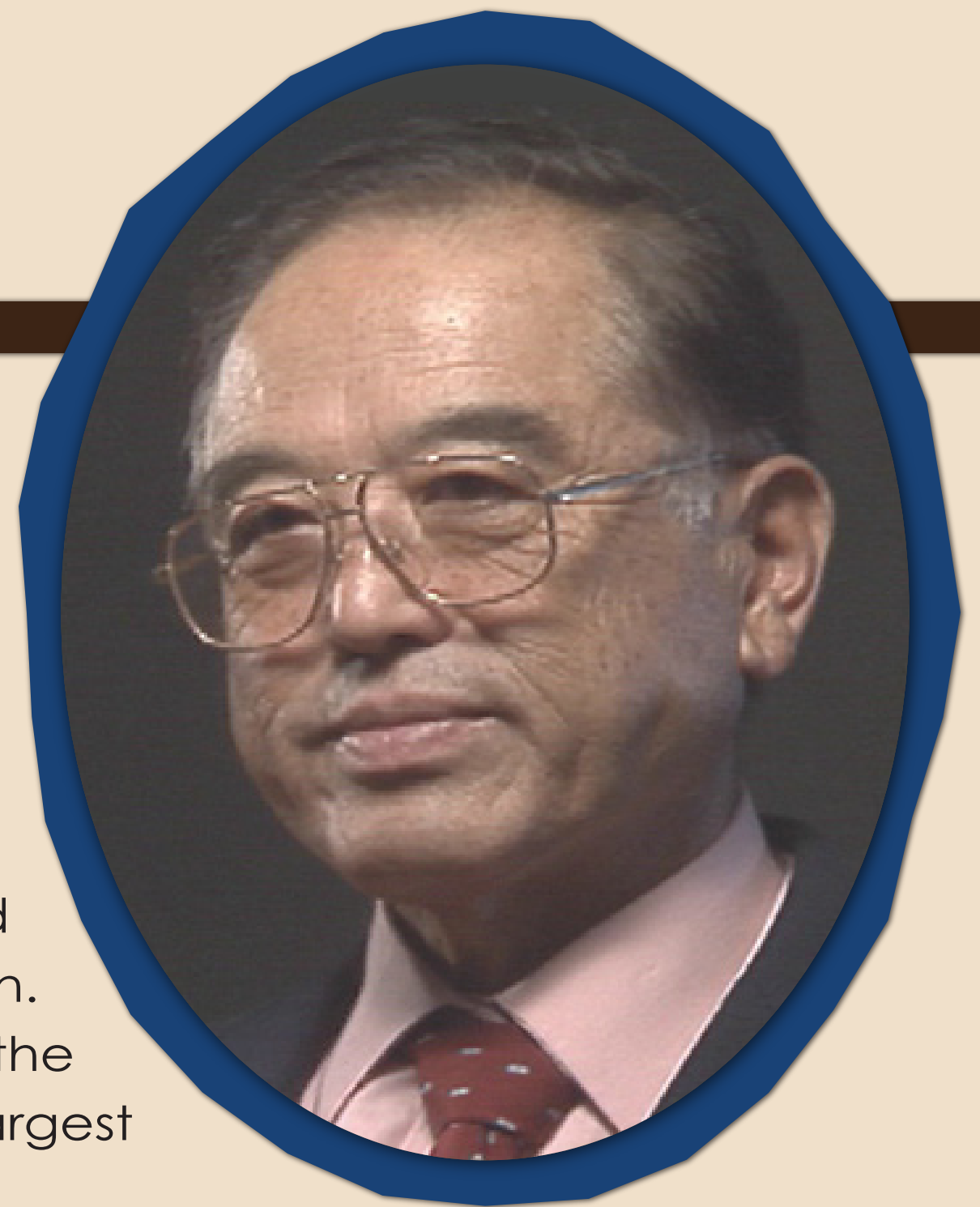
At 19 years of age, he was convicted for refusing induction and sent to a federal penitentiary while his family remained in Heart Mountain concentration camp in Wyoming.

Post-war, Mits kept a low profile; his stance had been very controversial in the community, but he had a fire burning inside and a desire for justice. In the 1980s when Japanese Americans began a movement for redress from the US government for their WWII incarceration, he began to talk. Many others, especially young Japanese Americans, were eager to learn about his past and were inspired by his resistance.

Mits joined the redress movement in San Jose’s Japantown, and later became a spokesperson for the draft resisters, documenting a history few people in his community even knew about.

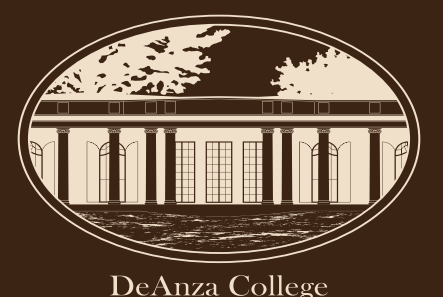
“I got into all of that trouble during World War II because I really did believe in the Constitution and my rights as a US citizen. In fact, I was fighting for the Constitution and for my rights!”

(from interview with Mits in May 2000)



**When the borders of democracy
are tested, who steps forward?**

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BETTY REID SOSKIN

Betty Reid Soskin (1921– 2025) was an American ranger with the National Park Service assigned to the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historical Park in Richmond, CA.

Until her retirement at age 100, she was the oldest serving National Park Service Ranger in the United States.

Soskin had diverse heritage. Her parents were of Louisiana Creole and Cajun backgrounds, and she had a great-grandmother born into slavery.

Before becoming a park ranger at age 85, she worked during World War II as a file clerk for an all- black labor union, in the 1950s ran a small black-owned record company and later worked in state government.

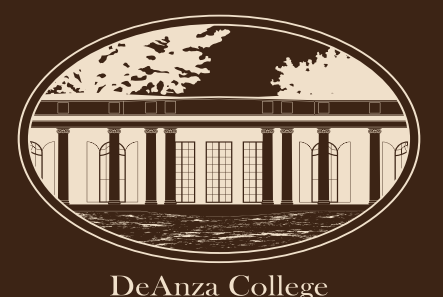
She experienced racism in California such as getting death threats for moving in the 1950s into the white suburb of Walnut Creek, CA.

Reflecting on her role in planning for the Rosie the Riveter park's creation, and on how she brought her personal recollections of the conditions for African American women working in that racially segregated environment to bear on the planning efforts, Betty says that, often, she "was the only person in the room who had any reason to remember that ... what gets remembered is a function of who's in the room doing the remembering."



Whose memories are missing from the stories your community tells about itself?

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AMADEO GIANNINI

Amadeo Giannini (1870-1949) was an Italian American banker who founded the Bank of Italy, which later became the Bank of America, who helped bring financial services to a previously unserved immigrant community.

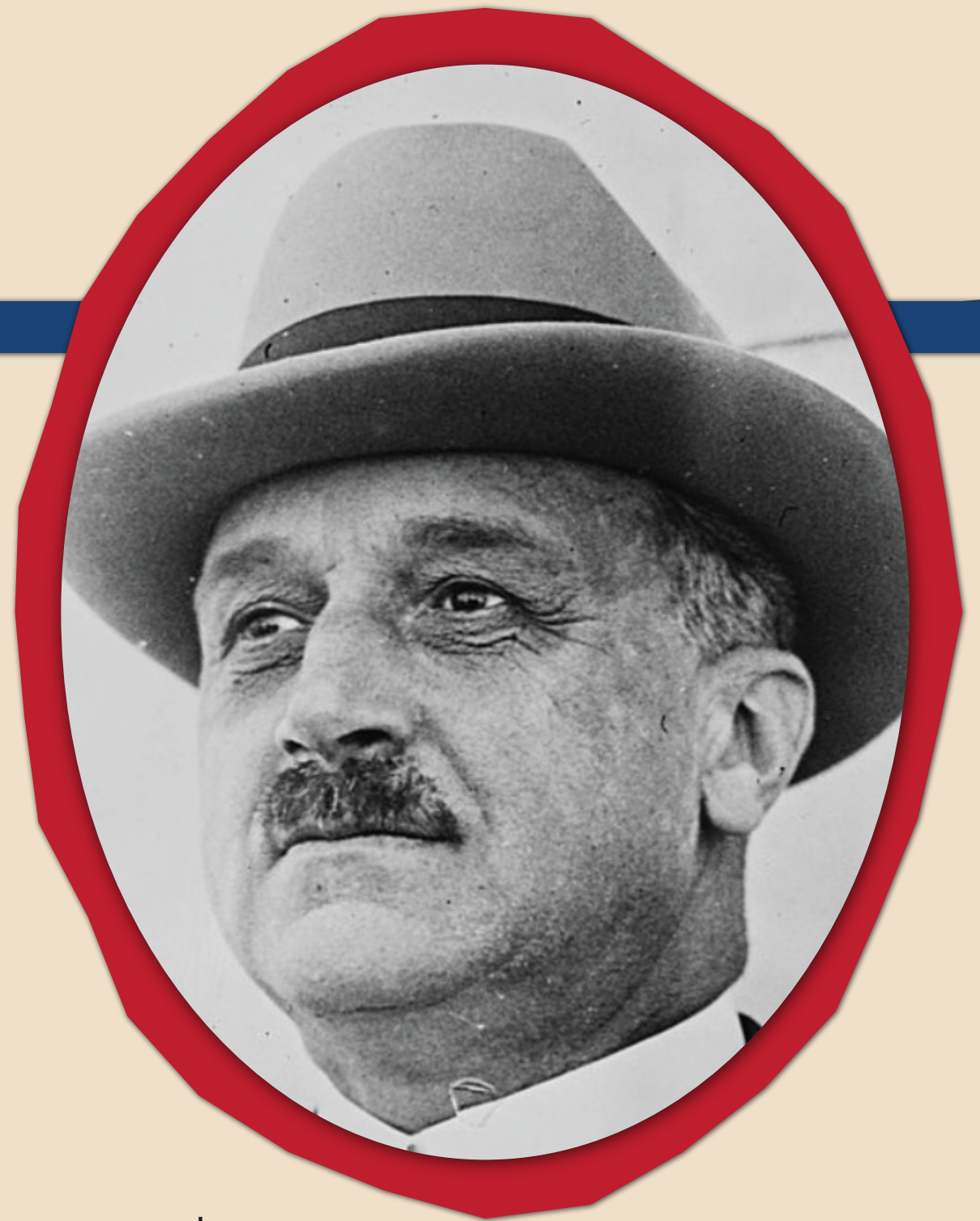
He was born in San Jose to Italian immigrant parents. He rose swiftly in business, including as a produce broker and dealer to farms.

Later as a bank board director, Giannini proposed expanding financial services beyond elites to "the little fellow," especially working-class immigrants who were looked down on and underserved by banks.

When his proposal was rejected by the other directors, he quit the board in 1904 and started the Bank of Italy, which became a great success and merged in 1923 with the Bank of America.

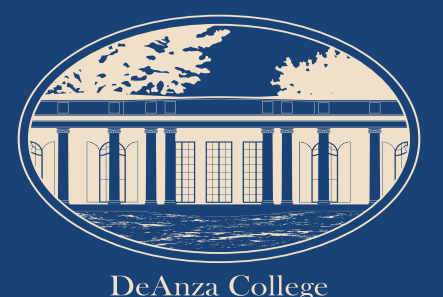
A pioneer in California banking practices, Giannini as financier also helped nurture California's motion picture, wine, and high-tech industries.

For example, he lent money to Walt Disney to produce Snow White, the first feature-length animated film, and he provided capital to William Hewlett and David Packard to help form Hewlett-Packard.



Who decides which people and customers get served by business?

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TAKAO OZAWA

In November of 1922, Japanese-born, American-educated Takao Ozawa stood before Supreme Court justices of the United States. He was there to ask the court to grant him U.S. citizenship.

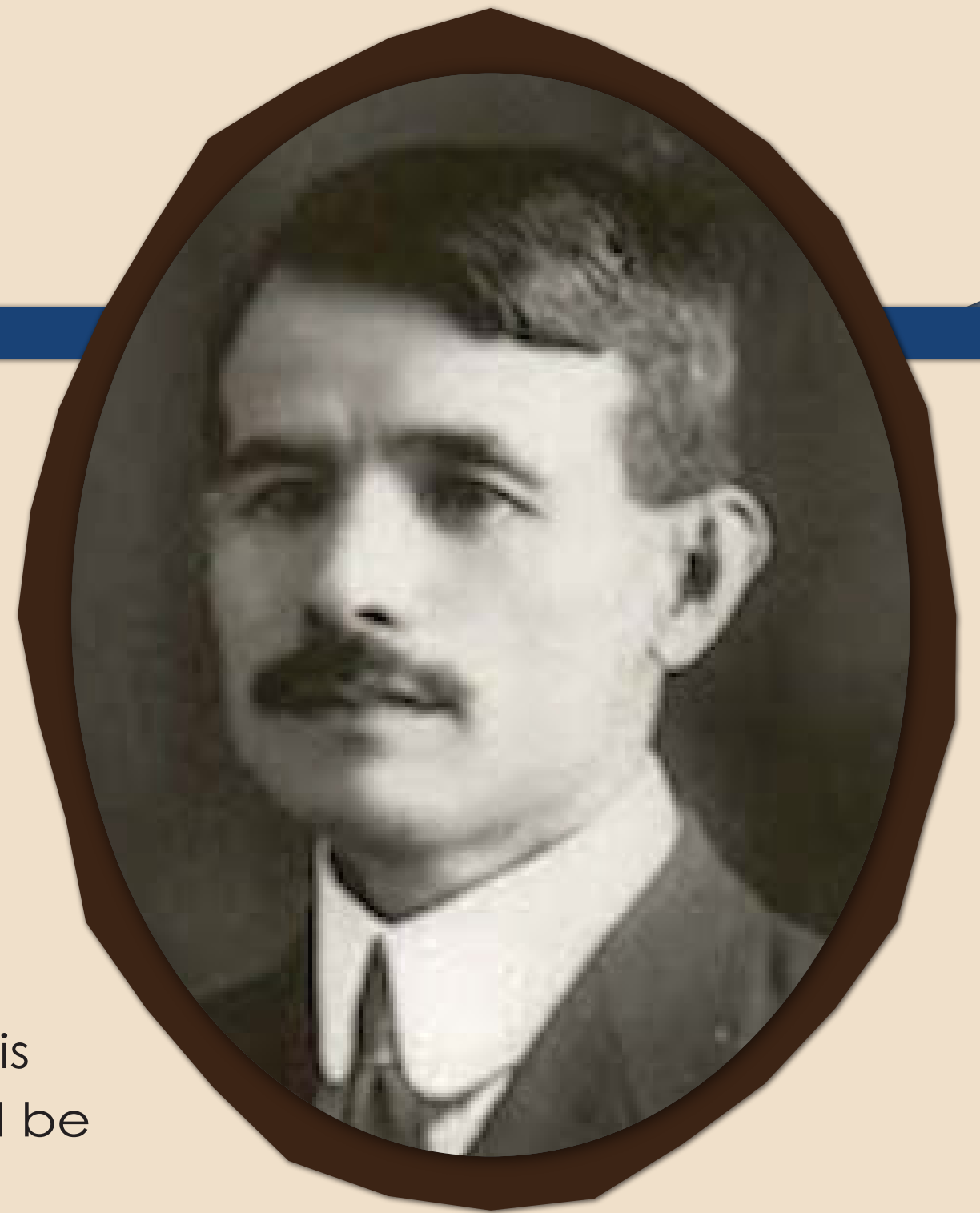
Takao Ozawa was born in Japan in 1875 and immigrated to the United States in 1894 where he met his wife, got married, and started a family. Ozawa made sure to highlight that he attended a Christian church with his family and that he and his wife only spoke English at home to ensure their children would be able to speak the language of their “homeland.”

In an attempt to use the history of the United States in his favor, Ozawa declared: “In name Benedict Arnold was an American, but at heart he was a traitor. In name I am not an American, but at heart I am a true American.”

Ozawa failed to convince the all-White-male Supreme Court in 1922, and they ruled against him. They would go on to rule against fifty-two other non-White immigrants who sued to become citizens between 1878 and 1952. According to the Supreme Court justices...

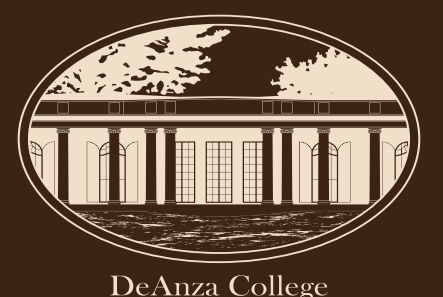
“The original framers...intended to include only the type of man whom they knew as white.... almost exclusively from the British Isles and Northwestern Europe...When they extended the privilege American Citizenship to ‘any alien being a free white person,’ it was these immigrants — bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh.”

In the end, Ozawa was not White, and therefore, was not allowed by law to be “American.”



What does it mean to be "American", and who decides?

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YOLANDA PEREZ

Yolanda Perez's commitment to community and culture was shaped early by her father, Ramiro, whose guitar playing and singing were a fixture of family gatherings. He taught Yolanda to play guitar as a teenager, and she went on to play clarinet in her school orchestra and marching band. But Ramiro's influence extended beyond music. His involvement in community organizing introduced Yolanda to social justice at a young age. At just thirteen, she marched to Sacramento in support of the United Farm Workers.

By the late 1960s, parents and community leaders in San Jose were pressing the San Jose Unified School District to address serious inequities at Roosevelt Junior High School, including the poor quality of education and the absence of non-white teachers. In April 1968, about 200 Roosevelt students — supported by parents and nearby San Jose State College activists — walked out of school in protest. As a ninth grader, Yolanda helped lead the walkout, working alongside community organizers and families to challenge the treatment of Chicano students. Later that year, the district announced plans to revise the school's curriculum to better reflect the contributions of Black and Chicano communities to American history and culture.

As the UFW and Chicano movements grew, Yolanda channeled her activism into creative expression through *teatro* and *música*. At just seventeen, she joined Teatro Urbano, a local Chicano theater group in San Jose, performing as both actor and musician. She later joined El Teatro Campesino, touring throughout the United States and to an international theater gathering in France, and went on to co-found the former Castillo/Alvarez Productions.

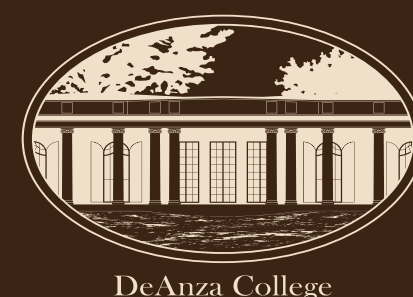
In 1970, Yolanda performed with fellow musicians at the August 29th Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles. The energy of seeing thousands of Chicanos gathered in the park was shattered when police rushed the crowd. Yolanda handed her guitar to one of Corky Gonzales's daughters, who had been separated from her father in the chaos, and Yolanda was soon tear gassed by police while trying to help locate Corky and others.

Music remained central to her life. She helped form her family-music group Alma Del Sol. The group later merged with Flor Del Pueblo becoming a two family-based musical collective. Together they devoted to sharing the songs and struggles of *el pueblo*. In 1972 Flor del Pueblo recorded a self-titled album. Yolanda contributed her percussion and guiro skills along with guitar and vocals. Years later, Yolanda built a professional career in television broadcasting as a producer and on-air personality for the local ABC affiliate in San Jose — believed to be one of the first Latinas on air at the station — before transitioning into marketing and public relations. Her production company, Alma Del Sol Productions, is named for her greatest pride: her children, Alma and Sol.



How does one generation's
courage make room for another's?

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COZETTA GUINN

Cozetta Gray-Guinn (1931-2018) was a constellation — a celestial body of “images, memories... experiences which... like stars move in and out of... [our collective] consciousness...”

Just as the river near her grandfather’s farm cushioned the side of the Arkansan town of Redemption, Guinn — an Artist, Educator, and Historian — believed that America was capable of such an arc, though only with societal intervention. And so, Cozetta moved with the force of water.

“On the De Anza College campus, Mrs. Guinn was an Intercultural Studies instructor, Euphrat Museum board member, conference organizer, and curator... Professor Guinn was a California History Center board member from September 1999 till her passing... [in 2018]...”

In 1968, she and her husband, Isaac “Ike” Guinn, created a museum called Nbari Art that prominently displayed African and African American art. That same year, both were publicly recognized as visionaries at De Anza College. Like many Black women, Guinn not only navigated the intersections of race, gender, and class, but also worked across professional intersections — art, education, history, and, at times, ecology. One example is her art collection Watershed, which was displayed in several exhibits throughout California.

Like the rock formation near her and her husband’s home in China Lake, Guinn painted at different times of day — seeking to also capture the light, the love that migrates through time.

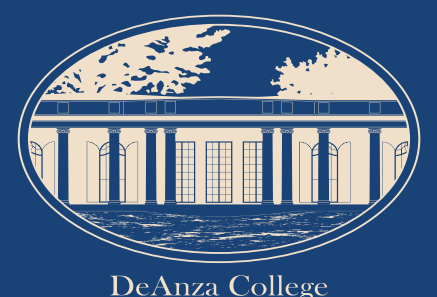
Her curated exhibit and later catalog (of the same name), *Keeping California Culturally Connected*, is described as follows: “This exhibit brought together beloved objects that carried memories from the lives of African Americans who came to California from other parts of the United States. For each object the meaning to the individual or family was told along with the story of how the object connected them to other places and times and to the bigger story.” Through this lens, each lent item in *Keeping California Culturally Connected* functioned as part of a historical and artistic dam. As “each individual... pass[ed] on a fragment of... [their personal]... history,” so too did it “preserve a piece of the past...” thus hoping to broaden the definition of the importance of experiential knowledge from the members of the Black community who survived American life.

By highlighting the importance of collective power fueled by everyday people, the exhibit removes some of the perceived impossibility for young Black students — especially on FHDA campuses — of imagining how to live a life that is worth living. Under the legacy of Cozetta Gray-Guinn’s visionary eye, peeking out from beneath the brim of her trademark hat, every life was/and is worth seeing and remembering at a communal level.



What would it look like to treat the everyday stories around you as worth preserving?

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LIBERTY VANS

On September 19, 2025, in Los Angeles, California, three Liberty Vans were launched and drove throughout the neighborhoods to protect the civil liberties and constitutional rights of immigrants and citizens alike. They spread the word that it was time for neighbors to join the immigrant communities and stand up to the violent and repressive actions of the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) federal forces that had occupied the City of Angels.

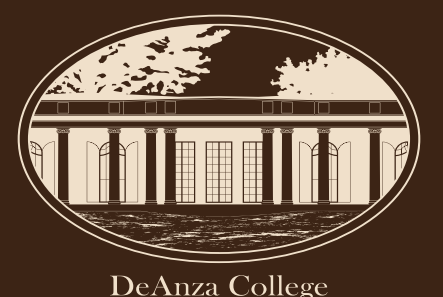


The crew of the Liberty Vans included an attorney, a faith leader, and someone to document incidents. "We are out there safeguarding democracy and the rights of all," stated Juan Jose Gutierrez, Executive Director of the Full Rights for Immigration Coalition. *(ABC 7 Eyewitness News, September 19, 2025)*

Other organizations joining these efforts include the bipartisan Save America Movement and the National Laborer Organizing Network. Other Liberty Vans launched in Chicago and Charlotte North Carolina, as if responding to the pleas of Neftali Herrera, a 15-year-old young woman whose father had been kidnapped from his place of work. "I ask our community for help. We need to have more programs that protect families and workers." *(La Opinion Spanish newspaper article, September 20, 2025 by Araceli Martinez Ortega)*

What responsibilities, if any, do neighbors have toward one another during times of fear?

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