



# Kathryn Doi Todd

Justice Todd spent the first three years of her life in a United States government-imposed Japanese internment camp with her parents and older brother. Leaving their jobs and evacuating their homes with

few belongings, the family was forced to live in cramped conditions in camps in California and Wyoming before eventually being released. While Justice Todd remembers little of the experience, her family spoke of the tragedy, and she says that “it was clear that the experience was degrading and invaded the psyche of each of us.”

After attending an exchange program in Japan while a student at Stanford University, Justice Todd majored in Asian history and began Japanese language studies. Following undergraduate studies, Justice Todd worked part time as a secretary at a law office in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. The experience of helping other Japanese Americans with their legal issues sparked a lifelong passion and inspired Justice Todd to attend Loyola Law School, where she was a member of the Order of the Coif and became executive editor of the *Loyola Law Review*.

Upon graduation, she opened an office as a solo practitioner in Little Tokyo; her brother joined her in 1976 after he graduated from law school. Practicing as one of only three Japanese American women lawyers in the Los Angeles area, Justice Todd became a trailblazer and role model for other aspiring Asian women. After only seven years as an attorney, Governor Jerry Brown appointed Justice Todd to the Los Angeles Municipal Court, making her the first female Asian Pacific American justice—not only in the state of California but, also, in the entire United States. In her judicial role, Justice Todd became a visible leader to aspiring women lawyers and judges and served as a more reflective example of the people of her courtroom.

In 1981, Governor Brown elevated Justice Todd to the Los Angeles Supreme Court. She remained on the trial court for 22 years, with varying assignments, including Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles Juvenile Court—the largest of its kind in the country, with 50

bench officers. During her tenure from 1988 to 1989, the court included more women-appointed lawyers and referees than had been in place under prior administrations.

Justice Todd was appointed by Governor Gray Davis to the California Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District in 2000, where she served until her retirement in January, 2013.

Justice Todd has done more than break the mold within a non-representative legal field. She has mentored a legion of women and minorities to reach their goals in the legal profession and tirelessly has encouraged other Asian American women to become lawyers and judges themselves. Starting early in her career, Justice Todd mentored law students, young lawyers, and aspiring jurists. Both Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Holly Fujie and previous Margaret Brent Award honoree California Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye name Justice Todd as a role model and mentor. As a result, Judge Fujie and Justice Cantil-Sakauye have gone on to break their own barriers, respectively becoming the first Asian Pacific American California state bar president and the first Asian Pacific American female chief justice on any state supreme court.

Justice Todd is a founding member of the Japanese American Bar Association, now a nation-wide organization, committed to pursuing diversity in the judiciary. She also was one of the founding members of the National Association of Women Judges, which aims to ensure equal justice and access to the courts for women, minorities, and other historically disfavored groups. These association formations are in addition to her pro bono work for ethnic nonprofit organizations in her community.

While she has achieved so much in her professional life, Justice Todd states that her role as mother to her daughter Mia has been her greatest achievement, even though being a single mother came with challenges. At the age of three, upon being introduced by her mother to a male colleague, Mia exclaimed, “I didn’t know men could be judges!”—thus showing that even within her own family, Justice Todd served as a role model to young women.

From the beginning of her legal career, Justice Todd has broken through countless barriers and helped other generations of women do the same. For these reasons, she is a shining example of a Margaret Brent Award honoree.