



Name in English: Delbert Earl Wong

Name in Chinese: 黄锦绍 [黃錦紹]

Name in Pinyin: Huáng Jǐnshào

Gender: Male

Birth Year: 1920-2006

Birth Place: Hanford, California

Philanthropy: Yes

The first CA judge in the continental US

Profession(s): Judge, Community Leader, Military Veteran

Education: A.A., Bakersfield College; B.S., Business, 1942, University of California at Berkeley; J.D., 1948, Stanford Law School

Awards: 1944, Distinguished Flying Cross, United States Army Air Forces; 1944, four Air Medals, United States Army Air Forces; 1994, Abacus Award, Organization of Chinese Americans; 1996, Lifetime Community Service Award, Edmund G. "Pat" Brown Institute of Public Affairs (PBI) at California State University, Los Angeles; 2002, Historymakers Award, Chinese American Museum; 2003, Asian American Award (Alumni), Stanford University Asian American Activities Center

Contribution (s): With a judicial career that spanned almost five decades, Judge Delbert E. Wong was the first Chinese American graduate from Stanford Law School. He made history, becoming the first Chinese American judge in the continental United States, when he was appointed to the Municipal Court of the Los Angeles Judicial District by California Governor Pat Brown in 1959. Prior to that, Judge Wong had served as Deputy Legislative Counsel for the California State Legislature and in 1952 became Deputy State Attorney General, the first Asian and Chinese American to hold both of these positions. In 1961, Governor Brown elevated Judge Wong to the Superior Court where he served for over 20 years.

Prior to his legal career, Judge Wong served his country in the Army Air Forces during World War II, having enlisted after graduation from UC Berkeley. Judge Wong was a navigator aboard a B-17 Flying Fortress and completed 30 bombing missions in Europe. Only two others out of his class of 18 navigators completed their full 30 mission requirement. The rest were either captured or killed in action. Wong was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and four Air Medals for his wartime service.

Throughout his life, Judge Wong stood up for civil rights and civil liberties in many cases. Judge Wong was instrumental in opening up the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles to minority residents. In 1953, while looking for property in Los Angeles, the Wongs found a lot in the Silver Lake area. When the real estate agent refused to deal with the Wongs because they were Chinese, Judge Wong contacted the property owner, who then

threatened to fire the agent unless he negotiated with the Wongs. The Wongs became the first minority family in the Silver Lake area.

Judge Wong also took part in the three-member appellate panel in the 1969 *People v. Cohen* case, ruling that a college student had the constitutional right to wear a jacket with an anti-draft message containing an expletive. Judge Wong and the appellate panel overturned the lower court's decision to jail the non-violent Vietnam War protester. The conviction was reinstated by the full Court of Appeals, but the case eventually went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court which affirmed the original ruling of the three-judge panel. This became a landmark decision protecting First Amendment free speech rights against state interference that is still taught in constitutional law classes today.

After retirement from the judiciary in 1986, Judge Wong continued to be involved with the City of Los Angeles. Immediately, the Los Angeles Department of Airports asked Judge Wong to research allegations of racial discrimination at the Los Angeles Airport Police Bureau. Judge Wong's findings of systemic racism in command promotions and practice led the department to revise its hiring practices and work on improving race relations. In 1989, Mayor Tom Bradley appointed Judge Wong to a seven-member panel to draft an ethics policy for the city of Los Angeles.

Most unusually, Judge Wong was appointed to serve as a special master in the infamous O.J. Simpson case in 1994. Judge Wong retrieved a switchblade knife from the Simpson residence that had been missed by police detectives, and also testified during the trial.

In memory and honor of Judge Wong after his passing in 2006, the Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association sponsors the Delbert Wong Distinguished Service Award to individuals recognized for their contributions to the Asian and Pacific Islander American communities.

Philanthropy: Judge Wong was a generous supporter and financial donor to multiple community organizations in the Los Angeles community, such as the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, the Chinese American Museum, and the Chinatown Service Center, best known for its senior citizen programs.

External Links:

<http://www.chssc.org/honorees/2005/Wong.htm>
<http://articles.latimes.com/2006/mar/12/local/me-wong12>
http://www.asianconnections.com/a/?article_id=753
<http://www.aalam.org/news/072006.pdf>