The AVCA History Commission was formed as a subgroup to the AVCA Diversity Development Team on December 1, 2020. The History Commission’s purpose is to recognize, amplify, and celebrate the rich and diverse history of the sport of volleyball. 2021 marked Phase 1 of the Commission’s work in conjunction with the AVCA’s 40th Anniversary celebration. Phase 2 of the Commission’s work continues with Feature 2 as we conclude Asian-American & Pacific Islander Heritage and transition to the month of June and the June 23rd 50th Anniversary date of the signing of Title IX legislation into law.

PHASE 2 | FEATURE 2

PATSY TAKEMOTO MINK: “THEN, NOW & NEXT”
“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance[.]”
As we bridge the end of the month of May, when we annually honor the heritage and achievements of Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders and enter the month of June and the significance of June 23rd and the 50th Anniversary of signing of Title IX legislation into law. The AVCA History Commission honors the significant contributions and pioneering efforts of Patsy Takemoto Mink.

Born in Paia, Hawaii Territory, on December 6, 1927, Patsy was one of two children (brother Eugene Takemoto) born to Suematsu Takemoto, a civil engineer and Mitama Tateyama Takemoto. Patsy would go on to graduate from Maui High School in 1944, where she served as the first female class president of the high school and was honored as the class valedictorian.

From Maui High School, she would enroll at the University of Hawaii at Manoa as a pre-med student with aspirations of career in medicine. In her sophomore year, she was elected president of the Pre-Medical Students Club and was a member of the varsity debate team. In 1946, Patsy would enroll and spend one semester at Wilson College, a small women’s college in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Due to her dissatisfaction with the school, Patsy would transfer to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she ran into longstanding racial segregation policies and inequities for students of color around housing, extracurricular activities, and involvement in social clubs and activities. In her time in Lincoln, she successfully led a coalition of students in ending the many of the university’s segregation policies.

In 1947, a health condition required her to move back to Honolulu to recover and complete her final year at the University of Hawaii and in 1948, Patsy earned her bachelor’s degree in zoology and chemistry. After graduation, she applied to several medical schools, but they all rejected her because she was a woman. She would go on to work as an administrative assistant at Hickam Air Force Base and at the urging of her supervisor was told that she should consider a career in law.
The University of Chicago admitted Patsy on the basis of her being a foreign student along with one other woman in her class. While attending law school, Patsy would meet a former U.S. Air Force navigator, WWII veteran, and master’s student named John Mink. Against the wishes of her parents, Patsy and John would marry in January of 1951. Later that spring, Patsy earned her Juris Doctor degree and John would graduate with his master’s in geology.

Being married, female, and Asian-American made it virtually impossible to find work as an attorney so Mink returned to the University of Chicago to work in the university library. In 1952, Gwendolyn (Wendy) Mink was born to Patsy and John. Shortly after, the family would move back to Hawaii. To practice law, Patsy would need to pass the local bar exam, but when she applied questions with her residency based on Hawaii’s status as a territory impacted her ability to sit for the bar exam. Patsy had to prove that she never resided in her husband’s home state of Pennsylvania. She would challenge the rule and Hawaii’s attorney general would rule in her favor allowing her to take the exam. She passed and became the first Japanese-American woman licensed to practice law in Hawaii. She would go on to start her own law firm instead of continuing to fight the barriers associated with her being a married woman with a child. Patsy would also become active in local politics with the founding of the Everyman Organization, where she would lead an influential group of young activists and campaign volunteers.
Patsy Takemoto Mink

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After serving as a campaign worker, Mink would be elected to the Hawaiian Territorial Legislature representing the 5th District in territorial House of Representatives in 1956. Another of her many “firsts”, as she became the first woman with Japanese ancestry to serve in the territorial House. Two years later, she was the first woman to serve in the territorial Senate. With Hawaii gaining statehood in August of 1959, Mink ran for the state’s at-large U.S. Congressional seat but was defeated by territorial senator Daniel Inouye. From 1962-64, she would serve in the Hawaii State Senate.

In 1965, Mink would be elected to serve as first woman of color to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. Known as an independent thinker, Patsy focused on issues impacting children, education, and gender equality. She was well-respected for her work on legislation and her committee work on behalf of her constituency as well issues of national importance. In 1970, Mink became the first Democratic women to deliver a State of the Union speech response and only the second woman overall to respond to the address.
In what would become her signature milestone with lasting impact to this very day, Mink co-authored and advocated for the passage of Title IX Amendment of the Higher Education Act, prohibiting gender discrimination by federally funded institutions of higher education. President Richard Nixon would sign the legislation into law on June 23, 1972. Serving six consecutive terms thru 1977, Representative Mink was steadfast in her fight for gender equity and equal opportunity.

In 1977-78, Mink was appointed by then-president Jimmy Carter to serve as the Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. After a time in the private sector, Mink was elected to complete the remaining term of her U.S. House of Representatives successor, Daniel Akaka’s term. Six weeks later she was elected to serve the subsequent full two-year term. She would be re-elected to six terms serving a second stint in the House from 1990-2002. On September 28, 2002, Mrs. Patsy Takemoto Mink would succumb to viral pneumonia. In honor of her groundbreaking efforts on behalf of gender equity and Title IX legislation, the Title IX Amendment of the Higher Education Act was renamed the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act on October 29, 2002.

For Patsy Takemoto Mink “then” started long before she walked the halls of Congress. The “then” played out in the halls of Maui High School in the early 1940s as senior class president. That “then” would set the stage for “now” with the journey between “then” and “now” resulting in groundbreaking change from Pennsylvania to Nebraska to Chicago to “now”. Smashing barriers, knocking down walls, and shattering glass ceilings on her way from Honolulu to the nation’s capital, Washington D.C. Two twelve-year stints in the U.S. House of Representatives. A decorated record of service to our nation, a devoted wife, and doting mom.

Patsy Takemoto Mink embodied “next” while living in the “then” and the “now”. Not just smashing barriers that existed but eliminating future ones. Not just knocking down those walls that she encountered but destroying the systemic building blocks that would build future ones. Not just shattering glass ceilings that held her down but breaking new ground where those ceilings are not as hard to shatter.

Thank you for your example! Then, Now & Next…

www.history.house.gov, Wiki, and PatsyMinkFoundation.org contributed to this feature.
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