



Impact Statement

Yana Lei Gould, Grade 12

The Revolutionary Salon, 2026

Watercolor, colored pencil, pen, marker on canvas board, 12 x 9 inches

White Knoll High School, Lexington, SC

Unsung Hero: Yuri Kochiyama

Changing Civil Rights has always been an admirable ambition to me. It means fighting for human rights, revolting against the status quo, or even changing society's expectations, which is a long and difficult task. That's why, during my search on Art Effects Directory, I looked through Civil Rights. Then, I saw Yuri Kochiyama holding a microphone. It made me curious. What was she discussing? Was she speaking to a crowd or debating against her opposition? To me, she looked courageous, confident in her beliefs, no matter the situation. So, I clicked on her and read her description. Kochiyama did not disappoint my expectations; she was a dedicated social rights activist who had fierce compassion and a strong heart. Her focus on improving marginalized lives inspired me to create an artwork about her actions for the community.

Yuri Kochiyama was a Japanese-American Civil Rights activist and was involved in several social movements throughout her life. Born on May 19, 1921, in San Pedro, California. In 1941, Kochiyama's life would change forever when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. On the same day, her father was arrested under suspicion and potential threat to national security. Shortly after her father is released, he dies a day later because he was never given the medical attention to recover from his ulcer surgery. Later, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, forcing Kochiyama and her family to relocate to a confinement site in Jerome, which would spark her activism. However, her true work wouldn't begin until she married Bill Kochiyama and moved to Harlem. In Harlem, Kochiyama was exposed to other ethnic struggles, leading to her opening her apartment to others. Kochiyama's home, known as the "Grand Central Station" or the "Revolutionary Salon," became a meeting place for activists and locals, aiding in building a stronger awareness within the community. After meeting Malcom X and joining the Afro-American Unity, her whole viewpoint would change from seeing racial inequality as a civil rights issue to a human rights injustice. With her connection to Malcom X, she hosts a reception in her apartment for Malcom X to meet survivors of the atomic bombings from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, helping bridge communities together. During the 1960s to 1970s, Kochiyama and her husband, in association with the Asian Americans for Action, worked to get reparations for former Japanese Americans, which led to the creation of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. In addition, she also advocated for Puerto Rican Independence by joining the Young Lords Party and participating in the takeover of the Statue of Liberty. Kochiyama's achievements in supporting different groups are vast; she has joined and created multiple organizations spanning black, Asian, and anti-war movements. The determination and commitment she had to unite

people from different backgrounds under one cause became the backbone of her legacy.

Kochiyama worked her whole life to bridge the gap between marginalized groups by encouraging compassion and cooperation to strengthen their fights. For my artwork, I wanted to encapsulate her ability to foster a community. To do this, I planned a scene of a meeting in her Harlem apartment, reflecting the times people came together to discuss and learn. I gave the background a wash of orange to represent how lively and warm she made people feel. I sketched out a scene with figures surrounding a table using a one-point perspective with Kochiyama in the middle, arms crossed. To capture solidarity, I used an assortment of acrylic marker colors, applying them into a harmonious blend that makes each figure feel individualistic but fit together. The difference in clothing colors is meant to represent the different communities Kochiyama helped bring closer. To make Kochiyama the focus, I painted her hair covering red, something I noticed other artworks depicted her wearing. Additionally, I left the other figures' faces blank to help keep the focus on Kochiyama. Finally, I used pen and colored pencils for additional details.

I grew up being a part of the Filipino American Association of Greater Columbia, that is aimed to share Filipino culture. However, their focus on Filipino dance led me to believe that they wouldn't be able to incorporate my artistic skills, but learning Kochiyama's drive to unite people made me realize that community isn't made by differences but by common goals. While the Organization has been expanding to showcase different Filipino skills and talents, it isn't as strong as their choreography performances. I could use my skills and knowledge to make a new branch that shares artwork on social media and hosts activities, educating people on Filipino designs. The first artwork I will feature is the one I made of Yuri Kochiyama. Although she may not represent Filipinos, she represents the reason behind expanding what I can do to educate people on my culture and for my community.

References:

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/06/06/honoring-legacy-yuri-kochiyama>
<https://connectandengage.housing.umich.edu/yuri-kochiyama-multicultural-lounge/history-and-namesake/> <https://www.yurikochiyama.com/timeline>
<https://www.nps.gov/people/yuri-kochiyama.htm>