

## insights

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TYPES NOT MAPPED YET March 28, 2023 | TTR not mapped yet | Jasmine S. Wynton

Thompson Coburn releases booklet celebrating Charlye O. Farris and Edna Cisneros, the first women of color to be admitted to the State Bar of Texas



# Charlye O. Farris and Edna Cisneros:

Stories from the  
lives and legacies  
of two Texas  
Legal Pioneers

**Women's History Month 2023**

In honor of Women's History Month, Thompson Coburn has created an educational booklet celebrating Charlye O. Farris and Edna Cisneros, the first women of color to be admitted to the State Bar of Texas.

The book, "[Charlye O. Farris and Edna Cisneros: Stories from the lives and legacies of two Texas legal pioneers](#)," was written by Thompson Coburn Dallas attorneys [Jasmine Wynton](#) and [Liz Rocha](#) and illustrated by Washington, D.C.-based illustrator [Laura Coleman](#).

In 1953, Charlye O. Farris became the first African American woman admitted to practice law in Texas. When she began her 50-year legal career, Charlye worked in segregated courthouses and represented clients before largely white, male juries. She was initially not permitted to join the local bar association or attend their meetings, which were held at a hotel that refused to serve African Americans. Nevertheless, she earned respect from her colleagues and made national news in 1954 when she was selected for a pro tem judge position that made her the first Black person to serve as a judge in the South since Reconstruction.

Charlye faced many challenges as one of the few women of color attorneys during that era, but she was determined to not let discrimination impact her zealous representation of clients. Charlye reminded prospective jurors that, "You may resent me because I am Black, and you may resent me because I am a woman, but please remember that our legal system requires that you make your decision based on the facts."

In 1954, Edna Cisneros became the first Mexican American woman admitted to practice law in Texas. Two years later, at age 26, she made national news by successfully running for District Attorney in Willacy County, Texas. She served her community in the position for 29 years, sometimes facing off in cases against her sister Diana, also an attorney.

Edna told reporters following her historic campaign for District Attorney that she "may be a little short on experience – but it's because I'm 26, not because I'm a woman."

To recognize these outstanding legal pioneers, Thompson Coburn has made a \$2,000 donation to the [Farris-Cisneros Scholarship](#) at the University of Texas at Austin School of Law.

#### **About the authors and the artist**

[Jasmine Wynton](#) is an experienced litigator who focuses her practice on high-stakes business litigation, employment law, and white collar criminal defense. She serves in leadership capacities for a number of civic and charitable organizations, and is currently on the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee of the Texas Supreme Court Historical Society.

[Liz Rocha](#) represents clients in the areas of antitrust and trade regulation, including advertising. Liz also represents hospitals and health care providers in coverage and reimbursement disputes. She is a Director on the 2023 Board of the Dallas LGBT+ Bar Association and a member of the Dallas Hispanic Bar Association (DHBA). In 2022, she served on the DHBA's committee for the 17th Annual Noche de Luz, an annual fundraiser that supports various DHBA pipeline initiatives, including law student scholarships, the Dallas Latina Leadership Program, and its Judicial Externship Program.

[Laura Coleman](#) is a Washington, D.C.-based illustrator and author who specializes in bold, vibrant designs and drawings of people. In addition to illustrations, her graphic designs have been featured in HelloGiggles, Artomatic, The DCLadies, FemmeFatale and more. She believes in the importance and power of art in black culture and has penned three books, including a coloring book for all ages, "Color In My Style."

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*Jasmine Wynton*



*Liz Rocha*

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