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EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Murray Turnbull Interview Narrative

5-10-2006 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

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The **East-West Center Oral History Project** strives to capture the Center's first 50 years as seen through the eyes of staff, alumni, and supporters who have contributed to its growth.

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Murray Turnbull

5-10-2006 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

Personal Background

I was born in 1919 in Iowa. I went to several universities in the Midwest. I got my undergraduate degree from the University of Nebraska. And, I was off for three years in the U.S. Army Air Force in World War II in Guadalcanal and the Philippine Islands.

Then I came back and got a job teaching high school in Great Forest, Montana, but that was only one semester. And then I went back to the University of Nebraska, on the faculty. And altogether I spent maybe 40 years on faculties: University of Nebraska, University of Denver, Hamline University and the University of Hawai'i.

I was chairman of the department, and dean of the college at Hamline University for about five years, and then I came out here in 1954. Been here ever since. Out here on the faculty for some 31 years until I retired in 1995. I was chairman of the Art Department at least two different terms. I was, at the time we created the East-West Center, I was acting dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. And, later I was director of planning for the University. I taught for many years: studio work -- painting, drawing, etc. And then for the last 20 years or so I taught courses on the history of Western Art.

I did some traveling. I worked in Mexico for some months. I spent a great deal of time in France, in Paris, and in London, Dresden, Munich, Copenhagen, Bern, and other European cities.

I've been married for 58 years to my wife, Phyllis. We have four children. My oldest is 63 and the youngest is 50.

Birth of the EWC

In February of 1959 I was acting dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. And at that time the faculty had a Senate which had taken a step somehow having to do with concern about how well the university system was working and what could be done about it and so on. And they came up with one or two suggestions that were, I thought, utterly bizarre. I thought they were just absolutely worthless. I thought, in effect, what they said was if we had more chalk for the blackboards, we could do better.

And I was so irked at this that I immediately got busy and sent a proposal to the Senate for the establishment of an international college. And I spoke some in that about what a wonderful resource Hawai'i was, and what an opportunity we had to use it, in which we could exchange ideas and we could bring people from other cultures, from various parts of Asia here, and so on and so forth. And that, of course, died. I mean, nothing came of that. It just was there.

Governor John Burns/LBJ role

But then shortly later, in April of that same year, Jack Burns, who was our delegate to Congress, not in the Congress, but our delegate to the Congress in Washington, had persuaded Lyndon Johnson, who was then the chairperson [*majority leader*] of the Senate, to make a brief statement, and he did make sort of a one-sentence statement about there ought to be an international university in Hawai'i we ought to establish.

So, Norm Meller, who was at that time chairman, I think, of the Faculty Senate, among other things, immediately went to the president of the University, Snyder, and told him about the letter I had written, making this other proposal, and said he had to respond to this remark. It will be in the paper, and so on. The remark that Johnson had made. And

he should get in touch with me, and so he did.

[Editor's note: On the original committee were Drs. Bouslog, Kirkpatrick, Martin, Rosenberg, Stalker, Stauffer and Wachter chosen by President Snyder.]

We set up a committee of about six. We started at ground zero. We started at 8 o'clock in the morning or whatever it was and off we went. They all had lots of ideas and requested information. And there was no prepoliticking or anything like that on our part. We just walked in the door and "let's go!"

It was wonderful, yeah. That's one of the delightful things about it. That it went through. That we did build the East-West Center. And we still have the East-West Center. That was a miracle in a way. It was wonderful.

And we went to work for three days, all day long, and each evening I would take home all the notes and everything, and I would transcribe them and change them and add to them and sort them out, etc., etc.

We were just totally absorbed in it, and we felt we had to get it done immediately. And they were all involved -- there was no worry or anything. We used all kinds of ideas. We tried in our discussions -- we tried out everything we could think of. We just would throw in something and then we would realize, well, that wouldn't be possible or that wouldn't be likely or it wouldn't be helpful. And we kept working on others. We just hammered away on it, but with enthusiasm. And I think we all felt that we were going to get it.

And by the end of the third day, I went to the president, to Dr. Snyder, and I told him verbally what we had proposed, what we were going to propose. And he thought that was fine. And then, at Norm Meller's suggestion, I told him that I thought he ought to

have a press conference on this and so he called one for the next day. On Friday of that week in April, he had a press conference in which he announced the intent of the University to establish this international university.

That was by no means the whole of the East-West Center but it was very much a step, a bigger step in that direction than we'd ever taken. In fact, it was so good that on the basis of that we, in that spring and summer, got the first funds from the State Legislature. We got over \$780,000 from the State which was to be used for planning and development of ideas. It may even have been that some of that was assigned for construction of an additional building, but I don't remember if that was true or not. It was then possible to make me an acting director of a proposed East-West Center [*in June 1959*].

So I was made acting director of a proposed East-West Center. And then just before that moment, at the end of May, Hawai'i was given statehood, and Johnson got the Congress to say that there ought to be some kind of an international university out here. The important thing about this that I was to have a good bit of trouble with was that Lyndon Johnson wanted something that would counteract the establishment in Moscow, in May, I think, of that year, of a university called the Friendship University, the aim of which was to bring in from other countries all kinds of students who would then learn about the Russian way, the Soviet way of doing things.

And what Johnson wanted was a similar institution here which would bring people in from all over Asia and so on, where they could learn about the glories of American customs and American life. And this was entirely contrary to what we intended with the East-West Center, because one of the things that we devoted a tremendous amount of effort to was the problem, the notion of mutuality, that we have some things that we

could help other people with but they also had lives and they had theories and they had systems and they had beliefs which we didn't know about or we knew very little about. And so what we wanted was an interchange, and that was the whole point of the Center -- an interchange rather than one point of view which would be passed on.

Johnson heard from us as soon as he made this known to Congress -- the idea of a college, of an institution in Hawai'i that would do this. Then we immediately got Jack Burns on the ball with this, to go to him and begin to push for it, but we were pushing for it in our terms and not in his.

Indeed, we then, by, I think it was by the end of the year, the Congress did pass the law, the bill, establishing the East-West Center here. And I think that was in December of 1960. And that then gave us some federal funds, which the Congress wasn't interested in but Johnson pushed for it.

It gave us some federal funds which enabled us then to set up a Center and I could then be moved from acting director of a proposed Center to acting director of the Center. And that's what we started.

Setting up Infrastructure, Staff

We were using whatever, wherever we could find space. We were, for awhile, it seems to me, I think, were in one of the wooden shacks they built during the war, those little wooden buildings.

And there were some of those still around. I think we were in one of those part of the time. And we had to sort of use offices where we could find them. By the time I left the Center in 1961, at the end of 1961, we had, on my staff 55 people working for me. And there were several hundred others through the University doing things, on committees,

and this, that, and the other thing. But employees of the East-West Center, not employees brought in to do the teaching or serve in other places in the University, but simply of the East-West Center, there were 55. Administration and support staff, right. No, we weren't consolidated. We were scattered around campus. I don't remember how many we had in one place. We may have had as many as eight or 10, I'm not sure. But it was a scattering around. There wasn't a Center or a space for us.

Well, again, since I was in several different ones, I don't know -- I was in one *[office]* for awhile down on the ground floor of Bachman Hall. And then another time, I remember having an office in one of those wooden barracks buildings, over by Gartley Hall. Across the campus. So they shuffled about a bit.

UH President Snyder's Role

By the way, President Larry Snyder was a great help in all of this. He was kind of outside it, as it were, but he was necessary and he came through marvelously. But he was instructed *[by the Board of Regents]* at the time we got the idea for the East-West Center, in the spring of 1959, that he was to conduct present services at present levels. Now that pretty well prohibits any kind of creative thought or anything else. That was absolutely nothing. So he was stuck with that. It wasn't his doing. So when we came up with this, we refused to pay any attention to that. We just went overboard. We went, "By golly! Let's propose the best thing we can think of and do it all."

And we got it to Larry Snyder and he was just delighted. He bought it right away. And as it happened, the time was right because, among other things, it was, after all at the end of May, in 1959, that Hawai'i was made a state and that was right at the time that we were just coming out with this stuff for the Center. So everything was lively and going

and there were no blocks in the way. It was, in a sense, something we could pull off and we weren't trying to do something that would antagonize people, but we didn't want something that was going to have to be "present services at present levels." None of these restrictions sort of things. We wanted to see what we could do.

Dr. Snyder accepted it right straight out. And he fought for it. He was all for it all the way. And the Regents accepted it. Herb Cornuelle was chairman of the Regents, and he was right along with it. I don't recall any objections that he had. He may have had some but I don't recall any. And they supported it, and then, of course, I got to serving, then, all sorts of other ways around the State. I got invited to speak at numerous meetings, and we began to build a lot of enthusiastic support that way. Economically, it looked good for the State. And it sounded very good to many of them, and so we got lots of support there. When we wanted to get State money for it, I asked the governor to set up a committee. The governor was Bill Quinn. And Bill Quinn set up this special committee with himself as chairman, myself as vice chairman, and again, to promote and develop and to involve other agencies in the State, other kinds of information, other kinds of knowledge, other kinds of expertise, and so on.

And in addition to that, with the kinds of speeches that were made around the State, and with the press we were getting, and with Hawai'i becoming a state -- there was a lot of local enthusiasm of all kinds sort of bubbling over. And a lot of it came out as support for the Center.

So it was an ideal time, all the various factors. Five years earlier, it probably would never have gotten off the ground. Ten years later, with the Vietnam War on, it probably would have never gotten off the ground. So it was a propitious moment, no doubt of that.

It was quite -- It was wonderful. I liked it because I, well, I hate to use the word but my interests are all in creative things. The nature of creativity. How do you create something and what are the problems and how do you go about it and so on? That's what I had spent my life teaching and everything, so I was just eager and delighted to see that we could plunge in. We were going to get mud on us. We're going to get sun on us. We were just going to do it and we're going to work our way up. We weren't just doing it out of excitement.

I don't mean to imply by that that we were just at random picking any old thing. I mean, we were very serious about it, and we had some good people, not only on the original committee but the number of people we quickly picked up. We brought some in from various universities around the country. We got a lot of people locally who had good experience and knowledge, and they all began to advise us and encourage us and so on. So we got a lot of response that was very useful obviously.

Reaction to Creation of EWC

The best memories, I think, you can surmise mostly from all that I've told you. Working with any number of people, and for me, it was a rich experience because I got out of the limitations of my own field, my own college, my own subjects, and so on. And I got to know a great many other people and it was interesting for me, I guess it was interesting because I could talk to them and work with them as equals. I was not an underling. I was not somebody they hired to do something. We were in the same boat. That was wonderful.

We had very few who were adverse. There were a few. And there were a few columnists on the [U.S.] mainland who wrote columns that were badly written, or which are like

most columns, pretty awful. I don't remember any one by name, or anything like that, but there were some of those we had to put up with.

There were some criticisms, of course, we'd get some people who would come in and say you shouldn't be doing that or why did you do this or you can't very well carry that out or that's too costly. We confronted a lot of that. But it was, it was normal. I mean, it wasn't anything that somehow I felt abused by or that it was unusual. This was part of what it was about. Building the road was hard work. Digging the ditches, and so on. And so on and so forth. That's the way it went.

We had lots of spread in the local papers. And we got a fair amount of attention from national media, from columnists who were around the country and so on who would call attention to it and notice it and were quite taken by the idea, either taken by it and thought it was quite splendid, or objecting and saying they should be doing that in Kentucky or well, why don't they do it in our state, or you know. So it wasn't all favorable or pleasant. But there was a fair amount of attention paid to it in the press, you know.

Ground-Breaking Ceremonies with LBJ

[A ground-breaking ceremony was held the 9th of May, 1960.]

I remember that because I, well, Lyndon Johnson was here and so on, and I've got all kinds of photographs of us digging up the dirt, that sort of thing. And it was a good moment because it was here -- we're digging up the earth, the dirt. This is really going to go. I mean, this is not just people sitting around in offices, chattering about it and so on. And I wrote a speech. I wrote my speech for that, which was the best speech I ever made, I think. It's only two paragraphs long. It was very, very limited, and I think it said exactly what I wanted to say and what the Center was, and it was precisely emphasizing

the intentions of mutuality, that it was not teaching somebody else how good we are, but it was everybody teaching everybody. Every once in a while, I've reread that, umpteen decades ago, and I still like it.

I think there's a copy in there. There must be. It's printed in a little booklet that we printed in 1961, I think it was, of summarizing the state of the East-West Center or something like that, and it's in that.

As I say, it's just two paragraphs which I think is ideal for a speech. Rather rare.

Selecting Program Areas

I thought that if we included technology, technologies as a central part of the East-West Center, this would mean, this would prohibit or it would certainly work against any mutuality, because there are superiorities of technology which are measurable. It isn't a philosophy. It isn't a theory or anything. It's an object. It's a thing. It's technological.

And the United States was one of the principals in technology especially with all of Asia. Asia has since then come out quite a ways, without a doubt. Although there are still millions and millions of people for whom technology is still unavailable. But yeah, we, it seemed to me that the idea of technology, and focusing attention on it, was one that would be contrary to the real aim of the East-West Center -- of mutuality.

It would mean, among other things, that the United States would play the primary role in that. Now, maybe that changes and maybe it has changed, but it is still a major role and there are still billions of people in the world who are victims of technology rather than profiting from it, and so on. So that was, it seemed to me, something that was not good. There were various other pressures from the Congress and so on. Some of them wanted one in their own state, that sort of thing.

And a good many of the conservative members of Congress did not like the idea of snuggling up to peoples from Asia, and so on. This was simply not done, not a thing to do and so on.

[The idea of technical interchange] was a name put on, in the Congress. But it was only a name, because now maybe things have changed, and maybe now technology plays quite a role in the Center. I do not know. I'm not that informed about it. I would guess not much.

But in any case, even though it was in the name, we simply avoided it. We steered away from it. We concentrated hard on the other things. Now, it may have been, after I left the Center, it's possible that there was an increasing attention on technological matters. I don't know. I just don't know.

[The programs started were] languages, histories, philosophies, the arts, religion, religious beliefs and so on, to get things out on the table and to respect them and to notice the differences. Yes, by comparing. Sure, they'd be different. But not comparing them in the sense that we're going to show the superiority of this one over that. So that was our main concentration at the time at any rate. Of course, I was with the Center only briefly. But we did not seek students or candidates in business courses and that sort of thing, making money, how you do business and so on. We were much more interested in philosophical matters, in historical matters, in religious matters, in those things that had to do with the mind and the intellect and so on, and not with making money.

Institutional Transitions

EWC/UH Influences

[At the time the Center began, UH was building programs in land economics, tropical agriculture, linguistics, areas that could lend themselves to the curriculum at the East-West Center.]

The UH evolved in a number of directions. I think that, in many cases, they were an improvement, like in agriculture. I think we had had programs in agriculture, but I think what happened in the 20 years or so after the founding of the East-West Center, and independent of the Center, there were developments of agricultural skills and knowledge and so forth in the State, and I think that's true, and that probably was also true in economics and business and so on. We developed a program in, a curriculum in business that was very thin in those days, and it developed over the years after that into a much bigger program, for example. I'm not very useful on that.

Separation from UH

But there developed some things in the '70s and '80s that I was concerned about. The first one, in 1975, the Center was withdrawn from the University, and placed on its own. And I objected to that. I even testified in the legislature for it.

And the reason I objected was that I thought, or the reasons were built around what I thought, that the University was an ideal place for the Center because it was free from any of the policies or most of the policies, at any rate, and intentions of communities otherwise. That is, it was, by taking it away from the University, I thought it then, for one thing, what bothered me the most was that it was as it had been set up originally, it was then responsible to the Department of State.

Now, the Department of State's principle function is to develop and inform about and to take care of American principles, American politics, American government, whatever. It's the American way. And that was so contrary to what I meant by the Center, not the American way, but everybody's way. We're all going to share in this. We'll argue and everything, but we're going to recognize one another. But that was not the function of the State Department. And that, I objected to and so, I felt that there was an advantage in having it tied to the University, that a University in its principle, is, not always in practice, admitted, but in principle, it's divorced from those biases or those specific methodologies or ideas of here's what you have to believe.

Instead of that, they are intended to be full of questions and asking about. University should be full of not the answers to things, but how do we go about getting answers? Let's try, seeking. Let's make the questions of all kinds and see what happens to them and then see what they do. And we'll think about it. Rather than some permanent form of knowledge.

So those bothered me since. In the last 20 years, I do not know the East-West Center that well. I do not know whether its being tied to the State Department is a good or bad thing. I couldn't argue this case now and I wouldn't attempt to. So I'm not being critical of the Center, but those two things did concern me at the time.

And in both cases, I testified before the legislature, the State legislature on them. That was when it became -- 1975 is when they were divorced from the University.

Naming of Buildings

By the way, one of the things that bothered me about the University, and I don't know where this was done, was the naming of the buildings.

I thought this was contrary to the intent of the Center. I mean, Lincoln Hall? Jefferson Hall? Burns Hall? I mean, these had nothing to do with this exchange we're talking about at all. This is the American identification. Kennedy Theatre?

So I didn't like the choice of names, and I don't think any of those names were there when I was with the Center. I think they all came afterwards. We didn't have any buildings yet. We were just starting construction. We didn't have any buildings built yet.

I was involved in the *[planning of the buildings in the]* sense that we were informed and we had engineers. We had our own faculty involved in this, as usual. Was it Bill Wachter, whoever it was, who was on our original committee, was an engineer and was very much involved in all of that? So it was being taken care of or supervised by or with the East-West Center and so on. And then *[I.M.]* Pei was an architect of our choice, without any doubt.

There was no question about that. There were some things done that I somewhat regretted. Aside from the names of the buildings which I think was wrong.

I was not entirely taken by Jefferson Hall, not so much Jefferson Hall originally. I rather liked it. It was sort of an open building, not just a lounge, but I mean, an open meeting area, and then they *[transformed that into the Imin Conference Center]* and froze it into offices. I thought that was unfortunate. I thought that was too bad to do that, because I liked it much more in its original form.

I do refer you to that history that I wrote. I mean, that, everything that I know is in there, one way or another.

Life After EWC

[The establishment of the EWC] changed my life in many ways. I think in a lot of ways, it made no significant difference because a lot of it was the outgrowth of what I was doing. I'm not trying to claim some credit here. I'm talking about ways of thinking and working.

As I said, I always had this tremendous interest in creative processes and that's what I taught. It was a plunge that I made in using creative means and so on. And it was experience that aided me, I suppose, from then on. One thing that I didn't do much of after that was to serve administratively.

I didn't become a dean again. I spent a couple of years as director of planning for the University, trying to draw up some plans for general practice in building buildings and so on, which was pretty wasted. We didn't do much of it. Too much pressure there, like I said, that art building. They introduced another architect. They didn't pay any attention to that sort of thing.

I didn't become chairperson of the *[Art]* Department again. I don't believe -- I may have -- I don't remember. I don't think I did, and I didn't become a dean or anything like that again, and so on, and I was glad not to. I was more interested in the teaching.

And with the art building. I, for about 20 years, continued teaching there. I had three courses each semester that I taught, and I had between 250 and 300 people in each course. I had big classes, huge classes, and then I was involved in various committees.

I served on the Hawai'i Red Cross. I was on the Board of Hanalei School. And I did a number of things. I was an advisor to the director of the Honolulu Academy of Arts on a regular basis. I mean, I would spend several hours a week down there, drawing up

plans of various kinds for programs, and making suggestions for exhibitions, things of that kind for them. And I got involved in various things of that kind for other organizations around the state.

In many ways, I did. I will say that in recent years, I think that that's probably less the case. I don't serve on committees or programs like that much any more. I've painted several murals around on the island in, recently, in the last five, six, seven years. That sort of thing. Yeah. But I haven't served on boards or that kind of thing. Not that I have been rejected. I don't think I've been rejected. I just think it's partly that there are younger generations and there are other people involved and I'm an old codger by now. But I'm not asked all that much because I don't seek it out. I'm not out there appearing in public and so on, the way I was with the Center. I was talking to people constantly obviously, with speeches and --

I enjoyed it up to a point. I mean, I enjoyed it but it wasn't the greatest thing in my life. I didn't enjoy it in the sense that I wanted to become a politician. Gee, I ought to go in for that. I'll do that. No need for that at all.

EWC's Impact

The Mission

I'm pleased. I think I should mention what you probably come across in there someplace, that after I left the Center, and after I had been gone a fair while, first of all, Tom Hamilton who had become [UH] president, at one point asked me to make a review of the Center and let him know what was going on. And I did that and it was a favorable -- it wasn't unfavorable or anything.