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EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Frank Damon and Robert Kamins

Interview Narrative

1-16-2008 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.

Co-coordinators: Terese Leber and Phyllis Tabusa

Narratives Editor: Susan Yim Griffin

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Frank Damon and Robert Kamins
1-16-2008 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

Personal Background

FRANK DAMON: My family has lived in Honolulu for many years. I'm a retired lawyer, born in 1926. My great grandfather, Reverend Samuel C. Damon and his wife Julia arrived in Hawai'i in 1842. He was a Seaman's Chaplain in Honolulu until his death in 1885. He ministered to seagoing men but not to Hawaiians, as did all the other missionaries.

Samuel's son, my grandfather, Francis W. Damon, was born here in the islands. He was a linguist, proficient in Chinese, German and French. But his career was marked notably by his interest in people of Chinese ancestry.

He met and married Mary Happer, whose father was one of the first medical missionaries to China. Mary was fluent in the Chinese language. In her early years she lived in Canton, now Guangzhou. She probably spoke better Chinese than English.

Francis brought her back to Hawai'i. She became quickly known by the Chinese people. They had never seen a young, beautiful woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, who spoke fluent Cantonese. She made an immediate and life-long impact among the Chinese people.

Francis (although he was not a minister like his father) worked with Chinese immigrants and Mary ably assisted her husband in charitable projects. In 1878, King Kalakaua appointed Francis to the Hawaiian Legation in Berlin. There he learned the German language. While there, he studied the concept of early education for children.

Returning to Hawai'i in 1892, he and Mary founded the first free kindergarten (a German

word) for Chinese immigrant children in Honolulu, known today as the Kindergarten Children's Aid Association (KCAA). Today there are seven kindergartens supervised by the KCAA.

My father (the son of Francis), Cyril F. Damon, was an active businessman in Honolulu. He served on many charitable boards. He was president of the old Bishop Trust Company which no longer exists.

I'm a fourth-generation kama'aina and after early schooling in Hawai'i I graduated from Yale University and the University of Colorado Law School. In 1954, I was admitted to the Hawai'i Bar and then for five years I worked in Honolulu with a private law firm.

In 1959, Hawai'i became the 50th state of the union. One of our two new senators was of Chinese ancestry: Hiram L. Fong. Senator Fong asked me to serve as his administrative assistant in Washington D.C. I held this exciting post for almost three years and then returned to Honolulu with my family. His nephew, Wadsworth Yee, recommended me to Senator Fong. Mr. Yee was a fellow lawyer. In prior years, we were both presidents of the Junior Bar Association. (For lawyers under the age of 36!)

Then Governor William F. Quinn (a Republican) appointed me State Director of Labor and Industrial Relations, a cabinet position which I held for a year. Then in 1963, I decided to form my own law firm and I asked a longtime friend, Henry Shigekane, Class of '58 at Yale, to join me. We formed our firm of Damon & Shigekane in 1963. We understood that this was Hawai'i's first, *haole*-Asian law firm. Today the firm is Damon Key Leong Kupchak Hastert. We are 24 lawyers today.

I should include -- and I'm sure that Dr. Kamins will amplify this -- but we became a state in the summer of 1959 and that same summer Hiram Fong was elected as a

Republican Senator and Oren Long was elected as a Democratic Senator. I think later in this interview we can refer to the incredible impact of having senators of both parties in office in Washington at that particular time.

ROBERT KAMINS: Well, in contrast to Frank's family, mine is decidedly *malihini*. The youngest of three children, I was born and raised in Chicago, attended public schools there, then went off to start college at UCLA in 1936, returning two years later to enroll at the University of Chicago as a student in Economics.

In 1940 I received a B.A. and in 1950 a Ph.D. in that field of study. In between those degrees I had a variety of jobs, as a research assistant in the economics department at the University of Chicago, then as associate economist with the Board of Investigation and Research in Washington.

In 1942, I was commissioned in the U.S. Navy, trained and assigned as a gunnery officer, serving first in the Atlantic and then Pacific, until the end of World War II.

Returning to the U. of Chicago in 1944, I was well along on my doctorate when I got an unexpected phone call from Norman Meller, director of the Hawai'i Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB), then attached to the University of Hawai'i. He was looking for a specialist in public finance, which was my field. I accepted his offer and in 1947, with my wife and infant daughter, came to the Manoa campus.

My job had two parts. When the territorial legislature was not in session I served as a member of the Economics faculty, teaching and studying the tax system of Hawai'i.

During legislative sessions, we of the LRB moved to a ramshackle wooden structure on the grounds of Iolani Palace, where the Senate and House of Representatives then met.

There we worked seven-day weeks and long hours, serving legislative committees and

individual legislators by providing information they requested; drafting bills, resolutions, amendments, and reports.

For the legislature (and members of the public interested in what was going on), each weekend we prepared an index of all bills and resolutions before each house and a status table, showing where each measure was in the legislative process. All this provided intensive schooling in how a legislature works. When the legislature adjourned, the LRB returned to the Manoa campus to resume academic work.

In 1950, I succeeded Meller as director of the LRB when he shifted over to head the newly created Pacific Islands Program of UH.

At the convention, which met that year to draft what came to be called Hawai'i's Hope Chest Constitution, I made the acquaintance of Oren Long – he was then the temporary presiding officer of the convention, I serving the convention as its research director. It was that meeting, I believe, that after statehood was achieved and he was elected to the U.S. Senate, led Oren Long to invite me to come to Washington as his administrative assistant or “AA” for short. That's what we were called, a very humble-sounding title; it's now called “chief of staff.”

In any case, that's what Frank and I were in our respective offices. And, there -- well, this brings us to the threshold of something you want to talk about separately, which is what we did there.

Since that time, I've had a variety of jobs. Now that I look at it, it seems that I can't keep a job. I've been a visiting professor at the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague in 1953; researcher and then director of the Legislative Reference Bureau in 1947 to '59; administrative assistant to Senator Oren Long '59 to '61; back to Hawai'i to be a

professor of Economics, chairman of the department. Then, I became dean for Academic Development at the University of Hawai‘i, that was ’63 to ’71 and I found time in 1971 and ’72 also to be an East-West Center senior specialist with an office in Lincoln Hall, 1971, 1972.

And then I became a co-principal investigator at the University of Hawai‘i’s geothermal project which sought to find an alternative energy source -- that was in 1973 to ’77, then I went to law school here, got a law degree in 1979.

Following that, I became a legal consultant to the Hawai‘i State Energy office from 1979; briefly in law practice in Honolulu 1979 to 1983, then I became Legislative Counsel to Congressman Heftel, during 1983-85 specializing in tax matters, in Washington. I've since retired.

Founding of the EWC

Role of Hawai‘i’s U.S. Senators

FRANK DAMON: My good friend Bob Kamins and I did similar work for our senators, including supporting our senators by working on the East-West Center and other legislation. There were a few matters which affected only Hawai‘i, but there were many areas of national scope which were relevant.

We had been a Territory of the United States since the early 1900s. Hawai‘i had a non-voting representative in Congress. One of our tasks was to assist our senators regarding matters wherein Hawai‘i’s interests had been omitted from consideration because we were a territory and not a state. In addition, we drafted correspondence to and from Hawai‘i for the senators’ signatures. In effect we were the second-in-command to our senators. We also worked with staff members of other senatorial offices. For example,

there were maritime issues unique to Hawai‘i and Alaska.

When Alaska actually attained statehood before Hawai‘I, there was the perception in Congress that Hawai‘i had a communist influence in one of its labor unions, the ILWU. However, once Alaska was admitted to statehood, regardless of these perceptions, Hawai‘i went sailing through.

It was also advantageous to Hawai‘i to have both a Republican and a Democrat in the Senate. The Republican could reach the staff of President Eisenhower and the Democratic senator could reach important Democrats such as Lyndon Johnson who was then president of the Senate.

ROBERT KAMINS: Well, first of all, on the Alaska-Hawai‘i connection, I think it was something even more fundamental than a concern about communism in Hawai‘i that held off statehood for Hawai‘i and made it necessary, politically necessary, to have Alaska come first.

That was the fear of many in the leadership of the Democratic Party that Hawai‘i – judged by its old-time voting record – would elect Republicans to national office. And among the Republicans the fear about Alaska was the opposite, or really a mirror image. They were afraid that the preference for Democrats that Alaska had shown as a territory would continue as a state. It was necessary to deal with those fears, if either were to be granted statehood, and the easy way was to balance them off – admit both allegedly Republican Hawai‘i and supposedly Democratic Alaska.

Of course it turned out that they had it backwards. In recent years Alaska was electing more Republicans and Hawai‘i more Democrats. However, the road-block to statehood was removed.

Alaska has generally sent Republicans to Congress. The old track record of both territories fooled the experts.

That was the balancing act, one that you'll still see exhibited in the Congress of the United States. With respect to how it worked out, despite the predominance at the ballot box here of the Democratic Party in the late '60s and early '70s, Republican Hiram Fong was elected to the Senate along with Democrat Oren Long. I think it was simply the great appeal of Fong who had friends across the board, including leaders of the ILWU who were beholden to him.

And the subsequent elections of senators and representatives from Hawai'i show that while the predominant tone is Democratic, strong Republican candidates can also get elected.

FRANK DAMON: I agree with Bob. Senator Fong was highly respected as a successful lawyer and businessman. In his boyhood, he helped his family by catching fish which he sold to the fish markets in Honolulu. He also sold newspapers to help his family. His parents were born in China and immigrated to Hawai'i. But I want to enlarge on what Bob said. Oren Long was well-known too. He was a former governor of Hawai'i who was appointed when we were a Territory [*in 1951*].

Senator Long was an educator and once headed Hawai'i's Department of Education. He was a generous and amiable person and respected by Hawai'i's people. Senator Fong was loved too, but in a different way. Fong was very aggressive in the best way. Senator Long was quiet and utterly trustworthy.

That's what I meant when I said one as a Republican could reach certain senators and important officials in the Eisenhower administration and the other as a Democrat could

do the same with the Democrats.

ROBERT KAMINS: And that describes how we worked on our jobs in Washington, Frank and I. As newcomers, there was a lot of acquaintanceship to be made. Our bosses made connections with their fellow senators. We had to do that with respect to the people who could help us, inform us, amongst the Senate staff. I made -- and perhaps Frank did, too -- a special effort to get to know the people in the Alaska office and they were very helpful because they had been there for over a year and they knew how to get things done. As Frank has said, several bills had to be enacted to help Hawai'i fit into operations as a new state. Of particular interest to me was one that established the University of Hawai'i as a full "land-grant" college. It had been known as a land-grant college without land, because as a territory we had not been eligible under the Morrill Acts for that assistance from the federal government. We could get other grants, but no land. Now the Congress obligingly enacted legislation which provided funds in lieu of the land, because appropriate federal lands were not available in Hawai'i. That was the second year I was in D.C., I believe.

LBJ's Role/ Senate Bill 3385

ROBERT KAMINS: Then came the interesting, important, exciting question -- voiced by Lyndon Johnson: Why shouldn't there be an institute to connect the U.S. more broadly and intimately with the Asian and Pacific parts of the world? The University of Hawai'i then said, "Yeah, that's a good idea," and Professor Murray Turnbull was named to chair a faculty committee to plan such an institute. In Washington, our job with respect to the proposal was simply to help it along by serving as an information source and to keep Senate offices interested in the idea, talking

with other AA's so they could keep their bosses informed. When a bill was introduced we helped by going around to get senators' signatures on it. There I worked particularly with Bobby Baker.

He was the AA or chief of staff of Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson. He had the same job title as Frank and I, but in a very powerful office, and one of the things an AA did was to keep his senator posted on what was going on, what was hot. And so it was important to keep in touch with Baker, reminding him of the need for legislation.

When a bill was drafted – Senate Bill 3385 it became – to create an East-West Center, its initial sponsors were Senators Long and Fong of Hawai'i and Senator Lyndon Johnson of Texas. That put the Majority Leader's license plate on the bill, and with it, it was easy to get more senators as introducers. SB 3385 went before the Senate with half of its members – a most unusually large sponsorship – as its introducers.

[Editor's note: Robert Kamins is asked what his reactions were when Lyndon Johnson proposed creating the East-West Center.]

Well, it wasn't very high on my consciousness. I must have been aware of it because we used to get the newspapers from Honolulu and had frequent conversations with the people, the staff back in Honolulu. But, I didn't remember any emphasis on that.

But, as soon as it came up, obviously, it was a good thing to do, and particularly when the University made a very rapid response to it. However, what became obvious is that the University and Lyndon Johnson were talking about somewhat different kinds of institutions. Lyndon Johnson seemed to be thinking of an East-West Center [being] of course in Honolulu, but one in which people from other countries could learn about America, admire America, become close to America, and come to use American ways –

say in government or economics to their advantage – and to our mutual benefit in international relations.

The faculty committee here, from the very beginning, was thinking of a bilateral exchange in which Americans could also learn from the people who came from abroad. But that did not turn out, as far as I know, to be an obstacle. What did was the question of money to establish and run the Center. I don't know who took the initiative -- maybe you do Frank -- in having the governor of Hawai'i, Bill Quinn, Republican, of course, and a couple of his staff members, come to a conference with Lyndon Johnson at which our principals and we were present and they talked amicably.

But then Lyndon Johnson, who was a direct man, said to the governor and his associates, "About how much money do you think would be necessary to make this East-West Center work?" and they gave him a figure. I don't remember what the figure was but it was modest. And Johnson said, "Well, are we talking about a really good robust institution, or are we talking about some chicken shit operation?"

(Laughter)

FRANK DAMON: That shows how important this was, but should we print the words "chicken shit" in this report? Do you think you'd have to omit it?

ROBERT KAMINS: That's what makes the point. It illustrates the process, it illustrates the personality and...

FRANK DAMON: Nobody had a more bawdy tongue than Senator Johnson.

[Frank Damon is asked about his reactions when Johnson proposed establishing the East-West Center.]

FRANK DAMON: There was no rumble in Hawai'i about the Center and certainly not in our

Washington office. But then the University of Hawai‘i went into action and sent staff and faculty members to Washington to gain the support of senators and representatives. One University official was Charles (“Chuck”) Engman. He came early and often to Bob Kamins’ and my office and to that of many other senators. He did well.

After the bill to create the Center was drafted, he and other officials from the University joined Bob Kamins and me going to senatorial offices urging support for this concept -- getting on the “bandwagon” so to speak – Republicans by our office and Democrats by Senator Long’s.

I have a picture at home which shows Chuck Engman, Senator Fong and me. Charles Engman must be his proper name and I think he was on the engineering faculty.

ROBERT KAMINS: Yes, Engineering. He and the others from UH brought a lot of useful information on how the University would work in conjunction with the East-West Center and became good lobbyists for creating the Center.

FRANK DAMON: Chuck did a great job promoting the East-West Center. He was doing much of what Bob and I did. He spent more time (in my opinion) working with the Senate than any other person from Hawai‘i. *[A note on Charles A. Engman appears at the end of this transcript.]*

[Damon and Kamins reminisced as they looked through “East-West Papers,” a gray-bound volume of Congressional documents about the founding of the Center. Robert Kamins’ signature (as verified by Kamins himself during this interview) appears on the first page of the book but he is not sure how it came to be compiled or how it ended up at EWC. Research Information Services obtained the “East-West Papers” from Alumni

Officer Gordon Ring, who used to work for the EWC President's Office under President Kleinjans. Gordon doesn't remember the book's origins either.]

FRANK DAMON: *[Pointing to a bill in the "East-West Papers"]*

This is Senate Bill 3385. It's such an incredible document. I mean, here is a bill that was signed by 49 senators. One more and it would have been half the Senate. It was important that Oren Long introduced it because Senator Johnson had the majority of Senate Democrats behind him. Senator Fong obtained the support of Republican senators, including Dirksen of Illinois who was the most powerful Republican. Other senators included Mansfield, Wiley, Moss, McCarthy, Muskie and Humphrey.

[Senate Bill 3385, authorizing the establishment of the East-West Center, was introduced in the Senate on April 19, 1960.

Damon and Kamins are asked if they worked closely with then U.S. Representative Daniel Inouye on the Senate Bill creating the East-West Center.]

FRANK DAMON: No, he was not involved in this bill. He served in the House of Representatives at the time. The East-West Center bill was included with other proposed legislation and it passed by the House without any comment.

I want to add that matters early on were under the jurisdiction of the Department of Interior. Hawai'i had a very close relationship with Alaska which was under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. So, on Bob's and my level, we worked with Alaskans before we became a state.

I can't give you specific instances, but I think that that relationship with the Department of Interior went back into our territorial days.

I believe Harold Ickes headed that entity.

ROBERT KAMINS: Yeah, he was Secretary of the Interior.

FRANK DAMON: I'm sure that Long and Fong had a relationship with Ickes.

ROBERT KAMINS: Ickes goes back to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

FRANK DAMON: And I remember that Ted Stevens, because he's a U.S Senator from Alaska today, and that close relationship with Hawai'i is history. He and Senator Fong were close friends. They worked together on legislation after he became senator, which was a long time ago.

These senatorial names are bringing back my memory. I think particularly of Senator Allott of Colorado. I was interested in him because that's where I went to law school and I knew the senator quite well. Others were national figures. George H. W. Bush's father [*Senator Prescott Bush of Massachusetts*] was there – as well as others who were nationally well-known such as Johnson of course, Dirksen, Mansfield, Humphrey and Muskie from Maine. Even though Maine, politically, was not a strong state, Muskie was a strong senator. Hubert Humphrey later ran for president. He was well-known, as were Yarborough, Clarke, Douglas, Morris, Murray and Ernest Gruening was an Alaskan senator and Bartlett was the second Alaskan senator.

[Damon and Kamins are asked which senators besides Johnson, who was the leader in the passage of the Senate Bill 3385, were helpful in moving the bill forward.]

FRANK DAMON: [Robert] Byrd of West Virginia had been in the Senate for 30 or more years. He was powerful although that's not a powerful state. Bartlett and Gruening were the two Alaska senators and they were important; and McNamara, Jackson, Sparkman (Alabama) -- this is an example -- that the senator from Colorado, Allott, though not a powerful senator, he and Senator Fong were good friends. And I know that

made a difference. And I had friends in his office.

Bipartisanship in U.S. Senate, 1960s

ROBERT KAMINS: The Senate and I suppose the House, too, at that time, seemed to be so full of brotherly love compared to how it is now.

FRANK DAMON: Well, I can enlarge on the Senate's high regard for Senator Fong in a dramatic way. First, he was the first Asian elected to the U.S. Senate, which then was a Caucasian body. On the Senate floor the Democrats sat on the left and the Republicans on the right. The phrase "the other side of the aisle" refers to the aisle between the two parties.

What I emphasize was the feeling of *aloha* that the other senators had for Hawai'i's two senators. An incredible example of this occurred during Senator Fong's first speech on the floor of the Senate. This came after the East-West Center bill was passed. Senator Fong was giving his maiden speech. This was in 1960 and he was speaking about a bill on immigration. Senator Fong was a powerful orator. What happened next was dramatic. There was a handful of Senators present – Democrats and Republicans, perhaps eight or 10 from each party. Bob and I were allowed to be on the floor of the Senate in those days, in the background.

ROBERT KAMINS: Well, you can come up to your senator's desk if you had something to tell or ask him.

FRANK DAMON: I remember watching Senator Fong give the speech. First, one Democrat walked across the aisle and sat closer to Senator Fong. I heard later that this had never happened before. His voice carried and his diction was excellent. (After all, he graduated from Harvard Law School!) But here was someone who, as a small boy, sold

fish and newspapers on the streets of Honolulu, who became a U.S. Senator. Senator Long had the respect of all of Hawai'i's people, but Senator Fong was Asian, a Chinese. He could have been Japanese, but that came later. So then several Democrats "crossed the aisle" and sat close to Senator Fong during the speech.

A few more Democratic senators crossed the aisle and sat close to him. Other Republicans moved and sat close to Senator Fong. I learned later from other Senate staffers that this had never happened before. Not only was it a great tribute to Senator Fong, but he was the new senator from Hawai'i and of Asian ancestry. I can visualize it even today.

I was just absolutely amazed and heard many colleagues nearby commenting, "Wow! Look at that!"

The subject was immigration. But, in my opinion, it could have been any subject. It was the fact that he was on his feet, talking their language and, boy, he was eloquent. I'll deviate here -- I remember this incident in his office because Bob would have the same feeling. In Washington, there was a reporter there representing the [Honolulu] Advertiser named Walter Priest, I think, and a reporter from the [Honolulu] Star-Bulletin. His name was Frank and his last named began with an "H". They weren't from Honolulu.

One day, the Star-Bulletin reporter came to our office and said, "Well, Senator Fong this, Senator Fong that, what's he doing?" And then he looked at me and says, "Does he speak English?" And I said, "Does he speak English? He's a graduate of Harvard Law School. Where did you go to school?" And I don't remember his answer. I was really angry at him and he got mad at me, I guess. He thought he was being so cute and I thought he was being totally off-base.

ROBERT KAMINS: Well, that was out-of-key with what was going on in the Senate of the United States then because the reaction of Hiram's maiden speech was more like it. The general circumstance was that the politics had been worked out by Alaska and Hawai'i, so bipartisan balances were not threatened -- always a disturbing thing in a legislative body.

So, that left an opportunity for the senators to enjoy what they had done and what had happened to the United States which had now moved in terms of its statehood all the way out to the Pacific. There was good feeling about it. And I think that was part of the reason that we were so welcomed, that and the fact that, as I recall, maybe the Hawai'i Statehood Commission -- somebody or other -- arranged for the distribution of large cans of pineapple juice to senatorial offices. (laughter)

There was a good feeling! We were welcomed.

FRANK DAMON: Let me just add. We can laugh at that, but it meant something to the receivers of this because here was something very special from Hawai'i that certainly didn't happen everyday. In fact, I'd later receive calls from other administrative assistants about it. I'm sure that both senators received calls from their counterparts. There was just such *aloha* for Hawai'i at that time!

ROBERT KAMINS: I think the Matson Navigation Company contributed goodies too.

FRANK DAMON: Oh, they did. I remember the Matson people, the Matson lawyer, Willis Deming. Matson was interested in our two senators. Perhaps regarding keeping the sea lanes open...

EWC's Impact

ROBERT KAMINS: Well, I have some feelings -- good feelings about a personal relationship

with this Center. Through it, I met some marvelous people, for example a fellow named Kuba, from the University of Okinawa. He became a friend and later on, I was visiting Okinawa, we expanded on that friendship. His wife was a good artist; she drew an excellent portrait of my wife which still hangs in our living room.

And then, in the Economics Department, very quickly after the formation of the East-West Center, there was increasing connection between members of the department and students who came either through the Center or the Center was what made them hear of the University of Hawai'i. The [increase of] academic traffic was very noticeable and helped the Econ Department and I'm sure its counterpart can be found in other academic departments. So, I had a good feeling about it.

FRANK DAMON: Well, I don't have the same kind of examples that Bob has just given us, but I do remember very often, after I returned from Washington, I was lucky to be asked as a speaker before Rotary clubs.

[A Note on Charles E. Engman

Charles Engman was assistant to the vice president for Administration, William Wachter, in 1959 when the University of Hawai'i formed a Committee on the East-West Center. Engman, as a member of the committee, served as the University's liaison with the U.S. Congress, government agencies and other organizations which could lend support for the proposed Center.

Engman left UH in 1962 to join the University of Wisconsin at Madison as its vice president for Administration. In 1974 he was recognized as one of UH's Distinguished Alumni. Engman graduated from UH in 1949 and served as a professor of engineering there from 1951 to 1955 and from 1957 to 1959.]

