

A Tribute to Patsy Takemoto Mink

INTRODUCTION

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Patsy Takemoto Mink's life generated a wave of praise for her work as a congressional and community leader. Upon her passing, numerous politicians, women's groups and civil rights organizations reflected on her lifelong accomplishments, celebrating what an inspiration she had been to women and minorities throughout Hawai'i and the nation. As the first woman of color in Congress, Patsy committed her life to fighting for women's rights and the rights of the poor and disenfranchised. Through her resounding voice, she ensured that the voices of those whom society had silenced would be heard. Yet, Patsy did more than speak about these causes—her life's work was a testament to what she believed in and spoke so vehemently about in public. Patsy's dedication to social justice was extraordinary. For even when the tide of public opinion was against her, she held steadfast to her beliefs and to her mission.

Even after her death, her life continues to inspire people who sought to ensure her enduring legacy. In early 2003, four young women of color inspired by Patsy's work—Tannaz Simyar, Della Au Belatti, Annie Lee and Tania Cruz—with the guidance of Professor Eric Yamamoto and support of Dean Lawrence Foster, conceived of and organized a tribute to Patsy to celebrate her many accomplishments and also to continue the social justice mission she began so many years earlier. On March 13, 2003, the William S. Richardson School of Law hosted "A Tribute to Patsy Mink." The event, while paying tribute to Patsy, was far more than that. With former Chief Justice Richardson and Patsy's husband John and daughter Gwendolyn there, along with judges, attorneys, professors, students, politicians, community leaders and the media, the event centered discussion on government national security restrictions of civil liberties. It was a direct extension of Patsy's work. In addition to recognizing Patsy's many accomplishments, such as co-authoring Title IX, the organizers sought to celebrate Patsy's life by discussing the issues they believed Patsy would have embraced had she

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been there. As a vocal opponent of the Vietnam War, Patsy dedicated her life to bringing peace to Americans. In her final days, she expressed grave concern over government's Post-September 11th civil liberties restrictions in the name of national security. As a tribute to her, the organizers believed it appropriate to focus the night on the examination and discussion of those very issues. John Trasvina, an Adjunct Professor at the Stanford Law School, spoke and led a discussion about the effects of the USA Patriot Act on the rights of both citizens and non-citizens, with a presentation entitled, "Peace, Justice and Civil Liberties After September 11."

Since Patsy devoted her political life to transforming her powerful rhetoric into social action, the student organizers also decided to "act" on the event's words of tribute. They created the Patsy Takemoto Mink Legislative Fellowship to send a University of Hawai'i law student to Washington, D.C. to work for the summer in Congress. They wanted Patsy's legacy to support the political education of a Hawai'i law student committed to social justice work. They garnered contributions from law firms, bar associations, the state democratic party and, most important, Patsy's friends and admirers. A selection committee chose Van Luong, who with her family emigrated from Vietnam through the rice fields of Cambodia, to be the first Mink Fellow. She will work with Congressperson Ed Case, who was elected in 2003 to the House position Patsy long occupied. Luong's outstanding academic record, her work with the Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission and her scholarly writing on reparations for historic injustice made her the perfect inaugural fellow—one inspired by Patsy's words and deeds, one connecting Asia and the Pacific to all of the United States.

Patsy's earlier words guided the innovative spirit of the Tribute's creation of this fellowship—one of the first student social justice fellowships for Congressional offices: "It is easy enough to...be consistently with the majority . . . but it is more important to be ahead . . . and this means being willing to cut the first furrow in the ground and stand alone for a while if necessary." Indeed, it is these words about cutting the first furrow in the ground of justice that form the epigraph to Patsy's mini-biography by Esther K. Arinaga and Rene E. Ojiri in the book *Called from Within: Early Women Lawyer's of Hawai'i*. That biography, which is reproduced below, traces Patsy's life from her humble immigrant-family beginnings to her dynamic political life in Hawai'i and in Washington, D.C. through the early 1990s. As Arinaga and Ojiri observe about Patsy's political as well as personal philosophy, "challenging the power structure and questioning orthodoxy are not simply acts of moral courage; they are

the essential obligations of every citizen in a democratic nation.” It is this courage and this sense of obligation that drove Patsy to her extraordinary achievements not only for Hawai‘i’s people but also for the nation itself. It is this same melding of idealism and commitment that endures in the Mink-inspired social justice work yet to come.

Patsy Takemoto Mink*

December 6, 1927-September 28, 2002

ESTHER K. ARINAGA AND RENE E. OJIRI

It is easy enough to vote right and be consistently with the majority . . . but it is more often more important to be ahead of the majority and this means being willing to cut the first furrow in the ground and stand alone for a while if necessary.

-- Patsy Mink
Honolulu Star-Bulletin,
October 8, 1975

In 1964 she seemed an unlikely candidate for national political office, and her election late in that year to the United States Congress, observed one historian, “broke every rule of American politics: she was Japanese, she was a woman, and she was married to a white man (haole).”¹ The historian might have added that she was also petite, articulate, and outspoken.

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¹ Gavan Daws, *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968), 393.

The odds against her election did not deter Patsy Takemoto Mink in 1964, nor have they ever kept her from making difficult political choices in a career spanning almost four decades. In her view, challenging the power structure and questioning orthodoxy are not simply acts of moral courage; they are the essential obligations of every citizen in a democratic nation.

Early in her career Patsy grasped the full significance of the interplay between law and politics. Politics was “the understanding that there is a larger society to which we have a greater responsibility and for which we must work.”² Training in the law provided the rules and principles she applied when taking stands on such controversial issues as flag burning, the Vietnam War, nuclear testing, equal educational opportunity for women, and excessive government secrecy. Her law degree became an immediate and useful symbol of respect, a tool for legal as well as political action, and a reserve for the fallow days when she was out of political office.

For her beliefs Patsy Mink risked censure from her colleagues and members of her own political party. Her style and tenacity, and her words and actions, evoke intense admiration—and occasional dismay—from her supporters and arouse anger in her critics. Like the proverbial *daruma* doll,^{*} throughout her career she has always managed to rebound from criticism, defeat, and bitter disappointment with renewed energy and vigor, taking on new causes and plunging headlong even into those places where she is told she is unwelcome.

Patsy was born on December 6, 1927, in Hāmākua Poko, Maui, the site of a large sugar plantation. Her childhood was idyllic and pastoral, yet the experience of growing up in a small plantation community on the island of Maui, where lines of class, race, and social status were clearly drawn, undoubtedly shaped the contours of her later social and political views.³ While many of the other Japanese-Americans in the area lived in

² Patsy Takemoto Mink, “The Meaning of Politics,” in *Five Asian and Pacific Perspectives on Educational Policy*, comments delivered at the April 1980 conference of the National Association for Asian and Pacific American Education in Washington, D.C. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 3 (hereafter Mink, *Perspectives*).

^{*} A pear-shaped Japanese doll often displayed in shops and advertised as “good luck,” as it rights itself when knocked over.

³ General information on Patsy Mink’s early life and political career was obtained from interviews with her (notes on file with the writers); from “Patsy Mink: Career Chronicle, 1986,” interview by George Simson, transcript, Friends of Patsy Mink, Honolulu (hereafter “Career Chronicle”); and from Anne Russell, “Patsy Takemoto Mink: Political Woman” (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1977).

humble plantation camps segregated by race, her family enjoyed a comfortable cottage surrounded by two acres of land.⁴ Pigs, chickens, rabbits, and turkeys roamed the yard and provided food. Patsy and her brother, Eugene, who was a year older, went on excursions into nearby mountains to pick edible mushrooms and bamboo shoots. Their father, Suematsu Takemoto, was a land surveyor for the East Maui Irrigation Company, a subsidiary of the plantation, and it was his position as a professional civil engineer that furnished the family with such perquisites as the spacious family home and the use of a company automobile.

Patsy's parents were both second-generation Japanese-Americans who spoke English at home, lapsing into Japanese only when her maternal grandparents visited. Her father was born on Kaua'i in 1898 to a family beset with personal tragedies. His mother died in childbirth, and four of his brothers and sisters died at an early age, including one brother who drowned in a plantation reservoir. When Patsy's father was nine years old, his father died unexpectedly, leaving two orphaned sons. A family cared for Suematsu Takemoto, and with the help of a kind minister, Suematsu obtained a scholarship to Mills School, a Christian boarding high school in Honolulu (now Mid-Pacific Institute). After graduation in 1918, he spent a year in the United States Army and then entered the University of Hawaii, completing a degree in civil engineering in 1922, the first Japanese-American to achieve that distinction at the university.

Despite the many advantages offered by his position with the plantation, Takemoto experienced the humiliation often borne by "onlys" of that period.⁵ The lone Japanese-American on an otherwise all-white

⁴ Plantation communities were carefully designed, with the manager's large residence usually located at the top of a hill. Directly below were the homes of white employees, including those of the Portuguese *lunas* (overseers). Below these homes were the workers' camps, segregated by race (usually Japanese, Korean, and Filipino). Sakae Takahashi, who grew up on a plantation camp in west Kaua'i, recalls that in his camp only the homes of white workers had sidewalks. Interview with Sakae Takahashi in Honolulu, Feb. 5, 1991.

For a discussion of community life and culture in the plantation camps, see Ronald Takaki, *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii 1835-1920* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983). For a work of fiction on Japanese-American life in a plantation camp, see Milton Maruyama, *All I Asking For Is My Body* (San Francisco: Supa Press, 1975; rpt. with afterword by Franklin S. Odo, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988).

⁵ "Onlys" is an expression from the 1950s civil rights movement and refers to the African-Americans who stood out as the only professor or judge or public official in a group. The term is appropriate to describe the Asian-American of the 1920s and 1930s who was the only engineer, *luna* (overseer), or company storekeeper to work for a plantation.

managerial staff, he was passed over several times for the chief engineer's position and with each rejection suffered even greater indignity when asked to train the newly appointed chief engineer, usually a younger white man, an outsider with little knowledge of water or land matters on Maui. In 1945 Takemoto was once again denied promotion and faced the loss of certain previously held perquisites because of a change in managers. Usually a quiet, reserved man, he completely surprised his family by resigning his position. In the aftermath of World War II he seemed to sense that economic and social changes were in the offing. Without first consulting his wife and children, he decided to move his family to Honolulu, where he eventually opened his own land surveying company.

Patsy's maternal grandparents experienced the more typical hardships and adventures of first-generation immigrants. Their lives were marked by the same kind of energy and willingness to try the unknown that Patsy would later exhibit. She admired her grandfather, Gojiro Tateyama, who arrived in Hawai'i from Japan before the turn of the twentieth century to work as a sugar plantation field hand. He escaped from that bondage by moving to Maui, where he found work as a ditchman for the East Maui Irrigation Company at monthly wages of fifteen dollars. In time Tateyama ran a store, pumped gas, and delivered the United States mail for the entire backcountry of Maui.

Gojiro Tateyama met Patsy's grandmother, Tsuru, on Maui, where they were married. The couple lived for many years in a shack on a hillside near Waikamoi Stream. Most of their eleven children, including Patsy's mother, Mitama, were born in this remote community.

Mitama Takemoto, together with all of her five sisters, benefited from the kindness of William Pogue, who worked for the East Maui Irrigation Company in the early 1900's, eventually serving as manager of the company from 1914 to 1917. At his own expense Pogue enrolled the Tateyama girls in Maunaolu Seminary, a Christian girls' boarding school at Makawao, Maui. The school offered them the equivalent of an eighth-grade education, which included training in the domestic arts. The journey to and from school was on horseback, up and down steep valleys, so the girls returned home only once yearly. Like her husband, Mitama Takemoto thus spent part of her youth in a boarding school operated by white Christian teachers who served as surrogate parents during the long school year.

It was not until Patsy entered school that she became aware of the differences in her background and the privileged life-style she enjoyed. Her family home was set apart from the "camps" of plantation workers; her father had a college degree; her mother was a homemaker; English

was the household language; and there were only two children in her family, while her classmates often had six to eight siblings.

The gulf between Patsy and other Japanese-Americans consisted of more than geographic distance and economic status. She was a *sansei*, or third-generation ethnic Japanese, whose parents had different expectations of their two children. One generation removed from the immigration experience, Patsy escaped the confining role assigned to females of Japanese descent in that era; to be docile, ladylike, and deferential to the male members of the family and the wider community. While her parents expected her to acquire traditional female skills, such as cooking and sewing, they also encouraged her to be strong and assertive. Patsy recalls that she and her brother Eugene were always treated equally: “They never said that I couldn’t ride a bike. In fact, when my brother got one, the only difference was that since he was a year older he got his a year ahead . . . my mother and father led me to expect that if he had a bike, I’d have a bike.”⁶

Patsy and Eugene maintained a close relationship throughout childhood. Eugene included Patsy in football and baseball games with the “boys” and in later life became Patsy’s staunch supporter, bearing the burdens of her numerous political campaigns. Secure in his own career as a federal contract and procurement officer, Eugene prefers to work quietly behind the scenes. In retrospect Patsy has often wondered “how he tolerated his pushy little sister,”⁷ for after leaving Maui she discovered that other men, especially those she encountered in local and national politics, would not show her the same tolerance.

During childhood Patsy had no serious interest in law or politics. The field of medicine fascinated her from an early age, perhaps because she underwent surgery for appendicitis at age four. Her surgeon, Frank St. Sure, served as a role model throughout her school and college years. She envisioned a career in medicine. “From the time I was four, I thought I was going to be a doctor, and some may have laughed, but nobody ever said, ‘You can’t be a doctor.’”⁸

Patsy’s father seldom talked about political matters at home, but he followed local elections closely. On Maui, as elsewhere in Hawai‘i, the Republican party controlled county government and territorial legislative offices. Patsy remembers being “trundled off to election rallies” in

⁶ “Career Chronicle,” 5.

⁷ Interview with Patsy T. Mink in her congressional office in Honolulu on Dec. 10, 1990 (hereafter PTM interview).

⁸ “Career Chronicle,” 5.

Wailuku, then sitting Hawaiian-style on blankets or *goza* (grass cloth) mats under starlit skies and listening to Hawaiian music and endless speeches late into the night. Perhaps then she had her first inkling that “politics was an important thing, that being a citizen was important.”⁹

With an independence characteristic of her later years, Patsy insisted at age four that she was ready to start school a year earlier than the norm. Eugene was already in school and she missed his companionship. With special permission from the principal, she began attending class at Hāmākua Poko School with Eugene in her own “headstart” program with books, teachers, and more playmates than she had ever had before.

In the fourth grade Eugene and Patsy transferred to Kaunoa English Standard School, a move that likely first sensitized her to the issue of race. In 1924 the Territory of Hawaii, bending to pressure from the white community, had established a dual system of public education that in effect segregated white from nonwhite children.¹⁰ Admission to an English Standard School was determined by examination of a child’s ability to use English correctly. White (including Portuguese) children were routinely admitted, while nonwhite children, especially those on Maui, were most often denied entrance. In the mid-1930s 95 percent of the students at Kaunoa English Standard School were white. All of its teachers were white.¹¹

Mr. Takemoto’s superiors at work probably encouraged the transfer to Kaunoa School with good intentions, and both Eugene and Patsy passed the admission test easily. Patsy found the new school environment intimidating and unfriendly. Despite her excellent grades she felt unrecognized for her accomplishments. Travel to school required taking both the train and a bus. Few classmates lived nearby. She turned to books and the radio for companionship.

In an era without television, the radio provided a window to the outside world. Radio programs entertained and also brought closer to home tragedies occurring in far-off places. The fireside chats of Franklin

⁹ PTM interview.

¹⁰ Lawrence H. Fuchs, *Hawaii Pono: A Social History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 275-279.

¹¹ Russell, “Patsy Takemoto Mink,” 43. Harriette Holt, a classmate of Patsy’s at both Kaunoa English Standard School and Maui High School, confirms the make-up of Kaunoa’s student body and its teachers. Holt is a family court judge for the Second Circuit Court on Maui. Telephone interview with Harriette Holt, Feb. 8, 1991.

Delano Roosevelt enthralled Patsy and provided a lifelong model of democratic rhetoric. During long afternoons and weekends she read books out loud while perched in a tree, her voice ringing out the words of each character. Perhaps then she discovered the power of words and of speech. She read voraciously, drawn to books about leaders like Mahatma Gandhi. His nonviolent defiance of the status quo left an indelible imprint. A romantic notion soon took hold; Patsy began to picture herself as a medical doctor saving the poor and “untouchables” of India.

Memories of her unsatisfying years at Kaunoa English Standard School faded when Patsy entered Maui High School, where she soon discovered an interest in school politics. She probably did not realize it at the time, but certainly her intense desire to understand problems in society began in high school.

In her senior year Patsy was elected student body president. She recalls her decision to run against one of her best friends, Harriette Holt: “Like most of the decisions I’ve made in politics, it seemed like a good idea at that time. Why not? The football team backed me, that’s why I won.”¹²

Patsy was a sophomore in high school when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The effect of the war on the lives of ethnic Japanese in Hawai`i was bittersweet. On the one hand, they faced the humiliation of being identified with the enemy. Although no one of Japanese ancestry committed a single act of sabotage in Hawai`i, criticism of local Japanese intensified in the months following the attack. The Japanese community itself, largely out of fear and shame, began an almost systematic obliteration of cultural objects, customs, and institutions. Family heirlooms such as kimonos, shrines, and swords were put away or destroyed; language schools closed; churches shut down; and cultural associations disbanded.¹³ On the mainland United States nearly 120,000 Japanese, more than two-thirds of them American citizens, were incarcerated in makeshift relocation camps encircled with barbed wire. In contrast only 1,500 Japanese in Hawai`i were interned, some in mainland relocation camps and others in detention camps on O`ahu and the neighbor islands, but the erosion of language, culture, and heritage was still tragic for the islands’ Japanese community.¹⁴

¹² “Career Chronicle,” 5.

¹³ Fuchs, 304.

¹⁴ For a vivid and moving account of the hardships and injustices experienced by some of the Hawaii internees, see Patsy Sumie Saiki, *Ganbare! An Example of Japanese Spirit* (Honolulu: Kisaku, 1982).

On the other hand, the war opened doors previously closed to Japanese and other nonwhites in Hawai`i. Two conditions were pivotal to the social, economic, and political changes that occurred in the territory after World War II: (1) increased educational opportunities for nonwhites, who began to enter the professions, form their own businesses, and acquire ownership of land; and (2) the military service of Japanese-Americans in the highly decorated 100th Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Many of the veterans were *nisei*, or second-generation young men from plantation communities. They returned from battle with an awareness that in other places in the world white people were not all in positions of superiority: they held the menial jobs too. The veterans used the political process to change the economic and political status quo in Hawai`i. They would engineer the 1954 political revolution, the epic event that changed the course of Hawaii's history and set the stage for Patsy's own political career.¹⁵

The United States was still at war in 1944 when Patsy graduated from Maui High School as class valedictorian. She enrolled at the University of Hawaii and in her sophomore year was elected president of the Pre-Medical Students Club and chosen a member of the Varsity Debate Team. A career in medicine was still her goal; school politics and forensics had no real connection to life after college.

At the end of her sophomore year Patsy discovered that most of her friends were transferring to mainland colleges and universities for the fall term. Because of the war, few classmates had applied earlier for admission to schools outside of Hawai`i. In the summer of 1946 the first large exodus of students since 1941 would occur. Dismayed to learn that she would be left behind, in June Patsy decided to find a school that would admit her for the next term. Enlisting the aid of Allan Saunders, professor of political science at the University of Hawaii, she applied for admission to Wilson College, a small women's college in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Dr. Saunders was a personal friend of the president of the college. Despite the late application, the college accepted Patsy as a transfer student for the fall semester.

Soon after her arrival in Chambersburg, Patsy met with the president of the college in what turned out to be her first brush with mainlanders' ignorance about Hawai`i. Ushered to a large chair, she sat dumbfounded as the president explained that since English was not her

¹⁵ Fuchs, 305-307.

first language, she would probably have difficulty with her courses and in getting along with other students. He went on to say that although it was not customary to grant students a private room, the college would make an exception in her case. After the lengthy monologue Patsy finally uttered several sentences. She recalls his reaction. "He said, 'You speak English . . . well, in that case, you'll share a room with another student.'"¹⁶

The academic atmosphere at Wilson stifled Patsy. After one semester she made plans to transfer to the University of Nebraska. The college was not pleased, and she left "quietly in the dark of night" with her suitcase.

For Patsy the experience at Nebraska was a watershed in her lifelong battle against discrimination. At the university she engaged in her first campaign to challenge a policy of institutional racism. A midyear transfer student, she was at first pleased to obtain housing at International House on the campus. Her delight turned to anger when she discovered that the university's housing policy segregated white students from students of color. International House was a dormitory not only for foreign students from India, Turkey, and Hong Kong; it also housed American students who were black, Asian, and Hispanic. Only white students were permitted to live in the school's dormitories and in the fraternity and sorority houses.¹⁷

Galvanized into action, Patsy began a letter-writing campaign to the university's board of regents, to the campus newspaper, and to a local newspaper in Lincoln, Nebraska, to protest the policy of segregation. She gave talks, entered speech contests, and talked to anyone who would listen. She became, in her words, "the campus Mata Hari – somebody who was going to stir up trouble." What began as a personal revolt was soon transformed into a crusade, especially when she received support from students completely unknown to her. At their suggestion she ran for president of the Unaffiliated Students of the University of Nebraska, a "separate" student government for those who did not belong to fraternities, sororities, and regular dormitories. She was elected by a landslide. That very year the board of regents rescinded the school's discriminatory policy.

¹⁶ "Career Chronicle," 7. Saunders had actually discouraged Patsy from applying to Wilson College because he felt the school would be too "conservative" for her. Interview with Marion Saunders, widow of Dr. Saunders, in Honolulu, Jan. 20, 1991.

¹⁷ See Russell, 76-78, for an account of Patsy's Nebraska experience.

A serious thyroid condition requiring surgery shortened Patsy's stay at Nebraska. After the operation she remained in Hawai'i to recuperate and completed her final year of college at the University of Hawaii. In 1947-48 she still viewed medicine as a career goal, but there were indications that her interests were widening. She had a brief fling as a thespian, playing the role of the princess in Ferenc Molnar's play *The Swan*. The play was not successful, but it was instructive for Patsy to learn the difference between playing a role on stage and playing one's self in front of an audience. In her last semester she took part in the mock constitutional convention organized by students on campus. Elected secretary of the convention, she worked tirelessly on policy issues, reveling in the heady discussions that went on deep into the night.

In the spring of 1948 Patsy applied to more than a dozen medical schools, only to be rejected by all of them. Two factors working against her admission: (1) she was a woman, and at that time only two to three percent of an entering class were women; and (2) medical schools in that year were inundated with applications from returning war veterans.

The months following graduation were grim. Patsy recalls her feelings of "total futility." She worked briefly at Hickam Air Force Base as a clerk-typist.¹⁸ There was little to type, and her supervisor advised her to "look busy – type your name over and over again if you have to." She quit in disgust and by one of those amazing twists of fate found work at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, a small museum with an excellent collection of Eastern and Western art. Her supervisor was an urbane and cultured matron, J. Purdy Restarick. For the next two months Restarick served as Patsy's mentor, inspiring, instructing, and encouraging the bright but somewhat discouraged young woman. It was Restarick who suggested law as a career.¹⁹

Acceptance at any law school for the fall term seemed impossible in July 1948, but with the same kind of almost naive yet brash optimism that had gained her admission to Wilson College two years earlier, Patsy applied to the law schools at Columbia University and the University of Chicago. Saunders and Joel Trapido, drama professor at the University of Hawaii, submitted letters of recommendation. Columbia rejected her immediately, astonished that anyone would apply for admission only a few months before the term was to start. The University of Chicago

¹⁸ In the 1940s nonwhite college graduates in the liberal arts and sciences had limited job options and often turned to clerical work.

¹⁹ Mrs. Restarick's husband, Arthur Restarick, was the chief clerk of the First Circuit Court.

accepted her under its “foreign student quota.” Patsy did not tarry to dispute or correct the university’s classification of her status but quickly left for Chicago.

The University of Chicago in the late 1940s offered an intellectually stimulating environment, with eminent scholars in residence both at the law school and in other departments. Although Patsy found Chicago rather conservative and legal studies tedious, she admired master teachers like Edward Levi, who later became U.S. attorney general under President Gerald Ford. In the first-year class with Patsy was Edward H. Nakamura, a war veteran of Hawai‘i, who would later enjoy a distinguished career as a labor lawyer and as an associate justice of the Hawai‘i supreme court. He recalls that he and Patsy found law school “an intimidating experience,” as they faced “sharp minds, articulate students, and the Socratic method of inquiry.”²⁰

For relaxation from her legal studies, Patsy played bridge at International House. It was at the bridge table that she met her future husband, John Francis Mink. He remembers his first impressions of Patsy:

She spent a great deal of time in the lounge in the evenings, just socializing . . . she was the queen of International House. She orga-nized everything, all the parties . . . and had a coterie of people, generally of two types. The first type was the very brilliant Americans . . . physicists and lawyers . . . the other type was the foreigners from Egypt, Turkey, Iran . . . It was a galaxy of very bright personalities. As bridge players they were out of my league.²¹

Patsy agrees that John was “a terrible bridge player,” but she was attracted to his keen intellect and his ability to converse on a wide range of subjects. Many of his interests paralleled hers: science, reading, and national and international affairs.

John Francis Mink was born on June 3, 1924, in Mesquehoning, Pennsylvania, a small town in a mountainous rural area very much like Hāmākua Poko, Maui. His grandparents had been Czechoslovakian immigrants. He barely knew his father, who died when John was six years

²⁰ Interview with Edward H. Nakamura in Honolulu on Jan. 10, 1991. Associate Justice Nakamura retired from the Hawai‘i supreme court in December 1989.

²¹ “Career Chronicle,” 12.

old. The elder Mink had worked with John L. Lewis in early efforts to organize the United Mine Workers. With six children to support in the midst of the Great Depression, John's mother was forced to place all but her oldest child temporarily in an orphanage and go to work as a seamstress in a garment factory.

Military service as an air force navigator during World War II qualified John for veterans' educational benefits. He earned an undergraduate degree in geology at Pennsylvania State University and then went on to the University of Chicago to pursue a graduate degree in geophysics.

In January 1951, six months after their first meeting, John and Patsy were married at the University of Chicago. Patsy's parents opposed the marriage. They wanted Patsy to complete her law degree before considering marriage. Perhaps unspoken was their disapproval of John's racial background. As usual Patsy made a swift decision. "And really, I guess that was the reason we got married, because there did not seem at that point any way that I could convince them to approve, so we said, 'let's get married' . . . [and] that's what we did."²² A few months later, with their respective degrees in hand, they began to look for employment.

John found a job immediately with United States Steel Corporation. For Patsy the obstacles in 1951 were formidable: she was female, married, and an Asian-American. Unable to find work as an attorney, she returned to her student job at the University of Chicago Law School library.

The birth of their daughter, Gwendolyn Rachel (Wendy), in 1952 prompted John and Patsy to think seriously of returning to Hawai'i. An oppressive heat wave in Chicago and Wendy's prickly heat rash led to another quick decision. Without even notifying Patsy's parents, John, Patsy, and Wendy left for Hawai'i in August of 1952.

John found a position with the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association,²³ while Patsy first had to prove that she was eligible to take the Hawai'i bar examination. Under a domicile law that required a woman to take the residency status of her husband, Patsy was now considered a resident of Pennsylvania and would have to reestablish her Hawai'i residency.irate, Patsy challenged the sexist statute. The attorney

²² Russell, 88. In the early 1950s, interracial marriages, especially between Asian-Americans and whites, were often looked upon with disfavor by parents of Asian background.

²³ The Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association (HSPA) was organized in 1895 by sugar plantations to conduct experiments to improve the production of cane.

general then reversed his earlier denial and ruled that since she had not ever physically resided in Pennsylvania, she had not assumed her husband's domicile.

Even with her admission to the bar in June 1953 Patsy failed to obtain work as an attorney in the private or public sector. Prospective employers believed that attorneys were expected to work long hours and that women "should not be out late at night." When interviewers learned that she had a child, they rejected her without further consideration, even if she explained that she had adequate care for Wendy. They were concerned that she might have "another child."²⁴ With help from her father, Patsy turned to solo practice. She opened her law office, furnished with borrowed pieces, in downtown Honolulu. Despite news stories announcing that she was the first Japanese female admitted to practice law in the Territory of Hawaii, few clients materialized. To augment her income and to fill time, she took court-appointed cases and lectured in business courses at the University of Hawaii. Her early cases were those that established law firms traditionally avoided: criminal, divorce, and adoption cases.

Although Patsy had long admired the rhetoric and democratic ideals of political leaders like Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Adlai Stevenson, she had never taken an interest in party politics. A chance invitation to attend a series of meetings on platform reform sponsored by the Democratic party in Honolulu opened the door at last to organized politics. With time and energy to spare, she moved from platform reform to the reorganization of the Democratic party with an astute recognition that the party needed more young people in its ranks.

For more than a half-century the Republican party had ruled Hawai'i, its members mostly white businessmen who controlled not only government but also the economic life of the islands. During World War II not a single Japanese-American held legislative office. When Patsy returned to Hawai'i in the early 1950s, there were already signs that a major political upheaval was in the offing. The diminishing influence of the Republican party was evident in the territorial legislature. In 1952 seventeen Japanese-Americans, most of them Democrats, were elected to the House of Representatives. A significant number were returning war veterans who had served with either the 100th Battalion or the 442d Regimental Combat Team.²⁵

²⁴ PTM interview. Not only women had difficulty finding jobs during this period. Nonwhite attorneys usually sought work in the public sector or opened their own law offices.

²⁵ Fuchs, 321-322.

In the years immediately following the end of World War II, the Democratic party had suffered from problems of weak leadership and inner dissension. Conservative Democrats, including Governor Ingram Stainback, feared the rising influence of the labor unions, especially the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), which had begun to capture an increasing number of party offices and convention delegate slots. Small independent factions with allegiances to individuals like John A. Burns, who would later become governor of Hawai'i, formed a third group within the party. As elsewhere in the United States, the specter of Communist party affiliation loomed over Democrats, and both party conservatives and some independents sought to distance themselves from ILWU leaders who were considered "suspect."²⁶

Patsy was scarcely involved in these early intraparty struggles. Her efforts were geared to changing party rules on O'ahu to allow more participation by young Democrats. She started the Everyman Organization, a group that served as the nucleus of the Young Democrats club on O'ahu. In time a network of clubs was established on all islands, and Patsy was elected chairman of the territory-wide Young Democrats, a group that would wield a remarkable influence over Hawaiian politics for several decades.

The 1954 election confirmed the decline of the Republican party's influence and control in Hawai'i. The Democrats captured more than two-thirds of the seats in the House of Representatives and more than a simple majority of the senate seats. Almost one-half of the legislative offices were won by Japanese-American males. A "revolution" had occurred in Hawaiian politics.²⁷

During the 1954 campaign Patsy had worked almost full time on John A. Burns's bid to replace Elizabeth P. Farrington as Hawaii's delegate to Congress.²⁸ His narrow defeat in light of the Democratic sweep disappointed Patsy, but the exhilaration of the campaign lingered.

A stint as a staff attorney during the 1955 legislative session gave Patsy the opportunity to draft statutes and to observe firsthand the workings of a legislature. Disappointed with the work of several legislators, in 1956 she decided to run for a seat in the territorial House of

²⁶ See Sanford Zalburg, *A Spark is Struck: Jack Hall and the ILWU* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), for the ILWU's influence on politics during this period.

²⁷ Fuchs, 308-322.

²⁸ Elizabeth P. Farrington was the widow of Joseph R. Farrington, former delegate to Congress from Hawaii.

Representatives. On the surface it seemed a rash decision. Patsy recalls: “I faced overwhelming odds: I was not from a political family, and I had no visible support in the community, no organizational support.”²⁹ Few party regulars believed she was “electable,” since she was both female and Japanese-American.

With only a handful of supporters, Patsy walked a district that encompassed more than one-half of the land area of O`ahu and included about one-half of the island’s population. She spoke directly with voters in a door-to-door campaign quite unlike the typical campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s, which relied on large rallies. She promised good government, and her law degree provided “instant respectability.” “It was important to be a lawyer . . . it eliminated questions of Can she do it? Is she smart enough? . . . Will she be able to articulate what we need? And the fact of being a lawyer answered all that.”³⁰ In this first election the Democratic party did not oppose Mink’s candidacy; rather it looked upon her entry into politics with a patronizing concern that she would be defeated – a trivializing, “poor thing” attitude. Her election by a wide margin surprised everyone. She led the ticket of five representatives elected from the Fifth District. She was the first Japanese-American woman elected to the territorial legislature.

On her first day in office Patsy gave notice that her interests went beyond the parochial concerns of a district representative. She put forth a resolution protesting nuclear testing by the British in the South Pacific. Sakae Takahashi, her colleague in the House and later president of the Senate, recalls that members who opposed the resolution believed that the issue was one more properly handled at the federal level.³¹ The resolution passed, but not without public outcry. A radio commentator known for his reactionary views labeled Patsy a “communist pinko” and “fellow traveler,” probably because the ILWU also supported the testing ban.³²

In 1958, after a single term in the House, Patsy decided to run for a seat in the territorial Senate. Several well-financed male candidates had already received the party’s blessings, so her announcement met with a cool reception. Party regulars criticized her “switch” and suggested that her lack of funds guaranteed defeat.

The Senate campaign was another watershed in Patsy’s life: her determination to run despite the party’s opposition marked the beginning

²⁹ Russell, 108.

³⁰ “Career Chronicle,” 19.

³¹ Takahashi interview.

³² Russell, 111.

of the party's recurring unhappiness with her independent decisions. They viewed her unwillingness to adhere to party preferences as a reflection of her raw ambition and questionable loyalty. Early in the campaign the ILWU had endorsed Patsy's candidacy but later withdrew its support after she rejected a union flyer intimating that she supported the union's sharp criticism of several fellow candidates. Despite the lack of party support, Patsy easily won election to the Senate.

On the eve of statehood, territorial legislators wrestled with a wide range of social and economic programs. Their decisions on housing, education, welfare assistance, workers' compensation, unemployment benefits, and a revised tax structure shaped the new society envisioned by liberal Democrats. Patsy authored the landmark "equal pay for equal work" law. As chairman of the Senate Education Committee, she applied her considerable energy and her interest in the welfare of children to scrutinize the Department of Education. Sakae Takahashi, who served as vice-chairman, remembers that "she was adamant about improving the educational system."³³ He believes that more funds per capita were spent on education during the 1958-59 term than at any time prior to or since that session.

Statehood in 1959 brought opportunities to engage in national politics. For the special election that year Hawai'i had two seats in the United States Senate and one seat in the House of Representatives. Patsy filed early for the House seat and until a few days before the filing deadline was the lone Democratic candidate. Daniel K. Inouye, a Japanese-American war veteran and attorney, whose political career closely paralleled Patsy's, had already announced for the U.S. Senate, but Democratic party leaders, like John Burns, favored Oren E. Long for the Senate seat. Long was a former governor of Hawai'i and a respected party elder.

Inouye was pressured to withdraw and to run instead for the House.³⁴ He complied. Although there had been no prior agreement between Patsy and Dan about the race for Congress, their friendship cooled when Dan announced his candidacy for the House seat. With

³³ Takahashi interview. The department felt besieged as Patsy demanded a school-by-school inventory of books and equipment, down to the number of pianos each school possessed. Inequities among schools suggested a misuse of funds and misguided departmental policies.

³⁴ Sakae Takahashi recalls that he was the "messenger" from Jack Burns and Dan Aoki, who convinced Dan Inouye to withdraw from the senate race. Among the reasons given: Dan was still young, with his entire career before him. Long, on the other hand, was in his twilight years and, as a good soldier for the party, deserved the honor.

strong party support and a record of heroism during World War II, Dan easily defeated Patsy in the primary election and went on to win the general election, thereby becoming the first Japanese-American to serve in the U.S. Congress. Disappointed by both Dan and the party, Patsy returned to the practice of law. Within a few years, however, Dan and Patsy would find themselves working together in Washington on issues vital to Hawai'i—Dan, as United States senator, and Patsy as United States representative.

As vice president of the National Young Democratic Clubs of America, Patsy was invited to serve on the Drafting Committee of the 1960 Democratic National Convention's Platform Committee. It was a heady experience to meet Eleanor Roosevelt and Adlai Stevenson, two Democrats she had long admired. Selected the lead speaker for civil rights, she felt both exultation and fright as she addressed the tumultuous convention. Her closing text included these words: "If to believe in freedom and equality is to be a radical, then I am a radical."³⁵

The convention experience convinced Patsy that she needed a political base. In 1962 she won election to the state Senate and soon turned again to the hope of a national office. With reapportionment, two seats for the Congress were open in 1964. Dan Inouye had moved up to the United States Senate in 1962. Spark Matsunaga was now the incumbent for one House seat. Three other Democrats, including Patsy, vied for nomination in the primary. Again Patsy was not the party favorite but, though underfinanced, she won both the primary and general elections. On January 4, 1965, she was sworn in by Speaker John McCormack as the first Asian-American woman elected to the Congress. She would serve six consecutive terms.

In Washington she discovered that notions she had encountered two decades earlier as a student still prevailed. Some of her colleagues and the media supposed that she would fit their stereotype of an "Oriental woman who was supposed to walk twenty feet behind her husband and never accomplish anything on her own."³⁶ In a speech to Asian-American educators given several years after she left the Congress, she discussed the burden of stereotypes on Asian-Americans. "And so as we carry around this baggage of being quiet, self-demeaning, self-effacing, and acquiescent, it's extremely difficult for those who are impatient with that kind of stereotype to really make a stand on public issues without being

³⁵ Russell, 122.

³⁶ "Career Chronicle," 25.

labelled a radical or misfit.”³⁷ In an interview soon after her election, a Honolulu reporter asked Patsy whether she planned a new wardrobe for Washington, whether she would use tears to win a point in Congress, and whether beauty was an advantage for women in politics – all questions unlikely to be posed to a newly elected male member of Congress.³⁸

Patsy’s major achievements in the Congress between 1965 and 1977 underscore her commitment to domestic issues such as education, the environment, child care, open government, and equal opportunity. She introduced the first comprehensive Early Childhood Education Act (passed by Congress in 1971 but vetoed by President Richard Nixon), authored the Women’s Educational Equity Act, and supported the regulation of strip mining. As she had demonstrated in earlier days as a territorial and state legislator, her agenda was not confined to local issues. In response to criticism that she was estranged from her constituents’ views, she expressed confidence that voters would trust her judgment in support of legislation that would benefit the nation as well as the state.³⁹

Patsy Mink’s views on the Vietnam War are an example of her national and international consciousness. She was an early critic, vigorously denouncing the war as immoral, objecting to government policies of secrecy and misinformation, and demanding the cessation of bombing in North Vietnam. Most important, she underscored the neglect of domestic programs caused by the diversion of funds to the war effort.

Patsy describes her challenge to government secrecy as her most satisfying accomplishment during the Nixon presidency. In 1971, the Atomic Energy Commission authorization bill included plans for a project, code-named “Cannikin,” to detonate an underground nuclear explosion at Amchitka Island in the Aleutian chain. Patsy feared the blast might set off a destructive *tsunami* with serious consequences for Hawaii. Attempts to remove authority for the tests failed, and as she prepared an amendment to delete funding for the project, she learned of a small newspaper article suggesting that five government agencies had expressed criticism of the Cannikin project.⁴⁰

³⁷ Mink, *Perspectives*, 3.

³⁸ *Honolulu Advertiser*, Nov. 5, 1964, A:1-A.

³⁹ See Nancy S. Gates, “Patsy T. Mink, Democratic Representative From Hawaii,” in *Citizens Look at Congress* (Ralph Nader Congress Project, 1972). The Gates report was somewhat critical of Patsy’s “estrangement” from her constituents.

⁴⁰ See Patsy T. Mink, “The Mink Case: Restoring the Freedom of Information Act,” 2:8 *Pepperdine Law Rev.*, (1977).

With the test date a few months away, Patsy quickly requested copies of the critical government reports. The president's counsel advised that the papers were "sensitive" and "vital . . . to national defense and foreign policy."⁴¹ On August 11, 1971, Patsy filed suit with thirty-two other congressmen to compel disclosure of the reports under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in *Mink v. Environmental Protection Agency* (hereafter *Mink v. E.P.A.*).⁴² At issue was whether the president could withhold information as "secret" without judicial or legislative review. Although the FOIA permitted public access to information, several exemptions under the act permitted the executive to withhold certain documents at his discretion, including those "specifically required by an Executive Order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy."⁴³

Ramsey Clark, former U.S. attorney and a law school classmate of Patsy's, agreed to serve as *pro bono* counsel on the case. The U.S. District Court held that the documents were exempt from compelled disclosure.⁴⁴ During appeal the tests were carried out, without incident, in November 1971.

The U.S. Court of Appeals reversed and remanded the case to the district court for an *in camera* inspection to determine if some of the documents could be disclosed.⁴⁵ The government appealed the case to the United States Supreme Court. In a decision described by Patsy as "a sort of Waterloo of the Freedom of Information Act," the Court held that the exemption did not permit disclosure of the documents, nor did it allow inspection by a court to separate secret from nonsecret papers.⁴⁶ The Court, however, indicated that the Congress could legislate new disclosure guidelines, which would permit judicial review of the executive's actions.

In 1974 the Congress amended the FOIA to permit *in camera* examination. President Gerald Ford vetoed the bill, but Congress overrode his veto. The door was opened to a flood of requests and lawsuits for release of documents previously withheld from the American

⁴¹ As the president's counsel, John W. Dean III had responded by letters to Patsy's request.

⁴² Civil No. 1346-71, U.S. District Court.

⁴³ 5 U.S.C. Sec. 552(b)(1) (1966). For a discussion of executive privilege and the Mink case, see Adam Carlyle Breckenridge, *The Executive Privilege: Presidential Control Over Information* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974).

⁴⁴ Civil No. 1346-71 U.S. District Court.

⁴⁵ *Mink v. E.P.A.*, 464 F.2d 742 (1972).

⁴⁶ *Environmental Protection Agency v. Mink*, 410 U.S. 73 (1973).

people.⁴⁷ The *Mink* case gained further historical significance when it was cited by the United States Supreme Court as precedent for the release of the Watergate tapes.

Throughout the early 1970s, Patsy's voice in Congress took on more of the style and rhetoric of her old idol FDR. Speaking after passage of a bill she had opposed because of its discriminatory provisions, she said, in words reminiscent of FDR's speech after the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941: "I say in all sincerity that this was the most infamous day during the entire seven years that I have been in the Congress. The House of Representatives disgraced itself and repudiated all of our nation's historical principles of freedom, justice, and equality."⁴⁸ She was increasingly critical of President Nixon's lack of moral leadership. In 1971 she took a bold step, entering the Oregon presidential primary. Her candidacy for the president of the United States drew mixed reactions. Some criticized the neglect of her constituents. Others raised familiar barriers and stereotypes: she was a female, Asian, under-financed, and little known outside her state. Why would she undertake a grueling and expensive campaign against such insurmountable odds? As she had said in prior races and would say again in races yet to come, her entry into the presidential race was an expression of her impatience with government inaction. The campaign offered a national stage from which she could present her views to the American people on the Vietnam War, the cutbacks in social programs, and the Nixon presidency.

In the May 1972 Oregon presidential primary, Patsy Mink lost her bid for delegates to support her candidacy, but not before another public controversy raised questions about her activities as a member of Congress. Frustrated by the prolonged stalemate in the Paris peace negotiations to end the Vietnam War, Patsy flew to Paris in April 1972 with Representative Bella Abzug to meet with three parties: Madam Nguyen Thi Binh, the foreign minister for North Vietnam; representatives of the South Vietnamese government; and the United States delegation. Mink's sole purpose was to urge resumption of the talks. Her peace mission drew criticism, largely from those who felt that she had gone beyond the proper role of a legislator. Patsy, however, believed that as a member of Congress and an advocate for peace, she had an obligation to seek an end to the war.

⁴⁷ See Morton H. Halperin and Daniel N. Hoffman, *Top Secret: National Security and the Right to Know*, (Washington, D.C.: New Republic Books, 1977), 48, 49, 95, 133.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Gates, 10.

Back in Hawai'i a group of Democrats mounted a campaign to "dump Patsy" in the 1972 election. At issue was her support of a women's group who had challenged the slate of delegates selected for the national Democratic convention that year. The slate had been chosen in secret, and contrary to party guidelines only four of the sixteen delegates were women. Patsy brought the women's complaint to the National Democratic Committee, which then denied the selected delegates any voting privileges in pre-convention meetings. Patsy was easily reelected, but the rift widened between her and party regulars.

Perhaps because her entry into politics preceded the women's movement, Patsy Mink was not always identified as a feminist. In her view, women's issues were a subcategory of civil rights. In 1970 she testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee against the nomination of G. Harrold Carswell to the United States Supreme Court. Portraying Carswell as deeply prejudiced against women, she also denounced his belief in white supremacy, even though his racist remarks had been made years earlier, when he was twenty-eight years old. Carswell was not confirmed.

As a member of the House Education and Labor Committee, Patsy authored and supported legislation to improve educational opportunities for women. Of special satisfaction was the enactment in 1972 of Title IX of the Higher Education Act Amendments, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender by educational institutions receiving federal monies.⁴⁹ The proscriptions on gender-based discrimination included areas such as recruitment and admission policies, financial aid, pregnancy, housing, and athletics. The 1975 regulations also mandated enforcement procedures.

Title IX has had a significant impact on the composition of college and university student bodies and on the opening up of the professions, including law and medicine, to all qualified women. It also brought about fundamental changes in athletic programs for women. Colleges and universities are now required to fund these programs equally for men and women, with the result that women athletes receive the same privileges and benefits that male athletes have long enjoyed.

A personal crisis in 1976 revealed a tragic dimension of women's low status in society. Patsy learned that she had unknowingly taken part in an experiment during her pregnancy in 1951. The University of Chicago had prescribed "vitamins" that were actually pills containing the

⁴⁹ 20 U.S.C. Sections 1681-1686 (1982). Title IX does not affect the policies of undergraduate colleges that traditionally have been single-sex institutions.

drug diethylstilbestrol, or DES. Nearly twenty-five years later researchers had found that DES caused cancer in both mother and offspring. One thousand women and their children were affected. Patsy's anguish over possible harm to her daughter, Wendy, was channeled into legal action. She brought a class-action suit against the University of Chicago and the Eli Lilly Company. Under terms of the settlement of the suit, all thousand women and their DES-affected children receive free lifetime diagnostic testing at the University of Chicago Lying-In Clinic, and treatment if needed.⁵⁰

With over a decade of legislative accomplishments and success in several landmark cases as a member of Congress behind her, Patsy felt emboldened to seek a more powerful position. The United States Senate was a natural step up the political ladder and presented opportunities to check the actions of the executive. In 1976, U.S. Senator Hiram L. Fong announced his intention to retire at the end of his current term. Patsy quickly decided to run for his seat. There was also an additional incentive: no woman had served in the Senate since the 1972 defeat of Maine Republican Margaret Chase Smith.

Representative Spark Matsunaga announced his candidacy for the Senate seat two months later. As Democrats, both he and Patsy had similar voting records and popular appeal, but Spark had an important edge, the support of the old-boy network of the party. The close and heated race between the gentle war veteran and the aggressive outsider, predicted by early media commentary, did not materialize. Lacking funds to mount a television campaign, Patsy was unable to convince voters that her distinctive style would serve them better. Her many achievements in the Congress were never translated into concepts easily grasped by the electorate. Spark defeated Patsy and went on to win the general election.

Mink's disappointment over her loss was somewhat eased by the victory of Democrat James Earl Carter for the presidency of the United States. Speculation arose soon after the general election that Carter would appoint her to a major cabinet post, perhaps as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. In January 1977, he nominated Patsy as Assistant Secretary of State for Ocean and International, Environmental, and Scientific Affairs. Both Hawai'i daily newspapers editorially stressed the "vigor" she would bring to the job and commented that undoubtedly some would suggest that she had been selected because she was "Oriental" and a

⁵⁰ PTM interview.

“woman.”⁵¹ Clearly, Patsy’s many accomplishments in the Congress had brought her this honor, yet the local media continued to focus on her style, her sex, and her ethnic background.

Her two years with the Department of State were especially tumultuous since they coincided with rising public outcries for stronger environmental policies. The protection of whales, the disposal of toxic chemicals, and ocean mining were among international issues critical to Hawai`i’s interests.

In 1980 Patsy resigned from her position in the Carter administration but remained in Washington to become national president of the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). She was the ADA’s first woman president and served three consecutive one-year terms. In 1980, after her final term, she returned to Hawai`i, for she was unwilling to be identified as an “ex-Congressman hanging around D.C. as a lobbyist.”⁵²

Patsy and John Mink found Hawai`i vastly changed. With urban sprawl had come problems of crime, water, energy, and sewage disposal. Near their home on the leeward coast, the County of Honolulu planned the construction of an H-POWER plant to convert garbage to energy. The decision was made without community input. Alarmed that “this could happen in a democracy,” Patsy became the *pro bono* attorney-spokesperson for a community group opposing the project and was successful in having the plant removed from the area. Her unpaid efforts provided an unanticipated dividend: a support group for her return to politics.

In 1982 Patsy was elected to the Honolulu City Council and immediately assumed the chair of that nine-member body. The independence and integrity of the council were important aspects of the City Charter mandate, and Patsy believed that a healthy tension between the council and the mayor kept the best interests of the city in focus. Her efforts to provide a more open city government suffered a setback in 1984 with the election of Republican mayor Frank Fasi. A former Democrat, Fasi was anxious to gain control of the council. In 1985 he convinced three Democrats on the council to switch to the Republican party. Outraged by their betrayal of the Democratic party midway through their term, Patsy quickly announced her intention to bring about a recall of the three men. State and O`ahu County Democratic party leaders supported

⁵¹ *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Jan. 7, 1977, editorial. *Honolulu Advertiser*, Jan. 8, 1977, editorial.

⁵² PTM interview.

the recall petition and stood with Patsy as she made her announcement at a press conference.

Despite attempts to invalidate the petition and to bring legal action to permit two of the three turncoats to run in the special election, the recall campaign succeeded. All three men were ousted from office.

In 1986 the state faced serious problems in public education, housing, health, economic development, and the environment. These were issues to which Patsy felt she could bring her considerable expertise and experience. After only one term on the city council she decided to run for governor of Hawai'i. Democrat Cecil Heftel, a wealthy broadcasting executive, had held a commanding lead of about 59 percent in the polls for over a year. Once again Patsy was the outspoken outsider, underfinanced, with only a 19 percent showing in the polls. Both Patsy and Heftel were defeated by John Waihee, a part-Hawaiian attorney who surprised even party regulars by his come-from-behind win in the primary and his victory in the general election.

In 1988 Patsy entered the race for mayor of Honolulu. She faced three other Democrats in the primary, including a former colleague on the council, Marilyn Bornhorst, who was the choice of the party's kingmakers. Bornhorst's running battles with the incumbent mayor had put her in the public eye almost daily. Like the mayor, she was white. She defeated Patsy in the primary election but lost the general election.

Two major campaign losses within a three-year period would have sent most politicians to the "locker room," but with characteristic aplomb Patsy took advantage of an unexpected turn of events. In 1990 Senator Spark Matsunaga passed away after a brief illness. The appointment of Representative Daniel Akaka to the Senate seat by Governor Waihee opened up the congressional seat for the Second District, Patsy's former district. Armed with favorable results from a prefiling poll, Patsy announced her candidacy for both the special and regular elections. Again, she was not the party's choice. The party's favorite was a strapping, young, Harvard-educated Samoan-American with ties to the business community, Mufiuli Hannemann. In 1986 he had run in the First Congressional District and was defeated by Republican Patricia Saiki. The two candidates presented a study in contrasts.

Campaigning on the slogan "The Experience of a Lifetime," Patsy easily countered arguments about her age and suggestions that she was perhaps beyond her prime. Her campaign literature presented the visual image of a youthful, attractive, and vital woman and the record of her public service and legislative achievements. Her style and patriotism became issues in the campaign only when the chairman of the Republican

party in Hawai'i mistakenly suggested that, like Jane Fonda, Patsy had made a trip to Hanoi during the Vietnam War. The controversy backfired for the Republicans when it was pointed out that Patsy had gone to Paris instead.

On September 22, 1990, as television cameras zoomed in on the primary election victory celebration at Mink headquarters in downtown Honolulu, an exuberant Patsy quite uncharacteristically danced a little jig. The image of a diminutive and carefree figure bedecked with leis bobbing on stage lingered until she stepped before the microphones. Employing rhetoric reminiscent of her old Democratic party heroes, she launched into a stunning explication of democratic ideals. A television political analyst watching her performance noted that it was like a return to the rhetoric of the 1960s, as Congresswoman Patsy Mink, elected to complete the remaining months of Daniel Akaka's term and nominated to run in the general election for the regular term, declared herself ready to undertake the challenges of the 1990s. Six weeks later she won election to a two-year term in Congress. Her victory was not a "comeback"; for Patsy, it was simply another milestone in a remarkable career.

Criticism of Patsy Mink's style, her forthright convictions, and her penchant for dramatic decisions continues to surface in her campaigns and suggests that a pervasive double standard may exist in American political life. She has long believed that "women who have a brain or an idea" will encounter hostility in public life. A male politician making a bold statement is hailed as a statesman, while a woman making the same statement is often ridiculed. Although Patsy has never considered her outspoken style a handicap, during the 1976, 1988, and 1990 campaigns her media consultants made a deliberate attempt to soften her image.⁵³ Often overlooked is her passionate concern for the underdog, especially those groups that need an articulate champion to make their needs known – children, the elderly, the poor, Vietnam War veterans, and women. She has a reputation for prompt and personal responses to inquiries from her constituents.

Many observers credit John Mink for the enduring success of his wife's political career. Patsy agrees.

John is a political person despite his international reputation as a hydrologist. He thinks politics; his scientific background provides him moral and ethical responsibilities. He's well read and well informed. We

⁵³ Ibid.

disagree but he respects my independence and stubborn tenacity. Often he's the final arbiter of any position I decide to take.⁵⁴

Never offended by remarks that he is "Patsy's husband," John continues to manage her campaigns while maintaining his own career as an international consultant in hydrology.

Few women of Patsy Mink's generation have equaled her achievements: an enduring marriage, successful parenting, a distinguished career in law and politics, and an independent life-style. Her childhood and lifelong friend, Harriette Holt, believes three factors have contributed to Patsy's success: (1) her tremendous physical energy; (2) her strong conviction and belief in whatever she undertakes; and (3) her personal confidence in her own abilities.⁵⁵ Certainly, her secure childhood and strong family support contributed to her willingness to take risks and to challenge traditional ways.

Long before the women's movement of the seventies, Mink made a conscious decision to limit the number of children she would bear, for she recognized that the size of her family would dictate the course her life would take. Her only child, Wendy, now grown, received her doctorate from Cornell University and is an associate professor of political science at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

All told, Patsy has run fifteen political campaigns since 1956. She served only single terms in the territorial house of representatives and in the city council. Her two terms in the territorial and state senate were separated by an unsuccessful campaign for the Congress. Yet her six consecutive terms in the Congress between 1965 and 1977 attest to her abiding interest in national and international affairs. The larger scope of a national forum like the United States Congress offers her the best opportunity to articulate and work toward her vision of American democracy. Her return to Congress in 1990 was heralded by many who recalled her earlier contributions. Among the old-timers of the Democratic party there are some who firmly believe that she is "one of the few remaining true liberals of the Democratic party in Hawai'i."⁵⁶ Few

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Holt interview.

⁵⁶ In separate interviews, Sakae Takahashi and Edward H. Nakamura expressed the same comment.

doubt that Patsy Takemoto Mink will continue to have an impact on national and state politics well into the twenty-first century.*

* BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Rene Ojiri prepared early drafts with the assistance of Michele M. Sunahara and Carol L. W. Hee. Her sources included an interview with Patsy T. Mink on April 10, 1989; Hawaii newspapers: *Hawaii Herald*, *The Honolulu Advertiser*, and *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*; *Patsy T. Mink Campaign Committee Key Workers' Handbook* (April 1988); as well as magazine articles. Bibliographic references are available in Ojiri's office.

Esther Arinaga prepared the final draft. Her sources included interviews with Patsy T. Mink, materials prepared for Representative Mink's various campaigns, local newspapers, law review articles, interviews with Democratic party colleagues, and numerous textbooks that discuss the implications of *Mink v. E.P.A.* Anne Russell's doctoral dissertation, "Patsy T. Mink: Political Woman" (University of Hawaii, 1977), provided an excellent description of Mink's early life but must be read with care, as there are a number of serious errors, especially with regard to names and events.