



Name in English: **Hiram Leong Fong**
Name in Chinese: []
Name in Pinyin: Kuàng Y uliáng
Gender: Male
Birth Year: 1906 - 2004
Birth Place: Kalihi District of Honolulu, Hawaii
Philanthropy: Yes

Profession: Politician, Business Leader

Education: University of Hawaii at Manoa, Bachelor of Arts, 1930; Harvard Law School, Doctor of Jurisprudence, 1935

Awards: Member, Phi Beta Kappa, 1930 (inducted as founding member when Hawaii branch was founded in 1952); Hiram Fong was the recipient of eleven honorary degrees: Doctor of Laws degrees from University of Hawaii (1935), Tufts University (1960), Lafayette College (1960), Lynchburg College (1970), Lincoln University (1971), University of Guam (1974), St. John's University (1975), California Western School of Law (1976), Tung Wu (Soochow) University and the China Academy, both of Taiwan (1978), and Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Long Island University (1968). Hiram Fong's overwhelmingly long list of awards can be found at: http://www.senatorfong.com/bio_awards.html

Contribution: Hiram Fong was born as Yau Leong Fong into a large and impoverished Chinese family in Honolulu, Hawaii. Early in life, he learned a hard lesson about honesty and integrity after he stole a pineapple from a passing farm truck, then had to flee in terror after his father learned about the youthful escapade. This early and undoubtedly painful lesson in avoiding the wrath of his father, by then a trusted security guard/fire watchmen on a sugar plantation renowned for his personal honesty, helped keep the young Hiram Fong away from the juvenile delinquents and petty criminals that lived in his poor neighborhood. His honesty and integrity, even after the early death of his father, would later stand him in good stead as a politician when he would be trusted to act as a liaison and peacemaker between hostile and mutually antagonistic political foes.

Through his intelligence and hard work Fong passed the entrance examination for McKinley High School, one of only 3% of the territory's school population to achieve that distinction. To add to the elite status of the school, the college prep courses offered at McKinley were so extremely vigorous and challenging that the school also had a high dropout rate. Fong prevailed in his studies, making his mark as a debater and even writing articles for local newspapers. After graduation in 1924, he became a civilian worker at Pearl Harbor for the US Navy to help support his family. By 1927, with his siblings old enough to earn a living for themselves and help support his widowed mother, Fong was finally able to go to the University of Hawaii in Honolulu and take pre-law courses. Again, he earned a name for himself as a debater, being recognized as exceptional by the newspapers even as a freshman. He also became editor of the university newspaper.

Even with his siblings helping and no college tuition (only registration and a few user fees were required at that time for regular sessions), Fong still needed to work various jobs to pay for food, clothes, and other essentials that he and his family needed. He also needed to pay for summer tuition for the additional classes he took in order to graduate early. His motivation was to get out of school as soon as possible to support his family.

In college, Fong took the voluntary advanced third and fourth year courses for the US Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC.) He was allowed to skip one year of the basic military course, then cram all the advanced courses into one year with permission, after the dean of university pressured the colonel in charge to allow it. The dean knew Fong from his debate activities. The ROTC offered a small stipend for the advanced courses that Fong badly needed even though he disliked military drills and had avoided the activities of the Junior ROTC in high school and the first two years of university ROTC. This was despite the fact that these were required courses at the time. He said, "It was a question of survival. I needed that 30 cents a day. That 30 cents was enough for my lunch." Fortunately the additional military courses allowed him to graduate in three years of college instead of the usual four.

It was in 1929, as part of the ROTC, that he first visited the United States mainland for the National Rifle Matches at Camp Perry, Ohio. According to his account, his first direct experience of overt racism was when he and other Asian Americans from Hawaii decided to visit Canada and the Chinese Americans were turned away from the border. The Canadian border official was willing to let the Japanese Americans through because Canada had a treaty with Japan, but not the Chinese Americans. Canada didn't have a similar treaty with China. This was in spite of the fact that all the Asian Americans were American citizens by birth.

Fong then worked in Honolulu City Hall from 1931 to 1932 in the Department of Public Works, a reward for his campaign work on behalf of the Republican mayor, whom he'd supported as a campaign worker when George Wright first ran for the Honolulu Board of Supervisors in 1926. Wright taught the most valuable lessons that Fong ever learned as a politician. By obsessively studying voter rolls and knocking on doors, Wright knew all his constituents and what they were thinking. On election nights, he would amaze everyone by accurately predicting the exact number of votes he would get. Hiram Fong would emulate this attention to detail during his political career. He would not only know his constituents but also make them familiar with Hiram Fong as well.

After having saved enough money to pay for the first year of tuition, he went to Harvard Law School, the only non-white student in classes. Every summer he returned to Hawaii to earn enough money to continue his law studies. As a protégé of the mayor, and before civil service rules came that limited political patronage, the job was held open for him each summer. He also received money from his family, from a Harvard scholarship, and by borrowing from friends, including Chinn Ho, a classmate from McKinley High, who later became one of the most richest and prominent businessmen in Hawaii. To save money to pay for tuition and expenses, he skimped on meals and wore inadequate clothing during the Massachusetts winters. As a result, he was stricken with frostbite and repeatedly got eye allergies or infections. Nevertheless, he still managed to give money to help one of his sisters get through the University of Hawaii.

After three years of barely making it financially, Fong graduated from Harvard in 1935 and returned to Hawaii. He passed the bar exam on his first attempt and then worked for the public prosecutor's office in Honolulu, another reward of political patronage. The mayor and the Board of Supervisors created the position of Third Deputy Attorney just for him. The work wasn't demanding, but it paid little more than what he'd earned in the

Public Works Department. He only survived and saved enough money to pay off his Harvard debts and get married by doing private legal jobs on the side. This was allowed as long as there was no specific conflict of interest with his government work.

It was during his honeymoon in 1938 that he learned of the unexpected death of his patron, Mayor Wright. To his biographer, Fong said that the routine work of handling child support cases and other minor cases for Honolulu, and in his private side practice, bored and depressed him, and he decided to go into private practice as a result. Undoubtedly, this was part of the truth. Given the timing of Mayor Wright's death, Fong must have realized that he no longer had anyone in a position to advance his career in city government.

He faced dim prospects as an independent private practitioner of law. Despite being a Harvard Law School graduate, none of the established law firms in Hawaii (or the United States) would hire a minority for any job higher than law clerk at best. Most wouldn't hire a minority for any position at all because of the racial discrimination prevalent in that era. To have enough business to survive as a lawyer, he would have to establish a name for himself across Hawaii, but he didn't have the money to get that kind of publicity. He hit on the idea of running for political office, a fairly cheap and established way of getting your name known.

Nobody in power, least of all the Republican Party establishment, expected Hiram Fong to win the district election. They simply listed his name as a Republican candidate and forgot about him. Fong emulated Mayor Wright and knocked on doors. In previous years, to support his family after the early death of his father, he'd worked as a grocery boy making deliveries in Kalihi, the very district he now ran in. This not only made him familiar with many of the residents, but had also established a local reputation as hard working and honest. He was also bolstered as the local boy done good, rising from poverty to the prestige of lawyer. Even in a working-class district that was increasingly leaning towards the Democrats, it meant a lot to the residents that he was one of theirs.

The fact that Fong hadn't gotten any help from the Republicans in his successful election meant that he was a free agent in the Hawaiian Territorial House of Representatives, able to make alliances as he saw fit that crossed party lines. Fong's first act was to refuse to endorse the re-election of the conservative legislative speaker, a lawyer whose law firm was firmly embedded as the main legal representatives of the hated plantation companies. He then further infuriated the party leadership by allying with moderate Republicans and both Democrats in the House to try to elect a moderate Republican ally as speaker.

The Republican establishment quickly tried to discard Fong. They challenged his election under a provision of the territorial constitution that said that nobody could run for territorial office while already holding a territorial government job. Fong had only resigned his district attorney job after he found out he'd won. To make this appear fair, the Republicans also challenged one of the newly elected Democrats. The case against the Democrat was soon dropped, but the case against Fong continued.

Fong pointed out in a speech made to the House, that quite a number of legislators, including many named Republicans, were in the same position of breaking the law that everyone had ignored until then. Even the Republican that brought the charge against Fong held the territorial position of deputy sheriff on the island of Hawaii for years with no complaints. The highly publicized fight not only brought more unwanted public attention to Fong's independence from the leadership, it also made the leadership look like they were persecuting a fellow Republican simply because of anti-Asian

discrimination. Fong's reputation as a political maverick spread across the whole territory and made him well-known even outside his district. The whole dispute made the establishment Republicans look like fools. The vote to drop the charge was a lopsided 27 to 2.

Hawaiian politics in those years was a Republican monopoly because the Hawaiian plantation barons, with their sugar and pineapple companies, and their landholdings, controlled the Hawaiian economy and their workers. This control led to serious abuses of power. Elections were not free and fair in the rural areas of Hawaii where most of the voters lived. Any plantation worker that didn't vote Republican could find themselves beaten, an eviction notice for them and their family from company housing, and no prospect of being hired as a laborer anywhere else in Hawaii. The same would apply to anyone daring to try to organize a labor union or demand higher wages. When one ethnic group organized a strike, another ethnic group could always be found to bring in as strikebreakers. Mutual distrust and lack of communication, encouraged by the plantation owners, kept ethnic groups divided and working cheaply.

Hiram Fong was one of the few Hawaiian Republicans that fought to change this untenable situation. The Japanese, who formed the majority of the population by the 1930s, along with other Asian immigrant groups, such as the Chinese and Filipinos, were becoming more organized and unified as they worked together. But as Asian immigrants, they weren't allowed to naturalize and become citizens under discriminatory American citizenship laws. The Supreme Court case of Wong Kim Ark in 1887, confirming that the 14th Amendment's birthright citizenship promise also applied to Asians, started breaking down these racial restrictions. Children born in United States territory would have the vote once they came of age. As Fong very well knew, this looming demographic time bomb carried bitter family memories against the plantation bosses supported by their Republican allies. The conservative Republicans were oblivious to the building backlash of keeping Hawaii as a political, social, and economic dinosaur.

Fong was considered too junior and far too liberal by the conservative majorities to be successful in his first year. All but one of his bills were shot down. He challenged and showed his independence from the Republican leadership by introducing bills to help workers and opposed those bills that he felt hurt them. This won him praise and support from Democrats, liberal and moderate Republicans, and the nascent left-wing labor unions in Hawaii. He easily won reelection with a very high percentage of the vote in 1940.

Fong used a special session of the Territorial Legislature in 1941 to successfully push an education bill to establish a uniform salary schedule based upon educational qualifications and teaching experience rather than on what grade was being taught. The old system had condemned elementary school teachers to hardships in pay and pushed many teachers towards teaching in high school, no matter what they wanted to teach. The teachers never forgot this, and they and their union supported Fong's political career from then on.

World War II brought huge changes to Hawaii starting with the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Hiram Fong, a first lieutenant in the US Army Reserves since 1933, joined the Judge Advocate General's office of the United States Army Air Forces in Honolulu, serving with the 7th Fighter Command of the 7th Air Force. As he was packing his law office before leaving for active duty, he met Katsuro Miho standing outside on the sidewalk. Miho was a Japanese American lawyer with poor eyesight that precluded military service looking for a better job than law clerk in a white law firm. Fong's

spontaneous decision to hire Miho was the start of the first multiracial law firm in Hawaii which, by 1952, had taken on the name of Fong, Miho, Choy and Robinson.

Even though he never left Honolulu during the war, Fong was told from Washington that as a serving military officer he wouldn't be allowed to run for reelection in 1943. He was forced to bow out of the race. That his military duties likely wouldn't have been seriously affected by a political reelection campaign was evidenced by the fact that Fong, with the permission of his superiors, was still active in his private legal practice on the weekends, and had also invested in and was a part-owner of a successful nightclub and restaurant that his brother ran as manager. That business closed as soon as the war ended.

In 1944, the military decided that Major Hiram Fong should be allowed to run for election after all, but he wasn't allowed to actively campaign. Stepping up to the plate, his wife, Ellyn Fong, made the rounds on his behalf at campaign events and rallies. Hiram Fong handily won the primary with the highest number of votes out of all the Republicans that year. He even received the endorsement of a coalition of labor union organizations, including one of the most militantly left-wing ones, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). He was the only Republican to receive such labor endorsements.

In 1945, Hiram Fong was discharged from active service just before the start of the legislative session. He'd later retire as a Colonel from the United States Air Force Reserves with over twenty years of service. In a surprise result, his coalition of Republicans and Democrats won majority control of the Territorial House by one vote. Fong was rewarded by becoming Vice-Speaker. The political situation was changing rapidly as the number of Democrats increased in Hawaii. Many millions of servicemen had passed through Hawaii on their way to battles in the Pacific and liked what they'd seen. Enough New Deal Democrats decided to settle in Hawaii after the war to begin to alter the political balance. Also returning were the Japanese American veterans of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team. They'd fought all over Europe and become the most decorated military unit for their size in the history of the United States Army. These guys were tough and they weren't afraid to get into physical confrontations to defend their rights. The war had also opened their eyes to the leadership opportunities available to them. The GI Bill also gave them the means to afford a college education. Leaders such as Spark Matsunaga and Daniel Inouye, came from this veteran group, and would later become United States Senators for the Democrats.

Hiram Fong and his allies successfully fought to pass what became known as the "Little Wagner Bill." The federal Wagner Bill of 1935 had been a central law of the New Deal, making it easier for workers to organize unions and outlawing some of the gross abuses of employers that had prevented union organizing. Hawaii, under the conservative Republicans, had successfully ignored federal law for a decade. To get the bill through the still ultra-conservative Territorial Senate, the final bill had to include two compromises. Workers could individually vote not to join a union (leaving individuals open to company pressure). The government labor relations board created to protect the workers would also have three members instead of one. This dilution of authority meant individual board member could be more easily pressured by the companies. The bill was a major step forward in Hawaii, allowing mainly agricultural workers to organize into unions, but it also showed that there were limits still.

The election of 1946 brought many more Democrats to power and the House soon deadlocked when one Republican unexpectedly died, leaving an even number of representatives from each party. The inexperienced Democrats bickered with each other and with the Republicans as they tried to wrest control of the chamber. Fong nearly got

into a fistfight after Charlie Kauhune, his opposite number as leader of the Democrats, punched Fong in the jaw after one stormy legislative session, only stopped when horrified legislators dragged the two men apart. It was a measure of the warm feelings that Fong generated that years later, Kauhune would invite Fong to deliver the funeral eulogy for his wife.

The deadlock was only resolved when both Kauhune and Fong were sent, along with other firebrands from each side, to represent Hawaii in front of the United States Congress to make the case for Hawaiian statehood that they all agreed upon. In their absence one of the Democrats switched sides. Fong and Kauhune were made floor leaders while the Republican speaker from the last session presided. Not much was accomplished in that session because of constant political fights.

The 1948 election brought deadlock among the Republicans even though they won a majority over the Democrats. Fong had eleven representatives supporting him and the conservative faction had nine. The only way the conservatives could win was in coalition with the Democrats to stab their fellow Republicans in the back. Rather than face that distasteful prospect they supported Hiram Fong as Speaker of the Territorial House of Representatives, the second Asian to hold the position (a Chinese Hawaiian had briefly held the position in 1933 then lost his seat in 1936). Fong continued to fight for the right of Hawaii to become a state, during his tenure. He also continued to fight on behalf of workers against the conservative Republicans.

He only managed to hold onto the position of Speaker after the 1952 election by forming a coalition with the Democrats against a majority of dissidents against his leadership from within the Republican old guard. All eleven Democrats said that they would back whoever became Speaker without naming Fong. This included Charles Kahune, who'd punched Fong in the jaw in 1946. Many conservative Republicans accused Fong of betrayal for working with the Democrats, after Fong's Republican allies used parliamentary procedures to freeze out the dissenters and were seconded by the Democrats. Fong was the first in a long line of Hawaiian leaders that governed in coalition with the minority party. The committee assignments Fong handed out showed his mastery of diplomacy. The Democrats became more powerful than they had ever been by holding committee chairmanships and assignments, even though they were outnumbered six to one in all the committee votes. Only one of the Republican dissenters failed to be appointed to a committee chairmanship.

By that time, the Chinese American population Hawaii only constituted 6% of the total population, showcasing the broad support that spanned many different ethnic groups that Fong had to remain a politician and the Speaker. His election victory also highlighted his personal success in holding a Republican seat in Kalihi, in what was now an overwhelmingly Democratic district. To enforce party discipline, and against the opposition of Fong and his followers, the Republicans instituted closed primaries. Only registered Republicans, many of whom were conservatives, would be allowed to vote in the next primary election. This eliminated several Republican moderates and liberals from contention. In the Democratic landslide of 1954, the Republicans in the Territorial House and Senate, were nearly wiped out. Fong lost his seat by just 31 votes. The strong labor union movement in Hawaii, the Japanese American veterans, past Republican abuses, and their isolation by creating a closed primary, meant that the era of Republican dominance was over in Hawaii. The dominance of the Democrats had now begun. Charles Kahune ended up becoming Speaker, and then found out precisely how thankless and difficult the job was. As Fong observed, "It's not easy to be speaker. You've got 29 prima donnas who feel they have all the solutions to all the problems. To

get them together or to get together a sufficient majority is about the hardest task there is.”

Hiram Fong turned his full-time attention to business. He'd already joined with two other families to invest in and create the first family-owned shopping center to open in Hawaii, the Market City Shopping Center, in Honolulu in 1946. He'd also invested in pieces of real estate including a farm and prime ocean front land. In 1952, he'd joined with other investors to put together Finance Factors, an industrial and consumer loan operation backed by Bank of America in San Francisco, that helped break the control four Hawaiian-based banks had over the territory through their loan policies. Finance Factor was among the the first to make loans to non-white businesses and individuals, a huge and untapped market that the white-owned banks in Hawaii had ignored.

Finance Factors soon became a million dollar company and the biggest industrial loan company in Hawaii. By the end of their foundation year they were a two million dollar company. By 1954, the company was worth nearly four million. Each full investor had only put in \$25,000 each, showing just how much business was being missed by the restrictive racial policies of the old banks. This rapid success led to the foundation of a burgeoning number of companies in related fields that acted in cooperation with each other. In 1953, Finance Realty was formed. Finance Home Builders, Ltd. was formed in 1957. Finance Investment was formed in 1958. Finance Securities was formed in 1962. None of the partners took profits, they simply ploughed the money into expanding their business interests. Hiram Fong was the public and trusted face of the organization who attracted, investors, professionals, and idea people. His law firm provided legal services. Day to day management was left up to professionals under the guidance of the board of directors that included Fong.

By 1959, when Hawaii became the 50th State of the United States, it was already solidly Democrat. Hiram Fong was ready to reenter politics by running for United States Senator. By that time the people had generally forgiven any mistakes he might had made in politics. He won handily and entered the Senate alongside the popular Democratic territorial governor, Oren E. Long. He became the first Asian American United States Senator, a fact that he was acutely aware of, “Being the first Asian there in the Senate, I was very, very careful. I knew that if I did anything that was in the line of dereliction of duty, why it would shame me or shame my family. It would shame those of my ethnic background and it would shame my people of Hawai'i.”

In 1964, he became the first Asian American to receive votes for the nomination for President of the United States at the Republican National Convention in San Francisco. The Hawaii and Alaska delegations picked him as a “favorite son” candidate over the eventual candidate, Barry Goldwater, who lost overwhelmingly to Democratic candidate, President Lyndon Johnson.

It was under President Johnson that Hiram Fong made his mark on national politics and history. As a liberal Republican, he worked alongside the liberal Republicans from the East Coast led by Senator Nelson Rockefeller of New York and a coalition of moderate Republicans and Democrats to overwhelmingly pass the “Civil Rights Act of 1964.” The act outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It ended unequal application of voter registration requirements and racial segregation in schools, in the workplace and in facilities that served the general public such as restaurants, hotels, and public transportation among others. This was the most far-reaching piece of civil rights legislation since the Civil War.

In 1965, Hiram Fong also strongly supported the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which finally ended racial restrictions on immigration and naturalization that had existed in one form or another since the foundation of the United States. The act also ended the strict national quota system that had kept out all but Northwestern European immigrants by preference since the 1920s. Although a quota remained, exceptions were carved out to take into demand the skills and education of the immigrant. Family reunifications were also allowed as exceptions. For the first time, Asian and other non-white immigrants to America could finally bring their families to the United States. The long-term implications of these changes are still playing out in the United States, which is now far less white and much more multicultural. Hiram Fong retired from the Senate in 1977, just as the time for liberal Republicans was starting to pass into history.

In 1988, he and his wife opened Senator Fong's Plantation and Gardens in Kahaluu, on land he'd acquired in 1950. The 700-acres preserved Hawaiian tropical landscape and became a popular wedding and photo venue. In 2003, the site was foreclosed on for over \$700,000 in debts but three of Fong's four children and eight grandchildren made a successful bid to keep it within the family. It still exists today, but can only be toured reservation only now. It was symbolic of the financial and personal difficulties Hiram Fong struggled with. Because of his devotion to family he'd backed his eldest son in several failed business ventures and then fought his youngest son through the courts after that son challenged these business decisions. In the twilight of his life he was forced to declare personal bankruptcy in 2003 with at least \$937,000 in debt.

United States Senator Daniel Akaka of Hawaii summed up Hiram Fong's Senate career of accomplishments after his death at the age of 97 in 2004 by saying, "Senator Fong ... personified the spirit of bipartisan cooperation as he worked with Republican and Democratic colleagues and administrations to enact landmark civil rights legislation in the 1960s, reform U.S. immigration laws to end discrimination against Asian immigrants, improve job-training programs for workers, and fight for equal pay for women. A self-made man who worked his way through elementary school, McKinley High, the University of Hawaii, and Harvard Law School, he fought for the rights of workers to organize in the 1940s, and supported worker rights over three decades of public service."

In 2005, Honolulu Magazine recognized Senator Hiram L. Fong as one of Honolulu's 100 most influential citizens of the past century. In 2006, the U.S. Postal Service dedicated the Kapalama Station as the Hiram L. Fong Post Office Building. In the same year, his alma mater, McKinley High School, dedicated their business building in his memory.

Philanthropy: In 1997, the Hiram L. Fong Endowment for the Arts and Science at the University of Hawaii was established to strengthen the Colleges of Arts and Sciences in all its endeavors and to provide students with an excellent education.

External Links:

http://www.senatorfong.com/bio_sketch.html

<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Aug/18/br/br03p.html>

<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Aug/19/ln/ln07a.html>

http://www.senatorfong.com/UH_endowment.html

http://www.senatorfong.com/memorial_akaka.html

The Education of a Senator : Hiram L. Fong, from 1906 to 1954, Michaelyn P. Chou, University Microfilms International, 1980

<http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/9307>