Descriptive Summary

Creator: Kamen, Martin David, 1913-
Title: Martin David Kamen Papers,
Date (inclusive): 1923 - 1992
Extent: 7.00 linear feet (14 archives boxes, 1 oversize folder)
Abstract: Martin David Kamen (8/27/13- ) received a B.S. in chemistry from the University of Chicago in 1933 and a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from the same institution in 1936. He continued his research at Berkeley's Radiation Laboratory (later known as the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory) in 1936, where he co-discovered carbon-14 in 1940 with Samuel Ruben. Kamen was expelled from the Radiation Laboratory in 1944 as a security risk for unspecified reasons. During his career at Washington University (1945-1957) he focused on the biochemical processes of photosynthesis. Much of his energy at this time was diverted by non-scientific matters: a libel suit against the Chicago Tribune, which falsely accused him of being a communist, as well as a successful 7-year battle to recover his passport, which had been rescinded by the U.S. government. In 1948, Kamen testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee. In 1985, Kamen published an autobiography, RADIANT SCIENCE, DARK POLITICS, documenting the details of this period in his personal and professional life. Following four years at Brandeis University (1957-1961), he joined the University of California, San Diego Chemistry Department, where he acted as a "founding father" of the new campus. Kamen was named Professor Emeritus in 1977. Correspondence, research notebooks, manuscripts and publications, newspaper clippings, and other miscellaneous material arranged in five series: 1. BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS, 2. CORRESPONDENCE, 3. LITIGATION, 4. WRITINGS, and 5. SUBJECT FILES. The bulk of the collection dates from 1945-1955 and reflects Kamen's re-organization of his files in preparation for writing RADIANT SCIENCE, DARK POLITICS. The collection also includes correspondence and research notes spanning Kamen's days at the University of Chicago to his tenure as chairman of the UCSD Chemistry Department. Notably lacking, however, are materials relating to his co-discovery of carbon-14; these are held at UC-Berkeley's Bancroft Library. Documentation of Kamen's role as a faculty recruiter and policy-maker on the UCSD campus is also very limited.

La Jolla, California 92093-0175
Collection number: MSS 0098
Language of Material: Collection materials in English
Access
Collection is open for research.
Acquisition Information
Not Available
Preferred Citation
Martin David Kamen Papers, MSS 0098. Mandeville Special Collections Library, UCSD.
Publication Rights
Publication rights are held by the creator of the collection.
Biography
Martin David Kamen, the son of Russian emigrant Aaron Kamenetsky and Latvian or Lithuanian emigrant Goldie Achber, was born a U.S. citizen in Toronto, Canada, on August 27, 1913. Kamen received a B.S. in chemistry from the University of Chicago in 1933 and a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from the same institution in 1936. He has been married to Esther Hudson (1938-1941), Beka Doherty, a journalist (1949-1963), and Virginia Swanson, a pathologist (1967-1987). Kamen is most widely known for his co-discovery of carbon-14, although for most of his career he has worked in the area of biochemistry focusing on mechanisms of photosynthesis.

On the advice of one of his mentors (David Gans), who had suggested that he continue his research in chemistry and nuclear physics at the E.O. Lawrence's Radiation Laboratory, Kamen set out for Berkeley immediately upon graduating from the University of Chicago in the winter of 1936. Kamen worked at the laboratory without pay for six months before E.O. Lawrence offered him a formal position, with a salary, overseeing the preparation and distribution of the cyclotron's radioactive products. Kamen's most distinguished contribution while at the Radiation Laboratory was his co-discovery, with University of California, Berkeley chemist Samuel Ruben, of carbon-14.

Kamen remained at the Radiation Laboratory until July, 1944, when he was summarily dismissed (without explanation) from the Manhattan Project and the laboratory. It was not until a full decade later that he learned conclusively that he had been blacklisted by the U.S. Army as a "security risk." Kamen's dismissal was followed by a year of reneged job offers in both academia and industry. In the spring of 1945 he was hired by Arthur Holly Compton to work in the medical school of
Washington University running the cyclotron program. Teaching tracer methodology to the medical faculty and preparing radioactive tracer materials for their clinical research, Kamen’s research interests gradually shifted away from nuclear physics and radiochemistry and more fully into biochemistry. With the publication in 1947 of his highly acclaimed text RADIOACTIVE TRACERS IN BIOLOGY, retitled in later editions as ISOTOPIC TRACERS IN BIOLOGY, Kamen ended his work on carbon-14.

In the next most significant phase of his research, Kamen focused on the mechanisms of photosynthesis in bacteria. It is this work for which he is most admired within the community of biochemists. His book on this subject is PRIMARY PROCESSES IN PHOTOSYNTHESIS (1963). In later research, regarding the comparative biochemistry of cytochromes, Kamen and his collaborators established the general occurrence of hematin compounds in all photosynthetic tissue and identified the physical and chemical structure of a large number of new cytochromes.

Kamen’s pioneering work with radioactive tracers placed him in high demand as a conference participant in the international scientific community, as well as at home. It was, therefore, more than a mere inconvenience when the U.S. government revoked his passport in 1947, on the eve of a planned lecture tour of Palestine. After repeated attempts to regain his passport failed, Kamen engaged legal assistance in 1950. Even then, it took five more years of hearings, interventions on his behalf by colleagues and friends in government, and court action before his passport was reissued.

The struggle to regain his right to travel freely was important to Kamen and it took up a great deal of his time. It was not, however, the only diversion to occupy his energies outside the laboratory during the postwar years. With communism increasingly identified in the U.S. as an evil influence, Kamen’s dismissal from the Radiation Laboratory seemed to some individuals, evidently highly placed, to carry a menacing significance. In 1948, he was called to testify before the House on Un-American Activities (HUAC) regarding the possibility that he had leaked “atomic secrets” to the Russians while employed on the Manhattan Project. Although he was cleared of those charges by the HUAC, the label “atomic spy” proved especially difficult to shake. In 1951, Kamen began libel suits against the Tribune Company, whose Chicago and Washington, D.C. newspapers carried front-page stories (July 7, 1951) identifying him as the “high atomic scientist” Senator Hickenlooper of Iowa had named in a speech as a “spy and a traitor.” As with his passport, Kamen triumphed in the end, winning a $7,500 judgment against the Tribune Co. in 1955. These events, as well as his scientific research and musical life are chronicled by Kamen in his autobiography, RADIANT SCIENCE, DARK POLITICS.

In 1957 Kamen left Washington University at the invitation of Brandeis University to organize a graduate department of biochemistry. From Brandeis, Kamen went to La Jolla, California, where between 1961 and 1974 he helped Roger Revelle and others develop the sciences at the newly created University of California, San Diego campus. In the late 1960s, Kamen spent part of his time establishing a photosynthesis laboratory in Gif-sur-Yvette for the French National Center for Scientific Research. Between 1974-1978 he was an adjunct professor of chemistry at the University of Southern California. Kamen returned to UCSD in 1977 and became professor emeritus.

**Scope and Content of Collection**

Accessions Processed in 1992

Although he probably remains best known for his co-discovery of carbon-14, Martin Kamen has contributed extensively to the field of biochemistry. The Kamen Papers provide valuable information about how, when, and with whom he conducted research, especially in the area of photosynthesis. Correspondence and research notes span most of Kamen’s career, from his early undergraduate and graduate work at the University of Chicago (1932-1936) to laboratory work done in the 1970s during his tenure as chairman of the Chemistry Department at UCSD. Absent from this collection is documentation of Kamen’s work done with Ruben and others between 1937 and 1944; these files are housed at the University’s Bancroft Library. Almost all of the materials in the collection are in English, but there is some correspondence in French, news clippings in German, and an account of the discovery of C-14 in Japanese.

The Kamen Papers are arranged in the following five series:

1) BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS; 2) CORRESPONDENCE; 3) LITIGATION; 4) WRITINGS; and 5) SUBJECT FILES. Most of the Kamen files date between 1945 and 1955 and offer a rare opportunity for investigating the far reaching impact of the postwar political climate on the scientific community in the United States. Documentation of Kamen’s experiences in the aftermath of his 1944 dismissal from the Radiation Laboratory as a “security risk” is especially rich and formed the bases for the two legal battles Kamen mounted: one against the Tribune newspapers for libel (in 1951) and one against the U. S. government (in 1955) for revoking his passport in 1947 and refusing to reissue it. The collection is also enhanced by the once-secret Federal Bureau of Investigation and Atomic Energy Commission records which Kamen acquired through the Freedom of Information Act. These provide telling examples of the reality and persistence of high level harassment aimed at scientists suspected of “disloyalty.” Both sets of records, and the correspondence associated with their procurement, are included in the SUBJECT FILES Series.
In addition to his contributions to biochemistry, Kamen was a “founding father” of the San Diego campus of the University of California; he arrived in 1961 and served as Acting Dean of Graduate Studies between 1965 and 1967. Kamen was also a strong leader of the Chemistry Department, which he chaired from 1970 through 1972. Some sense of his administrative contributions in these areas may be derived from a draft of his “Proposal for a Division of Biochemistry” (n.d.); from three memos he sent in 1972, one each to Vice Chancellors Paul Saltman and Bernard Sisco, and one to Chancellor William McElroy; and from a single letter dated April 2, 1973, addressed to Chancellor McElroy (for these items, see the SUBJECT FILES series, UCSD Chemistry Department, box 14, folder #5). These are the only items in the collection regarding the administrative and policymaking aspect of Kamen’s contributions to UCSD. Some of his financial contributions to the San Diego campus are documented, including an annually disbursed fellowship. There are also records of Kamen’s academic and intellectual work while at UCSD, in the form of lecture, research, and laboratory notes. In contrast, there is very little indication of his academic or personal life during most of the years (1957-1961) he spent at Brandeis University, nor is there record of his specific activities at the University of Southern California (1974-1978). His tenure at Washington University (1945-1957) in St. Louis is well represented. Finally, despite the inclusion of pages from an early scrapbook and scattered personal references in some pieces of correspondence, the collection is focused almost exclusively on Kamen’s professional life. There is one significant exception: the correspondence gives a clear picture of Kamen’s accomplishments as a violinist and sheds light on the intertwining of his interests in music and his scientific endeavors. The existence of a professional level musical community within his circle of colleagues is evident, as is the pleasure he took in friendships with Isaac Stern, Henri Temianka and Keith Humble.

SERIES 1: BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS
1923-1989 1.5 boxes
This series documents Martin Kamen’s professional career, beginning with his early educational achievements. Report cards, scrapbook pages, photographs, and transcripts are included. There is also a file containing media coverage of Kamen’s role in the discovery of carbon-14. The Awards and Honors subseries details the significant professional citations Kamen received during his career. His most famous achievement, the discovery of carbon-14, is recounted in files containing media coverage of the 30th anniversary of that event. There is also a file concerning his decision to join the faculty of the University of Southern California in 1974. The correspondence regarding FROM CYCLOTRONS TO CYTOCHROMES, the published proceedings of a symposium held in Kamen’s honor (see box 2, folder #2, Letters about “Science”), confirms his central role in the field of biochemistry. Commentary from colleagues and others regarding science and scientists and a summary of Kamen’s research career (including a vitae and bibliography) complete the series.

SERIES 2: CORRESPONDENCE
1939-1990s 1.5 boxes
Letters in this series are divided into two subseries: General Correspondence, which is arranged chronologically; and Collected Correspondence, which is also arranged chronologically but is further divided by subject (including named correspondent). Kamen’s correspondence focuses mainly on research and professional issues and offers documentation of certain aspects of his day-to-day activities: requests he received and made for lab samples, questions and comments about procedures, efforts to find jobs for his graduate students, commitments to attend conferences, write articles, review publications, etc. Letters to and from such significant members of the scientific community as Arthur H. Compton, Robert Oppenheimer, Linus Pauling, James Franck, Georg von Hevesy, and Melvin Calvin are included. These exchanges are sporadic, however, and evidence greater breadth than depth. A few letters directly related to laboratory research issues are found in the notebooks included in the SUBJECT FILES, Laboratory Notebooks and Research Notebooks subseries.

The immediate and longer-term effects of Kamen’s “security risk” difficulties are apparent from references in very early correspondence to his efforts to secure another academic job and from later references to his legal battles. The impact of the denial of his passport is tracked through correspondence (1947-1955) with the international scientific community, as Kamen is repeatedly forced to turn down invitations to attend conferences and/or accept academic posts abroad. His passport and libel problems receive more extensive treatment, however, in the correspondence found in the LITIGATION series. Additional letters on these topics appear in the Radiant Science subseries of the WRITINGS series (see box 8, folders # 11-13).

SERIES 3: LITIGATION
1947-1956 2.5 boxes
The Passport Division of the State Department revoked Kamen’s passport in 1947 while he was in the final stages of preparation for a lecture trip to Palestine. Kamen’s repeated attempts to regain his passport in order to attend conferences and deliver lectures abroad were unsuccessful. He sought legal counsel in 1950. The LITIGATION series, which includes four subseries, Correspondence, Court Documents, Legal Expenses, and Media Coverage, tracks Kamen’s efforts, those of his lawyer, Nathan David, and those of numerous friends, colleagues, and well wishers as they attempted to unravel the initial
reasons for the passport seizure, the reasoning behind the ensuing denials, and the prospects for the future. The legal maneuvers extended over a period of five years and included the active support of institutions such as the Federation of American Scientists and the American Civil Liberties Union. The series documents activities occurring against the backdrop of a rising tide of anti-communist sentiment in the U.S. that culminated in the McCarthy hearings. When, in July 1951, the Tribune Company newspapers in Washington, D.C. and Chicago ran articles referring to Kamen as a “spy,” he enlisted Nathan David’s aid in a libel suit. This suit and the passport case overlap both in time and in substance. The series reflects this overlap. The Correspondence subseries, in particular, contains files in which items concerning the libel case and the passport suit are intermingled. Some correspondence from this era of Kamen’s life is also found in the WRITINGS series, as part of the background research materials used in the preparation of RADIANT SCIENCE.

The Court Documents subseries consists of materials prepared for the libel suit (including aborted attempts to file suit against the Tribune Co. in Chicago as well as in the District of Columbia) and those amassed for the passport case. Among the trial exhibits are many newspaper clippings that convey the immediacy of the political and social climate of the 1950s while simultaneously capturing the details of Kamen’s own experiences.

Kamen incurred a substantial financial debt in his pursuit of justice. Records of many of the expenditures and repayments are included in the Legal Expenses subseries.

The number and variety of clippings (mainly from newspapers) in the Media Coverage subseries demonstrate the widespread interest the libel suit and the passport issue engendered. Each aroused public debate regarding wider questions, such as secrecy and freedom of speech, national security and freedom of movement.

SERIES 4: WRITINGS
1947-1992 3 boxes
This series consists of four subseries: Bound Papers, Reprints, Miscellaneous Writings, and Radiant Science. Nearly all of Kamen’s professional writings are included among the bound papers and reprints. In addition to drafts of such unpublished work as “What a Passport Means to a Scientist,” the Miscellaneous Writings subseries includes an article co-authored with his wife, Beka Doherty, a statement prepared for the Congressional Committee on Science and Astronautics, and nontechnical pieces published between 1985 and 1992.

The Radiant Science subseries, composed of materials pertaining to the writing and eventual publication of RADIANT SCIENCE, DARK POLITICS, provides a unique view of Kamen both as a writer and as a scientist. There is a complete copy of the original draft of the manuscript, along with correspondence mainly from the 1940s and 1950s that Kamen culled from his general files to support and document points he made in the text. Lightly annotated typescripts of the final draft of each chapter are also included. These drafts, in combination with correspondence between author and editors and between author and production staff, detail the process of transforming Kamen’s autobiography from idea to reality. Accompanying reviews of the book indicate that it attracted a wide and appreciative audience.

SERIES 5: SUBJECT FILES
1932-1992 5 boxes
The subjects covered by this series are divided into the following subseries: School Materials and Notes, Laboratory Notes, Research Files, Laboratory Notebooks, Research Notebooks, Patents, HUAC Materials, Loyalty, Security and the Red Scare, CIA, FBI and U.S. Army Records, UCSD Chemistry Department, Lectures, Addresses, Conferences, Miscellaneous Newspaper Clippings, and Trip to England. The first subseries contains work done in Kamen’s earliest days as an undergraduate and then as a graduate student at the University of Chicago. The next four subseries incorporate research that spans Kamen’s professional career, with material ranging from 1948 through 1985. The laboratory and research notebooks, which record various stages of controlled experiments, frequently include entries by other researchers in addition to Kamen’s notations. Some of these notebooks also include loose correspondence inserted between the pages.

The Patents subseries documents some of Kamen’s scientific contributions, mainly in the area of apparatus, and mainly in the 1940s.

The subseries on HUAC and on Loyalty, Security and the Red Scare are composed largely of newspaper clippings and magazine articles. These media excerpts give texture to allusions made in the CORRESPONDENCE and LITIGATION series; they also provide a useful framework for viewing the larger world in which most of the activities encompassed by the Kamen papers occurred.

The CIA, FBI and U.S. Army Records are a valuable source of information about how some organizations perceived and interpreted the daily activities of scientists during and following World War II. Kamen was the object of intense government scrutiny for many years despite repeated entries in the files kept by these same agencies that his case was "closed."

The UCSD Chemistry Department subseries contains a few memos, letters and clippings that give a clear, if sparsely documented, sense of Kamen’s intellectual and financial contributions to the growth and direction of bioscience at UCSD.
There is also a file of lecture materials Kamen used for a team-taught science course for undergraduates. Lectures, Conferences, Addresses consist mainly of correspondence from individuals inviting Kamen to speak before a wide range of audiences over the period 1956-1987. Some of the flyers and posters used to announce Kamen's appearances are also included.

Miscellaneous Newspaper Clippings includes clippings with little connection to one another; most were found loose among Kamen's papers. The items range from a brief announcement of Kamen's work on photosynthesis that appeared in a German newspaper in the 1950s, to a "human interest" piece on Kamen from a Sheridan, Wyoming newspaper, probably written in the 1970s when he was vacationing in the area.

The last subseries, Trip to England, contains a single file with receipts that document a visit to London in 1956.

Accessions Processed in 1996

The accessions processed in 1996 are arranged in one series: 1) ESSAYS. It contains a reprint of an essay titled "Reflections on the First Half-century of Long-lived Radioactive Carbon" (1994) and of the lecture titled "Out of the Darkness; Introspections about Chemistry at the University of Chicago in its First Half-Century."

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Subjects
Kamen, Martin David, 1913- -- Archives
Kamen, Martin David, 1913- -- Trials, litigation, etc
University of California, San Diego -- History -- Archives
University of California, San Diego. -- Dept. of Chemistry -- Archives
University of California, San Diego -- Faculty -- Archives
Washington University (Saint Louis, Mo.) -- Faculty -- Archives
United States. -- Congress -- House. -- Committee on Un-American Activities -- Archives
Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory -- Archives
Biochemists -- Biography
Biochemistry
Chemistry -- Research
Science -- Social aspects
Photosynthesis
Science and state -- History
Internal security -- United States
Security clearances -- United States
Cytochromes
Radioactive tracers

Contributors
Compton, Arthur Holly, 1892-1962, -- correspondent
Oppenheimer, J. Robert, 1904-1967, -- correspondent
Pauling, Linus, 1901- -- correspondent
Franck, James, 1882-1964, -- correspondent
Hevesy, Georg Von, 1885-1966 -- correspondent
Calvin, Melvin, 1911-

Accessions Processed in 1992

BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS

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Report cards 1923 - 1929
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<td>Recent photographs</td>
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<td>University of Chicago Materials 1930</td>
<td>Note Transcript, Convocation Program, etc.</td>
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<td>Awards and Honors 1935 - 1989</td>
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**Carbon-14 Materials, Accounts of Discovery 1963 - 1978**

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**Carbon-14 Materials, Accounts of Discovery 1963 - 1978**

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**University of Southern California Press Releases 1970**  
Note  
Media Coverage.

box 2, folder 2  
**Letters about "Science" 1983**  
Note  
May.

box 2, folder 3  
**Reminiscences by Others -- Articles, Lectures, etc.**  
Note  
No date.

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Note  
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**CORRESPONDENCE**

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CORRESPONDENCE

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Australian National Committee on Biochemistry Symposium on Haematin Enzymes 1956 - 1957
Note
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   Note
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WRITINGS

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<td>Miscellaneous Writings</td>
<td>Studies in Photosynthesis with Tracer Atoms Note Draft, [1954?], (no date).</td>
</tr>
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<td>8, 2</td>
<td>Life and Times of an Oyster</td>
<td>Annotated Drafts, [1954?], (no date).</td>
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<td>8, 3</td>
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<td>8, 7</td>
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box 8, folder 14  Original Draft Manuscript
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