

The Rise of Ethnic Studies at the University of Hawai'i Anti-War, Student and Early Community Struggles

John Witeck

The 1960s witnessed the birth and development of the United States' student movement and its related phenomena in Hawai'i. This movement was also global, spurred on by the inconsistencies and inequities of modern society and by outrage towards the US war against the peoples of Indochina. In other industrialized capitalist countries, similar simultaneous youth-generated revolts arose – in France (witness the 1968 Paris youth and worker uprisings), Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Canada, and Japan. These movements were also deeply inspired by the lengthy, determined struggle of the peoples of Indochina for self-determination. The Vietnamese revolution overcame French colonial rule initially and, finally, by 1972, even with the loss of over two million Vietnamese, defeated US military intervention. Other movements for liberation in Africa, Central and South America, and Asia also sparked students' interest and gained wide support. The student movement globally became a significant, though generally disconnected, force (at the international level) in those heady times of dissent, protest, and uprising.

In the US and Hawai'i, college attendance swelled and a broader cross-section of youth went to college, where previously only clerics, educators, businessmen, aspiring professionals and the well-to-do were permitted. The GI bill, the rise of community colleges and the development of education as big business were responsible for the growth of the diploma mill, which also sought to train students for new corporate and government jobs required by the *imperium*. Such education also sought to inculcate proper societal values in the young and aspiring who, during the Vietnam War era and its attendant military draft, could obtain student deferments against conscription by staying enrolled in colleges.

Once on campus, a growing number of students were able to see more clearly and to study more deeply the inequities and blatant contradictions in society that led to wars such as the one in Vietnam and to racism and sexism in the US and Hawai'i. The draft system itself sent working-class and poor youths to war, while more advantaged youths could remain safely enrolled in college classes, enjoying student deferments.

Hawai'i's own history was a graphic example of US expansionism and military conquest. The situation of the original peoples of the Islands, the Kānaka Maoli, demonstrated the continuity of this assault and injustice. Yet tragically and ironically, many Hawaiian youths were among Hawai'i's casualties of the US war in Vietnam, in which over 50,000 Americans died.

Birth of the Student Movement

At the University of California at Berkeley campus in the early 1960s, the Free Speech Movement organized against administrators' efforts to ban campus speech and protests. It sparked a student movement which, inspired by the civil rights campaigns and protests in the US South, quickly spread around the US. The students also looked at US policy abroad, especially in Southeast Asia. Encouraged by progressive and critical faculty members, the students, through teach-ins and fora, became informed and

began to conclude that the Vietnam War was racist and genocidal, and was undertaken by the US for imperialist and mercenary reasons in support of a corrupt regime in South Vietnam and in violation of the Geneva accords for the withdrawal of French troops from Indochina.

Many students were deeply influenced by the Civil Rights movement of the time. When the upholders of law and order violently repressed even the most moderate efforts for change, trampling on voting rights demonstrators in Selma; harassing, jailing and even killing black leaders and student protesters (as at Kent State and Jackson State); and beating and gassing anti-war demonstrators at the 1968 Chicago Democratic Party convention, students responded in many ways. Some became cynical and despaired, or dropped out into youth culture, alternative lifestyles, and drugs. Others turned to acts of sabotage and counter-violence, like the Weathermen, while many turned to electoral and reform politics. Some became radical pacifists, opposed to war and all violence, while still others strived to find a deeper understanding of why the slaughter in Vietnam occurred and why racism against blacks and other people of color was so ingrained and difficult to root out. It would also be fair to say that many students sampled some or all of the above, and went through various political ideologies, organizations, or personal responses, not necessarily in the same order or with the same ending point.

The more radical students eventually came up with, or were introduced to, systemic analyses often rooted in Marxism-Leninism, usually as amplified by Mao Tse Tung, China's revolutionary leader, or as exemplified by Che Guevara, hero of the Cuban revolution, or Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam's revolutionary leader. Study groups and revolutionary parties or movements became the order of the day, and Hawai'i became home to three or four of these parties in the early and mid-1970s, as they sought to give focus and form to the spontaneous protest of the late 1960s. These impulses and analyses also led them to appreciate Hawai'i's labor history, based in class struggle, and the role of Hawai'i's ethnic and working-class peoples in creating the wealth so inequitably distributed in the Islands. But this is getting ahead of the story.

“A Racist and Genocidal War”

The Reverend Martin Luther King's condemnation of the Vietnam War in 1968 as “racist” and “genocidal” led even more students to an anti-war position, especially when Dr. King was assassinated in April, 1968. At the University of Hawai'i Mānoa-campus, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was formed in the fall of 1967 by this writer and other peace activists. SDS, formed nationally in 1961 after the release of its foundational document, the Port Huron Statement, initially emphasized youth and students as the vanguard for change for a more democratic, participatory society. It bluntly condemned US imperialism and the war in Vietnam, organizing the first national protests against it, and encouraged draft resistance. In Hawai'i, it opposed US military and CIA recruiting on campus, US Department of Defense contracts with the University, racist admission policies, and the lack of democracy and student voices in decision-making. In community actions and campus fora against the war, SDS joined with Educators for Peace, the Hawai'i Committee to End the War, and the Hawai'i Peace Council.

Some SDS members and other activists reacted to the slaying of Dr. King and rumors of the mobilization of Hawai'i's National Guard by burning their draft cards, opting out of what they termed the "Selective Servitude System," and joining in a student mass march on Governor John Burns at 'Iolani Palace. The Governor, who met the students, denied that the National Guard would be mobilized and sent to the ghettos of the US (where there were uprisings by black citizens) or to Vietnam. But a few days later, the 29th Brigade, based in Hawai'i, was called up, and the National Guard was mobilized for duty in Vietnam. This prompted more campus and community protests, draft-card burnings and the formation of both a new youth group, the Hawai'i Resistance, composed of draft resisters and draft-card burners, and a local support committee, called the Hawai'i Committee to Support Draft Resistance, formed by UH Professor Walter Johnson and his wife Bette. In those times, refusing induction, burning draft cards, or advocating draft resistance were felonies, so it took some commitment and courage to join these groups. But more than a few hundred joined and contributed to the support committee, and nearly 30 youths were in the Resistance.

When in late April 1968, the UH Board of Regents moved to implement the firing of Dr. Oliver Lee, a SDS and Resistance supporter, SDS, along with its ally the Associated Students of the University of Hawai'i (ASUH), organized a student sit-in at Bachman Hall, the UH administrative building. This coincided with the more publicized May 1968 SDS sit-in led by Mark Rudd at Columbia University in New York. The sit-in lasted a few days before mass arrests of over 120 students and faculty occurred. The mass arrests then triggered a more massive sit-in around the building, which kept it closed for nearly a week. The ten days of protest under the banner of Liberation Hall did not lead to Oliver Lee's reinstatement at that time, but did cause the formation of a Student-Faculty Union and the continuation of the struggle the following semester. (Within a year, threatened with loss of national accreditation by the Association of American University Professors (AAUP) and continued student and faculty pressure, the Regents were compelled to reinstate Dr. Lee. UH President Thomas Hamilton resigned.)

The victory of the Bachman Hall struggle of 1968 and the escalating anti-war movement also led students to realize the need for broader community support. The students launched projects in the community and among other youth. Youth Action was formed with church support in 1969 following the historic Church of the Crossroads sanctuary in which 37 GIs went AWOL in protest against the war. The GIs made public statements and stayed at three local churches for 37 days before authorities moved in to arrest them. Youth Action sought to raise and distribute seed monies to youth social change agents doing projects among youth and in schools and the community. By 1971, Youth Action had forged the Hawai'i People's Fund, which eventually replaced it in order to seek broader funding and a wider variety of projects for social change, justice and peace. Youth Action, like the Hawai'i Resistance, was part of the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice, formed in late 1970 after the May 1970 US invasion of Cambodia to push for an end to the war and to link the anti-war struggle to local issues of justice and equality.

Youth Action called the first Youth Congress of 1970 which brought youth delegates together from a wide spectrum of groups, both liberal and conventional. The delegates caught the community's attention with their resolution affirming that Hawai'i should be independent from the US and in favor of peace in Vietnam. The Youth Congress also urged struggle against the blight of over-development in the Islands. A

few weeks later, some of the youth delegates were roused to go to Kalama Valley and undertake the defense of its residents against development schemes by Kaiser and the Bishop Estate. This led to the famed two-year-long Kalama Valley struggle and the formation of Kōkua Hawai‘i, a local peoples’ cadre organization modeled after the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, US revolutionary black and Puerto Rican organizations respectively. The People's Coalition for Peace and Justice supported the Kalama Valley struggle and other campaigns against evictions and gross overdevelopment on O‘ahu and other islands in which Kōkua Hawai‘i involved itself and its cadres – Kahalu‘u, Ota Camp (Waipahu), Niūmalu-Nāwiliwili (Kaua‘i), ‘Ewa, Waiāhole-Waikāne, Chinatown, and other communities. “People, Not Profits” was the slogan loudly chanted in protests, as the young activists joined with community residents of all ages to expose the lie in the myth that all change and development is “progress.” The kindred and similar demonstrations of hundreds, even thousands, of youths in Save Our Surf (organized by John Kelly) against destruction of beaches and surfsites by these same forces of capitalist development occurred in these same years and often rocked the foundations of the new State Capitol building where rallies were often held.

The relating of the anti-war struggle to community and Hawaiian issues such as Kalama Valley was a significant advance. The demolition scenes in Kalama Valley in East O‘ahu just across from Sandy Beach presented near mirror-images of daily devastation in Indochina minus the outright slaughter: homes burned or bulldozed, people rounded up, evicted, and made homeless. And Kaiser and its corporate tentacles were involved in both scenarios of devastation and uprooting. The racism behind the war and the evictions in Kalama became apparent. One Bishop Estate official in charge of the evictions even opined: “In the modern world, the Hawaiian lifestyle is and ought to be illegal.” Such racism naturally spawned resistance and reaction, and gave fuel to the fire of nascent Hawaiian and local peoples’ nationalism. Pae Galdera’s Waimānalo community organization was also coming up with similar ideas. Kōkua Hawai‘i, in the course of its Kalama occupation, began to expound such nationalism and also the need for a tactical separation from its white (*haole*) supporters. This was not unanimously accepted by all supporters, but many could see the reason for such a stance, given the media’s tendency to blame “outside agitators” and to showcase *haole* with long hair in their photo coverage of the struggle. It seemed beneficial for the young local activists of Kōkua Hawai‘i to have some autonomy to chart their own strategy and tactics and ensure that their efforts would be seen as a local people’s response to ravages of foreign occupiers, capitalist institutions and developers.

Though Kōkua Hawai‘i and the remaining valley residents like pig farmer George Santos lost in the final 1972 police raid on the valley, when they were arrested, though Kalama Valley yielded to golf course and subdivision developments along ‘Ehukai Road, Kalama was a pyrrhic victory for the elite manipulators and beneficiaries of such “progress.” The nonviolent protracted struggle there publicized the need for, and possibilities of, resistance, showed the lie within the “benevolence” of development, and alerted other communities to the resources available for just saying NO! Kalama signified the dawn of many more community struggles which eventually would forge into a Coalition against All Evictions, and also represented the militant birth pains of the Kanaka Maoli movement for sovereignty and self-determination.

Following the Cambodia “incursion,” and the May 1970 campus uprisings (that led to almost every campus in the US shutting down) and the many mass rallies of SOS and Kōkua Hawai‘i in the early 1970s, until the evictions at Kalama, movement activists

tended to move away from mass formations and efforts, and began instead to organize into cadre organizations to do more study and analysis, and to form a more disciplined unit. Many of these organizations, especially among local activists in them, looked to Mao Tse Tung for inspiration on Third World insurgencies and answers to analyzing Hawai'i's own situation. The issue of the Hawaiian national question came to the fore, often lending more confusion than clarity to the issue and leading to more divisions than unity. But, in general, most of the cadre organizations of the left tended to support either Kanaka Maoli self-determination or the less strictly delineated notion of "local peoples' struggles."

Many of the former student activists came now work daily in community organizing or service projects, while others moved to labor organizations, to link up with workers who were often the most oppressed victims of the new order, either at worksites or in their communities, as Nixon-era inflation, wage controls, and rising rents and development threatened their families' well-being. The campus SDS had become enamored of the Progressive Labor line which held that creating a "student-worker alliance" was the main task, thus causing these activists to neglect building a campus base. Nor did they succeed in creating a labor base.

Other activists coming from the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice in the aftermath of the Vietnam War elected to form a Labor-Community Alliance (LCA) in 1972 to link unions and workers to vital community issues and vice-versa. There were many mass strikes in the community, especially in 1973-74: pineapple, sugar, teachers, telephone workers. LCA was successful in mobilizing support for these struggles and later in building support for community campaigns against evictions, such as the struggle of elderly residents in Chinatown, Honolulu, against redevelopment. A cadre organization called Third Arm, primarily local students, did the initial organizing work and succeeded in getting the residents together in a mass organization called People Against Chinatown Evictions (PACE). LCA and PACE attempted to get union support against such redevelopment which evicted elderly pensioners. LCA was usually more successful in rallying student and community support for labor struggles than in developing labor support for community struggles, especially on issues like the TH-3 freeway in which labor felt it had a stake.

"Our History, Our Way!"

By the late 1960s local activists on campus began expressing dissatisfaction with the standard curriculum and courses, criticizing the lack of Hawaiians and local people in UH teaching and administrative positions, and started advocating an Ethnic Studies Program. A Black Studies Program had been launched earlier, in the aftermath of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination, but there was no program to educate students about their history and their roots. Marion Kelly, a researcher then with the Bishop Museum, had written extensively on the alienation of lands from the Hawaiian people, and was a respected figure in study groups and demonstrations against the war and against evictions. She began as a lecturer in the fledgling Ethnic Studies Program in 1970 when it was first launched with a handful of inspired campus activists, and was promoted to associate professor in 1984. She supported the movement to launch and preserve Ethnic Studies as did other community activists. These activists, who had contacts with ex-student activists in the larger community, called upon their friends and

associates to rally community support as well for the students' demand for "Our History, Our Way." This struggle, after repeated rallies, attendance at Board of Regents' meetings, and numerous fora and some sit-ins, succeeded and the ES Program became permanent in 1977. ES enrollment reached 280 students by the fall of 1977, and attained nearly 400 enrollees by 1984 (*Ka Maka'āinana* 1984). Between 1972 and 1976, there were 26 students who majored in Ethnic Studies, and 73 between the years 1977 and 1984. The ES certificate program was approved in 1982.

Needless to say, the Program was always strapped for funds and short on positions, and almost annually had to engage in renewed battles to maintain their staffing and funding levels or to prevent the Program's termination. ES staff worked as a cadre, in close collaboration with one another, in developing materials and curricula which would reveal the true history of Hawai'i's peoples, especially the working people and communities, and would train youth to be agents of change. Courses routinely included requirements for students to involve themselves with a community and its efforts to preserve itself. Such students became researchers and assets to community residents and fostered even more good will toward Ethnic Studies. Consequently, residents from Waipahu's Ota Camp, He'eia Kea, Waiāhole-Waikāne, Kahalu'u, and Chinatown came to ES rallies and hearings and supported the often embattled ES staff and program. And ES program staff and students often mobilized on campus or staged fora to discuss and support community eviction issues, such as those in Chinatown or Waiāhole-Waikāne.

In 1974, when the Regents and UH administration wanted to name the new Social Science building after Stanley Porteus, an academician whose writings and research were loaded with racist observations and motivations, the new ES program launched a petition signed by two thousand students and faculty and staged a mass rally in April 1975, demanding that the Regents refrain from naming the building after Porteus. Though not victorious then, the ES program today was involved in the struggle led by Hawaiian Studies students and the ASUH to remove Porteus' name from the building. It took courage and commitment for ES to wage such battles when its own fate and destiny were always in question.

Ethnic Studies also sponsored and supported fora bringing other Third World activists to the Islands. It published several volumes of the *Hawai'i Pono Journal*, which acquainted readers with working-class histories and heroes/heroines. It gathered research and materials on local history and communities, and organized them into a resource room. It helped community and student groups develop slide-shows and educational materials for use on and off campus. In all of this, Marion Kelly was often to be seen and heard from. She joined the ES staff full-time after her discharge from the Bishop Museum and has been one of the leading spirits of the program and the efforts it has helped spawn.

The legacy of the Ethnic Studies Program is an immense one, and its history is rich in research, publishing, recruitment and commitment. ES is certainly capable of writing its own history, in its own inestimable way. This paper sought to place the rise of the ES program in the context of the heady days of the student and anti-war movements and the early community struggles against eviction. These movements helped to create the social, ideological and material conditions upon which Ethnic Studies was launched, and the ES program replenished the community and labor movements with activists and ideas, resources and researchers. With its community and campus conferences, fora,

flyers and publications, Ethnic Studies continues to be an important asset for all of us concerned with the movement for social justice, peace, equality and self-determination.

Reference

Ka Maka'āinana. 1984. Ethnic Studies Newsletter. Fall issue.