This paper is written from the perspective of two different positions I held in connection with the University of Hawai’i Ethnic Studies Program. From 1977 to 1979, I served as Interim Director as well as a faculty member; from my experiences at that time, I will detail the history of the first eight years of the Ethnic Studies Program from its inception in 1970. Since 1979, however, I have not been directly affiliated with the Program. I utilize this distance to comment more generally about changes in the political and institutional “spaces” that Ethnic Studies currently occupies at University of Hawai’i and raise broader issues currently discussed. The political space of Ethnic Studies – which it initially shared with the demands for many other ethnic studies and minority programs across the nation – represents an ideology that formed the context for its origins. This political space is rooted in the mid-to-late 1960s civil rights thrust of the Blacks as well as growing general student disaffection towards American involvement in Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

Three decades later, the contemporary national political space reflects the history of conservative backlash against affirmative action and open admission programs on US campuses, and the substitution of a deradicalized and deracinated “multiculturalism” in the face of antagonistic “culture wars” and the teaching of the canon on university campuses. Locally, the Hawaiian sovereignty movement as well as almost a decade of economic recession in the Islands demarcate new arenas of conflict.

There has been a transformation as well of the “designated space” for Ethnic Studies within the University of Hawai’i, marking the former’s normalization and institutionalization. No longer concerned with fighting for its survival (though fighting for adequate positions and support remains), the Program shifted the terrain of its involvement in struggles in the community. The main intent of this paper is to present an historical analysis of the political and institutional spaces from which the Ethnic Studies Program began, situating it both nationally and locally, as well as indicating how the contemporary period significantly differs and poses new challenges.

In the Beginning

The Program was conceived by a rising tide of ethnic militancy and connected to changing perceptions of ethnic identity leading to demands for academic programs that would broaden the knowledge beyond concepts of ethnicity as race or black-white relations. This marked the emergence of the Asian American movement and Asian American Studies as they arose on the West Coast, in places such as San Francisco State, Berkeley, and UCLA (to name a few), to which the Ethnic Studies Program was linked. During the civil rights struggle, the “hallowed university – long seen as the institution with the most enlightened race relations” – became a center and focus for intense racial conflict (Blauner 1972:256). Bitter confrontations occurred between largely white university administrators and professors, who viewed themselves as liberals committed to the civil rights goal of equality, and “Third World” (i.e., non-white or non-European) students (and to some extent faculty) over the questions of admissions policies and Ethnic Studies programs. The first struggle resulted in an “open admissions” policy which to some degree succeeded in increasing the numbers of Third World minority students on campus. The second, and allied, struggle resulted in instituting various minority programs – the earliest were Black Studies, followed closely (depending upon the student population) by Chicano, Native American Indian, and Asian American Studies.

As these student demands evolved from the civil rights movement, they came to be regarded generally as a politicized “Third World movement” in their own right. In the broadest sense, initial demands for all Ethnic Studies programs were based on two major considerations. There was the growing awareness of the commonality of experiences of Third World people arising from colonial domination (especially as it was exemplified in Vietnam), as well as the common experiences of Third World peoples within the United States. Further, it was recognized that the history and present situation of such ethnic minorities were not adequately covered in existing courses and curricula within the school system, remaining, to a large extent, an “untold history.” Lack of ethnic awareness and pride on the part of minorities was not uncommon. Nor were continuing stereotypes perpetuated in an educational system.
which, itself, mitigated against the full and equal participation in our society of members of certain
minorities (Sharma 1978:2-3).  
These programs arose across the country as a direct offshoot of the civil rights movement and
were rooted in the contradictory perspectives of racism in America reached by (predominantly) white
liberal professors and Third World students. The latter’s perspective on racism led to questions of identity
as well as to the search for a more radical interpretation of American society and the place of Asian
Americans (as well as other non-white minorities) in it.

Perspectives on Racism and the Need to Define Identity

Struggles over Ethnic Studies centered around the issue of racism or the definition of the “race
problem.” The issue revealed cleavages and conflicting perspectives between white faculty and Third
World students. The white faculty, as Blauner noted,

began with (and to a degree clings to) notions of the 1950s, that prejudice and discrimination lie
at the heart of racial injustice, whereas Third World students conceive of racism as an overriding
reality, a systematic process structuring the entire society and its institutions (1972:258; see also

This conflict is crucial to understanding the rise and early directions of Ethnic Studies programs
as well as the controversy surrounding them. For many liberals, racism was (and still is) an individual
attitudinal matter; the Third World definition was a broader one, raising questions about the political,
social, and historical forces present in America. It focused on society as a whole and on structured
relations between people that reveal institutionalized racism, rather than on individual actions and
personalities. At the time, most white scholars were still ill-at-ease in explaining a phenomena that – by
the historical record of the dominant Anglo society’s attempts – should have long disappeared from the
American scene. Blauner (1992) perceptively noted that academia’s general commitment to assimilation
as the solution for racial and ethnic inequalities, and the associated tendency to describe distinctive
values and lifestyles in terms of social class, resulted in a “color blind” ethos of the liberal ideology. We
find a recuperation of this color-blindness in today’s espousal of multiculturalism which, while
acknowledging difference, downplays history and race (see discussion, below).

The failure of the University to transmit knowledge about the Asian experience in America
coalesced into a total indictment against institutional education as a legitimization of racialized thinking. A
University of California, Berkeley, document, for example, noted that race was institutionalized in an
educational system which

has utterly failed in terms of transmitting knowledge about the Asian experience, developing
Asian self-awareness and leadership, and serving the needs and interests of the Asian
community. Thus the University has not related itself to the entire society which it is obliged to
serve. In fact, the conspicuous absence of courses on Asian-American history and experience in
the University curriculum and in public education as a whole poses serious questions on the
academic integrity and competence of University curriculum planners and institutional personnel,
and reveals the pervasiveness and deep-rootedness of institutional racism in our society. The
indictment of the University and education in general goes even farther. At all levels of the system
one finds research and instructional materials that are biased in perspective and bear little or no
empirical correspondence to the realities of the Asian community (University of California,

Asian American Studies placed great significance on correcting errors of omission and distortion
in presenting knowledge of Asians in America, so crucial to the formation of a positive ethnic identity.
Perhaps somewhat ahead of their time in view of recent issues concerning globalism and
transnationalism, the “Declaration of Principles” for Asian American Studies at the City College of New
York stated that it was the “only university in the country to have Asian-American Studies as a major
emphasis in a Department of Asian Studies” (1974:36). Included in these principles were the promotion of
an awareness of the position of Asians as Asians in America and the provision of a proper world
perspective to discuss the oppression of Asians by imperialist and colonialist powers of Europe and the
United States and the related problems of racism and discrimination against Asians in the US. Another goal was to present an Asian perspective of Asian history – to re-analyze the early period of Asian struggle against Western subjugation, up to the current struggles of Asian peoples to set up independent modern states. Finally, they urged an understanding of the common struggles of Third World peoples and the promotion of unity among Ethnic Studies departments, and, in a broader sense, among Third World students and communities through its course offerings, programs, activities and public standpoint (City College of New York 1974:36).

Implicit in the rise of Ethnic Studies programs was a concern over omissions of knowledge in the areas of racism, ethnic identity and pride, perspective, concern for community, Third World unity, and political struggle. The expression of these concerns met with strong resistance on the part of the academic establishment, and all such programs were the center of controversy and bitter struggle. Paradoxically, nowhere can the issues be better revealed than in the case of Hawai‘i – long touted as the “melting pot” of the Pacific where peoples of many ethnic backgrounds live and work (to say nothing of marry) together, ostensibly in harmony.

**Bringing It All Back Home**

In the late 1970s, the population of Hawai‘i was indeed unique among the fifty United States – although now, in the late 1990s, changes in the ethnic/racial character of the United States make it somewhat less so. 1980 State of Hawai‘i statistics classifies the population as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
<td>12.0*</td>
<td>12.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other and unknown</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* It is widely believed that the US Bureau of Census, on whose data the above table is based, underestimate the number and percentage of Native Hawaiians in the population. The more likely figure is approximately 20 per cent (Office of Hawaiian Affairs 1998:10).

Source: DBEDT 1996:48, Table 1.29.

The student breakdown of the University of Hawai‘i along ethnic lines in 1976 was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1998</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islanders</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Asian/Pac. Isl.</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed( other)</td>
<td>5.4*</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am. Indian/Alaska Nat.</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No report/unknown</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Including some part-Hawaiian. 
" No information available for 1980.

Source: UH Statistics

This multi-ethnic population was primarily a result of changes during the two hundred years since the West “discovered” the Islands for themselves with the coming of Captain Cook. Contact with the West
brought about a revolutionary transformation from a subsistence economy of the Native Hawaiians to Hawai‘i’s incorporation as a colonial dependency within an expanding capitalist system (Kent 1971a, 1971b, 1977, 1993; Morgan 1948). This transformation was achieved by the decimation of the indigenous population and the alienation of their lands (Lind 1938; Kelly 1970). It was also accomplished by an attempted cultural genocide in which both American missionaries and merchants played parts.

After experimenting with provisioning, sandalwood trading, and whaling, Western migrants to Hawai‘i finally found that maximum profit lay in covering the Islands with huge sugar (and later, pineapple) plantations. The period of 1852 through 1946 (with a lull between 1932 and 1946) marks the time that the sugar industry imported into the Islands over 400,000 laborers, primarily Asian single men. The Japanese, Filipinos, and Chinese formed the largest groups. With the coming of postwar economic changes, Hawai‘i’s statehood in 1959, the tremendous construction boom of the sixties, and a “new kind of sugar” – the tourist industry – a large influx of people from the continental US threatened to drastically change the lifestyle of the Islands. On the eve of Third World student strikes across the nation, Governor John A. Burns openly expressed his fears about this threat at a meeting of the new 1969 Legislature. He remarked,

To be perfectly candid, I sense among some elements of our community – particularly those who are descended from our immigrant plantation workers – a subtle “inferiority of spirit,” which is totally unwarranted and which becomes for them a social and psychological handicap in life. [...] They should be proud of their ethnic roots, of the riches and treasures of their Pacific and Asian cultures.

I submit further that they should be given every opportunity – even in our public school system – to learn more about their own people’s rich past, to understand the sources of inspiration which motivated their fathers and their ancestors before them.

The undercurrent of uncertainty simmering beneath our affluent surface has been articulated in expressions of concern that Hawaii stands in danger of losing its unique character [...] It gets at the very heart of the problem each individual faces in establishing his identity, in tracing his background and traditions, his cultural roots and his own historical significance, his place in society.

Governor Burns continued by making a plea for the preservation of the stories of Hawai‘i’s ethnic groups, necessary for the identity of their children, before such stories become scattered and lost.

A small group of campus and community people came together at the same time to propose an Ethnic Studies Program. Subsequently, and in conjunction with a legislative mandate, the Program began in July 1970. Dennis Ogawa, now a professor of American Studies at the UH, was the first director. Almost immediately, internal troubles and a hostile administration began to plague the Program, setting a pattern that was to characterize its history for at least a decade. Miraculously, the Program survived due to the ability, dedication, and vision of a number of key personnel in the Program who, during its critical years, employed their talents to harness the support of students and the community in their fight for survival and for a meaningful Ethnic Studies Program.

Both in 1972 and in 1977, the administration attempted to ring the death knell of the Program. Both times, the Program mobilized large numbers of people from the student body and the community to demonstrate, sit-in, and testify for retention of an autonomous Program teaching “Our History Our Way." The spring of 1977 finally marked the Ethnic Studies Program’s transition from a “provisional” to a “permanent” University Program. The following academic year (when I joined), however, was fraught with an unprecedented scale of administrative harassment which sought to subvert the newly-made permanent Program. The following year saw the new hiring of the first full-time, tenure track director and a breathing spell from administrative hostilities. These would resurface again, however, over the years.

Between 1970 and 1978, conflict arose within the Program on three main occasions. More important to its early development and direction, however, was the high rate of staff turnover due to lack of tenure-track positions, instability in the Program’s status, and the short-term commitments that most students could make. Further, many dedicated staff members left, because they felt that their work could be carried out more meaningfully in the community than within the University itself. A total of eight directors in as many years highlights the problem of staff instability that continued to plague the Program. Despite this, the Program definitely proved itself as a unique and viable academic endeavor.
Early Direction and Goals for the Ethnic Studies Program

Accompanying the shift in personnel and leadership was a concomitant shift in the Program’s direction. This proceeded along two lines. With the ouster of the first director in 1972 and the establishment of a People’s Committee on Ethnic Studies, the history and culture of Hawai‘i’s multi-ethnic population became primary. The director had attempted to make continental US experiences a priority (UH/ESP – University of Hawai‘i, Ethnic Studies Program n.d.:1; 1972a). The fight against institutional racism at the University also became a concomitant goal at that time (see Gladwin 1972). Second, there was a dramatic move towards developing activism and student participation in both community struggles and the running of the Program, as well as in defining program work and objectives (UH/ESP 1973:4). This latter concern became primary during 1974 to 1976 and resulted in the participation of staff and students in numerous Island struggles.

It is clear, from tracing goals of the Ethnic Studies Program during 1972 through 1978, that rectifying the aims of omission and instilling knowledge and pride of student ethnic identity remained primary. This knowledge was presented through a perspective on society different from that offered in traditional academic departments (as epitomized by the assimilationist approach of the American Studies Department). The 1972 statement from the People’s Committee read, in part:

Until very recently, the whole public school system in Hawaii offered no systematically coordinated series of courses on the history, culture or current problems of any of the ethnic groups in Hawaii. What has been true of the public school system has also been true of the University of Hawaii. […]

Many generations have grown up in Hawaii without learning anything about the traditions and history of their ancestors. […] They [present school and university students] are, in many ways, a lost generation. They have no sense of identity, of pride in being themselves, little knowledge about the traditions, history and values of their respective ethnic groups. […] In many of them this lack of self-knowledge has bred shame; in others, a deep-seated sense of frustration and anger. […]

The Program is designed to instill in members of the ethnic groups living here a sense of intelligent pride in being themselves, in finding out who they are and how it is they have come to be in the position they are in today (UH/ESP 1972b).

This sense of a loss of identity among Island peoples – from the original Hawaiians through the laborers imported to work on sugar plantations and their descendants – was linked to the economic, political, and cultural dominance of the white elite that came to rule the Islands. Ernestine Enomoto, a senior at the University of Hawai‘i majoring in American history in 1971, wrote an article “Hawaii from Annexation: An Object of Cultural Colonialism?” This was published in the first volume of the Ethnic Studies Program’s Hawaii Pono Journal. In it she stated, “becoming a desirable citizen meant more than being educated and Christianized,” it meant being an Anglo-Saxon. The 1890s doctrines of social Darwinism and manifest destiny served to legitimize white supremacy over an inferior population in Hawai‘i (1971:4-5). Enomoto pointed out the significance of a “well-established public education system” that contributed significantly to the process of assimilating foreigners into American culture.” The “concept of Americanization demanded the absolute control of all phases of life by whites” (1971:9). She wrote further,

In specifying “cultural” colonialism, I suggest a dominating life style which subordinates those peoples. At the outset of Hawaii’s annexation [indeed, before], such a cultural colonialism was intended. In order to accommodate the “entirely different race,” Americans had to implant its [sic] values and principles in local soil. This is the common practice of the Americanization process which demands the surrendering of one’s ethnic identity to a uniformity (Enomoto 1971:10).

The same issue of Hawaii Pono Journal also contains a lengthy and well-documented article on “The Myth of Chinese Success in Hawaii” by William Bun Chin Chang. At that time Chang (from Hawai‘i and currently faculty at the Richardson School of Law) was a junior at Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs and active in the Asian Youth Alliance there. He made a strong argument against the “traditional explanation” of the Chinese success which relates alleged success to ethnic characteristics. Instead, he showed how the Chinese were “allowed” to succeed to a point by the
dominant white society in order to keep the Japanese from advancing. He further points out that the “ethnic character traits explanation of Chinese success breaks down when one compares the Chinese with the Japanese” (1971:70; cf. US News and World Report 1976). The articles by Chang and Enomoto clearly reflect concerns similar to those expressed in the Asian American movement on the continent as outlined above. They point to the commonalities marking Third World experiences in Hawai‘i and elsewhere.

By 1973, the academic and activist roles of the Program were clearly established. Ethnic Studies Program saw itself as

born of struggle and the support given by community organizations, unions, students, and the general community. In fighting for the Program and in developing the Program, long hours and commitment have been expended. Because of this the Program has had a responsibility to fulfill.

On the one hand, the Program’s role is educational; developing materials and analysis which critically examine situations and problems our people face: social, economic radical [sic], cultural, political, in terms of their historical development, and developing means by which this material is passed on to others. On the other hand, the Program has developed an active participation in the issues and struggles of the people of Hawai‘i (i.e. eviction struggles, improvement district struggles, labor support, etc.) (UH/ESP 1973:4, see also 1974, especially pp. 1-3).

The orientation that academics cannot be separated from the needs of the community became a firm principle. It was further enjoined that constant assistance to the community be offered, so that there would be a practical value to Ethnic Studies’ work. Program activists and students went out into communities and aided in such eviction struggles as Niumalu-Nawiliwili, Young Street, Waimānalo, Chinatown, and Old Vineyard. During the 1974-1975 academic year, political work within the Program continued to intensify, as activists joined the Wāiāhole-Waikāne eviction struggle and the H-3 campaign to stop a cross-island freeway and gave support to University maintenance workers. Ethnic Studies activists played a key role at that time in mobilizing opposition to naming a new University social science facility after a man (Stanley Porteous) well-known for his racist writings on the people of Hawai‘i (UH/ESP 1976:4, see also 1977:19 for a complete list of “community service and outreach”).

Between 1970 and 1976, there was also a shift in the Program’s emphasis from a sole concern with ethnic identity as an expression of cultural nationalism, to a broader concern that links class struggles in Hawai‘i with those on the continent. These are viewed as parallel to larger struggles now waged in Third World countries against the forces of racism and corporate imperialism. This fact, in part, accounts for the unusual fact (by national standards) that haole (whites) were teaching and continue to teach in the Program and served on its staff, and that a “Caucasians in Hawai‘i” course became part of the curriculum offering. An interview in the Hawaii Observer with Ethnic Studies then-director Davianna McGregor-Alegado, states “all of Hawai‘i’s ethnic groups (excepting the Hawaiians and Haoles) came to the Islands, first in response to a demand for cheap labor” (Shrader 1976:14). As they share in common this economic fact of their local origins, “their history is the history of a class and should be taught ‘from the bottom up.’” It is, says McGregor-Alegado, not a history of kings and businessmen but of working and common people. The slogan which now represents this set of assumptions is “Our history, Our way” (ibid.). The Observer interviewer concludes:

the Ethnic Studies Program is conspicuous less as a political entity than as an example of a particular approach to learning and teaching – an approach which de-emphasizes lectures, tests and grades, and which looks first for a way to involve the student personally in the issues under consideration. It seeks to employ teamwork rather than competition; and with its emphasis on first-hand experience, it defies the standard methods of evaluation (Shrader 1976:15).

Between 1974 and 1976, the Program came under attack from the administration for this type of work. The administration stated that a recognizable standard of scholarship had not been achieved. For its part, the Program maintained that much significant research had gone into curriculum development in a newly emerging field and that information gleaned from community work was a significant academic endeavor. In the fall of 1976, the Vice-Chancellor seized upon the ending of the provisional period to recommend Program dispersal after the Spring 1977 semester. During 1976-77, the Program undertook a massive “Instructional Program Review” and a massive campaign of student and community mobilization to succeed in gaining permanency for the Program. The work and discussion involved in completing the
“Instructional Review” document became the basis for the major goals of the Ethnic Studies Program which had evolved since 1972. The Ethnic Studies Program, in 1978, was oriented to serving the needs of Hawai‘i’s multi-ethnic community by:

- Teaching Hawai‘i’s multi-ethnic people’s historical and contemporary contributions and experiences in order to promote pride and appreciation of their own ethnic heritage and that of the diverse ethnic groups.
- Teaching common and working people’s historical and contemporary contributions and experiences from their perspective.
- Teaching the value of community knowledge and experience and encouraging application of skills and knowledge of serving community needs.
- Helping students develop skills of critical analysis in order to make intelligent decisions on personal and social issues and problems and take affirmative action to resolve them in the interest of the general community (UH/ESP 1977:10-11,15).

After gaining permanency as a regular University program, Ethnic Studies attempted to develop more specific educational objectives consistent with their goals. Faculty and administrative reviews in 1977 identified critical areas of weakness in academic quality which had to be rectified to some degree before the next review took place in 1981. Secondly, the Program was plagued with a plummeting student enrollment – from a high of 569 in fall 1971 to a low of 254 seven years later. To some extent, this reflected a declining interest in the humanities and social sciences and a general University enrollment decrease. But it was also due to factors in the wider society which marked an end to the turbulent sixties and the search for self, and a change to a student body more concerned with getting jobs after college. Finally, the local situation changed somewhat in terms of numbers and types of community struggles. The Ethnic Studies staff was still dedicated to presenting a radical analysis of Hawai‘i’s past and contemporary condition and working in the community, but it was committed to doing this within a quality educational program which generated a working-class perspective on ethnic history and experiences. It recognized the need for more stable staffing, more courses, and much research yet to be done. As the 1970s drew to a close, the Program began to move towards a normalization of the institutional space it occupied in the University.

If much had changed from the time of the founding of the Ethnic Studies Program until 1978, even more momentous changes and struggles face the Program twenty years later. The intervening decades mark a transformation of the national and local scenes. The conservative backlash against affirmative action and open admission programs was transferred into the classroom where a muted “multiculturalism” substituted for vocal challenges to a Euro- and androcentric curriculum. The failure of the economic dream in paradise and concomitant rise of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, combined with a globalization that increasingly laps up against and erodes the Islands’ shores, marks the terrain of new involvements and struggles for Ethnic Studies to address.

Facing the Challenges of Today

The Program’s institutional space within the University has transformed considerably. Twenty years ago, it dug in to concentrate on building a strong base within academia. Indeed, Nakanishi and Leong’s 1978 survey of Asian American Studies Programs, including Hawai‘i, noted that much energy was expended into maintaining programmatic and institutional resources, and undergraduate programs. Research, a major concern, tended to be historical in the form of oral histories or policy studies. [...] Teaching and program survival, due to administrative constraints, were the overriding concerns (Leong 1998:2).

During the second decade of the 1980s, such existing programs were already “grudgingly recognized” (ibid.). Tenure and promotion battles did occur (the more publicized one of Nakanishi at UCLA and Franklin Odo here at University of Hawai‘i respectively), but this was marked by an “increasing professionalisation’ of the field in academic settings” (Takagi and Omi, from Leong 1998:3) which enjoined faculty to submit to the “publish or perish” guidelines of academic survival. While the harbingers of change were already apparent in 1977, with permanency granted to the Program, the situation is markedly different now. In 1995, Ethnic Studies became a department and at present eight faculty
positions and several lecturers teach some 45 majors and 70 certificate students, while over 700 students take courses each semester. To some extent, these achievements mark a disjuncture in links to community issues.

More significant and pressing than the transformed institutional space of the Program, however, is the changed current political space that it occupies. One area of contention is the critical debates over reimagining the “canon” to offer a multicultural curriculum to all students, not just students of color. A conservative backlash against the 1960s civil rights and antiwar movements focused on what was seen as a radical left entrenched on college campuses across the nation. From warnings about the estimated ten thousand Marxist professors (US News and World Report 1982, quoted in Wilson 1995:10) to Allan Bloom’s tome about the decline and fall of the university, The Closing of the American Mind (1987), attacks came from without as well as within the University. Dinesh D’Souza popularized warnings about the threats of “Illiberal Education” as they worked themselves out in the politics of race and sex on campus (1986) while high government officials joined the bandwagon as well. For more than a decade, the state apparatus had been behind this attack as well. From Reagan to Bush, William Bennett to Lynne Cheney, and an increasingly conservative judiciary to the Republican Congress of the mid-nineties, the US turned to the right (Nelson 1997:35).

Education Secretary William Bennett railing against Stanford University’s attempt to revise its curriculum to reflect a broader, multicultural perspective; Lynne Cheney, Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities from 1986-1992, felt compelled to be “telling the Truth” about how, “in the view of a growing number of academics, the truth was not merely irrelevant, it no longer existed” (1995:15-16). When demands for a changed curriculum could no longer be ignored, the response was an emphasis on multiculturalism – but, as Nelson notes, there was a right and a wrong way to do “happy family multiculturalism.” The right way from Cheney’s perspective was to focus on select cultural traditions to celebrate, but to de-emphasize the historical record, refrain from negative comments about other groups, and avoid attacks on the nation-state. This was, in effect, a “cookbook of recipes for unchallenged coexistence” (Nelson 1997:35).

Even still, the reverberation of demands for an expanded curriculum, pressed by minorities, feminists, and the left, led to counterattacks on curricula changes and multiculturalism, along with attacks on feminism and affirmative action. It was, indeed, seen as a “closing of the American mind” with accusations of “political correctness hurled against those who, in the eyes of the Blooms, Cheneys, and D’Souzas, represented the barbarians at the gates and the end of western civilization” (see, for example, Kurzweil and Philips 1994). The National Association of Scholars (NAS), formed in the late 1980s to counteract the perceived threat from the left in higher education, also attacked affirmative action as recently as 1996. NAS officials Stephen Balch and Peter Warren stated,

To the extent that scholars allow theories of social justice to drive their decision-making, they forfeit their special claim to insulation from the political process and hence to academic freedom. And this is especially true when these theories embody concepts such as group rights, which are conspicuously at odds with evaluating the intellectual merits of individual students, scholars, and ideas (quoted in Nelson 1997:81).

It is important to know that an affiliate, Hawai‘i Association of Scholars, of the NAS also exists in Hawai‘i. While low-key in its functions, it consists of faculty and students at UH. By 1996, the Marxist-on-campus scare seemed no longer a concern, NAS officials began to rally against the “high percentage of registered Democrats in humanities departments” (Nelson 1997:81) but were not notably perturbed about their lack in business, engineering, or economics departments.

As John Wilson notes, in his pithy analysis in The Myth of Political Correctness:

The attacks on feminism, affirmative action, and multiculturalism are linked by the fear of a changing culture. Traditional ideas are no longer merely accepted as the eternal truth but instead are challenged by new perspectives of the status quo. None of these new perspectives and controversial issues is immune from criticism. […] The backlash against PC is part of the resentment against the many changes – institutional and intellectual – in American universities since the 1960s. […] Conservative critics say that a return to the good old days – when few people went to college, feminism and multiculturalism did not exist, and nobody caused trouble – will restore liberal education to its former glory (Wilson 1995:158; my emphasis).
While Wilson may have overstated that the conservative attack on American universities succeeding “beyond their wildest dreams in discrediting the academic left” (1995:163-64), disillusionment and backtracking did occur. Respecting “cultural diversity” in the classroom meant facing up to limitations on the training and knowledge of teachers, as well as limitations on, or even loss of, “authority.” Bell Hooks teaches students tactics of “transgression and resistance” and views education as “the practice of freedom” (1994:30), but notes the dangers these pose. “Indeed,” she writes,

the idea that the classroom should always be a “safe,” harmonious place was challenged. It was hard for individuals to fully grasp the idea that recognition of difference might also require of us a willingness to see the classroom change – to allow for shifts in relations between students” (ibid.)

– and between students and teacher. Although she also notes that many professors “lacked strategies to deal with antagonisms in the classroom” (ibid.:131), this certainly remains a change to teaching beyond the “comforting ‘melting pot’ idea of cultural diversity, the rainbow coalition where we would all be grouped together in our difference, but everyone wearing the same have-a-nice-day smile!” (ibid.).

Here at the University of Hawai‘i, it is imperative for Ethnic Studies to actively engage with these issues as they work themselves out in the classrooms and departments across campus. The struggle to incorporate a radical vision for teaching about minorities is often a diluted success, as it is often appropriated and taught as a depoliticized form of “multiculturalism.” The presence of numbers of vocal Hawaiian, minority, and female students who increasingly confront ideas in the classrooms can lead to volatile situations which, while creating openings for real dialogue, are often mismanaged, ignored, or worse, stifled. “Our history, Our way” is no longer exclusively the rallying cry of the Ethnic Studies, and the Department can no longer rest on the laurels that saw it in the forefront of struggles for progressive action and social justice. In 1974, the Ethnic Studies Program was a leader in the (failed) protest to rename Porteus Hall, galvanizing students and faculty across campus. After that, however, this issue lay dormant until 1997 when Native Hawaiian Students in the Associated Students of the University of Hawai‘i governing body with broad-based support from the University community, succeeded in having the Board of Regents change the name of that Hall to the Social Sciences Building.

A vital and expanded Hawaiian Studies Program housed in its own building, with roughly 25 majors and 140 students taking its courses each semester, now rivals Ethnic Studies as representing the voice of local people. Perceptions of “local” identity became more ambiguous within the context of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. Sovereignty for Kānaka Maoli (Indigenous Hawaiians) complicates any past meaning of the term that indicated “Hawaiians and the immigrant groups in general terms as people from Hawaii in distinction to whites from the mainland” (Okamura 1980:135). Okamura wrote about the “continuing significance of local identity” in the 1990s as a counterpoint to external forces which threaten to overpower those who make the Islands their home and invite a feeling of powerlessness to direct the course of Hawai‘i’s economic and political futures (1994). However, this significance is tempered by assertions of competing nationalism. 10 Increasingly, “native” and “local” struggles are differentiated and may conflict in the 1990s (Fujikane 1994). What role the Ethnic Studies Department constructively plays in these struggles and what coalitions this facilitates is yet to be seen. One indication of this is Aoudé’s analysis of the need to place the self-determination struggle of the Kānaka Maoli11 within the context of class interests reflected in both the local and the global economy, and the strategic alliances that must ensue (see Aoudé 1998 and this issue). Efforts such as these are clearly in keeping with the shift in the Program’s emphasis, by the mid 1970s, from a singular concern with ethnic identity and cultural nationalism, to linking class struggles in Hawai‘i and the continental US.

The Hawai‘i of today is, in many respects, a different place than that in the early struggles for Ethnic Studies. The dream of a better life was tarnished by a decade-long economic decline marked by a “dependency” and “helplessness” that Kent eloquently describes in the long march of “Islands under the Influence” of outside forces (1993). Immigrants, tourists, foreign investors (both from Japan and the continental US), the continuing overwhelming dependence on tourism, 12 and a greater absorption into a globalized economy controlled by outsiders, exacerbated the marginalization of Hawai‘i’s people to external sources of power and control. All this occurred with the downward swing of both tourism and the Japanese economy since the crash of East and Southeast Asian economies in mid-1997. For many of our students, this meant a future somewhere else, as the “brain-drain” of bright, young talent to greener pastures continued.
Conclusions

In its origins, the Ethnic Studies Program emphasized a perspective on the history of local minority groups that reflected the understanding and feeling of the people whose history was studied. The goal was to provide an environment wherein students obtain required skills to solve community problems and prove effective agents of social change. Ethnic Studies was conceived with a future orientation, telling students, “This is where you came from, this is where you are now, and this is where we can go.” The emphasis was on producing minority scholars, professionals, and others who could return to their own communities to work, and not be a part of the “ethnic” brain drain. It hoped to produce individuals who could use the perspectives of their own cultures to analyze the problems of their communities and develop institutions and agencies that were culturally consistent with solutions to those problems. Linked to such programs across the nation, specifically that of Asian American Studies, it arose from the attempt to instill in individuals a consciousness of ethnic identity and respect, and stressed the need to understand the objective factors or processes at work in society that actively defined such self-identity.

In these many ways, Ethnic Studies departments/programs, both here and elsewhere, were the forerunners of what has become a movement toward multicultural or multivocal perspectives that enter into every aspect of every discipline. Today, however, with minority voices demanding to be heard from every corner, and awareness of ethnicity and “identity politics” so widespread, the Department faces new tasks. What is also highlighted here is that identities are multiply articulated and situationally determined; along with ethnicity, for example, there are considerations of gender and class. Leong calls attention to the need to develop new “crossing strategies” to narrow the gap between public cultures and academic communities [to] cross the lines of race, gender, and class to form coalitions with those even more marginalized than we are – in international, national, and local struggles for civil, religious, immigrant, and workers’ rights (1998:9).

Ironically, the “brain-drain” pushing local students off the Islands is due to the long recession the state seems unable to pull out of, rather than a desire to leave local communities. Under such economic pressures, the need to evolve longer-term strategies that will create coalitions of people working towards a better future is now more critical than ever. Bridging what may be a growing gap between “natives” and “locals” is a case in point. Building on a strong foundation of active struggle, and facing new challenges in the future, the Ethnic Studies Department is in a good position to refashion itself and emerge as an even more powerful voice for equality and social justice.

Notes

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1. The idea of “spaces” is discussed by Russell Leong in his overview of “The Pathway of an Asian American Discourse” (1998:1). I do not deal here with the “discursive space” relating to analytical perspectives in the field, nor with the “transnational space” and its connections with global formations.

2. “Ethnic Studies” is used as a general term to cover all programs dealing with non-white minority groups in the US (e.g., Black Studies, Chicano Studies, Native American Indian Studies, or Asian American Studies). Some writers (Endo 1973:281) make a distinction between Black Studies Programs and Ethnic Studies. In Hawai‘i, Ethnic Studies is used to cover the study of all ethnic groups from a working class perspective. This paper uses Ethnic Studies to refer to all such programs and then specifies Asian American Studies or Ethnic Studies at Hawai‘i.

3. The case of City College of New York is one of the best documented (see e.g., City College of New York 1974; Gross 1978; Yanagida 1972). Asian Studies, Black Studies and Puerto Rican Studies were formed in 1971 as a result of the CCNY Third World Student Strike of 1969. It went from an “almost entirely white and predominantly Jewish” college in the sixties to the present multi-ethnic student population of “33 percent black, 21 percent Spanish, 12 percent Jewish, 11 percent Asian
and diminishing percentages of Italians, Irish, Ukrainians, Serbo-Croations and Slavs” (Gross 1978:13; see also Blauner’s general discussion, 1972:264-68).

4. For example, see Chun-Hoon (1975). Media and literary representations of Third World peoples have also come under strong scrutiny and attack.

5. Wong states (1972:33): “During the late fifties to the middle sixties, Asian Americans were conspicuously absent from the various events of the civil rights movement. This is not to say that no Asian Americans were involved, but only that they had no organizations or coalition to draw attention to themselves as a distinct ethnic group.” Endo also points out that blacks were the first to make demands for Ethnic Studies programs (1973:286). Uyematsu discusses the importance of the “black power” movement for the rise of “yellow power” and the questions raised regarding Asian American identity (1971).

6. Franklin Odo remained the director from 1978 until 1997, when he resigned to join the Smithsonian Institution.


8. “PC” is used to “refer to an ensemble that takes in various beliefs and causes, and often includes a rejection of the traditions of the West. Some aspects of these phenomena are individually acceptable, but as a whole and especially in its extreme forms, this ‘movement’ has created a dogmatic and intolerant atmosphere in the universities and elsewhere in the culture that is hostile to the exchange of ideas and harmful to the education of students” (1994:7).

9. The current president of the Hawai‘i chapter is James Roumasset, professor of economics. Its members subscribe to the NAS educational philosophy with its stand against campus affirmative action and sexual harassment policies.

The NAS works to enrich the substance and strengthen the integrity of scholarship and teaching, convinced that only through an informed understanding of the Western intellectual heritage and the realities of the contemporary world, can citizen and scholar be equipped to sustain our civilization’s achievements. In light of these objectives, the NAS is deeply concerned about the widening currency within the academy of perspectives that reflexively denigrate the values and institutions of our society. Because such tendencies are often dogmatic in character, and indifferent to both logic and evidence, they also tend to undermine the basis for coherent scholarly dialogue. Recognizing the significance of this problem, the NAS encourages a renewed assertiveness among academics who value reason and an open intellectual life (National Association of Scholars 1997).

More information can be found at: http://www.nas.org.

10. Candace Fujikane speaks of “the anomalous status of Local Asians who are part of a non-Native Hawaiian, multiracial Local movement asserting its own cultural identity” (1994:24) in the face of “Native Hawaiian Nationalism.”

11. Ibrahim Aoudé has been connected with Ethnic Studies since 1976, joined the faculty, full-time, in 1990, and is currently the Chair of the Department.

12. Despite all the writing on the wall and the downward slump in tourism – especially the affluent kind from Asia – the state still sinks more and more public expenditures into this mono-economy. A recent report produced by Hawai‘i-based research sponsors and the World Travel and Tourism Council (1997) contains glowing projections for future tourist revenues, provided that “more money will have to be spent to protect Hawai‘i’s market share in tourism. More taxpayer money must be injected into Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) and the Hawai‘i Visitors and
Convention Bureau (HVCB), so that they can market Hawai‘i to the rest of the world and particularly Japan (Roeder 1998:13; see his critique of the report).

References


