

# The Frank Marshall Davis Network in Hawaii

BY ANDREW WALDEN | JULY 29, 2008

In a [July 14 news release](#) the “Honolulu Community Media Council” (HCMC) denounces Accuracy In Media and the [Pittsburgh Tribune-Review](#) for “shoddy journalism and smear tactics.” HCMC, headed by Chris Conybeare of the University of Hawaii, “finds” that “there is no substance to the claim” that “Frank Marshall Davis was a lifelong Communist and a mentor to (presidential candidate Barack) Obama.”

Conybeare may be hoping that nobody else knowing the post-WW II history of Hawaii is willing to talk. Davis, it turns out, was just one member of a network whose works continue to exert influence to this day.

## Connecting the Dots

A faculty member of the [UH-West Oahu Center for Labor Education and Research](#) (CLEAR), [Conybeare](#) is producer of a many-part PBS series on the history of labor organizing in Hawaii, focusing on the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). His series, titled “Rice and Roses” tells the story of how the ILWU organized Hawaii’s dock workers and then its sugar and pineapple plantation workers.

Conybeare’s “Biography Hawaii” videos include the story of ILWU Hawaii President, Jack Hall and the life of Koji Ariyoshi, founder and editor of the ILWU-funded [Honolulu Record](#).

“[Biography Hawaii: Koji Ariyoshi](#)” is part of Conybeare’s “Rice and Roses” PBS series. According to Conybeare’s video, before hiring Frank Marshall Davis, Koji Ariyoshi joined the WW2-era Military Intelligence Service/OSS—predecessor to the CIA—and used his language skills to land himself a position as U.S. military liaison to Communist forces in China—working personally with Mao Zedong.

[The Record employed the services of Frank Marshall Davis](#) almost immediately upon his arrival in Hawaii. ILWU Chief Jack Hall and *Honolulu Record* editor Ariyoshi were among the Honolulu Seven defendants identified as key leaders of the Communist Party in Hawaii and convicted in 1953 of “conspiring to teach and advocate the overthrow of the government by force and violence.” Their convictions were reversed January 20, 1958 after the Supreme Court re-interpreted the Smith Act.

The *Record* had been founded just after the first prosecution of Communists began. From its [first issue](#) it had dedicated massive amounts of space to defending fired Communist schoolteachers John and Aiko Reinecke who would later become two of the Honolulu Seven. Shortly after the Honolulu Seven convictions were reversed, the paper folded. Ariyoshi then opened a flower shop and became known as “the Red florist.” But a decade later he was back in action leading the 1970 establishment of the Ethnic Studies Department at UH Manoa (slogan: Our History Our Way).

Ariyoshi's story told in Conybeare's video traces the unbroken ideological chain from China, to the ILWU, and to the University of Hawaii Ethnic Studies Department. In 1976, as Ariyoshi lay dying of cancer, the Democratic-controlled Hawaii State Legislature passed a resolution in his honor.

### **Another Mentor**

[The Honolulu Advertiser](#), reviewing Conybeare's Ariyoshi video, describes Ariyoshi as "Mentor to a generation of Hawaii activists." Apparently that generation is now rising to his defense. But the truth is hard to hide. Ariyoshi's political memoirs feature a front-page [photo of him with Mao Zedong](#) in Yenan, China during WW II. Already interested in Communist ideas at the University of Hawaii, he won a scholarship to the University of Georgia in the 1930s. In Georgia, Ariyoshi lived with the leftist parents of Communist sympathizer and *Tobacco Road* novelist, [Erskine Caldwell](#).

Hawaii's first Democratic Governor [Jack Burns, explained in 1975](#): "Every guy in the ILWU was at one time or another a member of the Communist Party of America. This is where they got their organizational information and how to organize, and how to bring groups together and how to create cells and how to make movements that are undetected by the bosses and everything else. ...I know what they were about. I said this is the only way they are going to organize."

Burns is likely referring only to union officials rather than the entirety of the rank and file. [Burns offered to testify](#) at the Honolulu Seven trial as a character witness on behalf of Jack Hall and Koji Ariyoshi, but Hall declined in order to protect Burns from exposure.

Senator Dan Inouye (D-HI) lost his right arm in WW II combat in Italy. In the 1954 electoral campaign he responded to Republican charges that the Democrats were influenced by communists with the famous quote now known by every Hawaii school kid: "I gave this arm to fight Fascists. If my country wants the other one to fight Communists, it can have it."

But in his [biography](#), Inouye is a little more circumspect: "No one with any sense of political reality denied that there were probably some Communists in the ILWU. ...There were those who felt that the Democrats' Party, by logical extension, was also controlled by Communists."

### **One-Party State**

Communists controlled the ILWU, the ILWU controlled the Hawaii Democratic Party, and in 1954, union-based election campaigns launched the Hawaii Democrats into control of the legislature. Burns' union-based 1962 capture of the governor's office created a one-party state unbroken for four decades until the election of Republican Governor Linda Lingle in 2002. During those decades in some sessions sat as few as one Republican legislator.

The story of Frank Marshall Davis, Obama's Marxist mentor, is completely intertwined with the story of the Hawaii Democrats rise to power.

Conybeare is joined in denials by UH Professor of Interdisciplinary studies Dr. Kathryn Waddell Takara. In the [Star Bulletin of June 29, 2008](#) she gives a non-denial denial: "Frank Davis loved democracy. But he was a fierce critic of racism and injustice, and in those years, anyone who was that controversial got labeled a communist."

But in the work she is so "angry" to see cited, [Dr. Kathryn Waddell Takara writes](#) (parenthesis added):

"Davis's initial contacts with Hawaii all had extremely strong ILWU ties. (Communist party member) Paul Robeson's own Hawaii acquaintances, which he passed on to Davis, insured that 'when I came over, one of the first things that I got involved with—well, I met all the ILWU brass, (Communist Party [executive committee member](#)) Jack Hall and all of them, and I went—they had both of us over to various functions for them—[Harriet Bouslog](#) ([Communist Party executive committee member](#)) was also a good friend.'"

These contacts were arranged by leading Communist Party members on the mainland. But in her writings Takara identifies none of them as such:

"Davis himself recalls that even before he left for Hawaii, (Communist Party member Paul) Robeson and (Communist Party member Harry) Bridges who was head of the ILWU and the CIO in the Pacific Region, suggested that I should get in touch with the *Honolulu Record* and see if I could do something for them."

Takara's implied claim that Davis was just tagged Red because he was "a critic of racism" might lead Senator Inouye to ask: Has she lost any sense of political reality?

## **CPUSA-Free History**

But Inouye would be wrong. Takara and Conybeare are defending a carefully crafted CPUSA-free version of history promoted by the "generation of Hawaii activists" for whom Koji Ariyoshi served as "mentor." Conybeare is Ariyoshi's video-biographer, while Takara created the first Black Studies courses within Ariyoshi's UH Department of Ethnic Studies.

In addition to telling the story of Frank Marshall Davis, Takara has time to write "freedom poems" such as "[Mumia Abu Jamal: Knight for Justice](#)," honoring the ultra-leftist cause célèbre convicted of killing a Philadelphia police officer over a traffic ticket. Another Takara poem is titled simply, "Angela Davis," honoring the former Communist Party vice presidential candidate acquitted as an accessory to the [1970 murder](#) of California judge Harold Haley. [Writes Takara](#):

I heard Angela was coming  
to Honolulu  
a real event  
like Miles & his red trumpet  
Sweet Honey in the Rock

Perhaps Takara would like the world to not mention Angela Davis's Communist Party membership as well?

There is much more to the story of Koji Ariyoshi. Japanese living in Hawaii were not uniformly sent to internment camps as was the case on the mainland. But Ariyoshi was in San Francisco working with the ILWU when Pearl Harbor was attacked. He was sent to [Manzanar Internment Camp](#) in the Mojave Desert. There he worked with fellow Communist Karl Yoneda to implement the CPUSA line in support of the war effort.

According to the National Parks Service [Historic Resource Study](#) on Manzanar:

One of the most prominent evacuees at Manzanar to join the [Military Intelligence Service](#) was [Karl G. Yoneda](#). A Kibei born in Southern California, Yoneda went to Japan with his family at the age of 11. Attracted by books as a young man, he developed an interest in Marxism and left home at the age of 16, bound for China in search of a Russian writer whose works he admired. In order to avoid being drafted into the Japanese army, he returned to the United States and quickly became involved in the labor movement in California. [He joined the Communist Party](#), and spent the 1930s as the editor of the Communist newspaper [Rodo Shimbun](#) (Japanese Worker) and as an organizer of Japanese labor in California and Alaska. He married fellow Communist and labor activist Elaine Black, a Caucasian, in 1933—a union that would last for more than 55 years.

With the coming of World War II, Yoneda, along with all members of Japanese ancestry, was expelled from the Communist Party. Yoneda volunteered to evacuate to Manzanar, and was among the large contingent of evacuees that left Los Angeles by train on March 23...[Yoneda emerged as one of the leaders](#) of the evacuee faction at the camp that advocated cooperation with WCCA and WRA administrators.

In fact, however, they were not expelled. They were technically dropped from membership, as were the party members who went into the Army. They continued to carry out the CPUSA line as explained in the [Historic Resource Study](#):

On April 4, (1942) less than two weeks after arriving at Manzanar as a volunteer, Yoneda was called to the camp administration office to be questioned by two sergeants from U.S. Army Intelligence concerning his thoughts about the center and the number of Communists residing there. Yoneda reportedly told them that Japanese-American Communist Party members and supporters were participating actively in the war against the Axis Powers and were willing to enlist if the Army would take them. In the meantime, they would take the message of democracy to the evacuees to help build a livable place

and would attempt to aid the war effort in every way possible. He told them the majority of the evacuees were loyal to America, but he refused to provide names of Communists in the camp. Despite his “patriotic” statements, the FBI assigned an evacuee informer, identified as “B,” to monitor and report on Yoneda’s activities at Manzanar.

Yoneda emerged as one of the leaders of the evacuee faction at Manzanar that advocated working with WCCA and WRA administrators. On July 20, he attended the meeting in Togo Tanaka’s quarters during which the Manzanar Citizens Federation was established to press for improved living conditions in the center and help promote the war effort. The organizing group included Koji Ariyoshi...

Shortly after Yoneda, Ariyoshi and others left for military service, pro-Japan internees rioted in an attempt to retaliate against the families of those who cooperated. This resulted in the rioters being transferred to [Tule Lake](#) and left the Communists in a Manzanar camp politically designed for receptivity to their line of supporting the war effort. Ironically, this put the pro-Soviet Communists in alliance with those in the camp who were genuinely patriotic Americans of Japanese ancestry, created much of the strange and contradictory nature of Hawaii’s Revolution of 1954, and centralized the role of Japanese Americans in it. The [Historic Resource Study](#) continues:

...After graduating from the MIS Language School, Yoneda served in the China-Burma-India Office of the War Information Psychological Warfare Team. He was first stationed in Ledo, India, where he wrote propaganda leaflets, prepared radio broadcasts, and interrogated Japanese prisoners of war. During the next two years, he conducted broadcasts to enemy lines in Myitkyina, Burma, before being sent to Kunming, China, where he prepared propaganda leaflets for air-drops to enemy troops until V-J Day. [\[103\]](#)

Koji Ariyoshi, an associate of Yoneda who was selected for the Military Intelligence Service from Manzanar, would later gain some notoriety. After training at the MIS Language School, he was also assigned to intelligence work in the China-Burma-India Office of the War Information Psychological Warfare Team. A native of Hawaii, Ariyoshi returned to Honolulu after the war and established the *Honolulu Record*, a progressive newspaper that he edited from 1948-58. Having become an admirer of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists while stationed in Yenan, China, during the war, Ariyoshi promoted U.S-China relationships during the Cold War era. In 1951-52 he and six others were arrested and convicted for “conspiring to teach and advocate the overthrow of the government by force and violence,” but his conviction was overturned in 1958. [\[104\]](#)

Where the Manzanar study leaves off, Herbert Romerstein picks up. Romerstein served as an investigator for the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Minority Chief Investigator for the House Committee on Internal Security, Professional Staff Member for the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and Head of the Office to Counter Soviet Disinformation for the U.S. Information Agency until he retired from the U.S. government after 25 years of service.

When the Soviet Archives and the Communist International archives were temporarily thrown open after the collapse of the USSR, Romerstein went to Moscow to read and copy formerly secret documents about the Communist Party, USA. At [a May 22, 2008 news conference](#) sponsored by America's Survival, Inc., Romerstein explained the connection between Koji Ariyoshi and Soviet Intelligence:

...one of Ariyoshi's close friends was [John Stewart Service](#), one of the penetrations of the State Department, and the man who stole vast amounts of classified material from the State Department and gave them to a communist magazine called Amerasia. [Amerasia](#) had two Soviet Intelligence Agents working on its staff and so they, of course, had access to the material that Service provided.

...there's a book about Koji Ariyoshi that was written after his death and it's in honor of him and the introduction is written by John Stewart Service, who says that when Nixon went to China, Service felt that it was time for him to go back and he did. But on his way he stopped in Hawaii to meet his friend, Ariyoshi, and urge him to visit China, which he did....

The book was published in a very small edition in San Francisco as a paperback, but it was then published in Communist China as a hardback book in English with all of the material about Koji Ariyoshi and what he had done and his work in the OSS and, of course, the introduction by John Stewart Service....”

## **Media Manipulation**

The Honolulu Community Media Council news release is not Conybeare's only brush with organizations attempting to tell the media what may or may not be “fact.” Conybeare is [Secretary-General of the World Association of Press Councils](#) (WAPC). In 2000 the [Australian Press Council resigned](#) from WAPC stating that many of the [20 remaining member organizations](#) “are councils which are in whole or part dependent on government support or patronage, and some have a direct or indirect role in the control of the press.”

In the U.S., [Media Councils exist](#) only in [Honolulu](#), [Seattle](#), and a few other places. According to the HCMC website, the editor of the *Honolulu Advertiser* [resigned from the HCMC](#) in the late 1980s when HCMC shifted towards attempting to critique and shape media coverage instead of just being an advocate for press freedom.

In 1999, American Society of Newspaper Editors President Edward Seaton [called on WAPC to scrap plans](#) for a so-called “International Code of Ethics for Journalists.” Seaton said: “We have profound reservations about any kind of an agreement at the international level. Not only would it be used against our press in our courts, it could become mandatory under international law. It would be an open invitation to authorities in other countries to inhibit our press.”

Conybeare is also a [board member](#) of the [Hawaii Peoples Fund](#) which doles out grants to dozens of left-wing activist groups statewide that HPF says are considered, “too small, too new, or too controversial by traditional funding agencies.” Before Conybeare joined its board, the Hawaii Peoples Fund helped [fund travel and honoraria](#) for a speech at UH by University of Colorado Professor Ward Churchill.

Churchill was invited [to speak at UH](#) by numerous professors from the UH Ethnic Studies Department *after* revelation of his remarks infamously comparing the people killed in the World Trade Center on 9-11 to “[little Eichmanns](#).” Speaking at UH, Churchill was greeted as a hero by a standing-room-only crowd. A few months later, academic freedom advocate David Horowitz was [only able to speak](#) over interruptions from hostile leftists at UH with the presence of a half-dozen campus security personnel.

### **Davis as Mentor**

What about Frank Marshall Davis’s role as a mentor to the young Obama? This is one of the assertions that Conybeare’s media council disputes.

[Merriam-Webster](#) defines “mentor” as “a trusted counselor or guide.” Was Frank a “trusted counselor or guide” to Obama? And what “vision” did Davis give to the young Obama?

Consider these examples from Obama’s 1995 book, *Dreams from My Father*:

- Obama’s grandmother (Toot) and Gramps have an argument over whether Gramps should give Toot a ride to work after she had been threatened at a bus stop by a black panhandler. Obama looks to Frank to sort it out in his mind. (p. 89-91)
- When Toot is having difficulty convincing the drug-abusing young Obama to apply for college, it is again Frank who is able to convince Obama that college is necessary. (p. 96-98)
- Frank delivers to the young Obama the one key lesson which radicals have sought to inculcate in the mind of every black person whether under slavery, segregation or civil rights: “...you may be a well-trained, well-paid nigger, but you’re a nigger just the same.” (p. 97)

In [his short column](#) about Dr. Kathryn Waddell Takara’s “anger” at the “bloggers...twisting her research,” *Star Bulletin* columnist John Heckathorn lets slip: “In the ’70s, a by-then-elderly Davis was a friend of Barack Obama’s grandfather and would proffer advice to a young Barry, as he was called then.” Oops.

Are “critics of racism” being unfairly tagged Red, as Takara says?

In reality, Reds often unfairly tagged other “critics of racism” who did not toe the Communist line. The examples start with Davis himself.

In the [Honolulu Record of August 11, 1949](#), Davis denounces black leaders who criticized Communist Party member Paul Robeson for saying, “American Negroes would never go to war against Russia.” Said Davis, “They were like faithful dogs, trying to curry favor with their masters.”

In his memoir, [Livin’ the Blues](#), Davis writes that when author Richard Wright in 1944 left the Communist Party, “his resultant series of articles in widely read publications was an act of treason in the fight for our rights and aided only the racists who were constantly seeking any means to destroy cooperation between Reds and blacks.” (p. 243)

There are other “critics of racism” who got a taste of the Communists’ tactics—from Davis. A [1949 letter](#) sent to NAACP acting National Secretary Roy Wilkins by a Honolulu attorney and NAACP leader named Edward Berman:

“I was at one of the election meetings at which one Frank Marshall Davis, formerly of Chicago (and formerly editor of the Chicago Communist paper, the Star) suddenly appeared on the scene to propagandize the membership about our ‘racial problems’ in Hawaii. He had just sneaked in here on a boat, and presto, was an ‘expert’ on racial problems in Hawaii. Comrade Davis was supported by others who had recently ‘sneaked’ into the organization with the avowed intent and purpose of converting it into a front for the Stalinist line....

...Already, scores of Negro members were frightened away from these meetings because of the influx of this element. Only by a reorganization with a policy that will check this infiltration, can we hope to get former members back into a local NAACP branch. We are going to have to have that authority over here—otherwise you’ll have a branch exclusively composed of yelping Stalinists and their dupes—characters who are more concerned about the speedy assassination of Tito ([who had just broken with the USSR](#)) than they are about the advancement of the colored people of these United States.”

Shortly after receiving this letter, the NAACP revoked its Honolulu Chapter’s charter in order to reorganize and prevent a Communist takeover of the organization.

NAACP leader Roy Wilkins had another view of “cooperation.” Writing to CPUSA member William Patterson on November 23, 1949, [he explains](#):

“We remember the Scottsboro case and our experience there with the (Communist front) International Labor Defense, one of the predecessors of the Civil Rights Congress. We remember that the present Civil Rights Congress is composed of the remnants of the ILD and other groups. We remember that in the Scottsboro case, the NAACP was subjected to the most unprincipled vilification. We remember the campaign of slander in the Daily Worker. We remember the leaflets and the speakers and the whole unspeakable machinery that was turned loose upon all those who did not embrace the ‘unity’ policy as announced by the communists.



“We want none of that unity today.

“We of the NAACP remember that during the war when Negro Americans were fighting for jobs on the home front and fighting for decent treatment in the armed services we could get no help from the organizations on the extreme Left. They abandoned the fight for Negro rights on the grounds that such a campaign would ‘interfere with the war effort.’ As soon as Russia was attacked by Germany they dropped the Negro question and concentrated all effort in support of the war in order to help the Soviet Union. During the war years the disciples of the extreme left sounded very much like the worst of the Negro-hating Southerners.”

Wilkins’ final sentence should be considered when reading Frank Marshall Davis’s words to the young Obama: “...you may be a well-trained, well-paid nigger, but you’re a nigger just the same.” Then as now, Communists see African-Americans as merely a tool with which to acquire power and are quite willing to send highly self-destructive messages in pursuit of that power.

Note: Frank Marshall Davis’s early columns in the *Honolulu Record* can be read [HERE](#).