

“Mau Mau/Communists: Kenya, Hawaii and the Making of a U.S. President”
Lecture at Rutgers University, 9 April 2009

by Gerald Horne

I should say to begin with that I began research on these two book projects—the one on Kenya to be published in a few months and the one on Hawaii to be published, most likely, next year—well before Barack Obama became a household name. Though I have sought information about the pre-1963 Barack Obama, Sr., the same does not hold true for my research concerning his son.

Thus, let me make two caveats: this talk provides background for an understanding of this U.S. President—information that could have been provided by those who perform the first draft of history, i.e. journalists, but was not done sufficiently in part because of the crisis in the newspaper and magazine industry. In short, this talk is not directly about the current U.S. President. Second, Barack Obama was not a member of “Mau Mau”, nor a Communist. I’m afraid I have to make this obvious caveat in light of the fact that two years ago I spoke at a forum on the occasion of the delivery of the archives of the US Communist Party to NYU; therein I made reference to Frank Marshall Davis, the leading Black Communist in Honolulu, and his relationship to President Obama—which is discussed in his memoir ‘Dreams from my Father’. These remarks were posted online. As a result, today you will find that this was the talk that animated and launched a thousand conservative blogs, drawing inferences that I hardly intended, to the point where I have had second thoughts and hesitancy about making this presentation today.

.So if there are conservative bloggers or NY Post reporters in the audience, I trust you will demonstrate a modicum of restraint and forbearance.

* * * *

In the Spring of 2007, recently declared U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama found himself addressing a curious throng at Brown Chapel AME church in historic Selma, Alabama. He had been battling whispers in certain precincts in Black America that, perhaps, he was not “black enough”—whatever that might mean—and this visit was seen as an opportunity to demonstrate his organic connection to a community that then contained not a few doubters.

Easily adopting the rhythmic cadences of the Minister who routinely held the pulpit, then Senator Obama spoke of how events in Selma had a rippling effect across the ocean, giving hope to his grandfather and father. He noted that his grandfather was a cook in colonial Kenya and was regarded as a “house boy” even as he passed his sixth decade. “They wouldn’t call him by his last name,” the Senator added ruefully. “Sound familiar,” he asked rhetorically. Seeking to establish his claim to being part of the struggle emanating from Selma after a number of well-regarded Black Intellectuals had questioned his bona fides, given his parentage and upbringing, Senator Obama added with an extraordinary flourish, “So don’t tell me I don’t have a claim on Selma, Alabama! Don’t tell me I’m not coming home to Selma, Alabama.”

The Senator had a point. Though some had argued that his roots in East Africa disqualified him from membership in a community whose roots disproportionately were to be found in West Africa, this was not altogether accurate. For as I showed in my book on the African Slave Trade—which, in fairness, was published after this particular

controversy erupted—we have underestimated the extent to which Africans in the western hemisphere had roots in Eastern Africa; to wit, after the Royal Navy established a maritime picket-line along the Western Coast of Africa in the wake of the 1808 trans-Atlantic ban on this odious commerce, slave traders—whose ships frequently carried the stars and stripes—quickly swung around the Cape to East Africa. And often they brought the enslaved to Cuba who could then be transshipped to, for example, Galveston, Texas—particularly in the period before 1845, for it was only then that the Lone Star state entered the Union. As I also show in that book, one of the prominent Black families in the state of Maine can stretch its roots back to East Africa—and not only via DNA but by authenticated documents. Indeed, as early as the 1840s, Euro-Americans were the prime foreign commercial force in the slave emporium that was Zanzibar and was challenging Portuguese hegemony in their colony of Mozambique, another frequent target of slave traders. It was in this context that the great 19th century Black Abolitionist, Martin Delaney, observed that “the Eastern coast of Africa has long been neglected and never but little known, even to the ancients but”—he added tellingly—“it has ever been our choice part of the continent” especially due to its strategic location presenting the “greatest facilities for an immense trade with China, Japan, Siam, Hindoostan, in short, all the East Indies...”

But more than this, if pressed, Mr. Obama could have pointed to other organic connections between his father’s homeland in East Africa and the U.S. For from the beginning of the formation of the British colony in Kenya, more than a century ago, there was a “kith and kin” tie between the early colonizers and the U.S. This too was nothing new, for as I showed in my book on Zimbabwe, there was—and is—a similar “White

Atlantic” tie between this former British colony and the U.S. that sheds light on the salience of this issue on these shores. Indeed, the seizure of the land by the colonizers was a major reason for the eruption of conflict in both nations, with the term “Mau Mau” affixed to what befell Kenya in the 1950s.

Thus, shortly after leaving office in 1908, adventurer and former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt journeyed to Kenya, where he was hosted by one of that colony’s wealthiest men and largest landowners, Northrup McMillan, whose roots in St. Louis did not prevent him from being knighted, not least because of his service to His Majesty during World War I where he helped to foil encroachments by both Germany and restive South African Boers. There TR spoke fondly of the similarity between the East African frontier and the “western frontier of America.” Aidan Hartley, descendant of a distinguished settler family in today’s Kenya, was not only related to the British actor, Vivian Leigh—she of the racist classic, ‘Gone with the Wind’—but as well to David Hartley, a former settler in British North America, a friend of Benjamin Franklin, who became a leading loyalist and was London’s Minister Plenipotentiary at the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, signaling the triumph of the 1776 Revolution. Ronald Reagan’s official biographer, Edmund Morris, is also a son of Colonial Kenya.

If TR had stayed longer, he might have heard that the movement led by Marcus Garvey, headquartered in Harlem, had tentacles stretching to East Africa, and, indeed, was accused of stirring one of the major anti-colonial rebellions there in the 1920s. Subsequently, a number of Black Americans migrated to the region, notably in the wake of Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in the 1930s; they were followed by Black American soldiers during World War II whose impact on the region was said to have been an

igniting factor in the early 1950s rebellion that we now know as “Mau Mau.” The same has been said about African-American merchant seamen, who often were to be found in East African ports of call, particularly Mombassa, Kenya. Their very example, flashing dollars, often spending lavishly and quick to respond to racist slights, was seen as providing a negative example. Thus, in 1948, John Louis Ross, a Black American sailor was discovered residing illegally in Nairobi, after having visited Lagos and London. He was reportedly acquainted with the Pan-African activist George Padmore and Peter Koinange—a Kenyan and former classmate of Chicago-based Black American scholar, St. Clair Drake, who was his room-mate at the historically black college, now known as Hampton University of Virginia. Koinange’s descendant, Jeff Koinange, was until recently a correspondent for CNN who, for example, covered the Katrina debacle in New Orleans in 2005. John Louis Ross, had resided in Nairobi for months before being detected, and was thought by the authorities to be on a mission for the National Maritime Union, whose number two leader was the Black Communist, Jamaican born Ferdinand Smith.

What gave resonance to the suspicions about Ross was this pre-existing pattern of Black American stays in Kenya. In the 1930s this included the scholar—and future Nobel Laureate—Ralph Bunche and the anthropologist, Eslanda Robeson. She was the spouse of Rutgers’ own Paul Robeson (whose 101st birthday we are marking today), who shared a flat in London with Kenya’ founding father, Jomo Kenyatta, in the 1930s. Kenyatta taught Bunche the lingua franca of the region, Swahili, in the 1930s.

But it was not just Black Americans that were attracted to Kenya. In some ways, because of the accessibility to Kenya via the Suez Canal—a reason for the establishment

of the colony in the first place—the persistence of English, and its construction as a European settler state, many Euro-Americans were attracted to the region. This included Ernest Hemingway and the down-market Hemingway, Robert Ruark, whose novel about “Mau Mau,” ‘Something of Value’ was not only a runaway best-seller in the 1950s but was turned into a major motion picture starring Sidney Poitier, recently released on DVD. “Mogambo”, starring Clark Gable, Grace Kelly and Ava Gardner, was filmed in Kenya in 1952, shortly after the ‘State of Emergency’ proclaimed in response to “Mau Mau.”

It was not so long ago, that when ordinary North Americans thought about Africa, the image in their mind was Kenya, not least because of the abundant wildlife that early on attracted devotees of safaris, including George Eastman, he of the Kodak photography fortune. Hence, the contemporary African-American writer, John Slaughter, is not misguided when he observes that “for many, Kenya is Africa.”

As the US was struggling with desegregation in the 1950s, some thought they saw a racial “black-white” similarity in the so-called “Mau Mau” in Kenya. Even the stark differences accentuated the parallels, for in Kenya, Europeans were outnumbered 100-1—which in certain precincts in the Deep South, led to frequently expressed sympathy for the Kenyan settlers and frissons of apprehension about the “Mau Mau,” apprehensions not abated by the fact that Europeans killed during this conflict was far less than 100 and Africans killed were in the thousands. Kenya, in some ways, resembled the antebellum South. Ernest Hemingway, for example, bragged about the two African mistresses he had there. Kenya was the home of “White Mischief” in a way Harriet Jacobs would have well recognized.

Not coincidentally, Kenya was thought to be sited in a dangerous neighborhood, a jumping off point for ventures to the ethnically rancorous Rwanda and Burundi, the similarly situated Congo and Sudan, and, of course, Ethiopia, long an inspiration for Pan-African solidarity.

But unlike these other nations, Kenya had a sizeable European settler class that was bound to attract attention in the U.S. Thus, Moral Rearmament, a major religious cum anticommunist movement in the U.S. that desperately needs a fresh interrogation, and which attracted to its ranks the slope-shouldered, left-handed slugger, Stan ‘The Man’ Musial, actually administered a detention camp in Kenya for so-called “Mau Mau” militants. Writing in early 1953 from the Hubbard Dianetic Center on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, a leading Scientologist, a religion that today includes New Jersey’s own Tom Cruise, most famously, provided detailed advice to the colonizers on how to squash the insurgency.

By the same token, African-Americans largely took a different tack. Malcolm X, provided the title of my book, by calling for a “Mau Mau in Harlem,” which one **New York Times** journalist reported as a way to “even the score.” Charles Evers, brother of the slain Mississippi martyr, Medgar Evers, for whom a college in Brooklyn is named, asked, “why not create a Mau Mau in Mississippi?” Bobby Seale, a co-founder of the Black Panther Party, recalled reading Kenyatta’s book, “Facing Mount Kenya” and was marked irrevocably by it. The same holds true for his putative ideological opposite, the cultural nationalist and founder of “Kwanzaa”, Maulana Karenga, who says Kenyatta’s book “personally influenced” him—his adopted name, “Karenga’, comes from the Kikuyu tradition, he says. During the height of the war in Vietnam, according to press

reports, a black nationalist organization called “De Mau Mau”, inspired by black marines, was said to have existed at US military installations; it was envisioned as a kind of undercover guerrilla unit and supposedly murdered Euro-Americans randomly.

These events were suggestive of the point that some saw Mau Mau in Kenya as portending a Day or Reckoning, Judgment Day for those who had profited from or acquiesced to white supremacy.

This trans-oceanic influence traveled in two directions. The self-proclaimed Mau Mau Daughter, Wambui Waiyaki Otieno of Kenya, declared, “we named our group the Jim Crow Action Group because we saw our struggle as the same one. We in Kenya particularly identified with the freedom struggles in the United States and Jamaica,” while “Martin Luther King, Jr. was a hero to us all...” Dedan Kemathi, a legendary national hero of Kenya, forwarded a copy of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army charter to W.E.B. Du Bois, shortly after its formulation.

The fearsome image of “Mau Mau,” a name by the way, which many deem to be inapposite, paved the way for the lionizing of Kenyan leader, Tom Mboya, when he arrived to great acclaim in the U.S. in the mid-1950s. He was thought to represent a moderate—and moderating—alternative to Kenyatta and the “Mau Mau.” An effective orator in English with a disarming smile that graced a stark and dark—and cherubic—visage, Mboya quickly claimed a vaunted TIME magazine cover profile, multiple appearances on Sunday morning talk shows, thousands of dollars in donations, most notably from leading trading unions (e.g. the United Auto Workers) and personal relationships with leading personalities, including John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon. Just before the crucial November 1960 election, U.S. Vice President Nixon told

Mboya, “few in public life today have had such a remarkable record of accomplishment and success.” In turn, Jomo Kenyatta, not as favored in Washington because of his Robeson connection and related reasons, told Kennedy just before his nation’s December 1963 independence that “the people of Kenya deplore continuing oppression of Negroes in [the] Southern United States;” forcefully, he added, “we express solidarity with American Negro freedom fighters in their struggle for human rights.”

There was a direct connection between this latter concern of Kenyatta’s and Washington’s decision to bring hundreds of Kenyan students to the U.S. to study in college, the idea being that this would predispose them towards Washington in the Cold War competition with Moscow. Thus it was in August 1959 that Mboya, a member of the Luo ethnic group who was thought to have designed this project with his compatriots in mind, wrote a transforming letter—and my ultra-left friends take note—to Irving Brown, a U.S. labor official thought to have close ties to the US intelligence community, introducing him to “one of my intimate friends.” He was referring to Barack Obama, Sr. Said Mboya, “He is calling in Paris for one or two days,” and he told Brown, “I therefore ask you kindly to welcome him and help him out...”

Mr. Obama was on his way to Honolulu and there in a fortuitous meeting at the University of Hawaii, strikingly—according to Neal Abercrombie of Hawaii, a friend of both the older and younger Obama—in a class in beginning Russian he met a young woman with roots in Kansas and that fortuitous meeting led directly to the birth of the 44th US President, two years after the archipelago attained independence—and there, hangs another tale.

For in contemporary parlance, Hawaii is the bluest of the blue states and it is no exaggeration to suggest that during the heyday of the radical left, Hawaii had the most influential Communist Party operating in a US jurisdiction. It is difficult to separate this fact from the profound influence on the islands of a union founded in the midst of a 1930s general strike in San Francisco by real and imagined Communists—I refer to the International Longshore and Warehousemen’s Union. Organized and led for decades by Harry Bridges, the slim, hawk nosed Aussie—well born in Melbourne—who migrated early in life to the city by the bay, then dispatched organizers to the islands in the 1930s. This thin and dapper man who was sharp of face, sharp of nose, sharp of dress, sharp of manner, sharp of speech, and sharp of gesture, was motivated to migrate by reading Oakland’s own Jack London. In November 1992 the leading anticommunist scholars, Harvey Klehr and John Haynes claimed that—contrary to his repeated denials, which had been the subject of lengthy trials and numerous deportation hearings—Bridges was in fact a member of the Central Committee of the US Communist Party. His first wife—Agnes Brown—testified in 1945 that Bridges was a Red and kept his party card hidden under the linoleum floor in their modest home (they divorced during that same tumultuous year).

The U.S. colony to which Bridges dispatched organizers in the 1930s was akin to an apartheid state. A ‘haole’—or Euro-American—elite had ousted the monarchy in the early 1890s, then Hawaii was annexed shortly thereafter by Washington amid concerns in Washington about the perspicacity of bringing so many people of color under the U.S. flag; one remedy was to curtail their voting, something that particularly antagonized Tokyo and was a step toward the bombing of Pearl Harbor, a scant four and a half

decades later. Prior to this overthrow, the monarchy had sought to counter U.S. hegemony by brokering a deal with Tokyo that led to the migration in the 1880s of a substantial Japanese population, where even today they form the plurality of the population and since have been joined by thousands of Filipino, Chinese, Koreans, Puerto Ricans and Portuguese—not to mention an indigenous population of about 20%, by some estimates, that is the spearhead for one of the more serious independence movements in any U.S. state.

Hawaii, as a so-called majority-minority state represents the future and this demographic reality is hard to separate from the progressive political climate that allowed the ILWU to gain a foothold here. Before the advent of the ILWU labor standards in Hawaii were among the worst in the nation, but by 1954 these standards were heading to the front of the pack. By 1966 Hawaii's agricultural workers, the major target of labor organizers, enjoyed the world's highest farm wages; Hawaii was the first state—and at that juncture the only one—in which all the workers in large scale agriculture belonged to a union. Hawaii was the only state in which agricultural workers had decent wages, comprehensive medical plans, dental plans, pensions, paid vacations and holidays, sick leave, severance pay and the like. As early as 1964 even an employer's representative conceded that that Hawaii was the only state in the union where the right to bargain collectively is guaranteed to agricultural employees by state law. By 1973, Robert Hasegawa, Hawaii's Director of Labor and Industrial relations, claimed that his state had the "best labor laws in America" in terms of "minimum wage, unemployment compensation, workmen's compensation, temporary disability insurance and a pioneering Fair Employees Practices Act."

This was quite a turnabout from a time when Niihau, one of Hawaii's islands, was owned by one family and no one could even visit this island without the permission of this family and the indigenes who lived there supposedly could not leave without permission. Life on islands like this were routinely described as feudal-like with workers held in virtual peonage. Laws mandating that children must stay in school to the age of 16 were violated routinely in favor of these youth toiling in the fields. Nothing but GOP ballots were distributed in farcical elections. Visiting Hawaii in 1937 the regional director of the newly minted National Labor Relations Board described working conditions as slave-like. Three years later a congressional visitor concluded that "if there is any true picture of fascism anywhere in the world than in the Hawaiian islands, then I do not know the definition of it;" there was "close cooperation," he said, "between the Army and Navy intelligence units and the Big Five", i.e. the corporations that dominated the local economy.

The island of Lanai was wholly owned by the Hawaiian Pineapple Company for a good deal of its modern history. Like Niihau, one could not visit this island without permission from the company. But even Lanai and Niihau may have been matched or exceeded in quotidian repression when World War II arrived, as one analyst argued that the islands' "wartime government" —with certain regimes in the Deep South conspicuously excepted—was "the only true fascism which has ever existed on American soil," in that there was martial law, arbitrary detentions, gross restrictions on unions, strictly enforced curfews and the like.

As late as 1956, five years before the future US President's birth, a journalist found families "living in tents down on the beach", while others were residing in automobiles.

It was not uncommon to find 15 to 20 persons living in a two bedroom unit. At this juncture, some plantation workers still resided in areas with open sewers and complained that rats bit their backsides in dilapidated outhouses.

It was precisely such harsh repression that dialectically led to the rise of both the ILWU and the Communist Party in Hawaii. Radical merchant seamen long had been passing through the islands, contributing to a progressive atmosphere.

Thus, by 1956 the powerful Senator James Eastland of Mississippi argued that “the power of the Communists in Hawaii is a thousand times stronger than it is in the continental United States.” Senator Eastland was exaggerating but was not totally misleading for in 1953 after the Smith Act trial convictions of the top leaders of the Communist Party of Hawaii, 20,000 workers went on strike, virtually crippling the islands. By way of contrast, if anything, there were demonstrations on the mainland in support of prosecution and jailing of Communist Party leaders at that precise moment. Senator Eastland’s concern had long been building for during the war in Korea—and later in Vietnam—the ports of Hawaii (which were closer to Osaka than Boston) were among the most efficient in the world with harbor entrances facing the Pacific Ocean directly. When Senator Hugh Butler of Nebraska sought to dispute the idea that since there might have been only 200 Reds in Hawaii in the mid-20th century out of a population of 500,000, he countered by noting “only about 3 percent of the population of Russia are members of the Communist Party.” He could have added that these few hundred radicals included a good deal of the leadership of the leading union, the ILWU, not to mention an African-American journalist and poet who had migrated to Honolulu on December 7, 1948, arriving from the Windy City, Chicago, deciding to reside there at

the suggestion of his good friend, Paul Robeson. I speak of the aforementioned Frank Marshall Davis.

These real and imagined Reds were confronting powerful antagonists. The Bank of Hawaii and Bishop National Bank were among the 100 largest commercial banks under the U.S. flag and, as of 1953, there were 7 Hawaiian firms among the 1000 largest within Washington's jurisdiction.

What helped to make for radicalism in Hawaii was not only the harsh working conditions that obtained there but also the lived experiences of its denizens. The indigenous movement in recent years has led sovereignty marches and demonstrations that have attracted, according to some estimates, tens of thousands in an archipelago whose population is slightly over 1 million.

The Filipino population, many of whom migrated to the islands in the wake of the famed Huk Rebellion against the Japanese occupation, in which Communists had played a leading role. Japan remains the site of a sizeable Socialist Party and a Communist Party whose Sunday edition outsells the Sunday NY Times, even though Japan's population today is about 120 million, compared to 300 million in the U.S. Many of these Japanese-Hawaiians had roots in Okinawa, site of a sizeable minority in Japan whose plight was often compared to that of African-Americans in terms of their maltreatment. One of the convicted Communist leaders in 1953 was Koji Ariyoshi, who advised Mao Zedong in the caves of Yen-an during World War II.

A founding father of modern Hawaii, former Governor Jack Burns, often visited local Communists in their homes and even Richard Nixon, when he was seeking Hawaii's

electoral votes in the runup to the 1960 presidential election, deigned to meet with the reputed local Communist leader.

The idea of the chief anticommunist hawk, Nixon, bending a knee before a reported US Communist in search of votes raises the related question of how an archipelago with such a profile wound up as part of the otherwise conservative United States of America in 1959. Of course, if Hawaii had not entered the union, there was a possibility in 2008 of the two leading presidential candidates—including John McCain born in the Panama Canal Zone—not being born technically in the U.S. (though this has not kept conservative bloggers and leading personalities like former GOP presidential candidate, Alan Keyes, of challenging the current President's nationality).

The short answer is that statehood for Hawaii was concocted when this territory was basically an apartheid state with the GOP as the leading party. Then it became difficult to ditch statehood even after Communists became powerful and the Democrats roared back into contention (the latter occurred in 1954; contrary to other historians of Hawaii—I argue that this progressive turn was in direct response to the conservatism embodied in the 1953 convictions of Hawaii's Communist leaders).

Moreover, by the 1950s the U.S. had fought in Korea was about to fight in Vietnam and it became difficult to tell the territory with an Asian majority that they were not worthy of statehood—even though Dixiecrats, like Senator Eastland, argued vigorously against statehood. Senator Olin Johnston of South Carolina, who too was opposed adamantly to statehood, stressed that “non haole peoples are taking Hawaii just as surely as a lava flow over-runs a volcanic region” since “non haole births are 9 times as [many] as haoles and the Japanese alone nearly 4 times as great.” His comrade in arms, Senator

J. Strom Thurmond proclaimed proudly that “I do not believe there is anyone who in the Senate who is more opposed to the admission of Hawaii to statehood than I”—though many of his fellow Dixiecrats disputatiously disagreed. Daniel Inouye, the current Senator from Hawaii and of Japanese ancestry, recalls that during the midst of these passionate debates about statehood, asked wondrously, “how would you like to be sitting next to a fellow named Yamamoto?” Like other Dixiecrats, Senator Eastland found Hawaii quite congenial; in 1948, for example, the local newspaper, routinely refused to publish the pictures of non-haole brides while passengers departing by ship for the US mainland were routinely segregated. There was a pecking order of racism in the islands with—strikingly—African Americans in the 1950s often found on the bottom rung of the ladder.

Actually the Dixiecrats were worried that Hawaiian statehood would lead to the election of two U.S. Senators who would vote in favor of civil rights legislation and in this they were correct. They also argued that Hawaiian statehood would lead to the Kremlin selecting two US Senators and in this were wildly incorrect. Yet, their hysteria mirrored a larger concern i.e. that the state of Hawaii represents a clear and present danger to white supremacy and certainly the election of the first Hawaii born president has done little to dissipate this concern.

Vice President Richard Nixon in early 1959 sought to reassure his fellow conservatives by asserting that “Hawaii will be less susceptible to any control by Communists as a state than it is as a Territory.” There was something to this argument. As a Territory, Hawaii remained vulnerable to anti-colonial claims by the indigenes; the United Nations had an open file on Hawaii, for example. Moreover, as a state, it was

thought, Hawaii would be even firmer under the control of Washington and subject to influence from the mainland. As early as 1946 Henry A. White, President of the powerful Dole Hawaiian Company, argued that statehood provided more leverage to otherwise grossly outnumbered haole elites and was yet another lever to circumvent domination of the overwhelming non-haole majority.

This sad state of affairs did not deter Frank Marshall Davis, who like the president's maternal grandfather, was born in Kansas—Arkansas City in his case, in 1905. Like Claude McKay, he too attended Kansas State University. He made his way to Chicago where he was part of the Chicago Renaissance, which rivaled the Harlem Renaissance, and included his good friend Richard Wright. Davis was also a journalist of note, toiling at length for the African-American press and after decamping to Honolulu, continuing his journalism with the 'Honolulu Record,' a left wing newspaper for which he penned a weekly column. During the Smith Act trial, witnesses testified that Davis was part of the Communist Party leadership which in order to foil surveillance met in a station wagon that he often drove.

In his best-selling memoir, Obama identifies him simply as Frank, a card playing confederate of his grandfather, who regaled him with tales about Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Black Chicago and all the rest.

It is unclear, to me at least, whether Davis with roots in Kansas, Chicago and Honolulu influenced a future President with roots in Kansas and Honolulu and who had attended college in Los Angeles, then New York to move to Chicago.

In any case, by the time the current President was born, the Communist Party and the union with which it was often linked, were in something of a decline. Many of the

pineapple and sugar fields, particularly in populous Oahu, the most populous isle, had been paved over in favor of housing and, in any case, sugar from Hawaii was being challenged by the more politically potent Fanjul interests of Florida and the Dominican Republic. The stevedores, the bulwark of the ILWU, were being challenged by the growth of mechanization on the docks, particularly the growth in use of the inter-modal system. The Communist Party, though it was able to bring out tens of thousands of workers to protest the Smith Act prosecution, was drained by the continuing prosecutions and appeals which required spending huge amounts on lawyers' fees, that could have been expended on labor organizing. Certainly, the 1956 revelations about Stalin at the 20th party congress of the Soviet Communist Party did not ignite CP membership growth in Hawaii. Moreover, the party was wracked with internal conflict, not least on the question of racism. Strikingly, haole radicals often requested that leaders of Japanese ancestry step back and allow, for example, Filipino leaders to step forward in leadership—but never requested that haole leaders take a step back in favor of other leaders of color. Certainly the fact that radicals rarely raised the fundamental question of why Hawaii should enter the Union in the first place, hardly endeared them to a number of nationalist indigenes. Apparently, Frank Marshall Davis drifted away from the party, at least that is the impression I received from his fascinating memoir, 'Living the Blues,' which is still worth reading.

Still, despite the severe setback to Hawaii radicalism, the legacy of the ILWU includes helping to forge the most consistently liberal state in the union, a state whose present GOP governor, Linda Lingle, is closer to David Patterson than Bobby Jindal and, in any case, will probably be dislodged by Neal Abercrombie, an early close friend of Barack

Obama, Sr. and his spouse and the source for many reporters' stories about them and their fortuitous meeting in a beginning Russian class, which helped to set in motion such profound events. Abercrombie is, of course, a leader of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the current US President whose current budget which, according to press accounts, seeks to retrofit and update the New Deal and Great Society, was born in the bluest of the blue states, Hawaii.

Thus, in some ways, in ways that future historians will seek to explore, in his person embodies the confluence of a number of potent trends—the black self assertion of Kenya, the rock-hard liberalism of Hawaii and, a point I have not explored, Chicago's historic though often unnoticed role as the vanguard of Black America, which mirrors the self-assertion of Kenya. In his memoir, Mr. Obama speaks of how his beloved maternal grandmother was reluctant to see him travel to Kenya because of perceptions about the ongoing violence there—though this was years after the height of the so-called Mau Mau conflict. Moreover, after spending considerable time in Hawaii I can attest that the question of race and racism there is quite different from the situation that obtains on the mainland, not least because of the presence of an overwhelming Asian-Pacific majority that is not ensnared by conservatism as those who reside on the mainland. Though he did not see Hawaii as some sort of racial paradise, as the more starry-eyed viewed it, Frank Marshall Davis was the leading—perhaps the only—African American voice speaking of Hawaii's race relations as being radically different from that which obtained on the mainland. Dick Parsons, the past CEO of Time-Warner and the current chairman of the board of Citi-group, who happens to be African-American, attended the University of Hawaii as an undergraduate, and has remarked in interviews that while there the people

of color found him simpatico because he was, after all, one of them and the haoles found him compatible because he was like them too, hailing from the mainland, having an Anglo name and being mono-lingual in English. This helped to fortify his already nascent leadership abilities and I daresay President Obama's biographer may arrive at a similar conclusion.

In an era when a GOP President seemed to be nationalizing everything in sight and when a NEWSWEEK cover story proclaims "we are all socialists now" while, other Republicans complain about the alleged European socialist character of the current administration, it is not surprising that some have made much of the current Chief Executive's past in Honolulu.

Likewise, the ongoing controversy in ultra-conservative circles about the alleged validity of President Obama's citizenship, represents—in a sense—a larger concern about what Kenya and the belated statehood of Hawaii represent and not only in the imaginary.