



Tom Hayden, Courageous Warrior For Peace

Par [Marjorie Cohn](#)

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The death of Tom Hayden at age 76 marked the passing of a major progressive leader who championed causes from civil rights to Vietnam War opposition to the environment, as Marjorie Cohn recalls.

When Tom Hayden died on Oct. 23, we lost a courageous warrior for peace and equality. Hayden was on the front lines of nearly every major progressive struggle for more than 50 years. Vilified by the Right and at times criticized from the Left, Hayden remained steadfast in his commitment to social, economic and racial justice.

An activist, political theorist, organizer, writer, speaker and teacher, Hayden was a Freedom Rider in the South during the 1960s; a founder of Students for a Democratic Society; a leader of the anti-Vietnam War movement; a community organizer; a negotiator of a gang truce in Venice, California; the author of more than 19 books; and an elected official in California for nearly two decades.



“Tom made important contributions as a writer and a political leader, but his greatest strength was as a visionary strategist,” said Bill Zimmerman, who worked with Hayden in the Indochina Peace Campaign and later managed his 1976 U.S. Senate campaign.

“Tom was able to see far over the political horizon, and was then able to create and lead political movements that were often ahead of their time. Whether it was radical opposition to war or mainstream support for candidates, progressive ballot initiatives and necessary legislation, he was a true leader, clay feet and all.”

The Indochina Peace Campaign (IPC), founded in 1972 by Hayden and Jane Fonda, who became his wife the following year, was a traveling road show that opposed the war in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Daniel Ellsberg, whose leak of the Pentagon Papers helped to

end the war, traveled with Fonda, Holly Near and others for two weeks, speaking around the clock against the war.

According to Ellsberg, IPC was instrumental in ending the war. While some in the organization took to the road to organize opposition to the war, others lobbied Congress to cut the funding for combat operations. Although the Paris Peace Accord was signed in 1973, many, including Ellsberg, knew the war was not over.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was pressuring President Richard Nixon to restart the bombing. Congress cut the funding in 1975 and the U.S. war in Vietnam finally ended.

“IPC was a model of grassroots activism and lobbying,” Ellsberg said.

Hayden was steadfast in his opposition to the Vietnam War. He made several trips to North Vietnam, calling attention to the U.S. bombing of civilians. On one trip, at the request of the North Vietnamese government, Hayden returned to the U.S. with American prisoners of war. Since the U.S. government refused to recognize the government in Hanoi, the Vietnamese would only release the prisoners to Americans in the anti-war movement.

Advice from Dr. King

A transformative event in Hayden’s life occurred in 1960 when he was a college student. He interviewed Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. on a picket line outside the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. The picket demanded that the Democratic Party include a strong commitment to civil rights in its platform. King told Hayden, “Ultimately, you have to take a stand with your life.”



Hayden took King’s exhortation to heart, dedicating his life to the struggles for peace, freedom, justice and equality.

Hayden will perhaps best be remembered for his lead authorship of the 1962 Port Huron Statement, which provided an ideological manifesto for the New Left. The 22-year-old began writing it while in an Albany, Georgia jail cell, after an arrest for trying to integrate a railroad station waiting room during a Freedom Ride from Atlanta.

The iconic document began, “We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.” It focused on organizing students to oppose the Vietnam War, supporting the civil rights movement in the South, promoting campus student activism, and establishing community projects to fight poverty. The idealistic document concluded, “If we appear to seek the unattainable, as it has been said, then let it be known that we do so to avoid the

unimaginable.”

After Hayden moved to Newark, New Jersey, in 1964 to be a community organizer, he did not escape the notice of local FBI agents, who sought increased surveillance of Hayden. They wrote, “In view of the fact that Hayden is an effective speaker who appeals to intellectual groups and has also worked with and supported the Negro people in their program in Newark, it is recommended that he be placed on the Rabble Rouser Index.”

Hayden’s effectiveness was also noticed by J. Edgar Hoover, the notorious director of the FBI. Hoover once wrote in a memo, “One of your prime objectives should be to neutralize [Hayden] in the New Left movement.” Hoover’s objective was never realized. Hayden continued to serve as a bulwark of the Left.

In 1968, in what a national commission later called a “police riot,” law enforcement officers in Chicago attacked and injured hundreds of demonstrators outside the Democratic National Convention. Hayden, who helped plan the protests, and seven others were charged with crimes. Although they were acquitted of conspiracy, five, including Hayden, were convicted of crossing state lines to incite a riot and sentenced to five years in prison. Their convictions were reversed on appeal for judicial bias.

Hayden’s work for economic justice and democracy was far-reaching. Marc Weiss, Chairman and CEO of Global Urban Development, worked with Hayden in the Campaign for Economic Democracy, which Hayden and Fonda founded in 1976. Weiss said Hayden “cared deeply about making progressive change for a more peaceful, prosperous, equitable, sustainable, innovative, inclusive, and much better world for everyone.”

Legislative Initiatives

Elected to the California State Assembly in 1982 and the state Senate in 1992, Hayden was dubbed “the conscience of the Senate” by the *Sacramento Bee*. He sponsored or co-sponsored 100 pieces of legislation, including laws to lower college tuition costs, prevent discrimination in hiring, and attach safety controls to guns. In 1993, he sponsored a bill to require electric-vehicle-charging stations and legislation to require the state to find alternatives to refrigerants that destroy the ozone layer.

“Tom had an amazing capacity and commitment to linking environmental issues to local communities and minority community struggles,” California Senate Majority Leader Bill Monning said. “He pushed a progressive agenda within the Democratic Party and continued to visit us in Sacramento with legislative ideas to address climate change,” Monning added. “We will miss his insight, advocacy, and friendship.”

Hayden co-founded Progressives for Obama in 2008. But, Hayden wrote,

“No sooner had a social movement elected [Obama] than it was time for a new social movement to bring about a New Deal, lest his domestic initiatives sink in the quagmires of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and a new peace movement must rise as well.”

In his contribution to my recent book, *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*, Hayden wrote, “The limitations of the drone war should be clear from any study of history and strategy. Wars cannot be won from secret aerial launches against

unknown forces and figures on the ground.”

Indeed, Obama’s use of armed drones in seven nations has made those countries more unstable and violent. And the resulting civilian casualties serve as an effective recruitment tool for those who would harm the United States.

In 2015, Hayden spoke at a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the end of the U.S. war in Vietnam. He said, “We gather here to remember the power that we had at one point, the power of the peace movement, and to challenge the Pentagon now on the battlefield of memory.”

Hayden was responding to the Pentagon’s attempt to sanitize the history of what the U.S. did in Vietnam. “President Obama has reminded us to remember, he said, Selma, Seneca Falls and Stonewall,” Hayden noted. “But not Saigon, not Chicago, not Vietnam. We have to ask ourselves collectively why that omission exists, and realize that only we can restore a place in the proper history of those times.”

Exhorting the audience to remember, and to “unify,” Hayden bemoaned “our collective refusal to admit that the Vietnam War was wrong and that the peace movement was right.”

Humanizing War Victims

Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies said, “I remain inordinately grateful to Tom for what I learned from him – most especially that if you’re going to build a powerful movement against a war waged against a nation far away, you have to build into the center of your organizing some understanding of that country, its people, its culture.



“I learned that lesson first about Vietnam, working with Tom and Jane at the Indochina Peace Campaign for a couple of years right out of college.” Bennis added, “I worked with others later to build that same understanding into the work we did on Central America, on Iran, on Palestine and beyond.”

Many of the themes of the Port Huron Statement resonate today. In 2012, Hayden wrote in *The Nation*,

“The Port Huron call for a life and politics built on moral values as opposed to expedient politics; its condemnation of the cold war, echoed in today’s questioning of the ‘war on terror’; its grounding in social movements against racism and poverty; its first-ever identification of students as agents of social change; and its call to extend participatory democracy to the economic,

community and foreign policy spheres - these themes constitute much of today's progressive sensibility."

Hayden has been criticized by some on the Left for favoring reform over revolution. Most recently, Hayden switched from supporting Bernie Sanders to Hillary Clinton during the presidential primary. The main reason was his belief that Clinton has a stronger commitment to combatting racism than Sanders, citing the Congressional Black Caucus' (CBC) support for Clinton. In fact, the CBC did not support Clinton. It was the CBC's political action committee that favored her.

In refusing to wait for the general election to support Clinton, Hayden also overlooked Sanders's record on civil rights. A leader in the Civil Rights Movement, Sanders served as president of the Congress of Racial Equality at the University of Chicago, organizing pickets and sit-ins, which led to his 1963 arrest for resisting arrest.

Before his death, Hayden worked with the Peace and Justice Resource Center, which he founded a decade ago. He published *The Peace Exchange Bulletin*, "critically following the Pentagon's Long War in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, as well as the failed US wars on drugs and gangs, and US military responses to nationalism and poverty around the world."

During Ellsberg's 1973 Pentagon Papers trial (at which Hayden testified), Hayden's book, *The Love of Possession is a Disease With Them*, was published. Ellsberg was struck by the parallels Hayden drew in the book between the U.S. anti-Indian campaigns and the U.S. "pacification" campaign in Vietnam. The book title, taken from a Sitting Bull quote, is still relevant today as the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their allies protest the Dakota Access Pipeline.



"Yet hear me, people, we have now to deal with another race - small and feeble when our fathers first met them but now great and overbearing. Strangely enough they have a mind to till the soil and the love of possession is a disease with them. These people have made many rules that the rich may break but the poor may not. They take their tithes from the poor and weak to support the rich and those who rule." — Sitting Bull, at the Powder River Council, 1877

Hayden's many books also include *Radical Nomad* (1964), *Irish Hunger* (1968), *Rebellion and Repression* (1969), *Trial* (1970), *Tom Hayden: An Activist Life* (1981), *Irish on the Inside* (2001), *The Zapatista Reader* (2002), *Street Wars* (2004), *Ending the War in Iraq* (2007), *Writings for a Democratic Society* (2008), *The Long Sixties: From 1960 to Barack Obama* (2009), and *Listen Yankee: Why Cuba Matters* (2015). His final book, *Hell No: The Forgotten*

Power of the Vietnam Peace Movement, will be published posthumously by Yale University Press in March 2017.

As we face the daunting challenges of U.S. militarism abroad, militarization of the police at home, and persistent economic and racial inequality, the absence of Tom Hayden is an incalculable loss.

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law and former president of the National Lawyers Guild. A veteran of the Stanford anti-Vietnam War movement, she is a member of the national advisory board of Veterans for Peace. Her books include Rules of Disengagement: The Politics and Honor of Military Dissent. See <http://marjoriecohn.com/> and follow her on Twitter @marjoriecohn

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