

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

George Helm Jr.

Native Hawaiian activist, musician, philosopher

"There is man and there is environment. One does not supersede the other."

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Background Information

Born: March 23, 1950, Disappeared: March 7, 1977

George Helm Jr was born on March 23, 1950, in Kalama'ula, Molokai, Hawaii. His family lived on Hawaiian homestead land, farming and growing their own fruits and vegetables.ⁱ They also raised animals. The Helm's taught their children to respect, protect, and be in harmony with nature. Aloha 'āina, or "love of the land," was a common cultural saying. Throughout childhood, George played sports and was a skilled musician. He graduated from St. Louis High School on Oahu in 1968.

Resistance

George began grassroots activism with a group known as Hui Alaloa in 1975. The group wanted access to the closed beaches and mountains on the island. During WWII, the U.S. Navy had taken control of Kaho'olawe and used the island for live fire and combat training.ⁱⁱ Many Hawaiians had grown up listening to the constant explosions. The fight against the island's military occupation ushered in the aloha 'āina movement. George joined the battle to develop and maintain Native Hawaiian access rights.ⁱⁱⁱ He showed himself to be an influential leader and public speaker. He spoke before the Hawaii State Legislature and U.S. Congress to end the target practice. George made it clear that Hawaiians wanted the government to return Kaho'olawe to the Hawaiian people. Native Hawaiians joined together to protect the island's Hawaiian culture, natural resources, and ecology. As a member of the Kahoolawe Nine, he and eight others demanded Hawaiian sovereignty. The group wanted the land to be protected and preserved. When the nine men and women landed on Kaho'olawe to occupy it in protest, the U.S. Coast Guard arrested them. The group filed a legal suit against the U.S. Navy on environmental grounds.^{iv} Before he could see how the legal battle would end, George disappeared at sea on March 7, 1977. On October 22, 1990, President George H.W. Bush ordered all weapons delivery training on Kahoolawe be stopped.^v The Navy completed its handover of Kaho'olawe in April 2004, after a 10-year, \$460 million cleanup.^{vi}

Achievements

In 2020, filmmakers released 'Hawaiian Soul', a film about George Helm's life.

