

Student Handout
Oakland Museum of California
What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era
Lesson Plan #1
From the Quiet Decade to Social Revolution:
How the Vietnam War Transformed California

Oral History
Clay Carson

Clay Carson was a civil rights activist, antiwar activist, and student at UCLA in the 1960s and now is the head of the Martin Luther King Papers at Stanford University. He talked about an organization from the 1960s, the Non-Violent Action Committee:

Non-Violent Action Committee. Yeah.

And it was a kind of a bi-racial group of—

It was; it was a split-off from the Congress of Racial Equality. There had—there had been a split of basically these three black guys who decided that CORE was not militant enough, and they wanted a, an organization where the basic entry requirement was that you had to be willing to get arrested. And, uh, so Robert Hall, Woody—Woody Coleman, the guy I wrote, um, one of my early articles about—and, um, um, Gray—Fred ... not Fred Gray. Um ... I'm ... I'm blanking on his first name. But anyway, there were three of these guys and they ... by the time I arrived they had already kind of developed a reputation for themselves as being very—they were taking on Bank of America, Van de Kamps, and Thrifty Mart and all these big companies. And their tactic was pretty simple—they would just threaten to shut the place down unless they hired more black people. And, uh, one of the things that was so nice about it is that there was ... there was no ideology, it was just very, you know—we will use direct action unless you do what we want.

