

Student Handout
Oakland Museum of California
What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era
Lesson Plan #2

1968: Year of Social Change and Turning Point in Vietnam and the U.S.

Oral History

Clay Carson #2

Clay Carson was a civil rights activist, anti-war activist, and student at UCLA in the 1960s and now is the head of the Martin Luther King Papers at Stanford University.

... brought home to us that, you know, no matter how militant we are, we were not—we were not into armed struggle. We were not going to, um, play a role in—in what happened in August of '65. So we had to really re-think what we wanted to do. And I think some of the people at NVAC went directly into the anti-war movement and kind of brought that same sense of militancy in that. Some, um ... Bill Hall I think went ... formed, um, uh, Operation Bootstrap, which was kind of a, a, self-help jobs program for people in Watts. And its first product were black dolls, you know, which, uh, um, they actually manufactured in South Central LA. Umm ... and, and also some of us went directly into what I guess became known as the New Politics Movement, trying to build a third force in, in California politics. We started what we called the, um, BBB campaign, which was kind of a play on Burn, Baby, Burn. But it was Boycott, Baby, Boycott. And, um, meaning the '66 election. And, um, we actually had these, these posters around town that had BBB with dashes after it, and of course that was pretty inflammatory after the—after Watts.

Interviewer: That was the election when Reagan and Brown were—

Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. And I remember getting arrested, actually, putting up those posters. The police didn't like them at all. Um, but, um, yeah—that ... at that point we thought Brown was just too ... too much of a conventional liberal. Now I think—gosh, you know, to go back to conventional liberalism would be kind of nice. But ... but at that point we were really convinced that we wanted to build something more radical. And, um, we didn't really take seriously, I guess, Ronald Reagan. And, um, I mean I ... I had some relationship with, um, oh, gosh—the ... what was the Democratic liberal group?

Interviewer: CDC?

Yeah, the CDC.

Interviewer: California Democratic Council.



Right. And, um—

Interviewer: Sy Cassidy and—

In fact, I was friends with Sy Cassidy, and I still remember flying up here in his airplane with him being the pilot and, a, through a storm. But, uh ... so, so our feeling was that, you know, California was this solidly Democratic state. The CDC really had kind of moved the Democratic Party to the left, and—but it needed to be moved further. And there was all this tension within the CDC about whether to oppose the war or not oppose the war. So, um, I was very much involved in that, and, a—so I guess I was part of the NVAC group that wanted to stay political, wanted to kind of broaden the focus and have some way of bringing in the civil rights issues, the war issues, and the political issues all together.

