

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

Dr. Maulana Karenga #2

Dr. Maulana Karenga was a social activist in 1965. Now a professor of Black Studies at The University of California, Long Beach, he is also the founder of the Organization US. He talked about the US Organization.

I was seeing it as I told you earlier—as a part of an ongoing historical struggle for freedom, that the freedom struggle had to continue. And that—as Frederick Douglass said—without struggle there is no progress. And as he said, the struggle may be moral or physical, or both. But there must be struggle because power can seize nothing without demand. It never did and it never will. So I'm thinking these things. And I'm seeing that he's right. And I'm thinking that, um, uh, this is going to open up a door for a different kind of relationship with the established order. And of course, it did. I mean, it led to a lot of the Johnson conversation about the Great Society and the need, and the Kernan Commission to talk about how the society is divided into two classes, and that it's along racial lines and that racism is one of the most, um, detrimental blights on, uh, the American, uh, body politic. And that it actually kills people and destroys their life chances. And what black people did with the Revolt was to raise that issue when other people were suppressing it. They raised it. They put themselves on the agenda. That's what I'm thinking. So this is a time for fighting it and a time for struggling. And the question becomes after that—how do you sustain this energy? You see? Because a revolt, by its very nature, is a short-term rebellion. It's a short-term. The revolution is continuous, but the revolt is short-term. And people can lose ... lose, um, their fervor. They can lose their way, even. And so the question is how do you do that? And so we said let's build an organization to help sustain that. Let's build an organization that talks about culture. Because that's the la—the most lasting thing. A culture of struggle. A culture that reaches back and mmm, recovers the best of what it means to be African and human. And using that to inform our daily life and our struggle. That's a very important thing that US wanted to do and US has been doing that. And actually, I mean, I don't want to ... I don't want to



seem immodest, but I mean, I'm talking about my history and I don't ... I don't have any one else to do it. And there's no reliable book on US now. And so what we have to do is save it. I mean, out of all the organizations that have come from the '60s we measure our history by anyone else. The majority of the things that you con—you see that have left from the '60s, that have endured, US has been a part of it. And it played a vanguard role. Black studies, okay?

