

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

Ezra Pratt #1

Ezra Pratt is an African American Vietnam veteran from the Palm Desert Area in Southern California.

--been hit and s---. So he tells me. He said—he looks back and looks at me right in the eye. He said, See, I ain't got nothing against you colored people. Yeah, I ain't got nothing against you colored people. I mean I, you know, nothing. I ain't prejudice. He said, But y'all moving too fast. You're all just moving too fast. You've got to slow down. So I'm thinking, I says, this m-----—since I've been over there face deep-down in the mud of rice paddies with buffalo dung and human dung and it was with leeches and they dropping mortars all around me, it's been 115, 120 degrees, and I'm lying face down in that s--- for hours at a time and this sucker's telling me I'm moving too fast? So, huh. I said, yeah, yeah, whatever, whatever, so—

Interviewer: So what did you do once you got out of the Service?

Huh, well, when I got back home, I was really, really—I was pretty popular because I was one of the first guys from my area to go to Vietnam. Plus I brought back all that weed. *[Laughs]*

So I was really, really popular. So then I bought a new car from the money I was saving, you know? And—but I didn't know how fu—how changed I was. All my values had been, been just reversed. I thought—see, I was—my dad worked—all, all I knew about was—like, I figured I was going to get married, I was going to get a job, and raise a family. Because that's what I saw going on around me all my life. And usually there were arguments or whatever. Drinking, not drinking. That's just how the family was. The men worked, got married, and raised a family. So somehow or another, when I got home from Vietnam, I said, man, that's, uh, sucker's move. I ain't going to work. F--- that, you know. Not, not that overtly did I say that. But I felt that this is all a big joke. I just—that value left me, you know, over there. So I was at a disadvantage already because in America, you know, that's what America, the United States, is all about. Prior, you know, the system was very easy for me to manipulate. Uh, it became my enemy. And, uh, I just didn't have the same personal and world view. The same view of myself because, I mean, I think pretty much my experience was pretty normal. I mean, I saw a lot of raping going on. GIs—I saw a lot of murder. It's like, you know, you give a 20-year-old an M-16 and



hand grenades and shotguns and machine guns, take them halfway around the world where he, he don't understand himself, and he don't understand the people he's dealing with, and they don't understand you, and you get permission to use that. You know, I felt, I just, I don't really like—the idea of having a gun. I never owned a weapon ever since I've been back from Vietnam. And maybe I might have fired one twice since I've been back, just for the hell of it. But weapons? Because I've seen too many human beings when they get one start playing God, myself included. And, uh, you know, I ain't God. I ain't nowhere—I can't even imagine what God is or isn't. But I know, as weak and scared as I am, I ain't that force. I have some of it in me. I have that part of creation that's in me, but I didn't understand that then. But I just knew I was playing God and I wasn't God.

