Excerpts from
'Troublemaker' Memories of the Freedom Movement
Los Angeles: 1963-1964

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CORE? What's a CORE? ~ 1963

I was 19 years old in the spring of 1963, just finishing up my second year at Los Angeles City College (LACC). Back then it was a "junior college" but now they're called "community colleges," which I suppose sounds more erudite. Like many teens, I had no clue what I was doing with my life. I went from high school right into college because my parents insisted. Neither of them had any kind of higher education — my mom had a high school diploma, my dad only completed sixth grade — but they were adamant, I had to get that degree. They saw that piece of parchment as some kind of magic talisman that would somehow protect me from a life of hardship and poverty. As it turned out, I never did get one of those degrees they had such faith in, and so far at age 75 I've experienced no ill effects from its lack.

After classes I began hanging out at Pogo's Swamp, a beatnik coffeehouse on Melrose Avenue a short block from the LACC campus. It was only later that I learned that the Swamp had an unusual reputation as a "racially integrated" venue. As I recall, a Black guy named Levi ran it and the clientele was mixed — which, given my background, seemed quite normal and unremarkable to me. But it was considered strange and noteworthy by others.

One afternoon I was there minding my own business, reading or playing chess or something, and Levi said, "Hey, come by later tonight, a guy from CORE's gonna show movies from the Torrance protests." Well, I knew Torrance was one of L.A.'s many suburbs, but I had no idea what a CORE was. Turned out it was the Congress of Racial Equality. They had this *meshugana* idea that people should be allowed to buy homes and rent apartments wherever they wanted and could afford, regardless of their race or religion. Like so many L.A. suburbs at the time, Torrance was 100% white — and they were determined to keep it that way. Developers, realtors, bankers, homeowners, apartment landlords, and the federal government cooperated to prevent nonwhites from moving in. Some developments also barred Jews.

The CORE guy, Jim, showed up right on time with a 16mm projector and a portable screen. He was Latino, maybe a couple of years older than me. He had about ten or fifteen minutes of film showing CORE pickets at one of the housing tracts developed by Don Wilson, the huge real estate baron. There were a dozen or so CORE protesters with signs and leaflets — half Black, half white — walking back and forth on the sidewalk as permitted by the U.S. Constitution. They were outnumbered and under attack by members of the American Nazi Party in full swastika uniform. jackboots, armbands, stiff-arm salutes, "Heil Hitler! Kill the Jews! Down with the niggers!" The whole Nazi rigmarole.

"Holy shit!" I thought to myself. "What the fuck is this?"

When he finished I was the only one to go up to him afterward, "I don't know who you guys are, but if you're against the Nazis I'm with you. When's your next picket line, I'll be there."

He was pleased that I wanted to join them — that's why he was showing the film, after all — but there was a "but." A big "BUT." He told me they were "nonviolent," and that I had to agree to be nonviolent too. Nonviolent? What's that? He explained and gave me a nicely printed two-color brochure with a drawing of Gandhi on the cover. It was titled "CORE Rules for Action." I still have it more than 50 years later and a scanned image of it is displayed on the Civil Rights Movement Veterans website (www.crmvet.org).

"Okay, whatever," I told him. "When and where do I show up?"

The following Saturday I was on the line in Torrance. CORE picketed every Saturday and Sunday afternoon when people were looking to buy homes, and as it turned out, accepting nonviolence wasn't all that hard for me — I was one of those bookish, scrawny kids not much given to fighting. In any sort of conflict my natural weapon of choice was my mouth, not my fists. Which, I suppose, is one of the reasons I got bullied a lot. (If my mouth failed, I relied on swift feet to carry me out of danger — sometimes that worked, sometimes it didn't.)

The tract's official name was Southwood Royale, but we always referred to it as "Don Wilson." As required by CORE rules at that time, I signed in with the picket captain, a tall, thin, Afro-American named F. Daniel Gray, who everyone called "Danny." I recognized him as the leader right off because he was carrying the clipboard. In the early '60s, battery-powered bullhorns were too expensive for little civil rights groups, so the sign-in clipboard was the badge of leadership.

The Southwood Royale sales office was one of the homes in the middle of the development. About a dozen of us walked back and forth on the sidewalk in front of the office with signs calling for equality, justice, and fair housing. You know, really *subversive* concepts.

The Nazis were there too with their swastika armbands and brownshirt uniforms. "Kill the niggers! Gas the kikes! Seig Heil! Seig Heil!" They outnumbered us two to one.

These Nazis were scary. They weren't your handful of pathetic Nazis surrounded by a throng of anti-racist protesters, the way it might be today in most places. This was a band of racist thugs threatening a little CORE picket line. The Torrance police kept them at a distance so they couldn't physically assault us, but not so far that they couldn't hit us with thrown eggs and small stones from the beds of decorative gravel.

None of the sales agents, cops, home buyers, or bystanders seemed actively pro-Nazi, but they were definitely anti-us — anti-protest, anti-CORE, and definitely anti-Black. It was clear they considered us CORE members to be the "troublemakers." Which in my view was completely ass-backwards. *They* were the ones practicing racial discrimination. That was the real trouble, we were just trying to correct it.

Yet in another sense I have to admit it was true, we *were* "troublemakers." As I later learned when I attended my first nonviolent training session, it's a basic principle of nonviolent resistance that injustice and evil must not be allowed to carry out business as usual in silence. Our purpose was to directly call attention to what they were doing. To loudly and disruptively say, *"No! This is wrong. No! This is not acceptable."* In other words, to raise a ruckus about it — to make trouble over it. "Troublemakers?" Yes, quite so.

For me, it was a tense and scary afternoon. It was also thrilling and uplifting. I knew no one else on the line (Jim wasn't there that day), but after a few minutes that didn't matter as eggs, rocks, and Nazi hate kept coming at us while people jostled and shoved us as they pushed past to go in and out of the sales office.

We responded by defiantly singing freedom songs. I didn't know any of the church-based songs like *We Shall Overcome, Oh Freedom*, or *This Little Light of Mine*, but those adapted from union picket lines — *Which Side Are You On*, *We Shall Not Be Moved* — those were the soundtrack of my childhood. Though I

can't carry a tune to save my life, I joined in full voice. I was fascinated by the way the CORE song leader used different songs and verses composed on the spot to directly respond to and counter our adversaries. In those days, on a well-managed CORE action, the designated song leader was second in command, and it was a post of both skill and honor.

A police paddy wagon was parked nearby, and I realized it was there to haul us off to jail if we gave the cops the slightest pretext to arrest us. But so long as we remained nonviolent and picketed legally on the sidewalk they had no excuse to haul us away — as they clearly wanted to do.

I don't recall how long we picketed, probably most of the afternoon and then again the next day on Sunday. And back again the following weekend, alternating between Don Wilson and another segregated housing tract called Sun Ray Estates.

As the school semester wound down I spent more and more time with CORE, participating in nonviolent training sessions, attending meetings at CORE's office on Venice Boulevard at the edge of the ghetto, making signs, handing out flyers, and cranking the old mimeograph machine that we used to run off our leaflets. Some years later I saw *Fiddler on the Roof* — one of my favorite films. There's a scene where everyone is cooing over something that at first you assume must be a baby in a crib, but then discover is a pedal-operated sewing machine for Motel the tailor. The first time I saw that scene, I flashed back to how we all felt when L.A. CORE was finally able to afford a Gestetner electric-powered mimeo and we no longer had to crank that damned drum by hand. In the mid-'60s, if you were a serious political organization, you had a Gestetner.

I graduated LACC in June of 1963 with an Associate of Arts degree (my one and only academic achievement). It meant so little to me that I didn't bother to attend the ceremony. They had to mail it to me — well, actually to my parents, I had no interest in it. I was now a dedicated CORE activist, that's what was important to me.

This all occurred right at a time that the entire Freedom Movement was sweeping across the nation. Headlines were filled with Freedom Movement battles — Birmingham, Greenwood, 'Frisco, Durham, New York, Gadsden, Philly, Danville. North and South. The Movement was growing exponentially. As it turned out, those Torrance actions were the last time we were ever outnumbered by counter protesters. By the fall of '63, it was the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) we were confronting, not the Nazis. Personally, I preferred the Nazis. They were a lot more honest about what they were about — and less violent.

Fighting for Fair Housing ~ 1963

The 1963 protests against segregated housing by Los Angeles CORE were not unique of course. Throughout the 1950s and ’60s, battles against housing discrimination flared across California and the nation. While L.A. CORE was protesting in Torrance, the NAACP and Northern California CORE chapters were waging a legislative battle in Sacramento for the California Fair Housing Act — commonly known as the “Rumford Act” — a law that would outlaw redlining and other forms of housing discrimination statewide.

Our demonstrations in Torrance were also intended to support that legislative fight. On one occasion we protested outside a Real Estate Board meeting which was being held at a suburban Ramada Inn. First we picketed outside. Then, once their meeting began, our line of about a dozen CORE members entered the building without permission and we sang as loud as we could while we marched down the hallway past the room they were using. We left before the cops arrived to arrest us for trespass. I was thrilled by our brazen defiance of the laws prohibiting protests on private property. At the same time, I was anxious about being arrested and so I was quite relieved when we safely exited and resumed our legal sidewalk protest.

For three weeks up in Sacramento, NorCal CORE members staged a round-the-clock sit-in on the marble floor of the Capitol Rotunda to demand passage of the Rumford bill. It was a fierce fight. Republican legislators who worshiped at the altar of Private Property ferociously defended the absolute right of owners to freely do whatever they wanted with their real estate regardless of broader social or economic consequences. In their opinion, that included the right to racially discriminate and maintain all-white neighborhoods. It wasn’t until the last minute of the last session, on July 21, 1963, that their opposition was overcome and the bill was passed. Governor Edmund Brown — father of Governor Jerry Brown — signed it into law.

There was joyous celebration in the L.A. CORE office. We all basked in the satisfied glow of a great victory in a righteous cause an in the course of some serious partying I was introduced to something called a “tequila shot.” I’m pretty sure we had a lot of fun that night, but the details are somewhat blurry.

Our victory didn’t last long though. The California Real Estate Association, which had been fighting the Rumsford bill with every dollar and dime at their disposal, immediately launched a well-financed initiative campaign to repeal it. They had no trouble getting thousands of whites to sign their petition. In November of 1964 voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition14 by a two-thirds margin.

That emphatic embrace of racism and repudiation of integration by the great majority of white voters was a low point in my life. It depressed and discouraged me. And it showed me how little progress we had made in 18

months of nonviolent protest and direct action. In my initial naive idealism, I had assumed that all we had to do was expose the injustice, unfairness, and un-Americanism of discrimination and segregation for people to reject it — that once we exposed the cruel reality, folks would stand on the side of justice. Nope. Now I knew better.

Two years later, in 1966, the California Supreme Court overturned Prop 14 on constitutional grounds, restoring the Rumford Act. Again there were court challenges delaying its implementation. Then, in the wake of violent ghetto revolts in more than 100 cities across the country after Martin Luther King was assassinated while supporting the sanitation workers' strike in Memphis, Congress passed a national Fair Housing Act in 1968.

California's Rumford Act and the federal Fair Housing Act outlawed most (though not all) overt, explicit forms of housing discrimination. But over the decades since, many in the real estate and banking industries continued to covertly evade those fair housing laws by various stratagems and subterfuges. And to this day, some local governments use zoning rules, building permits, urban renewal projects, municipal ordinances, subsidies, set-asides, and highway-planning schemes for the same purpose.

After the fair housing laws went into effect, whites migrated farther out from the city center as the nonwhite inner-city population expanded. As a result, many of the formerly all-white middle and working-class areas where we of CORE protested eventually become racially mixed or predominantly nonwhite. For example:

L.A. in 1960: roughly 70% white, 13% Black and 10% Latino.
L.A. in 2010: roughly 30% white, 10% Black, and 50% Latino.

Torrance in 1960: almost entirely white.
Torrance in 2010: 51% white, 3% Black, 16% Latino, 34% Asian.

Inglewood in 1960: almost entirely white.
Inglewood in 2010: 5% white, 44% Black, and 50% Latino.

Still, today in the 21st century, *affluent* nonwhites can usually live where they want — if they're doggedly persistent and willing to push through and overcome discriminatory obstacles and in some cases racial hostility from neighbors and suspicion on the part of cops in patrol cars. But most people of color in the urban North still live in racially defined neighborhoods, though the boundaries of those districts are now blurry and no longer delineated with the knife-edge sharpness they had in the 1960s.

Meanwhile, over the last half of the 20th century, many major American cities have become "majority-minority," with nonwhites outnumbering whites within the city limits which resulted in the election of nonwhite mayors and city councils. Now, however, a "gentrification" wave is bringing affluent whites,

mostly young professionals, back into the inner city, while the inner ring of older suburbs are becoming the new nonwhite zones. Yet in all this ebb and flow of whites and nonwhites two things have remained constant — persistent racial attitudes of *them versus us* held by a significant segment of the American population, and the deliberate, profit-motivated exacerbation of residential racism practiced by individuals and institutions who financially benefit from housing segregation.

Marching on Washington ~ 1963

CORE was not the only big change in my life. Somehow I'd managed at LACC to scrape together grades good enough for admission to UCLA as a transfer student for the fall '63 semester. (They must have been desperate for students.)

At the beginning of 1963 my father had gotten a new job in Connecticut and was now living just outside of New Haven. In June my mom and younger brother moved east too. My parents urged me to join them for the summer before starting UCLA, but at age 19 I wanted none of that. I was in the thick of CORE actions and eager to be free of parental control, influence, and (to be honest) their mere presence.

So long as I was enrolled in college, my parents provided me with a small stipend — $50 a month as I recall, equal to about $400 in 2018. Combined with my part-time job as a fry cook in a local chicken shack, that was enough for me to survive on. I rented a tiny one-room apartment in an old building on Hamilton Way overlooking Sunset Boulevard at the edge of the Silver Lake district. It was a crummy crib with a pull-down Murphy bed, but it was all mine and I loved it. Across the hall in a larger space lived a trio of call girls — drop-dead gorgeous each and every one of them. They were lesbians. They had to explain to me what that was.

CORE was going strong, and outside of work my summer hours were entirely consumed by the Freedom Movement. Our picket lines were growing larger, and by now we well outnumbered the Nazis when they even bothered to show up.

In a planned act of nonviolent civil disobedience, a number of CORE members sat down on the driveway of the Don Wilson housing tract office. It wasn't being used for cars and they weren't blocking anything, but they were on private property and therefore subject to arrest for trespassing. They went limp, the Torrance cops picked them up and carried them to the paddy wagon, and off they went. It was all quite civilized compared to the overt, almost pathological hostility of the LAPD that we later encountered at protests within the city limits.

I didn't sit down and I wasn't arrested. I wanted to — but I was afraid. Both Mom and Ken were laying it on thick and heavy. "Finish college, get your professional degree, secure your economic future, then you can really help others more effectively." They weren't politically opposed to integration or to CORE, I think they were secretly proud of what I was doing, but they were emotionally and economically scarred by the Red Scare persecution and they feared for my future if I became a radical with an arrest record. I wasn't entirely buying their line — but neither was I rejecting it.

Then in July — savvy and experienced organizers that they were — they made me an offer I couldn't refuse. Greyhound bus fare across the country, stay with them in Connecticut for a couple of weeks, participate in the upcoming August 28 March on Washington, and then return to L.A. in my mom's hand-me-down car. Okay, it was a crappy Renault Dauphine at the ragged end of its short shelf life — but it was a car! Of my own! The next day I was riding the dog east on Route 66.

Orange, Connecticut was pleasant in a very suburban way. Ken's new job at Yale paid much better than anything he'd ever earned before, and my parents' new two-story home was set on a half-acre, tree-shaded lot. A nice place to visit, no doubt, and it was good to see them all, but I was a city kid and suburbs bored me.

I soon made contact with the New Haven CORE chapter and arranged a ride down to DC on one of the four buses they had chartered. We assembled at the train station the night before the march and around 10pm headed south on I-95.

I didn't know any of the other folk on the bus and nobody was talking much anyway. Everyone was tense. Today, history knows how the march turned out, but as we rolled south that night we had no clue what we were headed into. A significant portion of the news media was in full panic mode over the march. "Call out the National Guard! Alert the 101st Airborne! Close the liquor stores! Hide the white women!" I'm not joking (I'm not even exaggerating very much). And it wasn't just the press. Members of Congress were literally saying crap like that and so were some of TV's talking-head pundits. It was like they thought the Mongol hordes of Gengis Khan were descending on the nation's capital to rape, ravage, and pillage.

Having by now learned quite a bit from CORE, I understood that such nonsense came from deep wells of racist fears and fantasies. But we'd just had Birmingham and Gadsden and Greenwood, where nonviolent demonstrators had been savagely clubbed, beaten, gassed and arrested, where fire hoses and police dogs were used to attack children for peacefully marching — just as we planned to do in DC

For some people on the bus this was the first public protest they'd ever participated in and they were scared. I was experienced enough in nonviolent direct action to be fairly certain we wouldn't encounter mass arrests or large-scale police violence. But whether the march would be a success or not — that none of us knew. We hoped — but we didn't know. A lot of the media had been running stories that only a small number of people would show up, that the Civil Rights Movement was a hoax, that it was just a handful of malcontents, outside-agitators, and so on, *yada*, *yada*, *yada*.

It was deep in the night, pitch dark, when we got our first inkling of what we were about to become part of. We were on some big bridge, maybe the one over the Delaware river, maybe the Susquehanna. The bus began to slow and I could see a red glow, like some kind of fire burning up ahead. As we came off the bridge we passed 20 or 30 people on the embankment with flaming highway flares and signs saying, "We're With You," "God Speed," "March For Us." They were cheering the buses on. We instantly realized they were folks who couldn't participate in the march because it was a weekday — a workday — but they'd gotten up before dawn to show their support. I can't describe how emotional that was for me, but I know it's a memory I'll treasure to day I die.

Not long afterwards, the horizon to the east began to grow lighter with the approach of dawn. As the sun came up over the Eastern Shore, we could see that the whole freeway was just buses, the whole damn road, just buses flowing into DC bumper to bumper. And we we're still miles out. Nothing but buses, solid buses. That's when we knew.

By 10am we were off the bus and march marshals were guiding us to the Washington Monument where everyone was assembling. Peter, Paul and Mary were singing *This Little Light* up on a platform, and a huge crowd of people — 80% Black, the rest white — were pouring in from all directions. Call us what you will, "freedom fighters," "freedom riders," "shit-disturbers," or just plain ol' "troublemakers," we were all there together, united for the same purpose. I was thrilled and excited by the power of our numbers and the sense of welcome and solidarity that everyone shared.

The scheduled start time for the march came and went. The leaders were meeting with members of Congress and as usual were running late. The Lincoln Memorial was easily visible and the route was obvious. Folk started singing, feet started walking, and without any formality or conscious decision the march was spontaneously on its way, flowing like twin rivers down Constitution and Independence Avenues. The "leaders" never did catch up to the front, they had to stop the flow somewhere in the middle so they could link arms and pretend for the photographers that they were at the head of the line. I thought that was so cool, the people leading the leaders.

The day was oven-hot, hot and muggy, but the oppressive heat did nothing to diminish the joyful spirit. We had no idea how many of us there were because only someone in a helicopter, or maybe on top of the Lincoln Memorial, could see the whole crowd, but we knew the turnout was vast and the protest an enormous success. People were proud — in some cases proud to the point of tears — of what we had collectively accomplished. And not just our huge number, but the atmosphere of friendship, solidarity, and determination. Determination to peacefully demand freedom and justice. Determination to give the lie to all those who had decried the march as an invitation to riot and rampage.

The speakers' platform was built up on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, but from where I sat on the grass at the far end of the reflecting pool it was too distant for me to visually identify anyone. Big loudspeakers on portable stands carried their voices to even the farthest outskirts of the crowd. I remember a moment of silence in honor of W.E.B. DuBois, who had passed away that very day at the age of 95 in African exile, driven from the country by the Red-baiting witch hunts of the McCarthy era. And I still remember the electric power of Mahalia Jackson singing *I've Been 'Buked, and I've Been Scorned*.

There were many good speakers that day, but the two I remember most vividly 55 years later are John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Dr. King of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). John castigated the federal government and the Kennedy administration for their lethargy, their inaction, and their politically expedient complicity with segregationists. He spoke for us young militants in SNCC and CORE when he declared, "*We want our freedom and we want it now ... For we cannot stop, and we will not and cannot be patient*."

King spoke toward the end of the program. Today, the first part of his speech where he raised issues of poverty and economic justice are hardly ever mentioned, but the "Dream" portion continues to be widely quoted and replayed. It still has the power to move me as it did when I first heard it thundering across the reflecting pool, with Mahalia Jackson and others on the platform backing him up with the traditional affirmation of the Black church, "*My Lord! My Lord!*" and the enormous shadowed statue of the compassionate Lincoln gazing down on us all. "*Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, free at last*," and tears were streaming down my face. And not mine alone.

A. Philip Randolph then led us through the ten demands of the march and we pledged our dedication to continue the struggle until all of them were met. Now, more than 50 years after, some have been achieved and some we're still fighting for. The $2 per hour minimum wage we were marching for in 1963 was equal to about $16 in 2018 — and as I write these pages we are *still* fighting for a $15 per hour minimum wage.

Benjamin Mays of Morehouse College gave the benediction and then all of us in our hundreds of thousands clasped hands with whomever was next to us and fervently sang *We Shall Overcome*. I didn't know the Black man and woman on either side of me whose hands I held, nor did it matter, for that day we were one.

Someone once asked me whether the mood was jubilant on the bus returning to New Haven. The truth is I don't know. I was so exhausted I fell right to sleep and didn't wake up till we unloaded around midnight at the New Haven train station.

The next day, though, I remember being surprised at the amount of attention the media bestowed on the march — print, TV and radio, domestic and international, it was *the* major story. Up to then, press coverage of the Freedom Movement had been almost nonexistent, or at best understated and under reported except for a few brief flash points where there had been dramatic violence — the Freedom Rides, Meredith at Ol' Miss, Birmingham, and so on.

But more than surprised, I was furious at how completely the media missed the point and distorted the meaning of the march. I'm not referring to the southern press — we knew they'd downplay, distort and condemn. I'm talking about the northern "mainstream" media, particularly the "liberal" press. Did they focus on the issues we were raising? No. Did they report on the civil rights bill being debated in Congress? No. Did they explore the failings of the Kennedy administration? No, not a word. Instead they expressed their astonishment that hundreds of thousands of Afro-Americans ("Negroes" in the parlance of the time) could peacefully gather and protest in the nation's capital without violence and drunkenness, looting and rape. To them, that was the great revelation of the march. To me, it was evidence of their ingrained cultural racism.

To a man (and they were almost all men), the members of Congress stridently proclaimed that the march would not influence their legislative votes one iota. But as my father was fond of telling me, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating" (he loved a good cliché). Reconstruction had ended 86 years earlier and in those 86 years, not a single piece of effective race-related civil rights legislation had been signed into law. (The Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 were watered-down shams.) But in the two years after the March on Washington the two most far-reaching and effective pieces of civil rights legislation ever enacted — the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 — were passed. Not due to the march alone, of course, but to the entire Freedom Movement as a whole. Yet it was the march, I believe, that showed wavering northern legislators that their constituents — both Black and white — not only cared about civil rights but were watching how they voted.

The march also had another beneficial effect, less clearly understood, perhaps, but no less significant. In 1963, fear of Communism still dominated the political thinking of a great many whites. Most Afro-Americans had long since dismissed "red menace" and "Communist plot" smears against the Civil Rights Movement by racist segregationists like FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. But those kinds of Red-baiting attacks still influenced a large number of whites. Now, at least for some of the millions who watched the march and King's entire 19-minute speech live on national TV — and heard for the first time, not just a few sound bites but the full content of a freedom sermon — slanders of foreign subversion and secret Soviet plots begin to lose their credibility.

For me personally, the march had a profound effect. It solidified my commitment as a full-time civil rights activist, and it set me on a lifetime path of political activism. I entered UCLA as a junior a couple of weeks later, but I had no intention of letting classroom studies or term papers interfere with my Movement work. Like cigarette smoke blown away in the wind, my hesitation (okay, fear) about engaging in civil disobedience and courting arrest were gone. I wasn't eager to be arrested, I didn't seek out opportunities, but I was no longer reluctant. Over the following 12 months I would be jailed four times for protesting. My mom fretted over what she saw as great risks to my future economic stability that I was running but I think she was also proud of me — and I know my dad was. As it turned out, so far as I know what eventually became a lengthy arrest record never affected my employment history at all.

An Indifferent Bruin ~ 1963

I enrolled as a UCLA junior in the fall of 1963. After World War II, California progressives had waged an aggressive political campaign to make college affordable. They won a huge victory in 1960 by forcing state government to enact the "Master Plan for Higher Education." Under that set of laws, California residents paid no tuition at all at any public university or college in the state. None. Zip. Nada. At UCLA we did have to pay student government and registration fees totaling $356 per year (equal to about $2800 in 2018). Since I had remained in Los Angeles when my family moved to Connecticut, I was still legally a California resident, and with my father now employed by Yale University as a business manager my parents could easily afford such a moderate cost.

Luckily for me, my college years happened to coincide with what turned out to be a short "tuition-free" period. Though the Master Plan was never officially repealed, Governor Reagan's administration began circumventing it in the late '60s by charging students tuition disguised as phony "incidental fees." (I call them "phony" because those "fees" were used to pay university expenses

that all other colleges funded through tuition.) Since 1967, Sacramento politicians from both parties have continued to ignore the Master Plan by steadily increasing the amount students have to pay. Today in 2018, UCLA tuition for California students is more than $13,000 a year.

As it turned out though, accommodating myself to UCLA proved more difficult than I anticipated. Our family had lived only a block from LACC and for me as a student it just seemed like a really big high school — high school on steroids, as it were. I think LACC's enrollment at that time was around 8,000 students, but a lot of them were working adults in evening programs, so as a day student I didn't encounter them. While the courses were both more challenging and more interesting than high school, class size was not that much different from Dorsey High (which, admittedly, was over capacity). And they were in normal size classrooms with individual high school–type desks. Most important, the professors were accessible, you could talk to them, ask questions, and engage in dialogue.

Not so, UCLA. Depending on traffic, it took me more than an hour to drive from my pad on Hamilton Way to the Westwood campus. With 30,000 students, UCLA was four times the size of LACC, the campus was huge and complex, classes were attended by hundreds of students in large, tiered lecture halls, and the professors had no time for lowly undergraduates like me.

During a full year at UCLA, I only remember two professors (though not their names). One was a cold, arrogant, narrow-minded experimental psychologist whom I detested. As I recall, he later became department head. The other prof was a marvelous American literature teacher who engaged, challenged, and stimulated his students — there was always a long wait-list for his courses. I thought he was so terrific that I actually made an effort to attend his classes. He was dismissed the following semester — in part I suspect because he taught racially controversial works such as *Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison. Today, that book is taught in many high schools, but back then it was "too radical" for UCLA administrators and their Sacramento overseers.

To be honest, though, except for that one lit class my real problem at UCLA was lack of interest. I hadn't gotten involved with CORE until just a few months before I graduated from LACC, so until the last half of that last semester I had plenty of time to devote to schoolwork. After I came back from the March on Washington, the only aspect of university that held much interest for me was UCLA's CORE chapter. At UCLA, everything was named "Bruin," the sports teams, the campus newspaper, the coffee mugs, the T-shirts — everything was "Bruin this" and "Bruin that." So, of course, we called our CORE group "Bruin CORE." The campus jocks were not amused, but that was their problem, not ours.

Actions of the "Action Faction" ~ 1963

What with registration and new classes, Bruin CORE didn't become active until the end of September, so my main focus upon returning to the city was resuming work with the main L.A. CORE chapter, which at that time was growing rapidly — the monthly general membership meetings were by then drawing 50–75 activists.

Over the years, I've noticed that when faced with new circumstances people usually go with what they know rather than inventing something entirely new from scratch. CORE was founded by pacifists and integrationists in the early 1940s when the labor movement was actually a real social movement. CORE's founders were familiar with trade unions, so that was the organizational form they adopted. Twenty years later, CORE chapters were still structured like union locals, with constitutions, elected executive committees (and therefore, internal electoral politics), various working committees — Membership, Publicity, Fundraising — and even a Sergeant at Arms (who never did anything).

CORE membership meetings were run like union meetings, with officers on a platform before a seated audience, a chairman with a gavel in his hand, and a formal agenda:

Pledge of Allegiance
Reports from president, treasurer, and committee heads
Old business
New business
Good & welfare

But rather than strikes, CORE engaged in "actions." For me as a child of union organizers, all this seemed quite normal and natural. So imagine my surprise (and fascination) when I started working for SCLC in Selma Alabama in early 1965 and discovered that the southern wing of the Freedom Movement was organized and run like an Afro-American church. There were "mass meetings," not membership meetings. Those mass meetings were modeled on church revivals and were *nothing at all* like union meetings. Amen.

As I saw it, protests were the essence of CORE. So I naturally gravitated to the Action Committee which was responsible for organizing demonstrations. Its leaders were three Black men — Woodrow (Woody) Coleman, F. Daniel Gray, and Robert Hall. They were my role models far more than the chapter chairman and the other Executive Committee officers who I rarely encountered. The Action Committee's stalwart nonviolent warriors — Mari Goldman, Richard Thompson, Jerry Farber, Jay Frank, Annette Becker, Danny Grant, Roberta Krinsky and her brother Fred, Lea Arond, Michael Robinson, Charles Bratton, Scott Van Leuvan, Sue Kovner, Candy Brown, Le Faucette, Bob Freeman, Jackie King, Jean Dalbert, and so many others were my comrades in arms — except, of course, that we were

nonviolent and therefore armed with nothing more than songs, leaflets, and cardboard signs.

It was from the Action Committee that I acquired my commitment to and understanding of nonviolent direct action. I studied the tactics and techniques — as opposed to the philosophy — of nonviolent resistance far more diligently than whatever it was I was supposed to be learning at UCLA. And by that fall of 1963 I had participated in so many demonstrations that I was considered an expert protester. Not that anyone ever praised or complimented me. Affirmations, acknowledgements, and "touchy-feely" human relations simply weren't part of our task-oriented organizational culture, but I knew I was respected and valued because they gave me increased responsibilities and trusted me to carry them out.

Another thing I've noticed in life is that promotions come amazingly fast if you're willing and able to do the work — and the job don't pay nothing. By October of '63, I was head of a tiny subcommittee consisting of Jay Frank, Jerry Farber and me. We were in charge of training picket captains and march marshals, and on occasion I led small actions myself (larger demonstrations were led by Woody or Danny, with me and other marshals assisting them). I was proud to be placed in charge of Action Committee training sessions, and I took the work seriously.

In the larger scheme of things however, L.A. CORE was dividing against itself, and the Action Committee and its various allies — colloquially referred to as the "Action Faction" — were becoming more and more pissed off at those we considered the "Conservatives." At root was a conflict between two different visions of what a CORE chapter should be doing. In essence, we of the Action Faction saw CORE as primarily a direct action organization whose committees — Publicity, Fundraising, Outreach, etc — existed to support militant and if necessary disruptive protests to demand immediate changes.

I don't know how the other faction thought of themselves, — we scornfully labeled them "conservatives" — though, of course, I'm sure they didn't think of themselves that way. No doubt they saw themselves as realistic and responsible moderates in opposition to us wild-eyed radicals, so I'll refer to them here as "moderates." Looking back on it now, I think the moderates saw CORE as a public education, community relations, negotiate-compromise, racial healing–type organization. One that sometimes might have to reluctantly use nondisruptive protests to further the work of persuading individuals, organizations, and businesses to accept the moral justice of integration by ending school segregation and adopting fair hiring and fair housing policies.

In reality, I was still so new to CORE that I didn't fully grasp the issues and all of their ramifications. But with all the passion and commitment that a 19-year-old can muster, I stood with my Action Faction compañeros. What's that

song from *West Side Story*? — "*When you're a Jet, you're a Jet all the way...,*" sorry, my mind wanders sometimes.

In any case, we of the Action Faction were usually outnumbered in membership meetings by the moderates who dominated the elected leadership and most of the committees. But they rarely showed up on protests. We were the ones on the picket lines confronting the Nazis and the cops, and it was Action Faction folk who were committing civil disobedience and going to jail. Which for us, meant that we were the *real* CORE, and we deeply resented the fact that they who did so little held the power to restrict and restrain those of us who were putting our bodies on the line.

While I was in Connecticut and marching on Washington, a crisis between the two factions had erupted around the housing protests. As I later understood it, some 50 or 60 people had been arrested for sitting down on the sales office driveway. CORE had no money to bail them out, a repressive injunction was imposed by a local judge, and there was a big media controversy over the sanctity of Private Property (meaning that empty driveway that had briefly been sat on by nonviolent protesters).

Somehow a mysterious agreement had been negotiated that required CORE to halt the Don Wilson protests in return for charges being dropped against those arrested in the sit-ins — but without any concession from Don Wilson that he would halt racial discrimination at any of his housing tracts. There had been no acknowledged meetings between Don Wilson and CORE, so no one seemed to know who had negotiated the agreement. It was all very murky. Nevertheless, the CORE Executive Committee endorsed it. The Action Committee, which had been organizing and running the housing protests, were not consulted at all. When the picket lines were halted we cried, "*Sellout!*"

The moderates countered that the Action Committee had had no authority to engage in large-scale civil disobedience without approval from the Executive Committee (which they would never have given) and that doing so when CORE had no funds for bail was "irresponsible." Action Faction proponents argued that L.A. CORE's constitution gave the Action Committee power to call and run demonstrations — that's why it was called the "Action Committee." And most of those in jail were Action Faction supporters who had known they wouldn't be bailed out right away. Now they all felt betrayed by a settlement that freed them without achieving any of what they were fighting for.

On a deeper level, those in the Action Faction more experienced than I saw the widening split in broader, more sinister, political terms. They were convinced that some of the moderate CORE leaders were politically aligned with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. Democratic insiders — politicians and their campaign managers — feared that militant civil rights protests would alienate white voters and benefit conservative Republicans. Action Faction militants

believed that some moderate CORE leaders were trying to rein in demonstrations for the benefit of the Democratic Party in the upcoming '64 elections, which were more than a year off. (At that time, Republicans were still strong enough in California to frequently win not only local and statewide offices but even presidential campaigns.)

As the Action Faction saw it, CORE's goal was to win racial justice, not to elect liberal politicians. For us, the whole point of CORE was using nonviolent direct action to provoke crises that would disrupt the quiet status quo — there were other organizations dedicated to tedious (and ineffective) moral education and humble pleas for justice and redress of grievances. We were putting ourselves on the line to end segregation and we held no brief for tokenism, lip service, or soothing moderation — nor should we have.

Some of the moderate CORE leaders were said by Action Faction adherents to be either members of the Communist Party or influenced by their leadership. As was well known among political activists on the left, the CP had long since separated its actual political work from its Marxist rhetoric, and by the early 1960s their strategy was to align with liberal Democrats against Dixiecrat segregationists and Red-baiting McCarthyite Republicans. In other words, they were "revolutionaries" who spent most of their time supporting the liberal wing of the Democratic Party (which they in no way controlled or even had much influence with).

After growing up in a Party family and seeing what they did to my parents, I had little love and less respect for the CP. And I had scant patience for the Party members and ex-members — including my parents and our family friends — who were all in my face (some politely, some arrogantly) telling me (from the safety of their living rooms) that we had to "go slower," and that the Civil Rights Movement was pushing "too far, too fast."

It constantly irked me that reactionaries and segregationists tried to slander the Freedom Movement as "Communist dominated" — and therefore dangerously revolutionary — when everyone inside the Freedom Movement knew that very very few Party members were actually active, and those who did take part were among the *most* conservative and *least* militant. The great majority of Marxists I encountered in Los Angeles were not only not active in the Freedom Movement at all, they stood to one side, criticizing us for "only putting a Band-aid on a diseased society" that in their view could only be cured by a socialist revolution — which they weren't doing squat to bring about.

Looking back on this factional conflict now, I suspect that the moderates were more amorphous and varied than we assumed at the time. I'm sure some of those in CORE leadership were exactly who we thought they were for precisely the reasons we assumed, but most were probably not. I now think many were simply liberals who sought racial justice yet were repelled by — in fact terrified of — turmoil and conflict. Demonstrators today often chant, "*No*

justice, no peace!" But over the course of a long political life, I've encountered no small number of well-meaning folks whose actions — or lack thereof — quietly affirm, "Peace and tranquility first, justice second."

Engaging in political conflict through parliamentary maneuvers and dueling polemics, however, wasn't really our Action Faction thing. Instead we verbalized how we felt through song. Jerry Farber put new words to the popular calypso tune "Marianne," and others added their own verses until there were a dozen or more. We called it "The Liberals Song," and sang it often. The first verse and chorus went:

Walking on the picket line
Carrying my freedom sign
Up came a liberal anxiously
These are the words he said to me:

You're only hurting your cause this way
That's what all of us liberals say
Nobody likes things the way they are
But you're going too fast, and you're going too far.

Bruin CORE and the DuBois Club ~ 1963

Over the decades since the 1960s history has bestowed on the Civil Rights Movement a glow of social admirability — but that was not the case at the time. Most definitely not. CORE, SNCC, and SCLC were widely seen as dangerously radical and potentially subversive. In November of 1963, for example — just before President Kennedy was assassinated — the University of Southern California (USC) barred James Farmer, CORE's nonviolent leader, from speaking on campus because he was "too controversial." I guess they felt their intellectually innocent students had to be shielded from his dangerous ideas (or, perhaps, it was the endowment fund that had to be protected from the ire of conservative alumni).

UCLA administrators, of course, were no less determined to avoid political controversies that might provoke retaliation — in their case mainly from conservative state legislators who controlled the UC budget. But as a public institution they had to carefully balance political pressures from Sacramento against potential negative consequences if they blatantly violated students' constitutional rights of free speech and association. (A year later, UC Berkeley misjudged that balance and sparked the Free Speech Movement, which rocked not only Berkeley but every college and university in America.)

So in the fall of 1963, questionable student groups like Bruin CORE were allowed to exist at UCLA so long as we strictly obeyed an extensive set of rules

and restrictions and refrained from inviting “controversial” outsiders to speak on campus.

Classes started in mid-September, and as I recall it took a few weeks for Bruin CORE to pull together its first meeting of the new semester. Black students at UCLA were few and far between in 1963. So rare that some of them complained they were mistaken for janitors or kitchen help by faculty members who questioned what they were doing in the classroom — I kid you not. So it was no surprise that the CORE chapter was almost entirely white, though a young Black woman named Berenice Powdrill was both chair and one of our two main spokeswomen — the other being a leftist graduate student named Marlene Dixon. Both of them were primarily interested in the sociology and politics of racism, so I stepped into the role of chapter picket captain and nonviolent tactics instructor.

Bruin CORE and the W.E.B. DuBois Club were the two main radical groups at UCLA that fall (if there was an SDS chapter I wasn’t aware of it). Leftists were even rarer on campus than Afro-Americans that year, and we were heavily outnumbered by the Young Republicans and the extremist John Birch Society, with their calls to impeach Chief Justice Earl Warren and their accusations that Martin Luther King was a “Soviet agent.” So to a certain extent there was a mutual “everyone’s against us” affinity between Bruin CORE and the DuBois Club.

Both groups occasionally set up literature tables on a little plaza outside the student union cafeteria and we were sometimes physically attacked by men we referred to as “jocks.” Whether they actually were school athletes we really didn’t know since we didn’t attend football games or participate in pep rallies like “normal students.”

My feelings about the DuBois Club were quite mixed. The DuBois Club claimed they were independent of any “parent” group, but everyone knew they were closely associated with the Communist Party and I knew a couple of Club members through my parents. However, since both my father and mother had resigned (or been expelled) from the Party some years earlier, that created a bit of awkwardness.

On the other hand, it was reassuring to at least know *somebody* on that vast and crowded campus. And, of course, DuBois members sometimes participated in our CORE actions, we sometimes attended their public programs, and all of us faced the hostility of aggressive conservatives. Sharing those activities and common enemies drew me closer to them, but at the same time I was increasingly at odds with the moderate faction of L.A. CORE, whose cautious “go-slow” political views were dutifully echoed by the DuBois Club leadership.

Politics aside, however, my academic career was not going well. Participating in the Freedom Movement left me with scant time for classes,

homework, labs, or term papers. Yet I was learning an incredible amount about racism, economics, practical politics, government institutions, mass media, social interaction, and human psychology (technically I was a psych major). Unfortunately, none of that was in the course syllabus or final exams. Yet I was thriving and growing as a person, becoming more self-confident and increasingly competent as an activist and demonstration organizer. So in that sense I considered myself a highly successful university student — despite my abysmal grade point average.

School Segregation, L.A. Style ~ 1963

At that time, American schools were segregated in two different ways. In the South there was "de jure" segregation — dual separate (and unequal) white and Colored school systems that were formally and legally segregated. In the North, including California and Los Angeles, there was what we referred to as "de facto" segregation. This northern-style segregation was imposed by the careful drawing of school district boundaries, use of racially biased academic tracking programs, and disparities in resource allocations and teacher assignments.

The white authorities overseeing de jure segregation in the South boasted about it: "*Segregation now, segregation forever!*" Those in charge of imposing segregation in the North denied any racial discrimination on their part at all. They positioned themselves as champions of neighborhoods and neighborhood schools, though as modern historians are now exposing northern residential segregation was *legally required* and *enforced* by federal housing policies starting with the New Deal and continuing on into the 1950s and '60s.

Residential segregation and school segregation were (and still are) inextricably linked. The proclaimed value of "neighborhood schools" was the justification for northern school segregation, and providing "good" (meaning "white") schools for their kids was the main rationale used by those who fought to maintain white-only neighborhoods by opposing open housing laws. So it's no surprise that battles over school segregation raged in parallel with struggles over segregated housing throughout the North — in Los Angeles, Boston, New York, Chicago, and elsewhere.

When I was growing up, the Los Angeles Unified School District was the third largest in the country, and under their system of covert segregation the disparities between white and nonwhite schools in resources, quality of education, and graduation rates were both stark and undeniable. Though there were a few integrated schools like Audubon and Dorsey where I went, most L.A. schools were segregated — either overwhelmingly white with perhaps a few token Blacks, Latinos, or Asians, or overwhelmingly nonwhite with perhaps a handful of whites.

Everyone in Los Angeles County — and especially all us kids — knew that the white high schools were the "good" ones and the Black, Latino, and integrated schools like Dorsey were the "bad" ones. Almost all of the district's Black students were in 93 underfunded, overcrowded, overwhelmingly segregated schools while the remaining 400 or so schools were either all white or had just a token handful of nonwhite students.

Three-quarters of all L.A. elementary schools were overwhelmingly white, but 90% of the elementary schools forced by overcrowding to limit children to half-day sessions were among those that were Afro-American or Latino because that's how the Board of Education (BoE) chose to allocate resources and assign students. Personally, I loved being on half-day sessions because I hated school, but my parents seemed to think there was something wrong with it. Go figure.

Inspired by *Brown v. Board of Education* and Freedom Movement successes in the South against de jure segregation, Black parents in L.A. began to demand that something be done to significantly improve their children's education. The NAACP, Afro-American community leaders, and local ministerial groups had been studying the situation, issuing reports, and negotiating with the BoE and City Council for years — to no avail.

When Black parents in Los Angeles asked the Board to end segregated schools in 1962, officials piously denied any racial intent on their part. They claimed they were just neutrally administering a system based on "neighborhood schools." But BoE members ran for election on explicit, openly stated anti-integration platforms, and they adamantly refused to collect or release relevant statistics while they stonewalled desegregation demands by CORE, NAACP, and others. Which is precisely what most white voters and public office-holders wanted — and in 1963 well over 70% of Los Angeles voters were white.

Most white parents feared their kid's education would suffer if they had to share classrooms and hallways with significant numbers of Black or Latino kids. A few token nonwhites they could accept, but more than that — no way! They also worried about crime and violence (though not so much about drugs, because this was before Nixon's War on Drugs turned narcotics into a major growth industry).

On an even deeper level, integrating schools raised white fears of interracial dating, sex, and the perceived horrors of "miscegenation." (Unbeknownst to any of us at that time, a child of just such an interracial marriage had been born two years earlier in Honolulu who would go on to become President of the United States — a reality that a good number of whites are still unable to cope with to this day.)

Afro-American demands for school desegregation put liberal Democrats in a bind. Conservative Democrats against whom they competed in primaries were

solid backers of the segregated status quo. They enthusiastically exalted the sanctity of "neighborhoods," as did the Republicans who they ran against in the November general elections. Yet almost ten years after *Brown*, liberal politicians had to publicly support the theoretical concept of integration — with, of course, "all deliberate speed," "in due time," "as conditions mature" — or risk alienating their base among Black, Latino, Jewish, and liberal white voters.

Political campaign managers, however, were terrified that if Afro-Americans pushed too hard for school integration they would arouse furious resistance — the kind of reaction that would soon be referred to as the "white backlash."

Enter CORE and the "Action Faction."

Sitting-In at the Board of Education ~ 1963

By the time I resumed working with L.A. CORE in September of '63, the housing protests had been hobbled by the moderates and their mysterious agreements with Don Wilson. And those aligned with the Democratic Party were increasing their opposition to further direct action of any sort. We of the Action Faction, however, were determined to push full speed ahead for "Freedom Now!" Regardless of electoral consequences.

With the 1963-64 academic school year commencing in September, L.A. CORE's Action Committee shifted its attention from housing to the equally controversial issue of school desegregation. Though I didn't realize it at the time, an action campaign for school integration would inevitably bring L.A. CORE's internal conflict to a head.

At our urging — and over the objections of the moderates — CORE's general membership meeting that September voted by a narrow majority to commence protests against segregation and racial discrimination by the L.A. Board of Education (BoE). The campaign began with eight CORE members participation in a week-long fast at the BoE headquarters, followed by a six-mile protest march to the BoE by some 500 students from the heart of the ghetto.

Meanwhile, out at UCLA in Westwood, Bruin CORE was starting up for the semester. Chapter leaders Berenice Powdrill and Marlene Dixon focused their energies on campus education and outreach efforts around race and discrimination, while I concentrated on recruiting and leading UCLA students to participate in protests at the BoE beginning in early October.

The first such actions were called "study-ins." A study-in was a kind of low-key sit-in. The Board met every Thursday afternoon, so around four o'clock, *Black and white together*, we marched into BoE headquarters at the corner of Sunset and Grand, lined the hallway, and then sat down, leaving open space in the middle of

the corridor and in front of each doorway so that no one was blocked from entering or leaving.

We called it a “study-in” because we wanted to counter segregationists who seemed to fear some horrible racial catastrophe if Afro-American and white students studied and learned together. As we conceived them, the study-ins were not civil disobedience. Our plan was to peacefully leave if told to do so. Of course, we knew that ordering students to stop doing school work under threat of arrest would be politically embarrassing to the elected BoE members. Which they obviously also understood, since they stoically suffered our presence.

In the early 1960s, CORE demonstrations were highly disciplined. They were not excuses for protesters to act out their personal rebellions, “do their own thing,” or self-aggrandize their egos. If someone refused to accept that, they were asked to leave. And everyone understood and accepted this because we wanted to win and we understood that victory required self-discipline. So there was little risk of arrest on the study-ins, and participants trusted CORE monitors and picket captains like me to maintain the discipline that kept everyone safe.

We held four Thursday study-ins during October with from 200–400 participants — mainly students, most of them college age, some from high school. It was an hour’s drive from UCLA to the BoE, twice as long on the bus, yet I would guess that between a quarter and a third of the study-in participants were mobilized by Bruin CORE, primarily from UCLA, plus a few from Santa Monica College and University High School.

As our actions continued and grew larger, so did media controversy and opposition from angry whites who furiously objected to their children attending class with Afro-Americans and Latinos. The growing furor dismayed the CORE moderates who stepped up their opposition to “provocative” direct action. They argued that petitions and educational outreach programs aimed at persuading whites that segregation was morally unjust were more effective than demonstrations that stirred up anger and hostility. We, of course, disagreed — passionately.

For their part, the Board of Education knew they had the solid support of both white voters and white elected officials. So rather than threatening mass arrests or using force to clear the building, which would have resulted in greatly increased media attention and controversy over their segregation policies, their strategy was to wait us out while vilifying us in the media as “impractical,” “irresponsible,” “divisive,” and “disruptive.”

We of the Action Faction and Bruin CORE considered ourselves nonviolent warriors — adapting Gandhian strategies to American realities. One of Gandhi’s precepts was that “the function of a civil resistor is to provoke a response and continue to provoke until they respond or change the law.” So since the BoE was

simply waiting out the study-ins, we decided to discontinue them and escalate toward civil disobedience.

One could argue — as we did — that it was no violation of law for students to sit in a Board of Education hallway on a Thursday afternoon without blocking any doors or hallways while reading books and doing homework. But an all-night sit-in after closing hours might well be construed as a form of trespass, certainly so if they told us to leave and we refused. At the end of the last study-in on October 24, about 150 of us remained in the building for what we called a "vigil." All of us understood and agreed that we would refuse to leave if ordered to do so and submit to arrest if necessary. As it happened, we must have taken the BoE by surprise because they made no effort to evict us, and we left in the morning as the office workers were arriving.

The BoE told the press that we had broken into an office and stolen hypodermic needles (untrue) and they claimed we had engaged in "licentious behavior" in the halls — meaning, I suppose, that some official saw some snuggling and possibly even some kissing. Apparently it astonished — horrified — whomever it was to observe such behavior by high school and college-age students. The CORE moderates echoed the BoE's nonsense, not because they believed it but because it suited their political purposes to paint us as out of control "radicals." We expected lies from the BoE we were protesting against, but hearing slanders from our fellow CORE members enraged us.

The moderates also falsely charged that we had violated CORE process when we canceled the study-ins and commenced the all-night vigils. And it was "irresponsible," they added, to court arrest for 150 people when CORE had no money for bail. We argued that we followed the correct internal procedures because the Action Committee had the power to initiate protests. And we countered that everyone understood they might be in jail for some time, that the dramatic arrest of such a large number of protesters would force the BoE to respond, and once we were in jail bond money could eventually be raised — which was, in fact, the standard CORE approach everywhere in the country.

After a fierce political fight the CORE Executive Committee narrowly approved a second vigil for October 31st.

The Los Angeles Unified School District had their own well-trained and well-disciplined police force, which meant we weren't up against the racist, violence-prone LAPD. When we attempted to enter the BoE for the second vigil just before closing time, the school cops tried to lock the doors and block us. About 30 of us managed to get inside, leaving a larger group locked out. This was long before cell phones, so communication between those of us inside and the others outside was almost impossible except by shouting out the restroom windows (the offices were all locked and we made no effort to break into them).

Those of us on the inside found a set of unguarded doors, opened them, and then sat down in the doorway to keep the school police from closing them while outside protesters scrambled over us to get in. The cops roughly forced their way through, dragged us away, arrested three people, and managed to get the doors closed and locked, though not before a number of additional protesters had managed to enter the building.

Jerry Farber, Jay Frank, and Scott Van Leuvan were the three arrested. A couple of months later they were convicted on a minor misdemeanor and sentenced to three days in city jail. They began serving their sentence on January 30, 1964, and as both a gesture of solidarity and continued protest we began an around-the-clock sit-in in the Hall of Justice lobby, which was open around the clock. Apparently we made such a nuisance of ourselves — my tone-deaf singing no doubt a major contribution — they let our people go a day and half early just to get rid of us. A victory to be celebrated.

Compared to what we had experienced from the Nazis in Torrance and would later receive at the hands of the LAPD, the roughness of the BoE cops that afternoon was minor. And compared to what protesters in the Deep South were enduring it was trivial. But some of the UCLA students were shocked, indignant, and outraged at being manhandled and shoved aside. A third vigil was held on the night of November 7. The school cops made no attempt to block us this time and it was clear the BoE had returned to their waiting-us-out strategy. Perhaps they knew CORE's internal conflict would soon solve their pesky protesters problem. They were right.

By now CORE membership and committee meetings had become increasingly bitter political battles as the two factions put forward rival motions and used parliamentary maneuvers to either curtail or push forward the school protests. As it turned out the moderates on the chapter's Executive Committee were far more skilled at political infighting than we were. They called two special membership meetings to revise the chapter constitution and bylaws, each meeting carefully scheduled to take place during one of our vigil actions at the BoE, when Action Faction supporters would be demonstrating rather than debating bylaws language.

With most of the Action Faction engaged in action, the moderates were able to rewrite the rules and revoke the Action Committee's authority to call and organize protests or make statements to the press. That gave them the power to slam on the brakes. Under the new procedures, a complex committee process was required to mount a protest. We had been in action at the BoE during every one of their regular Thursday meetings since mid-September, but on Thursday, November 14 nothing had been approved through the process, so nothing was done.

The following Thursday, November 21st, was the date for chapter elections. More than 100 members attended the meeting and both factions

nominated candidates. The moderates decisively defeated us. Most of our votes came from people who had consistently been on the line in Torrance and risked arrest at the Board of Education. Most of the moderate votes came from CORE members we had never seen on a demonstration and many we had never seen at all, not even in committee meetings.

The next day, November 22nd, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. There was no question in our minds — moderates and Action Faction both — that he was killed by white racists because of his perceived support for Afro-American civil rights. National CORE leaders in New York responded by ordering a month-long moratorium on civil disobedience until after Christmas. The new L.A. CORE officers expanded that into a moratorium on *all* protests of *any* kind.

After the moderates won the chapter elections and declared their expanded moratorium, CORE never resumed direct action protests against the Board of Education. The moderates continued to petition and plead for years — with no noticeable success at all.

But that didn't end the struggle against segregated education. Just as Afro-Americans were forced into overcrowded, highly-segregated schools, so too were Latinos living in East Los Angeles. The four Latino high schools, Garfield, Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Wilson, were notorious for their high dropout and low college-admittance rates, for penalizing students for speaking Spanish with their friends, and for using corporal punishment (swats with a wooden paddle). In 1968, students at those four schools organized a series of student strikes they called "walkouts" to protest conditions. Students at Roosevelt nonviolently sitting in on the school steps were brutally attacked by L.A. police in riot gear, who beat them with clubs, putting a savage end to such student protests.

In 1970, Judge Gitelson ruled that the Los Angeles Unified School District "knowingly, affirmatively, and in bad faith" deliberately segregated L.A. schools. He ordered them to desegregate the predominantly Black and Latino schools by 1972. Angry whites immediately voted him out of office. President Nixon and Governor Ronald Reagan condemned his ruling, which was quickly appealed, blocking the judge's 1972 deadline.

Finally, in 1976, the California Supreme Court ruled that L.A. had to desegregate its schools. Again the BoE, white parents, and their loyal politicians resisted. Anti-integration forces put Proposition 1 before the voters, who passed it in 1979 by another two-thirds majority. That proposition changed the California constitution so as to block all court-ordered school integration plans. Capitulating to the political winds, the California Supreme Court choose not to overturn Prop1. Los Angeles thus became the first city in America to eviscerate and completely eliminate court-ordered school desegregation. Today, school

segregation in SoCal is worse than ever. According to a 2011 report by the UCLA Civil Rights Project:

> "Southern California schools show profound segregation by race, poverty, and language status, all of which are visibly related to disparities in educational opportunity and outcomes. ... Over twice as many intensely segregated secondary schools were identified by the state as critically overcrowded compared to predominately white and Asian schools ... less than 50% of Grade-9 students in intensely segregated schools graduated on time. In schools educating a majority of white and Asian youth, 81% graduated on time. ... students in intensely segregated schools were close to three times as likely to have a teacher lacking full qualifications than students attending majority white and Asian schools." — UCLA Civil Rights Project report, 2011[2]

Expelled From Los Angeles CORE ~ 1963

Defeat in the CORE election didn't end the Action Faction. We decided to set up a new CORE chapter, one dedicated to direct action, one where no one could vote in any meeting unless they had participated in at least one recent protest action. We called it "Central CORE" after Central Avenue, the major artery of the main Los Angeles ghetto and the street on which we opened a tiny storefront office. Since National CORE had already chartered several satellite chapters in the Los Angeles area — Long Beach, Pasadena, Pacoima, Venice, and so on — we assumed we had a right to set up a new chapter too. The moderates now in firm control of L.A. CORE did not see it that way, and National CORE eventually sided with them against us.

Those of us who had tried to set up Central CORE were then charged by L.A. CORE leaders with violation of various rules and regulations, all of which boiled down to attempting to start a rival chapter. In all, 17 of the most vocal Action Faction members — including me — were expelled from L.A. CORE for our nefarious crimes. Since none of us had any interest in continuing to work with the moderates, our expulsion was entirely symbolic with little practical effect. My commitment and allegiance was to the Movement and to the other members of the Action Faction, not to a particular organization, so being expelled had little effect on me. Nor did it have any effect on Bruin CORE, with which I remained quite active.

Since we were barred from using the CORE name, we formed an independent civil rights organization — the Non-Violent Action Committee (N-VAC). To some degree we chose that name in honor of the Nonviolent Action Group at Howard University in Washington DC and the Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee (CNAC) in Cambridge Maryland, both of which we greatly admired from afar for their militancy. But mainly the name denoted our determination to push nonviolent direct action as far as we could take it.

N-VAC's three co-chairs had been the main leaders of the Action Faction. First and foremost was Woodrow Coleman — everyone called him "Woody." He was our heart. At 29, he was ten years older than me. Originally from Texas, he was one of the many Afro-Americans who joined the Great Migration out of the South and out of legally enforced segregation. He first got involved with the NAACP and CORE in 1960 during the Woolworth pickets in support of the student sit-ins, events that convinced him of nonviolent direct action's potential power. I don't know how many times he was arrested, more than a dozen at the time I first met him. He was a brilliant, self-taught innovator of nonviolent tactics and in 1962 he led a successful 33-day sit-in that desegregated an all-white Monterey Park neighborhood that had refused to sell a home to a Black college professor. Though he always wore a dark suit and tie on protests, Woody was stone working class, a construction laborer working out of Laborer's Local 300. He was then, still is, and will ever be, my picket captain.

F. Daniel Gray ("Danny") was our political strategist and along with Woody our main direct action leader. Tall and thin, originally from Brooklyn, a Black intellectual carrying on the tradition of the Harlem Renaissance. He was our head. One of the few Marxists actually active in civil rights protests, he knew all the currents, backwaters, and factions of the thoroughly splintered Los Angeles left. He had been one of L.A. CORE's most prominent leaders since at least the 1960 civil rights protests outside the Democratic Convention.

Robert Hall was N-VAC's soul. A snappy dresser with a thin mustache and a narrow-brimmed fedora, he was a former car salesman with the high-energy air of a born street hustler. He knew the ghetto, the walk, the talk, and the bitter anger, and he carried himself with the panache of a natural-born community organizer. He was a private person and shared little of his past with me, so I don't know how he got involved in CORE or Freedom Movement protests.

By obvious and common consent those three were our leaders. They were leaders by example because of their actions — not their verbal manipulations, political maneuvers, or sense of class entitlement.

Nonviolent Bootcamp ~ 1964

By January of '64 most of us who had formerly been part of L.A. CORE's Action Faction were now members of the newborn Non-Violent Action Committee (N-VAC). Some who hadn't been expelled remained active with both. From our cramped storefront office on Central Avenue we were ready to roll with the new year.

Our relations with the moderates who were now in uncontested control of L.A. CORE were chilly. But since they did little protesting and we in N-VAC did little else, our paths rarely crossed. N-VAC and Bruin CORE, however, became

firm allies, both of us committed to aggressive direct action. I was the bridge between the two organizations.

Back in those days, bumper stickers were an important source of both income and public outreach for civil rights groups. The ones L.A. CORE sold read "We Shall Overcome," those from N-VAC and Bruin CORE proclaimed "Freedom Now!" It wasn't that we rejected "We Shall Overcome" as a slogan or a song, we still sang it as the anthem that more than any other bound us together — every meeting ended with it. But we were no longer willing to settle for overcoming *some day*, we wanted freedom *now!*

N-VAC was democratic in its meetings and decision-making, we discussed, debated, argued, and disagreed. But out on the line we maintained — and expected others to maintain — the self-discipline of soldiers. Our discipline was self-discipline because, other than telling problem children to leave, we had no punishments with which to enforce it. Yet we almost never had to remove anyone because of their behavior — to tell the truth, I can't recall a single instance of that ever happening, though I suppose it must have at one time or another.

For us, you either put your body on the line with seriousness and discipline — or you didn't. It was your actions that counted, not your motives, psychology, verbal statements, political ideology or class consciousness. Rhetoric and bullshit didn't cut it. Later, when I was working for Dr. King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), in Alabama and Mississippi, it was pretty much the same with them — and with SNCC and CORE too.

When we were in action, the designated captain was in charge, usually assisted by a song leader and sometimes depending on the number of people involved one or two monitors or picket posts. On a big march there'd be a whole team of marshals organized into a structured unit. When new people showed up at a protest, we explained what we were about, and since all the N-VAC regulars were modeling disciplined behavior, everyone accepted self-discipline as the way it was. Which is not to imply that N-VAC actions were dour, regimented, militaristic affairs — far from it. Most N-VAC actions, even civil disobedience, were energetic, uplifting, sometimes humorous, often joyous. And always filled with singing.

On N-VAC actions I was frequently chosen to assist the picket captain as a monitor (though never as song leader). Outside of actually protesting, my main ongoing job for was printing our leaflets on my father's old 1930s-era hand-cranked mimeograph and running the nonviolent training sessions for new N-VAC recruits and Bruin CORE members. The training sessions I ran replicated how I had been trained by Woody and Danny, which was long on the tactics and strategies of direct action and short on nonviolent philosophy as a way of life.

In the Freedom Movement of the 1960s, two different kinds of nonviolence being put into practice (and argued over) — *Philosophical* and *Tactical*. (Today, Philosophical nonviolence might be referred to as *Principled*, and Tactical might be called *Strategic*.)

Philosophical nonviolence was the nonviolence of Dr. King, James Farmer, Bayard Rustin, and other well-known leaders and activists. It emphasized love, reconciliation, and winning over one's enemies through compassion and redemptive suffering. For its advocates it was a way of life. Though the mass media focused its attention on this kind of nonviolence, its adherents were always a small minority within the Movement.

Most Movement activists were tactically nonviolent. Rather than changing hearts, our focus was on changing racist behavior — through persuasion if possible, but if not, then by coercion through legislation, court rulings, nonviolent disruption, and cultural pressure. For us, nonviolence was not a way of life but rather a means to an end — we used nonviolence because we wanted to win.

As we saw it, violence as a social change strategy simply would not work in modern America — it was self-defeating. We knew there was no certainty that nonviolent tactics and strategies would achieve significant victories, but it offered the best chance of creating social change. By 1963, the great majority of Freedom Movement activists in all the main groups — CORE, SNCC, NAACP, and even SCLC — were tactically nonviolent rather than philosophically nonviolent. But the mass media portrayed Philosophical nonviolence as the only kind there was. That's still pretty much the case today.

On picket lines, sit-ins, marches, and other kinds of protests where we were confronted by violent racists and cops with their guns, badges, court systems, and jails, it was hard to tell Philosophical and Tactical adherents apart because our actual behavior was pretty much the same. The big argument between the two camps was over self-defense against white terrorists like the KKK when we were *not* engaged in public activity. Philosophicals argued for remaining nonviolent at all times in all situations. Tacticals under attack by the Klan might respond with either defensive violence or some form of nonviolence depending on their reading of the situation. This sounds like a minor theoretical difference, but we spent an enormous amount of time in passionate debate over it.

In real life situations, however, there was rarely any divergence in actions. Both Philosophicals and Tacticals agreed that most times nonviolence was more effective — and safer — than violence. It was more effective in winning supporters and achieving end goals, and safer in terms of arrest, injury, or death. During my first six months in Alabama working for SCLC, I came under direct deadly threat from the Ku Klux Klan on five different occasions. On three of those occasions — four if you count running like hell as a tactic of nonviolence, which I

do — I escaped without serious injury through nonviolent techniques. On one of those occasions we returned fire against KKK nightriders and scared them off.

N-VAC's leaders — Woody Coleman, Danny Gray, and Robert Hall — believed in serious training for serious action, and our N-VAC training sessions concentrated less on the "why" and more on the "how." Today, our kind of hands-on, boot-camp-style training in the discipline and methods of protest is not much seen, it's gone quite out of fashion. Nowadays, most nonviolent training is oriented towards Philosophical nonviolence, and the trainers use dialogue, discussion, personal role playing, and exercises in understanding the other person's point of view to impart concepts of nonviolent philosophy and communication, nonviolence in thought, word, and deed, social alternatives to violence, nonviolent conflict resolution, compassion training, and so on.

All that is no doubt valuable — but it doesn't teach people how to mount effective nonviolent protests. Our N-VAC training sessions taught the techniques and subtleties of how to picket and sit in, how to organize and direct a mass march, what to do when arrested (we had no illusions on that score), techniques for preventing and de-escalating hostility or violence from adversaries, and how to nonviolently protect yourself from violent physical attack if our de-escalation techniques failed.

Underlying our form of nonviolent training was a saying we took from the U.S. Marine Corps, "When the shit hits the fan, people don't rise to the level of their expectations, rather they fall to the level of their training." That was certainly true in my life. When the head of the KKK in Crenshaw County, Alabama put a .38 to my head and told me he was going to blow my brains out, my training in Tactical nonviolence may well have saved my life. When a mob of white racists attacked me in Luverne, Alabama, I didn't have time to ponder, "Hmmm these people want to stomp and beat me, I wonder what I should do?" And even if I'd had the time — which I didn't — I was too freaked to do that kind of abstract analysis anyway. What I did was what I was trained to do — nothing more, nothing less.

Each of our training sessions would take a whole day (two days if it was for people who were going to be acting as captains and monitors). There were usually a dozen or so trainees — men and women both — plus me, Jay Frank, and sometimes Jerry Farber as instructors. We discussed and analyzed, then we practiced and drilled. We role-played protesters keeping their cool while hecklers screamed insults and racial epithets in our faces. We practiced maintaining the picket line while being pelted with eggs and water balloons. We drilled in the various methods of going limp when being dragged off to jail, the techniques of sitting in to block an entrance, and the discipline of action in hostile environments. And, of course, we taught and practiced the songs — perhaps the single most important element of the training session.

We took care not to really hurt anyone, no acid was thrown in anyone's eyes, no burning cigarettes ground into anyone's cheek, no heads cracked by hard-swinging billy clubs. But we were rough because we were training for real dangers. People are often paralyzed when confronted by sudden violence, both from surprise and from simply not knowing what to do — hence our training.

At the end of the day, we were tired, filthy, somewhat sore, and in some cases bruised. A few people decided that nonviolent direct action was not where they wanted to put their energy, but those who endured a full-on N-VAC training knew how to protest effectively and what to do when shit hit the fan. More than that, I think our training sessions were a rite of passage into the solidarity of the Freedom Movement family — as my first training had been for me in early 1963.

You may wonder, I suppose, if such rough, hands-on training was really necessary (or even wise). Back then, it was. In the early '60s, protesting for or against anything was considered suspicious, if not downright subversive, and violent, aggressive racists were not confined to the Deep South. I still have the syllabus notes from a training session I ran in early 1964 and it listed some of the actual situations that I and my fellow CORE and N-VAC protesters had recently faced in Los Angeles:

Verbal abuse of many kinds
Being spat upon, shoved, jostled, and punched
A teenage girl dragged across the floor by her hair
Another had her loop earring bloodily ripped from her pierced ear
Beatings by white vigilantes with fists and chains
Rocks, bricks, manure, eggs, and exploding firecrackers thrown at us
Being kicked and stepped on during sit-ins on lobby floors
Sit-in participants being rolled down a flight of stairs
Cars attempting to run over pickets
Police cracking heads with their billy clubs
Choking by police (the infamous "choke hold")
Hot tar poured over a man's head
A knife stabbing (fortunately not serious)
An attack with a can of hair spray used as a flame-thrower[4]

That list above reflects "liberal" California in the early 1960s. Violence against protesters in the Deep South was much, much worse.

White Mob Comes to Watts ~ 1963

From our tiny N-VAC office on Central Avenue we were determined to test the limits of militant nonviolent action in the ghetto. Our focus was job discrimination.

At that time, employment discrimination was explicit, overt, and widespread — as it had been for generations past. Entire occupations were

commonly understood to be “white jobs,” or “Colored work,” or “women’s work.” It was so normal that most Los Angeles whites never spared a moment’s thought about it, at least not until they personally encountered, or heard about, a jobs-related protest.

Newspaper Help Wanted ads were how most people looked for work when personal connections failed. Many papers divided their employment notices into three sections: “White Men,” “White Women,” and “Colored,” or sometimes “Colored Men,” and “Colored Women.” People seeking work searched the classified ads in the section appropriate for their race and gender. And individual job postings might explicitly state racial requirements. I still have one snipped from the local Westwood paper reading: [SECOND COOK, white, for sorority house, UCLA.]

Though it’s little noted today, the March on Washington that so strongly moved me was a march for “*Jobs* and Freedom” Three of the ten march demands were related to employment discrimination. And by the later part of 1963, Freedom Movement direct action protests were increasingly targeting occupational inequalities.

N-VAC’s first direct action campaign began in December of ’63 when we were still calling ourselves “Central CORE.” It was against the two Wich Stands (“*Wich*” as in “*sandwich*”). The original Wich Stand was a drive-in burger joint at Florence and Figueroa, an area now commonly referred to as “Watts.” (Technically, it was in the South Central district, not the Watts neighborhood, but after the 1965 rebellion most people used “Watts” to refer to the entire Black community of central Los Angeles.)

The first Wich Stand had spaces for about 15 cars served by carhops and inside maybe a dozen or so counter seats with a small bar on the side. It had opened in 1939 when the neighborhood was white working-class. Realtors later “busted” that area, annexing it to the rapidly growing Afro-American ghetto. At the time of our campaign, 95% of the Wich Stand #1’s customers were Black. All of its employees were white. Every. Single. One.

Wich Stand #2 was newer and much larger. A drive-in diner (as opposed to a burger stand), it was able to accommodate twice as many more cars, plus it had inside table seating and a full lounge-bar. Located at the corner of Slauson and Overhill a block or so north of Inglewood, it was a hangout for white, “car-culture” teens who made it crystal clear that Afro-Americans were unwelcome. Together, the two Wich Stands employed almost 100 people — all of them white, even the janitors.

As was standard CORE policy, an N-VAC team composed of our most diplomatic members — not me, obviously — attempted to negotiate with the owners over their hiring practices. We asked that they immediately hire at least one Afro-American at each location and agree to stop discriminating against

Black job applicants. Not an unreasonable position given that the clientele at Stand #1 was almost entirely Black.

We also wanted them to adopt a program of "compensatory hiring." Meaning that they would favor Black applicants until the percentage of Backs in their employ roughly matched that of surrounding area. Again, not an extreme redress for more than 25 years of explicit, overt racial discrimination.

They were not receptive. They did, briefly, hire one Black carhop at the ghetto location, but she quit after three hours because of harassment from the white employees. After that, the Wich Stand managers stonewalled us.

So early in December we began to picket the ghetto Wich Stand. It was mainly a dinner joint, and every day we would picket from four in the afternoon until midnight — 2am on weekends. No Afro-Americans crossed our line. None. Zip. Nada. People from the neighborhood would come up to us saying, "Oh we're so glad someone is finally doing something about this. We've been angry about this for years." Folk would bring us fried chicken, cake, coffee, and other expressions of community support.

Looking back now, I'm both surprised and self-critical that we made no real attempt to organize the local community. I believe some N-VAC members did distribute leaflets along the adjacent streets during the day while I was at UCLA, and (I hope) they explained to people why we were picketing. Given the neighborhood support for our action, we could have — we absolutely *should* have — organized an ongoing community-based civil rights group. But our minds were fixed on direct action, not community organizing.

Our failure in that regard reflected our CORE roots. CORE mainly saw itself as a small force of highly trained nonviolent warriors who fought the good fight on behalf of the broader society. Community organizing, mass action, and building a broad mass base for political campaigns were just not part of CORE's organizational DNA. At least not in the North. In the South, CORE projects were influenced in a community-organizing direction by the success of SNCC's Mississippi and Southwest Georgia projects, but that didn't carry over to the northern or western CORE chapters — at least not those in SoCal.

Early on we tried picketing what we referred to as the "Inglewood" location, but without success. None of the white teens respected our line or sympathized with the issues we were fighting for. They did enjoy harassing us and calling us "niggers" and "nigger-lovers." Since it was clearly a waste of our time we decided to ignore Wich Stand #2 and concentrate on the ghetto location where we could really affect their business. Four to midnight picket, seven days a week. Maybe once or twice a night a white customer might come through our line, usually headed to the bar. Essentially their business was dead so long as we were there.

By midnight we were exhausted but still emotionally wired, so a group of us usually retired to someone's pad where we drank tequila shots with salt and lime until we were drunk enough to crash. By mid-morning we'd wake up hung over and grouchy, go about whatever errands and business we had for the day (in my case going to UCLA where I pretended to be a student). Then back on the Wich Stand line by four.

After a few weeks of that regime I realized I didn't like getting drunk and I liked the hangover even less. Marijuana, it turned out, was my relaxant of choice. So I stopped drinking alcohol and never resumed, becoming instead a dedicated pothead for the next 50 years (except when I was in the South or some other place where it was too dangerous, arrest-wise).

The Slausons were a large Afro-American street gang and Wich Stand #1 was on their turf. At that time L.A. had five major Black gangs — Slausons, Businessmen, Gladiators, Watts, and Comptons. They were big gangs with hundreds of members. But this was before Nixon's War Against Drugs turned narcotics into a billion-dollar business, so they weren't the narco gangs we see today with drive-by shootings, murder, mayhem, and kids dying with needles in their arms. Yes, they were sometimes violent, they committed petty and some not so petty crimes, they smoked weed and some of them sold it. But mainly they protected their hood from outsiders, hostile gangs, and to the extent they could, the LAPD.

Like the hood as a whole, the Slausons were quite friendly toward us. They supported our fight for racial justice, though they found the notion of nonviolence incomprehensible. We never preached nonviolence as a way of life to them, nor did we diss their gang culture, but we were firm that nonviolence was our *strategy* because that's what we thought could *win*. They respected that.

Every once in a while, for a lark, some of the gang members might walk the line with us for a few minutes. "Hey! Look at me! I'm being nonviolent!" And they'd all laugh and have a good time. Which was cool with us, we got a kick out of it too. N-VAC co-chair Robert Hall later told an interviewer:

> They would come down and walk the picket line. When they'd get on the line they'd tell you, "I don't believe in nonviolence," and I'd say, "Okay baby, give me your piece [gun] now, and if you get mad or something like that just step off the line." Sometimes I used to be standing around at the Wich Stand, Jerry Farber and myself, and I'd have as much as fifteen knives, three or four guns. ... And the guys would walk the picket line. Then they'd come up and say, "Okay baby, I'm ready to go." We'd give 'em the knife or gun or whatever they had. And we'd say, "See you tomorrow" and they'd come down.[5]

Though our action was strictly legal and we gave the LAPD no excuse to break us up with arrests or violence, they kept us under a close and hostile watch — passing by at frequent intervals and giving us the hard eye. They repeatedly stopped, got out of their squad cars, and demanded that we identify

ourselves — the same cops demanding our same IDs over and over, day after day. Their obvious antagonism, however, was a mark in our favor with the Slausons. There was bitter, unrelenting enmity between the LAPD and the youth gangs — Black and Latino both — and in truth the cops acted like an enemy gang — a blue gang that used their guns and badges to humiliate and dominate nonwhite communities.

As both the street cops and Police Chief William Parker saw it, their job was to enforce the social status quo of Jim Crow and racial subservience. Parker had a policy of recruiting white southerners because of their racial attitudes and their supposed “expertise” in controlling Blacks. He hired white Texans for the same reason with regard to Latinos. On the street their attitude clearly articulated their intention “to keep the monkeys in their place,” as one police official so charmingly expressed it.

The LAPD’s dedication to social and political control ran from trivial to brutal. I was (and still am) a good driver with nary a ticket. One month I attached a “Freedom Now” bumper sticker to my car and within six weeks collected four moving violations. I removed the bumper sticker and never got another ticket. For me it was just traffic tickets, for nonwhites the police policy was stop, harass, humiliate, and in some cases shoot first and fill out the paperwork later. There’s also no question in my mind that they yearned to crush the Black and Latino street gangs — and the Freedom Movement.

One chilly Saturday night in late early January of ’64 a dozen or so of us were on the line, maybe five of us white, eight or nine Black, and we were walking slowly back and forth on the sidewalk, talking quietly and singing our freedom songs from time to time. Just routine. Familiar. Boring.

Suddenly a car came crashing through the line, almost running over Roberta Krinsky and her brother Fred. Then more cars came screeching in, a dozen or more, and they were all filled with white teenagers — mostly boys, a few girls. There must have been more than 50 of them. “What the fuck is this shit?” I thought.

They got out and started up with all this racist crap, singing “Dixie,” making racial jokes, shouting, “Jiggaboos, niggers, nigger-lovers.” Some of them pretended to be monkeys — you know, dancing around and scratching under their armpits, as if to mimic us as monkeys. They had a crate of eggs, whole flats of them, which they began to pelt us with. We recognized a few of the most aggressive from the time they had harassed us at Wich Stand #2, so we understood that somehow the owner had convinced them to come teach us a lesson in white supremacy. I doubt he paid them money, they probably said to each other, “Hey, what a kick! Let’s go mess with the niggers!”

Keep in mind that this was before the large-scale urban violence of the mid-’60s. It was a year and a half before the Watts revolt, and the ghetto was not yet a

scary place for whites. For some whites, especially a large pack of teenagers, Blacks were people you humiliate, people you make racist jokes about, people you look down upon — not people you fear — not if you were in a mob with others of your kind.

Of course, we were deep into nonviolent training and discipline. We were determined to hold our line, "come hell or high water" as the old saying went. We kept on picketing, walking steady, keeping our intervals, and singing our hearts out — dodging eggs when we could, getting hit when we couldn't.

The Afro-American neighborhood, however, was most definitely NOT into nonviolence. A crowd quickly began gathering, at first across the street, then edging in closer as it grew larger. In a strange kind of way, they considered us *their* freedom fighters. They liked us, they were even proud of us. They reacted to the whites attacking us as if we were family and they ready to take care of business. Soon we had 50 white teenagers shouting racist epithets on one side of us, and almost 150 furious Blacks on the other side. Standing between them were our dozen or so nonviolent pickets singing freedom songs. And these idiot white kids had absolutely no clue the danger they were in. They're throwing eggs at us while we were trying to save their lives.

I remember clear as yesterday, a few minutes after the white teens first arrived this cool cat and his girl came walking down the street. Dressed. Obviously out on the town. Saturday night. She had on a green sequin sheath. He had on a dark suit with a turtleneck — no tie. Spiffy. Way cool. They must have seen the commotion and came over to find out what was going down. She got an egg right in the chest, splattering her sequin dress which is almost impossible to clean. They didn't say a word. They just looked at each other and walked away.

Then the Slausons came rolling in, more and more of them. The *word* had gone out.

"Please don't cross our line," we kept telling the gang kids and neighborhood folk. "That's what they want. We don't care what you do anywhere else, but this is our action. We have to keep it nonviolent. That's how we win. If they can provoke violence, then they win."

As I recall, Danny Gray was our picket captain that night (Woody was working). He was spending most of his time with a guy named Skillet who we knew to be the Slausons' war chief (their term) from the times he'd come by the line before. So it was up to Jerry Farber, Jay Frank, and me to hold the line together. And no police anywhere in sight. Any other night, they were always driving by giving us the eye, looking to harass us — but not that night. No. No, not that night.

As the gang kids rolled in, they would report to Skillet and Danny. "Four carloads of" — we didn't call them "pigs" in those days, that was later — we

called them “fuzz.” “Four carloads of fuzz over at... Three carloads up by... A whole Tac Team in such-and-so parking lot.” In a three- or four-block radius, completely surrounding us, there were probably more than 100 cops, all of them arming up for heavy action. All of them carefully out of sight. Waiting. Just waiting. Waiting for some violence on the part of the neighborhood Blacks or the gang members so they could swoop in to “protect” those dumb white kids.

By now members of other gangs were showing up — Businessmen, Gladiators, Watts, even a few Comptons. Danny was the one who responded. “It’s a trick,” he told them. “It’s a trap.” The gang members were organized and disciplined. They understood what we were saying. The crowd did too — mostly. Intellectually. But it was emotionally hard. Every once in a while something would happen, someone would get hit with an egg, or the white numbskulls would do something especially provocative, and the crowd would kind of surge forward. We’d rush in front of them to put ourselves between them and the white kids who were still shouting insults and throwing eggs at us.

What allowed us to keep the teenagers from physically assaulting us and the Blacks from charging through us to get at the racist whites was our discipline, our training, and above all our freedom songs. There’s not a doubt in my mind that we held the Wich Stand line that night with our songs. Somehow our singing created a psychological barrier that prevented those white teens — who outnumbered us four or five to one — from taking a few steps forward into our midst and beating the crap out of us as they so clearly wanted to do.

And at the same time, our songs created an invisible but emotionally-palpable social border that the furious Afro-American crowd respected and honored despite their anger. I cannot explain the psychology or sociology of the how or the why, but I saw it happen — and not just at the Wich Stand either, but again and again in similar situations I later encountered in Alabama and Mississippi. It’s certainly what saved our asses that cold night at Florence and Figuroa.

That cool cat and his girl came back. Dark shirts and jeans. They passed by Danny and came up to the line where he showed me the sawed-off shotgun concealed by his long trench coat. She had a big purse slung across her shoulder, her right hand resting inside it. Very politely, he asked me to step aside.

“No, brother no!” I told them. “It’s a trap, it’s a trap!” Somehow I convinced them. They didn’t leave, but they didn’t start shooting.

Those white kids didn’t know they were being used as bait to start the Watts Riot a year and a half early. I’m convinced that Chief Parker saw his opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. As soon as the “unruly crowd of Negroes” violently attacked the “innocent white children,” those cops would’ve come swarming in, just as they did in a year and a half later when Watts blew and they shot 34 people to death. They would have brutally smashed and arrested

Slausons and community folk alike while providing a media pretext to smear and discredit the entire Civil Rights Movement. No reporters were present, so the cops could have spun the tale any way they wanted, and since this was long before cellphones with cameras existed, their version would have been accepted as the gospel truth.

But that scheme didn't take into account N-VAC's disciplined nonviolence. Somehow we managed to hold that line for what seemed like an eternity (probably no more than 45 minutes). Protecting these racist idiots who were taunting us with verbal abuse and pelting us with eggs. A very weird night, very weird indeed.

Eventually, I guess either the white kids finally looked out and saw they were surrounded by what by then had grown to 300 or more angry Blacks, or they ran out of eggs, or something, because they abruptly jumped back in their cars and came smashing out through our line, driving through the crowd, almost running people down before they got out onto Florence. They raced back toward Inglewood, with people running after them and pounding on their cars with fists. The gang kids ran for their cars and gave chase. According to what we were told afterwards they caught some of the white teens and beat the shit out of them. Our attitude was that whatever happened away from our nonviolent action was not our concern — and if they got what was coming to them so be it.

The next day, of course, we were back on the line as usual. Skillet came by, kind of sheepish, "I want to apologize for what happened" he told us. "We weren't prepared. But don't worry, if they come again, we're copacetic. Look there." He pointed down the street to a house that had half a dozen or more cars parked on the lawn and a bunch of folk hanging around on the porch. "Every minute you're here," he told us, "we'll have 50 brothers standing by. We got your back. We've made a deal with the Gladiators." They were the gang that held territory between the Slausons' turf and Inglewood. "If they [the white kids] come back again, they'll never get back to Inglewood alive."

"As long as you don't do violence on our picket line," was our response.

"Yeah, yeah, we know. You people are nuts [laughing]. But you stand behind what you believe, and we respect that. But dig, those ofay motherfuckers won't get back to Inglewood alive." Fortunately, the idiot white kids never came back.

Not long after that, the Wich Stand owners tried to get an injunction against our picket line. We were stone broke as always, but Al Wirin, the famous ACLU attorney, agreed to represent us pro bono. He tied them in such knots they gave it up. Rather than hire Afro-Americans, they closed down Wich Stand #1 and sold the lot to Chevron for a gas station. Today, a McDonald's stands on that corner. I don't know how long Wich Stand #2 remained in business — probably quite a while — but now their old building is a health food restaurant.

Tilting at Blue Windmills ~ 1964

Rather than hire Blacks, Wich Stand #1 shut down in February of 1964. While that wasn't a victory, we didn't interpret it as a defeat. As we saw it, we had effectively drawn a line in the sand, making it clear that no business operating in the ghetto could get away with an all-white workforce. Having therefore not totally failed against a small, family-owned company with less than 100 employees, we decided to tackle a significant national corporation with 1,200 employees in the Southern California area alone. Clearly, the concept of "hubris" did not weigh heavily on our thoughts.

Van de Kamp's Holland Dutch Bakeries had been doing business in SoCal since 1915. Their logo was a blue windmill. In the mid-1950s, the company was bought up by the much larger General Baking Company of New York, though they continued to operate in California under the Van de Kamp brand. By 1964, Van de Kamp's SoCal operation had 240 retail outlets selling cakes, pies, and other baked goods inside supermarkets, a line of frozen foods that were also sold in grocery stores, and five large restaurants with attached stores.

Their frozen food products were sold in grocery freezers just like other frozen foods, but their bakery goods were marketed through concession spaces they rented from markets like Safeway and Vons. Stores with a Van de Kamp's concession had blue windmills on the outside, and they were staffed by bakery employees wearing cute blue and white "Dutch Girl" costumes rather than grocery store workers.

The majority of Van de Kamp's 1,200 or so employees were women. Half of them worked in the industrial bakery and food-processing factory, the other half served customers as waitresses, cashiers, and concession tenders. Women who dealt with the public were all required to wear the "Dutch girl" costumes. Male employees wore business suits. Our investigation indicated that fewer than 1% of their workers were Black, Latino, or Asian, and those few were limited to the most menial positions such as janitor and busboy.

Following standard CORE procedure, N-VAC leaders met with Van de Kamp's managers to ask that they provide us with figures on the racial makeup of their work force and agree in writing to end discrimination in their hiring policies.

In response, they hired a "labor relations specialist" — the kind that corporations bring in to block unions — who assured us that Van de Kamp's did not in any way practice racial discrimination. He told our negotiators that no "qualified" Blacks or Mexicans had applied for the unionized factory and bakery jobs. And since the company based its marketing on a "Dutch" theme, all employees dealing directly with the public had to look like they were from Holland, which naturally precluded hiring dark-skinned people. Of course, with

the Civil Rights Act of 1964 being debated in Congress, he didn't say it that explicitly or crudely, but that's what he meant.

We didn't find his "no-qualified" and "Dutch-theme" arguments persuasive. Other Los Angeles employers had no problem finding qualified Latinos and Afro-Americans for bakery and factory jobs. People of Color in Los Angeles worked as waitresses and sales clerks too. And he was apparently unaware that because of their colonial empire, which at one time included South Africa, the Netherlands had had an Afro-Dutch population since the1600s. We told him that anyone could put on a "Dutch Girl" costume regardless of their skin color. He refused to budge.

The labor relations expert proposed referring the matter to the county Commission on Human Relations or the United Civil Rights Committee (UCRC) for study. The commission was under the control of the same white politicians who were backing residential and school segregation. The UCRC was an umbrella coalition of the NAACP, L.A. CORE, and ACLU — N-VAC had not been invited to participate. So we saw his proposal for the stalling tactic that it was. So much for negotiations.

We began direct action against Van de Kamp's in mid-February of 1964. Their big restaurant-stores were all in white neighborhoods, but their grocery store concessions were spread out all over SoCal including 15 locations in the ghetto. We figured that if a boycott cut into their baked-goods business in the Afro-American neighborhoods, and we discouraged some patronage by picketing their restaurants, they might hire some Afro-American "Dutch Girls" along with some factory and bakery workers simply to get rid of us.

In order to effectively boycott a store — or in our case certain products within a store — we really needed two or three people covering each location with leaflets during all the hours they were open — 16 hours a day in most cases. But handing out boycott leaflets is really boring, and we simply couldn't mobilize the numbers we needed. And besides, we were N-VAC. We were "militants" dedicated to cutting-edge action and civil disobedience — leafleting was so mundane that even those stuffy NAACP folk sometimes did it. So we adopted a guerilla strategy of moving our actions from place to place — shifting back and forth between the ghetto stores and the restaurants. While we hoped for some media attention, we knew that was unlikely, so our plan was to generate word of mouth through bold, provocative actions.

Early in March we began "shop-ins" at the ghetto stores — an idea we adapted from the successful shop-ins conducted by the San Francisco Bay Area CORE chapters against Lucky Markets a couple of months earlier. We so envied the Bay Area (sigh). Where we struggled to find 25 people willing to sit in, they could mobilize hundreds for mass arrests. They were not only militant, they had panache — a flair for dramatic action we could only dream of.

Unlike the Bay Area shop-ins, ours were quick guerilla raids. Usually about 10 to 15 of us would drive to a ghetto store, hang signs around our necks, march single file into the store singing as loud as we could, find the Van de Kamp's space, remove all their goods and place them in shopping carts, scatter boycott leaflets on the now empty shelves and counters, and then get out of Dodge before the cops showed up. Then we'd drive to the next store and repeat. We often hit four or five stores in a single evening. Because we had school or jobs, most of our actions were after work or on the weekends.

Mari Goldman, an N-VAC mainstay, was our press-person. Though she was now a naturalized American citizen, she had been born in Britain and still spoke with an elegant English accent. She tipped off the media to our first shop-in and we did garner some newspaper and TV coverage. Which, of course, sparked controversy exactly as we intended. We hadn't stolen anything, nor had we deliberately damaged any goods, but some cakes and pies at the bottom of a shopping cart pile might have gotten a bit squashed by the weight of other goods on top of them — those thin boxes were so flimsy they didn't stack well.

In some quarters this "malicious property damage" caused great consternation, which we contrasted to lack of concern over lives crippled by pervasive racial discrimination — what's more important, a crushed pie or a crushed life? In the Los Angeles of 1964, if the life in question was Afro-American it seemed the pie (or more accurately, the pie's owner) got far more sympathy.

My dad had taught me to read and love maps, a skill I still find useful even in this Google age. I scouted all of Van de Kamp's ghetto locations and taped an AAA street map to a corkboard with colored pins showing the location of different types of stores. That was our low-tech targeting system, and I was responsible for directing our little car caravan as it darted back and forth across the ghetto in routes designed to confuse and foil the cops (if any were after us).

Once or twice the police did arrive before we got away. But we hadn't touched any of the grocery's goods or caused any extra work for them since they weren't responsible for Van de Kamp's shelves, and the market's night managers were smart enough not to anger their Afro-American customers by filing charges against civil rights demonstrators. With the "Dutch Girls" gone home for the day, that left no one willing to file a complaint against us, so we weren't arrested.

By this time we had about 20 dedicated N-VAC members, plus another 30 or so from Bruin and other CORE chapters and Friends of SNCC we could count on to sometimes participate in our actions. But given people's work and school schedules, our weekday evening protests rarely had more than 15 participants. For the weekend demonstration outside one of the Van de Kamp's restaurants we usually had 30 or more.

Our first restaurant sit-ins were on a Saturday and Sunday in mid-March at Van de Kamp's large Glendale establishment. Glendale was notorious as an all-

white “sundown town” — so named because a local ordinance had once required all nonwhites to be gone from the city by sundown. Federal courts had overturned such laws, but the concept was still aggressively enforced by the Glendale cops. If you were Black or Latino and they caught you in Glendale after dark they would find some pretext to charge you with some crime — or simply school you on the error of your ways by “tuning you up” with their nightsticks (or “nigger-knockers” as some lawmen referred to them).

About two dozen of us set up a picket line outside the restaurant’s main entrance. Then about half went inside and sat down on the floor of the lobby area, forming a half-circle line, shoulder-to-shoulder, blocking entry into the restaurant and the baked-goods store. The other half maintained the picket line so that customers would see there was a protest going on, receive leaflets explaining it, and have to choose to cross the line before they encountered the lobby sit-in. My assignment those two days was to take photos, so I didn’t sit in.

This being Glendale, all the customers were white. While some turned away rather than cross our picket line, most forced their way through the sit-ins, stepping on them and kicking them for good measure. An angry customer stabbed Richard Thompson in the back with a fork, and others on the sit-in had hot coffee poured over their heads. White patrons also dragged Annette Becker and Sue Kovnor across the floor by their hair, while Jerry Farber and Jay Frank were dragged out of position and repeatedly kicked. (Van de Kamp’s employees took no part in any violence against the sit-ins, they left that to eager volunteers among their customers.)

Both Sue and Annette had been active members of L.A. CORE and my recollection is that, like me, Annette was also the child of leftist Jewish parents. I think she was employed as a social worker at the time, and whenever we had an evening or weekend action she was always on the line and in the thick of it. Though I hadn’t really been that conscious of it at the time, most the whites active with N-VAC were from Jewish backgrounds, though not necessarily observant — Mari, Jerry, Jay, Annette, Sue, Lea Arond, Roberta and Fred Krinsky, myself, and a few others. I don’t believe that Richard Thompson, an N-VAC stalwart, was Jewish, nor was Scott Van Leuvan, I don’t think, but most of the other whites were Jews.

Eventually, the police arrived in force at the Van de Kamp’s restaurant and the white violence subsided. I guess we must have taken them by surprise because on Saturday no one was arrested — I suppose the manager needed to check with the front office to see how they wanted us handled. After sitting in from 4pm to 8pm we left.

The next day, Sunday, we were back, same time, same place, same action, sitting on the lobby floor. This time they were ready for us. More patrons roughly climbed over our sit-ins or kicked their way through the line — so many more that we concluded some local Glendale whites had come by just for

that express purpose. The level of violence quickly escalated until a white teenager with a big can of hair spray approached the sit-ins. He pressed the button and lit the spray with his cigarette lighter to create a homemade flame-thrower.

Fortunately, just at that moment a uniformed fire marshall showed up with a team of cops. To our relief — and no doubt that of the Van de Kamp's manager — they took the firebug into custody. None of us were ever called to testify against him so I assume he wasn't charged with anything.

The fire marshall and his assistants took photos of our people sitting on the floor and then announced the sit-ins were "blocking a fire exit." We told him that if a fire broke out everyone would simply get up and leave along with all the customers and employees. That seemed pretty obvious to me, but he didn't seem to grasp it. He ordered the sit-ins to leave. As planned, they refused and were placed under arrest. They went limp and had to be carried or dragged out to the waiting paddy wagon.

The next Saturday, March 21st, our protest was at the Van de Kamp's restaurant on Laurel Canyon Boulevard in the Van Nuys area of the San Fernando Valley. Since someone else was assigned to photo duty, I knew I'd be arrested this time with the other sit-ins. Despite my determined commitment I was a trifle nervous — okay, I was scared. Becoming a "criminal" with an arrest record — a "rap sheet" as they say — was a big step in my life. Still, though frightened, I was game.

We in N-VAC didn't like to routinely repeat ourselves, that was way too boring. So for the Van Nuys sit-in we came up with a new wrinkle. As we had in Glendale, we sat on the floor of the lobby blocking the way into the restaurant. The police and fire marshall showed up, took their evidence photos, ordered us to leave and then declared us all under arrest. I'll confess now (as I would never have admitted at the time) that my heart was pounding with excitement — and fear.

As soon as we heard "under arrest," we took out heavy chains that we had concealed in purses and pockets, quickly wrapped them around our ankles and padlocked them in such a way that each person's leg was chained to the leg of the person on either side — except for Mari. She was on the end of the line wearing skirt and stockings and she chained her wrist to Robert Hall's. We had carefully rehearsed this operation in advance because it isn't as easy as it sounds to accomplish so quickly that the police didn't have time to stop us.

The purpose of the "chain-in" was to delay for as long as possible being carted off to jail and thus prolong the disruption to Van de Kamp's business. And it worked — it took them half an hour or longer to obtain a bolt cutter large enough to break the locks. Fifteen of us were arrested on charges of trespass, disturbing the peace, and violation of that fire ordinance. It turned out that they

must have gotten some good legal advice, because when we eventually went to trial we were only convicted of violating the fire ordinance.

Once the chains were off, we all "went limp." I was dragged by my arms to the wagon. By now we were running low on bail money — or more accurately the amount of credit Celes King Bail Bonds was willing to advance us — so in order to get lower bonds we remained in jail over the weekend until we were arraigned the following Monday, on bond of $100 each for those like me who had only been arrested once [equal to about $800 in 2018] and $250 for those who had also been arrested in Glendale.

But now unpleasant truths and hard realities began to bite. The more often someone was arrested the higher each successive bond became as the system used bail as a means of punishment-before-conviction. And, of course, we knew we would eventually be convicted and that multiple offenders would ultimately receive longer sentences.

Of more immediate concern, the 10% fees we owed Celes King for each bond were mounting higher and higher. We simply didn't have the money. Celes King, the Afro-American bondsman, was a great guy. He always bailed out civil rights demonstrators on credit because he supported the Movement and he knew we wouldn't skip town on him. But he was running a business and eventually we had to pay his fee.

All of which meant that the same people couldn't keep getting arrested over and over without end. In order to continue our civil disobedience sit-ins we had to find *new* people willing to be arrested. But they weren't coming forward — for some reason people were reluctant to get arrested and go to jail even for a good cause. Weird, but there it was. We had been arrested in Van Nuys on Saturday, and on Sunday N-VAC couldn't scrape up enough people willing to sit in at the Laurel Canyon restaurant to make it effective. We weren't quite ready to admit it yet, but the truth was we were beginning to encounter the limits of militant nonviolent direct action.

So we got creative. For the rest of March and into April, we shifted to a "raid" strategy. We went to a restaurant, sat in, remained until the cops and fire marshal showed up, then got up off the floor and drove to another location, maybe a restaurant, maybe a store for a shop-in. Again, using my trusty corkboard map with its push-pins, I did the targeting.

By early April, we were engaged in a cat and mouse game with Van de Kamp's, and the cops. One day we showed up at the first restaurant on our list and saw they were already waiting for us. We aborted that sit-in. When it happened again, we became suspicious, so the next day I and a few of the other hard-core N-VAC member "planned" a fake sit-in entirely and only over the phone. Sure enough, when I drove by that location the police were waiting nearby for a protest that never materialized.

Today, people are no longer surprised to discover their calls and emails are being tracked and monitored by an alphabet soup of police agencies, advertising marketeers, and organized crime gangs. But back in the early '60s it was shocking — and infuriating. After that, rather than telling supporters to meet us at the first target location, we designated an assembly spot where we all gathered before telling people where the initial sit-in would take place. That way the cops wouldn't be ready and waiting for us.

Eventually, on April 18, a Saturday night, a couple of squad cars caught us coming out of a shop-in at the Thrifty Mart at Vermont and Adams in the West Adams ghetto. It was the last one of the evening, and by then there were only nine of us left, all well-trained N-VAC veterans. A couple more cop cars showed up, but they couldn't seem to decide whether to arrest us or not. I guess the store manager was reluctant to press charges against us while his neighborhood customers were watching. Meanwhile, we're standing on the sidewalk singing our freedom songs with our signs hanging from around our necks with a small Afro-American crowd looking on.

After a long conference with the manager they finally ordered us into the back seats of their cop cars — which we assumed meant we were under arrest. As per our training, we immediately sat down on the sidewalk and locked arms. As devotees of nonviolence we would not fight back or violently resist arrest, but neither would we in any way cooperate with what we saw as unjust police repression in support of racial discrimination. They would have to pull us apart, at which point we would go limp, forcing them to drag us and lift us into the cars.

They, however, interpreted our action as "Contempt of Cop" — that most heinous of all crimes. Now they were really pissed at us. They went after the women first and managed to drag off Mari Goldman. Robert Hall and I were on either side of Annette Becker and they used the infamous and extremely painful "choke hold" on Robert and me to break her loose from our grip. As the pain in my neck became excruciating and my breath ran short I saw the proverbial stars so beloved by comic book illustrators and cartoon animators. It turns out that you really do see stars just before you pass out.

Anyway, at this point a police sergeant showed up. He told us that if we cooperated by giving our names (as everyone is legally required to do) we would not be arrested. Fine by us. Mari and Annette were let out of the police car and we all went home.

We had planned and publicized what we intended to be a large rally in South Park on Avalon Boulevard in the middle of the South Central ghetto for the following Sunday, April 26. We suspended shop-ins and sit-ins in order to leaflet and organize for this rally. An hour before it was to start, the cops raided our N-VAC office, arresting people on warrants. Others of us were picked up while leafleting or approaching the park. The warrants were for charges related to that

Thrifty Mart shop-in the previous week. I assume the manager had been convinced to file charges once our arrest wouldn't be visibly connected to his store. The warrants could have been served at any time after they were issued, but they'd been held back until they could be used to disrupt the rally.

I was busted while making a phone call from a pay phone to the CORE office where we knew James Farmer, the national head of CORE, was meeting with the leaders of SoCal CORE chapters. Jerry Farber, who hadn't been on the shop-in and therefore had no warrant out on him, started the rally, which was soon joined by Farmer and other CORE members who had immediately halted their meeting to come to our support — Farmer was deep into Philosophical nonviolence, but he was most definitely not a "moderate." The rally was cut short and about 40 to 50 N-VAC and CORE folk went to picket the Newton police station a few blocks away as a protest against police repression.

Danny Gray, Robert Hall, and I were taken to L.A. police headquarters — known as the "Glass House" — where we were held for a while. Then we were put in with other prisoners and taken by bus to Lincoln Heights Jail. Known to generations of Angeleno inmates as the "Graybar Hotel," the hulking five-story concrete building was the main city lockup and drunk tank. You've no doubt seen it on-screen. For many years Hollywood film and TV studios used it for shooting prison scenes. As we got off the bus we started singing freedom songs, and some of the other prisoners joined in as we all marched inside with pride.

For some reason the guards did not consider that proper demeanor, so Danny, Robert, and I were invited to enjoy the facility's solitary confinement accommodations until we were bailed out later that night. Sadly, I cannot give the Graybar Hotel a "Like." The room was so small I might almost call it "cramped," and it was totally lacking in even the most minimal of amenities.

Trials and Tribulations ~ 1964

Early in the spring of 1964 I signed up to participate in the SNCC/CORE Mississippi Summer Project — "Freedom Summer," as it became known. But with two protest trials scheduled for July and August, I was barred from leaving the state.

By May of '64, N-VAC was at low ebb. Those arrested on the first sit-in at the Glendale restaurant were on trial for over a week, and as a show of support we all attended whenever we could, which left little time for protesting. Charges against the six juveniles were dropped, but the four adults — Woody Coleman, Annette Becker, Jerry Farber, and Jay Frank — had to stand trial.

Jerry Farber was a popular and creative English professor at Los Angeles State College (he later taught at San Diego State and UC San Diego). He had a streak of irreverent humor and a sharp sense of social satire. He was tall, quite

thin, and had a swarthy "Mediterranean" complexion. Of the other three defendants, Woody was coal black and the other two were quite white. One day during jury selection the judge started to ask a prospective juror if having a Black defendant would affect her verdict, when he stopped himself and asked, "Mr. Farber, are you Negro or white?"

Without missing a beat, Jerry replied, "On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, I'm white. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, I'm Negro. And on Sunday I just don't know." As I recall, the whole courtroom cracked up in laughter including the judge — that was Jerry for you.

All four were convicted of violating the fire ordinance but not disturbing the peace or trespass. The cops identified Woody as the leader, so he was sentenced to $150 fine or 15 days in jail, the others got $100 or 10 days. I don't remember why the verdict wasn't appealed — most likely we couldn't afford the legal costs even though the lawyer was representing us pro bono. One hundred dollars in 1964 was equal to about $800 in 2018, so the total fines were the equivalent of around $3600 today. We didn't have that kind of money, but even if we did, none of us would have contributed funds to support a "justice" system dedicated to maintaining racial discrimination.

During the trial we held a couple of weekend picket lines at Van de Kamp restaurants, but people were tired and turnout was poor. Between Bruin CORE on the Westside and N-VAC and Van de Kamp's in Central L.A, I was being run ragged. Oh, yeah, it was also the end of the semester, and I believe UCLA was expecting me to turn in completed term papers and pass some sort of final exams.

By this time though we had developed an "N-VAC Way," a mystique we created and embraced. When spirits flag — get creative. So in June, we came up with a new tactic — "sip-ins." On a Saturday afternoon we set up a picket line and handed out leaflets at the Van de Kamp's restaurant on Wilshire — a large establishment in the heart of the "Miracle Mile" shopping district a couple blocks from the La Brea Tar Pits. What with shoppers and tourists, weekend afternoons were quite busy for them. Once the picket line was up, most of us went inside, spread out one or two to a table, ordered a cup of coffee, and then sipped it very, very, very slowly.

Some of us carried our signs inside and propped them against the side of the table. "Oh, no, officer, we aren't trespassing or protesting, we're just having a nice cuppa joe." We stayed for more than four hours, and with 75 or so participants we put a serious crimp in their business as other customers got tired of waiting for a table. The manager did not seem to appreciate our patronage, and table service became somewhat frosty.

Next Saturday we went back, this time sipping from noon to eight with about the same number of people, and again the manager was quite cool to us — after a couple of hours he started asking us to leave. We told him we would leave

when Van de Kamp's stopped discriminating against Black and Latino job seekers. He did not seem to find that satisfactory.

On June 15th, the convicted miscreants who had sat in at Glendale began serving their sentences, Annette in the women's lockup and the three men in Lincoln Heights Jail. On Thursday the 18th, we jammed up the Wilshire restaurant with an evening sip-in. They were quite crowded and the manager was by now very annoyed, even though we only had about 50 "sippers." Two cameramen working for Van de Kamp's carefully took photos and movies making sure to note each time we were asked to leave. Wise as we were in the intricacies of law, we knew that meant an injunction was on the way.

Annette, Jerry, and Jay completed their 10-day sentences on June 24th, but Woody still had five more days. So Jerry and Jay refused to leave their cells unless Woody was released too. The guards were quite taken aback, no one had ever refused to be set free before. But policy was clear, when your reservation at the Graybar Hotel was up you had to leave. The two from N-VAC refused. When the correctional officers pulled them out of the cell, Jay and Jerry went limp. They were dragged out, stripped of their jail uniform, dressed in their street clothes, and deposited on the front steps where N-VAC and CORE supporters were waiting for them. We then commenced an around-the-clock sit-in on the jail steps for five days and nights until Woody's sentence was finished. Back in those days, when we used to sing "Solidarity Forever," we meant it.

There was, however, a downside to the refuse-to-leave plan — at least in insofar as I was concerned. Whoever in N-VAC came up with the idea decided it had to be kept "top-secret," not just from the cops but from everyone — including me. Yet they had to tell Movement folk that something was about to go down, so everyone would be waiting outside of Lincoln Heights when Jay and Jerry were released. So it was a case of "We've got a secret — but we won't tell you." I was quite hurt that they didn't trust me. It felt like a betrayal and a dismissal of all I had done with CORE and N-VAC. It was painful and corrosive. It was also stupid. Keeping it secret gained nothing. Jay and Jerry would have refused to leave their cell regardless of whether the guards had advance knowledge. That's one of the strengths of nonviolent tactics, they don't require secrecy. In this instance, the only purpose secrecy served was boosting the egos of those "in the know" *vis-à-vis* the rest of us. It still pisses me off.

Early in July, a judge issued a TRO (temporary restraining order) requiring us to suspend the sip-ins until he had pondered the case and made his final ruling. Though he ordered us to halt our sip-in protests, he said nothing at all about, or even took note of, racial discrimination by Van de Kamp's, so we had no illusions as to what his eventual ruling was going to be. To us, he was just one more enabler of a racist system. We immediately violated his order by conducting another sip-in, and shortly thereafter we were served with contempt

of court notices. Though we weren't taken in and booked, that amounted to my third arrest since the March on Washington.

We wanted to continue the sip-ins, but the novelty had worn off and too few supporters were willing to defy a TRO, so we no longer had enough sippers to make the tactic effective. We kept up some picketing and leafletting, but by now most of our days were spent in court and our evenings in fundraising to cover our bail and legal costs.

The second trial was for those of us who had been arrested on warrants stemming from April's Thrifty Mart shop-in. That trial began in mid-July. Our pro bono attorney was Luke McKissack, who later became famous for defending Sirhan Sirhan and members of the Black Panther Party and American Indian Movement. He put up a helluva fight trying to get at least one Afro-American on our jury. To no avail.

A source we had in the D.A.'s office told us that an edict had been handed down from on high that under no circumstances were any Blacks to be allowed on any jury trying any civil rights case — ever. In essence, it was a jury-stacking strategy not that much different from the all-white jury systems in Alabama and Mississippi, except that in California it was technically illegal and in the Deep South by explicit official policy Blacks weren't permitted to serve on *any* juries at all.

As I recall, McKissack mounted a "necessity defense." The point being that it's legally permissible to violate some minor law if doing so is necessary to prevent some greater harm or crime. In our case racial discrimination was the greater evil and we were justified in disturbing an unjust peace in order to call public attention to it — an argument that still seems valid to me. McKissack was a charmer, juries just loved him, but no matter how much the jury liked our lawyer they still convicted us of disturbing the peace. I guess we must have appealed that case and won, or maybe for some reason the D.A. later dropped charges, because I never served any time for that conviction. Or, for that matter, my sip-in contempt of court charges.

Our trial for the Van Nuys sit-in began in early August and it quickly turned into a *mano a mano* grudge match between Judge K.L. Holaday and Hugh Manes (pronounced "May-ness") our pro bono lawyer. Hugh later became famous fighting against police misconduct and abuse. Rather than a charmer he was a legal slugger, a sort of Churchillian character in both appearance and oratory. He took no shit from nobody, not even a judge, and he didn't know the meaning of "back down." My kind of lawyer.

It took almost three weeks to select a jury because Manes dug in and used every piece of legal ammo he had to get an Afro-American or Latino on the jury. The judge constantly and consistently overruled each and every one of Hugh's motions and objections. It got so that Holaday began to anticipate Hugh's points

and sometimes overruled them before they were even made — just out of habit. We started keeping score, and in late August, Hugh was overruled a record 141 times in a single day. In the end, as usual, our Black and white group of civil rights protesters was judged by an all-white jury. A "jury of our peers" as they told us with straight faces.

Because it took so long to seat the jury we were on trial for almost all of August — all day in court except for a long lunch break. On most days we grabbed a quick bite at Philippe's on Alameda Street. Philippe's was one of those quirky L.A. traditions — they claimed to have invented the French Dip roast beef sandwich — and their clientele was a real (and rare) social cross-section ranging from hookers and pimps, through working stiffs, defense lawyers, prosecutors, and judges, to bankers and business executives. Afterwards, for the rest the break we'd picket the Van de Kamp's outlet in the nearby Grand Central Market until we had to return to court.

The actual trial took only a few days. Manes quickly demolished the disturbing the peace and trespass accusations and I believe he argued that blocking a fire exit was a ridiculous charge because the law was intended to prohibit stationary objects like furniture and crates, not people who could simply get up and leave along with everyone else if a fire broke out. Apparently the jury had a hard time coming to a verdict, because it took them two days to finally decide we were guilty of violating the fire ordinance. What did they think? That if a fire broke out we'd just sit there are let ourselves be burned? Apparently so.

It's quite rare for anyone to be convicted of criminally blocking a fire exit — normally offenders are just told to unblock it — and rarer still to receive any punishment stiffer than a modest fine. Judge Holaday — by now we were publicly referring to him as "Hanging Judge Holaday" — sentenced us to 30 days. Longer for Woody. I guess we must have appealed (and eventually lost) because we didn't serve our sentences until a year later.

After the trials we continued to picket Van de Kamp's locations all through September and October, but we were worn out and no longer had enough new people to sustain nonviolent civil disobedience. Most of what energy we had was consumed raising money to pay off the $7,000 we owed Celes King for bail bonds (equal to over $55,000 in 2018), plus the amounts we owed various lawyers for legal expenses.

A year earlier we had formed N-VAC to test the limits of militant, nonviolent direct action. We hit those limits against Van de Kamp's, a corporation far too large for our small group to impact. Eventually, reluctantly — very reluctantly — we accepted defeat. Van de Kamp's continued to discriminate against nonwhites. N-VAC turned to other campaigns.

[Van de Kamp's went out of business in 1990. An unrelated company later bought their trademark and now sells frozen foods under the Van de Kamp's label.]

Cashing a Dead Chicken ~ 1964

In the spring of 1964, election fever was running high. Though everyone knew that Johnson would be nominated for reelection by the Democrats, he was being challenged from the right by Alabama Governor George Wallace who was running on a "white-backlash," states-rights platform explicitly appealing to whites outraged by the Black Freedom Movement. Nine candidates were vying for the Republican nomination, but leading the pack was Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, running on an ultraconservative, states-rights platform. In the mid-1960s, "states-rights" meant the right of states to impose unconstitutional racial restrictions, customs, and laws on nonwhite citizens.

LBJ was promising "Great Society" government programs such as Medicare, a "War on Poverty," and continued support for Black civil rights. Time and time again he swore he would never send us to war in Vietnam (even though there were already more than 20,000 Americans on the ground "advising" the Saigon military junta). For his part, Goldwater opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that was then being debated in Congress and called for an aggressive expansion of military action to "halt the spread of Communism" in Vietnam — including the use of nuclear weapons.

UCLA had a strong cohort of Young Republicans and throughout the spring they were actively campaigning against each other for either Goldwater or Nelson Rockefeller, the "moderate" Republican.

Since Wallace had almost no support on campus there was little student interest in the Democratic primary. Nevertheless, we of N-VAC and Bruin CORE managed to stir up a little teacup-tempest within UCLA's small circle of progressives and leftists when we passed around a flyer with the slogan "Boycott Baby, Boycott," meaning don't vote for either of the establishment parties because both of them supported or accommodated segregation and both stood on the wrong side of the anti-colonial struggles wracking Africa and Asia.

No one on the UCLA campus or in L.A.'s Afro-American community paid the slightest attention to our radical provocation — except the Communist Party and their DuBois Club adherents who were horrified that not only were we refusing to support Johnson and the Democratic Party but we were urging others to do the same — heresy!

Loud arguments and bitter recriminations broke out around our tables in the student union commons.

“You idiots, Goldwater will kill the Civil Rights Movement and start a war in Vietnam!” they grimly warned us.

“So will Johnson!” we retorted.

As it turned out, both sides were half right. LBJ did take us into a devastating Vietnam War (and in fact was planning to do so even as he swore he wasn’t), but on civil rights he did respond to our Freedom Movement demands, he did get strong and effective legislation through Congress, and though we continually criticized him for not doing as much as he should to enforce the new laws and rulings, he did more than anyone ever had before him (or since). And he fulfilled his Medicare, Medicaid, and federal-funding-for-education promises too. So on the domestic side Johnson turned out to be one of our best presidents — though that’s small comfort to the 60,000 or so Americans and more than a million Indo-Chinese who died in his war.

For us in N-VAC and Bruin CORE however, the election was largely irrelevant — a sideshow so far as we were concerned. All of our attention and work was focused on building the Freedom Movement. Whoever ended up in the White House, we were damned straight going to continue nonviolently fighting in the streets for justice and equality.

The four CORE chapters up in the Bay Area — ’Frisco, Oakland, Berkeley-City and Berkeley-Campus — were larger, more active, and noticeably more creative than our chapters in Southern California. When the new school year began in September of ’63 they too switched focus from housing segregation to employment discrimination. That fall they and other civil rights groups launched a series of militant direct action campaigns against racist employment practices by Lucky Markets, Mel’s Diners, the Sheraton-Palace Hotel, and the Auto Row car dealers, all of which led to mass arrests and eventually resulted in clear victories with signed fair hiring agreements.

Then in May of ’64, the NorCal CORE chapters called for a statewide campaign against the San Francisco–based Bank of America (BofA).

With 900 branches and almost 30,000 employees, BofA was the largest bank in California and one of the largest in the country at a time when banks were not allowed to operate across state lines. It was estimated that less than 3% of their workers were nonwhite in a state where nonwhites were 16% of the total population (9% Latino, 6% Afro-American, 1% Asian). Almost all of BofA’s nonwhite employees were in menial positions, with just a tiny token handful of Black and Latino tellers in ghetto and barrio branches. BofA’s basic policy was clear — anyone who handled or managed money had to be white — tellers, desk officers, managers, and of course corporate officers.

As we expected, BofA executives fervently denied any racial discrimination on their part. Yet when they met with CORE negotiators they refused to supply race-related employment statistics and blamed the obvious

absence of nonwhite tellers and desk officers on “lack of qualified applicants” — despite long lists of clearly qualified applicants they had rejected.

In mid-May, CORE called for consumers to boycott the bank and CORE chapters began leafletting and picketing branches around the state. With L.A. CORE still controlled by the action-averse moderates and most of the L.A. suburb chapters more or less moribund, Bruin CORE and its N-VAC ally, along with the small but feisty San Diego CORE chapter, ended up shouldering the brunt of the BofA campaign in SoCal.

Bruin CORE initially focused on the BofA branch in UCLA’s Westwood neighborhood. We handed out boycott leaflets and mounted picket lines — some as large as 50 protesters. But finals began at the end of May and then the school semester ended in early June. Students went home for vacation or found summer jobs and the number of people we could mobilize sharply declined.

Meanwhile BofA continued to proclaim their corporate spin, “We don’t discriminate... lack of qualified ...” They refused to sign any kind of enforceable agreement with CORE as other large employers had done, but in early June they did sign a memorandum of understanding with California’s Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) promising to *eventually* hire 400 new Black and Latino employees and to report their progress toward equal job opportunities.

This was far short of what CORE was demanding. It would only increase the percentage of nonwhites in their labor force from 3% to 4% and it was not a legally binding agreement — they could walk away from it whenever they wished. We were certain that absent an enforceable agreement they would return to their policy of racial discrimination as soon as the public pressure generated by our protests eased off. So we continued direct action.

BofA then announced to the media that they had hired some 300 new Black and Latino employees statewide, so we figured that the CORE actions were having some good effect, particularly the large late-May protests up in ’Frisco and Berkeley that had had hundreds of participants. It didn’t occur to us, though, that school semesters up north had also ended and they were now facing the same summer doldrums problems we were.

By now Bruin CORE had absorbed some of N-VAC’s mystique — or *’tude* as it might be called in today’s jargon. Since our summer numbers were small we had to be more provocative to make an impact. With students no longer thronging Westwood we shifted our attention to Santa Monica and escalated to what we called “coin-ins.”

Those BofA protests took place long before there were ATMs, bank credit cards, automatic payroll deposit, or “cash-back” at store checkout registers. To deposit your paycheck you had to go to your branch and line up at a cashier window. Ditto to cash a check or withdraw money. Since most people got paid on

Friday and needed dough for the weekend, Friday afternoon was banking rush hour. Banks closed at five o'clock in those days, and from 3:00 to 5:00 people were normally lined up half a dozen deep at each teller window. Today if you go into an older branch office you can usually see a long line of unused teller windows that were originally put in place for those Friday rush hours.

Our first coin-in was on June 12, a Friday afternoon, in the BofA branch at Wilshire and 15th in Santa Monica. We set up our picket line of about 15 folk and waited until we were sure that all customers in the bank had seen our protest and chosen to cross our line. Then about half of us went inside and lined up, one at each of the six windows.

When I got up to the teller, I handed her a dollar and asked for change (all the tellers were women). She gave me the usual quarters, nickels, and dimes. "Oh, no, I'm sorry. I need pennies." She gave me two rolls of pennies. I slowly unwrapped the first roll and started to count them. "One .... two .... three ..." and so on. "Oh, there's only 49 here, you count them." She counted them and discovered 50. But, of course, I had to count them again to check her accuracy. Back and forth. Back and forth. Obviously we were trying to hold up the line and inconvenience the other customers for as long as we could so they'd take their business to some rival bank (there used to be lots of different banks competing with each other for customers — they even offered toasters and other bribes to people who transferred their accounts).

Some of the tellers reacted to our coin-in with outrage, as though we were committing sacrilege or some sort of obscene blasphemy. Others thought it was amusing, a welcome break in boring routine — an attitude we encouraged with as much humor as we could generate. I'd smile and try to entice them into accepting the prank — sometimes that worked, sometimes it didn't. At the risk seeming a braggart, I was quite good at "coining." I could keep a buck in play for more than 15 minutes, often longer.

Side by side with me at these Bruin CORE protests were N-VAC warriors Jerry Farber, Jay Frank, and Josh Gould. We four were nonviolent musketeers, one for all and all for one, always showing up where the action was hottest. Jay had gotten involved in CORE when he happened to encounter the picket line at Don Wilson's housing tract. He recently told me, "I was a pretty naive white kid back in '62 and had never seen such a thing, nor was I at all familiar with the Civil Rights Movement. All I knew was that the idea of segregated housing struck me as immensely stupid and unfair, so I joined the demonstration." He was around my age, maybe a little older, solidly built (I was usually referred to as "that skinny kid" — alas, no longer), and he was always cheerful and wore a friendly grin.

Josh Gould was a Bruin CORE mainstay, a Santa Monica College student, tall and muscular with a strong commitment and a rich baritone. And out on the picket line we knew we could count on Lynn Busch — the "Widow Busch" as

she was fondly referred to. Her husband had been killed a year or so earlier in a car wreck leaving her with a toddler to raise, so she couldn't risk arrest, but she walked the line, sometimes pushing her daughter in a stroller, and she was the one we counted on to arrange bail for us when we were busted.

The first coin-in went well and so did a second one a week later. But in the N-VAC and Bruin CORE way, we began to get bored (or maybe it was just me as Bruin picket captain). I consulted a lawyer and confirmed that a check was simply a written message instructing the bank to transfer a certain sum of money from a particular account to a designated recipient and that so long as it had the proper names, amounts, and routing numbers it did not have to be written on the official printed forms everyone had in their checkbooks.

So I opened a small checking account at an out-of-the-way BofA branch we'd never leafletted or picketed, and then used a big marker to write out several one-dollar checks on the back of picket signs emblazoned with "Bank of America discriminates," "Boycott BofA," "Racism must go," and so on.

Normally, we never attached our signs to sticks because they could be snatched out of our hands by hostile adversaries and used to club us in the head or face. Instead, we always wore signs hanging by string from around our neck. Sometimes they'd be torn away and ripped up, but they were easily replaceable. In this case, however, we attached the picket-sign checks to broom handles so they'd stand out while we were waiting in the teller queues. Around 4 o'clock on June 26, half a dozen of us walked off the picket line and into the branch carrying our signs.

The manager immediately came bustling over. "You can't picket in here! This is private property! No picketing in here!"

"Oh, I'm not picketing, I'm here to cash a check. See —" I pointed to the $1 check I'd written on the back. It was made out to "Cash."

As a properly trained middle manager he immediately got on the phone for instructions. When I got up to the teller I slapped my sign down on the marble counter with an audible *Clack!* and endorsed it with a flourish. By now the manager was back. He instructed the teller to give me my dollar, and I promptly began going through the coin-in routine. We called this new tactic a "cash-in."

On Wednesday of the following week, I got a call from the branch where my little account had been set up. They told me they couldn't send my canceled picket signs through the mail. They offered to send me a receipt instead. Unless, of course, I wanted to come down and pick them up. Which I did. The guy I dealt with at that branch was clearly having a bit of fun himself because he'd written "Canceled" in a big bold hand across the check. (I kept those signs for years, but eventually as I moved from town to town they disappeared.)

Well, okay, good to know, we could cash a picket sign. *Hmmmm*, if we can cash a picket sign, what else could we cash? The next Friday, July 3rd, we showed up at the Wilshire branch with checks written on picket signs, and also on an old whitewall tire, a big tin washtub, and a wooden crate with a dead chicken inside. We'd actually had a long discussion about this at one of our meetings. The connection between our picket signs and the campaign against BofA job discrimination was pretty clear — not so much though for tire, tub, and crate. But we really wanted to do it, so we came up with some lame rationale about the junk representing poverty in the ghetto, or some such nonsense. I mean, who could resist cashing a dead chicken at a Bank of America? Certainly not I.

Sure enough, they cashed signs, tire, tub, and crate. But their patience was clearly running thin. This time I was not given the option of picking up our canceled junk and smelly carcass. Receipts were sent instead. A couple of days later we were informed by the Santa Monica chief of police that the manager was now under instructions to press charges against any protester who entered the bank regardless of reason. He asked us to come by his office to discuss how that would go down, because he'd never arrested protesters before — drunks and DUIs, yes, rowdy kids on the beach, potheads, the occasional "sexual deviant" (homosexuals), and the odd robber — all those he was familiar with, but not racial agitators. (In many ways Santa Monica was still a small suburban town in those days.)

So Jerry, Jay, and I went down to police headquarters to impress upon him that we were nonviolent and that we would not forcefully resist arrest in any way that might harm or endanger his officers. If arrested we might link arms and they would have to pull us apart, but then we would go limp and all they need do is carry us to the paddy wagon that was always stationed near protests in case it might be needed to haul us away. He assured us that he completely understood and that his men would be very professional (the few female officers in those days were restricted to desk duty so we never encountered them on protests).

Since we knew they were planning to arrest us we decided to stick with a plain old coin- in, no signs, no junk, no cash-in (sigh). After setting up the picket line about ten of us entered the Wilshire branch on July 10 and joined the queues at the teller windows.

Off to one side I noticed a little commotion. The manager and a couple of cops were ordering CORE activist Jon Tavasti to leave the premises. He asked why and they placed him under arrest. Well trained as he was, he immediately sat down and started to sing a freedom song. For a moment the other CORE kids looked at each other wondering what they were supposed to do. They didn't have to wonder long. N-VAC warrior Jay Frank asked me what was going on and I said, "Looks like they've arrested Jon." Three seconds later he was sitting

next to Tavasti and they'd linked arms. Jerry Farber immediately followed suit and so did Josh Gould and the other CORE members. Within 20 seconds or so, everyone except me was sitting in a line on the lobby floor, arms linked, singing *We Shall Overcome.*

I could see Jerry and Jay looking at me, obviously wondering why I was just standing there. As picket captain, however, I had duties and responsibilities. I mean, someone had to act like an adult. And, of course, I also had a plan. I went out to make sure everyone on the line knew what was going down and that they should keep on picketing. I told Lynn to go to the pay phone and begin executing our arrest procedures. She was equipped with a couple rolls of coins for calling the bail bondsman, alerting the press, notifying the CORE office on Venice, arranging legal help, and so on — all the civil-disobedience details that need to be planned out and assigned in advance when arrests are likely to occur.

While I was taking care of business outside, a squad of cops had come in and brutally broken up the line of sit-ins, who were now being roughly dragged out and tossed in the waiting paddy wagon. I guess that took about 20 or 30 minutes. At which point, with Lynn on the job and the line holding well, I stepped in front of the van and shouted as loud as I could, "I protest unjust arrests!"

Then I dropped down, rolled underneath, and wrapped my arms around the front axle. I could hear the cops shouting and yelling. I guess the driver decided to scare me by starting up the engine (he succeeded). That caused even more shouting.

Then they started pulling on my legs and eventually managed to drag me out from under, at which point I went limp. I was carried to the rear and lifted up to be shoved through the wagon's double-doors. Jerry, Jay, and Josh had seen what I had done and decided to support my protest by sitting across the door opening so as to prevent me from being placed inside. I was, of course, quite limp, so the cops were trying to shove me through a human blockade which was working about as well as trying to push toothpaste back into the tube.

Eventually, of course, they finally managed to get me properly taken into custody. Battered and bruised, we were all taken to the station and placed in a holding cell. At which point the chief showed up with a big grin on his face asking us how did they do? He seemed quite surprised when we failed to compliment his officers on their professionalism. Looking back on it now, though, I don't think they were intentionally brutal like the LAPD tended to be when arresting protesters — they were just poorly trained, overexcited, and ineptly supervised by their sergeant. I considered offering to run a nonviolent training session for them but in the end decided it would be too confusing all around.

That, however, was our last militant action at BofA. I had now been arrested four times in less than a year, with trials and sentences on the horizon. Jay and

Jerry had been busted even more than I. None of the Bruin CORE members wanted to go for two, so for the rest of July and August we just picketed and leafletted.

The Bay Area CORE chapters in NorCal were also running out of steam. Over the course of that school year, more than 600 people, mostly students, had been arrested for protesting job discrimination at several different firms and locations. But now most students were gone for the summer and as with N-VAC those previously arrested were tied up in a series of lengthy and costly trials leading to jail sentences. Where once Berkeley Campus CORE could mobilize hundreds of pickets for a BofA protest, now they were lucky to get 30. That was double what we could muster in SoCal, but it wasn't enough. Early in September CORE leaders in the Bay Area reluctantly conceded defeat and suspended the BofA campaign.

The previous Bay Area job actions had ended in clear-cut victories with signed, legally enforceable hiring agreements. That was not the case with Bank of America. Under their agreement with the FEPC they were supposed to report their progress towards becoming an equal opportunity employer, but their data did not have to be made public, and so far as I know, it never was. According to the bank's unverified statements, by the end of CORE's campaign BofA they had hired several hundred Afro-Americans and Latinos, which was far fewer than we had demanded though many more than they had before our protests began.

Of course, we feared those new hires would be fired once our pressure on BofA ended. So when the campaign petered out it felt like a defeat. We were wrong about that though. True, no one handed us any gold cup engraved with "VICTORY," but over the next few years our achievement became quite clear. By the end of the decade it had become commonplace to see people of color at teller windows and behind bank desks up and down the state — and not just in the ghetto. And back then, those were good jobs with decent pay for people without college degrees.

Nor was it only at BofA. When other financial institution saw that white customers did not flee in horror at the sight of a Black cashier they too signed equal employment agreements with the FEPC. Other large employers significantly altered their hiring practices as well, Pacific Telephone (PacBell), Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), and the western division of Greyhound bus lines all signed equal hiring agreements with the California Public Utilities Commission.

I and the others arrested in Santa Monica were charged with trespass, disturbing the peace, and resisting arrest. Since we had legally gone into the bank as customers, disturbed no one's peace until after we had been placed under arrest, and "resisted" only in the sense of holding on to someone else (or in my case, a truck axle) before going limp, the Santa Monica authorities (unlike

those in Los Angeles) were smart enough to avoid tying up their court in a lengthy and embarrassing trial that might result in them hosting us with free room and board in a city or county jail. That December they dropped all charges against us.

Free Speech Movement at Berkeley ~ 1964

When the UCLA school year ended in June of '64, I was placed on academic probation due to my abysmal grades. Grades which, in my opinion as a psychology major, failed to measure, or even take into account, all that I was learning about the influence of economics and politics on the psycho-sociology of racism, rage, and resistance. I was learning a huge amount, but just because it wasn't the psychology being taught at UCLA they didn't see it that way — perhaps because I failed to turn in any of my term papers, missed half the class sessions, and fell seriously short of "acing" my midterms and finals.

But back in the 1960s, students having academic difficulties were allowed to temporarily withdraw from the university with the assurance that they would be readmitted when they were ready to resume their studies. It was a common-sense method of helping young people who were having a hard time orienting and focusing themselves — as young'uns often do at that point in their lives. I filed the temporary withdrawal forms and told my parents I wasn't going to enroll for the fall semester.

My mom, of course, was distraught and voluble in trying to convince me otherwise. My dad, calmer and surely wiser, simply told me it's my life and my choice, but they weren't going to pay for my civil rights work. If that's what I wanted to do, I'd have to do it on my own without their $50-per-month stipend. Fine by me.

However, as a college dropout my "2S" student draft deferment was no longer valid. I expected to be reclassified "1A," which meant I would be available for immediate conscription into the Army. With an expanding war in Vietnam now looming ominously on the horizon that was no small concern. But Draft Board 102 of Los Angeles County — bless their hearts — bestowed upon me a welcome surprise gift. They informed me I was now classified "1Y." As it was explained in their little brochure, the "1Y" classification was for men who were "physically, mentally, or morally unfit for military service except in times of extreme national emergency."

In other words, until an armada of Vietcong rowboats appeared off the California coast I wasn't going to be drafted — *Hallelujah!*

Since they'd never given me any kind of pre-induction physical or mental evaluation my draft board must have concluded that I was *morally unfit* to fight in

Vietnam. No doubt because of my civil rights arrests. This is not as surprising as it might first appear. Boys were assigned to draft boards based on the neighborhood they lived in. Since my family lived in a working-class, mixed-race area of inner-city Los Angeles where relatively few kids went to college, Draft Board 102 had no problem meeting their monthly quotas. So it was easy for them to reject me as a potential troublemaker who might lead innocent recruits astray. Had I hailed from a more middle-class area like Beverly Hills or the San Fernando Valley it would have been quite a different story.

University of California classes resumed in mid-September of 1964 but as a dropout, I couldn't have cared less — or so I thought. By then CORE's campaign against BofA had been suspended, and while N-VAC was still doggedly leafleting and picketing Van de Kamp's, our numbers, energy, and enthusiasm were low. The truth is we were just going through the motions while we gradually accepted defeat. Maybe defeat is like what they say about dying, with five stages of acceptance, I don't know. But by November we had finally bowed to the inevitable.

I was sick of Los Angeles. I hated it. Actually, I'd always disliked L.A., now I actively loathed it. But I was still committed to the Freedom Movement. The heart, soul, and center of that Movement was in the South. My court trials had prevented me from participating in Mississippi Freedom Summer and now I was determined to "go South." There were just three little problems holding me back. First, I had no money. My old car had given up the ghost, my part time fry-cook job barely paid the rent, and I had no savings at all. Second, was simple inertia. And third — I was scared. I knew how dangerous it was to be a southern civil rights worker. Luckily for me, Republican Senator William F. Knowland and the UC Board of Regents broke me free.

People today cannot imagine how restricted and constrained college life was in the '50s and early '60s. Young women, known *co-eds,* were governed by *parietal rules* under the rationale of *in loco parentis* — the concept that it was the responsibility of the university to function as a parent — a socially-conservative parent — for female students. Parietal rules included dorm curfews, bed checks, and at many colleges so-called "character" requirements. Such rules were intended to control the personal and social lives of female students in the manner it was assumed their parents would do if she were still living at home. The clear purpose, of course, being to ensure that girls remained virgin until properly married — a goal neither university or parents had much hope of achieving in those halcyon years *after the pill and before the plague*.

Intellectually and academically, colleges and universities severely limited freedom of thought, speech, and association of *everyone* regardless of gender. Faculty at public universities like UCLA were officially subject to loyalty oaths and unofficially bound by the political dogmas of conservative regents and legislators. Courses were limited to those subjects approved by the powers-that-

were and content was tailored to avoid the ire of Republican alumni. Throughout the University of California system, controversial speakers and ideas that might offend conservative politicians or upset right-wing newspaper editors were either forbidden outright or strictly regulated.

Speakers could not be invited to address classes, clubs, meetings, or any other on-campus events without prior administration approval. Which they adamantly refused to grant for anyone deemed “too controversial.” You could not hand out political literature that had not been vetted in advance by campus authorities — you literally had to have a university official stamp *approved* on a copy that you had to keep on file before you could post notices on campus bulletin boards. You could not recruit for participation in off-campus political activities such as a civil rights protest, nor could you raise funds for the Freedom Movement or other liberal social causes. Even the officially recognized Young Republicans and Young Democrats were not allowed to engage in, or mobilize support for, off-campus events.

During the civil rights protests of the previous ’63–’64 academic year, Berkeley CORE activists had circumvented the no-political-activity rules by using a wide strip of sidewalk just outside the main campus entrance on Bancroft Way. Everyone, including UCB administrators, had assumed it was city property governed by the U.S. Constitution. So on that small piece of turf, groups were free to hand out flyers, set up literature tables, stage small rallies, and recruit for direct action protests against the Bank of America.

But during the summer of 1964 while school was out of session, CORE and other civil rights groups staged nonviolent protests at the Republican National Convention held in San Francisco’s Cow Palace, and civil rights activists had begun picketing the *Oakland Tribune* over its discriminatory hiring practices. At that time, the *Trib* was owned by William F. Knowland, a former U.S. Senator. He was titular head of the California Republican Party and a staunch conservative. The protests outside his corporate office and what he regarded as *his* convention did not meet please him. He wielded enormous political power in the state and he had no intention of allowing his political party or his personal newspaper to become the target of mass student protest once classes resumed in the fall. He demanded that civil rights recruiting on the Bancroft strip be suppressed and his cronies on the UC Board of Regents acquiesced to his command.

On the first day of class in mid-September, Berkeley administrators announced that the university owned the Bancroft strip and that it was now under the control of the UC Board of Regents. Henceforth, they declared, all political activity on that sidewalk would be governed by campus regulations — in other words, banned. It’s been said that “nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come,” and I suppose the corollary must be that “nothing is more futile than trying to *stop* an idea whose time has come.”

Among the students returning to school that September were veterans of Freedom Summer projects in Mississippi and Louisiana who had stood side by side with Afro-American sharecroppers and courageous Black schoolchildren daring to defy Klan violence and ferocious repression by state governments. Some of those Berkeley students had gone on to challenge Lyndon Baines Johnson, President of the United States, at *his* Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. These Freedom Movement veterans were not the kind of men and women who could be intimidated by the Dean of Bureaucratic Buffoonery or the Vice-Poobah of Alumni Appeasement.

The regents' political ban proved to be a spark in dry tinder that exploded into the Free Speech Movement (FSM). By mid-October newspapers in Los Angeles were filled with stories of student defiance at Berkeley, mass protests, and calls for action. I saw the FSM in terms of student support for a Civil Rights Movement that was challenging the Jim Crow status quo — South and North. The FSM was led by CORE and SNCC veterans. So for me, the Freedom Movement and the Free Speech Movement were one and the same.

Heeding the siren call of fife and drum, at the end of November I bummed a ride north, ending up in a shabby 'Frisco crash pad — an empty store on Buchanan Street that was awaiting demolition as part of an Urban Renewal project we referred to as "Negro Removal." Its ancient wooden floors were warped and splintery, the windows were grimy, and there was no heat at all. It was occupied by a shifting ménage of itinerant musicians and poets, political activists, strange drifters, and free spirits. I slept on the floor in my sleeping bag, shared communal meals of stews, brown rice, and thick soups, smoked some bodacious weed, went to beatnik coffee houses, and debated and argued the issues of the day long into the night. I loved every minute of it.

Like most newcomers, I was surprised at how much colder San Francisco was than the rest of California. From a local war surplus store I acquired a dark Navy peacoat and a blue wool watch cap. In the early years of the Freedom Movement, to show their respectability activists had dressed up in coats and ties, heels and hose, but by the end of '64, jeans, work shirts, and Army jackets were de rigueur for the serious protester.

My main expense was bus fare over the bridge to Berkeley where the Free Speech Movement was furiously engaged in a massive, and ultimately successful, struggle against the established order. I knew almost no one at Berkeley, had no roots there, and was no longer even a student, but I pitched in to help wherever I could.

Since I was on its periphery, the FSM story is not mine to tell. I was, however, immensely impressed by the sheer scale and power of a mass peoples' movement — so very, very different from our small N-VAC and Bruin CORE guerrilla-type protests in SoCal.

One day a speaker at one of the Sproul Plaza rallies asked for volunteers to help get out a fund-appeal mailing. I knew how to do that, we did it all the time in N-VAC. Four or five of us would sit around a kitchen table, folding, stuffing, and sealing, affixing mailing labels and stamps, and then sorting by city or zipcode.

So I showed up at an off-campus office and was astonished to see nearly 100 people working at long rows of tables set end to end, four or five rows, each an industrial-size mailing assembly line. At the end of each line, boxes and boxes of finished envelopes were being moved around on dollies. It wasn't just the scale of the mailing itself that amazed me, it was that they had such a huge list of potential supporters to make it necessary.

Looking back now, that memory of the mailing operation is as vivid to me as my memories of the truly impressive FSM protests on campus, which dwarfed anything I'd ever previously participated in. I suppose it may seem a bit strange that memories of a mailing remain with me all these years later, but by the fall of 1964 I had become a professional Freedom Movement activist — unpaid, true, but a professional in the sense that I saw it as my calling — and for professionals, methods and techniques can be as fascinating as the dramatic events are for amateurs.

And the FSM protests *were* filled with power and drama, thrilling and inspiring. And those too, I remember well. On Wednesday December 2nd, hundreds of students and supporters occupied Sproul Hall, the administration building, with a massive sit-in. The campus cops blocked the doors too late and they had neither the numbers, nor the training, nor the facilities to clear the building. After they started guarding the doors to prevent additional supporters from joining, we used a ladder up to a second story rear window to enter and exit.

Like a good CORE action, the sit-in was well disciplined and tightly organized. Only the hallways were occupied, no one entered the offices. Impromptu classes were being taught and films shown in the second-floor hallways, the third floor seemed to be where most of the passionate political arguments and debates were raging, and the fourth floor had been set aside as a silent area for those who wanted to study.

Late that night a swarm of 600 Oakland cops and Alameda sheriffs in riot gear began forming up to clear the building of the 800 or so people still sitting in. I was emotionally torn, I wanted to stay and be busted with all the others who were putting their bodies on the line. But if I was awaiting trial in Berkeley I couldn't go South. So I reluctantly left the building by the backside ladder just before the police seized it.

It took them almost 12 hours to clear the building, roughly dragging limp protesters down the stairs, kicking and punching them when the press wasn't looking. By mid-morning the cops were still hauling people away, and I phoned

in live reports to a support rally at UCLA hastily organized by Bruin CORE and the DuBois Club.

The Berkeley campus was now occupied by an army of cops and in total turmoil. Students were spontaneously boycotting classes and forming protest rallies. By Friday the last of the arrestees had been bailed out and were back on campus, welcomed as heroes. A student strike was called and picket lines went up at entrances to class and lab buildings across the sprawling campus. I borrowed a bicycle and volunteered to ride a scout circuit, bringing reports back to Strike Central. At least two-thirds, perhaps as many as three-quarters of the student body were now boycotting classes, and graduate students were refusing to tend their laboratory experiments (though they continued to feed the lab-animals).

Over the weekend there were meetings — many, many meetings — students, activists, faculty, administrators. I attended one for outside supporters. None of the experienced FSM leaders were present, I suppose they must have been in some kind of strategy session. The room was filled with energy and passion, but there was also chaos and confusion. Students wanted labor unions to honor their strike. Regular industrial unions, that is, not unions of campus workers, because California public employees had no collective bargaining rights until the late 1970s.

I remember someone from the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) — 'Frisco's feisty (and politically influential) longshore union — asking the students what their "beef" was. Not understanding that he was asking them to explain what the issues were, some of the students reacted as if it were a hostile question. I should have realized that someone needed to translate *laborese* into *studentese*, but in the excitement and hurly-burly of a disorganized meeting it didn't occur to me at the time. They kept shouting and demanding unions respect their picket lines and eventually the longshoreman threw up his hands and sarcastically told them, "Okay, fine, we won't unload any ships on your campus," and then he walked out. Such a valuable opportunity missed.

On Monday the 7th, the student strike continued to hold strong. University President Clark Kerr called a "convocation" of all students and faculty to meet in the open-air Greek Theater. Students and faculty overflowed the benches and aisles, occupied adjacent roofs, and climbed trees to see. Though the convocation had been called in response to an overwhelming student strike, not a single student was allowed to address the audience or even ask a single question. Not one. Not. One. The presidents, deans and department heads who did speak (at length) had only bland platitudes to share. No one was impressed.

When they finished lecturing us, FSM leader Mario Savio walked towards the microphone to announce that a student rally would immediately take place in front of Sproul Hall to consider and debate what the administrators had said.

He was jumped by campus cops and manhandled off stage to a location unknown. Pandemonium erupted.

Eventually Mario was released, but for most of us the police suppression of his effort to make a simple announcement and the fact that no students had been deemed worthy of speaking clearly illuminated the contempt that those in authority had for students — all of whom were old enough to be drafted into the Army, some in fact were military veterans, and many of whom were registered voters. Yet as the self-defined "adults," they considered and treated us as unruly children.

By now, though, the faculty — long held in forced political conformity by Red Scare threats and loyalty oaths — had finally begun to bestir themselves. On Tuesday the 8th, the strike was suspended while the professors deliberated. That evening almost the entire tenured faculty gathered in Wheeler Auditorium. For an hour and a half they debated, their words broadcast by loudspeakers to a throng of students waiting outside in a dark and frigid December night. By an overwhelming vote of 824 to 115 the Academic Senate passed a campus free speech resolution that did away with University authority to restrict or regulate political activity and the content of ideas.

As the professors left Wheeler Hall, we spontaneously formed two applauding lines on either side so that they walked in a kind of procession through a cheering crowd of their students. I don't think anything like that had ever happened to them before and I could see that many of them were visibly moved — in some cases stunned. For me this was what victory felt like. For the next six months, all through Selma and the March to Montgomery, I wore my blue and white FSM button as a badge of pride and honor — a pin I still have and still treasure today.

57.110.11c ~ 1965

Not long after leaving Luverne I was once again spending day after day in Los Angeles County Superior Court for yet another sit-in trial. Our convictions for sitting in at the Van de Kamp's restaurant in Van Nays had been reversed on appeal, probably because of the obvious bias shown against us by Judge Holaday. The district attorney, however, was determined to uphold "law and order" so I and the other N-VAC protesters were being retried, this time in front of a fair judge. Most of those days were occupied in a futile attempt to get at least one Afro-American or Latino juror impaneled on the "jury of our peers" that would try our integrated gang of nonviolent protesters for offenses against "the people of California."

Again we had an all-white jury and again they convicted us but this time without solid grounds for appeal. For the heinous crime of sitting on a restaurant

floor and singing freedom songs I and the others were sentenced to 30 days in county jail.

L.A. is the land of euphemisms and make-believe, so the county prison farm was called the “Wayside Honor Ranch” — no doubt because being granted access to its posh accommodations was such a sought-after honor. It was located in the rugged northern portion of Los Angeles County near the tiny village of Castaic, right off Highway 99 (today, I-5). At that time the area was completely rural, mostly sagebrush and scrub with occasional patches of farmland. Today, Wayside has become the “Pitchess Honor Rancho” and it’s no longer a farm, just a regular prison surrounded by typical suburban SoCal strip malls and housing tracts where an average home sells for a cool half million. One of those housing tracts right across the freeway from the prison includes a Hartford Avenue — sadly, though, I doubt it’s named after me.

I began serving my sentence in early February of 1966. Robert Hall and I had the same 30-day sentence and we both went in together. But he was such a smooth operator that he managed to serve his entire bid in the relative comfort of the prison hospital. For an “infected boil,” as I recall. Alas, I was not so slick.

For the first couple of days they kept me in the maximum security building, fondly known as “Max” or “Maxi,” which was your traditional bars-and-guards slammer like the ones you’ve seen in so many movies. It was intentionally made miserable. Then I was transferred to the farm.

Instead of barred cells we were housed in barracks with rows of cots, open showers we could use whenever we wished, meals cafeteria-style in a mess hall, vending machines for those with coin, and a commissary if someone on the outside had paid in to give you store credit. When we weren’t working, we could wander around within the fence among the various buildings. Basically it was like a World War II Army base but with guards — excuse me, I mean “correctional officers.” In other words, it was much better than Maxi. And, of course, that was the deal. Be a good, obedient prisoner and you remained on the farm, act up and it was back to Maxi for the remainder of your sentence.

Of course I was nervous about prison, having never served a sentence before and having heard all the frightening stories — none of which proved true for me. No one tried to rape me or make me his “bitch,” or shiv me in the shower, or force me into a gang, or ply me with smack. I would have welcomed a little pot but since this was before Nixon’s “War on Drugs,” no one had any for sale.

Before I went in, I was the beneficiary of much advice and cautions from people who had never themselves been in jail. I was told that asking other prisoners what they were in for was a terrible social faux pas. Which for all I know might be true in other jails, but it wasn’t the case at Wayside, where everyone asked everyone else. The custom was though that you never named

your crime, instead you gave the state penal code number. So if you were in for disturbing the peace, you'd say "415," or "602" for trespass, and so on. Everyone knew all the three-digit numbers for the common misdemeanors and minor felonies associated with inmates serving "county time."

I, however, had been found guilty of violating a fire ordinance prohibiting blocking an exit, so when asked, I replied, *"57.110.11C."* Which sounded very impressive. "Wow! You must be some heavy dude, man! All them numbers!"

Every morning we all lined up in front of our barracks in the cold for "count," so they could see if anyone had managed to escape (no one did while I was there). Then it was breakfast and off to work. I was assigned to the nursery crew, which so far as I could tell mainly manicured the grass and hedges of the warden's home.

On weekends, families were able to visit together at wooden picnic tables. That first weekend I immediately noticed there were way more prisoners around than during the regular workweek. Back then, before all the hills and scrub land was built-up with housing tracts, L.A. had a huge brushfire problem. To contain the inevitable fires, they had to maintain all these dirt access roads and build firebreaks running down the ridges. And they had to have guys ready to hit a fire line at a moment's notice at any time of the year.

Fighting fires in an urban area requires a lot of training and skill. It's also highly dangerous. But containing rural brushfires was just grunt work with ax, rake, and shovel while the pros drove the bulldozers. And prisoners were cheap labor. Real cheap.

In fact, the county had come up with a really slick system. Under the law at that time a hungry or homeless family was not eligible for welfare unless the father had "abandoned" them — which was a felony. If dad lost his job or was laid off the mother had to swear out a "child abandonment" arrest warrant against him in order to get welfare or public assistance to feed the kids. Since he hadn't really abandoned his family it was easy for the cops to bust him by simply pounding on the door late at night. He would then be arrested on the warrant and routinely sentenced to a year in jail — yes, a full year for, in essence, being hungry and poor.

But instead of serving their sentences in the Wayside barracks those guys were put in fire camps, where they worked as penal labor for the county for maybe a quarter an hour or a dollar a day or something like that. Very "cost-effective" in the lingo of the bureaucrats. Those guys weren't criminals in the normal sense of the word, and since they were only in jail because that's what the system required so their families wouldn't starve or become homeless, they weren't high escape risks. Most of them were Latino or Black, and the attitude of the politicians, judges, and guards was, "They're just a bunch of spics and coons. It's good for them — three squares a day and healthy exercise. We're doing them a

favor." And, of course, saving the tax-paying white public a pretty penny to boot.

I didn't enjoy barracks life and confinement was unpleasant, but what I hated most about Wayside was the way the guards harassed everyone. I'm not talking about the high-drama kind of abuse you see on TV shows, but rather constant petty humiliations on a daily basis. They enjoyed asserting their power over the inmates in trivial matters that clearly had nothing to do with penology, security, or rehabilitation but were merely to inflate their own egos and sense of importance. I suppose prison guard is the kind of occupation that attracts the kind of personality that hungers for such gratification.

A week or so after I started working on the nursery crew I came down with the flu. It was a cold winter that year and a mini-epidemic was raging through the camp. Rather than overload the camp's sickbay, they'd set up an infirmary ward in one of the barracks to isolate those infected while we recuperated with bed rest. One day the guard sergeant came through on inspection and he ordered me to shave off my mustache. Prison regulations permitted well-trimmed 'staches, which mine was, but he felt like exerting his authority. I trimmed it back some more, but didn't shave it off.

When he saw that I hadn't bowed to his authority he threw the sort of screaming tantrum that military drill sergeants use to intimidate their recruits, and he made me shave it off while he watched. Then he reassigned me from the nursery crew to the "punishment squad." I forget what its formal name was, but informally we were known as the "shit-shovelers" or other less savory sobriquets. Wayside had a dairy, and our job was to shovel up the cow manure, wheel it in wheelbarrows to open-air cesspools, and dump it in. We also got to put on tall rubber boots and wade into the slimy shit-pool and muck it out with buckets. It was tiring work and the stench was pervasive — but it was just work.

The guard in charge of that punishment squad was a tall, thin, Afro-American guy named Latimore who was tough as nails. But unlike the other guards, he wasn't into petty bullshit. He told me that if I gave him any trouble I'd deeply regret it but so long as I did my work he wouldn't mess with me. Hey, fine by me.

The first day I was on his crew I overheard him tell another guard that I was one of those "Vietnam protesters." Later I made sure he knew I was in for a civil rights arrest. Maybe he cut me some slack because of that, maybe he didn't, I don't know. As it turned out, though, I didn't mind being on his punishment crew because of his policy that he, and only he, would discipline his men. He made it very clear to the other guards that none of them were to mess with us in any way. I guess he must have had them intimidated because once I became a shit-shoveler for Latimore none of the other guards ever bothered me at all.

I spent the rest of my bid shoveling cow shit until I had served my debt to society. Then — no doubt thoroughly rehabilitated — I was deemed safe to release back into civil society