

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

Oral History
Karen Jo Koonan

In the 1960s, Karen Jo Koonan was a student at U.C. Berkeley and an antiwar activist. She talked about the Civil Rights Movement:

And it was led by the children of the African-American vets who went overseas and fought for democracy and then came back and faced the same old segregation and oppression that, um, that they left behind. And so by the time the vets came back, you know, some of them fought back. But they didn't organize, you know? I think they were dispersed, they were—I don't know what happened. But their children were the ones who started organizing. And they led this—the early sit-ins in the late '50s. When it was—it was that generation of African-Americans who kind of set the tone and were the inspiration for white people—white kids like me. Because we knew people. You know, we watched the news and we saw students be, you know, hosed down and beaten for trying to eat at a lunch counter. And, you know, just—it was such hypocrisy and it was so much that we had been lied to.

