

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

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

Oral History

John Baky

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... were confronted with ... with ... with the ... with the guys who did go, the discomfort was excruciating. And the way to deal with that individualism was to ignore it. And if somebody was to as a form of torture devise the most effective way to damage a traumatized individual coming back into the society, that ... that torture device would be ignoring the person coming back. And that's exactly what was done as a culture to these individuals coming back. It was used to isolate the individual, was used by other individuals in our society to get away from the discomfort. And the victims of that discomfort were in that state of being because they went and came as individuals. It's ... it's extraordinary.

Interviewer: It's kind of a distancing and a disappearing, you know.

It ... it's disappearing, and it's a ... it's a double bind. Uh, and in fact that was ... that was my experience ... well, that's certainly shown a lot in Vietnam War, the aftermath of Vietnam War film. But that in fact was my personal experience when I returned to the ... to the country in ... in my ... from my own tour, uh, both on the West Coast and the East Coast. What I ... what I distinctly recall, I came back into the country ... well, I left the country like everybody did out of ... out of California, Travis Air Force Base. And I do remember much about that, except that California was the Promised Land, and all of a sudden we finally got there as East Coast boys and had to leave right away. And we weren't just leaving, look where we were going. You know, *[Laughs]* talk about not having your cake and not having ... *[Laughs]* ... and eating it too, that was it. Uh, you had



two days there, and then you had to leave, and you might not ever be coming back. That ... that ... that certainly crossed your mind. Uh, and then when I came back, I came back to the West Coast, but in Fort Lewis, Washington. The Army often discharged their people in ... at Fort Lewis. But then the first thing you did after Fort Lewis was to come south into California, which I did, and I lived in ... I stayed in Cal ... in, uh, San Francisco for a while, three or four months. And what I most distinctly remember is not being abused. You know, I saw no spitting, it was not a possibility. That's I think by and large one of those film generated pieces of mythos that ... that simply didn't exist. Who ... first of all, what hippie in their right mind would walk up to a combat veteran and spit on him. I mean, that's suicidal. Who would do that? It didn't ... I didn't see it happen, I've never known anybody to whom that happened. To the contrary, what ... what my experience was, was that you were invisible. You got off of ... you know, you left your discharge point or you got off your plane, and you went wherever you were going to go.

