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HISTORY OF CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN SAN DIEGO
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We Shall Overcome song:

A significant part of the Civil Rights movement was music - its songs which kept us going. I'm going to ask you to help me get us all in the mood by joining me in what was the national anthem of the Civil Rights movement.

Before I talk about the Civil Rights movement in San Diego, I want to set the scene by telling you what was happening all over the U.S. The Civil Rights struggle in the U.S. was a period of passion, pain, jubilation, sacrifice and commitment. It was a period of protest against the evil forces of racism. Racism embodied the components of segregation and discrimination based on skin color. It was not a period of spreading love throughout mankind - teaching people to love each other. It was a period of protest against the lynching and raping of Black Americans, against the laws that denied Black people the vote and forced us to live only in certain sections of the cities throughout the U.S. It was a protest against the denial of jobs to Black citizens, the refusal of access to public accommodations such as restaurants, hotels, toilets, movie theaters, swimming pools, skating rinks, YMCAs. You name it. In spite of what many want you to believe, Martin Luther King, Jr., was not out there philosophizing about how people should come together and love

each other or about his dream that some whites and Blacks want to turn into a poetic piece of romance. Dr. King's dream speech, like all his speeches, were speeches of protest against the oppressive conditions that pressed against Black Americans. The plea that people should be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character, was a protest against the discrimination of Black Americans.

It was in the 1950s that Black Americans had had enough. You say that Blacks and Whites can't travel on buses together? Crank up the buses! You say that Blacks can't swim in the public pools? Splash, here we come! You say Blacks can't sit down at the counter in your restaurant? Where's an empty seat? You say you don't hire negroes to work in your bank? Well, all 200 of us will sit right here on your floor until you hire some.

This Little Light Of Mine ...

We were angry. Black folks were seething mad. We had had enough of being degraded as human beings. We have watched our people hanged as a social Sunday gathering, watched our women raped while husbands watched. They burned down our houses, tarred and feathered us and dragged our bodies through town. We were tired of being spat on, called boy and Nigger, patted on the head for good luck and having to move off the side walk to let a white person pass.

So the battle heated up. We demonstrated our protest by marching,

picketing, sitting in, standing in, wading in and any other in we could think of. All over the country, in the east, west, north and south, demonstrations of protest took place. The police, city officials, the KKK and status quo whites were angered and they retaliated. They beat us with night sticks, hosed us with the terrific force of water from fire hoses, probed electric prods into our bodies and threw us in jail. But we were the lucky ones. Some were killed.

With all of this as a backdrop, in 1960 we formed a Civil Rights organization in San Diego called the Congress of Racial Equality, (CORE). A handful of us applied to the national chapter of CORE to form a local chapter. We wrote our by-laws, agreed to subscribe to the principles of non-violence, was visited by a national staff person and was granted approval to form our chapter of CORE.

At that time some Black San Diegans referred to San Diego as "little Mississippi" because of the segregation and discrimination that existed here. What? Not in San Diego? Yes! In San Diego. Before the Civil Rights movement hit San Diego, San Diego's housing was segregated. And as in most if not all cities in the U.S. at that time, African Americans were discriminated against in most jobs. Blacks were not hired in "white" business establishments in positions other than janitor unless a white person intervened as a "special" situation. It wasn't just a matter of being locked out of top jobs, we were locked out of the lower jobs as well. Blacks could not even get hired as grocery clerks to bag groceries, as truck

or bus drivers, as bank tellers or office clerks. Yes, we had out teachers, who taught mostly at schools with heavy Black student bodies. We had a few lawyers rho practiced in the "Black" area, (with one exception). We had a few physicians and dentists who all practiced in the "Black" area.

Under this backdrop some of us had no choice but to protest these conditions. So in 1960 we formed CORE, and said, "down with segregation and discrimination," and we solicited others to join us as we sang "We are soldiers in the army".

We were soldiers but we were a very small army, a handful of men and women, no more than twenty people at any one time who carried the organization. But they were the most committed people you will ever meet. We struggled to get the active support of the San Diego Black community with very limited success. However the small group of Blacks and Whites took on segregation and discrimination in San Diego, taking on companies one by one trying to eliminate racial discrimination. We marched, picketed and sat in as we tried to negotiate a settlement that would hire people of color and break down segregated housing practices. Our demonstrations were with food markets, SDG&E, banks, the newspaper, the Realators the zoo, the airport and the City of San Diego.

Our first major demonstration was during the time President John Kennedy visited San Diego. We decided that the only way the President of the U.S. would

know how conditions were in San Diego for Blacks and other groups of color was to set up a picket line along his motorcade route. We did just that and I believe he got our message loudly and clearly.

CORE continued its attack on racism pretty much alone, attracting hostility from both sides, Black and White. Whites called us troublemakers, radicals and communists and invited us to go back to Africa. Blacks mostly avoided us and some said we were making things worse for them.

One of our major activities was against SDG&E's failure to hire Blacks and other people of color. Our marches, picketing and sit ins resulted in our being arrested for trespassing. We were hauled off to jail until bail was set and then fought in the courts only to be found guilty and receive jail sentences. But while in court and while in jail, the demonstrations continued. During the Christmas holiday season we dressed up one of our members in a Santa Claus outfit and had Santa picketing with us. I believe this was San Diego's first time seeing a Black Santa Claus. The demonstrations went on week after week with company officials refusing to negotiate with us or hire Blacks.

It wasn't until CORE throughout the state of California took on the giant, Bank of America, that the results of our hard labor were realized. We had been fighting hard since 1960. Now in 1964 we were taking on a giant.We were tired, wounded, frustrated and disgusted with a lack of Black participation, but the commitment,

determination and energy levels were so high we could have taken on two giants. In spite of the tremendous odds against only a few, and in spite of the internal problems within our organization, and in spite of being infiltrated and spied on by the FBI, CORE in San Diego was able to mount an aggressive and sustained battle against the Bank of America which resulted in some of us being arrested several times, taken to jail and eventually losing in court and being sentenced with jail time.

The Bank of America battle marked the end of the Civil Rights war in San Diego. The Black struggle took another turn - which time does not permit me to go into now. But the important thing to note is that CORE's battle was successful. B of A, other banks, as well as life throughout San Diego began to change. By 1966, B of A and other banks had hired numbers of Blacks and others of color. It was discovered in San Diego that Blacks could even bag groceries and climb telephone poles which defied the statement made by SDG&E years before at a congressional fact finding committee that they did not have Blacks working for them because Blacks could not climb poles because they are afraid of height. By 1970 most areas of San Diego were opening up for Blacks to rent or buy homes. So segregation and discrimination based on skin color in San Diego has been beaten into the ground. The Civil Rights movement was victorious. However, the struggle continues on.

Where are we in 1995? What did the Civil Rights movement in San Diego

produce? Although the Civil Rights movement in San Diego could not have been successful had it not been for the Civil Rights movement throughout the U.S. However, without the Civil Rights movement in San Diego, the national movement would have had little impact on the conditions here.

What happened since the 1960s in San Diego is that San Diego has become a much better city to live in for everyone, especially for people of color. Look around you as you travel throughout the city. Start by looking around where you are - San Diego State University. When I was a student here there were twenty five Black students enrolled at the University along with a few Latinos, Asians and Native Americans. At that time there were no Black faculty members, no administrators and I don't remember ever seeing any Blacks on staff. Now, we have Blacks in all those categories.

Look around the city. Wherever you see Blacks working in non Black-owned companies, except where there were federal contracts, most likely there were none until after the 1960s. Wherever you see Blacks living outside the neighborhoods located in Southeast San Diego, except for pockets in Linda Vista and La Jolla's domestics, there were none living there until after the 1960s Civil Rights movement.

San Diego has come a long way since the 1960s. Its beauty can now be shared by everyone. Opportunities exist beyond what I could imagine in the 60s. But after the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. took a different turn.

The movement seemed to stop, instead of continuing to push for complete inclusion into this society. Blacks began to take advantage of the opportunities to improve self and enjoy the fruits produced by the Civil Rights movement. Blacks went to college in greater numbers, were hired into America's corporations and universities, and were elected to city, state and federal offices. If anyone was at the switch, they were asleep. CORE had died; SCLC, the organization headed by Martin Luther King, Jr., never regained consciousness after King's assassination, SNCC was dead, the NAACP began to do even less than previous years and the Urban League did not consider itself a Civil Rights organization. So the ship was afloat at sea but the engine was off. The 1970s and 1980s came and went. During that time the big fight for Blacks was to keep from losing all that had been gained.

For many reasons we could not turn the corner. The leaders of the Civil Rights movement were older, exhausted from the battles, the law of utility rendered demonstrations less effective than in the 60s and there was very little if any, secondary leadership that surfaced. A strong factor in San Diego was jealousy over who received the benefits, as though it was a finite number.

The Civil Rights movement is dead as we knew it. So, maybe the Civil Rights organizations should die too. Or at least chart a new course for themselves. What do I feel that new course should be? It is undoubtedly a course of economic development.

We must raise ourselves as a group to be respected in this world. Therefore, we must act together as a group and participate as full players in the world's game of economics. We are 30 million strong, $250 ~~million~~ Billion rich, with education and skills in every area. We need organizations that can use those resources to complete the Black struggle. Are we psychologically and emotionally able? Do we have the will? Committment? The 1990s are half over and I don't have much confidence that the next generation will get us back on track. The professionals of the 80s and 90s have failed us as a group by indulging in self and forgetting what got them to where they are. And I see professional Blacks going into the 21st century with the same attitude. The opposition forces know it. That's why race relations have gotten worse - not better. That's why the trend is toward erasing the gains of the 1960s. The big question facing Black America today is who will rise to stop that trend - and how.

But, we are soldiers. We have survived a horrible system of oppression and we have made considerable progress. But our future does not look bright. The advances from now on will be made on the economic front. And if you are waiting for a leader to pop up and lead us, you will probably have a long wait. It is up to you to join forces with other African Americans and work together to develop the economic and political strength to influence the decisions that affect your lives. Let's not die hoping and dreaming - let's die fighting.