

US

AGITATE ANTAGONIZE EDUCATE ORGANIZE



**WRITTEN IN RESPONSE TO A REPORTER'S QUESTIONING
SOME 30 YEARS AFTER THE FACT**

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DEDICATION

Dedication of all reviewed here properly goes to everyone sympathetically involved, whether noted or not. There were really no leaders or special heros. However, in looking at the picture above, I cannot help but think of Buelah Kennedy, who passed away a year ago. I always considered Beulah a very special person. With her, there was never any of the so common "I believe in the cause, but blah blah blah." stuff. With her, there were no "but"s. If something was wrong and needed to be dealt with, she knew it and was ready with little consideration of personal risk to do whatever it took to make it right. When others tried to moderate movement, she was there to advance it. She made something of her life, and in doing so contributed to those of so many, including my own.

FORWARD NOTES

"US" was the name of a 1960's civil rights group which existed in the adjoining towns of Bloomington and Normal, Illinois. It was involved in many activities of locally controversial nature for several years. Some of its participants still reside and in area and continue related pursuits. The Daily Pantagraph is the local newspaper, which mirrors the area's very conservative general politic. It is understatement to note that Pantagraph coverage of US activities was not at the time very sympathetic. Now however, approximately 38 years later, the paper assigned a reporter, Karen Hansen, to write a story about US.

Ms. Hansen had already interviewed three US participants, Jack Porter, Merlin Kennedy, and Francis Irvin at the time of this writing. They suggested I should also be interviewed, and I was contacted by E-mail at our home in Mexico. I wrote this to provide Mrs. Hansen further background and insight into US.

I have attempted to answer specific questions asked and also expanded to those I believe perhaps could have been. Information that was requested but not included relates to events for which memory is too vague to detail. Items included are but a sampling of what could have been. They occurred over many years more than 30 years distant and are recalled only with fading memory.

No details are given regarding of events and activities not deemed as directly preceeding, integral to, or proceeding from the US group, the topic for which information was requested. Those included among others the womans movement, supporting striking but jailed Normal fire fighters, and failed attempts to unionize both the ISU faculty and secretarial staff.

Some of what follows has been cut and pasted from previously written material. I have made some changes to make it more specific as well as remove content not pertinent. Little attention was paid to grammar and even spelling. The writing shows it. Some was written for purpose of this paper but only as information for research and with little regard to publication style. Time constraint prevented even careful proof reading.

The mixing of sources and styles clearly leaves imperfect joining of topic flow, paragraphs, and changing perspectives. Understand that the activities described below did not happen in strict sequence. Though they are time ordered, there was usually an overlap.

The presentation and views are clearly egocentric. However, it need be emphasized that the movement was never about specific individuals, myself included. There were a lot of people involved at various levels, each working within personal beliefs and risk factors appropriate to themselves. We learned to work together with all our personal quirks and found we could cause change.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I grew up in the all white northwest side of Chicago. The area housed many close knit ethnic groups, Italians, Polish, Greek, Germans, etc, but no Africans. Those had to stay south of Madison Street. The elementary and high schools I attended were all white. I consciously knew nothing of racism. My Parents were working class very liberal union democrats. That was in open contrast to the rest of my mother's nearby bigoted republican family. Their main concern seemed to be about "kikes" and "niggers" taking over. The joke to be was when I found out my grandmother was probably part Chippewa and part black. She just looked sort of white. Her bigoted family never knew it. My parents spoke no racism, but the racist stereotypes were there as they are in everyone, black or white, who has been raised in the United States.

The high school Junior class trip in 1947 was to our nations capital. I hadn't known Washington D.C. was a southern city. On disembarking from the train I found a water fountain marked "Whites Only". Even as a 16 year old, I was incensed and sought out and drank from the other fountain. My father's brother was a capital cop, and I visited his family for dinner. I objected to the racism I'd seen, and the response was "Why, we treat out niggers fine.". I insulted them and left. My parents did not chastise when hearing the story.

Undergraduate school was at Western Illinois University in Macomb. Blacks could not use restaurants and had to travel for hair cuts. I played guitar in a band whose leader was black. He was a jerk, but a friend. A black family became close friends. Besides voicing mild complaint to their plight, I didn't give racism much thought. I noticed it, didn't like it, but accepted it. I taught for seven years in three small and all white downstate Illinois towns. In the late fifties, married and with kids, we moved to work at Illinois State University. From 1960 until 1981 that was as a supervising teacher in sciences at University High School. From then until retirement in 1987 I switched to the Department of Applied Computer Science. ISU had few black students in the early 60's and never a black faculty member. When I queried the dean, he responded "None have ever applied". Yeah sure, no racism there.

Then they bumped off Kennedy. In shock, my accepting attitude changed, not so much in sympathy for Kennedy or the nation, but with realization life is short, and it was time to begin honoring suppressed values. First there was the Human Relations Council.. The

mode there was to oppose racism by having interracial coffees, nice meetings, and write a few letters to the editor. I thought I was doing something by doing nothing.

Though I knew racism was wrong and begged to be fought, the burning hatred of it in my soul was yet to come. Selma, Alabama violence and murders occurred in 1965. The Bloomington Unitarian Church planned to send their minister there, but his wife wouldn't let him. He asked that I go. Staring at a picture of my kids told me I had to. For the first time, I associated myself with black society and through their feelings viewed whites. It was there I began to learn to fear and dislike white people and find security and comfort with blacks.

60's BLOOMINGTON/NORMAL

The towns were strictly segregated with regard to housing. Employment for blacks was in the whites wouldn't do it category. Restaurants were whites only. There were several cross burnings at black homes. There were three black churches. I never saw a black person in a white church, including the oh so liberal Unitarian one we attended. The black bar was the Third Ward Club, along the tracks under the Main Street viaduct. Whites bragged of Sunday entertainment throwing quarters off the bridge to watch knife fights among gatherers below. Mayor McGraw shut down a bar intending to operate as a blank and tan club saying "A bar is no place for race mixing". (approximate quote from Pantagraph). Contacts between the black and white communities were mostly through symbiotic financial relationships such as maids and real estate vending.

SELMA AND JACKSON AND BLOOMINGTON, THE LINK

The flight to Selma was in a private plane. Our car of two blacks and three whites was stopped by a sheriff car as we left the Birmingham airport. We were taken to a country justice of the piece, made to wait, and let go after they figured we had been sufficiently frightened. I would guess that was with hopes we'd go home. We didn't but rather crawled under police search light beams to reach the housing project where the movement was centered. The week was spent talking with people, church organizing meetings, facing the police barricades, a whole lot of singing, and a whole lot of eye opening.

The Pantagraph did a story on the trip. For a while I suffered rather than enjoyed local celebrity status which included objecting letters to the editor, threatening phone calls, and some ostracism at work. The local rabbi set me up to do a (do they call it?) sermon at the temple. It was broadcast live by WJBC. I began by reading a list of about 40 names of civil rights workers who had been murdered and concluded by claiming we are all responsible. There were no congratulations afterwards, just polite smiles, handshakes, and weak thank you's. It was to be expected.

The Unitarian Church had a civil rights committee of which I had become a part. They decided to bring a SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee) person here. I contacted Jesse Harris, one whose work I'd read about in Mississippi and arranged for it. He came with Cephas Hughes, and they stayed at our home for about a week. There were

Unitarian picnics, Human Relations Council, and Church presentations. One was at King Surret's (black) Union Baptist Church and attended by a mixed audience. Hughs and Harris much preferred the company of the Third Ward Club, and considered Champ, the old bartender, to be the one person with ears most tuned to the black community and thus central to any movement organizing that might take place. I later came to realize Maxine Pryor, the local madam, fitted the same category.

I was very affected by Jesse Harris. I came to find later he was regarded as almost a god in the Mississippi movement. He counted something like 40 or so jail stints there. Any psychologist would have given an arm to possess his insight into human thought. The two workers stayed with us about a week and then returned. A few weeks later, I received a call from Cephas Hughes asking that I come work in Jackson, Mississippi. I did for a week or two during ISU's Spring break.

I served two functions which depended on skin color. One was as a link to the national white print and television press. They preferred talking to whites, and the blacks didn't want to waste effort with them. There was little accuracy or sympathy to their reporting anyhow. Much in Jackson, as it was in Selma, seemed to be from self generated stories told among each other at hotel bar get togethers. I tried to at least put them in touch with what was really happening. One couldn't tell if it did any good, for movement oriented television news was censored. The joke as the networks led into coverage of the issue was "Here comes another gum commercial."

My other function was as a spy among the white crowds jeering demonstrators, where I could note and report instances of attitude, brutality, and illegality. I reported those to the local FBI, which seemed to show little interest.

I suffered no actual violence, but there were several close scares. Ducking into alleys while being followed was regular. At one point a bus ran our car into a curb, flattening two tires. Another vehicle stopped. The driver shouted at me and my black companion, picked up a club, and prepared to disembark. He would have probably received help from others if not for a car loaded with SNCC workers delivering tires. They spotted the situation and rammed his vehicle from behind. He kept on going. I stayed alone at the home of Cephas Hughes while in Jackson. He was arrested along with about 1000 other demonstrators.

I learned a technique useful use in civil rights meetings to move the discussion off endless do nothing ego promoting jabber. Move things to the point where a distinct controversial choice had to be made, say should we march or not. When things are about equally divided, say "I'd like to know where we are. Would everyone for it stand up?" An action, a commitment was required, to sit or stand. It worked in that it caused people to assess personal depth of principles and level of risk acceptance as well as that of those around them. It brought things into the open. It caused resentment. It moved things forward. I later lost friends that way but made others.

Another with opposite tack was learned by watching Jesse Harris. When a meeting went

on for hours with back and forth over marching or not, Jesse just listened. Finally someone tired of getting nowhere said "What do you think we should do Jesse?" After all, he was one of those who got them there. He would know what to do. Jesse stood, and the crowd quieted. He looked around and focused on a very old man who had not said a word and was socially regarded as no account and said "Well, what do you think we should do Mr. Jones?" Jones responded, the meeting reverted back to it's previous state, and the process repeated, all night long. The higher goal, was not really to decide whether to march or not. Rather, it was to encourage people, who had always lived in fear and done what they were told by white people to change their lives by making their own decisions. They marched the next day. A thousand were arrested and carted in garbage trucks for incarceration and beatings at the county fairgrounds. It was something they decided to do.

News media never did understand the black movement turning to chants of "black power" and distancing from white support. That's because it never understood what the movement was really all about. The primary thrust had always been to organize blacks people to do their own decision making rather than survive by doing what white people want, as they had been trained for generations. Eventually it dawned that white organizers were an impediment in trying to organize blacks.

With that realization, white civil rights participants were rightly told by blacks to move on and organize their own. I was encouraged to go home and see what could be accomplished in Bloomington/Normal. My response was that I was the wrong color. Jesse Harris retorted "You're the best you have, and you go with what you got."

Jack Porter, Merlin Kennedy, and Ralph Smith also later made journeys for participation in the Jackson, Mississippi movement.

THE BEGINNING OF US

My first step in organizing was to pick out some of the more action oriented persons known from the Bloomington/Normal Human Relations Council, the generally non militant, talk nice, get together group. My wife, Roberta, and I set up private individual meetings with each. Ralph and Ellen Smith had been active in the Human Relations Council. It was they who pointed me that way after John Kennedy's assassination and my expression of desire to become involved. Jack Porter had written a strong letter to the Pantagraph. King Surret was minister of Union Baptist Church. Eva Jones (now deceased) was one of his parishioners. Merlin Kennedy was NAACP president. His recently deceased wife to be, Beulah Thornton was a parishioner of the other Baptist Church (the name now escapes me). Marilyn Gnagy (deceased) was known through the Unitarian Church. There were probably others, but those are the ones which come to mind now.

At each of those individual meetings we discussed our concerns and the need for more active involvement. A meeting of the entire group together was then arranged in the basement of Union Baptist Church. We decided to act together to do what we could. We realized we needed a means of communication that went beyond that of the churches.

So, a news letter was in the offing. It was titled US. The name was a slang expression used by those in the southern movement. The single sheet, two sided paper was distributed in the black churches and at the Third Ward Club, where the bartender, Champ, was a willing participant. Maxine Pryor, the madam, by nature of profession was unable to become openly involved, but also helped distribution and provided support. Essentially, the paper we called US touted mimicking but fitting the southern experience to the local situation.

STRUCTURE OF US AND LACK THEREOF

The style of weekly meetings was spoken of as “going around the table”. There were neither motions nor votes. Everyone was more or less expected to provide input on each topic. Hesitancy and unclear positions were questioned until meanings and feelings were fully explored. We learned about consensual decision making by doing it. There were no leaders despite the natural inclination of the press and opponents to appoint them. The emphasis was always on marshaling the community for action. As activities were engaged in, participation grew and varied.

At one point further down the road, Brookings Institution, the Washington think tank, got wind of us and sent a couple investigators. They seemed befuddled at the lack of direction, structure, and organization. We kept it that way on purpose so as to focus on the tasks rather than personalities. But, It was not always peaches and honey between us.

At one point Francis Irvin’s principles forced him to quit due to conflict with my own militancy. Being always a man of principle however, his heart remained with the movement, I mellowed perhaps, though not admittedly, and Francis is still there though I am not except in heart.

Years later during CSA involvement, we had to divorce ourselves from Carol Cox. His constant attention to rigid political positions just wouldn’t allow us to get anything done. He was a close personal friend. We had been through much together. Roberta baby sat his daughters when his wife was ill. It was me he called for solace and help when he found her dead in bed after leaving a late night meeting at my house. I was best man at his second wedding. I cried when we tossed him out. He may have also. Our friendship was finished. We made the necessary decision, but I’ll never forget the shame of forsaking a friend and will carry the feeling to the grave. Holding beliefs close to the heart can do that.

ARTSY DEMONSTRATION

One of the first demonstrations was around the courthouse. It featured the neatest picket sign’s I’ve seen. We met the night before, ready with cardboard, posts, paints, and nails. Ron Hutchinson, a local university art student, made the first one. It didn’t say anything but was a crazy and very colorful abstract nothing using streaks and blotches of bright colors. The idea caught. The rest of the night Ron taught us about art, and all the posters ended up making no particular point but appearing wild to say the least..Onlookers were there the next morning to jeer us, but they didn’t. Instead they pointed, exclaimed, and some even

clapped as the weird signs paraded by. We had expected rough stuff, but there was none. Any that might have occurred would have been opposed by the new found art aficionado onlookers. There was no need for posters to say or picture any thing in particular. Marchers and opponents already knew what the demonstration was all about, and the social point of the picket was made. There have been so many, I've forgotten the particular circumstances of that one, but still remember the craziness of its pursuit. It was fun.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

We also had a three year ball with Bloomington's annual Christmas parades. The last float was traditionally that of Santa Claus, of course. At the time, Sears, then operating downtown, refused to employ black sales persons. US made a float that was entered as a commercial theme further in front. It's banner read "BOYCOTT SEARS, GIVE LOVE THIS YEAR NOT GIFTS". Jim Butcher was big, fat, and as black as can be. He hardly fit the Santa suit I had purchased. I'll never forget the little red head kid watching on the curb and chanting "jigaboo, jigaboo, jigaboo, (a pause) SANTA!". Sears hired a token black salesman.

Next year there was a new rule there could only be one Santa. Both his name and skin, by the way, were White. We told the city our float would have a religious motive. The saw horse, chicken wire, paper and paint donkey was beautiful. So was the 8 months pregnant long blond hair Mary astride it. Beulah's son, Jim Jones, at her side was a tall, muscular, and black Joseph. Most of us walked along the sidewalk, always near the float, and the cops following couldn't figure out what we were up to. That was despite one college student pretending to be a supporter but continually sneaking away to confer with them. They couldn't see the baseball bats out of site on the float floor. Those saw no use, as the crowd seemed to appreciate the point.

The Christmas parade generated press coverage from outside the city by year three. Now the rules were changed so only a recognized church would be permitted a religious float, so we decided to go Santa again and told them so. Merlin Kennedy, the NACCP president, was a thinner Santa. A police line was formed in front of our float blocking it at the assembly point. Merlin got off and walked down the street along side the parade. He was arrested for being a black Santa Claus. The AP picked up the story and photo of him being lead to jail by two cops. I don't recall any Pantagraph coverage, but we were sent copies the national story from all over the country. Jet Magazine featured the photo as it's next cover story.

URBAN UNRENEWAL

Mrs Pennick's house, to call it that, was across from the housing project. City Hall considered it an eyesore and not safely inhabitable. They were right. Mrs Penick was very poor, beset with personal family problems, age, and did not enjoy exactly a good relationship with the black community, of which she was a part.

Bloomington's Urban Renewal Department employed a housing counselor by the name of Kinzer, or something like that. We considered him hard nosed and not at all sympathetic to the plight of such as Mrs. Pennick. He had a judgmental perspective of those with whom he was supposed to work. We also considered him to be racist. His design was to move Mrs Pennick into the housing project and demolish her home.

We took up her cause and rebuilt the house to standards. The project caught on. College students, a union electrician, and others joined. Several would remain to be part of the movement. That may have been the time when Ralph Dring as well as Ray Ryburn became part of US,

At end, Mrs Pennick had a home with new walls, outside shingling, roof, and plumbing and electricity to code. Kinzer fought us all the way. One thing he didn't count on was his boss, Larry Lafever, the urban renewal director. Larry became involved with US over the matter in attempt to mediate. His sympathies led him to become part of US. He remained that until leaving Bloomington for employment in another state.

I recall a city council hearing regarding the situation. I made the statement that Chief Macalvany (Sp) would only remove Mrs. Pennick from her home over my dead body. Harold Liston had a ball with that in the following day's Pantagraph editorial, accusing me of inciting violence. It meant to me that we were doing something worthwhile.

BROKAW HOSPITAL

The local NAACP was not much more than a collection of titles. Mine was Legal Redress Chairman. It had uses. I could get into jails to talk to prisoners seeking help as, according to them, they were never guilty. The legal hat was useful when Brokaw Hospital ran up against a complaint of racial discrimination. They had moved a black lady out of a room because of sharing objections by a white room mate. The moved lady complained. We decided to go straight to the top and file an official complaint with the Federal Civil Rights Commission. Whether or not it was because that commission had little else to do, they investigated and took action. Brokaw was involved in a federally funded building program, and their federal funds were cut off. There were some rather confrontational local meetings. The hospital board types were quite hostile, but we did not back off. The hospital was forced reluctantly to develop a posted non discriminatory policy to which our agreement was required.

MERLIN'S NON ELECTION

Bloomington's city council was elected through an at large rather than ward system. It insured the south west side, which housed most blacks, would never be represented. We did a rather thorough demographic analysis of ward voting patterns. Merlin Kennedy ran for a city council seat. We found the council leader, a man named Hartenstein, had filed improper petitions according to state statute. We appealed the election commission's refusal to remove his name and won. Never having taken a law course, I wrote the brief full

of “now comes” and “Party of this or that part”, etc. Next it went to court. This time we had advice from a real out of town NAACP attorney. The word we got was that the particular judge didn’t like sailors or “niggers”. We lost with reasoning that no matter what the law said, it would be silly to restrict an election. It was too late, however, for Hartenstein to get his name back on the ballot, and he ran as a write in. We had poll watchers in each ward. Even that was considered by vote counters as some sort of underhanded (read communist) endeavor. Though we did the unheard of thing of challenging improper write in ballots, Hartenstein was an easy victor.

UNTIED SLATES

Those words came off a ticket to a Secretary of Defense speech. I helped print it along with Jack Porter. The full name used was Untied Slates of Aremica. Other wording included Melvin Lard and Secretary of Defeats. A sympathetic to the movement local official had given us a ticket to a carefully guarded invite only chamber of commerce speech that Nixon's Melvin Laird was planning to make. We made almost exact duplicates right down to type fonts and cardboard stock at a movement print shop in Champaign. The only thing changed were some of the words, which were unnoticeable on glance.

Packs of them were handed out at the demonstration organizing meeting. Present were two ridiculously overdressed characters trying to look like hippies. No one had ever seen them before, let alone anyone looking even remotely like them. A local sympathetic cop had informed us the two were from army intelligence. They didn't seem too intelligent when advising other action. However, we let them know we'd rather just all go and hear the speech, thank you. We gave them packs of tickets too for all their friends.

The building that night was ringed outside with police and ticket holders. Those types who had been honored with real invitations didn't like it a bit having to parade their fancy night out dress through the cordon and ticket waving throng. One lady did manage to get in with a fake. She was arrested and removed even though properly attired. Doing so caused even more confusion. I stayed outside but heard tell that those inside had a hard time hearing the speech. It was fun, as most demonstrations of imagination are.

PANTAGRAPH AND WJBC

Public education was central to what we did. Despite our short lived US newsletter, black churches, and the Third Ward Club bar, not to miss Pryor’s whore house, the press was always an important part of our activities. The Pantagraph, of course, was biased to defend the status quo, though some of it’s reporters may have personally felt otherwise. Thus, there was always considerable jousting between US and the paper.

A very funny victory in that regard was over a letter(s) to the editor. A local right wing nut, who saw her function in life as opposing US, had submitted a letter to the editor. We decided to respond in kind and came up with a letter of ten very extreme ridiculous demands. We had great fun at the meeting making them up. Editor, Harold Liston, pulled

us up short however, claiming it went beyond the maximal allowed length. We tore it in two and resubmitted it under two different names. The first contained demands numbered one to five, and the second numbered six to ten. They snuck by and were published in the right order one right after the other. Liston later reported the slip up made him mad as hell. We enjoyed as much as we could of what we did.

Sometime in the late 60's or early 70's There was to be a referendum to establish an open housing ordinance. A popular evening call in show on the WJBC radio station planned a discussion. I was one of the more vocal civil rights militants on the scene and so represented one side. The other was a local right wing white bigot preacher. The show started fine as we stated our positions. Then the first call came and asked why I didn't remove my hat at some past public pledge to the allegiance of the flag. I responded with points about the flag, pledge, and patriotism. The preacher goaded. More calls of similar nature came. The show turned into a discussion of myself, the movement, and various views of patriotism, communism, bigotry, religion, and continued in that manner until its end. Further mention of an open housing ordinance was lost. I felt good that I had showed them how right and determined I and my compatriots were. Anyone with any brains could perceive the ignorance and bigotry expressed by those idiots.

I met with movement companions after the show and found I was not to be congratulated. Rather, to a person, they gave me hell, and I'll never forget it. As angry complaints cut through my ego, I began to realize I had undercut the cause by dropping discussion of open housing in favor of doing personal battle with those I perceived on the wrong side of the fence. I was proving myself to myself, and it didn't help. I could have forgotten about myself, simply ignored the issue shifting points and responded to each only by focusing on the open housing referendum. The law passed anyhow, so I guess I wasn't really very important after all, but the great significance of the radio event was the lesson I learned. That was that it was the prize itself, not I, that was important. The words of one of my favorite freedom songs, Keep Your Eyes On The Prize, took on new personal meaning.

FORMATION OF CSA

Jack Porter's pulpit at the Western Avenue Presbyterian church was essentially under control of the downtown (was it 2nd Pres.?) church, pretty much an establishment group. We had done some fussing with that church. I've forgotten the particulars. Jack's church was shut down, and he was out of a job. We decided to pitch in and send him to law school at the University of Illinois. At that time the group sort of drifted into what still exists as CSA, or Community for Social Action. It was white populated, primarily of previous US participants, but grew beyond that. Several others became closely associated with CSA, notably Bob and Marilyn Sutherland, Bob and Barbara Hathaway, Mike and Mary Jane Brunt One of the first activities was over the establishment of a federally recognized Community Action Agency.

POVERTY PROGRAM

Federal poverty program law required community involvement in control of funding poverty program activities, one of which was a head start program. CSA began organizing poor people to that end. They were white as well as black and primarily from the housing projects and other west side neighborhoods. The educational and social worker establishment seemed to be licking their chops over the prospect of federal money for salary increases. We had something else in mind. There was door to door canvassing and many neighborhood meetings. Between them and the first head start program there was much contention. It was the people we organized rather than the professionals who established the first head start program. That's probably changed, as money has a way of doing such.

CSA continued with participants taking it in directions of their particular interests. Times were changing and we were in active objection to the US adventure in the Vietnam War. Some of us were involved in counseling conscientious objectors to the military draft. There was also picketing of grocery stores in support of the United Farm Workers Union activities in California.

The housing market was tightly controlled with understood discrimination practices both by individuals and the real estate profession. A continuing activity from the days of human relations council, through US, and into CSA was testing and bringing complaints of illegal housing discrimination. Usually a black couple would be refused housing on a phoney pretext and then complain. A white couple would then successfully attempt the same rental or sale, and an official complaint lodged. Along with that there was eventually successful protesting, elections, poll watching, and publicity regarding establishment of open housing ordinances. Ralph and Ellen Smith were particularly instrumental in that.

CAMPUS BLACK MOVEMENT

While a part of CSA, I became involved along with Carrol Cox in helping to organizing a movement among the growing black student population at Illinois State University. It became most confrontational when black students demanded renaming the Student Union after Malcom X.

One of the student protests was simply to use the university library. They went there in mass and took card catalog drawers from the cabinets and left them on tables. That is what is ordinarily done though not in mass. The place was a mess. The students each then checked out the limit of six books and immediately returned them leaving stacks of unshelved books. Carrol and I were both unaware of plans but noted the large unusual grouping of students on the way to the library. We went along to see what was happening. A white librarian, perhaps assuming black people never do anything without white direction, accosted Carrol and began screaming at him. Carrol pretty much kept quiet, a rarity for him.

The university filed charges in the librarian's name, and Carrol was arrested for disorderly

conduct. He made the mistake of representing himself in court. I testified as to what happened but to no avail. He was convicted and fined. The university officially censured him for the lie of his behavior. He suffered greatly, both financially and professionally.

There was some discussion, which went no further than brief consideration, of torching the student union building after the university board meeting denying the name change. The president, Sam Braden, resigned his job over the uproars. Wading through flanked black students chanting "Braden is a motherfucker" went beyond his professional expectations. The students did achieve agreements to promote increasing the black student population.

As had happened in Mississippi, the ISU black student movement grew to the point where white participation was in the way. I remember being told by one leader "Go organize the white kids, because when the shit comes down, we don't want everyone on the other side".

SDS

The campus chapter of SDS, or Students for Democratic Society was organized in exactly the same way as was US. That is, with individual meetings with likely prospects and then one of the group. White students, which primarily composed it, were concerned over the draft and the war. There was a good deal of on campus protest. As the movement expanded, it spread to other areas as well, including the 1968 Chicago Democratic Party convention and later trashing of Chicago's downtown store windows.

DENNIS MAJERUS STORY

Dennis Majerus was a military veteran, husband, father, and university student who was active in SDS. He made the mistake of buying a six pack of beer in exchange for some steaks at the request of a high school student. It was immediately reported, and Dennis was arrested. The court granted him probation.

The SDS kids were always very sensitive of my work position and didn't inform me when they decided to leaflet against the war in the U High lounge. They were of course confronted. A teacher, who I considered a right wing bigot accosted Dennis and attempted to tear the leaflets from his hand. Dennis held on. The campus police arrived and he was arrested. The teacher and another of like sentiment lied as they testified at his probation revocation hearing that Dennis had attacked them. I testified as to Dennis's character. Judge Townley woke from obvious sleep and sentenced Dennis to a year and a half in Menard Prison.

We wrote, published, and distributed an approximately 20 page booklet of his story.

PARANOIA

There were those who described me as paranoid. I can only attest to truth of what happened to me and what I observed first hand.

I woke for unknown reason one morning about 3 am, got up and looked out the front window from my darkened home. A car pulled up. A man got out the passenger side and threw a rock through the front picture window. I picked up the pellet pistol kept near the door. My wife correctly objected to that aspect of my paranoia, but threatening phone calls were common. I stepped out and shot once. I doubt I hit anything. The guy jumped back in the car, and it sped away. About the same time that night a similar thing happened to two friends, also movement activists. Scott Eatherly (deceased) got a rock. The Sutherland's garage was lit on fire instead.

The next morning, the three of us received mail with glued on letters cut from a magazine. Mine read something like "Next time it will be a bullet through your head, not a rock through the window." Also included was a commercially printed card stating it was from the KKK. It had a picture of rifle scope cross hairs and stated the sights are focused on the back of your neck. Together we met with the Normal police chief and lieutenants. They laughed. It seemed clear they were already well apprised. So much for Officer Friendly.

A friend and sometime US participant had been the business manager of the Pantagraph until he was fired when a copy of the leftist National Guardian was discovered in his desk. He then operated a private parking lot at the city's center. He also acted as a stringer for the local FBI Special Agent by feeding them information, but it went both ways. Without hearing the rock/fire/threat story he told me that persons from downstate were brought in by the FBI to administer the incident. His vehicle description fit.

Robert Bone, ISU's president, was a movement sympathizer. It was he who had given me permission to take off work to go to Selma. That was over the University High School superintendent's objection. I received a call at my office one day from Jim Fisher, Bone's assistant. He explained Bone wanted to talk to me personally but had to see his wife in the hospital. He instructed Fisher to give me the message that Bone had discovered an attempt would be made to fire me. The president's message continued that they would have to get rid of him first. I heard no more about it, but years later thanked the then retired president Bone. He too quickly said he didn't recall.

Years later after a University High School administrative change, I discovered the school kept a file of Pantagraph clippings on my activities. I had them destroy it.

A cab driver friend called from a phone booth and requested a meeting. He said he overheard the local FBI agent and state's attorney discussing plans to raid my home along with others and discover pot. I had none, but they probably did. I Never used it. The raid never took place.

In those days a room bug was simplicity in itself. One had only to unscrew a phone's mouthpiece, phone the target, and not hang up. The line remained open, bugged, and appeared dead. Many times I would attempt a phone call and find a dead line. The line itself was also tapped. I confronted two guys installing it on the pole in my back yard. They had an unmarked truck with other state license plates and said they were working on contract. The phone company denied it, and a neighbor employee informed me of the tap, as did a local police officer. The job was evidently not very well done. Several times the police department answered my calls placed to other parties. I had a separate unlisted line installed, and that was apparently overlooked. I used to chuckle at hours spent by someone unknown listening to my preteen daughters' endless conversations.

I built a bug tracing receiver and used it to locate and remove bugs from homes. With one very clumsy installation, we actually got word the Normal police wanted their equipment back.

There were some important papers I kept secret for family reasons that had nothing to do with movement activities. They were in an envelope taped behind a locked office file drawer. Years later on leaving that office, I discovered they were gone.

I never went to the trouble of obtaining my FBI and other agency files. Bob Sutherland and Ralph Smith did. My name was frequently noted. No telling what the blacked out parts were, but much of the information had been submitted by local patriotic right wing fanatics. There was no verification of any of their paranoiac garbage.

Some national church council promoted a thing where we refused to pay the special war tax imposed on phone bills. The phone company simply notified the IRS of the lacking 23 cents or so each month. I would receive and ignore IRS notes to pay the 23 cents. Each month's was separate and seemed to be from a different office. Then the 3 am phone calls demanding payment began. Next, they simply took it from my bank account, 23 cents at a time. My wife and I attended an old college friends reunion party at a distant city home of a former apartment mate. He was chief of IRS enforcement for the Midwest. When we were drunk enough, I joked of the matter. His response was that they would harass us as we harass them and get that 23 cents back over and over and over. He knew all about my activities, job, kids, etc. We hadn't seen each other or communicated for 15 years.

When my wife acquired a university secretarial job, a state senator from Pontiac raised hell about the school hiring the wife of a "communist". The Pantagraph did a full coverage story of his rantings on the Senate floor. No one asked for a response from us.

FADING OUT

University High School was politically at the bottom of the university totem pole. In the late 70's there was serious talk of closing it. The others involved in CSA were secure in their personal positions. I had years before dropped out of a mathematics PhD program at the University of Illinois because of movement activity. I couldn't do both, and the latter was

more important. My professional position was in jeopardy, and I decided it was time to take care of myself and family. I faded out of movement activity, began studying computer science at ISU, and in the early 80's moved to the university computer science department.

PERSONAL DUES

We retired in 1987. Roberta was a university secretary without full retirement vesting. My pension was based on the last few years highest salaries earned. That was lower than it could have been due to movement activity. Lack of a PhD was one factor. So, was the reputation developed over 15 years. I was essentially viewed in the work place as a professional embarrassment. Such was not conducive to salary increases, and those, both while working and in retirement, are percentage based. As a result, though having more than many, we enjoy less wealth than could have been otherwise. The small penalty is diminished by having learned to live within our means and lessened more now by residing in Mexico. We believed and still consider the value of affluence secondary to that of holding true to convictions. One makes choices based on values. I would make the same ones again today.

Though money was secondary, we felt real hurt every time our young daughters came home crying after finding a friend wasn't allowed to play with them because of their parents' activities. It went farther than the strain of peer relationships, of utmost importance to young people, and included even being singled out in class and shamed by ignorant teachers. The shadow of our public reputation was always upon them. Our dues was one thing, but the kids' was another. We hope what they gained was more than lost.

WHERE DID THEY GO

Often I now hear that the movement is a thing of the past or has fizzled. Not so. Several former workers I'd known with SNCC and SCLC have risen to national prominence and still fight for their beliefs while occupying positions as large city mayors and councilmen, members of congress, international emissaries, and even a presidential candidate.

Though living in Mexico, we have traveled back in summers to see the kids. Every once in a while we get together with old US and CSA friends. They still meet and are still actively and similarly involved with issues of the day.

I can offer other examples of those I'd known locally. A minister in the civil rights movement becomes an attorney, retires after heading a poverty law center, and now organizes to oppose bank discriminatory lending practices. A publisher of an underground newspaper goes to school after serving prison time, also becomes an attorney, heads a state ACLU office, and vacations in Latin America monitoring rightist response to guerilla struggles. He last visited us in Mexico after escaping as a prisoner of a right wing private army. A professor of English retires to write articles supporting social action and publishes a book to that end. A NAACP past president once arrested for being a black Santa Claus still fights discriminatory hiring. An SDS militant becomes a nationally known drug

rehabilitation consultant. A college student moves to union organizer and now sits on a city council. Another is a social worker who works fighting his bosses rather than clients, knowing the struggle is about power. A black activist and organizer becomes a physician and presses for socialized medicine. Another couple become peace corp volunteers in Peru. This trip down memory lane leaves many out.

COMMENTS ON THE ARTICLE

The following pages are a copy of Ms. Hansen's article as it appeared in the online edition of The Daily Pantagraph on Sunday, February 16, 2003. I consider it accurate and fair and am happy to have shared in providing information. Though it has taken the Pantagraph some 38 years to fairly note the existence of US, their doing so is still welcomed. That we helped in that may be considered in a way as a sort of a delayed US action. In that, I for one welcome the entire staff of the Pantagraph as fellow members of US.

There are many related dangers and wrongs still begging for correction in today's world. One never knows what the long term outcome of any activity will be. I can only hope in this case that these new members of US with their publication may have encouraged others younger and more able to join the process which we older members of US neither began nor finished but simply fitted into and helped.



Pantagraph Photographs



Pantagraph file photos



The Pantagraph/DAVID PROFFER

Merlin Kennedy, 76, held up a decades-old Pantagraph article with the headline "ISU Students in New March." Kennedy was recounting his experiences as a member of US and as a civil rights march organizer during the 1960s.

Left: People in a freedom march sponsored by the US group walked around the downtown square in Bloomington on March 13, 1965. **Above:** In September 1968, US group protesters and members of the ISU Peace and Freedom group protested a Normal nursery, charging the nursery discriminated by turning down an application from a minority family. Owners of the nursery had denied the charge, saying the nursery was full.

Discriminated found voice in US

By Karen Hansen
Pantagraph staff

BLOOMINGTON -- During the turbulent 1960s, a small group of Twin City residents helped make big civil rights gains.

US challenged landlords, government bureaucrats and local businesses in an attempt to fight discrimination against blacks and others without a voice.

Often unannounced and uninvited, members regularly questioned the policies and practices of organizations ranging from the town of Normal to the Bloomington Housing Authority.

Key to its success was the freedom to operate without the rules and regulations of more conventional organizations, such as the NAACP and Bloomington-Normal Human Relations Council.

"It was basically a group to agitate and confront," said 76-year-old Merlin Kennedy, an US member and longtime Twin City civil rights leader.

"This way, we could act on the spot. We didn't have to answer to anybody."

Not just conversations

The group's formation came as segregation and discrimination were being questioned throughout the country.

Former Bloomington resident George Warren was among those asking questions.

After joining civil rights protests in Selma, Ala., and Jackson, Miss., Warren was encouraged by other participants to see what he could accomplish at home.

At the time, Bloomington-Normal restaurants allowed only whites, several crosses had been burned at black homes,

and most interaction between blacks and whites was financial, recalled Warren, who now lives in Mexico.

He began working with "action-oriented" friends, both black and white, many of whom were also involved in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the human relations commission.

Initial membership was about 15; later there was overlap with other organizations such as the Community for Social Action. A mimeographed newsletter distributed via black churches, a black tavern, and even a local madam, kept supporters current.

"George felt an urgency to become more active, and not just have conversations about civil rights," recalled Twin City attorney Jack Porter, who was a minister at a small Presbyterian church when he joined the group.

"The idea of becoming more active, more confrontational -- we were open to that. I don't think we had anything special in mind when George challenged us to do something different."

Housing, parades, protests

But they quickly found issues to keep them busy.

- Joining other groups concerned about fair housing, the US group sent "testers" into the community to try to obtain rental housing.

"We would send a black couple out ... and they'd get refused. We'd send a white couple out and if we found they'd rent to a white couple, we'd jump on it," said Kennedy.

- Members protested Bloomington Housing Authority policies that called for many blacks to be segregated in the west end of Sunnyside housing complex.

It also took the Bloomington Housing Authority to task because none of its board members lived in public housing and complained about leases they said violated tenants' rights.

- In Normal, members protested an advisory referendum on renting or selling homes to minorities.

"Total open occupancy will come because it is both reasonable and right," an US group member told the Normal City Council in 1967.

- When Bloomington officials threatened to demolish the condemned home of a poor black woman, US volunteers helped overhaul the house, providing new walls, a new roof and upgraded plumbing and electricity.

- The annual Christmas parades in Bloomington offered

several opportunities for public statements. One year, the group made a float that said "Boycott Sears -- Give love this year, not gifts." At the time, the downtown department store refused to employ black salespeople.

Another year, Kennedy was arrested for being a black Santa Claus -- a move that received national attention.

Many times, to get attention, the group also took to the picket line.

"We were out in the street, hitting the pavement quite a bit," Kennedy said.

'Everybody had a voice'

And while it fought for civil rights within the community, the group itself could be considered a lesson in democracy.

US members met weekly to discuss issues. Everyone was expected to provide input, Warren recalled, but there were neither motions nor votes.

"There was a lot of freedom ... in the proceedings. Anybody could bring up an issue. Everybody had a voice. We tried to operate with consensus," said 82-year-old Francis Irvin, a retired school teacher and US member.

But not surprisingly, there were also frustrations.

Group members often worried about their jobs. Kennedy recalled docked paychecks when he missed work to attend meetings.

"I lost money," he said. "The wife -- she didn't like it too well."

Warren had a rock thrown through his window.

At one point, US was investigated by a Washington think tank, and Warren had his home bugged. But members weren't deterred.

"What we did was simply our nature," Warren said. "People do what they have to do."