



SCOPE50 News

The Struggle Continues!
SCOPE50.org

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Hospital Workers Strike, Charleston, SC, 1969

In 1969, when twelve women at Charleston's Medical College Hospital refused to air their grievances about low wages and long hours individually, as their supervisors insisted they do, they were fired. When other nurses and nurse assistants, both at the Medical College Hospital and two other local hospitals, heard about the dismissals, they went on strike, insisting the hospital rehire the dozen protesters and consider their complaints. The strike lasted for 113 days. SCLC was asked for its support, and Dr. Abernathy, believing this was a logical continuation of the Poor People's Campaign, sent staff to Charleston to assist the hospital workers in their efforts. Dr. Abernathy himself spent half the strike behind bars on a charge of inciting riot.

This March was the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the strike, and several events have been planned in Charleston to honor the strikers and their contribution to the civil and labor rights movements. On March 23, the co-chairs of the renewed Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival – Rev. William Barber II and Rev. Liz Theoharis – were guest speakers at a program honoring the women, but they also discussed the need to build a new Poor People's Campaign. Rev. Barber, architect of the Moral Monday Movement, is head of the social justice organization, Repairers of the Breach.

John Reynolds, representing SCLC, also spoke, outlining SCLC's role during the strike and describing some of his responsibilities, for example, leading young people through downtown, ringing cowbells and bouncing basketballs, to discourage the white residents from shopping at the downtown stores as part of a boycott of local businesses to apply economic pressure that might prompt merchants to push the hospitals to reach a settlement.





Louise Brown, one of the 12 hospital workers Vera Small, youngest of the 12 hospital workers

Eventually, the two sides struck a deal. The nurses received a modest raise, and a grievance procedure was set in place. The outcome was hailed as a victory. The strikers' complaints were acknowledged. The Hospital Workers Strike had been a bold fusion of labor power and civil rights protest that transformed Charleston, South Carolina, and the nation.

Poor Peoples Campaign

At its last annual meeting, the SCOPE50 Board voted to partner with the new Poor People's Campaign since SCLC has given up its claim to the Poor People's Campaign, one of SCLC's last major projects, which a number of us worked on. Since that meeting, we have been attempting to put a working relationship together, and we are now at the stage of collaboration. The Rev. William Barber has picked up where Dr. Abernathy and Hosea Williams left off in 1969, and has announced that fairly soon there will be a nationwide bus tour meant to draw attention to the nation's 95 million Americans considered poor or low-income. We will provide more details at a later date.



Rev. Barber states that the number of Americans in poverty has increased by 60%, to 40.6 million, since the late 1960s, according to an Institute of Poverty Studies report prepared for the Poor People's Campaign. The majority of American poor, more than 17 million people, are white. The number of poor blacks is 9.2 million. And about 11 million of the country's poor are Latinos, according to the report. When Dr. King conceived of the Poor People's Campaign in 1968, he believed that we could make a significant dent in poverty. But according to this report, that hasn't become a reality. One of the reasons that SCOPE50 voted to partner with the new Poor People's Campaign is because we feel that this is still an important issue.

Article about Richard Smiley and Lanny Kaufer

In the last issue of the SCOPE50 Newsletter, we reported on the visit that Richard Smiley and Lanny Kaufer made to the Midland School in Los Olivos, California – Richard's high school alma mater – where they shared their experiences in the Civil Rights Movement. A local newspaper (the *Santa Ynez Valley News*) published an article about their visit, which we thought we would share with you.

Civil rights veterans visit Santa Ynez Valley; remember Selma March, Martin Luther King, Jr.

by Lisa Andre

The Santa Ynez Valley has a connection to some of the most historic events of the Civil Rights Movement recalled during the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday and Black History Month. Richard Smiley, 70, a civil rights activist and 1968 graduate of Midland School in Los Olivos, was invited back to his alma mater in late January to speak to students and teachers about his personal experiences during the height of desegregation and the fight for equal voting rights in the South. Friend and fellow civil rights veteran Lanny Kaufer, a UCSB student during that time, joined him in the presentation.



Richard Smiley

Smiley stood before a wide-eyed group of eager listeners in Midland's library, giving detailed accounts of his youth in Alabama, remembering when the KKK would surround their community meetings. He shared about one event in particular, a peaceful demonstration which quickly escalated, garnering national attention: "Bloody Sunday."

Bloody Sunday: During that time, African Americans made up more than half of Selma's population and constituted a mere 2 percent of the registered voters. Addressing the inequality were hundreds of Selma demonstrators, one of which was 15-year-old Smiley, who from an early age understood the importance of his role in the civil rights movement. "I went to jail every day," Smiley said, explaining how he dropped out of high school at 15 to stand in solidarity with his brothers and sisters. "I had a moral obligation."

On Sunday, March 7, 1965, in their first attempt to march peacefully from Selma to Montgomery, a 54-mile hike over the Alabama River via the Edmund Pettus Bridge and down US Highway 80, an estimated 600 civil rights marchers congregated, protesting the obstruction of African Americans' right to register and vote. They were met with violent opposition by state troopers. Led by Rev. Dr. Frederick Douglas Reese, according to Smiley, "We marched from the church to the bridge and saw 200 white men on horses with billy clubs; then another 200 state troopers. When we kneeled to pray,

they attacked us, pushing us back across the bridge and back to the church. They tear gassed us." In all, 17 marchers were hospitalized and 50 were treated for lesser injuries.

Smiley said King flew out to assist, encouraging the protesters to stay focused and remain undeterred. Just two days later on March 9, King led the second march across the bridge, which was met with little resistance. "There were a lot of white people, community leaders -- even dignitaries that showed up to march. There were at least 1,000 this time. Nothing happened. We kept praying," Smiley said. "We would shout, 'What you want now!' and others would yell back, 'freedom!'"

On Sunday, March 21, a third march, amassing as many as 3,200 marchers, headed from Selma for Montgomery on 12-mile-per-day walk that took four days. "The court ruled we had the right to march. We would sleep in tents along the way. There were undercover FBI agents and state troopers protecting the marchers," Smiley said. By the time they reached the capitol on March 25, they were 25,000 marchers strong. And in less than five months, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, federal legislation that prohibits racial discrimination in voting.

Midland 1968: Taken in by a very nice white lady as a child, Smiley said he was given an ultimatum: Stop the protesting or be kicked out. Referring to his foster mother, Smiley said, "She had her job and reputation on the line. I understood." Despite the difficult choice, he chose the latter. Forced out into the streets, Smiley became homeless at 16, sleeping in churches or wherever there was shelter. He said that the black community took care of him, even guiding him to stay at King's Freedom House in Atlanta for safety. "Dr. King was a joker, he liked to have fun. People tend to think he was always serious, but he was human," Smiley recalled of times spent with the civil rights leader.

Then one day, everything changed. Bob Fitch, a civil rights era photojournalist hired by King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), took Smiley under his wing, reaching out to friend Carl Munger, a faculty member at Midland School (headmaster in 1968), to inquire about enrolling Smiley into school. In response, Munger stopped in Atlanta to interview Smiley. Not long after, Smiley was accepted into Midland and was sent via bus to Los Olivos. "I was the only black student there," he recalled. Smiley further explained how incredibly bonded his cohort of 13 students became, insomuch that when King was killed on April 4, 1968, his class pooled enough money to buy him a flight to attend the funeral in Atlanta. "Our class loved each other," he said.

In 1968, Smiley finished his last year of high school and graduated from Midland, receiving a letter of completion that enabled him to attend a California community college. "Even when I left Midland, I'd come back and hang with them," he said of his cohorts. "We just celebrated our 50th class reunion in June 2018." Smiley, who currently resides in Tampa, Florida, received his official diploma from Midland in 2003, earned a bachelor's degree from Cal State and a masters degree from the University of Utah. He is a retired 24-year juvenile probation officer and an adjunct professor at Hillsborough Community College.

UCSB South: Ojai resident Lanny Kaufer, 72, a musician, songwriter, retired high school teacher, and part-time university professor, remembered his time as an 18-year-old UCSB student and activist, who not only witnessed the passing of the Voting Rights Act in August 1965, but had a hand in it. Kaufer said he shared his story with Midland students through music, at first describing his summer working with King through a special rap. "I think they were kind of amazed," he said laughing.



Lanny Kaufer (Photo credit Jim Quick)

Further detailing, he said, in 1964, as a freshman at UC Santa Barbara, he heard a Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) representative speak about King's new voter registration project scheduled for the following summer. "I thought, 'here's a chance to make a real difference,'" he said. This prompted him to volunteer. "Both of my parents were refugees. My father escaped from the Nazis in '38 and my mother's parents escaped the Russians," he said, relating his activist nature to the moral compass they handed down to him. "My parents always taught me to respect other cultures. I was primed."

As a chapter member of the SCLC program's SCOPE Project (Summer Community Organization and Political Education), Kaufer flew to southern Virginia in the summer of 1965 where he became part of the organized movement canvassing the South in an effort to register black voters. Despite a series of race-related incidents in which he and his team were refused service at a restaurant; a laundromat owner locking them inside the building, threatening them and throwing their clean clothes onto the floor; and an indirect incident that involved a fellow chapter member being driven off the road in his car, Kaufer stayed the course.

Their local SCOPE Chapter was able to extend the hours of voter registration and establish an improvement association that still exists today, by going door-to-door, attending community meetings, showing up at local churches, and doing real "grunt work," according to Kaufer. "We registered 49,000 new voters that summer." The highlight of his summer, he says, was shaking King's hand and hearing him speak, which greatly inspired him. "I got to see the fulfillment of Dr. King's nonviolent strategies. It was really profound for me, but there is still a lot of work to be done."

50th anniversary: From Oct. 1-4, 2015, SCLC's SCOPE Project members from across the country gathered to celebrate 50 years since the fight for justice in the South began. The organization recognized as 'SCOPE 50,' a non-partisan organization which promotes and encourages voter registration nationally, is where Kaufer and Smiley first crossed paths. Little did they know that they also had Santa Barbara County in common. Having both been teenagers when they answered King's call to spend the summer of 1965 in the South registering black people to vote, the two are now on the board of directors for SCOPE 50, where they see each other or talk to each other on a regular basis. "We talk between board meetings," Smiley said.

An Update on Lanny Kaufer's Presentations

Recently, students at Matilija Junior High School in Ojai, California, formed a human swastika on campus, resulting in media coverage which sparked a community discussion on hate. In an article published in the *Los Angeles Times*, it was reported that authorities say that few hate incidents are reported in this liberal valley town. But at a community forum, several black and Jewish residents reported on their personal experiences with racism and anti-Semitism. The *Los Angeles Times* article quoted Lanny Kaufer: "As a Jewish person, I was very sad to see this happen. But as a teacher, I see it as a teachable moment. I think it's great that this came out in the open," he said. "I think it's been a long time coming."

The school district has announced plans to require all Matilija students to engage in social and emotional learning curriculum in response to the incident. Lanny has been invited to bring his presentation to all 5th grade classes.

Possible Online Bookshop

A number of us on the Board of SCOPE50 have been trying to figure out a way to promote books that have been written by SCOPE workers and SCLC staff, possibly creating an online bookstore. A small committee, led by Lanny Kaufer and Jo Freeman, are working on this. In the meantime we have put a list of books on the SCOPE50 website (SCOPE50.org) and we will be adding to this list. If you know of additional books that should be on this list, please contact Lanny Kaufer at civilrightsvet@gmail.com.

Annual SCOPE50 Board Meeting

The annual SCOPE50 board meeting will be held May 16-19, 2019, at a conference facility in the Charleston, South Carolina, area.

A Loss in our SCOPE50 Family

We received the sad news that our friend and colleague Lynn Goldberg had unexpectedly lost her husband Larry. It was a shock to all of us since Lynn had reported a couple weeks before that Larry was responding well to treatment. We encourage all of you to hold Lynn in prayer. Larry had been supportive of SCOPE50 and the work that Lynn had been doing, and he had accompanied her to SCOPE50 events.