

Felicia

By Alan Gorg

My involvement in the civil rights movement began while I was a student at UCLA. Residential areas and employment in California had been largely segregated historically and remained so until the 1960s. As a result, schools were mostly segregated, and there were only two African-American students in a student population over 2,000 at Hollywood High School when I attended. My education in the history of racial segregation in America came from black students I met at UCLA. They and the news reports made me conscious of what needed to be done.

As an entering freshman at UCLA, I had pledged a fraternity, but became embarrassed by a total absence of people of color there, so I quit the fraternity and found companionship with the independent, racially mixed students.

South Los Angeles and Inglewood were not areas with people of color when I was young. But Caucasian homeowners there found they could get higher prices selling to blacks who wanted to move there, which, however, led to white flight west and north, so South Los Angeles and Inglewood became African-American, and then Latino, too.

My first step into civil rights action was joining the picket line protesting racial segregation in housing at the sales office for the Don Wilson housing development in Torrance. I joined the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and we approached employers to hire people of color, who began appearing in office jobs in Los Angeles. On Sunset Boulevard, where for many years black women were taking the bus west to clean the homes of the upper classes in Beverly Hills, Brentwood, Bel Air, Pacific Palisades, Malibu, the African-American females were gradually replaced by Latino women, mostly illegal immigrants not able to work many places.

My spare time went to civil rights meetings, work, and demonstrations. My wife of 51 years, Gwyn Gorg, then a student from Los Angeles City College, I met in civil rights, after she had been arrested by Torrance police, for participating in a group NAACP and CORE sit-in at the Don Wilson housing tract.

Since I was a film student, I thought about making a film. My fellow film students Bob Dickson and Trevor Greenwood agreed that a film presenting a black viewpoint and appealing to young people was what we wanted to do.



Felicia Bragg, a mixed-race teenager from the Watts area of Los Angeles, discusses her feelings toward her community on the eve of race riots. Courtesy A/V Geeks.

CORE brought me into contact with many people. A teacher I had met at Jordan High School in the black ghetto of South Los Angeles introduced me to her student, Felicia, and Felicia's mother and brother and sister, at their tiny old house in Watts.

My UCLA filmmaker friends Bob Dickson, Trevor Greenwood, and myself, agreed that white people in Los Angeles, who in those days a half-century ago rarely encountered any black people because of the strict segregation in housing and employment, should learn that black people are people.

While we were in the process of shooting "Felicia," we did the editing at UCLA, and another fellow student, Stuart Roe, who was involved in film distribution, liked our project and offered to pay our post-production costs and do distribution for us. He took a producer credit for himself.

Please let me note that working cooperatively with Bob and Trevor was far more pleasant than my subsequent films, all of which required me to shoulder most of the production work on my lonesome, except family.

My feeling is that the informal atmosphere, with Trevor, Bob, and myself the only film people ever present when we shot, made Felicia feel relaxed and comfortable throughout our project

Stuart Roe only got us paid once for a total of \$500, which we donated to Felicia's mother as a thank you and because she needed money.

Subsequently, Trevor began a lifelong career a distinguished motion picture Professor at the University of Southern California, winning an Academy Award with his short "The Redwoods."

Bob and I did "The Savages," a documentary short about black high school dropouts in the black ghetto which existed at that time in Venice, California, heavy drinking and wild, again presenting young black people as people.

Bob produced for the BBC and is now at the UCLA Motion Picture Library. I got into raising five children with double teaching shifts. Our family proceeded on to make our last documentary short "Autobiography of a Hopi," before the introduction of video production killed 16mm documentary film production and distribution.

David Monongye, a spokesman for traditional Hopi resistance against oil and mining on the Hopi reservation, was introduced at a CORE meeting, brought there by a member of TILL, the Committee for Traditional Indian Land and Life. The traditionals wanted their conflict known about and asked me to make a film. So I drove the 600 miles from Los Angeles to the Hopi reservation in Arizona--many times, on vacation breaks from school, with our whole family. "Autobiography of a Hopi," was shot secretly on the Hopi reservation, where photography is prohibited.

What I learned from the Hopi traditionals changed my viewpoint in life. The "Progressives" on the Hopi reservation run for elected office on the Tribal Council established by federal law and favor development, business, industry, oil, mining, making money and material wealth.

But the name Hopi means "peaceful people", The Hopi lived in peace there on their sacred mesas for a thousand years before the Europeans came. They

were content with their lives until missionaries came and soldiers came to take away the children 500 miles to a government boarding school, not to see their family for five years, returning brainwashed into wanting to make money, but then drafted into the Army to make war.

Moving into feature filmmaking with only family and friends and credit cards, still seeking to tell the untold that needed to be told, our family, friends, and I took many years to make just two feature films, but good films with important content for making the world a better place: R&B Hall of Fame legend Sam Taylor in the movie "Living the Blues", a classic story of interracial romance in conflict, and a cop shooting a black teenager. Winner of the FilmTrax Award at the International Festival of Music in Film. The other production is "Earth Spirit," a film docudrama supporting resistance by indigenous peoples against exploitation and pollution by oil and mining,

Currently, my wife Gwyn is President, and I am on the Board of Directors, of our local community non-profit organization African Americans On Maui (AAOM), which is dedicated to promoting understanding among diverse peoples here in Hawaii and around the World. While my genetics are not African-American, my wife and children are, so our family can be viewed as African-American, but our organization is open to all. For our AAOM project for peace among peoples, we are looking to find a grant for an educational documentary/docudrama with American veterans who say, no more war!

The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Library of Congress.

Alan Gorg, (B.S. 1952 and M.F.A. 1970, U.C.L.A.), teacher/writer/producer/director/actor, has written and produced documentary films for the University of California and PBS, and founded theater groups in Hawaii and California.. Media Associates published his two autobiographical novellas "Proof That God Exists: Sixties Biographies" and "Encounters with Aboriginal Philosophers."