

## Excerpt from Oral History Interview with Wendell Miller

Interviewed by Robert Marshall as part of the Urban Archives General Oral History project in 1996, Miller was pastor of the University Methodist Church, Los Angeles from the 1930s to the 1950s. He was a conscientious objector during the interwar period between 1918-1939, and was labeled a radical for his public anti-war stance in Los Angeles. In this clip he describes some of his anti-war activism during the 1930s, and the backlash it garnered.

### Transcript:

RM: How did this come about that they started calling you a radical? Are you saying, what, the local neighbors were calling you radical? Who was calling you radical?

WM: Yes. Yes. Well, I was against war. I was a conscientious objector. So I had a big sign as long as this room is, and about so high, and painted across, "Truth Is The First Casualty Of War." And I had it hanging there all during that particular time.

RM: And what year was this?

WM: 1932.

RM: Okay.

WM: From '32 to '36. I had...they had Tokogia Kagowa from Japan, who started the Kingdom of God movement over there. Their government jailed him first because he apologized to the Chinese for invading them. And we organized a Kagowa League, and I was on Kagowa's American Committee. And in the...we called it Decorate Memorial Day, they had a parade. A military time parade, the American Legion and others, and we...we entered a float, which they didn't know what it was about until it was too late to do anything about it. We got a big truck, flat bed truck, and we made a mound of dirt like a grave, and put the cross on it and hung a helmet there, and in a wheelchair we had a blind soldier, and on the side again, we put "Truth Is The First Casualty Of War," and such.

They were very indignant, but it was too late, so we entered it in there. Then we had a carpenter. He was the father of some of our young folk. And we made a bus stop bench, 'cause that was...that harbor...I mean, Florence Avenue, was one of the busiest thoroughfares in L.A. at that time. And our church is right on the sidewalk right to it. And we had a bus stop bench made, and we put on the back, "Millions For War! How Much For Peace?" And we had a box where we put peace literature in it. And...

RM: What was going on in the world at the time to make you do this?

WM: Well, we had gone through the last war...

RM: World War One.

WM: ...the First World War. We'd gone through that. And I began to realize the futility of war. To me, it was an un-Christian method of dealing with international problems. And at that time, Governor Marion [sic], was the governor of Los Angeles...

RM: The mayor of Los Angeles?

WM: The governor of...

RM: The governor of California?

WM: ...of California. And they were having a new election and Upton Sinclair decided to run. And I supported him publicly, and wrote articles and the like, supporting him. And... because Upton Sinclair, if you know about his writings and all, he was...well, more socialist than anything else, although he ran on the Democratic Party thinking that would be the best way. And I immediately supported him publicly. It was known I supported him, and our church had two big electric signs right on the sidewalk. On the one, I put the hours of our service and different activities. On the other, I put "I would rather vote for an atheist who acts like a Christian, than a Christian who acts like an atheist." Well, that immediately stirred everybody up. [Laughing.] And, well...

RM: What were some of the reactions?

WM: Well, we got all kinds of letters and they broke some of the windows up there in front. And then I organized...I helped sponsor what we called the "Interracial Quest Group for Understanding." The secretary of the Urban League and I, we organized it wherein we were studying problems which were akin to both races. And...but we did more than just study. We organized it so we had a singing group, and we had a drama group. We put on plays in some of the theaters on Central Avenue. And so, then the Klu Klux Klan came and burned two crosses on our lawn. The first one on the...the parsonage lawn, which was right behind the church, and then one on the church lawn, and put on the door the big sign, "Communism Will Not Be Tolerated, Klu Klux Klan Rides Again," and all that stuff.

RM: And what year was this?

WM: Oh, sure.

RM: What year was this?

WM: That would be 1933.

RM: 1933.