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Greensboro Sit-Ins [1]

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by Alexander R. Stoesen, 2006

See also: Greensboro Four [2], Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [3].

Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Billy Smith and Clarence Henderson. Greensboro News and Record.

The Greensboro [4] sit-ins of February 1960 launched the movement to integrate lunch counters and other eating establishments throughout North Carolina and the rest of the South. Sit-ins [5] had previously occurred in other places, but the Greensboro protests sparked widespread activism and media attention. The sit-ins began when four students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University [6]—Ezell A. Blair [7] (now Jibreel Khazan), Franklin E. McCain [8], Joseph A. McNeil [9], and David L. Richmond [10]—sat at the lunch counter of the Woolworth Store on Elm Street in Greensboro late on the afternoon of 1 Feb. 1960. At the time, Woolworth's only served African Americans [11] at a stand-up counter. Instead of having the students arrested for trespassing, the manager closed the lunch counter, intending to leave them stranded at closing time. The Greensboro store, one of the most profitable in the region, had a large black clientele-hence the need for prudence. However, by not filing charges, the manager left an opening for further nonviolent action.

The next day, the number of demonstrators grew rapidly, and in the days and weeks that followed, sit-ins spread to other eating places in Greensboro's central business district. Some managers closed their operations, but by the end of the summer an agreement had been reached to end segregation [12] in public eating places. In the process, Greensboro became an important focal point of the civil rights movement [13]. In addition to the integration of many businesses, a principal outcome of the sit-ins at the national level was the creation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [3], which pushed for the use of direct action to obtain civil rights [14].

In 1993 several local civic leaders founded an organization called Sit-In Movement, Inc., to purchase the original Woolworth building on Elm Street and create a museum to memorialize the events of 1960 and the years following. The modern-day International Civil Rights Center and Museum [15] features a large auditorium, an art gallery, and 14 informative exhibits, including a popular "lunch counter experience."

Educator Resources:

Grade 8: Greensboro Sit-Ins: A “Counter Revolution” in North Carolina. North Carolina Civic Education Consortium. http://database.civics.unc.edu/files/2012/04/GreensboroSitInsCounterRevo... [16]

Grade 8: Sitting Down To Stand Up For Democracy. North Carolina Civic Education Consortium. http://civics.sites.unc.edu/files/2012/04/SittingDownToStandUpForDemocra... [17]

References:

William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*(1980).

Miles H. Wolff, *Lunch at the Five and Ten: The Greensboro Sit-Ins, a Contemporary History*(1970).

Additional Resources:

Primary source documents in NC Digital Collections,https://digital.ncdcr.gov/documents?search=sit-ins&searchtypes=Metadata|Full%20text&applyState=true [18]. (Includes letters written to N.C. Governor Luther Hodges by students)

"Greensboro Sit-ins: Launch of a Civil Rights Movement"*News-Record* (Greensboro, N.C.) http://sitins.com/index.shtml [19] (accessed June 27, 2012).

"The Object of History: Behind the Scenes with the Curators of the National Museum of American History: The Lunch Counter." Smithsonian National Museum of American History. http://objectofhistory.org/objects/intro/lunchcounter/ [20] (accessed June 27, 2012).

"Greensboro Sit-Ins at Woolworth's, February-July 1960." Civil Rights Greensboro.University of North Carolina at Greensboro [21]. http://library.uncg.edu/dp/crg/topicalessays/busdesegsitins.aspx [22] (accessed June 27, 2012).

"Sit-Ins." North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program. https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=map&sv=J-79 [23] (accessed June 27, 2012).

Gaillard, Frye. *The Greensboro Four: Civil Rights Pioneers*. Charlotte, N.C.: Main Street Rag Publishing Co. 2001.

Image Credits:

Students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College sit in at the whites-only lunch counter at the F. W. Woolworth store in downtown Greensboro on 1 Feb. 1960. Left to right: Ezell Blair, Franklin McCain, David Richmond, and Joseph McNeil. Greensboro News and Record.

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Authors:
Stoesen, Alexander R. [27]
Origin - location:
Greensboro [28]
From:
Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.[29]
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