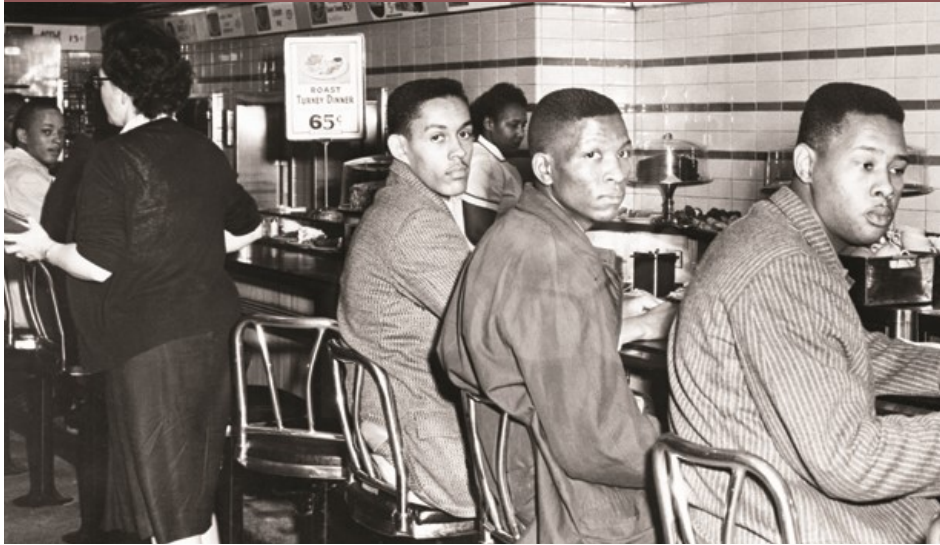


Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-In

Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-In February 2nd, 1960



*Ronald Martin, Robert Patterson, and Mark Martin at a sit-down strike after being refused service at an F.W. Woolworth luncheon counter, Greensboro, N.C.
Credit: Bettmann / Contributor*

On February 1, 1960 four freshmen at the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College walked into the F.W. Woolworth store in Greensboro. They quietly sat down at the lunch counter and refused service. These students, Frank McCain, David Richmond, Joseph McNeil, and Ezell Blair Jr., launched a movement of lunch counter sit-ins across the south. It was not the first desegregation sit-in, but it had special significance because it was initiated by black college students and served as a model for discontented black students in other colleges. The next morning they came with more than 20 students. On the third day over 60 students joined the sit-in. On the fourth day, the students were joined by three white female students from the Women's College of the University of North Carolina, and by the fifth day Woolworth had more than three hundred demonstrators at the store. The next day the company said they were willing to negotiate, but only token changes were made. The students resumed their sit-ins, the city adopted more stringent segregation policies, and forty-five students were arrested and charged with trespassing. The students were so enraged by this that they launched a massive boycott of stores with segregated lunch counters. There were instances where the protesters were beaten not by the police but by white residents. Some of this was broadcast on television. Sales dropped by a third, forcing the store owners to relent. Six months from the very first sit-in, the four freshmen returned and were served at Woolworth's lunch counter.

Questions:

1. Does this protest reflect the Black Panther Party's approach or SCLC's approach? Cite specific evidence.
2. Is this an example of a non-violent protest? Cite specific evidence as to why or why not?
3. Does it seem to have been a successful form of resistance? Why or why not?

Resisting Racism Reading 1: March From Selma

When about 600 people started a planned march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, on Sunday March 7, 1965, it was called a demonstration. When state troopers met the demonstrators at the edge of the city by the Edmund Pettus Bridge, that day became known as “Bloody Sunday.” Why were the people marching?

One hundred years after the end of the Civil War, many African Americans were still facing barriers which either prevented or made it very difficult for them to register to vote. In Selma, African Americans made up almost half the population, but only two percent were registered voters. Discrimination and intimidation tactics aimed at blacks kept them from registering and voting. The demonstrators marched to demand fairness in voter registration.

John Lewis was a key organizer of the march. The 25-year-old son of an Alabama sharecropper was the leader of an organization dedicated to ending segregation and to registering black voters. The movement practiced non-violence. Lewis and other leaders asked the demonstrators not to fight back against anyone who committed violence against them during the peaceful protest. What did the demonstrators do when the heavily armed state troopers confronted them?

The marchers paused for a moment, then kept walking. The sheriff warned the people that they had two minutes to break up the march, but the deputies attacked sooner. The demonstrators were tear-gassed, clubbed, spat on, whipped, trampled by horses, and jeered by others for demanding the right to register to vote. Television and newspapers carried pictures of the event that became known as “Bloody Sunday.”

The images sickened, outraged, and electrified people throughout the country. Within 48 hours, demonstrations in support of the marchers were held in 80 cities. Many of the nation’s religious and lay leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr., flew to Selma. After one more failed attempt, there was a peaceful march from Selma to Montgomery. Congress responded to these events by enacting the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

John Lewis went on to serve as Director of the Voter Education Project (VEP), a program which added nearly four million minorities to the voter rolls. Today he is a U.S. Congressman.

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Resisting Racism Reading 2: Boycott Ready For McCrory's, Woolworth

New York Amsterdam News. 1 April 1961

In the 1950s, Brooklyn CORE remained a small organization primarily based on college campuses. In 1960, however, events in the south mobilized Brooklyn supporters in the historically black community of Bedford-Stuyvesant to organize Brooklyn CORE as a community-based organization. Among Brooklyn CORE's first actions were a series of boycotts in support of the southern campaign to integrate Woolworth.

Boycott Ready for McCrory's, Woolworth

Brooklyn residents pledged to fall in line behind members of the Brooklyn Congress of Racial Equality and picket two national chain stores beginning 1 P.M., Saturday, April 1. We'll "continue to picket them forever, if necessary in an effort to force their southern outlets to serve Negroes at lunch counters and hire Negroes at the same lunch counters to serve the public," Mrs. Josephine Tomlinson CORE director said. The pledge came from a group of some three hundred Brooklynites who met at CORE's headquarters, 603 Eastern Parkway, Monday night and decided they would walk picket lines before Woolworth at 408 Fulton Street and McCrory Department Store at 492 Fulton Street. "These two are on Brooklyn's mainstream and we'll picket them indefinitely, possibly forever with our children taking over from us, if they refuse to desegregate their southern branches," Dorothy Spells, a CORE official told this paper. Brooklyn residents, who will picket in small-number relays, will report for picket duty before the stores at 12:30 P.M., CORE officials said.

Courtesy of the Brooklyn Public Library

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3. Does it seem to have been a successful form of resistance? Why or why not?

Resisting Racism Reading 5: Freedom Rides

In 1961 CORE undertook a new tactic aimed at desegregating public transportation throughout the south. These tactics became known as the “Freedom Rides.”

The Freedom Riders were a group consisting of students and civil rights activists who used nonviolent tactics and rode interstate buses into the segregated southern states to test the United States Supreme Court decisions *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960), which declared that segregation in interstate travel, including bus station facilities, violated the Interstate Commerce Act. Despite the ruling, law enforcement officials within some local jurisdictions in southern states still supported segregation between African Americans and European Americans on interstate buses, and many citizens in the South also supported the segregationist stance within their towns.

On May 4, 1961, 13 activists in Washington, D.C. climbed aboard Greyhound and Trailways buses bound for New Orleans. Some of the riders made only partial journeys, with new activists taking their places along the way. The riders consisted of a mix of African Americans and Caucasians, with clergy and students comprising the majority of the group.

The early portion of the journey passed with little incident. However, as the group moved deeper into the South, hostility from local citizens and law enforcement officials increased. In South Carolina, an angry mob beat the riders. Martin Luther King Jr., meeting the group in Georgia, warned, “You will never make it through Alabama.”

Despite the threats, the Freedom Riders continued their journey. Just outside of Anniston, Alabama, segregationists firebombed one of the buses and a mob attempted to attack the riders as they fled the burning vehicle. When the second bus reached Birmingham, Alabama, a mob with similar intentions also assaulted the riders, who were dragged away and beaten nearly to death. The Freedom Riders were not allowed to leave the city for five days as Bull Connor, Birmingham’s Public Safety Commissioner, effectively held them hostage.

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