

A “Counter Revolution” in NC: The Greensboro Sit-Ins

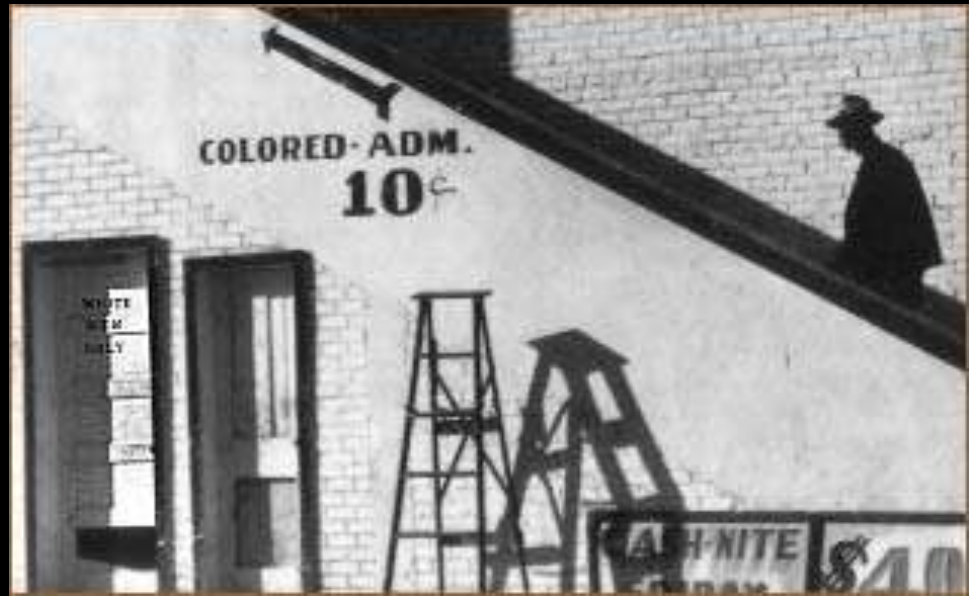


Power Point Accompaniment for the Consortium’s lesson “A Counter Revolution,”
available in the Database of Civic Resources (in PDF format) at:

www.civics.org/resources/docs/GreensboroCounterRevolution.pdf

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SEGREGATION



What “double standard” do you think this poster is referring to?



People demonstrating outside the Kress department store in Greensboro, NC in 1960.

A New Form of Protest: Sit-Ins



As a means of protesting segregated lunch counters and stores, African Americans and white allies began to organize “sit-ins,” a form of peaceful protest in which participants would take a seat meant for “whites only” and wait for service.



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“The Greensboro Four”

- Why do you think the simple act of four friends sitting at a lunch counter was considered “legendary?”
- What were Franklin, Ezell, Joseph, and David risking by sitting at the “white only” counter?
- Why do you think the students refused to respond to the threats and harassment they experienced with violence?
- Why do you think the sit-in movement spread to so many other cities and states?
- How would you characterize the four college students who started this movement, as well as all the other high school and college students who participated?
- Why is it important to stand up for what you believe in?
- What are other ways you can make a difference, regardless of your age?

“The Greensboro Four”



The Greensboro Sit-In: Feb. 1, 1960

- On February 1st, 1960, four students from North Carolina A&T University walked into a Woolworth store in Greensboro.
- They made several purchases, then sat down at the “whites-only” lunch counter and ordered coffee.
- They were denied service, ignored and then asked to leave.
- Police arrived on the scene, but without provocation, no arrest could be made.
- They remained seated at the counter until the store closed early at 5 p.m.
- The four friends immediately returned to campus and recruited others for the cause.



The Greensboro Sit-In: Feb. 2, 1960

- Twenty-five men (including the four freshmen) & four women returned to the F.W. Woolworth store on Feb. 2, 1960.
- The students sat from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. while white patrons heckled them. Undaunted, they sat with books and study materials.
- AP news reporters & local TV news crews monitored the scene.
- Police were again present, the students remained peaceful, and were again refused service.
- Once the sit-ins hit the news, momentum picked up and students across the community embraced the movement. (By the next day, protests in High Point, NC occurred.)

The Greensboro Sit-In: Feb. 3-4, 1960

- By opening time, there were students scrambling to get seats at Woolworth's, but there was also a growing opposition group.
- Whites continually taunted the demonstrators, who refused to respond to incitement or provocation, and remained non-violent.
- The sit-ins were on the national news and the protests spread to Winston-Salem, N. C.
- On February 4, female students from Bennett College & Greensboro Women's College joined the sit-in, including three white students.
- The protests had effectively paralyzed Woolworth's & other Greensboro businesses.



The Greensboro Sit-In: Feb. 5-6, 1960

- On February 5, about 300 students were now sitting-in at Woolworth's.
- Tensions were high and students feared being jailed or kicked out of school.
- Meanwhile, the sit-in movement continued to spread like wildfire to 35 - 40 other cities across the country.
- By February 6, witnesses estimate there were nearly 1,000 protesters and observers filling Woolworth's.
- The sit-ins had spread to the nearby Kress department store, bringing downtown Greensboro to a virtual standstill.
- With the crowd at Woolworth's growing increasingly hostile, it was announced at 1:00 in the afternoon that the store was closing due to a bomb threat. Kress closed early as well.

The Movement Spreads

- The Greensboro Sit-In ignited a wave of student sit-ins across the South.
- Young people in more than 100 Southern cities challenged segregation in restaurants, parks, pools, theaters, libraries, etc., with over 3,600 of them being arrested for the simple act of sitting.
- Even in Northern cities, where segregation had long ago been fought and won, picket-line sprung up at Woolworth and Kress stores.



Young people demonstrating in Chapel Hill .

The Greensboro Sit-In: Feb. 7, 1960 – Summer, 1960

- On February 7, A & T students voted to suspend demonstrations, trying in good faith to give city and store officials an opportunity to work things out.
- The negotiations failed, and students resumed the protests at Kress and Woolworth's.
- When the college students left for summer recess, Dudley High School students took their place.
- Throughout the sit-ins, participants were often threatened, sprayed with food, burned with cigarettes, and tormented in unimaginable ways. However, never did they respond with violence. Students sat peacefully while being screamed at and spat upon.

The Greensboro Sit-In: July 26, 1960

- Finally, on July 26, 1960, they won their peaceful fight. Store manager C. L. Harris agreed to integrate Woolworth's lunch counter.
- The simple, yet courageous act of sitting down to eat, by four students, was the catalyst that ignited a decade of revolt.
- Within two months the Sit-in Movement had spread to 54 cities in 9 states, including Nashville and Atlanta.
- Students had discovered the power of direct action, and a new generation came alive to transform the Civil Rights Movement.



Think – Pair – Share

Directions: Take 5-10 minutes to answer the following questions with your partner. Be prepared to share your answers with the class.

- Why was it such a revolutionary action for a black person to sit down at a “whites-only” lunch counter in 1960 North Carolina?
- How do you imagine the A&T students felt when taking that seat for the first time?
- Evaluate the use of “nonviolence” in the sit-in movements. Do you agree or disagree with this philosophy? Explain.
- Why do you think many civil rights activists, such as Martin Luther King, believed so passionately in nonviolence?
- How would you characterize David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, and Joseph McNeil?

The End of Segregation

- Thanks to the brave people that stood up to segregation by 1968 the Supreme Court had declared all forms of segregation unconstitutional.
- By 1970, formal racial discrimination was illegal in school systems, businesses, the American military services and the government. Separate bathrooms, water fountains and schools all disappeared.

Honoring History

In 1995, an 8-foot section of the Woolworth counter and four stools went on permanent display at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.



The Woolworth counter on display at the Smithsonian.

On Feb. 1, 2010, the International Civil Rights Center & Museum opened in Greensboro, marking the 50th anniversary of the Greensboro Sit-Ins.

Sources

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