

# 1960

## Greensboro Sit-in

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The Greensboro sit-in was a civil rights protest that started in 1960, when young African American students staged a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, and refused to leave after being denied service. The sit-in movement soon spread to college towns throughout the South. Though many of the protesters were arrested for trespassing, disorderly conduct or disturbing the peace, their actions made an immediate and lasting impact, forcing Woolworth's and other establishments to change their segregationist policies.



### Greensboro Four

The Greensboro Four were four young Black men who staged the first sit-in at Greensboro: Ezell Blair Jr., David Richmond, Franklin McCain and Joseph McNeil. All four were students from [North Carolina](#) Agricultural and Technical College.

They were influenced by the nonviolent protest techniques practiced by [Mohandas Gandhi](#), as well as the Freedom Rides organized by the Congress for Racial Equality ([CORE](#)) in 1947, in which interracial activists rode across the South in buses to test a recent [Supreme Court](#) decision banning segregation in interstate bus travel.

The Greensboro Four, as they became known, had also been spurred to action by the brutal murder in 1955 of a young Black boy, [Emmett Till](#), who had allegedly whistled at a white woman in a [Mississippi](#) store.

### Sit-In Begins

Blair, Richmond, McCain and McNeil planned their protest carefully, and enlisted the help of a local white businessman, Ralph Johns, to put their plan into action.

On February 1, 1960, the four students sat down at the lunch counter at the Woolworth's in downtown Greensboro, where the official policy was to refuse service to anyone but whites. Denied service, the four young men refused to give up their seats.

Police arrived on the scene but were unable to take action due to the lack of provocation. By that time, Johns had already alerted the local media, who had arrived in full force to cover the events on television. The Greensboro Four stayed put until the store closed, then returned the next day with more students from local colleges.

### **Sit-Ins Spread Nationwide**

By February 5, some 300 students had joined the protest at Woolworth's, paralyzing the lunch counter and other local businesses. Heavy television coverage of the Greensboro sit-ins sparked a sit-in movement that spread quickly to college towns throughout the South and into the North, as young Blacks and whites joined in various forms of peaceful protest against segregation in libraries, beaches, hotels and other establishments.

By the end of March, the movement had spread to 55 cities in 13 states. Though many were arrested for trespassing, disorderly conduct or disturbing the peace, national media coverage of the sit-ins brought increasing attention to the civil rights movement.

In response to the success of the sit-in movement, dining facilities across the South were being integrated by the summer of 1960. At the end of July, when many local college students were on summer vacation, the Greensboro Woolworth's quietly integrated its lunch counter. Four Black Woolworth's employees—Geneva Tisdale, Susie Morrison, Anetha Jones and Charles Best—were the first to be served.

### **SNCC**

To capitalize on the momentum of the sit-in movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee ([SNCC](#)) was founded in Raleigh, North Carolina, in April 1960.

Over the next few years, SNCC served as one of the leading forces in the civil rights movement, organizing [Freedom Rides](#) through the South in 1961 and the historic [March on Washington](#) in 1963, at which [Martin Luther King Jr.](#) gave his seminal "[I Have a Dream](#)" speech.

SNCC worked alongside the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ([NAACP](#)) to push passage of the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#), and would later mount an organized resistance to the [Vietnam War](#).

As its members faced increased violence, however, SNCC became more militant, and by the late 1960s it was advocating the "Black Power" philosophy of [Stokely Carmichael](#) (SNCC's chairman from 1966-67) and his successor, H. Rap Brown. By the early 1970s, SNCC had lost much of its mainstream support and was effectively disbanded.

### **Greensboro Sit-In: Impact**

The Greensboro Sit-In was a critical turning point in Black history and American history, bringing the fight for civil rights to the national stage. Its use of nonviolence inspired the Freedom Riders and others to take up the cause of integration in the South, furthering the cause of equal rights in the United States.

**YouTube video:** [Reflections on the Greensboro Lunch Counter](#)

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Author

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