**The Greensboro Four**

        

Instructions:  Watch the videos and read the texts, then discuss and answer the questions.  You will find the video and text on this website.  Write down your responses on your question sheet and keep for a notebook check.  Be prepared to share your answers and ideas.

Source # 1 (Online Article):  The Story of the Greensboro Four: <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/299/entry>

1.       In your own words, who are the Greensboro Four?

2.       Was their sit-in at Woolworth’s well planned?  Why do think that?

3.       Why do you think the ‘sit-in’ movement spread so quickly across the state?

4.       Do you think these ‘sit-ins’ were truly successful?  Why?

Source # 2 (Online Article): Brief Timeline of the Woolworth Sit-in:  <https://www.britannica.com/event/Greensboro-sit-in>

1.  Can you explain how the sit-in at Woolworth’s Store in Greensboro grew during its first couple weeks, from February 1st to February 14th, 1960?

Source # 3 (Video Clips):  Brief Bios of the Four:  <https://www.smithsonianchannel.com/search?q=greensboro%20four>

1.       Can you share 3 important things we should know about…  Franklin McCain?

2.       Can you share 3 important things we should know about…  Joseph Mcneil?

3.       Can you share 3 important things we should know about…  David Richmond?

4.       Can you share 3 important things we should know about…  Ezell Blair, Jr. (Jibreel Khazan)?

Source # 4 (Online Video):  The Legacy of the Greensboro Four:  <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Rmjt0kJF0A>

1.       In your own words, what is the legacy of the Greensboro Four?

2.       How did whites react to the Greensboro Four?

Greensboro Sit-In

*Written by*[*Jonathan Murray*](https://northcarolinahistory.org/author/jonathan-murray/)

On February 1, 1960, four African-American students of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University sat at a white-only lunch counter inside a Greensboro, North Carolina Woolworth’s store. While sit-ins had been held elsewhere in the United States, the Greensboro sit-in catalyzed a wave of nonviolent protest against private-sector segregation in the United States.

The first Greensboro sit-in was not spontaneous. The four students who staged the protest, all of them male freshmen, had read about nonviolent protest, and one of them, Ezell Blair, had seen a documentary on the life of Mohandas Gandhi. Another of the four, Joseph McNeil, worked part-time in the university library with Eula Hudgens, an alumna of the school who had participated in freedom rides; McNeil and Hudgens regularly discussed nonviolent protest. All four of the students befriended white businessman, philanthropist, and social activist Ralph Johns, a benefactor of both the NAACP and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical.

The first sit-in was meticulously planned and executed. While all four students had considered different means of nonviolent protest, McNeil suggested the tactic of the sit-in to the other three. To him, discipline in executing the protest was paramount. Months before the sit-in, he attended a concert at which other African-American students behaved tactlessly, leaving him determined not to repeat their error. The plan for the protest was simple. The students would first stop at Ralph Johns’ store so that Johns could contact a newspaper reporter. They would then go to the Woolworth’s five-and-dime store to purchase items, saving their receipts. After finishing their shopping, they would sit down at the lunch counter and courteously request service, and they would wait until service was provided.

The protest occurred as planned on Monday, February 1, 1960. Despite urbanely requesting service, the students were refused it, and the manager of the Woolworth’s store requested that they leave the premises. After leaving the store, the students told campus leaders at Agricultural and Technical what had happened.

The next morning twenty-nine neatly dressed male and female North Carolina Agricultural and Technical students sat at the Woolworth’s lunch counter. The protest grew the following day, and on Thursday, white students from a nearby women’s college took part in the protests, which expanded to other stores. Soon crowds of students were mobbing local lunch counters. As the protests grew, opposition grew vociferous. Crowds of white men began appearing at lunch counters to harass the protesters, often by spitting, uttering abusive language, and throwing eggs. In one case, a protester’s coat was set on fire, and the assailant was arrested.

The protests continued each day that week. On Saturday, fourteen hundred students arrived at the Greensboro Woolworth’s store. Those who could not sit at the lunch counter formed picket lines outside the store. A phoned-in bomb threat cut the protest short, but the following week sit-ins began at Woolworth’s stores in Charlotte, Winston-Salem, and Durham. Soon other five-and-dime and department stores with segregated lunch counters became targets of these protests.

The reaction of police departments in the region was, by and large, muted. In the case of the Greensboro Woolworth’s sit-ins, protesters were left alone by the police department while those reactionaries who became violent were prosecuted. Statewide no protesters were arrested until forty-one black students in a picket line at the Cameron Village Woolworth’s in Raleigh were charged with trespassing.

Despite these arrests, progress was swift. At many stores, African-Americans were soon eating at the same lunch counters as whites. For instance, at the Greensboro S.H. Kress store, blacks and whites were eating together at the lunch counter by the end of February 1960. Some stores in Raleigh closed their lunch counters altogether to preclude protests. Though most stores did not immediately desegregate their lunch counters, the sit-ins were successful both in forcing partial integration and in increasing national awareness of the indignities suffered by African-Americans in the southern United States.

The 1960 sit-ins began without the assistance of any organization, and they effected partial desegregation in less than a month without legal action. They proved one of the simplest and most efficacious protests of the civil rights movement.

Sources

 William Henry Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*(New York, 1981); Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*(Raleigh, 1992).

**THE GREENSBORO CHRONOLOGY**



In the fall of 1959, four young men (Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Jr. and David Richmond) enrolled as freshmen at North Carolina A&T University. The four young men quickly became a close-knit group and met every evening in their dorm rooms for "bull sessions". It was during these nightly discussions that they considered challenging the institution of segregation. The breaking point for the group came after Christmas vacation when Joseph McNeil was returning to N.C. A&T after spending the holidays at home in New York. McNeil was denied service at a Greyhound bus station in Greensboro. McNeil’s frustrating experience was shared by the group, and they were willing to make the necessary sacrifices - even if it meant their own lives - to provoke change in society. On that final night in January 1960 in Scott Hall, the four friends challenged each other to stop talking and take action. They didn't realize the journey they would take the next day would ignite a movement, change a nation and inspire a world.

**FEBRUARY 1960**

**MONDAY, FEB. 1, 1960**

Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Jr. and David Richmond (The Greensboro Four) entered the F.W. Woolworth store in Greensboro, N.C., around 4:30 p.m. and purchased merchandise at several counters. They sat down at the store's "whites only" lunch counter and ordered coffee, and were denied service, ignored and then asked to leave. 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.

**TUESDAY, FEB. 2, 1960**

Twenty-five men, including the four freshmen, along with four women returned to the F.W. Woolworth store. The students sat from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. while white patrons heckled them. Undaunted, they sat with books and study materials to keep them busy. They were still refused service.

Reporters from both newspapers, a TV camera man and Greensboro police officers monitored the scene. Once the sit-ins hit the news, momentum picked up and students across the community embraced the movement. That night, students met with college officials and concerned citizens. They organized the Student Executive Committee for Justice to plan the continued demonstrations. This committee sent a letter to the president of F.W. Woolworth in New York requesting that his company "take a firm stand to eliminate discrimination". Meanwhile, at its regular monthly meeting, the NAACP voted in unanimous support of the students' efforts.

**WEDNESDAY, FEB. 3, 1960**

More than 60 students, one-third of them female, returned to the Greensboro store and sat down at every available lunch counter seat. Students from Bennett College and Dudley High School increased the number of protesters, and many carpooled to and from the F.W. Woolworth store to sit-in shifts.

Members of the Ku Klux Klan, including the state's official chaplain George Dorsett, were present. White patrons taunted the students as they studied. A statement issued from F.W. Woolworth's national headquarters read that company policy was "to abide by local custom".

**THURSDAY, FEB. 4, 1960**

More than 300 students participate in the protests. Students from N.C. A&T, Bennett College and Dudley High School occupied every seat at the lunch counter. Three white supporters (Genie Seaman, Marilyn Lott and Ann Dearsley) from the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina (now UNCG), joined the protest. As tensions grew, police kept the crowd in check. Waiting students then marched to the basement lunch counter at S.H. Kress & Co., the second store targeted by the Student Executive Committee, and the Greensboro sit-ins spread.

That evening, student leaders, college administrators and representatives from F.W. Woolworth and Kress stores held talks. The stores refused to integrate as long as other downtown facilities remained segregated. Students insisted the F.W. Woolworth and Kress retail stores would remain targets, and the meeting ended without resolution.

**FRIDAY, FEB. 5, 1960**

Tensions mounted early in the day when 50 white males were seated at the Woolworth counter. Sit-in participants, including white students from area colleges, filled the dozen or so remaining seats. Police removed two white youth from the store for swearing and yelling. By 3 p.m., more than 300 people were present. Members of both races were escorted from the premises. Three whites were arrested and the store closed at 5:30 pm.

Store representatives, students and college officials met once again that evening. F.W. Woolworth personnel took issue with the students limiting their protests to two stores and asked college administrators to end the sit-ins. Administrators plainly stated they could not control the private activities of students. Some administrators recommended store officials consider temporarily closing the counters. The meeting adjourned after two hours of debate.

**SATURDAY, FEB. 6, 1960**

Early that morning, more than 1,400 N.C. A&T students met in Harrison Auditorium. After voting to continue the protest, many headed to the F.W. Woolworth store. They filled every seat as the store opened. A large number of counter protesters showed up as well. By noon, more than 1,000 people packed the store.

At 1 p.m., a caller warned a bomb was set to explode at 1:30 p.m. The crowd moved to the Kress store, which immediately closed. Arrests were made outside both stores. The F.W. Woolworth store was cleared and closed as the the manager announced the temporary closing of the lunch counter in the interest of public safety.

That evening at N.C. A&T, a mass rally of 1,600 students voted to suspend demonstrations for two weeks. Dean William Gamble proclaimed this would give the stores time "to set policies regarding food service for Negro students".

**FEB. 8 - 14 1960**

On Monday, students in Winston-Salem, N.C., and Durham, N.C., held sit-ins to demonstrate their solidarity with Greensboro students. Sit-in protests quickly followed in North Carolina cities such as Charlotte, Raleigh, Fayetteville and High Point. The movement also gained momentum and spread to Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and even F.W. Woolworth stores in New York City.

**FEB. 15 - 21 1960**

Edward R. Zane, a member of the Greensboro City Council, worked with students to reach a compromise. The Mayor agreed to appoint a committee to address the issue, and the protestors agreed to continue negotiations. Several Greensboro associations, including The Board of Directors of the Greensboro Council of Church Women, the YWCA and several ministerial alliances came out in favor of integration.

**FEB. 22 - 28 1960**

The lunch counters at F.W. Woolworth and Kress stores reopened, but were still segregated. Greensboro Mayor George H. Roach introduced the Greensboro Advisory Committee on Community Relations representing the City Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants Association. Chairman Ed Zane worked to increase public support for integration of lunch counters, encouraging people to write and express their opinions on the racial situation.

By the end of February, the sit-in movement had spread to more than 30 cities in eight states.

**MARCH 1960**

Of the 2,000 citizen letters the Advisory Committee received, 73 percent favored integrated lunch counters. The hotly debated topic was constantly in the news. The Greensboro Record reported a letter signed by 68 white citizens urged that "service to all customers at the lunch counters in these stores be entirely on a 'first come, first served' basis, just as it is in other areas of these establishments." Chairman Zane and the Advisory Committee held numerous meetings with representatives from F.W. Woolworth, Kress and other downtown businesses. All refused to integrate. On March 31, a disappointed Edward Zane met with student leaders to break the news.

By the end of March, the sit-in Movement had spread to 55 cities in 13 states.

**APRIL 1960**

**FRIDAY, APRIL 1, 1960**

Students resumed sit-in activities at the Kress and F.W. Woolworth stores and began picketing on Elm and Sycamore streets. That evening at a mass meeting, more than 1,200 students pledged to continue the protests.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 2, 1960**

Both the F.W. Woolworth and Kress stores officially closed their lunch counters.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 3, 1960**

Speaking at Bennett College, NAACP legal council Thurgood Marshall urged attendees not to compromise. The protests strengthened after an economic boycott of the two stores was organized by local leaders.

**APRIL 16 - 17, 1960**

Easter weekend, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) organized a meeting of sit-in students from all over the nation at Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C. Leader Ella Baker encouraged students to form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced "snick") to organize the effort.

**THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 1960**

Forty-five students (including Ezell Blair, Jr., Joseph McNeil, David Richmond and 13 Bennett College students) were arrested for trespassing as they sat at the Kress store lunch counter. All were released without bail.

**JUNE 1960**

When N.C. A&T and Bennett College students left the Greensboro for the summer, Dudley High School students took up the charge. William Thomas led the students as the protests expanded to Meyers and Walgreens.

**JULY 1960**

**THURSDAY, JULY 21, 1960**

F.W. Woolworth manager Clarence Harris met with Chairman Zane and the Advisory Committee in his store. He informed them that F.W. Woolworth's would soon serve all properly dressed and well-behaved people. Kress manager H.E. Hogate was present.

**MONDAY, JULY 25, 1960**

F.W. Woolworth employees Charles Bess, Mattie Long, Susie Morrison and Jamie Robinson are the first African-Americans to eat at the lunch counter. The headline of The Greensboro Record read "Lunch Counters Integrated Here".

The Kress counter opened to all on the same day.

**TUESDAY, JULY 26, 1960**

F.W. Woolworth's is desegregated.

By August 1961, more than 70,000 people had participated in sit-ins, which resulted in more than 3,000 arrests. Sit-ins at "whites only" lunch counters inspired subsequent kneel-ins at segregated churches, sleep-ins at segregated motel lobbies, swim-ins at segregated pools, wade-ins at segregated beaches, read-ins at segregated libraries, play-ins at segregated parks and watch-ins at segregated movies.

America would never be the same.

**Data Sources**: BURRIS, Greensboro Historical Museum, F.D. Bluford Library Archives, North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, Lewis Brandon, Paul Gaston, Jack Moebes, Sit-In Movement, Inc. and International Civil Rights Center & Museum staff.