

# Civil Rights Movement History

## 1960

*"If you don't like the history they're teaching you in school  
— go out and make some of your own."*

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## Sit-Ins Background & Context

1960 was the year of the student-led lunch-counter sit-ins. For those who are not familiar with lunch-counters, they were the fast-food providers of the era (McDonalds, Taco Bell, Burger King, and others were just getting started). Suburban malls were still few and far between, and "downtown" was the main shopping district. Most large stores had lunch counters where a cup of coffee cost a dime, and you could get a cheeseburger, fries, and Coke for 60 cents. Lunch-counters provided quick cheap meals for shoppers, students, and workers on break the same way that shopping-mall food-courts do today. Nationally, there were more than 30,000 lunch counters in drug and department stores, bus terminals, and public buildings. Many were part of large national chains such as Woolworth (2,130 stores), McCrory (1,307), and Kress (272).

In most segregated communities, Blacks were encouraged to shop at chain and department stores, but they were not permitted to eat at a store's "white-only" lunch counters and restaurants. And unlike whites, Blacks were not permitted to try on clothes prior to buying them or return purchases that did not fit. The sit-ins focused on the lunch-counters and restaurants, but all forms of discrimination were the ultimate target. In most cases where the sit-ins achieved victory, agreements to desegregate lunch-counters usually included eliminating the other forms of consumer discrimination.

Note that in most southern communities, segregation was not a matter of personal choice on the part of white business owners. Segregation was mandated by law (see [examples](#)). Blacks who tried to use "white-only" facilities could be, and often were, arrested for violating a segregation ordinance (and in theory a white establishment could be held liable for serving Blacks).

But after federal courts began declaring school and bus segregation laws unconstitutional, most southern prosecutors were careful to charge Blacks who defied segregation with general crimes such as "Disturbing the Peace" or "Disorderly Conduct" rather than violation of race-specific segregation laws. In this way they prevented the courts from overturning the segregation ordinances on appeal, and that allowed store owners to continue claiming that they *had* to deny service to Blacks because "*it's the law*." This cynical ploy was used to maintain segregation until the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) eliminated all segregation laws.

See also: [Sit-Ins of 1960-61 for articles written by Freedom Movement veterans](#).

[Sit-ins](#) for web links.

[Sit-In Movement](#) for books.

## The Greensboro Sit-Ins (Feb)

### [Photos](#)

See [The Rising of the Bread](#) for preceding events.

Bennett College for Women and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (NCA&T) are two Black colleges in Greensboro NC. In the Fall of 1959, the Bennett College NAACP chapter discusses strategies and tactics for opposing segregation. The young women seek information from the Oklahoma City NAACP, which had previously used nonviolent direct-action to desegregate local restaurants. They decide to target the Woolworth's lunch counter in downtown Greensboro because it is part of a national chain that Blacks all over the country patronize. The president of Bennett advises them to hold off until after the long Christmas break, so that their campaign does not begin, and then lose momentum when the students return home for the holidays.

On February 1, 1960, four Black men from NCA&T — Ezell Blair Jr, Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond — sit down at Woolworth's "whites only" lunch counter and ask to be served coffee and doughnuts. They are refused. Though they are prepared to be arrested that does not occur. They stay until the store closes. The next day they return, now joined by Billy Smith, Clarence Henderson, and others. They sit from 11am to 3pm but again are not served. While they wait, they study and do their school work.

*In 1959 I was fortunate enough to get an academic scholarship to A&T. Junior Blair and I were roommates. Frank McCain lived down the hall from us. David Richmond lived in the city. We were all in the same algebra class and we gravitated to each other and became friends. We would get together and discuss current events, political events, things that affected us — pretty much as college kids do today. Bull sessions. The question became, What do we do and to whom do we do it against? There were many conspicuous forms that we could have chosen, but Woolworth seemed logical because it was national in scope and somehow we had hoped to get sympathies from without as well as from within. ...*

*We had played over in our minds possible scenarios, and to the best of our abilities we had determined how we were gonna conduct ourselves given those scenarios. But we did walk in that day — I guess it was about four-thirty — and we sat at a lunch counter where blacks never sat before. And people started to look at us. The help, many of whom were black, looked at us in disbelief too. They were concerned about our safety. We asked for service, and we were denied, and we expected to be denied. We asked why couldn't we be served, and obviously we weren't given a reasonable answer and it was our intent to sit there until they decided to serve us. — Joseph McNeil. [11]*

The local newspaper and TV station cover this second sit-in. At first they call it a "Sit Down," but soon everyone is using the term "Sit-In." Blair tells an interviewer: "Negro adults have been complacent and fearful ... It is time for someone to wake up and change the situation ... and we decided to start here."

*We had planned to come back the following day and to repeat that scenario. Others found out what we had done, because the press became aware of what was happening. So the next day when we decided to go down again, I think we went down with fifteen, and the third day it was probably a hundred and fifty, and then it probably mushroomed up to a thousand or so, and then it spread to another city. — Joseph McNeil. [11]*

The Greensboro students activate the telephone networks that had been built over the [preceding months](#), and word is flashed across the South — from one Black campus to the next — **Sit-In! Greensboro, North Carolina!** Suddenly everyone is aware that Black students have openly defied a century of segregation.

Greensboro students form the Student Executive Committee for Justice to sustain and expand the campaign. The Greensboro NAACP endorses their action. On February 3rd, more than 60 students, now including women from Bennett who have returned from break and students from Dudley High School, occupy every seat at the Woolworth's counter in rotating shifts for the entire day. By February 4th they number close to 300 — including white students from Womens College (now University of North Carolina) — and the sit-ins spread to Kress and Walgreens lunch counters, and then to other Greensboro restaurants. In the following days as many as 1,000 protesters demand an end to segregation in Greensboro, North Carolina.

The Ku Klux Klan reacts. Led by George Dorsett — North Carolina's official State Chaplain — they heckle and harass the students. The students are not deterred. Hoping that their presence will deter white violence, the NCA&T football team joins the protests. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) sends organizers to help train the students in the tactics and strategies of Nonviolent Resistance.

Sit-ins, picket lines, and boycotts continue off and on as negotiations get under way, the lunch counters are closed and reopened, and public opinion weighs in. The segregation laws are strengthened and dozens of students are arrested and charged with "trespass" for sitting-in. Woolworth and Kress stores in the North and West are boycotted and picketed in support of the sit-in movements that are now [spreading](#) across the upper and mid South, Atlanta, and New Orleans. When the college students leave for the summer, Dudley High students carry on. Finally, in July, the national drugstore chains agree to serve all "properly dressed and well behaved people," regardless of race.

See [Freedom Highways in the Tarheel State](#) for continuation of Greensboro events.

For more information on the Greensboro Civil Rights Movement:

Books: [Greensboro, NC Sit-in & Movement](#)

Web: [Greensboro Sit-ins](#)

## **Sit-ins Sweep Across the South (1960-1964)**

## [Photos](#)

The [Greensboro sit-in](#) on February 1st is the spark that ignites a raging prairie fire, a fire for justice that the forces of the old order cannot suppress. First by word-of-mouth, and then via media coverage, the news flashes across the South. Black students defy segregation! In the following week, students in other North Carolina towns — [Charlotte](#), Winston-Salem, [Durham](#), Raleigh, Fayetteville, and others — pick up the torch and begin their own sit-ins at local lunch counters and restaurants.

On February 10, sit-ins spread to Hampton VA, on February 12 to [Rock Hill](#) SC. On February 13, two weeks after the first Greensboro sit-in, Black students in [Nashville](#) TN began a desegregation campaign that lasts for years. On February 20, Charles Sherrod and Frank Pinkston lead 200 Virginia Union University students and faculty on a march into the heart of Richmond's business district to launch a wave of sit-ins that continue until victory a year later.

By the end of February there have been sit-ins in more than thirty communities in seven states. By June, sit-ins have spread across the South as far as Kansas City, Missouri, where 35 students led by Gloria Newton demand service at four lunch counters and two movie theaters. By year's end, more than 70,000 men and women — mostly Black, a few white — have participated in sit-ins and picket lines. More than 3,000 have been arrested.

*After we had started sitting in, we were surprised and delighted to hear reports of other cities joining in the sit-ins. And I think we started feeling the power of the idea whose time had come. Before we did the things that we did, we had no inkling that the movement would become as widespread as it did. I can remember being in the dorm any number of times and hearing the newscasts, that Orangeburg had demonstrations, or Knoxville, or other towns. And we were really excited. We'd applaud, and say yea. When you are that age, you don't feel powerful. I remember realizing that with what we were doing, trying to abolish segregation, we were coming up against governors, judges, politicians, businessmen, and I remember thinking, I'm only twenty-two years old, what do I know, what am I doing? And I felt very vulnerable. So when we heard these newscasts, that other cities had demonstrations, it really helped. Because there were more of us. And it was very important. The movement had a way of reaching inside you and bringing out things that even you didn't know were there. Such as courage. When it was time to go to jail, I was much too busy to be afraid. — Diane Nash.[11]*

Most of the sit-ins are preceded by careful planning and training in the tactics of Nonviolent Resistance, and are characterized by strict discipline on the part of the protesters that reduces the effects of physical assaults and provides a clear, powerful message. Some sit-ins, however, are spontaneous and lack of training in nonviolent tactics sometimes results in demonstrators retaliating when attacked by racists. That gives the cops an opportunity to arrest the sit-ins (not the racist attackers) on violence-related charges (with higher bail and stiffer sentences), and for a hostile local media to discredit the protests.

There had been earlier lunch-counter sit-ins in Northern cities like Chicago, and around the periphery of the solidly-segregated South — Oklahoma, Kansas, [Baltimore](#), and [Miami](#). And

there had been previous student protests against segregation in the segregated South itself — such as those in [Orangeburg in 1956](#) and Durham's [Royal Ice Cream Sit-in of 1967](#) — but after the Greensboro sit-in on February 1, it is as if a dam has broken, and the waters that had steadily been building up are suddenly unleashed. Often the action takes place near college campuses where students have been [talking and quietly organizing](#); sometimes it takes place where there has been almost no preparation. And everywhere, new people became involved who have not been to meetings and who have never thought of themselves as activists before they participate in their first sit-in.

Several factors may explain why the Greensboro sit-in ignites a freedom firestorm across the South when earlier student protests had remained local:

- The cumulative affect of [Brown vs Board of Education](#) and subsequent school integration struggles in [Alabama](#) and [Little Rock](#), the [Emmett Till](#) lynching, the bus boycotts in [Montgomery](#), [Tallahassee](#) & other cities, and the assassinations of voter registration activists such as [Harry & Harriet Moore](#), Reverend [Wesley Lee](#), and [Lamar Smith](#) create a climate of rising tension and increasing determination among young Blacks that with the Greensboro Sit-In reaches a sudden tipping point.
- The discussions, workshops, and meetings between activists from different Black colleges in the months immediately [prior to Greensboro](#) prime students for action, and create a communications web that can immediately be activated after the first Greensboro sit-in on February 1st.
- The Greensboro sit-ins continue and escalate day after day as more and more students join the protests. Previous student actions such as those in [Orangeburg](#) in May of 1956 and [Durham](#) in June of 1957 occurred just as school was ending (or had ended) for the term, so there could be no campus-based follow up. Greensboro occurs in the middle of the school year just after students return from winter break.

Yet for all that it is widespread, the sit-in movement is mostly limited to the upper and mid-south. With only a few exceptions, attempts to build ongoing movements in the Deep South states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana are ruthlessly quashed by arrests and violence, as for example, in [Montgomery](#), [Orangeburg](#), and [Baton Rouge](#). A few Deep South towns do manage to build ongoing sit-in movements in 1960 — [Rock Hill](#) in South Carolina, [Atlanta](#) & Augusta in Georgia, and [New Orleans](#) Louisiana — but they are exceptions to the ruthless "Never in the heart of Dixie" resistance against any form of desegregation that typifies the Deep South. And even in the upper and mid-south, sit-ins are mostly limited to college towns.

### **Sit-ins — Important Points**

- **Young people take the lead.** The sit-ins do more than just challenge segregation, they also challenge the established leadership within the Black community and their traditional reliance on legislation and litigation. Prior to the wave of sit-ins, Black students had followed the lead and relied on the direction of adult leaders: teachers, preachers, lawyers, and the officials of the NAACP and community organizations. With the sit-ins, young people take the lead and chart new directions and strategies

of their own, sometimes in cooperation with the adults, sometimes in opposition to them. In the years to follow — the turbulent "60s" — it is the young who set the pace, seize the initiative, and determine the direction of the Freedom Movement.

- **Movements grow by taking action.** Action inspires more action, and nothing is more contagious than courage. "Movements" are movements because they take action and move. That is true for both individuals and organizations. At the dawn of the sit-ins, CORE has just 8 chapters in the Mid- and Deep-South (2 in FL and 6 in SC). SCLC has between 30-40 affiliates across the region, some of them active some of them moribund. The NAACP, the oldest and largest of the organizations, has a bit over 200 southern branches and around 170 Youth groups. But throughout the Deep South the NAACP is under vicious attack by the White Citizens Council and state governments — it's on the defensive and fighting just to survive. It's [outlawed](#) in Alabama and only the courage of Medger Evers and Aaron Henry are keeping it alive in Mississippi. Largely suppressed in Louisiana as a "subversive" organization, membership has fallen from 13,000 in 65 branches, to 1700 members in 7 branches, mostly in New Orleans. And SNCC — which will emerge as the cutting edge of the Movement and the exemplar of youth leadership — does not yet exist.

The sit-ins both challenge the existing organizations and reinvigorate and re-energize them. By the end of 1960 all them (and, of course, the newly formed SNCC) are experiencing a new birth of activity, new members are joining, new branches, chapters, and affiliates are forming, and new, more militant leadership is emerging.

For more information on the sit-ins:

Books: [Sit-In Movement](#)

Web: [Sit-ins](#)

Documents: [Sit-Ins: The Students Report](#) — CORE Pamphlet, May 1960.

## Durham, NC, Sit-ins & Protests (1960-61)

### [Photo](#)

See [Royal Ice Cream Sit-in](#) for preceding events.

Inspired by, and in support of, the [Greensboro Sit-Ins](#) of a week earlier, on the 8th of February 20 men and women sit-in at Woolworth, Kress, and Walgreens lunch counters in downtown Durham. Most of the protesters are Black students from North Carolina College (today, North Carolina Central University), but four are white students at Duke, and one is Gordon Carey, a white activist with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). They are well-trained, well-dressed, and nonviolent — but the stores won't serve them at the "white" counters. Woolworth's manager closes the entire store, supposedly in response to a bomb threat, Kress shuts down it's lunch counter, and Walgreens ropes off the eating area.

There are no arrests, but the cops "detain" a white divinity student from Duke and also Gordon Carey, who as CORE Field Director had been invited to Durham by the Black students to help them train in nonviolent tactics. The white power-structure claims the sit-ins are the result of "outside white agitators" (because, of course, Durham's Negroes are all happy and content with the segregated status quo). Rev. Douglas Moore, the leader of the [Royal Ice Cream Sit-in](#) of 1957, and Floyd McKissick an attorney and CORE leader, immediately come to the support of the students, confronting and challenging establishment lies. The city's NAACP chapter, the black Ministerial Alliance, and other Black organizations publicly endorse the sit-ins and demand an end to segregation.

The sit-ins continue day after day, growing in strength and numbers. On February 16, eight days after the first Durham sit-in, Dr. King and Rev. Abernathy address an over-flow crowd of more than 1,200 at White Rock Baptist Church. King acknowledges the importance of young people, "*What is new in our fight is the fact that it was initiated, led, and sustained by students.*" And for the first time ever, he makes a public call to end segregation by filling the jails through mass civil-disobedience if necessary: "*Let us not fear going to jail if the officials threaten to arrest us for standing up for our rights. Maybe it will take this willingness to stay in jail to arouse the dozing conscience of our nation.*" [6]

Aware of the enthusiastic response to King's "fill the jails" call, Durham mayor Emmanuel Evans quickly moves to defuse the swelling protest. He calls on the city's Human Relations committee to negotiate a settlement of the issues and he persuades the protesters to suspend further action pending the outcome. But over the following days, the white officials refuse to talk with the demonstration leaders. They negotiate only with the established, and more conservative, traditional Black elders. No agreement acceptable to the student activists and their supporters is reached. Eventually the students and CORE resume direct action, but the momentum built during the first week of sit-ins and King's call for civil disobedience has faded, the renewed demonstrations are intermittent and small-scale for the rest of 1960, accomplishing little.

On a cold January 21st, 1961, a young, vibrant, charismatic President takes the oath of office on the Capitol steps. Regardless of what *his* intent might be, Black Americans, particularly Black students, take the stirring words of his inaugural address into their hearts, hearing in them an endorsement of the growing Freedom Movement.

*Let the word go forth from this time and place, ... that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans — born in this century, tempered by war, ... proud of our ancient heritage, and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today ... We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty. ... If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich. ... To heed, in all corners of the earth, the command of Isaiah to "undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free." ... And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. ... ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man. — President John F. Kennedy. [4]*

In freezing cold, Black students joined by a few whites turn out to picket the segregated Carolina theater in downtown Durham which is part of a city-owned (taxpayer-funded) facility. Demanding justice and equality, their signs and slogans echo Kennedy's freedom rhetoric. But the Carolina and others theaters are adamant against integration. For weeks, then months, the campaign continues. The theater management refuses to negotiate. Black protesters initiate what they call "round-robin" tactics, they line up and ask to buy a ticket, when they are refused, rather than block the line and be arrested they return to the rear of the queue and try again, and again, and again, slowing and delaying the theater commerce. White supporters buy tickets and pass them to Blacks, or let them in through the emergency side-doors.

*You just sort of grew strong as you marched — you were angry, and I guess that was where you were really getting your strength from, your inner anger as you walked around the Carolina Theater in the rain ... as you listened to people calling you names and spitting at you and everything. But, it was like a drive once you got involved. It was like something just kept pushing, pushing. — Fay Bryant Mayo, 2003 interview. [5]*

Eventually a court injunction forces an end to the protests and the issue moves into the slow, sluggish, hostile judicial system. The Durham theaters remain segregated.

See The [Freedom Highways Campaign in Durham](#) for subsequent events.

For more information:

Books: [North Carolina Movement](#)

Web: [North Carolina Movement](#)

## **Charlotte & Rock Hill Sit-ins (Feb-Mar)**

For detailed timeline see [Rock Hill & Charlotte Sit-Ins](#)

Inspired by [Greensboro](#), sit-ins by Smith University students begin in Charlotte NC on February 9. Led by [J. Charles Jones](#), 200 students occupy all downtown lunch counters. On the 12th, some 100 students, mostly from Friendship Junior College, sit down at Woolworth's and McCrory's in nearby Rock Hill, SC. Rather than serve Blacks, the two stores close their counters until February 23rd when they reopen them. Led by Leroy Johnson, and joined by NAACP leader Rev. Cecil Ivory (who had led a successful bus boycott in 1957), the students resume their sit-ins.

To oppose any form of integration, 350 businessmen form a White Citizens Council in Rock Hill and South Carolina Governor (later U.S. Senator) Ernest Hollings supports them with the assertion that the sit-ins "*..are purely to create violence and not to promote anyone's rights.*"

But the students make it clear, in the words of sit-in leader Clyde Williams Jr. "*We're not seeking intermarriage. We don't feel that sitting next to a white person will help us digest our food any better. We just want to be able to sit down and have a cup of coffee like other customers.*" On March 15, Rock Hill police arrest 70 men and women for sitting-in. For a time, this mass arrest temporarily slows the sit-in campaign.

By July, most of the Charlotte lunch counters and restaurants accept integration and agree to serve Blacks. But Rock Hill continues to resist any form of racial equality and sit-ins resume there in June.

See [Jail-No-Bail](#) strategy for continuation.

For more information on the Charlotte and Rock Hill Civil Rights Movements:

Web:

[Rock Hill & Charlotte Sit-ins \(J. Charles Jones\)](#)

[Rock Hill, SC, Students Sit-in](#) (Nonviolent Action Database ~ Swarthmore College)

## **Nashville Student Movement (1960-1964)**

[Photos](#), [More Photos](#)

The Nashville Christian Leadership Conference (NCLC), an affiliate of SCLC, is founded in 1958. Led by Rev. Kelly Smith and divinity student CT Vivian, it organizes workshops on Nonviolent Resistance by James Lawson who had studied nonviolence with Gandhi's disciples in India. In the Fall of 1959, Lawson, a Vanderbilt University divinity student, begins regular strategy meetings and nonviolent training sessions for students attending Nashville's Black colleges: American Baptist Theological Seminary, Fisk University, Meharry Medical College, and Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial (now Tennessee State Univ). The focus is on using nonviolence to oppose segregation and prominent among those attending Lawson's sessions are students who will soon assume major leadership roles in the awakening Freedom Movement: Marion Barry, James Bevel, Bernard Lafayette, John Lewis, Diane Nash, and CT Vivian.

*In early 1959 we decided that we needed to begin a movement to desegregate downtown Nashville. We planned a series of work-shops on nonviolence to begin to start that process. Through those workshops in the fall came adults in the community and students from Tennessee State and American Baptist Theological Seminary and Fisk University. We met weekly for much of September, October, November. We tried to give people a fairly good view of nonviolence, and we mixed that with role-playing of various kinds. — Rev. James Lawson.<sup>[11]</sup>*

Lawson places Nonviolent Resistance in a religious and historical context ranging from biblical times to colonial India to Nazi occupation in Europe. As John Lewis later recalled,

*"To learn that the tension between what was right and was wrong that had torn at me since I was old enough to think, [and to learn] that people of all cultures and all ages had struggled with the same issues — it was mind-blowing" [9]*

*I was really feeling stifled that fall. My goodness, I came to college to grow and expand, and here I am shut in. In Chicago, I had had access, at least, to public accommodations, lunch counters and what have you. So my response was, "Who's trying to change these things?" Paul LaPrad, a white Fisk student, told me about the nonviolent workshops that Jim Lawson was conducting. They were taking place a couple of blocks off campus. — Diane Nash.[11]*

On Saturday, February 13, less than two weeks after the [Greensboro](#) sit-in, more than 100 students commence the Nashville Student Movement — the largest, best organized, most disciplined, and most persistent of the student sit-in groups in the South. They occupy the Kress, McClellan, and Woolworth's lunch counters. The managers close the counters rather than serve Blacks.

*We had on that first day over five hundred students in front of Fisk University chapel, to be transported downtown to the First Baptist Church, to be organized into small groups to go down to sit in at the lunch counters. We went into the five-and-tens — Woolworth, Kresge's, McClellan's — because these stores were known all across the South and for the most part all across the country. We took our seats in a very orderly, peaceful fashion. The students were dressed like they were on the way to church or going to a big social affair. They had their books, and we stayed there at the lunch counter, studying and preparing our homework, because we were denied service. The managers ordered that the lunch counters be closed, that the restaurants be closed, and we'd just sit there, all day long. — John Lewis. [11]*

Hundreds more join as the sit-ins continue — lunch counters at Grants and Walgreens, Greyhound and Trailways, and locally-owned department stores are added. White racists heckle, harass, and attack the students who meet — and defeat — violence with the tactics of Nonviolent Resistance.

*The sit-ins were really highly charged, emotionally. In our nonviolent workshops, we had decided to be respectful of the opposition, and try to keep issues geared towards desegregation, not get sidetracked. The first sit-in we had was really funny, because the waitresses were nervous. They must have dropped two thousand dollars' worth of dishes that day. It was almost a cartoon. One in particular, she was so nervous, she picked up dishes and she dropped one, and she'd pick up another one, and she'd drop it. It was really funny, and we were sitting there trying not to laugh, because we thought that laughing would be insulting and we didn't want to create that kind of atmosphere. At the same time we were scared to death. — Diane Nash.[11]*

Nashville's Black community stands solidly behind the students. Two days after the first sit-in, the Black ministers vote to support the students and the NCLC organizes an economically crippling boycott of downtown merchants.

Racist violence against the sit-ins escalates with harassment and beatings on February 27. The violent hecklers are not arrested, instead 81 nonviolent protesters are hauled off to jail.

*On Saturday, February 27th, when we had about a hundred students prepared to go down — it was a very beautiful day in Nashville — we got a call from a local white minister who had been a real supporter of the movement. He said that if we go down on this particular day, he understood that the police would stand to the side and let a group of white hoodlums and thugs come in and beat people up, and then we would be arrested. We made a decision to go, and we all went to the same store. It was a Woolworth in the heart of the downtown area, and we occupied every seat at the lunch counter, every seat in the restaurant, and it did happen.*

*A group of young white men came in and they started pulling and beating primarily the young women. They put lighted cigarettes down their backs, in their hair, and they were really beating people. In a short time police officials came in and placed all of us under arrest, and not a single member of the white group, the people that were opposing our sit-in, was arrested. — John Lewis. [11]*

The city tries to intimidate the students and break the boycott with mass arrests that fill the jails to overflowing. Jailing the students fails to break the movement, the united students and community hang tough. When the 81 students are convicted of "Disorderly Conduct" they refuse to pay the fine, choosing instead to serve their time in jail. Sit-in leader Diane Nash explains, "*We feel that if we pay these fines we would be contributing to, and supporting, the injustice and immoral practices that have been performed in the arrest and conviction of the defendants.*"

*That was the first time that I was arrested. Growing up in the rural South, you learned it was not the thing to do. To go to jail was to bring shame and disgrace on the family. But for me it was like being involved in a holy crusade, it became a badge of honor. I think it was in keeping with what we had been taught in the workshops, so I felt very good, in the sense of righteous indignation, about being arrested, but at the same time I felt the commitment and dedication on the part of the students. — John Lewis. [11]*

Lawson is expelled from Vanderbilt and other student leaders are threatened with reprisals. The sit-ins continue. The Mayor offers a "compromise" — divide the lunch counters into separate Black and white sections. NCLC and the students reject his proposal — separate is **not** equal.

Black attorney Z. Alexander Looby is the lawyer who defends the students in court. On April 19, his home is destroyed by a terrorist bomb. More than 2,500 demonstrators — students and adults, including some whites — silently march through Nashville to the steps of City Hall.

*The march on April 19 was the first big march of the movement. It was what, in many ways, we'd been leading to without knowing it. We began at Tennessee A&I [college] at the city*

*limits. Right after the lunch hour, people began to gather, and we began to march down Jefferson, the main street of black Nashville. When we got to 18th and Jefferson, Fisk University students joined us. They were waiting and they fell right in behind. The next block was 17th and Jefferson, and students from Pearl High School joined in behind that. People came out of their houses to join us and then cars began joining us, moving very slowly so they could be with us. We filled Jefferson Avenue; it's a long, long way down Jefferson.*

*We walked by a place where there were workers out for the noon hour, white workers, and they had never seen anything like this. Here was all of 4,000 people marching down the street, and all you could hear was our feet as we silently moved, and they didn't know what to do. They moved back up against the wall and they simply stood against the wall, just looking. There was a fear there, there was an awe there. They knew that this was not to be stopped, this was not to be played with or to be joked with. We marched on and started up the steps at City Hall, and we gathered on the plaza that was a part of City Hall itself. The mayor knew now that he would have to speak to us. — Rev. C.T. Vivian. [11]*

With characteristic eloquence, Vivian speaks truth to power, condemning segregation and terrorist violence. Diane Nash then steps up to face the Mayor.

*I confronted Mayor West with what his feelings were as a man, as a person. I was particularly interested in that, as opposed to his just being a mayor. I have a lot of respect for the way he responded. He didn't have to respond the way he did. He said that he felt it was wrong for citizens of Nashville to be discriminated against at the lunch counters solely on the basis of the color of their skin. That was the turning point. — Diane Nash.[11]*

To cheers from the protesters the Mayor says: "I appeal to all citizens to end discrimination, to have no bigotry, no bias, no discrimination." The following day the headline of the *Nashville Tennessean* reads, "Mayor Says Integrate Counters." Soon the downtown stores began to desegregate. Nashville becomes the first Southern city to at least begin desegregating its public facilities, though demonstrations continue in Nashville until passage of the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) finally makes overt, legally-sanctioned segregation illegal.

For more information on the Nashville Civil Rights Movement:

Books:

[\*The Children\*](#)

[\*Walking With the Wind\*](#)

Web: [Nashville Student Movement](#)

## **Tallahassee Students Gassed & Arrested (Feb-Mar)**

See [Tallahassee Bus Boycott](#) for preceding events.

Despite the [Tallahassee Bus Boycott](#) victory of 1956, segregation is still so pervasive in Tallahassee that some Black residents refer to the Florida state capitol as "little Mississippi." In the Summer of 1959, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) students Patricia and Priscilla Stephens attend a [CORE training session](#) in Miami and return to form a local CORE chapter which mounts small-scale actions against segregation with limited success.

Two weeks after [Greensboro](#), eight Black FAMU and local high school students nonviolently sit-in at the Tallahassee Woolworths on Saturday, February 13. They are not served, but there are no arrests. A week later on February 20, eleven students return. They are met with harassment from violent whites. The Mayor and the cops are ready. He orders the nonviolent Blacks to leave and when they refuse they are arrested. The violent whites are ignored by the police.

On March 5th, and then again on March 12th, more students, now joined by some whites from Florida State University (FSU), return to the Woolworth and McCrory's lunch counter. Almost 250 are arrested. After the arrests on the 12th, close to 1,000 — mostly Black, some white — march to protest the arrests. The cops attack them with teargas. Patricia Stephens (20) is leading the march and the burning chemical is sprayed directly into face, permanently injuring her eyes. *"I couldn't see, but I could hear the screams of the students."* For the rest of her life she has to wear dark glasses whenever in bright light. *"I know we've been through a lot, but we can't let up, because the struggle continues,"* she says.

On March 17, the eleven arrested on the February 20 sit-in are convicted of "Disturbing the Peace by Riotous Conduct" and "Unlawful Assembly." They are sentenced to 60 days or a \$300 fine (equal to about \$2,300 in 2012). Three pay the fine. The remaining eight adopt a "Jail-No-Bail" position, the first sit-in group in the country to do so, and they serve 49 days in the Leon County Jail. The Tallahassee Eight are: Patricia and Priscilla Stephens, John and Barbara Broxton, William Larkins, Clement Carney, Angelina Nance, and high school student Henry Marion Steele (16) who is the son of Bus Boycott leader Rev. C.K. Steele.

Their "Jail-No-Bail" stand garners national and international support. Dr. King sends them a telegram that they receive in jail:

*I have just learned of your courageous willingness to go to jail instead of paying fines for your righteous protest against segregated eating facilities. Through your decision you have again proven that there is nothing more majestic and sublime than the determined courage of individuals willing to suffer and sacrifice for the cause of freedom. You have discovered anew the meaning of the cross, and as Christ died to make men holy, you are suffering to make men free. As you suffer the inconvenience of remaining in jail, please remember that unearned suffering is redemptive. Going to jail for a righteous cause is a badge of honor and a symbol of dignity. I assure you that your valiant witness is one of the glowing epics of our time and you are bringing all of America nearer the threshold of the world's bright tomorrows. — Dr. Martin Luther King. [7]*

State officials and some Black leaders urge the students to halt direct action so as not to weaken Florida's toothless Interracial Committee or strengthen the gubernatorial candidacy of the segregationist Farris Bryant. The sit-ins and marches are suspended. The Interracial Committee fails to make any noticeable progress towards ending segregation, and Bryant wins the election anyway. CORE tries to resume the sit-ins but garners small support. A Black boycott of the downtown chain stores is declared. It continues for more than a year, with little success.

Patricia Stephens marries civil-rights attorney John Due and together they continue for years to struggle for justice in Florida as CORE and NAACP leaders. They are active in sit-ins, marches, boycotts, voter-registration, speeches, organizing workshops. They endure frequent arrests. Patricia Stephens Due is expelled from FAMU for leading protests, decades later the university awards her an honorary doctorate for her courageous leadership.

For more information:

Books: [Florida Movement](#)

Web:

[Florida Movement](#)

[Tallahassee Bus Boycott](#)

## **Richmond Desegregation Campaign (1960)**

On Saturday, February 20, some 200 students and faculty of Virginia Union University march from campus to Richmond's downtown shopping district. Inspired by [Greensboro](#) and led by students Frank Pinkston and Charles Sherrod, they occupy "white-only" seats at store lunch counters. They are not served and hold their seats until the stores close. As one student described it:

*Kids who didn't have morning classes would go down when they opened up, [stay] for a couple hours, maybe go back to class and then another shift would come down by 12 o'clock or so. I was leaving my student teaching in Church Hill, caught the bus up to Seventh and Broad, got off, go over and got in line. The ladies who would normally be serving people, many of them were Afro-American women, and you could look in their face and see how proud they were. [8]*

On Monday, two days later they are back and this time they also sit-in at the Richmond Room, a posh restaurant on the 4th floor of Thalhimers department store. Whites verbally harass them and some have hot coffee splashed in their faces. When they refuse to leave, 34 are arrested. The 23 men and 11 women are between 18 and 23 years old. They are released on \$50 bail. Though they are quickly convicted, their convictions are later overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in mid-1963.

The arrests lead to formation of the Richmond Campaign for Human Dignity, a coalition of Virginia Union & black high school students and community leaders who organize a boycott

of stores with segregated facilities. Picket lines manned by young men and women ask shoppers to stop buying segregation.

*Our group made signs and set up picket lines ... There was a Thalhimers over in South Richmond, on Hull Street... And I said, well, we need someone over there. And I went over there and I picketed by myself. We had five or six policemen out there and dogs and me. ... I wasn't afraid. — Richmond Schoolteacher and Alpha Kappa Alpha president, LaVerne Byrd Smith. [8]*

It takes almost a year of determined action, but as economic losses mount during the crucial Christmas shopping season the city's chain and department stores are forced to change their policy. By January of 1961 they agree to desegregate. But other Richmond businesses maintain segregation until it is halted nationwide by the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)

For more information:

Books: [Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia](#)

Web: [Virginia Movement](#)

## **Mass Arrest of Student Protesters, Orangeburg, SC. (Feb-March)**

### [Photo](#)

See [Student Protests & Boycotts — Orangeburg, SC](#) for previous events.

Orangeburg is small (14,000), politically conservative, and rigidly segregated. Blacks make up a majority of the town's population. It is home to a pair of Black colleges on adjacent campuses. South Carolina State (SCSC) is publicly funded and politically dominated by the white power-structure. Founded in 1869, Claflin University is privately funded and the oldest Black institution of higher learning in South Carolina. After the [1956 protests](#), the SCSC administration suppressed the campus NAACP chapter, leaving the Claflin NAACP branch as the main student-oriented civil rights organization. When they hear of the [Greensboro sit-ins](#), students from both colleges form the Orangeburg Student Movement Association (OSMA) to resume and coordinate direct action protests against segregation. Using the [CORE Rule For Action](#), the students train in the strategies and tactics of Nonviolent Resistance.

Students are welcome to spend their money at the Kress store in downtown Orangeburg, but they can't eat at the "white-only" lunch counter. The same is true for other eating establishments. Following the CORE process, OSMA attempts to negotiate with store managers who rebuff them. On February 25th and 26th, some 40 students from the two schools try to sit-in at the Kress lunch counter, but the counter is closed and the stools removed. The students picket. More training sessions are held for new activists. On March 1, close to 400 students march against segregation. They disperse when ordered to by

police. The white power-structure declares that the demonstrations are the work of outside-agitators, possibly Communist inspired. The city passes an ordinance to prohibit picketing.

In mid-March, Kress and other stores re-open their lunch counters. On March 15 — a cold, wet, winter day — Claflin Student Council President Tom Gaither and SCSC freshman Charles "Chuck" McDew, lead almost 1,000 students on a peaceful march downtown to protest segregation and support the wave of sit-ins occurring in [Rock Hill](#), Columbia, Sumter, Spartanburg, and across the South as a whole. (Among the student leaders is James Clyburn who today represents Orangeburg and the 6th District in Congress.) Walking two-by-two on the sidewalk from their rally point on the Claflin campus, they march in groups of 50-75 so that they can't be accused of disrupting traffic.

The cops order them to halt and return to campus. They refuse. The cops attack them with clubs and tear-gas. The fire department knocks them off their feet with freezing water from high-pressure hoses. Holding to the self-discipline of nonviolence, a hard core of protesters stand their ground. Almost 400 are arrested in the largest Freedom Movement mass arrest up to that time. Soaking wet from the hoses and rain, shivering from the 40-degree weather, they are forced into an outdoor stockade that according to local lore had at one time been the site of slave auctions. They cling together for warmth and sing "*God Bless America*," "*The Star-Spangled Banner*," and newly learned freedom songs like "*We Shall Overcome*." Supporters who try to pass them food and blankets are also arrested.

Swift, railroad-style trials for the arrested protesters begin three days later on March 18. They are defended by attorney Matthew Perry of the NAACP. The judge throws him in jail for "pursuing his case vigorously." Convicted of "Breach of the Peace," the protesters appeal the verdicts and refuse to pay their \$50 fines (equal to about \$390 in 2012). Eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court overturns the convictions because their sidewalk march was a peaceful, orderly petition for redress of grievances within the protection of the 1st Amendment.

SCSC President Benner C. Turner threatens to expel any student who demonstrate against segregation. The state of South Carolina passes legislation making it a crime to "refuse to leave a place of business when asked to do so by the management." Though occasional small protests occur over the following two years, the campus and state repression is largely successful in suppressing the Movement. None of the stores agree to desegregate.

Following the arrests and trials, many of the main student leaders leave campus to devote their full energies to the Freedom Movement. Tom Gaither becomes a CORE field secretary and Chuck McDew becomes the second Chairman of the [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](#) (SNCC).

See [Orangeburg SC, Movement](#) (1963) for continuation.

For more information on the Orangeburg Civil Rights Movement:  
Book: [Freedom & Justice: Four Decades of the Civil Rights Struggle..](#)  
Web: [Orangeburg SC Movement & Orangeburg Massacre](#)

## Montgomery Sit-ins Suppressed (Feb)

Inspired by the news from [Greensboro](#), some 35 Black students from Alabama State College (ASC) in Montgomery stage a sit-in at the county courthouse lunchroom on Thursday, February 25th. The concession operator closes down and whites harass the students.

White elected officials express outrage at this violation of southern custom (which, due to an oversight in local segregation laws, is technically not illegal). Governor Patterson orders ASC President Trenholm to expel any student who dares to challenge segregation in any way and threatens to cut off funding to the school if his orders are not carried out. He makes it clear there will be no integration, no sitting-in, and no Black protests in either his capitol or his totally segregated state. The *Montgomery Advertiser* quotes Police Commissioner L.B. Sullivan:

*We do not intend to permit outside forces to create, provoke or otherwise incite any racial incidents here in our city. ... I want to assure the citizens of Montgomery that we are prepared to take whatever actions that might be necessary to maintain and preserve the time honored traditions and customs of the South. [10]*

The following day, February 26, student leader Bernard Lee tells the press, "*We only wish to gain our rights as guaranteed us by the federal Constitution and the Bill of Rights. All we did was request some food service in a public building which was built by the tax payers' money. ... We deeply resent the humiliating treatment to which the Governor has subjected the President of our College.*" Several hundred students march to the courthouse to support a fellow student who is on trial for attempting to register to vote (he's convicted of perjury for misunderstanding a question and answering it incorrectly).

Over the weekend, white men armed with baseball bats patrol the downtown streets on lookout for any Blacks who might dare sit at a segregated lunch counter. The Sunday paper runs a photo of a white man clubbing a Black woman in the back of the head. To no one's surprise, he is not arrested.

On Monday, February 29, as many as 800 ASC students defy the Governor by holding a civil rights rally addressed by Dr. King who travels from Atlanta to speak. The next day, March 1st, a thousand people, almost half the ASC student body, march from the campus to the state Capitol. They sing "*The Star-Spangled Banner*" near the monument to Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

Over the objections of college President Trenholm, on March 2nd, Governor Patterson has the State Board of Education expell nine ASC students considered to be the leaders of the courthouse sit-in. Twenty others are suspended for their participation. At first, student leaders call for a class boycott until those expelled are reinstated, but with final exams starting that is not practical. Instead, they vow to hold off registering for the Spring

semester as a gesture of support. To starve protesting students into submission, the college retaliates by withholding their dining hall meal tickets.

On Friday, March 4, Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) leader Rev. Ralph Abernathy calls for a Sunday mass march and prayer vigil at the Capitol in support of the students. Police Commissioner Sullivan threatens, "*In view of the situation that exists in Montgomery, if the Negroes persist in flaunting their arrogance and defiance by congregating at the Capitol on Sunday, the police will take whatever action that might be necessary to disperse them.*"

On Sunday, the 6th of March, a throng of white men occupy the Capitol grounds in anticipation of the march. Riot-equipped State Troopers, sheriffs deputies, and city police are out in force. Blacks and a few white supporters gather at nearby Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Led by Rev. Abernathy and Father Robert DuBose they march out of the church but are pushed back by a phalanx of cops who force them back inside. The white crowd tries to assault the protesters, but to their credit the police under command of State Safety Directory Floyd Mann hold them back and prevent mob violence.

On Monday, the registration strike continues on campus. On Tuesday the 8th, students try to march from the campus to the nearby church where they hold their mass meetings. A half-block from campus the nonviolent protesters are blocked and surrounded by a swarm of cops many of whom are brandishing rifles, carbines, and sub-machineguns. More than 30 of the students at the head of the march are arrested. The remaining marchers retreat back to the campus grounds where they are joined by almost the entire student body. Intimidating them from across the street are the heavily-armed forces of "law and order." The nonviolent students sing "*We are not afraid.*" Eventually, seeing no pretext for any further action, the police disperse.

Another march the next day is called off because of weather. Marches around the campus resume the following day, with heavily-armed police assembled in force to arrest any protesters who step off the school grounds on to a city street or sidewalk. White officials are outraged at these shows of Black defiance. Commissioner Sullivan calls for ASC to be completely shut down. The state begins an investigation. Dr. King wires President Eisenhower to protest: "A reign of terror has broken out in Montgomery, Alabama. Gestapo-like methods are being used by police and city authorities to intimidate Negroes who have been pursuing peaceful and nonviolent techniques to achieve their moral and constitutional rights." Eisenhower does not respond.

On Thursday the 11th, the students suspend their registration-strike so that they can enroll for the new quarter. The next day the arrested students are convicted of "disorderly conduct" and "disobeying an officer" and fined \$200 each (equal to \$1500 in 2013). Police harassment of students and ordinary Black folk going about their daily business increases sharply. There are beatings and assaults and arrests on trumped up charges. Expelled student leader Bernard Lee is dragged from a car and arrested on charges of "vagrancy" even though he is employed. New laws are passed giving police expanded powers to suppress protests and enforce the southern way of life. This concerted assault of white

violence, police repression, and academic punishment succeeds in suppressing the student-led sit-ins and protests — for now.

For more information on the Montgomery sit-ins:

Web:

[\*The Montgomery Situation\*](#), Lawrence Dunbar Reddick, Alabama State College.

[Montgomery, AL students Sit-in for Civil Rights, 1960](#) (GNAD ~ Swarthmore Coll.)

## **Alabama Attacks Black Leaders (1960-1964)**

See [Montgomery Bus Boycott](#) for preceding events.

In the late Fall of 1959, the state of Alabama launches a politically-motivated audit of Dr. King's state income taxes covering the years during and after the [Montgomery Bus Boycott](#). They accuse him of under-reporting his income to evade taxes. From 1955 to 1958, many Movement supporters from all over the world wrote donation checks to Dr. King — whose name they knew — rather than the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) or Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). King deposited those funds into his personal account, and then diligently transferred every dime to the appropriate organization. While Martin Luther King has many great talents, bookkeeping is not one of them. Though he knows he is innocent, he cannot prove it. So he agrees to pay \$2,100 in back taxes to settle the matter.

In January of 1960, Dr. King moves to Atlanta and assumes his duties as co-pastor (with his father) of Ebenezer Baptist Church. On [February 1st](#), lunch-counter sit-ins led by Black students begin to [sweep across the South](#). On February 16, Dr. King and Rev. Abernathy address a huge mass meeting of more than 1,200 in [Durham, NC](#) where protests are rattling the foundations of segregation. For the first time ever, King makes a public call to end segregation by filling the jails through mass civil-disobedience. The next day, Georgia sheriffs invade Ebenezer church and arrest him on an Alabama warrant. He is charged with felony perjury regarding his tax returns. If convicted, no one doubts that an Alabama court will sentence him to the maximum five years in the state penitentiary.

Dr. King is the first person in Alabama history to be charged with a felony in this kind of tax case — the normal practice is to handle the case administratively or at worst bring misdemeanor charges — and the fact that he had accepted the auditor's decision and already paid the back-taxes they claimed he owed makes the charges particularly outrageous. With a wink and a nod, Alabama Governor Patterson — who as state Attorney General had fought the Bus Boycott and illegally [suppressed the NAACP](#) — confirms the political nature of the case and takes personal credit for it. "*If you dance,*" he tells the press with a grin, "*you must pay the fiddler.*"

King is distraught. He is willing to face prison if he has to, but the accusation that he personally profited from Movement donations wounds him deeply. The NAACP assembles a force of five attorneys to defend him, but they do not take King's case for free and the NAACP will not cover their substantial fees. Dr. King supports a growing family on his modest Ebenezer salary; everything he earns from speaking and writing goes to the Freedom Movement, and his meager financial resources cannot cover the legal costs of fighting the tax case.

Meanwhile, the sit-ins surge into the Deep South. In [Orangeburg, SC](#), hundreds of students are attacked by club-swinging cops, sprayed with tear gas, battered with high-pressure fire hoses and incarcerated in an open-air stockade. In [Montgomery Alabama](#), students are arrested, gun-toting police threaten the campus, and student leaders are expelled.

In New York City, Harry Belafonte and A. Philip Randolph form a "Committee to Defend Dr. King and the Struggle for Freedom in the South." Bayard Rustin is it's Executive Director. The committee pools its resources and pays \$4,800 (equal to almost \$38,000 in 2013) to buy a full-page advertisement in the March 29 issue of the *New York Times*. Based on verbal reports flowing up from embattled southern communities, the ad written by Bellafonte, Rustin and playwright Lorraine Hansbury is titled, [Heed Their Rising Voices](#). The statement describes the swelling sit-in movement, the savage state repression directed against it, King's tax case, and the political motivations behind it. It appeals for donations to support King's legal defense, the students, and voter-registration. The ad is signed by 84 prominent Americans from politics, religion, sports, letters and the arts.

Alabama Governor John Patterson and Montgomery Police Commissioner L.B. Sullivan strike back. Along with three other officials, they file suit charging that the advertisement is false and defamatory against them — even though their names do not appear at all in the statement — and that as office-holders it subjects them to public shame and ridicule.

This kind of retaliatory lawsuit is a common tactic used across the South to intimidate the media and prevent them from running stories on civil rights or criticizing southern police or officials. Under libel law as it exists at this time, there is no First Amendment free speech protection for statements a court later deems to be defamatory. And stories about a public official (or the official's actions) can be ruled false and libelous if they contain any factual error at all, no matter how innocent or trivial. The same applies to political advertisements. At the time the Alabama officials file suit, defamation cases against news organizations claiming some \$300,000,000 in damages are in courts across the South. (In 2013 dollars, that's the equivalent of \$2.3 Billion in pending lawsuits.) Most of these cases are related to civil rights coverage. The inevitable (and intended) result is fear-driven self-censorship by both media and individuals.

The Sullivan suit is also a direct attack on Freedom Movement finances. In later years, civil rights organizations develop mailing lists and support chapters they can appeal to for desperately needed funds. But in early 1960, only the NAACP has some limited capability of that kind, so newspaper advertisements are a mainstay for groups like SCLC, CORE and the

yet to be formed SNCC. But with the *Times* now being sued, newspapers everywhere abruptly become unwilling to run any kind of ads related to civil rights.

In addition to the *New York Times*, the suit also goes after four of those who signed the advertisement — the reverends Ralph Abernathy, Joseph Lowery, Solomon Seay (Sr), and Fred Shuttlesworth. (Since the ad was on his behalf Dr. King did not sign it, so the Alabama officials are unable to name him as a defendant.) The four leaders they do name are the four who live in Alabama or hold property there.

Meanwhile, prosecutors are rushing the tax-perjury case against Dr. King through the courts. Young attorney Chauncey Eskridge is added to Dr. King's defense team. He discovers that while King's financial records are poorly maintained, King's personal diary contains detailed financial information and he comes up with a strategy for using the diary to prove King's innocence. (Eskridge is so powerfully impressed by the man that he devotes his life to supporting Dr. King's struggle for justice — nine years later he is standing in the Lorraine Motel parking lot when King is assassinated in Memphis.)

The trial commences in Montgomery on May 22nd. Lloyd Hale, the Alabama state auditor is called to the stand. He testifies that at the time of the audit the previous December he informed King that he had found no evidence of any fraud. There is an audible gasp of astonishment from the courtroom spectators — this white employee of the state has just defied the governor (his boss) by telling the truth in a politically-charged racial case. Dr. King takes the stand and through his diaries shows that all the donations deposited in his personal account were later transferred to the MIA and SCLC. On cross-examination, the prosecution hammers King with irrelevant, race-related questions intended to provoke hostility among the all-white jurors.

On May 28 the case goes to the jury. After less than four hours deliberation, the jury acquits Dr. King on all charges. Cheers and sobs of relief and elation erupt from the Black spectators. The state prosecutors are stunned — a white jury has gone beyond race to justice. King tells reporters, "*This represents great hope, and it shows that there are hundreds of thousands of white people of good will in the South, even though they may disagree with our views on integration.*"

In November of 1960, a quite different all-white jury in Montgomery decides *Sullivan v. New York Times*. The *Times* and the four Black leaders are found guilty of falsely defaming the white officials. The charge of "falsehood" is based on trivial inconsistencies: the statement said that the Montgomery students sang, "*My County 'Tis of Thee*," but actually they sang "*The Star-Spangled Banner*;" the student leaders were expelled for a sit-in at the courthouse, rather than the rally on the Capitol steps as the ad claimed; the statement reported that the police "...ringed the Alabama State College Campus," but the cops massed only on one side; Dr. King had not been arrested seven times, but only four, the dining hall was not "padlocked" to starve the striking students into submission, instead meal tickets were withheld from protesting students.

The five white officials are awarded \$500,000 in damages (equivalent to almost \$4 Million in 2013) from each defendant that they sue. For the Black leaders this is an economic death sentence. The verdict is appealed on First Amendment, "free speech" grounds to the Alabama Supreme Court. In August of 1962, the Alabama court denies the appeal stating: "The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution does not protect libelous publications." To begin collecting damages, the cars of Shuttlesworth, Abernathy, and Lowery are seized and sold at auction. Abernathy's land is placed under lien, Seay's land is attached for "quick-sale."

Stanley Levison, one of Dr. King's most loyal supporters, recruits new attorneys with strong backgrounds in constitutional law for an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. Among them are Harry Wachtel, Herbert Wechsler, and Clarence Jones. In January of 1964, attorneys argue *New York Times v. Sullivan* before the Court.

On March 9, 1964, the Court unanimously issues a broad, sweeping decision that overturns the Alabama court and redefines the 1st Amendment as it applies to criticism of public officials. The Court affirms that Constitutional guarantees of free speech and press do apply to paid commercial advertisements. In the words of Justice Brennan: "*Any other conclusion would discourage newspapers from carrying "editorial advertisements" of this type, and so might shut off an important outlet for the promulgation of information and ideas by persons who do not themselves have access to publishing facilities — who wish to exercise their freedom of speech even though they are not members of the press.*"

The Court also affirms that errors and exaggerations are common in public debate (to say nothing of political campaigns) and cannot be criminalized without crippling freedom of speech and freedom of the press. In the opinion of Justice Brennan: "*If Sullivan ... could intimidate The New York Times, the media in this country would become as effective as a toothless guard dog.*"

The Court goes on to rule that an official (as opposed to a private person not in the public eye) has to prove "actual malice" — that the statement is made with knowledge of its falsity, or with "reckless disregard" of whether it is true or false — before damages can be claimed. This becomes known as the "Absence of Malice" doctrine. Brennan writes: "*We consider this case against the background of a profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials.*"

With the Alabama lawsuit decisively over-turned and a new doctrine allowing criticism of public officials established, retaliatory lawsuits by southern officials based on media stories about the Civil Rights Movement dwindle away.

For more information:

Web: [New York Times v. Sullivan & King Tax Case](#)

Documents:

[Heed Their Rising Voices](#) Times advertisement  
[The Burning Truth in the South](#), Martin Luther King.

## **Baltimore Sit-ins & Protests (1960)**

See [Baltimore Sit-In Victory](#) for preceding events.

The Civic Interest Group (CIG) is one of the main direct-action organizations active in Baltimore, MD. Led by students from Morgan State, CIG also includes activists from Coppin State College, Black high school kids, and some white students from Goucher College and Johns Hopkins University.

Up the street from Morgan State is the Northwood Shopping Center where eating and entertainment facilities are segregated. Early in March, CIG begins picketing and sit-ins at Hecht's department store, Arundel's Ice Cream Parlor, and the Northwood movie theater. Some protesters are arrested. Within a short time the eating places agree to serve everyone regardless of race, but the theater continues to bar Blacks. Protests continue at the cinema for years (see [Northwood Theatre — Baltimore](#) for continuation).

The CIG students expand their protests to the the lunch counters and tea rooms of the big downtown department stores which quickly agree to desegregate. Other Baltimore lunch counters, cafes, and restaurants, are more recalcitrant and direct-action continues at those facilities. Among those arrested in November are Howard University students and future SNCC field secretaries Mary Lovelace and Stokely Carmichael, Bill Mahoney, Jan Triggs.

Students are arrested and convicted of trespass for sitting in at Hooper's Restaurant. Their case is appealed by Thurgood Marshall and Juanita Jackson Mitchell of the NAACP. In 1964, their convictions are overturned by the Supreme Court. Robert Mack Bell (16), the student body president of Dunbar High School, is the lead name on the case. He later graduates from Harvard Law School, and in 1996 becomes the Chief Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals.

Over the next few years CIG on its own or in cooperation with other civil rights groups goes on to desegregate more than 100 public facilities in Baltimore and along Maryland highways.

See [Desegregate Route 40 Project](#) and [Northwood Theatre — Baltimore](#) for subsequent events.

For more information on the Baltimore Civil Rights Movement:  
Web: [Baltimore & Maryland](#)

## Atlanta Sit-ins (Mar-Oct)

Atlanta University, the Interdenominational Theologic Center, and Clark, Morehouse, Morris Brown, and Spelman Colleges have adjacent campuses. Together, these Black institutions are known as the Atlanta University Center (AUC).

[In 1988 Atlanta and Clark merged to form Clark-Atlanta University.]

After reading about the [Greensboro sit-ins](#), AUC students Lonnie King, Julian Bond, Roslyn Pope, and Joseph Pierce form the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR). They are soon joined by many others and eventually a Movement policy council is organized with three representatives from each of the six schools. Workshops and training sessions on the strategy and tactics of Nonviolent Resistance are organized and students willing to take an oath of nonviolence and sit-in at local lunch counters are recruited.

On March 9, the COAHR students publish "[An Appeal for Human Rights](#)," in Atlanta newspapers. Largely drafted by Roslyn Pope, it's a declaration of war against racism and discrimination, the Appeal condemns in specific detail the injustices of segregation, demands that it be ended, and unequivocally states:

We [AUC students] have joined our hearts, minds, and bodies in the cause of gaining those rights which are inherently ours as members of the human race and citizens of these United States. ... We do not intend to wait placidly for those rights which are already legally ours to be meted out to us one at a time. Today's youth will not sit by submissively, while being denied all the rights, privileges, and joys of life. ... We must say in all candor that we plan to use every legal and nonviolent means at our disposal to secure full citizenship rights as members of this great Democracy of ours.

The Appeal is also a challenge to the "old guard" leaders of Atlanta's Black community and their slow strategies of negotiation and litigation. Against the advice of their more cautious elders, 200 AUC students launch sit-ins on March 15, targeting facilities at government buildings and interstate bus and train terminals since — in theory — public access to these are guaranteed by the 14th Amendment.

On orders of Georgia Governor Ernest Vandiver, 77 students are arrested for sitting-in, as are the six students who had signed the March 9 "[Appeal for Human Rights](#)." The 83 are charged with "Breach of the Peace," "Refusing to Leave Premises," "Intimidating" the restaurant owners, and "Conspiracy," a serious felony. If convicted, they face 99 years in the penitentiary. Negotiations with the white power-structure slowly get under way while direct-action continues until the students leave for summer vacation. An ultimately successful legal defense of the arrested students is mounted. The negotiations with Atlanta civic leaders are long and ultimately fruitless — they will not agree to end segregation.

Over the summer, COAHR plans for the fall when students return. On the weekend of October 14-16, SNCC holds a strategy conference at AUC of student-activists from across the South, and many Atlanta students attend. On October 19, COAHR resumes large demonstrations and sit-ins, this time targeted at eight of Atlanta's segregated downtown

stores. In addition, hundreds of AUC students picket an Atlanta police station to protest previous arrests and general mistreatment of Blacks by the cops. A small number of whites from Emory and Georgia Tech also protest segregation. In all, 52 protesters are arrested and charged with "Trespass" and "Refusing to Leave Private Facilities." Fourteen of those arrested refuse to post bond as part of a "Jail-No-Bail" strategy to intensify the struggle.

Rich's Department Store is the flagship emporium of the downtown business district, and it becomes a primary sit-in target. The students ask Dr. King to join them in sit-ins at Rich's restaurants, including the upscale Magnolia Tea Room on Rich's 6th floor. Though reluctant to be arrested due to legal troubles stemming from his Movement activities in Alabama, Dr. King participates and is hauled off to jail with the students. In solidarity with those following the "Jail-No-Bail" strategy, he refuses to post bond and remains imprisoned.

The arrests galvanize Atlanta's Black community and some "old guard" Black leaders join the ongoing protests. Blacks boycott the segregated stores. Negotiations are resumed. Six days later, on October 24, Atlanta Mayor Hartsfield orders the release of all demonstrators still imprisoned. But Dr. King is kept in jail (see [King, JFK, and the 1960 Election](#) for what occurs in regards to King).

Protests and boycotts continue. By September of 1961, many store owners have desegregated their lunch counters. In 1962, a federal court rules in favor of a COAHR lawsuit and orders the desegregation of the city's public pools and parks. But overall, in spite of power-structure propaganda touting Atlanta as the "City too busy to hate," Atlanta lags behind many other southern cities. Student leaders tell the new Mayor in 1963 that, "*Three years have passed without our having realized the goals which we set down.*" The struggle continues until the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) makes segregated public facilities illegal. Even after that, it takes years to break down the barriers of custom, bigotry, and social pressure.

See [SNCC Meets Kenyan Freedom Fighter in Atlanta](#) for continuation.

For more information on the Atlanta Civil Rights Movement:

Web:

[Atlanta in the Civil Rights Movement](#) (Atlanta Higher Education)

[Atlanta University District](#) (National Park Service)

## **Nonviolent Action Group (NAG), Howard University**

Inspired by the [Greensboro Sit-ins](#), students at Howard University in Washington DC found the Nonviolent Action Group (NAG). In the years to come, NAG emerges as one of the most active, and most influential, of the student groups that [establish SNCC](#). NAG students are soon sitting in at segregated area amusement parks such as Glen Echo Park in Maryland, participating in the [Route 40 Project](#), supporting the Baltimore students at the [Northwood](#)

[Theatre protests](#), joining the [Freedom Rides](#), and facing mob violence in [Cambridge MD](#) and the [Eastern Shore](#).

Of all the student sit-in organizations, NAG addresses the widest and most varied range of issues. As with the other student groups, NAG confronts both off-campus segregation and on-campus issues related to student rights (freedom of speech, association, and political activity, administration authoritarianism and paternalism, etc). But because it is located in Washington DC, NAG is also involved in national political issues involving the White House and Congress. And through contact with the embassies and foreign student delegations of emerging nations, NAG encounters and interacts with the international de-colonization/national-liberation struggles of Africa and Asia.

While hundreds participate in NAG-organized protests from time to time over the years, or attend an occasional meeting, NAG itself never has more than 50 or so active members — roughly half of whom are women, and a handful are white. This totals one-half of one percent (0.005) of Howard's 8,000 students. But despite their small numbers, NAG's influence is deep and significant. This pattern of tiny size and great impact is typical of all the student action groups on campuses around the South (and compared to most of SNCC's student affiliates, NAG is actually quite large).

As the Freedom Movement evolves and grows, many of its most dedicated activists and organizers come out of NAG, including: Ed Brown, Rap Brown, Charlie Cobb, Courtland Cox, Dion Diamond, Ruth Howard, Karen House, Tom Kahn, Mary Lovelace, Bill Mahoney, John Moody, Joan Mulholland, Cleveland Sellers, Mike Thelwell, Hank Thomas, Muriel Tillinghast, Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael), Cynthia Washington, and Jean Wheeler.

## **Savannah Sit-ins & Boycott (1960-62)**

In 1960, roughly one-third of Savannah residents are Black, but unlike other cities in the Deep South more than half of them are registered to vote (Black registration is as high as white registration). Elected officials know that Blacks can affect the outcome of elections which they prove by electing a racial "moderate" as Mayor in 1960. The new Mayor appoints Black representatives to various municipal governing bodies.

On March 16, Black students in Savannah sit-in at eight downtown lunch counters. Three are arrested. Led by postman Westley Wallace Law of the NAACP, the local movement then demands desegregation of facilities, use of courtesy titles (Mr., Mrs., Miss, instead of the usual "boy" or "girl"), and hiring of Black clerks and managers. To win these demands, they call for a boycott of white-owned downtown stores.

Young activists keep the boycott strong with picket lines, sit-ins, and other forms of direct-action at public beaches and parks, on the buses, at movie theaters and white churches. Weekly mass meetings are held each Sunday afternoon after church services.

Unlike [Albany](#) in 1961-62, the city of Savannah does not resort to mass arrests of everyone who demonstrates, and some of those they do arrest have their convictions over-ruled as unconstitutional.

The boycott is particularly effective, forcing some of the large stores into bankruptcy. The protests and boycott continue for 19 months, from March of 1960 to October of 1961. In June of 1961 the bus line agrees to begin hiring Black drivers. In October the city agrees to desegregate parks, swimming pools, busses, and restaurants and the boycott is lifted.

See [Savannah Boycott Victory](#) for continuation.

For more information on the Savannah Civil Rights Movement:

CRMVets: [Siege at Savannah](#)

Book: [Weary Feet, Rested Souls...](#) (pages 179-188)

## **Baton Rouge Sit-ins & Student Strike (March-April)**

As sit-ins spread across the upper and mid-south, the all-white Louisiana State Board of Education threatens "Stern disciplinary action," against any student who participates in a sit-in. Felton Clark, the President of Southern University (SU) — a segregated, state-funded, Black college in Baton Rouge — tells students they will be expelled if they sit-in.

On March 28, seven SU students are arrested for sitting-in at a Kress lunch counter. Charged with "Disturbing the Peace," their bail is set at \$1,500 (equivalent to \$10,000 in 2006 dollars) — an astronomically high bond for a misdemeanor charge. Reverend T.J. Jemison, leader of the [Baton Rouge Bus Boycott](#), somehow manages to raise the enormous bond amount and the seven students are met with cheers when they return to campus later that night.

The next day, nine more students are arrested for sitting-in at the bus terminal and a store lunch counter. The following day, led by SU student and CORE supporter Major Johns, 3500 students walk out of class and march to the state Capitol building to protest segregation, the arrests, and the outrageous bail amounts.

Major Johns and the 16 students arrested for sitting in are "indefinitely suspended" (expelled) from SU and barred from all public colleges and universities in the state of Louisiana. In response, SU students call for a student strike — a boycott of classes until the 17 are reinstated. Marvin Robinson, President of Senior Class and one of the expelled students later explains: "*What is more important, human dignity or the university? We felt it was human dignity.*"

The SU administration tries to break the boycott by appealing to the students' school spirit and calling parents with accusations that the student leaders are inciting a riot. The

parents, fearing for the safety of their children, begin pulling their sons and daughters out of the university. The boycott evolves into a mass withdrawal to protest SU's complicity with segregation. Over the weekend of April 2nd, hundreds of students leave SU, and hundreds of others want to leave but are unable to do so due to lack of funds for bus fare. Communication between the students and the Baton Rouge Black community are poor and there is confusion and indecision among the student leaders. The boycott falters, some students permanently withdraw from SU, others return to class.

Eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court overturns the "Disturbing the Peace" convictions of the 16 students who were arrested for sitting at "white-only" lunch counters. In 2004 — 44 years after being expelled — they are awarded honorary degrees by Southern University and the state legislature enacts a resolution honoring them.

See [Baton Rouge Student Protests](#) for continuation.

For more information on the Baton Rouge Civil Rights Movement:  
Book: [Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana](#)  
Web: [A House Divided Teaching Guide](#) (SIER ~ Tulane Univ)

## **New Orleans Merchant Boycotts & Sit-ins (1960-1963)**

There are three major Black colleges in New Orleans — Dillard University, a private college; Xavier University of Louisiana (XULA), a venerable Catholic institution; and the newly opened Southern University of New Orleans (SUNO), which is state-financed and subject to the Louisiana Board of Education and legislature.

In 1960, close to 40% of New Orleans' population is Black. The city's main shopping-commercial avenue is Canal Street where all the stores are white-owned with segregated facilities — Blacks can buy goods but not eat at the lunch counters, the restrooms are segregated, and so on. There is also a Black shopping-commercial district — the second largest in the city after Canal Street — along Dryades Street. Here the stores are also white-owned, but the shoppers are almost all Black. Blacks can use the facilities, yet except for an occasional janitor all of the employees and managers are white. Many of the white Dryad Street store-owners are Jews who are themselves prevented from owning stores on prestigious Canal Street by the same white power-structure that enforces segregation against Blacks.

In late 1959, Rev. Avery Alexander, Rev. A.L. Davis (SCLC), and Dr. Henry Mitchell (NAACP) organize the Consumers' League of Greater New Orleans (CLGNO) to fight employment discrimination by the Dryades Street merchants. Said Reverend Alexander: "*There were a hundred stores and there were no Blacks clerking in any of the stores. No managers, no assistant managers. No white collar workers. We didn't believe it was equitable when ninety percent of the customers were Black.*"

For several months in late 1959 and early 1960 the League negotiates with the Dryades Street merchants — to no avail. Despite their own experience of discrimination as Jews, the store owners refuse to open "white" jobs to Blacks. In April, the League launches a boycott of the Dryades stores that won't employ Blacks as anything but menials.

The boycott is effective. The week before Easter is traditionally a major business peak, but on Good Friday the street is filled with pickets but empty of shoppers. Attorney Lolis Elie, working *pro-bono* for the CLGNO, describes the boycott as "*in many ways a spiritual movement*" that unifies the New Orleans Black community.

A few stores begin to hire Blacks, but most continue to refuse. Over the following months, many stores close or move to the white suburbs rather than hire Blacks. The boycott continues, and customers take their business elsewhere. Dryades Street — once a busy commercial district — becomes a street of abandoned, boarded-up stores.

Inspired by the boycott, new organizations emerge including the Citizens' Committee, a coalition that targets segregation at the Canal Street stores and Coordinating Council of Greater New Orleans (CCGNO) which focuses on voter registration. Students from XULA, SUNO, and Dillard — along with a few white students from Tulane and University of New Orleans (UNO) — join the picket lines on Dryades Street. When the CLGNO pickets are temporarily halted by an injunction, they form a CORE chapter led by former XULA student body President Rudy Lombard, Oretha Castle from SUNO, Jerome Smith one of the students who [withdrew from Southern University](#) in Baton Rouge, and Hugh Murray a white student from Tulane.

On September 9, seven members of the new CORE chapter stage a sit-in at the Woolworth on Canal Street. This challenges the white (Christian) commercial elite in a way that a boycott of Jewish stores did not. They react with anger. The integrated group of Blacks and whites is arrested and charged with "Criminal Mischief." Mayor Morrison issues a statement condemning the sit-in, forbidding any future sit-ins, and ordering the police to suppress civil rights activity in the downtown shopping district. CORE leader Oretha Castle is fired from her job at the Hotel Dieu Hospital: "*The good nun gave me my paycheck and said, 'Take it, and get out of here, and don't ever come back.'*"

On September 16, a week after the Canal Street sit-in, CORE field secretary Jim McCain, Reverend Avery Alexander, and other members of CLGNO are arrested for picketing stores on Claiborne Avenue. On Saturday, September 17, Rudy Lombard, Oretha Castle, Dillard student Cecil Carter, and Tulane student Sydney Goldfinch are arrested for sitting-in at the McCrory's department store lunch counter. As a Jew, Goldfinch is particularly hated by the white (power-structure). He is charged with "Criminal Anarchy" which carries a potential sentence of 10 years in state prison, his bond is set at \$2,500 (equal to \$19,000 in 2012). As police repression against the Movement increases, not only are sit-ins arrested, but so too are picketers. And soon people passing out flyers are being busted for "Leafletting Without a License." Some 3,000 people attend a support rally for the "jailbirds" at the ILA (longshoremen's union) hall, and SCLC leader A. L. Davis opens his church to CORE activists for meetings and training sessions in Nonviolent Resistance.

Hampered by lack of bail money, CORE sit-ins continue off and on as funds become available, and the NAACP Youth Council led by Raphael Cassimire pickets the stores to protest segregation and the arrests. Crowds of angry whites taunt, abuse, and attack the CORE and NAACP demonstrators, beating them, scalding them with hot coffee, and throwing acid on them.

The New Orleans sit-ins, pickets, boycotts, and arrests continue for years, culminating in a massive [Freedom March](#) in September of 1963. Slowly — too slowly — public facilities in New Orleans are desegregated. Passage of the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) overturns all segregation laws, but custom and practice yield slowly, taking years more to change.

For more information on the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement:

Book: [Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana](#)

Web:

[New Orleans Citizens Boycott...](#) (Global Nonviolent Action Database)

[A House Divided](#) (Southern Institute ~ Tulane Univ.)

## **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Founded (April)**

By spring, sit-ins are breaking out in college-towns all over the upper & mid-south, and even a few in the Deep South. News coverage and community mass meetings are thrusting young Black students into leadership positions and media spotlights for which they are often unprepared.

Seeing the need for sharing experiences, leadership training, and improving communication between the independent sit-in groups, Ella Baker, SCLC's Executive Secretary, convinces Dr. King to drain SCLC's meager funds by providing \$800 to finance a conference of student sit-in leaders. By letter, Baker issues a [Call](#) for a Youth Leadership Conference signed by Dr. King, inviting student activists to, "... chart new goals and achieve a more unified sense of direction for training and action in Nonviolent Resistance." Understanding the students' desire for independence, the call to conference states that although "Adult freedom fighters" would be present for "counsel and guidance," the conference would be "youth centered." (Dr. King — the most prominent "adult" — is at this time just 31 years old.)

*I remember receiving the invitation to attend the conference that would bring together student leadership from many campuses where sit-ins were going on. Ella Baker saw how important it was to recognize the fact that the students should set the goals and directions and maintain control of the student movement. I never had to worry about where Ella Baker was coming from. She would speak her mind honestly, and I turned to her frequently, because she could emotionally pick me back up and dust me off. ... I think she was constantly aware that the differences that the students had were probably not as important as the similarities that we had, in terms of what we were trying to do. So, very often, she was the person who was able to make us see, and work together. — Diane Nash.[11]*

Dr. King co-signs Baker's letter, and the conference is held at Shaw University in Raleigh NC over the Easter Weekend (April 15-17) — just six weeks after the first Greensboro sit-in. 126 student delegates from 58 sit-in centers in 12 states attend, along with delegates from 19 northern colleges, SCLC, CORE, Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), National Student Association (NSA), and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). A dozen white students are among the more than 200 participants.

The largest, and most influential of the student delegations come from the [Nashville Student Movement](#), the [Atlanta Coalition](#), and the [Nonviolent Action Group](#) in Washington. From these three centers of student action come many of SNCC's most dedicated activists and significant leaders.

These students are intellectual and emotional rebels willing to put their bodies on the line for what they believe. They are stubborn and independent, and their debates and discussions are long, intense, and passionate. As SNCC field secretary Joyce Ladner would later comment: "*SNCC folk would argue with a street sign.*"

*I think [Ella Baker] was constantly aware that the differences that the students had were probably not as important as the similarities that we had, in terms of what we were trying to do. So, very often, she was the person who was able to make us see, and work together.* — Diane Nash.[11]

In a speech titled "[Bigger Than a Hamburger](#)," Ella Baker — 55 years old at the time — addresses the assembled students and "adult freedom fighters," telling the adults that: "*The younger generation is challenging you and me, they are asking us to forget our laziness and doubt and fear, and follow our dedication to the truth to the bitter end.*" Julian Bond later recalled:

*I remember her speech "More Than a Hamburger." And I can remember it being an eye-opener to me, because I really had not thought about much more than a hamburger. We were doing lunch counter sit-ins, we wanted to integrate the lunch counters, and that was the deal. I knew that racial problems extended far beyond lunch counters. But I didn't see us doing anything like that, 'till she mentioned it there. So it was a real eye-opener, a real big step, a big leap for me. And I think it was for a lot of the other people too.* — Julian Bond. [11]

James Lawson of the [Nashville](#) sit-ins gives the keynote address, emphasizing both the need for immediate direct-action (as opposed to slow court cases) and the power of Nonviolent Resistance — its philosophy, strategy, and tactics. His presentation is so powerful that "Nonviolent" becomes part of SNCC's organizational name.

With Baker's support, the students set up their own independent organization rather than become the youth arm of SCLC. They adopt a [Founding Statement](#) based on Lawson's presentation. The name they choose for their new organization — "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee" — clearly states their intentions: "Student" denoting an independent group as opposed to the youth arm of an existing organization, "Nonviolent" indicating their commitment to nonviolent direct-action, and "Coordinating Committee"

establishing a democratic, non-hierarchical, group-centered culture and structure. Says one student: "*The greatest progress of the American Negro in the future will not be made in Congress or in the Supreme Court; it will come in the jails.*"

*I can remember [Ella Baker] warning against entanglement with adults. Not political entanglements, not against leftists or anything like that. But just to keep our movement pure. That we had started it, we had carried it forward, and we could carry it on by ourselves. And she didn't say that directly; you got the feeling that that's what she meant. She didn't say, "Don't let Martin Luther King tell you what to do," but you got the real feeling that that's what she meant. You know, "He's a good man and so on, but don't let him tell you what to do."* — Julian Bond.<sup>[11]</sup>

Guy Carawan sings a new version of "We Shall Overcome" used by the Nashville students when they were arrested and jailed. Arms crossed and hands joined, gently swaying back and forth, everyone sings the verses that will soon become the anthem of the Freedom Movement: "*Black and white together,*" "*We are not afraid,*" and the refrain, "*Deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day.*"

Marion Barry of Fisk University in Nashville is elected as SNCC's first Chairman. Ella Baker and [Connie Currie](#) (age 24) are chosen as SNCC's adult advisors. A month later a dozen members of the new coordinating committee meet for the first time in Atlanta on May 13-14. With school terms ending, they hire Jane Stenbridge, a white Virginian studying at Union Theologic Seminary in New York, as SNCC's secretary. Ella Baker provides her with a donated desk in a corner of SCLC's Atlanta office, and together they begin raising funds over the summer, arranging for nonviolent training for students returning to school in the Fall, maintaining communications between the campus groups, and putting out the first issue of SNCC's newsletter, the *Student Voice*. The first donation check given to SNCC is \$100 from Eleanor Roosevelt.

In July, Harvard graduate and Horace Mann teacher Bob Moses comes to Atlanta to work with SCLC. But there is little happening, and he begins helping Baker and Stenbridge at the SNCC desk. Baker asks him to go down into Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana to recruit for a SNCC strategy conference scheduled for Atlanta in October. He leaves in August on a journey that will, in time, transform SNCC from a loose association of independent student groups to an organization of organizers fomenting social revolution in the Deep south (see [Direct Action or Voter Registration?](#) for continuation).

When student sit-ins resume with the Fall term, SNCC plays an increasingly important coordinating and publicizing role. And in the Spring of 1961, when the [Freedom Rides](#) are blocked by mob violence in Anniston and Birmingham AL, SNCC sit-in veterans are ready to step up and carry them forward.

In the years that follow, SNCC becomes the cutting-edge of the Freedom Movement as it evolves from an association of campus-based student protest groups to an organization of organizers in southern Black communities. From 1961 through 1965, it grows rapidly. From its single staff member in late 1960, by mid-1963 it has a national office staff of 12,

some 60 field-secretaries and 120 full-time volunteers working in half a dozen southern states and northern "Friends of SNCC" support groups.

SNCC's Annual Budgets 1960-1965	
1960 (half-year)	\$3,100
1961	\$14,976
1962	\$71,927
1963	\$267,750
1964	N/A
1965	\$1,153,000
Note: SNCC's annual budgets adopted at the beginning of a year don't necessarily reflect what was actually raised and spent over the course of that year. But they do reflect the anticipated scale of operation.	

SNCC Executive Secretary James Forman later recalled SNCC's early years:

*We were a band of sisters and brothers, a circle of trust. ...*

*We were young.*

*We had energy.*

*We had brains.*

*We had technical skills.*

*We had a belief in people and their power to change their lives.*

*We were willing to work with the most dispossessed — the sharecropper, the day laborer, the factory workers, and the mill hands.*

*We were not afraid of death.* — James Forman. [2]

Historian Charles Payne would later say about SNCC:

... it is not too much to say that [SNCC] did a great deal to invent the sixties. Bernice Reagon calls the Civil Rights Movement the "*borning struggle*" of the decade, in that it was the movement that stimulated and informed those that followed it. In the same sense, SNCC may have the firmist claim to be called the *borning* organization. SNCC initiated the mass-based, disruptive political style we associate with the sixties, and it provided philosophic and organizational models and hands-on training for people who would become leaders in the student power movement, the anti-war movement, and the feminist movement. [3]

[We would also include the Chicano movement, womens' liberation, gay rights, and movements for the environment, farm workers, tenant rights, union democracy, and so many other causes of the 1960s and later.]

And as Mississippi Movement leader Hartman Turnbow once observed: "*Power seek tha **weak** places, water seek tha **low** places, but SNCC done seek the **hard** places, seem like t' me.*"

For more information on SNCC:

Books: [SNCC \(Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee\)](#)

Web:

[The Founding of SNCC](#) (From SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference)

[Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](#) (other websites)

Documents:

[Call for the Raleigh Conference](#) 1960 [PDF]

[Bigger Than a Hamburger](#) Ella Baker, 1960

[SNCC Founding Statement](#) 1960

[Student Voice](#) Example issues of the SNCC newsletter

[SNCC Brochure](#) 1963 [PDF]

Personal stories of SNCC activists:

[Joan Browning](#) *Religion and Joining SNCC*

[Charles Bonner & Betty Fikes](#)

[Charlie Cobb](#)

[Hardy Frye](#)

[Don Jelinek](#)

[Wazir \(Willie B.\) Peacock](#)

[Judy Richardson](#)

[Jimmy Rogers & Linda Dehnad](#)

[Ruby Sales](#)

[Jean Wiley](#)

## **Civil Rights Act of 1960 (May)**

In the late 1950s, the Klan bombs churches and burns schools to oppose desegregation and intimidate Blacks. In response, President Eisenhower introduces a new civil rights bill in 1959.

The bill covers three topics, known as "titles." Title I makes it a federal misdemeanor to use violence to obstruct a federal court order, such as a school desegregation ruling. Title II makes it a federal crime to cross state lines to commit, or evade prosecution for, arson against buildings such as churches and schools.

The key provision is Title III which empowers the federal government to act on its own to enforce court orders and previous civil rights legislation. It would allow the Justice Department to file civil rights suits on behalf of the public, obtain injunctions, move civil rights related cases from state to federal court, and give the U.S. Attorney General the power to intervene directly in southern racial issues. This is the same Title III that LBJ stripped out of the [Civil Rights Act of 1957](#).

Under existing law, individual Black citizens have to file civil rights lawsuits against discrimination and abuse. A main purpose of the [White Citizens Council](#) is to keep Blacks

from doing just that. Blacks who petition a court for racial justice in the South face economic retaliation, beatings, false arrests on trumped up charges, bombings, burnings, and lynching. If no one dares file an enforcement suit, national laws and even the Constitution itself are effectively nullified. Without the federal powers granted by Title III, the situation remains unchanged.

A majority in the House of Representatives favor the bill, but it is blocked by Congressman Howard Smith of Virginia who is Chairman of the powerful Rules Committee. To stall the bill, he leaves Washington for his farm out in the rural. With the Chairman absent, no action can be taken on the bill. Through a parliamentary maneuver, Representative (later Senator) Emmanuel Celler of New York forces the bill out of committee and it is passed by the House.

In February of 1960, the bill comes up for debate on the Senate floor. As expected, the segregationist southern Democrats (known as "Dixicrats") stage a filibuster to block passage of any bill containing Title III. Unable to break the filibuster, the Senate drops Title III just as they had in 1957. Shorn of its teeth, the sham bill is then passed as the Civil Rights Act of 1960. It has no significant effect.

See [Civil Rights Act of 1960](#) for text of the Act as enacted.

For more information on the Civil Rights Acts:

Books: [Civil Rights Legislation](#)

Web: [Civil Rights Act — 1960](#)

## **Jacksonville Sit-ins & 'Ax-Handle Saturday' (August)**

In 1960, roughly 100,000 of Jacksonville Florida's 375,000 residents are Black. Lunch counter and store segregation is required by law.

Led by high-school student [Rodney Hurst](#) and Alton Yates, the local NAACP Youth Council with support from NAACP leader Rutledge Pearson, begins organizing students over the summer for a "mission" to desegregate local lunch counters. Before taking action, the students undergo training in their legal rights and the philosophy and principles of nonviolent action.

Saturdays are the main shopping day in Jacksonville, and on the morning of August 13 more than 100 young Blacks — most of them high-school students — assemble at Laura Street Presbyterian Church, form into teams each with a captain, and then walk downtown to a major store. They first purchase items at various counters and then sit down at the "white-only" lunch counter. They are denied service. When they refuse to leave, the counter is closed. Over the following days the sit-ins continue. Though whites insult and harass them, the protesters respond with disciplined nonviolence.

In what later becomes known as "Ax-Handle Saturday," on August 27 the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Council organize a mob to attack the sit-ins. They assemble in Hemming Park where the leaders pass out ax-handles and baseball bats. Many of the Klansmen — some from as far away as Georgia — are wearing replicas of Confederate Army clothing and carrying Confederate flags. They hand out racist flyers signed "Segregation Forces of Duval County" and chat amicably with police who make no effort to question or halt them.

The white mob surges through the downtown streets, brutally attacking the sit-ins with their baseball bats and ax-handles. Black shoppers on the sidewalk and in cars are beaten. Police make no effort to halt or arrest the Klansmen who are mobbing any Black person they can find. Black bystanders who are not part of the sit-in teams try to defend themselves, but against an organized gang armed with heavy clubs they stand little chance. As people flee to escape, the violence spreads across downtown and into the Black neighborhoods where people fight back and hurl rocks at cars driven by whites.

When angry Blacks begin moving out of their community towards downtown where the nonviolent protesters are still under vicious attack, police and sheriffs deputies suddenly appear in large numbers to block them. The cops later report making 62 arrests — 48 Blacks and only 14 whites, one of whom is Richard Parker a Florida State student and NAACP member who is supporting the demonstrators. He is later sentenced to 90 days in jail, while a white thug who beats him in his jail cell is given a \$25 fine.

Violence between whites and Blacks continue into the night, a Black man is shot in the head, several others are wounded by gunfire, and some stores are set afire. Sporadic violence between whites and Blacks continues for several days as do nonviolent rallies and protests.

In continuation of its policy against reporting on the sit-ins or any other civil rights activity on the part of Blacks, the local newspaper orders its reporters and photographers not to cover the mass violence occurring just blocks from their building. (Across the South, many local newspapers either deny coverage to, or grossly distort civil-rights stories.)

After "Ax-Handle Saturday," further sit-ins are suspended as too dangerous, and an economic boycott is launched against the segregated stores. Eventually, negotiations between the NAACP and the Chamber of Commerce result in the gradual desegregation of lunch counters and restaurants over the course of a year.

For more information on the Jacksonville Civil Rights Movement:

Web: [\*It was never about a hot dog and a Coke!\*](#)

Book: [\*It Was Never About a Hotdog and a Coke: A Personal Account of the 1960 Sit-in Demonstrations in Jacksonville, Florida and Ax Handle Saturday\*](#)

## JFK, King, and the 1960 Election (Oct-Nov)

In February of 1960, Dr. King moves to Atlanta GA from Montgomery AL. Early in May, he drives author Lillian Smith home after her cancer treatment. Seeing an inter-racial couple in the car, a cop pulls him over. Under Georgia traffic rules, a new resident has 90 days to get a Georgia license. King is still using his Alabama license a few days past that deadline. The cop gives him a ticket. The judge fines King \$25 and puts him on 12 months probation. King pays the fine, but is not told about the probation.

Early in October, Dr. King is arrested on a [sit-in](#) at Rich's Department Store in Atlanta. The sit-in charges are dropped, but the judge sentences King to four months in jail for violating the traffic ticket probation that he did not know about. Contrary to standard legal practice in a misdemeanor case, the judge refuses to let King out on bail pending appeal. In the dead of night, King is secretly moved to Reidsville State Penitentiary, notorious for its brutal chain gangs and history of mysterious deaths of Black prisoners.

Fearing for Dr. King's life, family, supporters and staff reach out to everyone they know, alerting them to the danger. Both the Kennedy and Nixon campaigns are contacted. Nixon does nothing. John Kennedy makes a personal call to Coretta King to offer his sympathy, his brother Robert calls the judge to ask why bail was denied in a misdemeanor case. The judge then grants bail, and King is released after 8 days incarceration.

A few weeks later, Kennedy defeats Nixon by just .002 of the popular vote — the closest presidential election in living memory (up to that time). Four years earlier, in the election of 1956, Blacks voted Republican ("the party of Lincoln") by a 60% majority. In 1960, JFK gets 70% of the Black vote. Analysts conclude that it is this dramatic shift in Black votes that gives Kennedy his narrow margin of victory in several key northern industrial states (he wins the crucial swing state of Illinois by only 5,000 votes). They attribute this sea-change in Black voting patterns to his gesture of support for Dr. King.

*It is pretty conclusive now that the Negro played a decisive role in electing the president of the United States, and maybe for the first time we can see the power of the ballot and what the ballot can do. Now we must remind Mr. Kennedy that we helped him to get in the White House. We must remind Mr. Kennedy that we are expecting him to use the whole weight of his office to remove the ugly weight of segregation from the shoulders of our nation. — Dr. King. [1]*

For more information on Martin Luther King and the 1960 election:  
Web:

[King Encyclopedia](#) (King Institute ~ Stanford Univ.)

[Black Voters Key to Putting JFK in White House](#) (Stanford Report)

[Martin Luther King, Jr](#) (Thomas Gale Inc.)

## New Orleans School Desegregation (Nov)

### [Photos](#)

See [Second Youth March for Integrated Schools — Washington, DC](#) for preceding events.

In 1960 — six years after [Brown v. Board of Education](#) — New Orleans still maintains two completely separate, segregated school systems, one for whites and an inferior one for Blacks. Though whites outnumber Blacks in population by roughly 60% to 40%, many white students attend private or parochial schools, so Blacks outnumber whites in the Orleans Parish Public Schools by 52,500 to 38,000 (58% to 42%).

In May of 1960, in the first-ever court-ordered school integration plan, federal judge Skelly Wright decrees that 1st graders be allowed to enter the nearest formerly-white or formerly-Black school at their option (an approach similar to the [Nashville Grade-a-Year](#) plan). White New Orleans is horrified and the school board appalled. If the 7,000 incoming Black 1st graders all choose to attend the nearest white school, two-thirds of white elementary schools will be integrated, and Blacks will greatly outnumber the expected 4,000 white 1st graders.

The Louisiana legislature passes Act 496 granting Governor James Davis the power to "supercede" any school board threatened with an integration court order. If a board is superceded, the state then runs those schools (the theory being that since Wright's court ruling is directed at the New Orleans School Board, a new round of integration lawsuits would have to be initiated, this time against the state). They also enact a law empowering the governor to close *all* Louisiana public schools if even a *single* school anywhere in the state is threatened with integration. (Closing individual integrated schools, or all schools in a given district, had been tried by Governor Faubus in [Little Rock](#) and those tactics had already been forbidden by the courts.)

With the help of the White Citizens Council, many white parents begin forming private, white-only schools for their children. Other whites form two organizations — Save Our Schools (SOS) and Committee on Public Education (COPE) — to keep the schools open. These two groups do not support integration, in fact they oppose it, but in effect they indicate a willingness to accept some limited integration if that is the only way to keep the schools open. With their support, the school board files suit against the Governor to prevent him from superceding the New Orleans board or closing the schools.

Just days before school opens on September 8, Judge Wright grants the school board's motion against the Governor, and accepts their integration plan based on Louisiana's anti-integration school placement law. This new plan puts the burden on Black parents who now have to apply to transfer their child to a white school, and allows the board to severely limit the number of Blacks permitted to attend a white school (in other words, the new plan is for token integration by a few carefully-selected Black 1st-graders at a couple of white schools rather than across-the-board integration of the entire 1st grade).

In addition, Wright grants the school board's request to delay integration until November 14 so that they can screen and select the few Black children allowed to integrate a white school. Behind the scenes, the Eisenhower administration also wants to delay integration-day until after the November election because they don't want to face another huge school crises like Little Rock just days before voters cast their ballots in Kennedy vs Nixon and the Congressional races.

Despite having publicly promised to integrate Catholic schools no later than the public schools, Archbishop Rummel decides not to integrate the parochial schools so they remain a segregated option for parents who pull their children out of public school rather than let them sit next to a Black child. The Archbishop piously urges Catholics to pray for "an early solution to the race problem."

As it turns out, only **five** Black students — all girls — are approved by the school board to transfer to a white school on November 14. It's then discovered that the mother of one of the girls is not married to her father, and because she is "illegitimate" she is dropped from the list, leaving just **four**. Meanwhile, the Governor and legislature frantically pass bill after bill aimed at stopping these little girls from attending a white school, but Judge Wright annuls them as fast as they are signed into law. In a final act of desperation, the legislature declares November 14 a state-wide school holiday and dispatches state troopers to prevent Black children from attending school in New Orleans.

Evading the troopers, federal marshalls escort the four girls to school, three of them to McDonogh elementary and the 4th — little Ruby Bridges, just six years old — to Frantz elementary. Whites jeer and curse the girls and the Marshalls, but there is no violence or disruption.

Both of the integrated schools are in the Ninth Ward, which in 1960 is the poorest white working-class neighborhood in New Orleans. The poor whites living in the Ninth Ward bitterly resent the New Orleans power elites who maintain segregation in the schools attended by their own children — or, as in the case of Judge Wright, send their kids to private white-only schools — while imposing integration on those whites who have the least influence in the uptown halls of power. In the opinion of NAACP leader Raphael Cassimere, the school board, "... *maliciously calculated that if we start at the places where the tension is the greatest, then maybe we can defeat [integration] by showing it just can't work.*"

The following evening (Nov 15), thousands of whites crowd into the Munciple Auditorium for an anti-integration rally (the Mayor had previously denied the NAACP's request to hold a meeting at the auditorium because he said it would be too "*emotional*"). White Citizens Council leader Willie Rainach calls on whites to boycott the schools, "*Let's use 'scorched-earth' policy. Let's empty the classrooms where they are integrated!*" The politically powerful, arch-racist Leander Perez shrieks hatred against Blacks and Jews and urges whites to march against the school board, "*Don't wait for your daughter to be raped by these Congolese! Don't wait until the burr-heads are forced into your schools! Do something about it now!*"

The next day (Nov 16) a marauding mob of white adults and high school students rampage down Canal Street, into government buildings, and through the downtown area, attacking and beating Blacks on the street. The police do little to deter them until they attack the Mayor's office at which point they are dispersed. White parents withdraw their children from the two integrated elementary schools. Only one teacher, a woman just arrived from Boston, remains at Frantz. She is the only one willing to teach Ruby Bridges.

The White Citizens Council retaliates economically. Ruby's father is fired, and her grandparents evicted from the farm where they had lived and worked for a quarter of a century. A few white parents refuse to withdraw their children from the integrated school, some of them are also fired and one family has to flee the state.

In an effort to close the schools by economic blockade, banks (white-owned, of course) refuse to process checks issued by the school board for money in its accounts, and the city and state refuses to turn over tax revenues intended for schools. By January the school board is unable to pay 1900 school employees. Eventually, the federal courts threaten bank officials and legislators with Contempt of Court. Facing jail, the segregationists falter, the banks are forced to honor school board checks and funds are pried loose from city and state.

Day after day, the four Black children and the few whites remaining in the integrated schools are forced to run a gauntlet of enraged racists as they enter and leave school each morning and afternoon. Mostly women, the daily mob that gathers outside the two schools call themselves the "cheerleaders." They threaten the children with death, shriek obscenities, and throw things at the students, their parents, and the federal marshalls protecting them. By the end of November, McDonogh is empty except for the three Black girls, while at Frantz the entire student body consists of Ruby Bridges and two white kids who brave the mob.

SOS works to encourage white parents to break the boycott and return their children to the two boycotted schools. Slowly, a few white kids come back to class and by the first week in December, there are 23 whites attending Frantz school with Ruby Bridges. The White Citizens Council organizes vicious hate-campaigns of intimidation, harassment, and violence against their parents. Local police are slow and ineffective in offering protection. The FBI refuses to involve itself in protecting Blacks or anyone sympathetic to the cause of freedom. Yet, despite these obstacles, Blacks and a few whites persevere, and slowly, very slowly, the white boycott wanes and the "cheerleaders" dwindle.

Over time, those whites most opposed to integration either place their children in white-only private schools, or white-only Catholic schools, or move to the suburbs — a "white-flight" that eventually shifts New Orleans population from majority white to majority Black. In 1960, the Ninth Ward — location of the two integrated schools — is inhabited by poor and working class whites. It is the most impoverished and neglected white neighborhood in the entire city. When Hurricane Katrina hits New Orleans 45 years later, the Ninth Ward is still the most impoverished and neglected in the entire city, but now it is inhabited by Blacks.

See [Massive Evasion of School Integration](#) for continuation.

For more information on the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement:

Books:

[Ruby Bridges](#)

[Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana Schools and School Desegregation](#)

Web:

[School Desegregation](#)

[A House Divided](#) (Southern Institute ~ Tulane Univ.)

### 1960 Quotation Sources:

1. [Stanford News Service ~ M.L. King Research & Education Institute.](#)
2. [The Making of Black Revolutionaries](#), Jim Forman
3. [I've Got the Light of Freedom: ...](#), Charles Payne
4. [John F. Kennedy Inaugural Address.](#) (American Rhetoric).
5. [Carolina Theatre — 1961-63.](#) (Civil Rights Heritage ~ Durham Public Library)
6. [On the Road to Freedom: A Guided Tour of the Civil Rights Trail](#), Charles Cobb
7. Biography: Patricia Stephens Due. (Univ. Florida, formerly posted at: [www.history.ufl.edu/](http://www.history.ufl.edu/))
8. [The Barriers They Broke](#) (Raymond Hylton ~ Richmond "Style Weekly")
9. [Civil Rights History From the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement](#), Emilye Crosby
10. [The Montgomery Situation](#), Lawrence Dunbar Reddick, Alabama State College.
11. [Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement](#), by Hampton & Fayer.

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