

The effect of our Charters of Freedom on the 1960 Greensboro Woolworth Sit-In Movement

176 Days of people sitting down to stand up for freedom

On February 1, 1960 a shot was heard around the world.



Four (4) North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University students David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair Jr., and Joseph McNeil entered F.W. Woolworth in Greensboro, NC and sat at the counter to be served and was refused.

Jim Crow Laws

- Jim Crow laws forced racial segregation.
- F.W. Woolworth had separate toilets, and water fountains.
- The Jim Crow laws in the south forbade them to be served seated at the counter. Blacks could only take their food to go.

My Participation

On the second day, I was approached by Ezell Blair, Jr. about what had occurred on the previous day and asked if I wanted to participate. The answer was a resounding YES!

On February 2nd this picture was captured depicting the event that sparked a movement.



**On February 2, 1960, Joseph A. McNeil and Franklin E. McCain are joined by William Smith and Clarence Henderson at the Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina.
(Courtesy of Greensboro News and Record)**

Imagine This

Walking into a place not knowing if you are leaving in a vertical position going to jail or a prone position going to the hospital or the morgue. I participated because it was the right thing to do.

The Idea

To peaceably assemble in a nonviolent manner to achieve the desired outcome of the right to be served.

The Constitution of the United States of America

The 1st Amendment of the Constitution states - Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; **or the right of the people peaceably to assemble**, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The Declaration of Independence

The second paragraph begins with – We hold these truths to be self-evident, **that all men are created equal**, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The Woolworth Sit-In Movement

- Participants from neighboring colleges and high-schools participated.
- The movement spread among students throughout the south and the up the east coast.
- The nonviolent display of civil unrest, was met with violence from white citizens culminating in bomb threats and several students being arrested for trespassing. No consequences for the backlash shown to the students.
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated the sit-in movement was a catalyst that helped propel the Civil Rights Movement.
- Economic repercussion caused the integration of the Woolworth Diner in Greensboro, NC on July 25, 1960, after one hundred and seventy six (176) days.

Jim Crow on Trial

The Greensboro Woolworth sit-in put Jim Crow on trial and Jim Crow was found guilty. The founding principles within the Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence that states **the right of the people peaceably to assemble** and **that all men are created equal**, respectively, bore out their claims.

Our Charters of Freedom

- The Declaration of Independence is the promise that recognizes our freedoms.
- The Constitution of the United States of America is the foundation of our birth certificate and the fulfillment of the promise and recognizes our general rights.
- The Bill of Rights recognizes our individual rights.

Other Demonstrations

I have been in the midst of other demonstrations of civil unrest, namely, the Harlem Riots in 1964 and the riot that occurred on North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State campus in 1969. These were not peaceful protests. My stance then as is now, has always been to bring about change in a peaceful, non-violent manner. Riots rarely yield positive results.

Positive Change

It was demonstrated in 1960 that change can occur within the confines of our founding principles and laws to achieve desired outcomes through peaceful protests.

**RESPECTFULLY
SUBMITTED BY:**

Clarence Henderson

