

Sit-Ins

By Jane Runyon

Events in the 1950's set the wheels of change into motion. Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education led the Supreme Court to rule against **segregation** in public schools. By 1960, it was the law that children of all races were to attend the same schools. Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama bus led the courts to ban segregation on public transportation. These were bold first steps. But segregation still existed. Restaurants, theaters, restrooms, and drinking fountains still had signs reading "Colored" or "Whites Only." Groups such as the NAACP learned early that they would make no headway in gaining civil rights using force or violence.



In February 1960, a group of young college students decided to make their voices heard in a quiet way. The four attended college at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro. One morning they entered the F.W. Woolworth store in town. Black Americans were welcome to shop in the local Woolworth store. They were not welcome at the lunch counter located in the store. The counter stools in the store were for "Whites Only." After browsing through the store for a few minutes, the four strolled back to the counter and seated themselves at the counter. They looked at their menus. They waited to be served by the attendant behind the counter. They knew there would be no service. They quietly waited. They were completely ignored. They waited until the store closed in the evening. No one had offered to serve them. They quietly left the counter. The next morning they entered the store again. This time there were twenty-five students who seated themselves at the counter. They all quietly waited to be served. Again, they were ignored. Each day the number of students grew. The students fully expected to be arrested for their sit-in at the counter. They were not. Neither were they ever served.

The Woolworth store was losing money. The students filled all available spaces at the counter. They also filled all of the space around the counter where white customers might want to order. The store management complained that something must be done. When students in other cities and other states saw what was happening in Greensboro, they held the same kind of sit-ins in their own towns.

The students from North Carolina may not have been served in the Greensboro Woolworth store, but they did start a movement that would affect Black Americans throughout the South. There are some historians who go so far as to compare the Greensboro sit-ins to the Boston Tea Party during the Revolutionary War. These historians believe that the movement begun in Greensboro motivated a change in America just as great as the show of rebellion made by the colonists. This simple black protest was the beginning of a much larger change in the social structure of the United States. Civil Rights reform began with a quiet sit-in at a dime store lunch counter. It didn't come quickly, and it didn't come easily, but it started there.

Sit-Ins

Questions

- _____ 1. What event led to the desegregation of public buses?
- A. Brown vs. the Board of Education
 - B. Civil War
 - C. Sit-ins
 - D. Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat

Name _____



Date _____

_____ 2. Where was the Woolworth store located?

- A. Greensboro, North Carolina
- B. Greensboro, South Carolina
- C. Montgomery, Alabama
- D. Topeka, Kansas

_____ 3. Who were the people who sat at the lunch counter?

- A. Linda Brown and friends
- B. Rosa Parks and friends
- C. college students
- D. Members of the NAACP

_____ 4. The Greensboro sit-in was a quiet protest.

- A. False
- B. True

5. Why did the Woolworth management want something done?

_____ 6. How long did the protestors stay at the lunch counter?

- A. An hour
- B. Until closing time
- C. Just a few minutes
- D. A year

7. Why do you think this protest was compared to the Boston Tea Party by historians?

_____ 8. The Civil Rights movement ended with these protests.

- A. False
- B. True

When you want something from someone else, is it better to yell and scream to get it or ask for it quietly? Why?
