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“The Price of a Woolworth’s Burger:” The Importance and Overshadowing of the
Nashville Sit-Ins

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

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Masters of Arts in History

by

Aaron Michael Owens

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Dr. Elwood Watson

Dr. Dinah Mayo-Bobee

Keywords: Nashville, Greensboro, Wichita, sit-ins, non-violence

ABSTRACT

“The Price of a Woolworth’s Burger”: The Importance of and Overshadowing of the
Nashville Sit-Ins

by

Aaron Michael Owens

This thesis examines the sit-in demonstrations that used direct action and civil disobedience to target segregation at store lunch counters. The Nashville demonstrations were the last sit-in protests to occur that are discussed in this thesis, which also examines the protests in Wichita and Greensboro. Historians argue that the Wichita and Greensboro sit-ins were the most important demonstrations of their kind. The movement in Wichita was the first protest to end segregation policies at targeted stores, and the Greensboro protests led to a direct action movement in over fifty other cities targeting lunch counters. However, the Nashville based sit-ins surpassed the other two cities in planning and organization, demonstrations, and ending results following the protests. This thesis will provide a historical analysis of events in America’s past that led to the sit-in movement; the thesis will also examine the movements within the three cities.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2. EVENTS PRIOR TO THE SIT-IN MOVEMENT.....	10
3. THE ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING OF THE NASHVILLE SIT- INS.....	27
4. “THE PRICE OF A WOOLWORTH’S BURGER”: THE POWER OF THE NASHVILLE SIT-INS.....	45
5. OVERSHADOWING OF NASHVILLE: SIT-IN DEMONSTRATIONS IN WICHITA AND GREENSBORO.....	70
6. CONCLUSION.....	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	94
VITA.....	98

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mary-Lou and her son along with thousands of others were shopping along Fifth Avenue in Nashville during the Christmas season. The mother and son watched the Lionel trains circle around the looped track in the display windows of major department stores in the city. The snow pelted the two as they entered Harveys department store and shopped for packages. Mary-Lou's son, Thomas, eagerly pulled at her jacket as he watched the monkeys play in the cages at the children's lunch counter. The young mother knew that the store's policies forbid persons of color from entering the restaurant. Mary-Lou and Thomas entered a small door and entered the segregated section of the department store lunch counter and ordered two hamburgers and two cokes. The duo left the counter because whites were the only persons allowed to dine at Southern department store lunch counters. In the snow and blistering wind Mary-Lou and Thomas sat among dozens of other blacks sitting on the snow covered sidewalk eating their dinner. As Mary-Lou and her son sat in the chilling Christmas season the two hoped for a day when blacks were allowed to dine in the lunch counters along with whites. The mother and son achieved their dream to eat at the counters in May 1960 when a combined effort of organizations and leaders throughout the city attacked the segregation policies.

The sit-in demonstrations that forced change occurred in the United States following direct action tactics after the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955). The protest of the Montgomery transit system began as African Americans protested the treatment of minorities on the city's buses; African American riders were forced to sit in the back of the bus and give up their seats to allow a white rider to sit down. The boycott of Montgomery's buses lasted until 1956, when the

buses were integrated. The success of the boycott occurred from the direct action used and civil disobedience of the protestors. The protestors used Gandhi's view of civil disobedience, nonviolence, to combat overt racism and segregation laws during the struggle. The theory of nonviolence originated from Gandhi's use of the practice to combat British colonial rule in India. The use of nonviolence flourished under civil rights leaders who used the idea to attack Jim Crow legislation in the United States. The leaders of the movement believed nonviolent protests were less likely to anger whites and more likely to gain sympathy from them. The sit-in demonstrations of Wichita, Greensboro, and Nashville used the theories of direct action and civil disobedience in their struggles to desegregate store lunch counters.

The sit-in demonstrations in Wichita, Greensboro, and Nashville began in 1958 and lasted till 1960. Protestors in the three cities all focused on integrating segregated store lunch counters, but the sit-ins were started following different events and concentrated on different businesses. The Wichita sit-ins began following the publicized death of Emmett Till. The young boy, Till, was brutally killed in Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a white woman. The two men responsible for Till's murder published an article on the killing following their acquittal. Till's mother spoke of the murder and torture her son faced to a crowded Wichita church in 1958. The Wichita sit-in demonstrations originated out of the event as Young Adults, a branch of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), began using the theories of direct action and civil disobedience to combat the segregated lunch counter at the Dockum's Drug Store. The Greensboro movement initiated after four men from North Carolina A&T University refused to vacate a white only lunch counter at the Woolworth's lunch counter. The four men, Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond, sat peacefully as people harassed them from behind. The Nashville based sit-in demonstrations, the

last protests to occur of the three cities, used the Montgomery Bus Boycott as inspiration as well as Gandhi's Great Salt March (1930). The Nashville movement focused on the department stores, drug stores, and restaurants in the centers of transit terminals. The three sit-in protests each achieved desegregation of the stores directly targeted under their movements; however, the Nashville movement surpassed the other two cities in the early stages of planning and organization, sit-in protests, and final steps towards integration.

Scholars have not focused on the importance and overshadowing of the Nashville sit-in demonstrations. Nor have they compared them with the sit-in protests in Wichita and Greensboro. Few historians have written on the Nashville sit-in demonstrations, and the ones who have written on the protests commonly write on the actions that led to the integration of the Nashville lunch counters as well as biographical accounts of the protests and student leaders. Linda T. Wynn's article in, *Tennessee Women: Their Lives and Times – Volume 1*¹, Aldon D. Morris's, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*², and David Halberstam's, *The Children*³ all provide biographical accounts of the sit-in demonstrations and the leading cause to desegregation of lunch counters in Nashville.

Chapter 1 examines events in United States's history that allowed segregation in public places to exist, notably *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). The court case originating in Louisiana allowed segregation to exist in all public places in the country as long as the segregated places were equal in every way. The segregated places were not equal, and the gap between the white facilities and black facilities continued to grow. The chapter examines racism and Jim Crow laws

¹ Crawford, Vicki L., Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds (*Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

² Morris, Aldon D. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984).

³ Halberstam, David. *The Children* (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1998).

following *Plessy v. Ferguson* with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and *Powell v. Alabama* (1932). The court case examined the Scottsboro boys, who were not given a fair trial. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the defendants. The final part of the chapter focuses on the use of direct action and civil disobedience in the 1950s, following the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

Chapter 2 focuses on the early planning and organization of the Nashville sit-in demonstrations. The chapter provides a broad overview of the pivotal leaders who emerged during the protests including James Lawson, Diane Nash, and John Lewis. The three leaders are followed with two organizations that were influential to the early planning, organization, and demonstrations in Nashville, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Nashville Christian Leadership Council (NCLC). The theories of nonviolence and direct action are discussed in this chapter, as well as Gandhi's influence on James Lawson's workshops. The workshops of Lawson taught the students the theories of civil disobedience and pushed other people to join the nonviolent campaign to desegregate Nashville's lunch counters.

Chapter 3 inspects the demonstrations of Nashville that began twelve days following the Greensboro demonstrations. The Nashville based protests were planned and organized two years prior to the sit-ins that began on February 13, 1960, focused on the department stores and drug stores in downtown. The chapter centers on the growing strength around the sit-ins and the movement to integrate the transit terminal restaurants. Finally, the chapter discusses the city's involvement to end the sit-in protests and the economic boycott of the targeted stores. In addition this chapter discusses the integration of Nashville's lunch counters.

Chapter 4 analyzes the sit-ins in Wichita and Greensboro and how the two cities overshadow the demonstrations in Nashville. The Wichita sit-in demonstrations were the first sit-ins in the United States to end segregation at a store lunch counter after three weeks of protests. The Greensboro demonstrations, historically known as the most important, are discussed beginning with the early stages of organizing and planning. In addition, the chapter focuses on the results the North Carolina movement achieved after two department stores and two restaurants integrated.

Overall, the thesis examines the importance of the Nashville sit-in movement and how the demonstrations in the city were overshadowed by the sit-in protests in Wichita and Greensboro. The thesis provides a historical background of segregation and racism that flourished following the Civil War, and the push by groups to use direct action and civil disobedience to end Jim Crow legislation. Finally, the Nashville sit-ins, part of the civil rights movement that used the two nonviolent theories to end segregation at lunch counters, are discussed including the movement's unsurpassed planning, organization, demonstrations, influence, and results leading to desegregation.

CHAPTER 2

EVENTS PRIOR TO THE SIT-IN MOVEMENT

The Nashville sit-in protests were the direct result of laws mandated by the federal and state governments that separated blacks and whites from one another. The laws were created following several United States Supreme Court cases that began in 1875. Laws that had been enacted to help African Americans gain citizenship were eradicated as Jim Crow laws were implemented by southern whites opposed to racial equality. Numerous federal acts were passed by Congress, and several cases were examined by the United States Supreme Court based solely on segregation in the South and Midwest. The elimination of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) led to the passage of Jim Crow legislation in the South and Midwest. Segregation existed in all public forms of life including public beaches, pools, transportation, restaurants, water fountains, and schools. Segregation remained nearly unchallenged until the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which stated that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. The decision limited segregation; however, segregation continued for decades following the Supreme Court ruling. The Court's decision opened the door to large-scale integration and led to the Nashville sit-ins, which attacked segregation in department store lunch counters. However, to discuss the events leading into Nashville, one needs to understand the impact Jim Crow legislation had on America.

In 1875, Congress enacted the 1875 Civil Rights Act. The Act was progressive for the time period because it initiated equal rights for all Americans. The 1875 Civil Rights Act was the result of five African Americans being denied equal rights in public facilities. Samuel Nichols,

Michael Ryan, Sallie J. Robinson, Samuel D. Singleton, and Murray Stanley were all barred from enjoying the same privileges as white men. Nichols and Stanley were denied service at a hotel because of the color of the plaintiff's skin. Robinson was traveling on the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, when Robinson's wife was forced to move to a segregated car. Ryan and Singleton were excluded from entering a theater. The Supreme Court of the United States consolidated the five cases, *United States v. Stanley*, *United States v. Nichols*, *United States v. Singleton*, *United States v. Ryan*, and *Robinson & Wife v. Memphis and Charleston Railroad Company* to argue the validity of the 1875 Civil Rights Act. The United States Supreme Court struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875 on October 15, 1883. The Court stated that the Act directly violated the Tenth Amendment. The Supreme Court mandated that the states directly involved (Kansas, California, New York, Missouri, Tennessee) garner legislative control over the issues instead of the federal government. The Court dissolved the 1875 Civil Rights Act as being unconstitutional in 1883; the Tenth Amendment of the United States Constitution guaranteed states had rights not bound by the federal government. In 1883, the Supreme Court ruled the Act as unconstitutional. The Court stated that the Tenth Amendment was breached; the federal government violated states' authority in promoting equal accommodations for all races. The Tenth Amendment allows states to mandate powers where the Constitution does not give authority to the federal government.⁴

The reversal of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 allowed states to enact racial laws that states deemed acceptable. The state of Tennessee enacted the first law that separated blacks and whites. Southern states followed Tennessee's initiative and by 1885 Jim Crow legislation became the law of the land following the Court's decision in 1883. In 1885, schools were mandated to

⁴ *United States v. Stanley*.; *United States v. Ryan*.; *United States v. Nichols*.; *United States v. Singleton*.; *Robinson & Wife v. Memphis and Charleston Railroad*., 109 U.S. 3 (1883).

separate black and white children. The states legally adopted Jim Crow legislation and racism through new state constitutions adopted following Reconstruction. The new legislation passed by Southern states was reaffirmed through the decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

In 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson* decided that segregation was lawful in the United States. Homer Plessy, a man of mixed descent boarded a train on the East Louisiana Railroad and was forced to enter the car for blacks. Plessy, under Southern law, was considered black. Homer A. Plessy refused to move from the white section of the train and was arrested. The courts in Louisiana ruled in favor of the East Louisiana Railroad; however, Plessy was issued a writ of error. The writ of error allowed Plessy to pursue the matter at a federal level. The Supreme Court of the United States stated that segregation was lawful as long as separate facilities were equal in every way.⁵ The decision of equal facilities for both races in *Plessy v. Ferguson* would have a tremendous impact on segregation in the United States.

The *Plessy v. Ferguson* case legally allowed segregation throughout the United States, and segregation flourished as a result. African Americans were forced into an apartheid system. The society that whites dominated allowed for better conditions of facilities, public education, transportation, and housing. The society blacks lived in proved to be second-class, with blacks receiving inadequate facilities, few educational opportunities, poor transportation, and substandard living conditions. Jim Crow further forced blacks to use separate bathrooms, water fountains, laundry services, and other facilities.

⁵ *Plessy v. Ferguson* 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

The Ku Klux Klan promoted Jim Crow legislation throughout the South through the use of terror. The Klan used intimidation, politically and socially, through rallies, violence, and protests. In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan reached the height of its power. D. C. Stephenson, a Grand Dragon of the KKK, addressed the Indiana branch of the Ku Klux Klan in July 1923. Stephenson stated, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Stephenson pushed the Klan politically and ran candidates for public office who favored the organization's policies. The Indiana Ku Klux Klan under Stephenson's leadership became one of the largest Klan organizations in the United States. The Klan declined following the scandal of D. C. Stephenson and his release of documented bribes that caused politicians throughout Indiana to be ousted.⁶

The Ku Klux Klan quickly collapsed following Stephenson's scandal. D. C. Stephenson, Earl Klink, and Earl Gentry forced a fearful Madge Oberholtzer to board a train bound for Chicago. Stephenson forced the young woman into a private car, where Stephenson raped and mutilated the young woman. The following day on March 17, 1925, Stephenson took Oberholtzer to a hotel in Hammond. The woman asked to go to the drug store to buy rouge. Oberholtzer secretly bought Bichloride of mercury and swallowed six tablets. Stephenson drove Oberholtzer back to Indianapolis against the woman's will, where Oberholtzer continued to beg to be left on the side of the road. The group took Oberholtzer to Stephenson's house and locked the woman above the garage. Stephenson did not allow Madge to receive medical treatment during the ordeal in Indiana. A worker for Stephenson returned to Oberholtzer's home, and the

⁶ Doug Linder, "The D.C. Stephenson Trial: An Account," University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, <http://l-aw2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/stephenson/stephensonaccount.html> (accessed April 13, 2012).

woman recorded the events that occurred by D. C. Stephenson to the doctor. Oberholtzer died on April 14, 1925, from injuries sustained by rape and mercury poisoning.⁷

The Supreme Court of Indiana charged Stephenson with homicide following the death of Madge Oberholtzer. Stephenson claimed to be innocent during the trial, but the jury found him guilty of murder in the second degree. D. C. Stephenson received life in prison for the crimes committed on the young white woman. Stephenson appealed the guilty verdict, but the second trial ruled with the prior.⁸

D. C. Stephenson believed that the state government would issue a pardon. The Ku Klux Klan helped dozens in of persons in Indiana attain political office, but Stephenson did not receive a pardon. D. C. Stephenson outraged by the refusal of a pardon released papers in the black boxes he had been collecting. Stephenson kept and collected all the favors and scandals in black boxes for blackmail. The boxes, once released, became a political scandal that would complete the downfall of the Klan. The black boxes contained documents of bills that politicians used to become elected. The boxes held \$800,000 in funds that Stephenson issued to Governor Ed Jackson, and other funds to Indianapolis's mayor, councilmen, agents, and controllers. The men all stepped down following the public release of the boxes.⁹

The following decades after the Supreme Court ruled that separate but equal was lawful, segregation grew by leaps and bounds. In 1932, the Supreme Court of the United States heard *Powell v. Alabama*. The case portrayed Southern attitudes toward African Americans that had been expanded following the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. The case originated on a freight train

⁷ Stephenson v. State of Indiana., 205 Ind. 141 (1932).

⁸ Stephenson v. State of Indiana.

⁹ Don Cosby, "Bringing down the Klan at the Round Barn Part 3 of 3," *Washington Times-Herald*, February 3, 2010, <http://was-htimesherald.com/local/x1512276495/Bringing-down-the-Klan-at-the-Round-Barn-Part-3-of-3> (accessed April 15, 2012).

between white and black men who had boarded the train illegally. The black men threw the white men from the train, and when the train neared Scottsboro, Alabama it was stopped by a white mob. The men who were thrown from the train stated that two white women were raped by the black men. The black men were arrested and put in confinement. The men were not allowed to notify relatives in neighboring states. The Alabama courts heard the case. The black men were found guilty by white jurors; however, several circumstances arose following the case. The examination of the two white women showed no evidence of rape. The arrested did not receive representation until the day of the trial, the defense did not have time to review the case, and the women involved in the rape later recanted the story. The men, Ozie Powell, Andy Wright, Clarence Norris, Olen Montgomery, Charles Weems, Eugene Williams, Roy Wright, Willie Roberson, and Haywood Patterson, were found guilty and received the death penalty; however, the case was appealed where it went before the United States Supreme Court.¹⁰

The United States Supreme Court heard the case following the refusal from Alabama to assure a fair trial provided under the United States Constitution. Alabama stated that the Sixth Amendment guaranteed a fair trial only affected federal courts and not state courts. Alabama further stated that Powell received a fair trial, because the men were given an attorney. The plaintiffs stated that the trial was another attack of Jim Crow legislation on African Americans. The courts made an example out of the men.¹¹

The Supreme Court of the United States ruled 7-2 that Alabama had violated due process in the decision on *Powell*. The rapid pace of the trial was in direct conflict with the Constitution, because the accused did not have adequate time to prepare for the case. The Court further stated

¹⁰ Powell v. Alabama. 287 U.S. 45 (1932).

¹¹ Powell v. Alabama.

that states were not allowed to dismiss amendments that state governments did not approve. The Fourteenth Amendment became fundamental because it mandated that state governments had to provide equal representation for defendants. The Scottsboro Boys were released because the rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment in United States Constitution under the due process clause had been violated. The Court mandated that the nine men did not receive an equal trial because black men were denied representation on juries, Alabama courts did not provide representation to the defendants, and the trial was inherently unequal.¹² The case *Powell v. Alabama* exemplified the role Jim Crow legislation had in the South.

The 1950s and 1960s became known by many as the Second Revolution in the United States. The first revolution eradicated British control over the country. African Americans had been treated as secondary citizens for more than three centuries. World War II fueled the push to end apartheid in the United States. The *Declaration of Independence* stated, “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.” In the 1950s, blacks pushed societal boundaries, and, grasped at the unalienable rights that the Founding Fathers had promised.¹³ Segregation would reach its pivotal end in the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court heard five segregation cases in Virginia, Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, and the District of Columbia; the cases brought before the Supreme Court were labeled *Brown v. Board of Education*. Each case stated that segregation in public schools was detrimental to children. *Plessy v. Ferguson* mandated that public facilities

¹² *Powell v. Alabama*.

¹³ Bond, Julian and Unita Blackwell, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Right Years 1954 – 1965*. DVD. Directed by Henry Hampton. New York: Blackside, 1990.

could be separate, but the facilities had to be equal. Facilities in the South were not equal for both races. Several problems plagued segregated schools including inadequate facilities, underpaid teachers, old textbooks, and inconvenient locations.¹⁴ In Prince Edward County, Virginia, students at one of the black high schools were forced to be taught in shacks covered in black tar paper.¹⁵

The Supreme Court mandated that separate facilities were unequal. Chief Justice Warren stated that the Equal Protection Clause had been violated and ordered public schools throughout the country to be integrated.¹⁶ Chief Justice Warren stated the opinion of the Supreme Court of the United States on May 17, 1954. Chief Justice Warren stated,

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be available to all on equal terms.” The Chief Justice further stated, “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. This disposition makes unnecessary any discussion whether such segregation also violates the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.” Warren continued, “We have now announced that such segregation is a denial of the equal protection of the laws.”¹⁷

However, whites, state governments, and President Eisenhower offered fierce resistance.

¹⁴ *Brown v. Board of Education*. 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

¹⁵ Frederic O. Sargent. *The Civil Rights Revolution: Events and Leaders, 1955-1968* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2004), 14.

¹⁶ *Brown v. Board of Education*.

¹⁷ *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The twenty-year integration of public schools mandated by the United States Supreme Court met fierce resistance by President Eisenhower and Southern society. The Southern United States largely resisted integration of public schools. The President argued that integration should happen in the United States; however, Eisenhower stated that if integration occurred at the speed the Supreme Court mandated, more harm would come than good. The South saw integration as a direct attack on state governments as well as an attack on the Old South. Southerners also stated that desegregation was non-Christian. Several believed that the Bible authorized segregation in Genesis 9:27.¹⁸ The verse stated, “May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave.” Senator James Eastland from Mississippi stated that schools had been segregated for years, and that the Supreme Court would not force integration of Mississippi schools.¹⁹ States throughout the South continued to resist the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

Many Southern states completely refused to discuss the idea of integration in public schools. The Ku Klux Klan stated that if the two races mixed, the human race would end.²⁰ Governor Herman Eugene Talmadge, of Georgia, spoke to the press after the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Talmadge asserted that Georgia would not integrate and would continue to be permanently segregated. Governor Talmadge continued, “The U.S. Supreme Court by its decision has reduced our Constitution to a mere scrap of paper.”²¹ The reaction by Governor Talmadge of Georgia was common throughout the South. Southern society saw the Supreme Court’s ruling as a direct attack on the South.

¹⁸ Bond, Julian and Unita Blackwell.

¹⁹ Bond, Julian and Unita Blackwell.

²⁰ Bond, Julian and Unita Blackwell.

²¹ M. L. St. John, “Calls Panel To Set Up Lasting Ban,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 18, 1954.

The South continued to refuse *Brown v. Board of Education*. Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia proposed and developed a new government document named the *Southern Manifesto* to resist Supreme Court's decision to desegregate. The *Southern Manifesto* was quickly signed by nearly one hundred politicians who did not side with the *Brown* decision. The *Manifesto* drew its argumentation within the 1927 Supreme Court decision of *Lum v. Rice*. Chief Justice Taft stated that the "separate but equal principle is within the discretion of the state in regulating its public schools and does not conflict with the Fourteenth Amendment." The document encouraged Southerners to resist the encroachment of new legislation mandated by the United States Constitution.²²

The decision to integrate public schools by the federal government met resistance throughout the South. Little Rock, Arkansas was seen as a progressive Southern city in the 1950s. The city school board began gradual plans to integrate Little Rock's public schools. However, Governor Orval Faubus became directly involved with the integration of the city's schools to gain white supremacist votes. Faubus wanted to serve another term as governor and needed white votes. Previously, Faubus stood on issues favorable to both races. The National Guard was called in upon the Governor's request and the nine students selected by the school board were refused when they tried to enter Little Rock Central High School. The massive effects of Little Rock's desegregation efforts were blamed on Eisenhower's gradual desegregation and the Court. However, President Eisenhower quickly urged Governor Faubus to travel to Rhode Island to discuss the desegregation of Little Rock's schools. After the meeting, Eisenhower believed Faubus would allow the nine black students to enter the school and provide protection. Faubus removed the National Guard and let the students enter the building. City

²² Public Broadcasting System, "Southern Manifesto on Integration (March 12, 1956)," PBS, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/supreme-court/r-ights/sources_document2.html (accessed April 22, 2012).

police kept peace at the school. The city police could not contain the mob and the students were rushed out of school. President Eisenhower immediately sent federal troops into the city to guarantee the nine students equal education. Governor Faubus stated in a press conference that Little Rock was an occupied territory. Helicopters, military jeeps, and machine guns escorted the students out of the school. A soldier was assigned to each student for protection. Ernest Green became the first African American student to graduate from Little Rock Central High School. In 1958, Little Rock Central High School and other city schools closed under the authority of Governor Faubus to halt further graduation of African Americans in Little Rock's public schools.²³

The closure of schools throughout the South became a common occurrence. Governor Faubus was one of many Southern politicians who rationalized that federal mandates on school desegregation could be stopped if schools did not exist. In Virginia, Governor James Almond Jr., closed black schools in Norfolk and Charlottesville that were mandated to integrate by the federal government; the closure of black schools in Norfolk and Charlottesville obstructed fifteen hundred black students from receiving education for five years.²⁴

Public schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia closed following the *Brown v. Board* decision. The Supreme Court mandated that Prince Edward County in Virginia integrate following the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Prince Edward County, a defendant in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, resisted desegregation and closed the public schools throughout the county. Prince Edward County then reopened private schools and excluded non-white ethnicities. The Commonwealth chose to end massive resistance in favor of a "freedom of

²³ Bond, Julian and Unita Blackwell.

²⁴ Bond, Julian and Unita Blackwell.

choice” program that led to counties in Virginia making the decision whether to desegregate or keep segregation. The creation of the Prince Edward School Foundation created white private schools to keep African Americans out. The *Brown v. Board of Education II* case went before the Supreme Court of the United States; Justice Black stated, “the public schools of Prince Edward County may not be closed to avoid the effect of the law of the land as interpreted by the Supreme Court, while the Commonwealth of Virginia permits other public schools to remain open at the expense of taxpayers.” The Court mandated that schools in Prince Edward County would be integrated with “deliberate speed.”²⁵

Southern schools slowly integrated following *Brown v. Board of Education II*. However, state and local school boards continued to slow desegregation. In 1960, a riot occurred in New Orleans when four girls of African American descent began the gradual integration of city schools in the first grade.²⁶ In 1961, Memphis planned a similar integration of city schools as New Orleans had in 1960.

The integration of Memphis State University occurred two years prior to the integration of city schools. In 1959, John Simpson, Ralph Prater, Bertha Rogers, Marvis LaVerne Kneeland, Luther McClellan, Sammie Burnett, Eleanor Gandy, and Rose Blakney known as the Memphis State Eight planned to enter the University. Prior to 1959, Memphis State University excluded black students. Black students were forced to enter private LeMoyne College. Jones recalled, “My daddy said, I pay taxes and you have the right to go this school as much as any of these white kids.” Memphis State University admitted the students, but the students did not have equal liberties as white students. The Memphis State Eight only attended classes, and police escorted

²⁵ Green Et Al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County Et Al., 377 U.S. 218 (1964).

²⁶ Bond, Julian and Unita Blackwell.

the students off campus. Lynn Lowery, a white student at Memphis State, recalled the feeling of other students about the integration of the University, “I think everybody recognized that it was inevitable and the right thing to happen.” The desegregation of Memphis State University in 1959 provided an example of successful integration to city schools.²⁷

In 1961, a dentist by the name of T. W. Northcross filed suit against the school board of Memphis. Northcross hoped the lawsuit would allow black children to attend the same schools as whites. Northcross, a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), believed desegregation of public schools in Memphis would challenge black inferiority. The NAACP represented Northcross in, *Northcross v. Memphis Board of Education*. Northcross won, but the court provided stipulations. Memphis City Schools would desegregate; however, one grade would be integrated per year. Memphis chose thirteen black children to desegregate first grade in four schools. The four schools received no more than four students. The images of other Southern cities that were forced to desegregate lingered over the parents of the young children who would desegregate Memphis. Rev. Samuel Kyles stated, “Some of the other parents of the 13 black children who were integrating the schools were getting uneasy and were going to pull out.” Anti-integrationist and Memphis chief of police Claude Armour stated to his police force, “If you can’t protect these little nigra children, then you can turn in your badge and gun tonight.” Kyles stated, “I appreciated that.”²⁸ The children attended the schools without outside harassment. Police Chief Armour stated, “As far as the youngsters, they seemed to be having a ball running around the playgrounds and talking to the policemen on duty.”²⁹ The

²⁷ Linda A. Moore, “Memphis State 8 were torchbearers for integration at university,” *Commercial Appeal*, February 2, 2009, <http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2009/feb02/paved-the-way/> (accessed April 12, 2012).

²⁸ Branston, John, “Integration and Innocence,” *Memphis Flyer*, May, 19, 2004.

²⁹ Allen, Richard T., “Schools Quiet, Armour Reports,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, October 4, 1961.

students were asked several questions from classmates. The young students met hostility once the school year began. Teachers and students mocked and bullied the thirteen students. The children were beaten on the playgrounds, pushed down stairs, and yelled at by whites.³⁰ However, following the integration of the city's schools, whites fled. Private schools were created to keep the races separate.³¹

Southern states instituted private schools throughout the land; private schools operated outside the realm of the *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Brown v. Board of Education II* decisions. In 1969, eleven states educated over 300,000 students through white only private schools.³² In 1971, private schools and school attendance continue to rise. Private schools proved detrimental to public schools throughout the Southern United States. Thousands of white students fled the newly integrated public schools for private schools; inner city public schools became almost entirely black, while rural public schools lost funding.³³ The integration of public schools led to desegregation attempts in other public facilities.

The decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* directly mandated public schools be desegregated and led to the end of Jim Crow legislation. *Brown v. Board of Education* directly led to the desegregation of Montgomery's bus system and the desegregation of interstate bus terminals. The NAACP pursued abolishing segregated city buses following the refusal of Rosa Parks to stand once the bus was crowded. In 1955, blacks were required to sit in the back, and once the bus was full blacks were forced to stand. Bus drivers had complete control of the buses,

³⁰ Branston, John, "Integration and Innocence."

³¹ Tennessee Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, *School Desegregation in Tennessee: 12 Districts Released from Desegregation Orders 17 Districts Remain Under Court Jurisdiction* (April 2008), 16.

³² "Private Schools: The Lost Refuge," *Time.com*, November 14, 1969, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/-article/0,9171,840365,00.html> (accessed April 23, 2012).

³³ Kathryn Johnson, "White Private Schools Booming," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, June 12, 1971.

and on that fateful day the driver told Parks to move. Parks was immediately arrested for not moving, but following Parks arrest a massive boycott was enacted. The boycott led by Montgomery's black citizens was an immediate success. Buses were empty because over two-thirds of the riders were of African American descent. Riders walked, rode in carpools, or paid fares in taxis. Sympathetic white women also transported blacks to work and to stores. The buses remained empty. The boycotters were led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who was thrust into the movement. Dr. King had recently settled in Montgomery. The City Council did not attack the leader because of his recent settlement to Montgomery. Meetings continued for months where both sides tried to find a compromise. The boycotters wanted better conditions, but the city and the bus line would not consider integration. The city filed suit on the boycotters, because the city stated that King's group violated an ant-boycott law. The decision to prosecute the boycotters backfired. National media focused on the protestors. During the Montgomery boycott, other bus lines in Southern cities desegregated. However, Montgomery prided itself on preserving the confederacy.³⁴ The boycott lasted eleven months, until the Supreme Court ruled that segregation on Montgomery's bus line violated the United States Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment's clauses of equal protection of the law and due process.³⁵

In 1960, the Supreme Court mandated under *Boynton v. Virginia* that interstate facilities could not be segregated. Bruce Boynton traveled on an interstate bus from Washington D.C. to Selma, Alabama. The bus stopped at a terminal in Richmond, Virginia for a layover. Boynton

³⁴ Bond, Julian and Unita Blackwell.

³⁵ Aurelia S. Browder, and Susie McDonald, and Claudette Colvin, by Q. P. Colvin, next friend, and Mary Louise Smith, by Frank Smith, next friend, and others similarly situated, Plaintiffs, v. W. A. Gayle, Clyde Sellers and Frank Parks, individually and as members of the Board of Commissioners of the City of Montgomery, Alabama, and Goodwyn J. Ruppenthal, individually and as Chief of Police of the City of Montgomery, Alabama, and the Montgomery City Lines, Inc., a Corporation, and James F. Blake, and Robert Cleere, and C.C. (Jack) Owen, Jimmy Hitchcock, and Sibyl Pool, as members of the Alabama Public Service Commission, Defendants., 142 F. Supp. 707 (US Dist. 1956).

entered the terminal's restaurant and was refused service. Boynton insisted to be served and was arrested. Boynton brought suit against Virginia. Federal law mandated under a previous case, *Morgan v. Virginia*, that segregation was unlawful against interstate passengers. The Supreme Court heard the case on the basis that the Fourteenth Amendment had been breached and the Morgan clause had been violated. The clause stated that interstate commerce could not be segregated. The Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that restaurants in terminals had to accommodate every passenger regardless to race.³⁶

The desegregation of public places continued with department store lunch counters. African Americans could shop in department stores throughout the South and Midwest; however, blacks were banned from dining in the department store restaurants. Activists targeted Jim Crow legislation in the lunch counters throughout the United States beginning in Wichita. The sit-in movements spread throughout the South including Greensboro, Knoxville, and Nashville. The Nashville sit-ins centered on downtown and were coordinated by students and the older African American population. Thousands of students lived in Nashville unlike other Southern cities, and protestors like James Lawson, Reverend Kelly Miller Smith, and Diane Nash studied and lived in the city. Lawson held workshops at Smith's First Baptist Church; Lawson wanted to test desegregation in Nashville, and the women in the group decided that the lunch counters needed to be desegregated. The women, many of them mothers, told Lawson, "You men don't know anything about the downtown. You don't shop. You don't know the humiliations that they inflict

³⁶ Aaron Owens, "Early Supreme Court Cases and Their Effect on the 1961 Freedom Rides" (undergraduate thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2010), 17-23.

on us every day.” The department stores did not allow blacks to try on clothes, use the same restrooms, and did not let them enjoy meals at the lunch counters.³⁷

The mothers of Lawson’s workshops recalled horrific stories of children not understanding the full scope of racism and segregation at the lunch counters. Mildred Ray, a biology professor at Fisk University, went to a local lunch counter for an orange juice. Ray’s five year old son accompanied the woman, and, without Ray’s knowledge, the child sat on a stool at the counter. The man behind the counter yelled, “Get that nigger kid off that stool!” DeLois Wilkinson’s children wanted to eat in the Monkey Bar at Harveys Department Store. Wilkinson recalled that the children did not understand that African Americans were not allowed to enter the restaurant. Several other women at Lawson’s workshops remembered incidents downtown where children used the bathroom on themselves because facilities did not allow blacks to enter.³⁸

James Lawson and others who attended the workshops began planning the sit-in protests. The group targeted the department store lunch counters. The counters unified the African American community. The counters provided easy access to demonstrators and media, and protestors would reduce the profitability of the department stores. Lawson’s followers observed the lunch counters during the Christmas season and planned full scale demonstrations in January 1960.³⁹

³⁷ Halberstam. *The Children*. (New York: Fawcett Books, 1998), 90.

³⁸ Halberstam, 90-91.

³⁹ Halberstam, 91.

CHAPTER 3

THE ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING OF THE NASHVILLE SIT-INS

The organization and planning of the Nashville sit-ins of 1960 relied on the role of students, organizations, and leaders. The city limits of Nashville serve as the home to a dozen universities and colleges, where thousands of students from across the country live. Many of these students were raised outside of the south, and, therefore, never experienced Jim Crow. Students who had never witnessed the effects of segregation, such as Diane Nash and James Lawson, were appalled by the conditions of southern society. However, John Lewis, one of the key leaders of the early planning and organization of the sit-ins, had dealt with racism and segregation his entire life. Several organizations were also critical to the formation of the planning for the sit-ins, which included the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Nashville Christian Leadership Council.

The supporters of the desegregation of the lunch counters traveled to Highlander School in Monteagle, Tennessee. The school focused on the labor rights movement in the 1930s and 1940s and later became involved with the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁰ In 1952, the Board of Highlander Folk School gravitated towards the civil rights movement. Highlander educated African Americans along with Caucasians on the value of desegregation in public schools before the Supreme Court of the United States issued its decision in 1954 banning segregation in public schools. The school also educated major civil rights activists, including Rosa Parks, prior to the boycott of the bus lines in Montgomery, Alabama.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods. *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 145.

⁴¹ Crawford, 152-153.

Highlander Folk School came under direct attacks from state governments throughout the South. Governor Marvin Griffin of Georgia labeled Highlander as a communist training center. Governor Griffin used propaganda in the form of billboards, brochures, and photographs of children of multiple ethnicities swimming to bring national support to close the school. The state government of Tennessee also wanted to close Highlander School. In July 1959, Attorney General A. F. Sloan ordered the Tennessee State Troopers to raid the school on suspicion of illegal sales of whiskey. The school also supposedly allowed miscegenation. During the trial, several white groups vandalized the school. The courts of Tennessee revoked Highlander's charter on the grounds of illegal drinking and selling of liquor, allowing different ethnicities to attend the institute, and the misappropriation of funds. Leaders of the schools appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of the United States, but the Court refused to hear the case. Myles Horton, cofounder of Highlander, relocated the school to Knoxville, Tennessee. The state of Tennessee continued to push for the closure of the school and termination of the education of civil rights leaders.⁴² Highlander Folk School still became an educational center to many civil rights leaders, but it was Nashville's universities and colleges that served to bring James Lawson, John Lewis, and Diane Nash together.

Three key leaders emerged from the organization and early planning of the Nashville sit-ins; Diane Nash, James Lawson, and John Lewis. These three leaders played a fundamental role in the success of the Nashville sit-ins, and each served a different role during the struggle. The three leaders attended – Fisk, Vanderbilt, and American Baptist Seminary, respectively. James Lawson's workshops were crucial to the planning and organization of the sit-in movement of Nashville.

⁴² Crawford, 158-162.

Diane Nash was raised in a middle class family that inhabited the Southside of Chicago on March 5, 1938. Her family had emigrated from Memphis, Tennessee to escape the overt problems of racism and Jim Crow legislation. She spent most of her childhood with her maternal grandmother, Carrie Bolton. Nash's grandmother worked under an elite white doctor as a seamstress. Bolton's occupation as a seamstress allowed the family to live a middleclass lifestyle because the doctor highly respected Bolton. Carrie Bolton had a light skin tone, was highly educated, and was an attractive young woman. The doctor told Bolton to separate herself from the rest of black society because of these characteristics.⁴³ Bolton followed her Memphis employer's advice, and the family moved to Chicago.

Carrie Bolton had a major influence on the future civil rights leader. Bolton's practice of imitating white society was pushed on Diane Nash as a child.⁴⁴ Nash's comfortable home life continued after her mother, Dorothy Bolton Nash, married John Baker. Baker worked as a sleeping car porter. The job allowed the family to live in a middleclass dwelling on the Southside. Diane Nash also moved back with her mother after the marriage, because Dorothy was able to financially support her child.⁴⁵ The middleclass lifestyle, however, did not protect Diane Nash from racism.

Chicago was deeply racist and segregated like many cities throughout the United States in twentieth century America. Carrie Bolton and John Baker were unable to shield Nash from the racial problems of Chicago. Nash attended St. Anselm Catholic School to avoid the appalling conditions of Chicago's segregated public schools. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament controlled the school. As a child, Nash was told, "You know that we love God in our order,

⁴³ Freeman, 283.

⁴⁴ Wilkerson, 283.

⁴⁵ Wilkerson, 284.

because we deal with the least of God's people."⁴⁶ Diane Nash continued to experience racism later in her childhood when she wanted to attend charm school. The man in charge of the school met with Nash and was receptive of her attending the school, but when Nash stated that she lived on the Southside the man became angry. Many people who met Diane Nash believed she was white because of her skin tone. The Southside dictated that Diane Nash was indeed black. The charm school did not allow African Americans to attend. In 1956, Diane Nash graduated from high school and attended Howard University in Washington D.C.⁴⁷ Diane Nash enjoyed the department stores in Washington D.C. that had recently desegregated, but Nash was forced to leave Howard following financial difficulty.

Nash moved to Fisk University following financial problems, much to the dismay of Carrie Bolton, who had fled the south. The city of Nashville was more progressive on race than other southern cities during the 1950s. African Americans served on Nashville's police and fire departments as well as on the city's government boards. However, Nash's first experience with southern segregation occurred when Nash attended the Tennessee State Fair in Nashville. In 1959, Nash was on a date at the Tennessee State Fair when she was forced to enter a segregated bathroom. Nash later stated, "[This] was the first time that I had encountered the blatant segregation that exists in the South... signs designating 'white' or 'colored'... had a tremendous psychological impact on me. To begin with, I didn't agree with the premise that I was inferior, and I had a difficult time complying with it."⁴⁸ Nash asked her date whether he was offended by segregated facilities, and to Nash's amazement he wasn't offended. The following week, Diane Nash asked other students at Fisk University if segregated facilities bothered them. Nash again

⁴⁶ Freeman, 284.

⁴⁷ Freeman, 284-285.

⁴⁸ Freeman, 285.

was amazed that those students also were not bothered by separate facilities.⁴⁹ The Tennessee State Fair fed Nash's involvement within the movement to integrate public places in Nashville; Nash noted that a person should not be judged by skin color alone.

Lawson was born in a religious Methodist family in Pennsylvania in 1928. His father and grandfather served as ministers in the Methodist Church. Lawson followed his father's and grandfather's shoes, after he graduated from high school in 1946, and became a licensed Methodist minister in 1947.⁵⁰ Lawson entered Oberlin College in Ohio as a divinity student. The same year Lawson joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He joined the organization after meeting Martin Luther King Jr. at the school. King stated, "We don't have anyone like you." The divinity student left Oberlin and began actively participating in the civil rights movement and served as a field secretary for the Fellowship for Reconciliation.⁵¹ Lawson continued to serve the Methodist Church following his role in the early stages of racial equality following World War II.

Lawson served as a Methodist missionary in India in 1953 in the newly independent country. Lawson served in the Campus Ministry and as a coach. Lawson had read about the nonviolent ideology of Mohandas Gandhi before moving to India as well as reading the nonviolent ideologies of the principles of Christianity. Lawson also drew from the history of African Americans in nineteenth century America. The young minister studied the first Freedom Ride. The Freedom Ride of 1840 began when blacks protested Jim Crow legislation on Pennsylvania and New York trains. Blacks were forced to segregate on trains that traveled south.

⁴⁹ Freeman, 286.

⁵⁰ Public Broadcasting System, "James Lawson," PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/witness/james-lawson.html> (accessed February 11, 2013).

⁵¹ Public Broadcasting System, "Freedom Riders. Threatened. Attacked. Jailed," PBS. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/freedomriders/people/james-lawson> (accessed February 11, 2013).

The nonviolent ideologies of Lawson continued to grow after he left India in 1956 and returned to Oberlin College in Ohio. However, the college student was unhappy with Oberlin and wanted to work in the southern United States and Africa. He left Oberlin again in 1957 and entered Divinity School at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. In Nashville Lawson used the nonviolent ideologies he had studied throughout the 1950s and began holding workshops teaching thousands on the nonviolent ideas to end racial segregation in the city.⁵²

John Lewis was raised in Pike County, Alabama.⁵³ Lewis's family were sharecroppers in Troy, Alabama, and he was one of ten children in the Lewis family.⁵⁴ Lewis recalled during his childhood that the county was made up of two different worlds – the white world and the black world. The two worlds did not mix.⁵⁵ His mother worked for an orphanage affiliated with the Southern Baptist Church and brought home a brochure on the American Baptist Theological Seminary.⁵⁶ Lewis moved to Nashville, Tennessee in 1957 to attend the school.⁵⁷ However, Lewis wished to return to Troy and become the first black student to attend Troy State University. He gained the support of Martin Luther King Jr. but declined following his family's fear of the seizure of the Lewis farm by angry whites.⁵⁸ Lewis stayed in Nashville and began working to end racial segregation throughout the city.

The young Alabama student immediately began working on racial equality issues in the city, including the organization of a Nashville branch of the National Association for the

⁵² James Lawson, interviewed by Dallas A. Blanchard, 24 October 1983, transcript, Southern Oral History Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁵³ Blanchard, interview.

⁵⁴ Michael Cass, "Nashville Prepared Me," *Tennessean*, under "Civil Rights project," <http://www.tennessean.com/civil-rights/> (accessed February 12, 2013).

⁵⁵ Blanchard, interview.

⁵⁶ Michael Cass, "Nashville Prepared Me," *Tennessean*.

⁵⁷ Blanchard, interview.

⁵⁸ Michael Cass, "Nashville Prepared Me," *Tennessean*.

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The Southern Baptist Convention was hesitant about the organization, and Lewis focused on James Lawson's workshops instead. Lewis stated, "... these workshops dealt with the question of philosophy, the discipline of nonviolence, the whole history of the struggle in India led by Gandhi and his attempt to organize in South Africa – building it on the whole idea of Christian faith and that type of thing." Lewis took part in the planning of the sit-ins in 1959, where students, both black and white, as well as Lawson's fellow friends in India, sat at restaurants downtown waiting for service.⁵⁹ Lewis also stated, "It became a part of me: not to hate but to love."⁶⁰ The initial sitting in 1959 predated the major movement in 1960 but served as an example to preparing for full scale demonstrations.⁶¹

Two key organizations also emerged from the early planning and organization of the Nashville sit-in demonstrations, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Nashville Christian Leadership Council. The two southern based organizations worked with leaders to end racial segregation in the capital city. The organizations also worked with the community in unifying a base for the sit-in protests.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1957 led to the creation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The Atlanta organization created increased organization and planning through regional organizations including Nashville. The new council, originally entitled Southern Negro Leaders Conference met at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The organization was directed by Martin Luther King Jr. It coordinated with local black churches throughout the south to liberate racial oppression. King stated, "because we have no moral

⁵⁹ John Lewis, interviewed by Jack Bass and Walter Devries, 20 November 1973, transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁶⁰ Michael Cass, "Nashville Prepared Me," *Tennessean*.

⁶¹ Bass and Devries, interview.

choice, before God, but to drive deeper into the struggle – and to do so with greater reliance on nonviolence and with greater unity, coordination, sharing, and Christian understanding.”⁶²

The creation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957 was different from other racial equality organizations because the council worked with other racial equality groups such as the Nashville Christian Leadership Council. The other point that differentiated it from other organizations like that of the NAACP was that it tested racial equality at local levels instead of the court system. The SCLC, originating from the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) following the Montgomery Bus Boycott, trained local persons on the philosophy of Christian nonviolence. The acting affiliate for the SCLC in Nashville was the Nashville Christian Leadership Council.⁶³

The Nashville Christian Leadership Council (NCLC) originated in 1958, when a religious leader of Nashville attended the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference initiated plans for the creation of a Nashville based organization. The SCLC organized a meeting in Nashville on January 18, 1958, to register members for a citywide organization. Religious leaders from different religious backgrounds met that day and initiated plans to end racial problems throughout the city on Christian principles. The leaders of the NCLC realized that the organization was hampered by only allowing African American religious leaders into the group; all races and non-religious leaders were allowed to join the Nashville based organization.⁶⁴

⁶² Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Global Freedom Struggle, “Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC),” Stanford, http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_southern_christian_leadership_conference_sclc/ (accessed August 30, 2012).

⁶³ Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Global Freedom Struggle.

⁶⁴ Nashville Christian Leadership Council, *Toward the Beloved Community: Story of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council*, 2.

The Nashville Christian Leadership Council continued to grow in importance in the early stages of ending racial segregation in Nashville. James Lawson began meeting with the organization in 1958, and the group met at Bethel A. M. E. Church for its first planned workshop. The workshop pushed the theory of Christian nonviolence.⁶⁵ The workshop also served as the first meeting point for leaders in the Nashville sit-in movement. In 1959, the organization focused on ending segregation in department store lunch counters and restrooms and equal hiring policies for employees. The Council debated over which place or policy to end segregation first, and after meeting several times the group decided to combat the desegregated lunch counters downtown. The NCLC believed that ending segregation at the department store lunch counters served as a foundation for ending segregation in other places throughout the city. The leaders of the Nashville organization contacted the department stores in the hope of beginning negotiations; however, the business leaders did not budge on segregation. The NCLC responded to the failed negotiations by inviting students to the nonviolent Christian workshops. In December 1959, the Nashville Christian Leadership Council had grown into a large organization.⁶⁶

The Nashville Christian Leadership Council was a branch an affiliate to the Atlanta based Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The Council united church leaders throughout Nashville to end segregation and racism in the city. The NCLC practiced nonviolent ideologies like James Lawson's workshops. Christian love served as the primary basis to reconcile the differences of segregation in Nashville. Three primary principles served as the basis to the foundation of the Nashville organization. The first principle of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council was to discover solutions in solving the city's problems in race, economics,

⁶⁵ Nashville Christian Leadership Council, 2.

⁶⁶ Nashville Christian Leadership Council, 3.

politics, and society as a whole. The second principle behind the group was to find equality within politics and economics. The final principle was to use both the first and second principle to better Nashville through Christianity. Disciplined groups using Christian principles would end racism and segregation in Nashville.⁶⁷

Nonviolence was the central element of Lawson's ideology. Students were taught nonviolent tactics because Lawson fundamentally believed in the idea of nonviolence. The divinity student argued that conflicts can be resolved without using violence, and he further stated that most conflicts originate over power. However, nonviolence serves as a better resolution to human problems than violence. Nonviolence brings all humans back towards a sense of community. As Lawson stated, "Nonviolence puts major influence on the major axiom." Power, values, and nonviolence are interwoven into each other, and once the three ideas are separated key problems occur. Human values determine how humans will shape the environment. The United States's values originate from the Declaration of Independence. Lawson stated the value given to us by the Declaration of Independence is formed economically, politically, and socially.⁶⁸

James Lawson stated the role of nonviolence plays into three nonviolent movements in American history – women's suffrage, the labor movement, and the modern civil rights movement. These three movements illustrate the importance of the use of nonviolence to accomplish a group's values against a violent opponent. Women's suffrage used nonviolent tactics to gain voting rights in the early twentieth century. The labor movement was formed under the Democratic Party during the New Deal. The movement pushed for economic security

⁶⁷ Nashville Christian Leadership Council, 1.

⁶⁸ Lawson, James. "The Rev James Lawson: The Non-Violence Struggle." Lecture, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, September 4, 2007.

and rights for working people including workplace safety, vocalization, and wage security. These ideas originating from the labor movement pushed the theory of environment. In the last half of the twentieth century, conservatives have continually chipped away on the policies enacted by the labor movement. Lawson argued that the United States is one group of people; therefore, as one group, Americans do not need to be segregated into different sects and backgrounds. Nonviolence rests on the belief that twentieth century America is responsible to the entire American population. Nonviolence is the answer to problems of war and conflict.⁶⁹

James Lawson used Christian principles of nonviolence and Gandhi's nonviolent ideas to educate Nashville's student leaders and demonstrators. In moments of conflict or struggle, leaders emerge. Gandhi argued that humans can band together into an army, but the army can also use nonviolent tactics. Lawson stated that one of the greatest problems he faced at Vanderbilt University was the use of power. His principles of Christianity argue that power is a bad idea, but Greek philosophy argues of its neutrality. Power can be both positive and negative. War is an example of how power can be used in a negative way. Lawson argued that an example of this use of negative power can be seen throughout the modern Middle East. War is violence, and under violence the other group is killed or pushed into submission. Nonviolence adamantly rejects violence and motivates the two groups to find a solution. Gandhi was the father of nonviolent ideas in the twentieth century. Gandhi led India, a British colonial power of 350 million people, to independence. The struggle for Indian independence led to the deaths of over 800,000 people. James Lawson used the Christian principles and Gandhi values to push his ideas of nonviolence.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ "The Rev James Lawson: The Non-Violence Struggle."

⁷⁰ "The Rev James Lawson: The Non-Violence Struggle."

The ideas of Gandhi's peaceful resistance to the British became a basis to the protestors in Nashville to the white majority. The struggle to desegregate the lunch counters developed from the same ideology of the British and Indians. Gandhi and other leaders of India met British strength with peaceful disobedience. Lawson's ideas within the organization in Nashville discussed the same ideas. Whites would attack the students and forcibly attempt to push the protestors back into segregation; however, Lawson believed like India nonviolence would end segregation in the South.⁷¹

James Lawson's workshops blended the nonviolent ideologies previously stated with roleplaying violence. Students from the colleges and universities of Nashville met at Clark Memorial United Methodist Church near Fisk University to attend the workshops. Matthew Walker Jr. stated, "Clark was the birthplace of the civil rights movement in Nashville." The workshops constantly discussed the ideologies of Gandhi and Christianity and role-played sit-in demonstrations. The students sat in chairs as other students harassed them. Lawson pushed the students to be passive and remain calm while being attacked. The students who attended the workshops were also given rules of conduct when the sit-ins began. The protestors were to be polite, keep the entrances and exits of the restaurants open, dress in appropriate attire, and never look back from the counter.⁷² The followers of Lawson's workshops were in the early stages of their goal to desegregate downtown department store lunch counters.

James Bevel introduced the followers of Lawson's workshops to the study of Tolstoy's Christian principles. Tolstoy's work discussed when a person kills another in the event of an accident, deliberate, or in war that person is no longer considered a Christian. Bevel also read

⁷¹ James Lawson, interviewed by Renee Montagne, *Morning Edition*, NPR, 26 December 2006.

⁷² Michael Cass, "Area Students Led the Way," *Tennessean*, under "Civil Rights Project," <http://www.tennessean.com/civil-rights/> (accessed February 12, 2013).

Gandhi's work in Nashville. Bevel quickly realized the similarities of Lawson and Gandhi.⁷³ Lawson along with other Nashville college students held workshops in preparation of the full scale sit-in demonstrations. Lawson molded the workshops on the ideas of Gandhi and Tolstoy. Gandhi's use of non-violence and Tolstoy's ideas of Christianity had profound effects on the group and other civil rights demonstrations. Gandhi's peaceful resistance through the use of satyagrahas would become the basis to Lawson and the protestor's action at the downtown lunch counters. Lawson's workshops influenced James Bevel; however, Diane Nash was unsure whether nonviolence could fight segregation.

James Lawson's workshops were attended by several vital leaders who originally believed the tactic of nonviolence was too idealistic and was not going to end segregation. Paul LaPrad, a classmate of Nash's at Fisk University, asked the young woman to attend the workshops.⁷⁴ She quickly became involved in the desegregation attempts at the lunch counters.

Diane Nash believed the workshops Lawson hosted were too idealistic to the real problems of segregation. Nash also knew that Lawson's workshops were the only place in Nashville that was attempting to end segregation in the capital. The leader of the workshops won Nash over by stating that the success of the sit-in movement lay with the protestors, and the protestors had to realize that each one of them was important and significant.⁷⁵ Nash likened the principles of nonviolence Gandhi used against the British to one of the greatest inventions in the twentieth century. Nash stated, "If you bomb somebody and you kill their relatives and their friends, you've made an enemy, and I think that – and you haven't solved any problems. I really

⁷³ Halberstam, 101.

⁷⁴ Freeman, 281.

⁷⁵ Freeman, 287.

wish governments would look at this as a viable alternative to the killing and maiming that they do.”⁷⁶ Diane Nash believed nonviolence would work as it had in India and the Transvaal.

The students of the movement elected Diane Nash to replace the two prior male leaders. Diane Nash, who previously believed the workshops were too idealistic to end segregation in Nashville, emerged as a leader within the movement. She was elected because the male leaders did not realize the movement demanded efficiency. The young woman knew the students faced death and violence when coming forward to white segregation. Diane Nash feared becoming leader of the student movement to desegregate the lunch counters because of the unwanted side effects of leading the student movement to end segregation at business lunch counters. She realized unlike others that racism was a major problem in the South, and persons older and stronger would attack the students. Nash also realized that the students were on the brink of entering a point of no return. Diane Nash recalled after becoming leader, “I was afraid, and in fact the night I was elected even past my attempts to avoid it, I remember coming back into my room in the dormitory. My roommate wasn’t in and the room was dark, and I really didn’t have the strength to walk across the room to my side of the room.” Nash continued, “We’re coming up against Southern white men who are in their fifties and forties and who are businessmen and government officials, and who are we? A bunch of students, eighteen, nineteen, early twenties. I remember not being able to imagine what things would be like in two months or three months.”⁷⁷

Lawson taught Nash and other leaders of the sit-in protests acts of nonviolence on how to combat segregation. The Nashville Christian Leadership Council taught classes to combat segregation with nonviolence in 1958. The workshops headed by Lawson and Reverend Glenn

⁷⁶ Tavis Smiley, interview.

⁷⁷ Tavis Smiley, interview.

E. Smiley, a leader of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, were popular throughout Nashville. Lawson discussed the theory and methods of nonviolence including how to handle attacks, how to be defensive without seeming violent, and how to negotiate with managers and workers.⁷⁸ Lawson trained the students on the violence that faced the group. The students sat on stools while other students hit, grabbed, yelled, and knocked fellow students to the floor.⁷⁹ The workshops were a blend of Nash's Student Central Committee and the Nashville Christian Leadership Council. College and high school students made up the Student Central Committee, while the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, a branch of the Southern Christian Leadership Council, organized older African Americans and Caucasians in the area.⁸⁰

The Student Central Committee and the Nashville Christian Leadership Council divided responsibilities among the groups. The meetings focused on the teaching of nonviolent tactics to protestors, but issues that regarded the function of the meetings were also discussed. The two organizations divided members into smaller groups to organize publicity, finances, food, contacting members, creating signs and maps, and transportation. The Nashville Christian Leadership Council provided the transportation, food, finances, and publicity. The Council's older members rallied the community behind the students because several of the protestors, including Nash, resided outside of Nashville. The Student Central Committee contacted members, created signs and maps, and would take part in the sit-in protests.⁸¹ The Nashville Christian Leadership Council organized the African American churches throughout Nashville. The churches took offerings each Sunday to help with expenses the protestors needed to start the

⁷⁸ Powledge, 204.

⁷⁹ Bond, Julian and Unita Blackwell.

⁸⁰ Morris, 209.

⁸¹ Morris, 209-210.

sit-in demonstrations.⁸² The organization of the committees continued to grow stronger as the African American community in Nashville rallied around the group.

Diane Nash realized segregation had passed its prime, and that millions of African Americans were ready to end segregation. Nash, raised in middleclass Chicago, felt the abrupt loss of freedoms segregation took in the south. The young woman realized that by using separate rest rooms or water fountains that the person complied with Jim Crow legislation. During lunch, the sidewalks of Nashville were littered with blacks eating lunch. Several lunch counters allowed African Americans to purchase food; however, blacks could not dine at the lunch counters.⁸³ The students like Nash who entered the city through higher education directly attacked the southern law.

The students under the leadership of Diane Nash and the Nashville Christian Leadership Council remembered Lawson's nonviolent ideologies as planning for the sit-in protests neared. The college and high school students along with backing from the African American community of Nashville led the students towards a battle that would encompass months of the protestors, police, government, and communities lives. The next step for the students would be testing direct action against segregation at department store lunch counters downtown.

The hatred of many whites in Nashville reached a breaking point in the late 1950s. Mothers, tired of explaining the way society pushed African Americans into a subservient position, pushed James Lawson to find a solution. The solution Lawson and the women reached was the desegregation of department store lunch counters. The people of James Lawson's workshops observed the lunch counters downtown and realized that the lunch counters provided

⁸² Morris, 211.

⁸³ Tavis Smiley, interview.

excellent press coverage and safety. The observance of department store lunch counters during the Christmas season of 1959 brought the sit-in protestors to a new level. Lawson's workshop followers, several of them women, directly targeted the prominent department stores downtown. The stores easily visible and easy to protest began in January 1960 in secret. Lawson's followers did not alert the *Nashville Tennessean* or the *Nashville Banner*. Lawson's group learned firsthand reactions on how people reacted and the nature of segregation in the south.⁸⁴

The organization of the Nashville sit-in protests provided a key to the success of the movement. The observance allowed the student protestors to detect what would occur in the following months. Students under Lawson continued to test segregation in the city. The city's bus terminals were also segregated, and Lawson's students tested the early effects of desegregation at the transit stations. Racism varied by department store; Harveys department store did not become upset with protestors and did not abuse Lawson's group. Harveys the largest and newest department store within Nashville became the largest target.⁸⁵ As recalled, Harveys offered a Monkey Bar to patrons' children. The Monkey Bar was a lunch counter that hosted live monkeys to entertain customers. Black children; however, could not enter the restaurant.⁸⁶ Harveys, a national department store, reacted more favorably than local department stores. Cain-Sloan treated the organizers harshly before asking the students to leave. The students met with Lawson once more at First Baptist Church in Nashville and discussed the results of the observance of the department store lunch counters. Christmas brought an end to the monitoring of the stores, but the students would return the following year for full-scale

⁸⁴ Halberstam, 91.

⁸⁵ Halberstam, 92.

⁸⁶ Halberstam, 90.

demonstrations.⁸⁷ The observance of the lunch counters proved pivotal in the following months of protest.

The leaders and groups that had organized and planned the Nashville sit-ins returned in 1960 to witness what would become known as the most recognized sit-in in United States history – the Greensboro sit-ins. Joseph McNeil, David Richmond, Ezell Blair Jr., and Franklin McCain entered the Woolworth’s lunch counter and demanded service. The four men were all freshman students at the Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina at Greensboro. The four students discussed entering and sitting at the lunch counter weeks before, and only after Franklin McCain, who mocked the other three students did the group enter the restaurant on February 1, 1960. The students were denied service and told blacks ordered food at the end of the counter and ate outside. A black worker at the Woolworth’s lunch counter screamed, “You are stupid, ignorant! You are dumb! That’s why we can’t get anywhere today. You are supposed to eat at the other end.”⁸⁸ In the four days the Greensboro movement continued to grow larger.

James Lawson’s friend, Douglas Moore, worked with the Greensboro sit-in movement. Moore was a Methodist minister like Lawson and called for the students at Vanderbilt to ask if Nashville was ready to join the fight for desegregation. The Nashville sit-ins began five days after the Greensboro demonstrations.⁸⁹ However, unlike Greensboro the Nashville movement had been planning and organizing for this day since 1958. The Nashville sit-in demonstrations affected thousands and encompassed four months of nonviolent protests.

⁸⁷ Halberstam, 92.

⁸⁸ Halberstam, 92-93.

⁸⁹ Halberstam, 93.

CHAPTER 4

“THE PRICE OF A WOOLWORTH’S BURGER”: THE POWER OF THE NASHVILLE SIT-INS

The movement to desegregate the lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina on February 1, 1960, pushed America to watch what was happening in the south during the infancy of the modern civil rights movement every night. The sit-ins in Greensboro were not the first sit-ins to occur in the United States; major demonstrations that involved protestors sitting in had taken place as early as 1943. However, following the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) the civil rights movement gained momentum, and the Greensboro sit-in was seen as another major demonstration occurring in the south to end Jim Crow legislation.⁹⁰

The sit-ins in Nashville began five days following the protests in Greensboro, and both pushed for equal eating facilities in downtown stores. In 1960, Nashville was a cosmopolitan city. Nashville boasted personifying the city image of the “Athens of the South,” because of the vast number of colleges and universities within the city limits. Nashville also boasted a progressive stance on racial issues. The city’s departments of police, fire, and government were integrated before 1960. However, Nashville’s public areas including restaurants, public transportation, movie theaters, grocery stores, neighborhoods, and hospitals were segregated.⁹¹ The sit-in demonstrations in Nashville focused on integrating five and ten department store restaurants, pharmacies, and transit terminals.

⁹⁰ Linda T. Wynn, “Leaders of Afro-American Nashville” (paper presented at the 1992 Nashville Conference on Afro-American Culture and History, Nashville, Tennessee).

⁹¹ Linda T. Wynn, “Leaders of Afro-American Nashville” (paper presented at the 1992 Nashville Conference on Afro-American Culture and History, Nashville, Tennessee).

The lunch counters that were chosen by the Nashville movement were located along Fifth Avenue, North. The department stores and Arcade were located next door to each other and provided easy access for the student movement to gather outside. The department store lunch counters of Kress, McClellan, and Woolworth were targeted on February 13, 1960.⁹² The well-dressed students walked in silence through the streets and assembled outside the department stores on Fifth Avenue North.⁹³ One-hundred twenty-four students divided into the stores at lunch time and waited to be served. R. L. Prescott, Kress department store manager, told the protestors it was against company policy to serve persons of color. The staff at McClellan's witnessed the students entering the lunch counter and immediately began sitting at empty seats to stop the protest. The staff at McClellan's was forced to vacate the seats, and the lunch counter was immediately closed. The lunch counter at Woolworth remained open for the first hour and then following Kress and McClellan closed.⁹⁴

The sit-in demonstration on February 13, 1960, was the first major sit-in event in Nashville. Students used the nonviolent tactics learned in Lawson's workshops to begin the demonstration. Diane Nash stated, "We just got tired of having no place to eat when we shop downtown, so we decided to do something about it."⁹⁵ Nash also stated that the sit-ins were, "a spontaneous student movement for equal recognition – not a boycott." The three department store lunch counters affected by the sit-in demonstrators that day did not witness violence, and the students freely walked in and out of the stores and lunch counters. The Nashville police entered the lunch counters at 2:40 p.m. and told the employees that the police's hands were bound unless violence occurred. The students left before 3 o'clock; however, an assistant

⁹² James Talley, "Lunch Counter Strikes City," *Tennessean*, February 14, 1960.

⁹³ Halberstam, 103.

⁹⁴ James Talley, "Lunch Counter Strikes Hit City."

⁹⁵ James Talley, "Lunch Counter Strikes Hit City."

manager at Woolworth's noticed seven students who counted the number of seats before leaving the counter.⁹⁶ The city of Nashville took notice of the event on February 13 and realized that sit-in demonstrations on that day were not a freak occurrence.

The sit-ins continued to grow throughout Nashville, and on February 20, 1960, the students began protesting at the Grant's department store and the Walgreen's drug store. Three hundred fifty students from American Baptist Seminary, Fisk, and Tennessee A&I State met on Fifth Avenue North and protested at the five lunch counters. Luther Harris stated, "[Walgreen's] was the first effort in the South to desegregate drugstore eating facilities." The students continued to practice James Lawson's nonviolent direct action tactics. The student movement elected Luther Harris as spokesperson for the sit-ins of February 20. Harris stated, "As long as we obey these principles we are bound to succeed. It took Ghandi 36 years in India, but I don't think it will take us that long here." The students involved in the protests at the five stores did homework and read books, and John Lewis wrote his sermon for his church service. The sit-ins continued to be civil as white crowds gathered along the street. The students left the five department stores at 3:45 and attended a mass meeting at Nashville's First Baptist Church.⁹⁷ Reverend Kelly Miller Smith's First Baptist Church served as the demonstrators' center of planning and organizing protests throughout the sit-ins.

The sit-ins continued on Fifth Avenue North on February 27, 1960. The students and the merchants reached an impasse. The students continued nonviolent protests downtown because the merchants adamantly denied ending Jim Crow legislation. Nashville's city council and the department store merchants met, seeking a resolution to end the protests. The merchants realized

⁹⁶ James Talley, "Lunch Counter Strikes Hit City."

⁹⁷ "Lunch Counter 'Strike' Spreads: Drug Store Included Among 5 Places Visited by Negroes," *Tennessean*, February 21, 1960.

that the stores faced economic ruin if the protests continued and patrons stayed away. The Student Central Committee and James Lawson realized that violence was looming, and the group met with Nashville's police chief, Douglas Hosse, to curtail any violence. The students wanted one policeman for each restaurant but Hosse stated that the Nashville police department was unable to grant them their wishes. However, Hosse told the students that his police force would do their best in keeping peace on Fifth Avenue North. Douglas Hosse turned to the students after the meeting was over and asked, "Is all this worth a twenty-five-cent hamburger?"⁹⁸

The students met at the Reverend Kelly Miller Smith's First Baptist Church to organize before marching to the department stores. The Student Central Committee discussed which tactics to use against the lunch counters and over a dozen voiced opinions. The leaders of the committee wanted to overwhelm downtown and show the city council that the sit-ins were not going to end until the lunch counters desegregated. However, the leaders within the Student Central Committee realized that with the thirty protestors who met at the church, an overwhelming sit-in was impossible. The leaders went into the basement and decided that the students were to sit at the lunch counter in small groups until the counters were closed. The leaders emerged from the basement and were astonished to find over three hundred students waiting for the leaders. Many of the three hundred students had not attended Lawson's nonviolent workshops, so the leaders of the Student Central Committee quickly taught the students how to respond to the violence waiting for the group. The committee dispersed quarters and phone numbers among the students for anyone who needed medical treatment after the

⁹⁸ Halberstam, 127-28.

protests.⁹⁹ The three hundred students left First Baptist Church on Eight Avenue North and headed to the stores on Fifth Avenue North.

The sit-ins in Nashville changed as the student protestors quietly marched along Fifth Avenue North and entered the stores the Student Central Committee had assigned them. The street was crowded with thousands of whites who were kept back under the watchful eye of the Nashville policemen. The greatest violence that day occurred at McClellan and Woolworth department stores. Two demonstrators were beaten after the two refused to acknowledge white hecklers who blew smoke in their faces and called the two “nigger lovers.”¹⁰⁰ Paul LaPrad, a white student who introduced Diane Nash to James Lawson’s workshops, was violently attacked as he sat beside Peggy Alexander and Maxine Walker. Alexander and Walker, both black students, sat silently as LaPrad was beaten.¹⁰¹ LaPrad said, “He grabbed me from behind and pulled me off the stool. I tried to hang on to the stool but I couldn’t. He hit me on the head several times with his fist. I did not try to fight back. After he had hit me a few times he and his friends – two or three of them – left.”¹⁰² The police entered the store following the attack on Paul LaPrad and arrested the beaten Fisk student. The other students were forced out of McClellan’s and then entered one of the four other department stores under siege.¹⁰³

The violence continued to grow after the manager of McClellan’s closed the lunch counter, and soon student demonstrators were attacked at the other lunch counters. The Woolworth’s department store lunch counter was located on two levels; three protestors were

⁹⁹ Halberstam, 128-29.

¹⁰⁰ James Talley, “Massed Police Halt Sit-Downs At Food Counters: Quick Action Halts Outbreak of Fighting in Downtown Area,” *Tennessean*, February 28, 1960.

¹⁰¹ Halberstam, 132.

¹⁰² James Talley, “Massed Police Halt Sit-Downs At Food Counters: Quick Action Halts Outbreak of Fighting in Downtown Area.”

¹⁰³ Halberstam, 132-33.

severely beaten by white men at Woolworth's. Two of the protestors were attacked after sitting silently as men behind them screamed, "Go home nigger." White men violently beat two protestors who huddled in the fetal position, while a third protestor was pushed down a flight of stairs.¹⁰⁴ One protestor, Herman Cobb, fought back against the white crowd that had previously pummeled him.¹⁰⁵ The manager at McClellan's forgot to lock the door as he rushed to close the lunch counter, and students quickly rushed into the restaurant. The police department began arresting student protestors massed throughout the department store lunch counters.¹⁰⁶ Seventy-five students were arrested that day as the white crowd cheered outside.¹⁰⁷ Diane Nash was one of the students arrested on February 27 and led to the paddy wagons outside. The first group of students was driven away but second and third groups took the place of the arrested.¹⁰⁸ The police force stood in silence as dozens of students refused to vacate the lunch counters. However, the police began arresting all students who did not leave the lunch counters when asked; the demonstrators were arrested for disorderly conduct. Earl May stated, "We're going to fill their jails. That's a promise." The students who remained in the Woolworth's lunch counter from the third wave were attacked at 5:00 pm. The protestors were burnt with lit cigarettes and spit on. An elderly man hit the back of each African American who sat at the lunch counter and whispered into the ears of the protestors. White men then marched up the stairs to the second floor of the Woolworth's lunch counter and pushed protestors down the steps and beat several others. The police arrived after the students were badly beaten.¹⁰⁹ The protests ended along Fifth Avenue

¹⁰⁴ James Talley, "Massed Police Halt Sit-Downs At Food Counters: Quick Action Halts Outbreak of Fighting in Downtown Area."

¹⁰⁵ "75 Students Arrested Here; Schools Put Up," *Tennessean*, February 28, 1960.

¹⁰⁶ Halberstam, 133.

¹⁰⁷ James Talley, "Massed Police Halt Sit-Downs At Food Counters: Quick Action Halts Outbreak of Fighting in Downtown Area."

¹⁰⁸ Halberstam, 133-34.

¹⁰⁹ "75 Students Arrested Here; Schools Put Up."

North that night, as seventy-five students sat in jail and dozens more received medical treatment at segregated hospitals.

Diane Nash and seventy-four other students waited in Nashville's jails. The students were booked, fingerprinted, and placed in cells throughout the jail. Nash's light complexion separated her from the treatment other blacks received while being booked. Two white officers openly talked in front of Nash on how the black protestors appeared and smelled. The officers also told Nash her light complexion allowed her to separate herself from other blacks. The fear that the young Chicagoan held quickly moved into a mind of anger on how people divided themselves among race. Nash knew that race was not in her mindset, but if Nashville was racially divided, the protestors were going to fight for equality.¹¹⁰

The United States National Students Association (USNSA) enacted a national demonstration to sympathize with the students in Nashville who had been arrested for practicing nonviolent strategies. The USNSA targeted the national chains of Kress, Walgreen, and Woolworth. The organization continued its support of the sit-in movement and protestors by supporting student leader Diane Nash. The young woman was telegraphed by the group as she sat in jail, and it stated, "We have just been informed of the incidents of Saturday afternoon which led to your arrest and imprisonment without provocation. We are at once struck both by the justices and courage of your non-violent action and the injustice and bigotry with which it has met. We realize that the struggle in of bail.. command our respect and that of the millions of students we represent. You have given us so much to be proud of, in return we pledge our further support in any way which you may request or which may be possible." The organization messaged the office of Mayor Ben West and attacked it by stating that his office had failed to

¹¹⁰ Halberstam, 134-35.

uphold the law for all of its citizens. The USNSA ordered that West's office release the students arrested following the restart of the sit-in demonstrations.¹¹¹

The students who had not been arrested during the previous sit-in demonstration met with the Nashville Police Department. Douglas Hosse, police chief, promised the student movement that order was to be preserved in downtown Nashville; however, order had not been preserved along Fifth Avenue that day. Hosse proclaimed to Reverend C. T. Baker that he had the power to end the sit-in demonstrations. Baker contacted Mayor Ben West's office several times in the hope of ending violence against the student protestors, but Mayor West did not return his calls.¹¹² The students who remained free rallied behind their fellow classmates in Nashville's jails.

The students serving time in Nashville's jails were bonded a couple of days following the arrests. Fisk University sent Mrs. A. S. Cheatham to post bail for the university's students. Cheatham served as Dean of Students for Fisk University, and stated, "I think what they did is commendable. I think it took courage for them to speak out for their conviction." Z. Alexander Looby, a black city councilman and attorney for the student movement, posted bail for the rest of the students in jail.¹¹³ Several students remained in jail and followed the principles that Gandhi sat decades before. The group cleaned city buildings, shoveled snow covered sidewalks, and worked within the jail cleaning floors and commodes. The Nashville sit-ins continued through March with several arrests and ever-growing violence throughout the city.

The demonstrators continued Lawson's nonviolent strategies at the lunch counters at the Greyhound and Trailways bus terminals. Fifty-six students entered the Greyhound terminal lunch

¹¹¹ Fisk University Forum, "Sit-ins Unseat Jim Crow," March 24, 1960.

¹¹² "75 Students Arrested Here; Schools Put Up."

¹¹³ "75 Students Arrested Here; Schools Put Up."

counter and refused to leave after the restaurant refused to serve the students. The bus station was evacuated after police officer, Carney Patterson, received an anonymous tip that a bomb was placed at the depot. The protestors were jailed after refusing to evacuate with the other patrons inside. Seven students were arrested at the Trailways terminal for conspiracy to stop business.¹¹⁴

James Lawson was expelled from Vanderbilt University Divinity School on March 2, 1960, for his activities in the sit-in demonstrations. Chancellor Harvie Branscomb stated that the university forced his expulsion following Lawson's refusal to withdraw as an executive committee member to Vanderbilt University's Board of Trustees. Branscomb further stated that, "The university enjoys not only the privileges but is subject to the obligations incident to its charter from the State of Tennessee and its membership in a society organized under law. There is no issue involved of freedom of thought, or of conscience, or of speech, or of the right of protest against social custom. The issue is whether or not the university can be identified with a continuing campaign of mass disobedience of law as a means of protest." The university waited until 9:00 a.m. on March 3, to receive Lawson's letter of withdrawal from the committee. James Lawson failed to issue his withdrawal, and Vanderbilt University expelled him for his actions an hour following the deadline. Dean J. Robert Nelson addressed the press and public later that Wednesday, stating, "Your strong commitment to a planned campaign of civil disobedience, as expressed in your signed statement of today, compels the executive committee of the Board of Trust to ask you to withdraw from the university." The executive body at Vanderbilt University continued that James Lawson broke the university's student code of conduct. The student code of conduct under Vanderbilt University's College of Arts and Sciences stated, "It shall be the duty of every student to discourage disorderly assemblage in large groups on or off the campus.

¹¹⁴ "63 New Arrests Mark Sit-in Drive," *Tennessean*, March 3, 1960.

Should mob action or rioting occur, or seem likely to occur, each student shall be held responsible for his actions and should remove himself quickly from the scene, returning to his residence. Students found at the scene of a riot or in an unruly mob shall be subject to immediate expulsion from the university whether or not they are participants.” James Lawson issued a rebuttal to his expulsion, “When the Christian considers the concept of civil disobedience as an aspect of non-violence, it is only within the context of a law or a law enforcement agency which has in reality ceased to be the Law, and then the Christian does so only in fear and trembling before God.”¹¹⁵ Lawson’s expulsion from Vanderbilt occurred on the same day hundreds of cases were going before the city’s court system.

The Nashville judicial system was submerged on March 3 under the growing number of cases that dealt with arrests from the sit-in demonstrations.¹¹⁶ The judicial system broke down following the growing number of arrests and the illegitimate legality of each case. Connie Curry, member of the United States National Student Association (USNSA), argued that the entire court proceedings were a show trial. Curry stated students were arrested for visiting demonstrators in jail and given varying fines.¹¹⁷ Black and white students involved with movement bonded together and refused to answer questions from the city prosecutors that implicated others. The students incited the fifth and fourteenth amendments as protection from prosecutors.¹¹⁸ Z. Alexander Looby asked Judge Andrew Doyle to postpone the sentencing of the sixty-three students who protested at the Greyhound and Trailways terminals in favor of the recommendations under Mayor Ben West’s newly appointed biracial committee.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Jack Setters, “Vanderbilt Dismisses Lawson,” *Banner*, March 3, 1960.

¹¹⁶ “She Pleads Constitutional Protection,” *Tennessean*, March 5, 1960.

¹¹⁷ “Student Trials Called ‘Farce,’” *The Fisk Forum*, March 24, 1960.

¹¹⁸ “She Pleads Constitutional Protection,” *Tennessean*, March 5, 1960.

¹¹⁹ “Doyle Delays 63 ‘Sit-in’ Trials,” *Tennessean*, March 10, 1960.

The sit-in protests were halted on March 3, 1960, under Z. Alexander Looby's and Coyness L. Ennix's advisement. The attorneys declared that the student movement was going to halt any further demonstrations and let Mayor West's biracial committee find a resolution to the desegregation of Nashville's department store lunch counters. The attorneys stated that while the two served as a legal defense to the group, the two did not have control of the group nor did they make the decision to halt the sit-in protests. C. Madison Sarratt served as the chair of the committee and served as vice chancellor emeritus of Vanderbilt University. Two university presidents also served on the board, Dr. Stephen J. Wright, Fisk University, and Dr. W. S. Davis, A&I State University. George Barret, Nashville Community Relations Conference president, served on the board. B.B. Gullet also served on the committee; Gullet headed the Nashville Bar Association. The rest of the committee was made up of corporate magnates including Lipscomb Davis in charge of Davis Cabinet Co. and president of Temco Inc., F. Donald Hart.¹²⁰

The biracial committee created under the authority of Mayor Ben West attempted to find middle ground on the violence that occurred throughout the city following the downtown desegregation attempts. Mayor West had previously won election by winning a large number of black votes and needed to find a common ground in hopes of winning reelection. West, a moderate, created the biracial committee in the hope of finding such a stance. The students still serving sentences in Nashville's jail were released, and the Student Central Committee agreed to halt any further sit-in demonstrations.¹²¹ Sarratt stated that the committee had not reached any recommended plans to the department store owners and managers on desegregating the store's restaurants. Each department store managing staff met exclusively with the biracial committee

¹²⁰ "Sit-in' Halt Advisable – Lawyers: Told to Await Committee," *Banner*, March 4, 1960.

¹²¹ Lynne Olson, "Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970," (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 158.

over a three-hour period. Madison Sarratt and the committee declared that separate but equal facilities in the department store lunch counters were going to be the first step in the desegregation of Nashville's lunch counters. However, the student movement rejected Sarratt's plan. Madison Sarratt stated on March 11, 1960, that the committee had made no immediate plans to discuss recommendations with Mayor Ben West.¹²² The student movement grew impatient with West's biracial committee, and the sit-in demonstrations continued.

The Greyhound Terminal witnessed its second sit-in demonstration on March 16, 1960. Diane Nash, Peggy Alexander, Stanley Hemphill, and Matthew Walker entered the Post House restaurant and ate at the lunch counter at 1:30 p.m.¹²³ The national chain restaurant served the four students, and the terminal became the first desegregated lunch counter in Nashville following the sit-in demonstrations.¹²⁴ However, the four students from Fisk University were finishing their meal when four young white men attacked Stanley Hemphill and Matthew Walker. The men were severely beaten, but Diane Nash and Peggy Alexander were not harmed.¹²⁵ The Post Office Restaurant immediately called the police following the beating of the two men and after one of the students failed to pay for his meal.¹²⁶ The students discussed the planning and organization of other sit-in demonstrations following the desegregation of the Post Office restaurant chain.

The Student Central Committee discussed plans for more sit-ins throughout Nashville but halted any further plans until the biracial committee presented its plans to Mayor West and the city. The Student Central Committee also halted plans for student protestors to carry signs

¹²² "Bi-Racial Group To Hold 3rd Session," *Tennessean*, March 12, 1960.

¹²³ "Bi-Racial Meetings Continue," *Banner*, March 17, 1960.

¹²⁴ David Halberstam, "Marshall Invites Looby, Partner," *Tennessean*, March 18, 1960.

¹²⁵ "Bi-Racial Meetings Continue."

¹²⁶ "Bi-Racial Meetings Continue."

throughout downtown Nashville with the acronym NERD. The signs represented Nashville Equal Rights Day, and the protest gained momentum throughout Fisk University. However, the leaders of the Student Central Committee stopped any plans for the sign demonstration in hopes to accelerate the plans of the biracial committee.¹²⁷ The racial demonstrations cooled as the biracial committee formulated the group's ideas.

The student's legal defense under Z. Alexander Looby left Nashville during the cooling period of sit-in demonstrations to meet with Thurgood Marshall in Washington D.C. The meeting orchestrated under the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People met over a three-day period at Howard University. Marshall invited Looby and his defense team to a national meeting to discuss the issues of arrests and the lawlessness that occurred from sit-in demonstrations. The Nashville sit-ins during this time were accompanied by dozens of sit-ins across the southern United States.¹²⁸

The demonstrations in Nashville continued following the cooling off period. The sit-in demonstrations in Nashville continued to receive national attention. The student leaders were contacted by Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) to film a documentary examining the sit-in protests. The directors of the documentary filmed James Lawson teaching a sit-in demonstration while other students portrayed the nonviolent strategies. The film also looked in-depth into the student leaders meetings and how the protestors parents felt about the demonstrations. CBS filmmakers witnessed the sit-in demonstration downtown on March 25, 1960, and included the event in the film. However, Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington immediately attacked CBS for

¹²⁷ David Halberstam, "Marshall Invites Looby, Partner."

¹²⁸ David Halberstam, "Marshall Invites Looby, Partner."

inciting the sit-in demonstration.¹²⁹ The New York based filmmakers immediately left Nashville following Ellington's verbal attack on filming the sit-in demonstration. Ellington quickly issued an investigation into the sit-in movement as well as CBS's role in the movement; a consequence to the filming of the documentary was that the biracial committee was forced to include the events of the film within the study, which further slowed the group's recommendations.¹³⁰

Governor Ellington's attack on the sit-in demonstrations did not hamper the movement, and the NCLC, under the authority of Reverend Kelly Miller Smith, supported the continued fight for desegregation. Smith stated at a press conference at Eighth Avenue First Baptist Church that the sit-in demonstrations were to be continued. During the press conference several people discussed that the city's government was slowing desegregation, and that the crew of CBS had not played a role in the protests. However, as news companies broadcasted the sit-in updates the Woolworth department store closed following fear of further sit-in protests at its lunch counter.¹³¹

The biracial committee produced its public recommendations on resolving the sit-in protests at downtown lunch counters on March 30, 1960. Sarratt's committee stated that the lunch counters were to be separated equally into a white section and colored section. The stores were to test the plan for ninety days, and then were given an option to follow the plan. The student movement met and refused to accept Sarratt's and West's plan enacted under the biracial committee. Student leaders met with the managers of the department stores and requested that

¹²⁹ Julia Moore, From Jubilee Bell Tower, *Fisk News*, Summer, 1960.

¹³⁰ Tom Flake, "Bi-Racial Group Back Where It Started: Sarratt: Ellington Orders Complete Investigation Of Sit-Ins," *Banner*, March 26, 1960.

¹³¹ Don Walker, "Negroes Gather To Report On New Sit-In Activity," *Banner*, March 26, 1960.

the lunch counters be desegregated; however, the merchants blatantly refused to integrate.¹³² The students continued to use direct action to push for integration at downtown lunch counters.

The Nashville movement continued to grow as adults demonstrated with the students. Z. Alexander Looby stated, “Nashville is getting worse than Mississippi now.”¹³³ Demonstrators met at the Davidson County Courthouse on March 30 to pray that Mayor West integrate restaurants downtown. The protestors, under the guidance of Reverend Barnyard Clark of St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church, numbered over two hundred people. Clark’s group met and formed a circle on the plaza below Mayor West’s office window. The demonstrators prayed for him to take a stance towards equal rights at the lunch counters.¹³⁴

Students from across Nashville met at Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee to discuss the future of the sit-in demonstrations in the city. The meeting which focused on the sit-in demonstrations was the largest meeting to ever take place at the school reported Septima Clark. The students were told that the sit-in demonstrations were the most successful protests to gain national attention. James Bevel, a student at American Baptist Theological Seminary, stated to the group that city officials and whites were forced to realize their goals when hundreds of protestors were arrested. Sit-in demonstrators from across the south also met at Highlander and witnessed the role the students in Nashville had on the larger student sit-in movement.¹³⁵

The sit-in demonstrations were aided by a downtown department store boycott from the African American population on April 4. The student movement under pressure from Mayor Ben West agreed to stop sit-in demonstrations, but the movement pushed for a massive boycott of all

¹³² Julia Moore, From Jubilee Bell Tower.

¹³³ “4 Negroes Face New Charges,” *Tennessean*, March 29, 1960.

¹³⁴ David Halberstam, “200 Negroes Pray for West’s Aid,” *Tennessean*, March 31, 1960.

¹³⁵ Rudy Abramson, “Sit-In Group Opens Seminar: Meet at Highlander Folk School To Map Future Course of Action,” *Tennessean*, April 3, 1960.

department stores in downtown Nashville. The leaders of the movement were persuaded to enact the boycott under Fisk University's Professor Vivian Henderson. An economic boycott can be massively destructive argued Henderson and can change any mindset. The leaders followed Henderson's idea and quickly called friends sympathetic to the sit-in movement.¹³⁶

The boycott of department stores downtown continued to damage the companies financially. The effects of suburbanization had damaged the economic prosperity of Nashville like other cities throughout the United States following World War II. The department stores received twenty percent of their yearly business from people living in the suburbs of Nashville, and during the sit-in demonstrations and boycotts whites were fearful of entering downtown. The weather in Nashville was also colder than usual preventing persons from walking to the department stores downtown. Finally, Nashville's large black population was not buying merchandise because of the boycott. During the boycott, Harveys reported a fifteen percent loss. The lunch counters at the four major stores (Kress, Woolworth, Walgreen's, and McClellan's) lost half of their restaurant business during the boycott. The bus lines throughout the city also faced financial ruin because blacks were no longer boarding buses to shop downtown; the two major newspapers in Nashville, the liberal *Tennessean* and conservative *Banner*, also reported massive advertisement losses during the boycotts.¹³⁷ The boycotts pushed the merchants to find a common ground with the student movement.

The student movement and the merchants of the department stores moved to find common ground during the first weeks of April. The student movement under Diane Nash and the Nashville Christian Leadership Council under Reverend Kelly Miller Smith issued a

¹³⁶ Wallace Westfeldt, "Settling a Sit-in" (report presented at the Nashville Community Relations Conference, Nashville, TN).

¹³⁷ Wallace Westfeldt, "Settling a Sit-in."

statement in the *Tennessean* addressing the unified group's recommendations that dealt with Mayor West's biracial committee. The NCLC and the Student Central Committee differed with the biracial committee's findings because West's commission did not deal with the moral issue of segregation. The two groups centered on the democratic ideals and religious principles; the boycotters argued that Christianity and democracy cannot flourish when minority groups are separated from the racial majority. The second issue that the NCLC and Student Central Committee recommended to the merchants that differed from the biracial committee findings was the ninety-day trial period. The students and the NCLC argued that the department stores were likely to revert to pre-demonstration segregation. Thirdly, the group looked at the creation of a new diverse committee where persons throughout Davidson County served to resolve racial issues.¹³⁸ The merchants issued their own demands.

The merchants of the department stores issued their own set of demands in dealing with the damaging effects of the demonstrations and boycott. The first request was that African Americans throughout Nashville serve on the negotiation board and the second was that whites were not to be present on the board. The department store merchants stated that West's biracial committee did not allow equal representation because the two African Americans, Dr. W. S. Davis and Dr. Stephen J. Wright, served as university presidents. The merchants believed that university presidents did not relate to common African American issues.¹³⁹ The negotiations between the NCLC, Student Central Committee, and downtown department store merchants continued as Nashville witnessed further events and sit-in demonstrations.

¹³⁸ "Student's Statement," *Tennessean*, April 10, 1960.

¹³⁹ Wallace Westfeldt, "Settling a Sit-in."

The student protestors focused a new ideology to push for integration at downtown lunch counters. Students numbering between three and four of different racial backgrounds now entered the lunch counters and sat while the larger student group remained outside on Fifth Avenue North and picketed the outside of the lunch counter and store. However, the student protestors continued to receive the same results as previous demonstrations; the merchants closed the lunch counters to end violence, but the sit-in protests continued to grow more violent.¹⁴⁰

The sit-in demonstrations continued to turn violent in the first weeks of April. A massive protest occurred on April 13, 1960. One thousand people gathered around the department stores on Fifth Avenue North. The violence on that day reached its pinnacle when a teenage student from Cameron High School, Rufus Jamison, not directly involved with the sit-in demonstrations, was harassed by a jeering white crowd. A white crowd threw balls of paper at the student while he worked in a beauty shop on Twelfth Avenue South. The young student then threw a lighted cigarette at the crowd. Jamison barricaded himself on the top floor of the Arcade as the angry mob hurled items at him. The high school student continued to fight back by throwing a glass bottle into the crowd. Thirty persons ran up the stairs and physically attacked Jamison. Women in the beauty shop tried in vain to stop the mob, but the young man was beaten with an ash tray and the tip of woman's high heel shoe. Police arrested Jamison as women from the beauty shop yelled that he was the victim. An injured Jamison was released from a juvenile detention center that night. The sit-in protests remained relatively quiet that day, but six other people were arrested that day with Rufus Jamison.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Julia Moore, From Jubilee Bell Tower.

¹⁴¹ David Halberstam, "2 Whites Among 7 Arrested As Sit-in Disorders Continue," *Tennessean*, April 13, 1960.

On the morning of April 19, 1960, the city of Nashville awakened to a massive blast and smoke that filled the western end of the city. The home of the sit-in demonstrator's attorney, Z. Alexander Looby, was bombed. Looby and his wife were sleeping in the back of the house and escaped the bombing. The front of the house was destroyed, and the windows and doors of Meharry Medical School alumni and cafeteria buildings were blown out. The windows of Hubbard Hospital located two hundred yards away from the residence were also blown out.¹⁴² The Loobys escaped injury, but students at Meharry were injured from flying glass.¹⁴³ The injured students at Meharry Medical School were treated at Hubbard Hospital.¹⁴⁴ The front of the residence was crowded in a couple of hours with policemen, firemen, reporters, and the leaders of the demonstrations.¹⁴⁵ Mayor Ben West also hurried to the site of the bombing to address the gathering crowd. West stated, "This is terrible. Violence of any kind is abhorrent and we certainly plan to do everything within our power to find the culprit or culprits." However, the only lead the Nashville police department had was that two white men were seen in the area at 5:15 a.m. The detectives on the scene stated that the explosion came from five to six sticks of dynamite, and that if the explosives had gone through the window the explosion was strong enough to level the block.¹⁴⁶ Mayor West was shaken by the bombing, and the demonstrators received a final push to confront the city government as well as Mayor Ben West.

The Student Central Committee organized a meeting to protest the bombing of Z. Alexander Looby's home. The march to confront Mayor West's actions in the Nashville sit-in

¹⁴² Larry Brinton and Jack Setters, "Bomb Wrecks Looby's Home: Councilman, NAACP Aide Uninjured," April 19, 1960.

¹⁴³ Julia Moore, From Jubilee Bell Tower.

¹⁴⁴ Larry Brinton and Jack Setters, "Bomb Wrecks Looby's Home: Councilman, NAACP Aide Uninjured."

¹⁴⁵ Julia Moore, From Jubilee Bell Tower.

¹⁴⁶ Larry Brinton and Jack Setters, "Bomb Wrecks Looby's Home: Councilman, NAACP Aide Uninjured."

demonstrations began later that morning at A&I.¹⁴⁷ Mayor West received a telegram from the demonstrators that stated he was to meet the marchers in the plaza at 1:30 p.m. The leaders of the march handed out leaflets to discuss the rules of the march and waited as the march passed their university. The leaflets stated that the marchers were to be nonviolent and silent throughout the march to and from City Hall and were to remain silent during the confrontation with Mayor West. The students marched three persons abreast from A&I along Jefferson Street and picked up students at Meharry and Fisk University.¹⁴⁸ Diane Nash, Rodney Powell, Curtis Murphy, and Bernard Lafayette led the student demonstration to City Hall; the students represented Fisk, Meharry, A&I, and American Baptist Theological Seminary respectively.¹⁴⁹ The students numbered over two thousand and stretched ten city blocks by the time the march ended up in the City Hall Plaza.¹⁵⁰ The demonstrators silently filled the plaza and awaited Mayor West.

Mayor West entered the plaza from his office and addressed the massive crowd outside. He told the crowd that his administration desegregated the restaurant facilities of Nashville's airport, and that it was the downtown department store merchant's decision to desegregate the lunch counters. The demonstrators responded to Mayor West's statement with a letter read by C.T. Vivian. The letter stated:

We have come from every part of the city. We are those of all races. Together we have come to urgently beseech the mayor a policy of sanity that will make this city what it should be under God, so all of us may begin to live together as brothers and first class citizens.

In the bombing of Attorney Z. Alexander Looby's home an indication that the mayor's office has not the authority to prevent the violence that has occurred this morning and during the past few weeks? The citizenry is outraged and must speak when one of Nashville's most honored citizens and city councilmen's home is bombed and

¹⁴⁷ Julia Moore, From Jubilee Bell Tower.

¹⁴⁸ "West Tells 2,000 Marchers City's Laws To Be Upheld," *Banner*, April 20, 1960.

¹⁴⁹ Julia Moore, From Jubilee Bell Tower.

¹⁵⁰ "West Tells 2,000 Marchers City's Laws To Be Upheld," *Banner*, April 20, 1960.

injustice is visited upon many. We feel that this bomb can silence decency in Nashville or cause decent men to speak more loudly than bobs. The mayor has steadfastly ignored the moral issues involved in segregation. He has refused to speak out against the injustice of the segregation statement offered him by his own committee. He hasn't made any attempt to speak to all the citizens concerning the most pressing problem since his election. He has not used the moral weight of his office to speak out against violence and hated mongers. By his lack of decision he was encouraged partiality. They have from the beginning arrested the wrong people and allowed hoodlum elements the freedom of violent action against peaceful demonstrators. During this critical situation Mayor West has been difficult to reach and has been out of the city making speeches while citizens were being beaten and abused. The mayor has been unrealistic in his approach to the just demands of the realities of the pressing need for full citizenship for all of our citizens. We feel that he has waited for the students to leave town and has failed to realize that the Student Non-Violent Movement and the declarations of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council embodies the hopes, dreams and aspirations of all men of goodwill. Because he has failed to speak we ask that he now consider the Christian faith he professes and the democratic rights of all citizens and declare for our city a policy of sanity based on our common faith and our democratic principles.

We are all aware that the student and community persons who have openly engaged in this movement have been disciplined, loving and asking what any man under God and under the Constitution of our country should demand. We would be less than Christians or Americans to ask or expect less than our civil liberties. All of the city is aware that the violence has come from ungoverned hoodlum elements. We are asking the mayor and the persons of the city who have nudged the hoodlums on by their inactivity to rise and accept for our city Christian principles and the truths of our Democratic faith. It is not now too late to act sanely. For the mayor to put politics above realistic understanding of human needs or for merchants to put dollars before human decency will make this another Little Rock or Birmingham. We can by some measure accomplish in this city what has been accomplished in San Antonio and Galveston.

The decision for decency has been and is now basically in the hands of the mayor. If you act under God and for common human decency you can save the city. The alternate is chaos created by hating hoodlums. The decision is yours.¹⁵¹

Mayor West reacted harshly following the letter read by C.T. Vivian.

The letter read to Mayor Ben West from C.T. Vivian stirred emotions that had been brewing since February 1960. The attitude of the mayor changed from welcoming to angry, and he interrupted in stating, "I deny and resent to the bottom of my soul the implications you made in that statement. I intend to see order maintained in this city... As God is my helper the law will be enforced." Mayor West continued and told the crowd that the bomber of Looby's home will

¹⁵¹ C.T. Vivian to Mayor Ben West, April 19, 1960, Fred Travis Papers, X-H-1 Box 6, F. 34 ACC. 88-6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

be found and convicted. The mayor knew the 2,000 protestors had enough power to bring Nashville to its knees, and West pleaded with the crowd not to riot. He continued to dodge questions asked to him by Vivian and declared that the students were ignorant in the subject of what his administration had done for integrating public places in the city.¹⁵² Mayor West finally stated to the crowd, “We are all Christians together. I am the Rev. C.T. Vivian’s brother and he is my brother, whether we like it not. Let’s all pray together.” Diane Nash interrupted the mayor, before he had time to think of the political consequences of his actions. Nash cried, “What about eating together?” Diane Nash, head of the Student Central Committee, and Mayor West discussed the role of race and morality surrounding the sit-in demonstrations. The young leader asked West if a person should be discriminated from equal opportunities based on racial identity.¹⁵³ The mayor replied that a person is entitled to the same entitlements of another person. However, Mayor West continued to indicate that the desegregation of department store lunch counters was the decision of the merchants.¹⁵⁴ The demonstrators left the plaza silently, and returned to their respective schools.

The march on City Hall was followed with a visit to Fisk University from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The Atlanta based leader of the civil rights movement told a four thousand person crowd, “The movement here is the best organized and best disciplined of all movements in the Southland today. The students have gained a better understanding of the philosophy of the (non-violence) movement than any other group.” King further argued that the students were saving the country and future generations from hatred and a second class society. The Atlanta based leader declared that the student leaders were not solely pushing for integration at lunch

¹⁵² “West Tells 2,000 Marchers City’s Laws To Be Upheld.”

¹⁵³ Diane Nash to Mayor Ben West, April 19, 1960, Fred Travis Papers, Box 6, F. 35 X-H-1, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

¹⁵⁴ “West Tells 2,000 Marchers City’s Laws to Be Upheld.”

counter but for each person to be treated with respect.¹⁵⁵ The movement in Nashville along with other protests throughout the south has one common link between them, King dictated, “We will meet the capacity to inflict suffering with the capacity to endure suffering. We will say, do what you will to us but we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer.”¹⁵⁶ Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech followed with Z. Alexander Looby’s created a second surge of strength for the student movement to continue the sit-in demonstrations throughout downtown Nashville.

The movement to desegregate downtown Nashville continued to grow following Martin Luther King Jr.’s visit to Fisk University. The organization, planning, and the direct action of the sit-in demonstrations in Nashville became the standard for future sit-in demonstrations. The student leaders were contacted to appear on national television shows and to discuss the early stages of planning with other sit-in demonstrations.¹⁵⁷ Diane Nash, leader of the Student Coordinating Committee, appeared on College News Conference. The program aired on American Broadcasting Company (ABC). Nash argued during the program that segregation throughout the south held the country back from progress. Nash along with nearly two hundred students were in Washington D.C. for the annual USNSA conference. The students attending the two-day event voted on whether to support the student movement through the sit-in demonstrations. The USNSA voted, 80-13 in support the sit-in movement.¹⁵⁸ The merchants of Nashville continued to feel an economic burden with the sit-in demonstrations, and with the national spotlight on the movement the merchants did not see an end to the boycott.

¹⁵⁵ “King Urges Sit-Ins Continue; Bomb Scare Clears Fisk Gym,” *Banner*, April 21, 1960.

¹⁵⁶ Wallace Westfeldt, “Settling a Sit-in.”

¹⁵⁷ Julia Moore, *From Jubilee Bell Tower/*

¹⁵⁸ “Fisk Coed Tells Of Day in Jail,” *Tennessean*, April 25, 1960.

The lunch counters in downtown Nashville pushed for early desegregation tactics on May 10, 1960. The student leaders selected specific persons to enter the downtown lunch counters. Blacks and whites were served food without incident. The sit-in demonstration was supported under the guard of the Nashville police department and the United Church Women. The lunch counters in the department stores were crowded that day, but each person who sat down was served. The United Church Women encouraged the protestors, and one woman exclaimed to a Baptist minister who entered the department store lunch counter, “What are you doing in here? This room is for the Unitarians!” The students selected by the leaders in the movement continued to be served without incident until 4:00 p.m. The leaders of the sit-in demonstrations continued to handpick black students to enter the lunch counters until the end of May 1960.¹⁵⁹

The Student Coordinating Committee and the Nashville Christian Leadership Council announced on May 24, 1960, that the department stores, pharmacies, and transportation terminal restaurants targeted during the sit-in demonstrations had integrated their lunch counters, with the notable exception of Grant’s. However, Grant’s along with other restaurants downtown desegregated weeks later.¹⁶⁰ In June 1960, each department store that was targeted by the student movement had desegregated its lunch counter. The student movement pushed Nashville to become one of the first great southern cities to desegregate its lunch counters.¹⁶¹ The sit-in protests in Greensboro which began five days prior to the sit-in demonstrations in Nashville were still occurring at segregated lunch counters.

¹⁵⁹ Wallace Westfeldt, “Settling a Sit-in.”

¹⁶⁰ Julia Moore, From Jubilee Bell Tower.

¹⁶¹ Wallace Westfeldt, “Settling a Sit-in.”

CHAPTER 5

OVERSHADOWING OF NASHVILLE: SIT-IN DEMONSTRATIONS IN WICHITA AND GREENSBORO

The sit-in demonstrations in Nashville have been overshadowed by the sit-in protests in Wichita, Kansas and Greensboro, North Carolina. Despite the organization and planning that began in 1959, as discussed previously, scholars recognize Wichita as the first modern sit-in demonstration and Greensboro as the most successful. The demonstrations in Greensboro affected fifty-four other sit-ins throughout the South and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States directly following the beginning of the sit-in demonstrations on February 1, 1960. The sit-in demonstrations in Wichita (1958) have recently been recognized by historians as an important demonstration and the first sit-in protest to end segregation policies at lunch counters. These two sit-in demonstrations have overshadowed the planning, organization, and the protests that occurred in 1959 and 1960 in Nashville.

The Wichita sit-in demonstrations began in the summer of 1958. The sit-in demonstrations in Kansas exemplified the problems of racial barriers throughout the country. Wichita endured the same racism as the southeastern United States, and the youth growing up in the Kansas city suffered from overt forms of segregation notably in downtown lunch counters. Van Ray Morgan noted that blacks of light complexion were able to enjoy full rights granted to whites because light skinned blacks were commonly mistaken for white racial majority. Morgan's friend had a light skin complexion and was able to eat at the lunch counters in Wichita.

She stated, “You just go ‘head and enjoy yourself because eventually we will be sitting together.”¹⁶²

The movement in Wichita was hastened to enforce equality in the lunch counters following the death of Emmitt Till in 1955. The murder of the young Chicagoan in Mississippi exemplified the overt effects of racism throughout the country to the young protestors in Wichita. People throughout the city listened as Mamie Till Mobley, Emmitt Till’s mother, told of the events that had happened to her son in Money, Mississippi. Mobley spoke to a horrified crowd at New Hope Missionary Baptist Church.¹⁶³ Mobley’s speech to the crowded church pushed the congregation to target segregation and racism in Wichita.

The youth affiliated Wichita branch of the NAACP, Young Adults, began planning demonstrations that summer. The adult based Wichita branch of the NAACP didn’t show immense interest in a protest, so Ronald Walters, a college student, asked the Young Adults group if they were interested in protesting segregation at Dockum’s lunch counter.¹⁶⁴ The group depended on the adult based branch under the authority of Chester I. Lewis to support it, and Lewis agreed.¹⁶⁵ The young college student gained inspiration to begin the nonviolent protest from Martin Luther King Jr.’s nonviolent bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. Walters theorized that a student based group using King’s nonviolent theories could get the same outcomes as the Montgomery strategy.¹⁶⁶ Walters and a small group of students met at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church to practice nonviolent ideologies and how to deal with harassment from

¹⁶² Christina M. Woods, “Saturday event will recognize Dockum sit-in,” *Wichita Eagle*, October 18, 2006.

¹⁶³ Christina M. Woods, “Saturday event will recognize Dockum sit-in.”

¹⁶⁴ Angelia Harrin, “Trying to fix history’s mistake: Civil rights struggle began in Wichita, participant says,” *Wichita Eagle*, November 11, 1990.

¹⁶⁵ Christina M. Woods, “March To Mark 50th Anniversary: Dockum Sit-In Resonates,” *Wichita Eagle*, August 2, 2008.

¹⁶⁶ “Walters staged first lunch counter sit-in,” *Wichita Eagle*, February 25, 1993.

angry whites.¹⁶⁷ The student protestors practiced being intentionally beaten and spit on from other students to be prepared for the possibility of violence in downtown Wichita.¹⁶⁸

The Young Adults group of the Wichita branch of the NAACP demonstrated in several lunch counters throughout Wichita but focused on the Dockum drug store lunch counter.¹⁶⁹ The Dockum drug store sat in the hub of downtown Wichita and was centered among the major department stores. Dockum's provided easy access for the protestors and was a prominent landmark in the city.

The protests began in July 19, 1958, at the Dockum Drug Store at the intersection of Broadway and Douglas.¹⁷⁰ The students protested because they were refused service at the drug store lunch counter.¹⁷¹ The Young Adults entered the lunch counter in nice attire and calmly sat at the vacant seats at the lunch counter. One of the first students to enter Dockum's was Carol Parks Hahn. The young woman sat at the lunch counter and was baffled when the waitress asked what she wanted. The young woman ordered a soda, and a friend shortly joined her. The waitress returned and asked Hahn, "You're not black, are you dear?" Hahn stated that she was black and was refused service.¹⁷² The managerial staff at Dockum's asked each member of the Young Adults to leave the store but was refused.¹⁷³ The merchants at Dockum's closed the lunch counter after the student protestors refused to leave the lunch counter after being denied service. However, Dockum's opened following the closure to allow white customers to enter the lunch

¹⁶⁷ Angelia Harrin, "Trying to fix history's mistake: Civil rights struggle began in Wichita, participant says," *Wichita Eagle*, November 11, 1990.

¹⁶⁸ Mary Neubauer, "Civil rights pioneer recalls Wichita sit-in," *Wichita Eagle*, May 17, 1991.

¹⁶⁹ Christina M. Woods, "Saturday event will recognize Dockum sit-in."

¹⁷⁰ Christina M. Woods, "NAACP group recalls historic sit-in," *Wichita Eagle*, October 22, 2006.

¹⁷¹ "Drug Store Picketed by NAACP," *Beacon*, August 3, 1958.

¹⁷² Mary Neubauer, "Civil rights pioneer recalls Wichita sit-in," *Wichita Eagle*, May 17, 1991.

¹⁷³ "Wichita Youth Protest Discrimination: Youth Group Attempts Break In Discriminatory Practices At Dockum Drug Store," *Enlightener*, August 7, 1958.

counter.¹⁷⁴ The response to the protestors from white customers was mixed. Several customers read the sign placed at the entrance of the restaurant in response to the protests that stated, “This Fountain Temporarily Closed,” but others entered the lunch counter and wished the protestors luck in trying enforce integration at the drug store restaurant.¹⁷⁵ Lequetta Glass was interviewed at the first demonstration, “What would you do [if] I came in the drug store and was hot and tired shopping all day and all of you occupied the counter as you’re doing now?” Glass told the news official, “I’d feel sorry for you, but it happens to us every day.”¹⁷⁶

The Young Adults continued to protest at Dockum’s throughout July and early August 1958. Students under the NAACP organization entered the lunch counter in shifts and relieved protestors. However, the drug stores lunch counter stools were never vacant during a demonstration.¹⁷⁷ Galyn Vesey stated, “You kept your eyes on the clerks, you kept an eye out for possible thugs coming in, you kept your eye out for the police.” The protestors were bumped and yelled at by whites during the demonstrations.¹⁷⁸

The demonstrations at the Dockum Drug Store continued as students met twice weekly to stage protests to enforce the desegregation of its lunch counter. Dockum’s desegregated on August 11, 1958.¹⁷⁹ The Dockum Drug Store integrated three weeks following the first demonstration in July 1958.¹⁸⁰ Carol Parks Hahn noted that the owner of Dockum’s entered the drug store lunch counter during the third week of the protests and looked at the floor the entire

¹⁷⁴ “Drug Store Picketed by NAACP,” *Beacon*, August 3, 1958.

¹⁷⁵ “Wichita Youth Protest Discrimination: Youth Group Attempts Break In Discriminatory Practices At Dockum Drug Store,” *Enlightener*, August 7, 1958.

¹⁷⁶ “Wichita Youth Protest Discrimination: Youth Group Attempts Break In Discriminatory Practices At Dockum Drug Store.”

¹⁷⁷ Christina M. Woods, “National NAACP plans to recognize local efforts,” *Wichita Eagle*, June 2, 2006.

¹⁷⁸ Christina M. Woods, “Saturday event will recognize Dockum sit-in.”

¹⁷⁹ Christina M. Woods, “National NAACP plans to recognize local efforts.”

¹⁸⁰ Christina M. Woods, “March To Mark 50th Anniversary: Dockum Sit-In Resonates.”

time as he walked to the restaurant's office. Hahn also stated that he calmly left the office moments later and continued to look towards the floor as he walked out of the lunch counter. After the owner of Dockum's left the lunch counter the students were immediately served.¹⁸¹ The main store and its nine affiliated stores in the city desegregated, as well as its parent company Rexall.¹⁸² The Wichita sit-in demonstration desegregated the entire Rexall drug store chain in Kansas.¹⁸³ The three-week demonstrations in Wichita also led to sit-in demonstrations in neighboring Oklahoma City.¹⁸⁴

The Wichita sit-in demonstrations are followed with the Greensboro sit-in protests as the two of the most prominent demonstrations to occur in the United States. The Greensboro movement is seen by scholars, notably William H. Chafe, as the most important sit-in demonstration to occur in the United States. Chafe concludes in *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*, that the Greensboro sit-ins led to over fifty other sit-in protests; however, Chafe failed to realize that the Nashville based demonstrators began planning and organizing for full scale demonstrations in 1959. Chafe also failed to mention that the Nashville based protests were more organized, had more demonstrations than Greensboro, were publicized more nationally, and were seen as the model sit-in by major civil rights leaders. The demonstrations began at the Woolworth's lunch counter on February 1, 1960. The demonstrations like the Wichita sit-ins (1958) and Nashville sit-ins (1960) targeted the same racial problems. The Greensboro movement attempted to enforce desegregation at department store lunch counters. The Greensboro demonstrations were similar in the circumstance that the sit-ins in the city targeted segregation at department store lunch

¹⁸¹ Christina M. Woods, "NAACP group recalls historic sit-in."

¹⁸² Christina M. Woods, "National NAACP plans to recognize local efforts."

¹⁸³ Christina M. Woods, "March To Mark 50th Anniversary: Dockum Sit-In Resonates."

¹⁸⁴ Christina M. Woods, "Saturday event will recognize Dockum sit-in."

counters; however, the events in Greensboro were quickly planned and not as organized as the demonstrations in Nashville. The four men involved in starting the sit-in demonstrations in Greensboro recounted that the four of them never believed the protests were going to lead to desegregation attempts in fifty-four other cities.¹⁸⁵

The original four who began the Greensboro demonstrations were tired of having to be subservient to a ruling white class. Two of the four students, Ezell Blair Jr. and David Richmond, had attended the segregated black high school in Greensboro, Dudley High. The school introduced the two students to their first discussion on not following the segregated policies of Jim Crow. The teachers at the segregated school urged their students not to demean themselves with segregation and not go to the public places that forcibly separated minorities from whites. Franklin McCain noted that many thought that segregation was a fair policy because it had been around for many years.¹⁸⁶ The four men met at North Carolina A&T and began planning the Greensboro demonstrations.

The four men began planning the Woolworth's protest a month prior to their refusal to vacate the lunch counter on February 1, 1960. The four men openly discussed the planning for the demonstration but refused to act on it until Joseph McNeil entered the dormitory room of the others on January 31, 1960, and asked the others to protest the next day. The men sat in the room at the college in Greensboro and openly joked about starting a citywide demonstration. The men continued to question whether or not to protest at the Woolworth's in Greensboro until Franklin McCain stated to the group, "Are you guys chicken or not?"¹⁸⁷ Blair's father recalled that the

¹⁸⁵ Jim Schlosser, "Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers," *Greensboro News & Record*, January 27, 1985.

¹⁸⁶ Jim Schlosser, "Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers."

¹⁸⁷ Miles Wolff, *Lunch at the Five and Ten* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970), 16.

four men met with him and his wife the last week of January 1960 and stated, “Daddy, we, Momma, we’re disturbed about a certain thing.” The four men including Blair were disturbed how the Woolworth’s lunch counter and other lunch counters in the city openly segregated them from other customers. The four men told Blair’s parents that they going to sit at the lunch counter in protest of the segregation policy.¹⁸⁸ Blair noted that sitting at the lunch counter was going to fulfill a childhood dream, Blair stated, “As kids, we always wanted to know what water from a white water fountain tasted like – we thought it would taste like lemonade.”¹⁸⁹ The morning of the demonstrations the four men decided around 3:00 a.m. that the four of them were going to test the segregation policy at the Woolworth’s lunch counter.¹⁹⁰

The men met at the college’s library later that morning, and walked to Ralph Johns’s clothing store.¹⁹¹ The owner of the store had discussed protesting the policy of segregation at the Woolworth’s lunch counter with Joseph McNeil in December 1959, but the college student did not seriously accept Johns offer until that February morning in 1960.¹⁹² Johns quickly taught the four men how to behave in the store and gave them money to purchase goods in the store. The store owner instructed the men not to use his name at any time during the protest and also sent bond money to the jail when the students were arrested.¹⁹³

The Greensboro sit-in demonstrations began on February 1, 1960, at the downtown Woolworth’s white-only lunch counter. The demonstrations in Greensboro began when four male students, Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, David Richmond, from North

¹⁸⁸ Blair, Ezell, and Corene Blair. Interviewed by Eugene E. Pfaff., transcript, 2 February 1977, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro NC.

¹⁸⁹ Jim Schlosser, “Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers.”

¹⁹⁰ Jim Schlosser, “Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers.”

¹⁹¹ Wolff, 19.

¹⁹² Wolff, 26-27.

¹⁹³ Wolff, 23-24.

Carolina Agricultural and Technical College entered the department store lunch counter after purchasing toiletry items from the store.¹⁹⁴ Joseph McNeil and Franklin McCain were the first two to sit at the lunch counter; David Richmond was the last student, he stated, “I was the last one to sit down because I was the most afraid. If someone had come up behind me and said ‘boo,’ I would have fallen out of the chair.”¹⁹⁵ Blair recalled after sitting down at the segregated counter that his legs were trembling, and he was afraid to get up and use the restroom.¹⁹⁶ Ezell Blair Jr. ordered a coffee but was told that the Woolworth’s lunch counter did not serve blacks. The waitress then pointed to the end of the counter and stated that blacks ordered food from that point. The four men continued to sit at the lunch counter as the merchants and patrons of the lunch counter became angry.¹⁹⁷ A black waitress at the lunch counter approached the four young men and said, “Why don’t you boys go back to the campus where you belong. It’s people like you that make our race look bad.” The North Carolina A&T students told the serving staff at the counter that the four of them had purchased items in the store; the four addressed the issue why persons of color were allowed to purchase goods but not dine inside the restaurants. The students received mixed comments from the whites dining in the restaurant. The four men were cursed at, while other whites told the four young men that they supported their cause. The manager of the Woolworth’s department store was angered that the four African American men sat at the lunch counter and refused to leave. Manager C. L. Harris left the store and went to the city’s police station to discuss the matter with the city’s police chief, Paul Calhoun.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Wolff, 11-12.

¹⁹⁵ Jim Schlosser, “Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers.”

¹⁹⁶ Jim Schlosser, “Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers.”

¹⁹⁷ Wolff, 11-12.

¹⁹⁸ Jim Schlosser, “Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers.”

The Greensboro police department under the authority of Paul Calhoun did not share C. L. Harris's ideas that blacks were not allowed at the lunch counters. The police chief told the Woolworth's merchant that the only legal way to deny protesting students from the store's lunch counter was to issue a warrant that forced the demonstrators to stay out of the counter unless the students wanted to risk being arrested for trespassing. Calhoun stated, "As far as we were concerned, the people had a right to be in the store." Members of Greensboro's police department shared Calhoun's ideas that the stores needed to be integrated.¹⁹⁹

The following morning thirty-one demonstrators marched into the Woolworth's department store lunch counter from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and Bennett College to protest the restaurant's refusal to serve African Americans. The protestors were classmates of the original four protestors and had heard of what happened on Elm Street first hand. The atmosphere of the second day of protests continued to be nonviolent; the newspapers of Greensboro had not documented the events, and many whites did not realize demonstrations were occurring until entering the lunch counter. President Warmoth T. Gibbs, North Carolina A&T College, also did not realize student protests were occurring at the Woolworth's lunch counter until a student went to his office and discussed the matter. That night the Greensboro branch of the NAACP voted to back the sit-in protestors legally.²⁰⁰ However, both the NAACP and Gibbs did not know of the events downtown until informed by others days after the initial protests occurred.

The original four men met at Shiloh Baptist Church to organize and plan briefly for the third demonstration at the Woolworth's lunch counter. The men met at the church to use a

¹⁹⁹ Jim Schlosser, "Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers."

²⁰⁰ Wolff, 31-35.

mimeograph machine to print instructions on how to deal with violence on Elm Street.

Demonstrations began at 11 a.m. that morning at the lunch counter where sixty seats were taken, and more protestors stood behind their fellow participants. White participants from Greensboro College also attended the demonstration and declared full support for the African American men at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College.²⁰¹

The sit-ins in Greensboro forced persons who had never questioned the segregated policies in the city to examine the laws first hand; Geneva Tisdale worked at the Woolworth's counter and had never realized that while she was allowed to work at the restaurant, she was not allowed to sit down inside. Tisdale, like other minorities, had to order meals at the end of the counter and eat the meals outside.²⁰² Several residents in Greensboro believed the sit-in demonstrations were a local movement orchestrated from the same college students who participated in panty raids but quickly realized that the protests were spreading throughout the southern United States. Others joined the protests on Elm Street, and organizations sided with the fight to desegregate the Woolworth and Kress lunch counters.²⁰³

College students throughout Greensboro became involved in the demonstrations that were started from the four students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Students from Guilford College, Woman's College, and Bennett College joined the strictly based student movement.²⁰⁴ Three of the four Greensboro colleges involved in the demonstrations issued statements following the third sit-in protest at the Woolworth's counter. North Carolina A&T issued a statement to the press stating that the school was not taking a

²⁰¹ Wolff, 39.

²⁰² Jim Schlosser, "Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers."

²⁰³ Claude Sitton, "Negro Sitdowns Stir Fear Of Wider Unrest in South," *New York Times*, February 14, 1960.

²⁰⁴ Jim Schlosser, "Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers."

stance on the issue of the sit-ins because the college needed funding from the legislature of North Carolina. The college also did not allow larger outside organizations to plan or organize the demonstrations, instead wanting the protests to continue to be student led. However, the administration had close contact with the students following the continued downtown protests. Greensboro College president, Dr. Harold Hutson, declared that his college also did not take a stance on the protests; the men who approached the protestors that day acted as free citizens and did not represent the school.²⁰⁵ Chancellor Gordon W. Blackwell, Woman's College, issued a statement on February 9, 1960. Blackwell stated that the sit-in demonstrations had larger effects on the city and people of Greensboro than the students realized. Blackwell urged his students to realize that the reputation of Greensboro and the economic vitality of the department stores were in the hands of the protestors. Finally Blackwell told the demonstrators within his college that racial advancement within the city was going to be hampered through the sit-in movement.²⁰⁶ The support of the sit-in demonstrations was surprising in the fact that North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State College had recently banned Martin Luther King Jr. and Thurgood Marshall from speaking to its student body because the leaders were seen as too controversial. North Carolina A&T feared reprisals from state leaders for supporting major civil rights leaders. The leaders of the school did not want to stir public rage by hosting people who were in direct opposition to the city's segregation policies.²⁰⁷

The Greensboro demonstrations continued to gain support from schools and colleges not affiliated with North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College. Students from Bennett College, Woman's College, and students from the segregated Dudley High School participated in

²⁰⁵ Wolff, 41.

²⁰⁶ Gordon W. Blackwell, "Talk to Student Assembly," (Chancellor address, Woman's College, Greensboro, NC, February 9, 1960).

²⁰⁷ Edwin M. Yoder, "Greensboro: Where the Movement Began," *Greensboro Daily News*, June 21, 1970.

the demonstrations that continued to grow and spill over at other department store lunch counters along Elm Street.²⁰⁸ The sit-in demonstrations eventually turned violent with the demonstrations on February 5, 1960. White youth from local schools throughout the city as well as members of the Ku Klux Klan entered the store early that morning and sat at the lunch counter before the student protesters arrived at 10 a.m.²⁰⁹ The youth and Klan sat at the lunch counter and only moved from the seats when a white customer wanted to dine in. Violence between the student protesters and angry bystanders continued throughout the day as each group pushed and knocked each other down.²¹⁰

Sit-in demonstrations continued to grow in Greensboro as the protesters demonstrated on February 6, 1960; the demonstrations had recently moved to the nearby Kress department store. The manager of Woolworth's was reluctant to open the lunch counter that morning following a meeting on February 5, where C. L. Harris, Woolworth's manager, met with the presidents of the local colleges in hopes of ending the demonstrations, but the presidents stated they sided with the students. The morning the staff of the store opened the restaurant, crowds of people lined Elm Street. Woolworth's only allowed a few into the facility, but hundreds eventually entered the store before noon. Students lined the lunch counter three persons deep with whites harassing them in the available standing room. The crowd continued to grow as football players from North Carolina A&T entered the lunch counter.²¹¹ The school's football team protected the protesters from the angry white crowd, and allowed more demonstrators to sit at the lunch counter. Teachers from the segregated black Dudley High School went to the lunch counter that

²⁰⁸ Wolff, 44.

²⁰⁹ Wolff, 45-46.

²¹⁰ "Bomb Threat Closes Stores: Call Comes After Negroes Attempt To Obtain Counter Services," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 7, 1960.

²¹¹ Wolff, 50-51.

day to witness the protests.²¹² The Woolworth's department store was evacuated after an employee, J. W. Largen, received a telephone call from a woman that a bomb was in the basement of the Woolworth building. The crowd reluctantly evacuated after two policemen were forced to commence an evacuation.²¹³ The evacuating crowd then moved down the street to sit-in at the Kress department store. Fearful of more violence the managerial staff at Kress's closed following the bomb scare at Woolworth's.²¹⁴ The decision to close the store from Kress's manager, H. E. Holgate, resulted in overwhelming support from the angry white crowd. The reaction from the protestors was less than excited. The students quietly left with their American flags.²¹⁵ The events of those two days of protests at the department store lunch counters sent a shockwave through the Greensboro community that the city was on a brink of racial rioting.²¹⁶ Governor Luther Hodges was angered upon hearing that sit-in demonstrations were occurring in Greensboro. Hodges believed the most effective way in deterring any further protests from college students was to cut funding from the original four men's college, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State College.²¹⁷

The first days of the demonstrations were not as violent as the protestors originally believed. The sit-in protests in Greensboro had caused several persons to be arrested, but several of the arrests were white hecklers being arrested for disorderly contact. The police department arrested a heckler for attempting to set fire to one of the protestors by dropping a paper engulfed in fire on the demonstrators lap. Although, the Greensboro demonstrations rallied members of

²¹² William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 85.

²¹³ Wolff, 50-51.

²¹⁴ Wolff, 53.

²¹⁵ "Bomb Threat Closes Stores: Call Comes After Negroes Attempt To Obtain Counter Services."

²¹⁶ Gordon W. Blackwell, Talk to Student Assembly, February 9, 1960, Chancellor Gordon William Blackwell Records, Jackson Library, Greensboro, NC.

²¹⁷ Jim Schlosser, "Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers."

the Ku Klux Klan, who actively protested inside the lunch counters with the student protestors. The demonstrators notified the newspapers that the downtown sit-ins were based on nonviolence and the principles of Christianity. An unknown student stated that the protestors were to encounter dangerous situations through passive reactions.²¹⁸

The protests of February 6, 1960, were followed with a two week cooling off period. The two weeks were to allow for the merchants of Woolworth and Kress to implement new policies allowing whites and blacks to dine in the department store lunch counters. The college presidents met with their student bodies and declared that no protestors were to demonstrate at the two department stores during this period.²¹⁹

During the two-week period that the protests were halted the movement gained attention from the North Carolina state government and the national headquarters of F. W. Woolworth Company.²²⁰ The department store chain, F. W. Woolworth Company, used a mixed racial segregation policy; stores in the South were segregated while stores in other regions of the country had integrated lunch counters. Woolworth's declared that the Southern segregation policy had been put in place because of fear white customers were unwilling to shop in an integrated department store. The effects of suburbanization also played a major role in the reasoning to continue to support a segregated policy at downtown department store lunch counters. The Atlanta based regional headquarters believed the last step to deal with the demonstrations was to integrate the downtown lunch counters in fear that the few white shoppers left would move to the outlying suburbs.²²¹ The head office of Woolworth stated that the

²¹⁸ "Bomb Threat Closes Stores: Call Comes After Negroes Attempt to Obtain Counter Services."

²¹⁹ Wolff, 55.

²²⁰ Movement By Negroes Growing," *Greensboro Daily News*, February 4, 1960.

²²¹ Jim Schlosser, "Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers."

regional custom of segregation was the policy of the Woolworth Company but stated that the company was going to integrate the lunch counters if the sit-in demonstrations were successful. North Carolina Attorney General Malcolm Seawell stated that North Carolina law did not prohibit both races from dining in the same facility; however, the law of the state did not force private businessmen to serve every customer.²²²

During the two weeks the department store lunch counters were closed the two parent companies made no plans to change segregation policies. The lunch counters remained closed throughout the period, and Woolworth removed the seating at the counter and used the area as retail space. C. L. Harris went to Atlanta on February 19 in hopes of finding a solution to the problem at the regional office. However, regionally Woolworth's stated its policy of segregating the lunch counter was not to change, and the movement to desegregate them through sit-in demonstrations was only a fad.²²³

The sit-ins were resumed on February 23, 1960, after the lunch counters reopened to the public. The day of reopening the restaurants were peaceful, but the following day the Woolworth's lunch counter was evacuated after an African American man told the crowd that the basement of the building had a bomb in it. The building was evacuated and searched, but no bomb was found. The black staff in the restaurant also became more hesitant to do their work, and did not address white co-workers unless they were asked a direct question.²²⁴ Mayor George H. Roach was forced to find a solution to the problem and created a committee to answer the sit-in problem. The Mayor's Committee on Community Relations was headed by E. R. Zane, who served as Greensboro's city councilman. The other committee members were members of the

²²² "Movement By Negroes Growing," *Greensboro Daily News*.

²²³ Wolff, 83.

²²⁴ Wolff, 86.

city's government and elite members of the community. Roach then instructed the students to send the committee suggestions as well as ask residents to voice opinions.²²⁵ The sit-in demonstrations were again halted as the committee under Zane tried to find a solution to the problem facing downtown Greensboro.

Seven weeks following the decision to halt sit-in demonstrations ended as the Committee on Community Relations stated that a resolution was not found to end protests downtown. Owners and managers throughout the city refused to integrate their stores lunch counters, and the student movement responded with the decision to continue the demonstrations. Students followed James L. Stover into the Woolworth's lunch counter and refused to move.²²⁶ The students arrested following Roach's failed committee were arrested for trespassing.²²⁷ Stover's action to sit at the lunch counter was pushed by a mass meeting held Bennett College and North Carolina A&T students that decided the sit-ins were to be continued following the failure of Mayor Roach's committee.²²⁸

The following morning the *Daily News* reported that the committee failed to reach a finding because of the management at Woolworth and Kress. E. R. Zane responded to the newspaper report and stated that the committee met with twelve different establishments throughout Greensboro, and all of the restaurants refused to integrate. Mayor Roach took a different stance on the issue of the two stores blamed by the newspaper. The mayor stated that Kress and Woolworth were to blame because the stores were the scenes of sit-in demonstrations in the city.²²⁹ Harris received a message from the regional office in Atlanta under C. M. Purdy

²²⁵ Wolff, 87.

²²⁶ Wolff, 107.

²²⁷ Edwin M. Yoder, "Greensboro: Where the Movement Began."

²²⁸ Wolff, 107.

²²⁹ Wolff, 125-126.

that the Woolworth's lunch counter was to close until further notice. Kress closed its restaurant after Woolworth to prevent protestors from occupying the lunch counter following the closure of Woolworth. Kress opened its lunch counter on April 6. The first day the lunch counter was reopened at the department store a small number of students entered the lunch counter and protested. Thirty-four students entered the lunch counter at Kress on April 11, and the lunch counter was immediately closed.²³⁰

The stores continued to be picketed and targeted by student protestors and agitators. Greensboro youth countered the sit-in demonstrators along Elm Street throughout April 1960. The youth massed along Elm Street attacked the student protestors with stink bombs purchased in nearby stores. Others made signs and walked alongside the students in front of the stores. Members of the Ku Klux Klan paid white youth to heckle protestors.²³¹ The Klan targeted Mayor Roach and E. R. Zane as well as the members of the committee to force them to end the sit-in demonstrations. The organization threatened the city's officials with bombings and physical harm to their families.²³²

The protests in Greensboro continued with shopping centers in the outlying areas of the city. Oscar Burnett ran a drug store in the Summit Shopping Center where students met and demonstrated; the manager met with the students and allowed them to demonstrate in front of the store with police protection. Burnett stated that he sympathized with their movement but was unable to change regional policies. The students also demonstrated at Eckerd's in the Friendly Shopping Center. Friendly's located in an upscale district of Greensboro was less sympathetic to

²³⁰ Wolff, 127.

²³¹ Wolff, 129-130.

²³² Wolff, 135.

the movement. The owners of the shopping center stated that the center was owned privately, and that the students had to vacate.²³³

Students involved in sit-in demonstrations throughout the South met at Shaw University on April 16 to discuss strategies to force integration. The meeting lasted through the Easter weekend and students from Greensboro went to the meeting to listen to strategies from Martin Luther King Jr. and Nashville based leader, James Lawson. The Atlanta based leader of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr., told the crowd that summer was approaching and groups needed to be created to allow the protests to continue when the demonstrators were no longer in town. The meeting in Raleigh gave a push to the movement, and protests at the department store lunch counters continued on April 21.²³⁴

The students continued the student demonstrations at Kress on April 21, 1960. Kress had placed a chain around the lunch counter and instituted a new policy where customers had to wait to be seated. The students stood along the chains as the group looked into the department store restaurant. A local fire marshal told the students that the group was going to have to move because codes were being broken with the mass of people blocking the exit. The students left but returned. Hogate allowed the students to enter into the lunch counter but ordered if the students sat down the group was to be arrested for trespassing. Forty-five protestors were arrested following their refusal to vacate Kress's lunch counter.²³⁵

Many of the students who began protesting at Woolworth on February 1 left the city when school ended in May. College students throughout the city taught students at Dudley High

²³³ Wolff, 136.

²³⁴ Wolff, 138.

²³⁵ Wolff, 138-139.

School, a segregated black school, how to protest at the lunch counters.²³⁶ Student Bill Thompson spearheaded the protests during the summer months. Thompson coordinated the student movement with the NAACP Youth Chapter, an organization that the young man also led.²³⁷ The students continued the protests throughout June. The Atlanta-based regional headquarters contacted C. L. Harris and told him to integrate the lunch counter at the best available time.²³⁸ The manager of Woolworth welcomed the suggestion. The sit-in demonstrations had taken a drastic toll on the store; Harris's department store had lost two hundred thousand dollars since February 1.²³⁹ Harris approached Mayor Roach in June to solve the sit-in problems, but Roach replied that a committee had been formed to find a solution. Harris contacted Arnold Schiffman, a committee member. The member of the committee touched base with other members of the committee, and plans were made to advise Harris on the integration of the Woolworth's lunch counter.²⁴⁰ Harris declared that the store's restaurant now had a strict clothing policy, and only nicely dressed patrons were to be served. The Woolworth manager also dictated that his employees were to be the first ones served, and that the Greensboro press was not going to document the event firsthand.²⁴¹

The Greensboro department store lunch counters integrated on July 25, 1960. Three employees of Woolworth sat at in the restaurant and ordered a meal. The manager of Woolworth, C. L. Harris, and Mayor Roach's committee had begun negotiations on July 21 to begin steps to integrate the lunch counter at the Woolworth department store.²⁴² The four men who had dared one another and been pushed to find a change in the city's segregation policy did not return to

²³⁶ Wolff, 169.

²³⁷ Chafe, 97.

²³⁸ Wolff, 169.

²³⁹ Chafe, 97.

²⁴⁰ Wolff, 169.

²⁴¹ Wolff, 170.

²⁴² Wolff, 167.

the restaurant when the store integrated over the summer.²⁴³ The lunch counter at Woolworth served over three hundred blacks the week after the lunch counter desegregated. Smaller stores followed the lead of Woolworth and Kress; Meyer's luncheonette and the Guilford Dairy Bar integrated weeks after the two stores.²⁴⁴ Other stores, however, continued to segregate their lunch counters throughout the metro area.

The demonstrations in Greensboro led to a major sit-in movement throughout the Southern and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States, including the beginning of the sit-in demonstrations in Nashville and over fifty other cities.²⁴⁵ The demonstrations in Nashville; however, quickly, surpassed the movement in Greensboro and Wichita in its early stages of planning and organization, the sit-in demonstrations, and the final stages towards integration.

²⁴³ Jim Schlosser, "Daring act by four teenagers tumbles racial barriers."

²⁴⁴ Wolff, 171.

²⁴⁵ "Sit-Ins Victorious Where They Began," *New York Times*, July 26, 1960.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Nashville sit-in demonstrations swept the city of racial segregation at the lunch counters in prominent department stores, smaller regional stores, and restaurants in areas of public transit. The sit-in demonstrations orchestrated by a select group of leaders created one of the largest movements in the modern civil rights movement; but they were also a movement that has been overshadowed by the sit-in demonstrations in Wichita and Greensboro. The Nashville sit-in demonstrations were the last protest to begin out of the three cities, and this is the reason that scholars have not focused on its sit-in demonstrations. The Nashville movement was started in mid-February because a supporter of the Greensboro sit-ins phoned James Lawson to ask if students in Nashville were willing to support the sit-in protests occurring in North Carolina. The start of the sit-in protests in Nashville as a sympathy demonstration also points to why scholars do not emphasize the importance of the protests. However, the Nashville demonstrations exceeded the other two protests, Wichita and Greensboro, in planning and organization, the desegregation of a larger and more diverse group of businesses, documentation from more news companies, and the recognition as one of the most powerful and disciplined sit-in protests by prominent civil rights leaders.

The Nashville Christian Leadership Council and James Lawson began planning and organizing demonstrations in 1958. The young divinity student at Vanderbilt University, James Lawson, modeled his desegregation workshops on the principles of Christianity and Gandhi's use of nonviolence in winning Indian independence from the United Kingdom. Lawson's workshops won the attention of Reverend Kelly Miller Smith's NCLC, and the two united to

teach older and young people wanting to end Jim Crow legislation in the city. The planning and organization of the Nashville demonstrations was aided by the Student Central Committee headed by Diane Nash. The young woman, a Fisk University student, spearheaded the students' actions with Smith and Lawson to push for the desegregation of Nashville's lunch counters. The restaurants in Nashville's businesses were observed throughout 1958 and 1959. The combined groups targeted the lunch counters in December 1959 and held a test demonstration to determine white racial attitudes towards the full-scale demonstrations in 1960. However, the Greensboro demonstrations started before the students were able to regroup and protest downtown. The protests in Greensboro forced the students in Nashville to follow and sympathize with the North Carolina protest. The Greensboro demonstrations beat the Nashville sit-ins as coming first, but the Tennessee based sit-ins quickly surpassed the North Carolina and Kansas protests.

The planning and organization of the Wichita and Greensboro demonstrations was not as in-depth as the early stages of the Nashville movement. The Nashville movement outpaced the planning and organization of the Wichita and Greensboro movements because the Tennessee sit-ins worked with organizations including the Nashville Christian Leadership Council and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The Nashville based movement also had major leaders who emerged during the demonstrations who later surfaced as major leaders in other civil rights demonstrations. The Wichita movement began after students from a branch of the NAACP, Young Adults, listened to Emmett Till's mother discuss the torture and murder of her son. Emmett Till was visiting relatives in Money, Mississippi when he was violently killed. The Wichita demonstrations were planned following the discussion. Students from the Young Adults held similar workshops as the Nashville movement where students met at a church and role played violent tactics. A local white merchant, Ralph Johns, pushed African American students

to protest segregation at local department stores. Students at North Carolina A&T followed Johns advisement and targeted the restaurant in the Woolworth department store. The four men, David Richmond, Joseph McNeil, Ezell Blair Jr., and Franklin McCain, protested at the lunch counter. The men gained inspiration to protest the segregation policies from Ralph Johns, the segregation policies of national department stores, and the teachers at the segregated black school, Dudley High. The planning and organization for the Greensboro demonstrations was inadequate in the early days of the protest because the majority of citizens in Greensboro did not know sit-ins were occurring downtown.

The three cities that are discussed in this thesis were all successful in integrating the lunch counters that were directly targeted by the respected groups. The Wichita movement desegregated the Dockum Drug Store and nine affiliated stores. The Greensboro demonstrations integrated the lunch counters at the Kress and Woolworth department stores, Guilford Dairy Bar, and Meyer's Luncheonette. The Nashville movement, however, desegregated several department store lunch counters, pharmacies, and transit facilities.

The events of Nashville's sit-in demonstrations received mention in dozens of newspapers, television programs, and conferences. The sit-ins in the city were documented heavily through its two newspapers, *Banner* and *Tennessean*. The Nashville's demonstrations were documented from Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) that traveled to the city to discuss the theories behind the protest and the role Nashville was having on the South and Midwest. The United States National Student Association (USNSA) sympathized with the students in Nashville and publically sympathized with the Tennessee based citizens fighting for integration in the capital. In Washington D.C., the protestor's attorneys traveled to meet with Thurgood Marshall.

The local newspapers in Wichita and Greensboro did not actively document the events occurring downtown in the hopes that little press coverage was going to actively hamper the movement.

Finally, the tactics used in the early stages and eventual demonstrations pushed national civil rights leaders to realize the importance of the Nashville sit-ins. The Nashville demonstrations, lauded as the most planned, organized, and nonviolent sit-ins in the country from civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr., served as the basis to demonstrations throughout the country. The protests in Nashville had profound effects on its leaders as well. The Nashville movement later resurrected the stalled Freedom Rides of 1961, which focused on forcing states to follow the Supreme Court decisions in *Morgan v. Virginia* (1946) and *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960).

The Nashville sit-in demonstrations were the most planned and organized protest to target segregation at lunch counters in businesses. The protestors focused on the lunch counters following the request from mothers that the segregated lunch counters was detrimental to their children. The resulting effects of this led the combined forces of Lawson's workshops, Smith's NCLC, and Nash's Student Central Committee to push to integrate downtown lunch counters. The Nashville protests quickly outpaced the demonstrations in Wichita and Greensboro. The Wichita based sit-ins lasted only three weeks after the owner of the Dockum Drug Store integrated following economic losses during the protests. The Greensboro demonstrations were not planned adequately, and during the first days of the protests, most people in Greensboro did not know sit-ins were happening downtown. The demonstrations were started and ended sporadically, and the final push to integrate segregated lunch counters came from a conference where Nashville leader James Lawson spoke. The Greensboro demonstrations continued through the summer with participants from high schools protesting. The decision to integrate the

Woolworth counter came from C. L. Harris, manager of Woolworth. Harris's decision came solely from the regional headquarters of the Woolworth Company, and the Greensboro protestors did not have an active part in the desegregation discussions. The Greensboro demonstrations integrated months following a combined protestor and city-wide movement that desegregated Nashville in May 1960.

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