

## Bringing History To Life: The Greensboro Sit-In



A workshop by Teaching Artists Serena Ebhardt and Mike Wiley

Source Material <http://www.sitins.com>

## Greensboro Sit-Ins

The Woolworth's Five & Dime in Greensboro, North Carolina, is historically significant for a unique sit-in that empowered student activists for the next decade and changed the face of segregation forever. On February 1, 1960, when four freshmen from the Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina took vacant seats at the store's "whites-only" lunch counter, they had no idea what might happen. Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, David Richmond, and Ezell Blair, Jr., sat down, ordered coffee and waited. The waitress ignored them, as did the store manager and a pacing policeman. Some white customers taunted the students, while two others patted them on the back, whispering "Ah, you should have done it ten years ago." The next day, the four young men returned with 19 supporters. By the third day, the number had risen to 85, including white and black students from neighboring colleges. Before the week was out, there were 400. They demonstrated in shifts so they wouldn't miss classes. Local officials asked for a two-week moratorium in which to consider solutions. Meanwhile, energized students staged smaller sit-ins in seven other North Carolina cities as well as in Hampton, Virginia, and Nashville, Tennessee. By summer, 33 southern cities, including Greensboro, had integrated their restaurants and lunch counters. One year later, 126 cities had taken the same step.





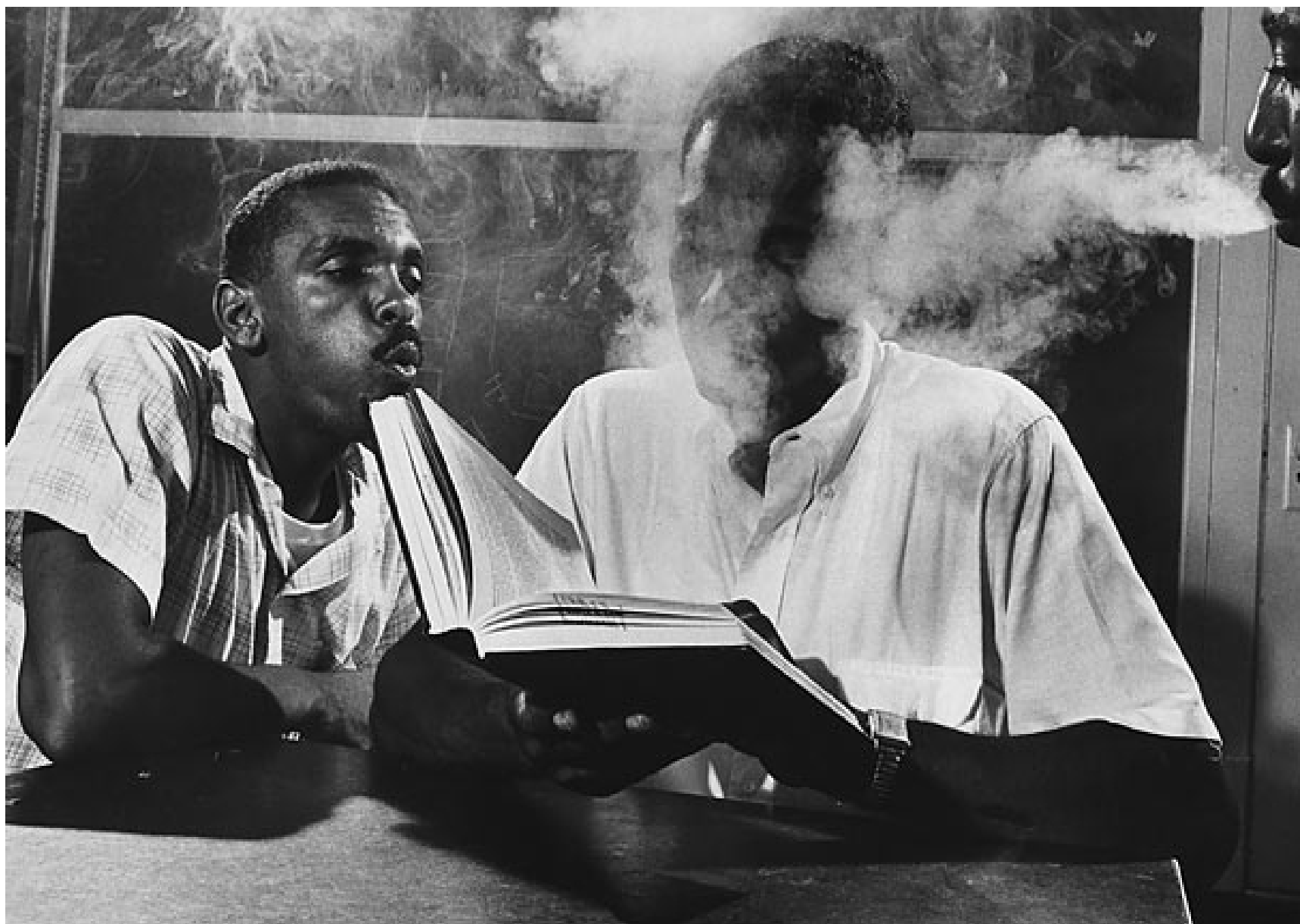










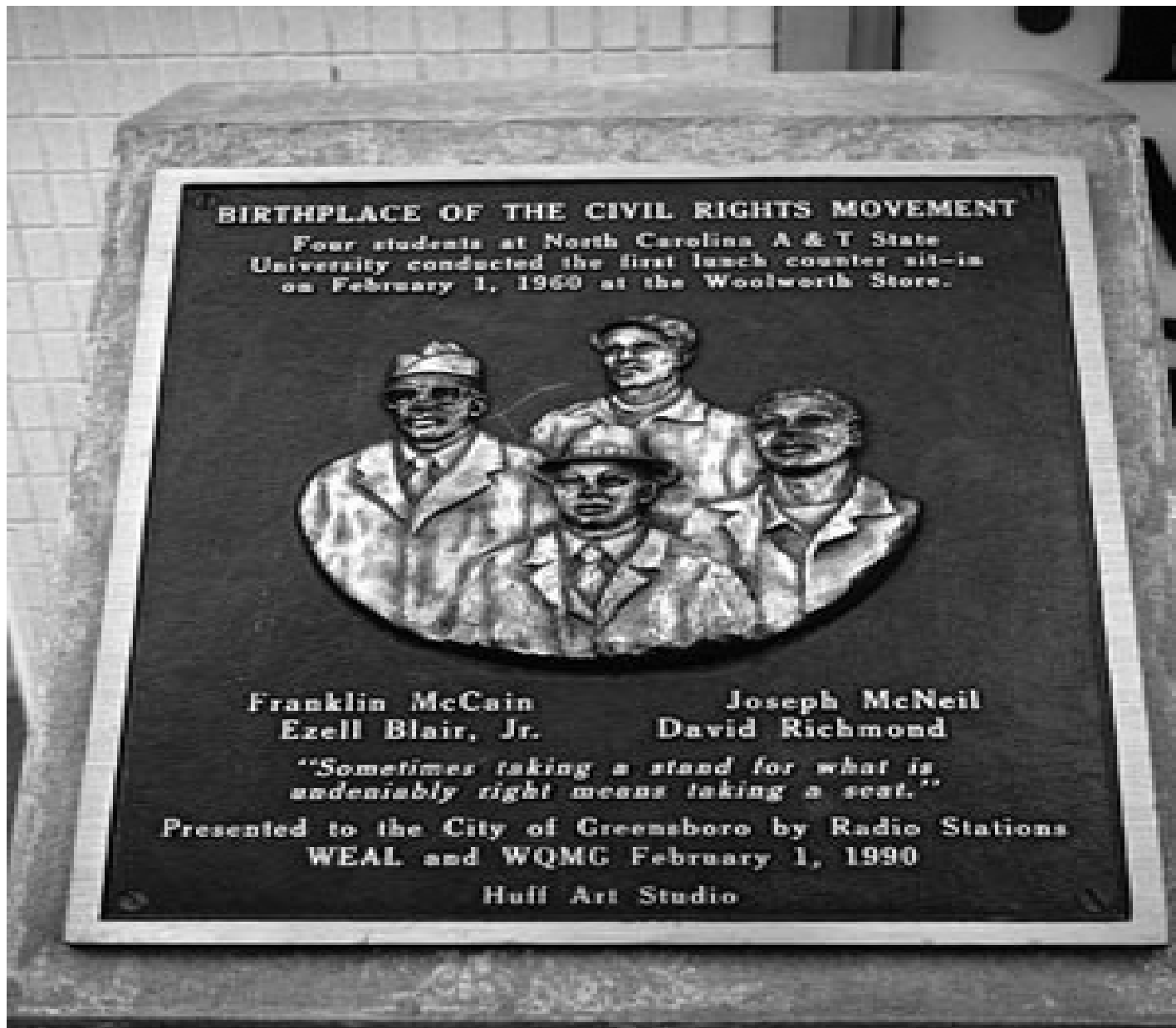








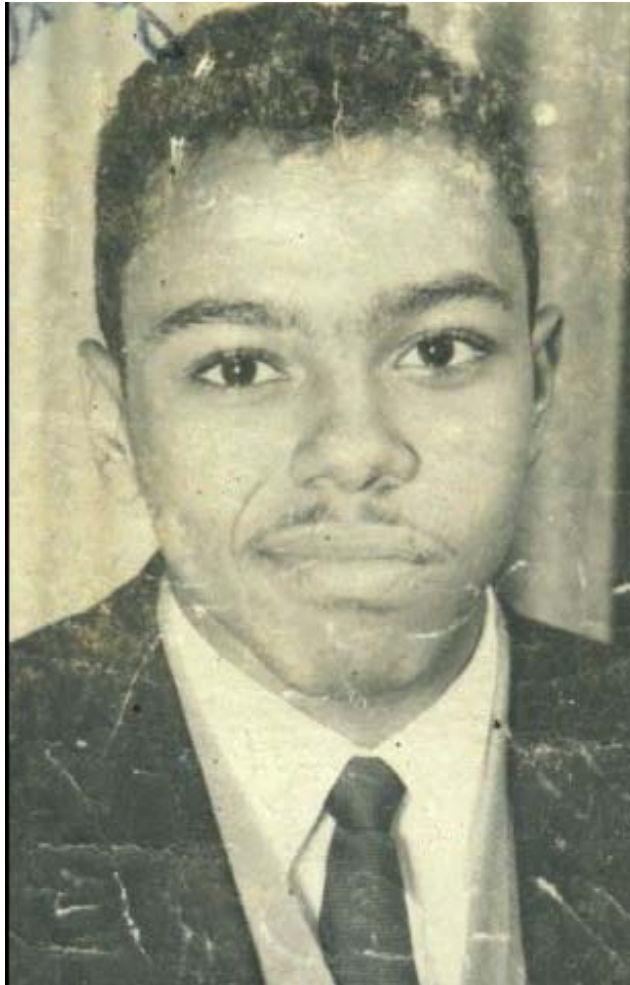






**Franklin McCain**





**Joseph McNeil**





**David Richmond**



**Mayor George Roach**

## Evening Meditation

For Personal and Family Devotions

Love yourself as you love your neighbor: this is the heart of the law—Matthew 22:39.

Christ taught us to love God without reservation and our neighbor as ourselves. In the time for today, Paul also points out that love of fellowmen is the fulfilling of the law of God and Christ. Paul might have given us a lot of detailed instructions; instead he gave us a guiding principle that covers every situation. Real love will guide in every relationship. It will make us helpful to others in the time of their need and compel us to lead them from harm and danger.

Father, help us to be good neighbors to all who are in need and to those who need a guiding hand. In Christ's holy name we ask. Amen.

## Greensboro Grist

### BOOK CLUB TO MEET

Great Books Group No. 1 will discuss Shakespeare's "Macbeth" at an 8 o'clock meeting tonight at the Greensboro Public Library.

### WATKINS ILL.

George M. Watkins of Wimburne Court Apartments was reported in critical condition at Wesley Long Hospital this morning. He is not allowed visitors.

### DEAS TO SPEAK

J. Roger Deas, an official with American Can Co., will speak today at the 6:30 p.m. meeting of the local Industrial Management Club. The dinner meeting will be at the Mayfair Cafeteria.

### PLAY ON AGAIN

"Love Remains, Angel," a dramatization of a portion of Thomas Wolfe's book, will be presented again at 8:30 o'clock tonight at War Memorial Auditorium. The play, by Kent French, stars Marian Hopkins and Michael Elers.

### MISS KISER SPEAKS

Miss Mary Kiser, director of Baptist Student Activities at Woman's College, spoke to the Providence Baptist Church Youth Conference last night. Her topic was "Editorial Devotion and the Christian's Role."

### MEN'S GROUP MEETS

The Businessmen's Noonday Bible Class will meet at 12:30 p.m. at the Central YMCA. Charlie Phillips is the teacher and President Abner Crothers will preside.

### AT CONFERENCE

C. O. Williams, manager for Southern Bell Telephone Co. here, is in Charlotte attending a five-day conference in management development for company employees.

### MINISTER SPEAKS

Dr. Charles P. Bowles, pastor of West Market Street Methodist Church, spoke on the subject, "Humor Can Be Fun," at a luncheon sponsored by Greensboro Exchange Club here today.

### HISTORY MONTH SET

Mayor George H. Roach has designated February as "American History Month" in Greensboro. The project is sponsored by the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution.

### TOASTMASTERS MEET

Tim Pace will be toastmaster and John Gillespie, topic master, when Greensboro Toastmasters Club meets at 8:30 o'clock tonight at Central YMCA. The speaker will be

# A&T Students Launch 'Sit-Down' Demand For Service At Downtown Lunch Counter



**STUDENTS BEGIN MOVEMENT:** Shown are four of the 20 A&T College students who sat down, without being served, at the luncheon counters of F. W. Woolworth Co. today, to start a movement they declared is for ending discrimination against Negroes there. They are, left to right, Joseph McNeil and Franklin McLain, two of the four leaders in the movement, and Billy Smith and Clarence Henderson.

## The Greensboro Record

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Tuesday, February 2, 1960

## Woolworth Made Target For Demonstration Here

BY MARVIN SYKES  
Record Staff Writer

A group of 20 Negro students from A&T College occupied luncheon counter seats, without being served, at the downtown F. W. Woolworth Co. store late this morning—starting what they declared would be a growing movement.

The group declared double that number will take place at the counters tomorrow.

Employees of Woolworth did not serve the group and they sat from 10:30 a.m. until after noon. While customers continued to sit and get service.

Clarence Harris, Woolworth manager, replied "No comment" to all questions concerning the "sit-down" move about Woolworth custom, and about what he planned to do.

Today's 20-man action followed appearance at 4:30 p.m. yesterday of four freshmen from Scott Hall at A&T who sat down and stayed, without service, until the store closed at 2:30 p.m.

Students spokesmen said they are seeking luncheon counter service and will increase their numbers daily until they get it.

Today's group came in at 10:30 a.m. Each made a small purchase one counter over from the luncheon counter, then sat in groups of three or four at spaces behind vacant.

There was no disturbance and there appeared to be no conversation except among the groups. Some students pulled out books and appeared to be studying.

The group today wrote to the president of Woolworth stores in



### ACCEPTS PASTOR

At the Rev. Ernest G. Holt, associate pastor of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, has accepted the pastorate of Semmerfield Baptist Church, effective Feb. 14. He also is Sunday school superintendent and clerk of the Piedmont Baptist Association. Prior to his association four years ago with Sixteenth Church, he was with Northwood Baptist Church, 174 N. Woodland

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**Edward Zane, Burlington Industries**



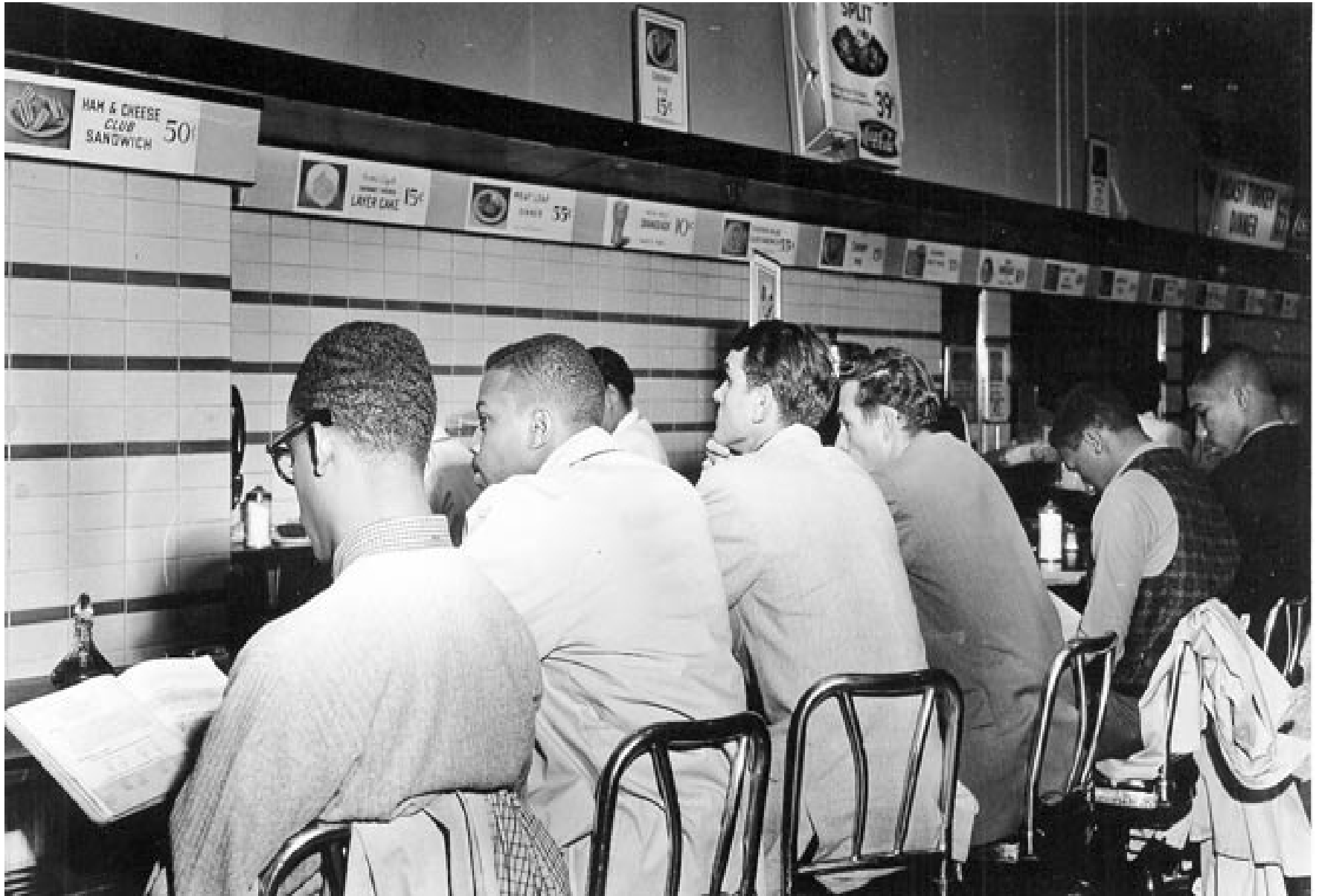
**Spencer Love, Burlington Industries**













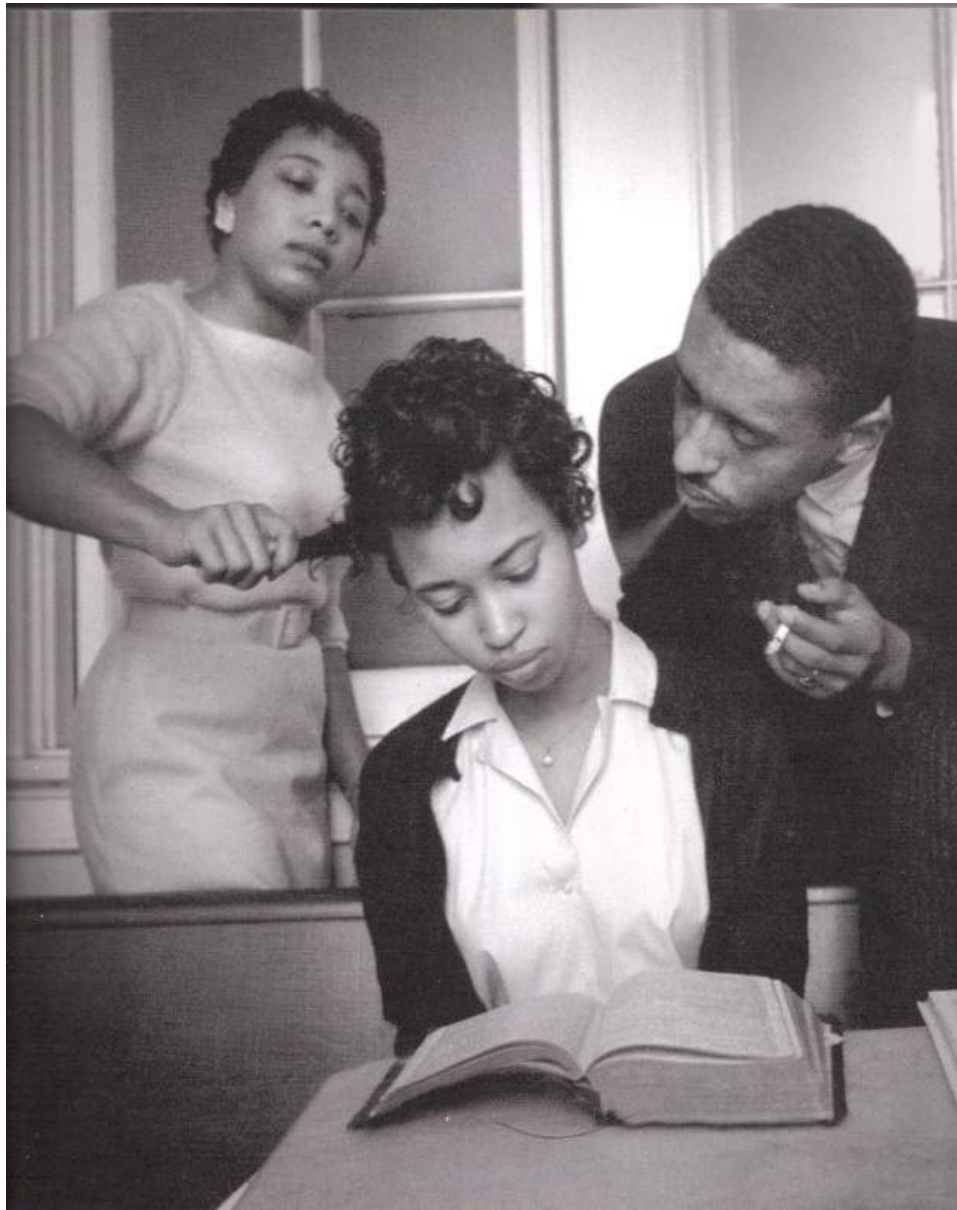
**Warmouth Gibbs, Sr. - A&T University President**



**Ezell Blair, Jr. (Jibreel Khazan)**









Whites Only  
Woolworth's Lunch Counter  
Sit-In  
February 1, 1960

## The Greensboro Four

Franklin McCain

Joseph McNeil

David Richmond

Ezell Blair, Jr.,

Feb. 1, 1960

Ezell Blair Jr. (now Jibreel Khazan), David Richmond, Joseph McNeil and Franklin McCain launch the Greensboro sit-ins. In just two months, the sit-in movement spreads to 54 cities in nine states.

After passing by Ralph Johns' store on Market Street, the four A&T students enter the Elm Street Woolworth at 4 p.m., purchasing school supplies and other items. They then approach the lunch counter and order coffee at 4:30 p.m. They are refused service. The four remain in their seats until closing at 5:30 p.m.

Feb. 6, 1960

More than 500 students jam the Woolworth and Kress stores and the sidewalks in downtown Greensboro.

Feb. 11, 1960

Students participate in sit-ins across the state. Twenty-six William Penn High School students sit at the Woolworth lunch counter on South Main Street in High Point.

July 25, 1960

F.W. Woolworth agrees to integrate its Greensboro store; four black Woolworth employees — Geneva Tisdale, Susie Morrison, Anetha Jones and Charles Best — are the first to be served.

“I'd like to order a cup of coffee.”

A statement issued by Woolworth's national headquarters said the company would "abide by local custom" and maintain its segregated policy.

As a matter of "custom which has existed for many years," a private businessman can serve or not serve people at his discretion, Seawell noted.

“...with all this mob of people yelling and jeering and carrying on,...  
and in one of the most moving moments of my entire life was the fact  
that we stood and they said the Lord's Prayer...”

-Ann Dearsley Vernon  
Protestor

“a little old white lady walked behind McNeil and McCain and put her hands on their shoulders. She said in a very calm voice, 'Boys, I am so proud of you. I only regret that you didn't do this 10 years ago.'”

President Eisenhower expressed his concern, saying that he was:  
“deeply sympathetic with efforts of any group to enjoy the rights...of  
equality that they are guaranteed by the Constitution.”



“Fifteen seconds after ... I had the most wonderful feeling. I had a feeling of liberation, restored manhood. I had a natural high. And I truly felt almost invincible. Mind you, [I was] just sitting on a dumb stool and not having asked for service yet, It's a feeling that I don't think that I'll ever be able to have again. It's the kind of thing that people pray for ... and wish for all their lives and never experience it. And I felt as though I wouldn't have been cheated out of life had that been the end of my life at that second or that moment.”

-Franklin McCain

“Scared, Scared, Scared.”

“At least I've accomplished something,  
one thing in my life that I am proud of.”

-David Richmond

"stupid, ignorant.....rabble-rousers, troublemakers."

Lunch Counter  
Closed in the interest of public safety.

“No Comment.”

- C. L. Harris

Manager, Woolworth's

“Negro adults have been complacent  
and fearful. It is time for someone  
to wake up and change the situation ...  
and we decided to start here.”

-Ezell Blair, Jr.



## Non-Violent Protest

“Walter Cronkite had on the documentary of Mahatma Gandhi. I couldn't believe it, a little skinny brown skinned guy out of India. ...Led a movement for independence, through non-violence, through the teachings of Jesus Christ. Then I began to realize since I was only about 106 lbs. maybe I could do something like that, too!”

-Ezell Blair, Jr.

“I was still in high school . I do remember that we were all interested in the daily news and the rule at our house was to just stay away. In my home the discussion was that of course black people should be served at the counter in Woolworth's just like any person who had the money to pay for the services. My mother had a strong sense that people should be treated equally and judged by their actions and words, not by their money or color. . . and as you can imagine, she was vocal about these feelings. Even before the sit ins, she would lecture me about how wrong it was to belittle the black people with traditions like colored only water fountains, and colored only sections in movie theaters and other places. “

-Carolyn Hackett

“I think my mom and dad had some strong empathy for the young men featured in the news who were doing most of the sit-in activity. They respected the fact that these folks were able to remain non violent when they were being the center of some pretty abusive and scary words and thoughts. On the other hand, they had strong feelings for the man who owned Woolworth's because his business was being totally destroyed. He could not (or would not) serve any food at the counter, and the folks who normally shopped and spent money in Woolworth's stayed away. I don't think I ever went in Woolworth's after the sit ins. You know, folks just found other places to shop and be. I believe it was the demise of his business.”

-Carolyn Hackett

“As we took our seats on the counter, on the stools there, the waitresses looked in amazement, they had the look on their face like 'What in the world are they doing here? What are they doing?'"

“They said, 'I'm sorry we can't serve you here.' We said, we beg to disagree with you, why not?"

“Well, it's just custom that we don't serve black people at this counter.”

“Well, you will agree that the custom is wrong and bad won't you?"

“Well, I didn't make the customs', she says. It's just the way we do things. I just can't serve you here. And if you insist, I'll have to get the manager.”

“What do you boys want?”

“We simply want to be served.”

“Well, I can't serve you here.”

“Can't or won't? What is the problem? Do you condone this custom of discrimination?”

“Well, I didn't make the custom, I just abide by it. I just go along.”

“Well we are asking you to go along with what's fair and what's just.”

“Well I just, I simply can't do that.”

“ I thought, this is it, any moment my brains will be spattered across the floor here. But after nothing happened I said to myself, 'Aha! We've got him, he doesn't know what to do.'”

-Franklin McCain

“The third day we had close to 50 people. The fourth day we had more people than we had stools at the counter.”

“The second week it spread to more than 112 cities.”

-Franklin McCain



“The Ku Klux Klan got involved. One gentleman spat in my face. I turned to him and said, 'I love you because you are my brother.' and he looked at me in quite amazement.”

-Franklin McCain

“I said, my soul has been rested. I felt it was one small victory on the path to full equality.”

-Franklin McCain

“Martin Luther King said to us, 'You know, just before you boys staged your sit-in, I was in a quandary because I had absolutely no idea what to do next. You in essence really saved me.’”

-Franklin McCain

“It ushered in a new era, a new confidence, of what can happen if people are determined to secure all the rights and all the blessings and all the liberties of democracy.”

-Franklin McCain

“My reaction to it was that they were entitled to use the counter facilities at Woolworth's just as much as they were entitled to buy from any other department or counter in Woolworth's. We called on the manager of Woolworth's and asked him to integrate his counter... and he would not go along with it at all. He said it was a policy of the local community.”

- Mayor George H. Roach

“It was significant, it was unusual, it was something we had not had at A & T – administration and handling of students and a question of relationship with the city, for example. It was just a new situation in that the students apparently had the thing well-in-mind as to what they wanted to do, but they hadn't made known very much, at least I hadn't heard much of anything about it.”

-Warmouth T. Gibbs, Sr.  
A & T President

**No!**



**No!**

**No!**

**No!**

On Monday, February 1, 1960, four freshmen who attended North Carolina A&T University held a lunch-counter sit-in at a Woolworth's variety store in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Blacks could buy school supplies and other items in that store, but were not allowed to eat at its lunch counter.

When these four young men sat down at the lunch counter that day, the waitress refused to bring them the coffee and doughnuts they ordered. So they sat there until the store closed for the day.

All week, additional students joined the sit-in. By week's end, more than 300 had participated, including some white students.

Crowds of angry segregationists participated, too - by harassing and shouting insults at the protestors.

TV and newspaper reporters showed up and did stories on the sit-ins. Word spread to other college campuses. Nonviolent student led sit-ins began to spring up elsewhere, first in other cities in North Carolina, then South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee and Florida.



By year's end, more than 50,000 people in over 100 cities had participated in lunch-counter protests. Police had arrested about 3,000 protestors. The Greensboro Woolworth's reportedly lost \$200,000 worth of business during the sit-ins. In July 1960, that Woolworth's dropped Jim Crow and integrated its lunch counter. Soon other lunch counters did, too.

The sit-ins showed the value of nonviolent protest, economic pressure, willingness to face arrest, media coverage and marshaling the power of young people to change the world.

"We teach our students how to think, not what to think."

We shall overcome.

Lift every voice and sing.

I'm on my way to freedom-land.

Keep your eyes on the prize - hold on.

Stupid, ignorant...rabble-rousers, troublemakers.

Whites only!

David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair Jr. and Joseph McNeil had spent that night, and many evenings before, complaining about what it was like being black in Greensboro and the South.□

□

“We finally felt we were being hypocritical because we were doing the same thing that everyone else had done, nothing.”

“I could feel my legs and hands trembling, I was perspiring. You can’t image what it was like, being 17, Afro-American, sitting in a position like that, expecting the worst.”

"Scared, scared, scared."

“Until that time, everyone thought something was right just because it had been that way for so long, I think the sit-ins made everyone stop and think about the type of system we had.”

“You began to wonder to yourself why it was the way it was. I mean, we worked here, but we couldn’t sit at the counter, either.”

“We don’t serve Negroes at this counter.”

“Why don’t you boys go back to the campus where you belong.”

"What other restaurants do, we'll do. We'll abide by local custom."



The four were startled when two elderly white women approached and began talking to them. □

□

“Boys, we support what you’re doing,” one said.  
“You stay and sit there.”

Ezell Blair  
Franklin McCain  
Joseph McNeil  
and  
David Richmond

