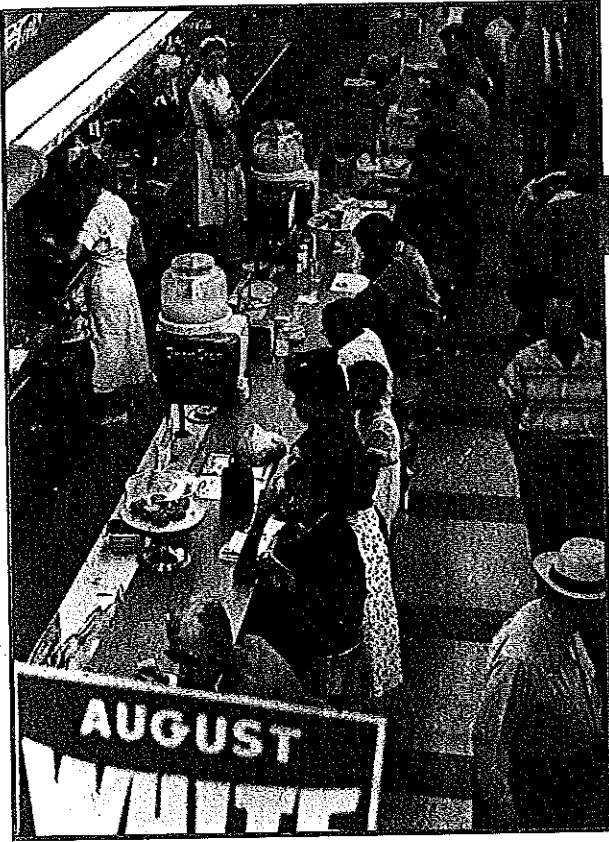


Case Study 4

SITTING IN FOR JUSTICE



A white waitress stands behind a lunch counter with arms folded refusing to serve African Americans at an Oklahoma City diner in 1958.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- Can store owners prevent people they don't like from shopping at their store?
- What can people do to fight laws that they believe are unjust?

TERMS TO KNOW

- sit-in
- civil disobedience
- picket



ACTIVE LEARNING

A storyboard is a plan of action. It consists of a series of cartoons or sketches. When movie directors plan a scene, they first draw it on paper. Then everyone has an idea of what the scene will look like *before* it is filmed. After you have read this case study, you will draw the storyboards for a film on the sit-in movement. The Active Learning boxes in this case study will give you ideas for several storyboard panels.

Imagine the following scene: You walk into a restaurant with a friend. Right away, you see that everyone is looking at you. People at the tables whisper to one another. You can see that some are even laughing at you. You sit down at a table. No waiter comes with a menu. You try to get service, but the waiters seem to be avoiding you. Then you see three men walking toward you. They are not waiters, and they don't look very happy.

"Uh-oh," you say to your friend. "This looks like big trouble."

In 1960, Ezell Blair, Jr., and three other teenagers experienced an incident similar to the one described above. Blair and his friends had angered some white people in Greensboro, North Carolina. In fact, the whites were so angry that Blair and his friends could have lost their lives. Instead, their actions set off a series of events that rocked the nation.

1 Breaking Down Barriers

The South had changed little since the *Brown* ruling of 1954. (See Case Study 1.) When African Americans broke the color barrier at Central High School in 1957, it seemed a great defeat for segregation. (See Case Study 2.) Yet by 1960, five Southern states had not even begun to desegregate their schools. More than 99 percent of African American students in the South still attended separate schools.

A Long Way to Go

Segregation in education was just part of the civil rights story. The Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56 had stirred people across the country. (See Case Study 3.) Yet almost all public places across the South were still segregated.

In 1957, Congress had passed a law protecting a citizen's right to vote. Yet, in the South, few African Americans were registered to vote. African Americans who tried to register risked their jobs. Sometimes, they risked their lives.

A few protests did occur in 1958. For example, an African American teacher named Clara Luper led eight of her students on a lunch-counter sit-in, a type of protest, in Oklahoma City. Similar sit-ins spread to Wichita, Kansas. But that was as far as these protests went.

Segregation was strong throughout the South. African Americans could not eat at white-owned restaurants. They entered public buildings through side or back entrances. Whites used restrooms marked "Men" and "Women," while African Americans used restrooms labeled "Colored." Whites and African Americans were even buried in different cemeteries. White funeral notices were printed at the top of Southern newspapers; African American funeral notices were printed at the bottom. These conditions led Ezell Blair, Joseph McNeill, Franklin McCain, and David Richmond to act against segregation.

Deciding to Act

Blair and his three schoolmates did not rush into their decision to act. They often talked to each other in their dormitory at North Carolina's Agricultural and Technical College. They always came back to the realization that the Jim Crow laws were stronger than ever in Greensboro.

The four teens were impressed by the courage of the Little Rock Nine. (See Case Study 2.) They were awed by the people who had boycotted buses in Montgomery. Those role models led the teens to believe that direct action was the only way to break racial barriers.

For many nights, the teens talked about what they could do to oppose segregation.

Finally, they chose a plan. North Carolina, like all Southern states, had segregated lunch counters. One portion of each counter was reserved for whites; the other portion was for African Americans.

The four decided to sit at a whites-only lunch counter. They would start at F. W. Woolworth's store in Greensboro.

The four did not want to cause a disturbance. They thought that just sitting at the counter would show how senseless segregation was. "We'll stay until we are served," one of the students said.

Shaking Up Greensboro

On January 31, 1960, Ezell Blair asked his parents a strange question. Would they be upset if he stirred up trouble in town?

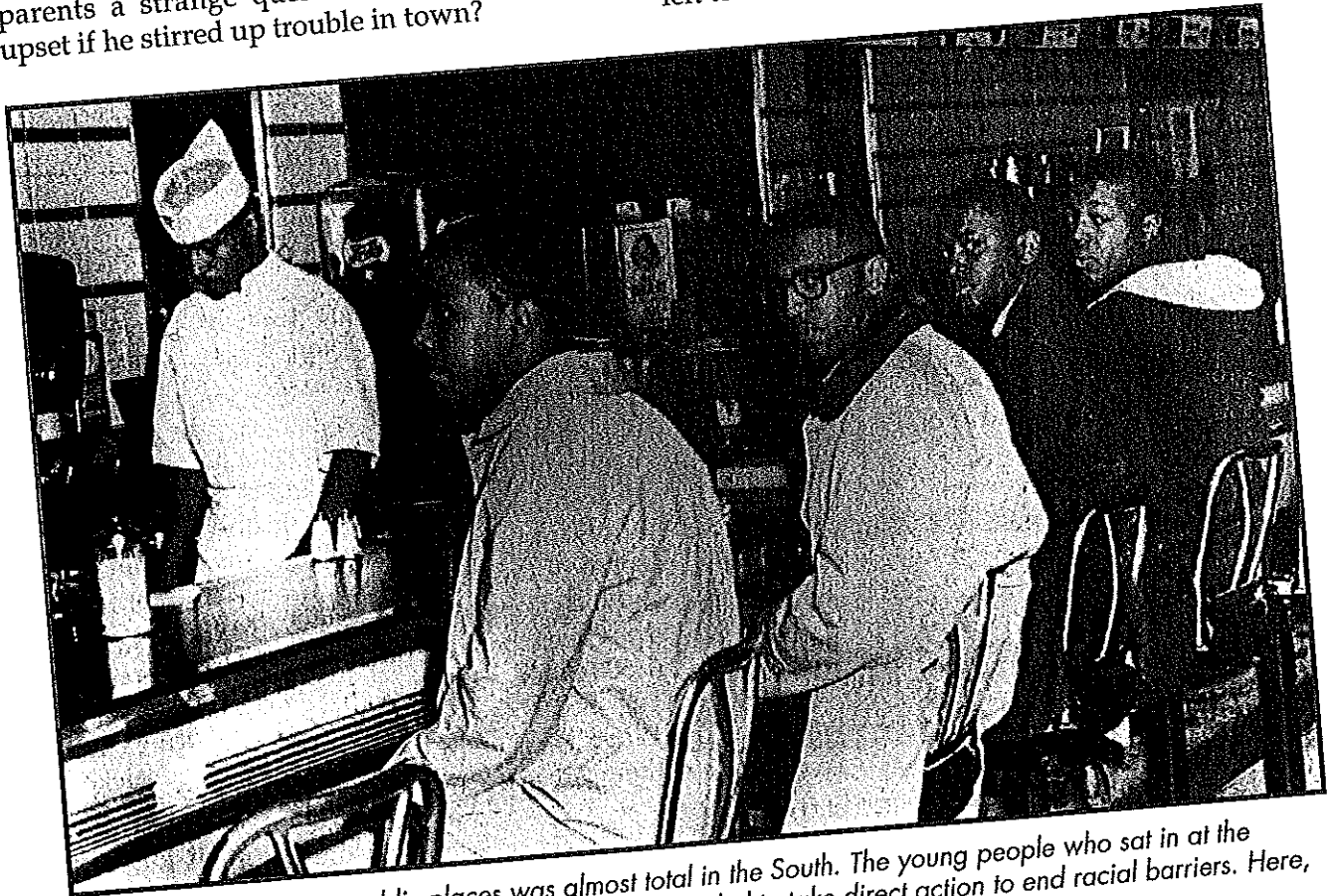
"Why?" his parents asked.
"Because tomorrow we're going to do something that will shake up this town," he replied.

At approximately 5:00 P.M. on February 1, 1960, Blair and his friends carried out their plan. They walked into F. W. Woolworth's. They bought a few items. Then they sat down at the whites-only lunch counter.

"Coffee, please," one of them said.

A waitress asked what they were doing at the whites-only counter. One of the students replied, "We believe we should be served."

The waitress called the store manager. He refused to serve the students. The four remained seated until the store closed. The next day, 20 students returned to sit at the counter. They stayed for a few hours. When the students left to attend classes, others took their places.



In 1960, segregation in public places was almost total in the South. The young people who sat in at the Woolworth's store in Greensboro, North Carolina, decided to take direct action to end racial barriers. Here, sitting at the "whites only" lunch counter in February 1960, four students protest segregation.



Active Learning: For your first storyboard, you might draw the scene at the Woolworth lunch counter. Draw two panels. The first panel could show the waitress asking the students why they are at the whites-only counter. The second could illustrate the students' responses.

Two days later, 63 people crowded the same lunch counter. By Friday, more than 300 people were involved. Soon newspapers were calling the demonstration a sit-in.

As the news spread of the sit-in, reporters arrived to cover the story. A reporter asked one of the students why he was protesting.

"Segregation makes me feel unwanted," said 17-year-old Joseph McNeill. "I don't want my children exposed to it."

Thinking It Over

1. Why did the four Greensboro students decide to sit at the whites-only lunch counter?
2. What effect did previous civil rights protesters have on Blair and his friends?

2 Challenging the Heart of Segregation

Unlike earlier protests, there was no stopping this one. On the fourth day of the protest, white students from the University of North Carolina's Women's College in Greensboro joined the sit-in. Then similar sit-ins spread to

other towns. A week later, a sit-in began in Durham, 55 miles away. Students from North Carolina College led this sit-in.

The Rising Tide of Protest

Then the protests spilled over into Tennessee. Students in Nashville and Knoxville started their own sit-ins. However, they did not just protest segregated lunch counters. These students also held sit-ins at movie houses, drugstores, libraries, and restaurants.

Soon, the sit-ins spread to the heart of segregation—the Deep South. This region included Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and northern Florida.

In late February, a sit-in began in Montgomery, Alabama. Before long, there were sit-ins all over the South. People in Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia organized sit-ins. Thousands of students joined the rising tide of protest.

No central group directed the sit-ins. Yet the sit-ins had a common pattern. Most were led by college students. Some were even led by high-school students. Everywhere, the students were polite and peaceful. They simply asked for service. When whites would not serve them, they remained calm, but they didn't move.

Many of the whites who supported segregation were neither as polite nor as peaceful as the protesters. Instead they jeered at or dumped food on the students. They beat some of the protesters and even burned some with cigarettes. In the six months that followed the Greensboro sit-in, police arrested more than 1,600 young people.

Still, the protesters refused to strike back. When they were knocked down, they picked themselves up and got back on their seats.

Organizing Nonviolence

After a while, hundreds of sit-ins were underway. Student leaders met in Raleigh,

North Carolina, to form a committee to coordinate the activities. In April 1960, the students formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

SNCC was based, in part, on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s ideas of nonviolence and civil disobedience. Civil disobedience is the act of breaking a law that a person thinks is unjust.

SNCC gave the protesters lessons in nonviolence. People who intended to participate in a sit-in learned how to protect their bodies if they were beaten.



Active Learning: You might use the "Sit-in Do's and Don'ts" to create a storyboard. Four panels of your storyboard could show the four "Do's" in the instructions for a sit-in. You might choose to create sketches showing a person practicing all the "Do's" suggested by the instructions.

Sit-in Do's and Don'ts

The students who took part in Nashville's sit-ins learned to be firm without being violent. They received the following instructions:

- DO show yourself in a friendly way at all times.*
- DO sit straight and always face the counter.*
- DO refer all information to your leader in a polite manner.*
- DO remember the teachings of Jesus Christ, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- DON'T strike back or curse back if attacked.*
- DON'T laugh out loud.*
- DON'T hold conversations with floorwalkers.*

DON'T leave your seat until your leader has given you permission.

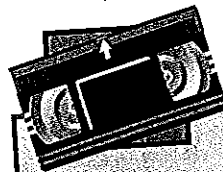
DON'T block entrances or aisles of stores.

Thinking It Over

1. What was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee?
2. Do you think nonviolent measures were effective in the fight against segregation? Defend your answer.

3 "We Shall Overcome"

Under the leadership of SNCC, the protest movement took new forms. Students marched through town. They linked hands and sang spirituals. Of all the songs they sang, one spiritual stood out. Slaves had sung it a century before in their secret meetings. The spiritual expressed confidence that faith would lead them to victory.



A Good Video to Watch

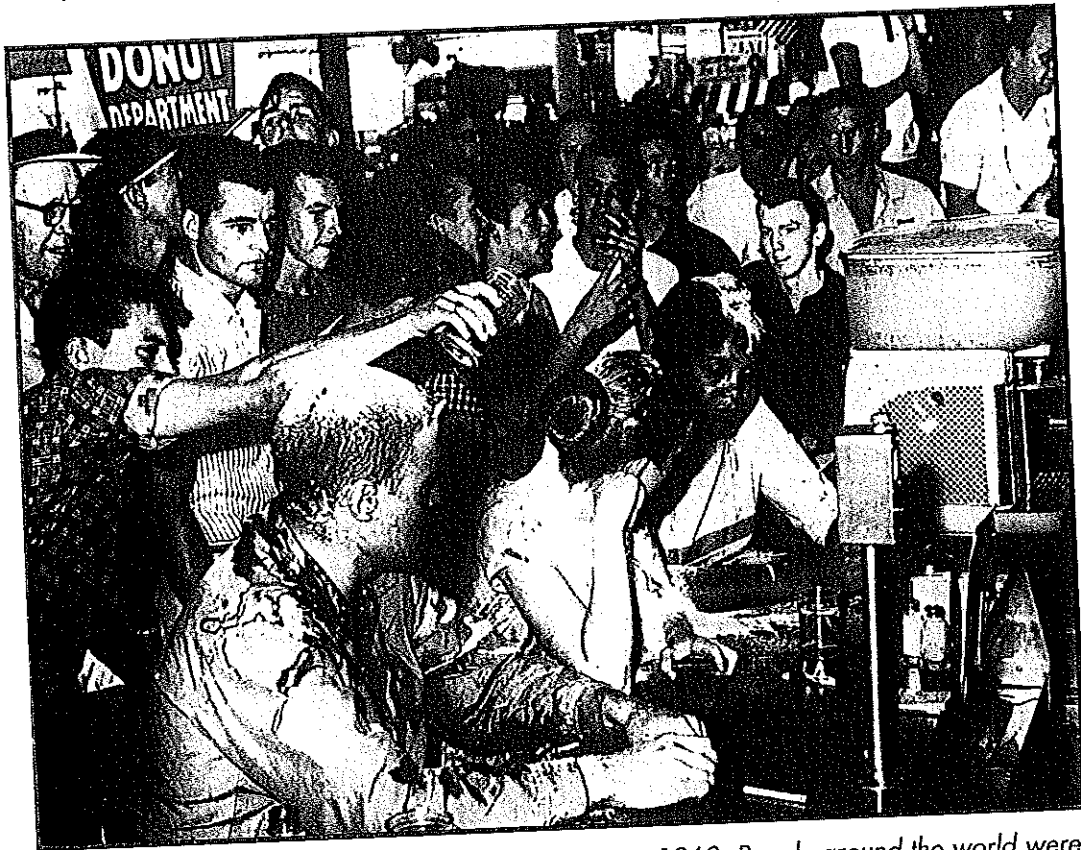
Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-55. Boston, MA: WGBH.

This series of six videos examines the struggles for civil rights. Number 3, entitled "Ain't Scared of Your Jails," provides an exciting glimpse of the sit-in movement. The book, *Eyes on the Prize*, by Juan Williams, complements the video series.

Going to the Source

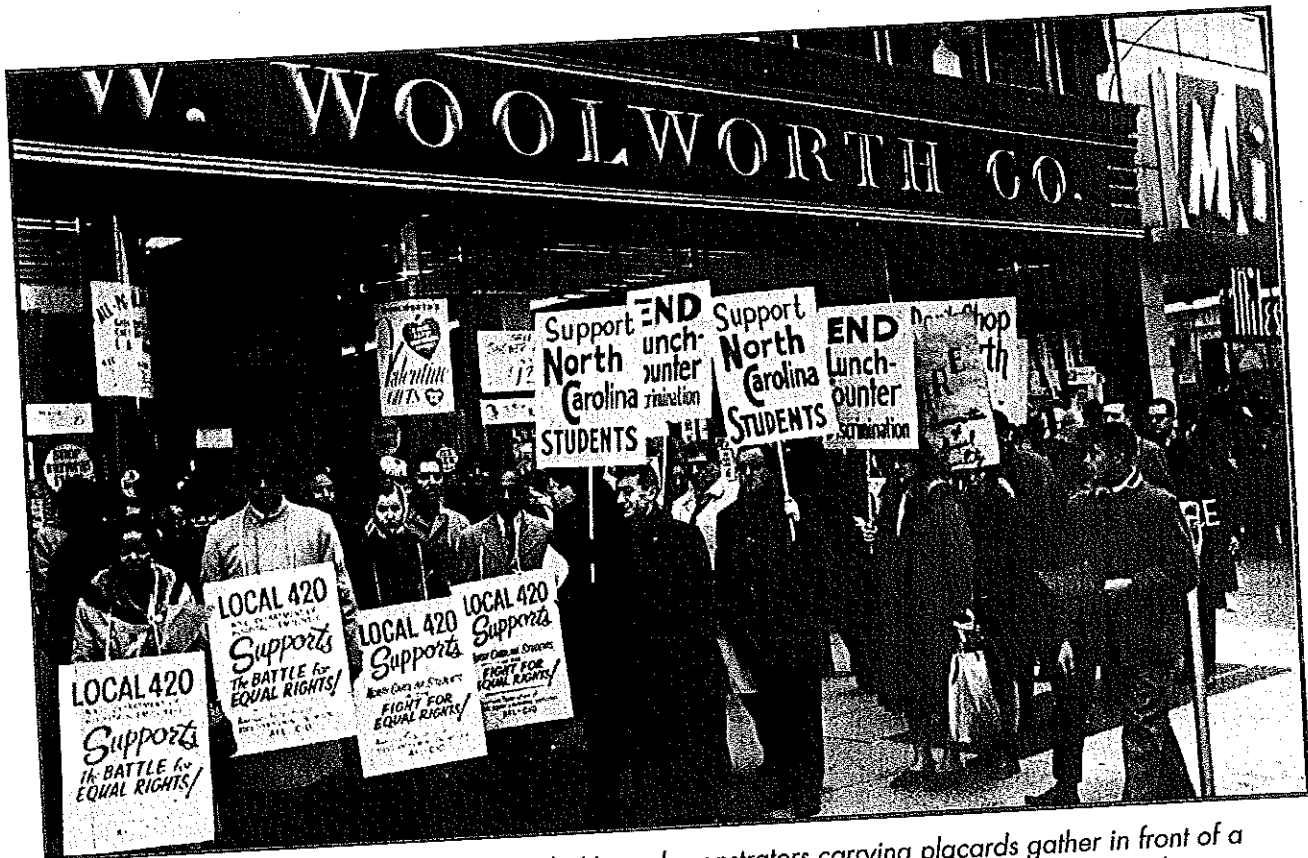
College Students Sit-In for Justice.

In 1961, a group of African American and white students sat down at a whites-only lunch counter in Jackson, Mississippi, and ordered food. A crowd soon gathered. A news photographer, called to the scene, took this picture. Study it and then answer the questions that follow.



The scene: a lunch counter in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1960. People around the world were dismayed by this picture. Peaceful demonstrators trying to be served at a Jackson, Mississippi, lunch counter, are doused with ketchup, sugar, and mustard by a cursing, leering group of young punks.

1. What does this picture show?
2. What do you think was the impact of this picture when people outside the United States saw it? What impact does the picture have on you?



The sit-in movement soon spread to the North. Here, demonstrators carrying placards gather in front of a Woolworth's store in Harlem in New York City. The demonstrators urged Harlem residents not to buy at Woolworth's until the store ended segregation at its lunch counters.

We shall overcome.

We shall overcome some day.

Oh, deep in heart, I do believe

We shall overcome some day.

"We Shall Overcome" became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. It became well known throughout the world.

Soon the sit-in movement spread to the North. Students in Northern cities picketed stores to support the civil rights protesters in the South. To picket means "to walk or assemble outside a place to publicize your cause."

Soon other types of sit-ins began, including "read-ins" in segregated libraries and "wade-ins" in segregated pools and beaches. There were even "kneel-ins" in segregated churches.



Active Learning: You could use the descriptions of the sit-ins to create three more panels in your storyboard. The panels could show the different types of sit-ins that took place in Southern and Northern cities.

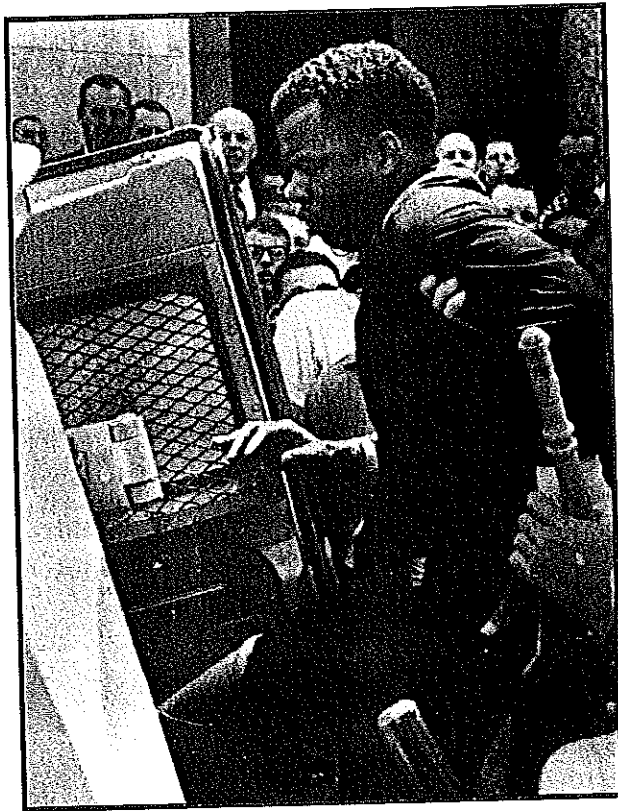
To Break the Law or Not?

The tactic that the sit-ins used was known as civil disobedience. Not all African American leaders were pleased by the protesters' use of civil disobedience. Some, such as Thurgood

Marshall, were uncertain about the effectiveness of civil disobedience. Marshall had spent his life fighting against segregation in court. Many times he had also put his own personal safety on the line. No one could accuse Marshall of not supporting the Civil Rights Movement.

However, the sit-ins troubled Marshall. What would happen if large numbers of people involved in these sit-ins became violent? Shouldn't people fight these issues in courtrooms instead of in the streets?

Yet Marshall knew that the sit-ins were pushing progress. He saw that sit-ins raised legal questions. He could challenge these questions in court. In March 1960, Marshall called together 60 leading civil rights lawyers. As a result of the meeting, the National



After demonstrations in Nashville, Tennessee, SNCC leader John Lewis was pushed into a police patrol wagon and sent to jail. He was joined by 300 other protesters.

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) took a firm position. It decided to help defend those who peacefully took part in sit-ins. Marshall said:

If a dime store is open to the public, anyone who enters should get the same service as anyone else gets. The right of protest is part of our tradition. It goes back to tea dumped in Boston Harbor.

In the months ahead, the NAACP provided valuable legal help to sit-in protesters who had been arrested.

A Badge of Honor

Martin Luther King, Jr., and other leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) gave students their support. In April 1960, King told a sit-in group that nonviolent protest was not only a way of integrating lunch counters, it was also a way to change the hearts of the people who supported segregation.

King said that the arrests for taking part in sit-ins were "a badge of honor." Over the next year, 70,000 students took part in sit-ins. About 3,600 received their "badge of honor" by serving time in jail.

Thinking It Over

1. What does the term civil disobedience mean?
2. Do you think that civil disobedience is an effective way to change the law? Why or why not?

4 "The Sit-Ins Made It Ready"

Slowly, white merchants began to cave in under the power of the sit-ins. Lunch counters in Nashville and Greensboro began serving

African Americans. Other public facilities, such as restaurants, hotels, and other places, slowly became integrated.

By the end of 1961, stores in 114 cities agreed that they would serve all customers. "I used to say this town was not ready to desegregate," a white businessman said in Nashville. "The sit-ins made it ready."

New Leaders

The success of the sit-in movement created new, young leaders. One of the most determined was a Nashville, Tennessee, student named John Lewis. Lewis was one of ten children born to Alabama sharecroppers.



The sit-in movement brought new dynamic leaders to the fore. In March 1960, young Julian Bond led sit-ins at 10 restaurants in Atlanta, Georgia. A sit-in at Atlanta's City Hall made the nation aware of a new leader.

His family was very religious. Lewis began preaching at age four.

In the days of the Montgomery bus boycott, Lewis sat by his radio and listened to the sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr. King's religious faith gave Lewis the courage to risk arrests, jailings, and beatings.

Another young leader was Julian Bond. Bond was a 20-year-old student in Atlanta, Georgia. He helped organize a plan to support the Greensboro students. In March 1960, 200 Atlanta students held sit-ins in ten restaurants and lunch counters. Bond led a group into the whites-only cafeteria in Atlanta's City Hall. As they walked up the stairs, the group noticed a sign that read: "Public Is Welcome."

When they entered the cafeteria, the manager stopped them. "We can't serve you here," she said.

"That's not true," one of the students said. "You've got a sign outside saying the public is welcome. We're the public and we want to eat."

The manager called the police. The police arrested the student protesters, then released them later that evening. The protesters were eager to resume their work.

Bad for Business

The Civil Rights Movement became more powerful in the early 1960s. Many merchants feared that protests were "bad for business." They also worried about their cities' images in the media.

In the end, these fears proved to be important in ending segregation. For example, by the spring of 1960, merchants in some cities had integrated their stores to improve their image.

By the summer of 1960, 30 Southern cities had set up groups to review complaints of discrimination. On July 25, Woolworth announced that its Greensboro store would serve African Americans at the lunch counter.

But progress was slow. The sit-ins trailed off during the summer. They began again when

Thinking It Over

- 1. Who were John Lewis and Julian Bond?
- 2. Explain what the businessman meant when he said, "I used to say this town was not ready for desegregation. The sit-ins made it ready."

The sit-ins hit white merchants where it hurt the most—in their wallets. As a result, many merchants gave in and soon integrated their businesses. They learned that integration was not harmful to business. In fact, it brought in customers who had never before shopped at the store.

More importantly, the student protesters showed that it was possible to bring about change through nonviolent means. They ended segregation by taking action and holding fast to their ideals.

school started in the fall of 1960. Sit-ins continued throughout the South for more than two years.

By the middle of 1961, restaurant and lunch-counter segregation was almost gone. Now, the young leaders looked for other ways to challenge segregation. Their next target was segregation on long-distance buses that ran between states. (See Case Study 5.)

By the end of 1963, about 930 protests had taken place. More than 100 Southern cities had been involved. More than 20,000 people had been arrested.

Civil rights protests also focused on other goals. One of the most important was registering people to vote. Another was getting the federal government to pass laws that would protect the rights of African American citizens.

The sit-ins had set off a firestorm of protest. Four college students had lit a spark by wanting to eat at a Woolworth's lunch counter. When other students pitched in, the fire blazed brighter. Then the fire spread across the state and to nearby states. Finally, it spread to the Deep South. When it finally ended, the South was a very different place.