

# Sitting Down to Take a Stand

**Fifty years ago, four black students began a peaceful protest to change America**

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CHUCK BURTON—AP

On February 1, 1960, four black teens sat down at a "whites-only" Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, Ezell Blair Jr. and David Richmond wanted much more than the coffee and donuts the waitress refused to serve them. Their goal was to stop the unfair treatment of blacks at that lunch counter and many other places in the United States.

The "Greensboro Four," along with friends and supporters, continued to return to the lunch counter every day. After six months, the students were finally served.

## **Peaceful Protesters**

By 1960, it had been six years since a Supreme Court decision had made school segregation, or the separation of white and black students, illegal. Still, in many parts of the country, little had changed. In the South, many restaurants, hospitals and parks remained segregated.

"Segregation was an evil kind of thing that needed attention," says McNeil. Like Martin Luther King, Jr., the Greensboro teens believed in bringing about change through nonviolent protest. News of the peaceful sit-in quickly spread and inspired others to get involved. Within two months, sit-ins were occurring in 54 cities in nine states.

Eventually, these demonstrations helped put pressure on lawmakers to pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The law guarantees equal rights for black Americans in employment, voting and the use of public facilities. "Greensboro . . . turned the history of America around," says Bill Chafe, a historian at Duke University.

## **Holding on to History**

On Monday, the International Civil Rights Center & Museum opened in the very building where the sit-ins began. Museum visitors can watch a film on the sit-in story and can even get a glimpse of the famous stools and counter where the Greensboro Four first sat 50 years ago.

"It is appropriate that we mark this historic anniversary with the landmark grand opening of the International Civil Rights Center and Museum," said Assistant Attorney General Thomas E. Perez. "We need this civil rights museum so that we remember our history."

To learn more about the museum, visit [sitinmovement.org](http://sitinmovement.org).