

Source B: Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, video reenactment of events related to the Greensboro lunch counter sit-in, *Join the Student Sit-Ins*, 2010

Link to the video on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usVzJ3qngSU>.



Transcript of *Join the Student Sit-Ins*

[Singing]

I'm gonna sit at the welcome table/I'm gonna sit at the welcome table one of these days/Hallelujah/I'm gonna sit at the welcome table/I'm gon' sit at the welcome table one of these days, one of these days.

I'm gonna eat at the Woolworth lunch counter/ I'm gonna eat at that lunch counter one of these days/Hallelujah/ I'm gonna eat at the Woolworth lunch counter/I'm gonna eat at that lunch counter one of these days, one of these days.

I'm gonna get my civil rights/I'm gonna get my civil rights one of these days/Hallelujah/I'm gonna get my civil rights/I'm gonna get my civil rights one of these days.

[End of song]

[Shouting] Make America great! Desegregate! Make America great!  
Desegregate!

Samuel: Make America great!

Audience: Desegregate!

Samuel: Make America great!

Audience: Desegregate!

Samuel: Make America great!

Audience: Desegregate!

Samuel: Make America great!

Audience: Desegregate!

Samuel: Make America great!

Audience: Desegregate!

Samuel: Give yourselves a hand.

[All clap]

Samuel: I am so glad to see all of you here today. You're exactly what we need. You're what we need to keep this movement going. My name is Samuel P. Lennon, and I'm a student right here in Greensboro at North Carolina A&T. When I heard what my classmates had started at their Woolworths, I was shocked. I was shocked and surprised and frightened and invigorated. And I went up to people, I said, "Did you really do that? Is this really true what I'm seeing on the television and hearing on the radio? When I read the newspaper this morning?" I knew I wanted to be a part of this movement, but I couldn't help but wondering: Am I strong enough? Well, then, I finally decided to join my friends in protest. Now, my first sit-in, I walked in that store not knowing whether I would walk back out, but when

I did, I felt powerful. I can't even tell you how good it felt when I left that place. I had my to-the-mountain-top experience. So I'm here today to help prepare you all to join us so that you can feel what I felt that first day. Now, you know I heard we were going to get a lot of new soldiers for this army we're creating, but I had no idea I'd have this many new recruits. I've got my work cut out for me in getting you all trained. But I'm not complaining at all; you're important. Each and every one of you is essential if we're going to be successful. So, are you all ready for your first sit-in?

Audience: Yes!

Samuel: How about it? You ready to go?

Audience: Yeah!

Samuel: No. No, you're not ready yet. Look—you can't just walk in here and sit down and order lunch and expect to change anything. You've got to be prepared; you've got to be motivated! And you've got to be trained, so that's what we are going to do today. We're going to get you all ready to stand up by sitting down. And we're going to get you prepared to be as active and strong and powerful as you've ever been and probably ever will be. All by being passive and non-violent.

So, why do we need all of you? Well, you all remember what happened at this lunch counter, right? Right?

Audience: [mixed responses]

Samuel: You do? What happened? What happened at this lunch counter?

Man in audience: Well people came. They sat at the counter. They got arrested, and after a while, things started to change.

Samuel: Now, you said some people got arrested? You might be thinking of a different lunch counter. You might not be thinking of this one, but let's talk—you said some people came, some people sat, and it drew attention to something. Well, what? What's so important about that? How could that change something? So people came in here, and they sat down. Well that's what people do all of the time. It's a lunch counter, right? People come in here and they sit down all of the time. So what's so special about *this* lunch counter? What's so important about what happened here that we're all in front of this lunch counter here today? Maybe there's more to the story than that? All right. Well let's talk about it.

Four young Negro men who were freshmen college students right here at A&T. Now these young men did something shocking. And what they did was they stayed up all night talking. Now I realize it's not exactly shocking for college students to do, but they talked about how Rosa Parks ignited the Montgomery bus movement when she was arrested for refusing to give

up her seat. They talked about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s leadership, yes? They especially talked about the nine students just about their own age. Do you remember three years ago, those nine were the first colored students to attend their all white high school in Little Rock, Arkansas? Well they talked about what they could do. So, they walked in to this Woolworth's at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. They browsed the store and they made a small purchase and then, they went to this whites-only lunch counter, quietly sat down, politely asked to be served. And when they were refused, they just kept sitting there peacefully and quietly.

All right. Now I know so far the story really doesn't sound all that shocking. You wouldn't think it would be—it is 1960! Even though the Supreme Court ruled against segregation in schools six years ago. Today, we can't walk into this store that claims to be everybody's store, sit down, and order lunch, like from one of these menus here. You know, it was five years ago Ms. Parks sat down on that bus in Montgomery, Alabama, but today, we still have to go to the colored stand-up section in the back. And so, these four young men, and we should all know their names—Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Joe McNeil, and David Richmond—they did something that many of us would love to have done. My classmates and I, we're sick of waiting around for change to come. Do you know when I was about twelve years old and the Supreme Court said that we could go to school anywhere—anywhere we want and my father looked at me and he said, "Everything's gonna change now."

Yes, but every day, I walk past this Woolworth's, and I know that hasn't come true. The only thing we can do now is to do something. Well these four young men, they did something extraordinary. They went first! They put their bodies on the line to force a change and the movement needs some people to wade in there first and get things started. All of us in the movement take risks, but those of us who go first and go alone are special. They might get arrested, they might get beaten up, maybe even killed, but they just might spark something. And the Greensboro four sparked something.

So, that's where we come in. Now everybody please make sure you pass those menus around, all right? So everybody gets a chance to see them. And now, let me ask you all a question. Do you all think it's okay for a lunch counter like this one to serve one person but not another solely based on the color of their skin?

Audience: [Mumbling]

Samuel: All right, I'm having some trouble hearing you all today. Are you all asleep? I'm not boring you, am I? Are you sure? Am I speaking the right language? Can you understand what I'm saying? Do you all think it's okay for a lunch counter to serve one person but not another solely based on the color of their skin?

Audience: No!

Samuel: All right. I mean you realize it's important to have a strong opinion on that, right? Because a lot of people say, "Oh yes, a business only has the right to serve and not serve whomever they choose, for whatever reason they choose."

All right, now what if we do this? What if we have two lunch counters? One will be on this side for Negroes, and then one will be on this side for whites. Is that all right?

Audience: No.

Samuel: Is that all right?

Audience: No!

Samuel: Why not? Why isn't that all right?

Woman in audience: Separate but equal isn't...

Samuel: What did you say?

Woman: Separate but equal is separate, but it's not equal.

Samuel: It's not equal? What do you mean?

Woman: It never is. Usually one is better and one is worse, and it's usually the white, rich schools that are better.

Samuel: What if, on both sides of the lunch counter, they are both good? They're both the same? They have one for one skin color over here and one for another skin color over here and both lunch counters are the exact same? Same food, same service, waitresses are twins; everything will be the same. Now can we do it?

Audience: No.

Samuel: No, we still can't? There must be another reason? Why not? Why can't we do that?

Different woman in audience: Freedom of choice.

Samuel: Freedom of choice? So I can do whatever I want?

Woman: What you choose. You should have the right to choose.

Samuel: If I wanted to go into your restroom, could I do that?

Woman: No.

Samuel: Oh, well, hold on now! Freedom of choice! I'm sure you don't want me in your restroom, yes, but do you see what I'm saying? So where does that come from? The law says it's fine, it must be right, right?

Audience: No.

Samuel: You all are awful quiet today. Are you shy? Right? Is that right?

Audience: No!

Samuel: No? Then who says that? Who says that we should have the freedom to choose wherever we sit at this lunch counter? Who is it?

Audience member: The people of the Civil Rights Movement.

Samuel: The people of the Civil Rights Movement is pretty big. You're going to have to be more specific.

Audience member: The four boys sitting at the counter.

Samuel: Now maybe they do, but they're not here today, are they? They can't speak for themselves.

Audience member: We do.

Samuel: What'd you say? Who's we?

Audience member: We do. Us sitting right here.

Samuel: You speak for everybody in this group?

Audience: Yes. Yeah.

Samuel: I don't think she does. I don't think you can do that. You're not speaking for me, that's for sure.

Audience member: Well, I say it's wrong.

Samuel: What'd you say?

Audience member: I say it's wrong.

Samuel: Who?

Audience member: Me.

Samuel: You?

Audience member: I do.

Samuel: Really? Are you sure?

Audience member: Yes.

Samuel: Are you the only one person?

Audience: [mixed protests]

Samuel: Oh, some other people do, too. Anybody else? Now I told you all before, it's important to have a strong opinion on this. We're not joking. We're not playing around. If you're not willing to say that 'I do,' then how in the world are you going to be able to sit here. So maybe I should ask it again. Who says that it's wrong? We shouldn't do that, it's just plain wrong, and we should have the right to sit wherever we want at a lunch counter based on our skin color? Who says that?

Audience: I do!

Samuel: You know why that's so important? You know why I had to take so long to get you all to say that? 'Cause this is the next step. What are you

going to do about it? The law says it's perfectly fine for someone to separate us at this lunch counter based on our skin color, so if the law says that but we all believe today, you know, I don't think they should do that, I think that we should have the freedom to sit wherever we want, then let me ask you this. What are we going to do about it? What can you do to change those laws? Maybe I should ask you another way. When there is a law you don't like, what do you do about it? You don't have to raise your hand. You can just say it!

Audience member: You could write to people like congressmen and—

Samuel: Well I suppose we could, you mean write your congressmen? Yes, I suppose you could do that, but you know sometimes your congressmen don't listen. Some of them don't listen to what you write. So today, we're going to teach you all some even more aggressive tactics. Before we do that, though, let me ask you another question. And, you know, this one is really easy, but I need everybody to answer this and I want you to be honest. What's the first word you think of, the first word that comes to your mind, when you hear someone say the word *nonviolent*? Nonviolent. Nonviolent. What does that make you think of?

Audience: [mumbles]

Samuel: Did someone say passive? That's a good one. What else? Peaceful? Peace is usually the first thing people think of. What else? Gandhi? Oh, people all over the world would think Gandhi. Dr. King? That's the easy one. Dr. King nowadays, right? What else? Nonviolent. That's it? It can't be it. Let me tell you some words that come to my mind when someone says "nonviolent," and you want to know something funny? We didn't hear any of these today. We usually don't. Strong. Powerful. Aggressive. Active. Now how come, and all those were good, but how come we don't hear any of those kind of words? You see, a lot of people come to these training sessions. They say, "Nonviolence? That's not for me." Because they think most of us in this movement are these mythical heroes, these self-sacrificing saints who love our enemies and look forward to suffering with love in our hearts and a smile on our lips. Well I can tell you that just ain't me. I don't look forward to getting beaten up, do you? No, I'm afraid I have the urge to fight back and protect myself, but nonviolence is a tool. And it's a tool we use because we want to win. We see nonviolence as the most effective way to accomplish our goals. But even though it's effective, in order for it to work, we need people. We need trained activists to take the place of those who do get arrested. We need to fill up every seat at lunch counters, and every jail cell if necessary until we

get noticed by the nation. We need all of you to force the country to decide whether segregation is wrong or right.

Now, does anybody still have one of my menus? Please don't walk off with my menus. All right, listen, if you have a menu in your hand right now, can you come up here and bring it to me please? Come on. Come up here and bring it to me. All right. Miss, can you have a seat right here in this chair? All right. And miss, can you have a seat right here in this chair? We'll put you right in the middle. And sir, can you have a seat right here in this chair? All right, there you are. And today, you three are going to take the role of protesters at a sit-in. Now, don't be nervous. I'm not going to give you a microphone. I'm not going to put a funny costume on you. As a matter of fact, what do we do at a sit-in?

Audience: Sit.

Samuel: Sit. That's all you have to do. You three have the easy job today, but the rest of us have a tougher job. We're going to give them a taste of what to expect at a real sit-in. Now before we do that, the rules are simple, and this is very serious. Protestors, there is to be no physical retaliation, no verbal response, no non-verbal reaction to any kind of an attack. Now, everyone, remember to dress in your Sunday best. Although men should actually wear clip-on ties rather than these regular ones, all right? And women should not wear pierced earrings or high heels. Do not bring anything with you that can in any way be seen as a weapon. Not even a pocket full of change. Stay together. Never leave or arrive by yourself. We're always much stronger as a group, and that's what's going to get us through in this situation. All right, now what I want you three to do today is really think about these things. Think about how it's going to feel when you first sit down and are surrounded by people who hate you. And while you imagine that, I'm going to give everybody else some instructions. Please do not touch any of our three protestors today. It's very important. Keep your hands to yourself at all times. Also, do not talk to them today. Even if there is somebody up here who you know, don't say a word. The only thing we're going to do today is look at them, and that means you can stand either here beside them and look at them, or behind them and look at them. Look at how close I am. But do not touch any of our three protestors, all right? Does everybody understand that?

Audience: Yes.

Samuel: Yes?

Audience: Yes.



Samuel: All right. Now we all have to do this together for it to work, so everybody stand up. Step forward. Come on in and fill in the space. All right. Come on. Come on in, everyone. Yes, that's perfect. That's excellent. Now protestors, as that mob is closing in around them, how will you feel? Are you determined to be free? Can you control your fear and your emotions? Now, I want you to imagine, all right? Just imagine feeling all these angry stares on the back of your neck. Imagine hearing people say, "What do they think they're doing here?" And then I also want you to imagine the Negro women in the kitchen whom you thought would be on your side, they're saying, "You're making the race look bad."

Now the crowd starts to yell at you and call you the worst kind of names. And now, they begin to touch you—pushing and poking and spitting and then a milkshake gets poured on your head. They might start attacking at any moment. What will you do? Can you stay strong? Can you stay focused? Can you stay non-violent?

All right. Everyone, can we back away to our seats? Let's give these three some space. And also, let's give them a hand for participating today. You all realize what we just practiced was very mild. You'll all have to expect much worse treatment at a real sit-in, but the same rules apply, and if you follow them, usually you won't be attacked physically. Now, if you are, do *not* fight back, but do protect your head from being beaten and protect each other. One thing you can do: you can move yourself up against the wall and curl up into a tight ball and cover your face as best you can. Now let's say we have one person who's taking a severe beating. We can all get up and put our bodies between them and the violence. Imagine with more people, the violence is more evenly distributed, and then hopefully no one will get seriously injured. And in future sessions, we're going to practice some of these techniques.

All right. I think we're starting to become a real group of believers here today. There's one more lesson I'd like to share with you all before we go. That lesson is on the power of song. You know singing is one of our most important nonviolent tactics. Hey, you should all know there's a good chance we could all be arrested, but through singing, we can all stay together, even from a jail cell. When they arrested us, they took us out to this jail house with hardened criminals, put the women on one side and the men on the other. That means we couldn't talk to, we couldn't comfort each other, but we could still sing, and we sang song after song. This made everybody feel better, except the guards, but even the worst convicts whom the guards bribed to attack us were moved by our devotion.

Now here's the rule we have about singing: it's protest singing. It ain't like a concert. We're not singing to sound good; we're singing to make our country a better place, to make it live up to the words of the Declaration of Independence, to create another new birth of freedom, and because of that, everyone sings—no exceptions. All right? Now, if you can't sing, can't carry a tune, can't hold a note, can't sing at all, then what I want you to do is sing louder. All right? And it's real simple. All you have to do is repeat after me. This is how it goes:

Samuel: [singing] I'm on my way...

Audience: [singing] I'm on my way...

Samuel: [speaking] Pretty good.

Samuel: [singing]...to freedom land.

Audience: [singing]...to freedom land.

Samuel: I'm on my way...

Audience: I'm on my way...

Samuel: ...to freedom land.

Audience: ...to freedom land.

Samuel: I'm on my way...

Audience: I'm on my way...

Samuel: ...to freedom land.

Audience: ...to freedom land.

Samuel: [speaking] All right, now try this part with me.

Together: [singing] I'm on my way, oh Lord, to freedom land.

Samuel: [speaking] That's everybody together. You got it? All right, so you ready? Here we go!

[Samuel and audience repeat first verse, then move to next one, below]

Samuel: [singing] I ask my mother...

Audience: I ask my mother...

Samuel: ...come go with me.

Audience: ...come go with me.

Samuel: I ask my mother...

Audience: I ask my mother...

Samuel: ...come go with me.

Audience: ...come go with me.

Together: I'm on my way, oh Lord, to freedom land.

Samuel: And if she don't go...

Audience: If she don't go...

Samuel: I'm going anyhow.

Audience: I'm going anyhow.

Samuel: If she don't go...

Audience: If she don't go...

Samuel: I'm going anyhow.

Audience: I'm going anyhow.

Samuel: And if she don't go...

Audience: If she don't go...

Samuel: I'm going anyhow.

Audience: I'm going anyhow.

Together: I'm on my way, oh Lord, to freedom land.

[repeat first verse]

Source: Public domain. National Museum of American History.