



Note: Before this narration is slowly read—with appropriate pauses—make sure all roles have been filled, all preparation has taken place, and all students are in their respective places. Refer to the SCHE-MATIC.

With the example of the Greensboro sit-in at Woolworth's in early February 1960, plans now were put forth to stage similar demonstrations all over the South. Besides Woolworth's, other national chains of so-called "dime stores" such as Kress, some with several stores in each city, became targets for sit-ins. Here was the sit-in scenario: walk in, sit down at the lunch counter, politely request food or drink (usually coffee—the college student's drink of choice), remain at the counter on the bar stool or swivel chair when refused service, and above all, "Keep silent."

If the Greensboro sit-in was somewhat spontaneous, the one planned for Nashville in late February was not. Students who had decided to stage the Nashville protest against lunch counter segregation had attended Jim Lawson's workshop on nonviolence. Lawson was an older Negro with experience while in India in Gandhian passive resistance. There he had refused to fight in the Korean War. Back in the states he had trained and educated Nashville's black students to never fight back, to love their oppressor, and to absorb, if necessary, the body blows from hostile forces. His message: "Respond in dignity."

On February 18, students from Nashville's four black colleges staged their first sit-in downtown. Diane Nash, a 22-year-old from Chicago, was one of 200 who sat down at the segregated lunch counter that day. Along with John Lewis, C.T. Vivian, and Leo Lilliard, she was "wall-to-wall terrified" of being not only a lawbreaker but also a victim of physical violence—although no sit-in as yet had generated a confrontation. Nash, who would soon be recognized as a leader and the articulate spokesperson for the demonstration, thought this first sit-in in Nashville was almost comical, even laughable. Nervous waitresses kept dropping dishes and all other employees were confused. Moderate white reaction in Nashville produced comments such as: "These are agitators from up North" ... and... "These are not our niggers."

Day after day for more than a week, the sit-in ritual was played out by these dedicated, well-trained, and inspired students. But on February 27, a Saturday, Diane Nash's fears of violence actually erupted even though this particular sit-in had begun like all the earlier ones.

The action begins...

The students walk in, sit down at all available lunch counter swivel chairs, order lunch or coffee, and are soon told by the waitresses that "We don't serve you coloreds here." The demonstrators sit passively until another supporter dashes into the counter area and announces the imminent arrival of an angry gang of white hoods. *(Pause)*

NARRATION - 2

Within minutes these teenage toughs come through the front door of the dime store and walk downstairs to the lunch counters. Some of Nashville's police force walk among them as if to watch what happens rather than prevent an outbreak. The mob of whites approach the swivel chairs, stop, and hover around the fearful students with silence. *(Pause)* Everyone senses an explosion is about to happen. Suddenly the thugs shout racial slurs and epithets like "chicken" and "Nigger" to the seated students, who stare straight ahead, and neither speak nor turn around.

This non-action disturbs the toughs. *(Pause)* Suddenly several grab the shirts and jackets of the protesters, hit them, and try to pull them away from the stools. Many students have locked their legs around the bolted-down chairs, yet, this does not prevent the students from taking blow after blow to the head, neck, and abdomen from the white mob.

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One black student is pried away from his stool, and because he is being beaten with fists, he assumes a fetal position on the floor. Still he is kicked, slugged, and spit on. Two more black students have cigarette butts ground into their necks. They wince, but do not turn around to confront or attack their oppressors. Three thugs then grab bottles and jars of catsup and mustard off the lunch counter and begin dousing the students, who remarkably still remain immobile.

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(Pause)
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As this action occurs, the police still do nothing. A few even smile at the proceedings. *(Pause)* Minutes later, one police officer steps forward. "Okay," he says, "all you Nigras, get up from the lunch counter, or we're going to arrest ya for disturbing the peace." *(Pause)* "Everybody's under arrest."

Most of the students comply with the officer's request, but as they stand up and are escorted away to the wagons outside, something wondrous happens. A second wave of demonstrators slide into the vacated seats and sit quietly. So another officer and his fellow policemen arrest this second group and lead them upstairs and out the door to the police vans which are now bulging with demonstrators. As this happens, a third wave of students sits down. They, too, will be arrested by the perplexed police. Still others are waiting outside, prepared to fill the counter seats.

The gang of white teens who instigated the confrontation and caused an outbreak are left behind smirking and basking in their success.

POSTSCRIPT - 1

What made the protest at the lunch counters so different from the Montgomery bus boycott or the Little Rock school integration crisis was obvious. These two earlier events were *reactions*; the sit-ins were *direct actions*. The sit-in in Greensboro, followed by fresh demonstrations at lunch counters the next week in Raleigh, Durham, and Winston-Salem, set the tone and pattern for the sit-in in Nashville. Segregation, after 100 years, was becoming antiquated. As Dr. King eloquently said: "The underlying philosophies of segregation are diametrically opposed to democracy and Christianity."

Two days after the February 27 sit-in in those arrested came before a judge the defense counsel and pronounced demonstrators guilty of disturbing the \$150 fine, plus court costs. Fourers—including Diane Nash and to pay the fine and spent the work house, an experience of honor" among stu-

Nashville, who ignored all of the dem-peace with a teen of the protest—John Lewis—refused next 33 days in a city later considered a "badge dents.

Jail time excluded, cessful. The large onstrators at the the arrested was the un-who when

the Nashville sit-in was suc-number of supporters and dem-lunch counter site ready to replace was a vital factor. Also important expected honesty of Mayor Ben West, asked by Nash, publicly admitted that segregation based on color was morally wrong. The most important factor for the sit-in's eventual success was the boycott of Nashville's downtown stores by the 70,000 strong black community. The boycott even extended into northern cities where national chains such as Kress and Woolworth's had stores.

By the end of March, after several weeks of the boycott, Mayor West's comments, and the negative press about Nashville's treatment of the students, the town's Greyhound Bus terminal lunch counter finally served Negroes. This first sit-in victory, however, was marred by the fact that four students being served were badly beaten as they tried to eat. Two days later, two unexploded bombs were found in the terminal.

POSTSCRIPT - 2

Perhaps the most important outcome from the dramatic events of 1960s winter was the success of the sit-in itself as a protest strategy in the Civil Rights Movement. The Montgomery bus boycott had shown that a boycott worked. Now it was clear that sit-ins at lunch counters also worked. Sitting at lunch counters day after day, with backup demonstrators ready to slide into vacated chairs proved to be another arrow in the quiver of the nonviolent strategies preached by followers of Jesus, Thoreau, Gandhi, and King.

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The movement would move on to other battles: freedom rides, marches, and protests to integrate public facilities; increasing Negro voter registration; and outlawing literacy tests and poll taxes. Perhaps none, however, would have the drama of seeing college-age men and women join the ranks in the quest for racial justice. For they braved hecklers who poured condiments over their heads, dodged fists to their bodies, and twisted their legs around bar stools seats to avoid being dragged away to jail by police. No doubt the Nashville sit-in quickened the nation's pulse for justice and reform, and in a large way defined the coming decade, the 1960s, which, it should be noted, would see many if not all goals of the movement achieved.