

February One

Documentary Film Study Guide

By Rebecca Cerese & Diane Wright

Film Synopsis

Greensboro, North Carolina, was a fairly typical Southern city in the middle of the 20th Century. The city was certainly segregated, but city officials prided themselves on handling race relations with more civility than many other Southern cities.

Ezell Blair, Jr. (who later changed his name to Jibreel Khazan) was the son of an early member of the NAACP, who introduced him to the idea of activism at an early age. Ezell attended segregated Dudley High School, where he befriended Franklin McCain. Franklin, raised in the more racially open city of Washington, DC, was angered by the segregation he encountered in Greensboro. Ezell and Franklin became fast friends with David Richmond, the most popular student at Dudley High.

In 1958, Ezell and David heard Martin Luther King, Jr., speak at Bennett College in Greensboro. At the same time, the rapid spread of television was bringing images of oppression and conflict from around the world into their living rooms. Ezell was inspired by the non-violent movement for independence led by Mahatma Gandhi and chilled by the brutal murder of Emmett Till.

In the fall of 1959, Ezell, Franklin, and David enrolled in Greensboro's all-black college, North Carolina A&T State University. Ezell's roommate was Joseph McNeil, an idealistic young man from New York City. Ezell, Franklin, David, and Joseph became a close-knit group and got together for nightly bull sessions in their dorm rooms. During this time they began to consider challenging the institution of segregation.

The breaking point came after Christmas vacation when, on returning from a visit to New York City, Joe McNeil was denied service at the Greyhound bus station in Greensboro. Joe's degrading experience made the four friends decide to stop talking and actually do something. On the night of January 31, 1960, after several weeks of discussion, they challenged one another finally to take action. They sat down and penned a letter which they signed "Students Executive Committee For Justice."



The simple, yet courageous act of sitting down to eat, by four students, was the catalyst that ignited a decade of revolt. Within two months the Sit-in Movement had spread to 54 cities in 9 states, including Nashville and Atlanta. Students had discovered the power of direct action, and a new generation came alive to transform the Civil Rights Movement.

Biographies: Greensboro Four



David Richmond was born in Greensboro and graduated from Dudley High School, where he was one of the most popular students. During high school, he belonged to many clubs and was on the track team, setting the state high jump record in 1959.

Although forced to leave Greensboro after the sit-ins because his life was threatened, David is the only one of the four that ever returned to live in Greensboro, to care for aging parents. He had a hard time finding a job, fighting the stigma of being a troublemaker, finally finding work as a janitor. David was married and divorced twice, fathering three children. He battled many demons as he grew older, including alcoholism, and a sadness that he could not do more to improve the world he lived in. Richmond died in Greensboro on Dec. 7, 1990. He was 49 years old. North Carolina A&T awarded him a posthumous honorary doctorate degree.

Franklin McCain was born in Union County, NC and moved to Greensboro with his family where he attended Dudley High School. Franklin spoke about how his grandparents and parents would tell him, "The Big Lie," if he behaved in a respectful and modest way, and kept up his grades, then all opportunities would be open to him. When he realized that the color of his skin kept a lot of opportunities from him, even sitting down with other folks at a lunch counter, he was very angry. If he did not do something about it he would not be able to live with himself.



After the sit-ins he received a degree in chemistry and went to graduate school, then married Bettye Davis and they raised three sons. He is now retired, and has worked with local organizations to bring about changes in the educational, civic, spiritual, and political life of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area.



Jibreel Khazan, (born Ezell Blair, Jr.) was born in Greensboro, NC. He graduated from Dudley High School where his father was a teacher. At North Carolina A&T, Khazan was President of the Junior Class, the Student Government Association, the campus NAACP, and the Greensboro Congress for Racial Equality.

After the sit-ins he found it nearly impossible to find a job in Greensboro because of his reputation as being "one of those four troublemakers", despite a Bachelor Degree in sociology. He relocated to New Bedford, Mass. in 1965. In 1968, he became a member of the New England Islamic Center and took on his present name. Jibreel works with developmentally disabled people for the CETA program in New Bedford. He is married to Lorraine France George and has three children, one of whom graduated from NC A & T.

Joseph McNeil, a Wilmington, N.C. native, graduated from Williston High School. Soon after high school, his parents moved the family to New York, where he experienced a much more open society. Joe came to North Carolina A & T State University on full scholarship, and found it hard to live in the segregated South. Joe's breaking point came after Christmas vacation, when he returned by bus from New York, and was not served a hot dog at the Greensboro Greyhound terminal.

Thirty minutes after graduating with a degree in engineering physics, Joe McNeil was commissioned by the U. S. Air Force. He spent six years as an officer and attained the rank of captain. He recently retired from Air Force Reserves, having achieved the rank of Major General. During his tenure in the Air Force, he started a series of diversity programs that profoundly changed the culture of that institution. He is married to Ina Brown and they have five children.



Historical Sequence of Events—February 1960

February 1, 1960 – That afternoon, the four friends gathered in front of the A&T library and walked downtown to Woolworth's. They made small purchases, saving their receipts to prove they were customers. Then they took their seats at the whites-only lunch counter. The waitresses and the store manager, C. L. Harris, denied them service, but they remained seated. The police arrived on the scene, but without provocation were unable to take action against the four students. Finally, it was announced that the store was closing early. The Greensboro Four vowed to return the next day. With no plan in place for continuing the sit-ins the four rushed back to campus to recruit students to help them.

February 2, 1960 – In an excerpt from his diary, C. L. Harris, the manager of Woolworth's, observed that long before any students arrived for the second day of the sit-ins, UPI and AP newspaper reporters, as well as local TV news crews, were gathered at the store. The intense television coverage was an important factor in the success of the sit-in movement, helping spread the protest to High Point, NC by the very next day.

February 3, 1960 – By opening time, there were students scrambling to get seats at the Woolworth's lunch counter, but there was also growing opposition group. Whites taunted the demonstrators who, refusing to respond to provocation, remained non-violent. By the third day, the sit-ins were on the national news and the protests had spread to Winston-Salem, N. C.

February 4, 1960 – Female students from Bennett College and Greensboro Women's College joined the sit-in, including three white students. Among those demonstrating was Bettye Davis, who would later marry Frank McCain. The protests had effectively paralyzed Woolworth's, and other Greensboro businesses.

February 5, 1960 – About 300 students were now sitting-in at the Greensboro Woolworth's. Tensions were high and students feared being jailed or kicked out of school. The anxiety was most acute for David Richmond who had recently become a father. Meanwhile, the sit-in movement was spreading like wildfire to 35 - 40 other cities across the country.

February 6, 1960 – Witnesses estimate there were nearly 1,000 protesters and observers filling Woolworth's, and the sit-ins had spread to Kress department store, bringing downtown Greensboro to a virtual standstill. With the crowds growing increasingly hostile, it was announced at 1:00 in the afternoon that the store was closing due to a bomb threat. Kress closed early as well.

February 7 – A&T students voted to suspend demonstrations, trying in good faith to give city and store officials an opportunity to work things out. The negotiations failed, and students resumed the protests at Kress and Woolworth's. When the college students left for summer recess, Dudley High School students took their place. Finally, on July 26, 1960, store manager C. L. Harris agreed to integrate Woolworth's lunch counter.

Civil Rights Timeline

1896 - Plessy V. Ferguson - This Supreme Court ruling establishes the legality of “separate but equal” facilities, ushering the era of Jim Crow segregation.

1909 - NAACP Founded - The National Association of the Advancement of Colored People is formed to promote the use of the court system to help black Americans regain their legal rights under the 14th Amendment.

1942 - CORE Founded - The Congress of Racial Equality is founded in Chicago as a non-denominational Christian organization dedicated to using the tactics of Gandhi to improve life for black Americans. This pacifist, interracial organization helped refine many of the protest actions used in the 60's and 70's before transforming to a more radical, black power movement.

1948 - Military Desegregated - President Harry Truman ends legal segregation in the U. S. Armed forces.

1954 - Brown v. Board of Education - In this landmark case, the Supreme Court rules that segregation in schools is unconstitutional, concluding “In the field of public educational the doctrine ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” However, with white schools zealously resisting the enrollment of blacks, and some even closing rather than desegregating, it takes more than a decade of further struggle for any significant integration to occur.

1955 - The Murder of Emmett Till - A fourteen-year-old Chicago boy, visiting relatives in Mississippi, allegedly whistles at a white woman. Her husband and his half-brother brutally beat him and throw him in the river with a metal fan tied around his neck. Despite the evidence, a jury of 12 white men acquits them of murder. Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Bradley holds an open casket funeral for her son, to show the world the horrors of the Jim Crow South.

1955-56 - Montgomery Bus Boycott - On Thursday, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat at the front of the bus to a white man because, as she says, “I thought about Emmett Till and I couldn't go back.” In response to her arrest, black community leaders led by Martin Luther King, Jr. organize a bus boycott. By establishing their own private transportation system they are able to continue the boycott for an entire year, forcing Montgomery to integrate their bus system completely by the end of 1956.

1957- Little Rock, Arkansas - Despite the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, it isn't until 1957 that Little Rock's Central High School attempts to desegregate. But when nine black students arrive at school in September, the Arkansas National Guard, under orders from Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, denies them entry. Three days later the group of nine students returns to Central High School only to be met by a mob of 1,000 townspeople. President Eisenhower is forced to send federal troops to Little Rock to enforce the desegregation order and keep peace. Finally, on Sept. 24, the nine students are escorted into the building and Central High is desegregated.

1957 - SCLC Founded – Civil rights leaders found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to coordinate the movement's efforts. Martin Luther King, Jr. is elected its president, emphasizing the organization's roots in the black church and its firm commitment to non-violence. The SCLC becomes the central force in the civil rights movement during the 1960's.

1957 - Civil Rights Act of 1957 - This piece of legislation guarantees federal protection for voting rights, and spurs the SCLC to focus its efforts on voter registration. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 also establishes the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, which investigates civil rights abuses in the areas of education, voting rights, and housing.

February, 1958 - Crusade for Citizenship - The SCLC launches a movement in 22 southern cities with the objective of registering one million new black voters by the November 1960 election. Unfortunately, the campaign generates great opposition from Southern politicians and does little to increase the number of black southerners registered to vote.

August, 1958 - Oklahoma Sit-in - 35 members of the NAACP Youth Council occupy all seats at a local luncheonette, but are refused service. When they return the next day, they were served.

October, 1958 - Children's March - This march protesting school segregation attracts 20,000 people to the Lincoln Memorial. Among those speaking are Jackie Robinson, Harry Belafonte, and Coretta Scott King. However, a delegation of students led by Belafonte is refused a meeting with President Eisenhower.

April, 1959 - Youth March - More than 30,000 people meet at the Washington Monument in support of school integration and civil rights legislation. Among the speakers are Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jackie Robinson. A petition is presented to the White House calling for faster action by the federal government in bringing about school integration.

February One, 1960 - Sit-in Movement - Greensboro, North Carolina is the catalyst for a far-reaching student movement when four young men from NC A&T State University organize their own sit-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter. The intense media coverage quickly touches off demonstrations across the state – in Raleigh, Henderson, Shelby, New Bern, Rutherford, Elizabeth City, High Point, Concord, Monroe, and Salisbury. By the end of February, sit-ins have spread to Nashville, Chattanooga, Richmond, Baltimore, Montgomery, and Lexington. By the end of April there have been sit-ins in more than 30 communities in 7 states. By the end of the year, 75,000 students, both black and white, have participated in sit-ins, launching a new phase of the civil rights movement.

April, 1960 - SNCC Founded - Inspired by the sit-ins, student activists attend a conference in Raleigh where they form the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Martin Luther King, Jr. gives the keynote address, calling the sit-ins a “turning point” in history. The SNCC is a grassroots organization dedicated to local direct action. Though the students share the SCLC's philosophy of non-violence, their organization is not based in the church, but in the frustrated idealism of youth. In 1963, the SNCC carries out 630 demonstrations in 115 cities in 11 states.

1961 - Freedom Rides - CORE organizes bus rides through the Jim Crow South to test recent Supreme Court rulings outlawing segregation on buses and trains. The non-violent protest is brutally received at many stops along the way as both black and white travelers are beaten and harassed.

1962 - University of Mississippi Riots - When James Meredith attempts to become the first black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi, a riot breaks out in which two students are killed. It is the most serious clash between federal and state governments since the Civil War. President Kennedy sends 5,000 federal troops to Oxford to keep peace as Meredith quietly registers.

1963 - Birmingham - Birmingham is a hotbed of activism. Protesters hold sit-ins at lunch counters and “kneel-ins” on church steps. Hundreds of demonstrators are fined and imprisoned. Martin Luther King, Jr., Reverend Abernathy, and Reverend Shuttlesworth lead a protest march in Birmingham. The protestors are met with policemen and dogs, and the three ministers are jailed. However, the events in Birmingham succeed in drawing much national attention to the Civil Rights Movement.

August 29, 1963 - March on Washington - 250,000 marchers meet in Washington, DC in the Civil Rights Movement's largest public demonstration. This orderly, dignified show of strength broadens the movement to embrace the poor and disenfranchised of all races. A highlight is

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech that introduces his oratory to a national television audience and becomes the symbol of the movement.

1964 - Freedom Summer - SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and SCLC join in a massive voter registration effort in Mississippi before the 1964 presidential election. Idealistic young workers are shocked at the brutal racism they encounter, as many are arrested, assaulted, and even fired on. Three SNCC workers are killed and 21 Klansmen are convicted, not of murder, but of denying them their civil rights.

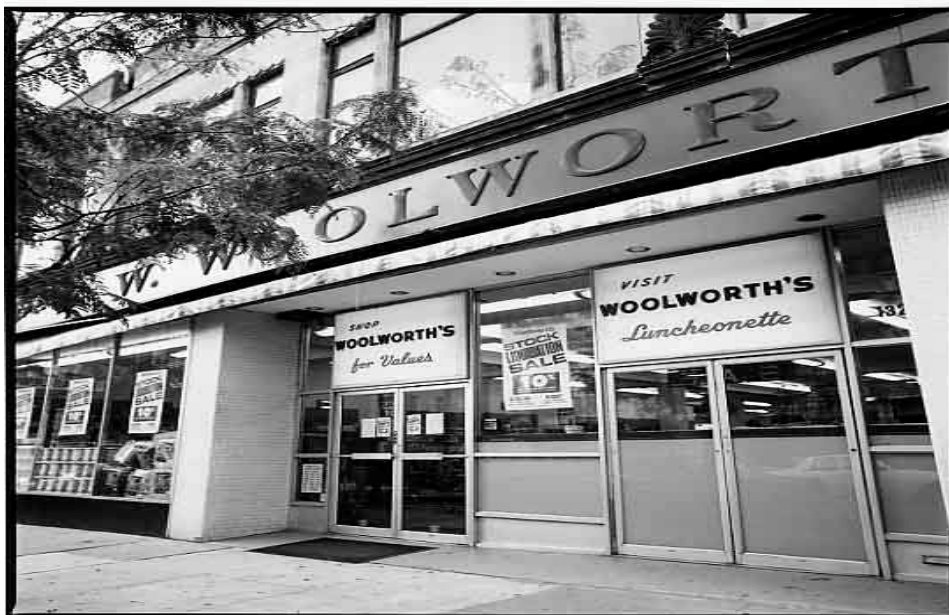
1964 - Civil Rights Act of 1964 - The Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes racial discrimination in public places, such as theaters, restaurants, and hotels, illegal. It also requires employers to provide equal employment opportunities. Projects involving federal funds can now be cut off if there is evidence of discrimination based on color, race or national origin.

1965 - Selma to Montgomery March - When a protester is killed during a peaceful voting-rights demonstration in Selma, Alabama, the SNCC and SCLC organize a march to the state capital in Montgomery. Police attack the passive marchers in a terrible conflict televised across the world, prompting President Johnson to propose the Voting Rights Act.

1965 - Voting Rights Act of 1965 - A natural follow up to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, this act eliminates discrimination in the area of voting, specifically outlawing poll taxes, literacy tests and the Grandfather Clause.

April 4, 1968 - Memphis - The strike of largely black sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee turns violent during a march, when buildings are burned and one rioter is killed. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis to support the workers and reaffirm his philosophy of non-violence, is assassinated outside his hotel room.

1968 - Open Housing Act of 1968 - This last major piece of 1960's civil rights legislation forbids discrimination in federal housing. Together with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, this law brings an end to the legal foundation of Jim Crow segregation.



Post Viewing Discussion Questions

1. Other sit-ins were attempted before the successful ones in Greensboro. Discuss how the following factors contributed to the success of the Greensboro Sit-ins:
 - a. The determination of the four students involved
 - b. The role of the media in spreading the word
 - c. Greensboro's image of itself as a moderate and progressive Southern city
 - d. The role of the police force
 - e. The presence of historically black colleges in Greensboro
2. Greensboro was home to many excellent black schools, such as Dudley High, Bennett, Women's College (now UNC Greensboro) and NCA&T, which encouraged students to value self-worth and fostered independent attitudes, critical thinking, and self-discipline. How did these lessons serve the students participating in the sit-ins?
3. What factors put youth in a better position to start a movement like this?
4. What happened to David Richmond in the years following the sit-ins and what could be considered the cost of taking action the way that these four young men did?
5. C. L. (Curly) Harris, the Woolworth's manager, came to believe he was harshly judged by history as a villain. Do you agree? How do you see his role in the sit-ins?
6. Greensboro's Woolworth's lost more than \$200,000 in sales during the demonstrations. How did the economic impact of the sit-ins throughout North Carolina and the South advance Civil Rights?
7. Jibreel's sister, Jean Howard, makes an interesting point about segregation having ills, but also advantages. What impact did segregation have in the 1960's, both good and bad, and how does it compare it to the type of racism that exists today?
8. How does segregation continue today? In what ways is it institutional, chosen, or both?
9. What are the origins of the passive and non-violent resistance used in the Sit-in movement? Do you think this is the right approach to the problem or the wrong one?
10. What other movements took place during this time period and how did they compare to the Greensboro movement? What lessons can we learn from this event today? Why is it important to remember this piece of history? Have there been any recent events that compare to this one?
11. How might you have chosen to act if faced with issues similar to The Greensboro Four.
12. Do you think this sort of direct-action protest can work today? What examples can you think of?
13. Should the Greensboro sit-ins be considered a piece of American History or simply African American History? Why?
14. Nelson Mandela commented that the thought of these four young boys from Greensboro helped him get through many days in prison. The students at Tiananmen Square also cited the Greensboro protests as an inspiration. In what other ways might these protests have had an international impact?

Photo Analysis Form

Student: _____ Date: _____

Non-Violent Student Protests



Please answer the following questions about this photograph:

1. Write a one-sentence description of this picture.

2. What is the mood of the subjects?

3. What details reveal specifics of the time period in which the photo was taken?

4. What action(s) are taking place?

5. What is (are) the relationship(s) among the various people in the picture?

6. To what degree are the themes of Jim Crow revealed in this photograph?

7. Who are the people in the photo? Describe them by details that are indicated in the photo: age, economic standing, race, etc.

8. What is the purpose (intent) of the photographer in snapping this shot? Did he or she succeed?

Related Web Sites

<http://www.newsreel.org> – The official distributor of the documentary film, *February One: The Story of the Greensboro Four*.

<http://www.februaryonedocumentary.com> – The official production web site of *February One: The Story of the Greensboro Four*.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/sncc> – This site covers six years of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from 1960-1966. This site contains many resources and links as well as audio clips.

<http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/home.htm> – An extensive web site on the history of the Jim Crow era. Lesson plans, WebQuests, and activities have been created by teachers for teachers.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/aohome.html> – A thorough analysis of the African American experience with text, photographs with numerous opportunities for relevant and creative lesson planning.

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards> – This is the official site for the National Council for the Social Studies. You may view some of these standards on-line and the information for purchasing the Curriculum Standards is included.

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/socialstudies> – This site contains the new standard course of study for North Carolina. You may view this in HTML format or Adobe.

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov> – This is a wonderful site with an extensive collection of primary documents and lesson plans.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow> – This is the official companion site for the PBS series *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow* ("Emancipation ended slavery, but not its legacy..."). Besides an array teaching resources, it contains an excellent interactive map and timeline with real player clips, that everyone should research.

<http://www.sitins.com> – The most comprehensive site about the Greensboro sit-ins found on the web. Hosted by the Greensboro News and Record, it includes biographies, articles, audio clips, and extensive resources.

<http://www.sitinmovement.org/default.asp> – The Official web site of the International Civil Rights Center & Museum.

<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King> – Home of the Stanford Papers Project, a comprehensive site of Martin Luther King's papers, sermons, speeches, etc.

<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/index.html> – This is a great site for a president that gets little attention in reference to the Civil Rights Movement. There are many resources on his integration of the Armed Forces as well as the Fair Employment Practices in Civilian Agencies of the Federal government.

<http://www.crmvet.org> – This is the site for the Alabama Voter Application and Literacy Test is found. It also contains in-depth information on the process. A must read if you are going to use these items in your classroom.

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