

Join the Student Sit-Ins

Act Two Transcript

Video online at: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/freedomandjustice/A2.asx>

Codes:

A = Actor (Samuel P. Leonard)

P = Participant

“ “ =interrupting, pause

[] = not speaker's words

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

P = Yes.

A = You do? What happened? What happened at this lunch counter? Go ahead.

P = Well, people came, they sat at the counter, they got arrested, and after a while things started to change.

A = 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? Some people came in here and they sat down. Well that's what people do all the time. It's a lunch counter right? People come in here and they sit down all the time. So what's so special about this lunch counter? What's so important about what happened here that we are all in front of this lunch counter here today? Maybe there's more to the story than that, all right, let's talk about it.

Four young Negro men who were freshman 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 had ignited the Montgomery Bus Movement when she was arrested for refusing to give her seat, they talked about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s leadership, yes? They especially talked about 9 students just about their own age. Do you remember three years ago those 9 colored students were the first to attend their all-white high school in Little Rock, Arkansas? Well they talked about what they could do. So they walked into 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. They 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, and 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 even walk into this store that claims to be everybody's store, sit down and order lunch like one of these menus here. You know it was five years ago Mrs. Parks sat down on that bus in Montgomery, Alabama. But today we still have to go to the Colored Standup Section in the back. And so these four young men, and we should all know their names: Franklin McCain, Ezelle Blair, Joe MacNeil, and David Richmond. They did something that many of us would have loved to have done. My classmates and I, we're sick of waiting around for change to come. Do you know when I was about 12 years old and the Supreme Court said that we could go to school anywhere, anywhere we wanted. My father looked at me and he said [everything is going to change now.] Yes, but every day I walk past this Woolworth's and I know that hasn't come true. So 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. The movement needs some people to wade in there first and get things started. All of us in the movement take risks, but those who go first and go alone are special, they might get arrested, 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?

P = No.

A = 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?

P = No.

A = 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 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 the other one will be on this side for whites. Is that alright?

P = No.

A = Is that all right?

P = No.

A = Why not? Why isn't that all right?

P = Separate but equal isn't . . .

A = What did you say?

P = Separate is equal, but it's not equal.

A = It's not equal, what do you mean?

P = It never is usually one is better and one is worse and it's usually the white rich schools that are better.

A = What if on both sides of the lunch counter they are both good? They are 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, and everything would be the same. Now can we do it?

P = No.

A = No we still can't. There must be another reason. Why not? Why can't we do that?

P = Freedom of choice.

A = Freedom of choice. So I can do whatever I want?

P = What you choose. You should have the right to choose.

A = If I wanted to go in your restroom could I do that?

P = No.

A = Oh hold on now. Freedom of choice! I'm sure you wouldn'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? You all are awful quiet today. Are you shy? Is that right?

P = No.

A = No, then who says that? Who says that we have the freedom to choose wherever we sit at this lunch counter? Who is it?

P = The people of the Civil Rights Movement.

A = The people of the Civil Rights Movement is pretty big, you are going to have to be more specific. Who is it? What's that?

P = The four boys sitting at the counter.

A = Now maybe they do, but they are not here today are they? They cannot speak for themselves. What did you say?

P = We do.

A = Who's we?

P = Us sitting right here.

A = Us--you speak for everybody in this group?

P = Yeah.

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

P = Well I say it's wrong.

A = What did you say?

P = I say it's wrong.

A = Who?

P = Me.

A = You. Are you sure? Really?

P = Yes.

A = Are you the only person?

P = I feel that way.

A = Oh, some other people do too. Anybody else? I told you all before, it's important to have a strong opinion on this. We are not joking, we are not playing around. If you are not willing to say that, I do, than how in the world are you going to be 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?

P = I do.

A = You know why that's so important? You know why I had to take so long to get you all to say that? Because 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 I don't think that they should do that, I think that we should have the freedom to choose 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?