

## **Greensboro Youth Town Hall Transcript**

**Date: 2/4/2010**

**Video online at: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/webcast/townhall020410.html>**

### **Codes:**

CW =Christopher Wilson

BG = Brent Glass

JK = Jibreel Khazan

FM = Franklin McCain

JM = Joseph McNeil

DR = David Richmond

XC = Xavier Carnegie

P = Participant

“ “ =interrupting, pause

[ ] = not speaker's words

\*\*\*\*\*

CW = Good afternoon, welcome to the National Museum of American History and our special Youth Town Hall with the Greensboro Four. My name is Christopher Wilson and I'm the director of the program in African American Culture here at the museum. As many of you know, one of our landmark objects here at the museum is the Greensboro lunch counter where 50 years ago on February 1st, 1960 a sit-in began by the gentlemen that we're going to be recognizing today that really changed this nation. In celebration of that anniversary, we have a number of programs throughout this month and last night were able to confer upon The Greensboro Four the Smithsonian medal, the Smithsonian's James Smithson Bicentennial Medal for their actions 50 years ago. Today is another special day where we're allowing an opportunity for people around the same age as the Greensboro Four when they took this courageous step to get a chance to enter into dialogue with them and talk about that moment and what it meant for this nation and the future in fact of our nation. We've a great program for you

today and to welcome you to the museum and to get us started I'd like to welcome and introduce the director of the National Museum of American History, Brent Glass.

BG = Thank you Chris and good afternoon to all of you. Welcome to your National Museum of American History. I first want to begin by thanking Chris Wilson and the great group of people here at the museum. You know everything takes a team to make something happen and Chris has put together a tremendous team of people and I just like you to join me in thanking him and the great staff here at the museum for the work they do. This is, as Chris mentioned, this is a historic week in this country because we're observing something that happened 50 years ago this week, February 1st, 1960, that really changed the country. We're going to have a chance to meet three people who participated in that event. Three historic figures and it is very rare that any of us get a chance to meet people who made history but today we will have a chance to do that. Many of you in this room are about the same age maybe a little bit younger than these men were when 50 years ago they took this very courageous step to protest and achieve their civil rights. They were ordinary men; ordinary young men who did an extraordinary thing and we will learn more about that today. But at this point, I'd like you to join me in welcoming and honoring Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Jibreel Khazan and their families, as well as David Richmond Jr. and Lynn Massenberg who are representing their father David Richmond. Please join me in welcoming these gentlemen. What they did 50 years ago as freshmen at North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, was to sit down at a Whites Only lunch counter at the F.W. Woolworth's department store in Greensboro and politely asked to be served. When you think about that time in the South where segregation was the tradition and the norm and the law in some places, that was quite a bold and courageous act. With their decision to sit in they not only began a protest that would ultimately result in the desegregation of that lunch counter but they also sparked an awakening among thousands and thousands of black American youth to understand their power to come together and to change our country for the better. Their act 50 years ago demonstrates the potential we all have to become active and involved and engaged in our community and in our nation to ensure that we live up to the ideals that are in our founding documents in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights. At

the National Museum of American History we are committed to telling this story and many other stories that we, and we have dedicated our museum this year, in this anniversary year, to telling the stories of freedom and justice; stories that influenced and shaped and changed our country. Now a section of the lunch counter is on display here and you will see that section of the lunch counter, the Greensboro lunch counter, later this afternoon. It represents the American ideals that we all now take for granted but were not achieved without the courage and determination of people like The Greensboro Four. This lunch counter has always held special meaning to me for two reasons: first, it represents the courage and determination of thousands of Americans: black and white, men and women, young and old who understood that racial segregation was wrong and that they needed to do something to end it. These ordinary people achieved extraordinary deeds. They were really part of a greatest generation. And second, the lunch counter represents the determination of this museum to tell the story of what it means to be an American. This is a story that involves overcoming barriers often overcoming barriers to the American dream of freedom and opportunity. Now to help us understand and give us a little bit of a context for what times were like in 1960 and what these young men experienced, we have a short film clip from a wonderful documentary that's called February One: the story of The Greensboro Four. Please enjoy this film clip and please enjoy the afternoon here at the National Museum of American History, thank you.

Film Clip: The next afternoon the four friends gathered in front of the library on the A&T campus.

[JK] I put on my Sunday go to meeting clothes, my hat, my suit and tie. Frank McCain didn't have time to change so he wore his air force blue uniform. Joseph wore his tie and coat. He was dressed to kill. David, of course, had his cap on, his leather cap, and he was dressed immaculately.

[FM] I had some anxiety and my anxiety was the unknown. I really didn't know what was going to happen. I just assumed that we'd be plugged on the head or we'd be

thrown in jail. I tell you the one thing that I was certain of, is that we weren't coming back.

[JM] From the time we left the library until we reached Downtown, we were rather somber, silent. I think we're all reflecting on what we're about to do and trying to step ahead in time and project what's going to happen.

[JK] It was like, this is so down, we're like the four musketeers. We're going to our destiny.

When we walked into the store, we wanted to prove that we were customers. I bought notebooks and made sure to get receipts.

We mulled around in the store just trying to get some fix on where we were and what we're about to do.

[JK] I was trying to breathe slow and heavy so my anxiety would not get too high on me. I felt my temperature increase. I could feel my collar and the sweat coming off the side of my face.

[FM] I didn't have to always ask Joe what he was thinking. We looked at each other and both of us looked at the counter at the same time. We just started to walk towards the counter. I mean without a single word that's how it happened. And we took our seats. Almost instantaneously after sitting down on a simple dumb stool, I felt so relieved I felt so clean. I felt as though I had gained a little bit of my manhood by that simple act. And Joe and I looked at each other without saying a word not, not I mean absolutely not a word. It was about maybe some 40 seconds, a minute later, seemed like a lifetime, that the people behind the counter acknowledged that we were sitting.

[JK] The waitress approached us, "What do you boys want?" We said, "We like to be served please." "Now you boys know we don't serve colored people here. Why don't you

all get up.” And she pointed her finger to the lunch counter instead of lunch counter over there.

[FM] Of course we said, “Well, we beg to disagree with you. You do serve us here and we can prove it. We’ve got receipts to provide and we bought all these things here and we just want to be served here.”

I’m trying to keep myself composed meanwhile I feel my legs shaking. Out came this Negro lady, this colored lady. She was really, she says, “What do you boys want?” “We like to be served please.” She says, “I’m going to say this to you. You all need to leave here right now go back to that campus because you’re starting trouble. You know it’s people like you that make our race look bad. You got that?”

[Geneva Tisdale] I used to wonder sometime why I couldn’t sit and you know eat meals. It felt like, “well, what’s wrong with me. I’m not good enough to sit at the counter and be served?” I was good enough to work and prepare the food for others but I couldn’t sit there and have a meal. And that was kind of hard to take.

[JK] The waitress left and she sent out this tall Caucasian man who we found out was the manager, Mr. Harris. He said, “You know, I don’t know who sent you boys but I pride myself of having a good store.” He said, “I don’t want any trouble.” We could see the man is worried. He got a frown on his face. He doesn’t know what to do. Meanwhile some of the Caucasian people are getting up and leaving.

[FM] Shortly thereafter, we noticed the policeman who comes into the store and he is as red as your shirt when he sees us sitting at the counter. He took his nightstick out and I said to myself, “You know I think this is it.” I mean I could almost feel his hot breath. I mean this guy was breathing fire.

[DR] One of the officers started to take his Billy club and to sort of hit it in his hand and that was perhaps unsettling, to say the least.

[JK] Meanwhile, tension is going full speed now: teeth are chattering, sweat is pouring like water; I mean like a river.

[FM] I could imagine what he was thinking, “I know what I want to do but I have no justification for doing it yet because I haven’t been provoked.” And once he paced two or three times and didn’t do anything, I said to myself, “Aha, he doesn’t know what to do. He is frustrated.”

[JM] McCain and I are sitting at the lunch counter and an elderly white lady comes and sits next to McCain and starts a conversation about being disappointed in us. McCain inquires, “Ma’am, why are you disappointed in us?” She relates that she’s disappointed because it’s took us so long to do what it is that we’re doing.

[FM] To hear someone say that whom you least expect was quite rewarding. I mean it quite calming. It was quite reassuring. When that was observed by other folk in the store, there wasn’t much noise anyway. I mean, people had stopped talking. For a Five and Ten Cent store, it was quiet. I mean it was more like church service. Carroll, as he was called he was truly frustrated. So, he finally goes back to the corner and leans up against the wall and was like, “My God, won’t these guys leave here. I mean won’t they please get out of my life.” I mean that was the kind of expression that he had. Short time later, it was announced that the store was going to close early.

[J] Nothing occurred. The police were there. They didn’t arrest us. We were shocked. They closed the store. And we said we would be back.

[JK] I felt relieved. I felt like a great weight had been taken off my shoulder. We had witness between ourselves a great transformation.

David Richmond said, “If I don’t do anything else in my life, this is the peak of my life. I think I’ve done my greatest jump.”

[FM] People take on a religion to try to get that feeling. I mean that's what Buddhists try to do all the time and here I am at 18 years of age having that feeling of total freedom; total acceptance. I'm asking myself, "What do I do for an encore?" It's all downhill from here.

On the sidewalk outside Woolworth's, a reporter from the Greensboro Record caught up with the four sit-ins. The reporter had been contacted by Ralph Johns, a local civil rights activist and friend of Joe McNeil's.

[JK] The reporter asked us were we coming back the next day. So we said, "Yeah, we're coming back the next day." He says, "You have backup?" We say, "Sure." We had no backup at all." So, we went back to campus that evening.

[FM] We need to get some help and the way to get help, Joe and I concluded, is to summons those people on our campus who had leadership positions. We went to the Dudley Building after we passed the word that that's were the meeting would be. When we started that little session with all those leaders, we spent 90% of the meeting trying to convince them that this wasn't a hoax. In principle most agreed that they would help us and I can confirm that it was in principle only because the second day, they didn't come.

P = That display at the museum really showed me and showed a lot of us the impact that they had.

P = People today, you know young kinds like us today like we wouldn't probably be able to go to restaurants or even sit with our friends.

P = I would want to talk to David Richmond only because he was the only one that had to stay back in Greensboro and I would ask him, "After staying in Greensboro after the lunch counter event how did it make him feel and how did Greensboro change after the event?"

P = I think I want to talk to Franklin McCain because he was my focus group. I want to hear from him what he really felt when he was sitting there all of those days and then I want to hug him and tell him thank you.

P = I would like to meet Jibreel Khazan because he just seems to have a big personality, he's outgoing and I feel like he has a lot of insight on life. It would be just nice to talk to him.

P = I would really like to meet Franklin McCain. He seems like a very passionate intelligent man who has like a razor line of thought. Almost like there is a waterfall of ideas and concepts going on behind his eyes.

P = I would like to meet Ezell Blair because I kind of can relate to him because he was the quiet one of the group. He was always the one person that you know was close to their parents and would always ask their parents for something. So, I would like to ask, I would like to talk to him and see what prompted him to do what he did.

P = It takes a lot of effort to actually be able to go out and do like what they did over there with the sit-ins; be able to go in despite all the odds that were against them.

P = It wasn't just one snap of the finger like let's go and do this. It was a process that they've really worked for and they really planned and took everything into consideration.

Song: You know I'm tired of segregation and I want my equal rights. Segregation did me wrong, made me leave my happy home. That's why I'm fighting for my rights. Oh yeah, I'm fighting for my rights. You know I'm fighting for my rights, fighting for my rights.

Well my father, yeah he told me a long, long time ago. He said, "Son if you don't fight for freedom you'll be a slave forevermore." That's why I'm fighting for my rights. Oh,

I'm fighting for my rights. You know I'm fighting for my rights. I'm fighting for my rights.

Well, an old lady yes she told me and she was very brave. She said, "Before I'd be a slave I'd be buried in my grave." That's why I'm fighting for my rights. Lord I'm fighting for my rights. You know I'm fighting for my rights. I'm fighting for my rights.

Well, my cell it had two windows but the sun could never come through. You know I felt so sad and lonely child I just didn't know what to do. That's why I'm fighting for my rights. Oh, Lord I'm fighting for my rights. You know that I'm fighting for my rights. Yes I'm fighting for my rights. That's why I'm fighting for my rights. Oh, yes I am. You know that I'm fighting for my rights. I'm fighting for my rights.

XC = Thank you everyone. This was the cast of Sing for Freedom, which is one of the several programs we're doing here at the National Museum of American History to commemorate this event and the many others that made up the Civil Rights Movement for Black History Month. My name is Xavier Carnegie and over the past year and two months my colleagues and I have had the opportunity to tell the story of the Greensboro Four and the Sit-Ins to over one hundred thousand people. And that experience has been wonderful and we're really grateful for it. But today is special because we have the opportunity and you as well to meet and speak with the real people whose story we have learned and told for over a year. I hope the weather wasn't too bad coming in for you gentlemen but it's really a great chance to get the real story straight from the source. Before we do introduce our honored guests today, let me introduce one of the gentlemen who has helped to put this together and the gentleman who along with myself is going to be conducting our discussion with them. He is the director of daily programs and the program in African American culture here at the National Museum of American History. He grew up in Detroit, Michigan, graduated from the University of Michigan and worked at Henry Ford Museum outside of Detroit for 15 years before coming to this museum six years ago. So, please join me in welcoming Chris Wilson and now for our honored guests.

Joseph McNeil was 17 when he began the Greensboro sit-ins. McNeil earned a degree in engineering physics from North Carolina A&T in 1963 and then spent six years as a US Air Force officer and attained the rank of Captain. He is now a retired Major General in the Air Force Reserves. He has worked in computer sales for IBM, as a banker for Banker's Trust, and stockbroker for E.F. Hutton. Please welcome General Joseph McNeil.

Franklin McCain was born in North Carolina but reared in Washington D.C., graduating from Eastern High School. He received a B.S. in Chemistry and Biology and an M.S. in Public Administration from North Carolina A&T. In 1965, he joined the Celanese Corporation and now heads its office Shelby, North Carolina. He has worked on the board of the NAACP legal defense fund and in 1993, he received the Nancy Susan Reynolds award for leadership. He is currently chairman of North Carolina A&T's board of directors. Please welcome Mr. Franklin McCain.

Jibreel Khazan received a B.S. in Sociology from North Carolina A&T State University in 1963 then attended law school at Howard University. In 1968, he became a member of the New England Islamic Center and took on his present name. In 1994, he received an honorary doctorate from North Carolina A&T. Now Mr. Khazan works with developmentally disabled people for the CETA Program in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Please welcome to the stage Mr. Jibreel Khazan.

David Richmond majored in Business Administration and Accounting. After leaving A&T he became a counselor/coordinator for CETA but his life was threatened and he moved away to Franklin. After returning to Greensboro to care for his parents, he worked for the Greensboro Healthcare Center. And in 1980, the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce awarded him the Levi Coffin Award for leadership in human rights, human relations, and human resources development in Greensboro. Mr. Richmond died of cancer in December 1990. North Carolina A&T awarded him a posthumous honorary doctorate degree. Please join me in honoring Mr. David Richmond.

CW = Thank you Xavier. Let's take a seat. Well, again I want to in addition to welcoming again everyone in the audience for our discussion now, we are joined online through a live webcast by many other students across the country, as well as we're being filmed by C-SPAN for further broadcast. And so it's great to be able to share this story not only with the three hundred or so of us in the audience but with thousands of people across the country. I first want to move back. We saw a clip from the film. and I should mention in addition to the film clip that we saw from the February One documentary, we also saw part of a program put together by Montgomery College here in Montgomery County, Maryland, which invited students from a social justice class there to learn about each member of the Greensboro Four and think about the questions that they would like to ask of these individuals. And you all will actually have that opportunity today. So, it's a wonderful opportunity as well. We saw in the clip what happened on February 1st 1960, but in order to tell the whole story, let's move back a little bit and move back into what it was like growing up for you before you got to college, before you got to February 1st, 1960. Just, I want to hear a little bit about your childhood and what segregation was like.

JM = I grew up in the segregated South. I went to a school that was reserved for black students only. Segregation was particularly demeaning and disrespectful of me as an individual. I resented it very much. It was a system designed to make me feel inferior. And I didn't feel inferior to any man. I'd been taught never to treat myself with low expectations of my capabilities but whenever I saw things like a separate water fountain that said "Colored Water Fountain" and "White Water Fountain," it made me very, very angry. It was something that existed that impacted my parents. They had to suffer for years under the onus of racial segregation. They were mistreated as second-class citizens. So, it affected them. It affected their parents. And unless, I felt that unless I did something about it, it was going to impact my children in the future.

FM = I too grew up in a system of segregation. And segregation, my thoughts were, naturally produced inequality. And that certainly bothered me. And it bothered me even more as a very young boy to see how my parents and my grandparents appeared to be tolerant of that situation. I could not understand that. They were reasonably well-

educated folk and I thought that this is not the way educated people behave or this is not the kind of thing they ought to be accepting of. And I grew up with what I term, and I thing Ezell, David Richmond, Joseph McNeil grew up under the same guise of what I term the big lie. And the big lie came from your parents and your grandparents. And if you know anything about African American families, parents might lie to you once in a while you think but grandparents, never. But our grandparents lied to us. They called themselves giving us the prescription for life in total acceptance, which we did not have. And they said, "Son, if you want to get along and be successful in this great democracy of ours there are certain things that you absolutely have to do. One is to believe in the Bill of Rights and the Constitution." There's certainly nothing wrong with that. "The other is you have to accept the Ten Commandments as your code of ethics and it does not matter whether you're Christian, non-Christian, Jewish, or agnostic." There's nothing wrong with the Ten Commandments in terms of how to behave. "You have to go to school and get not good grades but superior grades. And last but not least, you have to do good deeds and good turns for people and never expect to get anything in return or be praised for it." And if you were to do these things then you'll be accepted and enjoy all the rights and privileges that this country has to offer. Well, it took me only about maybe to become 12 or 13 years of age to find out in your vernacular that I had been screwed. And I had been screwed because I'd upheld my end of the bargain and it was still business as usual, no colored here, whites only, when it come to what we called "public accommodations" like theaters, like schools, like libraries, like parks, and everything that you thought was public was still off limits to you. And I didn't like that. I mean it felt, it made me feel as though I was less than a human being without any dignity. And not only did I not like it, it made me mad as hell. And fortunately before I blew my top of my stack, I met three good friends for life and the name of Joseph McNeil, Ezell Blair, and David Richmond, who really felt the same way I did. And I will take my parents and my grandparents off the hook now. What they were telling me yes it was a big lie but they were preparing me for the future. They knew that I only had a 5% chance of being successful in this life growing up during the late 50s and early 60s. And if I had a chance at all, I had to follow that prescription. Yes, they lied to me but they lied to me because they loved me. And they lied to me because they were concerned about my future.

XC = How about you Jibreel?

JK = Oh, I start by saying in the name of the life giver our life giver, the compassionate and merciful. First of all, I like to thank the members of the Smithsonian Institute, Mr. Christopher Wilson and director of this institution for inviting us to be here. Blessed are those who struggle, oppression is worse than the grave. Blessed are those who live and die for a noble cause but to live and die as a slave. I was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, October the 18th 1941 to master builder Ezell Alexander Blair Sr., master builder and Mrs. Corene Lee Williams Blair, first of three children. I lived at 908 Curtis Street, which was the home of my great-great-grandfather Rev. Noah R. Heddon. He founded Divine Missionary Baptist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina in the Warnersville community in 1897. He wanted to be Jewish but at that time, Jews were discriminated in the South and in America. They were Caucasian people from Eastern Europe and he was a brown-skinned man. So in 1897, he went to the first World Zionist Conference and Zionism, meaning returning to Israel, was founded by a man named, correct me, I can't remember right now, by the name Herzl. He was Jewish. So, my great-great-grandfather decided that he would name the name of his church New Zion meaning New Jerusalem Missionary, go out and save people, Baptist Church after Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist. Saying that, his wife Mrs. R.D. Heddon, who outlived him, were descendants of slaves. She reared four generations and I was the fourth generation that she reared. Racist segregation I never liked. I couldn't understand why because I was a kid 5 years old my skin was brown, why I was mistreated. I'd never done anything to Caucasian people and I asked Jesus, "Hey, Jesus how come you know look out for your people the Jews and what about the colored people? I pay my dime in Sunday school every Sunday. Jesus you owe me something." And of course, I went to racial segregated schools. I did not like sitting in the back of the bus. I didn't like going up to the crow's nest three stories up at the Carolina Theater on Saturdays and Sundays. I didn't like being called Negro. I didn't like segregated water fountains; colored and white water fountains. I thought the white water fountain was special. I thought it had lemonade in it. Colored water fountain has chocolate, yeah. So, you know you kind of grin and bear it. We lived in segregated neighborhoods. All

the people in my neighborhood were everyday people. Warnersville which was the oldest community founded in Guilford County at the time, which is now 144 years old. It was set aside right after the 13th Amendment of the Constitution was passed on Tuesday, January 31st, 1865. The next day, President Abraham Lincoln, to congratulate Congress for getting him out of the jam he was in, you know congratulated Congress and said, "From now on February 1 will be known as National Freedom Day." We didn't know that then when we set in but this had been revealed to my conscience in the last 50 years. So, what happened was I said, "I'm sick and tired of this." One day when I was 5 years old, I heard that a colored woman was thrown off the bus because she refused to sit in the back. When I was seven, the Ku Klux Klan had sounded a message in my community, "Tell those niggers we're coming through tonight, man. We're going to hang some niggers on the cross." I said, "Well gee, they hung Jesus on the cross. Something's not right with this thing. Are they going to be wearing, they're wearing white too? That's all that Jesus wore and the angels and the disciples. Somewhere along the lines these guys didn't get the right message." My father said, "Nobody's going to hurt my family." He said, "I was in World War II. I'm a soldier and anybody try to take my family out is going to get shot." I never heard my father say that before. When I was eight, two Caucasian man came to my house. "Your name Ezell Blair?" He said, "Hold it. I'm Mr. Blair to you." This was like 1949. He said, "Why are you here?" "We hear you got white lightning on your property." "White lightning where?" You know, he said, "Before you search my property you better have a search warrant." They said, "This nigger is smart." And my father said, "The only niggers that I see in front of me are you." I backed up. I said, "Dad's talking to white people like he's the man. He is the man." Yeah, he had a shotgun, shotgun do it right baby. He had a 45-Magnum like Dirty Harry with a silencer on it. I said, "Where did daddy get this toy gun from?" He is a peaceful man. I never heard him call white people you know crazy people or devils. He said, "There are some crazy crackers around here. Polly want some cracker?"

XC = Let me skip forward a little bit.

JK = Wait a minute I just want to clear that up.

XC = Okay.

JK = It wasn't racist is that Caucasian people call themselves that in the South that they were like Georgia crackers. Well, my father was reared by a Caucasian man when he was 13 when his great-great-grandfather died. His name was Mr. Robert Ingram. He took my father on as an apprentice in the Depression. Can you imagine? Took this colored boy with him everywhere he went like he was his own son and in two years my father became the master roofer at 15 years old. This man, whom I call my second grandfather, gave my father a chance to become a skill, to get an education and help thousands of other young people become architects, draftsman, teachers in his thirty years as a teacher in Greensboro. I want to let you know be proud of our ancestry. All the genes in our body: the good, bad, ugly, indifferent and strive to be perfection. That's my experience in segregation.

XC = Thank you.

XC = I wanted to ask specifically and I've got to tell you. I've told you all's stories so many times but so excellent so amazing being here and just really, really hearing this from you. Let me ask everyone out there, how many people are actually from this area, were actually born here, actually, ah that's most people here. Well, since we have pretty much a local on stage I wanted to ask Mr. McCain if you could give us an idea of what segregated Washington was like and specifically growing up here because I know a lot of people I mean we can't even fathom what that must have been like.

FM = Segregated Washington in its effect was no different from segregated Greensboro, North Carolina. The big difference is there weren't too many signs inside the District that said "White Only" or "No Colored Allowed" or "Colored Only." But the net effect was the same as in Greensboro where you would in fact see those signs at public places and employment as well. The District was just as bad as any city in North Carolina. There were only certain jobs that African Americans were allowed to hold. The public schools were by and large integrated by law but segregated by practice. There were only a couple of years where the schools were truly integrated and shortly and that is after

1954, the Supreme Court decision. Shortly after that, there was a mass movement of primarily white people outside the District into Maryland and Virginia where the schools were by and large still segregated in spite of the '54 decision. And the District began to become browner and browner and browner and at the same time the laws were still in place for integrated facilities. However, the practice was pretty much the same as before 1954. The law had changed but the customs hadn't changed and the practices hadn't change. And in fact you could go just a few blocks from here if you know where Glen Echo is. Glen Echo was like lower Mississippi. If you wanted to go to the beach, if you were, if you look like me, you wouldn't dare trying to go out to Ocean City or you couldn't go if you went across that 14th Street Bridge, it was like Greenwood, Mississippi all over again not very different at all. I don't recall anybody being lynched across the 14th Street Bridge but lynched mentally, yes. On several, that was the standard bill of fare. So, the difference between I would say the District and North and South Carolina and Virginia is that the District didn't have signs. It had customs and it had ways of doing things. North and South Carolina and Virginia still had the signs. So, in effect black folk felt the same pressures, suffered the same indignities and it wasn't terribly different.

CW = So, moving forward toward February 1st, 1960 you know you have said I mean in essence you saw through segregation in some ways that there were rules but for instance at Woolworth's they would serve you in certain areas in the store and they wouldn't serve you at the lunch counter. So, even as children and certainly as high school students it seems that you saw that these rules didn't make a lot of sense and started thinking of ways in which you know in which you could resist against them. Is that true?

JM = It was true I think throughout or country. I think young people particularly resented racial segregation and racial injustice and we were constantly in our minds seeking ways where we could stand up for our manhood as we approached our rights of passage. It was time for us to stand up. If we didn't do this then we were deferring it for some future generation to have to do. So, we were constantly trying to figure out ways where we can stand up that we can make a statement. There are some things in life that

are important enough that you might want to put your life on the line for and racial segregation was that kind of thing. It was so important to us as young men to not be afraid but to stand up and to fight and even though that fight was nonviolent it still had to be waged. And what was particularly impressive to me was how thousands of people all around our country from every racial makeup, from every religious background found ways to come together and to carry this fight on as one. We could have never pulled it off. One person could never have done what we did. Four people, we had a fighting chance of doing it. Once we became 16 and 63 and 125 and then thousands, we were unstoppable. So, we had to, it was an imperative that we come forward.

FM = I, Chris I concluded early on that there's certain things that a man simply can't live without. And one is manhood the other is dignity and the other is self-respect. And if you can't have those things to, first of all it makes you truly a slave and it makes you a slave really without any even a modicum of dignity. I think that the grave holds some relief. That was my thinking as a very young boy. The grave might not be so bad considering what this life is all about and what it has to offer me at this stage in my life. And I thought secondarily about it well, there is one way out. But I'm not so sure that it isn't semi-cowardice to do that because then you only get relief for one person and not only that you cut your own life short and you never have the opportunity to express and to do those kinds of things that you were probably predestined to do or you're really born to do. And you also let other folk down when you take the shortcut and the coward's way out. So, you, I got to the point where I knew that I had to make a difference for in the life of Franklin McCain because I was determined to be a full and a fully respected man and human being.

XC = Jibreel I wonder if you might take us through the night before. You know so we've heard that you guys would stay up all night talking and what you called "bull sessions." And talked about you know okay, what, how can you take this great step. Can you take us through your thoughts right before February 1st?

JK = Well, that evening I was in the dormitory studying hard to pass the exam for my architecture engineering courses of which I was not doing so well. I was going down,

down, down to the ground. And Joseph would say, "In another month or so you're going to be carrying a 20 pound rifle on your shoulder. Like those guys, ants marching around the bedpost." [Them boys were marching around the bedpost they were marching.] I said, "Joe, man don't say that to me. I need hope and help. That's why I moved in with you." I figure his smartness would rub off on me. And of course, Franklin was originally, the original Big Daddy Cain. He was tall, handsome, smart thinking, slow to make a decision but when he did watch out, the hammer fell on you. So, David Richmond he was cool, calm, and collected. [Three cool cats, yeah.] I wanted to hang out with these cats, meow. And I was studying, there was this knock on the door. My mother said, "Always knock on the door before you go in." "Even to my dormitory room?" "Yes, because somebody else may be sleeping in your bed." "Oh, thanks okay." "Hey, E.Z." I didn't look up. I sensed trouble was coming. "Don't come in." Here come Frank. Here come David. "Yeah, man, we're all ready for tomorrow." Joe said, "Hey, what's up E.Z.?" "Wake up man, I'm studying Joe man. I got a hard way to go." He says, "You're ready to go down for tomorrow?" "Tomorrow, what's happening tomorrow?" "We're going down awhile man you know have this sit down at Woolworth's." He looks at Frank and says, "Hey, big daddy Frank are you chicken?" Frank says, "No man, I ain't chicken." The look at David Richmond, David's doing his grasshopper, he was a high jump champion. David was always jumping and doing his exercising even while he is standing still, "Hopper grass." "Yeah." "Are you chicken?" "No man, I ain't chicken." Then these guys went around the cadaver think you're looking at something under the microscope. "Hmm, where did this creature? E.Z. are you chicken." I'm looking down and look up, I said, "I'm, hey guys listen man, I don't think I can do this I just you know I can't." Well I felt a couple of arms holding me down. "I got to go to the bathroom." Oh, can't get up and move, feet don't fail me now. I was figuring I said, "Listen, I got to use the toilet. Then I'll come back and I'll make a decision." See you always supposed to wet before you forget. So I figure if I go across the hall go to the bathroom, I would escape these guys and jump three steps I would be off the second floor out the front door and bust a 5-minute mile which I could never do in high school and be three miles at home in about 15 minutes. It didn't happen like that. And so, the guys held me and said, "You're not going anywhere. We're going to vote on this." I said, "Okay." They voted 3 to 1 in a democratic way and I was the

oddball out. Have you ever been the oddball out? It's like always as, how come the white ball stayed on the pool table and the black ball always went into the hole first? I was the goofball. And so, the guys said, "Well, we voted you got to go down tomorrow." I said, "Can I get out of this." "No." So I figured the Ace in the Hole I'm going to call mom and dad because you don't do anything without talking to your mom and dad first. After all, "Who's your mother?" "You are." "You are going to do what I tell you to do?" "Yes, mother." "Mother's always right." "Yeah, ma you're always right." "Okay." My wife says that now. "Yes, dear you're always right." Anyway, so we got a cab or drove out there and I walked in the house and said, "Ma, what do you think we're going to do tomorrow? We're going to do something and shake up Greensboro." She said, "Well, hold it, what are you talking about?" So we explained to her we're going to be nonviolent. We have a nonviolent protest. Nonviolent insistence on equal rights at Woolworth lunch counter. It was the people's store Joe said. And Franklin said he made a down payment on his manhood. And David Richmond said, "Hey, let's do it." [Do it, do it, do it when you can whatever it is. Do it, do it when you can.] Oh sorry, I thought I was back in the dormitory. Anyway so my mother said, "Okay, you two guys are talking about doing something like this can either make you or break you. And not only you all you are representing yourself you represent: our families, our community, our church, you know our city. If you all go on and do and say the wrong thing, all the colored people in this city are going to be in trouble. Plus, those of us who are here may lose our jobs. The Klan definitely may come into the city and do harm to a lot of colored folk. Do you want that?" Oh man got me sweating. We said, "No." She said, "Well, you have my blessings." No, this is not what I wanted. I didn't want to go at all. The real truth is my roommate tried to kill me two months before we did this. Wasn't Joe. The other roommate I had he was an athlete. He wanted to throw me off the second story window because he kept the window open in the dormitory at night and I was a nerd and he decided he was going to kill me if I pull the window down. So yeah, I didn't want to get killed twice when these guys were talking about social revolution. And that's what happened. We went back to the dorm but I didn't sleep a wink at all that night. That's the story.

CW = Well, did and let me ask this because you all talked about the anger that you felt when you were in segregation but then also you mentioned nonviolent. We're going to be nonviolent. Where did that come into play? How did you, how were you able to channel that anger and instead of going one way that many people would have and saying I'm going to do this violently. But the fact that you all were nonviolent, which is what's so profound and one of the things that we're celebrating today, how did that come into play? How were you able to go in that direction?

FM = When we say we were angry. We didn't hate or dislike anybody. We were angry with a system that had betrayed us, that did not hold its end of the bargain up. And we were out to attack the system. The way, operating under the very guise of nonviolence wasn't difficult at all. First of all, we were keenly aware of some of our heroes and their successes and how they were to make successes. Think about Gandhi for example: the little guy running around in a diaper in India saying that he's going to kick the British out of his country and gain independence and you know that he did. And you know that he did it without violence. He didn't believe in violence. And you also know that he gave his life for what he believed in. You also know that the Christ himself created one of the greatest revolutions that the world has ever known, whether you're a Christian or not you have to agree that he did it through nonviolence and that he was successful because we even talk about him today and even try to emulate and carry out his teachings. So, for effectiveness you gave him an A plus. We also knew that locally, we didn't have the numbers, even if you wanted to resort to violence, that played right into the hands of the opposition and that is something they knew how to contend with and they would out-violence you so to speak and you would summarily lose that battle right quick. If you were lucky enough you'd end up in a prison cell and not so lucky you'd pick your brains off the floor from wherever you started your violence. And we knew as well that practicing nonviolence we were likely to convince other people who were not directly involved with us. People who were of different races would see the purity of thought and deed that we were involved in and as good thinking people would have no choice but to be in sympathy with us and in some cases join us. So, it wasn't difficult at all to be nonviolent. Might be for some people when they spit on you when they, well call them an ugly name or a nasty name that was somewhat par for the course during the

'40s and '50s. We were pretty used to that, so. And occasionally someone spitting on you and people lighting cigarettes and putting them down your back and cutting your clothing and knocking you off stools. You expected that and what the opposition does not expect you to do when they hurl that kind of insult to you they don't expect you to sit there and take it. And when you do and just look at them, I mean they look at you as though you're from another planet or you're some kind of nut. But it disarms them and they don't continue to kick a source when it's on the ground so to speak and you win.

CW = That certainly turned into an effective tool and what I really would like to do next is get to some of the questions from the audience. I think we'll certainly get into some more elements of the sit-ins itself. Xavier is going to join us, join you in the audience with the microphone and please just raise your hand if you have questions that you'd like to.

XC = Anyone have a question. Don't be shy really. Right here, all right. What's your name?

P = Akeem Anderson.

XC = Okay, and what's your question?

P = Were you scared when you first, when you first wanted to sit down at the restaurant?

XC = Were you all frightened when you first got there, the first day?

FM = Oh no, we were not afraid. We particularly in the case of Franklin, I was too angry to be afraid. And if I were anything I had anxiety yes but that's not fear. My anxiety was for the unknown. What is going to happen today? That was my only concern and I knew that it was not going to be good whatever it was but I was fully prepared for it and prepared to pay the price.

XC = Do we have one right here?

P = My name is Makeba. Before I can you know ask a question I'm going to try to divert a little bit which will lead me back to my question. Okay, the Civil Rights was and still is something that we always value and appreciate in our society. In my understanding though, there came you know a long process with obtaining the Civil Rights. And that process from what I can tell, my conclusion was that some exchanges or even sacrifices had to be made. An example of that would be black people were willing to fight to the end you know to fight to the end even though you know they faced rejection, beatings, or even death by doing what was right. Considering the fact that you were aware of the danger you were putting yourself into and you know my question is what prompted you guys to want to go ahead anyway and stage you know the sit-in at the Woolworth store. That's the question.

JM = I would say life times of unfair treatment, of racial injustice, of horrible things that we were witness to. For example, the lynching of Emmett Till was so traumatic I mean it just filled my heart with so much sorrow that I sort of said to myself, "We cannot, we cannot ever, ever let this happen again." And it could happen to any of us. Any person of color caught in awkward situations in certain states could have been subject to what happened to Emmett Till. And so, this whole evil ended when we made up our mind to end it. And while we knew that this waiting would never bring about change. We had to act. We had to be defiant. To stand up and say these laws are unjust, separate is not equal. We're going to abate this unjust law. If the consequences are we're going to get our heads beaten in, then it's worth it. It matters enough to all of us to that generation, the generations before us, and the generations after, as Frank will say, our ancestors to all those folks it was on us to act and if not then, when? So it was imperative that we act. And in terms of fear, I will say I'll use the term uncertainty and the uncertainty was bound to exist with anybody. The question was not whether it existed but how we handle it when it occurred. We handled it very well. I saw women who were 90 pounds stand up against the Ku Klux Klan night after night, carry a picket sign, get cursed at, called all types of negative names: bitches, niggers. They used every term negative that they could to make these women stop picketing but it did not move them. They came

back time after time in harm's way and were some of the bravest people I've ever had an opportunity to live with.

XC = Amazing.

JM = So, when I hear the term fear used there are people who are six five, males 250 pounds who did not have the courage of some of those females.

CW = We have a question in from Live Chat now.

P = Okay, this question is from Arcomb's 9th Grade class in Buffalo, New York. Why that particular lunch counter, and what was your thinking about that particular location? Why did you choose it?

P = Go ahead man.

JM = One of the goals of the sit-in movement was to bring awareness to the world of the horrors and tragedy and unfairness of racial segregation. Woolworth's was a national chain store. It had stores in San Francisco; Portland, Oregon; Boston, Massachusetts; Montgomery, Alabama. It was everywhere. So, we hoped that people who lived in those various communities would see what we were doing in Greensboro and offer support to what we were trying to change, to spend their money at another store unless Woolworth's and these other national chains changed their policy. So, a national store was why we chose Woolworth's. Now all those other guys we had to take care of them too but it was one step at a time. Do the national guys and then we'll take on all the local guys.

FM = I'd add to that secondarily they were chosen because they represented a true dichotomy relative to how they treated their patrons. And that is, you could go to the Woolworth in New York City as a black person and shop at all 44 counters which included the lunch counter. If you were to come to a store represented by that same corporation, the Woolworth Corporation in Greensboro, North Carolina or Hyattsville,

Maryland, then you could shop at 43 out of 44 counters and that counter was off limits to you that is the lunch counter simply because you were black and no other reason. And we wanted to really show the hypocrisy of that corporation.

XC = Wasn't their slogan though "Everybody's store." Wasn't that one of the slogans that they had?

FM = Pardon.

XC = Wasn't one of their slogans "Everybody's store?"

FM = Oh yes, and we wanted to make it everybody's store.

JK = It wasn't the Soviet Union but they called it the "People's Store" also and since we were people we decided we owned this store. That's the next level. One important thing here was we talked about was being visible when we went down there. We determined that we would act in a particular manner, that we're being nonviolent. We were dressed neatly. You may have seen some people carrying Bibles down there at the lunch counter. I've seen some people with Bibles that had 10 pounds of dust on them. They hadn't read it but on the lunch counter, "Oh these children are so righteous. They got the Holy Bible down there." During the engineering exam, I don't know if that works but we had the help of the news media. Now the news media is the reason why this movement spread because with the introduction of television starting in 1951, of course you can see from me that I was a Howdy Doody fan number one. I saw all this stuff on television like Gandhi, 20th Century who was charged by Walter Cronkite when I was 14 years old. And we saw Dr. King and Mrs. Rosa Parks and others on television acting out the movement in Montgomery, Alabama and then the Little Rock nine students in Little Rock in 1956. The news media began to carry these actions live. They didn't censor stuff like they're doing now like you probably see me censored tonight at 12 o'clock. [Please don't look at him because the children may have nightmares], you know. But news media is like the fourth part of our government. You must treat them very good give them coffee and cake, give them more money because if you don't your image will

be terribly presented. So, that's why we did it. We studied what Dr. King and others had done with the technique of news media. When people saw us neatly dressed sitting at the lunch counters doing our homework, slide rule. I got kicked out of my trigonometry class; Frank and Joe stayed. But anyway they said, "My God, these Negroes, these colored people are scholars." The Caucasian guys that came in were dressed somewhat like ducktails; they had chains on them, "We're going to kill us some niggers and everything." To me the Caucasian people said, "Oh, that's not the image we want the Caucasian community be represented by." So many of these people who normally would not do anything came to our aid because they did not want their community to be represented in a negative way. [No, those white people do not represent us. We are the people who run this city and we want this city to have a good image,] see. The other thing was too, psychologically if the City of Greensboro would say was very good as Franklin said had a lot of negative things underneath the surface but the sit-in movement brought all these things to the surface and any town any place in the country. So, the leadership had to sit down and say, "Wait a minute we have R.J. Salem Cigarette Company here. We don't want to have this city being viewed in a negative light because we may lose commerce and trade." You understand? So, the sit-in movement is more than just colored folks and Negroes and people sitting in. It was about the entire spectrum of a people of a city, of a state, of a country, of the nation. You understand. Plus the '60s were the beginning of independence of African countries and other countries in Latin America and Asia. They were looking toward America for the right image.

CW = Okay let me also say to our audience now we do have microphones on both sides so if you have something to say just head up to the microphone. Looks like we've got something over here.

XC = Yes, we do.

P = I'm Clara Benjamin and in the video it stated that you all said that the next day that you went back to Woolworth no one else joined you from your college campus. I was

just wondering how did you feel when you realized that no one else came to join your sit-in protest immediately after it happened.

FM = Someone did join us on the second day. There happened to be two colleagues whom we met as we left the meeting with the student leaders and we just said to them casually what we had accomplished and invited them to come in and support us the second day. Now they were the individuals who did come the second day at noon for the lunch hour and in the late afternoon, we were joined by some 12 to 16 other people but who did not come during the lunch hour.

XC = Excellent, we've got another question from e-mail now.

P = This question is from Aurora and Morgan in Susquanita Middle School in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. They asked, did you know any of the segregationists who opposed you while you were at Woolworth's? Were you friends with any of them and did any of them apologize later?

FM = Yes, we did know a lot of the segregationists. We knew by deed and by reading the head of the Ku Klux Klan locally, as well as in the state and in the nation. And we knew the names and the personalities of all the subversive groups who were directly opposed to the rights of African Americans. I don't recall any of the adversaries apologizing or joining us subsequent to February the 1st or even during 1962 and 1963.

XC = Does someone have a question down here down front? I saw a lot of hands. What's your name?

P = Jamal.

XC = Jamal what's your question?

P = How did you feel clean when you sat on the bench thing at the counter?

XC = How did they feel?

XC = Explain.

FM = Yes, how did I feel clean. Well, not the clean that you normally think about when you go to take a nice shower. I was always clean. But I felt clean because I thought that in my own soul there were things that perhaps I had not done for myself to feel good about me. Things that I was in control of to feel better about Franklin McCain I had pushed them in the back or just not done them. And I thought after I sat and after I showed defiance and broke a bad custom I thought that that was the beginning of the right kind of thing to do. And all of those sins of omission that I had done in the past was suddenly starting to come off me, come out of my mind, come off my shoulders and not be a real burden to me anymore. So, I felt, "Hey, I am cleaning myself of all this old baggage, of all these old thoughts, all these old concerns. They're coming off. So, I'm cleaning up."

JK = We say, "Oh, happy day when Jesus comes wash our sins away. Oh, happy day."

XC= We have another one on this side. Say your name.

P = My name is Savan.

XC = You have to speak really close.

P = My name is Savan Copely and I wanted to ask you, were you fighting for like black rights or were you fighting for like equal, for equality.

XC = So just for black rights or for equal rights for everyone in there.

FM = We were fighting for human rights.

P = Yeah.

FM = And that included everybody.

CW = Great, I do want to get through as many of our questions as we can in the short time that we have left. So, let's move to our next question.

XC = All right here on the side. Go ahead.

P = Okay I'm Leah Hammond and while other people who were searching for the same sort of justice were using means of violence and other methods, what did you think that you guys did you have any doubts ever that you would accomplish anything by simply sitting down?

FM = Simply sitting down we thought was a way it was passive resistance and it was a kind of fighting back that people weren't used to nor did they have a defense for and it was frustrating to them and it was victorious for and to us. It was a surprise.

JK = To the concept, you've probably seen Kung Fu, is about mental over physical. And so, what happened to foster nonviolent resistance to evil is based upon the concept of to trip the opposing force, to redirect it. And the people who were using violence were confused because naturally you're supposed to defend yourself or attack your attacker. Like when everyone is born in the world they used to smack you on the butt and you breathed in. My teacher Dr. Wendy Ambunboa from Nigeria said when we're brought into this world we're born into a violent world. And every created being whether it be a human being or a gnat or fly wants to survive. So when it's attacked it's going to attack back for their survival for the law of the jungle is according to Mowgli, the jungle boy, is, "You only kill to eat or keep from being eaten. Do you understand?" Okay, so that is a natural thing no organism wants to die.

XC = Okay let's.

XC = We have another e-, we have a question from e-mail now.

P = This question is from Catie R. in Galveston Independent School District in Texas. She asks, what suggestions do you have for young African American students today when they feel that they are discriminated against. How would you handle it?

XC = That's a great question.

XC = Yeah, sure.

JM= I would say, first of all we should all be respectful. Respect starts with ourselves and how we project to others but pride and self-respect is so important. And then the next thing is to be respectful to others. When you sense that you are being treated differently based on your race, it is so important to speak up and share your views, share your perspective. We need to communicate. Today, it's different. We don't go to the streets and march like we used to. There are laws on the books that say that racial discrimination is against the law so we ought to take advantage of those remedies where they exist and use the law to preserve and defend our constitutional rights that we fought so hard to make sure that we have. So, let's never give up. Let's take on, like Dr. King said, "Injustice anywhere is justice everywhere." So, things that happen in our community, in our schools and our churches, in our world we all ought to be concerned about.

FM = I might add also that people who observe people being discriminated against have a responsibility as well. You even if you're not being discriminated against, you are obligated as a fellow human being to stand up, point it out, and help to seek relief for that person or persons who are being discriminated against, that is your responsibility as a decent human being.

JK = Okay also, I would like to add that we must be ever vigilant to protect the rights of ourselves as well as others. Going back to the Great Commandment of Yeshua Hamashiach called Jesus Christ who said, "A new commandment I give unto you that you love," meaning respect, "one another by this shall all man," meaning minds, "know

that you are my disciples if we have love and respect one for another.” “Who is my neighbor? Well, my neighbor is myself.” Life consciousness is not owned by any of us. Think about who your neighbor is. Everyone has life consciousness in and out of this room is really our neighbor. When the body goes, the life consciousness what you call me and you and I returns to its source. We are all our neighbor. You got it?

XC = All right, well.

JK = That’s science.

WC = That’s all the time we have for now with questions everyone. We want to thank everyone. Please give yourselves a big hand. Thank you so much.

XC = There’s one more thing we’d like to do. We started this program or the interview part of this program with a song, the song “Fighting for My Rights,” the freedom song. We have talked a bit about the, how students changed the civil rights movement. One of the ways that they did was inventing a new use for music during the movement. Music was an incredibly powerful tool during the civil rights movement just as nonviolence was and it really worked along with the nonviolent tactics that these gentlemen practiced. So we wanted to end this program with the anthem of the civil rights movement the song “We Shall Overcome.” Xavier is going to lead us in that.

WC = Okay, everybody stand up. Come on stand up. Everyone together and join hands with the person next to you if you will. All right, is everybody ready? All right, yes join hands and let’s sing “We Shall Overcome.”

We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome some day. Oh, deep in my heart I do believe we shall overcome some day.

Yes, we’ll walk hand in hand. We’ll walk hand in hand. We’ll walk hand in hand. We’ll hand in hand some day. Oh, deep in my heart I do believe we shall overcome some day.

Excellent everyone once again, we shall

P = overcome. We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome some day.

XC = Deep in my heart,

P = Deep in my heart,

XC = I do believe

P = I do believe

XC = that we shall overcome some day.

Excellent, let's give a hand to our guests our esteemed guests.

WC = Again, thank you for coming. I'm going to ask our ushers to help us exit from the auditorium and I will release, ask the schools to leave by name. We will be heading up, the gentlemen will be heading upstairs to the Greensboro lunch counter. You can take photos up there and get to talk with them a little bit more. Okay and please, keep your classes together. Kim. We're going to start moving from the back. The ushers will head us out from the back, thank you.