PUBLIC LIBRARY DESEGREGATION IN JIM CROW SOUTH

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Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor: it must be demanded by the oppressed.

Photo Credit: Wiki Commons
MLK Jr being arrested
THESIS PROPOSAL

HOW DID NON-VIOLENT PROTEST FOSTER PUBLIC LIBRARY DESEGREGATION IN JIM CROW SOUTH DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA OF THE 1960s?
OVERVIEW

• During the civil rights era, public libraries were targets of sit-ins as a form of non-violent protest against unequal access.

• *Separate but Equal* policy is seen as the antithesis of what a public library should be -- a place for free access to knowledge for all.

• Public Libraries as symbol of the state.

• Public Library as symbol of democracy and opportunity for all.

• The simple action of reading a book in a public space is seen as an act of rebellion.
JIM CROW SOUTH

- Jim Crow was a derisive slang term for a black man.
- It came to mean any law passed in the South that established different rules for blacks and whites.
- Jim Crow Laws were based on the theory of white supremacy and were a reaction to Reconstruction, the rebuilding of the U.S. following the end of the Civil War.
- Jim Crow Laws touched every part of life – schools, colleges, hospitals, restaurants, public restrooms, public transport, public libraries, etc.

- Segregation was so complete that whites did not see blacks except when being served by them.

Reference: Constitutional Rights Foundation
SEPARATE BUT EQUAL

Definition: Pertaining to a racial policy by which blacks could be segregated if granted equal opportunities and facilities.

• Phrase used to support principle of segregation in southern US states.
• Based on 1896 US Supreme Court decision that stated segregation was legal provided separate facilities for black people were equal to those for white people.
• During 1960s civil rights movement, African-Americans protested and publicly opposed the fact they were treated as second-class citizens, even though they allegedly had the same rights to freedom and liberty that white Americans enjoyed.
“COLORED” DRINKING FOUNTAIN
DESEGREGATION

Definition: to free of any law, provision, or practice, requiring isolation of the members of a particular race in separate units.

- One way to advocate for desegregation was NON-VIOLENT SIT-INS
**SIT-IN MOVEMENT**

- **1960**

- **THE GREENSBORO FOUR**
  - Greensboro, North Carolina. Woolworth Department Store.
  - FOUR African-American college students sit-in at a whites-only lunch counter and ask for coffee.
  - Refused service, they patiently wait, suffering threats and intimidation from white bystanders.
  - The four return to protest every day for five months until Woolworth’s agrees to serve black customers at its lunch counter.
  - The sit-in movement had begun.
GREENSBORO FOUR

A&T Students Launch ‘Sit Down’ Demand For Service At Downtown Lunch Counter

Woolworth Made Target For Demonstration Here

BY MARVIN SYKES
Record Staff Writer

A group of 20 Negro students from A&T College occupied lunchroom counter seats, without being served, at the downtown F. W. Woolworth Co. store late this morning—starting what they declared would be a growing movement.

The group declared double that number will take places at the counters tomorrow.

Employees of Woolworth did not serve the group and they sat from 10:30 a.m., until after noon. While customers continued to sit and get service.

Clarence Harris, Woolworth manager, replied “No comment” to all questions concerning the “sit-down” move against Woolworth custom, and about what he planned to do.

Today’s 20-man action followed appearance at 4:30 p.m. yesterday of four freshmen from Scott Hall at A&T who sat down and stayed, without service, until the store closed at 5:30 p.m.

Student spokesmen said they are seeking lunchroom counter service, and will increase their numbers daily until they get it.

Today’s group came at 10:30 a.m. Each made a small purchase one counter over from the lunchroom counter, then sat in groups of three or four as spaces allowed.
WOOLWORTHS LUNCH COUNTER

PHOTO CREDIT: SMITHSONIAN
NON-VIOLENT LIBRARY SIT-INS TIMELINE

1960 Petersburg, Virginia. First library sit-in. 11 arrested.

1960 Danville Public Library, Virginia. Closed by court order after denying entry to 5 African-Americans. Blacks-Only Reading Room established but has no tables or chairs to discourage use of library.

1963 Anniston, Alabama. Two young African-American Ministers are attacked by an all-white mob applying for library cards.

1966 *Brown v Louisiana*. United States Supreme Court rules 5 African-American demonstrators arrested during a sit-in at Audubon Regional Library, Clinton, Louisiana, should not be charged with disturbing the peace. This is the only library segregation case argued in the courts history.
PUBLIC LIBRARY SIT-INS

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

ELIZA ATKINS GLEASON

• First African-American to receive doctorate in Library Science.

• Ph.D dissertation of 1941 –

  *The Southern Negro and the Public Library: A Study of the Government and Administration of Public Library Service to Negros in the South.*

• Public Libraries non-existent to blacks until early 20th Century.

• Black Colleges served as community centers making library services available to locals.

• African-Americans in South organized own lending libraries under threat of physical harm from local whites.
KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Supreme Court Case

Brown v Louisiana

Argued: December 6th, 1965

Decided: February 23rd, 1966

• Five African-American demonstrators arrested at sit-in at Audubon Regional Library should not be charged with disturbing the peace.

• Mr. Justice Fortas, the presiding ruling judge, stated that the regulation of libraries and other public facilities must be reasonable and nondiscriminatory and may not be used as a pretext for punishing those who exercise their constitutional rights.
KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

FREEDOM LIBRARIES

- **1964** Mississippi. 25 freedom libraries established by a group of librarian volunteers.
- Part of *FREEDOM SUMMER PROJECT* designed to aid in the effort to secure voting rights and other services for African-Americans.
- Housed in churches and old buildings.
- Provided library services and literacy guidance to African-Americans.
FREEDOM HOUSE LIBRARY
CLARKSDALE, MISSISSIPPI
SEPTEMBER 1964

Photo Credit: McCain Library & Archives, University of Southern Mississippi
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Historical Method

- *Three Criteria of Historical Study by Dan Ostrowski*
- Scholarly study
- Collect Evidence
- Analyze it – arguments and interpretations about it
- Reach own conclusion
- Important: Just because someone says they are an authority on something doesn’t mean it is so. Pay attention to when scholarly work was published, the political climate of the time.
DATA GATHERING PROTOCOL

- Case Studies
- Supreme Court Case
- Newspapers from period
- Photographs from period
- Oral history – if any?

PROS
- Not a subject heavily researched

CONS
- Lack of sources
- Difficult to locate sources
- Time consuming
- Be mindful of author of source – fabricated research, interpretation