

Austin, TX, U.S. students sit-in for desegregated lunch counters (Austin Movement), 1959-1961

- [U.S. Civil Rights Movement \(1950s-1960s\)](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [2]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) student participants](#) [3]
- [local community or neighborhood-level campaign](#) [4]

- [U.S. Civil Rights Movement \(1950s-1960s\)](#)

Timing

Time period notes:

There were scattered sit-in incidents beginning in spring 1959, but the campaign begins focus on lunch counters in April 1960. End date is unclear; a "second phase" of direct action toward desegregating Austin movie theaters was launched on Feb. 1, 1961 which seems to end the focus on desegregating lunch counters.

April

1959

to:

March

1961

Location and Goals

Country:

United States

Location City/State/Province:

Austin, Texas

Location Description:

On and around the campus of University of Texas. Sit-ins occurred at lunch counters in Austin, primarily on or near to Congress Ave.

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

Desegregation of lunch counters in Austin, Texas. In September 1960, Suzy Young, chair of University of Texas-Y's Race Relations Committee states the goal to "aid all students in gaining their just rights in the University community."

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support>Student groups sent a letter to Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson asking him to use his resources (newsletter, television station) to promote their cause.
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 016. Picketing>Students marched and displayed signs on the street outside lunch counters in Austin.
- 162. Sit-in
- 189. Selective patronage>Students groups incorporated integration into the criteria for their "Steer Here" ratings.

Methods in 4th segment:

- 162. Sit-in
- 189. Selective patronage>Students groups incorporated integration into the criteria for their "Steer Here" ratings.

Methods in 5th segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books>URC (University Religious Council) distributed leaflets for restaurant patrons to give to cashiers that stated "I will continue to patronize this establishment if it is integrated." Also Method 189, Selective Patronage.
- 162. Sit-in
- 189. Selective patronage>Students for Direct Action encouraged people to "patronize at least one integrated restaurant per week."
- 189. Selective patronage>Students groups incorporated integration into the criteria for their "Steer Here" ratings.

Methods in 6th segment:

- 162. Sit-in
- 189. Selective patronage>Students for Direct Action encouraged people to "patronize at least one integrated restaurant per week."
- 189. Selective patronage>Students groups incorporated integration into the criteria for their "Steer Here" ratings.

Segment Length:

Approximately 4 months

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Interracial college and seminary students in the Austin area

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

William Clebsch, professor of history at Austin Episcopal Seminary.

Casey Hayden, student activist (part of University of Texas's Student Assembly Human Relations Committee and later Students for Direct Action).

Houston Wade (Students for Direct Action).

Chandler Davidson (Students for Direct Action, wrote column criticizing segregation called The Jabberwock for The Texan, a newspaper).

Partners:

University Religious Council of University of Texas, student groups from University of Texas, St. Edwards University, Huston-Tillotson College, and Austin's Presbyterian and Episcopal seminaries

External allies:

University of Texas Young Democrats, "biracial action group" including Austin mayor Tom Miller and former Texas Supreme Court Associate Justice W. St. John Garwood (chair), Austin Human Relations Commission, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, University of Texas Y, University of Texas's Student Assembly (SA) Human Relations Committee,

Involvement of social elites:

"Biracial action group" including Austin mayor Tom Miller and former Texas Supreme Court Associate Justice W. St. John Garwood (chair)

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Austin Human Relations Commission
- Student Assembly of UT
- student groups from area universities and seminaries

Groups in 4th Segment:

- biracial action group

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Students for Direct Action

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

Approximately 4 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Lunch counter owners, citizens in Austin supportive of segregation

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Total points:

8 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The movement reoriented itself to focus on desegregating Austin area movie theaters in February 1961, staging stand-ins and demonstrations.

The University of Texas admitted black graduate students in 1955 and undergraduate students in 1956, but conditions on campus remained unequal. Admission was limited to an educationally elite section of black students. Facilities, such as dorms, were still segregated and of worse quality than the equivalent dorms for white students. Black students were not allowed to participate in athletics or drama. Protests emerged in the early 1960's to improve these conditions, but after 3 days of picketing, students decided to focus on other ways of addressing discrimination.

The movement to integrate lunch counters in Austin took the momentum of the on-campus anti-discrimination efforts and began with isolated incidents involving only a few students. In spring of 1959, an activist and two black University of Texas students sat in a café without being served. These occasional sit-ins continued through April 1959 at different Austin restaurants without much success, but the participants began to call themselves "the fellowship of sitters." Austin student and activist groups openly stated support for the protests. In January 1960 the UT Student Assembly developed a rating system for local restaurants which took integration into account, so that restaurants that were integrated received a higher number of points (up to 100) and a "Steer Here" classification.

After the February 1, 1960 student lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, NC, the focus on lunch counters increased considerably. The resulting efforts in Austin and elsewhere were a part of the nation-wide sit-in/direct action movement that occurred in 1960. In April 1960, the Austin Committee on Human Relations hosted a meeting between student groups from UT, Huston-Tillotson College, and Presbyterian and Episcopalian seminary students (more than 80% of students in attendance were black) and lunch counter owners, which the students considered unsuccessful.

The student protestors, after this meeting with lunch counter owners, issued an ultimatum that, unless the counters were integrated within a week, the students would resort to other methods to "present the problem

effectively and to find a satisfactory solution." With no action from the owners, students took action. Groups from the University of Texas, St. Edwards University, Huston-Tillotson College, and students from the Presbyterian and Episcopal seminaries in Austin picketed on Congress Ave. in Austin with signs protesting the segregation of the restaurants in the area. It should be noted that the students always protested in integrated groups both to protect black students and to "practice what they preached."

The first large sit-in occurred on April 29, 1960. Between seventy-five and one hundred students occupied seven lunch counters in Austin. Most lunch counter owners ended up shutting down in response. Sit-ins continued throughout April and May. A few lunch counters (Bray and Jordan pharmacies) stated that they would serve all customers. Student groups also sent a letter to then-Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson asking him to use his influence and resources to add strength and awareness to their campaign.

The mayor of Austin Tom Miller and a former Texas Supreme Court Associate Justice formed a "biracial action group" with other community leaders to address desegregation of lunch counters. This group had some success in procuring service for black individuals. By mid-May, thirty-two lunch counters had desegregated, the situation was assessed as stable and the group disbanded.

In November 1960, Students for Direct Action formed. This student group intentionally did not have ties to the University of Texas so that they were able to act in the way that they saw fit. Chaired by Chandler Davidson and involving other experienced activists such as Casey Hayden, who had taken part in other groups and efforts, the group's first action was to petition students to "patronize at least one integrated restaurant per week." Also in November, students in the University Religious Council handed out cards printed with the statement "I will continue to patronize this establishment if it is integrated" to patrons of segregated restaurants encouraging them to give them to the cashiers. This would indicate support of integration to restaurant owners. They handed out 3,800 cards in less than a month.??

Sit-ins continued, but the focus of the campaign began to shift toward integrating Austin-area movie theaters, prompted by leaders like Casey Hayden after she attended the Southern Student Leader Seminar in summer of 1960. On February 1, 1961, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee decided to start a "second phase" of direct action focusing on movie theaters. Protests, generally stand-ins, began at movie theaters in December. A date of complete desegregation of lunch counters is unclear.

Research Notes

Influences:

The sit-in campaign in Austin was influenced by the nationwide movement of sit-ins beginning on February 1, 1960, in Greensboro, NC. (1)

Sources:

Kulhman, Martin. Direct Action at the University of Texas during the Civil Rights Movement, 1960-1965. The Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Vol. 98, No. 4 (Apr., 1995), pp. 550-566.

Oppenheimer, Martin and David J. Garrow. The Sit-In Moment of 1960. Brooklyn, N.Y. Carlson Pub. 1989, 1963.

Rossinow, Douglas C. The politics of authenticity: liberalism, Christianity, and the new left in America. New York. Columbia University Press, 1998.

Email correspondence with Casey Hayden. 14 September 2012

Additional Notes:

The article "Direct Action at the University of Texas during the Civil Rights Movement, 1960-1965" by Martin Kuhlman lists a 1952 case in which Sam Gibbs, a graduate student at UT, wrote letters to fifty-three restaurants, asking for integration. The researcher could not find any substantive change resulting from this action.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Lekey Leidecker, 16/09/2012

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