



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Baltimore, MD, students sit-in to integrate Read's drug stores, USA, 1955

- U.S. Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1960s)

January 20,  
1955

to: January 20,  
1955

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** *Baltimore, Maryland*

**Location Description:** *Read's drug stores*

**Goals:**

To desegregate Read's drug stores which had been denying lunch counter service to African Americans.

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 162. Sit-in

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

**Methods in 4th segment:**

**Methods in 5th segment:**

**Methods in 6th segment:**

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › demonstration outside of the store
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Notes on Methods:**

Students also held a week-long demonstration at the same time as the sit-in at a Read's drug store nearby in Northwood Shopping Center, but little has been reported about these demonstrations or the methods used. Most likely more methods were used than reported here.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

**Group characterization:**

- African-American students
- a group of social activists fighting for civil liberties

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Ben Everingham (leader of Baltimore CORE), Dean McQuay Kiah, and Dr.Helen Hicks (of Morgan State)

**Partners:**

Student activists from Morgan State University, Baltimore chapter of CORE

**External allies:**

Not known

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Baltimore CORE
- Morgan State College students

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 1 hour*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Read's drug store chain

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

Not known

**Repressive Violence:**

Not known

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

Read's Drug Store announced they would desegregate lunch counters on January 22, 1955. Morgan State College student activists would stay active in the civil rights movement and stage many other sit-ins and protests to desegregate local businesses. The CORE would also become a pivotal organization for African-Americans in the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

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A Read's Drug Store was built at the corner of Howard and Lexington Streets in 1934, when it was first praised as a local landmark and the modern flagship store for the chain. The store was located at the center of the downtown shopping district and the business grew as Read's drug store expanded throughout downtown Baltimore and surrounding regions.

Read's, as well as many of the other downtown businesses in the early 1950s, had a policy of racial segregation at its lunch counters. African-Americans could buy products from the store but they were not allowed service or a place to sit at the lunch counters. However, people were becoming discontent with the institutionalized policies of racial segregation and discrimination in Baltimore businesses. In 1955, a year after the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, there was widespread talk of civil rights liberties and desegregation.

This became an issue especially for faculty and students at the nearby Morgan State College, which had a predominantly black student body. A group of Morgan State College student activists were denied service at a nearby Read's Drug Store in Northwood Shopping Center, and they decided to work together with the Baltimore chapter of CORE (Committee on Racial Equality) to integrate the drug store.

CORE was a group of civil rights activists originally established in 1942 in Chicago. The organization grew rapidly during the American Civil Rights Movement and would become an important group in other civil rights campaigns in the 1960s. The Baltimore chapter of CORE began in 1952, and was headed by Ben Everingham, originally a history teacher at Edmondson High School.

CORE conducted many successful campaigns to desegregate the lunch counters of K-mart (then called Kresage) and other chain stores in the Baltimore area. In 1954, the group held protests at Grant's chains stockholder meetings and flagship stores and managed to desegregate many of the Border-South outlets. Thus, the students at Morgan State resolved to work with CORE to integrate Read's drug store.

On January 20, 1955, a group of student activists from Morgan State and CORE staged a "sit-in" at the Read's central Howard and Lexington location at the same time another group of Morgan State students held a week-long demonstration at the nearby Read's in Northwood Shopping Center, although not much has been reported on this campaign or the methods used. The sit-in was led by Ben Everingham, Dean McQuay Kiah and Dr. Helena Hicks of Morgan State, and other students who came to sit at the Read's lunch counters to demand service.

The sit-in lasted for less than half an hour before the students left voluntarily. The peace was not disturbed and none of the protesters were arrested. However, the students were also denied service at Read's during the sit-in. Students organized other protests at the same time at several Read's branches in the area.

This effort led to quick results. Read's was hurt by the lost business from the sit-in and related protests and quickly declared that it would desegregate the lunch counters. On January 22, the headline of Afro American was "Now Serve All", and the article quoted Read's President Arthur Nattans Sr. saying, "We will serve all customers throughout our entire stores, including the fountains, and this becomes effective immediately".

The Baltimore sit-in at Read's predated the more famous sit-in in Greensboro, NC that took place in 1960 (see "Greensboro, NC, students sit-in for U.S. Civil Rights, 1960"), and served as a model for sit-in movements during the Civil Rights Era that many campuses used to protest segregation. In Baltimore, Morgan State College students would stay active in the civil rights movement and later organize more sit-ins and protests to integrate businesses downtown with CIG (Civil Interest Group).

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The use of the sit-in strategy to protest segregation at lunch counters influenced the well-known sit-ins that occurred at Greensboro, NC in 1960 (see "Greensboro, NC, students sit-in for U.S. Civil Rights, 1960")(2).

### Sources:

"Baltimore Sit-In Victory." Civil Rights Movement Veterans. Webspinner, 2009. Web. 11 Sept. 2011.  
<<http://www.crmvet.org/tim/timhis55.htm#1955balt>>.

Gunts, Edward. "Read's Drugstore Flap brings Baltimore Civil Rights History to Life." The Baltimore Sun 8 Feb. 2011: n. pag. The Baltimore Sun. Web. 11 Sept. 2011.<[http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-02-08/business/bs-bz-reads-sit-in-20110201\\_1\\_civil-rights-rosa-parks-baltimore-heritage](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-02-08/business/bs-bz-reads-sit-in-20110201_1_civil-rights-rosa-parks-baltimore-heritage)>.

Pousson, Eli. "Why the West Side Matters: Read's Drug Store and Baltimore's Civil Rights Heritage." Baltimore Heritage. N.p., 7 Jan. 2011. Web. 11 Sept. 2011.<<http://www.baltimoreheritage.org/2011/01/why-the-west-side-matters-reads-drug-store-and-baltimores-civil-rights-heritage/>>.

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

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