



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Rock Hill, South Carolina, students sit-in for U.S. civil rights, 1960

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

12 February

1960

to: March

1961

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** *Rock Hill, South Carolina*

### Goals:

"[African-Americans] just want to be able to sit down and have a cup of coffee like other customers," said Clyde Williams, Jr. who was a leader of the sit-in movement in Charlotte. Friendship College President James H. Goudlock wrote that the fight against segregation took "root in the Negroes' insatiable hunger and thirst for first-class citizenship, a chance to live and grow as free human beings."

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 048. Protest meetings
- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 3rd segment:

### Methods in 4th segment:

- 090. Revenue refusal › Refusal to pay bail
- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 5th segment:

- 090. Revenue refusal › Refusal to pay bail
- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 016. Picketing
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 042. Motorcades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 090. Revenue refusal › Refusal to pay bail
- 162. Sit-in
- 167. Pray-in

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 063. Social disobedience
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 195. Seeking imprisonment

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- students

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Leroy Johnson, student spokesperson; Rev. Cecil Ivory, president of the local NAACP; Thomas Gaither, CORE organizer

**Partners:**

Ernest A. Finney, attorney; CORE

**External allies:**

Raymond H. Jackson, dean at Friendship Junior College; James H. Goudlock, president of Friendship Junior College

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- NAACP
- Thurgood Marshall

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

- CORE

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

- Edward Haan (first white protester to join campaign)
- Ernest A. Finney (attorney)
- James H. Goudlock (president of Friendship Junior College)
- Raymond H. Jackson (dean at Friendship Junior College)
- SNCC

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 2 months*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### **Opponents:**

Gov. Ernest F. Hollings of South Carolina, Jim Crow Laws

### **Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Letters of opposition or support; Selective social boycott (retailers closed their lunch counters)

### **Campaigner violence:**

None known

### **Repressive Violence:**

One incident is mentioned: "At Rock Hill, S. C., a Negro youth was knocked from a stool by a white beside whom he sat. A bottle of ammonia was hurled through the door of a drug store there. The fumes brought tears to the eyes of the demonstrators." - "Negro Sitdowns Stir Fear Of Wider Unrest in South" from the New York Times

## Success Outcome

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

2 points out of 6 points

### **Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

### **Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

### **Notes on outcomes:**

Clyde Williams, Jr.'s goal to desegregate lunch counters was fulfilled by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which ended segregation in public accommodations. It is arguable, however, that this ruling was an accumulation of many civil rights protests and did not depend solely on the Rock Hill sit-ins (the Civil Rights Act was passed nationally 3 years after the end of the sit-ins).

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In 1955, before the sit-in campaign in Rock Hill, South Carolina even began, Rock Hill's St. Anne School desegregated in compliance with the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling. In 1957, Rev. Cecil Ivory (who would later become a leader in the sit-in campaign), led a bus boycott that put the Rock Hill bus company out of business. Sit-ins elsewhere, including in nearby Charlotte (see "University students campaign for racial integration in Charlotte, NC, 1960"), helped start Rock Hill's own sit-in campaign. Sit-in protests lasted throughout the entire year. Clyde Williams, Jr., a leader of the Charlotte sit-ins, wrote that the

goal of the movement was for African-Americans “to be able to sit down and have a cup of coffee like other customers.”

February 12, 1960, marked the first day of sit-ins in Rock Hill and the first in South Carolina. About 100 black students (mainly from Friendship Junior College) sat-in at Woolworth’s and McCrory’s. Both stores closed their counters until February 23. After the counters reopened, the students resumed their sit-in protests. They were led by Leroy Johnson, who acted as their spokesperson. CORE, a civil rights group, helped train at least two of the organizers of the Rock Hill sit-ins.

Rev. Ivory of the NAACP joined the students, holding a mass meeting to discuss the sit-ins. Meetings and rallies continued throughout the year to support and organize the protests. On March 14, Thurgood Marshall gave a speech at an NAACP convention in support of the students. The next day, sit-ins at lunch counters and at bus stations resulted in 70 arrests, with bail provided by the NAACP. Governor Ernest F. Hollings stated that the sit-ins were “purely to create violence and not to promote anyone’s rights.”

In mid-June, Rev. Ivory held a “wheelchair sit-in.” He rolled up to the lunch counter at McCrory in his wheelchair and asked for service, but was denied. He claimed that he did not break any laws because he never actually sat on a lunch counter seat. This incident was covered by the national press.

After two months of little protest, the sit-ins resumed June 23, 1960. In the fall of 1961, CORE organizer Thomas Gaither introduced “Jail, No Bail” in an effort to make the sit-ins more successful, gain new media attention, and decrease the amount of funds spent on bail (\$17,000 in bail money had already been spent). On January 31, 1961, Rock Hill students were arrested at a sit-in and on February 1st they were found guilty of trespass (They were represented by attorney Ernest A. Finney). Instead of paying a \$100 fine they chose instead to face 30 days of hard labor. They were sent to York County Prison Farm. Historian Howard Zinn wrote that this marked “the first time anyone had served full sentences in the sit-in movement.” After one student decided to pay the fine and be released, the remaining students become known as the “Friendship 9.” On February 6, the SNCC sent four more students to Rock Hill, where they were arrested as well. Two were sent to the Prison Farm while the other two, both women, were sent to York County Jail. The next day a mass meeting of 300 people was held by Rev. Ivory; they voted to visit the Prison Farm the following Sunday.

On February 8, protester Edward Haan became the first white person to participate in the protests at Rock Hill, according to the Rock Hill Evening Herald. Picketing in protest of segregation began the same day, and letters to the editor both for and against segregation were printed. Margaret H. Gregg, a student supporter, wrote that segregation was “a violation of a cardinal principle of Christianity—equality before God.” The protests gained media recognition in local and national newspapers as well as in local television.

The dean at Friendship Junior College, Raymond H. Jackson, did not punish protesting students for cutting class and the college’s president, James H. Goudlock, later criticized a new city policy that would allow police to break up protests or any public gathering. This allowed students at Friendship Junior College to continue their protests without interruption and with the support of their institution.

The weekend of February 11 marked the beginning of mass protests in Rock Hill. These included a motorcade to the Prison Farm, a 2.5-hour rally, a sit-in at a bus depot, and a “kneel-in” (where students were admitted to 3 out of the 5 churches where they had planned on praying). A week later a march was held in solidarity with the Friendship 9, who had been placed in solitary confinement for singing. The condemning song as reported by the Baltimore Afro-American was “Before I’d be a slave, I’d be dead and in my grave.”

Meanwhile, more letters were being printed from the perspectives of those on both sides of the struggle against segregation. On February 23, Rev. Ivory and two others were arrested for a “breach of peace,” while a few days later, on March 2, the Friendship 9 were released from prison. Five days later a mass meeting was held in their honor. Novelist Lillian Smith, a white Southerner, wrote of the Friendship 9: “This story of the Rock Hill jail-in will bother you... It is something that should not have happened in our country and yet it did happen.”

The Friendship 9's release from prison marked the end of the sit-in campaign but not the end of the civil rights movement in Rock Hill. Thomas Gaither, the CORE organizer, proposed the Freedom Ride in early 1961, which took place later that year (see "Freedom Riders end racial segregation in Southern U.S. public transit, 1961"). The Albany Movement (Fall 1961 to Spring 1962) borrowed the "Jail, No Bail" tactic from the Rock Hill sit-ins and because of it gained national media attention (see "The Albany Movement campaigns for full integration in Georgia (Fall 1961- Summer 1962)").

Although the Rock Hill sit-ins did not immediately lead to a victory for the civil rights activists, CORE director James Farmer wrote that the protests "turned the spotlight of publicity once again upon the evils of segregation." In 1964 the Civil Rights Act desegregated all public accommodations.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The sit-ins in Rock Hill were influenced by other ongoing sit-ins in the South and themselves influenced the further spread of the sit-in movement specifically and the civil rights movement generally. (1)(2)

### Sources:

Dys, Andrew. "Feb. 12 'changed Rock Hill forever': Local segregation died at the hands of brave blacks, whites during sit-ins, marches." HeraldOnline (2009): n. pag. Web. 26 Jan 2010. <<http://www.heraldonline.com/129/story/1136398.html>>.

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Claude, Sitton. "Negro Sitdowns Stir Fear Of Wider Unrest in South." New York Times (1960): n. pag. Web. 26 Jan 2010. <<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0201.html>>.

### Additional Notes:

For further reading: CORE director James Farmer's memoir, Freedom Now.

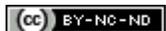
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