

Chapter Three: The Sit-Ins

In Chapter Three, titled "The Sit-Ins," the narrative unfolds the significant events leading up to and including the sit-in protests in Nashville during early 1960. Before John Lewis returned to Nashville in January, local ministers were intensifying their efforts to integrate lunch counters, but they encountered persistent resistance from department store owners. Despite their efforts, the movement faced stagnation until North Carolina A&T students organized a successful sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter on February 1, capturing national attention and inspiring students across the South.

Angeline Butler and other Nashville students felt invigorated by the developments in Greensboro. While James Lawson, initially preoccupied with his studies, hesitated in organizing a response, the excitement among students grew. John Lewis and his peers felt a strong desire to act, leveraging the momentum created by the Greensboro sit-ins. A meeting at Fisk University saw seventy-five attendees, with some students unfamiliar with nonviolent protests but eager to join.

As the Nashville student movement organized sit-ins for February 12, they prepared meticulously, guided by Lawson's teachings on nonviolence. Students were instructed to dress neatly, bring books, and be ready for arrests. Lewis felt apprehensive about the newcomers' readiness but recognized their collective commitment to the cause. The sit-in on that Saturday drew significant numbers, with students split into groups occupying various stores downtown.

During the protests, Lewis faced harassment and violence from white counter-protesters but remained nonviolent, adhering to the principles of satyagraha. As students were arrested, their resolve and camaraderie deepened; some felt liberation in their actions despite the risks they took. The excitement and pride in their achievements grew, and soon after, the movement attracted increased media attention, igniting support from the community.

The sit-in protests progressed beyond Nashville, with students from other cities joining the cause. However, the movement faced challenges, including legal repercussions and increased opposition from white segregationists. The chapter illustrates the growing confidence and unity among young Black activists and the critical support from local figures, ultimately laying the groundwork for further activism in the civil rights movement. Through perseverance and unwavering faith, the Nashville Student Movement sought to dismantle segregation and advocate for equality, spearheading a pivotal shift in the struggle for civil rights .