

Mississippi Lunch Counter Sit-ins, 1963

From Anne Moody. *Coming of Age in Mississippi*.

At exactly 11 a.m., Pearlena, Memphis, and I entered Woolworth's from the rear entrance....before 11:15 we were occupying three seats at the previously segregated Woolworths lunch counter. In the beginning the waitresses seemed to ignore us, as if they really didn't know what was going on. Our waitress walked past us a couple of times before she noticed we had started to write our own orders down and realized we wanted service. She asked us what we wanted. We began to read to her from our order slips. She told us that we would be served at the back counter which was for Negroes...

"We would like to be served here," I said.

The waitress started to repeat what she had said, then stopped in the middle of the sentence. She turned the lights out behind the counter, and she and the other waitresses almost ran to the back of the store, deserting all their white customers. I guess they thought that violence would start immediately after the whites at the counter realized what was going on.

At noon, students from a nearby white high school started pouring in to Woolworth's. When they first saw us they were sort of surprised. They didn't know exactly how to react. A few started to heckle and the newsmen [by now this sit-in had attracted the attention of the local press] became interested again. Then the white students started chanting all kinds of anti-Negro slogans. We were called a little bit of everything. The rest of the seats except the three we were occupying had been roped off to prevent others from sitting down. A couple of boys took one end of the rope and made it into a hangman's noose. Several attempts were made to put it around our necks. The crowd grew as more students and adults came in for lunch.

We kept our eyes straight forward and did not look at the crowd except for occasional glances to see what was going on... Memphis suggested that we pray. We bowed our heads, and all hell broke loose. A man rushed forward, threw Memphis from his seat, and slapped my face. Then another man who worked in the store threw me against the adjoining counter... Down on my knees on the floor, I saw Memphis lying near the lunch counter with blood running out of the corners of his mouth. As he tried to protect his face, the man who'd thrown him down kept kicking him in the head...

The mob started smearing us with ketchup, mustard, sugar, pies, and everything on the counter. Soon Joan and I were joined by John Salter, but the moment he sat down he was hit on the jaw with what appeared to be brass knuckles. Blood gushed from his face and someone threw salt into the open wound...

Then a Negro high school boy sat down next to me. The mob took spray paint from the counter... The high school boy had on a white shirt; the word "nigger" was written on his back with red spray paint.

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We sat there for about three hours taking a beating... About ninety policemen were standing outside the store; they had been watching the whole thing through the windows, but had not come in to stop the mob or do anything.

-Anne Moody, 1968

Questions:

1. What do you think was the immediate or short term goal of Ann Moody and her fellow demonstrators on that day in 1963?
2. How were they trying to achieve that goal?
3. How did Ann Moody and her fellow demonstrators respond to taunting and violence of the “mob”?
 - a) Answer in your own words
 - b) Underline a quote from the passage that helps to prove your answer
4. Do you think this method of protest was effective? Why/why not?