

"THE SITDOWNS CAME IN 1960, BUT THEY REMAIN FOR 1961"

By George Collins

To a City Desk reporter, covering the general assignment beat, the job of picking the top ten stories of the year can be far less than attractive.

News events, from children's mock weddings to those changing the course of human existence, all fall to his lot.

So pardon me for gloating, but I've ducked the "top ten fever," so prevalent this time of the year.

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Instead, this corner will deal with what it considers ~~the~~ the top of all the "tens"----

Few, if indeed any Baltimoreans are not acquainted with the Sitdowners.

Every phase of their story has rolled across City Desk during 1960.

They are a group of young high school and college students dedicated to the betterment of themselves, their neighbors, community, city and nation.

What they have done, directly, and indirectly, is equally well known.

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Because of them, Baltimore will never be the same. Fortunately, that is good.

Herewith are highlights from the nine-month life of the sit-downers.

MARCH

The Sitdowners came to Baltimore when they staged the first demonstration at the Rooftop Restaurant, Northwood Shopping Center.

Following a week of such demonstrations the first arrests occurred, involving a student and the restaurant manager. The cases were dismissed by mutual consent.

Four other students, arrested two days later, were charged with trespassing. They requested jury trials. This set the pattern for subsequent arrests.

It was during these hearings that the shadow of Thurgood Marshall and the 14th Amendment loomed over the movement.

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Demonstrations continued. Restaurant officials obtained a court injunction, limiting pickets to six.

Undaunted, the sitdowners switched tactics.

On March 26, five buses carrying 250 students descended on the downtown department store restaurants.

Targets of the demonstrations were Hutzler Brothers, Hecht-May, and Stewart's department stores.

Hochschild Kohn served them.

The others held out, but not for long.

APRIL

The campaign moved into high gear.

Pledges of support came from individuals, churches and organizations throughout the city.

Paul Butler, then Democratic National Committee chairman, endorsed the movement in a talk at Morgan College.

So did Mahalia Jackson, the noted gospel singer.

Thirty local ministers, convinced that moral support wasn't enough, joined the picket lines.

Led by the Rev. W. J. Odom, national church secretary, N.A.A.C.P., they carried signs decrying segregation.

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This act attracted, widespread recognition and support from other community business and fraternal groups.

Following three weeks of demonstrations, the stores dropped color bars.

Following the decisions, store executives praised the Sitdowners for the manner in which they handled the protest movement.

Many other individual eating places in the downtown area voluntarily followed this lead.

Sitdowners then turned their sights on other chains and individual establishments still refusing to serve all.

The Restaurant Association of Maryland announced plans to study its policy regarding the matter.

To date, the association has taken no stand.

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As the demonstration spreaded, the Police Department conferred with the Attorney General's office.

They drew up a method to deal with sitdowners. The "Lusby Ordinance" followed.

Purpose of the "ground rules" was to put the burden of students' arrests on restaurant owners, rather than on the police department.

Sitdowners moved their protest to City Hall Plaza. Their ranks bulged by schools, organizations and individuals they urged passage of Civic Rights legislation.

MAY

Moving to outlying areas, the month of May saw sitdowners staging demonstrations at restaurants in the North Avenue and Linden Avenue area.

While covering one such demonstrations at Nates and Leon, this Afro

reporter was arrested.

The restaurant changed policy shortly thereafter.

JUNE

Returned to City Hall urging passage of Civic Rights.

School closed, with Ronald Merriweather, Civic Interest Group founder, graduating and entering service as second lieutenant.

He was cited by President Martin D. Jenkins as having done more than normally is expected of a student.

Lt. Merriweather was succeeded by Levin West, his chief aid in the early phase of the movement.

West took a summer job and leadership of the CIG as the sitdowners are known here, was shared by Clarence Mitchell 3rd, Tony Adona, and John Quarles.

Students, arrested in stepped-up police crackdown, which followed "Lusby's order," chose to go to jail rather than halt demonstrations.

JULY

Miss Mary Sue Welcome, 16 year-old high school student, and CIG member, wrote a revealing story for Afro.

It detailed her three hours behind bars for the first time, expressed her determination to remain with the movement despite having been jailed.

Sitdowners joined forces with N.A.A.C.P. to conduct Non-Partisan Register and Vote Campaign.

Instructing new voters, canvassing areas, babysitting, hauling new voters to the Elections office, and receiving them once they were there, were some of the many things they contributed to the campaign.

Organizations again came to aid of sitdowners when operating funds ran low.

A civic group, headed by Mrs. Catherine Adams, raised nearly \$3,000 for the movement.

AUGUST

Other than a pilgrimage to Washington, in August, Sitdowners mostly confined themselves to the registering and voting campaign until September 26th, helping to get 26,000 persons registered.

SEPTEMBER

Following a return and adjustment to a new school term, Sitdowners were again on the protest path.

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More arrests followed as demonstrations continued. Presently 23 cases are awaiting court action.

They rounded out September by accusing Mayor J. Harold Grady with ignoring their picket lines at the One West Restaurant.

Mr. Grady replied that he was unaware of the picketing and expressed sympathy for the movement.

OCTOBER

While demonstrating at the same restaurant, sitdowners charged they were manhandled by restaurant officials while police looked on.

Police Commissioner James M. Hepbron assured them that officials would be fair in discharging duties.

A picket line at the One West, which still refuses to serve all, put a damper on a Democratic rally.

NOVEMBER

Carried protest to suburban areas while still fighting segregation in central section of city.

DECEMBER

City shocked by unexpected death of Tony Adona. A moving force behind the Sitdowners from the beginning, Tony died of an asthmatic attack.

A Johns Hopkins University grad, "The Angry Young Man" was a junior at the University of Maryland Law School.

While CIG'ers still mourned Tony's loss, Levin West resigned as chairman.

Cutting classroom and campus pressures as the chief factors, Levin was succeeded by Clarence Logan, a Morgan junior and long-time co-chairman of the negotiating committee.

Thus ends an eventful year in the lives of a band of courageous and determined young people.