



## **Michael James O'Brien**

### **About the Author**

It was while visiting the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1991 that Michael James O'Brien conceived the work that has become *We Shall Not Be Moved*. As part of its civil rights display, the King Center showed a photograph of the 1963 Jackson, Mississippi, Woolworth's sit-in—a photograph that has become the image used in history books and magazine articles to show what a sit-in was like. Mr. O'Brien was inspired to tell the story of the ten individuals who joined in the sit-in that day—May 28, 1963—and to fully explore the grassroots civil rights movement in Jackson that the sit-in sparked. During that journey of discovery, Mr. O'Brien spoke with all eight of the ten surviving demonstrators, as well as with journalists, policemen, and crowd participants who were on the scene that day. He also chronicled the two-week period from the sit-in to the untimely murder of Jackson movement leader Medgar Evers and the events that followed in the wake of Evers' assassination. Finally, Mr. O'Brien traced the lives of the sit-in participants after the civil rights era ended and tells how their lives have turned out—for better or worse.

Mr. O'Brien is a leading authority on the May 28, 1963, sit-in and on the three weeks of demonstrations that followed. He has lectured on the subject at Georgetown University and as part of Julian Bond's civil rights courses at both the American University and the University of Virginia.



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## Research and Classroom Activities:

1. Interview your parents, grandparents, or someone who lived in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. Sample questions:  
Did you experience or practice discrimination?  
How did you feel about the civil rights struggle?  
Were you involved in any protests? Why?
2. Identify legislation that changed the rights to education, housing, and voting since 1954.
3. Compare and contrast popular music that might have played on the radio between 1954 and 1963. What do the style of the music and the lyrics of the music say about the United States at that time?
4. Create three to five questions to be used in a statistical poll at your school or in your community. What do the questions, the answers, and the numbers mean?
5. Find examples of nonviolent protests today.
6. You are one of the protesters sitting at the Woolworth's counter. Write a letter to a friend explaining how you became involved in this protest and what is going through your mind as the crowd pours mustard and ketchup over your head.
7. Create a time line that marks key events during the civil rights struggle in the United States.
8. Create a biographical dictionary of the key people and organizations in the civil rights movement. For example—Rosa Parks, Thurgood Marshall, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Congress of Racial Equality.
9. How did the following people influence the concept of nonviolent protest?  
Reinhold Niebuhr                      Henry David Thoreau                      Mo Ti  
Lao-Tzu                                      Mahatma Gandhi                              Jesus Christ
10. As a class, select an issue or a piece of legislation that students feel violates their civil rights. Create nonviolent strategies to protest this issue or legislation.
11. What roles did the media and public opinion play in the civil rights movement?
12. Freedom songs were key in uniting people and identifying the issues during the civil rights movement. Many of the songs were adapted from songs sung in African American churches. "We Shall Overcome" is adapted from the hymn by Charles Tindley, "I'll Overcome Someday." Compare the difference in the lyrics.
13. List the types of nonviolent protests used during the civil rights movement. What were some of the responses to each type by the local law enforcement agencies?



## Discussion Questions

1. What is your reaction to the following quote from Congressman John Lewis (D-Ga.)?  
"All my life I'd heard, seen, and obeyed the rules. You can't use that library. You can't drink at that fountain. You can't go in that bathroom. You can't eat in that restaurant. I hated those rules, but I'd always obeyed them until now." (*Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*. John Lewis with Michael D'Orso)
2. Are the accomplishments of the civil rights movement taken for granted today?
3. Why did young people become involved in the civil rights movement?
4. What does tolerance mean to you?
5. Can protest take different forms? If so, what kind?
6. At what point does someone begin to protest? Why?
7. What is the nature of race relations in 1999? Does discrimination exist?
8. A phrase in the Declaration of Independence states, "...it is the right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness." How did Jim Crow laws negate the Declaration of Independence?