Texas Lunch Counter Desegregation Narrative

The historical narrative on the San Antonio Woolworths fronting Alamo Plaza so far has been imprecise and factually wrong. It has been written repeatedly that it was "the first lunch counter desegregated in the entire south." That statement is incorrect based on research in numerous sources, that show that it was clearly not even the first lunch counter desegregated in Texas. This paper will only deal with the situation in Texas, and other states were not researched due to the imprecision and difficulty of doing Internet-only history research.

The Woolworths fronting on Alamo Plaza opened in 1920 and had the street address of 520 E. Houston St., and was one of two Woolworths stores in operation in San Antonio in 1960.[1] There were also other department stores as well as drug stores in San Antonio at the time which operated lunch counters.[2] The obsession with Woolworths probably has a lot to do with two factors: it was a prominent and beloved business in the U.S. for over one hundred years (even boasting that its headquarters was the tallest building in the world for a while), and the fact that Woolworths was thrust into the center of lunch counter desegregation history in the U.S. when the lunch counter sit-in that began in a Woolworths in Greensboro, North Carolina beginning on February 1, 1960 received prominent press coverage and turned into a national movement.[3]

The Greensboro Woolworth's lunch counter saw protests that continued until it was desegregated in the summer of 1960. In the meantime, many other cities in the north and south had citizens that began negotiating with retailers for an end to segregated lunch counters, or else participated in forms of protest or direct action, either sit-ins or picket lines, designed to force retailers to integrate. By the end of February 1960 thirty cities had sit-in demonstrations. As historian Theodore Carter Delaney has written, "[t]here is a certain amount of romantic mythology that cloaks the civil rights movement in general and sit-in demonstrations in particular." The 1960 demonstrations were not the first in regards to lunch counters in the U.S. or even in the south, but they were widely covered by journalists. [4]

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[1] The San Antonio City Directory for 1960 lists two F. W. Woolworth Co. stores at 715 W. Commerce Street and 520 E. Houston Street. *Polk's San Antonio City Directory*, 1960. Dallas: R. L. Polk & Co., 1961, image 138; The Woolworths that fronted on Alamo Plaza was one of three stores in San Antonio that closed in 1997 after losing their fight against big box stores and specialty retailers. "Woolworth's Stores Closing Doors," *San Antonio Express-News*, July 18, 1997, p. 1A, 8A.

[2] The 1960 San Antonio City Directory lists 34 Department Stores, 5 - Five Cent to $1.00 Department Stores, and 150 Retail Drug Stores, many of which also had lunch counters. *Polk's San Antonio City Directory*, 1960, images 138-140.

[3] "F. W. Woolworth Company." American Company. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Britannica.com.; F. W. Woolworth Company. *The Cathedral of Commerce: The Highest Building in the World*. Baltimore: Munder-Thomsen, 1916: https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nnc2.ark:/13960/t3dz2js6k

[4] Schmidt, Christopher W. "Why the 1960 Lunch Counter Sit-Ins Worked: A Case Study of Law and Social Movement Mobilization," *Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equality*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring, 2017), pp. 282-4. https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1065&context=ijlse
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The chronology below outlines how lunch counter desegregation proceeded in Texas:

All *HEB* grocery store lunch counters in **Corpus Christi** are desegregated in 1952 in response to a complaint.[5]

In 1958, the *Woolworths* in **Corpus Christi** is also desegregated in response to a complaint.[6]

The *Sears* in **San Antonio** is quietly desegregated sometime during the 1950s in response to negotiations. No press was alerted to this fact in hopes there would be no white backlash.[7]

After a threatened sit-In and then desegregation meetings between local religious and business leaders in **San Antonio** on March 15, 1960[8], the actual first lunch counter to serve African-Americans in San Antonio is reported as the *S. H. Kress* on March 16, 1960.[9]

By March 20, 1960, it is believed that all **San Antonio** *Woolworths, Neisners, Grants, Greens, McCrorys, Summers* are desegregated.[10]

All remaining **Corpus Christi** lunch counters are desegregated on March 25, 1960 by negotiation, with no press intended.[11]

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[5] Martin Herman Kuhlman, *The Civil Rights Movement in Texas: Desegregation of Public Accommodations, 1950-1964*. Ph.D.---History. (Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 1994), p. 142. http://hdl.handle.net/2346/61160 ; Kenneth Morland, *Lunch-Counter Desegregation in Corpus Christi, Galveston, and San Antonio, Texas.* Pub. #15. (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, May 10, 1960), p. 1, 2. https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt:31735066227822

[6] Kuhlman, p. 142-3; Morland, p. 2-3.

[7] Robert A. Goldberg, "Racial Change on the Southern Periphery: The Case of San Antonio, Texas, 1960-1965," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Aug., 1983), p. 356. www.jstor.org/stable/2208100 ; "Sears, Roebuck, and company, it was known to some, was already serving without regard to color or race" in "San Antonio Quietly Integrates Eating Facilities," San Antonio Register, March 18, 1960, p 1.

[8] "San Antonio Sit-Ins Slated by Negroes," *The Austin Statesman*, March 14, 1960, p. 1; "Lunch Counter Integration Set to Begin Today in S.A.," *San Antonio Express*, March 16, 1960, p. 1, 2A; "San Antonio Quietly Integrates Eating Facilities," San Antonio Register, March 18, 1960, p 1.

[9] "LUNCH COUNTER," News-Script, WBAP-TV/NBC, Fort Worth, Texas, March 16, 1960 ; "SA 'Opens' Lunch Spots," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 16, 1960, p. 1; "San Antonio Lunch Counter Integrates Without Incident," *Del Rio News Herald*, March 16, 1960, p. 1; "San Antonio Firms Agree to Integration," *Corpus Christi Times*, March 16, 1960, p. 1; "San Antonio Mixes Races in Cafeteria," *The Daily News-Telegram (Sulphur Springs, Tex.)*, March 16, 1960, p. 3 ; Goldberg, p.357; Kuhlman, p. 160 (Kuhlman erroneously reports the date as 3/20.)

[10] Kuhlman, p. 160, Goldberg, p. 357; "The group staunchly refused to reveal stores which will desegregate," and "Speculation was that the flat refusal by the group to name the stores may stem from recent reports that some of the larger chain stores ordered their managers not to integrate." Both quotes from "Lunch Counter Integration Set To Begin Today In S.A.," *San Antonio Express*, March 16, 1960, p.1; "Lunch Counters Integrate Quietly," San Antonio Express, March 17, 1960, p. 1; "Those taking the step included Woolworth's, Kress, Neisner's, Grant's, Green's, McCrory's Variety Stores and Sommers Drug Stores" found in "Lunch Counters Integrated Peacefully in San Antonio," *New York Times*, March 20, 1960, pp. 1 and 48; "San Antonio Quietly Integrates Eating Facilities," San Antonio Register, March 18, 1960, p 1.

[11] Kuhlman, p. 143, Morland, p. 1, 3-4 (Morland gives the date as 3/28.)

All Galveston lunch counters are desegregated on April 5, 1960 after direct action and later negotiation.[12]

Austin lunch counters are desegregated in late April—early May 1960 by direct action and later negotiation.[13]

Dallas lunch counters are desegregated on July 26, 1961 by direct action and then later negotiation.[14]

All *Joske's* lunch counters in **San Antonio** are finally desegregated in late summer 1960 after direct action.[15]

Houston lunch counters including *Foley's Woolworths, Kress, Joskes, Walgreens, Schulte-United, Henke and Pilot,* and *Weingartens* are desegregated on September 1, 1960 after direct action, with no publicity.[16]

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[12] Kuhlman, p. 154, Morland, p. 14.
[13] Kuhlman, p. 158.
[14] Kuhlman, p. 169, 171.
[15] Kuhlman, p. 160-1.
[16] Kuhlman, p. 148.