

Project Title

Virginia's First Lunch Counter Sit-In Demonstration: A Public Key to Civil Rights and Responsibilities

Project Description

“Virginia's First Lunch Counter Sit-In Demonstration: A Public Key to Civil Rights and Responsibilities” is designed as a community-based project rooted in publicly-engaged scholarship. The project aims at raising the visibility of Virginia's first sit-in demonstrations and to build a sustainable tradition around its history through public art, community conversations, oral histories, and continued scholarship. Through the prism of the F.W. Woolworth building located at 10-12 E. Queen Street in Hampton, Virginia, and the story of the student activists from Hampton Institute (now University) who challenged the color-line at the Woolworth's lunch counter of February 10, 1960, the project will broaden our region's understanding of and role in the modern civil rights movement. Project collaborators—sit-in veterans, artists, scholars, museum professionals, and students, to name a few—will spark a series of memory actions, to include a public mural of sit-in students to mark the Woolworth building, community conversations concerning race and remembrance, collecting efforts to preserve the artifacts that illuminate this story, and oral histories with sit-in veterans. From these actions, the project is expected to be sustained through a civil rights exhibit produced by the Hampton History Museum, extended research that digitally maps the impact of the Hampton students' human rights movement in dismantling spatial/racial segregation—past and present—and annual commemorative events on February 10. The project's public key to local experiences of civil rights and responsibilities turns two ways: the sit-in students who acted out of a moral responsibility to assert equal rights in the face of historical injustice and, following, our responsibility to that past—showcases history as a community-building and problem-solving enterprise, and is timely given the current state of our social, cultural, and political environment.

This project raises the visibility of Virginia's first sit-in demonstrations and builds a sustainable tradition through public art, community conversations, oral histories, and continued scholarship. Through the prism of the F.W. Woolworth building located in Hampton, Virginia, and the story of the student activists from Hampton Institute (now University) who challenged the color-line at the Woolworth's lunch counter of February 10, 1960, the project broadens our understanding of and role in the modern civil rights movement. Project collaborators; sit-in veterans, artists, scholars, museum professionals, and students, spark a series of memory actions, including public mural to mark the Woolworth building, community conversations concerning race and remembrance, collecting efforts to preserve the artifacts that illuminate this story, and oral histories with sit-in veterans. From these actions, the project is expected to be sustained through a civil rights exhibit produced by the Museum and an annual commemorative events on February 10. The project's public key to local experiences of civil rights and responsibilities turns two ways: the sit-in students who acted out of a moral responsibility to assert equal rights in the face of historical injustice and, following, our responsibility to that past—showcases history as a community-building and problem-solving enterprise.