

Transcript, February 1st Supplement



The Greensboro Four. From the left: David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Jibreel Khazan, Joseph McNeil.

Intro

Osha Davidson

What was it that sparked the movement when you four sat down in the Woolworth's at the lunch counter in 1960, that hadn't happened before?

Jibreel Khazan

What happened was: Our DNA spoke to us.

[Music]

Osha Davidson

This is Osha Gray Davidson, producer and host of “The American Project,” with a special February 1st supplement. On this day in 1960, four Black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, sparked what became known as the lunch-counter movement, protesting enforced racial segregation throughout the South.

The four students at North Carolina A&T, Franklin E. McCain, Joseph A. McNeil, David L. Richmond, and Ezell Blair, Jr. (now Jibreel Khazan), walked into the Woolworth’s store and sat down at the lunch-counter – a lunch-counter that served only white people. The four refused to leave until they were served. It was a revolutionary act that challenged the very notion of white supremacy. They were acting on their own, and at great risk, without knowing that a nationwide movement of lunch-counter sit-ins was already being planned by civil rights organizers.

I first interviewed Jibreel Khazan two decades ago for my book, *The Best of Enemies*. When I began planning this podcast, I called Jibreel again to see how this iconic civil rights hero felt about the subject of reparations. But when we talked a few months ago, the stories he told were so powerful that I knew I needed to share some of our conversation to celebrate this 60th anniversary of a pivotal moment in this nation’s history. And, by the way, I apologize in advance for the poor audio quality of the phone interview (I’ll make a transcript available to fill in any garbled portions)

Please look for “The American Project” wherever you get your podcasts. Season One is devoted to another milestone battle for democracy: reparations for slavery and its legacy. The introductory episode is live now.

It’s important to celebrate victories, so, happy February first. But as Jibreel himself says in the interview: The fight isn’t over yet.

Jibreel explained to me that the night before the actual sit-in, he decided he’d better inform his family.

Jibreel Khazan

So, I'm calling my mother. Hey Ma. What's going on, Junior? Uum, I got a question I want to talk to you about and it's real serious. Then, well, come on home and talk about it. So my friends, we hopped in the car and went home. Told my mother and father what was going on. But my mother said, Oh yeah? You thinking about doing what? I said, well, we're going downtown tomorrow, have a sit-in at Woolworth’s. She said, Oh, you guys are very smart aren't you? Something like that. Yeah, ma. No, I'm not "ma." I'm mother. Okay, mother. And the women in our community were very strong about proper, proper etiquette and respect for the elders.

She said, Have you thought about what you guys are going to do? Uuuuhhh, yes. Yes, mother. Yes, mom. She said, Do you realize how many people can be hurt by what you're planning to do?" Uhhh, we thought about it. Oh, you thought about it, huh? You better think again. You know some people can be

hurt or killed by your four freshmen's actions. So what are you going to do, Junior? Well, we intend to go to jail. Well, I'm glad you planning to go to jail because we're not gonna get you out.

She said, Now's the time for you guys to be men. Not boys, no more. You're in college. And the decision you make will determine your destiny. And so it was time to go. So she said, Okay. I wish young men well, and just ask you to think about other people more than yourself. And I wish you well. Godspeed.

So as my three friends were leaving the house, Mom says to me, Junior, I want to talk to you. Yes Mom. When you go down there tomorrow, I want you to wear your hat. My Dr. King hat? Mom, do I have to wear tha...She said, Listen to me. You gonna put on your shirt. Your nice bow tie. You' gonna wear the vest, corduroy vest, and your jacket and you will put the nice pants I got on you, and your new shoes.

Osha Davidson

Tell me about that hat. You said it was like a Martin Luther King hat?

Jibreel Khazan

Well, it wasn't exactly....You see the picture of us coming out of Woolworth's on February One? All right? I'm the guy with the hat on. The little guy with the hat on. It was a green felt hat. That was the style at that time. And a lot of the guys were wearing it. I said the 'Martin Luther King hat' because I was looking at it like, I hadn't planned to wear it down there, to look all dressed up. But she insisted, You're going to wear that. Okay mother, I'm going to wear it.

Osha Davidson

Can I ask you why? Why do you think she insisted that you wear it?

Jibreel Khazan

Because, like many mothers in the South, see our people were enslaved. And my mother came from the country. She wanted to make sure that her son looked like somebody who is going to work or who's going to be looking for a job.

Osha Davidson

What was it that sparked the movement? When you four sat down in the Woolworth's at the lunch counter in 1960 that that hadn't happened before?

Jibreel Khazan

What happened was: ancestors. Our DNA spoke to us. See, our generation was only about three or four generations from slavery. So we still had my great-great-grandmother living. And I used to hear

her talk to the elder women at church, on the front porch, and I heard some stories, it would cause my hair to stand on end.

Osha Davidson

Then I turned the conversation to reparations.

Osha Davidson

Do you remember what you thought of [reparations] when you first heard about it?

Jibreel Khazan

Yeah, I thought it was a good idea and that we should pursue that. I think the idea of reparations is good. We should get paid back for the labor that our ancestors gave as slaves in this country. Plus that, there were thousands, hundreds of thousands of us who are the children of Caucasian men who had sex with our mothers, like, Frederick Douglass. His father was Caucasian. That happened to millions of our mothers, fathers and children. So there should be reparation for us.

Jibreel Khazan

I relate to all those things almost 60 years later. And I just say for all my companions, may the life-giver bless us all, wherever our life has been before and since the sit-in movement. And all the people who gave their energies to be a part of this great crusade – I call it, crusade for freedom – and it's not over yet.

Osha Davidson

No, of course Jibreel is right. The fight is not over yet. Happy February first. To celebrate, let's roll up our sleeves and get busy perfecting the democracy that's still in the works. For "The American Project," this is Osha Gray Davidson.