

# LOUISVILLE DOWNTOWN SIT-IN *Demonstrations*

## LOUISVILLE DOWNTOWN *Civil Rights Trail*



**T**hrough the 1950s, most Louisville restaurants, department stores and other white-owned establishments outside the African American community either excluded African Americans altogether or treated them differently as customers. Oftentimes, they were denied the opportunity to try on clothes, sit at lunch counters and to enter movie theaters.



**Lyman Johnson**  
U of L Photo Archives

Although segregation seemed "softer" in Louisville, appearances were deceiving and the city was still deeply and structurally segregated. Early successes in breaching the walls of segregation led to more ambitious efforts to level those walls altogether. Central High School teacher Lyman Johnson led the NAACP Youth Council in sit-ins in downtown Louisville in 1956, and members of the Youth Council protested segregation at the Brown Theater in 1959. However, the battle lines of the first major struggle were drawn in January 1960, when a delegation of community leaders, black and white, met with Mayor Bruce Hoblitzell to press for passage of a public accommodations ordinance. Both the mayor and the Board of Aldermen were unresponsive. William W. Beckett, the lone African American member of the board, twice introduced an ordinance to end segregation in restaurants, theaters, and other businesses. Twice the ordinance was rejected by a vote of 11 to 1.

Following the example of the non-violent demonstrations sweeping the South, large numbers of blacks, mostly young adults and high school students, and a number of white supporters marched and "sat-in" at restaurants and businesses in downtown Louisville. It was, however, the "Nothing New for Easter" boycott in 1961 that was considered as the defining moment in the local history of the civil rights movement.



**April, 1961, Kupie Restaurant**  
The Courier-Journal Archives

The boycott exerted economic pressure on businesses and deflated the usual Easter sales boom. While downtown businessmen felt the impact of the boycott, local officials remained unresponsive and black leaders adopted yet another strategy that proved most effective. A voter registration campaign was initiated in the



**Fourth Street, between Liberty and Jefferson Streets. March 1961.**  
The Courier-Journal Archives

summer and fall of 1961 that led to the election in November, of a new mayor and new Democratic Board of Aldermen—all sympathetic to passage of a public accommodations ordinance. Sporadic demonstrations and political pressure continued; however, on May 1, 1963, the public accommodations ordinance was passed. Still, the passage of the public accommodations ordinance was a "first" for a southern city and Louisville received – and, for a time, basked in the public glow of - national recognition for peaceful desegregation precisely at the time that racial violence had exploded in Birmingham and elsewhere.....

Excerpts from "The Civil Rights Era in Louisville (Two Centuries of Black Louisville, 2011: 185-193)"  
Dr. J. Blaine Hudson, September 8, 1949 – January 5, 2013



Designed by Ed Hamilton, nationally recognized sculptor and artist

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Publication and tour information compiled by Clest Lanier, Project Coordinator, Office for International, Diversity and Engagement Programs, a unit of the University of Louisville, College of Arts and Sciences, Office of the Dean. All information is believed accurate at the time of publication and we apologize for any errors or omissions.

For additional information call The University of Louisville, College of Arts and Sciences at (502)852-2252.

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**LOUISVILLE**  
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In Partnership with:  
Louisville Metro Council,  
Louisville Downtown Partnership



## *Walking Directions*

Total Walking Tour (includes review of markers)  
1.5 hours Total Walking Tour.  
Walking Tour and Driving Tour, approximately 3 hours.

- 01** **Louisville Convention & Visitors Center, 301 South Fourth**  
Review the Sit-in Demonstration Sites Markers Project locations.  
Proceed South on Fourth Street across Liberty Street. Continue South on east side of street through 4th Street Live. Continue on Fourth Street to Marker
- 02** **Kaufman-Straus Department Store, 427 South Fourth**  
Proceed South on east side of Fourth Street across Muhammad Ali Boulevard.
- 03** **Stewart's, 510 South Fourth**  
Marker is located in front of CVS Pharmacy on the east side of Fourth Street. Proceed west across Fourth Street past the Seelbach Hotel Parking Garage
- 04** **Blue Boar Cafeteria, 410 W. Walnut Street**  
Marker is located across the entrance to the parking garage and in front of a restaurant on the south side of Muhammad Ali Boulevard. Proceed east on Muhammad Ali Boulevard. Make right onto Fourth and proceed to Guthrie.
- 05** **Civil Rights Movement Overview, Fourth & Guthrie Street**  
Cross Fourth at Guthrie to east side and proceed south.
- 06** **Walgreens, 573 South Fourth**  
Cross Fourth at Chestnut and proceed south on west side
- 07** **Mary Anderson / Rialto Theater - 630 South Fourth**  
Cross Fourth in front of Louisville Palace Theatre
- 08** **United Artists Theater/Penthouse Theater (formerly Loews Theater), 625 South Fourth**  
Proceed on Fourth to TARC turnaround. Ohio Theater sign is near marker site
- 09** **Kentucky/Ohio Theater - 655 South Fourth**  
Continue south on Fourth past the statue of J. Graham Brown walking his dog!
- 10** **The Brown Hotel, Northeast Corner of Fourth & Broadway**  
Make left onto Broadway. Continue east
- 11** **W. L. Lyons Brown Theater, 315 W. Broadway**  
The Walking Tour ends here, or you may board a bus or car and take the driving tour!



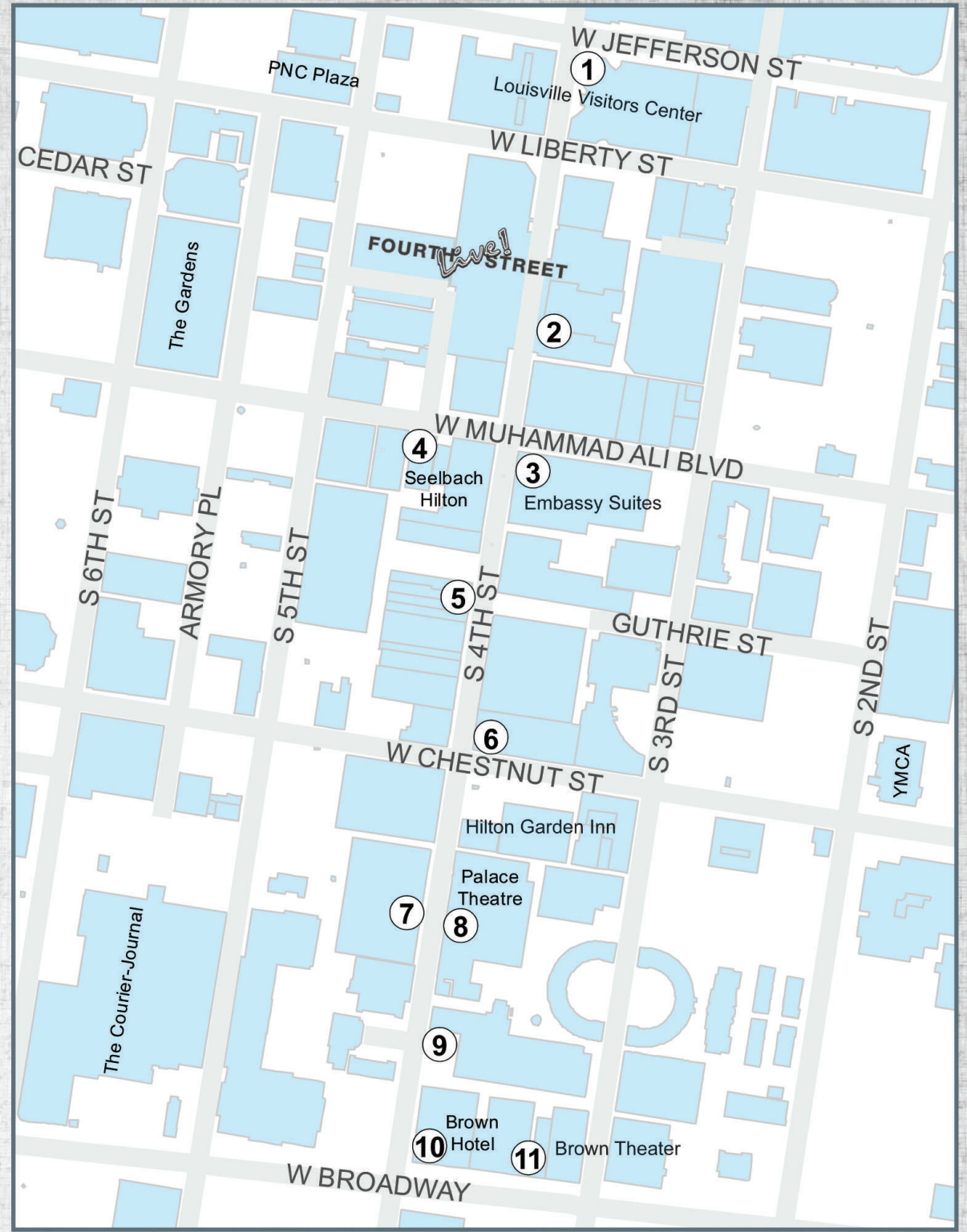
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# LOUISVILLE DOWNTOWN

## Civil Rights Trail



Stewart's Department Store, March 11, 1961.



## Marker Locations

**NORTH - SOUTH**  
(From the Louisville Convention & Visitors Center)

### 1. Sit-In Demonstration Sites Markers Project – Louisville Convention & Visitors Center, 301 South Fourth

The Downtown Civil Rights Trail preserves an important part of Louisville's history. The marker logo is designed by nationally recognized sculptor Ed Hamilton and depicts student protesters to symbolize the civil rights movement in Louisville, the South and across the country.

As visitors follow the Sit-In Demonstration Sites walking tour along Fourth Street from Jefferson Street to Broadway, and see the revitalization, they will catch a glimpse of what was once described as "the heartbeat of activity" of Louisville.

### 2. Kaufman-Straus Department Store, 427 South Fourth

Kaufman's was one of two large department stores targeted for demonstration because black patrons were denied service in their restaurants. Beginning in February 1960 student members of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), headed by the Reverend M. M. D. Perdue, protested in front of the store and were later joined by Bishop C Eubank Tucker, AME Zion Church, NAACP Youth Council and a biracial coalition of individuals.



Stewart's Department Store  
March 11, 1961.

### 3. Stewart's, 510 South Fourth

Demonstrations led by CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), the Youth Council of the NAACP and a coalition of churches and individuals, started in February, 1960 and resulted in the restaurant's periodically closing due to the disruption of business. Stewart's employees assaulted demonstrators by knocking them down to get them to disperse. The demonstrations continued throughout the year leading up to the "Nothing New for Easter" boycott.

### 4. Blue Boar Cafeterias, 410 W. Walnut Street

Targeted sites for the demonstrators on Fourth Street included the Blue Boar Cafeterias because of their unwillingness to serve black customers. Blue Boar Cafeterias were part of a chain of southern cafeteria-style restaurants based in Louisville. The first restaurant opened in 1931 on Fourth near Broadway and the Walnut Street location was the second location opened downtown. As with its corporate siblings, the restaurants flourished during the period 1930-1960s, even expanding into suburban malls in the 1970s.



Blue Boar Cafeteria, April 24, 1961

### 5. Civil Rights Movement Overview, Fourth & Guthrie Street

In Spring 1960, sit-in demonstrations spread throughout the South, as young African Americans demanded an end to second-class treatment in restaurants, department stores and movie theaters. In Louisville, the sit-in campaign for an ordinance against discrimination in such accommodations centered on the shopping and dining corridor along Fourth Street in the heart of downtown. Earlier demonstrations set the precedent for the campaign, including NAACP Youth Council sit-ins at Walgreens in 1956, demonstrations at the Brown Theater in 1959, and CORE protests at Kaufman-Straus in 1960. Despite the mass arrests of sit-in participants, the movement grew and adopted new tactics. In the summer the movement focused on the upcoming city elections for a new mayor and aldermen. In November 1961, the black community went to the polls and successfully cleaned house, voting to remove all the aldermen who had opposed a civil rights ordinance. The new board did not act immediately, but in May 1963, the city adopted the first public accommodations ordinance in the South.

### 6. Walgreens, 573 South Fourth

On November 27, 1958, Kingston, Jamaica Mayor, Iris King, and a group that included a delegation representing national, state and local governments stopped briefly in the store where King sought to have a cup of coffee. Management of the store declined to serve her and black members of the group. Incensed by the action, a group of Central High School students led by Lyman Johnson protested briefly in front of the store.



March on Fourth Street, March 9, 1961

### THEATERS

The Louisville Defender reported that the Louisville Police Department, arrested 170 students and 10 adults during demonstrations. Three Negro leaders were also arrested for leading the demonstrations.

### 7. Mary Anderson / Rialto Theater - 630 South Fourth

Opened in 1921, the entryway to the theater includes an inset, multi-story area with a ticket booth and decorative tile flooring. The stone building has the word Rialto written on it and has elaborate carvings. Two businesses once shared the building, Roth Jewelers and Shyrock's Fine Candies. The building was partially destroyed in 1969.

One of six segregated theaters targeted for demonstrations by the NAACP, the Mary Anderson Theater opened in August 1933 and was "Home of Warner Brothers" first national Vitaphone first run super attractions."



United Artists Theater.  
March 1961.

### 8. United Artists Theater/Penthouse Theater (formerly Loews Theater), 625 South Fourth

Opened as the Loews Theater in 1928, the theater closed in the late 1960s following the demonstrations and later reopened as the Louisville Palace Theater. The interior is elegant and ornate and has two floors that once housed both theaters. The Palace is currently host to many concerts and theater productions and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

### 9. Kentucky/Ohio Theater - 655 South Fourth

Built in 1921, the building served for years as a movie house. The movie house closed in 1986 and was almost scheduled for demolition until a local entrepreneur bought it at auction and turned it over to two arts advocates who created a nonprofit arts organization, called the Kentucky Theater Project Inc. In 2008, the Kentucky Theater was renovated into the Kentucky Theater Shops.

Constructed in 1923 by Louisville businessman James Graham Brown, the Brown Hotel has anchored the "Magic Corner" of Fourth and Broadway since its opening.

Prior to the demonstrations in 1961, and the passage of the public accommodations ordinance in 1963, Brown resisted early efforts to integrate the hotel. Today, the Brown Hotel continues its long tradition of being a downtown Louisville cornerstone and remains committed to providing all of its patrons with excellent service.

### 11. The Brown Theater - 315 W. Broadway

While the Brown Theater relaxed its policy to admit African American school children to see a performance of the "Ten Commandments", management was reluctant to permanently change its policies. Motivated by previous unsuccessful attempts to generate support for a public accommodations ordinance, the NAACP Youth Council targeted the Brown Theater in 1959.

Demonstrations continued until the theater opened its doors to African Americans following the passage of the public accommodations ordinance in 1963.



Protesters sang "Everybody Wants Freedom" at Quinn Chapel,  
March 1961

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