

What Sets the Woolworth Building Apart?

NEW STATE LANDMARK

Alamo Plaza Location:

- This building, which opened in 1921, occupies what the *San Antonio Light* considered “San Antonio’s most prominent corner,” where all races converged and mingled. It is in the Alamo Plaza National Register Historic District.
- The Woolworth Building provides a visible link to the plaza’s little-known Black history, which includes the siege of the Alamo in 1836.
- The building fits with the plaza’s historic use as a site for public statements and represents San Antonio’s positive role in one of the 20th century’s greatest struggles for freedom: civil rights.

Importance in the Civil Rights Movement

- The lunch counter sit-ins that brought about the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act started at the Woolworth’s national chain of stores.
- Of the seven San Antonio stores that integrated their lunch counters in 1960, Woolworth’s is the oldest, the most culturally significant, and the most prominently located. It was photographed during the local newspaper coverage of the March 16th integration.

Who We Are - The Coalition for the Woolworth Building is a grass-roots advocacy group. We support the preservation of the Woolworth Building and want to build on its presence in Alamo Plaza to share an integrated history that includes African-Americans. Members include: San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum; Esperanza Peace and Justice Center; Westside Preservation Alliance; concerned historians, civic leaders, and community members; and the San Antonio Conservation Society. **Contact:** admin@saaacam.org or conserve@saconservation.org

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The Woolworth Building on Alamo Plaza



A Civil Rights Site Worth Saving

What Happened at Woolworth's?

518 E. Houston St. (Alamo Plaza and Houston St.)
San Antonio, Texas

The Woolworth Building represents a unique site in the civil rights movement in San Antonio, and across the United States, for its role in lunch counter integration.

Backstory: The National Struggle

- On February 1, 1960, four African-American college students challenged racial segregation by sitting down at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. They inspired a student-led movement to integrate lunch counters across the South. Students endured police scrutiny, arrests, and bystander violence in some cities.

San Antonio: "A Shining Example"

- Mary Andrews, a college freshman at Our Lady of the Lake, served as president of the San Antonio Youth Group of the NAACP. In March 1960, Mary sent letters to the managers of local downtown stores requesting equal lunch counter service. The San Antonio NAACP followed up with an ultimatum: desegregate by Thursday, March 17th, or face sit-ins.
- San Antonio's religious and civic leaders met with store managers, who reached an agreement to desegregate most lunch counters. **On Wednesday, March 16, 1960**, seven downtown stores – **F.W. Woolworth**, S.H. Kress, Neisner's, W.T. Grant, H.L. Green, McCrory-McClellan, and Sommer's Drug Stores – **voluntarily desegregated, serving black and white customers at their lunch counters without incident.**
- The event received positive local news coverage, which reached other cities nationwide. On March 19th, *The New York Times* quoted baseball great Jackie Robinson's comments. Robinson called the voluntary integration, "a story that should be told around the world," and compared local efforts to his own integration of major league baseball.

The Cause for Concern

- While the 2017 Alamo Master Plan supported the reuse of the Woolworth Building as part of a planned Alamo Museum, the State-owned Woolworth Building **does not appear in any of the 2018 conceptual drawings for the new museum. Demolition of this historic building appears to be likely.**
- The City of San Antonio has **no control** over what the State of Texas does with the Woolworth Building. It could be reused as part of the new Alamo Museum or it could be reduced to rubble and removed from Alamo Plaza forever.

Why You Should Care

- San Antonio's peaceful lunch counter integration, associated with the Woolworth Building, initiated positive social change for all races and paved the way for additional civil rights progress for Hispanics.
- The Alamo Plaza experience should be **relevant to everyone**. "Relevant history is inclusive history," states John Dichtl, president of the American Association for State and Local History. The Woolworth Building is necessary for an authentic experience that embraces the growing public interest in civil rights.
- Although the Woolworth Building received designation as a **State Antiquities Landmark** from the Texas Historical Commission on May 10, 2019, **this designation does not guarantee its preservation.**

What You Can Do to Help Save the Woolworth Bldg.

- **Contact: Commissioner George P. Bush, Texas General Land Office**
Email: <http://www.glo.texas.gov/contact/email-us/index.html>
Phone: 1-800-998-4GLO (4456)
- **Contact: Governor Greg Abbott**
Online: <https://gov.texas.gov/contact>
Phone: (512) 463-2000 (Main Switchboard: 8AM – 5PM)