On September 23, 1957, nine brave African-American teenagers walked through an angry, white mob to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Ark. What followed was a standoff between the state of Arkansas and the federal government over the right of black students to attend an all-white school. Just three years earlier, in 1954, the Supreme Court had ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools were unequal. Nonetheless, some state officials defied the ruling. Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus was one of them.

When Faubus ordered the state’s National Guard to surround Central High and prevent the nine students from entering, President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock to escort the students safely into the school and uphold the Supreme Court’s ruling. The event became known as the “Little Rock Crisis” and signified one of the many struggles for civil rights in our country’s history.

Last month marked the 50th anniversary of integration at Central High. Though the celebrations and commemorations have subsided, the story of the “Little Rock Nine” can be taught at any point in the school year. As shown over the next three pages, *American Educator* has compiled a short list of Web sites that offer teachers a starting point for developing lessons on desegregation and has asked the lone senior in the Little Rock Nine, Ernest Green, to reflect on his time at Central High.

The National Park Service, which maintains Central High—a national historic site—offers nine lesson plans on the crisis at Little Rock on its Web site (www.nps.gov/chsc/index.htm). Most are listed as appropriate for grades 9-12, while a few can be taught to younger children. Lesson #6, for instance, is geared toward grades 5-12. It teaches the contributions of “the Nine” to the Civil Rights Movement and helps students understand courage in the face of adversity. The Web site’s “History and Culture” section also has classroom-worthy materials—a timeline and several two-page handouts (including one in Spanish) on topics such as the Women’s Emergency Committee that formed to support the desegregation plan.

For teachers looking to supplement their lessons with documents from the period, the online archive created jointly by the *Arkansas Democrat* and *Arkansas Gazette* (www.ardemgaz.com/prev/central/index.html) and the manuscript holdings of the Eisenhower Center (www.eisenhower.archives.gov/dl/LittleRock/littlerockdocuments.html) are excellent resources. The *Democrat* and *Gazette*, the two statewide newspapers of that era, provide a timeline from the *Brown v. Board* decision to the events at Central High. The site also provides links to editorials and articles covering the crisis 50 years ago, as well as photographs that appeared in both papers.

The Eisenhower Center archives include links to statements by President Eisenhower and Governor Faubus defending their positions, as well as their letters and telegrams from that time. In a draft of one speech, Eisenhower refers to Little Rock officials as “demagogic extremists” and notes that the Supreme Court “has declared that separate educational facilities for the races are inherently unequal.”

For a more in-depth look at what the 1957-58 school year was like for the Nine, see Melba Pattillo Beals’ account from the Summer 1994 issue of *American Educator* (www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/summer94/beals.htm).

—Editors
Above, the Eisenhower Center archives include links to letters and telegrams exchanged by President Eisenhower, Governor Faubus, and Mayor Mann, as well as official documents such as the military situation report at right (images courtesy of the Eisenhower Center).
When the Civil Rights Movement began, Ernest Green was just a teenager. Like most African Americans in the South his age, he attended a segregated high school. His life, though, changed dramatically when he decided to help integrate a white one. Green was one of the Little Rock Nine. Fifty years later, he remembers the federal troops escorting him to class, the name-calling, and the determination it took to get through his senior year. Today, Green is managing director of public finance for Lehman Brothers, a global investment banking firm. Green recently sat down with American Educator to share his thoughts on that pivotal time.

—Editors

In the spring of 1957, students at Horace Mann High School—the segregated school I attended—were asked to sign up if they were interested in transferring to Central High School the next year. Well, I signed the sheet of paper. I was aware that the Brown decision represented a fundamental change occurring in the South. It meant expanded opportunities, better jobs. I was aware of the Montgomery bus boycott and the role that Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King played. And I was taking a course in Negro history in 11th grade at Horace Mann. We talked about slave insurrections, protests. We talked about Jackie Robinson breaking into baseball. So I had some consciousness that things didn’t have to be the way they were. The other thing that always struck me was that change was only going to occur if the African-American community was willing to step forward, that it wasn’t going to be handed to you. And I saw Central High School as an educational institution. They had more courses, more reference books, more science labs than we had at Horace Mann. I saw this as an enhancement for my own personal education.

The first day we went to school with the phalanx of paratroopers surrounding us, the morning of the 25th, I felt absolutely exhilarated. This was the first time I could remember that the U.S. government was supporting the interests of African Americans. I felt protected. Initially, the most avid of the segregationists boycotted class and that really was a breath of fresh air. There were students who attempted to speak to us and befriend us. A few tried to eat lunch with us. They came to the table and introduced themselves. But as the soldiers were withdrawn, the segregationists—I guess they figured that we weren’t going to leave—began to trickle back into the school. That’s when the harassment and the intimidation towards us, as well as towards white students who tried to befriend us, increased—and it increased significantly.

Our lockers were continually broken into. I’m sure the Little Rock school board spent thousands of dollars replacing our books. They
were stolen, broken, vandalized. But each time they moved us to a different locker—supposedly a secret locker—in about five minutes that locker was broken into. So we learned very early never put your homework in your locker. Anything you didn’t want destroyed you had to carry around.

In my classes, I participated as much as I could. There was only one teacher that I felt simply didn’t want me in the class. That was the physics teacher. He was very hostile toward me. I was having great difficulty in the course and had a couple of tutors, located through the NAACP, who worked with me. One was a biophysicist from the University of Arkansas. He was white, Dr. Robert L. Wixom. I spent Saturdays at his house being tutored. I wouldn’t have gotten through the course without his help.

There was some apprehension on the part of the school about my going to the graduation ceremony. There were some threats. Some individuals in Little Rock had indicated that they would harm me if I showed up. And of course I was laser focused on going because of the toil and tribulations we went through that year. So there were 600-plus students graduating with me. They went through the list of students alphabetically. When they got to my name there was this silence: No one clapped except my family. As I walked across the stage I thought to myself that I really didn’t need anyone to clap. The moment, the achievement was recognition enough.

It turned out that Dr. King attended my graduation. I didn’t know he was coming and didn’t know he was in the audience. He sat with my family. We spoke briefly at the end of the ceremony. I was honored that he appeared.

I’m proud to have been part of the Nine. Fifty years later to see your name in a history book or have a teacher come up to you and say they use Eyes on the Prize (a documentary on the civil rights struggle) as a teaching tool for young people, it makes you feel good. What Little Rock represents is trying to be prepared to take advantage of a moment. It’s about us pursuing what most people would think an admirable goal: a decent education.