

Teaching the Legacy of Little Rock

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

FALL 2007

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

James C. Hagerty, Press Secretary to the President

September 5, 1957

THE WHITE HOUSE

U. S. Naval Base
Newport, Rhode Island

THE PRESIDENT TODAY SENT THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM TO THE HONORABLE ORVAL E. FAUBUS, THE GOVERNOR OF ARKANSAS

The Honorable Orval E. Faubus
Governor of Arkansas
Little Rock, Arkansas

Your telegram received requesting my assurance of understanding and cooperation in the course of action you have taken and integration recommended by the Little Rock School Board ordered by the United States District Court pursuant to the order of the United States Supreme Court.

When I became President, I took an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. The only assurance I can give you is that the Federal Constitution will be upheld by me by all legal means at my command.

There is no basis of fact to the statements you make in your telegram that Federal authorities have been considering taking you into custody or that telephone lines to your Executive Mansion have been cut off by any agency of the Federal Government.

At the request of Judge Davies, the Department of Justice is presently collecting facts as to interference with or failure to comply with the District Court's order. You and other state officials -- as well as the National Guard which, of course, is not uniformed, armed and partially sustained by the Government -- will, I am sure, give full cooperation to the United States District Court.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

CLASS OF SERVICE
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WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

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DL=Day Letter
NL=Night Letter
LT=International Letter Telegram

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PRESIDENT DWIGHT D EISENHOWER =
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THE IMMEDIATE NEED FOR FEDERAL TROOPS IS URGENT. THE MOB IS MUCH LARGER IN NUMBERS AT 8AM THAN AT ANY TIME YESTERDAY PEOPLE ARE CONVERGING ON THE SCENE FROM ALL DIRECTIONS MOB IS ARMED AND ENGAGING IN FISTICUFFS AND OTHER ACTS OF VIOLENCE. SITUATION IS OUT OF CONTROL AND POLICE CANNOT DISPERSE THE MOB I AM PLEADING TO YOU AS PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE INTEREST OF HUMANITY LAW AND ORDER AND BECAUSE OF DEMOCRACY WORLD

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

WIDE TO PROVIDE THE NECESSARY FEDERAL TROOPS WITHIN SEVERAL HOURS. ACTION BY YOU WILL RESTORE PEACE AND ORDER AND COMPLIANCE WITH YOUR PROCLAMATION =
WOODROW WILSON MANN MAYOR OF LITTLEROCK ARKANSAS =

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Authority MR 79-96 #5
bc

NLE Date 3/28/79

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

White House

No. 217

Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations

SITUATION REPORT: ARKANSAS
131700 - 141700 Eastern Standard Time February 1958

- Events at Central High School
 - Central High School opened at 0830 hours, Central Standard Time, 14 February 1958 and closed at 1530 hours, Central Standard Time. Eight Negro students arrived and departed in private vehicles. Minnie Brown (colored student) is in suspended status.
 - There was no significant change in attendance at Central High School.
- Dispositions
 - During school hours
 - Central High School
One Platoon, Task Force, 153d Infantry
 - Camp Robinson
One Platoon, Task Force, 153d Infantry (30 minute alert)
One Company (-), Task Force, 153d Infantry (60 minute alert)
Balance of Task Force, 153d Infantry
 - During all other hours - Camp Robinson
One Platoon, Task Force, 153d Infantry (30 minute alert)
One Company (-), Task Force, 153d Infantry (60 minute alert)
Balance of Task Force, 153d Infantry
- Items of Significant Interest
 - Ernest Green (colored student) reported to school officials on 13 February 1958 that his locker had been damaged. (This is in addition to the previous report of three damaged lockers on 13 February 1958.)
 - At 1250 hours, Central Standard Time, 14 February 1958, Ernest Green (colored student) reported that his locker had been damaged beyond use, and that all his books had been stolen.
 - The original three-day suspension of Minnie Brown of 6 February has been increased to two weeks. The two-week suspension is not in addition to the original three days as previously reported.
 - The three white boys, who were suspended for a minimum of three days on 30 January 1958 for starting a fire in Central High School, have been permitted to return to school.

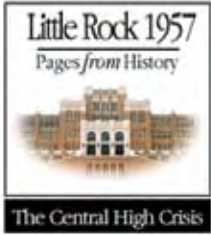
Little Rock School Integration Crisis

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* that segregated schools are "inherently unequal." In September 1957, as a result of that ruling, nine African-American students enrolled at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. The ensuing struggle between segregationists and integrationists, the State of Arkansas and the federal government, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus has become known in modern American history as the "Little Rock Crisis." The crisis gained attention worldwide. When Governor Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to surround Central High School to keep the nine students from entering the school, President Eisenhower ordered the 101st Airborne Division into Little Rock to insure the safety of the "Little Rock Nine" and that the rulings of the Supreme Court were upheld. The manuscript holdings of the Eisenhower Library contain a large amount of documentation on this historic test of the *Brown vs. Topeka* ruling and school integration.

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).



At left, historic headlines reveal the showdown between President Eisenhower and Governor Faubus (courtesy of the Arkansas Gazette). Below left, an angry mob follows Elizabeth Eckford (one of the Nine); below center, troops guard Central High; and below far right, Ernest Green accepts his diploma. Opposite, excerpts from Little Rock lesson plans and handouts featured on the National Park Service Web site (reprinted with permission).



HISTORIC FRONT PAGES FROM THE Arkansas Democrat and Arkansas Gazette

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A Senior Year, A Civil Right

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

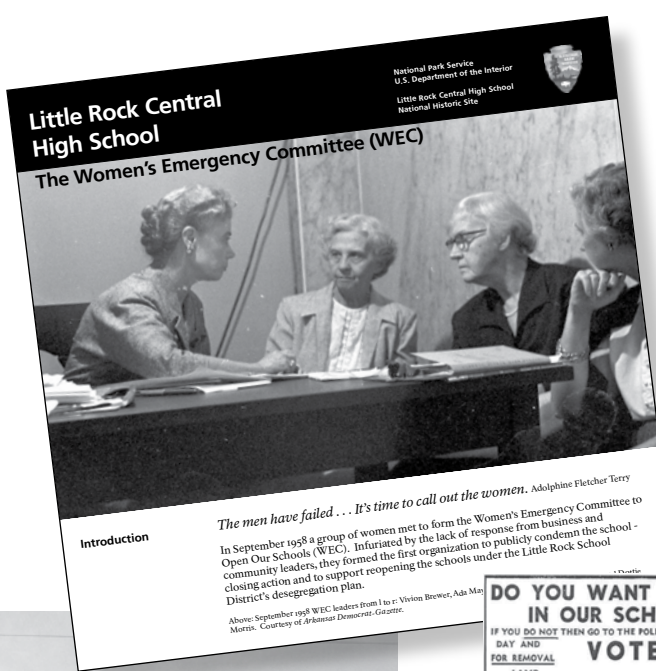
In the spring of 1957, students at Horace Mann High School—the segregated school I attended—were asked to sign up if they were interested in transferring to Central High School the next year. Well, I signed the sheet of paper. I was aware that the *Brown* decision represented a fundamental change occurring 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 segre-

gationists 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



Little Rock Central High School
National Historic Site

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The Fourteenth Amendment
Lesson #7

Grade Level: 9-12

Objective: To analyze the historical meaning of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and how it is used today.

Ties to Arkansas Civics: (full year) 1.4-, 1.5-, 3.6-, 4.1-, 5.2-, 5.3-, 6.1.; (one semester) 1.4-, 1.5-, 3.4-, 3.4-, 4.1-, 6.2.

Ties to American Government and Civics: NSS-C.9-12.1, NSS-C.9-12.2, NSS-C.9-12.5

"While the Union survived the Civil War, the Constitution did not. In its place arose a new, more promising basis for justice and equality, the Fourteenth Amendment." —Justice Thurgood Marshall

A Historical Perspective:

Three major amendments to the U.S. Constitution were added at the end of the Civil War – the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments – otherwise known as the Civil War Amendments (1868). The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery and the Fifteenth Amendment gave African American men the right to vote. However, the most relevant to the civil rights movement was the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Fourteenth Amendment was passed to stop states from unfairly discriminating against citizens who were once enslaved as citizens of "equal protection under the law." This could not be any unreasonable any minority groups in the U.S. The Fourteenth Amendment is the basis for claims of legal equality and expands the Constitution. It is cited more often than any other amendment in modern history.

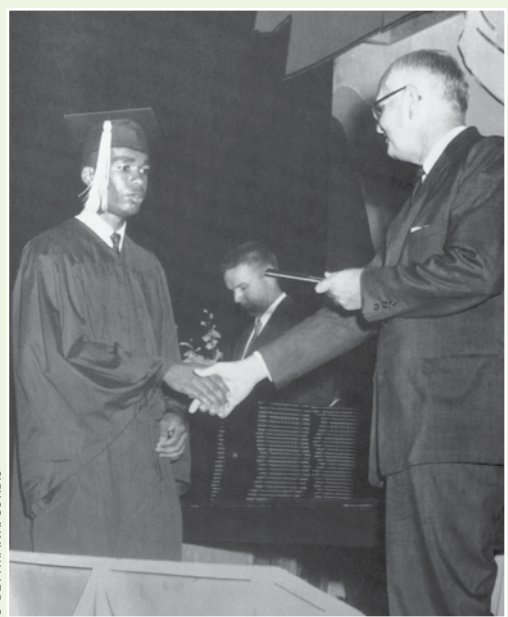
Use of Representatives on the passage of the proposition to amend the U.S. Constitution, January Harper's Weekly (volume 9, no. 425, 1865, Feb. 18). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



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.

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