

Little Rock Central High School

By Haley Hersant

“Two, four, six, eight, we don’t want to integrate!” The crowd shouted at the first African American students who had been chosen to attend Little Rock Central High School.

Central High School was built in 1927. This big, beautiful, new school stocked with new textbooks and equipment was an all white student school.

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court passed a law to put an end to racially segregated schools. In 1957, Little Rock School Superintendent Virgil Blossom was given a list of African American students who were interested in attending Central High School. They had to be hardworking, have excellent grades, and a personality to survive in an all white school where they weren’t particularly welcomed.

The original list consisted of ten students, however, Elizabeth Eckford couldn’t handle the harassment and dropped out. The nine who entered were: Ernest Green, Terrence Roberts, Minnijean Brown, Thelma Mothershed, Gloria Ray, Melba Pattillo, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls. This group of students became known as the “Little Rock Nine.”

Crowds of white students, their parents, and other adults greeted the nine African American everyday with signs that said mean and nasty remarks. The crowd yelled at them, kicked them, and even spat on them.

For safety reasons, the National Guard was brought in to protect the nine students. The National Guard escorted the nine students to school everyday in a vehicle. Even though they were in a car, the crowd still tried to attack them by pounding on the windows.

They were also harassed everyday on the inside of the school. For example, the teachers would mark things wrong on the nine students’ papers when they were right. One of the nine was expelled for throwing chili on a white boy after he kept saying mean things to her. Another time, one of the nine was pushed down the stairs and the boy told the principal that he bumped into her by accident. In the hallways the students would tell the nine to “go home” and “go back to your old school.” They received threatening phone calls, notes in their lockets, and had their personal belonging destroyed.

The Little Rock Nine were very brave. They must have felt horrible when people called them mean names, hurt them physically, and told them to leave the school. They were not only brave but also determined to make the world a better place and put an end to segregation.

Ernest Green was the first of three African Americans to graduate from Central High School, a previously all white school. When he received his diploma his family and friends were the only people clapping in the stands. Ernest Green was so proud and excited to receive his diploma he didn't notice that he helped change the world forever.

The desegregation of Central High School was considered one of the most important events in the African American Civil Rights Movement. The school received international recognition and it is currently a National Historic site. It provides a constant reminder of how discrimination is wrong.

Bibliography

Fitzgerald, Stephanie. The Little Rock Nine: Struggle for Integration. Minneapolis, MN: White Thomson Publishing Ltd., 2007.

O'Neill, Laurie A. Little Rock: The Desegregation of Central High. Brookfield, CT: Millbrook Press, 1994.

**I also visited the Central High School Museum and got to talk to one of the original Little Rock 9 students, Minnijean Brown-Trickey.