



History of the Little Rock Nine



Central High School
Little Rock, Arkansas, 1957

BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION DECISION

... segregated public schools were unconstitutional and must be integrated "with all deliberate speed."



Chester's Little Rock Nine Hiking Trail was named for the historic school desegregation legal effort to enroll nine Black students at the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. The Little

Rock Nine case was litigated by **Constance Baker Motley** and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) team. It was among the first and most important tests of the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, that ruled segregated public schools were unconstitutional and must be integrated "with all deliberate speed."



Integration efforts in Little Rock were led by **Daisy Bates**, Arkansas NAACP President and civil rights activist; local ministers; and by attorney Wiley Branton.

The *Brown* ruling was bitterly contested in Arkansas, spearheaded by its segregationist Governor, Orval Faubus, who tried to obstruct all desegregation by enacting state anti-integration laws, amending the state constitution and filing federal lawsuits.

When these efforts failed, and the federal courts ordered admission of the nine Black students into Central on Sept. 2, 1957, Gov. Faubus deployed the **Arkansas National Guard** to physically block their entry. This precipitated the "Little Rock Crisis," a three-week blockade of Central High by the Guard, supported by white mobs who violently attacked school property, injured Black observers, and terrorized the Black students whose entry attempts were thwarted.



The crisis ended on Sept. 25, 1957, when **President Eisenhower** invoked the 1807 Insurrection Act and sent 1,200 federal troops to Little Rock. They then quelled the riots, took command of the

Arkansas National Guard, and physically escorted the Little Rock Nine students into Central. Not since Reconstruction had federal troops been used to protect Black civil rights and never to enforce a U.S. Supreme Court decision. The nine students remained at Central under armed guard for the 1957-58 school year, though they were constantly harassed and intimidated.



Governor Faubus, undeterred, claiming threats of violence, filed and won a new federal injunction in May 1958 to delay until 1961 any further integration at Central, and to return the status quo to

segregated schools.

The injunction was immediately appealed by Mrs. Motley and the NAACP LDF team, led by



Thurgood Marshall. Their case, *Cooper v. Aaron*, reached the U.S. Supreme Court and, in September 1958, the Court reaffirmed *Brown* and rejected the measures to delay desegregation. Under court

order, the Black students could remain at Central.

Cooper v. Aaron also reaffirmed that U.S. Supreme Court rulings on civil rights superseded state and local law, and that decisions involving the constitutional rights of individuals or groups cannot be blocked because of popular disagreement or threats of violence.

The **Little Rock Nine case** was the beginning of the end for Jim Crow education. The courage and persistence of the nine teenagers, Mrs. Motley, and the Legal Defense Fund lawyers and their supporters was a major victory for school integration and equal rights in America.

Central High School in Little Rock is now a National Historic Site housing a Civil Rights Museum, administered by the National Park Service, commemorating the 1957-58 events around school desegregation in America.

LITTLE ROCK CRISIS • September 2 - 25, 1957



The Nine Students in the Little Rock Nine School Desegregation Case, September 1957. Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Pattillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, Carlotta Walls. (Wire Service Photo)



White crowds at Little Rock Central High gather on September 4, 1957, to support the Arkansas National Guard blocking entry of Black students, enrolled under the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education*. (Photo: William P. Straeter/AP)



"The Scream" – Elizabeth Eckford taunted by white crowd and prevented from entering Central High, September 2, 1957. (Photo: Will Counts; Arkansas History Commission.)



Marchers protesting school integration head from the State Capitol toward Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas. (Photo: Will Counts/Arkansas Democrat via AP, September 1957)



Arkansas National Guard troops deployed by Gov. Faubus, stand outside Central High School to prevent nine Black students from entering the school. They remained from September 2-24, 1957, until Eisenhower intervened with federal troops on September 25. (Wire Service Photo)



1,200 Federal troops from the 101st Airborne Division from Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, deployed to Little Rock, Arkansas, on September 24, 1957, stand guard on September 25, at Central High School at dawn, waiting to escort nine Black students into the school. (Photo: AP)



Nine Black students enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, on September 25, 1957, escorted by federal troops of the 101st Airborne Division. (Photo: UPI)



The Little Rock Nine students being escorted by federal troops from Central High at the end of the first day of school integration, September 25, 1957. (Photo: UPI)