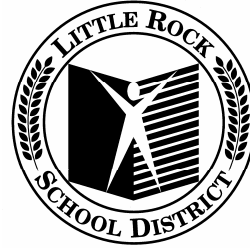


Little Rock School District History/Biographical Sketches The Little Rock Nine



The Little Rock Nine and their mentor Daisy Bates collectively received the prestigious Spingarn Award from the NAACP in 1958. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., received the award the previous year. The Spingarn Award, which consists of a gold medal, is awarded annually by the NAACP for outstanding achievement by a black American.

In November 1999 President William J. Clinton honored the Little Rock Nine with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest honor that can be bestowed upon a civilian.

Also in 1999 these nine brave individuals banded together once more to form the Little Rock Nine Foundation, an organization dedicated to furthering the cause of quality public education for all students.

The United States Postal Service honored the Little Rock Nine in August 2005 with a commemorative stamp; it was one of ten stamps in the “To Form a More Perfect Union” series commemorating a variety of civil rights milestones. The stamp features George Hunt’s painting *America Cares* (1997).

A bronze memorial that pays homage to the Little Rock Nine was unveiled on the grounds of the Arkansas State Capitol the same day the commemorative stamp was released. Named “Testament,” it consists of life-size bronze figures of the nine students and quotes from each on bronze plaques. It is the first civil rights memorial to be placed on the grounds of a state capitol in the United States. The memorial was designed by Little Rock artists Kathy and John Deering.

The United States Mint honored the Little Rock Nine with a commemorative silver dollar in July 2007. The obverse (front) of the coin features a view of the feet of the students, escorted by a United States soldier, walking toward school below a row of nine symbolic stars. The reverse of the coin features a rendition of Little Rock Central High School as it appeared in 1957.

*** * * * ***

Minnijean Brown Trickey was suspended and later expelled from Central High School for her involvement in altercations with other students. She went to live with Dr. Kenneth & Mamie Clark in New York City, and she graduated from New Lincoln High

School in 1959. She attended Southern Illinois University and earned a master's degree in social work from Carleton University in Canada.

Minnijean has committed her life to peacemaking, environmental issues, developing youth leadership, diversity education and training, cross-cultural communications and gender and social justice advocacy.

As part of her ongoing commitment to education, Minnijean has been a facilitator/teacher for the Sojourn to the Past Project. More than 3,000 high school students have joined this 10-day interactive history course that travels to civil rights sites, meeting with key leaders and participants in the southern United States.

Minnijean served in the Clinton Administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Workforce Diversity at the Department of the Interior.

Journey to Little Rock: The Untold Story of Minnijean Brown is a documentary that has received critical acclaim in several national and international film festivals. She also has been featured in *People*, *Newsweek*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the BBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. and other media outlets. She is the recipient of numerous awards for her community work for social justice, including the Lifetime Achievement Tribute by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and the International Wolf Project Award for contributions to racial harmony.

Minnijean continues her roles as a teacher, writer and lecturer. She holds the Shipley Visiting Writer Fellowship at Arkansas State University, which includes support for researching and writing her memoirs. Her daughter Spirit Trickey is a Park Ranger at the Central High School National Historic Site.

* * * * *

The image of 15-year-old **Elizabeth Eckford**, walking alone through a screaming mob in front of Central High School, catapulted the Central High School crisis into the nation's living rooms and brought international attention to Little Rock. On September 4, 1957, Elizabeth arrived at Central alone. The nine students were supposed to go together, but their meeting place was changed the previous night. The Eckford family had no phone, and group mentor Daisy Bates intended to go to their home early the next morning but never made it. As a result, Elizabeth got off the bus alone a block from the school and tried to enter the campus twice, only to be turned away both times by Arkansas National Guard troops, there under orders from Governor Faubus. Elizabeth then confronted an angry mob of people (men, women, and teenagers) chanting "Two, four, six, eight, we ain't gonna integrate." Elizabeth silently made her way through the crowd and sat on a bus bench at the end of the block. She was eventually able to board a city bus, and went to her mother's workplace.

Because all of the city's high schools were closed the following year, Elizabeth did not graduate from Central High School. Rather, she joined the U.S. Army and earned her

G.E.D. She returned to Little Rock in the 1960s to be closer to her family. She later attended Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. Elizabeth is an Army veteran and has held a variety of jobs throughout her life, including a waitress, history teacher, welfare worker, unemployment interviewer and military reporter.

In 1997 Elizabeth Eckford shared the Father Joseph Biltz Award, presented by the National Conference for Community and Justice, with Hazel Bryan Massery, a segregationist classmate who appears in the famous Will Counts photograph. During the reconciliation rally of the same year, the two former adversaries made speeches together. They were recognized for contributing to the organization's mission of promoting understanding and respect through advocacy and education.

* * * * *

Ernest Green was a senior when he enrolled in Central High School for the 1957-58 school year. He was the first of the nine to graduate and was the first African-American student to graduate from Central High School. Sitting with Green family at the event was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who attended the graduation ceremonies as a guest of the Green family.

Ernest earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Michigan State University. He served as the director for the A. Phillip Randolph Education Fund from 1968 to 1977. He then was appointed Assistant Secretary of Labor for Employment and Training under President Jimmy Carter; he also served as Chairman of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Capital Financing Advisory Board and Chairman of the African Development Foundation under President Clinton. Ernest is Managing Director of Public Finance at Lehman Brothers in Washington, D.C., and has been with the company since 1987. He has served on numerous boards including the NAACP and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

In 1992 Disney produced a television movie, *The Ernest Green Story*, which still is popular with students of all ages and is used in classrooms around the world to teach about desegregation and the Little Rock Nine.

* * * * *

Despite daily torment from white students at Central, **Thelma Mothershed Wair** completed her junior year at the formerly all-white high school during the tumultuous 1957-58 year. Despite the fact that she had a cardiac condition since birth, she had a near-perfect record for attendance. Because all the high schools in Little Rock were closed in 1958-59, Wair earned the necessary credits for graduation through correspondence courses and by attending summer school in St. Louis, Missouri. She received her diploma from Central High School by mail.

Thelma graduated from Southern Illinois University and taught home economics in East St. Louis, Illinois. She earned a master's degree in guidance & counseling from Southern

Illinois University in 1970. She taught in the East St. Louis School System for 28 years before retiring in 1994. Wair also has worked at the St. Clair County Jail, Juvenile Detention Center in St. Clair County, Illinois, and was an instructor of survival skills for women at the American Red Cross Second Chance Shelter for the Homeless. During the 1989-1990 school year, Thelma was honored as an Outstanding Role Model by the East St. Louis chapter of the Top Ladies of Distinction and the Early Childhood-Pre-Kindergarten staff of District 189.

* * * * *

Melba Pattillo Beals faced daily harassment from white students at Central High School. The soldier that was assigned to protect her told her, “In order to get through this year, you will have to become a soldier. Never let your enemy know what you are feeling.” Melba, whose mother was the first African American to attend the University of Arkansas, took his advice and finished the school year. She moved to Santa Rosa, California, for her senior year of high school when Central and the other three Little Rock high schools were closed. Melba received a bachelor’s degree from San Francisco State University. She earned a graduate degree in communications from Columbia University, worked as a reporter for NBC and currently works as a communications consultant.

Melba is the only one of the Little Rock Nine to have written a book based on her experiences at Central High School; it is titled *Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Desegregate Little Rock’s Central High School*. The book was named an ALA Notable Book for 1995 and won the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award that same year. She also wrote *White is a State of Mind* in 1999, which follows Melba from her senior year in high school to her college and family days in California. She currently is chair of African-American History at Dominican University.

* * * * *

Gloria Ray Karlmark was just 14 years old when she finished Dunbar Junior High School and registered to attend Central for her sophomore year. Ray, like the others, was tormented by certain white students who called her names and even pushed her down a flight of stairs. Still, like the others, she was determined to finish the year. Her mother, a woman with two university degrees and who worked as a sociologist for the State of Arkansas, was fired by Governor Faubus when she refused to withdraw Gloria from Central High. The following year when all the public high schools in Little Rock remained closed, Gloria moved to Missouri where her mother had been able to find employment. She attended the newly integrated Kansas City Central High School. Gloria attended Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago, graduating in 1965 with a bachelor’s degree in Chemistry and Mathematics. She worked briefly as a public school teacher and laboratory research assistant at the University of Chicago Research Medical Center.

In 1966 Gloria joined the IIT Research Institute as Assistant Mathematician on the APT IV (robotics) project. Her career has been varied, including working at the IBM Nordic

Laboratory in Sweden, working as a patent attorney for IBM International Patent Operations; serving as Editor-in-Chief of *Computers in Industry*, an international journal of practice and experience of computer applications in industry; and Philips International. She retired in 1994.

* * * * *

Dr. Terrence Roberts was a sophomore at Horace Mann High School when he volunteered to integrate Central High School. When the high schools were closed during the 1958-59 school year, he moved to Los Angeles and graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1959. He earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from California State University and went on to graduate school at UCLA where he received a master's degree in social welfare in 1970. He received a Ph.D. in psychology from Southern Illinois University in 1976.

Dr. Roberts became director of the mental health unit of St. Helena Hospital in Deer Park, CA. He later became assistant dean of the UCLA School of Social Welfare. As demands on his time increased, he became program co-chair to concentrate on the activities of his management consulting firm. He currently is chair of the master's in psychology program at Antioch College in Los Angeles and runs a private psychology practice in Pasadena. He travels widely as a sought-after speaker and consultant and is CEO of the management consulting firm Terrence J. Roberts & Associates, and he serves as a desegregation consultant for the Little Rock School District. He serves on the boards of the Economic Resources Center in Southern California, Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena, the Eisenhower World Affairs Institute and the Little Rock Nine Foundation.

ABC's *Good Morning, America* brought Dr. Roberts and former Arkansas governor Orval Faubus face to face on May 17, 1979. He told Mr. Faubus, "I really feel it was a violation of public trust to practice your own personal policies of racism in that position. You endangered not only my life, but the lives of hundreds of other people, both black and white."

* * * * *

Jefferson Thomas was a track athlete at Horace Mann High School before enrolling at Central as a sophomore, where his quiet demeanor made him an easy target for the bullies at school. He graduated from Central High School in 1960. He attended Wayne State University in Detroit and Los Angeles State College, where he received his bachelor's degree. He worked as an accountant for the U.S. Department of Defense in Columbus; he retired in 2004. A Vietnam veteran, Jefferson resides in Columbus, Ohio. He received an honorary "Doctor of Humane Letters" from Ohio Dominican University in 2001.

Jefferson is a frequent speaker at high schools, colleges and universities. He served as a mentor in the Village to Child Program co-sponsored by Ohio Dominican University. He

continues to serve as a mentor and also serves on the Board of Directors for the City of Refuge Learning Academy at the First Church of God.

* * * * *

Carlotta Walls LaNier was the youngest of the Little Rock Nine. Inspired by Rosa Parks, she had a desire to get the best education available by enrolling in Central High School. White students called her names and spat on her while armed guards escorted her to classes, but Carlotta concentrated on her studies and protected herself throughout the school year. She graduated from Central High School in 1960. She attended Michigan State University and Colorado State College (now the University of Northern Colorado) and worked with teenagers at the YWCA. In 1977 she began LaNier and Company, a real estate brokerage firm.

Carlotta is the president of the Little Rock Nine Foundation, an organization committed to ensuring that future generations have access to quality education, and she is a member of the Urban League and the NAACP. Carlotta has served as a trustee for the Iliff School of Theology and the University of Northern Colorado.

Carlotta was named a “Woman of Distinction” by the Girl Scouts in 2000, and she was inducted into the Colorado Women’s Hall of Fame in 2004. She recently received the National Shining Star Award from NOBEL/Women (National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women).

* * * * *

Sources:

LRSD archives.

Little Rock Nine Foundation, online at <http://www.littlerock9.com/>. Accessed 12 July 2007.

Central High 50th, online at <http://www.lrsd.org/centralhigh50th/default.cfm>. Accessed 10 July 2007.

The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture, online at <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net>. Accessed 10 July 2007.