



Every Person Has A Story of Courage: The Little Rock Nine

Grade Level: 5-12

Objectives:

- To learn about and feel the emotions of events surrounding the integration of Little Rock Central High School.
- To identify the Little Rock Nine, their contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, and understand their courage in the face of adversity.

In 1957, nine African-American students entered Little Rock Central High School. Each had chosen to go to the previously all-white high school for various reasons - it was close to their homes, it offered more courses than their other school, and/or they exercised their right to attend the high school following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. No matter what their reasons, the nine students showed great character and courage in the face of adversity. This lesson identifies the nine students, now known to history as the "Little Rock Nine," and discusses the issue of courage and character development for students of all ages.

Have students take this self-evaluation prior to beginning the lesson:

True False

I stand up for what is right, even if I stand alone.

I don't cave in to negative peer pressure.

Fear of failure does not prevent me from trying things.

I am not afraid to express myself just because some people might disapprove.

I think I am/am not a courageous person because:

Ties to Arkansas History Frame - works: (grades 5-8) TCC1.1., TCC1.3., TCC1.4., TCC2.2., TCC2.3., PPE1.2., PAG1.1., PAG1.2., PAG1.3., PAG1.4., PAG1.5., SSPSI.1., SSPSI.2., SSPSI.3., SSPSI.4.; (grades 9-12) TCC1.1., TCC1.2., TCC1.3., TCC1.4., TCC2.2., TCC2.3., PPE1.1., PPE1.2., PAG4.1., PAG4.2., PAG4.3., PAG4.4., SSPSI.1., SSPSI.2., SSPSI.3., SSPSI.4., SSPSI.5., SSPSI.6.

Ties to the Arkansas Civics Frame - works: (full year)1.4, 1.5, 2.3, 3.6, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2; (one semester) 1.3, 1.4, 2.3, 3.4, 4.1, 6.1, 6.2.

Ties to the Social Studies Frame - works (U.S.): (grades 5-12)NSS-USH.5-12.9.

Ties to US Civics Frameworks: (grades 5-8) NSS-C.5-8.1, NSS-C.5-8.3, NSS-C.5-8.5; (grades 9-12) NSS-C.9-12.1, NSS-C.9-12.3, NSS-C.9-12.5.



Elizabeth Eckford being followed by a hostile crowd on September 4, 1957.
Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat.

The Little Rock Nine

Melba Pattillo Beals

Elizabeth Eckford

Ernest Green

Gloria Ray Karlmark

Carlotta Walls Lanier

Dr. Terrence Roberts

Jefferson Thomas

Minnijean Brown
Trickey

Thelma
Mothershed Wair

I had long dreamed of entering Central High. I could not have imagined what that privilege could cost me.

After three days inside Central, I know that integration is a much bigger word than I thought.

—Melba Pattillo Beals

1957 Crisis at Central High School: A Background

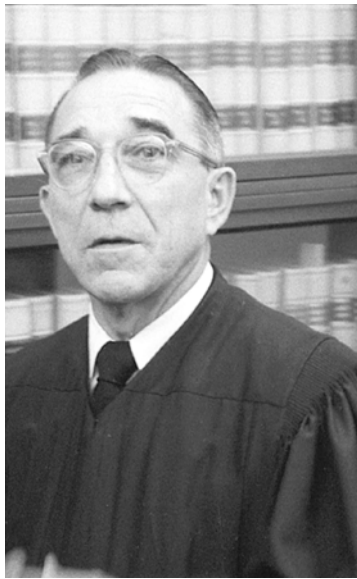
In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public education was a violation of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It was known as the *Oliver Brown et al v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision. As school districts across the South sought various ways to respond to the court's ruling, Little Rock Central High School became the symbol of resistance to desegregation.

On May 22, 1954, the Little Rock School Board issued a statement saying that it would comply with the Supreme Court's decision once the court outlined the method and time frame for implementation. Meanwhile, the school board directed Superintendent Virgil Blossom to formulate a plan for desegregation. His plan, known as the *Blossom Plan*, was adopted in May of 1955. Originally conceived to begin at the elementary school level, school district officials decided to begin "token" desegregation in the fall of 1957 at the all-white Central High School only.

The Blossom Plan also called for desegregation to expand to the junior high level by 1960 and the elementary level by 1963. The plan also included a transfer provision that would allow any student to transfer from a school where his/her race was in the minority. This action assured that students at both Dunbar and Horace Mann High School would remain predominately African American, but white students zoned for both could transfer to another school. Later that month, the Supreme Court issued the *Brown II* decision that directed districts to desegregate with "all deliberate speed."

Governor Orval Faubus (foreground) with Virgil Blossom of the Little Rock School District before the desegregation of Central High School, 1957. Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat.





Federal Judge Ronald Davies, ca. 1957. Courtesy of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

The story of the Little Rock Nine and the desegregation of Central High School is nine separate stories. Each of the nine student registered at different times and for different reasons. No one controlled their registration to Central High School and they were not "chosen." As Thelma Mothershed Wair recalls, "We were not chosen, we chose ourselves." Therefore, Americans should view their story as nine individuals exercising their own constitutional rights!

In February 1956, the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)* Legal Defense Fund filed suit against the Little Rock School District on behalf of 33 African-American students who had attempted to register in all-white schools. In the suit, *Aaron v. Cooper*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit upheld the school district's position that the Blossom Plan complied with the Supreme Court's instructions. The federal court retained jurisdiction in the case, making compliance with the plan mandatory.

Meanwhile, across the South, resistance to desegregation grew. Eighteen United States Senators and 81 Congressmen (including all eight members from Arkansas), signed the *Southern Manifesto* that denounced the Supreme Court's decision and urged southern states to resist it. In Little Rock, the Capital Citizens' Council - a local version of the white citizens' councils that were emerging across Arkansas and the South - formed in 1956 and promoted public resistance to desegregation. The organization purchased newspaper advertisements attacking integration and held rallies at which speakers challenged Arkansans to resist. In one of the more publicized events, Georgia Governor Marvin Griffin and former Georgia State Legislator, Roy Harris, frequent speakers at white citizens' council rallies across the South, assured listeners at a Capital Citizens' Council fundraiser that the State of Georgia would not allow school desegregation and called upon Arkansans to support white supremacy and defend segregation.

With fall of 1957 fast approaching, both segregationists and school district officials appealed to Governor Orval Faubus to take action to preserve order. In a letter writing campaign to the governor, segregationists predicted that violence would erupt if desegregation proceeded at Central High School. School district officials appealed to the governor to assure the public that desegregation would proceed smoothly. Governor Faubus, in turn, asked the federal government for assistance in the event of trouble. The head of the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division met with Faubus on August 28, 1957, and advised him that the federal government could not promise advance responsibility for maintaining order. Angered when the press received nor Faubus told reporters that the federal government was trying to force integration on an unwilling public while at the same time demanding that states handle any problems that might arise on their own.



Closely aligned with the Capital Citizens' Council, the Mother's League of Central High formed in August and petitioned the governor to prevent desegregation at the school. The group filed suit seeking a temporary injunction against integration. Pulaski Chancellor Murray Reed granted the injunction on the grounds that desegregation could lead to violence. The next day, however, Federal District Judge Ronald Davies nullified the injunction and ordered the Little Rock School Board to proceed with its desegregation plan.

The conflict reached crisis proportions when Governor Faubus appeared on television and announced that he had called out units of the Arkansas National Guard to prevent violence at Central High School, saying "There is evidence of disorder and threats of disorder which could have but one inevitable result - that is violence which can lead to injury and the doing of harm to persons and property." School district officials advised the African-American students who had registered at Central High School not to try to attend for the first day of classes. Judge Davies ordered the school board to proceed with desegregation the next day.

On September 4, 1957, nine African-American students attempted to enter Central High School. Several of them made their way to one corner of the campus where they were turned away by the National Guard. One of them, fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Eckford, arrived at the north end of the campus and was directed away by National Guardsmen. She walked south down Park Street in front of the school campus, surrounded by a growing crowd of protesters who jeered and taunted her. She made her way to a bus stop on the south side of the campus and was able to board a bus and get away to safety. The next morning, people around the country and world opened their newspapers to the image of a teenager besieged by an angry mob of students and adults.



Photos (top and bottom): Arkansas National Guard troops stand guard in front of Central High School on Park Street, September 1957. Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat; Several of the Little Rock Nine are barred from the school by the Arkansas National Guard. Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat.

The Little Rock School Board asked Judge Davies to temporarily suspend his desegregation order, but the judge refused and ordered the school district to proceed with desegregation. The judge also instructed the U.S. Attorney General to file a petition for an injunction against Governor Faubus and two officers of the Arkansas National Guard



Members of the 101st Airborne from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, enter Little Rock on September 24, 1957/ Photo by Larry Obsitnik for the Arkansas Gazette at the Arkansas History Commission.

to prevent them from obstructing the court order to desegregate. In the interim, U.S. Congressman Brooks Hays arranged a meeting between Arkansas' governor and President Dwight D. Eisenhower to try and reach a solution to the crisis. They met at President Eisenhower's vacation home in Newport, Rhode Island, on September 14, but the meeting adjourned without an agreement to resolve the situation.

On September 20, 1957, Judge Davies ordered the governor and National Guard commanders to stop interfering with the court's desegregation order. Governor Faubus removed the guardsmen from the school and left the state for a southern governors conference in Georgia. The following Monday, September 23, Little Rock police were left to control an unruly mob that quickly grew to over 1,000 people as the nine African-American students entered the school through a side door two weeks after school began. The crowd's attention was diverted when some of the protestors chased and beat four African-American reporters outside the school. By lunchtime, police and school officials feared that some in the crowd might try to storm the school and removed the nine students for their safety. Little Rock Mayor Woodrow Mann asked the federal government for assistance and President Eisenhower issued Executive Order 10730, sending in units of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division and federalizing the Arkansas National Guard.

*It's been an interesting year,
I've had a course in human
relations first-hand.*

—Ernest Green

U.S. Army troops escorted the "Little Rock Nine," as they became known, into Central High School on September 25, 1957. After weeks of turmoil and trying to keep up with their work without attending school, the students went to their classes guarded by soldiers. Governor Faubus appeared on television saying that Little Rock was "now an occupied territory." By October 1, most of the

enforcement duty was turned over to the Arkansas National Guard troops while the U.S. Army troops were completely removed by the end of November. On October 25, one month after they arrived with a federal troop escort, the Little Rock Nine rode to school for the first time in civilian vehicles.



While conditions calmed outside the campus, inside the school, the Little Rock Nine endured an endless campaign of verbal and physical harassment at the hands of some of their fellow students for the remainder of the year. More than 100 white students were suspended and four were expelled during the year. One of the nine students, Minnijean Brown, was expelled in February 1958 for retaliating against the abuse.

In spite of the abuse, the bomb threats, and all other disruptions to the learning environment, the only senior among the nine students, Ernest Green, became Central High School's first African-American graduate on May 25, 1958. Of his experience that year, Green said, "It's been an interesting year...I've had a course in human relations first-hand." The 1957 Central High Crisis came to symbolize both massive resistance to social change and the federal government's commitment to enforcing African American's civil rights. Its nine students showed uncommon bravery and courage in the face of adversity.

Photo: Ernest Green graduates from Central High School in May of 1957. Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat.

Did You Know?

The word "crisis" means different things to different cultures, nationalities, and religions? The Buddhists use the word "crisis" for "courage." The Chinese have two meanings for the word...these are "opportunity" and "dangerous opportunity." In Greek, it means a "decision," "choice" or "turning point." Examine how your culture uses the word "crisis" in relation to the desegregation crisis of Central High School in 1957.

Meet the Little Rock Nine:

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site highlights the accomplishments of nine African-American teenagers who faced great obstacles and angry mobs in September 1957 to desegregate Little Rock Central High School. Ranging in ages from 15 to 17, these teenagers showed an enormous amount of courage and are considered civil rights activists - meaning that they fought for the right for children all over the country to attend the school of their choice regardless of their race. Today, history remembers these students as the "Little Rock Nine." Their actions showed the world that no matter how old you are, you can change the course of history through positive actions.

Minnijean Brown

Minnijean Brown, was born September 11, 1941, in Little Rock and 16 years old when she entered Central High School. Although all of the nine experienced verbal and physical harassment during the 1957-1958 school year at Central, Brown was first suspended, and then expelled for retaliating against daily torment. In February of 1958, she moved to New York and lived with Doctors Kenneth B. and Mamie Clark, African-American psychologists. She graduated from New York's New Lincoln School in 1959.



Brown attended Southern Illinois University and majored in journalism. She later moved to Canada, where she received a Bachelor of Social Work in Native Human Services from Laurentian University and a Master of Social Work from Carleton University in Ontario, Canada.

Brown is a social activist and has worked on behalf of peacemaking, environmental issues, developing youth leadership, diversity education and training, cross-cultural communication, and gender and social justice advocacy. She served in the Clinton Administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Workforce Diversity at the Department of the Interior from 1999 to 2001. She has taught social work at Carleton University and in various community colleges in Canada.



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 Award for contributions to racial harmony.

Photos (top and bottom): Minnijean Brown, ca. 1957. Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat; Minnijean Brown in 1997. NPS photo.

Elizabeth Eckford

Elizabeth Eckford was born on October 4, 1941, and is one of six children. The image of 15-year old Eckford, walking alone through a screaming mob in front of Central High School, propelled the crisis into the nation's living rooms and brought international attention to Little Rock.



On September 4, 1957, Elizabeth Eckford arrived at Central High School alone. She got off the bus a block from the school and tried to enter the campus, but was turned away by Arkansas National Guard troops. She then confronted an angry mob of people opposing integration, chanting, "Two, four, six, eight, we ain't gonna integrate." As she made her way down the block, Eckford attempted two more times to enter the school campus, but was blocked by the guardsmen, who were there under orders from the governor to keep them out. Eckford made her way through the mob 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 job at the Arkansas School for the Deaf.

Photos (top and bottom): Elizabeth Eckford trying to enter Central High School on September 4, 1957. Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat; Elizabeth Eckford in 1997. NPS Photo.



Because all of the city's high schools were closed the following year, Eckford did not graduate from Central High School. She joined the U.S. Army, and was able to earn her G.E.D. and returned to Little Rock in the 1960s to be closer to her parents. She attended Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. Eckford is an Army veteran, and has held various jobs throughout her life. She has been a waitress, history teacher, welfare worker, unemployment and employment interviewer, and a military reporter.

Ernest Green

Ernest Green was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, on September 22, 1941. Green made history as the only senior among the "Little Rock Nine." His place in Arkansas' civil rights history was solidified when he became the first African-American to graduate from the previously all-white high school in May of 1958.

An active member of the community from an early age, Green regularly attended church. He was involved in the Boy Scouts and eventually became an Eagle Scout. He was a student at Horace Mann High School before volunteering to integrate all-white Central High School. Green persevered through a year of daily harassment by some of his fellow students to become the first African-American Central High graduate on May 25, 1958. Sitting with Green's family at the event was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who attended the graduation virtually unnoticed.

After graduating from high school, Green attended Michigan State University, earning a bachelor's degree in 1962 and a master's degree in 1964 in sociology. Afterwards, he served as the director for the A. Phillip Randolph Education Fund from 1968 to 1977. He then was appointed as the assistant Secretary of Housing and Urban Affairs during President Jimmy Carter's administration from 1977 to 1981. Currently, Green is Managing Director at Lehman Brothers in Washington, D.C. and has been with the company since 1987. He has served on numerous boards, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

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



Photos (top and bottom): Ernest Green on graduation day, May 25, 1957 at Quigley Stadium, Central High School. Photo by Will Counts; Ernest Green, ca. 1980s. Photo from Central High School.

Thelma Mothershed Wair



Thelma Mothershed Wair was born in 1940 in Bloomberg, Texas. Wair attended Dunbar Junior High School and Horace Mann High School before transferring to Central. Despite daily torment from white students at Central, she completed her junior year at the formerly all-white high school during the tumultuous 1957-58 year. Because the city's high schools were closed the following year, 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 Mothershed Wair graduated from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, in 1964 and earned her master's degree in Guidance and Counseling, as well as an Administrative Certificate in Education from Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville. Wair taught home economics in the East St. Louis school system for 28 years before retiring in 1994. Wair has also 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 Shelter for the homeless. During the 1989-1990 school year, she 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. Wair and her late husband have one son.

**Photos (top and bottom):
Thelma Mothershed in
September of 1957. Photo by
Will Counts, Arkansas
Democrat; Thelma
Mothershed Wair in 1997.
NPS Photo.**



Melba Pattillo Beals

Melba Pattillo Beals was born on December 7, 1941, in Little Rock, Arkansas. She later recounted her experience at Central High School in her book *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle To Desegregate Little Rock's Central High School*.

Beals grew up surrounded by family members who knew the importance of an education. Her mother, Lois, had been one of the first African-Americans to graduate from the University of Arkansas in 1954. At Central, Beals faced daily harassment from white students and as Beals later recounted, the soldier assigned to protect her instructed, "In order to get through this year, you will have to become a soldier. Never let your enemy know what you are feeling." Beals took the soldier's advice, and finished the school year. Barred from entering Central High School the following year when the city's schools were closed, Beals moved to Santa Rosa, California, for her senior year of high school.



Beals graduated from San Francisco State University with a bachelor's degree. She earned a graduate degree in communications from Columbia University, worked as a reporter for NBC, and has served as a communications consultant. Beals is also the only one of the Little Rock Nine to have written a book based on her experiences at Central High School. The book, published in 1995, is a first-hand account of the trials and tribulations that Beals and the nine students encountered from segregationists and racist students. The book was named the ALA Notable Book for 1995 and won the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award that same year. She has also written *White is a State of Mind*, published in 1999, which follows Beals from her senior year in high school to her college and family days in California, and serves as a sequel to *Warriors Don't Cry*. Beals has three children.



**Photos (top and bottom): Melba Pattillo at
Thanksgiving in 1957. Photo by Will Counts,
Arkansas Democrat; Melba Pattillo Beals in 1999 at
the White House. NPS Photo.**

Carlotta Walls LaNier



The oldest of three daughters, Carlotta Walls LaNier was born on December 18, 1942, in Little Rock, Arkansas. LaNier made history as the youngest member 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 LaNier concentrated on her studies and protected herself throughout the school year. LaNier, along with all other Little Rock high school students, was barred from attending Central the next year when the Little Rock high schools were closed, but she returned to Central High and graduated in 1960.

LaNier attended Michigan State University for two years before moving with her family to Denver. In 1968, she earned a Bachelor of Science from Colorado State College (now the University of Northern Colorado) and began working at the YWCA as a program administrator for teenagers. In 1977, she founded LaNier and Company, a real estate brokerage firm. Her experience in real estate includes everything from constructing and remodeling properties to marketing and selling them.

LaNier is currently the president of the Little Rock Nine Foundation, a scholarship organization dedicated to ensuring equal access to education for African-Americans. She has also served as a trustee for the Iliff School of Theology. LaNier and her husband, Ira “Ike” LaNier, have two grown children.



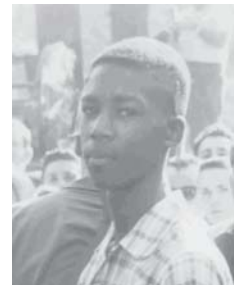
Photos: Carlotta Walls being turned away from Central High School in September of 1957. Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat; Carlotta Walls LaNier in 1997. NPS Photo.

Terrence Roberts

Terrence Roberts was born December 3, 1941, in Little Rock, Arkansas. Roberts was a sophomore at Horace Mann High School when he volunteered to integrate Little Rock’s Central High School. When the city’s high schools were closed to prevent further desegregation, Roberts moved to Los Angeles, California, and graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1959.

Following his graduation from high school, Roberts attended California State University and was awarded a bachelor’s degree in sociology in 1967. He went on to attend graduate school at the University of California at Los Angeles and received a master’s degree in social welfare in 1970. In 1976, Roberts was awarded a Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University in psychology. Following his graduation from SIU, Roberts moved to the Napa Valley and directed the mental health unit of St. Helena Hospital in Deer Park, California, for ten years. After this, Roberts accepted an invitation to join the UCLA School of Social Welfare as assistant dean. In 1994, he took a position of department chair of the psychology program at Antioch University, Los Angeles. As demands on his time increased, Roberts became program co-chair to concentrate on the activities of his management consulting firm. Currently, he is a faculty member at Antioch and travels widely sought-after speaker and consultant.

Roberts serves on the boards of the Economic Resources Center in Southern California, Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena, Eisenhower World Affairs Institute, and Little Rock Nine Foundation. He and his wife have two adult daughters and one grandson.



Photos: Terrence Roberts being turned away from school on September 4, 1957. Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat; Dr. Terrence Roberts in 1997. NPS Photo.

Shared Honors:

For their courage, the Little Rock Nine received several prestigious human rights awards. In 1958, the NAACP gave them the Spingarn Medal and in 1999, President William Jefferson Clinton gave the highest civilian honor to the Little Rock Nine when they received the Congressional Gold Medal.

Jefferson Thomas



Jefferson Thomas was born in 1942 in Little Rock, Arkansas. A quiet young man with a sense of humor, Thomas was a track athlete at Horace Mann High School when he chose to volunteer to integrate all-white Central High School for the 1957-58 school year as a sophomore. The Nine were harassed daily by white students, and Thomas' quiet demeanor made him a target for bullies at the school. He graduated from Central high School in 1960 and eventually became an accountant for the United States Department of Defense. Thomas is now retired.



Photos: Jefferson Thomas in September of 1957. Arkansas History Commission; Jefferson Thomas in 1997. NPS Photo.

Gloria Ray Karlmark

Gloria Cecelia Ray was born September 26, 1942, in Little Rock. She was the third child of H.C. Ray, Sr. and Julia Miller Ray. Mr. Ray was already a retired federal employee when Gloria entered Central High (he was born 1889, the son of a former slave). In the beginning of the century, it was he who founded the Arkansas Agricultural Extension Service for Negroes under the auspices of the US Dept of Agriculture; he had also studied and work for none other than the distinguished George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington, before graduating from Tuskegee Institute. These facts strongly influenced Ray's choice to attend Central High School. She was 14 years old when she finished Dunbar Junior High School and registered to attend Central for her sophomore year. Ray, like the others of the Nine, was tormented by certain white students who called her names, threw things, spit, vandalized her locker, 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 a Sociologist working for the State of Arkansas, was fired by Faubus when she refused to withdraw Ray from Central High. The following year when all public high schools in Little Rock remained closed, Ray moved to Missouri where her mother had been able to find employment, and attended the newly integrated Kansas City Central High School. After high school graduation, she attended Illinois Institute of Technology (ITT), in Chicago. She graduated in 1965 with a bachelor's degree in Chemistry and Mathematics. Immediately after graduation she worked briefly as public school teacher and laboratory research assistant at the University of Chicago Research Medical Center.



In 1966, Gloria Ray married Krister Karlmark, a professor at the Institute of Design in Chicago, and industrial designer. The same year, she joined the IIT Research Institute as Assistant Mathematician on the APT IV (robotics) project—which included work at Boeing in Seattle, McDonnell-Douglas in Santa Monica and NASA Automation Center in St. Louis. In 1970, Ray Karlmark joined IBM Nordic Laboratory in Sweden, working as a System Analyst/Technical Writer.

After graduating as patent attorney from Kungliga Patent & Registreringsverket in Stockholm, 1977, Ray Karlmark worked for IBM International Patent Operations as European Patent Attorney until 1981, when she moved to Brussels, Belgium, and began working for N.V. Philips Gloeilampenfabrieken as CAD/CAM and Technical Product Documentation Specialist. From 1976 to 1994, Ray Karlmark founded and served as Editor-in-Chief of *Computers in Industry*, an international journal of practice and experience of computer applications in industry. From 1982 to 1994, she entered into early retirement before going back to work in the Netherlands first for Philips Telecommunications in Hilversum, later for Philips Lighting in Eindhoven. Gloria and Krister Karlmark have two children: a son, Mats Karlmark, born in Sweden 1972, and a daughter, Elin Karlmark, born in Sweden 1974.

Photos: Gloria Ray being turned away from Central High School in September of 1957. Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat; Gloria Ray Karlmark in 1997. NPS Photo.

A Question and Answer with Thelma Mothershed Wair Fall 2004

1) Why did you choose to go to Central High School? “We were American citizens who [paid] taxes and ha[d] the right to attend any public school. Central [had] a reputation for achieving academic excellence. Students who [did] well were offered scholarships to “top” colleges and universities. [The] faculty at Central was more diverse [and the] courses offered [exceeded] what was offered at Horace Mann, the black high school. Central offered Latin and German...Central was our neighborhood school. Most of the Nine could have walked to Central. We got to Mann on [a] city bus and even had to transfer!”

2) What type of incidents happened inside Central during the 1957-1958 school year? “After lunch one day, I was called to Mrs. Huckabee’s office. When I entered the office, I saw a girl sitting and crying. I was told that she was crying because as we came upstairs from lunch, she said, “Thelma was in front of me, and kicked me.” It was a complete lie. I told the girl, “If I kicked you, I apologize.” That evening on the 6:00 news, her name was called saying that I had kicked her!...I was seated across from Minnijean Brown in the cafeteria when a white male student came and dumped a bowl of soup on her head. The 101st [Airborne] had left [the school]...As I was going down a flight of steps to go home one day, someone on the landing above spat down on my poodle skirt. One day someone threw black ink on the back of my white blouse...One day it snowed [and] Minnijean, Melba, and I were waiting inside a hall exit door for my mother to pick us up. The Arkansas National Guard were there to “keep peace.” Some boys found small rocks and packed them into the snow and tossed them inside the hall at us. The Guards[m]en said nothing to the boys, but ducked to keep from getting hit themselves! The guards[m]en said nothing to the boys and when my mother arrived, as we ran to the car, the same foolishness continued.”



Photos (pages 12 and 13): Thelma Mothershed attending court in 1957. NPS Photo; Thelma enjoying a Thanksgiving dinner with their mentor, Daisy and L.C. Bates, 1957. Photo by Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat.

“In the mornings, students gathered for chapel, even though Central is a public school. Some of the Nine decided to attend Chapel since it was not spelled out as extracurricular. Chapel was a pleasant way to start the day with prayers, scripture, readings, and hymns. [It was] pleasant, until we looked around and found that some of the angels in the chapel were the same devils who gave us trouble in the hallways...My homeroom teacher did not want to touch me. After being absent, we would go to the office to get a readmission slip for each teacher to sign. When I presented my slip to my teacher, she would look at me as if to say, ‘what do you want?’ I would put the slip on her desk. She would sign it, place it in a book and slide it back over to me. I think she felt that if our fingers should happen to touch, she would suddenly turn into my color, up to her shoulders!” “Some kids asked us, ‘Why don’t you go back to Africa?’ My immediate thought was, “How can one go back to a place where that person has never been?”

3) What happened at home? “When a notice came to [Horace] Mann that students interested in transferring to Central should sign up, several of my friends [did], and a lot more students signed up. When I got home, I told my mother what I had done. She was aggravated with me. She said, “How can you make it around that high place? Your heart might give out and then what would you do?” [Mrs. Wair has had a heart condition since birth] I told her that I was sure that Mann sent all my records, so they [Central] would read about my problem and arrange my schedule so that I would not have too far to walk. When my dad came home, they had a discussion and decided that I could attend, if I promised to drop Central if I became ill.”

“In the Little Rock telephone book were two listings for Mothershed - my family and a number for a white neighborhood. We occasionally got hostile telephone calls at night. The caller would tell whoever answered the phone, “If you let that n----- come back to Central, we’ll burn your house down.” My brother, who is two and a half years younger than I, told them, “Come on -



we’ve got something for you.” We had nothing but kitchen knives! We decided that the way to protect our house was to not answer the phone. Our plan began to have whoever was last coming to bed, would leave the phone off the receiver.”

4) What did you do after Central? “I graduated “by mail” because Central was closed during my senior year. [I went to] Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, where I earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Home Economics Education. Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville is where I earned a Master’s of Science in Guidance and Counseling. [I] taught Home Ec in a junior high. One day some girls came to me with their history book and said, “Ms. Wair, Mr. Reid said that you were in that Little Rock stuff. Were you?” There was a picture of the Nine climbing the steps to the school. I told them “Yes, I was in the Little Rock situation.” I pointed to the picture, I said, “and there I am.” One girl said, “In a history book, you sure must be old!” I told them, “Something historical happens every day (I was 25-years old at the time!).”



“The mother of a student in Missouri wanted me to come to their school district and tell my story. She and her daughter came to pick me up and take me to a restaurant where they could quiz me and take pictures. A young woman working in the restaurant was an ex- student of mine. When I went to the ladies room, she asked them what the occasion was. When I came out, she asked me, “Ms. Wair, why didn’t you tell your classes that you are famous?”

Thelma Mothershed Wair resides in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Photo (left to right): Minnijean Brown, Terrence Roberts, and Thelma Mothershed in 1957. NPS Photo.

Suggested Teaching Activities:

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Thomas Jefferson said that one person with courage is a majority. What does that mean to you?
- 2) What is courage?
- 3) How did the story of the Little Rock Nine make you feel? What did you learn from it? What were some of the pressures the nine students encountered and how did they overcome them? What risks did they take, and why? How big a factor was courage in the success of the Little Rock Nine? Is it realistic to think that the average teenager could stand up for him/herself in the way that the nine did, or were they just a special case?
- 4) What things in your life required courage?
- 5) What do you think stops people from taking a stand against something they know is wrong?
- 6) Is courage something you have to be born with - or can you develop it?
- 7) What does courage have to do with the quality of your character?

Writing Assignments:

- 1) Describe or illustrate a situation in which you showed courage. What did it accomplish? How did people respond before you took your stand? What did they say to you afterwards?
- 2) What was the hardest moment of courage you ever had in your life? Did it cost you anything? What were the benefits?
- 3) Have you ever gone along with the crowd even though you knew it was wrong? How did you feel about yourself? In what way did that take courage?
- 4) Write a letter to someone in the news (or anyone you know) whose courage has impressed you.
- 5) Write an essay about a historical event in which courage played a major role.



Student Activities:

1) What does it take to show courage and stand up against peer pressure? As a class, discuss the kinds of peer pressure that exist at your school. What makes it difficult to resist those pressures? Develop and list strategies for standing up to them. Compile this into a written pamphlet for the students of your school.

2) Profiles in Courage: Have students (individuals or groups) identify acts of courage by people in the news or by people in your school or community (alternate for lower grades: assign them individuals). Then, have each individual or group make a presentation to the class and conduct a discussion using one to two questions developed by the group or individual. What do these selections have in common? What are their differences? What can the students learn about themselves from the selections they made? What have they learned from the people they selected?

3) Have your students bring in articles from magazines and newspapers describing situations in which courage is an issue. Conduct a discussion in which they decide who is acting courageously and who isn't - what difference does it make?

4) Role play some typical situation which require taking a courageous stand against a group or an individual. After each improvisation, have a discussion - what important principle or issue was at stake? How well did the individual stand up? What could he/she have done better? What did you learn from this?

5) Have your students search the Internet for quotations and other inspiring or provocative writings on courage. Compile this into a book.



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