

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site

The Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site serves to remind us of a turbulent and intolerant time in our county's history, and showcases the bravery of nine African American students who dared to change our country forever.

Can you hear the train rumbling? Feel the vibrations of the loud engine powering along the tracks? Imagine that same level of noise, but intensified, and not caused by a train, but by hundreds of angry protestors. They scream, spit, stare, and curse at you. And for what reason? You are trying to go to class.

This was the experience of the “Little Rock Nine” on their way to their first day of class. It was no ordinary class though; it was to be one of the first classes in America to serve white and black students together. It was September 4, 1957. The governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, refused to acknowledge the Supreme Court’s ruling to end public school segregation. He went so far as to have the Arkansas National Guard prevent the black students from entering the building.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower knew he needed to act quickly, or the hopes of integration would die out. He sent in the 101st Airborne Division to enforce the new law and they set up camp outside the school. After weeks of legal battles, the nine were allowed to enter the school, but had to walk through angry protestors to do so. Life did not get easier for the nine as the year went on. Even though they were guarded by the military, the black students endured continued harassment.

Ernest Green, the only senior of the group, would go on to graduate that year and be the first black student to graduate from Little Rock Central High School. The graduation ceremony was heavily guarded by the military due to many bomb and death threats, but the intimidation did not stop Ernest from receiving his diploma.

Today you can visit the Little Rock Central High School historic site and museum to learn about this important event in our nation’s history. You may be lucky enough to have Spirit Trickey as your guide, daughter of one of the original nine, and now one of many National Park Service rangers. Be sure to be respectful; classes still go on even when visitors are touring! The school is now fully integrated – the student body is approximately 54% African-American and 43% Anglo. Today’s students, as well as the tourists, can be thankful for the bravery of the Little Rock Nine who made important strides for our country during a time of intolerance.

Source(s):

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