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A look at the Little Rock Nine

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A Look at the Little Rock Nine

Senior Thesis Paper

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The sun beat down on fields of puffy white clouds as glistening backs reaped the new harvest. At the end of the long, grueling day, the people known as slaves returned to their cabins to sleep until the early morning call once again beckoned them to the fields. As the white owners spent their evenings reading books, writing letters, updating the accounts, the people they owned may have sung or told stories, but they did not read. They did not write, and they did not update any accounts. They did not show any sign of education. To be educated and to be black, in the South before the Civil War, equaled punishment: even death.

Nearly one hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the scene in the South had changed, but not drastically. The members of the black race were allowed an education, yet they were still treated as inferiors to the white race. Segregation dominated the South, and that included the schools. The white students received the newest buildings, books, equipment, buses, and anything else that was new. On the other hand, the black students attended older schools with older books, equipment, and older buses, if indeed they even had them. These years of segregation and inequality set the stage in the city of Little Rock, Arkansas in the late 1950's for one of the

major events in the history of the Civil Rights movement. The events that unfolded around Central High School in the years of 1957 to 1959 critically affected the view of segregation in the United States. In the end, the walls of segregation could not withstand the right of nine black students to obtain an education.

Plessy V. Ferguson

The roots of government-sanctioned segregation in the United States can be found in the history of the state of Louisiana. A simple train ride from New Orleans, Louisiana to Covington, Louisiana on June 7, 1892 set the precedent for segregation known as "separate but equal". In an action that occurred long before the bus ride of Rosa Parks, Homer Plessy, an African-American male, sat in a train car designated for white passengers. Although of African-American heritage, Mr. Plessy had the appearance of a Caucasian male because his African-American ancestry was comprised of only one-eighth of his background. Yet according to the one drop rule, where one single drop of African-American blood makes one an African-American, Mr. Plessy was seated in the wrong car, and consequently, the conductor asked him to move. Mr. Plessy refused. Under the

Act of 1890, No. 111, the conductor of the East Louisiana Railway Company possessed the right to throw Mr. Plessy off the train and have him arrested. Believing that the Fourteenth Amendment protected him, Homer Plessy took the matter to court. The case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, was heard on April 13, 1896 and May 18, 1896, and the outcome denied Mr. Plessy the protection he thought he had under the Fourteenth Amendment.¹ The Supreme Court upheld the Louisiana law, and the term "separate but equal" emerged, which indirectly placed a sanction on legal segregation that would take years to remove.

Brown V. The Board of Education

Sixty years after the Plessy case, a young girl in Topeka lived under the results of that decision. Linda Brown, a black child, lived in an area of Topeka near a school that was a short walk from her home. However, she could not attend that school because of the color of her skin. The school Linda attended rested a mile away, which was a long distance for a young child to travel. Adding to the danger of the walk, Linda had to travel through the switchyard of Topeka's railroad station to reach her

¹ *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Supreme Court of the United States No. 210, 1896) [database on-line]; available from Lexis-Nexis.

destination. Concerned for the safety of his child, and outraged by the laws that kept his daughter of the nearby school, Linda's father, Oliver Brown, requested an injunction against the segregated school system in Topeka. Along with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) the Browns appealed to the U.S. District Court for the District of Kansas.²

Over a span of about three years, the trial made it all the way to the Supreme Court. On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren, along with the other eight justices, decided that segregation conflicted with the 14th Amendment. This decision resounded throughout the country because it required all schools to end segregation.³

Blossom Plan

Soon after the decision in 1954, the Little Rock School Board announced its plans to comply with the order.⁴ Virgil T. Blossom, the Superintendent of Schools, announced his plan of desegregation, the Blossom Plan, would take

² Edward W. Knappman, ed., Great American Trials (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1994), 467.

³ Elizabeth Jacoway and C. Fred Williams, eds., Understanding the Little Rock Crisis: An Exercise in Remembrance and Reconciliation (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 5.

⁴ Harry S. Ashmore, Arkansas: A Bicentennial History (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1978), 149.

affect in the fall of 1957.⁵ The plan called for a slow desegregation beginning in Central High School. If those students assimilated well, then the following year the Junior High School would desegregate. Finally, the elementary school would become integrated.⁶

The Students

During the summer of 1957, nine students prepared for their entrances into Central High School. Those slated to begin the integration process were Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Patillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls.⁷

Governor Faubus and the Integration Opposition

Tension mounted in Little Rock as the 1957-58 school year approached. The governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, soon found it impossible to step around the issue of

⁵ Elizabeth Jacoway and C. Fred Williams, eds., Understanding the Little Rock Crisis: An Exercise in Remembrance and Reconciliation (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 5.

⁶ David R. Goldfield, Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 106.

⁷ John Leland and Vern E. Smith, Echoes of Little Rock (*Newsweek* 29 September 1997) [database on-line]; available from Ebsco.

integration.⁸ Governor Faubus always used what he perceived as the will of the people to guide his decisions, as is evident in his words: "A great majority of the people of Little Rock are definitely opposed to integration. I have received information that a number of revolvers were taken away from our high school students, both white and colored."⁹ Yet even when his actions rested on the side of anti-integration, he always maintained his desire rested in keeping the peace, not stalling integration.

The Mother's League of Central High School aided Governor Faubus in his attempts to maintain the peace. On August 27, 1957, Mrs. Clyde A. Thomason, the secretary of the league, filed an injunction against the integration of Central High School. Chancellor Murray O. Reed heard the case and granted the motion on August 29, 1957. However, the next day, Federal District Court Judge John E. Miller reversed the action and ordered the Board of Education to begin integration.¹⁰

The order of immediate integration meant the end of peace in Little Rock for Governor Faubus, and he

⁸ Timothy P. Donovan and Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., eds., The Governors of Arkansas: Essays in Political Biography (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1981), 218.

⁹ *New York Times* (New York), 30 August 1957.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

immediately set new wheels in motion because the mandate threatened his peace. Rumors of mobs and caravans heading toward the city of Little Rock provided the perfect opportunity for Governor Orval Faubus to use extreme measures to protect the city, and most importantly, the school. On the evening of September 2, 1957, the city of Little Rock began to buzz about Central High School. On the eve of the first day of school, the Arkansas National Guard arrived to surround the structure. According to Governor Faubus, he called in the troops to prevent bloodshed over the planned integration.¹¹

The School Board Reacts

The arrival of the Arkansas National Guard created such a commotion in the city of Little Rock that the Board of Education postponed the planned integration. In a statement released on the evening of September 2, 1957, the board asked, "In view of the situation, we ask that no Negro students attempt to attend Central or any other white high school until this dilemma is legally resolved."¹² Consequently, when the doors of Central High opened on

¹¹ *New York Times* (New York), 3 September 1957.

¹² *Ibid.*

September 3, 1957, the white students slipped through the Arkansas National Guard, and the nine integrating students remained outside the school. Classes began without them.

That very afternoon, Judge Ronald Davies, a district judge from North Dakota, held a hearing in his court to provide an answer to the immediate problem: what should the school board do? At the conclusion of the hearing, Judge Davies stated:

An order will be issued tonight, directing you to put into effect forthwith the plan of integration which you presented to a judge of this court and which was approved by him and by the Court of Appeals.¹³

Mob Rule

The following morning, September 4, 1957, the nine students planned to go to school together. A message was phoned to each student, but Elizabeth Eckford never got the message. She went to the school alone. Elizabeth arrived at Central to find an angry mob, and as she approached the school, the crowd surrounded her. Rather than turning away, Elizabeth tried to get to the school, but the Arkansas National Guard prevented her steps. Rifles with bayonets and billy clubs blocked her way as Elizabeth

¹³ J.W. Peltason, Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 167.

walked the line of guards.¹⁴ Unable to find aid among the guards or a way through to the school, Elizabeth finally turned away from the school to make her way through the surging, angry mob. Her walk back to the bus stop was plagued with angry words, assaults, and even people spitting at her. Throughout the entire ordeal, Elizabeth remained stoic as she awaited her bus. When the bus came, one white woman out of the entire crowd escorted her home.¹⁵

Elizabeth was not the only student to brave the mob that day. Melba Patillo and her mother did as well. As they drove to meet the other students that day, the ever-increasing mob forced the two to park a long distance from the meeting. Just as the mob angrily threatened Elizabeth Eckford, it turned its venomous attention to the two lone women. Melba and her mother quickly realized the grave danger they were in, and they began retreating from the situation. Not willing to simply let them leave the scene, the men and women swarming outside the school threatened the pair and then chased them down the street. As Melba and her mother fled, men in the crowd threatened their very lives with ropes and bricks. One man even tried to attack Melba with a large tree branch. Melba and her mother did

¹⁴ *New York Times* (New York), 3 September 1957

¹⁵ David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 109.

manage to reach their car, but as they drove away, bricks and rocks were thrown at the retreating vehicle.¹⁶

On the morning of September 4, the crowd proved to be too strong for Elizabeth and Melba to fight on their way to school. They never made it through the doors of Central High that day. Neither did the remaining seven. The National Guard refused to allow the students admittance into the school and forced all of them to leave.¹⁷ When questioned about his mission at Central High School, General Sherman T. Clinger, director of the Arkansas National Guard had this to say: "We will do everything necessary to preserve the peace. That is our mission as given to us by the Governor."¹⁸ As is evident by the actions the National Guard took on September 4, preserving the peace meant keeping the black students out of Central High.

The following days continued with unrest and virtual mob rule as the National Guard remained stationed outside Little Rock's Central High School. The school year

¹⁶ Melba Patillo Beals, Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High (New York: Washington Squares Press, 1994), 51.

¹⁷ J.W. Peltason, Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 168.

¹⁸ *New York Times* (New York), 3 September 1957.

continued without the nine integrating students as both sides of the integration argument met in court.

Withdrawal of the Arkansas National Guard

On September 20, 1957, Judge Ronald Davies decided the fate of the Arkansas National Guard's involvement at Central High. After repeated attempts to argue against the integration petition, the counsel for Governor Faubus walked out of the courtroom in the middle of the session.¹⁹ The demonstration failed to discourage Judge Davies from going forth with the decision he had made at the beginning of September. He proceeded to order the removal of the National Guard from the perimeter of Central High School.²⁰

Three days later, on September 23, 1957, the nine black students finally saw Central High School from the inside. The students slipped through a side door as the rioting mob outside the school grew increasingly violent. The intensity of the mob only increased when they realized the nine were inside. They could not get at the students so the mob turned on people outside the school. The mob

¹⁹ J.W. Peltason, Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 172.

²⁰ David R. Goldfield, Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 109.

pulled two African-American women from their car and beat them. The mob also beat two men in a truck. The various reporters on the scene also encountered violence. On the same day as the two women and two men met attack, the entire staff of *Life* felt the abuses of the mob.²¹ Due to the unmanageable violence, the city police removed the nine students from school shortly before noon.²² Once again, Central High eluded the nine, but not for long.

President Eisenhower sends in the 101st

The nation's attention was focused on the chaos in Little Rock, forcing the President to get involved. The following morning, President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered the 101st Airborne Division from Fort Campbell to carry out the court's decision of integration. On September 25, with the men of the 101st surrounding the school, the nine students made their way into the building for their first full day of classes.²³

²¹ Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1986), 93.

²² Harry S. Ashmore, *Arkansas: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1978), 151.

²³ J.W. Peltason, *Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 173.

Violence inside Central

Although the students finally made it through the doors of Central High School, the battle had truly just begun. Inside the school, each of the nine students encountered regular acts of violence and verbal abuse. The opinions of many of the students inside Central reflected the opinions of the mob surrounding the school. The difference between the two groups was that those inside the building could carry out the abuse.

On one of her first mornings in the school, Melba Patillo was a victim of physical violence. As she walked to her first class, a group of boys bumped her as if by mistake, but then quickly surrounded her. A hard kick to her shins sent her to the ground, and a second blow to her stomach kept her there. Although soldiers moved in to stop the violence, it was too late to keep Melba from being hurt.²⁴

The other eight students also survived similar vicious attacks in their effort to attend class. One evening, Gloria Ray received a threat over the telephone. The caller announced that on the following day, members of the

²⁴ Melba Patillo Beals, Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High (New York: Washington Squares Press, 1994), 148.

student body would have water guns filled with acid waiting for them. Yet, Gloria awoke the next morning and proceeded to Central High School. That day, when she rounded a corner in the hallway, she ran into a boy carrying a squirt gun. She dropped her books as the boy shot her in the face. It took her many moments to realize that the gun only contained water. While she wiped her face with her dress, she had to convince herself she would be all right.²⁵

Terrence Roberts also repeatedly felt the violence of the segregationist students in Central High School. White males often kicked and assaulted him, yet when Terrence tried to report these incidences, the school officials told him that he needed an adult eyewitness, or nothing could be done.²⁶

The violence inside Central High posed a real threat to the lives of the black students in attendance. One day, while Jefferson Thomas stood at his locker, a group of white boys attacked him. The blows were brutal and relentless. One of the boys hit him so hard on the back of his head that he fell to the ground, unconscious.²⁷

²⁵ Daisy Bates, The Long Shadow of Little Rock (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1986), 139.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁷ Daisy Bates, The Long Shadow of Little Rock (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1986), 124.

Minnijean Brown

Although the white students of Central High repeatedly attacked all nine students, only one of the nine fought back enough to get expelled. Minnijean Brown endured three months at Central High School before she transferred to New Lincoln High School in New York City. Although her entrance into Central started on a slightly melodious note because the girls invited her to join the glee club, the year quickly turned sour as a series of events led up to Minnijean's expulsion and her decision to attend the New York school. Threats perpetually echoed around Minnijean as she walked the halls of Central. Even though she was a girl, Minnijean was not exempt from physical assault. She fell prey to stray feet kicking and tripping her. After two months of such treatment, and after repeated attempts to get school officials to stop the assaults, a war-weary Minnijean dumped a bowl of chili on two boys during lunch the day of December 17, 1957. Although the two boys admitted she was not entirely at fault, the school suspended her for six days. Upon her return after the suspension, a boy retaliated against Minnijean's chili incident by dumping his bowl of chili on her. After this, one final episode ended Minnijean's career at Central.

After a white girl followed Minnijean around the school, showering verbal attacks on her, Minnijean defended herself and called the girl "white trash". The school suspended Minnijean for the rest of the year. The expulsion caused Minnijean to think about her education and her experiences at Central, and ultimately she decided to finish her high school years at New York City's New Lincoln High School.²⁸

School Officials React

As the year wore on, the tensions remained both inside and outside the school. Instead of warming up to the idea of integration, the community surrounding Central High School searched frantically for new ways to prevent integration. Some students inside the school increased their efforts to harass the now eight remaining students to quit. However, their efforts were soon thwarted when the school suspended seventy-four students for harassing the black students as well as the pro-integration white students.²⁹ By the end of the 1957-58 school year, the

²⁸ Daisy Bates, The Long Shadow of Little Rock (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1986) 117.

²⁹ J.W. Peltason, Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 179.

segregationists had gone back to court in an attempt to kill the roots of segregation in Little Rock's schools.

Faubus' 1958 Election and Re-segregation

1958 was an election year for Governor Orval Faubus. To secure his place in the mansion, Orval Faubus stepped up his campaign against integration. In earlier years and earlier campaigns, Faubus hesitated to make a firm stand for continued segregation, however, the campaign of 1958 proved remarkably different. He pulled all the stops and supported continued segregation. He won the election with a sweep of every single county in Arkansas.³⁰

The momentum for re-segregating Little Rock's schools was in place before Faubus' overwhelming reelection. Superintendent Blossom's words of August, 1957: "We are law abiding citizens. Our people will abide by the law. We want to integrate our schools in as peaceful and quiet a manner as possible"³¹ seemed a distant memory by the winter of 1958 when he ard the school board had a change of heart. On February 20, 1958, the Little Rock School Board

³⁰ Numan V. Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 273.

³¹ *New York Times* (New York), 30 August 1957.

requested a delay of integration for two and one-half years. The board felt that the violence exhibited by the citizens of Little Rock proved the great need to abolish the standing order for integration. The board also felt that the education of the white students had been compromised by the presence of the black students and the troops.³² Their case landed in Judge Harry J. Lemley's court. On June 21, 1958, Judge Lemley granted the board's motion after hearing testimony from the NAACP and the Little Rock School Board. On August 8, 1958, the NAACP fought and won a reversal of the order by the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis.³³ The following statement issued by Judge Marion C. Matthes of the Court of Appeals sums up what would ultimately also be the opinion of the Supreme Court:

We say the time has not yet come in these United States when an order of a federal court must be whittled away, watered down, or shamefully withdrawn in the face of violent and unlawful acts of individual citizens in opposition thereto.³⁴

With the decision of the Court of Appeals and the confirmation from the White House that the Constitution

³² J.W. Peltason, Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 183.

³³ Elizabeth Jacoway and C. Fred Williams, eds., Understanding the Little Rock Crisis: An Exercise in Remembrance and Reconciliation (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 11.

³⁴ J.W. Peltason, Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 186.

would be enforced, Governor Faubus called a special legislative session to suggest measures that would strengthen the State's position in matters of segregation. On August 26, 1958, the legislature met and passed the proposed bills. One bill in particular allowed the governor to close down the schools if integration was enforced.³⁵ Two days later, on August 28, 1958, the Supreme Court met in a special session to review the case. The Supreme Court decided to wait until September 11 to announce its decision in the case, called *Cooper v. Aaron*, in order to hear the arguments of both sides. Due to this delay, the Little Rock School Board decided to delay opening day until September 15, 1958.³⁶ On September 12, the Supreme Court rendered its decision: integration shall proceed.³⁷ Upon hearing the decision of the Supreme Court, Governor Faubus signed a proclamation that shut down the four high schools in Little Rock, Arkansas.³⁸

³⁵ Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 274.

³⁶ J.W. Peltason, *Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 189.

³⁷ Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 274.

³⁸ Elizabeth Jacoway and C. Fred Williams, eds., *Understanding the Little Rock Crisis: An Exercise in Remembrance and Reconciliation* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 11.

Throughout the year of 1958, the State government of Arkansas and the United States Federal Government played tug of war with the rights of the State. Governor Faubus tirelessly used his resources to attack and counterattack the position of the Supreme Court on segregation. With each charge, President Eisenhower insisted that he would uphold the Constitution, and with every statement from the President, Governor Faubus insisted he would fight for the rights of Arkansas. When the dust settled at the end of the summer of 1958, the scene remained the same as it had looked at the beginning of the year, but with a twist. The Supreme Court, along with the Federal Government, stood on the side of integration. They held firm with their decisions. On the other side of the line stood Arkansas and Governor Faubus. In February of 1958, Governor Faubus had watched as black students entered Central High School with the white students, against the wishes of the school board, and his methods of keeping them out had been spent. In September of 1958, Governor Faubus had a new trick. Rather than proceed with another year of integration that he felt would upset the education of the white students, he merely closed down the schools for an entire year, because he could not stand for such a disruption.

Governor Faubus felt that he had out-smarted the Federal Government. His plan in closing the schools also included ideas of reopening the schools as State-funded private institutions. After some deliberations and consultations with Judge John Miller, the school board signed the schools over to privatization on the morning of September 29, 1958. That same morning, the Supreme Court issued a statement saying that State funds could not be used to fund segregated private schools because this act interfered with the Fourteenth Amendment. The Federal Government thwarted Governor Faubus' plans once again.³⁹

An entire year passed and Little Rock's high schools remained closed. Finally, in the fall of 1959, against the will of Governor Faubus, the schools of Little Rock opened once again, putting into action a scaled-down plan of desegregation.

Desegregation continued in Little Rock, Arkansas. Eventually, the mobs subsided, and the anger settled. The minority students began to gain acceptance in the halls where kids like Minnijean Brown and Jefferson Thomas often fell to the ground after being inflicted with kicks and

³⁹ J.W. Peltason, Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 199.

blows to their bodies. Yet surprisingly, this is not the end of the story.

Segregation Today

In recent years, studies have been done in schools throughout the country, and they have yielded some surprising results. The bottom line is that in many cities, integrated segregation now rules the schools. What that means, is that the schools, although integrated, have slowly moved toward segregation again, yet in a reverse order. For example, schools like Central High School in Little Rock, that were once all white, are now shifting closer to a black majority. This turn of events has been largely precipitated by the suburban effect. As the cities have grown, more and more of the white population has moved to the suburbs. Of course, the suburbs are not completely segregated, but the trend has nonetheless left a minority majority of students in inner city schools, and the old majority, the white students, have become the minority.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ John Leland and Vern E. Smith, Echoes of Little Rock (*Newsweek* 29 September 1997) [database on-line]; available from Ebsco.

Conclusion

Due to the closing of the Little Rock High Schools during the 1958 school year, Ernest, Jefferson, and Carlotta were the only three of the nine to finish their high school careers as a part of the integration program at Central High School, but they took the first step. They took the most important step. For every road traveled, at least one road remains untaken. If the nine integrating students of Central High School had given up in the face of adversity, only guesses can be made as to the outcome. Possibly, integration would have taken hold elsewhere the next year, and it would have progressed and things today would not be altered. Yet the segregationists in Little Rock in 1957 tried to harass the nine and force them to quit. They believed that in such an occurrence, motions could be filed that would delay integration indefinitely. Had this plan succeeded, education today might be much different. History holds story after story of small steps and their effects. A wrong turn in Sarajevo in 1914 precipitated World War One. A train ride in 1892 instituted segregation. A little girl's walk through one train yard legally ended school segregation, and nine students on the steps of Central High School carried out

the action of integration. In the end, the ring of Arkansas National Guardsmen around Central High School parted, and the wall began to crumble.

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