

## What is Injustice? The Little Rock Nine

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On this day (September 4th) in 1957, 15-year-old Elizabeth Eckford encountered an angry mob when she attempted to enter Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Eckford was one of nine teenagers, known as the Little Rock Nine, who became the first African American students to attend the previously all-white Little Rock Central High School after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled school segregation unconstitutional in its famous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

While the nine students had planned to enter the school together, the meeting place was changed the night before and Eckford, whose family did not have a telephone, did not learn about the change of plans. As a result, she attempted to enter the school alone through a mob of 400 angry segregationists and a blockage by the Arkansas National Guard, which the pro-segregationist governor, Orval Faubus, had ordered to block the students in violation of the Supreme Court decision.

Due to the line of soldiers blockading the school and threats from the crowd, Eckford was forced to flee to a bus stop. As she sat at the bus stop crying, New York Times reporter Benjamin Fine consoled the scared girl, telling her "don't let them see you cry." Civil rights activist Grace Lorch, who had learned that Eckford had arrived separately from the other students, then arrived to escort her home.

In response to Eckford and the other students being blocked from the school, Little Rock Mayor Woodrow Wilson Mann asked President Eisenhower to send federal troops to protect the students. To enforce desegregation, Eisenhower sent the US Army's 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock

and federalized the entire Arkansas National Guard to remove control from the governor. The Little Rock Nine were able to start school by the end of September. Although soldiers were deployed at the school for the entire year, many of the students experienced physical and verbal abuse, including Eckford who at one point was pushed down the stairs.

The governor continued to fight integration and, the following year -- in what came to be known as the "Lost Year" -- ordered Little Rock's four high schools closed rather than allow it to continue. As a result, Eckford did not graduate from Central High but took correspondence courses to complete her degree. Eckford and the rest of the Little Rock Nine were awarded the Spingarn Medal by the NAACP and she later received a BA in history at Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio.

The famous photograph pictured here shows Elizabeth Eckford on September 4, 1957 as she walked alone through a mob to Central High. Taken by Will Counts, it was a runner-up for the Pulitzer Prize for Photography. The young woman shouting in the photo, Hazel Massery, apologized to Eckford and the two made amends at a 40th anniversary celebration of the school's integration.

The story of Eckford and Massery, the two women pictured, is told in the fascinating book for adult readers "Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock" at <http://amzn.to/1VDtr6Q>

The story of this famous incident is also recounted in "Little Rock Girl 1957: How a Photograph Changed the Fight for Integration" for ages 9 to 12 at <https://www.iamightygirl.com/little-rock-girl-1957>

For a powerful new memoir by another member of the Little Rock Nine, Melba Pattillo Beals, for ages 12 and up, we highly recommend "March Forward, Girl" at <https://www.iamightygirl.com/march-forward-girl>

For another personal account by a member of the Little Rock Nine for older teen and adult readers, check out "A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School" at <http://amzn.to/1uApZQV>

For a compelling fictional account of the tumultuous school integration of 1950s Little Rock for readers 10 to 13, check out "Lions of Little Rock" at <https://www.iamightygirl.com/the-lions-of-little-rock>

And, for more books for all ages about the courageous girls and women of the Civil Rights Movement, check out our blog post on "40 Inspiring Books on Girls & Women of the Civil Rights Movement" at <https://www.iamightygirl.com/blog?p=11177>

**Discussion:** What is injustice? How does one fight it? What roles do people and institutions play in furthering or fighting it?