



Episode 2 focuses on the struggle to enforce federal civil rights legislation across the South. During the first half of the century, the American social system was sharply segregated along color lines. Enacted into law with such Supreme Court rulings as the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case (which

sanctioned segregated seating in railroad cars), this system provided “separate but equal” facilities and services for blacks and whites.

In the 1930s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) formed a legal team to systematically challenge segregation in the nation’s courts.* The team, led first by Charles Houston and later by Thurgood Marshall, believed the best way to attack segregation was to contest the central premise of *Plessy v. Ferguson*—the idea that separate would ever be equal. By the early 1950s, the NAACP focused on segregation in US public schools. In a series of rulings know as *Brown v. Board of Education*, the US Supreme Court declared the doctrine of “separate but equal” unconstitutional. The rulings had widespread implications; activists saw it as the first step toward desegregation, but many white Southerners interpreted it as an infringement on their states’ rights. The ruling’s implications for the particularly sensitive issue of children and education ignited segregationists’ rage and fed their sense of imminent threat.

The episode begins in 1956 when Autherine Lucy, a black woman, enrolled in the all-white University of Alabama. In response to widespread hostility and mob violence, the university board suspended Lucy, ostensibly for her safety, and then later expelled her for challenging the decision in court. The struggle for school desegregation continued in Arkansas. In 1957, the Little Rock Board of Education decided to comply with the Supreme Court decision

* Under the leadership of Harvard University scholar W. E. B. DuBois and the antilynching advocate Ida B. Wells, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was established in 1909. The NAACP’s goals include the promotion of equality and justice in America and the eradication of prejudices among all its citizens. Its charter calls for the protection of the interests and opportunities of citizens of color and for the promotion of progressive policies in the fields of education, housing, and employment. For more information see “NAACP,” at Britannica.com, <http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article-9372942> (accessed April 18, 2006).

1955	
May 31	The Supreme Court issues <i>Brown II</i> proclaiming that districts must “make a prompt and reasonable start towards full compliance with our May 17, 1954 ruling.”
1956	
Feb. 3	Autherine Lucy becomes the first black woman to enroll at the University of Alabama but is soon suspended “for her safety”
1957	
Jan. 11	Martin Luther King and other religious leaders form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to lead the struggle against segregation
Sept. 4	In Arkansas, nine black students are prevented from attending Little Rock Central High School by a mob of neighborhood whites
Sept. 25	President Dwight D. Eisenhower sends federal troops to Little Rock to escort the nine black students into the school and protect them for the rest of the school year
1958	
Sept. 9	President Eisenhower signs into law the Civil Rights Act of 1957, which gave the federal government some power to enforce equal voting rights
1960	
Nov. 8	With a strong black voter base, Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy defeats Republican candidate Richard Nixon
1962	
Sept. 20	James Meredith, a black man, applies for admission to the traditionally all white University of Mississippi, but is met with opposition by school officials
Sept. 30	President John F. Kennedy sends federal troops to intervene on behalf of Meredith, forcing the school administration to allow him to enroll

and admitted nine black students to the prestigious Little Rock Central High School. Governor Orval E. Faubus, courting the segregationist vote for his reelection campaign, responded with a blatantly political decision: in defiance of federal laws, he called in the Arkansas National Guard to stop the “Little Rock Nine” (as the press dubbed the students) from entering the school. In these actions, the governor adopted extreme segregationist rhetoric, and incited a near-riot atmosphere. During the first several days, the black students were forced into the hands of the mob and only narrowly escaped physical harm. In response to the crisis, President Dwight D. Eisenhower called in the 101st Airborne Division to ensure the students’ safety and enforce compliance with the federal ruling.

The episode ends with the story of James Meredith, who successfully used the courts to fight for the right to enroll in the University of Mississippi. Despite on-campus riots, Meredith persevered and became the first black student to attend “Ole Miss” (as the university was known).

KEY QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between desegregation and integration? What is required for each?
2. Why was school desegregation so explosive?
3. The NAACP chose to contest segregation in federal courts. What myths did it force people to confront? What other avenues of protest were open to blacks in America?
4. How can a democracy ensure that it is not undermined by mob rule?
5. What is the role of the federal government in protecting the freedoms guaranteed to all American citizens when the state fails to do so? What role does the US Constitution play in protecting the rights of American citizens?

Document 1: OVERTURNING SEGREGATION IN THE SUPREME COURT

The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling had legally legitimized the “separate but equal” policy in American public life. The ruling stipulated that blacks and whites could receive separate services so long as they had equal access to resources. While ostensibly blacks may have been entitled to equivalent resources and opportunities, in actuality the policy preserved “separate and unequal” racial divisions.

By the early 1950s, the NAACP had decided to undermine the “separate but equal” doctrine through legal challenges to educational segregation in US public schools, primarily because the gaps between white and black educational institutions were so glaring. The NAACP legal team argued to the US Supreme Court that “separate but equal” violated the Fourteenth Amendment clause, which states that the freedoms and privileges of US citizens must be equally protected. In the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, the US Supreme Court declared the doctrine of “separate but equal” unconstitutional on the grounds that it provided inferior education



A mother explaining the *Brown v. Board* decision on the steps of the Supreme Court. The ruling declared that the doctrine “separate but equal” was unconstitutional.

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to African-Americans. The landmark decision initiated the process that dismantled the legal segregation of schools in America.

US Supreme Court

BROWN v. BOARD OF EDUCATION, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

347 U.S. 483

BROWN ET AL. v. BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TOPEKA ET AL.

**APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF
KANSAS. No. 1.**

Segregation of white and Negro children in the public schools of a State solely on the basis of race, pursuant to state laws permitting or requiring such segregation, denies to Negro children the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment—even though the physical facilities and other “tangible” factors of white and Negro schools may be equal.

(a) The history of the Fourteenth Amendment is inconclusive as to its intended effect on public education.

(b) The question presented in these cases must be determined, not on the basis of conditions existing when the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted, but in the light of the full development of public education and its present place in American life throughout the Nation.

(c) Where a State has undertaken to provide an opportunity for an education in its public schools, such an opportunity is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

(d) Segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race deprives children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities, even though the physical facilities and other “tangible” factors may be equal.

(e) The “separate but equal” doctrine adopted in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 has no place in the field of public education.

[...]

In approaching this problem, we cannot turn the clock back to 1868 when the Amendment was adopted, or even to 1896 when *Plessy v. Ferguson* was written. We must consider public education in the light of its full development and its present place in American life throughout [347 U.S. 483, 493] the Nation. Only in this way can it be determined if segregation in public schools deprives these plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws.

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other “tangible” factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.

[...]

To separate [black children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone. [...]

We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. This disposition makes unnecessary any discussion whether such segregation also violates the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.¹

CONNECTIONS

1. The Supreme Court is the highest legal authority in the United States. It hears cases that have wide constitutional implications. How significant was the Supreme Court’s decision to take up the case of segregation in schools?
2. As you read the court’s decision, what words or phrases stand out? How did the court explain its ruling?
3. Seven years before the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Mendez family, Mexican Americans in California, fought public school segregation in the courts. Supported by the United Latin American Citizens (ULAC) with the help of the NAACP (Thurgood Marshall co-authored the legal brief), The American Jewish Congress, The Japanese American League and other civil rights organizations, the Mendezes argued that California’s schools were in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Federal Judge Paul McCormick sided with Mendez in his ruling. He explained:

“The equal protection of the laws pertaining to the public school system in California is not provided by furnishing in separate schools the same technical facilities, text books and courses of instruction to children of Mexican ancestry that are available to the other public school children regardless of their ancestry. A paramount requisite in the American system of public education is social equality. It must be open to all children by unified school association regardless of lineage.”²

Compare Judge McCormick’s ruling to the Supreme Court’s ruling *Brown v. Board of Education*. What language strikes you?

4. In the *Brown* decision, how did the Justices write about the role of education in a democracy?
5. Why do you think the court ruled that the doctrine of “separate but equal” had no place in the field of public education? Why was this decision hard to enforce?
6. The courts dismantled official segregation, but many American students still attend schools that have a strong ethnic, religious, or class imbalances. What is the difference between desegregation and integration? What can be done to further break down cultural and ethnic barriers between students? How can institutions and individuals promote dialogue between racial and ethnic groups?

Document 2: THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

In 1955, Virgil Blossom, the Little Rock, Arkansas school superintendent, announced a plan to integrate the state’s schools gradually, beginning with Little Rock Central High School. The school board selected nine outstanding black students to be the first to attend the all-white institution. Among the nine was 15 year-old Elizabeth Eckford. The night before the first day of school, Governor Orval Faubus delivered an inflammatory speech to incite white segregationists to protest the integration attempt. Rumors of riots spread across town, but Elizabeth Eckford could not be contacted and warned. The next morning she arrived by herself, unprotected. Segregationists crowded the streets leading to Central and surrounded her. Facing taunts, racial epithets, and threats, Eckford only narrowly escaped physical harm. In the excerpt below, she recalled the dreadful day:

I am part of the group that became known as the Little Rock Nine. Prior to the desegregation of Central, there had been one high school for whites, Central High school, and one high school for blacks, Dunbar. I expected that there may be something more available to me at Central that was not available at Dunbar; that there might be more courses I could pursue; that there were more options available. I was not prepared for what actually happened.

I was more concerned about what I would wear, whether we could finish my dress in time. [...] What I was wearing, was that okay? Would it look good? The night before when the governor went on television [September 2] and announced that he had called out the Arkansas National Guard, I thought he had done this to insure the protection of all the students. We did not have a telephone. So, inevitably we were not contacted to let us know that Daisy Bates of NAACP had arranged for some ministers to accompany the students in a group. And so it was I that arrived alone.

On the morning of September 4th, my mother was doing what she usually did. My mother was making sure everybody's hair looked right and everybody had lunch money and notebooks and things. But she did finally get quiet and we had family prayer. I remember my father walking back and forth. My father worked at night and normally he would have been asleep at that time, but he was awake and he was walking back and forth chomping on a cigar that wasn't lit.



Elizabeth Eckford attempting to enter Little Rock Central High School. Facing taunts, racial epithets, and threats, Eckford narrowly escaped violence.

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I expected I would go to school as I did before on a city bus. So, I walked a few blocks to the bus stop, got on the bus, and rode to within two blocks of the school. I got off the bus and I noticed along the street that there were many more cars than usual. And I remember hearing the murmur of a crowd. But, when I got to the corner where the school was, I was reassured seeing these soldiers circling school grounds. And I saw students going to school. I saw the guards break ranks as students approached the sidewalks so that they could pass through to get to school.

And I approached the guards at the corner, as I had seen other students do, they closed ranks. So, I thought maybe I am not supposed to enter at this point. So, I walked further down the line of guards to where there was another sidewalk and I attempted to pass through there. But when I stepped up, they crossed rifles. And again I said to myself maybe I'm supposed to go down to where the main entrance is. So I walked toward the center of the street and when I got to about the middle and I approached the guard he directed me across the street into the crowd. It was only then that I realized that they were barring me so that I wouldn't go to school.

As I stepped out into the street, the people who had been across the street start surging forward behind me. So, I headed in the opposite direction to where there was another bus stop. Safety to me meant getting to the bus stop. I think I sat there for a long time before the bus came. In the meantime, people were screaming behind me. What I would have described as a crowd before, to my ears sounded like a mob.³

CONNECTIONS

1. What did Elizabeth Eckford say was her motivation for attending Little Rock Central?

2. How did she describe her preparations for her first day of school? What did she expect would happen? Why didn't things go as she expected?
3. As you study the photo of Elizabeth trying to make her way into the school, what details stand out? If you were there, what sounds might you have heard? If you were one of the reporters at the scene, whom would you want to interview? What questions might you have asked?
4. How do you explain the mob's reaction to Elizabeth's arrival at school? What do you think white protestors were trying to accomplish?
5. What is a mob? What is the difference between a mob and a crowd? Which term best describes the people Eckford faced on her first day at school? Have you ever been caught up in a mob? How do mobs express their power?
6. Hazel Bryan was the young woman shouting at Elizabeth in the photograph. In 1962, five years later, Bryan apologized to Eckford. Bryan later said:

“I don't know what triggered it, but one day I just started squalling about how she must have felt. I felt so bad that I had done this that I called her [...] and apologized to her. I told her I was sorry that I had done that, that I was not thinking for myself [...]. I think both of us were crying.”⁴

What do you think might have prompted Bryan's apology? How important do you think the apology was to Eckford? To Bryan?

Document 3: **MOB RULE CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO OVERRIDE THE DECISIONS OF OUR COURTS**

Orval E. Faubus was elected governor of Arkansas in 1954. He pursued a progressive agenda that included increased spending on public services and the integration of public transportation. Pressure from segregationists, however, pushed him to resist federal calls for school integration. In a calculated appeal to Arkansas's segregationists, Faubus sent in National Guardsmen to stop the attempts to desegregate Little Rock Central. Defying federal laws, the governor incited a near-riot atmosphere. Prompted by the crisis, President Dwight Eisenhower delivered the following speech:

Good evening, my fellow citizens. For a few minutes this evening I should like to speak to you about the serious situation that has arisen in Little Rock. [...] In that city, under the leadership of demagogic extremists, disorderly mobs have deliberately prevented the carrying out of proper orders from a federal court. Local authorities have not eliminated that violent opposition and, under the law, I yesterday issued a proclamation calling upon the mob to disperse. [...]

Whenever normal agencies prove inadequate to the task and it becomes necessary for the executive branch of the federal government to use its powers and authority to uphold federal courts, the president's responsibility is inescapable. In accordance with that responsibility, I have today issued an executive order directing the use of troops under federal authority to aid in the execution of federal law at Little Rock, Arkansas. This became necessary when my proclamation of yesterday was not observed, and the obstruction of justice still continues. [...]

As you know, the Supreme Court of the United States has decided that separate public

educational facilities for the races are inherently unequal, and therefore compulsory school segregation laws are unconstitutional. Our personal opinions about the decision have no bearing on the matter of enforcement; the responsibility and authority of the Supreme Court to interpret the Constitution are very clear. Local federal courts were instructed by the Supreme Court to issue such orders and decrees as might be necessary to achieve admission to public schools without regard to race and with all deliberate speed.

During the past several years, many communities in our Southern states have instituted public school plans for gradual progress in the enrollment and attendance of school children of all races in order to bring themselves into compliance with the law of the land. [...] Here I might say that in a number of communities in Arkansas, integration in the schools has already started, and without violence of any kind. [...]

The very basis of our individual rights and freedoms rests upon the certainty that the president and the executive branch of government will support and insure the carrying out of the decisions of the federal courts, even, when necessary with all the means at the president's command. Unless the president did so, anarchy would result. There would be no security for any except that which each one of us could provide for himself. The interest of the nation in the proper fulfillment of the law's requirements cannot yield to opposition and demonstrations by some few persons.

Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of our courts. [...]

A foundation of the American way of life is our national respect for law. [...] [I]t would be difficult to exaggerate the harm that is being done to the prestige and influence, and indeed to the safety, of our nation and the world. Our enemies are gloating over this incident and using it everywhere to misrepresent our whole nation. We are portrayed as a violator of those standards of conduct, which the peoples of the world united to proclaim in the Charter of the United Nations. There they affirmed faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, and they did so without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. [...]⁵

CONNECTIONS

1. How did President Eisenhower explain his decision to bring federal troops to Little Rock? What arguments did he make? Which arguments resonate with you?
2. What dangers did the president foresee when mob rule “override[s] the decisions of our courts”?
3. What is the role of the president when states and local officials defy federal law?
4. Many segregationists claimed that the federal government was imposing its will and that they had rights as well. How do you think President Eisenhower might have responded to that argument? How might you respond?

Document 4: CONFRONTING DESEGREGATION STUDENT TO STUDENT

A few weeks after the showdown in Little Rock, NBC News invited several students to a nationally-televised roundtable discussion. Of these students, Sammy Dean Parker, Kay Bacon, Robin Woods, and Joseph Fox were white, and Ernest Green and Minniejean Brown were black. The discussion centered on the constitutional rights of blacks and whites and the impact the Little Rock desegregation had on them.

MRS. RICKETTS: Do you think it is possible to start working this out on a more sensible basis than violent demonstration?

SAMMY: No, I don't because the South has always been against racial mixing and I think they will fight this thing to the end. [...] We fight for our freedom—that's one thing. And we don't have any freedom any more.

ERNEST: Sammy, you said that you don't have any freedom. I wonder what do you mean by it—that you don't have any freedom? You are guaranteed your freedom in the Bill of Rights and your Constitution. You have the freedom of speech—I noticed that has been exercised a whole lot in Little Rock. The freedom of petition, the freedom of religion and the other freedoms are guaranteed to you. As far as freedom, I think that if anybody should kick about freedoms, it should be us: Because I think we have been given a pretty bad side on this thing as far as freedom.

SAMMY: Do you call those troops freedom? I don't. And I also do not call free when you are being escorted into the school every morning.

ERNEST: You say why did the troops come here? It is because our government—our state government—went against the federal law.[...] Our country is set up so that we have forty eight states and no one state has the ability to overrule our nation's government. I thought that was what our country was built around. I mean, that is why we fight. We fought in World War II together—the fellows that I know died in World War II, they died in the Korean War. I mean, why should my friends get out there and die for a cause called "democracy" when I can't exercise my rights—tell me that.

ROBIN: I agree with Ernest.

JOE: Well, Sammy, I don't know what freedom has been taken away from you because the truth there—I know as a senior myself—the troops haven't kept me from going to my classes or participating in any school activity. I mean, they're there just to keep order in case—I might use the term "hotheads"—get riled up. But I think as long as—if parents would just stay out of it and let the children of the school at Central High figure it out for themselves, I think it would be a whole lot better. I think the students are mature enough to figure it out for themselves.... As far as I'm concerned, I'll lay the whole blame of this trouble in Governor Faubus's lap.

SAMMY: I think we knew before this ever started that some day we were going to have to integrate the schools. And I think that our Governor was trying to protect all of us when he called out the National Guard—and he was trying to prepare us, I think.

ERNEST: [...] Well, I have to disagree. [...] I know a student that's over there with us, Elizabeth, and that young lady, she walked two blocks, I guess—as you all know—and the mob was behind her. Did the troops break up the mob?

ROBIN: [...] And when Elizabeth had to walk down in front of the school I was there and I saw that. And may I say, I was very ashamed—I felt like crying—because she was so brave when she did that. And we just weren't behaving ourselves just jeering her. I think if we had had any sort of decency, we wouldn't have acted that way. But I think if everybody would just obey the Golden Rule—do unto others as you would have others do unto you—might be the solution. How would you like to have to [...] walk down the street with everybody yelling behind you like they yelled behind Elizabeth?

MRS. RICKETTS: Sammy, why do these children not want to go to school with Negroes?

SAMMY: Well, I think it is mostly race mixing.

MRS. RICKETTS: Race mixing? What do you mean?

SAMMY: Well, marrying each other.

MINNIEJEAN: Hold your hand up. I'm brown, you are white. What's the difference? We are all of the same thoughts. You're thinking about your boy—he's going to the Navy. I'm thinking about mine—he's in the Air Force. We think about the same thing.

SAMMY: I'll have to agree with you.

ERNEST: Well, getting back to this intermarriage and all that. I don't know [where] people get all that. Why do I want to go to school? To marry with someone? I mean, school's not a marriage bureau. [...] I'm going there for an education. Really, if I'm going there to socialize, I don't need to be going to school. I can stand out on the corner and socialize, as far as that.

MINNIEJEAN: Kay, Joe and Rob, do you know anything about me, or is it just that your mother has told you about Negroes?

MRS. RICKETTS: [...] Have you ever really made an effort to try to find out what they're like?

KAY: Not until today.

SAMMY: Not until today.

MRS. RICKETTS: And what do you think about it after today?

KAY: Well, you know that my parents and a lot of the other students and their parents think that the Negroes aren't equal to us. But—I don't know. It seems like they are, to me.

SAMMY: These people are—we'll have to admit that.

ERNEST: I think, like we're doing today, discussing our different views [...] if the people of Little Rock [...] would get together I believe they would find out a different story—and try to discuss the thing instead of getting out in the street and kicking people around and calling names—and all that sort of thing. If [...] people got together it would be smoothed over.

KAY: I think that if [...] our friends had been getting in this discussion today, I think that maybe some of them—not all of them—in time, they would change their mind. But probably some of them would change their mind today.

SAMMY: I know now that it isn't as bad as I thought it was—after we got together and discussed it.

KAY: We [Sammy and I] both came down here today with our mind set on it [that] we weren't going to change our mind that we were fully against integration. But I know now that we're going to change our mind.

MRS. RICKETTS: What do your parents say to that?

KAY: I think I'm going to have a long talk with my parents.⁶

"Integration: Central Students Talk It Out," *New York Times*, October 20, 1957 © 1957 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted with permission.

CONNECTIONS

1. The roundtable discussion organized by NBC was one of the few opportunities Little Rock Central High School students had to express their concerns. They discussed issues of equality, states' rights, "race mixing," and the conflict between free speech and free association on the one hand and individual rights on the other. None of these issues were discussed at school. How do you think the students learned about them? What did the roundtable discussion add to their understanding of these issues? What did it add to the understanding of those who heard their discussion?
2. How do students get the message that some people deserve more than others?
3. Whose responsibility was it to prepare the students—black and white—for integration?
4. Suppose a community group, the school, or the students themselves had organized informal conversations like NBC's roundtable discussion. Who might have benefited? What might the students have learned from one another? How could teachers educate students about racial, cultural, and other

Document 5: PRESIDENT CLINTON REMEMBERS LITTLE ROCK

Former President Bill Clinton grew up near Little Rock, Arkansas. The crisis surrounding the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School left a deep impression on the 11 year-old and permanently impacted the way he thought about race and racism. On September 25, 1997, then President Clinton spoke at Little Rock Central to mark the 40th anniversary of the integration of the school:

Forty years ago, a single image first seared the heart and stirred the conscience of our nation. So powerful, most of us who saw it then recall it still. A 15 year-old girl, wearing a crisp black and white dress, carrying only a notebook, surrounded by large crowds of boys and girls, men and women, soldiers and police officers. Her head held high, her eyes fixed straight ahead. And she is utterly alone.

On September 4, 1957, Elizabeth Eckford walked through this door for her first day of school, utterly alone. She was turned away by people who were afraid of change, instructed by ignorance, hating what they simply could not understand. [...] Elizabeth Eckford, along with her eight schoolmates, [was] turned away on September 4th, but the Little Rock Nine did not turn back. Forty years ago today, they climbed these steps, passed through this door and moved our nation. And for that, we must all thank them.

Today, we honor those who made it possible, their parents first. As Eleanor Roosevelt said of them, to give your child for a cause is even harder than to give yourself. To honor my friend Daisy Bates and Wiley Branton and Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP and all who guided these children.

To honor President Eisenhower, Attorney General Brownell and the men of the 101st Airborne who enforced the Constitution; to honor every student, every teacher, every minister, every Little Rock resident, black or white, who offered a word of kindness, a glance of respect or a hand of friendship; to honor those who gave us the opportunity to be part of this day, a celebration and rededication.

But most of all, we come to honor the Little Rock Nine. Most of those who just watched these events unfold can never understand fully the sacrifice they made. Imagine, all of



Honoring the Little Rock Nine. Federal troops were sent to ensure that the students were safe and that Arkansas authorities complied with the desegregation ruling.

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you, what it would be like to come to school one day and be shoved against lockers, tripped down stairways, taunted day after day by your classmates, to go all through school with no hope of going to a school play or being on a basketball team, or learning in simple peace. [...]

But let me tell you something else that was true about that time. Before Little Rock, for me and other white children, the struggles of black people, whether we were sympathetic or hostile to them, were mostly background music in our normal, self-absorbed lives. We were all, like you, more concerned about our friends and our lives day in and day out. But then we saw what was happening in our own backyard, and we all had to deal with it. Where did we stand? What did we believe? How did we want to live? It was Little Rock that made racial equality a driving obsession in my life. [...]

Well, 40 years later we know that we all benefit, all of us, when we learn together, work together and come together. That is, after all, what it means to be an American. Forty years later, we know, notwithstanding some cynics, that all our children can learn, and this school proves it.

Forty years later, we know when the Constitutional rights of our citizens are threatened, the national government must guarantee them. Talk is fine, but when they are threatened, you need strong laws, faithfully enforced, and upheld by independent courts.

Forty years later we know there are still more doors to be opened, doors to be opened wider, doors we have to keep from being shut again now.

Forty years later we know freedom and equality cannot be realized without responsibility for self, family and the duties of citizenship, or without a commitment to building a community of shared destiny, and a genuine sense of belonging.

Forty years later, we know the question of race is more complex and more important than ever, embracing no longer just blacks and whites, or blacks and whites and Hispanics and Native Americans, but now people from all parts of the earth coming here to redeem the promise of America.

Forty years later, frankly, we know we are bound to come back where we started. After all the weary years and silent tears, after all the stony roads and bitter roads, the question of race is, in the end, still an affair of the heart.

But [...] if these are lessons, what do we have to do? First, we must all reconcile. Then, we must all face the facts of today, and finally, we must act. [...]

And what are the facts?

It is a fact, my fellow Americans, that there are still too many places where opportunity for education and work are not equal, where disintegration of family and neighborhood make it more difficult. [...]

There is still discrimination in America.

There are still people who can't get over it, who can't let it go, who can't go through the day unless they have somebody else to look down on. And it manifests itself in our streets and in our neighborhoods, and in the workplace, and in the schools. And it is wrong. And we have to keep working on it, not just with our voices, but with our laws. And we have to engage each other in it. [...]

We have to decide...all you young people have to decide, will we stand as a shining example or a stunning rebuke to the world of tomorrow? For the alternative to integration is not isolation or a new Separate but Equal, it is disintegration.

Only the American idea is strong enough to hold us together. We believe—whether our ancestors came here in slave ships or on the Mayflower, whether they came through the portals of Ellis Island or on a plane to San Francisco, whether they have been here for thousands of years—we believe that every individual possesses a spark of possibility. [...]

We must be one America. The Little Rock Nine taught us that. [...]

We have to act. All of us have to act, each of us has to do something, especially our young people must seek out people who are different from themselves and speak freely and frankly to discover they share the same dreams.⁷

CONNECTIONS

1. What did Clinton describe as the lasting legacy of Little Rock for him? For the country?
2. Some people argue it is better to forget difficult episodes in our nation's history. How do you imagine Clinton would respond to this suggestion? How would you respond?
3. In 1999, each of the Little Rock Nine received the Congressional Gold Medal, Congress's highest civilian honor for their "selfless heroism" in 1957. To what extent do such honors make a difference? Are they merely symbolic? In what ways do they reflect our nation's values?
4. Who benefits from preaching hate and fear? Who is harmed by it?

¹ US Supreme Court, "Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)" *Find Law*, http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/print_friendly.pl?page=us/347/483.html (accessed on April 26, 2006).

² United States District Court for the Southern District of California, "Mendez v. Westminster School Dist. of Orange County, 64 F Supp. 544 D.C.CAL. (1946)", <http://www.mendezwestminster.com/> (accessed on August 15, 2006).

³ Elizabeth Eckford, interview by Facing History and Ourselves, June 28, 2000.

⁴ Sara Alderman Murphy, *Breaking the Silence: Little Rock's Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, 1958–1995* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 58.

⁵ President Dwight Eisenhower, "Ike on Little Rock," *American Radio Works*, <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/marshall/ike.html> (accessed on April 26, 2006).

⁶ "Integration: Central Students Talk It Out," *New York Times*, October 20, 1957.

⁷ Facing History and Ourselves, *Choices in Little Rock* (Brookline: Facing History and Ourselves, 2005), 156–58.