From "Little Rock Nine" to Today

Sections

1. About the Little Rock Nine
2. School Integration: Success and Setbacks
3. Teacher Lesson Plans and Resources

ABOUT THE LITTLE ROCK NINE

Melba Pattillo, Carlotta Walls, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Gloria Ray, Jefferson Thomas, Minnijean Brown, Terrence Roberts, Thelma Mothershed

On September 23, 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas, these nine African-American students quietly slipped into Central High School through the side door with the assistance of the city's police, while an angry white mob numbering 1,000 swarmed the front of the school to await their arrival. Upon learning of their entry, the crowd became unruly, confronting and overwhelming the city police. During the riot, two African-American journalists were physically harassed and attacked and then chased out of the area. School windows and doors were broken and the nine African-American students were escorted out of the school by police. Fearful of what may happen, the school administration had the black students escorted out a side door. Central High School's integration efforts that day—which started in 1955 with the school board voting to gradually integrate—came to a quick close, all before lunch.

On September 25, 1957, under escort by the soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division, the nine black students were escorted back into Central High. The brave efforts of the students, later known as the "Little Rock Nine," to gain equal access to
education in the United States, established September 25th as an important date in the Nation and in the Civil Rights Movement.

**SCHOOL INTEGRATION: SUCCESS AND SETBACKS**

**Successes**

After that fateful day the "Little Rock Nine" integrated Central High School, the U.S. Supreme Court contributed to advancements toward school integration, from such decisions as those in *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958) which overrode state government's ability to block desegregation, to *Keyes v. Denver School District No. I* (1963) which established the right to desegregation outside the South and the right of desegregation for Latino students. As a result of such key court-ordered desegregation requirements, for the next three decades, school districts across the country implemented plans to desegregate their student bodies.

**Setbacks**

By the 1990s, most once-segregated schools had desegregated in accordance with the law, and thus fewer desegregation orders were deemed necessary by the courts. Unfortunately, however, the courts’ decisions, in addition to existing residential housing patterns, have led to an increase of de facto segregation. For example, at its peak of integration in 1988, 44% of black southern students were in majority-white schools, the kind of schools that provided strong potential opportunities for diverse learning experiences. By 2011, that number had declined to 23%, a drop by nearly half, and the decline has accelerated in recent years. The percentage of students in majority white schools is lower than it was in 1968. In addition, while white students are attending schools with slightly more students of color than in the past, they remain the most isolated of all racial groups. The average white student attends a school where 72.5% of the student enrollment is white.[1]

In addition to court-mandated plans, voluntary integration plans—plans implemented by schools rather than mandated by the courts to address de facto
segregation—have also been under attack. In June 2007, the Supreme Court struck down two voluntary integration plans, one implemented in Seattle and the other in Louisville. Even though the decision confirmed that the government has a compelling interest in promoting racial diversity, the Court's decision finding the plans unconstitutional may discourage school districts from creating any integration plans, and may make racial isolation in our nation’s schools an inevitability.


TEACHER LESSON PLANS AND RESOURCES

The following ADL resources provide educators with curriculum lessons and educational resources to assist students in better understanding the school integration landscape, exploring difficult questions about the state of school integration today, and understanding the connection between Brown v. Board of Education, the Little Rock crisis, and the 2007 Supreme Court decision on the voluntary school integration plans.

Teaching Resources

LESSON PLAN

Looking Back Reaching Forward: Exploring the Promise of Brown v. Board of Education in Contemporary Times

HIGH SCHOOL

This curriculum unit commemorates the 60th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education. High school students explore the history of school desegregation in the United States and examines current patterns of resegregation in public schools.
In light of the 2007 Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District* and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*, this four-part high school lesson examines the debate over school integration within the broader context of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 and the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, AK in 1957.
Teach students about the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and analyze the modern day “school-to-prison pipeline” and the opportunity gap that exist in our public schools.