

# Little Rock



Describe what happened at Little Rock High School in 1957.

Explain why the world was shocked by what happened to Elizabeth Eckford.

# What happened at the Little Rock High School in the state of Arkansas in 1957?

Southern states ignored the 1954 Supreme Court ruling that outlawed school segregation.

Schools in the South which did try to desegregate were met by furious white racist mobs. The mobs along with KKK members attacked black students. Some schools were even blown



In 1957 the NAACP decided it would test the willingness of states in the South to desegregate. Little Rock High School was a very successful all white school.

In 1955, the school board had agreed to start integration in the autumn of 1957.

The NAACP selected 9 grade A students so that the school could have no complaints about the ability of new black students.

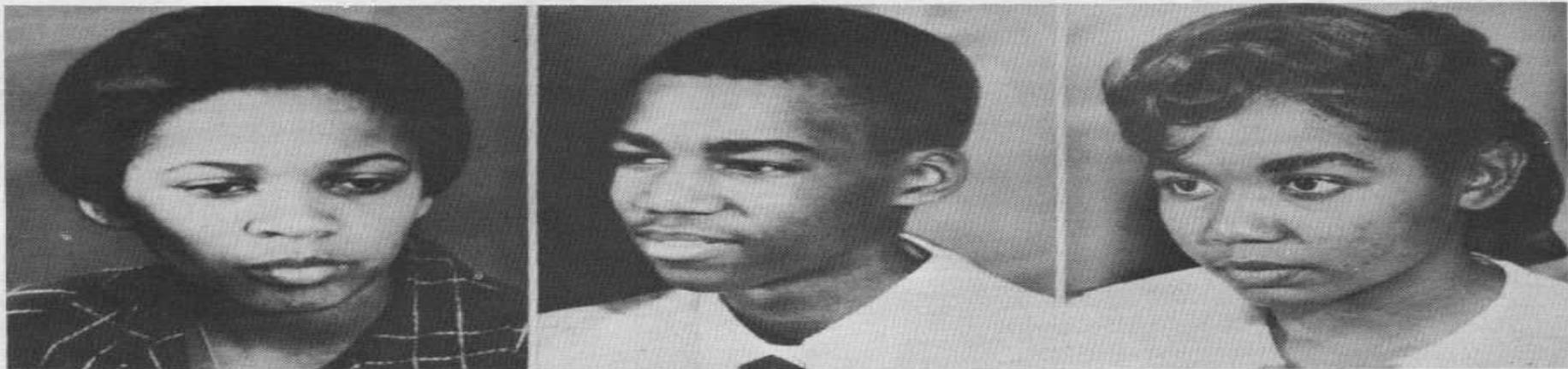


White racists in Little Rock claimed that black students trying to go to Little Rock High School would be risking their lives. Even the KKK promised to take action.

The NAACP knew that the 9 black students due to attend school would be in danger. The students were telephoned and told not to attend.

However, one student, Elizabeth Eckford did not have a phone so was not warned. The next day she turned up at school on her own to face a white mob. Elizabeth also had to face a line of soldiers blocking her path.





The Little Rock Nine (top to bottom, left to right), Gloria Ray, Terrance Roberts, and Melba Patillo; Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, and Minnijean Brown; Jefferson Thomas, Carlotta Walls, and Thelma Mothershed.

**Black History X**

The governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus had ordered a line of troops from the National Guard to block the path to the school.

Faubus tried to say that he had used the National Guard to keep the mob away from the black students. In effect, what the National Guard did was to form a human blockade preventing the black students getting to the school.

The sight of National Guardsmen and screaming white crowds stopping an American child going to school made national news headlines. Soon afterwards the events at Little Rock became world



## Why did events at Little Rock become a national and international issue?

By the mid 1950s, most US homes had television sets. For the first time, people could see what was happening in places like Little Rock. The world was shocked about the events at Little Rock.

During the 1950s the USA was involved in the Cold War with Russia. When film of Elizabeth Eckford being bullied and threatened was shown around the world, Russia used the images to show that USA was very far from being a land of the free. President Eisenhower was embarrassed.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qk1tTCk2Kks>

# What did the president do to solve the crisis?

- Eisenhower was no longer going to let individual states ignore federal law.
- When Faubus removed the National Guardsmen, there was nothing to stop the mob from attacking any black student going to school in Little Rock.
- Eisenhower sent 1000 US paratroopers to 'invade' Arkansas.
- Armed soldiers carrying rifles with fixed bayonets surrounded the black students on their way to school. Students were also protected by troops in jeeps with machine guns.
- The soldiers stayed in Little Rock for a year and even patrolled school corridors.
- Tension died down but black students in Little Rock were still bullied. Ernest Green was the first black student to graduate from Little Rock High School in 1958.

In 1962, a black student, James Meredith, attempted to attend the University of Mississippi Law School. His admission was blocked and during the violence that followed, federal troops were once again used to restore order and enforce national law.

Meredith was escorted to the university by 123 federal marshals, 316 border patrolmen and 97 federal prison guards. Facing Meredith and his protectors was a mob of over 2000 men and women. Riots broke out and two journalists were killed.

President Kennedy had to send 16,000 troops to protect Meredith and restore order at the university. 28 US marshals had been shot and another 160 law enforcers were injured. Federal troops remained at the university for over a year just to protect one black student.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8VvNkTXVCM>

# Did the Civil Rights Act of 1957 make much of a difference?

- On one hand it seemed to show that the federal government was no longer willing to allow the southern states to do as they pleased as far as race relations were concerned.
- On the other hand, some civil rights campaigners were disappointed with the limited power of the act. By 1959 the new Civil Rights Act had not added a single southern black person's name to the voting register.

Complete Activity 1 and 2 on page 62.