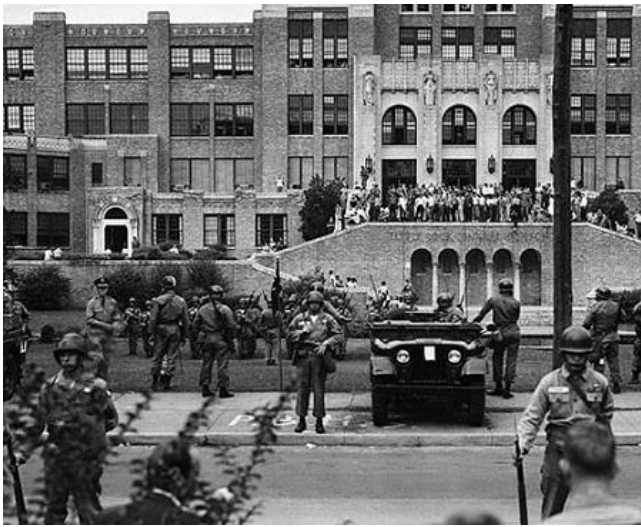


## A Brief History of the Little Rock Nine

Many southern states were outraged by the ruling of the Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Southern legislators swore that integration in the schools would never happen. On Sept 2, 1957, Orval Faubus, governor of Arkansas, defiantly declared that "blood will run in the streets" if African-American children tried to attend Central High School. Two days later, 15-year-old Elizabeth Eckford and eight other brave African-American students attempted to do just that.

After the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, President Dwight Eisenhower tried to get Governor Faubus to voluntarily allow desegregation in Arkansas schools. But Faubus was adamant that he would not allow desegregation, and in response, the NAACP filed a lawsuit asking the federal court to prevent Faubus from interfering with desegregation.



On September 4, 1957, nine African-American students attempted to attend the first day of school at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Faubus had called the Arkansas National Guard not to protect the nine students, but instead to block them from entering the school. The Little Rock Nine were turned away in the face of 150 protesters.

Three weeks later, the nine students again attempted to enter Central High. Local police had set up barricades, but because they were not experienced in crowd control, over 1,000 people showed up in protest. The Little Rock Nine entered the school through a side door, after school had already started. It took the mob and people in the school an hour and a half to realize that the nine were in school, and the angry mob took out its frustration on an African-American reporter named Alex Wilson who happened to be standing in the



crowd, beating and kicking him. Some police refused to arrest the attackers, saying that they would rather throw down their badges than arrest white people. However, a few kind police helped the Little Rock Nine get out of the building, and whisked them away to safety.



When President Eisenhower saw the television footage of the reporter being attacked, he knew he had to do something. In one of the only two times that an elected

official acted to enforce a desegregation court order, Eisenhower sent in 1,200 soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock. The soldiers arrived on the night of September 24, dispersed the mob, and escorted the Little Rock Nine into school on September 25. The 101st Airborne followed the nine throughout the school until October, at which point the Arkansas National Guard took over. However, the Guard was instructed not to interfere with any student activity within the school. Consequently, the Little Rock Nine were regularly assaulted both mentally and physically throughout the school year. There were constant bomb threats and fire drills, and the school hired 26 additional janitors to go through all the lockers every night to check for bombs. Only once was a bomb found, and it had not exploded only because it contained a faulty fuse.

Faubus was so angry with the forced integration of Central High that the following year, 1958, he shut down all three high schools in Little Rock for the entire school year. Three of the Little Rock Nine graduated from Central High School; three others would have graduated had Faubus not closed the schools during their senior year. In 1959, the high schools were reopened as desegregated high schools.