

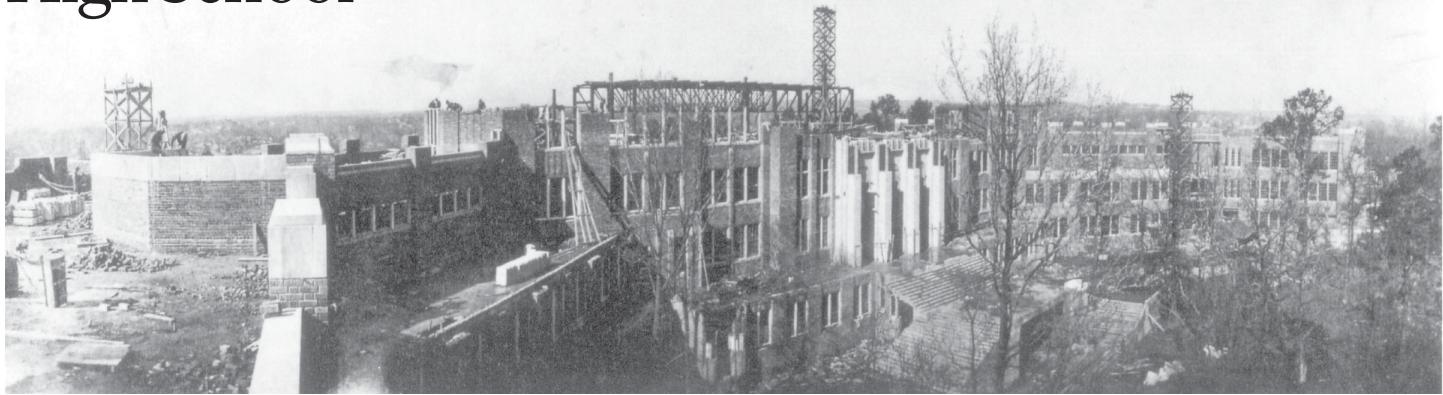


Constitutional Writes

The official newsletter of Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site

Summer 2003
Volume 1, Issue 1

Seventy-five Years at Little Rock (Senior) Central High School



Little Rock Senior High School under construction, 1926.

As we celebrate Central High's 75th Anniversary this year, it seems appropriate to look back on the school's rich history and its ever-changing student body. By 1924, the city's high school was considerably overcrowded, and Little Rock's business and civic leaders saw a need for a much larger facility to handle future enrollment needs. Built in 1927 as Little Rock Senior High School, Central was named "America's Most Beautiful High School" by the American Institute of Architects. Designed as a mix of Art Deco and Collegiate Gothic architectural styles, the school was built to evoke images of higher seats of learning in Europe. One of the primary design elements is the four Greco-Roman cast stone figures over the school's main entrance. During the school's dedication in September 1927, school board member Lillian McDermott said that the new building would, "stand as a public school where Ambition is fired, where Personality is developed, where Opportunity is presented, and where Preparation in the solution of life's problems is begun." The school's immense size was designed to inspire awe for learning. The building is two city blocks long, and includes 150,000 square feet of floor space. Over 36 million pounds of concrete and 370 tons of steel went into the building's construction. It cost \$1.5 million in 1927. The school received extensive publicity upon its opening. An article in the Arkansas Gazette said, "we have hundreds of journalists in our fair city for the dedication" of the new high school.

At its construction, Central's auditorium seated 2,000 and included a 60 x 160 ft. stage that doubled as the gymnasium. In 1935, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built the "ultra-modern" football stadium, Quigley Field, behind the school. Named for Tiger Coach Earl Quigley, who coached Little Rock teams from 1914 to 1935, in its early years the stadium was the state's largest and hosted many college and university teams, including the Arkansas Razorbacks. In 1932, Little Rock High School hosted a radio program, broadcast weekly from the school tower. The show included music, dramatic readings, and short talks.

As the United States entered World War II, many of Central's seniors enlisted in the armed forces. Students also raised \$175,000.00 by selling war bonds and stamps. After the war, a recycled barracks building was relocated to Central's campus and became known as the Tiger Inn, where many students met and danced the lunch period away. In 1943, the school's first principal, John A. Larson, retired. The Tiger Fieldhouse was added in 1951, eliminating the need to use the auditorium's stage for games, and a new library was built in 1969—named for longtime principal Jess W. Matthews. In 1953, the school's name was changed to Little Rock Central High School, in anticipation of a new high school, Hall High, in Pulaski Heights.

Continued on pg. 3

Superintendent's Greeting

Central High School recently celebrated its 75th anniversary of service to the community. The school opened its doors in 1927, about the same time that Lindberg first flew the Atlantic Ocean and that the first talking motion picture was released. The building has stood witness to many stories in its years, most notably the desegregation crisis of 1957-1959. However, the school's history is far from complete. New ideas, events, and people add to Central High's rich heritage each year.

In the late 1990s I had the privilege of participating in the National Park Service (NPS) study that examined if it was feasible to include a large, fully operational high school as a unit of the national park system. Although we realized such an arrangement would present challenges, we could not ignore the many exciting opportunities the unique partnership would create. One of the most important factors that convinced NPS staff of the potential success of an historic site was the strong, community-wide support for the idea. School administrators, business leaders, elected officials, former students, neighbors, and others were all enthusiastic in inviting the National Park Service to become part of Central High's future.

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site has now been a part of the national park system for four years. I am honored to return to Little Rock as Superintendent for the site. And, I am delighted that community support of the school and the Historic Site is as strong now as it was when I first visited the city in the '90s. I look forward to working with our many partners to ensure that all Americans have an opportunity to learn and remember the inspiring stories of the Little Rock Nine, civil rights in education, and Central High School.

This is the first issue of what we envision will be a regular newsletter. Look within, and watch future issues, for interesting and educational articles, information about upcoming events and programs, and the latest on what's happening at the Historic Site. And, finally, please visit us often (and don't forget to bring your friends, relatives, and neighbors!)

Michael Madell, Superintendent

Brown v. Board of Education 49th Anniversary

May 17th, 2003 marks the 49th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that ruled that segregation in schools based on race was unconstitutional. That decision dramatically changed the path of education in the United States. The Brown decision overturned the 1896 Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which set up the "separate but equal" doctrine that ordered the separation of blacks and whites in public facilities.

The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision justified segregation in restaurants, hotels, trains, buses, theaters, parks, restrooms, and public schools. Facilities including education were to be "separate but equal," but that was often not the case. "Seventeen states and the District of Columbia permitted legal school segregation, and several other states allowed school districts to maintain separate schools at their discretion."¹ Delaware, Virginia, South Carolina, Kansas and the District of Columbia were named in the *Brown* case. The fact that Linda Brown, one of the plaintiffs, was first alphabetically was the reason the case was called *Brown v. the Board of Education*. Several other parents from different states were also interested in fighting segregation. Their class action case was argued before the Supreme Court under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall, the senior counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. The primary argument on behalf of the plaintiffs was that the "separate but equal" doctrine violated the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees equal protection under the law.

Chief Justice Earl Warren read the Supreme Court decision. He stated, "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...We conclude that in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place."²

After the *Brown v. Board* decision southern states were mandated to implement a desegregation plan for their schools. Locally, three years passed before the Little Rock School Board's plan of integration was put into action. Nine black high school students exercised their rights to equal education by integrating the formally all white Central High School in 1957. The Crisis of Central High was a direct test of the *Brown v. Board* decision.

Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site was established on October 26, 1992, to commemorate the Supreme Court decision that was to end segregation in public schools. The site includes Monroe Elementary School, one of the four segregated elementary schools for African American children in Topeka.

Spirit Trickey, Park Guide

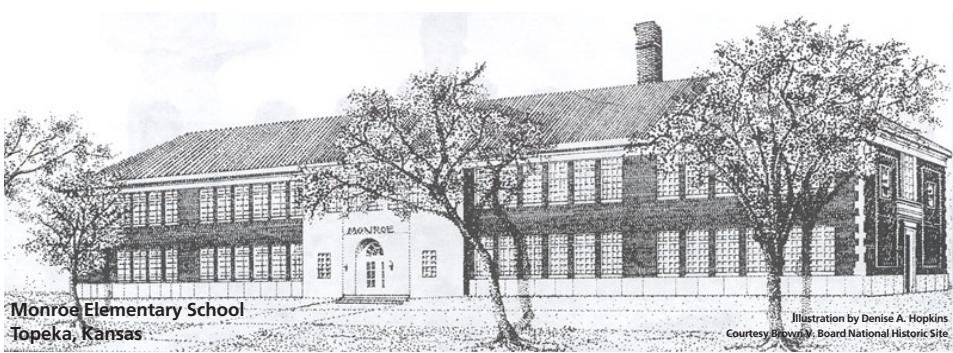
¹ Darren Rhym, *The NAACP* (East Bridgewater, MA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 68.

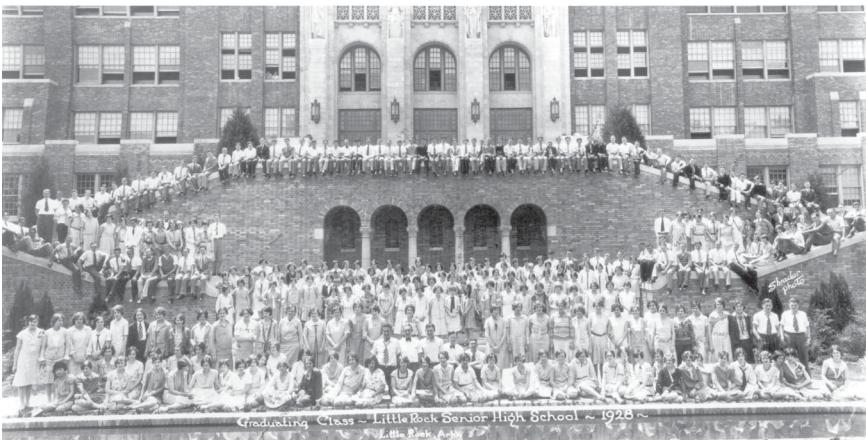
² Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 9.

For additional research:

www.nps.gov/brvb

www.nationalcenter.org/brown.html





Little Rock Senior High School Class of 1928

Seventy-five Years, Continued

In the spring of 1956, Elvis Presley made his Little Rock debut at Robinson Auditorium, a year later Central students were rocked by a much larger event as their school became the focus of the federal government's commitment to eliminating segregated public schools. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that racial segregation in public education was unconstitutional. In Little Rock, hostilities arose over the admission of nine African-American students to Central High School. President Dwight Eisenhower was compelled to use troops from the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division to escort the nine students into the school. The president's action was the first time since the post-Civil War Reconstruction period that federal military force was used to support African-American civil rights. Federalized Arkansas National Guard troops remained for the rest of the school year. Inside the school, teachers and students tried to carry on as usual, while a small group of students consistently harassed the nine African-American students. Vice Principal for Girls Elizabeth Huckabee wrote to her brother saying, "our role as administrators seems to be to try to carry on education as normally as possible and to protect these children with every precaution we can. The NAACP is almost as mad at us as the Capital Citizens' Council [segregationist organization] for our 'lack of discipline'. But there are a hundred ways of making the Negroes miserable without being detected. As one person put it, it's hard to put these Negro children...up against our near-delinquents."

Senior Ernest Green became the first African-American graduate of Central. During the summer, while the NAACP pursued the matter through the courts, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus signed

a bill into law, allowing him to close all four of Little Rock's public high schools to prevent further desegregation efforts. Two weeks later, Little Rock's citizens voted against the immediate integration of all the district's schools and the high schools remained closed for the duration of the 1958-59 school year. In May 1959, three of the six school board members voted not to renew the contracts of 44 teachers and administrators who they felt had supported desegregation. This move prompted the city's leaders to act, and a campaign to recall the three segregationist school board members succeeded. That fall, the newly-constituted school board reopened the high schools under the existing desegregation plan.

By 1961, international events continued to affect Central's students as the Cuban Missile Crisis loomed over the nation. Central High Tiger editor, Ruth Ann Vaughan, wrote, "one of the changes evident in today's ever-moving society, and especially here at Central, is the decline of the school as a social institution as well as an educational one. Students today are more concerned with international affairs than they are with local events." Two years later, Principal Jess Matthews relayed the news of President John F. Kennedy's assassination to the student body saying, "at this time in American history many Central High School students and teachers feel a sense of personal as well as national loss." One month before the president was killed, the Central High Concert Band had played for him at the State Fair in Little Rock. The 1970-71 school year brought less earth-shattering, but nevertheless enduring changes to campus. For the first time female students and faculty were allowed to wear slacks to school as an alternative to dresses or skirts. That same year, a large contingent of male students formed a cheering section called "The Wild Bunch."

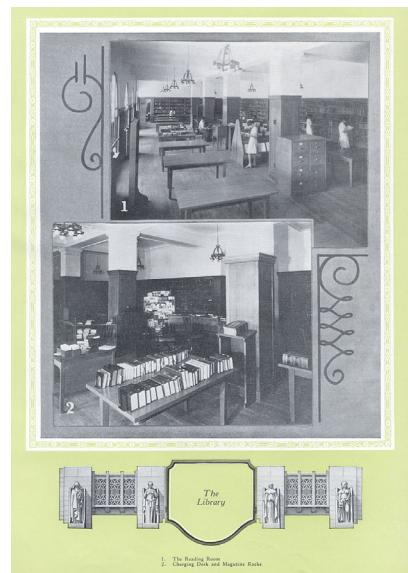
Discouraged by school officials, this group became known for providing ample spirit at football and basketball games. The next year, the school district, in order to comply with a federal desegregation order, submitted a plan to convert Central into a junior high school. After an extended court battle and picketing of the district's administrative offices by Central students, parents, and teachers, the plan was overturned. In 1984, Central's auditorium was renamed in memory of Roosevelt Thompson, a 1980 graduate and Rhodes Scholar, who died in an automobile accident shortly before he was to graduate from Yale University.

In 1998, President William Jefferson Clinton signed legislation designating the school and nearby properties as a National Historic Site to "preserve, protect, and interpret for the benefit, education, and inspiration of present and future generations...its role in the integration of public schools and the development of the Civil Rights movement in the United States." Today, Central High is the only operating high school in the nation to receive such designation—and it is an historic site that includes not only a past, but a present and a future as well—in the form of an ever-evolving student body.

-Information for this article taken in part from "Golden Years," written by students and faculty at Central High School.

Laura A. Miller, Chief of Interpretation & Cultural Resources

**Little Rock Senior High School Library
from the school's Dedication Program, 1927**



Booksing

On Thursday, May 22, 2003, Josh Gottheimer signed copies of his new book, *Ripples of Hope: Great American Civil Rights Speeches*, at the park's visitor center. The book includes a forward by former president Bill Clinton and an afterward by Mary Frances Berry, Chairwoman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

These speeches span the entire range of U.S. History -from the colonial period to the present-including a never-before-published speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The book is comprised of a wide range of both famous and less well-known eloquent speeches representing many unique voices from various walks of life including the African American, Hispanic American, gay, and women's civil rights movements.

Josh Gottheimer was a Special Assistant to the President and a Presidential Speechwriter. He coordinated the policy, research, and drafting process for Clinton's last two State of the Union addresses, his 2000 Democratic Convention speech, his farewell address, and several commencement speeches. Gottheimer has served as a Senior Advisor to the Chairwoman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. He currently attends Harvard Law School.

Ripples of Hope: Great American Civil Rights Speeches is available at the park bookstore for purchase along with other educational materials that cover the Civil Rights era.

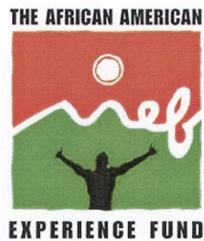
The Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site visitor center is located in a restored Mobil service station across the street from the high school.



Josh Gottheimer, signing his book for Minnijean Brown, one of the Little Rock Nine.



Magnolia Mobil service station



Established in 2000, the African American Experience Fund is an official fund of the National Park Foundation, the congressionally chartered 501(c)(3) non-profit partner of the National Park Service. The mission of AAEF is to

strengthen the enduring connection between the American People and their National Parks by raising public awareness of African American history and culture in National Park Sites and by raising private funds, making strategic grants, and creating innovative partnerships for National Park Sites and programs focusing on African American history and culture. This mission is especially acute because the National Parks are a repository for vast amounts of African American history. Central High School is one of the historic sites supported by AAEF. Mr. Ernest Green, a member of the Little Rock Nine, serves on the Fund's Board of Directors.

By providing the Parks with strategic funding for educational and community engagement and volunteer programs, AAEF will increase participation and commitment to these precious places, ensuring their preservation for generations to come.

To learn more about AAEF and how you can help, and to learn more about the sites supported by AAEF, please visit their website at www.aaexperience.org.

Passport to your “National Parks”

Golden Age and Golden Access Passports are now available at the park visitor center. These passports provide admission into any National Park requiring an entry fee. If you are 62 or older, or receive disability benefits, you may be eligible for the Golden Age or Golden Access Pass!

The Golden Access Passport is free and available to citizens or permanent residents of the United States who are medically determined to be blind or permanently disabled. You may obtain a Golden Access Passport by showing proof of medically determined permanent disability, or eligibility for receiving disability benefits under federal law.

The Golden Age Passport is available for citizens or permanent residents of the United States who are 62 or older and there is a one-time \$10 processing fee. You must show proof of age, such as a state driver's license, birth certificate, or similar document.

The visitor center is open from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is free. For additional questions about National Park Passports: call 1-888-GO-PARKS or email parkspass@nationalparks.org.



Staff Notes



LRCHS NHS staff l to r: Laura Miller, Spirit Trickey, Tarona Armstrong Bennett, Rhonda Stewart, and Mike Madell

Welcome to *Constitutional Writes*, the first issue of the official Central High School National Historic Site newsletter. The title of our newsletter was chosen to represent the relationship between Central High School and the Constitution. Before 1954, and the *Brown v Board of Education* case, black and white students attended separate schools by law. Lawyers involved in the *Brown* case argued that black students were being denied their 14th Amendment rights. Our site is a concrete representation of the strength and meaning of the Constitution. Our Constitution is much more than a document-it is a set of ideals and values that ensure our rights and freedoms as citizens of this country. *Constitutional Writes* will keep you updated with feature articles and current events at Central High School National Historic Site.

Tarona Armstrong Bennett transferred from Arkansas Post National Memorial May 6, 2002. A native of Arkansas and a graduate of University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff with a B.S. in Parks and Recreation. Tarona began working with the National Park Service in 1991 at Gateway National Recreation Area in NY. She is currently a graduate student at Webster University majoring in Human Resource Management. In her spare time she enjoys spending time with her husband, Rulah.

Mike Madell became the second superintendent of Central High School National Historic Site in January 2003. Mike is a 15 year veteran of the National Park Service; before arriving in Little Rock, his career included assignments in Colorado, Minnesota, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Kentucky. Prior to joining the NPS, he also worked for Michigan State Parks and a regional park district in Minnesota. In the late 1990s, Mike was Chief of Planning & Compliance for the NPS Midwest Region. In this position, he played a key role in the study and legislative processes that led to the designation of Central High School as a National Historic Site. When not at work, Mike often can be found exploring regional parks and trails with his dogs "Sky" and "Terra."

Laura Miller joined the National Park Service in 2001 as the site's first historian. Previously, she served as Executive Director of the Central High Museum, Inc. She obtained her master's degree in Public History from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 1999. Her master's thesis, which was published in 2002 by the

UALR/Ledbetter Monograph Series Press, is a biography of Irene Samuel, a leader in the Women's Emergency Committee, the organization that worked to open Little Rock's schools following the 1957 crisis.

Rhonda Stewart began her employment with the Central High Museum, Inc. in February 1998. In February 2002 she became a Park Ranger with the National Park Service. She is a master's candidate in the Public History program at UALR. Born in Little Rock, Rhonda completed high school at Parkview Senior High and she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism with a Public Relations emphasis from Arkansas State University. Off duty, Rhonda enjoys writing poetry, researching and documenting family history, and reading.

Spirit Trickey joined Central High School National Historic Site staff in May, 2002. Her first experience with the National Parks was in 1998 when she worked for a youth program called Young Canada Works in the Canadian National Parks system. Spirit is originally from Canada, but moved to the United States in 1999. She is currently a senior at UALR where she is majoring in Radio, T.V., and Film. She enjoys her job and is passionate about informing visitors about the "Crisis of 1957" because her mother is Minnijean Brown Trickey, one of the Little Rock Nine.



Children's Corner

In order to name our mascot for the junior ranger booklet (a puppet tiger) we held a "Name the Tiger" contest with Ms. Pamela Adams's fourth grade art class from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary. We provided a drawing of the tiger for students to color, as well as space to write their ideas for the tiger's name. Once the drawings were completed, the staff selected the winner, "Courage," submitted by Becky Scott. The entire class received junior ranger booklets and badges and their teacher received a teacher's resource guide.

Calling all Junior Rangers!

Yes, you can now become a Junior Ranger at Central High School National Historic Site. Our Junior Ranger booklet includes a series of fun activities designed to enhance student's knowledge of Little Rock and the 1957 crisis.

You can become a junior park ranger by completing three of the six activities. As a junior park ranger you will receive a junior park ranger badge and a certificate of achievement. The junior ranger program is free and available to anyone between the ages 9 through 12. Activity booklets are available at the Visitor Center front desk.

If you are not able to visit the park, log on to www.nps.gov/webrangers and become an WebRanger. A WebRanger is a Caretaker, an Adventurer, a Learner, a Seeker, and a Discoverer. WebRanger is designed for ages 6-9, 10-12, and 13 and up. You could be a WebRanger!



EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the
Interior

This newsletter is brought to you by the staff
of Little Rock Central High School National
Historic Site.

Editor
Tarona A. Bennett, Park Ranger

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Summer Programs

Thursday, July 10

2:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Topic: From Plessy v. Ferguson to Brown v.
Board

Thursday, July 24

2:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Topic: "2, 4, 6, 8...we ain't gonna integrate" -
Segregationist Resistance to School
Desegregation

Thursday, August 7

2:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Topic: Aaron v. Cooper and the Fight to
Desegregate Little Rock's Public Schools

Thursday, August 21

2:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Topic: Who is Jim Crow?

July -August - -(Thursdays at 10:00 a.m.)

Ranger -led walking tour at 10:00 am. Join a Park Ranger and learn about Little Rock and the 1957 Crisis.

Scheduled Events

July 24

Junior Ranger Rally

September 21-23

Constitution Week

September 25

Anniversary of Integration at Central High
School

Park Rangers are available to give tours of the visitor center exhibit, commemorative garden and the exterior of Central High School. Off-site visits to present a talk on Little Rock and the 1957 Crisis can be arranged as well. The Visitor Center features the exhibit, "All the World is Watching Us: Little Rock and the 1957 Crisis," as well as a bookstore with a wide selection of educational materials.

Contact a park ranger for more information on daily program topics and scheduled events. Reservations are required and can be made by calling the park at (501) 374-1957.