



Constitutional Writes

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

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Central High School National Historic Site Launches Oral History Project

Over the past year, we received funding to begin our oral history project. Working in partnership with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, we will complete 20 interviews in this fiscal year and we expect to obtain funding to complete an additional 20-30 interviews next year. The interviews are being conducted in the studio at the university with our own Spirit Trickey, a park ranger and Radio/TV/Film major at UALR, working behind the camera. All of the interviews are being videotaped and will be closed-captioned, so that we can use them in future exhibits, as well as for research. We hope to include many different perspectives of the events, and capture the memories of participants—such as students in 1957, parents, police officers, government officials, reporters, members of the National Guard and 101st Airborne—and others affected by the events at Central High.

So far, we have completed five interviews. Dr. Johanna Miller Lewis, chair of the Department of History at UALR, has interviewed Minnijean Brown Trickey, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Thelma Mothershed Wair, and Jefferson Thomas (all members of the Little Rock Nine), as well as Rev. Rufus K. Young, who was pastor at Bethel A.M.E. Church (a congregation that included the families of three of the Nine) and also worked with Daisy and L.C. Bates during the crisis. Each of the interviews offers a fascinating glimpse into the history of our community and our nation during the turbulent events of 1957-1959. Some of the stories are hysterical (if you ever run into Jefferson Thomas, ask him about the time his brother convinced him spaghetti grew on trees), some of them are poignant (such as with Thelma Wair asking, "...can separate really be equal? I think when people divide things up, they take the best share for themselves..."), some of the stories are uplifting, and some of them are heart-wrenching.



Three of the Little Rock Nine, l to r, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Jefferson Thomas, and Thelma Mothershed Wair, speak to UALR's Brown v. Board class.

All of the stories are vitally important for understanding our past. We would like to thank all of those who have participated so far in allowing us to share and preserve their memories for this and future generations, and we look forward to talking to many more individuals in the coming months.

If you would like to participate in our project, or know of someone we should interview, please call our historian, Laura A. Miller at (501) 374-1957 or email her at laura_a_miller@nps.gov.

Following is an excerpt from our interview with Reverend Young:

"Well, Virgil Blossom was superintendent of the Little Rock schools. He started integrating at the high school level. And of course most of us thought it better to start

at the elementary level. I call racism a skin disease...they think they're better than you all because the color of the skin. But, when a kid's born, they don't have the skin disease...So we thought it would be better to start down there at the kindergarten and elementary level and come on up, but Virgil Blossom started at the high school level. So, all the white students in the high school level had to decide what side they were on. So, that's the reason they had all that trouble. Of course, ...then Faubus went down over there and encouraged them. And, of course ...Elizabeth Eckford...well, she came down there by herself. That picture went all over the country...of her marching down...going down there...looked like a little statue...ignorant mob there screaming at her. So, the state militia ...instead of letting the students in...they

Superintendent's Greeting

We Need Your Input!

Two documents have recently been drafted that will help guide management of Central High School National Historic Site. We welcome your comments and suggestions on the documents, both of which can be found by clicking the "Management Documents" link on our website, <http://www.nps.gov/chsc>. Comments on either document can be sent to: Superintendent, Central High School National Historic Site, 2125 Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive, Little Rock, AR 72202; comments also may be emailed to michael_madell@nps.gov.

Available for review are:

Superintendent's Compendium

In accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations, superintendents may establish provisions for the proper management, protection, government and public use of land within units of the National Park system. The Superintendent's Compendium describes the discretionary provisions that apply at Central High School National Historic Site. Because of limitations imposed by Public Law 105-356 (explained in the compendium), the provisions apply only to those properties within the historic site that are owned by the National Park Service; the provisions do not apply to non-federal property within the boundary of the historic site.

Scope of Collections Statement

As we continue to develop education and interpretive programs, and as we plan for a new and larger visitor center, we find ourselves with a growing collection of artifacts, documents, and other items that help us tell the story of Central High School. Together, these items comprise our museum collection. Featured in exhibits, interpretive programs, films, and publications, items in a museum collection are key resources for educators, students, researchers, and the public. We expect that many more items may become available to us in the coming years. It is likely that more items will be available than we will have resources to care for properly. The *Scope of Collections Statement* provides the guidance necessary for us to choose those items that best contribute to understanding and interpretation of the site's stories and resources.

R. Michael Madell, Superintendent

"We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place...it is so ordered."

U.S. Supreme Court, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 1954

In the era of legalized segregation, the lawsuit known as *Oliver Brown, et. al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, et. al.*, challenged the 1896 Plessy v Ferguson decision of "separate but equal" in America's public education system. Attorneys for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund argued that separate education systems for blacks and whites were a violation of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and its guarantee of "equal protection of the laws" to all citizens.

Spurred by the local Topeka, Kansas NAACP chapter in 1951, thirteen parents sought equal educational opportunities for their children, who had been denied admittance to all-white schools. Similar lawsuits against racial segregation in public schools had been filed across the country in Delaware, the District of Columbia, South Carolina, and Virginia. The Supreme Court ultimately combined these cases into one—in part to demonstrate that "separate but equal" education was a nationwide problem, not one confined to the South.

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously declared racial segregation in public education unconstitutional. This decision led to the integration of schools nationwide, including Little Rock's

Central High School. In representing the Little Rock Nine, Thurgood Marshall looked to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as the legal basis for his argument to allow the nine African-American students to attend the all-white Central High in the fall of 1957.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower ultimately used federal troops to enforce the court's ruling and to escort the nine into the school. May 17, 2004 marks the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (BRVB) decision and its guarantee of equal educational opportunities for all under the U.S. Constitution.

The Legacy of *Brown*: Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site and Philander Smith College will commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court cases with a special panel discussion on May 15. The panel represents a broad range of experience and expertise pertaining to the *Brown* cases. **Dr. Angelo Ancheta** is the Director of Legal and Policy Advocacy Programs for the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. **Mr. Christopher Mercer** is an attorney in Little Rock and, as a field secretary for the NAACP, assisted Daisy and L.C. Bates during the 1957 Crisis. **Judge Wiley Branton, Jr.**, whose father worked closely with Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Inc. in 1957, will discuss the legal battles of the crisis. **Junious C. Babb, Jr.**, Associate Superintendent for Administrative Services for the Little Rock School District, will address the importance of the *Brown* decision and the ongoing challenges in achieving Unitary Status for the school district. **Dr. Leroy Williams**, from the Department of History at UALR, will moderate the discussion.

The event will take place **Saturday, May 15, 2004 at 10:00 a.m.** at the Harry R. Kendall Science and Health Mission Center at Philander Smith College in Little Rock. For more information, please call us at (501) 374-1957.



George E.C. Hayes, Thurgood Marshall, and James M. Nabritt (left to right) on the steps of the Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C. after the *Brown* verdict was read.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-111236

Rejuvenating the Central High Neighborhood

By Arlene Obrzut & Michael Madell

We all know about Central High School's important place in history. But, how often do we stop and think about the historical importance of the neighborhood that surrounds the school? In 1996 the area generally defined by Martin Luther King Drive on the east, Jones Street on the west, 12th Street on the north, and Roosevelt Road on the south was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This area is known as the Central High School Neighborhood National Historic District.

The Historic District was designated because of its association with events that have made a significant contribution to American history and because of its architectural characteristics and qualities. The nomination process that led to the neighborhood's designation on the National Register of Historic Places determined that more than 400 buildings within the area contribute to the historical importance of the district. In addition, a "*Cultural Landscape Inventory*" prepared by the National Park Service determined that the area surrounding Central High School is culturally significant to the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

When today's Central High students walk to class, the features of the neighborhood (including buildings, roads, sidewalks, and vegetation) are much the same as they were in 1957. Preservation and restoration of this historically accurate setting is critical for visitors to Central High National Historic Site to truly appreciate and understand the events that happened in Little Rock during the desegregation crisis.

Sadly, time has taken its toll on the neighborhood. Some houses have been destroyed by fire. Other buildings have been abandoned or have fallen into disrepair. Vacant lots have become overgrown with weeds or have been strewn with garbage. A tornado during the 1990s destroyed many of the stately trees that used to line neighborhood streets. Is it really possible to retain the historic ambiance of the neighborhood? Yes! One new partnership hopes to be a catalyst for rejuvenating the neighborhood.

The **Central Park Initiative (CPI)** is the brainchild of Arlene Obrzut, a local citizen activist. The purpose of the initiative is to bring together existing resources and to develop new resources to reclaim homes and to repopulate the neighborhood. Several organizations are working together to get the CPI off the ground. Partners in this project include Central High School, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the Central Little Rock Community Development Corporation, the City of Little Rock, and the National Park Service.

The accomplishments of CPI to-date have been small, but important. Volunteers have been researching property records and trying to locate persons who own properties that are abandoned or that otherwise may be available for restoration. Preliminary structural evaluations have been conducted on some properties. Negotiations have been conducted with local lenders about the possibility of low interest loans for families who wish to move into the area. The students at Central High's E.A.S.T. Lab are working on a web site where people can learn about the history of the neighborhood and its homes. The site also will include information about available homes and a variety of resources for potential homeowners.

This summer the CPI partners will focus on fundraising, in hopes of acquiring houses for restoration in the near future. Once that happens, volunteers will be needed for construction activities, painting, planting, etc. Anyone who wishes to make a tax deductible contribution to the **Central Park Initiative** may send a check to the Central Little Rock Community Development Corporation, P.O. Box 3192, Little Rock, Arkansas 72203 (please note "*Initiative*" on your check). If you have questions about CPI or if you have skills you would like to volunteer to help rejuvenate the Central High neighborhood, contact Michael Madell of the National Park Service at 501-374-3067.

Arlene Obrzut is a financial planner with Morgan Stanley in Little Rock

National Park Week 2004

National Park Week Goes Shopping... Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site and Buffalo National River staff promoted National Park Week on April 17, 2004 at the Northwest Arkansas Mall in Fayetteville. Shoppers were drawn to a booth to learn more about the six national parks in Arkansas. Children were able to conduct Junior Ranger activities and receive badges and certificates. Material from several parks was available and all shoppers were encouraged to visit the parks in Arkansas.

Live from the Central High School National Historic Site Visitor Center On April 20 Arkansas KATV-Channel 7 broadcast their morning show live from the park visitor center to celebrate National Park Week 2004. Arkansas has six National Park Service areas including Central High School National Historic site, which offer visitors many opportunities to learn, relax, play, and "Experience Your America". During the show, visitors were able to call in and answer a trivia question about the parks and win a prize. On April 22, park ranger Spirit Trickey appeared on KARK - Channel 4's morning show and brought items from the site's museum collection and from Hot Springs National Park. We'd like to extend special thanks to Buffalo National River, Fort Smith National Historic Site, Hot Springs National Park, and Pea Ridge National Military Park for donating prizes!

Gas Prices Got You Down?

With gas prices rising and people staying closer to home for vacation, McCain Mall in North Little Rock, Arkansas, will host an event for adults and families on May 22, 2004 entitled "*What to do in summer 2004.*" Park staff will be on-hand to promote the parks as ideal vacation spots that can easily be visited on one tank of gas!



Minnijean Brown Trickey and Dr. Johanna Miller Lewis discuss the 1957 events at Central High School in the UALR studio.



Reverend Rufus K. Young

Oral History Project, continued from pg. 1

blocked the door to keep the students from going in. You couldn't get in down there until Eisenhower federalized the state militia and sent in the federal troops to get them in. That's the way they got in. If Faubus stayed out of it and let Little Rock do what it wanted to do we would have been integrated without all that uproar."

Ranger Recommendation

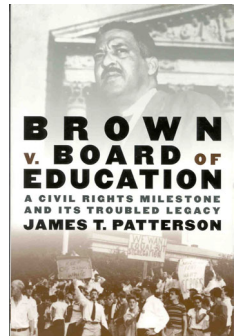
James T. Patterson's *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* presents an in-depth look at the landmark decision of 1954, which ruled that segregation in education was unconstitutional, and therefore illegal. By detailing the background of the cases, this book offers a better understanding of the *Brown* decisions, as well as their implications for future civil rights actions.

The author outlines the poor conditions of many African-American schools before the decision and conveys the struggles of lawyers with the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund to correct this situation. After providing a sufficient backdrop for *Brown*, Patterson goes on to explain the intricacies of the cases themselves. Patterson finishes his book by examining current trends in resegregation based on economics, as well as expressing lessons to be learned from the cases. His thorough examinations in these areas result in an increased understanding of *Brown* and its effect on American society.

James T. Patterson is the author of *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (Oxford University Press, 1996), for which he won the Bancroft Prize in history, and numerous other books. He is Ford Foundation Professor of History at Brown University.

Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy is available for purchase at the park bookstore, along with other educational materials about the Civil Rights era.

Michelle Simpson, Graduate Assistant



Calling All Vounteers!

Volunteering is an American tradition that over the years has made immeasurable contributions to communities, organizations, and individuals throughout the country. A recent poll found that over one-third of the American public has been or is now a volunteer. Today's volunteers are active, dynamic, creative individuals of all ages who possess the skills, desire, patience, and time to accomplish a wide variety of tasks. As a Volunteer- In -Parks (VIP), your job can be to help rangers preserve and protect America's natural and cultural heritage for the enjoyment of all generations. If you love visiting America's National Parks, here is an opportunity to be part of one!

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site is looking for volunteers to work at the Visitor Center. Currently, we have openings for volunteers in our bookstore, interpretation (historical research, photography, video), and gardening (Commemorative Garden, Visitor Center). Our volunteers will be part of the team that will assist visitors from AROUND THE WORLD expected to visit the site in the summer and in November 2004 with the opening of the Clinton Presidential Library!



Contact Lea Baker, Volunteer Coordinator, at (501) 374- 3067 for more information. We hope to hear from you soon!

Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America

Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens in the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Ratified July 9, 1868.

What does it mean to you?

Email us at CHSC_Visitor_Center@nps.gov and let us know!

Education Corner

As I pass my six-month mark with the historic site, I have come to the realization that my job is A LOT harder than I thought it would be! After a particularly difficult day, I became aware that our staff is at this site for a reason -we all personally care about this site! We have a large task ahead of us to educate our visitors about the legacy that began years ago when nine African-American students sought what was just and fair.

I also have several observations about teaching Civil Rights issues that I believe we need address: 1) we need to help instructors locate resources to teach contemporary history during their school year; 2) we need to have everyone (instructors and students alike) become more comfortable discussing the Civil Rights era; and, 3) the Civil Rights Movement continues to affect every person in the United States today - regardless of race or ethnicity.

Having said this, I can conclude that we are on the road to making this National Historic Site a place where learning and understanding go hand-in-hand. So, here are some activities that will be available throughout the Spring and Summer of 2004 for teachers across the state:

- *Brown v. Board of Education* Panel Discussion, Philander Smith College, May 15, 2004 at 10:00 a.m., two credit hours for teachers. Call (501) 374-1957 for more information.
- “Great Things Happen in Small Places...” *Government Authority and Civil Rights Activism in Arkansas (1954-1959) Summer 2004 Workshop Series* for teachers. **All workshops are at the education service cooperative offices unless otherwise noted. If you are registering for the workshops (except for June 29), please call your local education service cooperative office.**



June 14: Southwest Arkansas Education Cooperative, Hope, (hosted with the Clinton Presidential Materials Project), 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

June 17: Northcentral Arkansas Education Cooperative, Melborne, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

June 22: DeQueen-Mena Education Service Cooperative, Gillham, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

June 29: Pulaski County Special School District, Little Rock, North Little Rock School Districts to be held at **Little Rock Central High School**, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. **Please call Lea Baker at (501) 374-3067 to register.** Seating is limited and teachers from outside the three school districts are welcome!

June 30: Northeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative, Hoxie, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

July 13: Arch Ford Education Service Cooperative, Plumerville, 9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

July 16: Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative, Springdale, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

July 21: Wilbur D. Mills Education Service Cooperative, Beebe High School, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

August 2: Dawson Education Service Cooperative, Arkadelphia, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

August 3: South Central Education Service Cooperative, Camden, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

August 5: Western Education Service Cooperative, Branch, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Lea Flowers Baker

Come Celebrate the Clinton Presidential Library Opening With Us!

In conjunction with the Clinton Presidential Library's opening, November 15-19, 2004, Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site will host several events. For more information, see www.arkansasglobe.com and www.nps.gov/chsc/. Mark the following dates on your calendars:

November 15, 2004 - Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, in partnership with Central Arkansas Library System, is pleased to welcome Janis F. Kearney as our guest lecturer. Ms. Kearney is the former publisher of the *Arkansas State Press* newspaper and served as the personal diarist to former President William Jefferson Clinton. She is currently writing two books; *Cotton Field of Dreams* and *Conversations: William Jefferson Clinton ... from Hope to Harlem*. In her talk, “Our History Awaits Us: Creating Our Legacies,” Ms. Kearney will speak about our individual responsibilities to contributing to our legacies, and discuss ways each of us can make positive effects in our world. The talk will be held Monday, November 15, 2004 at 6:30 p.m. in Central Arkansas Library System's Darraugh Center for Intellectual Freedom at the downtown library.

November 16, 2004 - Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, in partnership with University of Arkansas at Little Rock will host a panel discussion on “*The Presidency and Civil Rights*”, on Tuesday, November 16, 2004 at 6:00 p.m. , at the Stella Boyle Smith Concert Hall located on the UALR campus. Dr. Peggy Scranton, Political Science Professor at UALR, will facilitate the discussion.

November 17, 2004 - Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site Park Rangers will conduct a guided “hard hat” tour of Central High School on Wednesday, November 17, 2004 at 6:00 p.m., allowing visitors an opportunity to see the school itself as well as the work being done to renovate the interior—work paid for, in part, by a \$2.5 million Save America's Treasure's grant.

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

Comments? Write to:

Superintendent
Little Rock Central High School
National Historic Site
2125 Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive
Little Rock, Arkansas 72202

Phone: (501) 374-1957
Fax: (501) 376-4728
Website: www.nps.gov/chsc
Email: chsc_visitor_center@nps.gov

Scheduled Programs

Saturday, May 15

10:00 a.m. - Panel discussion in
commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the
Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Supreme
Court decision.

Thursday, July 8

Program 2:00 p.m. -2:30 p.m.
Topic: Legal History of School Desegregation

Thursday, July 15

10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.-Junior Ranger Rally

Thursday, July 22

Program 2:00 p.m.-2:30 p.m.
Topic: Aftermath of Brown v. Board

Thursday, August 5

Program 2:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Topic: Legal History of School Desegregation

Thursday, August 19

Program 2:00 p.m.-2:30 p.m.
Topic: Aftermath of Brown v. Board

July-August - (Fridays at 10:00 a.m.)
Ranger-led walking tour at 10:00 a.m. Join a
Park Ranger and learn about Little Rock and
the 1957 Crisis.

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 for tours and can be made by
calling the park at (501) 374- 1957.