Little Rock Nine

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Introduction

It’s amazing to think how much we have grown as a society—that we now consider ourselves equal in race, gender and religion. 50 years ago, this was not the case. On May 17, 1954, the U.S Supreme Court issued Brown v. Board of Education, making it unconstitutional for public schools to be segregated. Three years later, in September 1957, nine African American students were enrolled in Little Rock Central High School. These students were faced with extreme prejudice and abuse in their efforts to achieve a better education. Crowds of students would stop them from entering the school. Even the governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, deployed his state’s National Guard to stop the students from entering.

How it affected the students

Today, the Little Rock Nine are seen as an integral part of the Civil Rights Movement. In 1999, the Little Rock Nine were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by former President Bill Clinton. At that time, Ernest Green worked for Lehman Brothers. Elizabeth Eckford had become the first African American in St. Louis to work in a bank. Jefferson Thomas worked for the U.S Department of Defense. Terrence Roberts was a teacher and a clinical psychologist. Carlotta Lanier owned a real estate brokerage firm. Minnie Jean Trickey served for a time as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Department of the Interior. Gloria Karlmark served as an executive for a Dutch company and publisher of a European computer magazine. Thelma Mothershead-Wair served as a teacher in the East St. Louis School System for 28 years. As of 1999, Melba Beals was the only one of the Little Rock Nine to write a book and was teaching journalism at Dominican University.

How it still impacts society

The Little Rock Crisis has had a major effect on society up until today. While schools are now all legally integrated, there is still unintentional segregation taking place. According to Dexter Mullins: “African-American and Latino students are less likely to attend racially and ethnically diverse schools today than at any other time in the last four decades.” School segregation can be due to the neighborhood within the school district. For example, if a neighborhood has a high population of African Americans, it’s more likely that the school population will mirror that of the neighborhood. There is also what we call “Lunchroom segregation,” where different ethnic groups are separated from each other. Many students say this happens because they aren’t able to identify with another racial group besides theirs, so they find no point in trying to force a false sense of community. While we have progressed, thanks to the Little Rock Crisis, we are still struggling with some forms of segregation.

Charts


References


Conclusions

The Little Rock Nine was not only a historic issue, but it also paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement. Little Rock Nine was an inspirational story that taught us that all we needed for change was determination and hard work. These nine African American students - Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed Wair, Melba Pattillo Beals, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas and Gloria Cecelia Ray - were all fearless when faced with prejudice and racism.

Impacted society back then

The landmark United States Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas declared the segregation of black and white students in public schools unconstitutional. Not only did it make it unconstitutional for schools to be segregated, but it ultimately overturned the decision of Plessy v. Ferguson which allowed state sponsored segregation. The NAACP began to register blacks in schools that were previously all white. When the kids of Little Rock Nine tried to enter Central High School, the Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus denied the students from entering. He even called up the Arkansas National Guard. But when Pres. Eisenhower federalized the National Guard, the students were finally admitted into the school. This decision was a great step for African Americans. That case was the stepping stone for African Americans, making segregation unconstitutional.