

Little Rock Central, 1957

On September 4, 1957, nine African-American high school students attempted to enter Little Rock Central High School in a effort to desegregate the all-white school, but were turned away by Arkansas National Guard troops called out by the governor. Elizabeth Eckford, pictured in the sunglasses below, was one of those students, who later became known as the “Little Rock Nine.” Elizabeth arrived at the campus at the intersection of 14th and Park Streets, she was confronted by an angry mob of segregationist protestors. She attempted to enter at the front of the school but was directed back out to the street by the guardsmen. Walking alone, surrounded by the crowd, she eventually reached the south end of Park Street and sat down on a bench to wait for a city bus to take her to her mother’s workplace. Of her experience, Eckford later said, “I tried to see a friendly face somewhere in the mob—someone who maybe would help. I looked into the face of an old woman and it seemed a kind face, but when I looked at her again, she spat on me.” Others of the Nine arrived the same day and gathered at the south, or 16th Street, corner where they and an integrated group of local ministers who were there to support them were also turned away by guardsmen.



Photo by Will Counts; courtesy of the Arkansas History Commission

