



Little Rock Nine didn't realize they were making history, speaker says

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The youngest of the Little Rock Nine spoke about one of the most important events in the Civil Rights Movement at the University of Illinois Springfield on Wednesday.

Carlotta Walls LaNier said she hopes sharing her story will help educate people who might not know be aware of hers and others' struggles in the civil rights movement.

LaNier was one of nine black children who enrolled in previously racially segregated Little Rock Central High School in 1957. Then-Gov. Orval Faubus tried to prevent the teens from entering the school even though the U.S. Supreme Court had declared segregated schools to be unconstitutional.

"I have found a number of communities did not know about this time in our history, and I discovered anger from young people wanting to know why they didn't learn" about it, LaNier said.

At the time, LaNier said, she didn't realize how historic her decision to stay in the school would be.

"We didn't go to school there to make history," she said. "We went to school there to get the best education available.

"When you look back on it, I was 14 years of age," LaNier added. Since then, "I have truly understood that we really did a monumental thing by staying. We weren't quitters."

LaNier wasn't scared on Sept. 4, 1957, when Faubus deployed the Arkansas National Guard to support segregationists who had gathered outside the school.

"Sept. 23 was my day of fear, and that was the day that the 17 policemen could not hold back over 1,000 mobsters who wanted to lynch one of us," LaNier said. "That day was a very fearful day. I didn't realize what was going on outside the school."

On Sept. 24, President Dwight Eisenhower ordered the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock and federalized the Arkansas National Guard, taking it out of Faubus' control. The next day, the students successfully entered the school.

Although much has changed in the past 54 years, LaNier said she believes desegregation laws are still necessary. The Springfield School District still has a desegregation order in effect.

"I do not think that it makes sense that you lift those measures if you have not succeeded in doing what was really necessary," LaNier said. "My feeling – and I don't know the politics in Springfield – I do feel education is still the foundation, is still the key to success.

The Little Rock Nine

The Little Rock Nine were nine black children who integrated Little Rock Central High School in 1957. Segregationists, aided by Arkansas Gov. Orval Faubus, tried to prevent the teens from entering the school, but they were admitted after President Dwight Eisenhower intervened.

Members of the Little Rock Nine were: Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Jefferson Thomas, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Minnijean Brown, Gloria Ray Karlmark, Thelma Mothershed and Melba Beals. Green became the first African American graduate of Little Rock Central.

Daughter to speak

The daughter of one of the Little Rock Nine will speak in Springfield Friday and will participate in the National Park Service's 150th anniversary re-creation of Abraham Lincoln's 1861 trip from Springfield to Washington, D.C.

Spirit Trickey, the daughter of Minnijean Brown Trickey, is a park service ranger at the (Little Rock) Central High School National Historic Site. Trickey also is the author of "One Ninth," a play about the meaning of her mother's experiences at Little Rock Central.

In Springfield, Trickey will discuss Lincoln's election, southern secession and national uncertainty during the kickoff event of the park service's anniversary commemoration.

The kickoff, which also features Fritz Klein as Abraham Lincoln, will take place at 9 a.m. Friday at Grace Lutheran Church, Seventh Street and Capitol Avenue. It is free and open to the public.