

Civil Rights Issues Dominate Landscape

Little Rock Nine Marks 50 Years

(AP) -- The Little Rock Nine, once barred from Central High School in Little Rock, Ark. because they are black, arrived on its soggy campus Tuesday in limousines as the community marked 50 years since President Dwight D. Eisenhower directed soldiers to escort the students inside.

"They didn't ask to be a part of history, but they certainly are now," said U.S. Rep. Mike Ross of Arkansas.

Seating was set out for 5,000 people on the front lawn of the inner-city campus, where the high school is now 52 percent black. Classes were canceled Monday and Tuesday to accommodate ceremonies marking the school's integration.

Gov. Mike Beebe said society had made progress since the Cen-

tral crisis, but he said economic and educational inequalities still exist.

"There will always be a necessity to show that we are inclusive as a society," Beebe said. "The lesson is that we need to make sure that people learn from this event and be as inclusive as possible."

Dale Charles, head of the state NAACP chapter, said the commemoration overstates the progress in race relations. Broad swaths of Little Rock are still predominantly black or predominantly white.

In September 1957, then-Gov. Orval Faubus used the Arkansas National Guard to keep nine black children out of Central High, telling a statewide TV audience that court-ordered integration would spark mob violence. He didn't acknowledge that he helped manufacture the crisis to boost his segregationist credentials.

Outside the school Tuesday, the Rev. Jesse Jackson said the civil rights struggle continues 50 years later in a social system that has "first-class jails and second-class



schools."

Gene Prescott, who photographed the school's integration for the Arkansas Gazette in 1957, noted the difference in the crowd over 50 years. The all-white mob 50 years ago jeered the nine; Tuesday's crowd of blacks and whites welcomed them.

"They are mingling and they are shaking hands. That certainly is a change," Prescott said.

Former President Clinton joined the ceremony. Ten years ago, Clinton and then-Gov. Mike Huckabee walked to the front of the

school and held the doors open for the Little Rock Nine: Melba Patillo Beals, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Gloria Ray Karlmark, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, Minnijean Brown Trickey and Thelma Mothershed Wair.

The U.S. Supreme Court declared segregated classrooms unconstitutional, ruling that many districts were operating education systems that were separate but not equal. By the fall of 1957, the Charleston and Fayetteville school districts had integrated peacefully, but agitators targeted Little Rock for trouble.

For three weeks, Little Rock became the focus of a showdown between Faubus and Eisenhower. Faubus pulled the Guard away, but a crowd gathered outside the school Sept. 23 to prevent it from complying with U.S. District Judge Ronald Davies' desegregation order.

Eisenhower that night authorized the use of federal troops to enforce Davies' order, and members of the 101st Airborne escorted the Little Rock Nine to classes on Sept. 25, 1957.

Carlotta Walls LaNier (from left) Ernest Green and Terrence Roberts, three of nine students who in 1957 integrated Little Rock Central High School, applaud Monday during dedication ceremonies for a National Historic Site visitor's center near the school in Little Rock, Ark. (AP photo)

'Jena 6' Points to Enduring Double Standard

Young make stand for racial equality

(AP) -- Drawn by a case tinged with one of the most hated symbols of Old South racism—a hangman's noose tied in an oak tree—tens of thousands of protesters rallied Thursday in Jena, Ark. against what they see as a double standard of prosecution for blacks and whites.

The plight of the so-called Jena Six became a flashpoint for one of the biggest civil-rights demonstrations in years. Five of the black teens were initially charged with attempted murder in the beating of a white classmate.

Old-guard lions like the Revs. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton joined scores of college students bused in from across the nation who said they wanted to make a stand for racial equality just as their parents did in the 1950s and '60s.

"It's not just about Jena, but about inequalities and disparities



Radio personality Michael Baisden, second from left, with Rev. Al Sharpton and Melissa Bell, mother of Mychal Bell walk behind two Louisiana State Troopers that are holding hands during a march in support of the Jena 6 in Jena, La. (AP photo)

around the country," said Stephanie Brown, 26, national youth director for the NAACP, who estimated

about 2,000 college students were among the throngs of mostly black protesters who overwhelmed this

tiny central Louisiana town.

But the teens' case galvanized demonstrators as few legal cases

have in recent years.

The cause of Thursday's demonstrations dates to August 2006, when a black Jena High School student asked at a student assembly whether blacks could sit under a shade tree that was a frequent gathering place for whites. He was told yes. But nooses appeared in the tree the next day. Three white students were suspended but not criminally prosecuted. LaSalle Parish District Attorney Reed Walters said this week he could find no state law covering the act.

Brown said the Jena case resonates with the college-aged crowd because they aren't much older than the six youths charged. Many of the student protesters had been sharing information about the case through Facebook, MySpace and other social-networking Websites.

Jackson, who led a throng of people three blocks long to the courthouse with an American flag resting on his shoulder, likened the demonstration to the marches on Selma and the Montgomery bus boycott. But even he was not entirely sure why Jena became the focal point.

"You can never quite tell," he said. "Rosa Parks was not the first to sit in the front of the bus. But the sparks hit a dry field."

The noose incident was followed by fights between blacks and whites, culminating in December's attack on white student Justin Barker, who was knocked unconscious. According to court testimony, his face was swollen and bloodied, but he was able to attend a school function that same night.

Six black teens were arrested. Five were originally charged with attempted second-degree murder — charges that have since been reduced for four of them. The sixth was booked as a juvenile on sealed charges.

Martin Luther King III, son of the slain civil rights leader, said punishment of some sort may be in order for the six defendants, but "the justice system isn't applied the same to all crimes and all people."

State police estimated the crowd at 15,000 to 20,000. Organizers say they believe it drew as many as 50,000.

Voter ID Law before High Court

(AP) -- The Supreme Court agreed Tuesday to decide whether voter identification laws unfairly deter

the poor and minorities from voting, stepping into a contentious partisan issue in advance of the 2008 elections.

The justices will hear arguments early next year in a challenge to an Indiana law that requires voters to present photo ID before casting their ballots. The state has defended the law as a way to combat voter fraud.

The state Democratic Party and civil rights groups complained that the law unfairly targets poor and minority voters, without any evidence that in-person voter fraud exists in Indiana. The party argued that those voters tend to be Democrats.

The court is expected to issue a decision by late June, in time for the November General Election.

Record Heating Bills Expected

(AP) -- U.S. consumers are expected to pay record prices for heating oil, electricity and propane to warm their homes this winter, and low-income families will need government help to cover those bills, government energy officials said on Tuesday.

Heating fuel expenses this winter will be highest for heating oil, with the average family paying \$1,834 for the season, up 28 percent or \$402 from last year, according to the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association.

The group expects propane costs to aver-

age \$1,732, up 30 percent or \$384. Consumers that rely on electricity for heat will pay \$883 this winter, up 7 percent or \$58.

Natural gas expenses will be the cheapest of the major heating fuels, averaging \$881, up 5 percent or \$50, the group said.

Mark Wolfe, the group's executive director, called on the Bush administration to immediately release money from the government's Low Income Home Energy Program, commonly known as LIHEAP, to help poor families pay their heating bills as well as cover past-due high cooling bills from the summer.

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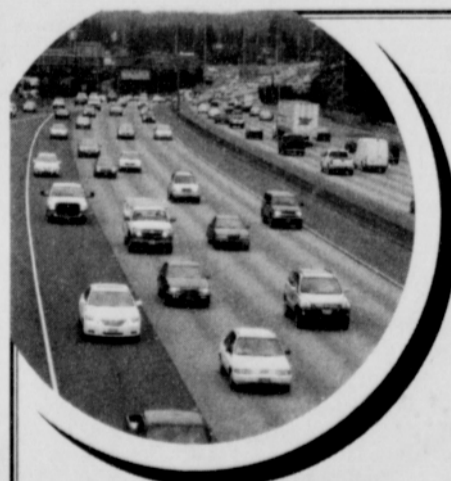
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Between Portland and Medford, drivers will pass through 19 active construction zones on I-5 in 2007. In the Portland metro area,

crews are currently replacing two highway bridges outside Wilsonville, and a paving project between Capitol Highway and the Tualatin River will be complete this fall.

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