

Focus on Our Collections:

Remembering the Little Rock Nine

When the United States Supreme Court handed down its landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision declaring that separating children in public schools by race was unconstitutional, it was just the beginning of the difficult and dangerous task of integrating America's schools. It was up to brave young people like Carlotta Walls, one of the "Little Rock Nine" who integrated Little Rock Central High School in 1957, to make integration a reality.

The outfit that Carlotta wore on that historic first day of school — a blouse and skirt featuring an alphabet pattern — is one of the nearly 40,000 artifacts in the National Museum of African American History and Culture's permanent collection. She wrote:

"...Great-uncle Emerald Holloway stopped by the house with a surprise gift for me: cash to buy a brand-new dress for my first day at Central.... this was no ordinary first day of school, Uncle Em said. The integration of the finest high school in Arkansas would happen just once in our lifetime, and I had to have a dress to match the occasion."

Carlotta faced real danger that day, as segregationists vowed to prevent her and her classmates from integrating the school. To protect them, President Dwight Eisenhower called on the U.S. Army and federalized the Arkansas National Guard. Carlotta endured racist insults and much more — including the bombing of her family's home — before graduating in 1960. But she never gave up.

Carlotta Walls and her fellow trailblazing African American students changed the lives of millions of African Americans and helped move our nation forward. On September 26, 2017, the Museum honored the tremendous courage and sacrifice of those students and their families with the special program *Reflections of the Little Rock Nine, 1957-2017* (details on page 8).

