

LESSON 8: CIVIL RIGHTS

Student Handout 8: Outcomes Little Rock, 1957

SCHOOL BOARD PERSPECTIVE

The school board chose to try to integrate the schools slowly (option 3). To many, this seemed like the most reasonable option available at the time. They believed that the school board had to obey the Supreme Court's mandate but also worried that moving too quickly would have created further problems. Other states (such as Virginia) opposed integration so vehemently that school boards chose option 1 when faced with the same choice and closed the public schools.

GOVERNOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Orval Faubus chose option 3 and sent the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the nine black students from attending Central High School. This move encouraged segregationists to fight harder against integration. Supporters of segregation from all over the country came to Little Rock, raising the possibility of deadly violence between the segregationists and the civil rights activists. When President Eisenhower asked Faubus to allow the black students to attend the school, he responded by withdrawing the troops. Without the troops to keep order, people feared widespread rioting and violence.



Governor Orval Faubus (far right) speaking to a crowd of anti-integration protesters outside the state capitol

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Eisenhower sent in paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division to maintain order in Little Rock and to ensure that the black students could attend Central High School. He felt obligated to enforce the law, despite the risk that white segregationists would desert the Republican Party. Eisenhower portrayed the action less as about ensuring integration and civil rights (a difficult political position, since most voters were white, and many supported segregation) than of preventing civil disorder (which almost everyone wanted to avoid). The President stated in a television speech, "When large gatherings of obstructionists made it impossible for the decrees of the court to be carried out, both the law and the national interest demanded that the President take action."