

# A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School

By Carlotta Walls Lanier, Lisa Frazier Page

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When fourteen-year-old Carlotta Walls walked up the stairs of Little Rock Central High School on September 25, 1957, she and eight other black students only wanted to make it to class. But the journey of the “Little Rock Nine,” as they came to be known, would lead the nation on an even longer and much more turbulent path, one that would challenge prevailing attitudes, break down barriers, and forever change the landscape of America.

For Carlotta and the eight other children, simply getting through the door of this admired academic institution involved angry mobs, racist elected officials, and intervention by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was forced to send in the 101st Airborne to escort the Nine into the building. But entry was simply the first of many trials. Breaking her silence at last and sharing her story for the first time, Carlotta Walls has written an engrossing memoir that is a testament not only to the power of a single person to make a difference but also to the sacrifices made by families and communities that found themselves a part of history.

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### Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

#### Book Description

When fourteen-year-old Carlotta Walls walked up the stairs of Little Rock Central High School on September 25, 1957, she and eight other black students only wanted to make it to class. But the journey of the “Little Rock Nine,” as they came to be known, would lead the nation on an even longer and much more turbulent path, one that would challenge prevailing attitudes, break down barriers, and forever change the landscape of America.

Descended from a line of proud black landowners and businessmen, Carlotta was raised to believe that education was the key to success. She embraced learning and excelled in her studies at the black schools she attended throughout the 1950s. With *Brown v. Board of Education* erasing the color divide in classrooms across the country, the teenager volunteered to be among the first black students--of whom she was the youngest--to integrate nearby Central High School, considered one of the nation’s best academic institutions.

But for Carlotta and her eight comrades, simply getting through the door was the first of many trials. Angry mobs of white students and their parents hurled taunts, insults, and threats. Arkansas’s governor used the National Guard to bar the black students from entering the school. Finally, President Dwight D. Eisenhower was forced to send in the 101st Airborne to establish order and escort the Nine into the building. That was just the start of a heartbreakingly long three-year journey for Carlotta, who would see her home bombed, a crime for which her own father was a suspect and for which a friend of Carlotta’s was ultimately jailed--albeit wrongly, in Carlotta’s eyes. But she persevered to the victorious end: her graduation from Central.

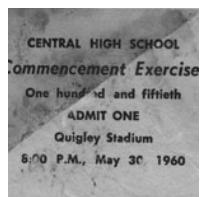
Breaking her silence at last and sharing her story for the first time, Carlotta Walls has written an inspiring, thoroughly engrossing memoir that is not only a testament to the power of one to make a difference but also of the sacrifices made by families and communities that found themselves a part of history.

Complete with compelling photographs of the time, *A Mighty Long Way* shines a light on this watershed moment in civil rights history and shows that determination, fortitude, and the ability to change the world are not exclusive to a few special people but are inherent within us all.

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### A Look Inside *A Mighty Long Way*

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The "Testament" memorial, which features life-size bronze statutes of each of the Little Rock Nine.

(Courtesy of the author)

I had six of these prized admission tickets for my closest family members to attend my graduation from Central.

(Courtesy of the author)

Little Rock Central High School, which the National Institute of Architects called "America's Most Beautiful School" when it was built in 1927.

(Courtesy of the author)

From right: Ernest Green, Gloria Ray, Jane Hill (standing behind Gloria) and I, face the National Guard on Sept. 4, 1957, on our first attempt to enter Central; Jane never returned to Central after that day.

(Will Counts Collection: Indiana University Archives)

## From Publishers Weekly

At 14, Lanier was the youngest of the Little Rock Nine, who integrated Little Rock Central High School in 1951; she went on to become the first African –American young woman to receive a diploma from the school. Her memoir provides a firsthand account of a seismic shift in American history. She recalls the well-reported violence outside the school and daily harassment and ineffective protection from teachers and guards. Away from school, the Nine were honored and feted, but their parents found their jobs—even their lives—in jeopardy. Lanier's house was bombed, and a childhood friend, Herbert Monts, was falsely accused and convicted. Monts's account of his experiences, shared with Lanier, 43 years later, is historically newsworthy. Lanier's recollections of family history and her relatively pedestrian experiences after high school graduation (graduate school, job hunting, marrying, finding her new home in Denver) lack the drama of her historical moment. In a sense, Lanier didn't make history, history made her. Her plainspoken report from the front line is, nevertheless, a worthy contribution to the history of civil rights in America. (Sept.)

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## Review

"This hindsight account suggests that the nation still has not achieved closure about the painful events at Little Rock....Keenly observed and moving." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"This is a marvelous book. It is a personal account that describes a moving period in the transformative struggle for civil rights and social justice in America. Above all, this story is an inspiration. Through it all, Carlotta Lanier and her fellow students never gave up. They never gave in. They kept the faith and because of their dignity, their tenacity, and their sacrifice they helped to redeem the soul of America." —Congressman John Lewis

"Carlotta Walls LaNier's memoir, **A Mighty Long Way**, is a searing and emotionally gripping account of a young black girl growing up to become a strong black woman during the most difficult time of racial segregation in Little Rock, Arkansas. The book is a page-turner and a tear-jerker, discussing the struggle and progress of an individual, and reflecting the historic challenges African Americans face in overcoming racial segregation. This book is a must read and should be required reading for every child of every race who may be trying to appreciate the values of education and the challenges that they might present for people who are different. We learn more about the struggles of the students of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas than is imagined, and it will change the way we evaluate the courage and dignity of people like Carlotta Walls LaNier." —Professor Charles Ogletree, Harvard Law School

"A half-century later, other young Americans draw their inspiration from Carlotta Walls. I am proud that she continues to carry the torch in the struggle for civil rights and to share her story of individual and collective courage with America's young people. Through her experiences of fifty years ago until today, she continues to challenge Americans about the true meaning of equal access to education for all." —Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe

"Carlotta Walls LaNier was the youngest of the Little Rock 9 to cross the color lines, political barriers and cultural chasms that circumscribed her life. She, her family and friends paid a heavy price that burdened

them even as it liberated all of us. Her memoir, which is really our memoir, provides a rare perspective on that history in the making.” – Hank Klibanoff, Pulitzer Prize winning co-author of *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of the Nation*

“In **A Mighty Long Way**, this revered American and special friend boldly tells how her high school days have evolved as the central experience of her life. I commend Carlotta for the legacy she has left and for the lessons she and her colleagues have taught us all with such nobility.” – Nancy Rousseau, Principal, Little Rock Central High School (2002 — present)

“Gripping...A moving, very personal account of the aftermath of the 1954 Brown decision that began the painful process of desegregation.—*Booklist*

“There is a quiet majesty to **A Mighty Long Way**. The telling of this journey is imbued with sweep, tenderness, and the sustained glory of memory.” –Wil Haygood, author of *In Black and White: The Life of Sammy Davis Jr.*

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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#### **Kimberly Wheatley:**

Playing with family inside a park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you may have done when you have spare time, subsequently why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. Just one activity that make you not experience tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love **A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School**, you may enjoy both. It is great combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh can occur its mind hangout men. What? Still don't get it, oh come on its called reading friends.

#### **Joshua Yoshida:**

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**Carolyn Alcantara:**

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