

“The Scream Image”

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS



INTRODUCTION

The analyzed document is the photo, known to history as “The Scream Image”, and it was taken on 4 September 1957 by Will Counts, a photographer of Arkansas Democrat. The image, portraying Elizabeth Eckford at the entrance of the Little Rock Central High School, in Arkansas, has become an icon of the 20th century. It made around the world, being published from London to Paris, from the Vatican to Moscow. Thanks to “The Scream Image”, the president Dwight “Ike” Eisenhower sent federal

troops to Little Rock, allowing Elizabeth and the other members of Little Rock Nine to attend school of the full year.

HISTORIC DETAILS

In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that racially segregated public facilities were legal and it constitutionally sanctioned laws barring African Americans from sharing the same buses, schools and other public facilities as whites—known as “Jim Crow” laws—and established the “separate but equal” doctrine that would stand for the next six decades. But by the early 1950s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was working hard to challenge segregation laws in public schools. An actor named Oliver Brown filed a class-action suit against the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, in 1951, because his daughter Linda Brown was denied to entrance to Topeka's all-white elementary school. Brown's case and four other cases related to school segregation were combined into a single case, called “*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*”, in which the justices ruled unanimously that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional. While Kansas and some other states acted in accordance with the verdict, many school and local officials in the South defied it. The most famous example was that of the Little Rock Central High School, where Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas called out the state National Guard to prevent nine black students from attending high school. This group of African American high-school students, consisting of Melba Pattillo, Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Minnijean Brown, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls, Jefferson Thomas, Gloria Ray, and Thelma Mothershed took the name of “Little Rock Nine”.

DESCRIPTION

The photo shows Elizabeth Eckford while she prepares herself to face her first day of school, on September 4, 1957, at the Little Rock Central High School. White dress, drawn for the occasion, dark sunglasses, books in her arms. But after a while she realizes being alone. In fact, there are not the remaining member of the Little Rock Nine to welcome she at the entrance of the school, but there is an angry crowd. According to the original plan, that morning the nine students would meet together in front of the school to be escorted in by Daisy Bates, a strong activist for desegregation. But there was a change at the last minute, which was to appear in front of the back entrance with own family to avoid potential problems. Unfortunately Elizabeth was not aware of this change because her family had not the phone. Therefore, Eckford arrived alone. In a few of minutes she is surrounded by an angry crowd of white people: men, women and students who are opposed to integration. They spat on her and scream

against her saying sentences like these: “Lynch her! Lynch her!”, “No nigger bitch is going to get in our school!”, “ Two, four, six, eight!

We don't want to integrate!”. One girl, Hazel Bryan (the student dressed in white behind Elizabeth), her face poisoned with hate, her teeth clenched, shouted: “Go home, nigger! Go back to Africa”. Will Coups captures this very last moment, so making Hazel symbol of racial hatred.

After having escaped thanks the help of the teacher Grace Lorch, Elizabeth goes home by a city bus. She describes the experience just happened in this way:

«I stood looking at the school— it looked so big! Just then the guards let some white students through. The crowd was quiet. I guess they were waiting to see what was going to happen. When I was able to steady my knees, I walked up to the guard who had let the white students in. He didn't move. When I tried to squeeze past him, he raised his bayonet and then the other guards moved in and they raised their bayonets. They glared at me with a mean look and I was very frightened and didn't know what to do. I turned around and the crowd came toward me. They moved closer and closer. Somebody started yelling, "Drag her over this tree! Let's take care of that nigger!"»

CONCLUSIONS

After five years Hazel personally asked forgiveness to Elizabeth and decided to undertake voluntary work on behalf of black women in difficulty to prevent that her face was forever related to that episode of violence.

Personally, I think this photo has had a significant role against racial segregation in America, giving strenght to the development of civil rights worldwide. It represents a historical fact of high interest and it is still valid , because it's important to raise awareness and move public opinion to understand that all people have equal dignity and that everyone should be guaranteed freedom and justice, without any form of discrimination.

In conclusion, I believe that “her voice” will always be needed

SITOGRAPHY

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