

GLOBAL YOUTH AND THE LITTLE ROCK CRISIS



Global Youth and the Little Rock Crisis

Introduction

In the fall of 1957, nine African American students attempted to enter Little Rock Central High School, but a white mob gathered around Central High to prevent them from entering the building. The nine African American teens – known as the Little Rock Nine – were the first non-white students able to enroll in Central High after the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* declared segregation in schools to be unconstitutional.

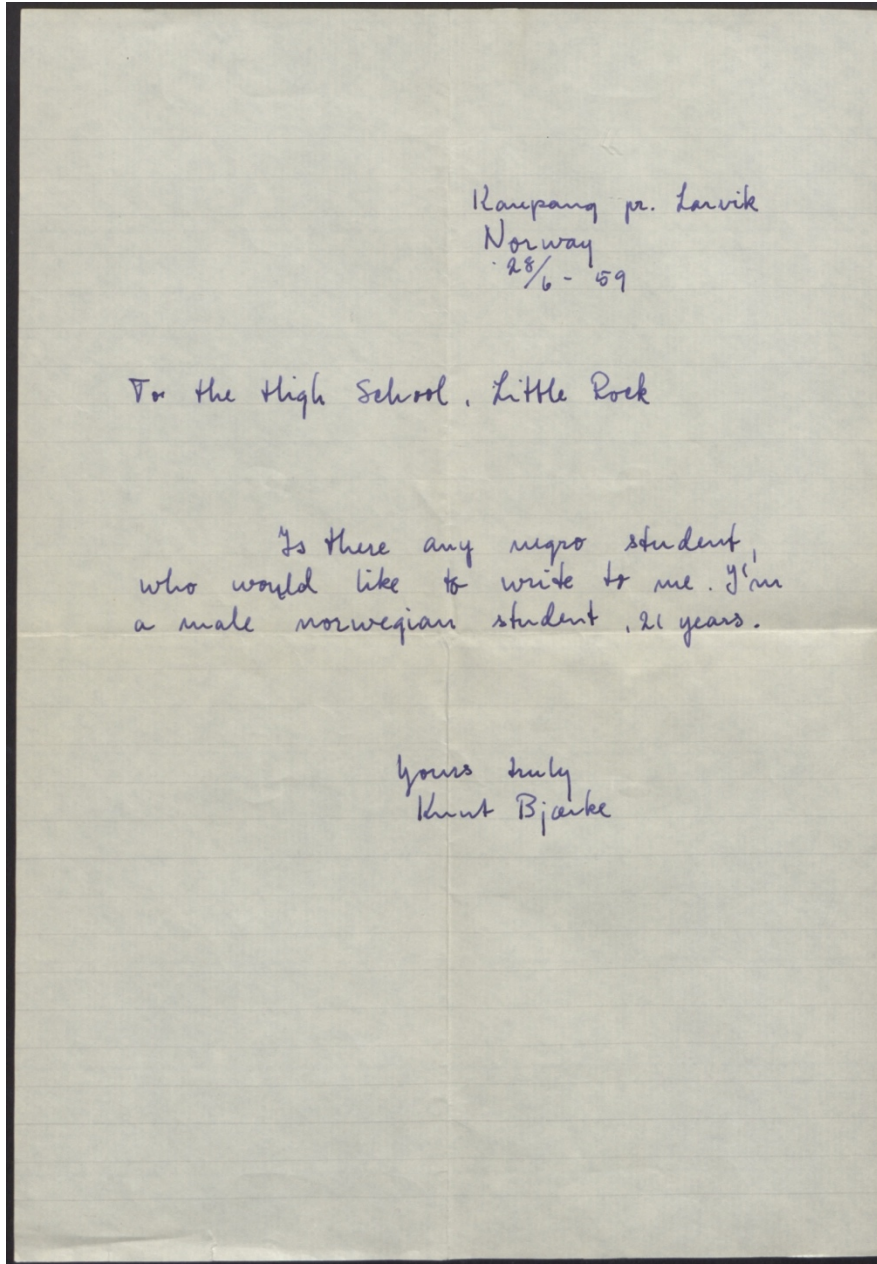
Following *Brown v. Board of Education*, in 1955, the Little Rock school board accepted a plan of gradual integration presented by superintendent Virgil Blossom. According to the plan, Little Rock schools were to begin the integration process in the fall of 1957. However, when the nine African American students wanted to exercise their right to attend Central High, Orval Faubus, the Governor of Arkansas, sided with the advocates of segregation. He called the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the students from entering the school building. In response to this violation of federal laws, President Dwight Eisenhower federalized the Arkansas National Guard and ordered them to support the integration and protect the African American students.

These events, known also as the Little Rock Crisis, attracted the attention of the world. Newspapers and TV stations in places as distant from Little Rock as France, Ghana, or Australia reported how African American teens were being treated in Arkansas. People all over the world could see photos and TV footage of angry white men, women, and children assaulting not only the African American Central High students but anyone who sympathized with them. Among those who were watching the news were young people, sometimes of the same age as the Little Rock Nine. In this activity, you will examine three letters that Elizabeth Huckaby, who was vice-principal for girls at Central High School, received from young people from across the world in response to the Little Rock events.

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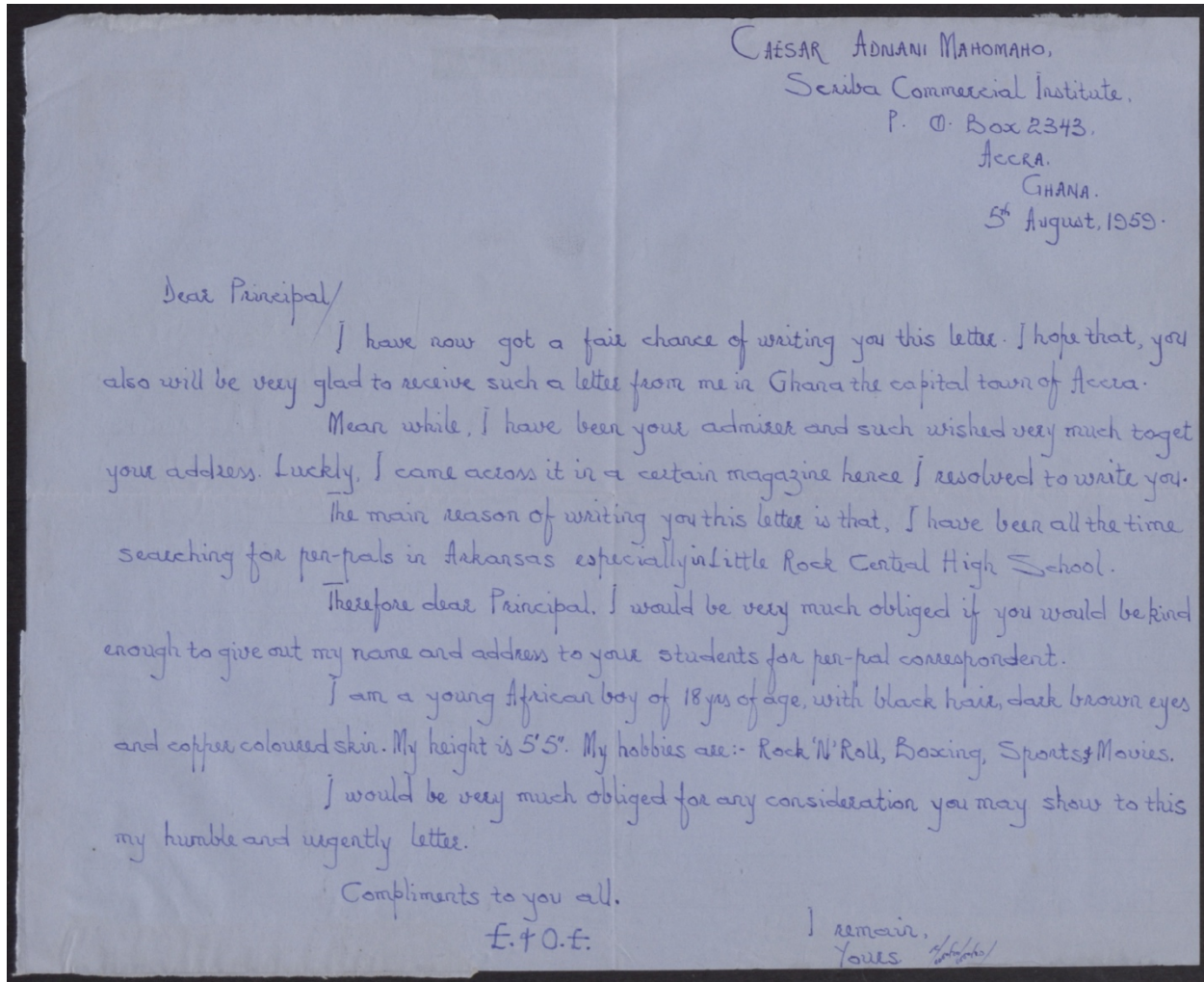


Letter by Knut Bjarke (Norway) received by Elizabeth Huckaby in the aftermath of the Little Rock Crisis, June 28, 1959 (Elizabeth Huckaby Papers)

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Letter by Caesar Adnani Mahomaho (Ghana) received by Elizabeth Huckaby in the aftermath of the Little Rock Crisis, August 5, 1959 (Elizabeth Huckaby Papers)

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Dresden, den 28.7.59

Werte Direktion !

Da ich persönlich großes Interesse an einer Korrespondenz zwischen der DDR und der USA habe, bitte ich Sie herzlichst darum, Freunde oder Freundinnen in Ihrer Mittelschule, im Alter von 14 - 16 Jahren, die auch daran Interesse haben, ausfindig zumachen.

Ich selbst bin Mittelschüler, 15 Jahre alt und meine Hobbys sind :

- Briefmarken,
- Autoprospekte,
- Filmschauspieler,
- und der Amateurfunk.

Mir ist es gleich ob in diesem Briefwechsel englische oder deutsche Sprache verwendet wird.

Meine Adresse : H e i n z G o l l u s
Dresden N 31
Scharfenbergerstraße 39

Haben Sie recht Herzlichen Dank für Ihre Bemühungen und mit einem Good bye verbleibe ich

Ihr

Letter by Heinz Gollus (East Germany) received by Elizabeth Huckaby in the aftermath of the Little Rock Crisis, July 28, 1959 (Elizabeth Huckaby Papers)

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Questions:

1. Read three letters that Elizabeth Huckaby received in the aftermath of the Little Rock Crisis. Who wrote them, when, and where? Look at the images of the original letters (not transcripts). In what languages were the letters written?
2. Look up a map of the world from the 1960s online. Locate the countries where the letters were written on the map. Then look up the current map of the world and try to locate the three countries. Note that one of them no longer exists. Do you know why?
3. All three authors of the letters make the same request. What is it? Note that the request in the letter from Norway is more specific than in the two other letters.
4. What kind of personal information about themselves do the authors of the letters share?
5. Why do you think the young man from Ghana described his appearance? Note that he is the only one that did that.
6. Huckaby received many more letters like these three and they came from many different countries. What does this tell us about news coverage all over the world at the time?
7. Why do you think young people from different countries wanted to correspond with Central High students? What could they hope to learn from the Central High students?
8. In the 1950s, calling someone in a different country was very expensive and most people in the world still did not have phones at home. Cell phones did not even exist. Writing letters was the most accessible and cheapest way to communicate. How has the Internet changed that?
9. Would you want to become a pen pal with someone living in a different country today?