

World and Nation

'Little Rock Nine' go back to Central High

By Peter Baker=(c) 1997, The Washington Post

LITTLE ROCK — From the outside, the building looks much the same, a massive fortress of brick and stone. The tall, arched doorways are still watched over by four statues labeled Ambition, Personality, Opportunity and Preparation.

But this time when nine black children of the Old South slowly mounted the steps of Central High School, there was no jeering white mob, no soldiers with bayonets, no governor vowing to stop them. Instead, the current governor and a former governor, now the president of the United States, held open the glass-paned wooden doors to welcome them inside.

The symbolic gesture was intended as a powerful statement of racial progress in America, a moment that President Clinton Thursday called "unbelievable," and in 1957 it would have been. Forty years to the day after those terrified teenagers integrated Arkansas' all-white flagship school under military escort, the "Little Rock Nine" returned to mark one of the most dramatic episodes in U.S. history — and at the same time provoke a soul-searching examination of how far the nation has come since then.

"At this schoolhouse door today, let us rejoice in the long way we have come these 40 years," said Clinton, who was an 11-year-old boy in a segregated school 50 miles away in Hot Springs at the time. However, warning of resegregation, he added, "Let us resolve to stand on the shoulders of the Little Rock Nine and press on with confidence in the hard and noble work ahead."

The anniversary of the Little Rock dispute came in the middle of Clinton's year-long campaign for racial reconciliation, and the conversation that has taken place in his home state in recent weeks has vividly exposed the sorts of troublesome issues that confront the president in translating high-minded intentions into concrete results.

The willingness to call attention to the volatile battle over integration indicates that this once-provincial southern city finally is ready to come to grips with its past, according to civic leaders. Yet, to some local African Americans, all the pomp has a sour taste — a "farce," in the words of the NAACP — at a time when race still divides Little Rock and the country. The executive committee of the Little Rock Branch of the NAACP voted not to support or participate in the Central High celebration.

"It's not about race relations and reconciliation," said Joy Springer, 40, a paralegal who participates as a monitor in a long-running school desegregation case. "It's about the city of Little Rock and the Chamber of Commerce bringing in money... to better the power structure. This is just hype, a public relations sort of thing, to say, 'We want to show the world that Little Rock is on the way to solving the problem.' ... They want you to believe that."

As part of this week's festivities, the city opened a small visitor's center in a renovated Mobil gas station across the street from the high school, creating an exhibit recounting the acrimony of that school year. The school and the surrounding neighborhood was spruced up with paint and landscaping, and city elders hope to put the site on the tourism map of the civil rights era.

The staunch segregationist Gov. Orval E. Faubus (D) called out the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the students from enrolling, setting off a tense standoff with President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who ultimately federalized the Guard and dispatched another 1,000 troops from the 101st Airborne Division to enforce a court order admitting the students.

The grainy, black-and-white television images from those days were etched upon the consciousness of a generation, including those of a young Bill Clinton — the snarling mob, the threats of lynching, the pained but proud expression of 15-year-old Elizabeth Eckford as she silently faced those who spat on her because of her color. "It was Little Rock that made racial equality a driving obsession in my life," Clinton said.

Getting in the door was not the end of the turmoil for the students, though. Throughout that first year, they found themselves shunned, shoved against lockers, tripped down stairways. "The larger community immediately began assaulting our character, our bodies, in an attempt to suffocate our spirits, to drive us back from where we came," recalled Ernest Green, who became perhaps the best known of the Little Rock Nine through a television movie made about his life. "I believe now as I did then, they didn't really know us."

They do now. The names of Green, Eckford, Melba Pattillo Beals, Terrence Roberts and the others are part of history. One by one today they approached the door that was once such a barrier and were greeted warmly by Clinton and Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee (R). Minnijean Brown Trickey was so overwhelmed she reached out to the president and Huckabee for support as she entered the building.

Marv Albert pleads guilty to assault charge

By Steve Zipay=(c) 1997, Newsday

ARLINGTON, Va. — Faced with the prospect of new revelations about his sex life, and with his lawyers saying they were barred from presenting most of their defense, sportscaster Marv Albert pleaded guilty Thursday to assault and battery after prosecutors dropped a charge of forcible sodomy.

Albert will be sentenced Oct. 24. He could receive as much as a year in jail and a \$2,500 fine, although Virginia lawyers said it was likely Albert would not receive a jail sentence, given his clean record. The felony charge carried a 5-years-to-life sentence.

The short but sensational trial, which ended abruptly after three days, not only shattered Albert's clean-cut image but also ended his broadcasting career at NBC and the Madison Square Garden network.

The 56-year-old New York sportscasting legend, who earned between \$2.5 million and \$3 million a year, was fired by NBC, where he had been the No. 1 National Basketball Association announcer. He resigned from the MSG network, where he had been the voice of the New York Knicks and New York Rangers for 30 years.

At least one juror thought Albert should have taken his chances with the jury's decision. Kerri Nelson told Fox News Channel that she "did not feel there was enough evidence to convict."

"The tape presented by the defense attorneys (of the accuser offering money and a car to her cab-driver friend to fabricate a story about Albert) raised questions in my mind about motive and credibility," she said. "Because of how compelling the tape was, I was shocked by the fact they plea-bargained."

After a morning of meetings in the chambers of Circuit Court Judge Benjamin N.A. Kendrick, Albert faced the judge in the 10th-floor courtroom about 1:15 p.m. and

in a low voice admitted he had repeatedly bitten his longtime lover on the back in his room at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Pentagon City Feb. 12.

He answered all the judge's questions about the plea with the same simple word that has been his signature play-by-play call: "Yes."

"I just felt that I had to end this ordeal for myself, my wonderful family, my fiancée, Heather (Faulkner), my friends and supporters. I'd like to thank NBC Sports and MSG network people for standing behind me through all this," Albert told a media contingent outside the courthouse. "It's been a trying day, and I want to spend the rest of the day with my family."

Later, Albert issued a written statement about his employment status.

"I have resigned from MSG and I have been let go by NBC," he said in the statement. "I fully understand the position in which the networks found themselves due to my very painful situation. In the interests of my family, my friends, and my many supporters, I step aside with deep humility and will seek to reconstruct my personal and professional life."

MSG, in a statement, thanked him "for 30 years of dedicated service ... We wish him well." His contract with MSG would have run through September 2001.

The plea followed two days of testimony that even the prosecution described as "titillating."

Tuesday, the accuser, 42, a native of the Dominican Republic, testified that Albert turned from a "kind and gentle" lover to one who had ordered her to recruit partners and participate in three-way trysts and displayed a fondness for wearing women's underwear.

On Wednesday came startling and damaging testimony from Patricia Masden, who said Albert twice bit her in hotel rooms. Albert's high-profile legal team, led by Roy Black, had sought to suppress the

testimony, which included the story of an attack by Albert while he was wearing white panties and a garter belt and her pulling off his toupee.

Thursday, as the fourth day of the trial began, defense counsel Peter Greenspun first asked for a bench conference, then both sides retired to Kendrick's chambers for 90 minutes. Sources said that during that time, Kendrick suggested a deal and believed the two sides had made one.

But upon returning to the courtroom at 11:40, Arlington County Commonwealth's Attorney Richard Trodden told Kendrick: "We have one last witness." Kendrick looked at the defense team quizzically; Greenspun asked for another conference, which lasted a few moments. Kendrick then declared a recess until 1 p.m. The plea came shortly after Albert and his family returned.

Trodden, the lead prosecutor, called the plea "appropriate."

"The heart of the commonwealth's opening statement was that there was a crude and coarse abuse of a human being," Trodden said. "Assault and battery is unlawful touching of another human being in an angry, rude and vengeful manner."

Trodden said he had extended the same plea offer to Albert before the trial and added that Thursday's offer was also agreed to by the accuser, who lives in a condo in nearby Vienna, Va.

Outside court Thursday, cabbie Walter Brodie was waiting to be called as a witness for the defense. Brodie instead called his lawyer, David Lamb, who contacted Albert's defense team. The defense set up a recording device on Brodie's home phone.

Trodden called Masden's testimony of "profound" significance. Two sources close to the case said the prosecution had several other women ready to testify that Albert had bitten or threatened them.

British nurse faces beheading after secret trial

By John Daniszewski=(c) 1997, Los Angeles Times

CAIRO, Egypt — Imagine two Saudis convicted of killing a foreigner in the United States.

If one defendant was ordered to die and the second sent to prison, igniting a public uproar in Saudi Arabia, would President Clinton respond to Saudi pressure and grant clemency to maintain harmony with an important ally?

Perhaps. But would he do so even if he knew he would be seen as soft on crime by a law-and-order-minded U.S. public, and if the victim's only relative was making repeated public calls for the death penalty?

That is roughly the dilemma that Saudi King Fahd and his advisers face in the case of two British nurses convicted in last December's murder of an Australian colleague in the eastern city of Dhahran. According to statements by attorneys, one has been given the death sentence and the second is to be imprisoned for eight years and flogged 500 times.

As monarch, Fahd will have to decide whether to sign an execution order.

The case has set into motion a blizzard of outraged demands in Britain for diplomatic action to spare the nurses, culminating in an extraordinary meeting Friday in New York between British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al Faisal to discuss the issue.

If Deborah Parry, 39, a native of the south of England, is led out to a public square in a black cloak and decapitated with a single sword

blow to the back of her neck — the usual Saudi procedure — it would be the first known case of a Westerner, let alone a Western woman, being put to death under the kingdom's strict interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law.

Such an event would have shattering repercussions in Saudi Arabia's relationship with Britain and the kingdom's desire to be seen as a civilized, modern state would undoubtedly suffer in Europe and the United States as well.

No European or American has ever been beheaded in Saudi Arabia, and the latest indications are that Parry also is likely to escape that fate.

The respected Saudi-owned newspaper Al-Hayat on Sunday quoted a judicial source as saying an execution would be ruled out for Parry if, as now appears, Gilford's brother in Australia has begun bargaining for a possible financial settlement.

According to published accounts, Frank Gilford has entered in negotiations for a \$1.2 million settlement — \$700,000 for him and \$500,000 for charity. That might be an outcome that all parties could live with.

From the beginning, the Yvonne Gilford murder case has been a hot potato.

Saudi Arabian officials understood that their system would be put under a microscope by the Western world, which they regard as ignorant of and biased against their Islamic beliefs. The case has been so sensitive that the verdict itself was kept under wraps. Although

legal sources have been speaking since mid-August of a guilty verdict against both nurses, no decision has been formally announced.

But lawyers in the case revealed last week that Parry faces execution after having been found guilty by the trial panel of murder, while Lucille McLauchlan has been found guilty of a lesser charge of assisting in the crime. Under Saudi law, the death sentence must be confirmed by at least two higher courts before going to the king himself.

In murder cases, death is the requisite sentence if the victim's family demands it. The sentence for McLauchlan, however, was at the judges' discretion. Under Islamic law, her 500 lash strokes should be administered with a bent elbow, not bruise or break the skin, and normally would be doled out over the course of her jail sentence.

Officials in Britain, Saudi Arabia and Australia are engaged in a delicate minuet to seek an outcome that would take into account the British pleas for the mercy, the demand for punishment from Gilford's brother, and the Saudis' need to adhere to their own centuries-old, religiously based system of justice.

Did Parry, 39, with the help of McLauchlan, 31, indeed stab, bludgeon and suffocate the 55-year-old Gilford at the King Fahd Military Medical Complex where they all worked and lived? Because the trial was not open to the public there is no way to independently evaluate the evidence.

Various Saudi newspapers have

stated the basic case against the accused. They say that the two women initially confessed to investigators after being

photographed by security cameras one day after the murder using the victim's credit cards to get cash from an ATM machine.

In their confession, according to the published reports, the two said they had been lovers of Gilford and that the murder occurred during an argument on a night of heavy

drinking. Adding to suspicions, McLauchlan previously had been accused in her native Scotland of taking the credit card of a terminally ill patient.

The women say that the case against them is a total frame-up, according to their lawyers and family. The women say their supposed confessions were forced from them through sleep deprivation, physical abuse and fear that they would be raped by interrogators who ordered them to strip naked and touched them during questioning, and who promised them freedom if they signed a confession.

Once they obtained lawyers, they retracted their confessions. They complained that they never had a chance, as they would in a Western court, to examine the evidence against them, to present their own evidence and to call witnesses to exonerate themselves and raise the possibility that someone else — for instance, Saudi guards working at the medical complex — had committed the crime.

Their fate has been controlled by a legal system that is radically different from Western models. Although suspects are considered innocent until proven guilty, the Sharia system relies far less on physical evidence than on the statements of the accused and the questions posed by the judges.

Rumor of Karadzic arrest heard 'round the world

By Lee Hockstader=(c) 1997,

The Washington Post

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina — Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb leader indicted for war crimes, was not arrested this week.

Elite American and French commandos did not swoop down in a daring dawn raid on the mountain redoubt of the heavily guarded former Bosnian Serb president, the West's Public Enemy No. 1 in the former Yugoslavia.

This came as a surprise to some of the West's largest media organizations.

Acting on a tip as hot as they come, journalists who cover the Balkans and southern Europe rushed to Bosnia Thursday and Friday to cover what they were told would be a "surprise" operation to seize Karadzic, who is under indictment for genocide and crimes against humanity.

It was all very hush-hush. Camera crews were deployed. Satellite phones were at the ready. Translators were on hand. The story was big. So big that the British Broadcasting Corp. sent in journalists from Jerusalem, Vienna and Belgrade. So big that Christiane Amanpour, CNN's ace correspondent, was said to be en route. So big that a Washington Post reporter was awaked at 5:45 a.m. by a call from — well, never mind.

And then ... nothing happened.

The birthplace of the rumor, everyone agreed, was ABC News. Its sources were said to be impeccable, very high-ranking, possibly military. But no one was entirely sure whether ABC itself had sent a crew to cover the big story.

"I don't deploy my troops on rumors," said Chuck Lustig, ABC's foreign news editor. "This is a

serious thing. The Balkans is a serious place. It's a serious matter."

But he would not discuss the genesis of the rumor.

In Sarajevo, press officers of the NATO-led Stabilization Force, which has 35,000 troops in the country, greeted journalists at their regular morning briefing Friday in a state of general hilarity.

"Here for the big 'operation,' are you?" asked one grinning SFOR officer. "Don't worry: We'll be sure to tell the press in advance exactly when and where it'll happen."

Chris Janowski, spokesman for the U.N. High Commission for Refugees in Sarajevo, was nearly as amused. "It's been very good socially," he said. "A lot of people came to town who I hadn't seen in years."

In Pale, the sleepy ski resort outside Sarajevo where Karadzic lives, a police officer guarding the entrance to his home did not seem put out by the attention of the world's media. "A big force is protecting Radovan," he said, smiling genially. "Ten times bigger than SFOR."

Only prosecutors from the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia did not appreciate the joke. For months, they have been demanding that Karadzic be arrested and brought to justice in the Hague, while NATO generals have threatened the Bosnia Serb leader but done nothing to arrest him.

"I think it's scandalous that those who have the responsibility for his arrest continue to fail to fulfill that obligation," Louise Arbour, the court's chief prosecutor, said at a news conference in Sarajevo Friday.