

Diluting the line between colors

Business



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Education. The most craved privilege in the world that some are not granted. For those who do have this privilege, there are limitations placed on them, later directing them towards neglecting getting one. African Americans have been denied certain inalienable freedoms for the past 200 years in America—such as, but not limited to, the opportunity to an equal education. “She Walked Alone” by Will Counts conveyed the endurance African Americans had towards getting an education in order to help change the future for not only individuals in their community and their nation, but the world as a whole.

With the stark white of her dress contrasting with the dark shade of the individuals to her left, Elizabeth Eckford is the first person in the image your eyes are drawn to. After the first five seconds upon coming across the picture, your eyes move in a sweep in a curve, peering at the faces and bodies of an angry white mob jeering at her, their bodies rigid with revulsion. In the faceless crowd of enraged spectators, one person effortlessly stands out: Hazel Bryan Massery. Massery was considered Eckford’s more infamous half, due to the apparent hatred and disgust on her face, fuming and shrieking at Eckford which is easily noticeable. Next to Massery is a female in a dark dress whose back is turned against the camera. She looks to the crowd, seeking approval prior to the repulsive words about to escape her mouth.

There is a juxtaposition of Eckford having her mouth shut, standing tall and muted with her head bowed within the jungle of chaos threatening to engulf her. The colors bleed out to a slight tint from the dark shades ingrained in the photo, leaving Elizabeth and her color as the only shade who refused to

bleed out. Gradually we realize, the U. S Education system was the diluter. Before the photo was taken, only a handful of schools throughout the nation were integrated, usually in the North.

According to the University of Portland's TAHPDX School Integration, the singular most important event that led to the call for integration at all schools: the court decision of Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka in 1954." This momentous finding by the Supreme Court of the United States was undoubtedly the single most important triumph over the entrenched system of segregation in America" (TAHPDX: History Topic) Although this may have been an 'important triumph', it did not ensure the immediate action of integration and more importantly the skewed ideas and concepts of African Americans and their place in society. The response: retaliation.

In keeping with what the US Department of Interior stated, even when the retaliation was addressed in another court ordered case for Little Rock to comply, Governor Orval Faubus defied them.(United States, National Park Service.) Allowing African American teenage students to volunteer to attend an all white school, nine were chosen. Of these nine were Elizabeth Eckford, a 15 year old girl. Stanford Law graduate David Margolick reported in Through a Lens, Darkly, the Eckfords didn't get the memo to not show up to the high school, Central High.

When the 15 year old girl arrived, she was greeted by not only soldiers who stood in flank at all entrances, but an irate crowd who jeered and sneered and even spat at her for even contemplating going to an all white school (Margolick, David). Trying to enter the high school not twice, but thrice, the

guards denied her entrance, later finding that Faubus actually called the Arkansas National Guard to deny the student's entry (US, National Park Service). Eckford, who was clearly shaken by abruptness of these events, could only hold her head high and stand her ground. Elizabeth is one of many African Americans teens who put on a collected stance to show they could tolerate anything if that meant they got the education they rightly deserved. The only comfort given to Eckford was the comfort given to her by reporters. Discreetly, reporters tried to somehow surround her so that she would not get physically harmed, ruling that verbal assaults would had to be enough for the rowdy crowd.

Students and individuals even threatened, on multiple occasions, that they would hang her for having the audacity to pulling this 'stunt' (Margolick, David). Reporters on the scene had to dress up and act as if they weren't actual reporters. There needs to be a remembrance if 'If a reporter went to these lengths to ensure he would not be assaulted because he looks like he's on the opposing side, what happens to those who ARE the opposing side?' Even though the 15 year old put on a cool front, her facade was seethrough. This event got to her very core and being and Count had the precise ability to have it captured in a single shot. The same can be said for those who come across this photo, feelings of distraught formed with the very thought that a child would be imprisoned in such an explosive setting, all due thanks to her desire for an education which is barred from her simply because of the amount of melanin she contains. The rest of the world payed more attention to the release of Count's image, more than the United States itself.

To the world, Elizabeth Eckford was now the face of the civil rights movement, especially when it surrounded the topic of African American youth. “ Elizabeth received long-distance calls, and as many as 50 letters a day, from all over the world. One, from a 16-year-old in Japan, was addressed simply to “ Miss Elizabeth Eckford, Little Rock, USA.”” (Margolick, David). Eckford had touched the lives of many through the single still of her self-esteem taken by Count. It went to such a point where the United States was looked down upon because of its resistance to integrate the schools systems and only then did President Eisenhower force Governor Faubus to integrate (US, National Park Service).

Soldiers remained in the school at all times to watch over the ‘ Little Rock Nine’. When the commotion made by the world calmed down with satisfaction of seeing the ‘ Little Rock Nine’ integrated, things got worse behind closed doors. Students enrolled at the high school were furious that Eckford was being comforted by the rest of the world. Because of the amount of support she had, she became the subject to a wide range of harassment throughout the school year. David Margolick reported that “ in the collection of Mrs. Huckaby’s papers” revealed what the 15 year old vividly endured in Central High.

“ Sometime in October: Elizabeth hit with a shower of sharpened pencils. October 28: Elizabeth shoved in hall. November 20: Elizabeth jostled in gym.”..

.” January 10: Elizabeth shoved on the stairs. January 14: Elizabeth knocked flat. January 22: Elizabeth spat upon.” ..

. “ January 31: Elizabeth asks grandfather to take her home after girls serenade her with humiliating songs in gym class. February 4: Elizabeth has soda bottle thrown at her. February 14: Elizabeth attacked with rock-filled snowballs. March 7: Elizabeth hit by egg.” (Margolick.

) The list was never ending. For whatever reason, Elizabeth kept it a secret from her parents. Knowing they would pull her out of the school as soon as they found out. By withdrawing, everything Eckford withstood and tolerated, all the threats and harassment, would be for nothing because it would show that the students got to her and that was something she simply wouldn't let happen. She couldn't destroy the very foundation she built as steps in the education system for African American youth.

Elizabeth Eckford's little ' stunt' didn't leave her being the only one with repercussions. When ' She Walked Alone' surfaced, Margolick reported that Mrs. Eckford lost her job “ retaliation, surely, for her daughter's role in the Little Rock drama”. This seemed to be the breaking point for Elizabeth and before the year was up, she fell into a depression that she later overcame several decades later. At this point “ she made the first of several suicide attempts, with over-the-counter sleeping pills” and again later “ tried killing herself, though in more novel ways: hitchhiking far from campus, for instance, half hoping someone would pick her up and murder her”(Margolick). The idea of these thoughts going through Elizabeth's head can occur to anyone, maybe solely one of the Little Rock Nine.

While being a shy individual, Eckford couldn't handle the severity and repetition of the backlash she sustained because of a photo even she had a

hard time stomaching. The nation and the world did not have an easier time stomaching the daunting image of Elizabeth as well. For African Americans, the indigestion of the cruel actions being displayed in Count's photo, was another point scored for them and the civil rights movement. Hazel Bryan Massery, Eckford's polar opposite in 'She Walked Alone', called Elizabeth out of the blue, countless year later. She wanted to apologize. For the longest time, the reality of her actions dawned on her.

Appalled by herself and her previous mindset, Massery set out on reconciling with Eckford, determined to right her wrong and that is exactly what she did. In doing so, the 40th anniversary of when Count took that famous (or rather infamous) picture of the two, Will Count called both Elizabeth and Hazel to see if they were willing to take a picture, arm in arm on the front steps in front of Central High (Margolick). Like when question of whether to stand up against injustice was posed to the black community and the nation, they answered 'yes'. As life continued, the blanket of depression fell off of Elizabeth Eckford's shoulders. Her life got brighter and she got stronger, a strength that never really left her.

A strength that played a factor as to why she endured what she endure for so long when she was a 15 year old girl. A strength that has not gone unrecognized. The Civil Rights Digital Library stated the number achievements and recognition that Eckford was granted. "Eckford was awarded the prestigious Spingarn Medal by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as were the rest of the Little Rock Nine... In 1997, Elizabeth Eckford shared the Father Joseph Biltz Award

(presented by the National Conference for Community and Justice) with Hazel..

" and "[i]n 1999, President Bill Clinton presented the nation's highest civilian award, the Congressional Gold Medal, to the members of the Little Rock Nine" (The Civil Rights Digital Library). Such courage that made sure the U. S. was really the land of the brave, could not go undeterred. For the African Americans, Ms.

Eckford never undeterred. In the end, Elizabeth Eckford created an aura of what America is really about, the persistence in making sure the wrongs are righted and for all to distinguish that color is never a barrier if you dilute the connotations associated with it.