



Dwight D.  
Eisenhower  
Memorial

## NATIONAL EISENHOWER MEMORIAL EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

LESSON

# Letters to the President



**Duration**

**One 45-minute period**

**Grades**

**7–12**

**Cross-curriculum Application**

**U.S. History, Government**



## Historical Background

The Supreme Court decision to desegregate public schools, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), did not end segregation immediately. The conflict in Arkansas between federal courts ordering desegregation and state governments refusing to allow it became national and even international news in 1957. Orval Faubus <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orval\\_Faubus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orval_Faubus)>, the governor of Arkansas, refused to allow nine African American high school students to enroll at Little Rock Central High School on September 5, 1957 citing dangers to public safety. In response, President Dwight Eisenhower authorized the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to ensure that the court order was carried out.

Sending U.S. troops to enforce a federal court ruling on school desegregation was an unprecedented step. The conflict in Little Rock represented a constitutional crisis that divided the country as both the state and federal government claimed the right to decide if schools could desegregate. President Eisenhower faced a difficult decision to take public opinion into account while still pursuing what he felt was the right course of action under the law. The National Park Service provides an overview of the sequence of events and issues at stake (see *The 1957 Crisis at Central High* in *Related Resources* below).

## Objective

By carefully examining letters written to President Dwight D. Eisenhower during the Little Rock Crisis on both sides of the issue, students will better understand the role of the President of the United States. Specifically, they will learn how Eisenhower balanced what he saw as his legal duties as president with the opinions and beliefs of the people of the United States. After reading and analyzing one letter carefully using a written documentary analysis worksheet, students will discuss what a response from President Eisenhower's staff to concerned citizens might contain and write a draft of that response to share with the class.

## Essential Questions

1. What is the constitutional role of the president?
  2. How did Eisenhower view the duties of the presidency?
  3. How did that influence the actions he took in Little Rock, Arkansas?
-



## Sources

- » “Little Rock: Civil Rights Battleground.” Eisenhower E-Memorial.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKNpKO7JPC4>.  
*Teacher Notes: A short video documentary (~7 minutes) on the Little Rock Crisis and Eisenhower’s decision to send troops from the 101st Airborne Division to enforce the federal court order to desegregate Little Rock Central High School.*  
*Interesting details:*
    - *Former President Bill Clinton, who grew up in Arkansas and was eleven years old at the time of the crisis, talks about Eisenhower’s calm and steady leadership. He says that his family supported Eisenhower and desegregation.*
    - *Eisenhower, in a televised press conference, blamed “disorderly mobs” for preventing implementation of a federal court order. Eisenhower makes clear that federal troops were in place to make sure the court order was carried out.*
  
  - » Telegram to President Eisenhower from Parents of Nine African American Students. October 1, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.  
<https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/research/online-documents/civil-rights-little-rock/little-rock-telegram.pdf>  
*Teacher Notes: This telegram from the parents of the “Little Rock Nine,” the students who integrated Little Rock Central High School, to Eisenhower thanks the president for ensuring that their children could attend school safely.*  
*Interesting details:*
    - *The parents tell the president that his actions have “strengthened their faith in democracy.”*
    - *The telegram also argues that equal opportunity for all is necessary for “America’s true growth and true greatness.”*
  
  - » Letter to Mr. W.B. Brown from President Eisenhower. October 4, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.  
<https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/research/online-documents/civil-rights-little-rock/1957-10-04-dde-to-brown.pdf>
-



*Teacher Notes: This letter is President Eisenhower's response to the parents of the Little Rock Nine.*

*Interesting details:*

- *Eisenhower sent the same letter to each family.*
- *Eisenhower writes that it is his duty to support and defend the Constitution and ensure that decisions by the Supreme Court are enforced.*
- *Eisenhower also writes that it is the duty of the president to see that the laws are "faithfully executed."*

*Letters supporting Eisenhower:*

- » Letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Charles Alexander Regarding Integration. No date. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/research/online-documents/civil-rights-citizens-letters/no-date-alexander.pdf>

*Teacher Notes: A letter from an 18-year-old African American named Charles Alexander supporting desegregation.*

*Interesting details:*

- *Alexander notes that he serves in the armed forces as an active duty member of the U.S. Navy and writes that he is "willing to lay down my life in the defense of a country where my people are not even wanted."*
  - *Alexander also cites American ideals in the Declaration of Independence as a reason to end segregation.*
- » Telegram to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Mary McGwin Anderson In Favor of School Integration. October 1, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/research/online-documents/civil-rights-citizens-letters/1957-10-1-anderson.pdf>

*Teacher Notes: A telegram from a teacher in Chicago supporting desegregation.*

*Interesting details:*

- *Since this is a telegram, students may be thrown a bit by the lack of punctuation.*
- *The writer argues that integration is better for white as well as African American children.*



- » Letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from H.E. Anderson Regarding Integration. October 10, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/research/online-documents/civil-rights-citizens-letters/1957-10-10-anderson.pdf>

*Teacher Notes: This letter from an Illinois writer supports Eisenhower who believes that all Americans deserve an education.*

*Interesting details:*

- *From the letter: "Any youngster, native of this country, is entitled to all the education we can give him."*
- *The writer notes that he had no interest in the Arkansas situation, but now sees it as a national issue.*

*Letters opposing Eisenhower:*

- » Letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Armstrong Against School Integration. September 24, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/research/online-documents/civil-rights-citizens-letters/1957-9-24-jh-armstrong.pdf>

*Teacher Notes: This letter from a married couple in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, opposes desegregation and Eisenhower's actions in Little Rock.*

*Interesting details:*

- *The letter is signed by "Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Armstrong" but the letter is written from Mr. Armstrong's perspective. One can surmise this since the writer cites his military service as a veteran of WWII.*
- *The writer compares school integration to a home invasion.*
- *The writer also mentions the "Hungarian people," a reference to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. The uprising, an international crisis for the both the U.S. and President Eisenhower, was put down by the army of the Soviet Union. The writer is suggesting that by sending troops to Little Rock, President Eisenhower was doing the same thing.*
- *The writer criticizes the idea of "9 men . . . tell[ing] 40 million people what to do." The "9 men" refers to the Supreme Court and "40 million" to the population of the American South. Opponents of desegregation frequently argued that the Supreme Court should not be able to impose their decision if the majority of southerners disagreed.*



- » Letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Rev. Fr. Richard P. Adair Regarding Little Rock, Arkansas. September 25, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/research/online-documents/civil-rights-citizens-letters/1957-9-25-adair.pdf>

*Teacher Notes: The letter writer, an Eastern Orthodox priest from New York, opposes Eisenhower's actions.*

*Interesting details:*

- *The writer identifies himself as a Republican and a supporter of desegregation in general who disapproves of Eisenhower using Federal troops to enforce integration in this case.*
  - *The writer does not seem to address Eisenhower's position that he was ensuring that a court order was enforced.*
- » Letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Mrs. Jane Adkins Regarding the Integration of Schools. October 9, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/research/online-documents/civil-rights-citizens-letters/1957-10-9-adkins.pdf>
- Teacher Notes: A letter from a mother of three from Oklahoma opposing Eisenhower's actions. Interesting details:*
- *The writer claims she does not object to integration, but objects to the federal government forcing states to integrate their schools.*
  - *The writer refers to the 18th amendment, which prohibited the sale of alcohol, as an example of the federal government forcing a law on the states. What might the response to this position be? Would states allow integration without pressure from the federal government? (Note that in 1957, three years had passed since the Supreme Court ruling in Brown v. Board of Education.)*

## Materials

- » National Archives Written Document Analysis Worksheet <[https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written\\_document\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf)>



## Preparation

- For each student, print one copy of:
  - the National Archives Written Document Worksheet
  - Telegram to President Eisenhower from Parents of Nine African American Students
  - Letter to Mr. W.B. Brown from President Eisenhower
- Print out enough copies of the letters to the president so that each student gets one letter and there are an equal number of “for” and “against” letters. There are three different “for” letters and three different “against” letters therefore:
  - 20-24 students = print 4 copies of each letter
  - 25-30 students = print 5 copies of each letter
  - 30-32 students = print 6 copies of each letter
- Cue the video, “Little Rock: Civil Rights Battleground.”

## Procedure

1. Show students the video, “Little Rock: Civil Rights Battleground.” Prompt for students: *How do you think people across the United States reacted to the Little Rock Crisis? What might different groups of people want Eisenhower to do?*
2. Pass out the “Telegram to President Eisenhower from Parents of Nine African American Students” and “Letter to Mr. W.B. Brown from President Eisenhower.” Read each aloud as a class. Prompt for students: *What do students notice about the telegram and the response? What did Eisenhower stress in his response?*
3. Ask students to imagine they work for President Eisenhower in 1957, the year of the Little Rock Crisis. The president has received many letters and telegrams supporting and criticizing his decision to send troops to Little Rock to enforce court-ordered desegregation. The students’ jobs as staff members will be to help read and answer these letters and telegrams. Let students know that Eisenhower, like most elected officials, takes voters’ opinions seriously. Almost all letters are read and receive a reply.



4. Pass out the additional letters and telegrams —one per student. Also pass out the National Archives Written Document Worksheet. Instruct students to read their letter carefully and fill out the worksheet with the appropriate information.
5. Ask each student to find a partner. Students who looked at letters that **supported** the president's decision should partner with students who looked at letters that **opposed** the decision. Prompt for students: *Work together and discuss: How would you respond, on behalf of the president, to these letters? What do you think a presidential response would be to a voter who disagrees with him/her? What would be a presidential response to a voter who agrees with him/her?* Have student pairs share their ideas for responses with the class.
6. Have each student write a draft of their response. (Note: students may want to refer back to Eisenhower's letter to the Little Rock parents to get ideas about how Eisenhower might respond.)

### **Differentiation**

For additional support, the instructor may have students work in groups to analyze the letters. Then, in Step 5, find a partner who worked in a different group on an opposing letter.

A possible assignment extension could be to have students research Eisenhower's actual responses to the letters.

Teachers may also make use of the Teacher Notes that accompany the above sources. Providing these notes to students may help them to notice important details within the sources.

### **Assessment**

Students will be assessed on their analysis worksheet and how they develop an understanding of the learning objectives listed above concerning how to interpret a letter as a primary source. In discussions with partners and to the class, students should be able to use the source to support their idea for a response letter. The letter draft itself can be assessed for factual understanding, sourcing, and ability to make an evidence-based claim per the attached rubric.





## Related Resources

### *Lesson Plans*

- » *Elizabeth Eckford and the Little Rock Nine*. Constitution Center.  
<http://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/Eckford+Formatted+Curriculum.pdf>  
A brief lesson on the history of segregation in public schooling, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), and the Little Rock Nine. The lesson outlines the Constitutional issues involved with desegregation.
  
- » *Lesson Plans and Teacher Guides from the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site*. National Park Service.  
<http://www.nps.gov/chsc/learn/education/lessonplansandteacherguides.htm>  
An excellent collection of twelve lessons related to the efforts to desegregate Little Rock Central High in 1957. Resources also include Constitution Day activities.

### *Secondary Sources and Digital Resources*

- » *We Shall Overcome: Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site*. National Park Service.  
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/travelweshallovercome/index.htm>  
Online exhibit from the National Park Service examines important sites associated with the Civil Rights Movement, including Little Rock Central High School.
  
- » *The 1957 Crisis at Central High*. National Park Service.  
<http://www.nps.gov/chsc/planyourvisit/upload/SitebulletinCrisis.pdf>  
This brochure from the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site contains an excellent overview of the crisis. It includes a detailed timeline of events including important court rulings and public statements by Governor Faubus and President Eisenhower.

### *Primary Sources*

- » *Civil Rights: The Little Rock School Integration Crisis*. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.  
<https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/civil-rights-little-rock-school-integration-crisis>  
An extensive collection of key primary sources related to the 1957 crisis, including the president's decision to deploy troops to enforce the court order by Judge Davies.
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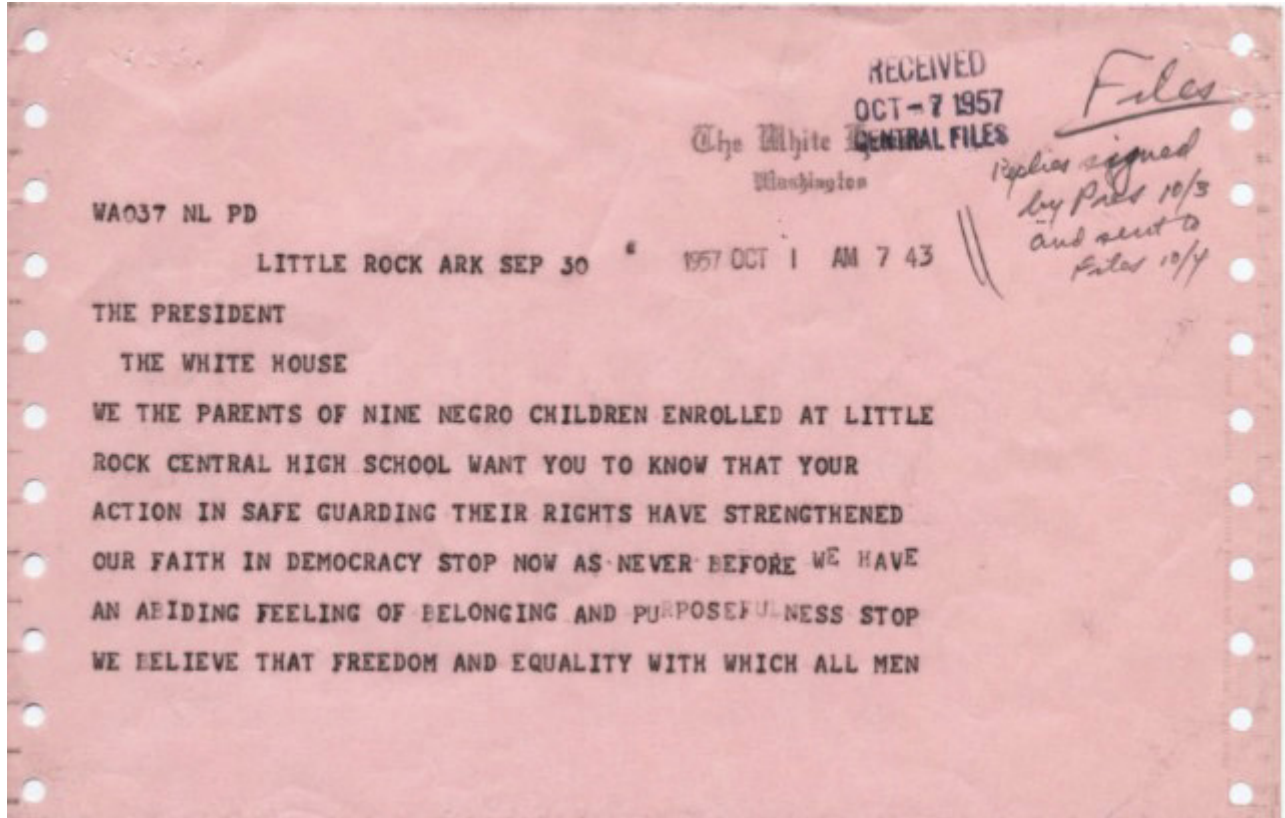
» *Little Rock Central High School Integration.* University System of Georgia.

[http://crdl.usg.edu/events/little\\_rock\\_integration/?Welcome](http://crdl.usg.edu/events/little_rock_integration/?Welcome)

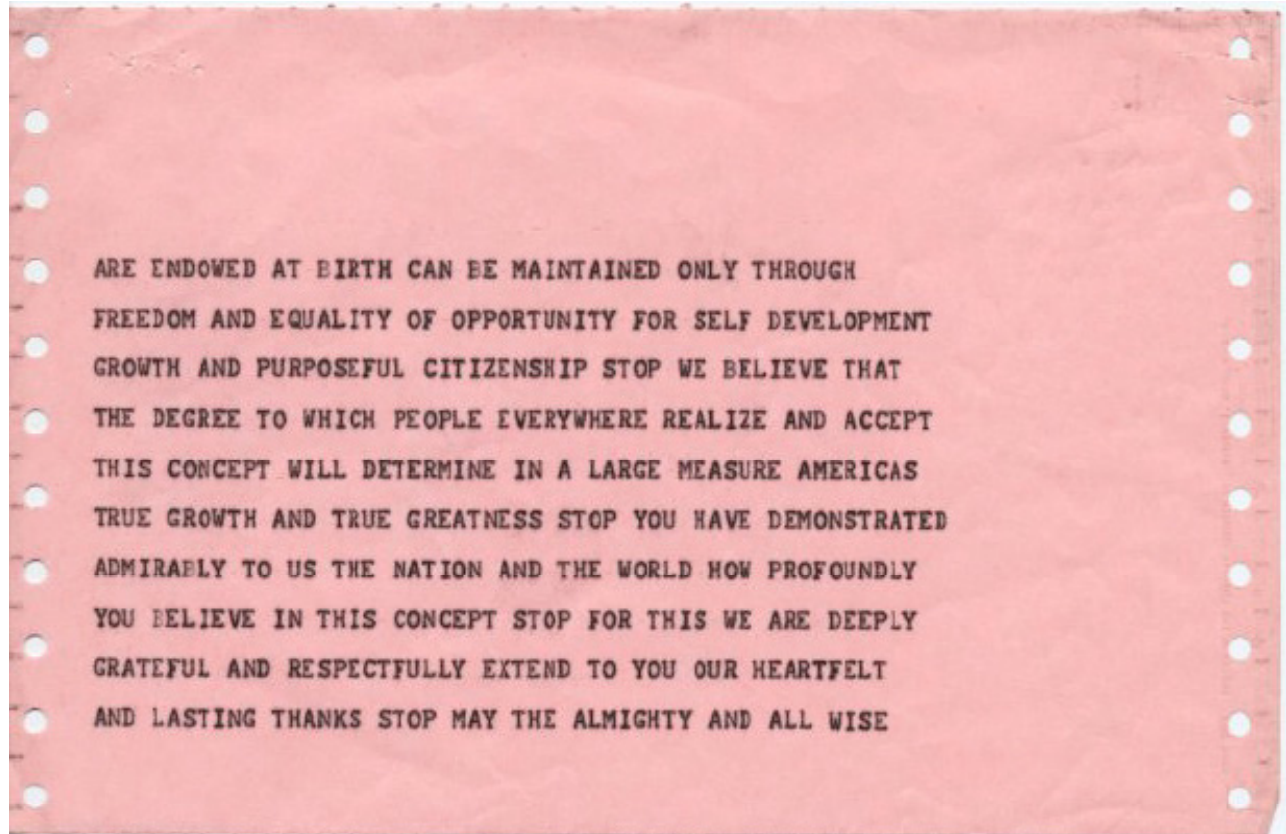
This website contains mainly primary sources related to Little Rock and other civil rights issues.



Telegram to President Eisenhower from Parents of Nine African American Students, p. 1. October 1, 1957.  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

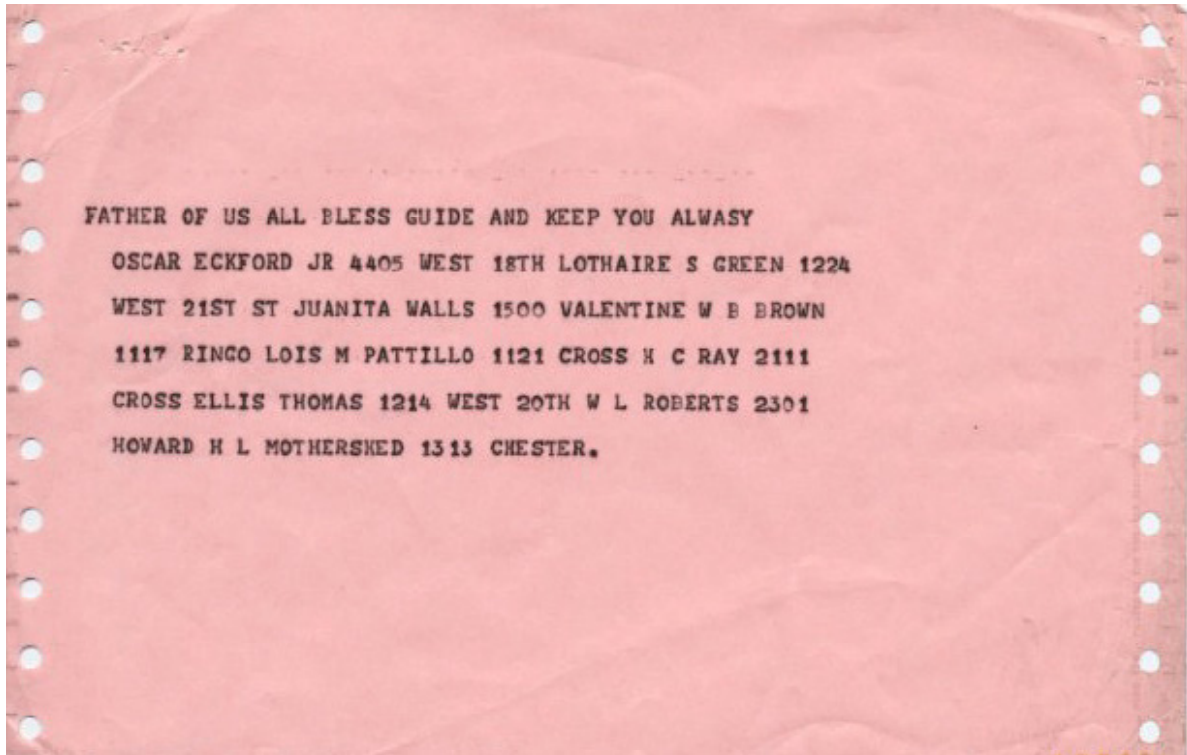


Telegram to President Eisenhower from Parents of Nine African American Students, p. 2. October 1, 1957.  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.



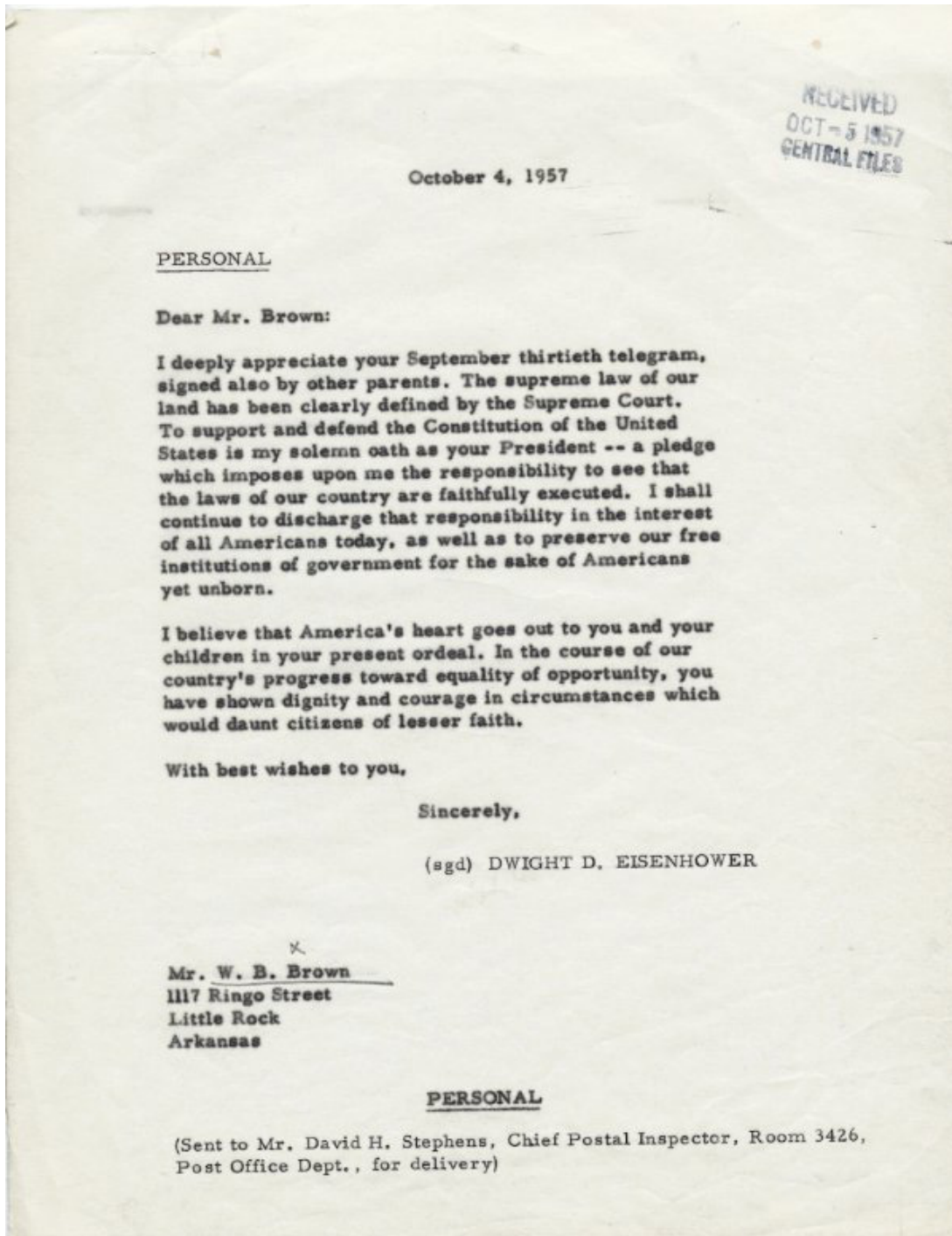
ARE ENDOWED AT BIRTH CAN BE MAINTAINED ONLY THROUGH  
FREEDOM AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF DEVELOPMENT  
GROWTH AND PURPOSEFUL CITIZENSHIP STOP WE BELIEVE THAT  
THE DEGREE TO WHICH PEOPLE EVERYWHERE REALIZE AND ACCEPT  
THIS CONCEPT WILL DETERMINE IN A LARGE MEASURE AMERICAS  
TRUE GROWTH AND TRUE GREATNESS STOP YOU HAVE DEMONSTRATED  
ADMIRABLY TO US THE NATION AND THE WORLD HOW PROFOUNDLY  
YOU BELIEVE IN THIS CONCEPT STOP FOR THIS WE ARE DEEPLY  
GRATEFUL AND RESPECTFULLY EXTEND TO YOU OUR HEARTFELT  
AND LASTING THANKS STOP MAY THE ALMIGHTY AND ALL WISE

Telegram to President Eisenhower from Parents of Nine African American Students, p. 3. October 1, 1957.  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.



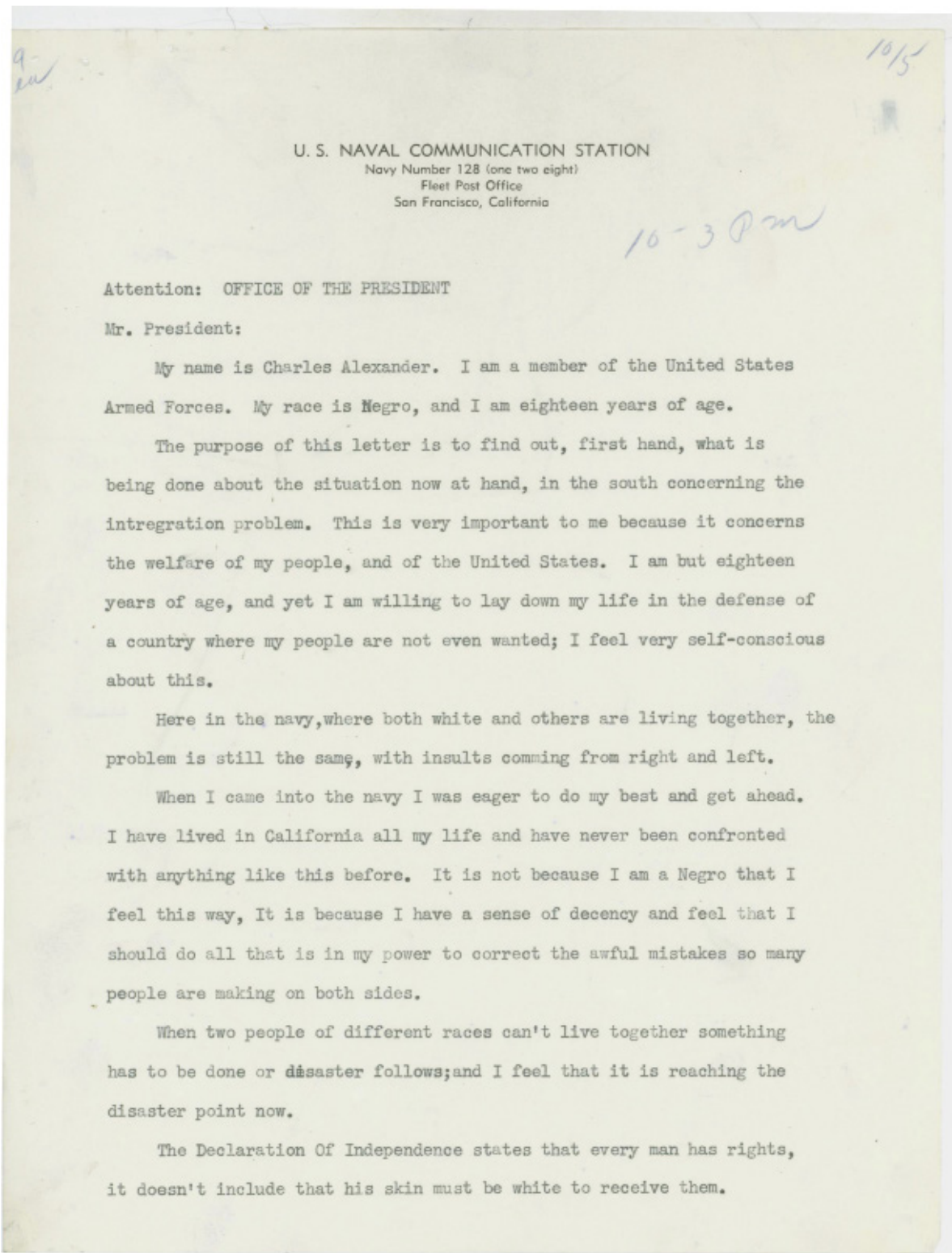


Letter to Mr. W.B. Brown from President Eisenhower. October 4, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

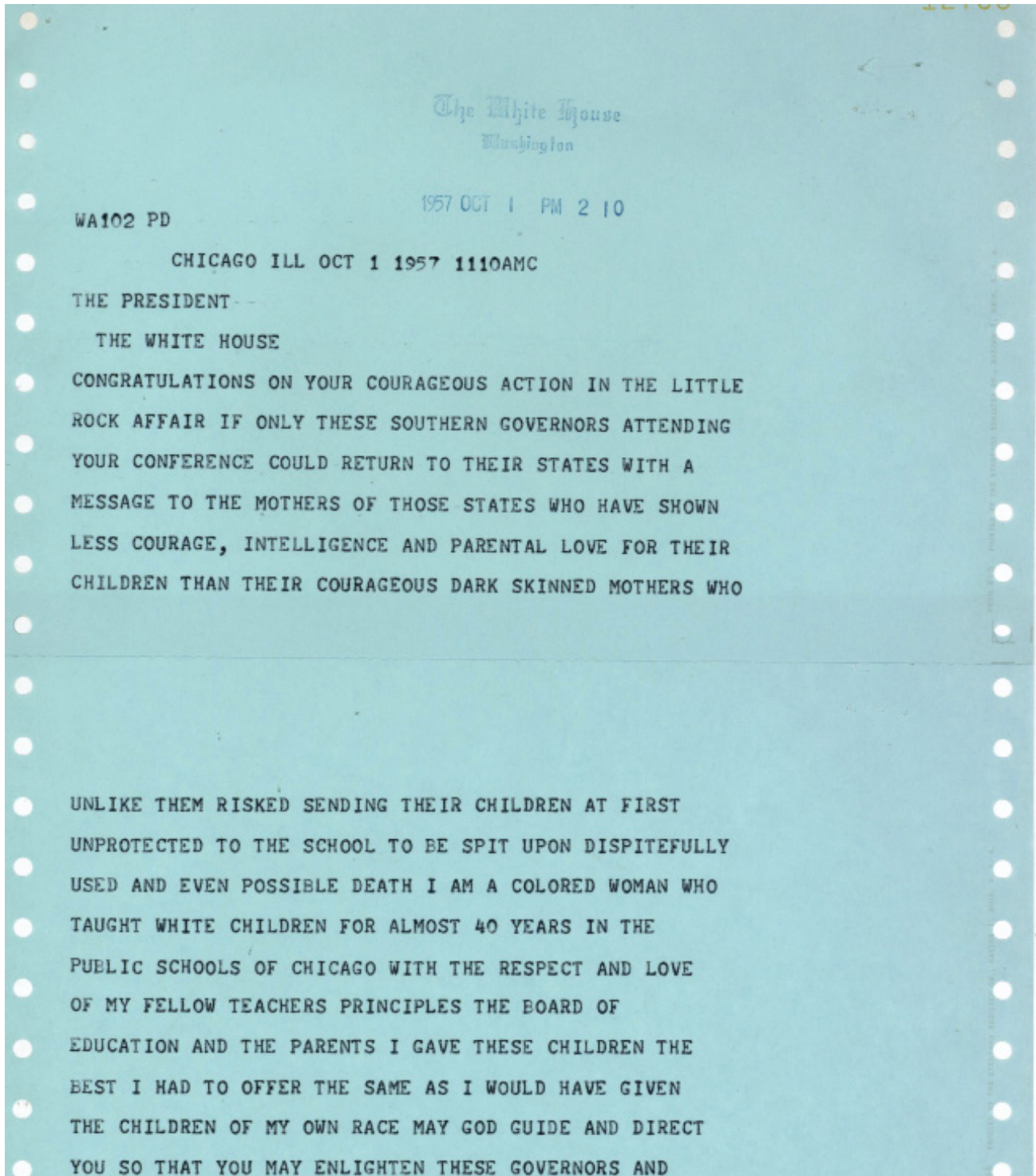




Letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Charles Alexander Regarding Integration. No Date.  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.



Telegram to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Mary McGwin Anderson In Favor of School Integration, p. 1. October 1, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.



The White House  
Washington

WA102 PD 1957 OCT 1 PM 2 10

CHICAGO ILL OCT 1 1957 1110AMC

THE PRESIDENT --  
THE WHITE HOUSE

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR COURAGEOUS ACTION IN THE LITTLE  
ROCK AFFAIR IF ONLY THESE SOUTHERN GOVERNORS ATTENDING  
YOUR CONFERENCE COULD RETURN TO THEIR STATES WITH A  
MESSAGE TO THE MOTHERS OF THOSE STATES WHO HAVE SHOWN  
LESS COURAGE, INTELLIGENCE AND PARENTAL LOVE FOR THEIR  
CHILDREN THAN THEIR COURAGEOUS DARK SKINNED MOTHERS WHO

UNLIKE THEM RISKED SENDING THEIR CHILDREN AT FIRST  
UNPROTECTED TO THE SCHOOL TO BE SPIT UPON DISPITEFULLY  
USED AND EVEN POSSIBLE DEATH I AM A COLORED WOMAN WHO  
TAUGHT WHITE CHILDREN FOR ALMOST 40 YEARS IN THE  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHICAGO WITH THE RESPECT AND LOVE  
OF MY FELLOW TEACHERS PRINCIPLES THE BOARD OF  
EDUCATION AND THE PARENTS I GAVE THESE CHILDREN THE  
BEST I HAD TO OFFER THE SAME AS I WOULD HAVE GIVEN  
THE CHILDREN OF MY OWN RACE MAY GOD GUIDE AND DIRECT  
YOU SO THAT YOU MAY ENLIGHTEN THESE GOVERNORS AND



Telegram to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Mary McGwin Anderson In Favor of School Integration, p. 2. October 1, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

THEREBY THEIR PREJUDICE CITIZENS WHO ARE MUCH MORE TO  
BE PITIED THAN CONDEMNED IGNORANCE IS OUR WORST ENEMY  
IN CHICAGO OUR MOST ARISTOCRATIC PRIVATE SCHOOL  
THE FRANCIS PARKER SOLICITS BOTH COLORED CHILDREN  
AND COLORED TEACHERS NOT SO MUCH FOR THE GOOD OF  
THE COLORED CHILDREN AS TO EDUCATE THEIR OWN CHILDREN  
IN TOLERANCE AND RESPECT FOR PEOPLE OF OTHER RACES  
WITH WHOM THEY LIVE. UNTIL NOW I HAVE BEEN A  
DEMOCRAT BUT IN ORDER TO GET RID OF THIS IGNORANT  
MAJORITY IN THE SOUTH WHO GIVES A BLACK NAME TO

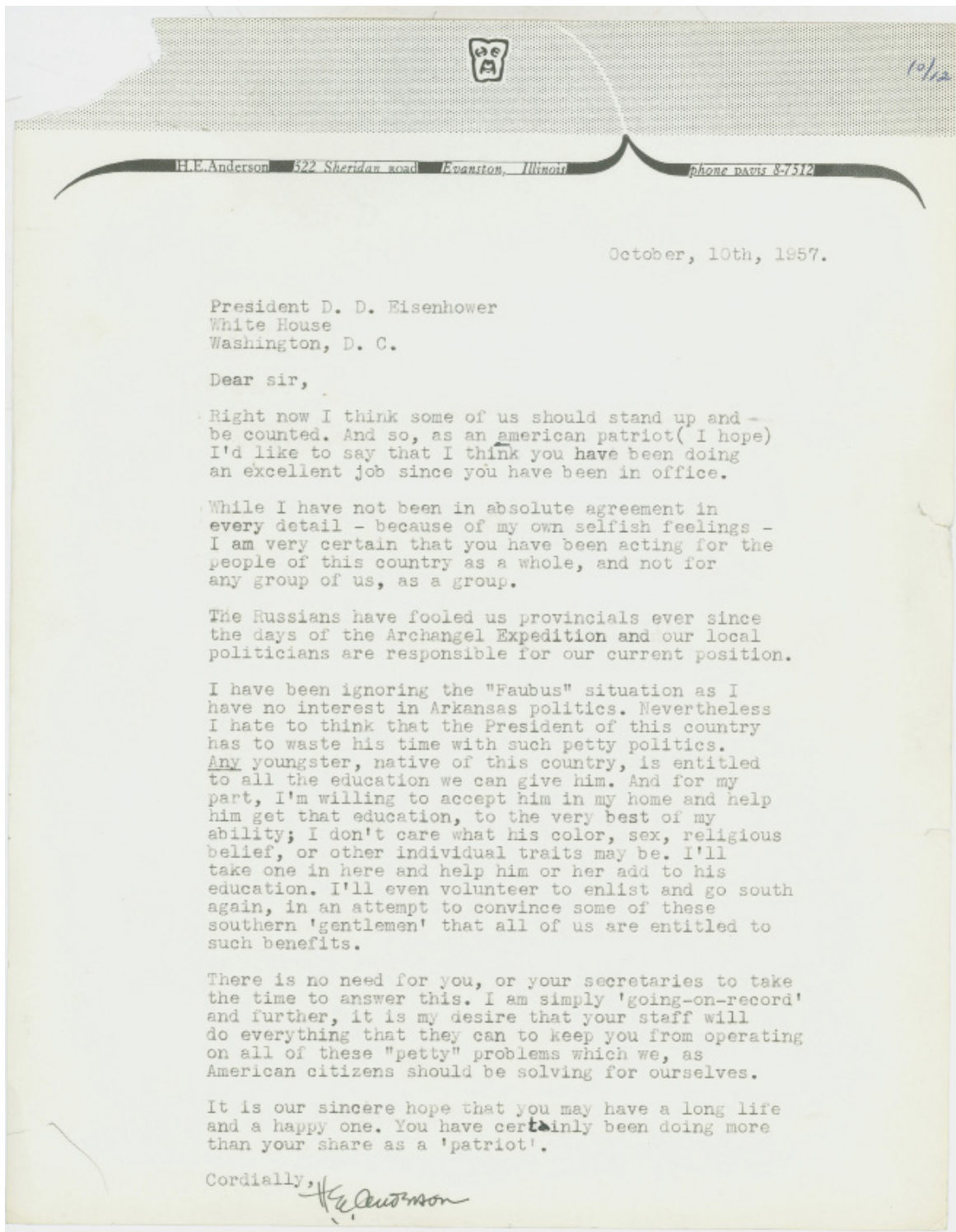
OUR COUNTRY ABROAD I SHALL VOTE REPUBLICAN PRAYERFULLY

YOURS

*Mrs*  
MARY MCGWIN ANDERSON 5946 SOUTH PKWY.



Letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from H. E. Anderson Regarding Integration. October 10, 1957.  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.





Letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Armstrong Against School Integration.  
September 24, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

718 Nashville Road  
Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
September 24, 1957

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D. C.

Sir:

Why are Negroes supposed to be allowed in White schools when they have their own? Why? Is it a crime now for White people to live as they wish as a separate race?

So, Mr. President, I ask again, why is this being forced? Would you sit idle and let an intruder enter your home, especially if you knew you and yours whole lives would forever be changed. THINK!

There is no point or reason why 9 men should try to make a law at the request or pressure of a few, to tell 40 million people what to do.

I fail to see how you or any American can have a feeling for the Hungarian people, and on the other hand try to force this mixing of the races on us.

I am a veteran of 33 months overseas in World War II and always considered it a duty and privilege, but never having a real personal reason as close as this. Now I am the father of 2 children and have a big stake in this issue. I feel more free to lay down my life, if necessary, over this than any wartime feeling with an overseas enemy. I am 38 years old, have never been arrested or connected with any police in any way whatsoever.

Why not put it up to the whole United States to vote on!

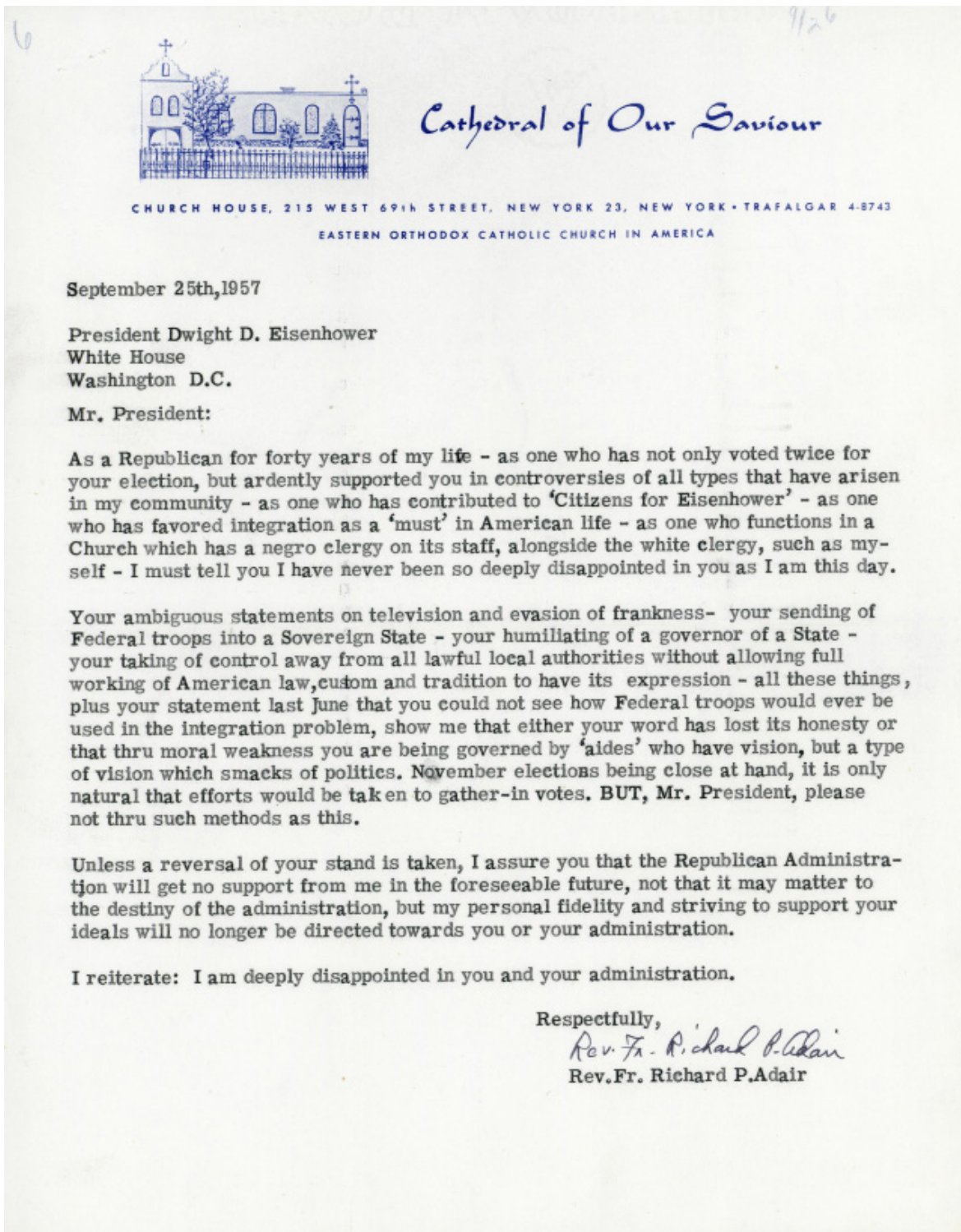
Yours very truly,

*Mr. & Mrs. J. H. Armstrong*

Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Armstrong

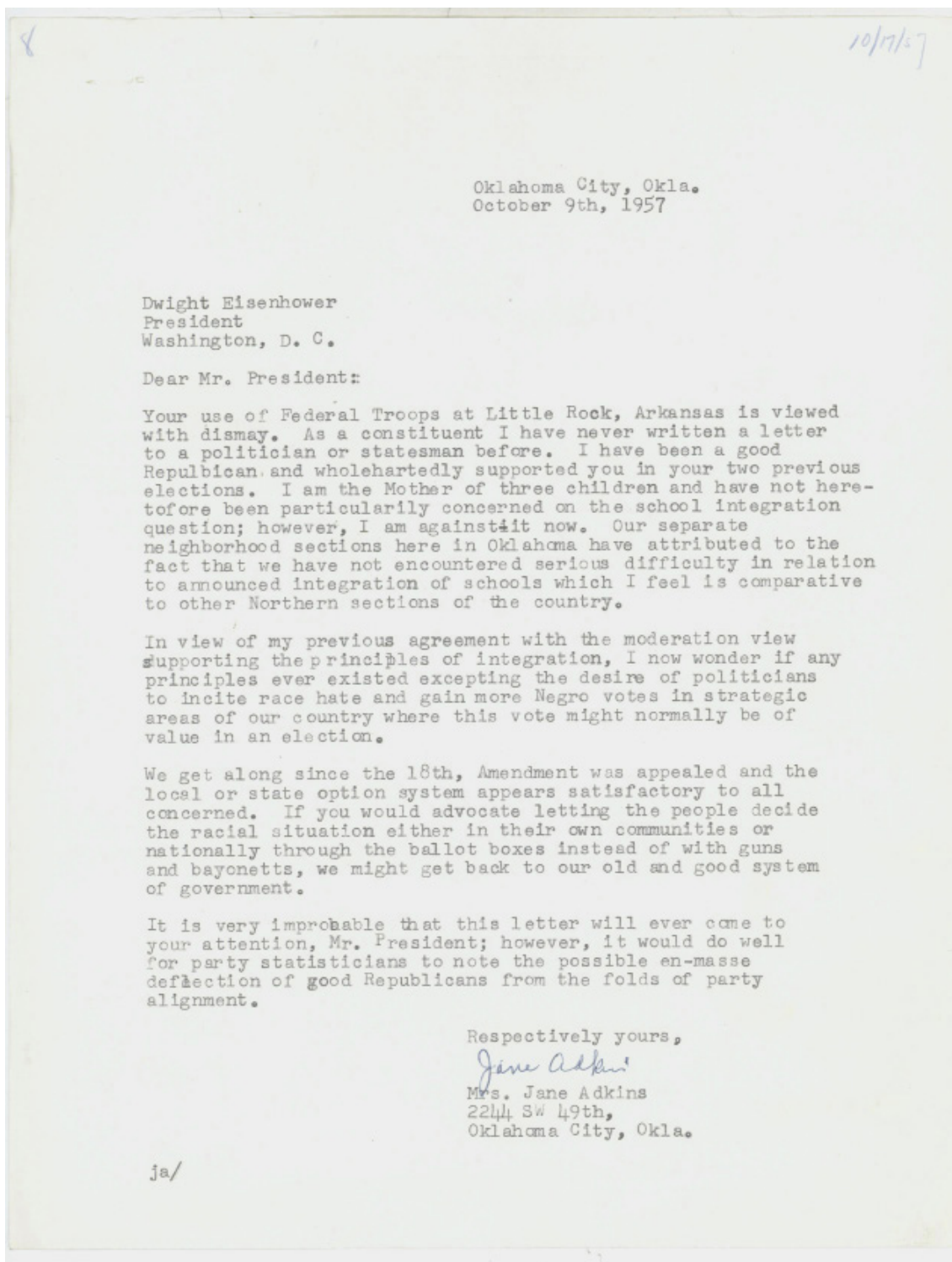


Letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Rev. Fr. Richard P. Adair Regarding Little Rock, Arkansas.  
September 25, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.





Letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower from Mrs. Jane Adkins Regarding the Integration of Schools.  
October 9, 1957. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.



Oklahoma City, Okla.  
October 9th, 1957

Dwight Eisenhower  
President  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

Your use of Federal Troops at Little Rock, Arkansas is viewed with dismay. As a constituent I have never written a letter to a politician or statesman before. I have been a good Republican and wholeheartedly supported you in your two previous elections. I am the Mother of three children and have not heretofore been particularly concerned on the school integration question; however, I am against it now. Our separate neighborhood sections here in Oklahoma have attributed to the fact that we have not encountered serious difficulty in relation to announced integration of schools which I feel is comparative to other Northern sections of the country.

In view of my previous agreement with the moderation view supporting the principles of integration, I now wonder if any principles ever existed excepting the desire of politicians to incite race hate and gain more Negro votes in strategic areas of our country where this vote might normally be of value in an election.

We get along since the 18th, Amendment was appealed and the local or state option system appears satisfactory to all concerned. If you would advocate letting the people decide the racial situation either in their own communities or nationally through the ballot boxes instead of with guns and bayonets, we might get back to our old and good system of government.

It is very improbable that this letter will ever come to your attention, Mr. President; however, it would do well for party statisticians to note the possible en-masse defection of good Republicans from the folds of party alignment.

Respectively yours,

*Jane Adkins*  
Mrs. Jane Adkins  
2244 SW 49th,  
Oklahoma City, Okla.

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## Written Document Analysis Worksheet

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**Type of document** (*circle one*):

*Newspaper*    *Letter*    *Patent*    *Memorandum*    *Map*    *Telegraph*    *Press Release*  
*Report*    *Advertisement*    *Congressional Record*    *Census Report*    *Other*

**Unique physical characteristics of the document** (*circle one or more*):

*Interesting Letterhead*    *Handwritten*    *Typed*    *Seals*    *Notations*    *“RECEIVED” stamp*    *Other*

**Date(s) of the document:**

**Author (or Creator) of the document:**

**Position (Title):**

**For what audience was the document written?:**

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## Written Document Analysis Worksheet

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**Document Information** *(There are many possible ways to answer 1-5.)*

1. List three things the author said that you think are important:

2. Why do you think this document was written?

3. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? *(Quote from the document.):*

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## Written Document Analysis Worksheet

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4. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written.

5. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:



### Letters to the President Rubric

	Fully Meets Expectations	Minimally Meets Expectations	Not Yet Within Expectations
	<i>3 points</i>	<i>2 points</i>	<i>1 point</i>
<b>Factual Understanding</b>	The letter demonstrates understanding of the main idea of each source (or piece of evidence) and identifies its key details.	The letter demonstrates understanding of the main idea of each source (or piece of evidence) but does not identify key details.	The letter does not demonstrate understanding of the main idea of each source (or piece of evidence).
<b>Sourcing</b>	The letter demonstrates understanding of each source's origin, especially when it was created and the creator's goal.	The letter demonstrates partial understanding of each source's origin, when it was created and the creator's goal.	The letter demonstrates insufficient understanding of each source's origin, when it was created and the creator's goal.
<b>Evidence-Based Claim</b>	The letter makes a reasonable claim about President Eisenhower's position on the Little Rock crisis and uses appropriate sources and evidence to support that claim.	The letter makes a reasonable claim about President Eisenhower's position on the Little Rock crisis but the sources and evidence only partially support that claim.	The letter makes a claim about President Eisenhower's position on the Little Rock crisis that is not supported by appropriate sources and evidence.