

***The Gordon Parks Center for Culture and Diversity
Fort Scott Community College
NEWS RELEASE***

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Elizabeth Eckford and Ernest Green to receive “Gordon Parks Choice of Weapons Award” at 4th annual Gordon Parks Celebration

Fort Scott—Elizabeth Eckford and Ernest Green, two of the “Little Rock Nine” who integrated Little Rock Central High School in 1957, will be the recipients of the Gordon Parks Choice of Weapons Award at the fourth annual Gordon Parks Celebration of Culture and Diversity this October 3-6 in Fort Scott, Kan. The Gordon Parks Celebration, a component of the Gordon Parks Center for Culture and Diversity, was created in 2004 by Fort Scott Community College to honor Fort Scott native Parks, noted photographer, writer, musician, and filmmaker.

At the culmination of the first year’s events, the Choice of Weapons Award was established in Parks’ honor to be given annually at the Celebration. Named after his autobiography of the same name, the award seeks to honor a recipient who has excelled in the areas that Parks did and who exemplifies the spirit and strength of character of Gordon Parks.

“We are very pleased that Elizabeth Eckford and Ernest Green accepted our invitation to receive this award.” Jill Warford, the Center’s Executive Director, said. “This year is the 50th anniversary of the 1957 integration at Central High so we thought it was fitting to honor these two people for exemplifying courage and giving inspiration to others.”

On September 4, 1957, Elizabeth Eckford and Ernest Green and seven other African American students attempted to enter Little Rock Central High School, which had previously only accepted white students. They were stopped at the door by Arkansas National Guard troops called up by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus. They tried again without success to attend Central High on September 23, 1957. The next day, September 24, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent U.S. Army troops to accompany the “Little Rock Nine” to school for protection.

After that, the black students thought things "would be relatively quiet," says Ernest Green, then a senior, who would become Central's first black graduate the following spring. But when the 101st transferred its duties to federalized Guard troops — many of them locals opposed to integration — a group of about 100 students began what Green calls "a reign of terror." The black students were cursed at, jostled and spat upon. Their lockers were broken into; glue was put on their chairs. They got threatening phone calls at home and their families' businesses were boycotted. "It was like going into battle every day," says Green, an investment banker in Washington.

Elizabeth Eckford is the subject of one of the most pervasive images from that memorable day in 1957, clutching her books as she made her way through the angry crowd. Eckford made her way through the mob and sat on a bus bench at the end of the block. She was eventually able to board a city bus, and went to her mother’s workplace. Because all of the city’s high schools were closed the following year, Eckford did not graduate from Central High School, but she had taken correspondence and night courses and so had enough credits. She later attended Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio, and has a BA in history. Eckford served in the U.S. Army for five years, as a pay clerk and as an information specialist. Eckford has held various jobs throughout her life. She has been a waitress, history teacher, welfare worker, unemployment and employment interviewer, and a military reporter.



Ernest Green



Elizabeth Eckford

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 1958. In 1997, Elizabeth Eckford shared the Father Joseph Biltz Award (presented by the National Conference for Community and Justice) with Hazel Bryan Massery, a segregationist classmate who appears in the famous Will Counts photograph and during the reconciliation rally of 1997, the two former adversaries made speeches together.

In 1999, President Bill Clinton presented the nation's highest civilian award, the Congressional Gold Medal, to the members of the Little Rock Nine. Eckford started speaking about her experiences because of her interest in education. She has said that true reconciliation can occur if we honestly look back on our shared history. Eckford is currently a probation officer in Little Rock and is the mother of two sons.

Ernest G. Green earned his high school diploma from Central High School and received a B.S. in Social Science and a Masters in Sociology from Michigan State University. He also received Honorary Doctorates from Michigan State University, Tougaloo College and Central State University. He is the Managing Director of Public Finance for Lehman Brothers' Washington, D.C. office.

Several books, movies and documentaries have been produced chronicling Mr. Green and his eight classmates historic year at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas -- the most recent being the "Ernest Green Story", produced and distributed by the Walt Disney Corporation. The October 1996 issue of Black Enterprise Magazine featured Mr. Green as one of the top twenty-five African Americans on Wall Street and again in the October 2002 issue as one of the top 50 African Americans on Wall Street and again in 2006 as one of the 75 Most Powerful Blacks on Wall Street..

Prior to joining Lehman Brothers, Mr. Green was president of Ernest Green & Associates, a minority consulting firm that provided technical assistance in marketing, financial management and economic forecasting. Mr. Green served as Assistant Secretary of Labor for Employment and Training during the Carter Administration. Prior to his appointment as Assistant Secretary, Mr. Green served as Executive Director of the Recruitment and Training Program, Inc. (RTP, Inc.), an organization that recruits minorities for apprenticeship programs in the building trades.

Mr. Green presently serves on the Board of Directors of Fisk University, Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Network and Clark Atlanta University Board of Trustees. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Executive Leadership Council, and the National Association of Securities Professionals (NASP) of which he served as Chairman for two consecutive years. He has also served on the Board of Directors of the March of Dimes Foundation and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

Mr. Green is the recipient of numerous awards including the Urban League's Frederick Douglas Freedom Medal, and the John D. Rockefeller Public Service Award. At the age of seventeen, he was the youngest recipient of the NAACP's Spingarn Medal. The Boy Scouts of America honored Mr. Green with their highest rank of Eagle Scout. Mr. Green and his wife Phyllis live in Washington, D. C. and are the parents of three children.

Eckford and Green will be honored at a tribute dinner on Friday, October 5. The Celebration schedule is available on the Center's website www.gordonparkscenter.org and will be mailed out soon. Tickets for Gordon Parks Celebration events will go on sale September 17 and will be available at the Gordon Parks Center at FSCC and at The Country Cupboard, 12 N. Main, in downtown Fort Scott. For more information contact Warford at 223-2700, ext. 515 or see the website at gordonparkscenter.org.

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