

New coin honors determination

*By Peter Rexford
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There's little argument that education and determination are the keys to success. Trouble is, those who espouse that belief are usually the ones who are already educated. It's much harder for children to understand why it's important to be determined to learn.

Fifty years ago this year, a handful of determined students went so far as to risk their lives to attend school and learn.

In September 1957, nine young black youths set off for all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Ark., knowing they wouldn't be welcome. In fact, they were so unwanted that Gov. Orval Faubus had dispatched the state's National Guard to keep them out. Segregation was still in force in many areas of the South.

President Dwight Eisenhower countered with a federal force of the 101st Airborne Division he deployed to Little Rock. For weeks, each of the nine had a soldier escort. It worked, but only partially. Melba Patillo was stabbed and had acid sprayed in her eyes. The soldier escort flushed water over her eyes, preventing permanent blindness.

Looking past the threats and violence, as well as Faubus' continued efforts to block them, the black students returned. Several graduated with their class.

This month, the U.S. Mint is trying to revive the memory of the Little Rock Nine's stance with a commemorative silver dollar. The new coin features a dramatic stylized visual representative of the black student's experience. On the face is an image of 10 pairs of feet walking along a sidewalk. Nine pair belong to the students. Upon closer inspection, it's clear the 10th pair belongs to a U.S. soldier. Below the image is a row of nine stars symbolizing the Little Rock Nine. The reverse of the coin depicts the facade of the Central High building.

The Central High coin in high-mirror polished condition is currently available for \$39 directly from the Jefferson National Parks Association. Those interested can get more information or order via the Internet at: www.chscoin.jnpa.com or by calling toll free 1-866-716-1906.

One person who's sure to be interested in the silver coin is Melba Patillo — the student who was stabbed and had the acid thrown in her eyes. While it would be entirely understandable that she would never want to remember or revisit the hallways where she was threatened and assaulted, Patillo became determined to find a silver lining. She became an educator herself — a teacher at Central High. That kind of determination money can't buy.

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