

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Statement on the Death of Jefferson Thomas

September 6, 2010

Michelle and I are saddened by the passing of Jefferson Thomas, who, as one of the Little Rock Nine, took a stand against segregation and helped open the eyes of our Nation to the struggle for civil rights.

Mr. Thomas was just a teenager when he became one of the first African American students to enroll in Little Rock Central High School. Yet even at such a young age, he had the courage to risk his own safety, to defy a Governor and a mob, and to walk proudly into that school, even though it would have been far easier to give up and turn back. And through this simple act of pursuing an equal education, he and his fellow members of the Little Rock Nine helped open the doors of opportunity for their generation and for those that followed. The searing images of soldiers guarding students from those days will forever serve as a testament to the progress we've made, the barriers that previous generations have torn down, and the power of ordinary men and women to help us build a more perfect union.

Our Nation owes Mr. Thomas a debt of gratitude for the stand he took half a century ago and the leadership he showed in the decades since. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family.

Categories: Statements : Deaths :: Thomas, Jefferson.

Names: Obama, Michelle; Thomas, Jefferson.

Subjects: Civil rights : Civil rights movement; Civil rights : Racial equality.

DCPD Number: DCPD201000728.