

## Impact Statement

Zoe Fitzhugh, Grade 11.

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Acrylic, pen, watercolor on paper, 12 x 16 Inches.

Independence High School, Thompson's Station, TN

Unsung Hero: Kendall Reinhardt

While researching my selected hero, Ken Reinhardt, I discovered that he went to the same high school as my dad, Little Rock Central High. I was instantly drawn to his story even more because of this connection. In the day of Reinhardt, 1957, civil rights and segregation of African Americans was a prominent issue. Little Rock Central High was the first school in Arkansas to integrate African American students into their school population. As a result, they received a lot of criticism and the students, later renowned as the Little Rock Nine, faced harsh and violent discrimination. Ken Reinhardt was a good friend of the African American students, and fearlessly defended them and stood with them through the torment and ignorance that they experienced. He, too, was bullied, beaten, and threatened with death from the rest of the student body.

Today, Little Rock Central High continues to educate all the ethnicities of Arkansas. It now neighbors a historic center featuring information about the context of the problematic time period in which it withstood. However, there are still racial tensions; however, they are much more mild than in Reinhardt's time, but they are still there. My dad describes Little Rock, Arkansas as still being an economically segregated area. Even at my own high school I walk down the halls and hear several racist comments and jokes just in passing. Nobody should be subjected to ridicule for the color of their skin. Reinhardt was aware of this and fought for what he believed was equal justice. His efforts were not wasted; he contributed a significant amount to the realization of the inequality that existed, despite the environment being "integrated."

Being able to visit the school for myself was a very humbling experience. The school has preserved its architectural beauty and is a sight to behold. Walking along the pathways, it was bewildering to know that just over sixty years ago, Reinhardt and his friends walked the same paths everyday, knowing that they would encounter some form of aggressive oppression.

The visitors center, which is relatively new to the school grounds, had a lot of useful information regarding the time period. The people at the desk answered all of my questions and were very helpful. They gave me some free digital files about the school in the 1960's, which was extremely generous of them. Some books there also had some sections in which Reinhardt was mentioned: "Reinhardt, who in recent years has joined Eckford in public speaking programs, reminds his audience that the actions against black students were far more aggressive than those he or other whites received." "At Central High, Reinhardt's overt gestures of friendship with Eckford and other black students resulted in numerous threats against him and anonymous calls to his parents, as well as alienation from some classmates." - Central in Our Time: Voices from Central High 1957-59.

My idea for this work was to paint Little Rock Central High School where Reinhardt attended, since it is where his story takes place. The mascot for the school is a tiger, so I used a black and white tiger as symbolism of the integration of African American students and white students in the school.

Creating this work showed me how much courage people can show in the most unfair of times and I hope that this same courage will spread to my own generation.