

Tell your kid about Ruby Bridges,  
the first black child at an all-white  
public elementary school in Louisiana.

She turned 66 this year.

She's only 66.

66.



On November 14, 1960, a 6-year-old girl walked into William J. Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans. That seemingly mundane moment would shake the community and change the city forever.

Before a first-grader named Ruby Bridges entered that school, the state of Louisiana had tried to stop her and other black students from enrolling in all-white schools. After the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision mandated desegregation of public schools, Louisiana and many Southern states passed laws to close schools facing racial integration. After those laws were overturned by the federal courts, the day finally came when the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* would be met in New Orleans.

"Racism is a grown-up disease. Let's stop using our kids to spread it."

- *Ruby Bridges*

"I think it's fair to say that if it hadn't been for you guys I might not be here and we wouldn't be looking at this together."

- *President Barack Obama*

During Ruby Bridges' visit to the White House

### **More of the story:**

In August 1955, African American parents in New Orleans, Louisiana sued the Orleans Parish School Board for failing to desegregate local schools in compliance with the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The following February, a federal court ordered the school board to desegregate the city's schools. For the next four years, the school board and state lawmakers defied the federal court's order and resisted school desegregation.

On May 16, 1960, Judge J. Skelly Wright issued a federal order demanding the gradual desegregation of New Orleans public schools, beginning with the first grade -- but the Orleans Parish School Board convinced Judge Wright to accept an even more limited desegregation plan, requiring African American students to apply for transfer into all-white schools. Only five of the 137 African American first graders who applied for a transfer were accepted; four agreed to attend, including six-year-old Ruby Bridges, who was the sole Black student assigned to William Frantz Elementary.

### **Learn more:**

<https://www.rubybridges.com/>

Video: <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/video/ruby-bridges-goes-to-school/>

Video: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/civil-rights-pioneer-ruby-bridges-on-activism-in-the-modern-era>

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/neworleans-ruby-bridges-and-integration-new-orleans-schools/>

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/ruby-bridges>

<https://www.nps.gov/people/rubybridges.htm>

<https://rubybridgesasingh.weebly.com/ruby-bridges-foundation.html>

Ruby had thought that what she did was not really that important, and she never would think about what she went through; however, that changed when in the early 1990s. Ruby's brother died due to a drug related shooting. This was a life altering event for Ruby. Her brother's daughters went to William Frantz, so she would drop them off there everyday for school, since her brother could not. It was then that she noticed the issues facing children and adults in urban areas. She also began to put her past experiences into perspective. The neighborhood around William Frantz had more poverty and crime rates, so she started volunteering at William Frantz because she didn't want the school to become segregated again. Because of her inspiration to help kids achieve their hopes and dreams, she established the Ruby Bridges Foundation. The Ruby Bridges foundation had a vision to give kids an equal opportunity to succeed. She began to

accomplish her vision at William Frantz by opening an after school multi-cultural art club. She then went to other schools to promote cultural understanding through community service so that racism can hopefully be eliminated. Her foundation is still running today, and she now travels with her teacher from elementary school, Mrs. Henry, to talk about her story and ways to eliminate racism.

A report put out by the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research at the University of Albany suggests that some school districts are showing a trend of increasing school segregation. Lets's hope that Foundations such as Ruby Bridges' will work hard to achieve complete integration and provide all children with an opportunity for equal education.