

Document A: Eyes on the Prize Transcript

Excerpt from the well-known 14-hour PBS documentary Eyes on the Prize, made in 1987. Henry Hampton, an African-American filmmaker, produced the film. The "chili incident" mentioned here occurred in December 1957.

NARRATOR: At school, the black teenagers were still being harassed by a few determined whites. Shortly before Christmas, Minnijean Brown struck back.

ERNEST GREEN [Little Rock Nine member]: For a couple of weeks, there had been a number of white kids following us. A series of hassles, continuous— Calling us niggers. "Nigger, nigger, nigger," one right after the other. And Minnie was – Minnijean Brown was in the lunch line with me. And I was in front of Minnie, and Minnie was behind me. And there was this white kid—fella—who was much shorter than Minnie—Minnie was about five foot ten. And this fella couldn't have been more than five-five, five-four. And he reminded me of a small dog, yelping at somebody's leg. And Minnie had just picked up her chili.

MELBA PATTILLO BEALS [Little Rock Nine member]: I could just see her little head click. She consciously said to herself, "No, Minnijean, if you do this, you know you won't be here." But then, this was the time of the year when we all didn't want to be there.

ERNEST GREEN: And before I could even say, "You know, Minnie, why don't you tell him to shut up?" Minnie had taken this chili, dumped it on this dude's head. It was just absolute silence in the place. And then **the help**—all black—broke into applause. And the white kids—the other white kids there—didn't know what to do. It was the first time that anybody, I'm sure, had seen somebody black retaliate in that sense.

CRAIG RAINS [white Central High student]: When Minnijean was kicked out of school following the chili incident, maybe 15, 20 students brought cards and gave them out that said, "One down, eight to go." When school was out in May, they still hadn't given up the fight. They came out with a two-colored card that said, "**Ike**, go home, Liberation day May 29, 1958," which was graduation day. They were still fighting the battle even then.

Vocabulary

the help: out-of-date term for service workers; cafeteria workers in this case

Ike: nickname for President Dwight Eisenhower

Document B: Suspension Notice

Days after this suspension notice was written, the Little Rock school board expelled Minniejean Brown from Central High School.

Suspension Notice
LITTLE ROCK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Date February 6, 1958

Name of Pupil Brown, Minniejean Birthdate Sept. 11, 1941 Grade 11th
(Last) (First) (Middle)

Name of Parent or Guardian Mr. & Mrs. W.B. Brown Address 1117 Ringo Phone (unlisted)

DEAR PATRON:

It becomes my duty to inform you that Minniejean Brown has been suspended from Central High School, for the following reasons:

REASONS:

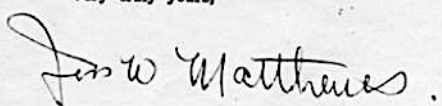
Reinstated on probation January 13, 1958, with the agreement that she would not retaliate verbally or physically, to any harassment but would leave the matter to school authorities to handle.

After provocation of girl student, ^{she} called the girl "white trash", after which the girl threw her purse at Minniejean.

Pupils in the Little Rock Public Schools who fail to adjust to their school program may be suspended from school for an indefinite period by the school principal. This pupil cannot again enter Little Rock Public Schools except by written permission from the Superintendent.

In order that this pupil may be reinstated in school, the parent or guardian must accompany her to the office of the Superintendent of Schools, Department of Pupil Personnel and Attendance, 800 Louisiana Street, Little Rock, Arkansas, for the purpose of discussing the problems relative to this suspension.

Very truly yours,


Principal

CC: Superintendent of Schools
Director of Pupil Personnel

Vocabulary

probation: a period of supervision to ensure good behavior

harassment: aggressive pressure or intimidation

provocation: action to deliberately make someone irritated or angry

Document C: *Look* magazine

The June 24, 1958 edition of Look magazine featured a report by 16-year-old Minnijean Brown titled “What they did to me in Little Rock” as told to Look staff writer J. Robert Moskin.

The last day [at Central], I went to school in a happy mood. When I would walk into the building, I used to get that “here-we-go-again” feeling.

At my locker, there was a blonde, Frankie Gregg. She would follow me up to the third floor every morning, saying, “Nigger, nigger, nigger,” all the way. This morning, I didn’t think anything about it when she and some other kids did the same thing. But this time, she even stepped on my heels and ran right into me. Then she said if I did that again, she’d beat me up. I didn’t answer her even then.

When I went into my home room, she kept yelling from the door. Finally, I turned to the girl and said, “Don’t say anything more to me, white trash.”

Then I walked to my seat. Frankie got so mad she started screaming at me. She threw her pocketbook and hit me in the back of the head. My first impulse was to beat her with it, but I just picked it up and threw it down again and walked to the office. Frankie and the guard came into the office too.

Frankie said, “Minnijean called me ‘white trash.’” I said, “Frankie has been calling me ‘nigger’ for a week and threw her pocketbook at me after I called her ‘white trash.’” Frankie refused to apologize. I said I would if she would. I guess I was supposed to apologize whether she did or not...

That night, the radio said I had been suspended... Several days later, the school board expelled me for the rest of the term. I haven’t been back to Central High since.

Document D: Press Conference

During the 40th anniversary of the integration of Central High School in September 1997, the Little Rock Nine answered journalists' questions at a press conference.

Reporter: One of the greatest stories of the Civil Rights Movement is the story of you and the bowl of chili in the cafeteria. One thing I'm curious about is, I've read it a couple of different ways, in terms of, whether that specific incident was responsible for your expulsion or whether it was something else?

Minnijean Brown: Well I think the reason for my expulsion was that I was tall, beautiful and proud. [Applause] And I've had a lot of time to think about that and I'm not going to go through the story of the chili because the chili incident is symbolic of what happens when one is tall, beautiful and proud, and unlike the **stereotype** of what a young black women should be. I've tried to explain that to my kids, I was not a violent person—I was **steeped in** non-violence—but I did have emotions.

Vocabulary

stereotype: a widely held but oversimplified belief

steeped in: to be surrounded or influenced by something

Document E: Sociologist

Excerpt from Beth Roy's book Bitters in the Honey: Tails of Hope, Disappointment Across Divides of Race and Time, published by The University of Arkansas Press in 1999. Roy, a sociologist, interviewed Central High School students and employees years later to understand how people experienced the school's desegregation.

[Minnijean's] **defiance** was not contained; it spilled over to become a force in a fierce contest of realities. One white Central student, searching for a way to explain her hatred for Minnijean, finally burst out, "She walked the halls as if she belonged there."

"There was plenty of room for all of us there," Helen [a white student] said, more reasonably. "The school was big enough to accommodate everybody, so who cares?" But the implication was strong that it was fine for "them" to come to "our" school. The problem arose if "they" acted like they were there by right, not by generosity.

My white interviewees commonly expressed this idea by reference to concepts of "place":

Jane: With Minnijean, I remember not feeling very **empathetic** that she left. Sort of, stereotypically that she asked for it, that she didn't know her place, do you know what I'm saying? That kind of feeling....

"They liked us," said Evelyn Armon, a black woman who was a school administrator in the district for forty-nine years, "as long as we stayed in our place." Segregation represented an ordering of the universe, a way of naming social **hierarchies** and the location within them of every individual, whether black or white. Comments about Minnijean's person and attitude, definitions of her as an individual, combine with comments about her "place" to assign her forcefully to a social position.

Vocabulary

defiance: open resistance, bold disobedience

empathetic: the ability to share another person's feelings

hierarchies: levels with different importance and value

Document	Sourcing	Corroboration: How does this document confirm or contradict the other documents?	Reliability: How reliable is this document as evidence of why Brown was expelled?
A	Who created the document? When? For what purpose?		
B	Who created the document? When? For what purpose?		
C	Who created the document? When? For what purpose?		

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E	Who created the document? When? For what purpose?		

Final Response

Why was Minnijean Brown expelled from school? Use evidence from at least three documents to support your answer.