Contents

1. Introduction: Women on the Left/Women on the Right — 1
Kathleen M. Blee

PART I: What's in a Name?

2. "I Am Kathy Power": Expressions of Radicalism in a Counterculture Community — 19
Pam E. Goldman

3. "Something about the Word": African American Women and Feminism — 38
Shirley A. Jackson

4. Winona LaDuke — 51
Sonya Paul and Robert Perkinson

PART II: Personal and Political

5. African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Spontaneity and Emotion in Social Movement Theory — 65
Belinda Robnett

6. Goody Two-Shoes and the Hell-Raisers: Women's Activism, Women's Reputations in Little Rock — 96
Beth Roy

7. Reflections of an AIM Activist: Has It All Been Worth It? — 133
Karren Baird-Olson

Chapter Six

Goody Two-Shoes and the Hell-Raisers

Women's Activism, Women's Reputations in Little Rock

Beth Roy

"You know, this will probahly be something that I made up in my head," Susan said apologetically, "but I can just remember her attitude. It was just a haughty, snotty, look-down-your-nose-at-me attitude that she had."

She was speaking of her high school classmate, Minnijean Brown. Minnijean was one of nine black students who integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, the year Susan was a senior. Susan's recollections of Minnijean echoed those of many of her white classmates as I talked with them about their brush with history at Central High.

Their hostility toward Minnijean was matched only by their contempt for another girl, a white junior named Sammie Dean Parker. "Who were the segregationist student leaders?" I asked Nancy, another senior that year. "Sammie Dean Parker was the only one I knew," she replied. "Sammie Dean Parker was taken to jail that day. She was kicking, spitting, scratching, and the policeman couldn't do anything with her, she was so out of control."

When Little Rock's Central High School was desegregated in 1957, I was a teenager fresh from the South, glued to a television in my northeastern college dormitory. Staunch rows of National Guardsmen sliced statically across the screen, standing militarily erect in front of the magnificent school building. Governor Orval Faubus's serious face appeared, reading earnest messages of resolution to "protect the peace" and prevent the undemocratic imposition of integration on the good

citizens of his state. Network commentators, all men, read somber but excited reports of late-breaking news.

But when the cameras turned to the streets around the school, the images were quite different. Girls and women moved through the crowds. Elizabeth Eckford, a frail-looking black teenager clad in the sort of big gored skirt fashionable at the time, clutched her schoolbooks and clenched her jaw as she was turned away from the front door by the Guards. A white girl her age screamed at her, open-mouthed. The mob of women and men noisily hounded her retreat. One gray-haired white woman shielded the terrified Elizabeth, turning to chastise the crowd as she accompanied the girl onto an empty bus.

Over the next months, the news media continued to report an unusual amount of activity by women: Daisy Bates headed the state NAACP, for example, and Margaret Jackson the hastily formed Mother's League of Central High, an offshoot of the Citizens Council's fight to preserve segregation. Inside the school Elizabeth Huckaby, the liberal vice principal, did daily damage control.[1] When the high schools were closed the following year, Adolphine Fletcher Terry, a doyen of Little Rock society, announced, "It is evident that the men are incapable of doing anything. I have sent for the young ladies." She formed the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, studied the political process and helped to elect a school board and a state legislature that removed the roadblocks to integration (Ashmore 1988, 281).

That women populated the stage on which the drama of Central High was played is not a coincidence. School desegregation was a struggle that especially evoked women's activism; who else could better claim the moral authority to speak up when the site of contention was the domain of children? But the women who did speak up faced a particular set of dilemmas. It was the 1950s; the ideal of white womanhood pictured Mother in the kitchen, tending traditional values along with the home fires. To enter into public discourse was itself an act of defiance, therefore, and especially problematic for segregationist women who, by weighing in to defend the status quo, betrayed it.

These paradoxes of women's radicalism shade and inform the stories that white women graduates of Central High tell about those times. Everyone made choices about how to act during that year of crisis. What women say about their own behavior and about that of their peers tells several other stories, too: about women's lives then and now, about relations between white and black Americans in the second half of the

twentieth century, about the nature of political action itself. By focusing on tales told about Sammie Dean and Minnijean by their classmates, as well as on the stories two of those classmates tell about themselves, I explore the moments when all those themes came together.

Meaning and Emotion

Over a period of three years in the early 1990s, I recorded forty oral histories of or long interviews with people, both black and white, who were involved with the integration of Central High School in Little Rock in 1957. My interviewees ranged from Governor Faubus and white adults in the mob outside the school to the African American registrar (for almost fifty years) in the black high school; from people who worked for and with the NAACP to bring about desegregation to students who chose in subsequent years to continue attending segregated black high schools when they might have enrolled in Central High. The single largest group were white students at Central High in the year of drama, 1957–58.

The good news and the bad news about my interviews is that they resulted in miles of tape and reams of transcripts, the oral historian's bane. To find my way through the tangle, I devised a method of starting from emotional "hot spots," recurring topics about which people spoke with passion. Never were the women alumnae of Central High hotter than when they spoke of their two classmates, Minnijean and Sammie Dean. What exactly did their hostility express, not so much about the women of whom they spoke, but about themselves and about the intense period of history through which they lived?

Storytelling is a political act.[2] How we portray the past, ourselves, and our fellows can defend or contest social arrangements. Often, I found "errors" in my interviewees' accounts; they placed the National Guard in the wrong place at the wrong time; insisted people were where they couldn't have been at a crucial moment; announced that one of the Nine was an "oursider" planted inside Central High for strategic reasons, while other people attested to that very person's having been born and reared right up the street.

It is precisely in these distortions of "fact" that political arguments reside (Irwin-Zarecka 1994). "Memory fails," wrote Karen Fields (1994, 89),

> leaving blanks, and memory collaborates with forces separate from actual past events, forces such as an individual's wishes, a group's suggestions, a moment's connotations, an environment's clues, an emotion's demands, a self's evolution, a mind's manufacture of order, and yes, even a researcher's objectives.

How memory is shaped by emotion is full of meaning, because individual emotion is linked to social life. What we think and feel, how we interpret our lived experience, is deeply informed by who we are as social creatures at a moment in time. Psychology itself, that most personal of arenas, is a social construct, because the beliefs and attitudes we learn in the course of social interaction, in which I include domestic interaction, fundamentally shape the direction of individual lives and the feelings we have along the way. The lessons we learn, especially those that appear in memory later as "truths," are not accidental. Instead, they mediate social relations of power and hierarchy with great force and constitute a concrete link between individual consciousness and social structure.

"Any mistake is meaningful," Fields (1994, 93) argues. "[M]emory 'tainted' by interest is a dead-serious party to the creation of something true. The 'mistakes' it may embody represent an imperfection only in light of the particular purposes scholarship has." Let us explore some "tainted" stories, reading between the lines the personal interests that shaped them and the social history lived by the ordinary people who told them.

Goody Two-Shoes and the Troublemakers

When school opened in the fall of 1957, Central High teemed with ordinary people, two thousand white students wishing to enjoy the dating and sports and, maybe, scholarship of their high school years and, most of all, to be left in peace by the adult world they would all too soon be joining. The latter was a wish not to be granted. For a variety of reasons, not least among them Little Rock's reputation for peaceful race relations, the school had been chosen as a prototype for desegregation. Characteristically, most of those who were students on opening day did not believe themselves to be history makers, even in the midst of mayhem. Said Helen,[3] a white woman I interviewed who was a

senior that year, "I went to school, just nothing, no big deal. I didn't see if there was commotion going on up here, I didn't see it. 'Cause I came in the side door, went to my locker, did my thing. . . ." Literally sidestepping history did not constitute a position, as Helen saw it. She insisted she was neutral on the question of desegregation itself: "There was plenty of room for all of us there. Now, I'm not trying to be Goody Two-Shoes, think about it. The school was big enough to accommodate everybody, so who cares?"

But some among the students clearly did care, and they protested hard. While grownup mobs raged outside the building, inside the black students were called names, tripped, kicked, and spat upon. As the year wore on, harassment took a more organized aspect. Printed cards appeared bearing racist slogans, for instance. Helen showed me one she got after Minnijean was expelled. "One Down . . . Eight to Go," it boasted. Another sported this ditty:

> Little nigger at Central High
> Has got mighty free with his eye.
> Winks at white girls,
> Grabs their blond curls:
> Little nigger sure is anxious to die.

All my inquiries about where the cards came from were in vain. Who had brought them into the school? How had Helen come by the ones she'd carefully (but shamefacedly) preserved in her yearbook? Had anyone tried to recruit my interviewees to distribute cards or join other protests? Everybody insisted she knew nothing about it, knew nobody involved, could name no names—except one, a girl named Sammie Dean Parker.

I had first learned that Sammie existed through a series of enigmatic references in a book called *Crisis at Central High*. Written by Elizabeth Huckaby, the vice principal of the school, it is a day-by-day account that was later popularized as a made-for-TV movie starring Joanne Woodward. Responsibly protecting the student's identity throughout, Mrs. Huckaby makes reference to a "small pony-tailed girl" who irked the authorities in many ways, even riling the endlessly patient vice principal herself. As Mrs. Huckaby's account proceeds, this girl becomes "the pony-tailed segregationist leader" (Huckaby 1980, 135). Years later, when I interviewed her, Mrs. Huckaby recalled her student with

better humor. But still she referred to her as "the girl who was so aggressive during all of this."

Sammie's peers shared none of Mrs. Huckaby's reticence as they reminisced about their classmate:

> *SUSAN:* Sammie Dean—this is confidential, right? Sammie Dean did not have the best—how do you put that?—reputation in the world.
> *BR:* She was a segregationist activist.
> *SUSAN:* Right. And plus, she also had other, uh, unredeeming qualities.
> *BR:* Would you say what?
> *SUSAN:* Well, she was the girl about town, we'll put it that way. And I was Miss Goody Two-Shoes, what can I say? Sweet sixteen and never been kissed and the whole nine yards. But, anyway, on one of the occasions that happened, they drug Sammie Dean kicking and screaming out of the schoolhouse. Probably the police or the troops or whoever, but anyway, it was one of the, quote, authorities. And she went kickin' and screaming out of the schoolhouse where she crawled out on them and they caught her.
> *SARA MAY:* Now I didn't know her, she was pretty, she was such a little doll, I remember she was *so* pretty and so cute. But they were what we considered white trash, really.

Susan's reference to herself as "Goody Two-Shoes" reminded me of Helen's use of the same term. Although Helen was talking about her position on desegregation while Susan hinted at sexual matters, both expressed something similar about innocence.[4] In the stories many of these white women told me, desegregation was forced on them. They acquiesced, innocently, minding their own business and the letter of the law. Nonetheless, they were treated badly, vilified in the press, represented as uncouth protesters. In fact, many claimed, the mob was made up of out-of-towners. They themselves had no beef with black people. They'd always had black people working in their homes, and folks of both races were good to each other. The trouble started, as they saw it, when the black students acted badly.

Actually, it was only one student who acted badly, as they remembered it: Minnijean Brown. The rest were fine, quiet, respectful, demure. If only Minnijean had stayed in her place, there'd have been no trouble. Not everyone blamed the Nine for the trouble; some placed responsibility on the NAACP, Govenor Faubus, the school authorities, or that mythic "outsider" who appears so regularly as a character in dramas of

social contention. But many of the students did blame their black classmates, and those who did universally focused on Minnijean.

Said Susan:

> I remember, uh, what was that girl's name? Big girl, Minnijean. She had an attitude, it was like, Okay white folks, here I am. [. . .]
>
> You know this will probably be something that I made up in my head, that I'm making up in my head now, but I can just remember her attitude. . . . I can't recall words that happened, it was just a haughty, snotty, look-down-your-nose-at-me attitude that she had.

Joyce spoke of Minnijean with more camaraderie, but in similar terms:

> Physically, Minnijean was a large girl. I was a large girl at the time; I've always been overweight. And Minnijean had, I think, more of a presence physically than the other girls did. I also think Minnijean had more, she exuded more of a sense of herself than I remember the other girls' doing. It was a confidence-slash-arrogance. The segregationists probably perceived it as arrogance, which they didn't like; I perceived it as confidence in herself, self-assuredness.

Martha was one of very few Central High grads who went on to a professional career. She theorized about her classmates'—and her own—view of Minnijean:

> I would describe her unlike all the rest of the blacks. I'd put it in class terms. First of all, she was overweight, so that made her more—what?—easy to tease. She was a stereotype of a Mammy, a young Mammy by white standards. Remember how there used to be the Mammy with the . . . [sketches big belly with her hands]? Okay? Because she was big and she was overweight, and she was more challenging, more asserting, she was more set. Whereas the others were very almost docile.

Mammy and White Trash: Troublemakers Disavowed

What do these descriptions of Sammie Dean and Minnijean tell us about the women who spoke them and about women's activism in the Central High struggle? Although Minnijean is cast as the problem, Sammie Dean, too, is held responsible. Minnijean may have behaved provocatively, but the women of Central High saw Sammie Dean's response as unacceptable, a way of acting that they themselves eschewed. Taken

together, these two assessments defined black womanhood and white trash and communicated a thick bundle of beliefs about what it was to be white women in Little Rock in the 1950s, as well as challenges to those beliefs. Three aspects of the women's accounts are especially vivid expressions of underlying meaning: their references to physicality, sexuality, and class.

Right along with the person herself, memories of both Sammie Dean and Minnijean are pinned to body size. Minnijean is large, Sammie Dean small. So central were physical images that they sometimes were the hook for fishing up the controversial classmate's name itself: "What was that girl's name? Big girl, Minnijean." Sammie Dean was small, cute, pony-tailed. Minnijean was large, overweight, Mammy-like. Both girls acted in the physical world and in that respect both challenged rules of femininity. Despite herself, neither one could avoid confrontation. Sammie tangled with policemen, fellow students, and vice principals. Minnijean talked back, pushed back, and eventually dropped a bowl of chili on the lap of a white boy who had tormented her once too often. Both girls were ultimately expelled, Minnijean for the chili incident, Sammie for distributing the cards after Minnijean left, saying, "One down, eight to go."[5] Both young women were formidable.

Right along with descriptions of physical bearing were references to their sexuality, sometimes overt ("she was the girl about town"), sometimes subtle ("she was *so* pretty and so cute"). Several people claimed Minnijean left school because she became pregnant: "She also had a baby in May, or right after graduation," insisted Sara May. "We knew a nurse that was there, she *did* have a baby." Both the tone and the context in which these comments were made implied that Sammie Dean's and Minnijean's sexuality explained away the significance of their activism.

Class appeared in the almost universal description of Sammie Dean as "white trash." What that meant was elaborated in an exchange between Sara May and her friend Helen: "They were what we considered white trash, really," said Sara May, and Helen responded: "I don't know why. They were extremely well-heeled. He was a big railroad man. They had money." Said Sara May, "Well, probably because of the way she acted and the way her mother acted." Class was equated with women's behavior. Minnijean, too, was considered déclassé—"a more working-class, less educated type of black woman, a young Mammy by white standards." Let us look more closely at each of these attributions.

That Sammie Dean's and Minnijean's body sizes were noteworthy speaks of an experience familiar to most women in America. How big we are, how thin or fat, tall or short, compels our consciousness, because physical characteristics are closely bound up with how our femininity is viewed and how, in consequence, we evaluate our own sense of worth. When people told me that Sammie Dean was small and cute, they conveyed indirectly a particularly damning critique of her behavior. How striking it was to them that someone who fit the physical standard for American female approval should act in so unwomanly a manner—kicking and screaming and putting herself in the way of being dragged out of the schoolhouse.

Identifying Minnijean as big and overweight similarly served to discredit her, although in this case very directly. Big women are figures of fun, and she was "easy to tease." Mammy carries a particular weight. She is one of the few black characters in American racial mythology who is forgiven for being overbearing, because she dominates in the service of motherhood. She can be allowed to dominate, because, unlike a "real" (read white) mother whose power might be genuinely threatening, Mammy's power is ultimately none at all—she is a slave. All the comfort of forceful mothering is therefore at the service of her white charges, who are nonetheless securely in charge. Indeed, they are in the ultimate control. If mothering is constructed as a natural instinct, the designation of Mammy has succeeded in subverting that instinct, severing servant from the mothering service of her own offspring and reconstructing her "natural" instincts to the benefit of her white masters. Unlike their biological mothers, she has no choice but to be unambivalently theirs (hooks 1981).

But Minnijean could not be tamed by the label "Mammy." Her defiance was not confined; it spilled over to become a force in a fierce contest of realities. One white interviewee, 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 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":

MARTHA: 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.

BARBARA: I jnst felt tbat she was different. . . . I felt she was probably one of the most out-of-place people in the whole school.

"Place" was an important concept in the South of that time. 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 consign her forcefully to a social position.

What place was that, exactly? Overtly, "place" was, and still is, a euphemism for racial dominance. But there is another sense in which the notion appears in my interviews, and that is about class. Significantly, just as often as her white classmates expressed animosity toward Minnijean in terms of her deviance from racial proprieties, they talked contemptuously of Sammie Dean in class terms. One clue to the link between those two conceptions is contained in things people said about their families' personal relations with black people. Helen identified her family as working class, with dignity: "If you want to say a railroad track, I lived on the wrong side of town, so to speak, in that town's way of talking. But that didn't make us trash or anything. We just lived in the older homes." Were there any black people in her life? I asked.

At one time we did have a maid, Odessa. Now, although we were middle to lower class, people had maids, right? They came in and they did the heavy work and they did the ironing.

I was always taught to respect my elders, and Mother didn't differentiate between black and white.

Many people emphasized to me how well their parents treated the family servant. "We had a maid, Lucy," said Sara May. "She was the best ole nigger-Mammy, is what she was. I mean she was wonderful. We had her almost until she died. She took care of me, she loved me, I loved her." But however much Sara May loved Lucy, she was not confused about injunctions against socializing with blacks:

SARA MAY: I don't remember any particular thing my parents said. I was just brought up to know you didn't associate with them.

> Our maid was wonderful, and my mother took, we took Christmas food and clothing and everything to them every year at Christmas.
>
> *HELEN:* We took care of them.
>
> *SARA MAY:* We took care of them and all that, but, you know, they were inferior. That's all there is to it.
>
> Back then it was okay. Now, I look back, and I do feel sorry for them. I think it's a shame it has to be that way, but it is and it still is, for the most part.

Sara May and Helen's stories contained a number of strategic layers. On the one hand, they were presenting themselves in a good light, arguing that white people in their South were benevolent, not "trash." But at the same time, in tone and posture, they also expressed discomfort with the southernness of their attitudes back then. "They were inferior. That's all there is to it," said Sara May in such a way as to suggest that their view back tben was not their view now but that they should be excused for what they thought back then, even though the consequences of what they thought had mostly not yet changed. When she used the phrase "nigger-Mammy" she spoke with a certain self-consciousness, mocking herself, but also defying my condemnation. Often people said, "That's just the way it was" in one breath and in the next defined nuances of their culpability in "the way it was." "I never used the word nigger in all my youth," Susan told me. "If I did I would have had my teeth knocked down my throat; my parents wouldn't have stood for it." Unwittingly damning herself with faint praise, Helen told me how upset she'd been when her father said "nigger" in front of her son:

> He doesn't say Negro, he says nigger. And my son, that beautiful little blond-headed, blue-eyed boy, I can remember the first time he said it, it just killed me. And I said, "Daddy! Don't teach him to say that. He's going to have to be around them, and I don't want you teaching him that word."

But at the same time Helen and Sara May and Susan defined with specificity the degrees of their own racism ("I never thought I was a racist, but . . ." Helen said, breathing noisily through her lips in perplexity, "I still haven't thought about that yet. I don't know if I am or not"), they argued implicitly that the arrangement back then worked. Black and white people got along fine before desegregation, they suggested, remembering how they themselves got along with Odessa or Lucy. These asymmetrical relationships between white families and black servants, often the only interpersonal contact white children had with black peo-

ple, were central in constructing a certain ideology about the racial order in the South: The proper arrangement of power was white dominance (in the most benign version, as employers); the proper role for whites was gentility and for blacks service; the proper site for interaction between the races was on white domestic territory. Finally, bolstering this ideology was a prevalent myth: that these relations were equally agreeable to both blacks and whites ("She loved me, I loved her").

Taken all in all, this set of ideas described a social hierarchy and justified punitive acts against black people who failed to play their assigned role, who expressed dissatisfaction with the status quo, for instance, by enrolling in Central High—and acting as if they belonged there. The other side of the coin, however, was the way in which this prescribed racial order helped to construct a certain moral control of the behavior of disadvantaged whites as well. The very proprieties of white people's treatment of blacks—from generosity toward those who served domestically to intolerance for a lack of deference in return, from sexual prohibitions against miscegenation to tacit acceptance of the sexual exploitation of black women by white men—contained within them an underlying set of rules that demarcated class among whites. One qualified for "superior" status vis-à-vis black people if—and only if—one acted with gentility. That these white families "took care of" their black servants (that fact associating them with a thick packet of social and ethical standards clustering around acts of generosity) in one sweep both defined black people as inferior and themselves as having standing on the white class ladder. They were "middle to lower class" whites, not white trash. White trash behavior—rowdiness in public, loose sexual mores, the behavior on which Sammie's classmates commented in their very first evocations of her—constituted a set of rules that my white interviewees recognized clearly and debated, obeyed and contested in very fine gradations. It is not insignificant that the everyday behaviors out of which the categories were constructed occurred on domestic terrain and were performed by women—an example of how acts at home enforce public power relations, which in turn dictate domestic dynamics. When racial change hit the "normalcy" of Central High, the white women students, for the first time, found themselves on a public stage in which to demonstrate their acceptance or resistance of the old behavioral standards through the medium of taking positions, passively or actively, about changes in the racial order. How they put the two togethet, whethet they acted as ladies ot as white ttash as they exptessed

their attitudes toward desegregation, constituted a rough sketch of their personal life plans, which were actively challenged at that moment in history.

Minnijean signaled that challenge when she betrayed the rules by which her racial "place" had traditionally been assigned—not so much to remain segregated as to remain grateful. At the same time, Sammie Dean challenged the social order, paradoxically, as she sought to uphold it in the form of segregation. It was not that she protested that was most significant but how she protested—without gentility:

> *NANCY:* Sammie Dean Parker was taken to jail that day. She was kicking, spitting, scratching, and the policeman conldn't do anything with her, she was so out of control.
>
> She came out the front entrance, the main entrance, and she was screaming at these black students as they were being led away. That they could not enter school. A policeman had walked up to her—I don't know what she was screaming, but she was screaming at them. I don't know what she had in her hand; she was throwing something. But nevertheless, he told her, you know, she had to stop and calm down and everything. Well, she kicked him. He grabbed her by the shoulders trying to calm her down, and she cussed him out. And then she started spitting on him and things of that nature, and he couldn't do anything with her, so he just took her and took her to jail.

She spit and fought and cussed; she attacked policemen and got arrested. The old class and race order was continually reproduced through daily acts of gratitude by black people and gentility by whites. Minnijean's behavior stood squarely outside that paradigm. Sammie Dean's both defied and, paradoxically, fit it. By all her physical acts of defiance, Sammie Dean confirmed the caricature of "white trash" behavior at the same time that she demonstrated that what always had stood behind gentility was force, in the form first of legalities and ultimately of violence. When the law failed, people resorted, as they historically had, to physical acts of resistance, as did Sammie. That unpleasant task was traditionally left to "poor white trash," allowing the higher classes to keep untarnished the distinguishing customs of generosity and niceness.

Somehow, though, that old design didn't work in 1957. Sammie Dean cut close to her women classmate's bone. Yes, she was acting as white trash is known to act. Yet to describe it that way did not resolve a certain discomfort. People talked about her too frequently, with too

much contempt, telling thereby another story within their story. Familiar acts in changing times take on new meanings. Why else did the women of Central High focus so contemptuously and universally on Sammie Dean's behavior?

If the social order was constructed in part through certain acts, it is noteworthy that the acts I've noted were performed by women. Indeed, gentility was a deeply gendered act; men could be rough-and-tumble while women carried the torch of right behavior. In Arkansas as in many other cultures, power relations in society were signified and transmitted by the actions of women,[6] in ways very similar to the construction of white social life through the control of black people's behavior.[7] From the most charged (sexuality) to the most assumed (race relations) to the most banal (salutations), white women's behavior was minutely judged because how they behaved was a measure of the social standing of their families.

All through judgments of the women's behavior, in references both to body size and to class, is laced commentary on their sexuality. How big or small they were is spoken of descriptively; their class status is analyzed in terms of observable behavior. But sexuality falls into the realm of reputation, which is an amalgam of perception, hearsay, and imagination. Of all the arbiters of social status, women's sexuality is the most potent, at the same time that it is often the most fictionalized. Sammie Dean's peers disavowed her activism by slandering her reputation. "Sammie Dean did not have the best—how do you put that?—reputation in the world. . . . Well, she was the girl about town, we'll put it that way." Markers of sexual doubtfulness go way beyond sexual behavior itself, many of them looping around to supply implicit meaning to comments about appearance and class: "She was such a little doll, I remember she was *so* pretty and so cute. But they were what we considered white trash, really."

It was not insignificant that Minnijean was large, Sammie Dean small. Mammy is the essence of a desexualized black woman. Black women, in the classic southern construction (and its descendants today), are either asexual matrons or supersexual wantons. Their sexuality is denied or demeaned. Minnijean's sexuality was referenced only in terms of illegitimate motherhood. On the other hand, sexuality (at least heterosexuality) is sanctified for white women if they belong to certain classes and behave certain ways. White-trash woman is like thin black woman; she smacks of sexuality, but of a cheap kind.

There are many indications that Minnijean did not have a baby right out of high school (for one thing, she graduated in New York, not Little Rock, and a year later than Helen and Sara May), and Sammie Dean married the boyfriend with whom she had gone steady throughout that time. Their classmates may have known something less obvious about them; rumor generally has some kernel of truth to it, however distorted. But it seems likely that the personal reputations assigned to Sammie Dean and Minnijean served metaphoric purposes. Susan and Helen contrasted their own behavior and status with their classmates', construing themselves as Goody Two-Shoes, the opposite of troublemakers. At the same time that the aspersions cast on Sammie Dean and Minnijean's sexual lives served to contain and trivialize the credibility of their actions in the social world, those same expressions of disapproval also defined the speakers as not-out-of-control, not-rebels.

Raising Hell while Avoiding Trouble

Female sexuality, controlled, serves social functions; uncontrolled, it is trouble, whispering of a social order out of order. Unbridled sexuality is a mark of male vitality, not troubling, perhaps even relieving. Boys will be boys, after all, and isn't it better that they blow off steam that way than some others? Gendered double standards are, of course, endemic throughout history, and they are often carried and enforced by women. That other women were the carriers of Sammie Dean's and Minnijean's reputations is an example of the paradox of internalized oppression.[8] Any well-functioning society implants social control in the hearts and spirits of those it seeks to control.

A prime implement for doing so is the complex web of ideas with which we define the world and our own place in it, our identity. Constructed early in life and elaborated throughout it, this internalized ideology is commonly drawn from three sources: a theoretical understanding of a moment in history, a set of beliefs formed through social discourse, and conclusions drawn from personally lived experience.[9] Ideas derived in these three arenas may confirm or contradict each other. Taken together, they serve to construct particular acts of protest, as well as the self-conscious perception of those acts by the perpetrator. Moments of protest thus serve as a magnifying lens through which to view the linkage between individual consciousness and social structure. Out

of our lived experience we form conclusions about how life works and who we are. We internalize these ideas and forget they are learned, not revealed, truths. But in truth, they are ideologies, reflecting fundamental aspects of social structure that in turn influence our actions in public arenas in ways that protect and reproduce those structures. Private relations thus mediate social ones, giving rise to psychological patterns with political bearing.

If women's bodies are the markers of social standing, women's minds are the parchment on which those markers are written. Stories, injunctions to behave in such-and-such a way, fears, and maternal anxieties are means by which they are communicated and thereby made functional. That level of the drama of Central High becomes clearer still when we look at the actions of those who derided the activism of Minnijean and Sammie Dean.

For despite their identification as "arch-radicals," the two girls were in fact not alone in acting. Political activism is not a category but a range. Helen acted significantly by "going in the side door." To refuse to answer a heated question is to express an opinion. Innocent everyday acts in times of trouble convey resistance and protest (e.g., Sacks and Remy 1984). Minnijean and Sammie Dean's classmates responded to the crisis in measured ways, sometimes gaily, sometimes secretly, but always significantly. Take, for example, Nancy.

Nancy came from a Little Rock family that typified gendered cultures of docility and troublemaking. Her mother came from a religious family. "There was never any disruption in their household," said Nancy. "I mean, it just ran very smoothly and properly." But Nancy's father was a different sort:

> My dad was a hell-raiser. My dad did everything he could possibly do. He smoked, he drank, he ran around with women. He went to the racetrack every time he could possibly get there. Even snuck me in over there when I was thirteen years old, just because I looked mature enough to fit in. Which I did, and it just thrilled him to death to get by with it.
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> I never heard my mother use a cuss word in my life. My dad—it was just something that came natural to him, it was every other word. Unfortunately, I'm the same way and I don't do it to shock, it's just there. You know, I never did it around my mother until I was married and one day a word slipped out and she, when a word slipped out, she used my full name, you know.

> I had a lot of fun with [my dad]. But I also have a lot of resentments against him for a lot of the things that he did.

If Nancy's parents typified the contrast between a proper woman and a hell-raising man, her own choices in the Central High drama wove a complex tapestry of both traditions:

> The summer before we started in September there was just a buzz around town, you know, just a buzz around town that these Nine were going to be brought in to Central.
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> The only thing really I remember my mother saying was, "I'm very worried about this because I'm afraid there's going to be trouble." To tell you the truth, at the time I didn't think too much about it. I really didn't dwell on it. My dad didn't really say too much that summer.
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> Then when we did go to school, they did bring them in and, I mean, all hell broke loose. . . . It jusr went from bad to worse. Mother was actually afraid for me to go to school. And I was going to go, I wasn't going ro miss anything, you know.
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> But the day that they brought them in, this is the way I remember it: There were so many people out in front of the school, raising hell. And it was parents, it was mainly parents. So I didn't know what was going to take place, no one else did either, and some friends and I left the school.
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> I went downtown to try ro find my dad and I couldn't find him. He was probably in a pool hall or somerhing, you know. I don't know where he was, but anyway I couldn't find him. I just wanted to let him know that I had left school.

Many parents had instructed their kids to leave the school if the black students came in, either because of fears for their safety or to express opposition to desegregation. I wondered if Nancy had acted independently when she left or whether she was obeying orders:

> *BR:* Had your father wanted you to leave school? I know some parents had instructed their children to leave.
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> *NANCY:* Yes. My dad had told me to just get up and walk out.
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> *BR:* Is thar because he was worried about you, or was that a protest?
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> *NANCY:* That was a protest on his part. My mother didn't want me to go; it was fear. You know, she was afraid of danger, something was going to happen. She did not want me to go that day at all. But it was left to be my decision. And like I said, I was just dying to get over there because I wanted to see what was going to happen, you know.

> But nevertheless, several friends, we left and went down looking for my dad, couldn't find him, and I decided to . . . I didn't go by mom's shop to mention it to mother that I left school because—I don't know why. I just didn't.

It was interesting to me that Nancy grappled (however cursorily) with the reasons she didn't go to tell her mother that she'd left. It was her own decision, but in its aftermath her impulse was to check in with her hell-raising father, not her proper (and frightened) mother. Failing to do either, she carried on in the flow of her crowd's enthusiasms:

> Anyway, in the meantime, we kind of organized. We had stopped at 15th and Main—it was a little place called Sweet-n-Cream. We had all stopped down there and several cars came pulling up, and I don't even remember who said it but someone said, "Let's have a parade." So we went to the drugstore, hought several bottles of white shoe polish and we put on the cars "Two, Four, Six, Eight. We Ain't Gonna Integrate." There were about fifteen, sixteen cars. We left 15th and Main and went downtown.
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> We were shouting this "Two, Four, Six, Eight. We Ain't Gonna Integrate." And we went across the bridge into North Little Rock. Went to North Little Rock High School.

North Little Rock is an independent city across the Arkansas River from Little Rock. It is a more industrial and working-class community. I asked Nancy why they'd chosen to go there:

> We had no place else to go, I suppose. We didn't want to head over to Central because there was already so much trouhle going on over there. We weren't actually seeking trouble. I think it was just mischief, you know, more than anything else.
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> We were met there by the North Little Rock Police Department. They told us that they could sympathize with us but we had no business being over there and they were going to escort us back across the hridge. As long as we did not try to get out of our cars or cause any kind of disturhance, then we were all right.
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> So we left. We were not trying to make trouble. You know, it was just, I think, something to do in a manner of protest. So as we came back across, I remember one of the guys—his father was a mortician—and his dad saw him. And you could tell he was furious. When we passed mom's shop, I would not look to see if my mother was on the sidewalk.
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> Well, we got back to our little hangout place, which was a drugstore where a lot of us congregated in the afternoon—before and after school,

> actually, and then on Saturdays. There was a juke box in there and (you know, kids used to have places to go. They don't anymore. But we did, fortunately) we went to the drugstore and as I walked in the door the owner said, "Nancy, your mother just called. She said that if you showed up here I was to keep you here. You're not allowed to leave." I said, "Okay."
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> So I went to the pay phone and I called mother. And this is what she said. She said, "I am so ashamed of you I don't know what to do." She said, "You have besmirched my name and I'm very, very upset. I'm very embarrassed and I'm very disappointed." [. . .]
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> We were all sitting around talking . . . and having a Coke and my dad came in and picked us all up. He was so proud of us, he didn't know what to do. He gave us money for the juke box. So it was just split. I had told him, I said, "Mother called here and I was told to stay here." And he said, "Well, you can go home with me. I'm headed home."
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> So I went home with my dad. My mother got off at 5:30. She came in, she would not even look at me. I mean, she was just furious. She was absolutely furious.
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> But that's the first day that I remember it starting.

Despite the fact that the "parade" made quite a stir in the community ("We did make the national news," Nancy said with some pride, "and that was one of the things that really upset my mother"), Nancy's story is organized around the theme of innocence. "We were not trying to make trouble," she said more than once. She carefully named the action a parade, not a demonstration, suggesting it was lighthearted, mischief, not a serious action. Their target was North Little Rock, not Central High, where "there was already so much trouble going on."

On the other hand, "it was something to do in a manner of protest." I suspected that statement applied to two domains, one public, the other private. When Nancy joined the parade, she also took a position in the politics of her family. By leaving the school, she might have satisfied both her mother's fears and her father's protest. By taking part in the demonstration, she allied herself squarely with her father:

> When I was in that parade I didn't see anything wrong with that. I told my mother, I said, "I don't think I've done anything wrong. I don't want to go to school with them either. So what's wrong with me protesting? I didn't hurt anyone." So that was my answer.

Women's activism always challenges domestic as well as public power relations, because by the very act of taking a position in the public domain women violate their patriarchal assignment to domesticity.[10] If Nancy's position was aimed at both spheres, how much was she influenced by an alliance with her father and how much by her own attitude toward desegregation? Seeking insight into her views about race, I asked what her relations with black people had been before that year:

> *NANCY:* We had all been brought up that the blacks stayed on one end of town and we stayed on the other. Well, to me, that was not our fault. That was the way it was at that time, you know. We came to believe that, that's the way we lived, that's the way we were brought up. I don't ever remember being unkind to any black person, because I never was close enough to one. I mean, we walked on the sidewalk, and if they met us, they got off the sidewalk and walked in the street. And that's actually what it was like.
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> *BR:* Do you remember what you thought about that at the time?
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> *NANCY:* I thought it was normal. I thought it was normal. I thought it was normal that they sat in the back of the bus because that's the way it had always been. I'd never seen it done any other way. So to me it was normal.

Like her white classmates, Nancy defined Jim Crow as normalcy in the past and thereby justified her participation. To participate without culpability, however, her protest had to walk a very narrow edge between trouble and mischief. That her footing slipped from time to time was made evident by another detail she reported, this one overlooked by the written histories of the time. She had described the scene of Sammie Dean's arrest earlier in our conversation, ending up with the statement, "She was so out of control." Nonetheless, Sammie's arrest galvanized Nancy and her crowd:

> *NANCY:* We all decided that we would go get Sammie Dean out of jail.
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> *BR:* Did you know Sammie Dean before this?
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> *NANCY:* Yes.
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> *BR:* What did you think about her? You made a little bit of a face when you mentioned her name. What does that mean?
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> *NANCY:* Well, I would say Sammie Dean was an instigator. Her father was one of the top-notch segregationists in Little Rock. He was very outspoken. And, therefore, Sammie Dean was. That's what she had been taught. Nevertheless, she was kind of a troublemaker. She was a very cunning person, you know. She could just almost charm the socks

off of anyone in order to get her way. You know? She was a beautiful young girl. She was. Very attractive.

But anyway, she was taken to jail. I don't know why, I don't know who decided to do this—I did not run around with Sammie Dean, I simply knew her. We all decided we would go down there and try to get her out of jail. And we went down there and they told us that she could only be released to her parents. And that her father had already been called and he was on the way. So we left.

BR: Were you supportive of what she had done?

NANCY: I don't think it was support. I don't think I would define it as support. Like I said, I think it was just the fact that they had taken her to jail and we didn't think that any of us should be put in jail. At that age you just think, Well, this is someone I go to school with and how dare they be arrested. Even though she was kicking and cussing and you know, having a little fit and all. We just decided she didn't deserve being put in jail.

Normalcy is a good description of assumed and invisible social structures, and in this case its evocation revealed Nancy's assumptions about the world she lived in. But her story also expressed some subtle tensions contained within her assumptions. She both sympathized with and condemned Sammie's segregationist prominence. She assumed that Sammie's position was a natural reflection of her father's, that she was merely doing what comes naturally to dutiful daughters. "Nevertheless, she was kind of a troublemaker." The word "nevertheless" suggested that duty did not altogether justify the way in which Sammie Dean followed her father's political lead. She was a troublemaker. Her very act of obedience to her father caused her to betray her feminine role. Not only did she cause trouble; she caused it by using female attributes: her charm, a product of her most gendered quality, attractiveness, became a weapon of cunning. Nancy made that observation in a tone at once shocked and admiring. More than most of her classmates, she felt a certain sympathy with Sammie Dean, evidenced by her joining the trek to the police station to free her. But for the very reason that she herself was suspect in the female world of propriety, that she had allied herself with her father, not her mother, she was also careful to distinguish herself from Sammie. Both girls protested, but Sammie caused trouble, while Nancy protested innocently. Nonetheless, both took a stand in two closely interlinked struggles: one to contest desegregation's challenge to white

dominance, the other to contest white society's cooptation of their female behavior as a signifier of their family's status. In doing so they engaged a set of social relations that transcended status. Their choices to obey or break the gender rules defined by their mothers expressed a position (and were an active factor) in redefining both race and gender for their generation. At the same time those redefinitions were going on, so were others—of the relationship of state and individual, of the rights of individuals to self-determination, of the proper relationship of older to younger generations.

What ultimately justified her act of support for Sammie was the intrusion of police force into their innocent teen-age world. It was at that point that a question of rights arose. Whatever Sammie had done, "she didn't deserve being put in jail." Resisting force was a common explanation given by my interviewees for their antipathy to desegregation. At its core, they claimed, it wasn't about going to school with black children. It was that change had been forced on them:

> Everyone was saying, and my dad was one of them, that the government was forcing something down our throats that shouldn't have taken place. I really did not want to go to school with them. I would not have welcomed them, but I would not have mistreated them either. I could have gone to school and gone about my business, had it been that simple. But it wasn't. It just was not that simple.

For white people to construe resistance to civil rights as a response to unjust coercion was to write their own character as Victim. It is not that I have perpetrated a wrong that deserves righting, they implicitly argued. I simply, innocently, did that which seemed "normal." What is not normal, what is not right, is that the government is forcing something down our throats. Nancy's statement that she would not have welcomed the black students to the school but also would not have mistreated them was echoed frequently by other white alumni I interviewed. Yet when she witnessed her peers "mistreating them," she did not protest; instead, she voiced yet another complaint, this one about the disruption to her own life:

> Central's a very large school, and I was coming downstairs from a class and one of the black girls was maybe four or five people ahead of me descending the staircase. I don't remember if it was Minnijean or not, but I think it was Minnijean Brown. She was going down the stairs and

> someone—it was a guy—he tripped her. She fell from maybe the second to the bottom step, dropped all of her books. Someone else came and kicked them across the hall.
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> Well, there were hundreds of kids out in the hall trying to change classes, you know. And the things that they would holler at her. It was very disruptive. You could then go to class and you could hear a big ruckus taking place out in the hall. Teacher would get up and shut the door. It was just very disruptive, you know.
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> I became very disenchanted with the whole thing. I just kept thinking, This is my senior year and this is not what I was looking forward to. This is just unfair.
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> The main reason I guess that I resented it so is because it was our senior year, it messed up everything for our senior year. Everybody aspired to get to Central, you know, because it was the only high school and it was such a beautiful school. It's supposed to be the most beautiful high school in the United States, and the largest. So it was just something to get out of the ninth grade and get to Central. My brother, of course, was in Central ahead of me, and seeing all the things that he did and got to do and the fun and everything—well, that's what I was looking forward to in my senior year.
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> Well, it didn't happen. See, we had all this disruption. [. . .] So I just felt like it was unfair that it was done the way that it was done because it could have been done a better way.

Throughout her narrative, Nancy gave clear voice to her several grievances: her community had been coerced into making unwelcome changes; her classmate had been (shockingly) arrested; her prized senior year had been irreparably disrupted. So when at the end of our conversation I asked her to reflect back on all that ruckus and tell me what in retrospect she thought the upset was most about, she took me by surprise:

> I don't really know exactly what it was other than I do know that everyone I was around at that time, they were talking about violence, there would be violence. When I look back on it now—I didn't think this then—but when I look back on it now I have a feeling that [the parents' fear] probably was that it would be the beginning of interracial marriage. That's the only thing I can come up with. The only thing I can come up with.

It was a stunning and meaningful non sequitur. Having complained about coercion, unjust arrests, disruption of her senior year, in the end it came back around to the realm of sexuality. Nancy might challenge her own role as woman-symbol. She might negotiate a complex balance between her duty to uphold certain standards and her desire to defy them. But when it came down to it, she joined her elders in collapsing race and sexuality as a means to describe resentments that were, it soon turned out, in some part about class. Having told me that her daughter's most adored teacher was an African American woman (a story that seemed intended to point out to me her own changes of heart over the years), Nancy then described an event at her workplace that for her was the other side of the coin:

> *NANCY:* [A black woman] came and made an application for a job and the salary she asked for to begin with most of us weren't even making at that time and we had been there for years. So we resented that. Just things, you know, like that.
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> But more and more, you would see more and more of them shopping, more and more of them downtown than ever before. Then, of course, they stopped sitting in the back of the bus and things like that. To me, it was just get along in this world, you know. This is it.
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> But I didn't want my daughter to marry one. I still don't. I still feel that way.
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> *BR:* Why is that?
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> *NANCY:* I guess just simply because of my background, the way that I was raised. I told Alice that. "You're to be nice to them. Respect them. But I don't want you bringing them home to play, and I don't want you to marry one." And I guess that's just because that's the way I was raised. The only reason I can come up with.
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> *BR:* Did Alice ever ask for an explanation of why you didn't want her to bring black children home to play?
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> *NANCY:* No, she didn't. And I don't know why she didn't, but she never did.

"I don't know why she didn't, but she never did." Long after our talk, those words looped round and round my mind. I believed her; Nancy really didn't know why her daughter never asked the single most critical question: "Why?" That she didn't seemed to me to say so much

about the causes of white racism, and about its injuries to the white people who perpetrate it. Nancy is an intelligent and strong person. Why, I wondered, could she not ask that critical question? Perhaps because to question her racial assumptions was to challenge at a deeper level than she was willing assumptions about her role as woman and her place in a class order.

Questioning the Alternatives

Joyce did question what she saw happening at Central High, and she was led then to question much, much more. I met with Joyce at the social welfare agency where she works. Round and welcoming, she sat behind her cluttered desk, apologizing for the scrape, scrape, scrape of a workman preparing the building's exterior for painting. Quickly she began to tell me what had clearly been for her the defining moment of that year, when she was a junior at Central High:

> *JOYCE:* One of rhe things that happened at Central had to do with a *very* close friend of mine. She and I were just like sisrers. We spent the night at each orher's house. We walked to school together. We studied together. We went to church together. I would go home with them for chicken dinner after church on Sunday. She'd come home with me. I mean we were very, very, very close.
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> I remember one time—have you had a chance to go by Central? Of course people have seen it in pictures and everything. Well, if you recall, the front of the school that faces on Park Street has stairs that go down, and there used to be a fish pond down there that was full of water and had goldfish in it, and so forth. And I remember one day, my friend (her name was Lydia) and another friend of ours, a mutual friend, Joanna, the three of us were walking down those stairs and I was between Joanna and Lydia.
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> And I don't even remember what brought the conversation to a start or anything, but I made the comment that I just, using the language of the day, I said, "Well, I don't see what's wrong with going to school with colored kids." And Lydia and Joanna both, and Lydia predominantly, got behind me and physically shoved me all the way down the stairs and right ro the edge of the fishpond and I honest-to-God thought at that moment they were going to shove me into that fishpond. And they stopped right there.

I don't remember whether the lesson came to me immediately. I think some kernel of it did, but it has grown over the years to the point that I realize that if you take a stand, if you believe in something that is not popularly accepted, if something like that is in your mind, then you either do one of two things: You either keep your mouth shut, or you be prepared to stand your ground. Because something's gonna happen. And that was a real shocking lesson to me, that even people you consider friends would take something like that so personally and focus so much anger on someone very close to them. That's the lesson I got from that.

BR: What did you do?

JOYCE: I think I kept my mouth shut for the rest of the school year with my friends.

Joyce kept her mouth shut with her friends, but she anguished over what she saw going on at school. I asked her if it had been hard, if she'd had to struggle to stay quiet, and she replied:

JOYCE: Yeah, I thiuk I did. As a matter of fact, there were two other things that happened, oue that I did sort of as my way of saying something without confronting the issue directly locally, and the other was an event that happened to somebody else that really made another deep impression on me. I'll tell you the latter first.

I remember, as I said, in September, Central was not air conditioned then, and the windows would he open in September 'cause it'd still be very, very warm. My homeroom—the front of Central faces Park Street, and as you look at it head on, my homeroom was on the lefthand end of that front part, and the desks all faced in that direction and the windows were to our left.

Every morning, they'd come over the loudspeaker and we'd all stand up and say the Pledge of Allegiance and they'd probahly have bible scripture, I'm sure we did at that time, and announcements or whatever. Well, I remember the mobs had been there every day, and I'll admit, I used some of that as an excuse to check out of school, calling my mother saying, I'm scared to be here, and then go off with my friends downtown to mess around. Because every day there were the mobs out across Park Street, they were kept across Park Street and into Park Street sometimes, but they were not allowed on the campus. You could heat them out there and everything.

Well, one day we were standing there and I had my hand on my heart saying the Pledge of Allegiance and I could hear the mob, the sound

escalating from what it normally was. And as I was saying the words, I turned and looked out the window, and I saw this mob of people chasing what to a sixteen-year-old girl was an elderly black man. I've since found out it was a New York *Times* reporter who was probably forty-five, something like that. I was looking and saying the Pledge of Allegiance, and I was watching them chase him across the yards on that side of the street, and I knew, I really believed that if they caught him they would kill him.

In that moment, while I'm watching this, saying the Pledge of Allegiance, hand on my heart, I'm thinking, There's something wrong here. How can this be happening in a country that we're pledging allegiance to? What's wrong with this picture? And that left an indelible—I can see it today, I will never, ever forget that. I think that, along with my parents' quasi-liberalism, and the experience with my friends, that helped ro water the seeds that my parents had planted earlier on about believing in right things and trying to do what was right.

The other thing that I did was after the incident with Lydia and Joanna, and after this had happened and the mobs were still going on day after day after day, I wrote a letter to President Eisenhower and said, Do something to make this stop. All I want is my education.

Which was a fairly selfish thing to write about, but as I think back on it, I think it was a fairly activist thing to do at that time, given the fact thar I had never done anything before in my life, and to write a letter to the Presidenr!

And I got a canned response; I've actually got it framed in my office at home. I got a canned response from some aide, who said, The President's happy ro hear from you. We agree with you that the solution has to be found blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. And I remember the day my mother encouraged me to write that letter.

I walked home from school; we lived about eight blocks from school, I guess. And as I got within sight of my house, my mother was out on the front porch waving this letter and telling me to hurry up, that the President in the White House had written me, you know. She was really, really proud, and that memory stays with me.

BR: Did other students know that you had written that letter?

JOYCE: You know, I don't remember, I sort of doubt it. I really doubt it, I doubt that I said anything to anybody. And I think that was probably hard, too, because I was so proud, and who could I tell?

Why had Joyce drawn such different lessons from the experiences at Central High she'd shared with Nancy and the others? Her family, like Nancy's, was not affluent. Her father came from a small cotton-growing Arkansas town:

> He picked cotton until he got sick of it, and then he lied about his age and took his older brother's name and enlisted in the army. You know, a little bit of a mover and shaker in a way of looking at it.

He was ambitious, rising as high as he could manage in the army. "We traveled a lot," Joyce told me, "had the experience of a lot of different cultures and places and all of that kind of thing." He also married a woman originally from the midwest. Was her mother an integrationist? I asked:

> It's hard for me to know how to characterize my mother. I don't feel totally comfortable saying that she was a liberal. But I don't feel totally comfortable saying that she was not a liberal. I don't know whether she was or not. But my memory of my mother was in some ways sort of the stereotypical, if not integrationist, moderate on the issue, who says, Some of my best friends are colored people, you know.

Like Nancy, Joyce approached the events at Central High from the point of view of her own needs. "I didn't think of myself as someone who was pushing for integration," she said. "I did think of myself as not having a problem." She echoed Nancy in harboring ongoing resentment about the injuries to her own high school experience, and especially the loss of the year after the drama when the high schools were all closed. I interviewed Joyce shortly before going to talk with Govenor Fauhus. "Is there any message you'd like me to carry to the governor?" I asked her. "He won't know who the hell I am," she replied, "but tell him I still resent the fact that he cheated me out of my senior year at Central High School."

But, after the fact, Joyce made very different choices in her life, attributing their roots to the incidents she'd described to me. Her parents' "quasi-liberalism"—"trying to do what's right" while keeping quiet—was no longer an option. She became an activist on behalf of poor people, "making trouble" in a good cause and standing up very publicly, in exactly the way she had failed to do as a junior at Central High, to promote and defend her beliefs. "You either keep your mouth shut, or you be prepared to stand your ground. Because something's

gonna happen." Today, Joyce firmly stands her ground, and what has happened is that she has become a radical, advocating very fundamental change in the social order of America.

Broken Promises/Promising Breaks

Looking back over my interviews, it seems to me that Joyce's classmates also took a stand. Sensing something about the close interweaving of racial change, changes in the roles of women, and changes in their prospects for economic opportunity, they took a stand for a future they believed was owed them. For most of the white students at Central High, greater educational opportunity for black children was not a very active threat. The times were booming in Little Rock. There was a sense, very present in my interviews, that the world was an oyster for these high schoolers to open. They did not represent themselves as fearful that black graduates from "their" school would become a greater competitive force: "To me, it was just get along in this world."

What they did resent and fear was the intrusion of coercive force into their seemingly predictable 1950s world. Central High itself typified all that was best in that world. "It was the only high school[11] and it was such a beautiful school. It's supposed to be the most beautiful high school in the United States, and the largest." It was also a place of uniformity, of seeming classlessness, and therefore of hope, well described by a man who graduated several years before the desegregation struggle:

> It was really kind of a wonderful, idyllic, Andy Hardy kind of high school. Very good musical programs. Fine athletic teams, which people in that part of the country tend to measure their schools by. Every year there were dozens of scholarships, always several scholarships to the Ivy League schools. People did very well.[12]

Again and again, people emphasized to me how they had rubbed shoulders with fellow students from affluent families and from poor ones, how everyone had equal rights and equal opportunities. It was not that the students didn't recognize differences. They used obvious codes (neighborhood, father's occupation, whether or not mother worked, and so on) to tell fine-grained stories of class distinctions. But the point was that they deeply believed those differences didn't matter, not, at least, so

long as they all faced forward toward the future from the idyllic present of Central High.

In the context of that consensus, Central High not only defined the white students' world—"one big happy family," lacking divisions, friendly and familiar—but also defined their world view. At the time Central High was desegregated, young white people believed the world was a place without impermeable divisions where everyone had an equal chance at the good life. Beliefs about the nature of the social world are communicated in many ways, direct and indirect. In the South of the 1950s, relations between white and black people were a highly communicative system of entitlement. The typical white mother, however poor herself, gave her maid old clothing and food, and that generosity implied both her power to be generous and a direction of largesse that in turn implied her superior standing in the community and her daughter's superior prospects in the world.

To be sure, it was a world changing profoundly, a fact prophesied by nothing so ominously as desegregation itself. But the changes impending went well beyond race relations. Corporatization presented youths with the prospect of working in huge, bureaucratized structures wholly unlike the personalized work settings their parents had known, both scary and promising because they offered such new possibilities for success. Domestic migration and suburbanization meant that young women would need to leave the communities in which their families had put down strong roots, both a loss and a prospect of liberation.

White teenagers in the fifties were reared to see their places in society in very clear definition perhaps precisely because the world was in such flux. They would, they believed, probably go to college, certainly marry, join corporations if they were boys and work for them forever, follow their husbands around the country and probably not take jobs themselves if they were girls, and raise children as happy helpmates. This was the "Andy Hardy type of vision" promoted by the "Andy Hardy type of school." Although it was a vision of a prototypic middle-class life, it was precisely the life for which these students, whatever the class status of their families of birth, were certain they were destined.

The presence of the black students in that world shook their certainties; the behavior of Minnijean shattered them. Not only did Minnijean act entitled to the largesse her white classmates might otherwise have been inclined to concede her, but she was a woman—a large woman—who felt entitled to defend and assert herself. In this she was similar to

Sammie Dean, a small woman of diminished class status who nonetheless commanded center stage in the drama that was transforming the ideal world of Central High.

Desegregation was a harbinger of a multifaceted set of alterations in the world as they knew it. A decade after the end of the war and the redomestication of Rosie the Riveter, the division between women who worked for wages and those who worked at home seemed stark. Unquestionably in the first category were women of color. Both they and the white world assumed the necessity, not to mention the propriety, of their employment as domestic, agricultural, or light industrial workers. White working-class women very often worked for wages also, but that fact was frequently questioned and contested in their families. By the postwar period, the illusion of gendered divisions of labor were far-reaching; the wives of white working men often saw their own jobs as "temporary," filling a financial need for the moment despite their husbands' shame about that necessity. The ideal type of domestic life was actively constructed by media and policy to be a one-earner family (May 1988). White women were encouraged to go to college, not so that they might get a job but in order to contract a more affluent marriage. Airline work offered a similar trajectory for girls from families who could not afford college (and sometimes also for those who could). In the popular imagination, stewardesses got to have adventures, see the world, and meet prosperous prospective mates, all while being paid well for a glamorous job.[13]

Alongside those forces that promoted a neat separation of economic and domestic life, however, other, contradictory developments were simultaneously taking shape. As it turned out, the promise of marriage as a refuge proved false; life in the labor force was not so temporary after all. Over the decades between then and now, service industries, which depend on women's labor, grew monumentally in the United States, as industrial manufacturing, employing mostly men, declined. One-earner families became a nostalgic memory of the past (and for many Americans a memory that never happened) (Rifkin 1995).[14] However unimagined those transformations may have been at the moment Nancy painted slogans on her classmates' cars, she nonetheless paraded straight into a period of historic change and became entangled in all the contradictions thereof.

Presentiment is a risky basis for sociological analysis, but I nonetheless hazard the dangers of this particularly thin and slippery ice and defend the inclusion of intuition and fear in the category of empirical

data to be unpacked and deciphered. We commonly craft behavior in the present under the influence of fears about the future; those fears always contain some kernel of truth, some accurate intuition about changes brewing, however ephemeral at the moment and however much inaccuracy and distortion our fears may also contain.[15] Because political behavior is often informed by such intangibles, it can appear to be irrational if we do not articulate the unspoken airs that may in fact form its underlying beat.

More than who attended which school, desegregation represented the dismantling and re-creation of a life vision for both blacks and whites. The white coeds were supposed to be in control of their world, even if that control was won at the price of adapting to a certain definition of femininity. So long as they conformed, they were certain they had all the world to gain. But their hatred of Minnijean and Sammie Dean speaks of the tenuousness of that certainty. In reality, they could not control their small world, their high school; armed force imposed on them changes they did not wish. They could not control members of their own group; Sammie Dean scrapped and tangled with authority. They could not control the black students whom, in the tradition of graceful southern defeat, they were prepared to "allow" as guests in their school. Minnijean "walked the halls as if she belonged there."

Perhaps on a deeper level they were particularly unforgiving of these two particular women because they challenged the very means by which women in general had been told they could win some measure of control in their lives. As women, they had internalized and accepted as "truth" notions of appropriate behavior for girls and women. Sammie Dean's family were "white trash," Helen argued, because of the way their womenfolk behaved. "Mother would have died for shame if her daughter's name had been put in the paper, or if I'd gotten in any type of trouble," Helen told me. "While we had our beliefs and our opinions, you didn't voice them to the public. You just didn't do that."

In return for "not doing that," girls gained the promise of a feminine place in an idealized type of society. They also accepted a role in constructing just such a society, a white society with little room for genuine black equality. When Sammie Dean broke the rules for women, she challenged implicit promises of a rosy future because she challenged her peers to "do that," to act on their beliefs in public. Minnijean broke rules governing both women's and black people's behavior, and for that she was doubly hated.

The women of Central High recounted their memories of Minnijean's and Sammie Dean's transgressions with all the vigor of their disapproval back then, even though we met in very different times. Presentiment had become the present; indeed, for many of these women, it was fast becoming the past. Nancy had moved more times than she could count, following her husband's corporate career from pillar to post, until at last he found himself "downsized" in his fifties. Helen also had reluctantly relocated for the sake of her husband's better prospects. Nonetheless, it had been necessary for her to hold a job, too, and now she counted the days until retirement and complained about the injustices of affirmative action. Martha achieved a satisfying career in broadcasting, but disappointments dotted her personal life. In her middle years, she struggled with ambivalence about her childlessness and worried about mistakes she'd made as a stepmother in her second marriage.

Throughout our conversation, Martha had been warmly honest about her feelings and beliefs. As our interview ended, while I packed up my tape paraphernalia, she generously pulled old clippings from her files to give me, pointing out photos of people whose names had come up in our conversation. Suddenly, she gasped and grew silent. I looked up from my wires. She was weeping, her eyes transfixed on a faded photograph on a yellowed page. It was a picture of the Nine, and Minnijean stood to one side, tall and stately—not overweight. On her face was a self-conscious smile; she seemed shy, chin tucked down, perhaps unsure of herself in front of the camera. She seemed very much a fifties sort of teenager, and very vulnerable.

"She was nothing like a Mammy," Martha moaned. "How could I have remembered her that way?"

"Memory fails," wrote Karen Fields, "and memory collaborates with forces separate from actual past events. . . ." Martha's memory collaborated with a reputation she'd helped to construct. All that talk among the girls had in fact constituted a political act of protest against Minnijean's disturbance of normalcy, against the implied threat to their place in a promised class order. To be sure, that place held them, too, in place, in gendered roles they both embraced and resisted.

"How could I have remembered her that way?" Martha lamented. Participating actively in the construction and defense of their Andy Hardy world, the women of Central High also felt its injuries and rebelled. Lacking clarity on the sources of their own discomfort and

hope, they blamed Minnijean and Sammie Dean. In a moment of historic social change, they chose up sides, like Nancy's daughter never asking why. Only later could they begin to glimpse their own misperceptions. But they still defended untenable positions of long ago, still were tangled in webs of gender, race, class, of domesticity and political opinion, of ambivalence about their lives, their peers, and their world.

NOTES

1. The literature on Central High is blessed with a number of firsthand accounts: Bates (1986/62); Huckaby (1980); Blossom (1959); Beals (1994).

2. What we choose to tell and to omit is often an act of consent to power relations or of resistance. For an excellent discussion of this aspect of storytelling, see Ewick and Silbey (1995). I also find useful James Scott's (1990) formulation of hidden transcripts, those stories people tell only among themselves.

3. All names of Minnijean's and Sammie's classmates have been changed.

4. According to a hard-to-track citation on the World Wide Web, the term Goody Two-Shoes derives from an anonymous allegory published in 1766 and entitled "The history of little Goody Two-Shoes: Otherwise called, Mrs. Margery Two-Shoes." It reads: "With the means by which she acquired her learning and wisdom, Set forth at large for the benefit of those, Who from a state of rags and care, And having shoes but half a pair; Their fortunes and their fame would fix, And gallop in a coach and six." Paradoxically, the women of Little Rock dropped the connotation of "do-gooder" but maintained the slight air of self-derision suggested by the original as they used the term to suggest that they *were* good.

5. Sammie Dean and her parents energetically challenged Sammie's expulsion and, with the help of segregationist leaders, succeeded in getting her reinstated. Minnijean was placed in a private school in New York, where she finished out her high school years.

6. There is an extensive literature on the link between women's ways and class status, both in the American South and in many other cultures around the world. For two examples, see Blee (1991) and Rozario (1992).

7. I deal more extensively with both racial and class components to the construction (and reconstruction in the fifties) of white social relations in *Bitters* (forthcoming).

8. I draw here on many formulations of the concept of internalized oppression, especially how the site of activity is a factor in constructing social systems and the ideologies that mediate them. For some particular angles on this discussion, see Freitag (1989) and Scott (1985).

9. This formulation draws on George Rudé (1980). I have elaborated it in more detail in Roy (1994).

10. This qualiry of contradictory rebelliousness is a nor uncommon characreristic of conservative politics in general. "Right-wing movements hold mixed stances toward prevailing power structures," writes Sara Diamond (1995) in her fine study: "They are partially *oppositional* and partially . . . *system-supportive*" (p. 6). If conservatism contains within itself this paradoxical quality, so all the more does conservative women's activism, because it is performed in two distinct domains, one public, the other private, and both sites elicit ambivalent attitudes. Like the state, the family too is a power structure that conservative women both defend theoretically and, often, resist in practice. The two dramas, one pnblic, the other private, intertwine, supporting and contradicting each other to weave a tapestry peculiarly gendered and revealingly political.

11. In fact, it was not the only high school. Dunbar High School had been built for black students at the same time as Central in the 1920s, using a very similar blueprint. It, too, was a renowned institution, celebrated for the excellence of its scholarship. Nancy demonstrates a familiar ethnocentrism when she disappears the black school. Two new high schools were opened in 1957, Hall for white students in the newly developing white suburbs in the western part of the city and Horace Mann in the traditionally black neighborhood to the east. Much resentment by working-class white people focused on the fact that Central was integrared while Hall was left all white for a number of years afterward.

12. Andy Hardy was a character in a long series of movies spanning the thirties, forries, and fifties. The son of a poor but upstanding judge in a typical midwestern town, Andy Hardy was the ideal of whire middle-class America struggling through the Depression and achieving respect and solidity in the decades following.

13. Of course, not everyone was eligible for this hountiful experience, only women who met certain standards of size and beauty, another clear example of the phenomenon of "looksism." See Chernin (1981) and Bordo (1993).

14. The influx of white women into the job market was to coincide with the demise of jobs for African American men in the failing industries of the North, an important factor in the coincidence of gender and race in reshaping social relations in recent decades.

15. And those "distortions" are, again, coded expressions of a deeper accuracy. A "middle-class" white girl myself at the time, I remember a startled recognition that I could have, indeed might have to have, a career of my own, and my ambivalence about it.

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