



DAISY BATES

FIRST LADY OF LITTLE ROCK

As a black woman who was a feminist before the term was invented, Daisy Bates refused to accept her assigned place in society. *Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock* tells the story of her life and public support of nine black students who registered to attend the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, which culminated in a constitutional crisis—pitting a president against a governor and a community against itself. Unconventional, revolutionary, and egotistical, Daisy Bates reaped the rewards of instant fame, but paid dearly for it.



FROM THE FILMMAKER:

Dear Viewer,

Fifteen years ago I stumbled upon the story of a woman who had lost her parents to violence, but rather than give in to a burning hatred inside of her, she became the leader of a movement to desegregate the white schools in Arkansas in 1957. I had studied history all my life and considered myself quite knowledgeable, but nowhere in my history books did the name Daisy Bates appear. I felt compelled to find out who this woman was and share her story in the hopes of resurrecting her memory in the American consciousness. We filmmakers tend to spend a lot of time with our subjects—it's inevitable that we fall in love with them. In the end, it's that love that drives us to finish what we started, which, like all grand schemes, comes with extreme highs and lows. Today, despite years of research, Daisy Bates still intrigues me. She was a woman who didn't fit anyone's preconceived notions about women of the 1950s. She was beautiful, uneducated, opinionated, and fearless. She smoked and enjoyed her scotch and a good game of poker. People who knew Daisy Bates rarely had mixed feelings about her—they either loved her or hated her. There are so few films produced about the women of the Civil Rights Movement from their point of view that my mission from the beginning was to break that ceiling.

Producing *Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock* taught me as much about Daisy Bates as it did about myself. Looking back, I realize now that in committing myself to making this film in 2004, I had done the equivalent of jumping off a cliff without a parachute. Once you are over that cliff, there's no turning back. To complete the film I had to make sacrifices that impacted my personal and professional lives. I was forced to become very strategic about how I spent my time and my finances. The film forced me to let go of my initial shyness and become much more fearless as I sought out the truth about who Daisy Bates was. I also learned to be more patient and to accept rejection without taking it too personally. Throughout the darkest moments of my journey to complete the film I thought of Daisy Bates. I felt she was always with me in spirit—encouraging me, pushing me—and I knew I couldn't let her down.

I hope that when audiences watch the film they will be inspired to become leaders in their own communities, educate themselves on women from the civil rights movement (Daisy Bates is only one of hundreds of unsung heroines from that time period), and use the film as an inspirational tool to discuss education in American schools today. For young adults, I want the film to be a reminder that where your life begins doesn't have to be where it ends, and I want those same teenagers to be inspired by the Little Rock Nine and their fight to desegregate Central High School so that students today can go to any school they choose to attend.

In watching *Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock*, audiences will learn about a time in history through the eyes of a woman whose life struggles are the stories of America at its best and at its worst. Audiences might laugh, they might cry, but they will never be bored as the story of Daisy Bates's life unfolds before their eyes.

Sharon La Cruise



Sharon La Cruise, Producer/Director

THE FILM

In the pantheon of civil rights leaders, the name of Daisy Bates is hard to find. Yet, this woman was a leader in the civil rights movement and a force behind the 1957 desegregation of Little Rock's Central High School. She was a woman of courage and conviction who "knew her place," which was wherever she wanted to be. Using archival footage; still photographs; and interviews with academics, historians, and personal friends, *Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock* tells the story of this remarkable woman.

Growing up in Huttig, Arkansas, in the early decades of the 20th century, Daisy experienced the strict segregation and racism prevalent in the South at the time. At a young age she learned that her biological mother had been raped and killed by white men and that her father had then abandoned the family. A spirited girl, Daisy was eager to leave her small town, and found her ticket out when she met L. C. Bates. He was a former reporter turned salesman, 12 years her senior, wealthy, and fearless. Daisy went off with him when she was 18, becoming his mistress for the next 10 years.

In 1941, the couple moved to Little Rock, where they purchased the *Arkansas State Press*, the most widely read black newspaper in the state. The paper provided a voice for the black community, crusading for justice and pushing a radical agenda for change. When L. C. taught Daisy to use the newspaper as a weapon, she abandoned the party-girl life she had been living and became a reporter. Daisy and L. C. finally married in 1942.

At a time when most women—even prominent women—in the civil rights movement were assistants to men, Daisy strived to be a leader. In 1948 she attempted to usurp the leadership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Little Rock, but her actions alienated the organization's leaders. Four years later, however, she ran for president of the Arkansas chapter of the NAACP and won.

After the 1954 Supreme Court decision striking down school segregation, Daisy and L. C. began a campaign to persuade black parents to transfer their children to all-white schools. It took a lawsuit by the NAACP to overcome the recalcitrance of the Little Rock school board, and in September 1957, nine black students—the Little Rock Nine—were chosen to integrate Central High School. As tensions mounted, Governor Faubus publicly announced that he was ordering the Arkansas National Guard to surround Central High to prevent violence, but those guards were also told to keep all blacks from entering the high school. A miscommunication left one student, Elizabeth Eckford, to arrive at the school alone. She was beset by an angry mob of white people who heckled and threatened her and followed close on her heels as she was turned away from the school. The experience created a strain between Elizabeth and Daisy, who had been shepherding the students through the preparation process for integrating the high school. Strains arose between Daisy and others as well. Some parents of the Nine felt left out of the process, and many in the black community, fearing for their safety and their livelihoods, questioned the tactics Daisy and the NAACP were using. White segregationists attacked the Bateses' house, throwing rocks



through the front window, burning crosses on the lawn and even setting fire to the house itself.

Three weeks into the crisis, the black students were finally able to enter Central High School when President Eisenhower sent army troops to escort them. But even after calm was restored outside the school, the Nine experienced daily abuse—verbal and physical—inside the school.

The NAACP saw the Little Rock crisis as a fund-raising opportunity and sent Daisy on a speaking tour around the country. This put Daisy in the national spotlight as she skillfully used the media to tell the Little Rock story. The publicity, however, brought her criticism. Fashionable, glamorous, and outspoken, Daisy was accused of using the events of Little Rock to promote herself.

The issue of self-promotion arose again in May 1958 when the NAACP awarded the Spingarn Medal, its most prestigious honor, to the Little Rock Nine. Daisy was not named as a recipient, and she launched a campaign to have herself included in the award. When several of the students' parents threatened to boycott the award ceremony, the NAACP gave in and made Daisy one of the recipients. The episode left a number of people with bitter feelings.

In 1959, segregationists made good on a promise to destroy Daisy Bates, targeting the Bateses' newspaper. As advertisers withdrew their support, the paper's revenue declined and the publication folded. In an attempt to escape the tensions of living in Little Rock and her troubled marriage, Daisy then moved to New York City, where she spent two years writing her autobiography. In 1968, she joined President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty program, which led her to work on economic development in the town of Mitchellville, Arkansas, for several years. Toward the end of her life, Daisy was in poor health and destitute. When she died, she was the first female and first African American to lie in state in the Arkansas State Capitol.

Daisy Bates has been recognized for her forthright and forceful efforts to ensure equal educational opportunities for Arkansas's children. Her leadership in the desegregation of Central High School laid the foundation for others in the civil rights movement to take bold action, and her legacy shows what one heroic and determined individual can do to change the world.

SELECTED INDIVIDUALS FEATURED IN *DAISY BATES: FIRST LADY OF LITTLE ROCK*

Professor Aldon Morris – Sociologist; author of *The Origin of the Civil Rights Movement*

Professor John A. Kirk – Chair of the Department of History, University of Arkansas; author of *Beyond Little Rock*

Elizabeth Jacoway – Historian; author of *Turn Away Thy Son*

Beatrice Epps – Childhood friend

Sybil Hampton-Jordan – Friend

Brynda Pappas – Friend

Lottie Brown Neely – L.C. Bates' cousin

David Neely – L.C. Bates' cousin

Members of Little Rock Nine:

Jefferson Thomas

Elizabeth Eckford

Minnijean Brown-Tricky

Ernest Green

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Important dates in the life of Daisy Bates

- **November 11, 1914:** Born Daisy Lee Gatson in Huttig, Arkansas
- **1941:** Moved to Little Rock with L. C. Bates, where they took over the weekly newspaper, the *Arkansas State Press*
- **March 4, 1942:** Married L. C. Bates
- **1952:** Elected president of the Arkansas Conference of Branches of the NAACP
- **1957–1958:** Led the struggle to desegregate Central High School
- **1959:** The Bateses closed the *Arkansas State Press* due to segregationists' boycott of advertisers and campaign of intimidation
- **1960:** Moved to New York to write her memoir, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*
- **August 28, 1963:** One of only three women to speak at the Lincoln Memorial at the March on Washington
- **1968–1974:** Moved to the all-black town of Mitchellville, Arkansas, to work with President Johnson's federal antipoverty program
- **1984:** Revived the *Arkansas State Press*, selling it in 1987
- **November 4, 1999:** Died of a heart attack in Little Rock, Arkansas

Civil rights and the NAACP

The struggle for civil rights for blacks has occurred throughout U.S. history, encompassing every aspect of America's economic, social, cultural, and political lives. It's a familiar story, beginning with the political strife surrounding the abolition of slavery, followed by decades of Jim Crow laws, when blacks were no longer in bondage but had severely limited opportunities. Whites' feelings of enmity and hostility toward blacks often resulted in lynchings and race riots. One such riot, in Springfield, Illinois, in 1908, led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—the NAACP.

Founded on February 12, 1909, by a multiracial, multireligious group of men and women, the stated goal of the NAACP was “to secure for all people the rights guaranteed in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the United States Constitution, which promised an end to slavery, the equal protection of the law, and universal adult male suffrage, respectively.” The NAACP's highest honor, the Spingarn Medal, named for J. E. Spingarn, one of the organization's early leaders, is awarded annually to an African American man or woman for outstanding achievement.

Since its inception, the NAACP has taken leading roles in public campaigns and lawsuits aimed at ending racial discrimination in the U.S.—in the movie industry (the 1915 protest against D. W. Griffith's racially inflammatory *Birth of a Nation*); in the military (through lobbying pressure and White House meetings with Presidents Roosevelt and Truman); in the election process (pressing for voting rights and voter registration from 1915 through the 1960s); and in housing and the economy (ongoing efforts to end discriminatory laws in housing and predatory lending practices).

One of the NAACP's biggest victories was the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision that struck down school segregation, and it provided Daisy Bates with the cause that brought her to national attention.

Ending School Segregation

Attempts to end segregation in public schools began long before the events in Little Rock in 1957, and even before the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954. As much as a century earlier, courts began hearing cases brought by black parents who charged the schools with providing their children inferior educational opportunities because of discriminatory treatment based on their race. Some of these cases, including a series of Kansas cases between 1881 and 1949, revolved around narrow issues such as student safety or teacher qualifications, and some cases dealt only with matters pertaining to higher education. While a number of the cases were decided in the plaintiffs' favor, those decisions applied only to the issues at hand and did not affect school segregation in general. The fact remained that in 17 states and the District of Columbia, segregation in schools as well as in other public facilities was the law.

Class Action

Progress toward school desegregation picked up steam when five cases—all brought by the NAACP's Legal Action Fund—came before the Supreme Court in 1952. The cases—from Delaware; Kansas; Washington, D.C.; South Carolina; and Virginia—had been unsuccessful in the lower courts. The facts of each case were different, but the central issue in each was the constitutionality of state-sponsored segregation in public schools. The Supreme Court chose to consolidate the cases under the name of the Kansas case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Because the Court did not reach a decision by the end of its term, it reheard the case in 1953. After much debate and discussion among the deeply divided justices, the Court handed down a unanimous decision on May 17, 1954, striking down



school segregation, saying that separate schools for white and black children violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

Sources: brownvboard.org/content/court-cases-prelude-brown-1849-1949;
www.uscourts.gov/EducationalResources/ConstitutionResources/LegalLandmarks/HistoryOfBrownVBoardOfEducation.aspx

Massive Resistance

After the *Brown* decision, the reaction throughout the South was anything but compliant. The congressional delegations of most Southern states signed on to the Southern Manifesto, a document declaring opposition to desegregation and promising to use all lawful means to reverse the Court's decision. Virginia established a policy of massive resistance, and schools were closed in order to avoid integrating. Massive resistance also took hold in Alabama and Arkansas.

In 1955, in a case known as *Brown II*, the Supreme Court asked district courts to take over the task of carrying out school desegregation, with orders that the process occur "with all deliberate speed." Supporters of the original *Brown* decision deemed the Court's language too ambiguous and many Southern states used this ambiguity as justification for resisting, delaying, and avoiding significant integration for years.

The Little Rock Experience

Shortly after the *Brown* decision, Arkansas announced that it would begin taking steps to comply with the Supreme Court's ruling, pending guidelines from the Court regarding the method and time frame for implementation. In Little Rock, where desegregation had already taken place in many public facilities such as libraries, parks, and public buses, school leaders developed a graduated plan that would desegregate Central High School in 1957, junior high schools by 1960, and elementary schools by 1963. In the intervening years between the Court's decision and its planned implementation, opposition to desegregation grew. White citizens' councils emerged in Arkansas and other Southern states to promote public resistance to desegregation. Newspaper ads and rallies, along with threats of violence, fed the resistance fervor. Citizens' groups petitioned Governor Orval Faubus to prevent desegregation at Central High School, and an injunction was granted in order to avert the expected violence. The district court, however, nullified the injunction and ordered the Little Rock School Board to proceed with its desegregation plan.

To deal with the ensuing chaos and near-riot conditions, President Eisenhower sent in federal troops to protect the nine black students who began attending Central High School in September 1957. Even after calm was restored outside of the school, however, the Little Rock Nine endured constant physical and verbal abuse from the other students for the remainder of the year. For their abusive behavior, more than one hundred white students were suspended and four were expelled. During that year, one of the Nine, Minnijean Brown, was also expelled for retaliating against the abuse.

Sources: encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=7118; www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=89

Civil Rights Challenges Today

In the nearly 60 years since the Supreme Court struck down school segregation, Congress and the courts have issued rulings and laws, such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, aimed at removing some of the last vestiges of discrimination in the U.S. But challenges remain. In many communities, schools have become resegregated, based on residence patterns and the desire of parents to send their children to a neighborhood school. In these places, school officials struggle with achieving and maintaining district-wide equality among schools.

According to *Education Week* magazine, every school day, more than seventy-two hundred students fall through the cracks of America's public high schools. Thirty percent of this year's graduating class, 1.3 million students in all, will fail to graduate with a diploma. President Obama called this reality a "crisis" that the nation cannot afford to accept or ignore. Graduating from high school, he said, is an "economic imperative." According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the median income for high school dropouts aged 18 to 67 years old was roughly \$23,000 in 2008. By comparison, the median income of persons of the same age range who earned their high school credentials is \$42,000. Over a person's lifetime, this translates into a loss of approximately \$630,000 in income. Further, dropouts age 25 and older reported being in worse health than adults who are not dropouts, regardless of income. Dropouts also make up disproportionately high percentages of the nation's prison and death row inmates, have a higher reliance on Medicaid and Medicare, have higher rates of criminal activities, and have a higher rate of reliance on welfare.

In housing, predatory lending has left many of the most vulnerable members of society foreclosed from their homes and from the American Dream. The criminal justice system often deals out harsher penalties to poor blacks and other minorities, particularly in the area of drug enforcement. And as the 2012 election approaches, there is discussion of tactics designed to limit the ability of certain groups to vote.

A *USA Today* poll* taken on the eve of the dedication of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial shows that a significant gulf persists between the views of blacks and whites regarding what the civil rights movement has achieved and how much remains to be done. Meanwhile, efforts to achieve equal rights for other groups, such as gays, immigrants, and the disabled are a reminder that similar issues affect all minorities. Sadly, the occasional hate crime committed against a member of one of these minorities underscores the need for continued vigilance and attention to the enforcement of existing civil rights laws.

*www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2011-08-17-race-equality-poll-mlk_n.htm



TOPICS AND ISSUES RELEVANT TO *DAISY BATES: FIRST LADY OF LITTLE ROCK*

A screening of *Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock* can be used to spark interest in any of the following topics and inspire both individual and community action. In planning a screening, consider finding speakers, panelists, or discussion leaders who have expertise in one or more of the following areas:

- The civil rights movement
- School desegregation
- Equal opportunity in education
- Leadership skills and the importance of community activism
- Social and political activism
- Feminism
- Gender roles
- Race relations today



THINKING MORE DEEPLY

1. What is your assessment of Daisy Bates as a person? Do you feel she was a self-promoter? What words would you use to describe her?
2. Had you ever heard of Daisy Bates before seeing this film? Why is she not more widely known as a prominent figure in the history of the civil rights movement?
3. How many women can you name from the civil rights movement?
4. If a man had been in Daisy Bates's position, would he have done anything differently with regard to the implementation of the Supreme Court decision on school desegregation? How might events have unfolded differently?
5. Do you think Daisy's being female was a help or a hindrance in her fight to achieve civil rights for blacks? Explain your answer.
6. Why did some leaders of the black community in Little Rock feel that change should be more gradual? Would desegregation have been less confrontational if it had taken place more slowly or at a later date? Would it have been more beneficial for race relations? Why or why not?
7. Why did the Little Rock Nine not strike back when they were abused by the white students at Central High School? What do you think would have happened if they had hit back or lashed out?
8. Are you surprised that the black community was divided in its attitude toward the integration of Little Rock's schools? What did one person in the community mean when he said, "Why are you messing it up for the rest of us?"
9. Do you think Daisy Bates deserved to receive the NAACP's Spingarn Medal? Why wasn't she included as a recipient along with the Little Rock students?
10. Was Daisy Bates like other civil rights leaders you are familiar with? If so, in what ways? How was she different?
11. How would you characterize the state of race relations in the U.S. today? What effect, if any, has the election of a black president had on relations between blacks and whites?
12. If given the chance, would you do what Daisy Bates did? Would you risk your marriage, livelihood, and standing in your community?
13. Is there a public issue today that could benefit from someone like Daisy Bates taking it on? Explain.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

Together with other audience members, brainstorm actions that you might take as an individual and that people might do as a group. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. Check out NAACP's Action Alerts and find out how you can get involved. As a member, you can also choose to work on one of the NAACP's many advocacy issues. More information is available at www.naacp.org/pages/take-action.
2. Women and Girls Lead is an initiative of the Independent Television Service (ITVS). Visit their webpage (www.itvs.org/women-and-girls-lead/get-involved) to learn how you can help girls in your community develop leadership skills by participating in service activities.
3. Learn about the civil rights leaders in your community – those who were active in the 1950s and 1960s as well as those who are active today. Find out what civil rights issues are currently occupying their attention and how you can get involved.
4. Education – Daisy Bates had no children yet she decided to take an active role in the education of children in her community; until her death she was known to visit the schools in Little Rock and read to the young students. Would you consider joining your local Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and also taking an active role in the schools in your community?
5. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) works on numerous civil liberties issues including racial justice. Contribute to the ACLU's efforts by taking action on one of the issues you feel strongly about. Visit www.aclu.org for more information.
6. Organize a discussion about the state of race relations in your community. Invite a mixed (racially and generationally) panel of experts to spearhead the discussion. Encourage the participation of as diverse an audience as possible.
7. Is there a social, political, environmental, or other condition you would like to see changed? Make your voice heard on the issue by writing to your elected representatives and to local newspapers and other media. Learn how to organize your community to mount a larger effort to work for change. Two resources that can help are "Bottoms Up: A Guide to Grassroots Organizing" (www.november.org/BottomsUp/index.html) and Common Dreams (www.commondreams.org).

For additional outreach ideas, visit www.itvs.org, the website of the Independent Television Service. For local information, check the website of your PBS station.



RESOURCES

www.itvs.org/films/daisy-bates – This is the ITVS website devoted to the film *Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock*.

www.itvs.org/women-and-girls-lead – Women and Girls Lead is a multiyear public media initiative to support and empower girls as they step into leadership roles; work to improve their communities; and create innovations in science, the arts, business, and governance.

Daisy Bates Biographical Information

libinfo.uark.edu/SpecialCollections/findingaids/batesaid/batesaid.html – The Daisy Bates Papers at the University of Arkansas catalogues correspondence, photographs, newspaper clippings, and other memorabilia. The website includes a brief biography of Daisy Bates.

encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=591 – The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture contains a biography of Daisy Bates, including her involvement in school desegregation in Little Rock.

Civil Rights History

www.infoplease.com/spot/civilrightstimeline1.html – This webpage contains a time line of milestones in the civil rights movement, from 1948 through 2009.

www.loc.gov/exhibits/brown/brown-aftermath.html – This Library of Congress webpage provides photos and brief descriptions of the major events from the civil rights movement.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brown_v._Board_of_Education – The map on this website shows the 17 states where segregation in schools and public facilities was legal prior to the *Brown* decision.

brownvboard.org – The Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research serves as a living tribute to the attorneys, community organizers, and plaintiffs in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Its mission is to keep the tenets and ideals of *Brown* relevant for future generations through programs, preservation, advocacy, and civic engagement. The website contains historical information on the legal cases, decisions, and events surrounding *Brown* as well as earlier cases pertaining to school desegregation.

clinton2.nara.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica/PIR_summary.pdf – This is the executive summary of “One America in the 21st Century: Forging a New Future,” a report of President Clinton’s 1997 Initiative on Race.

Civil Rights Organizations

www.naacp.org/content/main – The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People works to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.

hwww.civilrights.org – The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition of more than two hundred national organizations that promotes and protects the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States through legislative advocacy and outreach to targeted constituencies.

www.aclu.org – The ACLU works in courts, legislatures, and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States. The ACLU also works to extend rights to segments of our population that have traditionally been denied their rights, including people of color and women.

Female Leaders

www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9862643/ns/us_news-life/t/women-had-key-roles-civil-rights-movement – This article about women in the civil rights movement describes their contribution and explains why they remained largely unknown to the public. (Note: The article does not mention Daisy Bates.)

www.infoplease.com/spot/whmbios3.html – This website contains a comprehensive list of female reformers and activists, including both historical and contemporary figures.

www.historyswomen.com/socialreformers.html – History’s Women lists a variety of “unsung heroines” who were leaders, activists, crusaders, and reformers.

Female Leaders

www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9862643/ns/us_news-life/t/women-had-key-roles-civil-rights-movement – This article about Women in the civil rights movement describes their contribution and explains why they remained largely unknown to the public. (Note: The article does not mention Daisy Bates.)

