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DAISY BATES: FIRST LADY OF LITTLE ROCK PREMIERES ON INDEPENDENT LENS ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2012 AT 10 PM

Fearless Civil Rights Leader Achieved Fame as Leader of the Little Rock Nine — But at What Price?

(San Francisco, CA) — *Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock* is the story of a seven-year journey by filmmaker Sharon La Cruise to discover the life of a forgotten civil rights activist named Daisy Bates. Beautiful, glamorous, and articulate, Bates was fearless in her quest for justice, stepping into the spotlight to bring national attention to civil rights issues, and, some say, to herself. Unconventional and egotistical, she became a household name in 1957 when she fought for the right of nine black students to attend the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Her public support culminated in a constitutional crisis — pitting a president against a governor and a community against itself. As head of the Arkansas NAACP and protector of the nine students, Bates would achieve instant fame as the drama played out on national television and in newspapers around the world. But that fame would prove fleeting and Bates would pay a hefty price for her attempts to remain relevant. The film travels with Daisy Bates on her long and lonely walk from orphaned child to newspaperwoman to national Civil Rights figure to her last days in Little Rock. Bates’s journey, full of triumphs and defeats, parallels the ongoing struggle of generations of African Americans who have challenged America to live up to what it has claimed to be for more than 200 years. Produced and directed by La Cruise, *Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock* premieres on the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* on Thursday, February 2, 2012 at 10 PM (check local listings).

Daisy Bates was not born to make history, but make history she did. The product of a segregated Arkansas sawmill town, she was illegitimate and self-taught after the eighth grade.



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Her early life was scarred when she discovered that the couple raising her were not, in fact, her parents. Her biological mother had been raped, murdered, and dumped into a local pond by white men. Fearing for his safety, her father gave Daisy away and never reclaimed her. Throughout her life — even at the height of her acclaim — Daisy Bates would know loneliness and a feeling of being on the outside looking in. It was a feeling that drove her relentlessly: to take up with a married man as a means of escaping the circumstances of her birth, to constantly push herself and those around her, to ignore her fears and doubts, to never let friends or enemies see her in pain, and to always present an air of composure, sophistication, and glamour, even when her life was falling apart.

Today, Daisy Bates's contributions, first as a newspaper publisher in Little Rock and then as head of the Arkansas NAACP, remain unrecognized outside of Arkansas. The film connects Bates to many of the well-known female civil rights activists who followed in her footsteps: Gloria Richardson Dandridge, Diane Nash, and Angela Davis. Bates paved the way for all these women to take a stand in their communities when the time came to do so. In telling the story of Daisy Bates, the film fills in a gap in the story of hundreds of women in the civil rights movement, both past and present, whose contributions continue to be overlooked.

To learn more about the film, visit the *Daisy Bates* interactive companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/daisy-bates/>), which features detailed information on the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

The participants, in alphabetical order

Ernest Green is a member of the Little Rock Nine and was the first black graduate from Central High School. He currently works as an investment banker in his own Washington, DC-based firm.

Sybil Jordan-Hampton is retired president of Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. She attended Central High School after the Nine departed; she also sold *Arkansas State Press* newspapers as a child.

Elizabeth Jacoway is the author of *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock and the Crisis that Shocked the Nation* and the only historian to do an oral interview with Daisy Bates.

Janis Kearney is a former Clinton diarist and former managing editor of *Arkansas State Press*. She is currently a self-published author and adjunct professor.

Prof. John Kirk is chair and Donaghey professor of history at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He is the author of several books on Little Rock and an expert on the city during the 1940s.

Laura Manning is a resident of Huttig, Arkansas and local restaurant owner. A city council member, she is also an oral historian.

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Prof. Aldon Morris is a sociologist at Northwestern University and an expert on the organizations of the civil rights movement.

Brynda Pappas is a former newspaper publisher and public relations executive who has retired in Fayetteville, AR.

David Neely, an attorney, is a cousin of Daisy and L.C. Bates.

About the Filmmaker

Sharon La Cruise (Producer/Director) has worked in television and film for twenty years, both in the corporate and production aspects of the business. She began her television career with ABC Primetime sales, working closely with the account executives and advertising agencies. She has worked for Blackside Inc., Firelight Media, Roja Productions, The Faith Project, The Coca-Cola Company, the 1996 Summer Olympic Games and CNN. She has worked on *Shut up & Sing*; *Going Up River: The Long War of John Kerry*; *Beyond Brown: Pursing the Promise*; *Citizen King*; *Matters of Race*; *This Far By Faith: African-American Spiritual Journeys*; Zora Neale Hurston's *Jump at the Sun*; CNN's *Through the Lens*, *The Road to the White House* and *The Planetary Police*. She currently works as an associate for the Ford Foundation in the JustFilms unit, and is a member of the International Documentary Association. She holds an M.A. degree in television journalism from New York University, and a B.A. in history from Adelphi University.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities, and moments in history. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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