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“TIME FOR A SHOWDOWN:” THE PARTNERSHIP OF DAISY AND L.C. BATES,
AND THE POLITICS OF GENDER, PROTEST AND MARRIAGE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation examines how Daisy Bates emerged as the leader and spokesperson for the 1957 Central High School desegregation crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas. While much is known about Bates’ activism during the desegregation showdown, scholars have not yet explored the early portion of her life and the role gender politics played in her rise to fame. The precursor and backstory to the events of 1957 is critical to fully understanding the role local African-American leaders organized and mobilized their communities against Jim Crow. Episodes like the Little Rock Crisis were not random, precipitous confrontations; they were the products of decades of black activism. Bates’ story is not just a narrative about the self-realization and creation of an individual, but, perhaps more importantly, a personal and political partnership she shared with her husband L.C. by recovering the history of the Bateses’ activities before 1957, this dissertation explains the role African-Americans played in the creation and development of leadership for the Civil Rights Movement.

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Introduction: Searching for Daisy Bates: The Politics of Gender and Leadership

“We’ve been fighting for rights, individual rights all my life. What we fought for, what we stood for, we’ve seen come about, and that is that the law apply to the Negro the same as to any other man. That’s all we were fighting for; we were just a little ahead of our time”

-- L.C. Bates, quoted in *Arkansas Gazette*, January 22, 1972

“Not only was integration in the Border states a threat to segregation everywhere, it was also the decisive test of whether the extremists in the Deep South would feel isolated or not. Their strategy was to provoke a conflict over integration that would mobilize the broadest possible range of opinion in their support.”

--Oscar Handlin, “Civil Rights After Little Rock: The Failure of Moderation,”
Commentary Magazine, November, 1957

“Only such novel forms of storytelling can convey what it means to have lived through an undefeated but unfinished revolution, a world-defining social movement that has experienced both reversals and victories and whose victories are now, once again, being partially reversed. Both the victories and the reversals call us to action, as citizens and as historians with powerful stories to tell. Both are part of a long and ongoing civil rights movement. Both can help us imaging—for our times—a new way of life, a continuing revolution.”

--Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History*, 2005

Searching for Daisy Bates

Daisy Bates lived during a time when the realm of possibilities for African-Americans and women were severely limited.¹ The Jim Crow Era of which she was born and came of age was stained by the pernicious presence of racism and sexism. In the first half of the twentieth century race relations were in what historians have labeled the “nadir”, and male and white supremacy maintained incredible systematic power that

¹ Studies about the lives of women during the era in which Daisy Bates include, Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University Press, 1996); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 57; White, “The Cost of Clubwork, The Price of Feminism,” in Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock, eds., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 247-269.

shaped the private lives of all Americans.² Still, in spite of the reactionary power held by whites and men, the early to middle twentieth century was also a period of considerable change in the lives of African-Americans and women in the United States, especially in the areas of citizenship and politics.

Daisy Lee Gatson was born around 1913 in the rural, racially segregated South, under questionable circumstances, and in a world personally and politically in flux. The identity of Gatson's biological parents and the exact location and date of her birth remain unclear. Daisy Bates never knew the full truth about her pedigree, yet this uncertainty did not prevent her from creating a linear narrative about her origins based on what she was told by others. She took the liberty to reconstruct the events of her childhood so that they were consistent with the public image of the woman she later became. The little girl with the unknown start in life eventually grew to become one of the Civil Rights Movement's most important female leaders.³ The story about the self-creation and political evolution of Daisy Bates, the self-realized woman is also the story about a

² Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 4; Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954; Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson*, (New York: Collier Books, 1965), 292-302.

³ For Discussions of Daisy Bates in the Little Rock school desegregation crisis see, Lerone Bennett Jr., "Chronicles of Black Courage: The Little Rock 10", *Ebony Magazine*, (Vol. 53 Issue 2, December, 1997), 132-6; Tony Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis: A Constitutional Interpretation*, (Westwood, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984); Elizabeth Jacoway, *To Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, The Crisis that Shocked the Nation*, (New York: The Free Press, 2007); Elizabeth Jacoway and C. Fred Williams, *Understanding the Little Rock Crisis: An Exercise in Remembrance and Reconciliation*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999); John Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002); "Daisy Bates, the National Association of Colored People, and the 1957 Little Rock School Crisis: A Gendered Perspective," Peter Ling and Sharon Montieth eds, *Gender in the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 17-40, and, "The Little Rock Crisis and postwar Black Activism in Arkansas", *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, (Vol. LVI, Autumn 1997), 273-93; Linda Reed, "The Legacy of Daisy Bates," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, (Vol. LIX, Spring 2000), 76-83; Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, "Daisy Bates and the Little Rock School Crisis", *Journal of Black Studies*, (May 1996, vol. 26 issue 5), 616-28. Memoir is the genre that dominates our understanding of the Little Rock Crisis. See Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1962); Melba Patillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High*, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1994); Blossom, *It HAS happened here.*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959; Elizabeth Huckaby, *Crisis at Central High, Little Rock, 1957-58*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1980).

partnership and marriage with a man with progressive gender politics and a shared belief system.

At the time of Bates' birth, the United States was in the process of transforming itself into Modern America. Catalyzed by the late nineteenth century Industrial Revolution, the migration of southern blacks into northern urban and industrial centers, muckraking journalism, Immigration, and social discontent between wealthy capitalists and poor workers, the early twentieth century's Progressive Movement was a transformative, perhaps revolutionary, moment in United States History. Inspired by Republican President Theodore Roosevelt's "trust busting", and continued by his hand-picked successor, William Taft, "Progressivism" dominated the early twentieth century's political landscape. However, in 1912, native-Virginian, Democrat Woodrow Wilson became the first southern-born U.S. President since Tennessee's Andrew Johnson ascended to the position after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Wilson was sympathetic to the white segregationists in the South, and less concerned about the demands of the African-American community.

Despite the obstacle the President presented, the 1910s were significant because the period foreshadowed future changes in the lives of women and African-Americans. During the decade, support for women's suffrage culminated in the June 4, 1919 congressional bill, which, ten months later was ratified as the Constitution's 19th Amendment, finally granting women equal access to the ballot box. Unfortunately for black women, like the men of their race, Jim Crow laws limited their constitutional rights. For black women, the suffrage battle was bittersweet. For African-Americans, the twentieth century's second decade is significant because it represented a changing of

the guard for national black leadership. Between his famous 1895 “Atlanta Declaration” speech where he declared that blacks should “cast their buckets down where they are”, and his 1915 death, Booker T. Washington controlled the agenda of the black community from his Tuskegee Machine by advocating for vocational education, and policies that appeared unthreatening to the status quo by influential, wealthy whites throughout the nation. Washington’s death created space and opportunities for new national black leadership to surface. Established in 1909, led by Harvard University’s first African-American PhD., W.E.B. Du Bois, the interracial National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) emerged as the nation’s most formidable civil rights organization. The group pledged a crusade to eradicate Jim Crow segregation and racial oppression in the United States.⁴

In 1952, Daisy Bates became the first female President of the NAACP’s Arkansas State Conference (ASC). Upon assuming office, she organized a local youth chapter, reorganized the state conference, used her husband’s newspaper, the *Arkansas State Press*, to brand herself and promote her activities, and repaired the ASC’s relationship with the NAACP’s national leaders in New York. Daisy is most known for her leadership and emergence as the national spokesperson for the Little Rock Nine, after they were denied entrance into Central High School by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus in what became the 1957 Little Rock desegregation crisis. Attractive and articulate, Bates became a favorite of the national media, and reaped the quick rewards that often come with instant fame. The Associated Press named her 1957’s Woman of the Year in

⁴ Langston Hughes, *Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP*, (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1962); David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993); Patricia Sullivan’s *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: The New Press, 2009); Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP’s Legal Strategy against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1987); White, *Too Heavy a Load*.

Education. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. invited her to be the first woman to join the Executive Board of his newly formed Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins informed her that the group's governing body had elected her to its Board of Directors. In 1958, Daisy and the Little Rock Nine were awarded the NAACP's highest honor, the Spingarn Medal. Bates is the only woman, and the Little Rock Nine were the only youth, to receive this distinction during the years of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. In addition to the numerous awards she received at the height of her activism, Bates and Septima Clark are the only two women who published forward-looking memoirs during the movement's most tumultuous period, before its outcome was clear. These two accounts are doubly important because they were written by women, and because they were published when the history the Civil Rights Movement made was still unfolding. Daisy Bates was also the only woman to address the official crowd at the 1963 March on Washington. Bates spoke as a symbol for the women of the race. She did not speak independently for black women. Despite protests from female leaders and organizers, the voices of African American women were silenced by the sexism of the men of their race.⁵ In the middle 1960s, Bates continued to work for the NAACP, and registered black voters in northern cities for the Democratic National Committee (DNC). She dedicated the final years of her political career, 1966-1974, working for Arkansas Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), and as Director for the Mitchellville Project. Mitchellville is a small, all black

⁵ William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013); 175-6, 192-3; Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, (New York: Beacon Press, 2013); Theoharis, "A Life of Being Rebellious: The Radicalism of Rosa Parks," Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds, *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, (New York: NYU Press, 2009)2, 128. Paula Giddings wrote that "Mrs. Daisy Bates was asked to say a few words." *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, (New York: Perennial, 1984), 314; Dorothy Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 145-6.

town in the Arkansas Delta located roughly 90 miles southeast of Little Rock in Desha County. Bates used connections she had made in the movement to secure approximately \$2,000,000 in grants and loans from President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty to modernize the impoverished, forgotten town. In a 1968 interview, Bates told a local newspaper that she hoped to make Mitchellville a "model Negro community for the nation" of what was possible with the federal government's help.⁶ Although she was restricted in some areas by the subpar education she received growing up, with the support of her political, newspaper-owning husband, L.C., Daisy achieved a degree of recognition for her activism that has eluded many of her female contemporaries.

The truth about Daisy Bates' life before she made history and became a national civil rights figure is much more interesting and complex than the story she published in her 1962 memoir, *The Long shadow of Little Rock*.⁷ In her account, Bates recalled that her childhood was uneventful until around the age of seven. At that tender age, Daisy remembered her first encounter with southern racism when she ran an errand for her adoptive mother to the local commissary to get some porch chops for dinner. Roughly one year later, Daisy recalled learning about the event that she repeatedly isolated as the impetus behind her civil rights activism: the kidnap, attempted rape and murder of her birth mother, allegedly by three local white men. These two events, along with other observations she made about the differences between the quality of life for whites and blacks in her hometown, made Daisy angry at the way her people were treated, and at her people's acceptance of such blatant disregard for their humanity. Her adolescent, teen and early years of adulthood are almost completely undocumented periods of her life.

⁶ Maurice Moore, "Daisy Bates of '57 Fame: She's Fighting Poverty Now", *Arkansas Democrat* October 27, 1968.

⁷ Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press), 1962.

However what has survived for the historian challenges the verity of the events Daisy's constructed as the narrative of her life, and supports the claim that Bates was a politically conscious woman who constructed a personal persona that benefited her personal ambitions, while also protecting the respectable, non-violent image of the Civil Rights Movement.

In her memoir, Daisy imposed a noticeable silences around the subject of her relationship with the man she married, L.C. Bates. She was particularly tight-lipped about the period before they relocated to Little Rock. Throughout their lives, both Daisy and L.C. stated that they met when she was minor, but did not begin a romantic relationship before she was of adult age.⁸ At the time of their initial meeting, L.C. was a traveling insurance salesman who had lost his job as a reporter due to the Great Depression. He visited Daisy's residence in southern Arkansas, intending to sell her family a life insurance policy. L.C. formed a connection with Daisy's father, and eventually took her away with him while she was a teenager and he was still married to another woman in Memphis, Tennessee. Daisy did not mention this period when she may have been L.C.'s mistress for as long as ten years, or that the couple lived in Memphis in the 1930s when his wife, step-daughter and parents also resided in the city. The records for this period of their life are scant, but by 1940, the couple quietly relocated from Memphis to Little Rock, Arkansas. In her account about her life, Daisy stated that she married L.C. before they relocated.⁹ FBI records support the conclusion

⁸ Irene Wassell, "L.C. Bates: Editor of the State Press," M.A. Thesis, (University of Arkansas-Little Rock, School of Journalism, 1983), 12; Brynda Pappas, "L.C. Bates: A Champion of Freedom," *Arkansas Gazette*, January 22, 1982.

⁹ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 32-3.

that they at least presented themselves as husband and wife during this period.¹⁰ The truth is that the couple did not marry until March 4, 1942, and when they did, the ceremony was performed secretly, 100 miles south of Little Rock.¹¹

Daisy's account is also unclear concerning the nature of her involvement with the *Arkansas State Press*, the newspaper L.C. launched on May 9, 1941 from the basement of one of Little Rock's black churches. L.C. published the *State Press* weekly for 18 years. In 1959, the dream of which he had poured his heart and soul perished due to the economic reprisals hurled at him from local segregationists because of his support for integration and Daisy's NAACP activities.¹² Although Daisy claimed to write for the *State Press* in her memoir, it is likely that she dictated stories and ideas to L.C. or one of the paper's female reporters who helped the composition. Furthermore, it was not until after the end of World War II that Daisy joined the *State Press* in an official capacity as "City Editor." Daisy became more political after joining her husband at the *State Press*, but the level of her involvement remains somewhat of a mystery to scholars.

The period between the end of WWII and her election as president of the NAACP's Arkansas State Conference (ASC) demonstrates a woman evolving from the limitations of a trophy-wifedom into an independent, outspoken public advocate for social justice. After WWII, Daisy Bates started the political journey that made her a heroine for the Modern Black Freedom Struggle by increasing her visibility in the local black community through the *State Press*, co-chairing the state Fair Employment

¹⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Daisy Bates File, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas (hereafter cited as DB, FBI File)

¹¹ Dallas County Marriage Index 1845-1959, 1:16, Dallas County Courthouse, Fordyce, Arkansas; Grif Stockley, *Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader From Arkansas*, (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2005), 27.

¹² Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 170-8.

Practices Committee, serving as a poll watcher, and increasing her involvement in the NAACP, National Council of Negro Women, the Progressive Party, and other local and national civic and political organizations. Retelling the story behind the creation and evolution of Daisy Bates helps scholars better understand how she developed into a woman capable of providing courageous leadership. Bates' story is perhaps most compelling for what her life journey illuminates about the multitude of challenges black women and black men born and reared under Jim Crow confronted on the roads to self-realization. In order to clarify how Daisy changed over time into the woman remembered in accounts of the Civil Rights Movement, it is imperative to explore how L.C. and the *State Press* helped mold her political development.

The story about the journey that led Daisy Bates to her moment of national leadership requires retelling and reinterpretation. In his September 1958 article titled, "The First Lady of Little Rock," Ebony Magazine journalist Lerone Bennett Jr. wrote that Daisy Bates "wielded as much power as has been given to any woman of her time...during one of the greatest constitutional crises in American history."¹³ Although Bennett's article claimed to introduce the public to Daisy Bates, "the real woman," the narrative he authored rehashed a political narrative about her life that the heroine from Little Rock constructed about her personal history and pre-1957 civil rights activism.¹⁴ The story about the creation of Daisy Bates is as much a narrative about the collaboration between black men and women in the Civil Rights Movement, as it is about an individual woman determined to make her mark on the world and eradicate discrimination and oppression in the United States.

¹³ Lerone Bennett Jr., "First Lady of Little Rock: Daisy Bates becomes known around the world but few know the real woman," Ebony Magazine, (September, 1958), 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid*

Gender Expectations and Responses to Patriarchy

Studies about Civil Rights Movement figures typically focus on men.¹⁵ When the female spouses of these male subjects are discussed, their treatment is that of one member of a larger supporting cast of characters in a story centered on the greater, more-accomplished, singular male life at the heart of the narrative. Women often become prominent in biographies about men when they require male protection, or are able to be used as effective symbols for the movement. In other words, when they are playing their gendered, feminine role. While, traditional biographies deepen our scholarly comprehension of history-making individuals and the eras in which they lived, the genre's dominant focus on the lives of males typically relegates female life partners into passive objects that exist in the gendered background behind-the-scenes of the history being made around them.

While gender relations were in flux in the early twentieth century, marriage remained a sexist institution that imposed the expectation that men dominated public life

¹⁵ Scholarly biographies of black women in the Civil Rights Movement include, Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks*, (New York: Penguin, 2000); Katherine Mellon Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009); Cynthia Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson*, (New York: Roman and Littlefield, 2000); Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 2003); Ransby, *Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Rosa Parks*. Compilations on the movement's women include: Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, eds. *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 2001); Vicki Crawford, Jacqueline Rouse, Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, eds. (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Woman on Race and Sex in America*, (New York: Perennial, 1984); Faith S. Holsaert, eds, *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Davis W. Houck and David E Dixon, eds, *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009); Gerder Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, (New York: Vintage, 1972); Peter Ling and Sharon Montieth eds, *Gender in the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999); Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1870*, (New York: Touchstone, 2002); Beverly Guy-Sheftall, eds, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of Black Feminist Thought*, (New York: The Free Press, 1995);

and women should support them by providing a stable, private life inside the home.

Scholars of African-American and women and gender history have demonstrated how the unique circumstances of the black experience in the United States created a dynamic between women and men that often diverted from, even rejected, the models promoted by a patriarchal American society.¹⁶ Black women responded to the pressures to marry in different ways than white women. Nevertheless, black women did feel the weight of the prison of feminine gender expectations. The historian Deborah Gray White has written that one early twentieth century black male leader believed that African-Americans were “in need of men, and it is a great calamity for our women to act as substitutes...the surest way for our men to become more manly is for our women to become more womanly.”¹⁷ Similarly, in her biography about Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizer and leader Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, the historian Cynthia Griggs Fleming observes that in the 1960s, “women were not supposed to exercise power over men.”¹⁸ In addition to fighting racism, black women also had to deal with the gender chauvinism of black men. The presence of sexism directly influenced intra-movement relationships between men and women.

¹⁶ Elsa Barkley Brown, “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African-American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom,” Jane Dailey, Glenda Gilmore, Bryant Simon eds, *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, (Princeton: University Press, 2000); Elsa Barkley-Brown, “To Catch the Vision of Freedom: reconstructing Southern Black Women’s Political History, 1865-1880,” In *African-American Women and the Vote*, ed., Ann Gordon, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 66-99; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning For Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); *Sojourning For Freedom*; Lee, *For Freedom’s Sake*; Painter, *Sojourner Truth*; White, *Too Heavy a Load*.

¹⁷ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 57. See also, White, “The Cost of Clubwork, The Price of Feminism,” in Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebeson, eds., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 247-269.

¹⁸ Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 122.

Despite the pressure from men within the race to be more feminine, many black women rejected traditional notions about women's proper place in society. In his book about feminist black women on the political left, the historian Erik McDuffie asserts that black women constructed "personal narratives to show their 'resistance to being defined in the context of male-dominated relationships,'" and demonstrated their refusal to be "circumscribed by prevailing gender roles."¹⁹ National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) President Dorothy Height is an example of the rejection noted by Professor McDuffie. Ms. Height never married. White concludes that her "unmarried status and her seeming casualness about it reflected changes in women's lives."²⁰ Later in her life, Height stated that she did not believe that she needed marriage to increase her status, and personally feared that she would overshadow her husband. As White put it, Height was "her own 'person,'" and eventually decided that "she wanted no part of a marriage where 'the woman' has to become part of the background of the man."²¹ While some women chose not to marry, others, like Ella Baker refused to discuss what she called her "domestic arrangement" publically.²² Whether it was by choosing to remain single or completely disconnecting their husbands from their public lives, many black women were clear that they were independent females to be taken as serious intellectually as their male counterparts.

An interrogation of the intimate relationships between husbands and wives reveals important insights about the various approaches women took to juggle the demands of married womanhood with their personal and political aspirations. Studying couples also

¹⁹ McDuffie, *Sojourning For Freedom*, 149.

²⁰ White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 190.

²¹ *Ibid*, 190-1.

²² Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 102-6.

helps scholars understand the ways the men in the lives of assertive women either assisted or hindered their personal development and political activism. Collaboration and conflict are not mutually exclusive. Akin to romantically intimate relationships, in the Civil Rights Movement gender tension and racial unity existed, to borrow from the historian Timothy B. Tyson, “in tension and in tandem.”²³ Dr. White has written that “gender tension” was the “price” early twentieth century black women paid for their leadership and activism.²⁴ One of the Civil Rights Movement’s most egregious examples of the gendered expectations placed on black women, and of the fears expressed by Dorothy Height, is Ruby Doris Smith Robinson of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Biographer Cynthia Griggs Fleming describes Robinson as “one of the most powerful women in a Civil Rights Organization.”²⁵ Still, Robinson, who died of cancer at the age of twenty-five, had difficulties balancing her responsibilities in SNCC with what she accepted as her place as a wife and mother to her loving, but conventional husband, Clifford and their son, Toure. Friends recalled that Ruby tried to please Clifford, but also did not want to be “dominated by the whole process” of being married.²⁶ According to Fleming, Robinson’s “commitment to the movement and her commitment to her husband pulled her in different directions.”²⁷ Clifford “rarely offered to help because he had very traditional views of husband-wife-roles” and expressed his belief that their son was “definitely her responsibility.”²⁸ Ruby Doris Smith Robinson is

²³ Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and to Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 308.

²⁴ Deborah Gray White’s “The Cost of Club Work, The Price of Black Feminism,” in Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock eds., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp.247-269

²⁵ Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry*, 104.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 105.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 106.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 108.

an example of how the expectations placed on women, because they were women, very often conflicted with leadership in the Civil Rights Movement, and contributed to their early physical demise.

Black women's assessments of, and responses to, racism and sexism were far from monolithic during the Jim Crow era. In his study about radical black female leaders, Erik McDuffie demonstrates how some women chose to be silent regarding their intimacies, and "rarely discussed details about their marriages to friends, colleagues...and interviewers later in life."²⁹ Many black women supported male leadership because they sympathized with plight of black men who viewed as being denied their rightful access to fully realized manhood. Ironically, in a patriarchal society, the realization of full black manhood entailed the subordination of black women. In her study about African-American women and the Civil Rights Movement, the sociologist Belinda Robnett observed that most of the women she interviewed "included the courageous acts of men and women, and did not perceive their actions as having been limited by male domination."³⁰ When later asked about the Civil Rights Movement's gender dynamics, SNCC activist Bernice Johnson Reagon declared that "men grew up—and we were growing up. This is what you need to understand. We were growing up as adults."³¹ According to Robnett, for most of the women interviewed, the movement remained "a special and unique period in history, one which evoked memories of cooperation, love, fear, accomplishment, and empowerment."³² Minister Prathia Hall Wynn, who was also a member of SNCC was adamant about the importance and significance of public black

²⁹ McDuffie, *Sojourning For Freedom*, 148, 147-151.

³⁰ Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long?: African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36-7.

³¹ Robnett, *How Long? How Long?*, 37.

³² *Ibid*

male leadership. “I think that there has been an attitude of support for Black male leadership by very, very strong, assertive Black women,” she declared. “Women often went along with that, feeling that it was important to our community that Black males be seen as competent, standing up and giving strong leadership...there was an attitude of partnership.”³³ Mississippi activist Victoria Gray Adams also recalled collaborating with black men. Mrs. Gray Adams asserted that “the women were out front” because “the white folks didn’t see the women as that much of a threat...They didn’t know the power of women, especially black women.”³⁴ While sexism was clearly present in the Freedom Struggle, black women did not believe that their gender made them inferior to male activists who were their partners in the movement to defeat Jim Crow. However, the contradictions between their belief in the importance of fully realized black manhood and their desire as to be liberated as women must not be taken simply as a sign of the times, and deserves further interrogation from scholars.

The inseparable partnership many female activists acknowledged with black men did not prevent African-American women from fighting race, gender and class oppression. For example, when Fannie Lou Hamer and Shirley Chisholm attended the founding conference for the National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC) in summer 1971, they “fought for the passage of an antiracism resolution,” making it the organization’s “first official action.”³⁵ According to Hamer’s biographer Chana Kai Lee, the two women concluded that they could not forge a “sisterhood without an expressed

³³ *Ibid*, 42-3.

³⁴ Victoria Gray Adams, “They Didn’t Know the Power of Women,” Faith S. Holsaert, eds, *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 238.

³⁵ Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom’s Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 170.

commitment to end all forms of discrimination and suffering for all women.”³⁶ Chisholm told the majority white NWPC delegation that “Black women want to be part of the women’s movement but we are also part of another movement—the liberation of our own people.”³⁷ Hamer was more candid. “I’m not fighting to liberate myself from the black man in the South,” she declared, “because he’s been stripped of being a citizen...I got a black husband...that I don’t want to be liberated from. But we are here to work side by side with this black man to bring liberation to all people.”³⁸ While fighting for the liberation of their race, black women were also part of the movement to eradicate gender oppression; one identity marker did not trump the other.³⁹

Although most biographers focus on individuals, a growing number of scholars have begun to explore couples as inextricable duos who worked together to achieve their goals. The scholarly dialogue concerning partnerships and couples is a growing, budding field of scholarly inquiry. In her groundbreaking examination into the courtship, tragic marriage, and separation of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore, the historian Eleanor Alexander argues, that “marriage provides a simultaneous account of private and public life, since public policy provides the atmosphere in which intimacy develops.”⁴⁰ Though intimately private, marriage is also a public institution. On this point, historian Glenda Gilmore has written that turn of the century North Carolina black activists Sarah Dudley and Charles Pettey’s “devotion to one another spilled over into public life.”⁴¹ According to Gilmore, not only was Charles “proud” of his wife, but “saw her as his

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ *Ibid*, 171.

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race”; White, *Too Heavy a Load*; White, “The Cost of Clubwork”.

⁴⁰ Eleanor Alexander, *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow: The Tragic Courtship and Marriage of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore*, (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 7.

⁴¹ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 17.

equal,” going as far as “[bragging] about her to his colleagues. “The Dudley-Petty marriage,” Gilmore concludes, “suggests mutual cooperation and equal partnership.”⁴²

The late literary scholar Claudia Tate asserted that black women viewed marriage as what she called an “industrious partnership.”⁴³ For Gilmore, marriage “among African-Americans...was political” because it challenged white perceptions about people of African descent.⁴⁴ The intersection between the private and public spheres makes studying marriage, and the nature of intimate relationships, indispensable to a full recovery and comprehension of the intricate politics of the African-American Freedom Struggle.

The type of relationship Daisy and L.C. Bates enjoyed was similar to the one between Rosa and Raymond Parks. Daisy and Rosa were born within a year of one another. Each married politically active older men who mentored their political curiosity and supported their civil rights activism. Both women became national symbols for the Civil Rights Movement—Parks for bus integration, and Bates for school desegregation—during the tumultuous 1950s. At the height of their popularity, both women spoke to standing room only audiences across the nation for the NAACP. However, unlike Parks, who many reduced to the gendered position of a secretary, Bates was viewed as a leader for the movement she symbolized. While Bates was initially interpreted as more involved in Little Rock politics than Parks was in Montgomery, recent studies have resurrected the “Mother of the Civil Rights Movement” and has proven that she was unjustly imprisoned by symbolism. The reverse has been the case for Bates, who is now

⁴² *Ibid*, 17-18.

⁴³ Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 124-5, quoted in Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 18.

⁴⁴ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 18.

looked at more as a symbol than a leader. The truth is that both women were leaders to whom the public attached gendered symbolism. Leadership and symbolism are not mutually exclusive and usually coexist, but the denial of the category of leadership is gendered and sexist. Partnerships like the Parks and Bateses were more collaborative and egalitarian, and less conventional and hierarchal.

Both couples are important examples that challenge belief that relationships with two politically active partners were hierarchal, where one partner was more dominant than the other. By being demonstrative of the presence of collaboration between men and women, the Parks and Bateses also suggest that historians explore the role supportive husbands played in assisting their famous wives. In her recent political biography about the life of Rosa Parks, the historian Jeanne Theoharis observes that as “scholars have begun to foreground the crucial support that wives of civil rights leaders made, in a troubling omission, there has been almost no discussion of the role of husbands.”⁴⁵ It is important that “Rosa considered Raymond a partner” who facilitated her activism...[worried] about her safety” and “prioritized her work,” which was a change from the earlier period of their marriage when he was the more politically active of the pair.⁴⁶ The poet Nikki Giovanni called the said the Parks’s were “of one mind.” *Jet Magazine* described them as “a modern day power couple.”⁴⁷ Professor Theoharis, demonstrates how a full understanding of Rosa Parks’s political development requires knowledge of how her husband, Raymond Parks, helped shape her growth, and provided incredible support after she was enshrined as an indelible national symbol for the Civil Rights Movement. The approach of studying couples allows for a reinterpretation of the

⁴⁵ Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, 122.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 123.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

movement's gender dynamics, and is particularly useful as a model for studying the lives of Daisy and L.C. Bates. Theoharis provides an example of how to recover the presence of the complex, sometimes tense, collaborative interplay between women and men, and wives and husbands in the Freedom Struggle.

Reexamining the intersections between civil rights leaders' intimate relationships and their political activism elucidates the role women, as well as men, played in creating and maintaining their more famous spouses. In her brilliant biography about Eslanda Robeson, biographer and historian, Professor Barbara Ransby writes that the story about the accomplished black woman remembered by history as Paul Robeson's wife is "not a singular story. It is a story of a marriage and a partnership that was fraught with complications, but which ultimately endured."⁴⁸ Dr. Ransby recovers a compelling narrative about a self-realized woman who simultaneously "seeth[ed] with ambition" for her husband, and demonstrated an unwavering dedication to their marriage and his professional success.⁴⁹ Ransby demonstrated how Eslanda was Paul's fiercely loyal wife, but also an independent woman who chose to be a life partner who helped her husband achieve his many accomplishments.

This study is a departure from traditional biographies because it approaches Daisy and L.C. Bates as two separate individuals who formed a dynamic team that led the charge to overthrow Jim Crow's racial oppression in a Border South state. It covers L.C. and Daisy Bates' life from his birth in 1901 through the precipitation of the 1957 Little Rock Crisis. The story about Daisy Bates rise to national prominence is very much a narrative about how a husband and wife created a civil rights heroine. While most

⁴⁸ Ransby, *Eslanda*, 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 61.

accounts that mention Daisy Bates focuss on her 1957 activism, this project is a study that recovers the backstory that explains how she became one of the Civil Rights Movement's most public female leaders. The moment that made her famous is important, and will be the focus of future research. However, it is critical to recover Bates' pre-1957 activities so that she does not suddenly emerge as a prominent figure in 1957, and disappears shortly afterwards.

Writing about the Bateses as a political couple is historically honest because they and their friends remembered the pair always being an inextricable team. From the beginning, their union was nothing less than a partnership. "He grew me up", Daisy later recounted. "I was just a young country girl, and he'd already been out in the world, gone to college, had his own newspaper and all."⁵⁰ Attorney Christopher Mercer, who had worked with Daisy as legal counsel and briefly as field secretary for the ASC, told Daisy's biographer that L.C. had what he described as an "undivided love for Daisy", and that she "was his whole world."⁵¹ At the time of their meeting Daisy was approximately fifteen. Before the age of 20, the young woman left her hometown with the married man. Daisy was unexposed and immature, yet L.C. provided for her financially and gave her the time and space she needed to find her place in the world. L.C. helped Daisy to redirect her anger at racial injustice into political activism, a change which occurred slowly over three decades during the middle twentieth century. "L.C. was always telling me," Bates remembered the week following her husband's 1980 passing, "Daisy don't get so mad." He told me that all through our lives...And over the years, I would still just

⁵⁰ Brynda Pappas, "L.C. Bates: A Champion of Freedom". *Arkansas Gazette*, January 22, 1982.

⁵¹ Christopher Mercer, Interview with Grif Stockley, January 16, 2002, Arkansas Historical Commission, University of Arkansas-Little Rock, Little Rock Arkansas.

boil over at things—there was so much that was unfair.”⁵² Even when Daisy was in the spotlight, and L.C. in her expanding shadow, he stayed loyal and the two remained a team. Johnny Smith and Kenneth Racy, who worked with Bates for a Great Society Program in the Arkansas Delta from 1968-74 stated that “L.C. was her backbone in many ways” because “he was a very smart man” who could tell her what she needed to do” when she was uncertain of what to do.⁵³

Daisy and L.C. were an ideal team because one partner’s weakness was an area of strength for the other. While they shared similar ideals, the way they expressed themselves differed tremendously. L.C. was a reserved man. Not quite an introvert, he was most vibrant with the written word, and possessed a dry sense of humor. L.C., whose almost six foot frame supported his slender 140 pounds, was dark skinned, and spoke with a slight high pitch and a drawl that made for good conversation, but not for dynamic public speaking. Daisy was about 5’2”, 120 pounds, svelte, and fair skinned. She was outgoing, charming, loved attention, and was a natural in front of a crowd. She very much enjoyed Little Rock’s social scene. Daisy stated, “L.C. gave me independence and the mobility to work for the freedom of our people.”⁵⁴ Even though it was clear that they were a committed couple, Daisy and L.C. did not display much affection in public. Still, “everyone knew that they were dedicated and committed to each other.”⁵⁵ According to Mercer, L.C. was “content” with Daisy’s position in the limelight, did not appear “jealous, but always stood his ground.”⁵⁶ When asked if she or L.C. was “more of

⁵² Pappas, “L.C. Bates”, *Arkansas Gazette*, January 22, 1982.

⁵³ Deborah Robinson, *Daisy Bates: In her Own Words*, (Nashville: Robinson Omnimedia and Publishing, 2007), 222, 224.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 229.

⁵⁵ Mercer interview with Stockley.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

an activist?,” she replied, “I think about equal. We discussed everything we did—I did. After I did it, I’d tell him about it. And he’d say ‘okay fine with me but you should have done this.’ I’d say, ‘Okay, we’ll do that next time.’”⁵⁷ Mercer believed that L.C. “had a better mind than he had a talking voice,” and that Daisy sounded “pleasant” because she had a nice “tone”. He also thought that she benefited from her beauty and gender. “She could stand up,” Mercer joked in a statement loaded with gender stereotypes, “and that would get your attention.” While Mercer unequivocally viewed the Bateses as a political team, he accredited L.C. for his cognitive abilities, and Daisy for her physical attributes. This dissertation challenges Mercer’s assertion that “Daisy didn’t have any skills” and that her “greatest asset was [public relations]”.⁵⁸ Daisy did not work for her husband, she worked with him. Together, they worked to fulfill one another’s desires while sharing an incredible dedication to social and political justice.

“The women had to do it”: Gender and African-American Activism

Using Daisy Bates’ activism in Little Rock as a case study demonstrates how, in the wake of *Brown*, black women intensified the fight against Jim Crow, mobilized their local communities, and created the foundation for the national civil rights movement. Perhaps more than any other group, African-American women capitalized on the opportunity for eradicating Jim Crow that the *Brown* decision’s ambiguity regarding the process of school segregation created. As the Historian Christina Greene writes in her rich study about women and the black freedom movement in Durham, North Carolina, many whites overlooked black women, but, within the black community, they were

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 227.

⁵⁸ Mercer interview with Stockley

viewed by black men as vehicles of change, and assets to the civil rights struggle. “If you want anything done,” a male leader in the North Carolina NAACP stated in 1950,” get the women and children.”⁵⁹ In places across the South, female activists like Daisy Bates rose to the challenge of forcing the Federal Government to enforce the Supreme Court’s order on the local and state levels. According to Greene, during and after the World War II, African-American women “laid the foundation for the freedom struggle of the 1960s, in which female activists frequently outnumbered men.”⁶⁰ Daisy Bates is one of numerous local black women who provided indispensable local leadership for the Freedom Struggle during the decades preceding the 1960s.

While filling gendered positions in the background reserved for women, many African-American women also acted out of spaces usually reserved for men. Only recently has historical scholarship begun to reflect this reality. Women like Daisy Bates demonstrated courageous leadership during a time when it was incredibly dangerous to be known as a public civil rights activist, regardless of gender. Symbolism has overshadowed the leadership many black women provided. For example, until recently, Rosa Parks was remembered as an ordinary, middle-aged woman who spontaneously mustered the courage to stand up against bus segregation.⁶¹ This image of Rosa Parks buried her more complex personal history, which was much more radical and politically active than initially believed⁶². History has learned that the demure Mrs. Parks possessed complex political beliefs, was not a blind advocate of nonviolence, and was an active part of the Alabama NAACP before the event that catapulted her into the national civil

⁵⁹ Greene, *Our Separate Ways*, 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

⁶¹ Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*.

⁶² Theoharis, “A Life History of Being Rebellious,” *Want to Start a Revolution*, Gore, Theoharis, Woodard, eds., 115-137.

rights narrative. Like Parks, Daisy Bates' actions in a southern city in the 1950s captured national attention. And, similar to her friend, Bates' involvement in her local NAACP and the national movement were also just as intricate. Studying the development of the Civil Rights Movement outside of the Deep South during the 1950s broadens our understanding of the complex intersections between gender, race and sexuality in a movement that was local and national.

Unlike their male counterparts, women could not expect their "work" as a formal leaders to exempt them from their "jobs" as organizers, secretaries, or any other positions gendered female. In her book about black professional women, the historian Stephanie J. Shaw makes an important distinction between "jobs" and "work;" the former as a professional obligation; the latter as more of a personal choice. Shaw defines "work" as something that black women "defined for themselves." She argues that black women were conditioned to "provide whatever services the community needed" and "situate themselves where they could ultimately gain admission into the American mainstream, individually, and for the black community." Black women understood that "the public work they performed had important ramifications beyond their own status..."⁶³ The historian Erik McDuffie argues this point in his book about black women who were involved in the Communist Party. McDuffie demonstrates "how many black communists women functioned both as grass-roots organizers and visible, formal leaders within the communist left."⁶⁴ Some activists functioned as both leaders and organizers, and, not by chance or coincidence, many of these individuals were women. In Little Rock, while

⁶³ Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 166.

⁶⁴ McDuffie, *Sojourning For Freedom*, 10.

serving as President of the Arkansas NAACP, Daisy Bates was also a community organizer and a bridge leader. She became the conduit of information for both her local community and the Association's New York office. Placing black women at the center of the history of the Civil Rights Movement illuminates the critical leadership they provided, and, perhaps even more, challenges the gendered notion that leadership and organizing are mutually exclusive categories.

Working alongside black men, some with their husbands and partners, black women built the Civil Rights Movement partially out of necessity. The women of the race understood the physical dangers that were a customary part of being black and male in the Jim Crow South. The denial of black manhood was a great source of anger for many black women. Activists and historians have documented the impact the threat of physical violence, particularly murder by the inhumane act of lynching, had on the actions of black men and women during the Jim Crow Era. Looking back on the movement's early days, Mississippi activist Victoria Gray Adams remembered that "women were out front as a survival tactic. Men could not function in high-visibility roles...because they would be plucked off..." or "killed simply because they went down and tried to register to vote or simply because they gave shelter to someone. The women had to do it."⁶⁵ In parts of rural Mississippi, black men provided covert support by guarding travel routes for the their wives, sisters, mothers and daughters who were on the dangerous front lines of the civil rights battle. Adams admitted, "the men had to be willing for us to be active. Otherwise...we couldn't have done it."⁶⁶ Women like Daisy Bates may have been willing to be used to help the local movement. This strategic,

⁶⁵ Adams, *The Power of Women*, 237.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 238.

coordinated effort between black women and black men gave birth to the Modern Civil Rights Movement.

By focusing on the needs of local black communities, black women helped create collective support for the objectives of the emerging national movement. Highlander Folk School and the Montgomery Bus Boycott are examples of the central role black women played in the 1950s in preparing prepared local people to fight Jim Crow before the arrival of the national television media. Protected by the seclusion of Highlander's secluded location in Monteagle, Tennessee's Appalachian Mountains, South Carolina native, Septima Clark designed the "Citizenship Schools", which Andrew Young called "the base for which the whole civil rights movement was built."⁶⁷ Founded in 1946, Montgomery's Women's Political Council (WPC) had been waiting for the right moment to stage a city-wide boycott. Over a half-decade before the historic display of black organizing prowess and determination for legal equality made Rosa Parks and Dr. King household names, the WPC's President, Jo Ann Gibson Robinson asserted that the women "prepared to stage a boycott when the time was ripe and the people were ready. The right time," she concluded, "came in 1955."⁶⁸ Invited by Montgomery white liberal Virginia Foster Durr, Rosa Parks attended Highlander Folk School the summer before her refusal to give up her seat on a city bus catalyzed the WPC into action launched a historic boycott, and provided a spark for what was developing into the Modern Civil Rights Movement. While at Highlander, Parks and Clark discussed politics, and developed a friendship.

⁶⁷ Jacqueline A. Rouse, "We Seek to Know...in Order to Speak the Truth': Nurturing the Seeds of Discontent—Septima P. Clark and Participatory Leadership", Chapter 7, Collier-Thomas and Franklin, eds, *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American Women and the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 96.

⁶⁸ Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, 17.

Black women's participation in the early stages of the movements in their cities and towns, especially their work with black youth, gave the national movement the much needed foundation from which it grew. One of the first things Daisy Bates did when she became president of the Arkansas NAACP was organize a youth chapters. In 1957, Superintendent Blossom disqualified members of the Little Rock youth chapter from admission into Central High. This is part of the explanation for the development of the Little Rock Nine. The Superintendent did not want the black children attending Central High School to have any affiliation with Daisy Bates or the NAACP, who at the time were the local and national equivalence of a third rail when it came to race relations in Little Rock. When Parks was fearful of discussing her local activism in front of the group of activist at Highlander whom she did not know, Septima Clark reassured her that she was in a space where she could speak freely. Parks spoke about her position as Advisor for the Montgomery NAACP's youth Council. She also discussed the WPC's community activism, particularly their emphasis on "the need to work with youth to encourage them to seek elective office, learn about politics, and prepare for leadership."⁶⁹ Less than six months after meeting Mrs. Clark, Rosa Parks lit the fuse for the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Less than a year after that boycott ended in victory for Montgomery's black community, Daisy Bates and the issue of school integration took center stage in Little Rock. By 1960, college-aged black youth, many of whom were a part of NAACP youth councils mentored by women like Bates, Parks, and Baker when they were younger, became prominent actors in the Freedom Struggle. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was shaped by Ella Baker's sage advice. With Miss Baker's guidance, SNCC adopted a leadership structure that was more

⁶⁹ Rouse, "We Seek to Know", 104.

inclusive of women than other civil rights organizations. Many of SNCC's activists had political philosophies and notions about leadership that were molded by black women. Black women shaped the Modern Civil Rights Movement in ways that scholars are now beginning to recognize.

Working with black men, countless black women responded to the need for leadership and several became notable public symbols for the 1950s Freedom Struggle. In 1956, Septima Clark went to work at Highlander full-time after she was fired as a school teacher in Charleston, South Carolina due to her NAACP membership and activism. Her Citizenship Program was the model SNCC used in Mississippi and other parts of the Deep South in the 1960s. In 1953, Ruby Hurley set up the NAACP's first Southeast Regional office in Birmingham, only to be kicked out in the same year that the City of Charleston fired Mrs. Clark by a state ban on the organization that was a part of the wave of white massive resistance to *Brown* that swept across the South after the Supreme Court issued the desegregation ruling. Hurley recalled being angry, not scared at the pressures she faced in Birmingham. The NAACP legal challenge to the new law stayed in the court system until 1962, when the Supreme Court eventually ruled the ban be Unconstitutional. In the meantime, Hurley relocated the office to Atlanta, where she continued her work in the South's most dangerous region. In 1955, Mammie Till Bradley, mother of the lynched Emmett Till, became famous when she had an open casket so that world could see the consequences of Jim Crow on Black life. Autherine Lucy made national headlines in 1956 when she endured violent mobs in her attempt to desegregate the University of Alabama, only to be expelled for her own "safety". The Lucy case was a violent encounter. The NAACP wanted to retry her case, but the

traumatized young woman refused.⁷⁰ The following year, fifteen year old Elizabeth Eckford became an instant icon when she was filmed and photographed being attacked by mobs at Little Rock's Central High. Rosa Parks was called the "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement" because her arrest on a Montgomery bus catalyzed the historic bus boycott that introduced history to a 26 year old pastor named Martin Luther King Jr. Daisy Bates became a symbol for the school integration movement, but unlike other females, she also served as spokesperson to the national media. Mobilizing the Little Rock black community around the issue of school integration, Daisy Bates demanded that Bates fulfill the duties of public spokesperson, fundraiser, recruiter, organizer, and bridge leader. Black women were able to sustain and nurture the Civil Rights Movement during the height of the repressive Second Red Scare because their gender muted white fears about the dangers of predatory black male sexuality.

The 1957 Little Rock Crisis is unique because it is one of the few times that a major civil battle in the Modern Civil Rights Movement catapulted a woman into the national spotlight as a leader, and not only a symbol. Bates' leadership developed out of her personal desire to be an important player in the Freedom Struggle, but also from a pragmatic belief among some male activists that, considering the circumstances, a female spokesperson would better serve the movement's purposes. According to the historian C. Calvin Smith in Little Rock, "southern anti-black attitudes of the period, which were especially harsh toward assertive black males, would not allow [L.C.] to publicly lead the charge against...racial segregation."⁷¹ The 1951 Christmas Day murder of Florida

⁷⁰ Robnett, *How Long? How Long?*, 74

⁷¹ C. Calvin Smith, "L.C. Bates: Newsman and Civil Rights Activist," Negro History Bulletin, 45:4 (1982:Oct./Dec.), 103.

NAACP President Harry Moore and his family angered black America, and reminded many of the price black men often paid for asserting their manhood in the South. L.C. was cognizant that the movement might have a better chance of accomplishing its objectives with Daisy as the public face, so he worked with his wife to ensure her preparation to lead effectively, and prepared himself to support her. He also knew that Daisy enjoyed the spotlight and possessed the individual capabilities to be an effective spokesperson for the local movement. Daisy Bates was transparent about the role her gender played in her rise into leadership. In 1958, she told *Ebony Magazine* that when it comes to leadership, “a Negro woman can get away with more in the South than a Negro man.”⁷² She believed in the movement and, like the other black women, was willing to do whatever was in her power to defeat Jim Crow. The *Brown* decisions created the perfect opportunity for women’s leadership because the heart of the issue dealt with education and children, two of the most traditional parts of the female-dominated domestic sphere.

Organization, Sources and Methodology

This project contains nine chapters, divided into three equal sections. The chapters are ordered chronology, and organized to illuminate the competing narratives that exist about Daisy and L.C.’s personal lives, marriage and political activities. First, the reader learns what Daisy wrote in her memoir about the period covered in the particular chapter. Second, statements and opinions of scholars, contemporaries and friends are explored. Lastly, considering what Daisy wrote and the conclusions of the

⁷² Bennett Jr., “First Lady of Little Rock”, 20.

existing scholarship, original, primary research is used to rewrite and reinterpret the period at the center of the chapter's inquiry.

Part one, *Reconstructing Daisy Gatson, 1901-1942*, starts with Daisy and L.C.'s births and ends when they officially married. The part's three chapters argue that Daisy Bates used the lack of information about her pedigree and youth to reconstruct a narrative about her origins that was consistent with the image of the public woman she later became for the Civil Rights Movement. Chapter one, *Motherless Child: The "Rebirth" of Daisy Gatson*, interrogates the chapter of Daisy Bates' memoir where she discussed her life prior to meeting L.C. It argues that Bates presented her traumatic personal experiences with Jim Crow in her hometown, particularly the sexual assault and murder of her birth mother, as the foundation for the civil rights heroine she later became.

Chapter two, *Reconstructed Childhoods: The Politics of Black Autobiography* explores the political meanings behind Daisy's reconstruction of her past. Perhaps more importantly, the chapter interrogates the intentional gaps and silences Bates imposed during crucial developmental periods. Exploring the historical meanings behind the presence of intentional silences demonstrates how the *Long Shadow of Little Rock* is not just a retelling of personal story, but is part of a long African-American writing tradition that is both political and deliberate in how it uses individual stories to represent the experiences of the group.

Chapter three, *"I didn't reveal my plans:" Marriage and the Politics of Secrecy* explores the period between Daisy and L.C.'s initial encounter and their 1942 marriage. The chapter recovers the least documented and mysterious period of their life together, and argues that the couple practiced respectability politics in selecting the modicum of

information they revealed about their pre-marital years. Establishing and maintaining a respectable image was critical to their later success in Little Rock, where they would use their newspaper to establish themselves as the eventual leaders of the Arkansas Civil Rights Movement. When they married, Daisy was seen as L.C.'s beautiful wife, and not yet his partner in the crusade to eradicate Jim Crow.

Part two, *Becoming a Team, 1941-1950*, is a rewriting of the history of Daisy and L.C. relocation to Little Rock, the founding of the *State Press*, and their eventual rise as major players in the area of Arkansas racial politics. During the 1940s, the Bateses facilitated a slow, deliberate ascent that secured leadership positions for both of them in the state black community. Chapter four, *Selecting a New Home: Prewar Little Rock and the Founding of the State Press*, elucidates the reasons why Daisy and L.C. relocated from Memphis to Little Rock, and provides the historical context needed to understanding the black community for which they would become leaders and public representatives. The chapter also explains the conditions that led to the creation of the *Arkansas State Press*, and the political ideals that drove the weekly periodical.

Chapter five, *Finding His Voice: L.C. Bates and the Arkansas State Press During World War II*, argues that global war against fascism created an opportunity for L.C. to define his political voice and newspaper. The *State Press* was part of a proliferation of black periodicals nationally, many of which would become critical in reporting the 1950s and 1960s Freedom Struggle to black and white communities alike. Akin to other black papers, L.C. supported the Double-V Campaign, made Jim Crow synonymous with fascism. The international politics present in the *State Press* during the war years helped L.C. connect to Little Rock's local black community, which had been shaken by white

violence against black soldiers at the local Army base. When established local black leaders failed to respond to violence against black soldiers and veterans, L.C. turned his attacks to them, and proposed the need for new, fresh, uncompromising black leaders.

Chapter six, “*One Mell of a Hess:*” *The Postwar Leadership Showdown*, discusses Daisy and L.C.’s public and private battles with black leaders over strategies and direction. After the war, Daisy officially joined L.C. at the *State Press* as City Editor, and a few years later, the couple called for a showdown for leadership. Arkansas’s internal black politics are covered in detail because the discussion allows a fuller comprehension of the exact circumstances that led to Daisy’s 1952 election as President of the NAACP’s Arkansas State Conference (ASC). After the war, the couple accelerated their attacks on black leaders and set the stage for a public confrontation that positioned them to influence the direction of the local black political agenda.

Part three, *Becoming Daisy Bates, 1948-1957* is a rewriting of the decade preceding the 1957 Little Rock Crisis. Starting with Daisy’s first formal attempt to attain leadership in the NAACP, the chapters recover the history of how, with the Bateses leadership, the Little Rock black community took calculated, methodical steps to ensure that the city’s schools would be integrated on a timeframe that was satisfactory to African-Americans. The Bateses organized and mobilized their local community to take court action against the City of Little Rock. The case, which became known as *Aaron v. Cooper*, was decided by the United States District Courts in Spring 1957. The court ordered Little Rock to proceed with integration the following Fall semester. During this period Daisy rose to the forefront, and L.C. faded into the background. At the moment when their over 15 years of dedication to social justice began receiving more attention

outside of the state, L.C. was only mentioned in reference to his relevance to his wife. When the national media discovered Little Rock's heroine in 1957, L.C. was transformed from her partner into "Daisy Bates' husband", the man behind the woman.

Chapter seven, "*No one else to be elected:*" *Daisy Bates and the National Advancement for the Advancement of Colored People*, recovers the postwar political activities that prepared Daisy Bates for the ASC presidency. Her political and civic activism, and the favorable press she received, established Daisy as a new, female alternative to the ineffective preacher led black leadership in Little Rock. Involved in organizations like the Committee for a Permanent Federal Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), the Progressive Party, the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), Bates built her resume and profile and waited for her opportunity. When she was elected ASC president, Daisy focused the state program on school integration. Her post-*Brown* activities were a continuation, not the beginning of her evolution into an outspoken leader, and eventual symbol for the 1950's school integration phase of the Civil Rights Movement. By 1954, Daisy Bates had established a political voice independent of her husband, even if there were similarities.

Chapter eight, "*Things are going to be serious:*" *The Brown Decision and the Origins of the Little Rock Crisis*, examines the local impact the Supreme Court's school integration rulings had in Little Rock. The chapter is the first full account of the role black leadership and the local African-American community played in setting the foundation for the historical desegregation battle that made Daisy Bates famous. I argue that in the two years following the first *Brown* ruling on May 17, 1954, Daisy Bates performed the grassroots organizing necessary to prepare the Little Rock black

community for a confrontation with local whites over the school integration process. While the movement was a community effort, opposition quickly affiliated the black community's demands for equal education as the brain child of Daisy Bates and the NAACP. During this time, she became the face and spokesperson of Little Rock's integration movement.

The final chapter, "*the trouble we are having*": *Massive Resistance and the Politics of Desegregation*, argues that the conflict in Little Rock that made headlines in 1957, was the culmination of the white South's Massive Resistance Movement that had started after *Brown I*, but grew with voracious verve the following year, after *Brown II*'s vague "all deliberate speed" directive. The politics of school integration were fused with the rhetoric of race and sex. As a public African-American female leader, Daisy fought for dignity for not just her race, but also her gender. In addition, as the NAACP fought to exist in most of the deep South, the progress Daisy was making in the border state of Arkansas received more organizational attention and financial support from the NAACP's national leaders whose hands were tied in litigation in states like Mississippi and Alabama. With Massive Resistance having its intended effect in the deep South, the Border South, where cities in towns in states like Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee had proven that the integration process could be executed peacefully, became the focus of white opposition. By 1957, Daisy and L.C. found themselves in an unforeseeable national crisis backed by powerful national interest groups. In addition, the couple was no longer discussed as a team by the national media. Daisy emerged as the star, and L.C. faded into the background of her fame.

The story about L.C. and Daisy Bates' activism as a couple is an important story supported by an array of primary and secondary sources and oral interviews. L.C. Bates published a weekly periodical for 18 years. Prior to his death, L.C. gave an extensive interview with a graduate student at the University of Arkansas for her master thesis. In addition, L.C. also received coverage in the black press, and gave accounts of his life before and with Daisy until his 1980 death. Daisy left a massive archive for the historian about her activities. She published a memoir, and deposited two sets of personal papers at the state universities in Wisconsin and Arkansas. Furthermore, Daisy's political activities are well-documented in the NAACP's organizational papers, local and national media coverage, as well as by the countless interviews and speeches she gave throughout her life.

Conclusion

Recovering the history about how this crusading black couple set the stage for a watershed moment for the Civil Rights Movement makes a significant contribution to the existing scholarship in the areas of African-American, women and gender, and United States history. The retrieval of the lost, misremembered history about race relations and black political activism in Little Rock prior to 1957 changes the narrative scholars will tell about the epic desegregation crisis. The events at Central High were not precipitous; they were the product of decades of prodding and insistence by black leaders like Daisy and L.C. Bates, and black community that mustered the courage to support what many called a militant agenda for equal rights. Furthermore, while much has been written about the presence of gender tension in the Civil Rights Movement, it is important that

these narratives are balanced by stories about how men and women collaborated despite the presence of internal conflicts caused by the reality that sexism, colorism, heterosexism and classism existed in the movement for racial equality. Life is sometimes inexplicable, and individuals are often contradictory.

This dissertation is the story of Daisy Bates' creation. It is not another story about the accomplishments that made Daisy Bates a woman worthy of special attention from scholars. The aim of this project is to recover the narrative about how Daisy Bates became a woman who impacted history. The story that unfolds is one about how a husband's unconditional love and support for his wife helped her evolve from a traumatized young woman into a civil rights heroine. Due to the focus on the creation and construction of Daisy Bates and her public persona, the scope of this project is the couple's pre-1957 activism because it was during this period that they made themselves the leaders of the Arkansas Freedom Struggle. The story about the 1957 Little Rock Crisis and Daisy's experiences after her creation and ascent to the national stage is the focus of future work because it illuminates the experiences of female leaders during the Modern Civil Rights Movement, and what happened to black leaders, particularly women, after their moments in the national spotlight expired, and the battle over the legacy of the Freedom Struggle and the leaders that made it a national and global history-making phenomenon.

**“Time For a Showdown:
The Partnership of Daisy and L.C. Bates and the Politics of Gender, Protest and
Marriage**

Part One: Reconstructing Daisy Gatson, 1901-1942

Chapter One:

Motherless Child: The “Rebirth” of Daisy Gatson

Chapter Two:

Reconstructed Childhoods: The Politics of Black Autobiography

Chapter Three:

“I didn’t reveal my plans”: Marriage and the Politics of Secrecy

Summary: *Reconstructing Daisy Gatson* argues that Daisy Bates used her memoir to reconstruct her childhood and the early years of her relationship with L.C. Bates. Though revealing in some ways, Bates’ account of her formative is inconsistent and filled with silences during important periods in her life, particularly. Daisy was especially vague about the circumstances behind her marriage. The narrative Bates constructs about this part of her life is consistent with her public image as an educated, married, respectable black woman qualified to provide leadership in the Civil Rights Movement. Bates accomplished her reconstruction by writing a political autobiography. In the construction of her public persona, she dissembled. Bates also imposed critical silences around issues like her education, sexuality and marriage that must be interrogated. While the reasons Daisy recreated her past differ from the Freedom Movement’s other women, her crafting of a political memoir, the use of dissemblance and silence, and her ambiguity about her intimate relationships make her similar to how other African-American women refuted negative stereotypes about their womanhood through their autobiographical writings.

Chapter One:

Motherless Child: The “Rebirth” of Daisy Gatson

“A motherless chile see a hard time.
 Oh Lord, help her on de road
 Er sister will do de bes’ she kin,
 Dis is a hard world, Lord, fer a motherless chile.”
 --A Slave Song, quoted in Deborah Gray White, *Arn’t I a Woman?*

“How I loved this strong man who all his life had not been able to use his strength in the way he wanted to. He was forced to hold himself back, bow to the white yolk or be cut down. And now that his life was ebbing, he was trying to draw on the reservoir of unused strength to give me a lasting inheritance.”
 --Daisy Bates, “Rebirth,” *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*

“the South in 1919, as in the 1850s, was a reactionary society that stifled all dissent.”
 ---David Howard Pitney, *African-American Jeremiad*¹

Introduction: Creating the Historical Record

In her 1962 memoir, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, Daisy Bates asserted herself as the primary source and authority about her youth. Bates recreated her past, particularly her childhood, so that it supported her image as a respectable leader and symbol for the Civil Rights Movement. The lack of records about her birth and adolescence allowed Bates to control the historical record about her early years. The story she told about her pre-civil rights life in the chapter titled “Rebirth” was crafted so that it was consistent with her public image as a respectable black female civil rights leader. The reconstruction of her past suggests that Daisy Bates believed that her controversial public activism politicized the life she lived before she was discovered by the national media in September 1957. The way Bates recounted her early years is an example of life-long attempts to protect her public image, and shield the Freedom

¹ David Howard Pitney, *African-American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 104.

Struggle from additional attack.² Nevertheless, despite restructuring some information, “Rebirth” also contains important facts and personal reflections that reveal what Bates thought about her origins and their connection to her subsequent leadership. The chapter convincingly argues that the woman Bates became was determined by the girl Gatson was. Before analyzing and critiquing Bates’ presentation of her childhood, this chapter examines how she constructed her early years, and argues that her selection and reconstruction of the facts was a part of a political African-American writing tradition, intended to address historically raced and gendered stereotypes about black women and black men. Scholars should interpret “Rebirth” as a didactic narrative that Bates used to forward a personal and political agenda, and not a truthful retelling of Daisy’s traumatic early years.

The courage Daisy Bates demonstrated during the Civil Rights Movement is foreshadowed in “Rebirth.” The story she crafts explains how she developed the courage to challenge Jim Crow, and provides another example of how southern blacks developed the mettle to fight the system of racial discrimination in their communities during the Black Freedom Struggle. “Rebirth” demonstrates how black women’s resistance to racial and sexual oppression was sometimes successful, and sometimes ended with fatal results. The murder of Daisy’s birth mother, Millie Riley, due to her resistance to being raped one night by three white men is the catalyst for Gatson’s crusade for justice and the source of her courage to challenge Jim Crow. “Rebirth” opens with an image of a poorly constructed, “drab red painted”, black church that is “kept spotless by the church sisters”. The chapter also uses Daisy’s adoptive mother, Susie Smith, to make strong statements

² Margo Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 26.

about the connection between black womanhood, religion and morality. Bates constructed her narrative of black girlhood around five main characters and three traumatic events, which she used to make political statements that condemned white racism, defended black womanhood, criticized white manhood, and redefined black masculinity. Other than Gatson, the chapter's central personalities are her birth mother, adopted parents, a white male butcher and the town drunk. The story is defined by Daisy's first encounter with racism with the local butcher, the discovery of her adoption due to her birth mother's murder, and the premature passing of her adopted father. "Rebirth" corroborates that Bates believed that her life possessed larger meaning and significance for the race. Daisy Bates created her own historical record, and many of the accounts about her life are based on the information that she disclosed, and as will demonstrated, what she also chose to manipulate or omit.

Rape and Womanhood, Race and Manhood

This section provides the foundation for interpreting "Rebirth" as a political narrative by establishing what Bates wrote, before revealing what she omitted. After presenting Huttig as a part of the racist, southern tradition, Bates addressed the direct impact of Jim Crow on the lives of individual African-Americans through the retelling of the story of her birth mother's murder, childhood encounters with white men, and her relationship with her adoptive father. "Rebirth's" linear, neat, narrative is driven by strategically selected events she intended to emphasize the effects of racial discrimination on the people in the South. Bates' disciplined focus on episodes she viewed as significant, and the omission of events she believed were unimportant or irrelevant,

corroborate that a heroine of the Black Freedom Struggle centered her message of the dangers of Jim Crow around the themes of rape, black womanhood, and manhood—the abuse of white male authority, and the denial of black men’s masculinity. The deliberate selection of the information her readers would know about her childhood is an example of how Bates used undocumented encounters and confrontations with racial discrimination to politicize her past.³

Daisy Bates chose to discuss the traumatic events from her childhood that she believed emphasized the plight of black manhood and womanhood in the Jim Crow South. By narrowly selecting facts, and reorganizing them for her audience, Bates forged a continuous link between her life in Huttig, her leadership in Little Rock, and the larger objectives of the Black Freedom Struggle. Published on October 29, 1962, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* was written during the emergence of the Movement’s 1960s youth infusion, and the rise in black disillusionment that contributed to the growth of militant nationalistic groups like the Nation of Islam. It is in this political context that Daisy sought to define her role in the movement and continue her activism. “And so the battle for civil rights continues,” she wrote in the book’s final paragraphs. “The actors on the 1957 Little Rock stage have faded from the national scene. Their places have been filled by thousands of Negro and white Americans in the crusade for equality...”⁴ Bates’ selection of the facts of her childhood was strategic and political. She hoped to inspire and motivate the activists on the frontlines of the Freedom Struggle by connecting their

³ Sundiata Keita Cha-Ja and Clarence Lang, “The ‘Long Movement’ As Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies,” *Journal of African-American History* 92.2 (2007): 265-288; Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol., 19, No. 4 (March, 2005), pp. 1233-1263; Charles Payne, “Bibliographic Essay,” *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 413-441.

⁴ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 225.

stories, and the emergence of the 1960's nonviolent direct action, to the battle she waged first in Huttig, and later in Little Rock. Furthermore, her open discussion of rape and womanhood, and race and manhood, is consistent with the 1950s shift recently documented by historians of the Civil Rights Era.⁵

In addition to validating her own political activism, Bates used "Rebirth" to present her personal trauma as emblematic of the historical oppression experienced by African-Americans. Daisy Lee Gatson appears in the official U.S. Census for the first time in 1920, at the age of seven, residing at 75 A Avenue, and adopted by Oralee and Susie Smith, a lumber grader at the Union Saw Mill, and his devoutly religious wife.⁶ Daisy wrote that Oralee Smith, who was a close friend of her biological parents, told her that her mother, Millie Riley, was a beautiful, proud black woman who had the self-esteem to resist the sexual advances of some local white men. Riley's resistance to the sexual advances of white men led to her death, and made her the victim of what Smith called "the timeworn lust of the white man for the Negro woman—which strikes at the heart of every Negro man in the South."⁷ Daisy's account of what Oralee told her about her birth parents is the only record that exists and cannot be confirmed. However, what is important is that Daisy believed that "daddy" wanted her to "realize" that "mother wouldn't have died if it hadn't been for her race—as well as her beauty, her pride, her

⁵ See Danielle McGuire's discussion of Gertrude Perkins and Mary Louise Smith, *At The Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—a New History of the Civil Rights Movement From Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, (New York: Knopf, 2010), 53-7, 75-7.

⁶ Census record of Lapilo Township, Union County, Arkansas, February 17, 1920, U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Office, Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population, 228; Grif Stockley Papers, Series II, folder 4, Box 1, "Daisy Bates Genealogy," Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, University of Arkansas-Little Rock, Little Rock, Arkansas.

⁷ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 12, 15.

love for my father.”⁸ Daisy acknowledged that knowing her birth parent’s story caused her much personal pain and anguish. Nevertheless, Bates depersonalized her individual story. She repackaged it as an emblem of the ways racial segregation damaged black people’s lives. Nellie Y. McKay wrote that “in spite of differences among individual Afro-Americans....the search for individual and group freedom is central to the black autobiographical enterprise.”⁹ “Rebirth,” and later interviews corroborate that the story of her mother’s rape and murder became indispensable to Daisy Bates’ public image. The way she constructed her public persona around the egregious event is indicative of her attempt to politicize her personal story by connecting it, and the place of her upbringing, to the larger history of African American oppression.

After describing how Jim Crow’s control was apparent in custom, practices and physical appearance, “Rebirth” skips seven years to the event that shattered Gatson’s childhood in the Huttig commissary with a white butcher. The incident, which was public and humiliating, is the first of three personal watersheds Bates presents as critical to her evolution into a civil rights activist. Establishing the pre-trauma Edenic period, Bates recalled being a “proud and happy child” who “did not really know what it meant” to be Negro until “shortly after my seventh birthday.”¹⁰ On this particular day, Susie Smith was “not feeling well,” and asked Daisy Lee to make a trip to the commissary on

⁸ *Ibid*, 15.

⁹ Nellie Y. McKay, “The Girls Who Became the Women: Childhood Memories in the Autobiographies of Harriet Jacobs, Mary Church Terrell, and Anne Moody,” *Tradition and the Talents of Women*, Florence Howe, Ed, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 106.

¹⁰ Carol Pearson, *The Hero Within* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 25, 27; In order to reconstruct Daisy Gatson’s early years, and provides dates, I use the 1920 and 1930 Census records and an interview with Daisy’s childhood best friend, Beatrice Cowser Epps to establish 1913 as the possible her year of birth.

Main Street “to get the meat for dinner.”¹¹ Bates recalled that she put on one of her “prettiest dresses,” brushed her hair, then her mother gave her one dollar with instructions to buy one pound of center-cut pork chops. When she arrived at the market the butcher was serving “several white adults.” After patiently waiting for him to complete the orders of those waiting ahead of her, Daisy asked for the pork chops, but noticed that he began to serve more whites who had arrived after she made her request. “I was a little annoyed,” she admitted, “but felt that since they were grownups it was all right.”¹² Next, the butcher “looked down and asked, ‘What do you want, little girl?’” When Daisy smiled and replied, “I told you before, a pound of center-cut pork chops,” the butcher admonished her. “I’m not talking to you,” he growled. He was actually addressing a white girl around Daisy’s age, who she said, ironically placed the same order. As the other girl was leaving, Daisy wrote that she begged the butcher, “please may I have my meat?” Taking her dollar off the counter, he “reached into the showcase, got a handful of fat chops,” wrapped them up, and flung them at the seven year old girl. “Niggers have to wait ‘til I wait on the white people,” he snarled. “Now take your meat and get out of here.” Daisy cried the entire way home.

The butcher’s humiliation scarred young Daisy in one way, but learning of her parents’ inability to respond in a way she felt was appropriate had an even more indelible impact. When Gatson arrived home, her mother was clearly upset about the incident after hearing her clearly upset daughter’s account. “Oh Lord, I knew I shouldn’t have sent her,” Daisy heard Smith say to herself. “Stop crying,” she said, trying to comfort her

¹¹ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 7.

¹² *Ibid*, 8.

daughter, “the meat isn’t so bad.”¹³ Then, Smith turned away to stop Daisy from seeing the tears that were welling up in her eyes. “Go out on the porch and wait for Daddy,” she instructed in a fragile, somber voice. When Oralee arrived, Daisy rushed to him. As he lifted her up into his arms, he asked, “Now, what’s wrong?” His smile instantly faded when he heard her answer, which Bates described as “the inevitable insult and humiliation that is, in the South, a part of being ‘colored.’”¹⁴ With his muscles tightening as he carried his daughter into the house, Oralee responded to Daisy’s demands to go down to the market and confront the butcher, “We’ll talk about it after dinner,” which Bates remembered being “distressingly silent.”¹⁵ After talking in their bedroom Daisy’s mother communicated that she should go talk with her father. Oralee had difficulties finding the words to express what he wanted to convey to his young, confused daughter. “Several times, he tried to speak,” she wrote, “but the words just wouldn’t come. I stood there, looking at him and wondering why he was acting so strange.” He eventually rose to his feet and articulated “as best as he could that a Negro had no rights that a white man respected.”¹⁶ The scene concludes dramatically with Oralee reportedly dropping to his knees, “shaking me and shouting...Can’t you understand...There’s nothing I can do,” then explaining the dangers an attempt to reprimand the butcher would pose to his family. When Daisy asked, “Daddy, are you afraid,” she remembered that the way “he sprang to his feet” was founded “in an anger I had never seen before.” “Hell no!,” he asserted. “I’m not afraid for myself, I’m not afraid to die.” This scene is important because Bates recognized Oralee’s manly urge to defend his violated child. However, she also

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

amplified Jim Crow's denial of black manhood with Oralee's choice of action, not to confront the white man.

Nevertheless, the story of what happened in the Smith home after the incident with the butcher defined black manhood as pragmatic and, even more importantly, still manly. Bates acknowledged Oralee's desire to seek retribution for his daughter. She also concluded that his decision was a manly one because by *not* asserting his masculinity Smith fulfilled one of manhood's central tenants: the protection of women and children. "I could go down to that market and tear him limb from limb with my bare hands, but I am afraid for you and your mother."¹⁷ The reverence with which Bates writes about Oralee Smith illuminates how he believed that Jim Crow forced black men to suppress their masculinity, especially physically and sexually. Her discussion of Oralee suggests that she thought he was an example of southern black men who showed deference to whites as a means of self-preservation and the protection of their families. Oralee's fears are presented as pragmatic. Smith's decision to not confront the butcher is attributed not to Oralee's individual unmanliness, or to the butcher's individual power. Rather, the actions of the two men—Oralee and the white butcher—are presented as examples of how white men maintained a hegemonic, systematic control over black life in the Jim Crow South. The South's racial, patriarchal culture forced black men to suppress their manhood in order to fulfill it. Ironically, the most realistic and manly choice for southern black men like Oralee in the Jim South, who desired to protect their families from harm, was no action at all. Unable to rely on her parents, in the fury of the moment, Daisy Lee turned to her faith for retribution. She recalled angrily "praying that the butcher would

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

die.” After one night of discussing the matter, the family continued their ritual of forgetting traumatic encounters; never again mentioning the butcher or the incident. Daisy’s discussion of Oralee’s reaction to the destruction of her Eden is an example of how “Rebirth” challenges traditional notions of manhood. Bates presented Oralee as an African-American man forced to sacrifice one part of his manhood—physical assertion—in order to protect his family, and demonstrative of the self-control often associated with masculinity. White males are presented as cowardly men who abuse their power by exploiting and violating vulnerable black people.

Immediately following her recollections with the butcher, “Rebirth” further reveals the malicious character of Jim Crow in Huttig, particularly its impact on African-American women and children, by introducing Gatson’s second trauma, and most important event, the story of how she learned about the fate of her birth parents. Bates made her biological mother’s murder the foundation for her civil rights career. She also made the tragic story emblematic of a longer, historical violation of black womanhood. According to Bates, she was eight years old when a neighborhood boy, whom [she] didn’t happen to like,” disclosed that her birth mother had been killed. The children were on a neighbor’s steps when the unnamed older boy repeatedly pulled on her pigtails. Unable to stop him, Daisy Lee announced that she was “going home.” Perhaps a little chagrined, he blurted out, “If you knew what happened to your mother you wouldn’t act so stuck up.” Outspoken even in her youth, Daisy retorted, “Nothing’s wrong with my mother. I just left her.” “I’m talking about your *real* mother,” he revealed, “the one the white man took out and killed.” Responding with shock and disbelief, the little girl rebuffed his proclamations with a weak quip about his character. “That’s a story and

you're a nasty old boy.” Unfamiliar with the emotions raging within, Daisy Lee began to cry. “It ain’t,” the boy rebutted, and offered conversations he overheard between his parents for corroboration. The children’s moment is interrupted when an adult, the mother of one the other local youth, came on her porch, commanded the boy to “shut up,” and promised to tell his mother of his actions, who she was certain would give him “the beating of [his] life.” Though the woman was gentle and kind to a clearly shaken Daisy Lee, she is also an example of the inability of black adults to protect black children in the Jim Crow South. For Daisy Gatson, the knowledge was traumatic, devastating and life-altering. For Daisy Bates, it was a personal watershed, and a way of shaming the white South for prematurely destroying the innocence of countless black childhoods. The woman tried to reassure Daisy that the boy was not telling the truth about her origins. “Honey,” she said, “don’t believe nothing that no-good boy says.”¹⁸ The boy’s statement is an example of how black women and children were exposed to racialized violence in Huttig and the Jim Crow South. In the narrative Bates tells about her biological parents, the black woman is the victim of an act of sexual violence, and black children are victimized merely by their deep cognizance of such a traumatic event.

Bates wanted her readers to identify with not just her pain as an individual, but with the anguish of the blacks in the South. “Rebirth’s” attempt to use gender to solicit white sympathy for the Black Freedom Struggle is seen in her emphasis of the effects of racism on the black family, particularly, African-American women and children. The confrontation with the murky facts of her past would prove empowering in the long-run, but in that moment it shattered what Gatson thought was a steady foundation.

¹⁸ *Ibid*

Surrounded by the physical and cultural restraints of a hypocritical Jim Crow system, Daisy became personally incensed when she compared her physical features to the Smiths; she saw no resemblance.¹⁹ Daisy wrote that she concealed her cognizance that the Smith's were not her biological parents for two weeks. To validate her suspicion of the truth of the boy's claims, Bates' discovery is followed by a recalled conversation between her mother and a "salesman" who supposedly looked at Daisy then asked, "Have you heard from her father?" When Susie Smith replied "that she hadn't," the man allegedly responded with, "Does she know?"²⁰ After few weeks of keeping "so much to myself that my parents decided that I must be sick," Daisy Lee finally broke her silence to Susie Smith's nephew, her older cousin, Earl Broughton (Early B.) who often visited the family and protected her from boys who liked to "taunt and tease" her. One day, near the Millpond, Gatson asked her cousin, "Tell me about my mother," she curtly demanded. "Your mother," Early B. said in a confused tone, pointing to his Aunt, who they could see sitting on the porch. "No," she clarified, I mean "my *real* mother."²¹ Akin to first learning about her mother's death, Gatson's questions about the details of the murder are not answered by adults, but children, further reinforcing the unmanly display of white male power in the Jim Crow South, and black children's cognizance of complex, mature racial and sexual topics.

According to "Rebirth," Early B. told Daisy the following story: "One night when you were a baby and your daddy was working nights at the mill a man went to your house and told your mother that your daddy had been hurt." Later in life, Bates learned

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ *Ibid*, 11.

that her parents' names were Hezekiah Gatson and Millie Riley, but it is unclear if their namelessness in "Rebirth" is due to her uncertainty about their identities at the time, or concerns about the potential dangers of disclosing too much personal information in a highly public, written medium, like memoir. Daisy was told that the concerned, frantic mother "rushed out," leaving her baby at home alone asleep. While following this anonymous man, Millie ran into a female neighbor to whom she explained that her partner was hurt. Riley asked this woman to "listen out" for Daisy. The woman agreed. Millie Riley was never seen alive again.²²

The next morning Hezekiah returned from work, discovering Daisy unattended and Millie nowhere in sight. Before he embarked on a search, Hezekiah took Daisy to the home of his best friend Oralea Smith, with whom he worked in the mill, and his wife Susie, and asked them to "keep her until I come back."²³ Almost immediately into his search, Hezekiah was told by the female neighbor that she had spoken to Millie the previous night and that she was with a "man who looked like he was colored, although she didn't get a good look at him because he was walking in front" of her.²⁴ In a small town like Huttig, news of Millie's disappearance spread like a wildfire. "Later in the morning," Early B. concluded, some fisherman found Riley's violated body. Where did they find her?," Daisy asked, staring "into the dark, muddy water." Hesitantly, he "pointed at the water... 'Right over there,'" he revealed. "She was half in and half out."²⁵ Next, Daisy wrote that she inquired, "who did it?," to which he replied, "there was a lot of talk from the cooks and cleaning women who worked in 'white town' about what they

²² *Ibid*, 11.

²³ Brian Lanker, *I Dream A World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1999), 76.

²⁴ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 11.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

heard over there. They said that three white men did it.”²⁶ Lastly, Daisy pressed for information about her paternity, “What happened to my father?” Devastated at Millie’s death, and at his inability to avenge it, he vanished from town, and was never seen again.²⁷

Bates absolved her birth father of his abandonment by placing the onus for his action on Jim Crow’s suppression of black manhood. Like Oralee’s reaction to the incident with butcher, Hezekiah’s inability to respond in a forceful and manly way is attributed to racism, not African-American men’s unmanliness. When a group of friends arrived, Early B. left Daisy alone on the bank of the Millpond. Now dark outside, she heard Oralee whisper, “It’s time to go home, darling.” Reaching out for her small hand, he asked, “How long have you known?” She replied, “A long time.” The scene ends with Bates writing that Oralee “lifted me tenderly in his arms and carried me home.” Like in the incident with the butcher, and the incident with the boy who tells her about her birth parents, Daisy and her family imposed a silence around a painful issue of which they had no control. Hezekiah’s questionable decision is juxtaposed with Oralee’s noble action. For Bates, the two men were connected through shared, gendered experiences with southern racism.

“Rebirth” identifies this awareness of her biological mother’s rape and murder as the major turning point of her early life. After learning about the traumatic event, like

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Hezekiah married M.B. Boyette on August 10, 1915. The couple’s first child, Marvin B. “M.B.” Gatson was born almost eight months later on March 31, 1916. If Hezekiah Gatson is Daisy Gatson’s biological father, and the story of Millie Riley’s rape and murder are in fact true, her death would have occurred before August 1915. H.C. Gatson and M.B. Boyett, Marriage License, August 10, 1915, Farmerville Courthouse, Parish of Union, State of Louisiana, folder 3, Box 3, Daisy Bates Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

other children, Gatson, accumulated knowledge of the world around her. During a trip in the woods with her father in the Fall before her ninth birthday, Daisy asked him who killed her mother and why she was the victim of such a hateful act. This is when, “in tones so soft” that she “could barely hear the words,” Oralee told Daisy of “the timeworn lust of the white man for the Negro woman—which strikes at the heart of every Negro man in the South,” and that her mother died because “she was not the kind to submit.”²⁸ As he continued, Daisy’s mind fastened on the fact that “three white men...had killed my mother.” When they left the woods, she wrote Oralee appeared “tired and broken,” and, once again, took her hand as they walked home silently. “Young as I was,” Bates insisted, “strange as it may seem, my life had a secret goal—to find the men who had done this horrible thing to my mother. “So happy once,” she stated, harkening back to her Edenic period, and transitioning to her Warrior stage, “now I was like a little sapling which, after a violent storm, puts out only gnarled and twisted branches.”²⁹

Coming of Age in Huttig, Arkansas

Before attempting to analyze Bates’ later leadership in the Freedom Movement, it is imperative to explore the possibilities and potential scenarios about Daisy Gatson’s pedigree, place and date of birth, and the circumstances that ended in her being raised by adoptive parents in Huttig, Arkansas. Bates’ childhood was defined by Jim Crow and racial discrimination, and she spoke and wrote about how her jarring experiences with systematic oppression in her hometown shaped her adult life. Historians generally agree

²⁸ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

on the following facts about Daisy Bates' childhood. When Gatson was an infant, her biological mother was raped and murdered by three white men. After her mother's death, Daisy's biological father left her with childless friends who raised and adopted her. Daisy's formal education ended around age fourteen. At age fifteen she met her future husband, L.C. Bates, and eventually left Huttig with him. Historians also agree on the following interpretations about her early years. The knowledge of her birth mother's death, and the oppression of African-Americans in Huttig were the sources of her eventual public, historic showdown with the President of the United States and white supremacy. Additionally, the few scholars who have discussed Daisy Gatson have concluded that the young girl's relationship with her adoptive father was the most important relationship of her childhood.³⁰ These scholars have also written that Gaston rejected the authoritative personality of her Christian adoptive mother, whose penchant toward God and strict discipline prevented the two females from developing the type of intimate relationship each enjoyed with the male head of the household. These facts and interpretations are in part accurate, but they also only scratch the surface of a tumultuous girlhood that Bates endured and did not want to completely reveal.

A close reading of "Rebirth" reveals Bates' disdain for the place of her upbringing. Using her memoir as a platform from which she could speak, Bates she wanted her personal story to reflect the issues African-Americans were directly confronting through the Freedom Struggle. In the forward she wrote for *The Long Shadow of Little Rock's* first edition, Eleanor Roosevelt connected Bates' personal

³⁰ Kirk, "Daisy Bates," 20; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 19.

history of African-Americans and racial discrimination in the United States.³¹ “As you read this story...all the incidents are drawn together,” forcing readers to “marvel at the courage of the Colored Community,” Mrs. Roosevelt proclaimed.³² In the waning months of a life committed to interracial cooperation and human justice, the longest-serving First Lady in United States history “wishe[d] that Mrs. Bates...who had so much courage throughout *all* of her difficulties...had been able to keep from giving us some sense of bitterness and fear in the end of her book.”³³ Mrs. Roosevelt, who passed away just one week before *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* was published, believed “the book should shock the conscience of America and bring the realization of where we stand in the year 1962 in these United States.”³⁴ Similarly, Bates’ self-description as a person who “passionately loved all blooming things,” and her nonchalant reference to Huttig as “this town” of “so little beauty” objectified her hometown, and rendered its specific location in the Jim Crow South irrelevant.³⁵ This strategic presentation made Huttig a microcosm of the individual, group, regional, and national perils associated with racial discrimination, depersonalizing an extremely painful personal past in the process. “Rebirth” presents a familiar story about a black childhood damaged by Jim Crow. Bates’ presentation also allowed African-Americans outside of Arkansas, and the South, to identify with her personal struggle, and to understand what she thought was the catalyst for her civil rights activism.

³¹ Howard Odum, “Eleanor Clubs”, *Race and Rumors of Race: The American South in the Early Forties* (UNC Press, 1943, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 67-89.

³² Eleanor Roosevelt, “Forward to the First Edition,” *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, xx.

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ *Ibid*, xxi.

³⁵ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 13.

Daisy Gatson's virtual absence from the public record enabled Daisy Bates to hide, rewrite, and omit facts about her youth from history. For Bates, her early years were important, but she also treated her pre-Little Rock life like a prelude that paled in comparison to her more significant political activism. The dearth of records concerning Daisy Gatson prompted the historian John A. Kirk to write that the "massive imbalance between what we know about her public life and her personal life" makes Bates an "elusive," historical figure in need of examination.³⁶ When studying her full life it is essential to remember that Mrs. Bates' knowledge of her lineage was second hand. The facts remain largely unverified and contested. Bates had no direct memories of, or firsthand interactions with, her birth parents. The story she published about her origins is probable, but it is also questionable. What is certain is that what Bates wrote became central to the creation of her public image and historical legacy. In order to derive a fuller comprehension of Daisy Bates' leadership in the Civil Rights Movement, historians must revisit and interrogate *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*. Bates' memoir helps scholars to recover her complex personal story, clarifies her political beliefs, and elucidates what Bates thought about herself.

Due to the fact that Gatson's childhood lacks adequate documentation, Daisy's account will be interrogated more for intent and purpose, and less for truth and veracity. The carefully weaved narrative Bates crafted about her traumatic childhood eschewed critical facts about her early years, but the presentation she choose also allows scholars to search her book for political messages, and properly analyze it in the context of the African-American writing tradition with which it belongs. The information she selected

³⁶Jacoway, *To Turn Away Thy Son*, 164; Kirk, "Daisy Bates," 18, 19.

for “Rebirth” suggests that Daisy actively crafted a public persona before, during and after her moment in history’s spotlight. According to Daisy Bates’ 1959 Arkansas driver’s license, she was born June 18, 1919. The Little Rock Police Department reported a different birthdate, November 14, 1914, while other sources have listed 1920 and 1922. Bates eventually settled on November 11, 1914 as the official date of her birth.³⁷ Though challenging and problematic, documenting and mining her early years is critical to uncovering how the angry Daisy Gatson was transformed into a heroine for the Black Freedom Struggle.

Daisy’s Gatson’s path to becoming Daisy Bates started in the small town of Huttig, Arkansas. Located just five miles from the Louisiana border in Union County, near the south central part of the state, Huttig was created in 1904, and like the rest of the Arkansas, segregation and racism were alive and well. The town was named after C.H. Huttig, a native of Saint Louis, Missouri. , As the town’s principal investor, Mr. Huttig had ever intention on capitalizing on the state’s thriving lumber industry. Life for Huttig’s residents was determined by the owners of the lumber mill and Jim Crow enforced racial segregation. Though it promoted itself as part of a more progressive, less oppressive “New South”, from Daisy’s recollections, the remnants from the “Old South” remained firmly intact.³⁸ In the groundbreaking compilation, *Black Women in White*

³⁷ Mark Minton, “Keeping an eye on Daisy Bates,” *New York Times*, October 15, 2000, 6B; “Federal Bureau of Investigation, Daisy Bates File”, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas (hereafter cited as DB, FBI File).

³⁸ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 13. Maya Angelou called Jim Crow’s sharecropping culture “remnants of slavery’s plantations,” Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 17; For more on the New South please see, Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, (New York: Vintage, 1991); W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction In America, 1860-1880*, (New York: The Free Press, 1993); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the*

America, the trailblazing women's history pioneer Gerda Lerner used Works Progress Administration (WPA) surveys soliciting information about the availability of lodging for African-American travelers in Arkansas as an example of Jim Crow's control over the culture in the South. White residents who replied to the WPA's information request made it clear that there were no racial problems in the state because segregation was enforced with "rigidity." Racial incidents, letters indicated, were minimal as long as blacks stayed in their "place."³⁹ Daisy Bates described Huttig along this vein. She wrote that it was more like a "plantation" than a "town" because "everyone worked for the mill, lived in the houses owned by the mill, and traded at the general store run by the mill." The place was "ruled" by "the owners". Huttig's streets, she recalled, were "hard, red clay," and mostly unnamed. Main Street, the town's "longest and widest street," led to the Business Square, which contained four buildings, each one-story high—"a commissary and meat market, a post office, and ice cream parlor and a movie house."⁴⁰

Daisy wrote that Huttig's physical appearance exposed its façade as a place where race relations were "cordial", masking the reality that it was "a part of the Old South tradition."⁴¹ To borrow from her contemporary James Farmer, whites "pulled strings" like a "remote control."⁴² A town of roughly 1,250 inhabitants, Huttig was demarcated

Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); William Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997); Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, (New York: Knopf, 1998); Carl H. Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas: Persistence in the Midst of Ruin* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002); John I. Smith, *Forward From Rebellion: Reconstruction and Revolution in Arkansas, 1868-1874*, (Little Rock: Rose Publishing Company, 1983); C Van Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1951); ---, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

³⁹ Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 397-8.

⁴⁰ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 6-7.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 6-7

⁴² Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 13; "Huttig, General File, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Arkansas; James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (Fort Worth: Texas

racially near its center by Main Street and The Forty Acre Pond. “The physical appearance of the two areas provided a more definite means of distinction,” Bates recalled.⁴³ White residents lived in what she described as “White Town,” while blacks made their life on the other side in “Negra Town.” Huttig’s white population lived in white-painted “bungalows,” while blacks lived in often unpainted “drab-red shotgun[s],” which got their name from the ability to “stand in the front yard and look straight...into the backyard.” Blacks had “two church buildings” painted with the “same drab red exterior,” and a “two-room schoolhouse” with a “potbellied stove that never quite succeeded in keeping it warm.” White residents enjoyed “white steepled churches and a white spacious school with a big lawn.”

“Rebirth” reminds historians of how important childhood experiences are in the transition from adolescence into adulthood, and of how the beginning of an individual’s life creates the foundation for how that life will eventually end. Bates expressed extreme anger and bitterness at not knowing her parents, and for having them taken away from her at such an early age. “It took me a long time to get over the hatred that I developed from that terrible knowledge,” Daisy later told one interviewer.⁴⁴ Being young, attractive, African-American, and female put Gatson at risk for being sexually assaulted. The Jim Crow South enjoyed a rich history of white men raping black women with impunity that dated back to the days of Antebellum slavery.⁴⁵ In 1662, a Virginia law reversed the

Christian University Press, 1985), 52; Charles S. Johnson, *Shadow of the Plantation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 11, 12; Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005), 6.

⁴³ Bates. *Long Shadow*, 6-7.

⁴⁴ Peter Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, (New York: Free Press, 1988), 118.

⁴⁵ Foner, *Give Me Liberty*, 53. For more on the historical violation of black women by white men please see, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings: Southern Horrors, a Red Record, Mob Rule in New Orleans* (Salem: Ayer Company, 1991); Greene, *Our Separate Ways*; Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black

European tradition of using the status of the father to determine the status of a woman's children. This devastating law established white men's sexual hegemony in the South. It also helped codify the British Colony into a "slave society" which condoned and promoted raping black women to produce offspring who would then serve as life-long, forced, laborers. The creation of the slave system made it financially lucrative to rape black women, and the cultural tradition of violating black women's bodies it created persisted throughout the Jim Crow Era.

Daisy Bates inferred that she feared that her mother's fate could become her own. The historian Darlene Clark Hine has called this concern "the threat of rape."⁴⁶ According to Dr. Hine, the South was a culture that condoned the rape of black women. The fact of the presence and prevalence of rape created a culture of fear amongst black women that at any given moment, they could be the victim of sexual assault. It was in this historical context, and real-life environment under which Gatson left Huttig as a teenager, with a married man, and her father's blessing. When local people who knew Gatson's birth mother said that she was "the living image of her" they were also sending a message that she might also have been at risk of being murdered if she resisted the sexual advances of white men. Even though her memories were not based on her own recollections, Bates connected her life's mission to her mother's rape and fate, physically and spiritually.⁴⁷ One month before her 63rd birthday she told historian Elizabeth Jackoway "Well, I think I've been angry all my life about what has happened to my people. Finding that out, and nobody did anything about it. I think it started back

Women," McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*; Morgan, *Laboring Women*; Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*; White, *Arnt I a Woman*.

⁴⁶ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 16; Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women," 342; Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 16; Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women," 342

then.”⁴⁸ Some 55 years after becoming cognizant of her mother’s murder,. Bates identified that single event, and the anger it engendered, as the catalyst for her later political activism.

Constructing her linear narrative required Bates to dissemble. Childhood best friend, Beatrice Cowsver Epps recalled that around age twelve, Daisy Gatson rebelled against the black church and its culture of female respectability.⁴⁹ By roughly fourteen, she completed her limited education because Huttig did not have a high school for African-American students to attend, or an alternative plan that allowed them to continue their studies.⁵⁰ Before the end of her teenage years, Gatson left Huttig with the already-married traveling insurance salesman named L.C. Bates. Throughout her life she told the story that her mother was a beautiful, proud young black woman who was raped and murdered in her hometown when she was just a baby, and that her father, who was “as light as a lot of white people” was heartbroken and distraught, left her with friends, and never returned for her.⁵¹ The version of her early life that Daisy Bates claimed as her own may have conveniently explained how she met her husband, and ended up in Little Rock before the 1957 integration crisis. However, this story of Daisy Bates’ beginnings is only part of the truth of her life. In “Rebirth,” Bates imposed a silence on parts of her childhood through using gaps in time and by providing vague, shallow or non-existent explanations. The chapter lacks an in-depth discussion about Gatson’s education, and some of the unpopular ways the angry young girl attempted asserted herself. According

⁴⁸ Daisy Bates interview with Elizabeth Jacoway, October 11, 1976, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, “Documenting the American South, Oral Histories of the American South”
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>

⁴⁹ Judith Bloom Fradin and Judith Bloom Fradin, *The Power of One: Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine* (New York: Clarion Books, 2004), 28.

⁵⁰ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 20.

⁵¹ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 12.

her childhood friend, Gatson staked claim to her body and sexuality by wearing trendy, form-fitting clothes.⁵² Bates never mentioned that she was expelled from church, or that her behavior caused major tension with her religious, God-fearing adopted mother. If true, public knowledge of Gatson's rebellious behavior would have damaged Daisy Bates' public image, and resulted in the questioning of her credentials as a respectable female leader. The conflict some information from her past created between her image and her truth may have caused Bates to exclude them from "Rebirth." One of few black women who had a presence in the male-dominated public sphere, Bates had to walk a fine line between revealing and concealing a private past that was consistent with her civil rights activism, yet inconsistent with the image of respectable, educated African-American womanhood she projected.⁵³

Focusing on courage helps clarify why Gatson's possession of this leadership quality was critical to her personal development, and equally important to her later activism. Courage is useful analytical tool for scholars attempting to deconstruct the significance of Bates' life, and decipher the intentions behind her self-presentation. Months after Mrs. Bates' 1999 death, the historian Linda Reed asked "What will we remember most about her?" Gatson's best friend, remembered Daisy as a brave young girl who was unafraid to confront injustice or maltreatment in 1920s Huttig.⁵⁴ Arguing that "The struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, had roots in other periods of America's past," Dr. Reed's argues that "courage" is indispensable to leadership, and that the ability to be brave, regardless of the potential dangers, is perhaps the most important personal quality

⁵² Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 28.

⁵³ For an example of the public/private tightrope African-American women have walked historically, see Glenda Gilmore's portrait of North Carolina Progressive Era activist, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 178-85.

⁵⁴ Sharon LaCruise, "Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock," Independent Lens documentary, 2011.

leaders need to possess. “Blacks’ twentieth-century struggle relied on a tradition,” Professor Reed writes, “(an evolving heritage) of inner strength, or what is generally referred to as initiative and courage—qualities that even her critics granted that Daisy Bates possessed in abundance.”⁵⁵ Bates was a bold black woman who stood up and spoke for her race in the 1950s. She demanded that whites respect her status as a married woman, and her husband’s manhood by referring to her as “Mrs. Bates,” or not at all. Daisy Bates’ was courageous her entire life, and an examination of the central quality that made her a subject worthy of historical inquiry illuminates how she became a leader in Arkansas’s Civil Rights Movement.

Friends and enemies conceded that Daisy Bates demonstrated immense courage, and “Rebirth” identifies Huttig as the place, and her childhood as the period, where her courage started to develop. “She had faith and kept it all the way through,” her public adversary Governor Faubus later admitted.⁵⁶ A man who had also endured a rough childhood of his own, Faubus knew firsthand that Bates was as determined to integrate the entire state of Arkansas, as he was to remain in the Governor’s mansion. Faubus “believe[d] Bates is who she is because of her past. ‘She was motivated by the conditions in which she grew up. Like a lot of *us*,’” he admitted, “she knew hardship and deprivation, and she wanted to remove those hardships from others.”⁵⁷ No one doubted her commitment to the Civil Rights Movement, or her willingness to do whatever was in her power to ensure its success. Exploring the connection between Daisy Gatson’s courage and Daisy Bates’ civil rights activism is just as important as recovering facts

⁵⁵ Linda Reed, “The Legacy of Daisy Bates”, *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, (Vol. LIX, Spring 2000) 76, 78.

⁵⁶ Linda S. Caillouet, “High Profile: Daisy Lee Gatson Bates,” *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, January 12, 1992, 6

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

about her education or lineage because she achieved notoriety for her brave leadership in the face of seemingly insurmountable, organized, systemic pressures.

Reinterpreting “Rebirth” into an explanatory narrative about how a vulnerable colored girl grew into a courageous Black woman elucidates what Bates, herself, believed was important about her early years. “At the end of her life, Bates clarified that “her strength came from a belief in herself” the goals of the NAACP and the Civil Rights Movement. “It came from determination and faith in what we were doing,” she explained. “My courage,” she humbly reflected, “developed slowly.”⁵⁸ Courage is a form of leadership. An examination of courage as a leadership trait is historically relevant, precisely because Daisy Gatson demonstrated the remarkable personal trait for which Daisy Bates is remembered—before she met her husband, and before she became active in the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, it must have taken a level of courage to overcome the trauma of her childhood, and come of age in Huttig.

Defending Black Womanhood, Redefining Manhood

Although Huttig was as racist as any other part of the South, Bates did not want African-Americans to appear powerless. Her discussion of life with her adoptive parents, especially her portrait of Susie Smith as moral authority functioned as a literary defense of black womanhood against negative stereotypes. “Rebirth” also challenge to the notion of black men as unmanly and the image of white men as the manly. The section ends with “Rebirth’s” final, transformative event, the death of Oralea Smith. Bates provides a glimpse into life for an average black family in Huttig, and important information about

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

her complex relationship with her adoptive parents. Bates' depiction of the Smith's also reminded her readers of how African-Americans did not just passively or willingly accept racial subordination, and possessed a degree of moral authority that was lacking in southern white culture.

Bates portrayed her stern adoptive mother as a model of respectable black womanhood. Susie Smith is described as "a tall-dark brown woman with a kind face and big brown eyes that sparkled when she laughed." Acknowledging that "mother" was "very religious," Daisy reminisced that she "believed every word of the Holy Bible," "including that passage, 'Spare the rod and spoil the child,' which I later learned wasn't in the Bible at all. Of course, it made no difference that it wasn't in the Bible, Mamma believed it just the same."⁵⁹ More than a mother and a disciplinarian, who "often, clobbered, tanned, [and] switched," her rebellious daughter, frequently making her "stand in a corner," Susie Smith is presented as a moral authority who instilled the values associated with African-American female respectability in her unruly daughter. Oralee may have served as an enabler for Daisy's "fun-loving side," which included breaking church rules, but "Rebirth" subtly pays homage to Susie Smith as a symbol of devout, Christian African-American women's faith.⁶⁰

Susie Smith is a symbol of African-American female femininity, and Bates' characterization of her adoptive mother is used to challenge historical negative black stereotypes about black womanhood. For instance, Daisy's trip to the butcher is

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 25.

⁶⁰ For more on African-Americans, gender and religion, please see, Betty Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African-American Women and Religion*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirit Walks Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

presented as an aberration. The event occurred only because her mother was ill. Bates' layout of the facts freed Susie Smith of blame for the incident, much like her discussion of her birth father's abandonment absolved him. By clarifying the circumstances that led to the event that destroyed her Eden, Bates also excluded her mother from the category of lazy adults. Additionally, when she returned from the meat market, her mother comforted her. Susie Smith's austere persona is softened when she displays her emotions, and cries over the pain inflicted on her daughter, although Smith turned away to stop Daisy from seeing the tears in her eyes. On the occasion when Daisy ran a high temperature, her mother called in the Church Sisters to pray that she recover in good health. In another instance, Daisy slapped her white girlfriend out of confusion and anger. Shortly after learning about her birth mother's mother, when a white girl with whom she "had been friends for a long time," approached her with money to buy some candy, Gatson "slapped her face," and yelled "Don't you ever touch me again! I don't want your penny."⁶¹ She came home in search of the comfort from her mother, not her father. While contentious at times, Daisy writes about her relationship with her adoptive mother as positive and significant to her personal develop. Throughout "Rebirth," black girls and women are presented as resistors of segregation, while black men are conveyed as manly men compelled into submission.

The section of "Rebirth" that focusses solely on Susie Smith mounts an unequivocal defense of black girlhood and womanhood by portraying Gatson as a female who competed with boys, and through the depiction of the woman who raised her as her own biological child as a pragmatic, loving mother, who showed genuine concern for her

⁶¹ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 18.

spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. Daisy was a self-described, “regular Tomboy” who “enjoyed competing with the boys,” and her mother did not discourage her participation in activities viewed as typically male.⁶² Under her protective mother’s watchful eyes, Daisy frequently competed in climbing contest with neighborhood boys in an old mulberry tree, located in the backyard of their shotgun home. On one occasion, when not in her mother’s site, the ostentatious little girl fell from a tree, and onto some “broken glass,” and Daisy’s knee started to bleed. Afraid of being scolded by her mother, Daisy reluctantly made her way home. When Smith saw her daughter’s bruised, bleeding leg, she “rushed” her to the doctor, who nursed the wound and inserted stitches. Though Smith allowed Daisy to play marbles with the boys, she did not, however, allow her to permanently keep her winnings. This did not stop Daisy from keeping what she won anyway. After paying for lessons from the local champ, Daisy became the best marble player in town.⁶³ In “Rebirth,” Bates reminisced fondly about how she “won one of the boy’s favorite agates,” and when she refused to give it back, he yelled, “Miss Susie, Daisy got our marbles.” “You know you’re not supposed to play for keeps!,” Smith shouted. “That’s gambling and gambling is a sin.”⁶⁴ Daisy also remembered that Oralea played “stud-poker” every Saturday day, and though his wife insisted, “If you must play that devil’s game, the least you could do is go to church and ask the Lord to forgive you.” When he returned home, “Daddy” placed “his winnings on the dresser.” The lecture Susie gave her husband before departing for church depended on her “account of his

⁶² *Ibid*, 26.

⁶³ *Ibid*

⁶⁴ *Ibid*

financial rating;” winning guaranteed “God’s and Mamma’s forgiveness,” while losing constituted “a stern God and a sterner Mamma.”⁶⁵

Together, Millie Riley and Susie Smith present a portrait of black womanhood that is Christian, chaste, loyal, proud, loving and feminine, which were clear challenges to the stereotypes of black women that existed at the time. Susie Smith is a spiritual force in “Rebirth.” Ending with the Biblically-themed final chapter, “How Long? How Long?,” the lessons that Smith teaches her daughter echo throughout *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, and are consistent with the presence of religion in Bates’ real life. During one Sunday morning breakfast, while Daisy and Susie were preparing for church, Daisy recalled her mother admonishing Oralee for corrupting their daughter. Smith’s commitment to her Methodist faith, as well as her religious language, corroborate how she worked diligently to ensure that Christianity was a part of her home, and family life. When Daisy innocently told her father that he could “go to church and ask God to forgive you for a whole month...Mother fanned my tail and sent me off to Sunday School,” and told her to leave Oralee’s sins to “Mamma and God.” After Smith discovered that Daisy continued to play marbles for keeps, she told the boys to recoup their losses, but as they “scrambled over the marbles,” she lectured them about the sinful nature of “playing for keeps.”⁶⁶ Later that evening at dinner, Susie blamed Oralee, “Daisy has been playing marbles for keeps!...She had a shoe box full of marbles she won off the boys. You see what you’re doing to your daughter?” Oralee smiled, asking, “Are you really that good?” Susie interjected before Daisy could give her reply. “You stop that kind of talk. Can’t you see what you’re doing—you and your Saturday night poker games.” Later that night,

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 27.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

Susie took Daisy to Wednesday night prayer service at their church located behind the Smith home.⁶⁷

Bates' silences about her education in her teenage years signify her conscious construction of a public persona in "Rebirth". Regarding her adolescent years, Daisy only writes that she visited her grandmother's farm in eastern Arkansas during the summertime.⁶⁸ The silences around Gatson's formal education are noticeable because Daisy Bates became famous due to her crusade for equal education.⁶⁹ Bates tells her reader that "School opened. Nothing had changed. We had the same worn-out textbooks handed down to us from the white school. With the first frosts the teacher wrestled with the potbellied stove. Days drifted by as we tried to gain an education in those surroundings."⁷⁰ Bates' silence regarding her education must be seen as critique of just how unfair Huttig's was for blacks.

The denial of being properly educated that Daisy experienced growing up in Huttig was endemic to the state of Arkansas. Up until the 1870s, the state did not establish a public education system.⁷¹ Financial responsibility for school funding was placed on local districts, which, in effect, exacerbated racial disparities. At the turn of the century, less than two-thirds of whites between the ages of five and eighteen attended school, and 43 percent of the state's black population was illiterate, compared to 12 percent for whites.⁷² Texas and Louisiana were the only two states with racial disparities

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 7, 15-16, 19.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 15-16.

⁷¹ Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South*, 74.

⁷² *Ibid*, 75; J. Whanyne, T. Deblack, G. Sabo III, and M. Arnold, eds, *Arkansas: A Narrative History* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 293.

larger than the one seen in Arkansas's educational system. However, Arkansas ranked last in the number of days their children attended classes each year—70 days, compared to 89 days in Tennessee, 101.6 days in Mississippi, 111.5 in Texas, and 143.6 days in Louisiana. The lack of adequate education was especially problematic for rural Arkansans, particularly African-Americans. A report conducted by the Federal Government in 1923 declared that being “born in Arkansas” was “a misfortune and an injustice from which” most people would “never recover.”⁷³ In their adult years, the report concluded, the state's recipients would “look back with bitterness when plunged...into competition with the children from other states.” The historian Carl Moneyhon writes that majority of the state, who lived in poor, rural areas, were forced to “stay on the farm,” irrespective of their race.⁷⁴ Of course, the consequences of a subpar education had a disproportionate effect on the lives of African-Americans. Historians of Arkansas history have concluded that “Black children were less likely to attend school and more likely to be illiterate” because “the vast majority of whites...acted as a significant obstacle to improvement.”⁷⁵ Bates' refusal to discuss what she learned, or did not learn, in the overcrowded, understaffed two-room school house suggest that she did not want to discuss her education because it was painful and could be used by opponents of her leadership against her and the crusade for equal learning opportunities for all of Arkansas's children.

Clearly, Bates did not want her readers to focus on her educational limitations, and instead concentrated on the devastating effect the death of her father had on her

⁷³ The Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education's study, *The Public School System in Arkansas*, 2 vols (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923), quoted in Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South*, 75. 4

⁷⁴ Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South*, 76.

⁷⁵ Wayne, *Arkansas: A Narrative History*, 294.

young life. Oralee Smith's death is Gatson's third, and final transformative moment, and completes her rebirth into a civil rights activist. The discussion Bates provides about the time she supposedly spent away from Huttig on her grandmother's farm are an example of how "Rebirth" only discloses the information that Bates felt was pertinent to the story she was crafting. "I was in my teens. On one of my visits away from my home my mother sent for me. My father had been taken to the hospital."⁷⁶ Bates leads her readers to conclude that she was away at her grandmother's farm when she received the terrible news about Oralee. However, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the placement of the information about her trips to her grandmother's farm immediately before the story of Oralee's death is an example how Bates employed silences and narrative reconstruction to manipulate her readers into making assumptions about her actions that were consistent with her public persona as a respectable woman. "When I arrived home, the doctor told me it was just a matter of time. Daddy was gravely ill," she revealed. "The bottom dropped out of my world."⁷⁷ Bates wanted her readers to focus on the devastation of losing her father at such a young age, not on the facts of her life. This conclusion is supported by the narrative techniques present in "Rebirth".

Although Oralee's life was waning, Bates reminds her readers of not just the pain he experienced as a black man in the racist South, but more importantly, the dignity and strength he maintained despite the dehumanizing treatment he received from southern whites. As his life diminished, Oralee jettisoned the jovial mask of civility Jim Crow forced black men like him to wear, and revealed a man of intellectual wisdom and spiritual strength that the South's culture of racial oppression had forced him to suppress.

⁷⁶ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 28.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Daisy remembered how her father's dark skin contrasted with hospital bed's white linen, and how the juxtaposition revealed "wrinkles etched deep by a lifetime of struggle." Nevertheless, she also noticed that his "stubborn chin and proud high forehead" remained. When the reality of the moment hit her, Daisy began to cry. Oralee opened his eyes. "Don't cry for me, Daisy," he said, telling his daughter, "I'll be better off". Dying from an unspecified form of cancer, Oralee implied that death from a painful terminal disease was better than living under the indignities of Jim Crow. Before taking his last breath, Oralee told his daughter what he thought about her attitude and behavior—her dissemblance:

You're filled with hatred. Hate can destroy you, Daisy. Don't hate white people just because they're white. If you hate, make it count for something. Hate the humiliations we are living under in the South. Hate the discrimination that eats away at the soul of every black man and woman. Hate the insults hurled at us by white scum—and then try to do something about it, or your hate won't spell a thing.⁷⁸

Bates uses her father's death to connect the themes of the denial of African-American manhood and the violation of black womanhood, and to argument that black men remained manly despite segregation's limitations. Oralee is referred to as "strong man" who was "forced to suppress" his "strength" "hold himself back," and "bow to the white yoke or be cut down."⁷⁹ Bates also revisited her birth mother's the rape and murder, and directly connected the violation of her mother's womanhood to the denial of Oralee's manhood. By forging a direct link between "Rebirth's" most formidable events, Bates demonstrated that the oppression of black women and men, while with clear gendered distinctions, were inextricable. Bates wrote that Oralee recounted his memories from the day of Millie Riley's funeral. Dressed in his "best dark suit," Smith stopped by

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 29.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

the post office to pick up his mail. On his way out, he saw three white male teenagers near the steps. “Look at that dressed up ape!” one of them joked. And in a tradition as southern as State’s Rights and the Second Amendment, he continued, “You live here, boy,” calling African-American adults by their first names, an additional denial of black people’s personhood. When Oralee did not answer, but proceeded to walk past them, the young men blocked his path. “I know what’s wrong,” another said, “he needs something red on!”⁸⁰ That’s when he picked up a paint brush from a nearby bucket of red paint, left by workers who used it to color “Negra Town,” and placed a streak on the back of Oralee’s suit. Oralee stated that he could have used the “murder in my heart” to crush “the life out of him with my bare hands,” but was deterred by the fear that “if I touched one hair on his head I could be lynched.”⁸¹ To add insult to injury, when he told a deputy sheriff on the way home, the sheriff replied that the kids “were just having a little fun,” and suggested “turpentine” to “take the paint out.” This story provides a possible explanation as to why Bates believed more black men did not assert their masculinity in the Jim Crow South and challenge their white male counterparts. Like he did in the incident with the butcher, Oralee suppressed his manhood not because he feared this specific group of white men, but because their actions were supported by a violently oppressive racial system—Lynching . In other words, Oralee was concerned less for his life, and more for the well-being of his wife and daughter, and is an example of the ways in which race, sex and gender intersected in the Jim Crow South.

Now on his death bed, Smith was able to reflect upon his entire life, and recognized that the harm segregation inflicted on African-Americans was so deep, that

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 30.

⁸¹ *Ibid*.

death was a better alternative to living. Oralee's final appearance reminds readers of his vulnerability as a black man, and demonstrates how survival was a form of resistance for many African-Americans in the Jim Crow South. He tells his daughter, "Sometimes, you know later when you should have died." Having already told her readers that black men suppressed their manhood to protect women and children, Bates reveals Oralee's anger, which is intended to symbolize the fury of the race men living during the time in which she wrote *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*. "I ought have died that day they put the paint on my coat. I should have taken those guys and wrung their necks like chickens. But I wanted to live," he admits. "For what, I sometimes wonder." These are the last words Daisy attributed to her father, and they leave the reader with a complex image of the southern African-American man whose conditions forced him to assert his manhood in unconventional ways. Bates concludes that for black men like her father, death was better than life because it allowed them to be "at peace" with themselves "for the first time" since they were little boys.⁸² This final reference to boyhood and manhood created a connection between the story of the black boy who refused to step into the muddy puddle, Oralee's life-long suppression of his manly longing to assert his masculinity, and Jim Crow's control over all black people.

Ending "Rebirth" with Oralee's recollections about the day of Millie Riley's funeral completes her narrative of black lives damaged by Jim Crow, and is described as a moment that changed Gatson's attitude and behavior toward whites and civil rights. Daisy notes that when the "Catholic Sister" came into the room, the "pleasant voice" to which she responded to her was the first time in several years that I had spoken to a

⁸² *Ibid*, 31.

white person.”⁸³ The chapter’s conclusion corroborates “Rebirth’s” primary message: Daisy Gatson’s childhood experiences were the foundation for the civil rights activist Daisy Bates. “I knew that as surely as my father was dying, I was undergoing a rebirth. My father had passed on to me a priceless heritage—one that was to sustain me throughout the years to come.”⁸⁴ “Rebirth” concludes with a definitive statement that black women resisted sexual violation, and that black men detested the suppression of their manhood, and makes a clear distinction between the desires of southern black people, and the realities imposed on them by a violent, inhumane racist southern society.

The Angry Daisy Gatson and the Origins of the Courageous Daisy Bates

Daisy’s presentation of Millie Riley’s rape and murder as an unmitigated factual event is an example of how she challenged what feminists scholars have called “hegemonic ways of knowing,” and used her autobiography as a means of “recuperating” her public image.”⁸⁵ Biographer Grif Stockley’s interpretation of the events of Millie Riley’s death perpetuates the unbalanced power dynamics challenged by black feminist historians like Nell Irvin Painter and Deborah Gray White.⁸⁶ Citing the white run *Huttig News*, which rarely ran articles about African-Americans, Stockley writes that “the difficulty” with Daisy’s story is that the paper “contains no account of the violent death

⁸³ *Ibid*, 30.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 31.

⁸⁵ Nell Irvin Painter, Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth’s Knowing and Becoming Known,” *Journal of American History*, 81, no. 2 461; Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 70-1.

⁸⁶ Nell Irvin Painter, “Bias and Synthesis in History,” *The Journal of American History* Vol. 74, No. 1 (Jun., 1987), 109-112; Deborah Gray White, “Mining the Forgotten: Manuscript Sources for Black Women’s History,” *The Journal of American History* Vol. 74, No. 1 (Jun., 1987), pp. 237-242

of a black woman named Riley between the years 1913 and 1920.”⁸⁷ This conclusion ignores Stockley’s own work on the 1919 racial massacre, and cover up, in Elaine, Arkansas, as well as his astonishment when, in 2002, Huttig’s librarian denied Arkansas’s history of racial oppression when she stated, “I don’t think there was any discrimination” during the time Daisy lived in Union County.⁸⁸ Daisy’s account of her mother’s death directly challenged the accuracy of the historical records kept by whites during the Jim Crow Era. By ignoring traditional ways of knowing, Daisy Bates denied others the chance to speak for her or tell her story. And instead of relying on records and documentation, Daisy validated her life and experiences through the black oral tradition and information generated from black female domestics eavesdropping on the conversations of their white employers. Daisy’s presentation of her mother’s murder by three white men as an undeniable truth was an important rejection of hegemonic power, and is indicative of the ways in which uneducated African-American women like her have created political, public personas whose meaning transcended their individual activism.

While Bates explicitly connected her personal story to her race, she was also noticeably ambivalent on the specifics concerning her biological origins because she was uncertain about her lineage. The 1962 delayed birth certificate, which list her parents as Millie Riley and John Gatson, corroborates this conclusion. On June 28, 2001 a woman by the name of Melinda Gatson Hunter, and “several relatives,” visited the archives room on the fourth floor of the of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison to correct the record about Bates’ birth parents. Mrs. Hunter presented research archivist

⁸⁷ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 17.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 14.

Harry Miller with “Daisy Gatson Bates’ delayed birth certificate, and the marriage license of Hezekiah “H.C.” Gatson and Miss Minor Bell (M.B.) Boyett. Mrs. Hunter identified herself as the niece of Daisy Bates, and “the family historian.” She claimed that Daisy’s father was not John Gatson, but one of his relatives, Hezekiah Gatson.⁸⁹ For proof, Mrs. Hunter produced a marriage certificate dated August 10, 1915, from neighboring Union Parish, located in Louisiana, just across the southern Arkansas border. The marriage license proves the couple’s legal union, but it fails to establish a clear biological link between Daisy Gatson and Hezekiah Gatson. Daisy was never officially adopted by the Smith’s and the 1920 census confirms that her surname was Gatson, which does lend some credibility that her father was in fact a man named Gatson.⁹⁰ However, confirmations end there. Photographs show a strong resemblance between Hezekiah Gatson and Daisy Bates, but the physical similarities are circumstantial, and are therefore not enough to conclude with certainty that he was Daisy Gatson’s father.

The few kernels of information about Daisy Gatson’s biological father suggest that she reshaped the story of her origins to avoid perpetuating damaging stereotypes about black men, and is further evidence of “Rebirth’s” deliberate presentation and protection of black manhood. The story that has been passed down by the Gatson family about Daisy’s parents states that Hezekiah was a young, “single man, promised to be

⁸⁹ Mrs. Gatson has yet to clarify the relationship between John and Hezekiah. Additionally, she has not presented any information that confirms or denies her claims. Ms. Hunter has also refused requests to confirm her family’s personal relationship with Daisy Bates. Bates’ biographers have openly expressed skepticism at the timing their emergence and some of their actions, like removing Bates’ materials such as plaques and personal papers that could be of value to the historian from the home of L.C. and Daisy Bates, which is now a national historic landmark and museum. Ms. Hunter has not cooperated with researchers, adding to the doubt about her authenticity and relationship to Daisy Bates. For more on this topic please see: , Dennis Brindell Fradin and Judith Bloom Fradin, *The Power of One*, (New York: Clarion Books, 2004), 7-9; Grif Stockley, *Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader from Arkansas*, (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2006), 18-19

⁹⁰ Sarah N. Gatson, “The Genealogy of Daisy Bates,” *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2005, 294.

married to another woman waiting for him. He was working in Huttig to earn money,” they claim, “just like all young men in those days, because of the lumber in the area.”⁹¹ The Gaston family also asserts that Daisy was never formally adopted by Susie and Oralea Smith. “Back in those days,” another relative corresponded, “people just left children with friends and relatives to be raised as their own. People did not bother with adoption paperwork.” The Gatson family has made themselves an authority on Daisy Gatson when they had no ties to her until her later years. The story told by the Gatson’s contradicts the one Daisy told of a young, loving couple, viciously torn apart by Jim Crow. In addition, the Gatson’s appear more interested in protecting how Hezekiah is remembered, than recovering the facts of his relationship with Riley, because no one could have predicted that the daughter he abandoned would grow into a woman worthy of historical examination, or that her accomplishments would generate critical inquiries about her origins. The version of the facts they promote questions Riley’s sexual morality by transforming what Bates described as a loving relationship into something much more casual. Their story is a subtle attack on Riley’s womanhood. It is unlikely that Daisy knew much, if anything, about her father, but her explanation and presentation of his actions corroborates her protection of both black womanhood and black manhood.

While historians have made some inroads into uncovering the identity of Daisy’s birth father, the little existing information about Millie Riley remains controversial and unclear. The questions surrounding Daisy’s maternal lineage is compounded by a lack of records, but the alleged illicit nature of the relationships between her biological parents and maternal grandparents may help explain the pervasive silences and secrets that

⁹¹ *Ibid*

continue to exist about her ancestry. Mrs. Hunter has recovered an elaborate family history of Daisy Bates' potential paternal lineage, but little is known about her mother and her grandmother. Henritta Riley and Frank Lee Will, the people believed to be Daisy's maternal grandparents, lived across the state line in Louisiana. The relationship between Daisy Gatson's maternal grandparents is complicated by Will's 1888 marriage to Bettie Mims in Union Parish, Louisiana, and the ten children they conceived between 1890 and 1907.⁹² If Henritta Riley and Frank Will are Daisy Gatson's maternal grandparents, then her mother Millie Riley, who was allegedly born in Huttig, Arkansas, in 1898, was the illegitimate product of their extramarital affair. In addition, 1900 and 1910 Census records list Will's place of residence as Union Parish, Louisiana. The story of a woman who agreed to be the mistress of a married man for nearly a decade, and whose mother and grandmother also participated in relationships not respected during the time in which they lived was not an acceptable narrative for an African-American woman in the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, and may help explain Daisy's evasiveness regarding the specifics of her past.

The dearth of information about her biological roots forges questions over the place and date of Daisy Gatson's birth. Both the delayed birth certificate produced by Bates and the marriage certificate presented by Mrs. Hunter list her parents' place of birth as Louisiana. Huttig is in Union County, a few miles from the southern border of Arkansas. Union Parish is located adjacently across the state line in Louisiana. The marriage certificate supports the conclusion that Daisy's family relocated to Arkansas

⁹² United States Census, Year: 1900; Census Place: *Police Jury Ward 2, Union, Louisiana*; Roll: T623_584; Page: 15A; Enumeration District: 118.; Year: 1910; Census Place: *Police Ward 2, Union, Louisiana*; Roll: T624_533; Page: 27B; Enumeration District: 0132; Image: 102; FHL Number: 1374546.

from Louisiana, but does not indicate when.⁹³ One Huttig native remembered that Daisy “appeared out of nowhere as a young girl with her mother,” which challenges the conclusion that she was born in Arkansas.⁹⁴ Moreover, the fact that Huttig did not emerge into a place of employment opportunity until 1904, when it was founded as a sawmill town and hub for Union County’s lumber industry contests if Daisy’s mother and grandmother were born in Arkansas as well. Considering Huttig’s history, it is possible that Daisy’s arrival in Huttig is connected to the Union Sawmill Company that controlled all aspects of the town. Records may clarify Daisy’s belief that her birth parents were Louisiana natives, but do not solve the riddle of when she and her mother ended up in Huttig and under what circumstances. The Census records are consistent with the testimony of Beatrice Cowser Epps, Daisy Lee’s childhood best friend, who adamantly insisted that Daisy was born “sometime between September and November [1913].” She recalled that she and Daisy Lee “started school on the same day and were always in the same grade.”⁹⁵ If Daisy was born in the fall of 1913 as Mrs. Epps stated, in 1920 she would have turned seven years old, which is consistent with the records of the U.S. Census. However, without additional evidence, the date and place of Daisy’s birth remains shrouded in mystery.

Developments about the pedigree, location and date of her birth challenges the facts of the story Daisy Bates told about her origins, but they also support the conclusion that she was actively constructing a public persona through a political narrative intended to protect herself as an individual leader and the image of the Movement. The historian

⁹³ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 7-9; Amy Pokalow, *Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader*, (North Haven, Connecticut: Linnett Books, 2003), 6; Griff Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 16-19.

⁹⁴ Robinson, *Daisy Bates: In Her Own Words*, 11.

⁹⁵ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 8.

Adele Logan Alexander has written that black women are invisible “footnotes” in traditional histories.⁹⁶ Until the age of eight, Millie Riley did not exist to her daughter, and Daisy’s reactions to the knowledge of her death supports the notion that the young girl worked to solidify her mother’s memory. “What I am afraid of,” Bates communicated to the *Dallas Morning News*, “is that what we did will be forgotten.”⁹⁷ After becoming conscious of how Riley’s existence survived only because of the black oral tradition, to borrow from Ralph Ellison’s classic *Invisible Man*, Daisy worked diligently to move her mother from invisible to visible.⁹⁸ History may never know exactly what Bates knew about her past but we do know that she attempted to conceal some information from historians. An elder Daisy Bates told friend and journalist Deborah Robinson that “that the truth of history itself was more important than the truth of her life before she made history.” In this statement, Bates acknowledged her belief that she had created history, and that the facts of her personal story may be inconsistent with how she is remembered.⁹⁹

For Bates, the incident with the butcher at the commissary was a personal watershed that set her on the path to becoming a civil rights activist, and she used it to persuade her readers that the outspoken woman they saw in Little Rock was consistent with her actions as a young girl. Princess Kent, whose graduate thesis traced the similarities between young Daisy Gatson and adult Daisy Bates, made the following observation. “Gatson was given two choices in the episode with the butcher: she could

⁹⁶ Adele Logan Alexander, “How I Discovered my Grandmother: The Truth About Black Women in the Suffrage Movement,” *Black Women in American History*, 16 vols., vol. 1, Darlene Clark Hine editor, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing Inc, 1990).

⁹⁷ Marc Wilson, “Daisy Bates’ life work black achievement, pride,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 16, 1976.

⁹⁸ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1947), “Prologue,” 3-12.

⁹⁹ Robinson, *Daisy Bates: In Her Own Words*, 11

have either acquiesced and maintained a subservient position whites expected of blacks in the 1920's South, or demand the same service as everyone else in the store. Gatson chose the latter and learned the difficult lesson of what it meant to be a second-class citizen, and discovered the powerlessness of African Americans."¹⁰⁰ Akin to others who wrote autobiographical accounts of their participation in the Movement, she "[testified] not only to their experiences of oppression, but also to the extent to which such experiences are tied to systematic phenomena. In this way, their texts are engaged with theorizing political experience."¹⁰¹ Irrespective of the silences present in "Rebirth," the story it tells is a persuasive narrative intended to explain Daisy Bates' activism and convey the need for the Freedom Struggle's success.¹⁰²

Like she did with her birth parents, Daisy's conclusion that the episode was important because it illuminated that "a Negro had no rights that a white man respected," was intended to make her story less about her individual affliction, and more about the larger systematic racial issue being confronted by the African American freedom struggle during the time that she wrote. Though there is a minor discrepancy between the ages Bates told *Ebony* Magazine in 1958, and what she wrote in "Rebirth" about when the incident with the butcher occurred, the other parts of her story remained consistent. "A lot of water has gone down the Arkansas River," Lerone Bennett Jr. declared, "but the day is as vivid in her mind as yesterday. Nor has she forgotten what happened

¹⁰⁰ Princess Kent, "Where are God's angry men?" Daisy L. Bates: seeds of activism, local leadership, gender constraints, and her challenge to black male leaders," Master thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002, 16.

¹⁰¹ Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 23.

¹⁰² Perkins argues that the way black women used autobiography to make a political statement against the treatment of African Americans in the American South, to shed light on what racial problems was a strategy employed as far back as the emancipation/slave narratives in the 19th Century. Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 25-6.

afterwards...It dawned on Daisy Lee that nobody could or would do anything. She wept.”¹⁰³ Bates expressed her sense of helplessness to Bennett Jr., and admitted that later that night she prayed “that the butcher would die.” In “Rebirth,” the entire episode closes with one of the chapter’s many silences, “After that night we never mentioned him again.”¹⁰⁴ The silences that Bates noted from the moment she told her mother of the incident until she went to bed that evening are intended to connect her life and journey, and the heart wrenching plight of her parents, to the collective history, filled with dissemblance and silences, about the black family torn apart and damaged by systematic racial oppression.

Daisy’s silence about the education she received in Huttig is an example of the ways in which some of her omissions are political statements about larger issues confronting African-American under Jim Crow. The lack of details about Gatson’s education is a glaring omission especially because she became a relevant public figure due to her fight for equal access to educational facilities. Although Bates wrote that she did not know what it meant to be black in the South until the incident with the butcher, unpublished drafts of her memoir and a statement she made in 1958 suggests that she grew into her race consciousness first as a young black girl in Huttig’s segregated public school system. Nellie McKay used the experiences of James Weldon Johnson and Mary Church Terrell as examples of how African-American children “acquired racial awareness...in school...a ritual ground for black children’s awakening to racism.”¹⁰⁵ A passage omitted from a draft of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* was more visceral and

¹⁰³ Bennett Jr., “First Lady of Little Rock,” 19.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁵ McKay, “The Girls Who Became Women,” 115, 123 (footnote 10).

acrimonious than that the final version. “The Negro school consisted of two rooms with a pot-bellied stove. Whenever I see one of these stoves I have an almost uncontrollable urge to smash it with an axe.”¹⁰⁶ In the story about Daisy Bates, “the real woman,” Bennett Jr., wrote that “Huttig wasn’t a bad town, as Arkansas towns go....But there were some things Daisy Lee didn’t understand,” like “why she had to go school in a run-down frame building, while the white children had a ‘nice brick building.’”¹⁰⁷ Education for Huttig’s black children’s was unequivocally separate and unequal, and Daisy recognized this before she was publically humiliated by the butcher. As late as 1992, Bates stated that she graduated from “Huttig High School” shortly after “marrying” L.C. Bates “when she was 15 and he was 28,” which is inaccurate because her hometown had no high school for African-Americans, only the two-room schoolhouse mentioned in her memoir.¹⁰⁸ It is unclear if Daisy spent only summers at her grandmother’s in New Edinburg, or if she moved there at the age of thirteen, as her childhood friend remembered, in order to attend a “colored high school” somewhere in the area.”¹⁰⁹ What is certain is that her limited education in Huttig would have ended at eight grade. Like most places in Arkansas, Huttig did not have a high school for African-Americans. In 1920, there were only six high schools for blacks in the entire state.¹¹⁰ Bates also proclaimed that she studied “psychology at Lemoyne College in Memphis.”¹¹¹ A detailed discussion about her early education would have produced inquiries into her qualifications as a leader for her race. Therefore, Bates reconstructed her narrative so

¹⁰⁶ Daisy Bates, Manuscripts and Drafts of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, “Childhood” section, microfilm, reel 1, DBP, SHSW.

¹⁰⁷ Bennett Jr., “First Lady of Little Rock,” 19.

¹⁰⁸ Caillouet, “High Profile: Daisy Lee Gatson Bates,” 6.

¹⁰⁹ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 29.

¹¹⁰ Judith Kilpatrick, *There When We Needed Him: Wiley Austin Branton, Civil Rights Warrior*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 2.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

that her racial cognizance was awakened by her encounter with a white man, instead of the anger engendered from a subpar education. Nevertheless, the story of her deep-seated hatred for unequal education further explicates why she fought unflinchingly for African-American children to attend quality schools.

Together, her memoir and the drafts preserved in the archive help historians to understand the circumstances under which Bates wrote, and illuminate the role the editing process may have played in crafting her autobiography. In another part of the drafts of her memoir Bates rewrote the discussion about her mother's murder. Her original version captured the rumors and uncertainty that remain around Riley's death, as well as Daisy's anger. "Three white men were said to be involved," she wrote. This passage was changed to the more definitive "Three white men did it."¹¹² Daisy's uncertainty is seen in not only her attempts to validate the story, but also through the gossip that she describes that circulated through the small town. Bates tells her readers that "there was a lot of talk from the cooks and cleaning women who worked in 'white town' about what they heard over there. They said that three white men did it."¹¹³ Interestingly, in a world that questioned the integrity of words spoken by black women, Daisy validates the account of black domestics through their white employers. In *Radio Free Dixie*, the historian Timothy B. Tyson asserts that "Black women who worked as domestics played crucial roles as gatherers of intelligence, spying on employers who assumed their loyalty or unimportance."¹¹⁴ Knowingly or unknowingly, Bates was also documenting a history in which black domestics have enjoyed a degree of access to

¹¹² Daisy Bates, Manuscripts and Drafts of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, "Childhood" section, microfilm, reel 1, DBP, SHSW.

¹¹³ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 12.

¹¹⁴ Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 141.

whites not available to black men due to their gender and underestimation by whites.¹¹⁵

In a story that did not make the final version, Daisy described an episode in which she destroyed a family heirloom. She wrote that in her anger she “hurled” the vase “against the brick fireplace...Maybe it was the sudden realization that after all these years, the roots of the Negro were shallow indeed, regardless of how hard he tried, and could be uprooted at the slightest whim of the white man.”¹¹⁶ Another important passage that was changed by was Daisy’s conclusion about how she felt after she slapped her girlfriend out of anger at what whites had done to her biological parents. “How could I explain it to myself for that matter?,” was changed to “I hardly knew the reason myself.” Like the original draft, the published version’s language captures the uncertainty that was central to Daisy’s childhood. The confusion that resulted from her personal grief is important because it is indicative of an internal struggle that occurred inside of the young activist to be, as well as the balance between acknowledging the sources of black anger while painting an optimistic picture for the future.

The softening of “Rebirth’s” tone did not prevent Daisy from presenting a narrative that transformed trauma and anger into catalysts for her later nonviolent activism. Perkins discusses how political autobiographies tend to downplay emotional

¹¹⁵ For examples of black female historical invisibility and underestimation, please see, Adele Logan Alexander, “How I Discovered my Grandmother: The Truth About Black Women in the Suffrage Movement,” *Black Women in American History*, Darlene Clark Hine, eds, 16 vols, vol. 1, (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990), 16; Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 20; Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, xvi; Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 164; Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1990), 6; Audre Lourde, “The Transformation of Silence”, *Sister Outsider*, 43; Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 4, 204; Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2001), 16, 28.

¹¹⁶ Daisy Bates, Manuscripts and Drafts of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, “Childhood” section, microfilm, reel 1, DBP, SHSW.

pain and individual mourning. “Personal losses,” she writes, “are turned into something collectively empowering.”¹¹⁷ Black activists like Ida B. Wells, Ruby Hurley, Malcolm X and Amzie Moore expressed the importance of childhood trauma and anger to their later activism.¹¹⁸ Nellie McKay affirmed that one of the messages of black women’s autobiography is the ability to develop positive self-images, in spite of trauma.¹¹⁹ According to Bates, her life had a “secret goal—to find the men who had done this horrible thing to my mother.”¹²⁰ Anger is transformed into what becomes her public political career, and this theme shines through despite the influence of the editor, and was explicitly noted in the original foreword written by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, months before her death.¹²¹

Writers who have discussed the development of Daisy’s gender identity conclude that Oralee Smith was of greater influence than Susie Smith.¹²² Bates remembered Oralee as a “great teacher” who taught her “how to recognize what was happening to us.”¹²³ A secular man who enjoyed Saturday night poker parties with friends from the mill, Oralee helped Daisy Lee and Beatrice break the church’s rules, leading John Kirk to proclaim, “there seems to be little doubt that the most influential relationship in her early years was that of her adopted father.”¹²⁴ Beatrice Cowser Epps remembered of the Church of God and Christ, or “the Sanctified Church,” as it was called, “hated dancing... We couldn’t play baseball, couldn’t wear lipstick, couldn’t wear our stockings

¹¹⁷ Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 14.

¹¹⁸ Giddings, *Ida: Sword Among Lions*, 4,13; Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 29-30; Raines, *My Soul is Rested*, 137; Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 15, 21-2.

¹¹⁹ McKay, “The Girls Who Became Women,” 105.

¹²⁰ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 15.

¹²¹ Eleanor Roosevelt, “Foreword to the First Edition,” Bates, *Long Shadow*, xvi-xvii.

¹²² Kirk, “Daisy Bates,” 20; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 19-20.

¹²³ Caillouet, “Daisy Lee Gatson Bates,” 6.

¹²⁴ Kirk, “Daisy Bates,” 20

rolled down, and we were supposed to wear our sleeves below our elbows.”¹²⁵ What Susie saw as encouraging “Daisy’s wild ways,” was actually fostering an independence in her that would allow her to publically fight for human rights alongside racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination.¹²⁶ Oralee is remembered as an understanding, caring father who nurtured Daisy’s competitiveness with boys and allowed her to escape the melancholy induced by childhood trauma. In this sense, Daisy credited Oralee with her belief in herself as an individual; she was not limited by her gender (at least this is what she wanted her readers to believe).

Scholars have missed how “Rebirth” defends black manhood. Judith Bennett has written, “Men are certainly implicated in patriarchy, but not all men have gained equally from patriarchal structures.”¹²⁷ Nate Shaw, whose life spanned from 1885-1973, and is documented in the masterful *All God’s Dangers*, remembered, “My Daddy was a free man but in his acts he was a slave...He wasn’t a slave, but he lived like one...because he had to take what the white people give to get along. That much of slavery ways was still hanging on...And that was the rule durin...my daddy’s lifetime and up through my life, to be sure.”¹²⁸ Bates’ careful discussion of the men in her life suggests that she recognized the limitations the society place on African-American males. Before his death, Oralee is painted as a pillar of strength who inspired his daughter to turn her anger into activism for her people. Even her birth father, who abandons her, is absolved of his choice to leave his child, never to return. Black men are depicted as victims of a viscous, emasculating Jim Crow culture. Hezekiah Gatson is presented as responsible, because he

¹²⁵ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹²⁷ Bennett, “Confronting Continuities,” 90.

¹²⁸ Rosengarten, *All God’s Dangers*, 26-7, 33-4.

ensured that Daisy had a safe home before permanently leaving her life. Akin to North Carolina education advocate Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Bates “obscured” her illegitimacy by “making it seem as if her father was separated from her family” by Jim Crow.¹²⁹ The presentations of black men corroborate that Bates saw an insidious connection between the denial of black manhood, the violation of black womanhood, and the system of racial control in the Jim Crow South¹³⁰

Oralea Smith was undoubtedly a central person in Daisy Gatson’s life, but the focus on her obvious affection for him has obscured the importance of Daisy’s presentation of her adoptive mother. Susie Smith had to comfort Daisy after the incident with the butcher. When Daisy was ill, Mrs. Susie, as she was called, asked the Church Sisters to pray for her daughter’s recovery. When the young, gregarious girl overstepped her boundaries as a child, it was Susie Smith who, through discipline, taught her those limits. Historians have misinterpreted Daisy’s relationship with her adoptive mother. Furthermore, the scattered tidbits that remain about Daisy Gatson and Susie Smith’s relationship suggest they may have had the classic mother-daughter/love-hate relationship, where the daughter finds herself in part by rejecting her mother, but later appreciates her mother’s warnings and attempts to protect her female child.¹³¹

A few noteworthy events suggest that Daisy’s outspoken and rebellious personality became problematic as she approached her teenage years. On occasions

¹²⁹ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 181.

¹³⁰ Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Mind that Burns In Each Body: Women, Rape, and Racial Violence”, in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Anne Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 329.

¹³¹ For texts where the struggle between mother and daughter are prominent please see, Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, (New York: Vintage, 1994); Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brown Stones*, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1981); Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 129-31.

when Susie would go into town, Daisy's best friend remembered that Oralee would "get out the wind-up Victrola and put on records." "Go dance, girls," he would tell Bea and Daisy. "If I see Miss Susie coming, I'll yell." They would do "the Charleston, the Big Apple, and the peck" until he yelled, "Girls, girls, here comes Miss Susie, turn the Victrola off."¹³² It appears that Daisy was rebelling against the church, and as a devout Christian woman, Susie Smith struggled to keep her daughter from going astray. Daisy's refusal to play an Angel in the Sanctified Church's annual Christmas play about the birth of a white Jesus Christ is an example of how Susie Smith tried to balance discipline with nurturing her daughter's independence. After Daisy yelled that she would not participate in the play because "All the pictures I ever saw of Jesus were white. If Jesus is like the white people, I don't want any part of Him!"¹³³ Susie Smith does not discipline Daisy and force her to participate in the play. Instead, like the issues surrounding her mother's death and the incident with the butcher, mother and daughter never discussed the Christmas play. However, the incident would not be the last between the future activist and the Sanctified Church. According to her childhood friend, at the age twelve, they were kicked out of church because they "would put on lipstick...go uptown to the community house...[drink] cherry cokes, [talk] to guys... thinking we were cute."¹³⁴ Beatrice Cowser Epps recalled that neither she nor Daisy cared that they were kicked out of the Sanctified Church "because it seemed to them that their church opposed everything that was fun." Although Daisy did not care, her mother undoubtedly did, and the rumors that circulated of the two colored girls who "wore lipstick, dressed improperly and flirted

¹³² Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 25.

¹³³ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 20.

¹³⁴ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 28.

with boys” humiliated Susie Smith in a small town where nothing went unnoticed.¹³⁵ Daisy’s behavior was not just anathema to her mother’s religious beliefs, but she and Beatrice’s sneaking out to go uptown with money given to her by Oralee was also dangerous for a girl of her temperament, physical appearance, race and age. The *Long Shadow of Little Rock* makes no mention of Daisy’s rebellion against the church, her getting thrown her out, or of her sneaking out of house to go uptown to wear lipstick, dress provocatively and flirt with boys at the age of twelve. The exclusion of these events, support the claim that Susie Smith is a moral, religious and spiritual authority throughout *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, that Daisy did not see her as a repressive force in her life, and that she may have omitted this information because it was inconsistent with her respectable, Christian image.

Like its beginning, the end of Daisy Gatson’s childhood is shrouded in uncertainty, rumor, and mystery. In her elder years, Mrs. Bates believed that the anger that she eventually used as motivation during the Civil Rights Movement, had also altered her life in another, important, fundamental way. When asked about her teenage years at the age of 78 Bates’ reply was still evasive, but more authentic. “I don’t think I ever had a teen-age experience. After I found out how my mother died, my whole life took a different path.”¹³⁶

Conclusion

¹³⁵ *Ibid*

¹³⁶ Callouet, “Daisy Lee Gatson Bates,” 6.

“Rebirth” explains how Bates developed the confidence to lead the Arkansas black community, and why she chose to take on such a public role in a dangerous social and political movement at an unpopular time. As a southern black person, Daisy Gatson experienced the impact of systematic racial oppression in her personal life. However, Gatson did not develop feelings of race or gender inferiority.¹³⁷ The young girl was actually angered by southern racism. Millie Riley and Susie Smith are both presented as strong, principled and respectable African-American women. Daisy’s relationship with the boys in her neighborhood and her relationship with her father, strengthened her identity as an individual and boosted her self-confidence to the point where she began to assert herself in ways within her individual ability, and not her gender. One could argue that from her birth father’s abandonment, to Oralee’s inability to protect her from humiliation, and her male peers inability to defeat her in physical and mental activities, Bates consistently presents a strong image of black womanhood. Bates argued for black manhood by repeating their desire to protect black women, and how one of the ways they accomplished this goal was by not asserting their manhood. By presenting the women in her childhood as religious and emotionally stable, Daisy made a strong case for black women’s ability to lead.

While it is true that “Rebirth” is not a totally accurate narrative about Daisy Gatson’s childhood, an overconcentration on the facts misses its politics, and the ways Bates used the people she mentioned as symbols of larger gendered and racial problems. Undoubtedly attempting to protect herself, Bates also used her memoir to expose her audience to the plight of black women, men and children in the Jim Crow South. Though

¹³⁷ Kirk, “Daisy Bates,” 28.

valid, criticisms of her inaccuracies must consider the black writing tradition of which she participated. Daisy Bates was not the first, nor the last, African-American person, female or male, to dissemble in their autobiographies to forward the objectives of the race. The specifics of Daisy Gatson's life are important to Daisy Bates' place in history because they clarify that, akin to foremothers and contemporaries like Rosa Parks and Ida B. Wells, the battle Daisy Bates waged in Little Rock in the 1950s had personal origins connected to a history of racialized gender oppression and sexual violation.¹³⁸

A close reading of "Rebirth" reaffirms the importance Daisy Gatson's childhood experiences played in her development into a race leader in post-World War Two America, the political and historical intentions behind her memoir, which was published during a critical, uncertain moment in the Black Freedom Struggle, and how she used it to complete her personal narrative. Without an awareness of the circumstances that led Daisy Gatson to Little Rock, historians cannot comprehend the significance of Daisy Bates' individual actions, or place the results of her activities into proper historical context. Bates used one chapter of her memoir to fill in the gaps she felt were necessary, imposing silences when they either threatened or tarnished the public persona she created, or endangered the movement. Scholars of African-American Studies have concluded that "life and autobiography are not one in the same" because autobiographies of political figures "demand the selective rearrangement of...past lives," and are

¹³⁸ Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010); Paula Giddings, *Ida: Sword Among Lions, Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching*, (New York: Harper, 2009); Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*. For a discussion of gender, race and feminism in the context of African-American club women, see Deborah Gray White, "The Cost of Club Work, The Price of Black Feminism," in Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock, *Visible Women*, 247-69.

“engaged in *creating* the past.”¹³⁹ Daisy Bates’ presentation of her childhood is consistent with a historical, political black writing tradition that dated back to Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs in the nineteenth century to Zora Neal Hurston and Malcolm X in the twentieth.¹⁴⁰ Recovery of some of the events of Daisy Gatson’s pre-Little Rock years challenges the conclusions that she was a female figurehead who was “not ready to challenge the unvarnished sexism displayed by black males” and “deferred” to the judgment and decision-making of the NAACP’s better educated men during the 1957 school desegregation crisis.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, recovering these years are important because they prove that Daisy possessed courage, a quality indispensable to leadership, prior to meeting L.C. Bates, and before, as a couple, they recreated her into the image of African-American womanhood they believed the era needed. Her self-construction was based on an uncertain, complicated past, and written during an indefinite, complex historical moment.

¹³⁹ Annie Dillard, “To Fashion a Text,” *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, William Zinsser, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), 70; Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 2011), 11; Nellie Y. McKay, “Race, Gender, and Cultural Context in Zora Neal Hurston’s *Dust Tracks on a Road*,” in *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography*, ed. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 180; Perkins, *Autobiography As Activism*, 42.

¹⁴⁰ For scholarly treatments on the intersections between autobiography, race and gender, please see Nellie Y. McKay, “The Girls Who Became the Women,” 105-124; ---“ Race Gender, and Cultural Context in Zora Neal Hurston’s *Dust Tracks on the Road*”, *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography*, Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck Eds, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 175-188; Works about the politics of African-American autobiography include, William Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First One Hundred Years of Afro-American Autobiography*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*, (New York: New American Library, 1966); Stephen Butterfield, *Black Autobiography*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “To Write Myself: The Autobiographies of Afro-American Women,” *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*, Shari Benstock Eds, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968); Joyce A. Ladner, *Tomorrow’s Tomorrow: The Black Woman*, (New York: Doubleday, 1971); Marable, *Malcolm X*; Sidonie A. Smith, *Where I’m Bound: Patterns of Slavery and Freedom in Black American Autobiography*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974); Vernaline Watson, “Self-Concept Formation and the Afro-American Woman,” *Perspectives on Afro-American Women*, Ed. Willa D. Johnson and Thomas L. Green (Washington D.C.: ECCA Publications, 1975).

¹⁴¹ Anne Stadley, “The Role of Women in the Civil Rights Movement,” in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, in Vicki Crawford, Eds, (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1990), 189; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 4.

Chapter Two: Reconstructed Childhoods: The Politics of Black Autobiography

“If growing up is painful for the southern black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat. It is an unnecessary insult.”

--Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Introduction: The Culture of Dissemblance and “the threat of rape”

Recognizing that Daisy Bates dissembled throughout her autobiography, but particularly in her discussion of her early years, elucidates the silences she imposed around her sexuality, education, and physical movement away from her hometown. Though usually discussed in the context of rape, Dr. Darlene Clark Hine’s theory on Black Women and “The Culture of Dissemblance” also emphasized the power of the less-discussed, but equally important, “threat of rape.”¹⁴² For Daisy Bates, and other Black Women, dissembling was not just a response to a personal connection to rape; it was an art; a culture with its own “behavior and attitudes...that created an appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors.” Dr. Hine observed how the power of “the threat of rape” influenced women’s protest and migration—two parts of Daisy Gatson’s personal story.¹⁴³ “Reconstructed Childhood” demonstrates the ways in which Daisy Bates dissembled about her girlhood in her memoir. She appeared open, but was deliberately deceptive. Bates “shielded the truth” of her life from not just “her oppressors,” but also from supporters, who could have identified with her struggle for autonomy, and from women also navigating a sexist, patriarchal world. While recent histories of the Civil Rights

¹⁴² Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women,” 342.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 343.

Movement have uncovered differences between the civil rights generations, and their predecessors, dissembling was a powerful force in the lives of African-American women born in the post-Emancipation, and early Jim Crow generations. The shift in how Black women developed a form of leadership predicated on courage, to publically discuss rape, “the threat of rape,” and sexual vulnerability was the product of long history of little girls like Daisy Gatson, who grew into women like Daisy Bates, using dissemblance as one of many political strategies in the defense of their race, gender, and womanhood.¹⁴⁴

Why are there inconsistencies between Daisy Bates’ presentation of her girlhood and key facts in the chronology of her life? How did she dissemble, and why? Bates’ dissemblance, by the placement of strategic silences, ambiguity, and gaps in her autobiography, and her reorganization of the facts of her life, are not unique. Rather, the construction of her early years is consistent with an African-American autobiographical writing tradition that uses the power of individual narratives to reflect the general experiences of the race, make a case for black activism, and argue for major, often-revolutionary changes in society; the chapter was not intended to reflect the facts of Gatson’s singular life, but was meant to be representative of the experiences of African-Americans as a group.

Gender, Jim Crow and Black Childhood

¹⁴⁴ Danielle McGuire’s *At The Dark End of The Street* argues that in the post-war years, black women increasingly spoke up about sexual violence. See also, “It Was like All of Us Had Been Raped, (*JAH*, 2004), 906-31. In her seminal essay, “The Mind that Burns Inside of Each Body,” Jacqueline Dowd Hall insists that the history of lynching and rape are intertwined and complex, due to the sexual, racial and gendered nature of the act. Hall also reminded historians that sexuality and sexual violence “has not yet been given its history.” (329)

Bates' account uses the story of her mother's rape to honor the black oral tradition as a credible historical source to strengthen her argument that Huttig was a horrible place for a black child to grow up, and to reinforce that Gatson's painful encounters with Huttig's racism was one example of the gendered ways black children and adults experienced racial oppression. In her work on American slavery, Deborah Gray White has proven that "Race changed the experience of black womanhood" because "race, class, gender and sexuality, and other identity variables do not exist independently. Nor do they compete for supremacy, but reinforce, overlap, and intersect each other."¹⁴⁵ Later in her life, Bates expressed her personal belief that racial segregation contained important gendered distinctions for black females and males. In 1958, she told *Ebony Magazine* that when it comes to leadership, "a Negro woman can get away with more in the South than a Negro man."¹⁴⁶ Daisy Gatson was a courageous young girl who not just confronted Jim Crow, but asserted herself in ways that endangered her safety, and possibly her entire local black community.¹⁴⁷

Bates also included an episode that demonstrated how black children, were physically damaged and psychologically violated by racism and Jim Crow, irrespective of their gender. A local African-American boy did not understand that he was required to defer to the demands of all whites. After a white girl demanded, "Get of the walk, nigger, and let me pass." The boy responded, "You don't own all the sidewalk...and if

¹⁴⁵ White, *Am't I a Woman?*, 4-5.

¹⁴⁶ Bennett Jr., "First Lady of Little Rock", 20.

¹⁴⁷ For an example of the 1919 white massacre of the black population in Elaine, Arkansas, and the attempts to erase and distort their actions please see Richard C. Cortner, *Mob Intent on Death: The NAACP and the Arkansas Riot Cases*, (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); Grif Stockley, *Blood in Their Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacre of 1919*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001; Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice that Remade a Nation*, (New York: Crown, 2008).

you think I'm going to get off the sidewalk into the muddy street, you're crazy."¹⁴⁸ In developments which harken back to the psychological trauma associated with white mandated black on black physical violence during Antebellum Era, later that evening, the white girl's father came to the home of the black family with a "wide leather belt," handed it to the black boy's father, and forced him to "beat his son to teach him to 'respect white folks.'"¹⁴⁹ After this black boy's refusal to accept his subordinate place as an African-American person in Jim Crow Arkansas, he never again attended school. Shortly afterwards, the family moved away from Huttig. The juxtaposition of the difference between white reactions to aggressive behavior from a black girl and a black boy, illuminate why Bates believed that racial discrimination was also gendered. The story of the black boy's family is consistent with Daisy's themes of ubiquitous oppression of blacks in the American South, and the ways children and parents were damaged by Jim Crow.

While Bates is sympathetic to the plight of black men in the Jim Crow South, she was also calling attention to the reality that black women and children were not allowed the security of being protected by the men of their race. In the presence of the void left by black men, some black women became leaders who championed rights for their gender and race. The black feminist, lesbian, mother, poet, Audre Lourde spoke often about the complicated intersections between gender and race. She often asked groups, "If society ascribes roles to black men which they are not allowed to fulfill, it is Black women who must bend and alter our lives to compensate, or is it society that needs

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 19.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*

changing?”¹⁵⁰ Hattiesburg, Mississippi activist Victoria Gray Adams offered an even more complex explanation than Lourde.¹⁵¹ Adams believed that women became leaders in their communities many times out of necessity, oftentimes in the face of great physical danger. “Women were out front as a survival tactic. Men could not function in high visibility, high-profile roles where we come from, because they would be plucked off...The women had to do it.”¹⁵² The outspoken Victoria Gray Adams believed that “The white folks didn’t see the women as that much of a threat. White thinking has always been, if you controlled the men, you got the rest of them covered. They didn’t know the power of women, especially black women.”¹⁵³

After gaining knowledge of her mother’s death, Bates vaguely presents the subsequent years as ones which she rebelled against multiple sources of white society’s control over her black life by disassociating with whites, and rejecting white patronage. When she and Beatrice encountered Irvin Stewart, a retired, white mill worker with a reputation for knowing “all of the town’s gossip,” and for rewarding children, regardless of race, with candy near the commissary, Daisy stated that she rejected his offering. “If I want candy,” she told her best friend, Beatrice, “I have some money to buy it. I don’t want anything from white people.”¹⁵⁴ On another occasion, Daisy was leaving the commissary, when a white girl who she used to play with ran up behind her and poked her in the back. In this discussion of the incident with her former white playmates, Bates

¹⁵⁰ Audre Lourde, “Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface,” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, (New York: The Crossing Press, 1983), 66.

¹⁵¹ Charles Payne, “Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta,” in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, eds. Vicki Crawford, Jacqueline Rouse, Barbara Woods, (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990), 2.

¹⁵² Victoria Gray Adams, “They Didn’t Know the Power of Women,” in Holsaert, eds, *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, 237, 238.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁴ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 16-17.

admits that she did not tell her parents about either incident, but feared that the white people would come for her and her family at night when they were sleeping, like that had in the case of the black boy forcibly whipped by his father by a white man.¹⁵⁵ Daisy's rejection of whites is also seen in her refusal to play an angel in an annual church Christmas play. Susie Smith honored her daughter's request, and did not force her to participate in the production, and vindicated her hatred for white people.

The anger the butcher's humiliation generates in Gatson foreshadows her eventual challenge to white male supremacy during a series of symbolic encounters with a man only referred to as "Drunken Pig." On an errand to the commissary for her mother, Daisy stated, "I felt someone staring at me."¹⁵⁶ Seeing this "rather young white man sitting on one of the benches," they began "contest in starring," which she compared to when "a bird and snake will carry on."¹⁵⁷ While interrupted when friends called her into the store, Bates paints herself as the aggressor, not the victim. "Considering my feeling," she wrote, "I don't know which of us symbolized the snake, and which the bird." The following day, Daisy recalled that she returned to the commissary for a neighbor, and once again ran into Drunken Pig who was "seated on the same bench." Leaping to his feet, in what she described as an unmanly, "thin, weak voice," Drunken Pig yelled, "Stop staring at me, you bitch...Go away! Haven't I suffered enough," then slowly stumbled away.¹⁵⁸ Daisy expressed her joy at tormenting this man who she said "each time...seemed a little drunker and little dirtier".¹⁵⁹ Initially intimidated by Drunken Pig's maleness and whiteness, Daisy grew bolder in her pursuit of him because she saw that he

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 16,

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 17.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*

was fearful of her, and was in physical decline, due to an alcohol addiction supported by helping liquor bootleggers clean their mash barrels.

Drunken Pig is depicted as an unmanly lowlife who symbolized the cowardly nature of white manhood. His character is corrupt because he raped and murdered a black woman, verbally abused a black girl, and was a part of the white criminal underworld. However, Drunken Pig is also a complex character because Bates implied that white men would cower when confronted by blacks, but this was not the case with her birth mother. Her description of Drunken Pig as robust enough to rape and murder her mother in privacy of the dark Arkansas night, but frightful of a little girl in public during the day, was a sophisticated critique of the public/private dimensions of racialized sexual violence, and of the intricate ways both races possessed power—albeit unequal—in the Jim Crow South. Daisy enjoyed “tormenting Drunken Pig” because he allowed her to express her anger, and she blamed him for the ending of friendships like the one she had with her white girlfriend.¹⁶⁰ However, she also admitted that as Drunken Pig “sank lower and lower,” she suffered with him, as did Mr. Stewart, who usually observed their encounters in silence because Daisy had refused to speak to him ever since she rejected his candy offering. Finally, one day, Daisy returned to the commissary in search of Drunken Pig. She learns from Mr. Stewart that he died of alcoholism. Daisy’s reaction was to cry. “You’re the only one in town to cry over that drunkard,” she remembered him whispering in her ear, “Now go home and try to forget.”¹⁶¹ Daisy was not explicit about why she cried at the death of a man she believed participated in her mother’s murder. Though she had resolved to find the men responsible for her mother’s murder, it

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 21.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 23.

is unclear if Daisy really believed that the culprit was this particular man. However, from the enjoyment she received from tormenting him, one can infer that the young girl thought that she could get revenge for her mother over a symbol that was both white and male. She had vowed to make him suffer, and, in death, could no longer terrorize him. A few nights later, Oralea heard Daisy crying in her room. When he asked what was wrong, she disclosed her encounters with Drunken Pig. His response was the same as Mr. Stewart's: "go to sleep and forget it."¹⁶²

In addition to foreshadowing her later challenges to white authority, Bates balanced her discussion of Huttig's white racism by presaging future confrontations with segments of the Little Rock black community. According to "Rebirth" the young girl consistently challenged the adults in her hometown. Daisy asserted that she while she carried on her "private vendetta against Drunken Pig" she was also having issues with older blacks. Participating in what she described as "open warfare with the neighborhood adults," an older Bates stated that she believed that they were "a lazy bunch of porch sitters who were always chasing us kids around town on errands for them."¹⁶³ On one occasion, a woman named Mrs. Coleman asked Daisy to run to the commissary to buy some milk. As was customary after children completed favors for her, Mrs. Coleman began to reach into "her red-and-white cake pan," but before she could give Daisy her reward, the little girl interjected, "...you are always chasing me all over town and then giving me nothing but that old cake. I don't want it—I've been throwing it in the ditch, anyhow." Offended, Mrs. Coleman chastised Daisy for "The nerve," and promised to tell Susie Smith. Daisy recalled that her mother made sure that the episode was her "last feud

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 24

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

with adults.”¹⁶⁴ This section of “Rebirth” clearly intends to emphasize Daisy’s lifelong, outspoken rejection of all forms of subjugation, even from African-Americans. For Bates, freedom and human dignity were things to which every individual, irrespective of their background had the right. Her disputes with whites and blacks, men and women establishes the precedent for the uncompromising public leadership she demonstrated in 1957, and forged a link to her later challenge to segments of the black community..

The event with the butcher, the rape and murder of Millie Riley, and the confrontation with Drunken Pig clarify Bates’ personal beliefs about the resilience of black womanhood and manhood, and questioned white male masculinity and power. Drunken Pig and the butcher’s violation of a young black girl were intended to shame white manhood. Black men—Oralea Smith and Hezekiah Gatson—are presented as victims of gendered, racial oppression. However, at least in the case of Oralea, black men are still presented as manly men who protected their family in the ways that were allowed by the oppressive culture. Furthermore, Bates’ emphasis on Jim Crow’s deep impact on black women and children was a scathing critique of white male supremacy. Bates’ narrative establishes white men as cowardly abusers of power, and black women as courageous females, brave enough to challenge their authority.

“A Communal Act”: The Politics of African-American Autobiography

For African-Americans, especially a black woman with such a limited education like Daisy Bates, writing an autobiography was a political act in itself. It is significant not only that Bates lived a life she thought worthy of telling, but that she accomplished

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*

her feat despite personal challenges with formal writing. The historian Janet Cornelius's conclusions about the long, historical connection between literacy and African-American resistance are worth repeating:

Literacy was a mechanism for forming identity, the freedom to become a person...freedom from slavery, freedom from ignorance, freedom from non-being, freedom even from time...Literacy also reinforced an image of self-worth...When African-Americans fought to gain literacy, they expressed a desire for freedom and self-determination which had deep roots in modern culture...literacy was more than a path to individual freedom—it was a communal act, a political demonstration of resistance to oppression and of self-determination for the black community.¹⁶⁵

The *Long Shadow of Little Rock* deserves criticism for its mistruths, but, as Cornelius, and other scholars have demonstrated, literacy and writing have historically been political actions for African-Americans. Misrepresentations must not obscure *The Long Shadow of Little Rock's* usefulness as a unique historical document that illuminates the complicated, historical issues that were being addressed by American society during the revolutionary moment when it was published, or how it is a didactic document intended to support the Black Freedom Struggle.

The Long Shadow of Little Rock is a rich source of information on Daisy Bates because her narrative reconstruction, and selection and omission of facts corroborates that public African-American women viewed themselves as political figures, who could advance or hinder the struggle. Black women used personal stories to advance the race, more than to promote themselves. Scholars have written extensively about the uses, limits and intentions of autobiography, and this section utilizes interdisciplinary writings to provide a brief analysis of the ways that individuals organize and present their childhoods in their memoirs. I explore how African-Americans, female and male,

¹⁶⁵ Janet Duitsman Cornelius, "When I Can Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 2-3; James Olney, "I Was Born": Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and Literature," *The Slave Narratives*, Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr., eds (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 148-74.

construct public personas, and address group grievances by reconstructing their childhoods. Understanding how individuals recreate themselves, and the political objectives behind their deliberate recreations, reveals the African-American writing traditions and resistance strategies present in the chapter titled “Rebirth”. Furthermore, a reexamination of this crucial chapter forces scholars to reinterpret *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* as a literary allegory, primary source and a valuable political document.

The way that Daisy Bates constructed what she wanted readers and historians to remember about her early years is consistent with the historical traditions of black autobiography, specifically the presence of three particular stages of individual development. Carol Pearson has written that many political leaders are shaped by traumatic childhoods which transform some individuals into future activists.¹⁶⁶ “Rebirth” is an example of the Pearson’s model. The first stage is “The Innocent, or Edenic stage.” In this first period of human development, Pearson concludes that children live in “an unfallen world, a green Eden where life is sweet and all one’s needs are met in an atmosphere of care and love.”¹⁶⁷ Daisy Bates alluded to an Edenic period when she wrote, “As I grew up in this town, I knew I was Negro, but did not really understand what it meant until I was seven years old. My parents, as do most, protected me as long as possible from the inevitable insult, that is, in the South, a part of being ‘colored.’”¹⁶⁸ Gatson’s Eden ends early in “Rebirth.” Pearson calls the period after the

¹⁶⁶ Carol Pearson, *The Hero Within* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986). Ralph Ellison addressed the theme of the development of African-American in his classic novel, *The Invisible Man*. “It is when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And, let me confess, you feel that way most of the time. You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you’re a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, it’s seldom successful.” (3)

¹⁶⁷ Pearson, *The Hero Within*, 25, quoted in McKay, “The Girls Who Became Women,” 110.

¹⁶⁸ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 7.

Edenic stage the “orphan state,” where “the fall from innocence” is followed by “the acquisition of knowledge. Finally, after becoming cognizant of their oppression, future leaders enter the Warrior stage, when individuals “who have the courage to fight for themselves can have an effect on their destinies and events in their larger worlds.”¹⁶⁹

After her Eden is destroyed, Daisy enters her orphan state, and acquires the knowledge of what being a Negro “meant” that she lacked at the chapter’s opening. The orphan state, which is confusing for the young girl, ends with the death of Gatson’s loving, adoptive father. Her father’s dying words, that she should “make her hate count for something,” start the warrior stage, which forms the majority of the *Long Shadow of Little Rock*.¹⁷⁰

The warrior stage begins when Daisy learned about how her adoptive father lived an oppressive, unhappy life, which deprived him of full manhood. By ending her story of a happy Eden, despoiled by racial oppression, and an orphan state filled with hardship, with the emergence of a race warrior, Bates clarified what she believed was important about her early years: her childhood prepared her to be a leader for her race during a critical moment in history.

“Rebirth,” is an example of what the literary scholar Margo Perkins has called “the struggle within the struggle for control of the historical record” that occurred during and after the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁷¹ Like other parts of her memoir, “Rebirth” is noticeably devoid of details, and full of silences and important gaps in time. Perkins’s seminal work on the autobiographies of Angela Davis, Elaine Brown and Assata Shakur, three of the 1960s most public and radical black women, argues that “narratives by

¹⁶⁹ Pearson, *The Hero Within*, 27; McKay, “The Girls Who Became Women,” 109.

¹⁷⁰ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 29.

¹⁷¹ Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, xiii. For another example of the importance of written language to the how historical events and actors are remembered historically please see Jill Lepore, *In the Name of War: King Phillips War and the Origins of American Identity*, (New York: Vintage, 1999).

women activists implicitly address the question of how women become radical subjects in this society. Their stories,” she continues, “begin to demystify the process by which some Black women, in the context of ongoing sexist oppression, have been (and continue to be) able to move from social and discursive status of objects to subjects, capable of transforming their environment.”¹⁷² Nellie McKay added that these representations demonstrate how many black women developed positive self-images despite traumatic childhoods, making the transformation theme central to their autobiographies.¹⁷³ The redemptive, transformative story “Rebirth” tells of a black girl personally victimized by Jim Crow represented Daisy’s attempt to explain the origins of her later political actions and place them within the context of the larger movement in the early 1960s.

Akin to other public, political women and African-Americans before, during and after her time, Daisy Bates believed that her early experiences in life prepared her to provide leadership during a time when it was needed.¹⁷⁴ In her magisterial autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou stressed the importance childhood experiences play in individual development. “All of childhood’s unanswered questions must finally be passed back to the town and answered there,” Angelou asserts. “Heroes and bogey men, values and dislikes, are first encountered and labeled in that early environment. In later years they change faces, places and maybe races, tactics, intensities and goals, but underneath those penetrable masks they wear forever the stocking-capped

¹⁷² Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, xv.

¹⁷³ McKay, “The Girls Who Became Women,” 105.

¹⁷⁴ For examples of civil rights activists whose childhood’s shaped their participation in the movement please see, Angela Davis, *An Autobiography*, 79-80; James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement*, (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1985), 37; Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Crusade Against Lynching*, (New York: Harper, 2009), 4, 10, 13; Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 29-30; Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*; Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), 3, 15, 22, 31, 38.

faces of childhood.”¹⁷⁵ In his work on youth antiwar activism in the 1960s, Kenneth Keniston provided a similar explanation: “childhood creates in each of us psychological configurations that summarize the tensions and joys of our early lives. These configurations are, in one way or another, interwoven into our adult political commitments...Just as the foundation of a building limits, but does not determine, what can be built upon the site, so the legacy of childhood sets outer limits and establishes enduring sensitivities for later development.”¹⁷⁶ In his work on Betty Friedan, the historian Daniel Horowitz argues that Friedan’s political journey began long before her years as a student at Smith College during the Great Depression.¹⁷⁷ In *It Changed My Life*, a reflective Friedan stated that writing 1963’s *Feminine Mystique* “In a certain sense was almost accidental...and in another sense my whole life had prepared me to write that book; all the pieces of my own life came together for the first time in writing it.”¹⁷⁸ Like other activists, public women in particular, Daisy Bates discussed her childhood as the foundation of her adult activism.

Understanding Bates’ account of her early years as an example of “political autobiography,” then, helps scholars to reconcile the chronological inconsistencies and silences that are present between her public persona and the truth about her youth.¹⁷⁹ For

¹⁷⁵ Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 20.

¹⁷⁶ Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 76, quoted in McKay, “The Girls Who Became Women,” 106.

¹⁷⁷ Daniel Horowitz, “Rethinking Betty Friedan and *The Feminine Mystique*: Labor Union Radicalism and Feminism in Cold War America,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (March 1996), 3

¹⁷⁸ Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women’s Movement*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, (1998), quoted in Horowitz, “Rethinking Betty Friedan,” 1.

¹⁷⁹ Perkins states that political biography contains six key components: (1) that the autobiographer will emphasize the story of the struggle over her own personal ordeals; (2) that she will use her own story both to document a history of the struggle and to further its political agenda; (3) that she will provide a voice for the voiceless; (4) that she will honor strategic silences in order to protect the integrity of the struggle as well as the welfare of other activists; (5) that she will expose oppressive conditions and the repressive tactics of the state; and (6) that she will use the autobiography as a form of political intervention, to educate

example, Bates did not reveal the extent of her limited education, or the truth that she left Huttig permanently as a teenager with a married man to escape the dangers of southern Arkansas, and to have a life better than what she would have likely had in the place of her rearing. Perkins explains that contradictions and silences do not always represent attempts by historical subjects to deceive their audience. Instead, silences “surrounding their personal, interior lives,” she declares, are also often “intended to protect the interests and integrity of the Movement,” and “function strategically in each woman’s political objective.”¹⁸⁰ The historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s reminds us that “the past does not exist independently from the present,” and that “the past is only past because there is a present.”¹⁸¹ To borrow from Barbara Ransby’s work on Ella Baker, while the historian’s search for “answers” may often prove “elusive,” subjects and their meanings can be uncovered “by carefully reading and interpreting the fragmented messages left behind.”¹⁸² Mrs. Bates’ only biographer has conceded that history will never know the facts of Daisy’s life as the young, rebellious Daisy Gatson simply because she and her future husband, L.C. Bates “covered their tracks too well.”¹⁸³ Interrogating “Rebirth’s” construction and silences challenges the notion that it is impossible to recover Daisy Gatson’s life, and reinforces the need for historians to use gaps and the selection of information to recover lost and misrepresented narratives about historical subjects.

Bates’ deliberate manipulation of the facts of her childhood, makes the recovery of the truth of her life even more critical to properly situating her in the history of

as broad an audience as possible to the situation and issues at stake,” Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 7.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁸¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 15.

¹⁸² Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 2.

¹⁸³ Stockley, Daisy Bates, 12.

African-American activism because, like other women, she used her personal story to challenge racial and gender oppression. In her biography of Fannie Lou Hamer, the historian Chana Kai Lee writes that Hamer's early life "provides evidence that her childhood experiences—and memories—were central to her later commitments."¹⁸⁴

Barbara Ransby has noted how Ella Baker believed that an individual's place of birth, family and community was central the development of personal identity. "Who one's people were was important...not to establish an elite pedigree, but to locate an individual as a part of a family, a community, a region, a culture, and a historical period."¹⁸⁵

Daisy's cousin by adoption told one interviewer that "Daisy didn't know who her people were," and extant records corroborate that she may have never known the identity of her birth parents.¹⁸⁶ The fact that Bates did not allow the lack of documentation about her past to stop her from claiming what she was told as her truth, is powerful evidence of her belief that the events her past were crucial to the woman and leader she later became. It also confirms that she viewed herself a political woman, and crafted her story to explicate how she developed the courage to challenge a racist, classist, and patriarchal system oppression.

Remembering and Writing About Black Childhood

¹⁸⁴ Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 3-4.

¹⁸⁵ Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 14.

¹⁸⁶ Clifford Broughton, quoted in Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 18-19. Daisy Gatson did not have an official birth record until August 10, 1962 when L.C. submitted the information needed for a delayed birth certificate. He listed her birthdate as November 11, 1914, her parents as Millie Riley and John Gatson and Louisiana as their state of birth, Daisy Bates Delayed Birth Certificate, August 10, 1962, Arkansas State Board of Health—Bureau of Vital Statistics, folder 3, Box 3, DBP, SHSW. As late as 1992 Mrs. Bates told interviewers that she did not have any relatives, Caillquet, "Daisy Lee Gatson Bates: High Profile", *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, January 12, 1992, 1, 6-7.

“Rebirth’s” narrative reconstruction and Bates’ dissemblance are examples of how African-American activists who wrote autobiographies used their childhoods to make political statements against racial, gender and class oppression.¹⁸⁷ In her essay titled “The Girls Who Became Women,” Nellie McKay framed the way black women “recall” their childhoods as “adult public responses to a hostile world,” offering valuable insight as to the proper context under which “Rebirth” should be interpreted. “From their recollections of their early lives,” she continued, “we learn that while they were quite young they became aware of and actively resisted the arbitrarily designated boundaries of race, class, and gender, unconscious of the path toward which they were headed.”¹⁸⁸ Daisy Gatson may have exhibited glimmers of the courage she demonstrated over a quarter century later in Little Rock, but fundamental parts of her evolution into a Christian, married, respectable public leader for her race were inconsistent with the public image that her participation in the movement required. Bates’ omissions are emblematic what Nellie McKay called the “claim to full ownership of her body and the dignity of an autonomous self.”¹⁸⁹ They were also a rejection of what Dr. Carter G. Woodson coined the “Mis-Education of the Negro,” which he argued used the educational system as a means of thwarting radical black thinking, and perpetuating

¹⁸⁷ For more on African-American childhoods and Black activism, please see, David Halberstam, *The Children*, (New York: Fawcett, 1998); Wilma King, *African American Childhoods: Historical Perspectives From Slavery To Civil Rights*, (New York: Palgrave, 2005)---*Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Ellen Levine, *Freedom’s Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Stories*, (New York: Penguin, 1993); Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 359-61; Christopher Metress, *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

¹⁸⁸ McKay, “The Girls Who Became Women,” 107.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 113. For discussions about race, gender, and the construction of identity, please see Karen Sacks Fields, “What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly,” *Oral History Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Health and Caring (Spring, 1989), pp. 44-53; Anne McClintock, “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family,” *Feminist Review*, No 44, Summer 1993, 61-80; Nell Irvin Painter, “Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth’s Knowing and Becoming Known,” *The Journal of American History*, September 1994, 461-485; Joan Scott, “Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 27 (Winter 2001), 284-304.

white control over blacks.¹⁹⁰ McKay asserted that Bates wrote a political autobiography because identifying with a community allows the “marginalized” to “create their own image,” which is exactly what Daisy did in her memoir.¹⁹¹ Due to the fact that she wrote and published *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* during a time when it was not clear if the Civil Rights Movement would achieve its goals, Daisy Bates altered her narrative in a way that actually silenced controversial episodes from her upbringing, and emphasized the story she told as vindication of her belief that her later activism was shaped by the childhood experiences she specified.

African-American literary scholar Nellie Y. McKay defined “childhood in autobiography as the period from earliest recall to late adolescence, as we generally understand the latter in relationship to chronological age, even though psychologically, the childhoods of these subjects may have ended years earlier.”¹⁹² For McKay, childhood is determined less by biological age or chronology and more by life experiences. On this theme, in his classic *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Claude Brown observed, “they ain’t got no kids in Harlem...they don’t have any kids in Harlem because nobody has time for childhood.”¹⁹³ According to Lillian Smith’s *Killers of the Dream*, “haunted childhood[s]” are indelible to growing up southern.¹⁹⁴ North and South of the Mason Dixon Line, McKay concluded, “these young people must learn to protect themselves and to survive in a hostile society.”¹⁹⁵ Daisy Bates’ presentation of her childhood in her autobiography is consistent with McKay’s conclusion that “large numbers of black

¹⁹⁰ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 55.

¹⁹¹ McKay, “Race, Gender and Cultural Context,” 175, 178

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 107.

¹⁹³ Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*, 295.

¹⁹⁴ Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1949), 15.

¹⁹⁵ McKay, “The Girls Who Became the Women,” 107.

youngsters do not have traditional childhoods.” “Rebirth,” the one chapter of *The Long Shadow* in which Bates discusses her traumatic youth, begins and ends with events that support the notion that Daisy Gatson’s childhood ended at an early age. This is also supported by the chapter that follows “Rebirth,” which begins at the age of fifteen, when she met her future husband L.C. Bates.

Defined by more than biology or chronology, African-American childhoods are shaped by “experience,” and “Rebirth” is consistent with a pattern in African-American autobiography in which writers mold their individual, personal stories into deliberate recreations intended to forward the goals and objectives of the race. The historian Amrita Chakrabarti Myers’s work on black women in antebellum Charleston, South Carolina “posits that black women used all the resources at their disposal to craft a freedom of their own imagining as opposed to accepting the limited confines of a freedom shaped by white southerners.”¹⁹⁶ The short-term benefits of dissembling and silencing the past are commendable, however, the challenges they create for scholars attempting to recover accurate representations of history, are daunting, sometimes insurmountable, yet essential to fully understanding the events and people of previous eras. Daisy Bates’ presentation of her life is not unlike her contemporaries.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011), 2.

¹⁹⁷ For examples of the childhood memories of the meanings of African-American women’s sexuality, and civil rights activism see, Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 4, 67, 77-92; Mia Bay, *To Tell The Truth Freely* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 32-4; Giddings, *Ida*, 11-13; Lee, *For Freedom’s Sake*, Chapter One, “Delta Daughter,” 1-22; McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*; McKay, “The Girls Who Became Women”; Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 17-19, 35, 122, 128-145; Rosengarten, *All God’s Dangers*, 7-8; Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*.

The information Daisy Bates altered or omitted in “Rebirth” substantiates that she used certain facts about her life to recreate herself into a model of respectable womanhood, and to call attention to the how indispensable the suppression of black manhood was to black women’s sexual vulnerability, racial oppression, and female activism. Recovering the parts of her story that she left out, reveals how Daisy Gatson’s personal connection to sexual trauma, and her responses to it are representative of African-Americans’ employment of “infrapolitics” to subvert and survive Jim Crow, and African-American women’s complicated understanding of the gendered and sexual dimensions of racial oppression. “Rebirth’s” almost-allegorical characters celebrate black men and women, offer scathing critiques of white manhood, and present white women as passive victims and bystanders. The way Bates constructed her early years provides invaluable insight into her personal feelings about the connection between gender, race, class and sexual oppression. A more complete examination of Gatson’s life, and Bates’ construction of “Rebirth” illuminates how she dissembled around crucial issues like education, religion and sexuality, but also demonstrates that she developed into a savvy, self-aware woman, who possessed a sympathetic, complex understanding of the plight of black men, and a African-American female cognizance of the gender and sexual politics that shaped the activism and the strategies of the Civil Rights Movement.

Conclusion

When analyzed with other records, “Rebirth” proves that Daisy Bates did not allow earlier impediments, like her lack of formal education, to thwart her from attaining the knowledge and skills she needed to provide leadership for her race, and that she was

the primary architect of a partially fictional, political public persona.¹⁹⁸ Daisy Gatson was angry, restless and curious, and with the help of L.C.'s love and support, transformed the trauma of her childhood into political leadership for her race. And, while it is true that her desire for "freedom of action" and independence created the path that led to her becoming one of the Civil Rights Movement's most important female leaders, the actual story of how she got there has been muddled and hidden by the neat narrative Daisy told in "Rebirth."¹⁹⁹ Written as a political autobiography, during an uncertain moment in the Black Freedom Struggle, before the iconic campaigns and events between 1963 and 1965, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* was intended to justify the need for the Civil Rights Movement, and to support its activists. Gaps and silences between Daisy's 1920s childhood and her 1942 marriage—which also occurred later than Bates wrote—are examples of what the literary scholar Margo Perkins has called "The fiction of development...an important and perhaps indispensable aspect of *political autobiography*."²⁰⁰ Due to the fact that she published her memoir on October 29, 1962, when the Movement's success remained in question, Bates could not fully historicize her activism, but she did understand that the circumstances of her upbringing were not entirely unique.

¹⁹⁸ The events that occurred before Rosa Park's December 1, 1955 arrest and the civil rights career of African American Bayard Rustin are prominent examples of connection between public image and public leadership. For more on this link please see John Demilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, (New York: Free Press, 2003); David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*; David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow The History of an Image*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan*; Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*; Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*; Margo Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000); Jo Ann Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott And the Women Who Started It*; Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*; Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*; Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load*.

¹⁹⁹ L.C. Bates to Daisy Bates, December 10, 1962, folder 4, Box 1, DBP, UAF.

²⁰⁰ Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 42.

Daisy Bates dissembled in her memoir. She employed critical silences and reconstructed the story she told about her childhood. Like other black activists, Bates participated in a black writing tradition that molded past personal experiences into narratives about the effects of racial discrimination and oppression on African-Americans as a group of people. Bates depersonalized her individual story with hopes that her presentation of her life would support the Civil Rights Movement. Akin to other black women, Bates also used the moment to write her autobiography as a platform to address negative stereotypes about African-American women's sexuality, and to reject the idea of black men as unmanly. All of the African-Americans discussed in "Rebirth" are presented as victims of a racist Jim Crow culture. Bates' selection of certain facts supported the narrative she wanted to tell. Her omissions reveal a more complicated, controversial upbringing, illuminate the political intentions being the writing of her memoir, and elucidate how she used dissemblance, silence and narrative reconstruction to accomplish her challenge to the racial and gendered status quo. Bates' reconstruction of her life continued in her discussion of early adult years, which were more controversial than her childhood. As she did regarding her youth, Bates created a story that was consistent with her public persona.

Chapter Three: “I didn’t reveal my plans:” Marriage and the Politics of Secrecy

“I had decided two years before we got married that I would one day marry him. He was so much like my (stepfather). He reminded me so much of him.”

---Daisy Bates, Interview with *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 1992

Introduction: Private Lives and Public Battlegrounds

The private lives of activists like Daisy and L.C. Bates became public battlegrounds during the Civil Rights Movement. Daisy and L.C. had a 50 year relationship, but were particularly secretive about their life before moving to Little Rock, as information about this period of their lives would have damaged their ability to be credible leaders for their race. This reality left the couple in a moral and ethical conundrum, and weaved a web of difficulty for historians.¹ The distinction between how individuals act privately and their image in the public sphere is, more often than not,

¹ For more on L.C. and Daisy Bates please see the following, John Lewis Adams, “Arkansas Needs Leadership:” Daisy Bates, Black Arkansas, and the NAACP,” Master Thesis, Department of African-American Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003; Daisy Bates interview with Elizabeth Jacoway, October 11, 1976, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, “Documenting the American South, Oral Histories of the American South, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>; Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1986); Lerone Bennett Jr., “Chronicles of Black Courage: The Little Rock 10”, *Ebony Magazine*, December, 1997, Vol. 53 Issue 2, 132-6, and “First Lady of Little Rock: Daisy Bates becomes a name known around the world but few know the real woman”, *Ebony Magazine*, September 1958; Judith Bloom Fradin and Dennis Brindell Fradin, *The Power of One: Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine*, (Clarion Books: New York, 2004); Tony Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis: A Constitutional Interpretation*, (Westwood, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984); Elizabeth Jacoway and C. Fred Williams, *Understanding the Little Rock Crisis: An Exercise in Remembrance and Reconciliation*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999); Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis that Shocked the Nation*, (Free Press: New York, 2007); John Kirk, “Daisy Bates, the National Association of Colored People, and the 1957 Little Rock School Crisis: A Gendered Perspective,” Peter Ling and Sharon Montieth eds, *Gender in the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 17-40, and, “The Little Rock Crisis and postwar Black Activism in Arkansas”, *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, (Vol. LVI, Autumn 1997), 273-93; Brian Lanker, *I Dream A World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1999), 77-8; Amy Pokalow, *Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader*, (North Haven, Connecticut: Linnet Books, 2003); Linda Reed, “The Legacy of Daisy Bates”, (*The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*,)Vol. LIX, Spring 2000; Calvin Smith, “From Separate But Equal to Desegregation: The Changing Philosophy of L.C. Bates,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XLII. (Autum 1983); Griff Stockley, *Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader from Arkansas*, (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2006); Irene Wassell, ‘L.C. Bates: Editor of the State Press,’ M.A. Thesis, (University of Arkansas-Little Rock, School of Journalism, 1983)

blurry. Sara Evans's 1979 assertion that the "personal is political" changed how historians viewed and wrote history, especially regarding women.² Marriage is perhaps the most private of institutions.³

Comparing what Daisy Bates wrote about her life between the time she left Huttig and moved to Little Rock with information she omitted or reconstructed illuminates how she employed the politics of secrecy in her autobiography around her complex, intimate relationship with L.C. to protect herself and the Black Freedom Movement. "Across My Desk," the chapter which follows the story of Gatson's traumatic childhood, opens when Daisy is 15 years old, and ends the weekend before the school desegregation crisis, almost 30 years later. The scope of "Across My Desk" allowed Bates to continue the linear, political narrative of the budding civil rights heroine she started in "Rebirth". And, as she did in her discussion of her childhood, Bates dissembled. She used silence and factual reconstruction to reinforce her public persona in the discussion about the nature of her relationship with L.C. Bates at a time when he was married to another woman. While "Rebirth" contains important information about Daisy Gatson's life in Huttig, Arkansas, "Across My Desk" makes no mention of a life in Memphis, Tennessee, L.C.'s marriage, or that they moved to Little Rock before taking their marriage vows.

² Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, (New York: Vintage, 1979).

³ Works on 20th century marriage include Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage & Divorce in Post-Victorian America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Sara Elizabeth Rzesutek, "Love and Activism: James and Ester Cooper Jackson and the Black Freedom Movement in the United States, 1914-1968", PhD Dissertation, Rutgers University-New Brunswick, History Department, 2009. Works focusing more explicitly on race include Anastasia Curwood, "Three African American Marriages in the World of E. Franklin Frazier, 1932-1967," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003; Eleanor Alexander, *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow: The Tragic Courtship and Marriage of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore, A History of Love and Violence among the African American Elite*, (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Martin Summers *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Juxtaposing what Daisy Bates wrote about these years with information she omitted or recreated elucidates how, along with the help of her life partner L.C., she crafted a political public image. Daisy employed various strategies, particularly silence, in the creation of her public persona. Investigating a period of her life not discussed by Bates or historians also clarifies the process of her self-reconstruction as well as the intentions behind her self-presentation.

This chapter discusses the most understudied period of Daisy Bates' life; the years between 1932, when she left Huttig with L.C. Bates, and 1942, when they quietly married at a justice of the peace in the town of Fordyce, the seat of Dallas County, located 70 miles south of Little Rock. The union between Daisy and L.C. Bates and the symbolic meaning of the marriage of this militant black couple is situated within the context of the culture of respectability, attacks on the political left during the Cold War, and constant opposition to the Civil Rights Movement.⁴ I argue that Bates used silence about her marriage in order to make herself appear respectable to outsiders. Moreover, Bates' silence about her marriage, during her lifetime and in her autobiography, was not an atypical act for black women. However, Daisy's reasons differed from the movement's other women because her questionable past relationship with L.C. was inconsistent with her respectable public persona.

⁴ For more on the connection between the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement please see Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Thomas Borstelmann *The Cold War and the Color Line* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001); Mary L. Dudziak *Cold War Civil Rights* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000); Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: the McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*; McDuffie, *Sojourning For Freedom*; David. Oschinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: the World of Joe McCarthy* (New York: Free Press, 1983); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (New York: Little, Brown, 1998); Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1997), and *Satchmo Blows Up the World : Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

In order to understand how Daisy Bates evolved into a leader for the Freedom Struggle, it is imperative to discuss L.C. Bates' upbringing and the path that led him to Huttig. Knowledge of L.C.'s life experiences before he met Daisy elucidates exactly how he inextricably influenced her development into a civil rights leader. Daisy's relationship with L.C. shaped her politics as well as her public persona. They shared common political beliefs because L.C.'s philosophy was the one his wife embraced when she eventually joined him in the crusade. A deeper examination of L.C. Bates also reveals how meeting Daisy changed the trajectory of his life. L.C.'s relationship with Daisy helped him to fulfill his dream of operating his own newspaper. Daisy wrote that L.C.'s "urge to go back to that business was irresistible...Together we decided to...invest our savings in a weekly newspaper...We thought it was a gamble worth taking."⁵ Though Daisy imposed silences around various parts of her personal life, those relating to her time with L.C. are perhaps most compelling and daunting simply because he was so instrumental to her ascent and shaped the political philosophy she embraced. His status as an educated economically independent black man made L.C. an attractive, pragmatic choice for a husband for a girl like Daisy who did not personally possess the resources to leave Huttig. However, what developed was a complex partnership between two individuals who shared personal disdain for Jim Crow and the willingness to fight together in order to eradicate discrimination and injustice.

"I didn't reveal my plans" answers the following questions: Who was Daisy Gatson in 1928 or 1929 when she met L.C. Bates? How was her life changed by her relationship with a man almost 13 years her senior? Was the path Daisy Gatson took

⁵ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 33-4.

toward marriage typical or atypical for African American women during her lifetime? Why did Daisy and L.C. refuse to discuss the early years of the relationship? What do the facts of her life illuminate about her development from a girl into a woman, and about the images and perceptions of black women during the Jim Crow Era?

“I would one day marry him”

Bates’ discussion of her life between the ages of 15 and 27 is intended to establish the Smith household as a political, literate home, and her relationship with L.C. as respectable, and consistent with her public image. Closely reading the four paragraphs in “Across My Desk” that discusses Bates’ life between the time she met and married L.C. suggests that her selection of him as her future husband was initially based more on a pragmatic desire to leave her delimiting hometown, rather than love. Furthermore, the complete lack of details about these critical ages of individual development is perhaps the most ironic and striking omission in an otherwise personal and revealing memoir. Investigating her memoir’s most obvious, deliberate omissions corroborate exactly how Daisy constructed her public persona, and reveal the political nature of the narrative choices Bates made while crafting her autobiography.

Bates presents her relationship with L.C. Bates as accidental by emphasizing his relationship with her venerated adopted father. Daisy wrote that L.C. and Oralee Smith became close friends. L.C. is introduced as “a tall slender, soft-spoken insurance agent” who befriended her father after selling him a family policy, “One day when I was fifteen years old.”⁶ According to Bates, L.C. and Oralee became “fast friends,” due to their

⁶ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 32

mutual, manly interests in politics. Daisy presents L.C. as a family friend who brought Oralee “newspapers and magazines” he could not purchase in Huttig.⁷ Daisy wanted her initial interactions with L.C. to appear respectable and plutonic.

Bates reinforced her image as a model of respectable womanhood by describing her eventual marriage to L.C. as a progression from friendship, courtship, and ultimately romantic love. She leads her readers to conclude that she married L.C. only out of her love for him, and vice versa. L.C. “was a frequent visitor at our home”, she wrote.⁸ In addition to bringing political materials for Oralee, Daisy remembered that L.C. brought chocolates for her mother, and “special gifts” for her. On one occasion L.C. gifted Daisy Lee “a string of simulated pearls”; on another he surprised her with a bracelet.⁹ L.C. sometimes treated the Smith family to films at the local, segregated movie theatre, in El Dorado, the seat of Union County. One evening, Bates wrote, “L.C. held my hand in the dark theatre and I was thrilled, for I had grown to love and respect him during his visits.”¹⁰ That night, Bates declared “then and there, that I would one day marry him.” Daisy wrote, “I didn’t reveal my plans”—to make an already married man her husband—to anyone, not L.C., her father, and definitely not her religious mother Bates stated that she did not tell her father because he believed that “a girl should not consider marriage until she could cook and sew. And I could do neither.”¹¹ Daisy’s reasons for concealing her desire to make L.C. her husband were much more complex than her inability to cook and sew, yet this is not what she led her readers to conclude.¹² Daisy was unclear about

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*, 32-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 33.

¹¹ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 33.

¹² *Ibid*

her age when she married L.C., but she did indicate that their union elevated her status. Between 1926 and 1946, the United States's marriage rate rose from 79 women per 1,000 to 118 per 1,000.¹³ During this same period, the average age for marriage decreased from 21.5 to 20.3 for women and 24.3 to 22.7 for men.¹⁴ To borrow from the historian Sara Evans, "After a century of denial," starting in the 1920s, proponents of marriage emphasized "the centrality of romance and marriage and the competition among women for male attention."¹⁵ Bates recounted a romantic courtship between a young girl who fell in love with an older man who expressed equal love for her once she disclosed her feelings. Bates writes, "Shortly after my father's death he proposed marriage and I readily accepted...After marriage we settled in Little Rock." The story Daisy told was not just short, but excluded important considerations that factored into her decision to pursue L.C. Bates. The details and truth about her early years with L.C. challenge the narrative that led to her marriage and arrival in Little Rock at the end of the decade.

The way Bates subtly presented herself at the time of marriage provides much insight into how she wanted to be perceived by others. Bates appeared to write against popular ideas about the place of women in American society. Even as a young girl, Bates presents herself as unconventional; she does not cook or clean. However, she still marries, and achieves respectable womanhood. Writing about the 1920s, Evans concludes, "Male identity and economic security still rested primarily on work, whereas women understood that their economic security, emotional fulfillment, and social status

¹³ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 237-8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Evans also notes a rise in birthrates from 106 per 1,000 to 113 per 1,000 for white women, and from 106 per 1,000 to 155 per 1,000 for nonwhite women between the years of 1930 and 1955.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

all depended on a successful marriage.”¹⁶ Writing that she was not a woman who cooked or sewed, Bates was asserting herself as a modern woman, unlimited by the gendered constraints placed upon other women. She also reinforced the image of Daisy Bates as an independent woman who asserted herself from a young age, forging a critical continuity between her present and past lives.

As she did with “Rebirth”, in “Across My Desk”, Bates continued to craft her political story of a traumatized black girl who grew into a courageous, literate woman capable of leading her race. While her memoir does not specify the types of newspapers and magazines L.C. brought into the Smith home, in a later interview Bates asserted that her father was a race man who was a member of the NAACP. Daisy told Elizabeth Jackoway “nobody really knew but the family that he was a member. And then he paid our dues; he paid my dues and my mother's dues . . . Well, I asked him one day, "Why do you join this organization?" And he told me the meaning why and what they hoped to do, their dreams; then all my dreams were tied with this organization. Then he would give me their literature to read, when he'd go to New York and bring it back.”¹⁷ Even though Bates never discussed the specifics of her own education, her memoir and activism corroborate that she believed that literacy was important in order to achieve racial progress. She did not possess much formal education, yet Bates presented her household as one in which ideas circulated, and reading was practiced. Bates’ brief mentioning of the presence of political reading material in her home subtly established literacy, and the acquisition of knowledge, as continuous throughout her life, and, therefore, central to her development.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 178.

¹⁷ Bates, Interview with Jacoway, October 11, 1976.

Interrogating what Bates wrote reveals an important inconsistency between the rhetoric and reality about her relationship with L.C. Daisy wrote that L.C. held her hand, and that she was “thrilled” due to the fact that she had “grown to love and respect him.” Daisy made L.C. the initiator, and follows this event with her thoughts at the time. “I paid little attention to the movie,” she wrote. “I had decided, then and there, that I would one day marry him. I didn’t reveal my plans to L.C.—or to my family.”¹⁸ Being cognizant of Daisy’s disdain for her hometown, it is unclear why she did not return L.C.’s display of romantic interest. Her presentation is even more questionable because she previously stated that she loved him. Bates never explains why she chose not to express her love to L.C. She only states that her father believed that wives should “cook and sew” and that she “could do neither.” Without including dates or any explanation, the section concludes with L.C. somehow becoming “aware of my feelings for him,” then proposing marriage after Oralee’s death.¹⁹

While flattering and innocent at first appearance, Bates’ description of the development of her romantic relationship with L.C. also suggests an element of pragmatism in her selection of him as her life partner. Bates’ only biographer has described her as “not a woman who was going to clean the houses of white people for a living,” and she was not educated enough to break into the few professional occupations available to Black women.²⁰ Under these circumstances, Daisy concluded that she would “marry-up,” and L.C.’s occupation as a suit-wearing insurance salesman undoubtedly separated him from Huttig’s mill workers and farmers. L.C. was further distinguished by

¹⁸ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 250. For more on professional African-American Women see Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight*, 147-202; Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do*.

the fact that he owned his own motor vehicle. Around 1929, when L.C. Bates would have met Daisy Gatson, few black men in rural Arkansas owned cars. Rosa Parks, who was born in Alabama the same year as Daisy remembered, “It was something very special for a young black man to own his own car, particularly when he wasn’t driving for any of the white folks.”²¹ L.C.’s status as a professional black man must have made an impression on the young, rural girl, and owning his own vehicle made him an even more appealing partner.

Daisy did not write about how the threat of sexual violence factored into her desire to depart Huttig, or of the role it played in her decision to leave her hometown with a married man. It is likely that she felt sexually threatened in Huttig, a feeling justified by her mother’s rape and murder. In her seminal autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs called the black girl’s fifteenth year a “sad epoch.”²² As her master made sexual advances toward her, Jacobs remembered, “Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their importance.” Before fully becoming a woman, the black girl, Jacobs proclaimed, “will be compelled to realize that she is no longer a child.”²³ At the age when black girls became especially vulnerable, it is more likely than not that Daisy felt some degree of personal danger and trepidation at being sexually violated, and that this sentiment may have created the need for a sense of physical security. Though he was married, leaving Huttig with L.C. was a pragmatic decision based on the personal urgency Daisy felt at that moment and by her limited options.

²¹ Rosa Parks, *My Story* (New York: Puffin Books, 1992), 56.

²² Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Edited by Jean Fagan Yellin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 27.

²³ *Ibid*, 28.

L.C.'s reasons for marrying Daisy appear more lucid: he was in love and identified with the young woman's need for personal liberation. Having quit college to pursue his passion for the newspaper industry, L.C. personally connected with Daisy's desire for more than what her hometown could offer. L.C. also "looked upon" Daisy as a "very capable person," which also fueled his decision to take her away and give her the opportunity to fulfill her potential.²⁴ During their marriage's nadir, L.C. wrote, "you have brought me happiness...in spite of your overt contempt for me."²⁵ L.C.'s letter also alluded to Daisy's unhappiness in Huttig. "I don't think you would want to go back where you were when I met you and brought you away," L.C. reminded his newly independent wife. Recalling the constraints Daisy felt in Huttig, L.C. clarified Daisy's desire to act as she pleased, seemingly without the restrictions present in her hometown. "Freedom of action is what you have always enjoyed since you met me."²⁶ In a speech given at the NAACP's 50th Anniversary in 1959, Daisy echoed L.C.'s sentiments. "There is nothing in all the world greater than freedom."²⁷ In search of a way out of her hometown and the limitations living there placed on her future, Daisy most likely concluded that L.C. was her ticket out of Huttig. L.C.'s letter is the only correspondence that has survived about the private matters of their marriage, and it reveals that he questioned if Daisy had loved him when he took her away from Huttig permanently, five years before her father's death, and ten years before their official marriage. Other than stating that he reminded her of Oralee Smith, Daisy did not delve into her feelings for the man who became her life partner.

²⁴ L.C. Bates to Daisy Bates, December 10, 1962, folder 1, Box 4, DBP, UAF.

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ Daisy Bates, "Address for the NAACP Youth Organization Banquet," July 16, 1959, DBP, SHSW, folder 5, Box 3.

Daisy was ambiguous about her feelings for L.C. seems to have possessed a love for her that was unconditional. Even in his most bitter moment, L.C. reminded his wife of his deep, heartfelt affection. L.C. claimed that he “did not know how bad I was until you told me recently...I wanted you because I loved you and I was happy trying to make you happy...I enjoyed those years with you,” he admitted.²⁸ As Daisy became known as an activist in her own right, and the couple began to drift apart, L.C. reminded her of his “pleasant memories,” and unconditional love for her, despite their marital difficulties. “All I know is that I was happy,” L.C. wrote. Apologetic for Daisy’s “melancholy,” L.C. reminded her that, “I feel that I have been of a little help to you getting where you are.”²⁹ L.C. concluded his letter by telling Daisy, “Whatever you do you can always say that you were married to a man that loved, LOVED love you.” He signed the letter with another reminder of his love for Daisy. “Yours (as far as I am concerned) as ever. The man you married in Arkansas.” While her reasons for choosing him remain a matter of speculation, L.C. was explicit in that he chose Daisy out of love. The potential differences between their reasons for marrying one another foreshadowed future problems as Daisy grew more confident in herself.

An unpublished draft of her memoir corroborates that Daisy married L.C. for reasons other than her love for him. In the published version, the only evidence Daisy provides of any romantic connection to L.C. prior to the incident in the movie theatre are the gifts that he bought for her when visiting. Drafting her memoir, Bates wrote, “At times, looking back, I have questioned my reasons for marrying L.C., and his for

²⁸ L.C. Bates to Daisy Bates, December 10, 1962, folder 1, Box 4, DBP, UAF.

²⁹ *Ibid*

marrying me, for I must have seemed to him very immature.”³⁰ Was Daisy acknowledging ulterior motives for her marriage? While it is impossible to deduce the questions Daisy possessed about she and L.C.’s motives for marrying each other, it is critical to acknowledge the discrepancy between the unpublished draft of her memoir and the final version. Love is not a requirement, though it is typically the impetus. Being cognizant that Daisy may not have possessed a romantic love for L.C. in the early years of their relationship engenders even more questions about the forces that compelled her to start a new life with him, and of the circumstances that compelled individuals to enter legal partnerships.

From inception, Daisy and L.C.’s relationship contained a dimension that is perhaps most similar to that of a father and daughter. This dimension was appears to have been fairly unproblematic in the beginning years, when it was clear that she needed him. Daisy admired L.C. like one would a father (which, at the time, she may have interpreted as love). During the most tumultuous period in their marriage, L.C. accused Daisy of manipulation. Confronted with an impending divorce thirty years after they left Huttig, L.C. questioned Daisy’s love for him, calling her “the best actor I have ever witnessed perform.”³¹ He stated that she had the ability to “hate a person” yet “make him feel that you think he is the greatest.—when you decide to put on an act.” Whether or not she was acting may never be known, but L.C. wanted it to be clear he had fallen in love with a woman over ten years his junior. In many ways, L.C. did represent a father more than a romantic lover, and throughout their lives Daisy sought his advice. Her seeking his advice did not mean that they always agreed. Citing “abuse and contempt”, on June

³⁰ Bates, Unpublished Draft of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, DBP, SHSW, quoted in Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 19, n25.

³¹ L.C. Bates to Daisy Bates, December 10, 1962, folder 1, Box 4, DBP, UAF.

27, 1962, Daisy filed for a divorce. It lasted for less than a year.³² Frankie Jeffries, who was a friend of the couple remembered L.C. telling Daisy that she “got no business” going to New York, and leaving her husband to write a book. Daisy’s biographer equated the paternal aspect of their relationship to “an indulgent father” whose “child...would not stay in the house.”³³ Though it is possible that Daisy may not have loved L.C. when they met, she did see him a symbol of manhood. In addition, he was willing and able to give her the security and freedom Oralee Smith had previously provided during her upbringing in Huttig.

A Traveling Salesman

In order to understand the woman and leader Daisy Bates became, it is essential to explore who L.C. Bates was before they met. He had life experiences that shaped his beliefs, and he, in return, influenced Daisy’s political development. Regardless of her reasons for marrying him, meeting L.C. is important because his decision to take Daisy away from Huttig was a critical intervention in her life. Without L.C., it is questionable, even doubtful, that the world would have ever gotten to know the courageous Daisy Bates. One writer has called L.C. the “brains behind the operation”, an assessment which corroborates Daisy’s fear that her lack of formal education could be used to discredit her activism.³⁴ Daisy Bates was not L.C.’s creation, as this writer asserts. She was his partner. Rather than creating her, L.C. nurtured a “capable” young lady into a confident, mature woman who eventually sought independence from the second greatest source of her success. L.C. helped Daisy turn her proclivity toward rebellion, and her anger over

³² Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 241-3

³³ *Ibid*, 242.

³⁴ Christopher Mercer, quoted in Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 50.

racial oppression into political activism. Daisy's self-assertion and L.C.'s influence on her are not mutually exclusive.

Like Rosa Parks, Daisy selected L.C. to be her husband in large part because of his militant politics. As an assertive, ambitious woman, Bates was attracted to L.C.'s grandiose dream of starting a black newspaper that would lead black people to the promise land of freedom. Rosa Parks called her husband Raymond Parks, who she initially rejected because he was "too white," as the "first man of our race, aside from my grandfather, with whom I actually discussed anything about the racial conditions...I was impressed by the fact that he didn't have a meek attitude—what we called an 'Uncle Tom' attitude—toward white people...Parks was the first real activist I ever met."³⁵ It is likely that Daisy did not meet a civil rights activist before L.C. Clearly discontented with the state of race relations in her hometown, Daisy may have found this particular quality attractive. Biographer Douglas Brinkley concludes that Raymond Parks's work with the NAACP on behalf of the Scottsboro Boys "helped to radicalize Rosa Parks during the Great Depression years..."³⁶ Just as Raymond Parks influenced Rosa Parks's political activism, L.C. was an indispensable part of Daisy's evolution. It is imperative to provide information about the path that led L.C. to Huttig because his journey to southern Arkansas clarifies how meeting Daisy also altered the direction of his life.

L.C. Bates was Daisy's life-partner, husband and mentor. She trusted his judgment more than anyone else. Johnny Smith, who worked with Daisy in 1968, recalled this dynamic in their relationship. "I gathered from the few times I met L.C. that

³⁵ Parks, *My Story*, 59.

³⁶ Brinkley, *Rosa Parks*, 41.

he was a very smart man. When she would come up to a standstill, he could tell her how to do what she needed to do.”³⁷ Even after he found himself in Daisy’s shadow, L.C. continued to be her biggest supporter and collaborator.

L.C. drew upon his unique experiences as a child and the mistakes he made as an ambitious, idealistic young man to not just reshape his own approach to entering public politics, but to mold Daisy Bates’ political philosophy and create the conditions which empowered her to provide leadership for her race.³⁸ Unlike Daisy’s limited education, as a boy, L.C. was the only black student in his private grammar school. A slender, soft-spoken man, with an ebony complexion, Luscious Christopher Bates wore black-rimmed prescription glasses that added to his studious appearance. L.C. dreamed of owning his own newspaper. In her memoir, Daisy implied that L.C. completed a journalism degree at Wilberforce, when the truth was that he quit college to follow his dream of being a reporter.³⁹ L.C. shared all the privileges he received as an educated black man during the Jim Crow Era with Daisy. When they met, L.C. had lived a life filled with opportunities, while Daisy’s upbringing was traumatic and limited. The first four decades of L.C. Bates’ life was like one big social excursion, a journey of which few black people could boast, and in 1940, when he made the move with Daisy to Little rock, at 39 years old, his life was at another crossroads.

Born to Laura and Morris B. Bates, on April 27, 1901, in town of Liberty, on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, L.C. was raised by a father who made the sacrifices necessary to create opportunities for his only child. The son of a Baptist preacher who also worked as

³⁷ Robinson, *Daisy Bates: In her Own Words*, 224.

³⁸ Wassell, “L.C. Bates,” 4-6.

³⁹ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 33.

a farmer to support his family, L.C. “had everything [he] needed and lots that [he] wanted,” while growing up.⁴⁰ Father Bates secured educational opportunities for his only son, which ultimately impacted the course of history. Father Bates is an example of the ways African-Americans’ dreams and aspirations have had direct and indirect influence over the development of history. At the end of his life, L.C. recalled that his father made sure that he understood the importance of hard work, but “never picked or chopped cotton.”⁴¹ Father Bates wanted L.C. to become a doctor and made moves to make this dream reality. He allowed L.C. to plow fields and work as a “printer’s devil” in an Indianola shop, where, according to L.C., he “got ink in his veins,” and from then on knew what he wanted to do.⁴² In his later years, L.C. showed genuine appreciation for the sacrifices his father made for him, and for the opportunities he provided. When Bates was a young boy, his father moved the family to Moorhead, MS where he had taken a job as an overseer in addition to preaching. The estate Father Bates operated was owned by a New England widow L.C. remembered only as Mrs. Pond. Her husband had recently passed and she needed someone to run the estate’s daily affairs. Mrs. Pond was an important person in L.C.’s life because she used personal connections with influential local whites to get him enrolled in a private grammar school in Indianola, Mississippi, where he was the only black student. To meet the school’s graduation requirement, L.C. showed glimpses of the militant journalist-to-be in an essay titled “Discontentment Is a

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² *Ibid*, 5.

Means to a Successful End.” Afterwards, he took high school courses at Alcorn College, in Alcorn, Mississippi because Moorhead did not offer high school courses to blacks.⁴³ .

From Alcorn, in 1919, L.C. headed off to college at historic Wilberforce College, the nation’s first black college, where he would make his first difficult decision. L.C. was unhappy at Wilberforce because his heart was in journalism. In her memoir, Daisy implied that L.C. finished the journalism program. The truth is that L.C. cared less about formal recognition than Daisy. For a deeply curious and passionate man like him, a college degree was just a piece of paper. L.C knew that the piece of paper he would get from college could not “provide the kind of education he wanted.” And this is what he told his Dad, even though he realized that leaving school would break the heart of his loyal, hard-working father. By not becoming the doctor Father Bates had lived for him to be, L.C. disappointed his father for the first time in his life.⁴⁴

Shortly after deciding to leave Wilberforce, L.C. ‘struck out’ to find the world through experience,” and the stable ground his father had provided felt its first tremors. L.C. told his father that he wanted to be a reporter, so that he could help his people. Disappointed, but still supportive, Father Bates contacted H.W. Holloway, a personal friend who published the Interstate Reporter in Helena, Arkansas. The paper had a circulation of about 3,500. In the year that L.C. was at the paper he did more printing than reporting, and “covered all phases of the newspaper business.”⁴⁵ Working and living in the seat of Phillips County, L.C. must have heard of the previous year’s racial massacre in nearby Elaine, which Pulitzer Prize winning historian, David Levering Lewis

⁴³ *Ibid*, 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 6, 8; Bates, *Long Shadow*, 33; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 23.

⁴⁵ Wassell, “L.C. Bates”, 8.

calls “one of the bloodiest American repressions of the twentieth century.”⁴⁶ While in Helena, the protections of his childhood began to erode, and, like Daisy, the ugly reality of being Negro in the American South smacked him in the face.⁴⁷ Daisy’s Eden was destroyed early in her childhood. L.C.’s Edenic Period lasted through his early twenties.

The year L.C. spent at the Interstate Reporter is representative of the nomadic lifestyle he lived in the early 1920s. In 1921 L.C. took a reporting job with the Kansas City Call, where he would have his first contact with an ambitious young man named Roy Wilkins. Neither could have known that 36 years into the future L.C. would find himself on the front lines of one of the worst Constitutional crises in American history, and that Wilkins would be Executive Secretary of the NAACP, the most powerful civil rights group in the nation. One day, L.C. was given the assignment of interviewing an unknown young man from Independence, Missouri running for county judge. His name was Harry S. Truman. L.C. could not have known that he was interviewing the future president of the United States.⁴⁸

Even though he was gaining valuable experience, L.C. was always somewhat impatient and made the hasty decision to start his own paper at the age of 22. For reasons unknown, he selected Pueblo, Colorado as the place and the Western Ideal as the name. At this point in his life L.C. could not have selected a more appropriate name, for he was still a very idealistic young man. The 1923 Pueblo City Directory list L.C. Bates as “business manager of the Western Ideal Publishing Company.” He listed the YMCA as his place of residence, meaning that it is likely that he stayed there as he moved from

⁴⁶ David Levering Lewis, jacket to Griff Stockley, *Blood in Their Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacres of 1919*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001).

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

⁴⁸ Wassell, “L.C. Bates,” 9

place to place, or, as he did in protest of racial discrimination, during his days as an insurance salesman, slept in his car. According to L.C. the paper was “doing nicely” and had the “respect of the community,” until he learned his “first lesson in politics.” It was an election year. L.C. was approached by the city-controlling “underworld element,” who wanted to use his paper to campaign for its candidates. In his account, L.C. suggested that financial success and political influence was of higher priority than the moral principles that were the reasons behind the paper in the first place. Standing on principle became the trademark of the *Arkansas State Press*, as well as the primary reason for its eventual demise in 1959 during the integration crisis at Central High School. “I didn’t think they would lose,” L.C. admitted to his biographer, “and if they won, I would have influence in the administration.” They lost the election, the paper “folded,” and L.C. went “job-hunting.” Although devastated, from this experience, L.C. learned the lesson he would live his life by, “one does not ‘sell out.’”⁴⁹

L.C.’s sour experience in Colorado is important to understanding the militant, uncompromising positions he would take later in the *State Press*, and the unwavering stance Daisy demonstrated when she joined him in the fight to eradicate Jim Crow. Selling-out reminded him of his stubborn, philosophical maternal grandfather, Louis Erasmus Brown. L.C. credited grandfather Brown “with molding his character and with helping him develop a philosophy of life.”⁵⁰ Brown sold watermelons from a farm he operated in Heads, Mississippi. One summer, while L.C. and his young uncle were guarding the patch, a “white man came by and ‘proceeded to help himself’ to a choice of melons.” When the man saw that the boys were trying to stop him, he picked up a stick.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

Before he could strike, he was hit by a shotgun blast fired from grandfather Brown's gun. L.C. told his biographer, "Grandfather operated his farm and didn't bother anybody, and it wasn't safe for anybody to bother him." After shooting the man, Brown "sent word for the sheriff to pick up the 'son-of-a-bitch,'" and guaranteed that he would "be in town Saturday to see about it." Grandfather Brown is the model of manhood L.C. had looked up to since he was a young boy. Though he loved his preacher father, L.C. would spend much of his newspaper career criticizing the black ministry and fighting them for leadership of Little Rock's black community. L.C. preferred his grandfather's simple approach to addressing problems, "if he was right, he had no room for compromise, and you had to convince him he was wrong." After his sell-out experience, grandfather Brown's philosophy became L.C.'s mantra: "We can sacrifice a friend, but never compromise a principle."⁵¹

Selling out was one thing, but holding a steady job and financial stability was another. L.C.'s job-hunt landed him in Los Angeles, California and a reporting gig at the Golden Age, a black newspaper where he worked for a year before finally calling it quits. He moved to Omaha, Nebraska where he met Iowa native Cassandra Crawford, started a new career as an insurance salesman, got married in 1924, and adopted her daughter Loretta. Soon afterwards, L.C. moved his family to Memphis, Tennessee, where he worked as a "traveling salesman," and then as an "advertising manager." Bates worked a nine-state area that included Arkansas.⁵²

⁵¹ Wassell, "L.C. Bates," 7.

⁵² Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 23; Wassell, "L.C. Bates," 10.

When L.C. abandoned his dream of owning a newspaper to sell insurance he took perhaps his most important step toward attaining it. His travels as an insurance salesman exposed him to nuances of southern black life like he had never seen, even as a native son of the South. Akin to Daisy's feelings after hearing about her mother's murder, L.C. was angered by what he saw across the South, which was not the private schooling and endless education he knew as a child. He hated the fact that blacks had to sit on the back of busses and streetcars and that his people had to endure the "humiliating denial of the right to eat in a restaurant or of staying in a motel or hotel of their choice."⁵³ L.C. proudly told his biographer that he refused to enter through the back door of any restaurant. To avoid this unnecessary insult, L.C. "ate 'out of cans' with cheese or bologna."⁵⁴ If he did not have his own automobile he caught a taxi. According to Bates, he "rode a bus only one time." While Bates would continue to sell insurance, the thought of owning his own newspaper repeatedly made its way back into his stream of consciousness.⁵⁵ As he surveyed the South, L.C. grew angrier. Though he did not realize it at the time, L.C. was in the Orphan State of his evolution into a leader for his race. He was accumulating a deep understanding of the inner workings of racial oppression, and white psychology. In a statement reminiscent of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, L.C. declared, "The black man knew the white man because he read his literature, but the only contact the whites had with the blacks was with those who worked about the white man's house. The only newspaper coverage the white man saw of blacks was about crimes black committed"⁵⁶ L.C.'s experiences between the time he left Wilberforce and moved

⁵³ Wassell, "L.C. Bates," 11

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

to Little Rock provided him with the type of exposure and experiences that made him a radical activist, and capable of directing Daisy toward her self-realization.

Coincidentally, L.C. made his decision to once again start his newspaper while trying to sell promotional advertising in Alexandria, Louisiana. L.C. had made an appointment and was waiting for the president of the company. When he arrived, the company president looked at L.C. and blurted, “What do you want, boy?” Shocked, Bates recalled that it was at that moment that he stated to himself, “I have to start my own paper.”⁵⁷

Starting a newspaper was more difficult than it had been when he was a 22 year old man with no real responsibilities. Now, Bates had a wife and a child to worry about. Still, a fire burned in him to start the operation he often referred to as his “baby.” Cassandra and L.C. began to have problems, perhaps because he was seriously questioning the decisions he had made to abandon his dream and in marrying her. L.C. continued to sell insurance when he was brought to the unassuming rural town of Huttig, Arkansas, just five miles north of the Louisiana border.

When L.C. met a fifteen year-old girl named Daisy Lee Gatson in 1928 or 29 a new chapter began in both their lives. Like Daisy, L.C.’s story contains significant gaps until the 1941 establishment of the *State Press*. Daisy was full of life, charismatic, charming, and very beautiful. “She was nothing but a kid,” Bates repeated in his last interview. “I wasn’t thinking about her...When she got a little older, she looked a little better.”⁵⁸ Inconsistencies between L.C. and Daisy’s story, and available records suggest

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁸ Wassell, “L.C. Bates,” 12.

a different narrative about the nature of their relationship during its early years. While it is clear that Daisy saw L.C. as husband material, it remains unclear if L.C. viewed Daisy as a potential mate in their early interactions. At least, this is what they led historians to believe. A Daisy Bates biographer has written that L.C. “confided in Daisy that he and Cassandra weren’t getting along and would eventually get divorced.”⁵⁹ Whether or not L.C. disclosed problems in his relationship with Cassandra remains unclear, but it does appear that L.C. found a degree of happiness with Daisy that was lacking in his marriage.⁶⁰

L.C. was as vague about his feelings about having such a young mistress as Daisy was about her romantic feelings toward him. In 1932, he asked Daisy to move to Memphis with him. It is unclear exactly how L.C. felt about moving Daisy to the city where his wife, step-child and parents also resided. Daisy wanted to discuss the matter with her parents. The couple met with Daisy’s supportive father and God-fearing mother, Orlae and Susie Smith. Daisy’s mother could not bear such sin. How could her daughter run off with a man who was already married? Nevertheless, with her father’s blessing and her mother’s scorn, L.C. took their daughter away to Memphis. He also promised them that he would marry Daisy as soon as his divorce with Cassandra was final. This would not happen until ten years later, after they relocated to Little Rock and began publishing their weekly Friday newspaper, the *Arkansas State Press*.⁶¹ L.C. told his only biographer that he divorced Cassandra in 1930, which implied that there was no

⁵⁹ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 30.

⁶⁰ Stockely, *Daisy Bates*, 22; Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 30; Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 32-3.

⁶¹ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 31

overlap between his previous married life and his relationship with Daisy.⁶² In addition, L.C.'s story contains the same gaps as the one Daisy wrote. He too avoided discussing their relationship after the incident in the El Dorado movie theater. Like Daisy, he stated that they married prior to relocating to Little Rock. L.C. was the one person who had knowledge about the truth about Daisy's life during the 1930s, but his loyalty and love for her prevented him from ever exposing any details. The complicated bond the couple shared is important to fully comprehending Daisy's later activism.

The Historical and Political Uses of Secrecy: The Marriage of L.C. and Daisy Bates

Daisy and L.C.'s rewriting of their early years together was just the midpoint of life-long efforts to cover up the path that landed them in Little Rock, where history's spotlight would shine on her during the 1957 school desegregation crisis. The presence of such deafening silences about her personal life places Bates into the larger context of Black women's history where dissemblance and silence create a dearth of information concerning private matters. Deborah Gray White's 1985 assertion is worth repeating, "When black women moved into the public arena of work and politics they did so under conditions distinct from those that mobilized white women and with different strategies and goals."⁶³ Part of the labor of writing about the life of Daisy Bates is recognizing

⁶² Wassell, "L.C. Bates," 12, footnote 3.

⁶³ Deborah Gray White, "Mining the Forgotten: Manuscript Sources for Black Women's History," *Journal of American History*, Volume 74, Issue 1 (June, 1987), 237; for more on dissemblance please see Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, Second Edition, eds. Vicki Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois, (New York: Routledge, 1994); Danielle McGuire, "It Was like All of Us Had Been Raped:" Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 3, December 2004. For more on the topic of respectability please see, Ida B Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, Edited by Alfreda Duster, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, (New York: Random House, 1981); Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the*

what she did not want known about her past, and distinguishing truth from gossip. The lack of specific dates concerning Daisy and L.C.'s life before they moved to Little Rock is one of the most fascinating and questionable presentations in Daisy Bates' memoir. Bates skips twelve important years, ages fifteen to twenty-seven, which raises questions about what happened during that time and how knowledge of those years might change how history remembers the couple. In an unpublished draft of her memoir found in the archives at the University of Wisconsin, Bates wrote that she met L.C. when she was fifteen, "And three years after my father's death, L.C. and I were married. I was nineteen."⁶⁴ In her published autobiography the "three years," was changed to "shortly," and their rewriting of history continued.

Was Bates being honest in the book draft or in the actual memoir? Evidence suggest that Daisy and L.C. were involved when she was in her teens, (maybe even before she was of legal adult age) but did not marry until he was 40 and she was between 27 and 28 years old. Through all the uncertainty, it is clear that Daisy and L.C. did not want the particulars of the relationship known to the public. The absence of a traditional narrative including dates prevents biographers from knowing important life events like where she was born, when she left her hometown of Huttig, Arkansas, when she arrived in Memphis, Tennessee, and how long they stayed before moving to Little Rock. L.C. willingly participated in the rewriting of the past as well. After all, he was married with a

Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920, (Chapel Hill: University Press, 1996); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Church, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966); Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Intewar Detroit*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁶⁴ Daisy Bates, unpublished draft of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, reel one, chapter three, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

child when he asked Daisy's adoptive parents if he could take her to Memphis with him, meaning he had just as much to hide and lose as her. L.C.'s movements were just as elusive as Daisy's; she does not appear in the Memphis city directory, and he listed from 1935 to 1939, first as a "traveling salesman" and, finally, an "advertising manager."⁶⁵ When Irene Wassell, a graduate student in the field of journalism working on her master thesis, interviewed L.C. about his relationship with Daisy he told her that when they first met she was 14 and he was 27. "She was nothing but a kid then," he joked. L.C. went on to state that they did not meet again until three years later when she was "about 17 and old enough to go out."⁶⁶ Even in his old age, L.C. did not tell the truth about his early years with Daisy. The story they told was romantic and believable, still, it was also inaccurate.⁶⁷ Up to their deaths in 1981 and 1999, L.C. and Daisy Bates continued to manipulate historians and history about their early years and marriage.

Examining "Across My Desk", the biography of L.C. Bates, arrest and death records, FBI files, and personal correspondence between Daisy and L.C., this section analyzes some of the secrets they could not reveal while living. The fact of the presence of silence, and the refusal to disclose the "truth" must not be the stopping point of analysis about this period of Bates' life. Instead, the reasons behind the silence must be explored because they illuminate the impact the politics of respectability maintained over African-American women throughout the Jim Crow Era, even as the culture was changing, in large part to black women's leadership. Daisy and L.C. challenged the status quo at a time when an unrespectable past severely damaged the credibility of social

⁶⁵ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 25.

⁶⁶ Irene Wassell, "L.C. Bates: Editor of the State Press," M.A. Thesis, (University of Arkansas-Little Rock, School of Journalism, 1983), 12.

⁶⁷ For more on L.C.'s frequent trips to Huttig see, Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 29-33; Pokalow, *Daisy Bates*, 24-5; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 22-31.

and political activists. Full disclosure of their past in 1957 would have been a major setback for the local movement in Little Rock, and the growing national Black Freedom Struggle. I analyze why black women living under Jim Crow chose silence over disclosure, and argue that their successful manipulation of the facts of their past amplify a deeply racist and sexist American culture obsessed with negative images of blacks and women, and how people who possessed these oppressed identities worked tirelessly to bring their grievances to the forefront of American politics.

The secrets Daisy and L.C. kept about what is perhaps best described as their most unflattering, and transformative, years is a powerful example of the importance of silence to how individuals recall their lives. Their presentation illuminates the political and historical uses of secrecy in African-American culture, particularly among black women. The little evidence in existence about their life in the 1930s corroborates that Daisy employed strategic, political silences in her autobiography concerning her marriage to L.C. The couple's journey to Little Rock was less than pristine, and would have been used by opponents of the movement to publicly destroy them. Facing this reality, Daisy and L.C. never discussed his previous marriage or their early years after moving to Little Rock. They hoped to silence the past by never telling others about their secrets. In public, the crusading couple from Little Rock presented the image of a perfect marriage with an impenetrable bond, and depicted themselves as people of unwavering conviction, confronting all others who stood in the way of their fight for "freedom and human dignity."⁶⁸ Privately, the couple struggled with the impact a history of past infidelity

⁶⁸ The use of "freedom and human dignity" comes from Daisy Bates. She referred to the civil rights movement as a human rights cause for "freedom and human dignity," of which she believed everyone was entitled. On this topic I am indebted to Carol Anderson's *Eyes off the prize: The United Nations and the*

would have on their activism. The truth about Daisy and L.C.'s first decade together is much more interesting than the account they rehashed. However, the truth was not as politically useful.

Martin Summers's discussion about the shifting notions of marriage in the first half of the twentieth century may apply to the union between Daisy Gatson and L.C. Bates. Summer's *Mainliness and its Discontents* provides a historical context that may help decode why this militant black couple who became a controversial married political duo in Little Rock after a decade of infidelity banished their past into history's shadows. During the 1920s, Summers asserts, the institution of marriage became less about "starting a family" and more of "a means through which to experience individual fulfillment."⁶⁹ The couple never had biological children, and each definitely sought personal fulfillment from a union with the other. In 1945, Daisy joined L.C. in his crusade against Jim Crow as the "City Editor" of the *State Press*. Daisy and L.C. did not have children, and neither discusses the reasons why they never produced offspring. It is clear that Daisy desperately desired to leave Huttig. *Manliness and its Discontents* opens up new ways of thinking about why individuals marry. While sometimes based on love, marriage is an act intended to fulfill individual desires. *Manliness and its Discontents* demonstrates how marriage is often a political act. For some individuals, marriage became a springboard to political activism.

African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Also see Steve Estes, *I AM A MAN!: Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁶⁹ Martin Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004,) 111, 187.

In order to comprehend the secrets L.C. and Daisy kept, it is critical to consider the impact perception has played in African American and Black Women's history.⁷⁰ The historian Stephanie Shaw writes that black women's experiences "cannot be explained merely by degrees of oppression. Perception," she proclaims, "lies at the heart of the matter..."⁷¹ In her study about black professional women between 1880 and 1950, Dr. Shaw argues that African-American were cognizant that they were expected to "Be" respectable, but that they also harness a personal desire to "Do" whatever was necessary to uplift their race.⁷² Daisy and L.C.'s silence about the 1930s suggest that they understood the power of perception. Their secret marriage in a Dallas County, Arkansas courthouse on March 6, 1942, may also provide evidence of an awareness of their image, and their desire to be perceived as a respectable married couple. It would have been easy for outsiders to conclude that L.C. married Daisy because she was young and beautiful, and that she desired to be kept. However, it does appear that both were concerned about the danger knowledge that they were living together, unwed, would have on how they were perceived by others, and therefore their ability to be credible leaders in Little Rock.

Before discussing the evolution of Daisy and L.C.'s relationship it is important to first establish what she hoped to achieve when she became his mistress, as well as the forces that compelled him to take her away from a dangerous, racist, rural Jim Crow town. To borrow from Nanny, Janie Crawford's slavery-born grandmother in Zora Neal Hurston's

⁷⁰ Find and cite works that deal with perception and African-American history please see Sundiata K. Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang. "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies." *Journal of African American History* 92.2 (2007): 265-288; Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement"; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West"; Marable, *Malcolm X*; McGuire, *At The Dark End of the Street*; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, Chapter 14, "Every group its own historian," 469-521; Painter, *Sojourner Truth*;---"Bias and Synthesis in History"; White, *Arn't I a Woman?*;---*Too Heavy A Load*;---"Mining the Forgotten".

⁷¹ Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do*, xi.

⁷² *Ibid*, 8.

classic *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by entering a relationship with L.C., Daisy created a “highway through de wilderness” for herself out of an uncertain future.⁷³

Crawford represents a generation of enslaved black women who were prevented from achieving their personal aspirations. In her work about black professional women during the Jim Crow Era, Stephanie Shaw documents how formal education and entering professional occupations was an important “highway” out of the threatening Jim Crow South for black women. Daisy’s lack of formal education denied her the option of taking an educational highway out of Huttig, and increased her susceptibility to sexual violation. Shaw has written, “In the minds of many parents, their daughters would be far too vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation as female domestics or agricultural laborers.”⁷⁴ Hurston’s intent was not to portray Janie Crawford’s sexually violated Nanny as a victim, but rather as an enabler with connections to a larger theme of gender empowerment, and as an example of the existence of female networks within the African-American community.⁷⁵ Nanny told her infant granddaughter, “Ah been waitin’ a long time, Janie, but nothin’ Ah been through ain’t too much if you just take a stand lak Ah dreamed.”⁷⁶ In other words, Hurston was acknowledging historical continuities in black women’s history, particularly the importance of creating opportunities for future generations women unavailable to them. Education helped achieve this goal for black women who lived in a world where their options were severely limited, but so did

⁷³ Zora Neal Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, (New York: Perennial, 1990), 16, quoted in Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do*, 1.

⁷⁴ Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do*, 1.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the presence of female networks among slave women please see, White, *Arn’t I a Woman*, Chapter 4, “The Female Slave Network,” 119-141.

⁷⁶ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 16.

migration and marriage.⁷⁷ According to Shaw, “the education process” for black women “went beyond simple schooling.”⁷⁸ By making L.C. her “highway” out of Huttig’s “wilderness” Daisy created a path to receiving the type of education noted by Shaw and Nell Irvin Painter’s work on Sojourner Truth.⁷⁹ As a result, she was able to grow into her womanhood outside of the dangers of the rural South, and fulfill some of the dreams denied to previous generations of African-American women. The fact that L.C. reminded Daisy of her deceased adoptive father gave her the confidence that, like Oralee Smith, this traveling salesman would also love, nurture and care for her. And he did.

Comparing and contrasting the stories Daisy and L.C. wrote and told interviewers about their pre-marital life does not recover all of the details about their life together, but it does construct a general narrative about these critical years. Using November 11, 1913 as Daisy’s date of birth, according to her account she met L.C. sometime in between 1928 and 1929, when she was fifteen. Both also stated that the first three years of their relationship was not romantic. L.C. referred to Daisy as “just a little girl” who he “didn’t think much about” in their first meeting. Daisy herself, said that she was immature. However, L.C.’s attraction to Daisy changed as she grew into a young woman. Neither Daisy nor L.C. was clear about exactly when he expressed romantic interest her, but it is possible that it was around this time, 1931-1932, that he began to pursue her.

⁷⁷ For more on black migrations please see, James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2005); Farah Jasmine Griffin, *“Who set you flowin’?”: The African American Migration Narrative*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Joe William Trotter, jr., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of the Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, (New York: Random House, 2010).

⁷⁸ Shaw, *What A Woman Ought to Be and Do*, 1.

⁷⁹ Painter, *Sojourner Truth*.

The couple's silence about their private life has not prevented others from discussing the matter, and portraying Daisy as a woman willing to use her sexuality to lure an older, married man away from his family. The fact of L.C.'s marriage to another woman, and the couple's silence about their early years has led to speculation about the sexual nature of their relationship. Daisy left little documentation about private matters, and she never discussed her own sexual behavior in any capacity. L.C. was equally as tight-lipped. Quoting a friend and fellow activist from Little Rock, biographer Grif Stockley writes, "each believed there was cause for resentment against the other. From Daisy's perspective, L.C. had robbed the cradle. If Daisy had wanted to, she could 'tell the world that this old man took me and exploited me.' For his part, L.C. believed that 'infidelity was nothing new to her,' so in his mind he hadn't exploited her."⁸⁰ Stockley's presentation implies that Daisy and L.C. had an improper relationship before she left Huttig, and definitely before they moved to Little Rock. He supports this conclusion by the fact that L.C. was married until 1942. However, Stockley uncovered no details about L.C.'s first marriage. Bates fit the era's standard of beauty, but she never explicitly discussed the role her physical appearance played in how she established herself as a credible race leader. While beliefs about an improper relationship may be logical, until new evidence is recovered, the issue of Daisy and L.C.'s private, intimate relationship will remain the unsolved mystery they intended it to be.

While it is ironic, maybe even peculiar, that a woman whose physical beauty was a part of her arsenal left a massive public record completely devoid of any discussion about her physical appearance or sexuality, it is not entirely surprising. Daisy did not

⁸⁰ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 25.

acknowledge her physical beauty, perhaps because she wanted to be taken seriously as a political woman. Gender and racial stereotypes impacted different women in different ways. Just as Ella Baker challenged perceptions about outspoken, educated women, Bates constantly fought to ensure that her physical beauty was not used to disqualify the seriousness of her leadership. The fact that newspaper, magazine and television stories often presented her as an attractive, courageous black woman, may have compelled Bates to downplay her sexuality because the stereotype of the hypersexual black woman could have been used against her.⁸¹

Covering up what happened in the 1930s proved to be a life-long task for the crusading, militant couple. However, neither L.C. nor Daisy could manipulate or control government records. On November 16, 1934, five days after Daisy birthday, the couple was pulled over in Monroe, Louisiana and arrested for “investigation” when a subsequent search of the car revealed a handgun in the vehicle’s glove department.⁸² In terms of their relationship this minor event could not be more valuable because there are virtually no written materials on their happenings before their 1941 move into Little Rock. During the 1957 school crisis, the Little Rock Capital Citizens Council circulated a handbill listing Daisy’s arrest record. Even though their enemies did not understand the potential threat their smear campaign posed, Daisy and L.C. understood that more digging into their past could have unleashed a Pandora’s Box of which they had locked and buried the key at the Tennessee-Arkansas borderline. When asked about her record Daisy laughed. “Some of those things were so minor that I had forgotten them,” she told the *Arkansas*

⁸¹ For examples of writers discussing Daisy Bates’ beauty please see, Bennett Jr., “First Lady of Little Rock”, *Ebony Magazine*, 17-18; Counts, *A Life is More Than a Moment*, xv; Hughes, *Fight For Freedom*, 151; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 164-5.

⁸² Federal Bureau of Investigation, Daisy Bates File, UALR Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Democrat. “I remember the Monroe arrest. I remember that L.C., several relatives, and myself were traveling and a service station operator spotted a gun in the car—and he had a permit to carry the gun.”⁸³ She also added that the only thing the police asked her was her name and she told them “Daisy,” giving no surname. The police were questioning L.C., she clarified, “and assumed that my name was Bates also. I was only 14 and L.C. and I were not married at the time.”⁸⁴ Daisy and L.C.’s cover-up was officially in full swing.

The way Bates presented it, the Monroe arrest was routine and racially motivated, however, when compared to other records, the event takes on a different meaning. Daisy’s spin was crucial to her successful manipulation of the media and the facts of her life. In this scenario, in 1934, they were victims of the menacing Jim Crow system, just as they were the targets of a personal campaign to destroy them in Little Rock. By doing this Daisy was able to brush their arrest off as a minor incident segregationists were using to destroy her and L.C. because they were the leaders of Arkansas’s civil rights movement. In the climate of the 1950s, this was a believable counterargument. However, Daisy’s distortion of the particulars of that day suggests that she did not want the truth known. The F.B.I. file states, “Daisy Bates, a Negro female, 19 born Huttig, Ark, then residing in Memphis, Tenn., was arrested by the Monroe, Louisiana Police Department on a charge of investigation.” The report was signed “Daisy Bates and listed her occupation as ‘housewife.’”⁸⁵ Daisy’s explanation was that it is inconsistent with the police report. Bates understood that the wrong presentation of this matter could produce

⁸³ *Arkansas Democrat*, “Daisy Bates Laughs off Police Record,” December 17, 1957; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 24-5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Daisy Bates File, UALR Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

questions that might have unveiled even more revealing answers about the nature of her relationship with L.C. before their marriage, like the fact that they did not actually marry until 1942. To diffuse those possible inquiries, Bates told the reporter that she and L.C. were not alone and that she was only fourteen years old, neither of which was accurate. The truth is that Daisy and L.C. were alone. He was 33 and she was around 21. The police asked her more than just her name. Either she or L.C. told them that she was a housewife and inferred that they were married because she signed the document with the name “Daisy Bates.” The circumstances of the arrest and Daisy and L.C.’s attempts to rewrite what actually happened during their later, more active years supports the idea that they were in an improper relationship before they moved to Little Rock and got married. The full story may never be known, but the inconsistencies of the story told by L.C and Daisy all but confirm a close, likely romantic relationship between Daisy and L.C. before they relocated. In addition, an improper relationship also explains why they continued to cover up this part of their lives long after their moment in the spotlight had faded.

As an insurance salesman, L.C. spent much of his time away from home. It is possible that Daisy may travelled with L.C. After all, she was unemployed and was not educated. It is equally likely that Daisy and L.C. were in Louisiana to visit Oralee Smith who was being treated for cancer at the Negro hospital in Alexandria. Even though Daisy wrote that she started her relationship with L.C. after Oralee’s death, the truth was that she left Huttig in 1932, five years earlier.

It is not this biographer’s intention to reduce these crucial years of Daisy and L.C.’s life to mere gossip because that development does a disservice to an important couple I admire, and shifts focus away from the heart of the matter which is what they

hid, why they hid it, and what their actions illuminate about the periods of history in question. Long ago, Howard Odum demonstrated the power of rumors, especially when race is involved. How Daisy Bates is remembered is a testament of this reality.⁸⁶ Adding substance to this hugely important gap in Daisy and L.C.'s lives is important because their relentless efforts to conceal this information inflate its importance and helps provide clarity for the cloudiest moment in their lives. From her memoir to public statements, Daisy, to borrow from one historian, inferred that her "public persona is somehow privileged over her personal life."⁸⁷ When examined closely, Daisy's private life is equally if not more valuable than the accolades and praise she left in the archive for the historian. The Monroe arrest complicates how history should write about the militant couple and provides insight in terms of rhetoric and reality during a tumultuous, important era in American history. Writers will focus even more on their affair because it is all they left for scholars to draw insight. The result of their cover-up is that instead of concentrating on the perhaps more vexing issues like where they lived, how long they stayed in different areas and how each of them changed during the 1930s, the historian is left with one fragmented fact that must be read against multiple grains.

On the one hand, Daisy and L.C.'s affair allows historians to criticize their moral and political principles, but, on the other hand, it also tells a story much more complex and potentially more insightful than simple immorality and a lack of control. The couple was bonded by their history and strong political beliefs. Daisy and L.C. developed a deep appreciation for each other's talents, and this respect seems to have been the foundation

⁸⁶ Howard Odum, *Race and Rumors of Race: The American South in the Early Forties*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), "Eleanor Clubs," 67-89.

⁸⁷ Kirk, "Daisy Bates, the National Association of Colored People," 19.

for their complicated relationship. Their short-lived 1963 divorce that resulted from the pressures of their activism is an example of the price some activists paid for their commitment to the freedom movement. Nevertheless, they chose to dissemble about their early years and marriage. Daisy and L.C. dissembled for the same reasons that teenager Claudette Colvin did not become the poster-child for the 1956 Montgomery Movement that made Rosa Parks and Dr. King cultural icons: the anticipation of character attacks, the potential for a negative public perception, and the politics of respectability.

After her relationship with L.C., education is the most glaring omission from the first two chapters of Daisy's autobiography. Throughout her life, Bates stated that she attended high school in Huttig and Memphis, and took classes at Lemoyne College while living there. Her memoir makes no mention of attending high school.⁸⁸ Regarding her adult education, Bates only wrote that she took correspondence courses at Philander Smith College, a school run by the Methodists Church for blacks in Little Rock.⁸⁹ Daisy's adjusted her education to suit her public image. Daisy Bates is known for her courageous fight in the realm of equal education, but she never finished high school, and may not have completed elementary school either. In an early draft of her memoir, Bates wrote that "the Negro school consisted of two rooms with a pot-bellied stove." Bates expressed anger at the inequity of the school system in Huttig, adding "Whenever I see one of these stoves I have the almost uncontrollable urge to smash it with an axe." This last line did not make the final cut, but it tells the reader that the inferior education she

⁸⁸ Daisy Bates interview with Elizabeth Jacoway, October 11, 1976, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, "Documenting the American South, Oral Histories of the American South, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>.

⁸⁹ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 38-9.

received in Huttig was a point of extreme acrimony throughout her life. She would later tell Pulitzer prize winning photographer Brian Lanker, “There were blacks that didn’t understand what was happening to them. This disturbed me an awful lot. There were not enough people who wanted to change, not enough of them to fight for change.”⁹⁰ “I was fighting,” she clarified, “from my understanding of the past.” Sara Evans has written, “The story of women’s struggle to situate themselves in the public and civic life of American society is filled with ironies.”⁹¹ Daisy’s lack of formal education was perhaps the source of her greatest insecurity, and, therefore, also a foundation of her anger. One has to wonder why Daisy felt the need to cover this fact up, as it probably would have added to her moral claim to righting the wrongs of the American education system; for her life served as a testament of the evils and humiliations of Jim Crow.⁹² One of the ways Bates dealt with the issue of a subpar formal education with silence in her memoir, and by telling interviewers that she completed a series of courses at colleges in Memphis and Little Rock. Being great manipulators, the couple seems to have understood that Daisy taking college classes would lead most people to assume that her attendance was a natural progression from high school graduation.

Information about her relationship with L.C. and education are only a few of many secrets from their early years that they bent and twisted to fit the image they wanted history to have of them. Her age was also an area that Daisy and L.C. frequently fabricated. Daisy routinely used 1920 as her date of birth, when she was likely born in

⁹⁰ Brian Lanker, *I Dream A World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1999), 77.

⁹¹ Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America*, (New York: Free Press, 1989), 3.

⁹² In a 1976 with historian Elizabeth Jacoway, Bates stated that she had completed high school in Huttig and took a few college courses afterwards. ; Daisy Bates interview with Elizabeth Jacoway, October 11, 1976, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, “Documenting the American South, Oral Histories of the American South, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>.

1913 or 1914.⁹³ She does not seem to have corrected people who, for whatever reasons, thought she was much younger than her actual age. For example, the *Village Voice* reported that she was an “articulate, attractive woman in her 30s,” when Bates was in fact near the age of fifty.⁹⁴ It is possible that Daisy dissembled her age because she believed that appearing younger would better serve her personal goals, as well as those of the movement. Nevertheless, secrets were central to her existence from inception. Even today, rumors and controversy remain over the identity of her birth parents, the circumstances and year of her mother’s kidnap, rape and murder, why her father abandoned her, and over the possibility that her father may have been white. When all of these things are considered together, their attempts to cover-up their early years makes these secrets essential to understanding their private development as a couple and their public activism. It is almost as if one cannot understand Daisy Bates without addressing the issue of secrets because there is so much information hidden in the crevices of her life.

Conclusion

Placing Daisy and L.C. Bates’ circumstances within the larger context of the era in which they were active helps explicate their story’s gaps and inconsistencies. The Freedom Movement’s insistence on a pristine public image, and its demand for

⁹³ The year of Daisy Bates’ birth continues to be a point of major contention for those interested in studying her life. For more please see, Delayed birth certificate issued by the state of Arkansas, August 10, 1962, Daisy Bates Papers, Box 3, folder 3, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin; Dennis Brindell Fradin and Judith Bloom Fradin, *The Power of One*, 7-9; Amy Pokalow, *Daisy Bates*, 6; Griff Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 16-19.

⁹⁴ *The Village Voice*, February 22, 1962.

impeccable leaders immune to character attacks from white and black opposition, explains why Daisy and L.C. chose dissemblance over disclosure. Huttig was not a place with opportunities for black men or black women. L.C. was her ticket away from a unknown, yet bleak future. Due to the reasons behind their union, and the illicit nature of their early years together, Daisy dissembled and hid her early life. Though her personal reasons for imposing secrets on an important period of her life differ from the movement's other women, the motivation to protect the Freedom Struggle's integrity and public image is something each woman has in common.

Investigating the marriage of this crusading, militant, black newspaper-owning couple from Little Rock, Arkansas who propelled the 2nd poorest state in the country to international name recognition allows historians to identify how Daisy and L.C.'s relationship not only evolved as she was empowered, but also maintained the dimensions that initially drew them together. By concentrating on their understudied private life and the early years of their relationship, the connection between Daisy and L.C.'s public and private lives become more lucid and useful for those interested in studying their lives. The convergence of the private with the public created a dilemma for the couple. Daisy and L.C. projected an image of the perfect marriage, but the past told a different tale. The politics of secrecy that were so central to this era penetrated all facets of American culture, including marriage, the most private and intimate of institutions. Due to this climate where secrets changed and destroyed lives, in the midst of the struggle with violent segregationist in Little Rock, Daisy and L.C. recreated past blemishes that challenged the image of their perfect marriage.

Part Two: Becoming a Team, 1941-1948

Chapter Four:

Selecting a New Home: Prewar Little Rock and the Founding of the *Arkansas State Press*

Chapter Five:

Finding His Voice: L.C. Bates and the *State Press* During World War II

Chapter Six

“One Mell of a Hess:” The Postwar Black Leadership Showdown

Summary: *Finding Their Voice* recovers a critical part of Daisy Bates’ story before she became a public civil rights activist. The couple relocated to Little Rock and started a weekly periodical named the *Arkansas State Press*. Although Daisy wrote that they shared duties at the *State Press*, the paper was really L.C.’s domain. As he made a name for himself and his paper, Daisy was seen as L.C.’s wife. Though supportive, in the early years she was not directly involved in the paper’s daily affairs. Little is known about her political beliefs during these years. However, it does appear that Daisy’s curiosity was piqued during her visits to the *State Press*. When the United States entered World War II, L.C. found the niche and political voice for his newspaper it lacked beforehand.

It is important for this narrative to depart from Daisy during the war years. For starters, the battles L.C. waged through the *State Press* during the war laid a critical, indispensable foundation for Daisy’s later activism. Without L.C. there would have been no *State Press*; arguably, without the *State Press*, Daisy would have lacked the type of supportive and vociferous platform it provided to launch her public political career. *Finding Their Voice* explicates how after a decade, the husband and wife team emerged as controversial African-American civil rights leaders in Arkansas. By 1952, L.C. was editor of the state’s most widely circulated black periodical, and Daisy was elected as the first female president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) Arkansas State Conference (ASC). With her election, a new phase of their partnership began with L.C. and Daisy in the front, and leaders for the national NAACP commented about the potential danger they posed as a team. During these years, Daisy began to really grow in to the “capable” individual L.C. had always believed her to be, and he gladly took a position supporting and mentoring her from the background.

Chapter Four:
Selecting a New Home:
Prewar Little Rock and the Founding of the *Arkansas State Press*

“Until a September day in 1957 Little Rock was a quiet, undistinguished southern city, notable principally as being the capital of the State of Arkansas and for having won several national awards for being one of the cleanest cities of its size.”

---Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 1.

“When I moved to Little Rock, there were ‘good’ relations between Blacks and whites. But that meant that you stay in your place, that you know what the limits are for Daisy Bates. You couldn’t stand up for your rights, because the police wouldn’t protect you.”

---Daisy Bates, quoted in Peter Irons, *Courage of Their Convictions*, 120.

Introduction: Life as Husband and Wife

Moving to Little Rock symbolized a fresh start for L.C., who had the goal to start his own newspaper, and Daisy, who was waiting for him to make her his wife. After enduring a girlhood that was difficult at best, her new life with L.C. in Little Rock set Daisy on the path to self-realization. Some may have viewed her as a trophy wife, but L.C. viewed Daisy as a diamond in the rough. She possessed an outgoing personality and down-to-earth sense of humor that her husband lacked. In addition, Daisy was passionate about issues that mattered to her, and had an ability to absorb information easily. Perhaps most important, although uneducated, Daisy was extremely articulate. She spoke in a clear, convicted manner, and lacked the trademark southern accent for which children of the Deep South, in particular, are known. L.C. displayed a genius and mastery of the written word. Daisy had a gift for speaking them. Nevertheless, during these years, as L.C. worked day and night to make the *State Press* a success, Daisy had a visible presence in the community, but did not possess a public profile independent of her husband’s status as the owner and editor of the *State Press*. This chapter discusses a

brief, but important period of transition for L.C. and Daisy. It provides background about Arkansas and Little Rock during the period when Daisy and L.C. relocated from Memphis to Little Rock. This context is important to understanding their subsequent activism because it provides a necessary historical foundation for analyzing the couple's rise in the city of Little Rock and their interactions with different elements of the African-American community in the decade preceding the 1957 integration crisis.

Relocating to Little Rock

Sometime between 1939 and 1940, L.C. and Daisy relocated from Memphis to Little Rock. L.C. wanted to start his paper, and his visits to Little Rock gave him the confidence that it was a place ripe for a crusading black periodical. In addition to the problem his relationship with Daisy could have created for him in Memphis, where his wife and parents resided, the decision to relocate was also based on the fact the city already had a respected black paper, the *Tri State Defender*. If L.C. was going to start his paper, he had to position himself in place that lacked a militant periodical. L.C. was in search of a location with a void that he could fill. Based on his previous visits, he decided that Little Rock was the place because its black papers were moderate, even conservative.

With his ambitions, and his beautiful mistress, L.C. relocated a few hundred miles southwest, into Arkansas's capital city. Daisy was somewhat ostentatious with the privileges she enjoyed, which were rare for African-American women in the 1940s. She presented herself with dignity and gave the off the air of a woman who descended from a respectable pedigree. She did not work, had an active social life, and wore the latest

fashions. Daisy was never seen without ample make up, and was regular at the local black beauty shops. Christopher Mercer, Daisy's lawyer during the school crisis told one biographer, "Daisy was a very, very attractive woman. You know...She fit the limelight well. She wore very good clothes. Always ready to take a picture. Not gaudy or suggestive."⁹⁵ Daisy Bates' presentation of self was like an instruction manual for how she expected to be treated. This image—the glamorous, educated, respectable middle class woman— was one Daisy and her life partner, L.C., had worked hard to create.

L.C. believed that Little Rock needed a militant black newspaper because he knew that the city's civil, moderate image cloaked a reality that it possessed a history of racial violence and discrimination against blacks that was more alike, than dissimilar to the rest of the South. By the time he arrived in Arkansas's largest and capital city, L.C. was a seasoned man who had seen the whole country and had lived a quiet, invigorating life. Near 40 years in age, L.C. had learned from the failure of his first paper, *The Western Ideal*. That experience gave him clarity about his vision for the *State Press*. L.C. continued to sell insurance in Little Rock, but had never given up on his dream of running his own paper. Moreover, he had been to the "City of Roses" enough times to make a pretty convincing case to Daisy for starting the *State Press*. L.C. presented the paper as an opportunity and a potential vehicle to empower the black masses to stand up and fight for their rights. With passion and vision as his primary weapons, L.C. made his case to Daisy; she should help him make the *State Press* the black community's militant voice.⁹⁶ "If [Negroes] want a paper, they will support it," Daisy recollected L.C. saying.

⁹⁵ Grif Stockley, Interview with Christopher Mercer, January 16, 2002. Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock Arkansas.

⁹⁶ Throughout the 1940s, most notably during battle with Little Rock's black leadership, L.C. pleaded with his readers to support the *State Press*. The paper is filled with statements like "support your paper." L.C.

And, “If [Negroes] do not support it, we’ll cease publication.”⁹⁷ L.C. believed that the Little Rock’s black community would support a black-owned newspaper if he reported the truth and could be trusted that he would not “sell out.” This sentiment was expressed in the objectives stated in *State Press*’s first editorial: “The ARKANSAS STATE PRESS is occupying a position of confidence and reliability in this city and throughout the state... We are interested in giving information concerning the important happenings among our people in community, state and nation.”⁹⁸ He told Daisy that he wanted to establish the “newspaper for Negroes.”⁹⁹ On May 9, 1941, they published the first edition of the *Arkansas State Press*.

When Daisy Lee Gatson and Luscious Christopher Bates arrived in Little Rock, like the rest of the world, it was in the midst of change. They moved at the start of a decade when “a large number of newcomers” were changing the “small, homogenous city.”¹⁰⁰ A mostly rural state, Arkansas was falling behind the rest of the nation in population, and in attracting new industry. Nineteen-forty census records report that a slim majority of the state’s 1,949,387 residents still lived on farms. By 1950, the percentage of state residents living on farms fell to 35 percent, and the population had dropped to 1,909,511, a loss of over 50,000 residents.¹⁰¹ C. Calvin Smith, an admirer of L.C. Bates, and historian of the changes Arkansas experienced during the war has

went as far to write an editorial that explained how newspapers ran and why he could not give away free space in his paper. L.C. worked extremely hard to make the *State Press* a success.

⁹⁷ Daisy Bates, Unpublished Draft of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, Daisy Bates Papers, microfilm, reel one, chapter three, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin; Wassell, “L.C. Bates,” 20.

⁹⁸ L.C. Bates, “To Our Friends and Patrons,” *Arkansas State Press*, May 9, 1941.

⁹⁹ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 34.

¹⁰⁰ Fred Williams, “Class: The Central Issue in the 1957 Little Rock School Crisis,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, (Vol. LVI, No. 3, Autumn 1997), 341.

¹⁰¹ S. Charles Bolton, Carl Moneyhon, C. Fred Williams, Leroy T. Williams eds, *A Documentary History of Arkansas*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 1984), 213.

written, “In late 1939, the state, with a population of almost two million, had 90,000 unemployed persons and 67,000 employed on only a part-time basis. An additional 30,000 were on the direct relief rolls of the federal government.”¹⁰² Adding salt to the wound, Arkansas also lost one member in the House of Representatives. Out of the seven states which lost population in the 1940s, Arkansas lost the highest percentage.¹⁰³ In 1940, the effects of the Depression were visibly still being felt in Arkansas, but Little Rock represented hopes of growth and regeneration.

While the rest of the state experienced damaging population losses, Little Rock was growing because blacks from across rural Arkansas migrated to the state’s most urban, industrialized and populous capital city. As the state of Arkansas saw losses in its black residents, Little Rock was an important exception. Black in-migration and white outmigration created a potential black power base in the center of the state. By the time L.C. and Daisy arrived in Little Rock about 25 percent of its 88,000 inhabitants were black. Pulaski County, where Little Rock is located, saw a 7.4 percent increase in its black population during the Depression years and a 9.1 percent increase during the war decade.¹⁰⁴ Poor quality and availability of education and a dearth of jobs were just tips of the iceberg in Arkansas, affecting all sides of the color line. In addition to the dearth of jobs, the Census figures also reveal that only 8.7 percent of Arkansans over the age of twenty-five “had completed four years of high school,” a number not even close to the 14.1 percent national average. Only L.C.’s home state of Mississippi graduated less of its

¹⁰² C. Calvin Smith, *War and Wartime Changes: The Transformation of Arkansas, 1940-1945*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1986), 1, 29.

¹⁰³ Bolton, *A Documentary History of Arkansas*, 222

¹⁰⁴ Berna J. Love, *End of the Line: A History of Little Rock’s West Ninth Street*, (Little Rock: Center for Arkansas Studies, 2003), 19.

children from high school.¹⁰⁵ These numbers help explain why Arkansas experienced an outmigration while the rest of the nation experienced a boom. University of Arkansas historian Benjamin F. Johnson, III reminds us that Arkansas underwent “disproportionately white” population losses in the 1930s, but “the massive exodus during the 1940s bore away about 20 percent of Arkansas whites...” During the 1940s, Arkansas lost 11.5 percent of its black population, dropping from 482,578 to 426,636 by the end of the decade¹⁰⁶ Many of Little Rock’s blacks went to Chicago because, as one of them put it “You could find a job in Chicago.”¹⁰⁷ The struggling economy made it even harder for last-hired-first-fired blacks to find work in Arkansas. Despite the overall outmigration of Arkansas African-Americans, a black base was building due to the high number of white relocations outside of the state.

The vast majority of the blacks who made their way to Little Rock were from rural areas, but some, like L.C. and Daisy were from other cities, north and south, in search of economic opportunities unavailable in their current locations. L.C. was looking for an urban southern location with a market for his type of newspaper. The historian John A. Kirk attributes black interest in Little Rock to “the collectivization and mechanization” of the agricultural sector, which was the engine that drove the rural state. Kirk also asserts that the changes in agriculture “displaced many black farmers,” yet also “swelled the black populations of southern towns and cities.”¹⁰⁸ One affect of this trend was that “blacks were less isolated and vulnerable to white attack.” Another result was

¹⁰⁵ Bolton, *A Documentary History of Arkansas*, 221.

¹⁰⁶ Ben F. Johnson, III, *Arkansas in Modern America, 1930-1999*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 52;

¹⁰⁷ Love, *End of the Line*, 15, 17.

¹⁰⁸ John A. Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 17.

the arrival of significant black population unfamiliar with the established black guard. This development benefited newcomers like Daisy and L.C., who were also seeking to establish themselves at a time when Little Rock was in flux. In some ways, Little Rock's new blacks would learn Little Rock along with the newspaper editors. In this fluctuating, unstable environment, ambitious L.C. tapped into and mobilized the "growing mass urban base."¹⁰⁹ Where others saw devastation, L.C. saw a golden opportunity to realize his dream and make a nice living for himself and his future wife.

L.C. thought Little Rock was a good place to start his a newspaper precisely because when he was a younger man he had seen the southern city at its very worst. Plus, "He knew a lot about the city and 'liked it,'" he later relayed to his biographer, Irene Wassell.¹¹⁰ He also told Wassell about what he saw the first time he went to Arkansas's state capital. On May 4, 1927, exactly one week after his 26th birthday, L.C. was in Little Rock selling insurance. During this first visit he witnessed the city's streets being run by violent, angry, blood-thirsty white mobs, just as it would be 30 years later during the school desegregation crisis. L.C. never forgot the image of 38 year old John Carter's tortured, body burning on the corner of West 9th and Broadway Street, right in the center of the black business district, while horrified spectators watched.¹¹¹ The lynching of John Carter exposed L.C. to the cauldron of hate that could erupt in Arkansas, and to the type of physical and psychological warfare blacks in Arkansas were subject to. With the influx of new blacks, L.C. set out to expose the truth about Arkansas's good race relations, and debunk Little Rock's moderate image.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*

¹¹⁰ Wassell, "L.C. Bates," 14.

¹¹¹ For the lynching of John Carter please see, John A. Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); Grif Stockley, *Blood in Their Eyes*, 228-32;

Like L.C, Daisy could not bear to watch her people get treated so inhumanely without recourse. They were a part of generation of blacks whose assertion of their civil and human rights had evolved from the generations of degenerate treatment which preceded them.¹¹² Award winning historian Edward Ayers writes, “The black children and grandchildren, of the New South generation maintained and then intensified their ancestors’ struggle for black rights.”¹¹³ Though Daisy described Little Rock as “a quiet, undistinguished southern city” in her memoir, later statements lead historians to believe that this presentation may have been adopted to sensationalize her story, and market her book to a wider audience.¹¹⁴ Later in her life, Daisy clarified her feelings about race relations in Little Rock upon her arrival. “When I moved to Little Rock, there were ‘good’ relations between Blacks and whites. But that meant that you stay in your place, that you know what the limits are for Daisy Bates. You couldn’t stand up for your rights, because the police wouldn’t protect you.”¹¹⁵ Daisy had always been angered by her people’s inability to protect themselves, and by the limits placed on them by southern whites. She and L.C. understood that they were fighting against a history much bigger than each of them. In many ways, as they challenged the black and white establishments, Daisy and L.C. are perhaps described as Little Rock’s “New Negroes;” controversial, uncompromising figures determined to voice their dissatisfaction with the status quo.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Robert Norrell’s, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee*: (New York: Vintage, 1985), is a great study of the relationship between established and newer generations of leadership.

¹¹³ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 438.

¹¹⁴ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 1;---Unpublished Draft of the *Long Shadow of Little Rock*, DBP, SHSW

¹¹⁵ Daisy Bates, quoted in Peter Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, (New York: Free Press, 1988), 120.

¹¹⁶ For more on the “New Negro”, please see Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2007); Marcus Garvey, “Speech Delivered at Liberty Hall, N.Y.C., During Second International Convention of Negroes,” August 1921,

Born and raised during the era Rayford Logan termed the “nadir,” Daisy and L.C. were a part of “a new generation of black southerners [who] shared with the survivors of enslavement a sharply proscribed and deteriorating position in a South bent on commanding black lives and black labor by any means necessary.”¹¹⁷ Together, they set out to dismantle the culture of Jim Crow and the individuals and systems which maintained it. When L.C. told Daisy he wanted to start a paper she replied that it had to “stand for something,” that she would not support a “Negro paper” that was “begging sheets with a don’t rock the boat attitude.” L.C. responded, “Why do you think I want to start one in the first place.”¹¹⁸

Making a Name in Little Rock

Even if she was more of an observer than an active participant, Daisy received an important education during the war years. Being around the office of the *State Press* exposed Daisy events happening locally, nationally, and globally. While still an observer, rather than a participant, Daisy began to develop a political understanding of the issues confronting African-Americans in the Jim Crow South. The narrative Bates wrote was intended to capture how she developed a political philosophy during World War II, further preparing her to be a courageous leader for her race. The *State Press*

from Amy Jacques-Garvey, ed., *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1968), 93-97, 237-39; *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation and African-American Culture, 1892-1938*, Henry Louis Gates and Andrew Jarret, eds., (Princeton: University Press, 2007); David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, (New York: Penguin, 1997); Elaine Locke, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, (New York: Touchtone, 1991);

¹¹⁷ Quote is from Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, (New York: Random House, 1998), xiv. L.C. might have told Daisy about the lynching of John Carter. Research notes for her memoir left in her personal papers contain information about the 1927 lynching. It is unclear if Daisy had any knowledge before they moved to Little Rock.

¹¹⁸ Wassell, “L.C. Bates,” 15.

provided Daisy with her first serious engagement with how her life experiences were connected to larger political struggles happening domestically and globally.

To start the *State Press*, L.C. needed capital and a place to print it, which was another reason why he continued to sell advertising, where he was “making a lot of money.” They spent \$12,000 to get the *State Press* into publication. L.C. told his biographer that half of that amount came from selling his Memphis home. It is unclear if L.C. owned a home in Memphis. His account of events raises questions about how he could have sold his home while still married to her first wife. L.C. also stated that a portion of the sum came from his personal savings, and another part came from unknown shareholders. It also appears that Daisy had “some money of her own, which L.C. wanted her to invest in the paper.” It is possible that Daisy received a sum of money after the passing of her adoptive father, who was a military veteran. After securing the capital and investors, L.C. could not afford to print the paper on his own and, as a result, initially ran his paper out of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, on Ninth and Chester streets. The church had a plant and printing press from running the *Twin City Press*, which L.C. bought out. Learning from the experience with his failed paper in Colorado, L.C. made sure that the *State Press* “was in no way affiliated with the church or its newsletter.”¹¹⁹

Listening to Daisy and L.C., one might gather that Little Rock was devoid of a newspaper for its 88,000 Negro inhabitants. In fact, the city had three black-run newspapers prior to the founding of the *State Press*: The *Arkansas Survey Journal*, The *Southern Mediator Journal* and the *Twin City Press*. L.C. saw these papers as part of the problem because they did not report the full reality of local discrimination in their pages.

¹¹⁹ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 38; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 25, 28; Wassell, “L.C. Bates,” 14-15.

For L.C., conservative black newspapers left a void in the black community that desperately needed filling. None of the black papers spoke for the African-American community's militant faction. Daisy and L.C. would become that voice. After operating out of the church for two years, L.C. moved the *State Press* to its new location at 610 West Ninth Street, in the heart of the black business district. At first L.C. printed the papers through the white-owned Keith Printing Company. However, after the owner tried to tell L.C. what he could and could not print, L.C. partnered with the white-owned, but apolitical Bass Printing Company, who stayed out of the business of writing of newspapers, and stuck to printing them.¹²⁰ L.C. had his paper and Little Rock blacks had a new, thunderous platform to express their grievances with Jim Crow.

Prior to relocating to West Ninth Street, L.C. worked around the clock to make the *State Press* a profitable venture. The couple lived in a rooming house already occupied by a black couple and their children. Shortly after Daisy and L.C. moved to Little Rock, he invited his cousin, Lottie Brown (now Mrs. Neely) to come stay at the rooming house. When Neely moved to Little Rock, she became the first member of L.C.'s family to not only meet Daisy, but the first to become aware of her presence in his life. L.C. wanted Lottie to help him with the paper. Now married, Mrs. Lottie Neely recalls that the rooming house was so crowded that she sometimes had to "sleep with the children of the establishment's owners."¹²¹ From 1941-1945, Mrs. Neely proofread each edition of the *State Press* before it went to final printing, and sometimes worked as a photographer. Mrs. Neely also remembered that the early months of the *State Press* were not lucrative, but L.C. showed his genuine appreciation for the help his cousin had given

¹²⁰ Wassell, "L.C. Bates," 14-15.

¹²¹ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 36-7.

him. “When Daisy and L.C. were just starting out, they didn’t have the money to pay me, but later I was paid twelve and fifteen dollars a week.” In addition to paying her a nice salary, the grateful and generous L.C. continued pay his cousin’s living expenses at the rooming house.¹²²

With cousin Lottie’s help, the first edition of the *Arkansas State Press* hit Little Rock’s streets. At this time, their “horse and buggy operation” employed “two printers, two secretaries and one reporter.”¹²³ In addition to running the paper’s daily affairs, L.C. also edited, wrote articles, and served as a typesetter and photographer. He also sold advertising. Overwhelmed by the paper’s rapid growth, about one month into the operation, L.C. hired a full-time advertising salesman. Working until almost “two o’clock in the morning,” Mrs. Neely remembered that L.C. lived for his paper. Sometimes he would stop working only to pick up a sandwich from a nearby restaurant. L.C. was working to make his dream come true.

While L.C. worked tirelessly at the *State Press*, Daisy was unemployed, lived as a housewife, and appears to have enjoyed an active social and night life. When Lottie met Daisy in 1941, she was a 27 year old “playgirl.”¹²⁴ Over sixty years after their first meeting, Mrs. Neely had clear memories of the heroine from Little Rock. She described Daisy as “very beautiful woman, about five feet four inches tall, with long pretty hair.”¹²⁵ “Daisy was sweet, really nice person, and people just loved her,” she recalled. Daisy had an impulsive, “childish” side that made children “crazy” about her. As she would throughout her life, Daisy kept up with the fashion of the times. Lottie “liked the way

¹²² *Ibid*, 39.

¹²³ Wassell, “L.C. Bates,” 16.

¹²⁴ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 38.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*

she dressed” because it was “so up to date.” Daisy clearly loved clothes, but she was also very “generous. Neely described Daisy was the type of person who would “give you the clothes off her back.”¹²⁶ She gave Lottie many items from her personal closet. In addition to a love for fashion, Daisy also loved to eat. Two of her favorite foods were “fried greens and candied yams. In the latter half of 1941, while L.C. worked to establish himself in their new home, Daisy enjoyed the night life. L.C. had little interest in the night life and was consumed by the newspaper. During the day, Daisy supposedly read and did her hair and makeup. At night, she regularly hung out with her growing circle of friends. She felt she could come and go as she pleased because at the time L.C. was still married to his first wife Cassandra. It appears that Daisy sometimes threw this into L.C.’s face when she took his car to go out with her friends and he would tell her what time to return. “She loved flirt with guys”, Neely recalls, and would “get mad and sometimes throw a saucer plate at his head” when she felt like he was treating her like his child and not his future wife.¹²⁷

Daisy’s proclivities show how different she was from her husband. Their personalities were like night and day. “Daisy was more extroverted than L.C.,” who “had a dry sense of humor. He was not as much of an exhibitionists as Daisy,” who “was a very, very attractive woman....LC was content to let her have the limelight. He did not show any signs of marital jealousy, but he always stood his ground. He did not move out of the way for anyone,” Mercer affirmed. Due to the fact that she “never had a childhood,” during the early years of the *State Press*, Daisy was “determined to make up for it by having as much fun as possible.” L.C. understood Daisy’s needs and supported

¹²⁶ *Ibid*

¹²⁷ Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 37-9; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 25, 28; Wassell, “*L.C. Bates*,” 14.

her desires and development. In his 1962 letter he wrote, “I did my best for you and give you the benefit of what little I did know and have.” He was happy that she did not “earn one dime” until after the war.¹²⁸ He provided a good life for himself and for Daisy, and that made him feel extremely proud. “Do not get me wrong,” he clarified, “I did not want you to help me earn anything.” It is possible that, as he stated shortly before his death, Daisy kept “the books and [oversaw] the paper boys.” In terms of the *State Press*, Irby Jones, the first black medical student at the University of Arkansas recalled that Daisy “did whatever was necessary” to get the paper out, and “did not act ‘wifey’ about her role. “If it was cleaning and mopping the floor...if it was supervising...she acted like an employee.” Before taking a more active role as “City Editor” in 1945, Daisy enjoyed life as the wife of a newspaper editor, but became more active in the paper as her confidence grew.¹²⁹

While providing for Daisy, L.C. was waging a vicious attack against Jim Crow. During its first year, the *State Press* lacked a clear strategy of how relay a message that could help him make inroads in the local community. L.C. believed “newspapers should serve the public as vehicles for progressive social change, as distributors of the truth, and as defenders of social justice and equality.”¹³⁰ L.C.’s uncertainty as to the best way of confronting Jim Crow is evidenced in the *State Press*’s first edition, which celebrated black women for Mother’s Day. The paper attacked the entire Jim Crow system, as Daisy later put it.¹³¹ The *State Press*’s editorial page clarified the paper’s philosophy:

[the] only paper in Arkansas with a program to liberate the Negro from his state of oppression. It stands for honesty, justice, and fair play, and stands behind what it stands for...The opinion of the editorial staff demands respect...It is worshipped by liberty-loving groups and feared by

¹²⁸ L.C. Bates to Daisy Bates, December 10, 1962

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Smith, *War and Wartime Changes*, 255-6.

¹³¹ Daisy Bates, Interview with Elizabeth Jacoway, October 11, 1976.

oppressors...It is reliable, and believes when readers pay for news, they are entitled to the news without alteration.¹³²

The first edition sold 1,500 copies. Through the *State Press*, L.C. commanded blacks to stop “begging” whites, and start demanding their constitutional rights as Americans.

Still, in its early months, the paper did not have a clear strategy.¹³³

Studying the *State Press* immediately before and after WWII clarifies the events and issues that drove a political and personal wedge between L.C. and Daisy and established local black leaders. As readers responded positively to the *State Press*, and circulation eventually grew to over 20,000 copies each week, L.C.’s attacks on the Negro leaders grew noticeably more direct and aggressive. The increasing support the newspaper received from the local community emboldened L.C. For him, purchasing the *State Press* was a political act, and a sight that the masses desired not just a voice, but actual changes to Little Rock’s power structure. Blacks understood the heightened meaning of change in the context of global war; old-style leadership within a new more militant climate foreshadowed conflict.¹³⁴

Conclusion: Stirring the Pot

When L.C. published the first edition on May 9, 1941, he entered Little Rock’s black leadership pool. The city’s Negro elite controlled the black agenda, and had a history which stretched back to slavery. Educators formed roughly half the group, followed by religious leaders, and a “handful of doctors, pharmacists, dentist, lawyers,

¹³² *Arkansas State Press*, Editorial Page.

¹³³ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 36; Wassell, “L.C. Bates,” 22.

¹³⁴ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 7; While this chapter deals with Daisy Bates and her leadership, her transformation should be seen in conjunction with larger changes occurring at the same time. As the war progressed, Savage argues, radio became a medium under which Blacks broadcasted their discontent with American racism and the contradiction’s the Double-V campaign set out to expose.

and journalists.” These “Aristocrats of Color,” as historian Willard Gatewood has called them, often descended from “free people of color or privileged slaves.”¹³⁵ Most lived in interracial neighborhoods, and defined their status through intermarriage with other prestigious Negro families. The children of Little Rock’s Negro upper class, “often attended prestigious white and black colleges, like Yale, Harvard, Oberlin, Wilberforce and Talladega.”¹³⁶ This group controlled the Black community’s political agenda, and generally adopted a policy of slow progress as best. L.C. had to either work with this group whose politics he did not generally share, or wrestle power away from them. It quickly became clear that *State Press*’s militant approach to civil rights could not coexist with the black elite’s slow, moderate philosophy.

Part of their attack on the established black guard involved deceiving others about their past. L.C. must have understood that they were not going to become power players in Little Rock through traditional channels. For starters, neither had completed a college degree, and both lacked the influence that came with being born into a influential black family. The *State Press* gave Daisy and L.C. an alternative entrance into the black political domain. After getting one foot in the door, they made their case for their confrontational leadership, and used the support of their paper as evidence of a growing demand among local blacks. When L.C. and Daisy entered this leadership pool they confronted tradition, as well as their personal history. The black elite would have had a field day with knowledge of their past infidelity, the fact that the couple lived together for almost ten years before getting married, and with her lack of formal education. This reality hardly qualified either of them to be a part of the black elite. How they presented

¹³⁵ Willard Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 93-5

¹³⁶ *Ibid*; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 15.

their past, and acted in the present in their new home had significant implications for their future. The classist structure of black society in Little Rock was unfortunate, but also, like all others aspects of culture, a product of history. In actuality, Daisy's difficult past made her more than qualified to speak for the downtrodden of her race. After all, she had lost both natural parents to a history and tradition of southern racial and sexual violence. Daisy was angered by the powerlessness of her people. L.C. had rejected his place in the world of educated blacks when he left Wilberforce to find his place in the newspaper world. L.C.'s education may have been comparable to some members of the black elite. He went to a private grammar school and attended high school at an accredited college. Nevertheless, Daisy and L.C. had little-to-no choice but to bury their secret past, or risk being discredited from within and outside of the race. L.C. battles with white and black opposition taught Daisy that a successful local movement must embrace supporting whites and challenge complicit African-American leadership. However, before Daisy could join L.C. publicly, she needed some formal education and training to compliment her personal strengths.

Chapter Five:
Finding His Voice:
L.C. Bates and the *State Press* During World War II

THE DAY WE HOPE FOR

When we live in peace and harmony with one another—irrespectively of race, color, creed, former servitude or present positioning life, without mythical tolerance, but in spirit of Good Will assured in the conviction of our better judgment that we will remit to every man the indomitable rights to the admonition of his own conscience in what ever line of endeavor he pursues for his religious or material existence. When that day arrives we will be contented. Then, we all can boast of our CIVILIZATION. And not until then.

—L.C. Bates, *Arkansas State Press* Editorial Page Mission Statement

Introduction: Using the War to Find a Niche

The combination of relocating to Little Rock, starting the *State Press*, and the United States' entrance into World War II changed L.C. and Daisy's lives as both individuals and as a couple. During the War, L.C. began the process of centralizing an already-burgeoning, militant local black movement around their uncompromising leadership and controversial newspaper, the *Arkansas State Press*. Working like an architect designing a massive skyscraper, L.C. mercilessly attacked the oppressive Jim Crow system, and all individuals and groups that supported its maintenance. Through blistering weekly editorials and sensationalized reporting, that became a hallmark of the growing black press, during the war, the *State Press* addressed issues like educational inequality, racial discrimination, global colonialism, foreign and domestic fascism, police brutality, and the challenges all posed to an American democracy blemished by Jim Crow segregation.

Little Rock's racial milieu during World War Two gave the *State Press* an identity in the area of racial politics. The *State Press* championed black teacher's

movement for equal pay. Police brutality against black soldiers was also a frequent front-page headline, just as it was in the national black press. Closely examining the *State Press*'s coverage of the maltreatment of black men in uniform with challenges made in the area of education elucidates the paper's similarity to other black periodicals. The national black press movement that occurred during the war years impacted local movements in measurable ways, and helped set the stage for the Freedom Movement's outcomes and victories in subsequent decades. During the war, Daisy and L.C. focused their energies on exposing established black leadership as an impediment to racial progress. In the post-war years Daisy slowly took a more visible, public role in racial politics, and began her transformation into the daring woman history remembers. However, the war created a level of instability, and L.C. responded by bellowing discontent. He used the *State Press* to clarify where he stood in the battle for human rights, expose the liabilities of traditional black leadership, and position himself and his wife to become recognized and respected leaders in Arkansas's black community.

This chapter addresses the challenges newcomers Daisy and L.C. endured while trying to establish themselves as respected voices in the Little Rock black community during the war years. L.C. capitalized on the opportunity the fury of war created, and became instrumental to the growing, local black insurgency. Throughout the war, black American's demand to be treated with human dignity swept across the nation's cities, north and south.¹ The *Arkansas State Press* will be examined on two levels—how it

¹For black dissent and thought during the war years please see, Beth Thompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: African Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and*

allowed Daisy and L.C. to become local leaders, and as an example of the rise of the black press during World War II.

The episodes Daisy selected for this particular section of her memoir continued the self-construction started in the chapter about her childhood. The stories she selected for this period in her life also reinforced the theme of the gendered nature of racial oppression. Bates was consistent in her discussion of her parallel themes of individual and group empowerment. Titling the chapter “Across My Desk,” Daisy exaggerated her role at the *State Press*. However, by centering this portion of her memoir on the battles L.C. was fighting at the *State Press*, Daisy suggested that his actions were important to understanding her political development, influencing the direction of her civil rights activism. *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* is silent about their actual transition from Memphis to Little Rock, and devoid of any discussion about their personal lives before and after starting the *State Press*. Daisy’s account focuses on the political actions of the *State Press* and the black community during World War II. She paints the portrait of an African-American community that grew into a local political tour-de-force during the period of transition and uncertainty created by the war. Daisy also positions herself, L.C., and the *State Press* at the center of the changes that happened inside of the black community, and around Little Rock. Although she embellished her participation in the events that took place in Little Rock during World War II, Bates’ recollections about the period accurately recaptured the political changes that were occurring as a result of the global conflict.

“a real breakthrough”

Daisy Bates’ account of her life during World War II used the issue of police brutality to emphasize the pernicious levels of racial violence that existed in Little Rock. Bates also addressed the *State Press*’s role in local black activism. She painted the portrait of an African-American community that supported their newspaper, tactics, and leadership on racial matters; long before the 1957 school desegregation crisis, which was her memoir’s focal point. Even though appearing educated was central to her public persona, the ways Bates discussed and ignored her own education is similar to the discussion in “Rebirth”; it is brief and peripheral. Although it was L.C.’s efforts that made the *State Press* a political organ reflective of his readers’ desire for a just and integrated American South, Daisy placed herself close to the center of the local movement that occurred in 1940s Little Rock. Racial oppression and police violence against Little Rock black residents was rife during World War II. “There was no lack of causes for which to crusade,” Daisy remembered in her memoir, “Police brutality was rampant. Negroes were beaten unmercifully by the city police of Little Rock at the slightest provocation. This seemed the most urgent cause to which we should devote our crusade.” Daisy also recalled that the campaign went on “relentlessly and fruitlessly...until World War II was declared [and] a series of local events enabled us to make a real breakthrough.”²

After the United States entered World War II, the Army reopened Camp Robinson in North Little Rock, and the presence of black men in military uniforms in Little Rock at night and on the weekends escalated racial tensions. Conflicts between black soldiers and white police officers culminated in the March 1942 murder of an

² Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 34.

African-American sargent right in the center of West Ninth Street. “With the huge increase in business profits,” from the patronage of black servicemen, Daisy wrote, “came a huge increase in police brutality to Negroes. The city police had a field day beating the Negro soldiers who came into town on weekend passes...The *State Press* printed stories. Citizens protested. Nothing happened.”³ Many of Camp Robinson’s soldiers, Bates remembered, were born in northern states, were unaccustomed to southern segregation, and often complained to their superiors about the discriminatory treatment they were receiving in Little Rock. “Army officials,” she recounted “showed no interest” in what they called “purely ‘civilian’ affairs,” and as a result, Little Rock’s racial tension reached a fevered pitch just four months into the war.

The murder of Army Sargent Thomas P. Foster, in March 1942, is central to Arkansas’s racial history during World War II.⁴ His death was perhaps the most egregious of all the incidents involving black soldiers in Little Rock because it happened on West Ninth Street in front of the Little Rock black community. Not only did this incident impact Daisy and L.C., but more importantly, the local black masses. In her memoir Bates wrote that by the time she arrived on the scene after Foster’s murder, “hundreds of citizens had already gathered.”⁵ The black community was clearly in shock. She vividly recalled the size of the crowd that had witnessed the sargent’s murder, and the pervasive, collective silence under which they all mourned. Some, including a Negro soldier standing next to Bates cried in a painfully penetrating silence.

³ *Ibid*, 34-5.

⁴ The account Daisy recounted regarding Sargent Foster appears accurate. For more see, Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 49-52; *Arkansas Gazette*, March 24, 1942; “Report of Citizens Committee of Greater Little Rock, Arkansas, March 29, 1942,” 3-4, group II, series B, container 152, in “Soldier Killing Foster, Thomas B. 1942” folder, NAACP Paper, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Roy Wilkins to Wendell Berge, April 10, 1942; Thurgood Marshall to Scipio Jones, April 30, 1942; Thurgood Marshall to John A. Hibbler, May 1, 1942, II, B, 152, NAACP Papers, LOC.

⁵ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 35.

And as the ambulance drove off with Sergeant Foster's "bullet-ridden body," he broke his silence, yelling, "Why should we go over there and fight?," as he violently threw his Army cap to the ground. Madly stomping on this symbol of American democracy with what Bates described as "irreverence and bitterness," he shouted in a visceral and deafening tone, "These are the sons of bitches we should be fighting!"⁶ For Daisy, the soldier's action was a critique of American Democracy and Jim Crow. "I knew," she declared, "that the cap represented every white person who had ever called him 'nigger.'" The soldier's damage to a symbol of the American Republic during wartime was a rebuke engendered from "all the suppressed emotion of a lifetime of oppression."⁷ In this brief description, Bates demonstrated how black political assertion and the roots of African-American militancy were first planted in the childhoods of individuals, and revived by egregious, inhumane acts of violence committed by southern whites when they reached adulthood.

After placing herself on the scene of Sargent Foster's murder, Daisy implied that she participated in writing the story that appeared in the *State Press* and for starting the crusade for action from city officials that followed its aggressive reporting. It is unclear if she wrote the article. It is possible that the story that appeared in the *State Press* was written from Daisy's notes and reporting. By whom, she does not clarify. "With my notebook in hand", she wrote, "I hurried back to the office...There later appeared the following story."⁸ Titled "CITY PATROLMAN SHOOTS NEGRO SOLDIER: Body Riddled While Lying on the Ground," the story was not written by Daisy as she wrote. It is likely that the writer was L.C. The article certainly could not have been printed

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid*, 36.

without his approval. According to Daisy's memoir, the story upset the white businesses that depended on revenue generated from black soldiers, and "outraged" the black community, who were infuriated by "the hush-hush pleadings of the businessmen who wished to gloss over the brutality."⁹ The white community responded to the *State Press*'s crusade for justice with economic reprisals against the paper. In Daisy's words, "The newspaper suffered its first crippling blow in the struggle for human rights and dignity." As she would throughout her life, Bates placed herself at the center of events happening around her.

While Daisy may have embellished her role at the *State Press* during the war, she also recognized L.C. as the engine behind the operation. When segregationists first attacked the paper due their coverage of Sargent Foster's murder, Daisy remembered being discouraged. "I was tempted to pack up and leave Little Rock," she wrote. "Let's quit while we still have train fare," she recalled telling L.C. In the first month of their secret marriage, L.C. smiled and stated, "Things aren't that bad, Daisy... We still have a reserve in the *State Press* account, and of course, our savings." If these assets could not sustain the paper, L.C. promised to "try taking the paper to the people... We won't get rich but at least we'll be able to make a living. And what's more important we'll be able to publish a free and independent paper."¹⁰ Daisy wrote that the *State Press* made police brutality its number one issue, and "struck a responsive note among those who had long" suffered "in silence and shame from crude injustice of the police."¹¹ The Little Rock black community, she declared, "found a voice to express their feeling," and, after a few months, the newspaper's subscriptions increased to 20,000. By acknowledging her

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 37.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

doubts during the *State Press*'s first major crisis, Bates accredited L.C. with creating and sustaining the platform that launched her local and national activism.

Bates presented the campaign against police violence in the wake of Sargent Foster's murder as her first victorious civil rights crusade. While police brutality was its primary focus, Daisy also acknowledged that the *State Press* reported an array of issues confronting not just local blacks, but the African-Americans across the nation. She remembered championing causes for paved streets in black neighborhoods, improved housing conditions, better employment opportunities, as well as inequities in the legal system.¹² According to Daisy "small, integrated organizations" joined their crusade, which evolved into a campaign for black policemen in predominately African-American neighborhoods, and specifically on West Ninth Street, where the heinous murder actually occurred. After an investigation, the city complied with the *State Press*'s demand for black officers. Daisy called the change a major contributor to Little Rock's "reputation as a liberal southern city."¹³ Her account presents the crusade as an unequivocal victory. Bates did not delve into the token usage and the restrained power Little Rock officials granted black officers.

Akin to the chapter about her childhood, Daisy concludes a critically important period of her memoir with a brief discussion about her education, filled with silence. This presentation was consistent with Daisy's theme of personal empowerment, yet she contradicted the story she told about her close involvement with the *State Press*'s daily operations. Before proceeding to her discussion about the post-war years, regarding her education, Bates wrote, "Shortly after we founded the *State Press*, I enrolled at Shorter

¹² *Ibid*, 38.

¹³ *Ibid*

College, taking courses in Business Administration, Public Relations, and other subjects related to the newspaper field.”¹⁴ In a later interview, Bates stated that the classes were audited and unofficial, which provides an explanation for the lack of documentation about her post-secondary studies.¹⁵ Rather than explaining how she was improved through what she was learning in college, Daisy focusses her reader’s attention on a flight class she took at Philander Smith College, one of two local African-American institutions for higher education. She emphasized being “the only woman in the class”. While she says she enrolled, we have no evidence of what she learned, or her experiences.

Bates wanted her readers to view her as a respectable, and this included projecting the image of an erudite woman. Respectability required some level of education. What Bates wrote gave her readers the impression that she was attending college full time, while working long hours at the *State Press*. She even described how she and L.C. “worked twelve to eighteen hours a day to keep our paper going.”¹⁶ Considering her life-long challenges with formal writing, it is doubtful that Daisy was attending college as she mentioned and working at the *State Press*. It is more likely that Daisy watched her husband work day and night to bring the news to the Little Rock black community, and despite her desire to be involved, was not yet ready to contribute, hence the courses she took at Shorter College. It is possible that Daisy expressed interest in working at the *State Press*, and that she and L.C. agreed that she should receive additional training and education in the area of journalism before joining. With a foundation, he could teach her the rest. Instead of writing that she was being educated during this period, Bates exaggerated.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 38

¹⁵ Bates, Interview with Jacoway.

¹⁶ Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 37.

The Black Press Movement

The *State Press* flourished in part because it emerged during the Golden Age of the Black Press in the United States. L.C.'s founding of the *State Press* was a part of a growth of the Black Press Movement that occurred in the 1940s, and lasted through the modern Civil Rights Movement. As the country's preparation for a possible entry into World War II began to end the Great Depression, Daisy and L.C. prospered financially, and socialized in established black circles. Their gamble to publish their militant newspaper paid off when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The surprise attack created an atmosphere ripe for black dissent and mobilization, especially coming out of the instability and uncertainty of the Depression decade. Like their counterparts in other cities, L.C. and Daisy used the politics of the war to push the black elite to attack Jim Crow more aggressively.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, a debate occurred within the African-American community over the course of action blacks should take on the racial front domestically, in the context of a major global war. Should they "close ranks" as they had in World War One, or should they use the opportunity the war created as a springboard to press more aggressively for equal rights? History had proven the former to be ineffective. In June 1941, A. Phillip Randolph, Chairman of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, proved that the latter had the potential to produce noticeable results. Randolph's threat to mobilize the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) was pivotal in President Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 8802, which banned racial discrimination in "government employment, defense industries and training programs."¹⁷ The Executive

¹⁷ Robin D.G. Kelly and Earl Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African American From 1880*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 164-5.

Order also created the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), of which Daisy would later serve as Arkansas co-chair during her rise to power. The FEPC's purpose was to investigate reported cases of job discrimination in the federal government, as well as companies or industries completing work for the government. Although Randolph's gamble with FDR was successful, questions remained regarding where African Americans' fit in the whole war effort, as well as issues with its enforcement.

The debate over how blacks as a group should respond to the national call to service happened openly in the black press.¹⁸ One historian of the black press during the Second World War reports that black newspapers across the nation, including the widely-circulated *Pittsburgh Courier*, initially urged blacks to fully support the war. Nationwide, black papers joined in the patriotic call for wartime unity. While credit belongs to the *Courier*, the *Crisis*, the organ of the NAACP that also sounded the alarm cautioning blacks to pause and ponder before riding the blinding, infectious wave of American nationalism without condition. Then Executive Secretary Walter White remembered the NAACP's error in calling blacks to "close ranks" during Europe's first Great War. Moreover, there was vociferous opposition within the black press. Some voiced "reservations about the call to forget grievances" with fighting to save American Democracy, while enduring Jim Crow and American racism. In January 1942, before the *Courier* launched its history-changing Double V campaign, the *Crisis* published an article written by White. Titled, "Now is Not the Time to Be Silent." The article prodded blacks to oppose Hitlerism, but also cautioned them to remember the "broken promises of

¹⁸ For more on the African-American Press please see, Juan Gonzalez and Joseph Torres, *News For All The People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media*, (New York: Verso, 2011); Gene Roberts and Hand Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*, (New York: Vintage, 2006); Barbara D. Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom*; Washburn, *The African-American Newspaper*.

World War I.” The best way to fight Hitlerism, White acclaimed, was to start right here at home. White’s article expressed the ideas behind what became the Double V Campaign, which the *Courier* embraced as its own and gave it life. The article deserves a place in the history of black politics during the war, particularly the articulation of how blacks could effectively fight on both domestic and international fronts.¹⁹

Catalyzed by White’s firm resistance, the Double-V Campaign, of which the *State Press* took part, sprung from the most unlikely of sources. On January 31, 1942, the *Pittsburg Courier* printed a letter written by a twenty-six-year old cafeteria worker from Wichita, Kansas named James G. Thompson. “Most of our leaders are suggesting that we sacrifice every other ambition to the paramount one, victory. With this I agree, but also wonder if another victory could not be achieved at the same time.”²⁰ Coming from a man whom many of his time might have overlooked, Thompson’s letter to one of the nation’s most popular black papers was a true turning point in American history, and adds to the narrative of how ordinary southern blacks contributed to the success of the Black Freedom Movement. Titled “Should I Sacrifice to live ‘Half American?,” the letter’s body asked a series of questions that Thompson admitted “flash through my mind: Should I sacrifice my life to live half American?’ ‘Would it be better for the next generation in the peace to follow?’ ‘Would it be demanding too much to demand full citizenship in exchange for the sacrificing of my life?’ ‘Is the kind of America I know worth defending?’ ‘Will America be a true and pure democracy after the war?’ Will colored Americans suffer the indignities that have been heaped upon them in the past?” Thompson’s questions give historians insight into how ordinary black Americans’ viewed

¹⁹ Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II*, (Associated University Presses: Cranbury, New Jersey, 1975), 207-8.

²⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 31, 1942.

the war and its potential as a watershed moment for American race relations. For African-Americans it also suggests a level of group-thinking. When Thompson asked if he could exchange his military service for full citizenship, he articulated the contradiction at the heart of the movement that burgeoned in response to his letter. Thompson closed his modern treatise by calling on “we colored Americans to adopt the double VV for double victory. The first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over our enemies from within.” After the *Courier* published Thompson’s letter, black papers, like the *State Press* joined the cause.²¹ Daisy and L.C. were a part of a 1940s black press movement that collectively, had a major impact on American culture and history, especially on the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Promulgating a campaign was one part, but the diversity of Black America also meant making it work on different local terrains. Black editors like L.C. created intricate systems in order to get the news to the people whose minds demanded and whose spirits needed it. The *State Press*’s operations utilized a diversity of strategies to disseminate their periodicals because competition in the African-American press could be fierce. In a move to make the *State Press* stand out, Daisy suggested that L.C. deliver the paper with a green cover. L.C.’s cousin remembered that Daisy “was good at thinking of ways to sell the paper,” and “could think of ways that wouldn’t occur to L.C.”²² Like most newspapers, the *State Press* relied on advertising as its primary source of revenue. This quickly changed as the paper took political stances that were popular with its loyal black readership, but were opposed vociferously by most whites and conservative black elements. After white advertisers’ first boycott of the *State Press* in 1942, L.C. decided

²¹ Washburn, *The African-American Newspaper* 144.

²² Fradin and Fradin, *Power of One*, 41; Wassell, “L.C. Bates,” 17.

to make subscriptions the paper's primary source of revenue, instead of outside advertising. Though risky, L.C. preferred to put the fate of his paper in the hands of blacks, rather than unpredictable, fickle white advertisers. In restructuring the *State Press*, L.C. hired two men whose job it was to "work on subscriptions and to set up distributorships in all towns in the state where the black population was large enough to warrant it."²³ L.C. told his biographer that he gave distributors their first week of papers on a trial basis. After that point, they were responsible for selling whatever they bought. The *State Press*'s biggest markets were Texarkana in the Southwest, Pine Bluff and Hot Springs near the state's epicenter, El Dorado, the county seat of Union County—the place of Daisy's upbringing—and, of course, Little Rock. Buyers paid five cents for a single copy of the *State Press*, and two dollars for a yearly subscription. Distributors were given additional incentives. They bought papers at a price of five cents and sold them on the market for ten cents. L.C. recalled that some distributors made nice sum of \$30 each week for just a few hours of work. Distributors for the *State Press* also earned commission for any advertising they secured for the newspaper. Like other black newspaper editors, L.C. and Daisy recognized the demand in the black community and figured out a way to carry the message of the movement to locales throughout the South.²⁴ Black newspapers like the *State Press* reached black communities north and south, rural and urban, carrying the message of Double Victory Movement.

Black newspapers achieved nationwide readerships through Pullman Porters who sold editions as a way of making a second income, in addition to being a way of keeping blacks across the nation connected to each other and the Freedom Struggle. The

²³ Wassell, "L.C. Bates," 21.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 20-22.

circulation of black newspapers contributed to the collective sense of a national movement among African-Americans. Historians Robin Kelley and Earl Lewis write, “These papers were circulated through many hands in households, barbershops, beauty parlors, churches, and restaurants.”²⁵ Between 1940 and 1945 the circulation of black papers increased 42 percent nationwide. At their peak, it is estimated that 3.5 million to 6 million blacks were reading black newspapers each week, even though subscriptions never reached over 1.8 million.²⁶

By examining the rise of the black press in the 1940s and the impact the *State Press* had in the city of Little Rock and the state of Arkansas, the scope of black interest and depth of understanding in domestic and global affairs appears more common and less unusual. The black press made inroads and found some success precisely because they expressed “an articulated foreign policy strategy in the black community.”²⁷ The papers confirmed what many blacks had already concluded: that their battle against Jim Crow and American racism were part of a much larger struggle taking place globally, most notably India. Papers like the *State Press* brought world news to southern blacks at a critical historical moment. Blacks were interested in the events that were happening all over the world, sought information, and looked for opportunities to force changes and gain equal rights. The historian Brenda Gayle Plummer has argued that African American history should pay more attention to African American’s cognizance of global issues. In Little Rock, Daisy and L.C. could not have known that they were about to

²⁵ Kelly and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 175; For the a history of the black beauty industry please see Tiffany Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

²⁶ Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 177.

²⁷ Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 2.

partake in a press movement that would serve as one of the linchpins for the Black Freedom Movement. During the war years, the *State Press* was filled with stories of the fight for freedom happening all over the world. Countless political cartoons conflated fascism and Jim Crow, put a hypocritical American Democracy on display, condemned Hitler's crimes against humanity, and equated Europe's perilous moment to the South's lawless white mobs' reign of terror over southern blacks.

The combination of the ending of the Depression, national interest in World War II, and the *Pittsburgh Courier's* successful Double-V Campaign, contributed to the rise in the circulation of black newspapers across the United States. The message was simple: European Fascism and American Jim Crowism were two heads of the same coin; and it was impossible for blacks to fight on one front without addressing the other. Increasingly more black Americans adopted this message, and responded by supporting black newspapers with unprecedented verve. Kelley and Lewis write that "The black community followed local and national developments in civil rights by reading African-American newspapers..."²⁸ By becoming the voice of Black America's goals and objectives, black journalists created a movement that used World War II to unify a huge segment of Black America, and brought racial issues to the forefront of American thought and society. One major implication of this historical moment is that the Freedom Movement's more confident, coherent message reached blacks from Tallahassee to Los Angeles. And as circulation rose, so did the power and influence of local newspaper owners, as was the case of Daisy and L.C. The *State Press* provided Daisy and L.C. with a substantial, if vulnerable, power base. From a little office on West Ninth Street in

²⁸ Kelly and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 174

Little Rock's black business district, a budding local movement found its hub, and Daisy and L.C. found their entrance into formal politics.

The Teacher Salary Movement

"Segregation is the South's substitute for slavery."

This is what one of the *State Press*' first editorials, titled, "I GIVE IT AS I GET IT," read on May 9, 1941. "Who but a fool" it continued, "would be willing to fight merely for the glory of being brave? That's why if the Negro lets up in pressing for his rights during this crucial period he'll be let down during the calm period...It's false," the writer concluded, "to be deluded to thinking that you can get everything without giving anything."²⁹ With words like these in the *State Press*, L.C. and Daisy slowly gained respect, power and influence in Little Rock's race relations. From the very beginning, L.C. dropped hints of his mounting impatience with black leadership, but did not aggressively challenge the black elite. This editorial did not attack black leaders, but was a harbinger of tumultuous relationship between the newspaper editor and local black leadership. L.C. believed that May 1941 was a restless period, meaning a calm one was not far behind. With the first issue under his belt, L.C. took things a step further in the next week's issue. Another editorial entitled, "KEEP THE POT BOILING, proclaimed, "People who assume leadership as a side issue do not make leaders. Valuable leaders are they who serve enthusiastically and sacrificially."³⁰ According to the *State Press*, blacks needed leaders fully dedicated to the cause, and not part-time, self-interested activists.

²⁹ *State Press*, May 9, 1941.

³⁰ *State Press*, May 16, 1941.

The *State Press* kept the pot boiling by reporting the movement for equal pay for black teachers that was happening across the country.³¹ By presenting the battle for equal pay as a movement, L.C. gave his readers a context, filled with the tools of meaning and understanding local blacks needed in order to put their local struggle in a bigger perspective. With the *State Press* as his platform, L.C. religiously reported the emerging “teacher salary movement,” which was taking place all over the South, and being led by Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP’s young, rising star. L.C. filled the *State Press* with front-page articles like “Atlanta Threatens Teachers Who Sue for Equal Pay,” “Florida Must Adjust Salaries,” and “Chattanooga goes to single pay schedule.”³² From Florida to Nebraska, and in over one dozen states, the new decade gave birth to a new militancy among southern Negroes, with education once again on the frontlines of the struggle.

The *State Press* articulated a mood for the militancy that has been the subject of much historical discussion.³³ L.C. was not starting a local black freedom movement in Arkansas, but simply gave it the voice it lacked beforehand through his militant paper. For many activists, part of this new militancy was personal. The son of single-mother and teacher, Thurgood Marshall placed the issue of education at the top of his list. According to his biographer, Marshall “took it personally that his mothers work was

³¹ *State Press*, May 23, 1941, October 3, 1941, December 5, 1941, January 2, 1942, January 16, 1942, March 6, 1942, March 20, 1942, April 10, 1942, April 21, 1942, May 22, 1942, August 21, 1942, April 2, 1943, December 1, 1944, June 8, 1945, February 28, 1947.

³² *Ibid*

³³ For more on militant Black figures in the aftermath of World War II see Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight; Penny Von Eschen, Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*; Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Barbara Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom*; Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1999); On the New Deal see Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1996).

valued less than a white teachers'..." and, as a result, sought out "black teachers to act as plaintiffs for NAACP suits against school boards to equalize pay."³⁴ Credit for publicizing the salary movement belongs to Marshall and Carl Murphy, who ran the *Afro-American* in his hometown, Baltimore, Maryland. Murphy wanted to take the case to court in the 1930s, but black teachers were reluctant to put "their names on a lawsuit challenging racially separate pay scales, especially during the Depression." The editor had been tracking the young lawyer's work in his newspaper and arranged for Marshall to give a speech about the education between black and white children at the NAACP's 1936 annual convention. Marshall was so impressive that Walter White hired him to be a part of the association's legal team. Throughout his career, he defended black teachers and fought for equal education for his race. The future United States Supreme Court Justice was also an instrumental figure later in the battle to desegregate Central High School.

The legal battle over teacher salaries in Little Rock began in 1941 when the Little Rock Classroom Teachers Association (CTA), a mostly-female black professional group, gathered evidence that proved the unfair disparity in income between black and white teachers. In the state of Arkansas black teachers made \$367 to \$625 for their white counterparts. In addition, the average education level for the two groups was virtually equal; 2.5 years of college for blacks, 2.6 for whites. The teachers were inspired by the *Alston v. School Board of the City of Norfolk* in Virginia, where the judge ruled in favor of the black plaintiffs. The teacher's salary movement L.C. covered in the *State Press* grew out of this Supreme Court decision. After the *Alston* decision, the mostly women-

³⁴ Juan Williams, *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 89-91; Smith, *War and Wartime Changes*,

led CTA organized a Salary Action Committee (SAC), and named Miss Solar M. Caretners as secretary. Caretners wrote Walter White and Mark Alston, the plaintiff in the Virginia case soliciting “advice about ‘the method of procedure and techniques of bringing about equal salaries for teachers.’” On February 28, 1942, with the help of Scipio Jones, an African-American lawyer, life-long Republican, and local legend, Thurgood Marshall filed the CTA’s case against the Little Rock School Board. They chose Mrs. Susie Morris, the head of Dunbar High School’s English Department, as its lead plaintiff. Morris was selected because she possessed a resume and credentials that made it incredibly difficult to argue that she was not as qualified as any white teacher. As the lead teacher in her department, she had a long, documented track record in the classroom. In addition, Morris had performed highly in the graduate courses she had taken at the University of Chicago, and was probably more qualified than most white teachers in Arkansas. A movement was starting underneath his feet and L.C. got involved.³⁵

Black teachers’ demand for equal pay was rejected by the City of Little Rock. With the help of the *State Press*, the CTA made its case and the black community rallied behind the teachers. During the trial, the defense called Annie Griffey, a white teacher with 31 years of experience and “a supervisor of primary teachers.” Griffey told the courtroom that the income disparities were justified because “regardless of college degrees and teacher experience, no white teacher is inferior to the best Negro teacher.” The moderate southern city’s response was clear: they were going to fight the CTA “every step of the way.” L.C. had a response of his own. In the March 6, 1942 edition,

³⁵ Johnson, *Arkansas in Modern America*, 85-6; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 38-44; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 41-2.

the Friday following the filing of the suit, L.C. made it clear that he supported the teachers. After all, their actions were uncompromising, which was the philosophy he lived by. In an editorial titled, “STATE ADMINISTRATORS KNOW ‘THEIR ONIONS.’” L.C. described how the CTA’s case had “already been mislabeled and termed as ‘Dynamite’, branded as a campaign to ‘eliminate’ race discrimination...These teachers,” he conceded, “know that equalizing salaries will never eliminate race discrimination, they know the only thing that will bring about a change in race discrimination is a regeneration of the heart.” Throughout the 1940s the *State Press*, L.C. showed his support for the salary movement and the larger shifts that were occurring inside of Black America. The teacher’s suit was just an indicator of changes in the thinking of blacks in Arkansas, and in the entire nation.³⁶ After all, the teachers’ movement took off just months after the nation’s entrance into the war, making it one of many issues on the forefront of black community’s agenda, and an important part of Daisy Bates’ political education and radicalization.

The movement for equal teacher salaries was the first major local and national cause the *State Press* addressed. In Arkansas, as in other places across the nation, education was inextricable to black progress. The NAACP believed that eliminating racial disparities in education was the linchpin to dismantling White Supremacy and Jim Crow. In his classic, *Before the Mayflower*, journalist and historian Lerone Bennett Jr. wrote, “One of the major subsystems was educational discrimination, which prepared the way for and guaranteed discrimination other areas.”³⁷ Black political and social activism

³⁶ *Ibid*; *State Press*, March 6, 1942.

³⁷ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America*, (New York: Penguin, 1982), 256.

in the 1940s, in the area of education laid the foundation for the modern civil rights movement. When Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund dissected the Little Rock black teachers' discrimination case, they concluded that it was one The Association could win. L.C. and Daisy's support of black teachers is important because it is corroboration that not all of their relationships with black elites were contentious. The couple worked with different elements of their local community, and their affiliations appear more philosophically based than anything else.

The fight for equal pay for African-American teachers demonstrated that the black press could work together toward the same goals, reinforced the importance of the African-American media to the Freedom Movement, and illuminates the indispensability of black women and the female domestic sphere have played in the Freedom Struggle. The *State Press*'s coverage is indicative of changes in black racial attitudes and behaviors that happened during the war years. The 1940s was a decade of movement building. The teacher salary movement was a significant civil rights victory. Educational discrimination was just one piece of Jim Crow's puzzle, but it was also the system's Achilles heel, and could potentially bring the entire Jim Crow edifice it to its knees. For this reason, from slavery to Selma, education was an always contested political battleground. Opponents understood access to quality education's connection to either maintaining the status quo or catalyzing progress for groups receiving the short end of the stick. Daisy later remembered the ubiquity of Little Rock's racial problems. "Everything needed changing then," she remembered. "See, the Negroes were segregated all over."³⁸ Education was central to the maintenance of Jim Crow because it connected all parts of life; from voting and politics, to housing and employment. The difference in education

³⁸ Bates, Interview with Jacoway.

between white and black children had direct correlations with the types of jobs one could obtain. For example, Arkansas law required a 10th grade education of anyone interested in carpentry. “This requirement severely limited the number who could qualify for the program because few blacks in rural agricultural Arkansas in 1940 had a tenth grade education or equivalent.”³⁹ Education was an issue of which Daisy and L.C. were always passionate, and they used the *State Press* to support the sign-of-the-times movement being led by black teachers for equal pay.

L.C. believed that the teacher’s salary movement held real promise for the Freedom Movement, so he used the *State Press* to rally his readers behind black educators. *Little Rock Teachers File Suit: Equalization in Salaries Sought*, the headline of the March 6, 1942 edition read. The *State Press* published an informative, responsible article, but it was not free of the editor’s political position. “By rules, regulations, practices, usage and customs of the State, they have met all requirements, and denied the equal protection of the laws, and compensation from public funds for their services solely on the ground of their race and color,” the *State Press* wrote.⁴⁰ The paper also mentioned that the movement was supported by the “Daily press.” The salary movement, which was occurring in locations across the nation, was indicative of a shift in the thinking of a significant, vociferous part of Black America. It was a movement led by local blacks and the NAACP, and publicized through the black press. L.C. later wrote that the *State Press* rallied behind black teachers in an attempt “to mold sentiment.”⁴¹ For Daisy and L.C., and the *State Press*, the local teacher salary movement gave them their first opportunity

³⁹ Smith, *War and Wartime Changes*, 78.

⁴⁰ *State Press*, March, 6, 1942.

⁴¹ *State Press*, December 18, 1942

to show where they stood on issues that mattered to African-Americans nationally, as well as to the local black community.

Two days before publically supporting black teachers, Daisy and L.C. finally took care of some unfinished personal business, and finally married. On Wednesday March 4, 1942, Daisy and L.C. snuck away and got married at the justice of the peace in Fordyce, Arkansas, 70 miles south in Dallas County. She was twenty-eight, and L.C. was one month from his forty-first birthday. Daisy Bates biographer, Griff Stockley, has written that “L.C. was a freethinker, but he knew he could not have it both ways,” meaning that he could not hurl public attacks and question the character of local leaders from the *State Press* while he was living with a woman who was not his wife.⁴² L.C. was intelligent enough to understand the clear and obvious personal contradiction. He probably also understood the potential problem his illicit relationship with Daisy posed to his paper’s success as a trusted voice in the Little Rock black community. Speculation notwithstanding, Daisy and L.C. were now legally husband and wife.

Though their official marriage was quiet, that day they added an important piece to the puzzle of their success. The couple understood the hypocrisy of taking the moral high ground and living together like husband and wife when he was already married. The *State Press* could not criticize various segments of the black and white communities when they were living in what the culture deemed a sin. A respectable image was just as important to their success in Little Rock as that *State Press*’s blistering editorials and public confrontations with local leadership. Without being married, they would have been destroyed mercilessly by their rivals and enemies. L.C. did not have much time to celebrate because the *State Press* had to be proofed and printed the next day.

⁴² Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 27.

The Friday March 6, 1942 edition of the *State Press* not only carried the story of the teacher salary movement, the central story on the front page was about the rising local black leader Harold Flowers, who would soon resurrect the state's NAACP. "Flowers Addresses Huge Audience; Flays Educational Leaders," the headline read. It was written by Frances Sampson (which was actually Flowers's pseudonym). On page six the story continued with a striking portrait of the handsome young leader, topped with the simple caption, "He Founded a Movement." The specifics of their relationship remain uncertain, yet it is clear that the association between the Bateses and Flowers was complex, but for the most part positive. Flowers's story is indispensable to understanding how Daisy Bates made the difficult move from political outsider to a player in the state's political arena. The Bateses more than likely first met Flowers around 1940 when he gathered a group of black activists from all over the state to form the Committee of Negro Organizations (CNO). Around the same time, L.C. had helped form a similar group in Little Rock, the Arkansas Negro Democratic Association (ANDA).⁴³ Almost immediately, the relationship between the Bateses and Flowers blossomed, and together, they represented a vociferous, formidable militant force in Arkansas's black political arena. Flowers "connected the couple to black activist efforts statewide," and in return, "the *State Press* helped disseminate that program of the CNO in Little Rock," historian John Kirk reports. Not only did "Flowers [write] for the *State Press*," but when he visited Little Rock, he usually dropped by the Bates household.⁴⁴ L.C. clearly saw Flowers as a close friend and the type of black leader Arkansas needed. Flowers was the first man Daisy recalled who attempted to seriously address issues that concerned the

⁴³ Smith, *War and Wartime Changes* 259; Kirk, "Black Activism," 30.

⁴⁴ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 49.

black community. Fifty years later she described her late friend as “the only ‘effective’ protest leader of the time.”⁴⁵ The gains Flowers made with the NAACP and his successful grassroots organizing provided L.C., and later Daisy, a large base to advocate for and work with. Despite the problems he would encounter later in the decade, Flowers is an important figure in the development of Daisy Bates’ leadership and the avenues she and L.C. would take to have influence in the black community.

The relationship with Flowers is important because his status in the black community, and their close affiliation with him, validated the Bateses, their activities, and also vindicated the *State Press*. Flowers descended from an elite black family rich in history. Maya Angelou, who lived part of her childhood of Flowers’s hometown, described his grandmother as “the aristocrat of Black Stamps.”⁴⁶ Flowers believed that the “CNO possessed enough brainpower and courage to revolutionize the thinking of the people of Arkansas.”⁴⁷ Daisy Bates’ relationship with Flowers became a politically lucrative one, and launched a new chapter in her political career. Akin to Chicago’s burgeoning black labor movement, a little more than a decade earlier, both parties thought that in order to succeed, a militant and new black cadre must “[attack] the politics of the black machine.”⁴⁸ Arkansas’s black machine was composed of conservative religious and secular men. Their support of for local black teachers and the association with Flowers gave them the credibility the Arkansas black community required from their

⁴⁵ Kirk, “Daisy Bates,” 32.

⁴⁶ Kirk, “Black Activism,” 30.

⁴⁷ John Kirk, “‘He Founded a Movement’: W.H. Flowers, the Committee of Negro Organizations and the Origins of Black Activism in Arkansas, 1940-57,” *The Making of Martin Luther King and The Civil Rights Movement*, Tony Badger and Brian Ward, eds, (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 30.

⁴⁸ Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 101.

leaders. Together they revitalized the state's long defunct NAACP branch, and set the "natural state's" wheels of racial revolution into motion.

Police Brutality

Daisy wrote that police brutality against African-American soldiers and citizens was the most important racial issue facing the Little Rock black community during World War II. While the *State Press* informed blacks of the importance of a victory for black teachers, the paper's primary focus was the war and police brutality against black men in uniform. The issue became one of the engines which drove the Black Press Movement during and after the war, just as public integration would until the direct action movement of black youth nurtured by women like Daisy Bates in the upcoming decades. In Little Rock, as in the rest of the South, police brutality proved to be pernicious and problematic.

Prior to the U.S.'s official entrance into the war, L.C. sensed that tension was mounting in Little Rock.⁴⁹ While blacks identified with the plight of their Japanese

⁴⁹ The significant Japanese presence in Arkansas during World War II created a unique racial climate, and provided another layer to the intersections between race and place in the American South when the country was at war with Fascism. When Japan attacked the U.S military base in Pearl Harbor on December 5, 1941, like the rest of the country, Arkansas underwent a transformation. The "yellow peril" that had permeated America, culminating in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, now had a new target. And, as a result, white Arkansans showed an almost hysterical dislike of the Japanese. According to the historian Ronald Takaki, the "Anti-Asian prejudice" demonstrated by white Arkansans during World War II was "rooted in the nineteenth century." Their bigotry was in step with the country's larger mood. In the eyes of the most extreme Americans, the Japanese were "yellow little creatures that smiled when they bombed our boys." Adding to the resentment in Arkansas were its two relocation centers, packed with over 110,000 mostly Japanese Americans forcibly removed from their homes on the West Coast. When their motherland attacked the U.S., like the Chinese, all Japanese, American or not, "found themselves the targets of stereotyping, discrimination, violence, and exclusion that would lead directly to the internment camps of World War II." In Arkansas, the Japanese were assigned to live at either The Jerome Relocation Center in Chicot County or Rohwer in Desha County. The historian Ben Johnson has written, "When the national government established camps in the state for conscientious objectors, Japanese-Americans internees, and prisoners of war, it exacerbated anxieties over labor and race."

When the Federal Government opened up two relocation camps in the conservative Jim Crow state it changed how the affects of war would play out on local terrains. Suddenly at 110,000, people of Japanese descent made up five percent of the state's population. Their presence created much hysteria from the

brothers and sisters, they had their own axes to grind with the South's racial status quo. In preparation for a possible attack from Germany or Japan, the Army reopened its Camp Robinson base, across the river in North Little Rock. The military base was filled with black soldiers, who frequented West 9th street, and with them came a mountain of white hysteria. Between September 1941 and March 1942, L.C. published numerous articles involving conflicts between black soldiers and local policemen across the South.⁵⁰ On Tuesday September 31, 1941 "soldiers and civilians" clashed on West 9th street "in what was narrowly kept from being one of the worst riots in the city's history." The conflict started in one of the street's taverns, owned by S.W. Tucker. Apparently, "local civilians and members of the 92nd Engineers Company A" from Camp Robinson exchanged unpleasant words, which resulted in "open fighting and gun play" in the bar. During the melee two soldiers and one civilian were injured. One soldier was shot in the foot, while the other was "shot less seriously in the lung." The civilian was "shot in the neck and knifed in the back."⁵¹ The store owner told the *State Press*, "the history of the whole affair could probably be traced back several weeks ago when police arrested soldiers in

state's white population. One man shot a Japanese-American soldier, newspaper editors published articles reassuring whites of their "superior" status and the city of Jonesboro's American Legion branch formed a "Slap-A-Jap Club." According to a historian of the war's affect on Arkansas, by the end of 1941 "public opinion in Arkansas and the nation has become aggressively anti-Japanese." Like blacks, Japanese Americans used newspapers to voice their grievances. Eddie Shimanio served as editor of *The Communique*. In response to the shooting of the soldier, he wrote, "The regrettable shooting in Dermott of a Japanese American soldier shocked me, not because the soldier shot was of Japanese descent, but because the act of shooting an American soldier wearing the uniform of the United States seems to me to be an act of treason." Therefore, for Arkansas, the racial landscape was more intricate with the presence of the Japanese. Bolton, *A Documentary History*, 217-9; Johnson, *Arkansas in Modern America*, 15, 54; Smith, *War and Wartime Changes*, 11 Ronald Takaki, *Hiroshima: Why American Dropped the Atomic Bomb*, (New York: Little Brown, 1995), 7.

⁵⁰ *State Press*, October 3, 1941, January 2, 1942, and January 16, 1942; For more on white hysteria, black soldiers and lynching, see Laura Wexler, *Fire in the Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America*, (New York: Scribner, 2003).

⁵¹ Later that year, the War Department issued a report stating that they would not take action in the case because "the state troopers and civilians involved...are not within the classes of person amenable to trial by court-martial for violation of the Articles of war." The report gave no details.

the alley running alongside his place for gambling. Incidents involving black soldiers were omnipresent in the South during the war, and this definitely rang true in Arkansas.

L.C. reported incidents involving black military men locally, as well as nationally. The undeniable presence of proud black men carrying the hopes and dreams of a race and the nation on their young shoulders—and guns— created a climate ripe for conflict, struggle, and progress. In January the *State Press* reported a riot in Louisiana that involved 3,000 black soldiers, 60 white military policeman, 20 city police, 10 state troopers and over 1000 civilians.⁵² The riot began when one of the white military policemen clubbed a black soldier while attempting to arrest him from a theatre. When the other soldiers saw the white policemen hit the soldier they “rushed him.” According to the paper, “All of the Negro soldiers were from the Northern section, which was mostly the cause of the resentment of their presence in the southern city.” When the U.S. military stationed black soldiers in the Jim Crow south it laid the groundwork for black activism. Individuals like L.C. and Daisy were galvanized by watching their brave sons, daughters, brothers and sisters fight for the stars and stripes, just to come home and suffer the racial slurs and abuses of Jim Crowism.

L.C.’s warnings of the upcoming quagmire black men in uniform would create in Little Rock were ignored. In August 1941, the 94th Engineers Battalion from Fort Custer were singing and marching on a state highway.⁵³ A white state patrolman stopped them and ordered the white commanding officer to “keep the black troops quiet when in the presence of whites.” The white officer rebuffed. “Negroes,” he snarled back, are “as

⁵² *State Press*, January 2, 1942 and January 16, 1942

⁵³ “Two Soldiers, One Civilian Injured” “Near Riot As Soldiers-Civilians Clash on W. 9th” “Quick Police Action Averts Mass Slaughter And Injuries: Soldiers Sent Back to Camp; Confined to Area Indefinitely,” *State Press*, October 3, 1941.

good if not better than white people.” In a seemingly visceral response, the patrolman attacked the officer and the black soldiers came to his defense. Local whites cried “riot,” sent to Little Rock for guns and other supplies, and declared “war on the black soldiers.” The incident was squelched by intervention from white officers from the military base, as well as by a reinforcement of state police. Prior to the conflicts with black soldiers reaching Little Rock in early 1942, the small town of Gurdon, in southwest Arkansas was the sight of the first riot between black soldiers and local whites. The incident in Gurdon corroborates that Arkansas was more alike than dissimilar to other southern states. Racial codes were rigidly enforced in Arkansas. During the Depression, a local Chamber of Commerce president clarified why there was no racial discrimination in Arkansas. “I do not think that there is any section in the state of Arkansas that the negro would be discriminated against as long as he knows his place and most of our southern negroes do. However, the negroes from the north and east are not familiar with the conditions and laws in the south especially, in Arkansas, and would possibly have a right to feel that they are being discriminated against.”⁵⁴ Gurdon also proved otherwise. The presence of black soldiers brought racial issues from the shadows and into the forefront of Arkansas’s politics and culture.⁵⁵

1942 is the year that cemented the couple’s perception about race relations in Little Rock, and when the *State Press* began to be taken seriously as a potential vehicle of change by the local black masses. It is the year that they officially became political players in the city of Little Rock and the state of Arkansas. The racial climate churned

⁵⁴ Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 398.

⁵⁵ Smith, *War and Wartime Changes*, 81.

with the coming of the new year. The war brought more opportunities to condemn the status quo and advocate for a change in the direction of black leadership. L.C. supported the war effort but remained critical of American “demockery,” as he published in the *State Press*.⁵⁶ He pleaded with the War Department to “protect men in uniforms,” and blamed the white South for the restless racial climate.⁵⁷ L.C. proposed that the city employ black police to patrol black areas. “...If we had colored police on the force here it would make it much easier for them to make things more pleasant for colored soldiers,” he wrote. He blamed the tension on “prejudiced whites that are proving to be an impediment to the progress of the city.”⁵⁸ The *State Press*’s warnings were warranted, but ultimately fell on deaf ears. That is, until a local white policemen shot and killed a black soldier in front of the black community.

The *State Press* was instrumental in mobilizing the Little Rock black community when an African-American Sargent stationed at the local Army base was murdered in front of a crowd of witnesses by a white military policeman. Local blacks were disturbed and infuriated at the blatant disregard for black life the episode represented. On March 22, 1942, the first Sunday of Spring, Private Albert Glover, a Negro in the United States Army stationed at North Little Rock’s Camp Robinson took his weekend pass and made his way down to West Ninth Street, a stretch of city blocks that became the center of Black business and entertainment, resembling a “Little Harlem.”⁵⁹ The young Negro soldier, soberly entered a local saloon, and left inebriated. Two white military policemen approached Glover for “being drunk and disorderly.” Melee ensued. The officers

⁵⁶ *State Press*, April 14, 1944.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, January 30, 1942.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, March 6, 1942

⁵⁹ Berna J. Love, *End of the Line*, vi.

commanded Private Glover to allow them to take him back to the military base immediately. He refused.⁶⁰

What followed is inspiring and tragic, but also reveals how tense race relations were in Little Rock during the war. Seeing that a Negro “boy” was giving two white lawmen a difficult time, two of Little Rock policemen, Abner Hay and George Henson, intervened. How the events unfolded exactly is debated, but numerous eye witnesses stated that Hay and Henson pulled out their nightsticks and proceeded to beat the young Negro soldier on his head until his brown face was covered in his own blood. Every blow dealt to Glover seemed to attract more and more pedestrians, to the point where a mostly Black crowd had formed. The two military policemen took Glover to a nearby first aid-station for treatment. Standing outside, Officer Henson came out of his trance, apparently realizing that he and Hay had essentially placed themselves in what could develop into an insurrection, if the Blacks around them chose mutiny over observance. He panicked, drawing his pistol on the crowd, now about four hundred in number. Inside the first-aide station, “Glover remained uncooperative,” even refusing treatment. Glover made it clear that he was not leaving without “the boy I came into town with.” Fed up, the two military men dragged him out of the station and into “a truck that stood waiting to take him back to the army base.”⁶¹

As Glover was being manhandled out of the first-aide station, Thomas Foster, a twenty-five year old Negro sergeant from North Carolina, made his way through the onlookers, and identified himself as a sergeant at Camp Robinson and superior to the

⁶⁰ The details of Thomas Foster’s murder is constructed from the following sources, *State Press*, March 27, 1942, April 3, 1942, April 10, 1942, May 8, 1942, June 12, 1942, August 21, 1942, October 9, 1942; Daisy Bates, *Long Shadow*, 35-37; John Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 44-6; Griff Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 37-8;

⁶¹ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 45.

bloody young man. He commanded the white military officers to explain why they were handling Glover so roughly, and, most importantly, why his clothes were filled with blood. Foster reprimanded them because they allowed two Little Rock officers who had no business in the affair to get involved. One witness told the *State Press* that they heard one of the policemen ask Foster, “What you got to do with it?” Clearly, the two white officers did not appreciate a Negro, Army sergeant or not, questioning their authority, and decided to place “Foster under arrest,” attempting “to remove him from the scene by force. Each grabbed an arm...”⁶²

Perhaps chagrined, the white officers dragged Foster down West Ninth Street, as the crowd still watched in collective terror. Officers Hay and Henson treated Sargent Foster like a Nigger out of his place, who clearly needed reminding as to where he belonged. Some in the crowd began to shout, demanding the white men to turn this brave black man loose. Others tried to help free Foster. In the skirmish with Foster, “one of the military men lost his nightstick and drew [his] pistol.”⁶³ Foster then picked it up, and tried to knock the gun out of the officer’s hand. Next, all hell broke out. In the midst of struggle, the gun went off, and Officer Hay drew his revolver, firing one shot in the air, with hopes of clearing the crowd. The other officers beat Foster on the head with their knight sticks just as they had done Glover. A man of incredible strength, Foster somehow broke away and stumbled into the alcove of a nearby church. Realizing that he was now in a public showdown with a Negro man, Hay ordered the crowd to disperse. He needed room to detain Foster and take him down to the precinct. The crowd acquiesced. One man who was standing on the stairs of the church recalled that Hay

⁶² *Ibid*, 46; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 37; *State Press* March 27, 1942.

⁶³ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 46.

walked up to Foster and called him a “black nigger. So this soldier broke loose and hit this cop and spit in his face.”⁶⁴ A fight ensued. According to one historian, Hay was humiliated when he found Foster to be “more than he could handle.”⁶⁵ The other officers pulled out their nightsticks, beating Foster into vertigo. After a moment of trying to find his equilibrium, Foster fell to the ground. Hay pulled out his revolver, walked a little closer to the fatigued Sargent who was lying on the ground and shot him three times in the stomach, once in the arm, and a fifth shot missed, even though it was fired within “point-blank range.” Exhausted, yet satisfied, “as if he had done nothing more than shoot a stray animal, Hay pulled out his pipe and lit it as he stood over” Sergeant Foster’s pulsating body. The witness remembered that “the cop jumped back and pulled his gun and shot the soldier,” while the crowd watched in trepidation and disbelief. An ambulance took Foster’s body away. “When they found out that this white cop had shot this soldier,” one witness remembered, “all hell broke loose on Ninth Street.” The crowd had witnessed Foster’s vitality, and had watched this man’s life wither away. The *State Press* wrote, “just a few minutes before, [Foster] was the highest specimen of military manhood.” The whole episode had proven what happened to Black men in uniform who challenged southern white men’s fragile manhood. Five hours later, Foster passed.⁶⁶

After Foster’s death chaos filled Little Rock. One witness described the aftermath as a riot.⁶⁷ L.C. teamed with members of the black elite to form the “Citizen’s Committee which announced that it would conduct its own investigation into the matter. On Sunday April 29 they held a public meeting at Little Rock’s First Street Baptist

⁶⁴ *State Press* March 27, 1942.

⁶⁵ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 46.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*; Love, *End of the Line*, 22.

⁶⁷ Love, *End of the Line*, 22.

Church, on Seventh and Gaines streets, to give their findings about the “grave and unfortunate incident.”⁶⁸ People from all over the state came to hear the committee’s report. There was so much interest in the case that the crowd began to gather at one-thirty in the afternoon, even though the meeting was not scheduled to start until four o’clock. The Citizen Committee’s meeting at First Street Baptist generated “One of the largest gatherings of people ever assembled in the city.” The committee began its report stating, “For seven long days and nights the people of this community have been and are carrying a heavy burden upon their hearts.” They also connected the death of Sgt. Foster to the larger struggle of the nation’s “fifteen million Negroes.” The committee’s report got to what they saw as the heart of the matter: none of the officers attempted to protect Foster. “Regardless of what had transpired previously,” the committee declared, “the shooting was unjustifiable.” They also alerted the city about the “seriousness of our local situation,” and warned that “there shall be others.” Combating accounts of a riot, the committee commended the rank and file for not rioting. Riot or not, racial tension was high in Little Rock, especially after the city declared the shooting to be justified.⁶⁹

L.C. refused to let Sgt. Foster’s death fade into memory, and used the event as an opportunity to rekindle the crusade for black police officers he had begun the previous year. According to John Kirk, “The reaction from the black community was not casual. In particular, black anger was inflamed and sustained by *State Press* reports of the incident.”⁷⁰ In the months following Foster’s murder, L.C. turned up the heat on Little Rock’s leadership on both sides of the color line. Two weeks before the killing of Foster, L.C. pleaded with Little Rock to hire “colored police...to make things easier for colored

⁶⁸ *State Press*, April 3, 1942, April 10, 1942.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*

⁷⁰ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 47.

soldiers.” He had also reported the near riot on September 31, 1941, which he blamed on “prejudiced whites” who proved “to be an impediment to progress.”⁷¹ On Friday, August 21, 1942, the city began interviewing black men to fill eight positions on the police force. Due to the conflicts between local police and black soldiers, the military mandated that the city of Little Rock employ black officers in black areas to diffuse tension and eliminate the political propaganda the killing of black soldiers gave to the Axis powers in Europe, as well as Japan. Black officers were slated to patrol until July 1943, when city officials would assess their need and effectiveness. In L.C.’s words, it was a “temporary measure,” but an “epoch making event in the lives of Negroes...”⁷² Black officers received rookie pay (\$105) and started patrolling the streets in October 1942.⁷³

The crusade for black police officers came at a personal price for L.C. and Daisy. After the *State Press* had helped achieve the minor victory of black officers patrolling West 9th street, reprisals followed as white advertisers withdrew revenue from the paper, precipitating its first financial crisis.⁷⁴ L.C. told his biographer that he successfully solicited advertisements from black and white businessmen. At one point, 40 percent of the *State Press*’s subscribers were white. After L.C. coverage of Sgt. Foster’s murder almost all of the revenue generated from advertisements from white merchants disappeared. The *Arkansas Gazette* called L.C.’s coverage of Foster’s murder an “unjustified and scurrilous” attack on the white leaders of one of best places in the South for a Negro to live. The *Arkansas Democrat* went even further with its conspiracy theories. It claimed that the *State Press*’s coverage of the incident was “a part of a

⁷¹ *State Press*, October 3, 1941, March 6, 1942.

⁷² *Ibid*, August 21, 1942.

⁷³ *Ibid*, October 9, 1942.

⁷⁴ Kirk, “The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Little Rock Community and the 1957 School Crisis,” 4

‘nation-wide campaign by the black press and the NAACP to use the war to undermine white supremacy on the home front.’⁷⁵ As would be the case fifteen years later during the school desegregation crisis, white businessmen tried to pressure L.C. and Daisy with economic reprisals. Five days after the killing on West 9th street “all downtown stores cancelled their advertising.”⁷⁶ Summing up the situation, Daisy wrote in her memoir that she and her husband had the following assets and liabilities, “Ten thousand readers, one twenty-dollar-a-month classified ad, a five year lease on the printing plant, a monstrous flat-bed press that groaned and screeched with each revolution and an eccentric folding machine that would fold about half the papers then freeze...”⁷⁷ It was at this time, L.C. was invited to the office of E. Hobson Lewis, president of the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce. Lewis informed L.C. that he had the power to make him “one of the ‘biggest Negroes in the South.’” He said he would use his power to “underwrite advertising” that the *State Press* would be “paid for before the ad was run.” Lewis told the editor that he would get paid irrespective of if ads were run or did not run in the paper. L.C. asked what the “catch” was, to which he replied, “soften the tones” of your newspaper. Bates reminded Lewis that the *State Press* was created for Negroes and if they wanted it they would support him. If his support diminished he would halt publication, but he made it clear that he would not soften its tones. After that day, L.C. said that he “never solicited an advertisement from a white business.” He still carried ads from large corporations, like Southwestern Bell Telephone Company and Arkansas Power and Light Company, but these came in without solicitation. Due to the *State Press*’s coverage of Sargent

⁷⁵ *Arkansas Democrat*, March 23, 1942; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 51; Smith, *War and Wartime Changes*, 81.

⁷⁶ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 36-7; Wassell, “L.C. Bates,” 19-20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*

Foster's murder, members of the white and black communities began to take notice of L.C. and his paper.

Two months later, on December 18, 1942, in a rare front-page editorial that featured a rare headshot of himself, L.C. issued a subtle dig to black leadership when he claimed credit for forcing the city of Little Rock to do something other leaders had not:

For the first time in the history of Little Rock, Negro officers attired in uniform patrol our business section, is one of the accomplishments of this paper. Negro leaders and organizers in the city had been clamoring for Negro officers for some time but it was all falling on deaf ears, but when this paper took up the fight and earned it to the proper source, an announcement followed that special Negro officers would be appointed to the force with full police power.⁷⁸

A study conducted by the Army about the state of race relations in Little Rock "backed the demands of the *State Press*" for the city to hire black policemen.⁷⁹ L.C.'s editorial was prompted by what he saw as attempts by opportunistic black leaders to benefit politically from his diligent efforts. The article foreshadowed future disagreements with various local black leaders.

The events surrounding the murder of Sgt. Thomas Foster, and the war L.C.'s relentless crusade to hold the Little Rock's officials accountable reveals how deep divisions cut into the Little Rock black community. In an editorial entitled "YOU ARE ASKING TOO MUCH" L.C. responded to an anonymous letter asking him to tone down his aggressive tactics. The letter commended the *State Press* for the "excellent piece of work covering the murder of Sgt. Thomas B. Foster." However, the writer also recommended that the editors "handle such incidents as quietly as possible to keep from arousing the ire of the white people for we only constitute about one tenth of the population of the country. What we should do for our own benefit," the letter continued,

⁷⁸ *State Press*, December 18, 1942.

⁷⁹ *Arkansas Gazette*, August 13, 1942.

“is forget things like that as quickly as possible.”⁸⁰ The clear and present danger conveyed in the writer’s words resulted from fear of white terror or reprisals that L.C. was experiencing as he read the letter. Still, an outraged L.C. fired back, “The bestial murder of Sgt. Foster will never be forgotten, but to ask that it be forgotten, is asking too much... You ask us to forget. You cannot possibly think that there is a chance for us to forget, when we see an American soldier writhing on the ground in pain, and an American peace officer standing over him pumping lead into his body.”⁸¹

The death of Sgt. Foster was a watershed moment that increased the *State Press*’s profile in the African-American community, and L.C. used political capital he had gained to push locals to questions the leaders they had chosen to represent them. Although the *State Press*’s crusade against police brutality established the paper and L.C. as a power player in Little Rock, it also isolated the couple from influential segments of the politically-connected, local black elite. On April 28, 1944, two years after the murder of Sgt. Foster, L.C. expressed his frustration with black leaders, many of whom he had previously collaborated, in a front page editorial titled, “A 64?” In the plainly written language that was his trademark, L.C. described black leaders as reactionary and opportunistic. “The public responded with finances demanded by the committee who in turn was to have a federal investigation of the murder since the local official considered it an open and shut case,” L.C. fumed. Having just celebrated his forty-third birthday the day before, L.C. questioned the committee he had helped form. “What has happened to the money the public entrusted in the hands of the committee to see that justice was meted out?” L.C. gave the *State Press* credit for helping the teachers as well as the

⁸⁰ *State Press*, April 3, 1942.

⁸¹ *Ibid*

achievement of black police officers. Nevertheless, he was mad and made it crystal clear where he stood on the leadership issue. “What is needed in Little Rock? New Blood that is not afraid of the old mossback leadership?” L.C. wrote. Though L.C. posed his statements as questions, they were rhetorical. The editorial is representative of his increasingly aggressive and militant tone that seemed to increase over the decade.⁸²

Conclusion: World War II and the African-American Community’s “Emergency Leadership”

As it did in other localities, the war transformed Little Rock and the individuals living there. With the global war as infinite fuel, the growing black press became the voice of the burgeoning freedom movement, not yet crystallized, yet cohesive enough to call itself a movement. The emergence of national movements, like the battles over teacher salaries and police brutality, helped solidify local black resistance to segregation. And in some cases, like Little Rock, new leaders emerged during the war years. While L.C. worked mostly on the political front, with his help, Daisy prepared herself to join him in the struggle—staking claim to the title of newspaperwoman, and giving birth to a figure history remembers.

During World War II, L.C. intensified his developing public rift with segments of the local black leadership. He believed that the black elite were not pursuing change with the aggression the moment demanded. In his opinion black leaders gave in to whites and appeased blacks with tokenism and the faux of progress. A January 1942 editorial emphatically titled, “NEGRO LEADERSHIP” was the first instance when the *State Press* expressed public frustration with local black leaders. “Negro leadership is an emergency

⁸² *State Press*, April 28, 1944.

leadership,” the author proclaimed. “[It] displays itself at times when there are racial grievances...when the leaders think Negroes should have representation...A new Negro leadership is coming to the front,” the writer warned. “This leadership emphasizes prevention rather than remedy.”⁸³ L.C.’s willingness to publicly criticize other black leaders was one of the most controversial aspects of his activism. He made his disappointment with the local race leaders clear, and increasingly put a face and name to the piercing words the *State Press* published.⁸⁴

L.C. saw a leadership void and quickly moved to fill it. In an editorial published less than one year later, titled “Who is the Blame?” L.C. clarified his thoughts on the state of black leadership in Little Rock.⁸⁵ “Never before in the history of the Negro race has proper leadership been needed more than at the present time...So, today, proper leadership is very much needed within our group to lead the rank and files to the ends that will be beneficial for the future, or we will face the future treading upon a lost horizon.”⁸⁶ In one example of how sour his relationship with parts of the black elite became, the *State Press* reported that a prominent doctor and noted lawyer had referred to the newspaper as “just another rag—a dirty sheet.” Angry, L.C. lashed back. He stated that he knew his newspaper wasn’t “everything that it should be,” but claimed that he was also working “under a handicap of ‘community leaders’ who are interested only in themselves and not giving a damn about the community.” According to the editor, these

⁸³ *State Press*, January 16, 1942.

⁸⁴ The “new Negro leadership” was most likely Pine Bluff attorney Harold Flowers. By 1942, Flowers had promulgated his militant character and vision for black Arkansas. In addition, he was a close political and personal friend of the Bateses. See Adams, “*Arkansas Needs Leadership*,” chapter four; John Kirk, “The Little Rock Crisis and postwar Black Activism in Arkansas,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, (Vol. LVI, Autumn 1997), 273-93; John Kirk, “The Little Rock Crisis and Postwar Black Activism in Arkansas,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. LVI, (Autumn 1997). John Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, December 18, 1942.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

“so-called leaders” kept “the people fooled,” and this was “the reason that the STATE PRESS has not risen above a ‘rag.’”⁸⁷ As American forces fought for the Four Freedoms abroad, L.C. was in open warfare with Little Rock’s black elite, but as the war ended even more opportunities for leadership and control of black politics would materialize for L.C., and especially Daisy, who was undergoing a makeover of her own.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter Six: “One Mell of a Hess:” The Postwar Black Leadership Showdown

“My courage developed slowly.”
—Daisy Bates, 1992 interview

“It is my opinion that any woman who wishes to contribute to the welfare of the Association can find opportunity through the regular branch program...From our experience we have found that women who become members of the women’s auxiliary tend to isolate themselves from the main program of the Association and forget that money-raising, as important as it is, can never take the place of the purpose for which the NAACP was organized.”

---Ella Baker, April 1945 letter to Mr. Robert. H. McLaskey¹

“The values of any new generation do not spring full blown from their head; they are already there, inherent if not clearly articulated in the older generation.”

—Erik Erickson—Quoted in Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 207.

Introduction: Joining Forces During the Postwar

After World War II, Daisy Bates joined L.C. in an official capacity at the *State Press*. Although Daisy began to shape her political identity and public image in the postwar era, in the early years of her activism her actions were linked to the *State Press*. L.C. gave Daisy the platform from which she would launch her civil right career. Joining the *State Press* as “City Editor,” Daisy initially reported on small, community issues like the construction of public parks, and families displaced by fires to their home. In her early years at the *State Press*, Daisy authored articles that may be considered gendered, because covered issues pertinent to the female domestic sphere. This changed once she got more involved in the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) and the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People (NAACP). The FEPC was created in 1941 by President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 8802. Focusing on companies who

¹ Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 135-6.

received government contracts, the law was intended to address racial and religious employment discrimination in the workplace. Daisy's involvement in the FEPC and NAACP gave her a political identity which complimented, yet was independent of L.C. Her increased activities, which L.C. publicized in the *State Press* made local black residents take notice of Daisy, and begin to view the two as an inseparable duo.

This chapter argues that the Bateses became a political team during the postwar period. Daisy developed a political voice that was imitative her husband because she was mentored by him. In addition to working with L.C. at the *State Press*, Daisy chaired Arkansas's FEPC, increased her involvement with the NAACP. These experiences, and others, they believed, would qualify her as an acceptable leader for the local black community. After World War II, the Bateses attacked local black leaders and suggested Daisy as a fitting replacement for a group of black men L.C. often referred to as "pseudo-leaders". Daisy and L.C. was able to undercut local black leaders because they operated within a diverse network of local people and activists who supported their leadership and the *State Press*. Daisy's local allies included black beauticians, white liberals, communists, progressives, and black radicals. Underestimated because of her physical beauty, yet also empowered by it, Daisy Bates manipulated gender stereotypes about attractive women's abilities when she entered the male-dominate public sphere. As the NAACP male leaders would later, Arkansas's black male leaders did not take Daisy Bates seriously as a leader. Many viewed her as an appendage of her militant husband. Nevertheless, first from the *State Press*, and then from her post as president of the NAACP's Arkansas State Conference, Daisy provided unwavering leadership the local civil rights movement, gender stereotypes notwithstanding.

“On My Own”

In her memoir, Bates depicted herself as a respectable married woman who acted independent of men. Daisy claimed traditional womanhood while simultaneously rejecting it. In her account, she establishes herself as an important political actor in Little Rock a decade before the 1957 Crisis. The section opens with L.C. taking, what Daisy described as a “much-needed vacation,” which temporarily made her the editor in chief.²

Daisy’s presentation of postwar Little Rock captured the era’s radicalism. She acknowledged the individuals and groups who challenged the power of men, economic elites and southern whites in the war’s wake. In the section of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* which covers the time period between the end of the war and her election as President of the ASC, Bates concentrated on the different ways three groups—black women, American workers, and black men—asserted themselves in Little Rock after the war. The three stories Bates told painted a portrait of Little Rock that was violent, unjust, and somewhat unstable. Like the rest of the post-war South, Little Rock was a highly contentious place. It was a viciously contested geographical, ideological, cultural and political terrain. Bates discussed domestic violence against black women, wages and working conditions for American workers, and violence against African-American soldiers returning home the European and Pacific Theatres.

Daisy’s discussion of domestic violence suggests that she believed that that racism impacted one differently depending on their gender. She described an incident which she recalled occurring a few days after L.C. went on vacation; a local black woman killed her husband for physically abusing her. After the woman refused to talk to other reporters, who it appears were male, Daisy stated that she used a womanly

² Bates, *Long Shadow*, 39.

“sympathetic approach,” which suggests that there was a connection between the two women because of their shared gender identity. “You poor dear,” Daisy recalled saying, “I’m sure he must have been a brute.”³ The woman responded in the affirmative. “He was just no damn good. He was the kind who stayed out all hours of the night and then beat you up when he came home.” Daisy wrote that she told this lady that L.C. beat her, and began to cry from the thought of what “L.C. would say if he could hear me ruining his reputation.” The woman thought Daisy was crying due to her “sad plight”, and after about 30 minutes, Bates departed. As she was leaving the woman yelled through her cell, “stop that man from beating you. You’re too little.”⁴ In this subtle passage, Bates addressed the additional threat domestic violence and gender oppression posed to black women within the race. However, the story never appeared in the *State Press*.

This story is important for several reasons. First, like Daisy, the woman is a microcosm of black women’s struggle for respect and physical safety and demand for self-assertion in the postwar world. Domestic violence was not new or unique to this period, but Daisy demonstrated how women were fighting back against various forms of male oppression, just like blacks were standing up against Jim Crow. By using the story of an African-American woman whose freedom is taken away due to her choice to resist patriarchy and abuse, Bates subtly addressed the important distinction between the challenges confronting African-Americans as a group and the unique set of circumstances faced by the women of the race. Though incarcerated, the woman Bates interviewed is not presented as a victim. Daisy implies that she experienced some degree of personal liberation from killing her abusive husband. Second, her actions support L.C.’s claim

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*, 39-40.

that Daisy was willing to use deception to get what she wanted. In the story she chose to tell, Daisy convinced the woman that she too was a victim of domestic violence, which is always plausible, but to date is unsubstantiated. Lastly, the episode is an example of how, no matter how large or small, Daisy emphasized and promoted her own activities, and wanted to be seen more than L.C.'s wife. Daisy Bates' story is an important example of black women's desire for personal liberation. The personal journey to self-realization differs for each woman (and person) because it is based on the particulars of that individuals lived experiences, however, there is a commonality in desire.

After providing an example of a woman attempting to liberate herself by resisting male oppression, Bates discussed the ways American workers were also fighting their capitalist bosses for better wages and working conditions. Daisy continued to emphasize her political involvement, and her independence from L.C.. She reminded her readers that L.C. was "still on vacation" when the next major story concerning local workers broke.⁵ Again, Daisy was unclear about who wrote her stories in L.C.'s absence. In March 1946, the couple had a bitter fallout with some of Little Rock's leaders, stemming from a strike by members of Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) at the Southern Cotton Oil Mill, located about a mile from the *State Press* office. After Otha Williams, a white replacement worker, fatally shot Walter Campbell, a picketing black mill worker, Daisy said she did not hesitate to go get the story. The offender, Williams was acquitted, while the victims, three picketing black union members, were taken into custody, charged with accessory to the Campbell's murder, and found guilty. Their convictions were made possible by an Arkansas right-to-work law which stated, "If any violence broke out on the picket line, everybody on the line could be found guilty of it." The *State Press* saw

⁵ *Ibid*, 40.

the facts differently and gave its own interpretation of the events that transpired. The account published in the paper stated that the three men had not violated any laws.

“Three strikers, who by all observations were guilty of no greater crime than walking on a picket line, were sentenced to one year in the penitentiary by a hand-picked jury, while a scab who killed a striker is free.” Titled, “FTA STRIKERS SENCENCED TO PEN BY HAND-PICKED,” the article made the newspaper and it’s owner even more controversial in the white and black communities, and allowed them to take on several elements of the establishment in Little Rock and the state of Arkansas.⁶ Citing Judge Lawrence C. Auten by name and arguing that he not only provided biased instructions to an all-white jury, which violated state law, but set a bond that was more than double the usual amount in such cases, the *State Press* challenged the Arkansas court system.

The source of all the controversy Daisy and L.C. would soon find themselves in the center of was Lawrence C. Auten, one of Arkansas’s most powerful conservative judges. The *State Press* blamed the conviction of the strikers on the judge because “the prosecution was hard pressed to make a case until Judge Lawrence C. Auten instructed the jury that the picketers could be found guilty if they aided or assisted, or just stood by idly by while violence occurred.” On the morning of Thursday April 25, 1946, two Pulaski County Sheriffs showed up at their residence. The men had two warrants and a summons, one of which read:

You are commanded to take L.C. Bates and Mrs. L. Christopher Bates, City Editors of the Arkansas State Press, and them safely keep so that they be and appear before the first division circuit court of Pulaski County, Arkansas, on the 29th Day of April, at 9:30am to answer the people of Arkansas for contempt of court...”

⁶ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 40-1; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 44-5; *State Press*, March 29, 1946.

After receiving their summons, Daisy and L.C. scrambled to find legal council, but to their dismay, all of the lawyers who had represented them in the past were “too busy” to take their case. Eventually, they turned to CIO lawyers, but the reluctance of local black lawyers to help them continue the fight for their people left them with even more acrimony toward the black establishment.

In her account, Daisy was vague about who wrote the story that resulted in their first arrest in Arkansas. According to the Daisy’s memoir, “My story was fresh out of the typewriter when L.C. returned from his vacation.” Whose typewriter, she does not specify. After reading the story, she wrote that L.C. replied, “this is a pretty strong story.” “That may be,” Daisy answered, “but you and I know that the real intent of his law is to destroy organized labor in Arkansas.”⁷ It is possible, as was customary, that Daisy dictated information used for the article to one of the writers at *State Press*. Preston Toombs, who wrote for the *State Press*, recalls that Daisy usually went out on stories with photographer Earl Davy, and that her stories were written for her by her husband or Jewel Porce, or Ivy Wesley, two of the paper’s female writers.⁸ While it is unclear who helped Daisy construct this article, what is important is that she viewed the postwar period, and her activities with her husband at the *State Press* as integral to her political development, and the black resistance movement that emerged a decade later in Little Rock.

When Daisy and L.C. arrived in court, she wrote that “the wheels of justice, Arkansas style, immediately began turning.” The defendant in the case, Auten also

⁷ “Gentlemen, This Is It” Says Mr. Bates, *State Press*, May 10, 1946.

⁸ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 44.

served as “judge and jury.” In his reasoning for summoning the newspaper editors to court, he declared, “The article in the State Press implied that the entire court was dishonest and carried an implication that these men [Negro strikers] were railroaded to the penitentiary.” Elmer Schoggen, one of Daisy and L.C.’s white CIO lawyers—Ross Robley was the other—responded by boldly asserting that the jury “was indeed hand-picked,” and “that many persons by training and environment are not qualified to try Negro strikers.” Auten did not like criticism and took pause at the presence of a Negro newspaper with the gall to question a white man’s integrity and judgment, especially a man of the state judiciary. The incensed judge found Daisy and L.C. guilty of contempt, sentenced them to 10 days in the Pulaski County Jail, and fined them \$100. Auten also tried to create law by ruling that they could not appeal, ordering them to go directly to jail. Aware of the blatant unconstitutionality of such actions, Daisy and L.C.’s lawyers appealed immediately. Seven hours later, the Arkansas Supreme Court ordered the state to allow the militant couple to each post \$500 bail, and to release them upon receipt. In the first week of May, State Supreme Court Justice Griffin Smith “granted a supersedeas and a writ of certiorari under which the case would be reviewed by the Arkansas Supreme Court.” On November 11, 1946, Daisy’s thirty-third birthday, the state’s highest court ruled, “We know of no rule of law permitting jail sentences and contempt fines merely because a newspaper thinks some judge mistakenly state the law. Such law does not create a present danger to the administration of justice.” With that, Daisy and L.C. won a major victory in the Arkansas courts, and seemed to grow bolder in their paper, as well as in their criticism of black leaders.⁹

⁹ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 40-3; *State Press*, March 29, 1942; October 11, 1946; October 25, 1946; November

The case with Auten gave the newspaper editors a newfound credibility with the black masses. They had taken on a powerful judge, and emerged victorious, during a time when the NAACP was making national headlines with their successful use of federal courts to slowly chip away at Jim Crow. Whites began to take notice too. Perhaps most importantly, the FTA case is important because it supported the image of Daisy and L.C. as a team fighting against segregation, not to mention a potentially effective one. The November 15, edition announced “HIGH COURT UPHOLDS EDITORS,” L.C. published another headshot of only Daisy, with L.C. nowhere in sight. While the couple was trying to expand their influence in Arkansas, they were also crafting a public image where L.C. worked behind-the-scenes, and Daisy emerging as an attractive, outspoken front woman.

In addition to the assertions by black women and American workers, Bates presented the postwar South as a period radicalized and permanently changed by the return of black men in uniform, and their newfound pride and expectations. In Daisy’s words, black soldiers returned with a “dignity gained from the knowledge that they had served their country well...Negro soldiers...brought a new spirit of militancy born of combat, to the fight for equality”¹⁰ Serving their country did not translate into respect from whites in the segregated Jim Crow South. One Army captain told Bates that “Being home isn’t as pleasant as I had thought...While in the Army,” he recalled, “I was treated as a man...judged and respected on the basis of character and ability, not color.” Still in uniform, the captain walked into a local eating establishment. “What do you want, boy,” a white clerk told the uniformed veteran. The soldier remembered the “screaming

15, 1946.

¹⁰ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 44.

silence” that overtook the room. “Pardon me,” he stated, then left.¹¹ Bates wrote that this soldier’s story was one of “hundreds” of instances of “incredible brutalities committed against Negro veterans by white Americans” in the months following the war.¹² The white South, she concluded, was intent on using “the least altercation” between black veterans and white civilians “as an opportunity to ‘put the Nigras in line.’”

Daisy was changed by her experiences during World War II; in important ways, the tumult of the period helped her begin find her voice, as well as their voice as a couple. As a little girl Daisy resisted being oppressed. As a married woman in Little Rock, she once again found herself disgusted by the treatment African-Americans were forced to accept. Just as she had challenged the black adults in Huttig during her teen years, with L.C.’s help at the *State Press*, Daisy criticized and challenged Little Rock’s established black leadership.

“Little Rock’s Leadership Inconsistency”

Three months after the end of WWII, Daisy formally entered the public sphere and local politics with L.C when she joined the *State Press* as “City Editor.” On November 30, 1945, she published her first article titled “The Public’s View of Little Rock Leadership’s Inconsistency.”¹³ In the article Daisy claimed that she was approached by a concerned older black woman while in the heart of Little Rock’s black financial district on West Broadway Street. “Why don’t the leaders do something about

¹¹ *Ibid*, 44-5.

¹² *Ibid*, 45.

¹³ *State Press*, November 30, 1945.

our boys who have sacrificed years in the armed services, and are now returning home? Why isn't something being done to help them get work, clean decent jobs?," the woman allegedly continued. "What do you want and others like you?," Daisy responded. "Why don't *you people* visit *us* and find out" the woman replied as she walked away, infuriated, and clearly frustrated.¹⁴ The only record of the account is the article published in *State Press*. Although the story and writer cannot be verified, it is significant because the intention behind the self-described, random encounter has a clear political tone that is consistent with L.C.'s criticism of local black leaders. The article is also an example of how L.C. intentionally used the *State Press* to promote Daisy and to suggest her as an alternative to the current leaders. With the publishing of "The Public's View of Little Rock Leadership's Inconsistency," even if the role she might play remained undefined, Daisy officially joined L.C. in the local struggle for civil rights.

This alleged episode on West Broadway Street suggests that postwar black Little Rockians were beginning to see Daisy as a part of the city's black leadership. While Daisy Bates was undoubtedly influenced by her husband's writings and philosophy, she was not his mouthpiece or puppet, although this is what some writers have concluded.¹⁵ Though L.C. saw himself as shaping his wife, she was also shaping herself. Whether or not they had romantic love is a matter of opinion, but it is clear that the couple shared belief in a common cause, and that they worked together to achieve common objectives. Black women's historian Linda Reed has written that "by the late 1940s Daisy was increasingly finding her voice, even if it seemed imitative of her husband's."¹⁶ L.C.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See Grif Stockley, *Daisy Bates*; Stockley interview with Christopher Mercer, January 16, 2002, Butler Center for Historical Analysis, Little Rock Arkansas.

¹⁶ Reed, "The Legacy of Daisy Bates," 79

helped Daisy find her voice, and the fact that her beliefs are sometimes indistinguishable from L.C.'s politics is perhaps even more evidence of the existence of their partnership. One explanation for Daisy's politics mirroring her husband's is that she was a mouthpiece or figurehead, another possibility is that they shared the same beliefs. After all, they were husband and wife. The history of the Civil Rights Movement's partnerships and couples is now being written.¹⁷ This growing field of scholarship is interested in conflicts between men and women, but also the ways in which they collaborated in spite of the presence gender tension. Even if she became the public face of their activism, Daisy and L.C. Bates were a political partnership, and this is how they presented themselves throughout their lives.

Daisy's article was a continuation of the attacks on local black leaders L.C. intensified after WWII. During the War, L.C. had successfully used the *State Press* to voice black people's awareness of the Pro-Jim Crow/Anti-fascism contradiction and sensationalized local injustices. L.C. feared that the postwar life for blacks would mirror what it had been like before the War, and was determined to arouse his people into action. Through his paper, he reminded blacks that while the United States had helped rid the world of Hitler, blacks had a serious fight ahead of them with their own Hitlers at home. "What did V-J Mean to the Negro," an October 1945 editorial boldly declared. "Long before the surrender of Germany, America, especially in the South, was laying plans to deal with the Negro, and the moment the advance news reached American shores that victory over Japan was approaching, the South began the crusade to put the "nigger

¹⁷ For couples in the movement see Catherine Fosl, *Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); See also Sara Rzeszutek's recent dissertation on Ester Cooper and James Jackson, "Love and Activism: James and Ester Cooper Jackson and the Black Freedom Movement in America, 1914-1968," (Rutgers University, History Department, 2009).

in his place.”¹⁸ Just as he had warned of the mounting conflict between Negro soldiers and city policemen before the murder of Sergeant Foster during the war, L.C. called for new leadership in the black community committed to fighting Jim Crow. It was at this time that L.C. began to present Daisy as a serious alternative to clergy dominated black leadership.

The verity of the basis for Daisy’s first published article must be called into question. While the fact that the identity of the woman is never revealed, this is not what causes pause. The majority of the article is an editorialized critique of local black leaders. When isolated, the presence of commentary is not alarming. However, when considered with how Bates used her memoir to construct an identity, the intentions behind the publishing of the article must be interrogated. Nevertheless, “The Public’s View of Little Rock Leadership’s Inconsistency’s” framed the postwar battle for leadership that was taking place in the Arkansas black community:

As I sat listening...what I saw in her face made me ashamed, ashamed, not for myself, but for *the fathers of Little Rock* who have assumed the role of leaders and have been so busy trying to inveigle the public that the people who were responsible for their recognition were forgotten...Too often the noblest of leadership denigrates into a tool of oppression and a source of profit and uses the defenseless people and when the objective is accomplished the people are forgotten...I saw in this lady’s face fear, doubt and despair, yet hope, hope that someday Little Rock would produce honest leadership that she, and people like her, could believe in.¹⁹

The historian John Kirk has written that Daisy and L.C. used their paper to attack not only white proponents of Jim Crow, but more importantly to “criticize” the “shortcomings” of the “influential male-dominated leadership...criticism” that “sharpened, especially during the post-war era when a new black leadership began to

¹⁸ *State Press*, October 19, 1945.

¹⁹ *State Press*, November 30, 1945.

emerge in Little Rock.”²⁰ After the war, their political partnership grew and Daisy became much more visible in the public sphere.

The story about L.C.’s and Daisy’s partnership and the ways in which she was empowered in large part to her supportive husband is important because the 1940s were a schizophrenic decade for American women of all races.²¹ Like many of her female contemporaries, Daisy found herself “at a crossroads.”²² Women had answered the nation’s call to duty during the war. They had played pivotal roles in the victory over fascism, and many did not want to go back to the traditional life of motherhood and marriage after the war. “There was little discussion of the political meaning of women’s changed participation in public life,” the historian Sara Evans writes, “only assurance that it would be temporary... Women lacked collective, public spaces within which to redefine themselves.”²³ Unlike most women, Daisy had a progressive husband who offered his newspaper as an always-available platform to express her point of view. Though she undoubtedly faced gender hurdles, Daisy had married a man who did not possess patriarchal beliefs about the role of women. L.C. saw nothing wrong with women being

²⁰ Kirk, “Daisy Bates,” 29.

²¹ From the workplace to religious institutions, women made small gains in Arkansas during the war decade. For example, during the war years, women composed 20 percent of Arkansas’s workforce, ten points lower than the national average. The state Methodist Church had one female clergy member, which prompted another woman to write in one of the group’s annual reports, “Your magazines are full of articles giving new feats in fields never before open to women. When the war is over, these channels may be closed. Lets be ready so they won’t. We must study to know how to keep what we have gained.” Like race and class, gender was very much at the forefront of the national discussion about the future direction of the country. Her position as co-owner of the *State Press* made her position different from other black woman in a state where few women, of any background, were even in the workforce outside of domestic work and education. Johnson, *Arkansas in Modern America*, 67-9; For more on the intersections of race, gender and class see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, African-American women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 1992, 17:252

²² Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 234.

²³ *Ibid*, 240.

involved in politics, and his relationship with Daisy suggests that he was not only tolerant of empowered women, but supported their success.

Women had it bad in Arkansas, but blacks as a race and a labor force were not getting a fair deal either. Aware of racial tension, in 1946, The Greater Little Rock Community Council released a report titled, “Economic Justice: A Report on the Little Rock Black Community.” The report revealed that “the Negro worker is not a part of the main stream of employment but instead is relegated to the service and unskilled categories unless employed to give direct service exclusively to the colored population.” The council used the exclusion of blacks from positions in government agencies, like the postal service to substantiate its claims. L.C. and Daisy may have recognized that the report also noted that the City of Little Rock “failed to give equal status to the Negro policemen, while the City of North Little Rock simply does not employ any Negroes.”²⁴ The report confirmed what L.C. had been bellowing through the *State Press*: choices and opportunities for Arkansas blacks were limited by Jim Crow and the culture of segregation.

Daisy Bates’ increased postwar activity is one of the many examples of how black women found ways of inserting themselves into the Freedom Movement, sometimes with the help of men, and in spite of them in others. L.C. called Daisy’s search for self-determination “freedom of action.”²⁵ The historian Steven Lawson has written that black women represented one of the most “progressive forces” in the postwar period.

²⁴ “Economic Justice: A Report, on the Little Rock Black Community,” “Employment, Industrial Relations and Education, Report of Survey Community Relations Project, Greater Little Rock, Arkansas, vol. 2 (The Greater Little Rock Community Council, September-December 1946), reprinted in Johnson, *A Documentary History of Arkansas*, 227.

²⁵ L.C. Bates to Daisy Bates, December 10, 1962.

According to Lawson, after the war, black women “refused to retreat,” and continued to build what became the Modern Civil Rights Movement.²⁶ Although they are both women and blacks, ironically, black women sometimes get lost in discussions about race and gender. Despite the gendered and racial challenges they faced, sometimes with assistance of progressive black men like L.C. Bates, black women like Daisy Bates were able to carve out spaces for themselves in their local freedom struggles, and eventually the national movement. Historians have proven that black women were active agents who willingly served the Freedom Struggle in various capacities at different, critical junctures.²⁷ Black women’s historian Linda Reed argues that black women were successful aides in the freedom struggle and “sometimes proved more successful than men because their movement were less restricted or even because white males, the wielders of power, saw them as less threatening.”²⁸ Whether or not black women were “less threatening” is debatable, but their effectiveness and indispensability to the Black

²⁶ Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968*, (Roman and Littlefield: New York, 1998), 8.

²⁷ For more on women in the Civil Rights Movement see Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, eds. *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 2001) Vicki Crawford, Jacqueline Rouse, Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, eds. (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990); Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Houck and Dixon, *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009); Holsaert, eds, *Hand on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Lynne Olson, *Freedom’s Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of The Civil Rights Movement From 1830-1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001); Belinda Robnett, *How long? How long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁸ Linda Reed, “The Legacy of Daisy Bates”, *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*,)Vol. LIX, Spring 2000), 79. Black women played crucial roles in all phases of the Freedom Movement. In Arkansas, for example, while A Harold Flowers received credit as president of the NAACP’s Arkansas State Conference (ASC), black women actually did the work of running the state organization. Nationally, it was Ella Baker’s leadership and “spadework” that helped build the NAACP to its peak in the 1940s, her organizational wizardry that helped started Dr. King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, and her sage insight that, in 1960, molded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee SNCC. The Citizenship Schools, which trained many of the movement’s activists to nonviolently battle the most subtle and egregious elements of America’s southern racial system were created and run by Septima Clark.

Freedom Movement, from slavery to freedom, is not.²⁹ As a woman, Daisy was undoubtedly underestimated, which may have worked in her favor. Perpetuating the perception of Daisy Bates as a front woman for her husband's desires kept the real focus on L.C. This allowed her to slowly build an image for herself that was politically married to her husband's activities. And, though not explicit, it appears that L.C. and Daisy were playing subtle gender politics in their approach to attacking other black leaders.

“WE ARE ASLEEP”

After becoming the *State Press*'s “City Editor,” Daisy worked with L.C. to mobilize the Little Rock black community behind his crusade against Jim Crow. They used the *State Press* to promote her work with the FEPC and the NAACP. She also challenged male leaders, particularly the black clergy to oppose racial violence against black women on public transportation, champion labor rights, and to stand up for black veterans. Feeling that the black community needed a jolt of aggression and militancy, together, they worked to wake the masses.

Now in her early thirties, Daisy began to show more interest in political matters.

Labor was an area of which Daisy was passionate. Having grown up in a small, rural

²⁹ For more on the role of black women before Emancipation see, Elsa Barkley-Brown, “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African-American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom,” Jane Dailey, Glenda Gilmore, Bryant Simon eds, *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, (Princeton: University Press, 2000); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1984); Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in United States History* (New York: Carlson, 1990); Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Deborah Gray White, *Arn't I a woman? : Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984).

town run by owners of the local sawmill, she was personally aware of the bread-and-butter issues surrounding race, labor and class. How Daisy got involved with the local FEPC is never mentioned in correspondence, her memoir or the *State Press*. However, she served as the Executive Secretary of the Little Rock Council for a Permanent FEPC. The February 15, 1946 edition of the *State Press* contained two stories about the NAACP's activities. One report concerned Republican attempts to undermine the FEPC. The other reminded locals about Daisy's upcoming meeting in Washington D.C. with "representatives of the National Council." Daisy flew to Washington D.C. as a part of the NAACP's lobby on behalf of an FEPC bill recently defeated in the Congress. After the bill's defeat on Monday February 11, 1946, Daisy remained in Washington to attend a "special meeting" called by the National Executive Secretary to devise new strategies to get the bill passed.³⁰

Daisy was determined to be taken seriously as a leader and activist, and began the process of building personal confidence and developing a political identity. The next edition of the *State Press* carried Daisy's report from her trip in the nation's capital as Executive Secretary and Treasurer of the state FEPC, and like her husband she had plenty to say. "As a representative from Little Rock, I was subjected to no small amount of embarrassment, when I was forced to admit, with reluctance, that we are asleep... And this was it: 'Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize sailed through bloody seas.' With this I am determined to arouse my people."³¹ This statement made it clear that she would fight to become a formal leader in Arkansas. In her aggressive editorial, one can see L.C.'s influence on his young wife, but

³⁰ *State Press*, February 15, 1946

³¹ *Ibid*

her personality also shone through. “In other cities, the Negro democratic organizations are going all out for the passage of the FEPC bill. In other cities, the NAACP is leading the fight...But in Little Rock, from the action of these organizations, Governor Laney was right when he stated ‘Arkansas people do not want the FEPC,’” she continued. Daisy’s article challenged black leaders to provide leadership, and asked black masses to speak up and make their discontentment heard. Reiterating the sentiments of the woman who she said approached her after the war, Daisy reminded the *State Press*’s readers of the sacrifices blacks had made in the name of patriotism and democracy. She also recounted the dangers of inaction. “The fight our boys put up to make America a free country and a land of opportunity was never intended for their efforts to end with the acceptance of philosophy of McClellan, Bilbo, Eastland, Overton and Ellender, rewarding them with “nigger get back where you belong, we don’t need a porter today.” Daisy’s concern about the quality of life for blacks after the war echoed the one L.C. made just four months prior. She ended her editorial by questioning the motives and actions of the established black leadership in Little Rock. “What can the Negro in Little Rock who has established himself as a leader attribute for his opposition that is evidenced by his indifference?”³² Daisy attacked black leaders and threw her name in the hat of potential candidates.

Daisy Bates made the most the opportunity as executive director of the state FEPC afforded her with the NAACP. The National Office publically supported the FEPC, and Walter White wanted to use the NAACP’s new relationship with the CIO’s labor unions to make meaningful gains for blacks in employment. Though Daisy’s role

³².*Ibid*

was small on a national scale, locally, she was quickly becoming a voice in the area of race and labor in Little Rock. In addition, she leveraged the good relationships she had with at least one local minister to host meetings for the FEPC and the NAACP. On March 3, Daisy organized a “gigantic mass meeting” at First Baptist Church, located on 7th and Gaines streets, with Reverend Charles H. Taylor of New York as the guest speaker. According to the *State Press* the goal of the meeting was to win over “a large segment yet to approve of the organization’s program,” and Daisy hoped to convince the black masses to support the NAACP and the FEPC. Her involvement with the NAACP grew with her participation in Little Rock’s black politics.³³ L.C. and Daisy promoted the NAACP partially because they were still political outsiders, and because connecting her leadership and their newspaper with the most credible national civil rights organization validated both of them and their local crusade.

As they made inroads in the black community and participate in national political issues, Daisy and L.C. continued to attack black leaders for being inactive on issues that actually mattered to black Little Rock, like the abuse of black passengers on public transportation. The *State Press*’s coverage of the violation of African-Americans on Little Rock’s city busses exacerbated tensions between the Bateses and established black leaders. As in other places in the South, Little Rock’s black passengers were abused and humiliated by white drivers with impunity. Also like other southern localities, black women were most often the victims when these racist incidents occurred.³⁴ For instance, on March 8, 1946, the *State Press* reported that “Mrs. Jeffery James Dismuke... wife of a

³³ *State Press*, March 1, 1946.

³⁴ For more on this subject please see Danielle McGuire, *At The Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—a New History of the Civil Rights Movement From Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, (New York: Knopf, 2010).

sailor serving in the United States Navy...was caught by the leg in the rear door prematurely closed by an overhasty operator, and she was dragged for more than a third of a block before the alarmed shouts and running to the front of the bus by witnesses finally induced the stopping of the bus.” Based on eyewitness accounts, the bus stopped, “several persons” de-boarded to allow Mrs. Dismuke and her three year old son to exit the bus. Before she could get both feet onto the ground, the operator closed the door and put his foot on the accelerator. “Bystanders yelled to the excited mother to let go his hand. Her compliance” saved her boy from serious injury. Some of the passengers who had gotten off the bus to allow Mrs. Dismuke and her child to exit shouted to get the operator’s attention and “some of them even ran in front of the car.” After about one-third of a block, the operator stopped the bus, opened the door, asked Mrs. Dismuke “her name and if she were hurt.” He then took the names of only white passengers as witnesses. “He then drove off without giving aid to her, and without notifying police or the hospital,” the *State Press* continued.³⁵

The way white officials handled of the episode angered Daisy and L.C. perhaps more than the actions of the white bus operator. According to the *State Press*, “Later, Sgt. H.R. Yates, one of the witnesses to the incident, prominent because of his uniform, was arrested on charges preferred by an inspector brought to the scene by the operator. No action was taken with regard to the operator, and the inspector spent all of his time showing the eyewitnesses that the accident was impossible, according to the statements of those present.” The paper also claimed that the inspector called one African-American

³⁵ *State Press*, March 8, 1946

a “black son of a bitch” before ordering him off the bus.³⁶ The blatant racism of the whole situation must have made Daisy and L.C.’s blood boil because in the months preceding the incident with Mrs. Dismuke, two other cases concerning African-American women rose the ire of the black community, but, in each case nothing was done by black leaders or white officials. The *State Press* expressed its disdain with such “deplorable” conditions, and to the “insults handed one of our ladies by a bus driver.” L.C. blamed the tension on “the employment of low-grade-Negro-hating-uncouth-hoodlum- type” and responded by advocating for black bus operators, just as he had for black policemen following the murder of Sgt. Thomas Foster four years earlier.

In five years, L.C. and Daisy had made a name for themselves by challenging the black clergy and others for leadership of the black masses. As they would before the desegregation crisis, the couple relied on their successful newspaper, and the incredible degree of independence it allowed them. The lack of leadership on issues like public transportation abuse led the militant editors to imply that the race leaders were imposters, backed by the segregation-sympathetic white establishment.³⁷ “It is poor strategy,” L.C. bellowed, “and a complete waste of money on the part of the white political as well as an

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ The idea that established black leadership was controlled by conservative whites with capitalist impulses did not originate with L.C. Bates. In his last autobiography, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote of how Booker T. Washington was funded by Northern whites who supported the end of Jim Crow, but wanted to use educational institutions like Tuskegee to train the black masses as laborers for the American capitalist system. Du Bois had issues not only with Booker T. Washington’s demagoguery over the national black agenda, but, perhaps more importantly, the source of his funding: powerful, northern white capitalist, who did not see their attempts to keep blacks in the position as only laborers as racist. The father of the black intelligentsia also connected the division between Northern whites committed to some form of social reform for blacks and Northern white capitalists self-interested in exploiting black labor back to the split during the Civil War between moral-minded Northern white Abolitionist and Northern white capitalists interested in building railroads and expanding American industries and products to new markets. Du Bois’s point is that although each side fought for the end of slavery, their motives produced different results. This was the same case with Booker T. Washington, and L.C. Bates was arguing that this was still the case in Little Rock. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of its First Century*, (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 239.

insult to the Negro for any candidate to bargain behind closed doors with any Negro who has styled himself as a leader for the Negro people expecting the Negro vote.” L.C. wrote, “When Negroes accepted white folks made leaders, or self-acclaimed leaders. The Negro leader has to do more today than smile into the faces of white people to be leaders.” Attacking the black clergy, L.C. urged blacks to accept “men as leaders who have the courage and initiative to lead a moral fight for their moral heritage guaranteed them same as other inhabitants of America. The acquiescent Negro has no place in the leadership role of the masses.”³⁸ The religious tone of L.C.’s article is an example of what the historian Barbara Savage calls the “inherent and often incurable tensions that mark the connections between black religion and black activism.”³⁹ The editors were not stating that there was no place for preachers in race politics, but rather the opposite. As Savage brilliantly illuminates in her history of the politics of black religion, black people, including Daisy and L.C. Bates, believed that the church should stand for moral rights, and make itself a beacon for change. This editorial expressed not just frustration, but disappointment, seen in their hope that church leaders would live up to their moral obligation. By mid-1946, L.C. had clearly decided that he would no longer attempt to work with the black establishment. The following week, L.C. blamed the problems facing blacks on the “lack of honest leadership” that left his people “unprepared to grasp the opportunities that await him, blasting “pseudo-leaders’ who allowed “themselves to be used by candidates on a pretense that they can use us.”⁴⁰

³⁸ *State Press*, July 12, 1946.

³⁹ Barbara Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 10.

⁴⁰ *State Press*, July 19, 1946.

The editorial also identified labor as an area of opportunity for blacks. The *State Press* questioned the competence and motives black leaders, assailing black leadership that did not support the inclusion of blacks and labor unions. “If we were to advise you, we would tell you to watch the candidate’s platform and record towards organized labor (especially CIO) and support that candidate,” the couple warned.⁴¹ “For no candidate can help labor without helping the Negro. Neither can he include labor in his program without including the Negro. Most Negroes are laborers, and those who are not actually laborers are deriving their livelihood from the sweat of the laboring man.”⁴² For L.C., labor exemplified black leaders’ inability to confront segregation’s injustices.

Like her husband, Daisy’s early articles covered a variety of topics, a reflection of their belief that all aspects of the system needed changing.⁴³ In addition to political issues, Daisy was also making her opinion known on social subjects because she was a caring person concerned with the well-being of others. Her early additions to the *State Press* reflect this side her character. When a five-home fire in North Little Rock left eight families homeless on New Years Eve, Daisy publicized their plight in the *State Press*, urging preachers to ask their congregations to donate to a fund developed on the behalf of the unfortunate families. “This is an appeal,” her article read, “that should be given attention in every pulpit in Greater Little Rock.”⁴⁴ Daisy later thanked everyone who assisted in a commentary titled, “True Happiness is Found in Others; Not in Ourselves” concluding that some good came out of the situation. She provided a hopeful interpretation:

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Bates, Interview with Jacoway

⁴⁴ *State Press*, January 10, 1947.

“Unhappiness shows that somewhere, somehow, the laws of happiness have been broken. Happiness comes from inspiration, enthusiasm and unselfish deeds... This, I dedicate to all who have given in the campaign to assist the eight families who suffered a loss of practically all their possessions during the New Year Eve’s fire in North Little Rock when their homes were destroyed... These eight families lost in one way, but gained in another. Their faith in mankind has been renewed. Today they truly believe in the Biblical saying: ‘I am my brother’s keeper.’”⁴⁵

Daisy praised everyone who helped out with clothes, groceries and money. Most contributors were churches or other religious organizations. This is important, because it is another example of how Daisy and L.C. built support in Little Rock. Her insistence of her “renewed” “faith in mankind,” and belief that “I am my brother’s keeper,” embodied Christians virtues, and was perhaps another subtle slight to the religious leadership. Furthermore, she was adding personal touch to L.C.’s scathing editorials. Those receptive to their personalities seemed more likely to support their style of leadership. In the example of these eight families, Daisy assisted real people in dire circumstances, helping them built her resume as she and L.C. vied for leadership.⁴⁶

ARKANSAS NEEDS LEADERSHIP

As the postwar period developed, Daisy increased her political activities and L.C. continued to promote her activities through the *State Press*. Slowly, they began to suggest that Daisy was an alternative to the current black leadership. In November 1948, Daisy volunteered to be a poll watcher for the Presidential Election. Daisy was representing R. Walter Tucker, a Progressive Party Senatorial candidate. When she arrived at the polls, she remembered that there were no other black faces in the room. The white poll watchers were having dinner and Judge J.L. Bond politely asked her to

⁴⁵ *State Press*, January 24, 1947.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

join the group. Another man by the name of Marvel Chance earnestly asked Bates, “Have you ever worked at the polls before?” “No,” she replied. “Oh well, then you won’t like it,” he responded. “I have seen it done before. After the counting is over, you won’t know any more than you do now.” Responding to what she interpreted as a condescending tone, Bates asked, “if it was that complicated,” but made it clear that “[she] would stay,” before he could answer. Daisy felt singled out because he badgered her while one white woman didn’t even know what a poll watcher was, leading her to conclude that his interrogations were racial and had nothing to do with her ability to perform the required duties. Daisy left the room and returned. The white woman asked, “Did you forget something?” Bates’ answer was a hostile “No.”⁴⁷

The smug actions of some of the white folks angered Daisy but did not deter her. Deputy Chance “must have thought his beautiful little talk had discouraged me, for now, he asked in a not-too-friendly tone, ‘let me see your letter.’ After reading it, he gave it back without saying anything.” After this episode, the group commenced counting the votes. Judge Bond solicited a chair for Daisy. When she took her seat between the Deputy and a female judge, Chance “screamed in a loud voice,” “You can’t sit there... You will have to sit in the back.” He then began to instruct Daisy, with orders “evidently dug up for my benefit,” she noted sardonically. Chance called these instructions the “law.” Daisy, however, refused to be cajoled or pressured into submission. “[She] stood and informed him that [she] knew the law,” got up, and took a seat between Judge Bond and a Little Rock fireman. “I could feel hate and prejudice steaming from this deputy who is living off the taxpayers. Satisfied with himself, now that he had informed me of the law, he said to the judges, ‘now lets get to work.’”

⁴⁷ Daisy Bates, “My Experience as a Poll Watcher,” *State Press*, November 12, 1948.

Deputy Chance, whom she mockingly labeled a “law enforcer,” ...had broken the law five minutes after the counting started.” Daisy concluded that Chance realized that she knew he was breaking the law because he “looked around the table with a sheepish grin and said, ‘This is her first time serving.’” Daisy’s experience as a poll watcher is another example of various ways she made herself increasingly more visible in Little Rock.⁴⁸ It is also a testament of her refusal to be intimidated by southern white men.

In addition to representing a Senatorial candidate as a poll watcher, Daisy was also counting votes for Henry Wallace, former Vice President to Franklin Roosevelt, and candidate for the Progressive Party ticket. The *State Press* had endorsed Wallace the Friday before the Tuesday November 2, 1948 election. In their endorsement, the couple explained that they made their decision based on who they believed would help blacks the most. Expressing their awareness of the possible backlash from their endorsement, in typical fashion, the newspaper editors stood on principled ground, “We are cognizant that we are going to lose business for this paper in expressing a favorable opinion of Henry Wallace. We readily admit that we are not in any financial position to lose business. And too, we readily admit that we do not want the business that calls for the sacrificing of our opinions.” This statement was a direct dig on the “pseudo-leaders” they criticized and complained about weekly in the *State Press*. Their support for Henry Wallace’s candidacy is also a lucid, public example of how the Bateses were willing to sacrifice personal advantages in order to advance the objections of the race by challenging the black establishment.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Ibid*

⁴⁹ *State Press*, October 29, 1948.

Daisy and L.C.'s endorsement was politically clever and showed that the couple could use diplomacy and more subtle approaches if they chose. The editorial also addressed the flaws with the candidates on the Republican, Democrat and Dixiecrat tickets.

“We are told that Wallace has the support of the Communists who are out to overthrow our government...Mr. Dewey has the support of the capitalist who are out to starve us to death...Mr. Truman has the support of reactionary southerners who will keep our status of citizenship second class...Mr. Thurmond tells us already what he stands for: White man rule, to hell with Negroes.”⁵⁰

After addressing the liabilities of each candidate, the editors explained why Wallace was their man. They admitted that “the Negro is going to find it difficult to make up their mind” between Truman and Wallace, but conceded that blacks would have a hard time voting against the Democratic Party, “despite its evil associates.” The historian Patricia Sullivan writes that “Editorials in the black press hailed Truman’s proposals as the strongest civil rights program ever put forth by an American President.”⁵¹ According to journalism scholar Patrick Washburn, the black press may have been somewhat partial to Truman because in April 1945, he met with a group of fifteen reporters of the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA).⁵² Three days later, for the first time in the nation’s history, a black reporter attended a Presidential press conference. Still, Daisy and L.C. went against recent political pressures from national black leaders, like Walter White of the NAACP, and supported Wallace over Truman. The editors ended with a reinforcement of their principles:

We take the Progressive party because the party advocates just what we have dedicated life to—the integration of all people into government activities without regard to race, color or creed. The Progressive party calls for the abolition of segregation, based upon the color of skin. The Progressive party stands for ability without color...Irrespective of our feeling toward Mr. Truman, we are forced to vote our convictions. If we voted against Mr. Wallace’s electors, it would mean

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 356.

⁵² Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 173.

that we endorse 'white supremacy' and 'segregation,' and we will repeat here, that although we live under those evil practices, we'll never endorse them.⁵³

Daisy and L.C. understood that they could not completely shun the Democratic Party, especially since it was the only real functioning national party in the South. In addition to their balanced endorsement of Wallace, the editors also published advertisements for Democratic candidates, paid for by the Arkansas Negro Democratic Association, of which L.C. was a member.⁵⁴ Daisy and L.C.'s support for Henry Wallace should not be taken lightly, especially since the NAACP's national leadership was fiercely loyal to President Harry Truman's reelection campaign, and because they became active in the civil rights group and the national political party. Before the election, 70 percent of the NAACP national office stated in a poll that they would vote for Wallace. On Election Day, Truman won blacks by an almost five-to-one margin. Daisy and L.C.'s candidate had lost the election, but they had perhaps won the local battle against their mounting enemies in Arkansas. By remaining steadfast on their principles, they presented the image of a strong, sacrificial brand of leadership based on honesty and actions.⁵⁵

Daisy and L.C.'s bold support for Wallace was further indication that they were willing to go against the grain in the postwar era. The *State Press* attacked the local black Elks for previously agreeing to allow the Progressive party to host a meeting in their auditorium, only to renege "at [the] last minute." The editors likened these actions

⁵³ *State Press*, October 29, 1948

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990*, (University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 22-4; For more on Henry Wallace's campaign for president and the Progressive Party, please see, Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 127; Harry Ashmore, *Civil Rights and Wrongs: A Memoir of Race and Politics, 1944-1996*, (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, 1997), 76; Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 324-5; Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History, Volume 2*, (W.W. Norton: New York, 2006), 795; Kelly and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 171; Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 150; Savage, *Your Spirits Walk With Us*, 165; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 55-6; Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 113.

to “Dixiecratism.” They also continued to criticize the black clergy.⁵⁶ One 1945 article stated that Shorter College—where Daisy had taken courses—was run by a “one man government.” Another headline read in bold, capital letters, “HOT SPRINGS PREACHER SEEKS TO CONCEAL TRUTH FROM FLOCK: Revs. Woods and McJunkins, Baptist Preachers Concoct Plans To Boycott State Press Before State Congress”⁵⁷

The cause of the blow-up with Reverends Woods and McJunkins was an incident which occurred involving a young black man and a local policeman in the town of Hope, the birthplace of Arkansas’s most famous son, President Bill Clinton. According to the *State Press*, “a city policeman walked up to an innocent Negro boy just from the country as he was eating a hamburger and shot him to death. Witnesses declared no motive could be ascribed other than he was a Negro who did not “jump over the moon” when the police yelled “Nigger.” The newspaper editor accused the ministers of failing to provide adequate leadership in the tragedy’s wake.

The preachers were in Hope the Baptist Training Union’s (BTU) annual meeting. During the proceedings Reverend Woods, a doctor from Hot Springs tried to get the BTU Congress’s Ministerial Department to condemn the *State Press*, and “go on record boycotting the paper.” He said he would sue the paper, but concluded, “it was a waste of time.” Woods claimed that the PRESS allowed an article of over a thousand words to be published through its columns attacking the Baptist ministers and wouldn’t allow the ministers equal space to reply.” The motion was seconded by Reverend T.O. McJunkins of El Dorado. Reverend Clark, who presided over the session, shot the motion down,

⁵⁶ *State Press*, October 29, 1948.

⁵⁷ *State Press*, October 19, 1945, November 2, 1945, November 9, 1945, March 1, 1946, April 5, 1946, June 21, 1946.

telling the *Southern Mediator Journal*, “The PRESS prints the news and anyone subscribing to such a resolution will not hinder the people from reading it.”⁵⁸ The two preachers accused Daisy and L.C. of being an organ used by the Methodist Church to attack Baptist ministers. L.C. had his own summation of the events at hand:

“What the apostle really meant to say was that the writer exposed the tactics of the ministry, and the paper refused space for the ministry to cover up...Just who do Woods and McJunkins think they are anyway, when they take the liberty to tell people in America what they must read and must not read? Our interpretation is, ministers are servants of the people, selected to teach the gospel of Christ and authorized to administer sacraments. If Wood and McJunkins are agents of Christ, we have labored under misapprehension.”⁵⁹

L.C. joked throughout the commentary, “The STATE PRESS was a victim of a near boycott last week, concocted by the narrow and perverted minds of a few Baptist ministers.” Rubbing salt in the preachers’ wounds, L.C. reported an increase in request for the *State Press* in their hometowns of El Dorado and Hot Springs.

Not all of the articles the *State Press* carried about the black clergy were contentious. Four months after the Woods-McJunkins Boycott, Daisy praised Reverend Emanuel C. Dyer, former pastor of the historic First Baptist Church. Dr. Dyer resigned due to the objections of a church “minority.” L.C. published a front-page article lamenting Dyer’s departure as the end of a “Progressive Era.” After the war, he allowed Daisy to host meetings for the FEPC and the NAACP, which could have been a topic of disagreement between Dyer and the rest of the church leadership. The exact identity of Dyer’s minority opposition is not known, only that they were powerful enough to frustrate the pastor to the point of resignation, despite winning two church-wide popular votes. However, if Little Rock’s black churches were like other southern congregations,

⁵⁸ *State Press*, June 21, 1946.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

the minority leadership would have been disproportionately male and the majority of the congregation would have been female. In this scenario, the women of First Baptist were not only ignored, but silenced. And this is how Daisy saw it. “But in church nowadays,” Daisy asserted, “as in anything else, the majority has ceased to rule and there is always a rule or ruin group...which forced the pastor in the name of Christianity and decency to make his resignation over the protest of the majority vote.” Like the attack on the black Elks, Daisy’s article conflated the motivations and actions of black leaders with the reactionary Dixiecrats.⁶⁰

As the decade ended, Daisy and L.C.’s rhetoric amplified. “Our Preachers have failed us,” called “The Preacher as a leader a dismal failure,” and responsible for black people’s “pre-slavery status...Since the ministers have established themselves as leaders ...the Negro’s chances of becoming first-class citizens are more remote today than they were eighty years ago.”⁶¹ In addition to basically calling the clergy modern-day overseers for the Jim Crow system, the editors categorized them:

One class is too ignorant to lead; one class is too dishonest. These two classes absorb the majority of the ministry. One class can be found that is too wrapped up in its own ego and is very detrimental to welfare of the race, for this class has a cunning way of getting the white powers. Another class of Negro preachers is a class that possesses ability and other qualifications to lead, but has no desire ...This latter class of ministry would go a long way in elevating the race from its present status. If these ministers could be persuaded to exercise the courage to lead the group.

The *State Press* may have called the ministers cunning, but that term could have also described Daisy and L.C.’s actions. When looked at carefully, the editorial practically

⁶⁰ For a general discussion about the black church and black activism see Savage, *Your Spirits Walk With Us*. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s *Righteous Discontent*, is a study of the women of the Black Baptist Convention during the Gilded Age. See also, Collier-Thomas, *Jesus Jobs and Justice*.

⁶¹ *State Press*, July 1, 1949.

dismissed every type of preacher leader as too corrupt, egotistical, or cowardly to adequately address African-American's grievances.

The tone of the *State Press* was a product of the frustrations derived from a decade of struggle, and the conviction that inept leadership was indeed one of the most daunting issues facing blacks in Little Rock. The editors did not stop at just categorizing the clergy. "Until the people rise in mass and denounce this type of preacher-leadership and demand leadership that will teach them to live and be men...the Negro is going to forever be a race of people found lacking." Remembering previous battles with black ministers, the paper referred to their "ranting" and "blasphemy," declaring, "until the preacher rises up and establishes the right kind of leadership for this people, we have no apology to make. The Preacher must prove he is not a dismal failure." With that, Daisy and L.C. made their case and stood their principled ground. They would continue to have good relationships with individual ministers, but the division created between the crusading couple and some of the black clergy would remain beyond the school desegregation crisis.⁶²

"Our Preachers Have Failed Us" is demonstrative of the shift in L.C.'s political philosophy that occurred throughout the decade. The historian C. Calvin Smith writes that L.C. "was an advocate of equality, not desegregation. His attitude on equality of opportunity changed in the late 1940s when he realized that little was being done by those in authority to equalize opportunities."⁶³ Smith identifies the 1949 ruling in favor of desegregation in Dewitt, Arkansas as the reason for the change in L.C.'s philosophy. After black parents filed a lawsuit against the local school board, the court acknowledged

⁶² *State Press*, October 19, 1945, June 21, 1946, July 1, 1949; October 28, 1949.

⁶³ C. Calvin Smith, "L.C. Bates: Newsman and Civil Rights Activist," *Negro History Bulletin*, 45:4 (1982: Oct./Dec.), 102.

that separate was not equal, but only ordered the town to make facilities equal for both races in “reasonable time.” A frustrated L.C. wrote in the *State Press* that the decision “gave the all white school board the opportunity to do nothing because no time limit was established for equalization.”⁶⁴ Smith concludes that following the Dewitt case, L.C. “became a vigorous advocate of desegregation.”⁶⁵

At the same time, Daisy and L.C. were also working to carve out a space for her as a local leader. By late 1949, articles and editorials with Daisy’s name on them frequented the paper. This development was a clear departure from the pre-war years when she authored no articles. In one editorial, Daisy told readers about a recent visit to the state hospital. Calling it a “city of forgotten people where we put out relatives and cease to think about them,”⁶⁶ Daisy wrote with passion about the plight of its residents, as well as her reasons for fighting to improve state run facility. “For a number of years I have visited it and have come away disgusted, but with a stronger determination to strike out at whatever power made such a hell possible.” Her latest visit was prompted by a request from the Little Rock Urban League, who wanted her to go and see if the hospital’s administrators had made actual improvements. “Armed with notebook, pencil, and my soapbox, I said, ‘Today I am going to tell somebody off.’” However, when Daisy arrived, she saw noticeable improvement. “I did not need my soapbox,” she admitted. “[A] year or so ago where there would have been filth and an apparent don’t-care attitude toward these unfortunate people, today there are clean, airy, and well kept wards....” Daisy also noted that the head nurse was a black woman. The following week, Daisy joined the newly created State Hospital Auxiliary, which helped ensure the hospital’s

⁶⁴ *State Press*, July 15, 1949.

⁶⁵ Smith, “L.C. Bates,” 102.

⁶⁶ *State Press*, September 2, 1949.

upkeep. Articles like this are important to understanding how L.C. shaped Daisy's political image and voice. At times, it is difficult to distinguish their voices. Although she was unarguably influenced by her husband, Daisy was a woman who did not possess a simplistic world view. Her personal life had taught her some difficult lessons that became central to her political development. Another editorial accredited to Daisy, titled, "This Is One Mell of a Hess," chastised black leaders for allowing white politicians to exploit the black vote during election time, only to abandon them after victory. The article told readers that their demands would have to be "gained through the courts or the ballot, and not through BEGGING." With her husband's guidance, Daisy was slowly finding her political voice beside him.

As Daisy and L.C. stirred the pot of resistance in in Little Rock, they encountered opposition from conservative and moderate African-Americans. In March 1950, they were once again sued, this time by the conservative Elder M.D. Willett, pastor of Little Rock's St. Paul Church of Christ and God. The source of the lawsuit was an editorial the couple had published on February 25, 1950, title, "It Stinks to the High Heavens." In it, L.C. likened Reverend Willett's Sunday radio program to "the odor from a cesspool that has been exposed to the rays of the sun." He also called Willett's sermons "ranting" and "nauseating."⁶⁷ This article was followed up by "In the Wake of the Wanders" two weeks later, in which an anonymous writer challenged Willett's character, stating, "religion and undulant, concentrated ignorance don't mix."⁶⁸ In his \$15,000 lawsuit, Willett claimed that he lost income due to the articles published in the *State Press*. The pastor accused the editors of "intentionally" printing "false, libelous, and defamatory"

⁶⁷ *State Press*, February 25, 1950.

⁶⁸ *State Press*, March 10, 1950.

statements about him. The case made it to the Arkansas Supreme Court, where the jury ruled in favor of the newspaper editors, Willett was rewarded no compensation for his claims. Represented by the well-respected J.R. Booker and John A. Hibbler, L.C. testified that “there was no ill-feeling” between himself and Willett, but that the “article was published for the benefit of the public.”⁶⁹ The judges believed L.C. and questioned Willett’s motives. “In the first place,” the decision read, “the record shows that the appellee has been a defendant in criminal courts of Little Rock several times.”⁷⁰ When questioned about these cases, Willett diverted attention, and turned to race-baiting. The decision also stated that Willett was “attempting to inject, if possible, racism just enough to becloud the minds of the jury to the real issues involved, and portray him in the role of society’s benefactor.” Daisy and L.C. won another battle with local black conservatives, and were just starting to put pressure on their increasing number of rivals in the City of Roses.

Few recognized it, but through the *State Press* L.C. and Daisy had created a leadership debate and their influence in the city and state continued to rise. The same edition with the Reverend Willett article also contained “Constructive Leadership,” about the need for new black leaders written by Dr. Roland Smith, the new pastor of the First Street Baptist Church. “Our great need today is an unselfish, intelligent leadership,” Dr. Smith articulated. “Too many of our self-appointed and so-called leaders are selfishly interested in using the race for their individual...gains. This type of leadership without principle or character and will succumb to any unscrupulous act to advance itself.”⁷¹ Dr. Smith was not just speaking for himself, but for Daisy and L.C. as well. As their sphere

⁶⁹ *The State Press Company v. M.D. Willett*, Daisy Bates Papers (Madison), Box 6, folder 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *State Press*, March 31, 1950.

of influence grew in the state, they published articles written by respected members of the community like Dr. Smith. But most of the onslaught came from the couple, through the *State Press*. Two weeks later, “A Discovery—But No Startling” declared that the “rule or ruin leadership must be eradicated, and that “The Negro needs leadership that can and will stand up to be counted.”⁷² This editorial ended with words that cut to the heart of the matter, “Above all, Little Rock, the Arkansas capital city, needs leadership badly.”

Another article titled “Call for New Leadership,” criticized black pastors and pleaded for “down-to-earth, good leadership.”⁷³ Many blacks in Little Rock expressed their desire for new leadership and Daisy and L.C. used the *State Press* to make their case. In eight short years, Daisy and L.C. had made a name for themselves based on principle and action. They had taken on all elements in the state of Arkansas, irrespective of race, economic position, or community status. With the exception of a few hiccups, the couple had been very successful in Little Rock. By the time 1950 arrived, the couple was confident and ready to make a bigger move.

One month after “A Discovery—But Not Startling” appeared in the *State Press*,, with the help of the NAACP, Arkansas blacks took the Arkansas Democratic Party to the United States District Court. They argued that the party’s refusal to permit Reverend J.H. Gatlin to run in the Democratic primary due to his race was unconstitutional. In the 1944 *Smith v Alright* decision the United States Supreme Court had declared all-white Democratic primaries illegal. The ruling proclaimed that political parties were not private clubs, but were allocated power by the states, and their purpose was to elect political representatives. With this precedent in place, the Arkansas court sided with the

⁷² *State Press*, April 14, 1950.

⁷³ *State Press*, October 14, 1950.

plaintiffs, ending Arkansas's all-white Democratic primary.⁷⁴ This was a mammoth victory for the Bateses, because they had championed black voting rights since the *State Press's* 1941 founding. Although the decision did not prevent blacks from disfranchisement, the termination of the all-white primary was a symbolic victory, but an important one, nonetheless.⁷⁵

Daisy and L.C. finally got the opportunity for which they had been waiting. In December 1950, Dr. O. Sherman of North Little Rock announced a meeting for all "political leaders of Little Rock," perhaps because of all of the recent bickering amongst them. L.C. and Daisy thought the invitation and the goals were issued with "sincerity," but rejected it based on "our knowledge of Little Rock's leaders." After wishing Dr. Sherman luck, the couple made a call of their own: "it is about time for a general showdown in leadership in Little Rock."⁷⁶

Conclusion: The Evolution of Mrs. L.C. Bates

In the period following World War II, Daisy Bates joined her husband in his crusade against ineffective black leaders and white opposition to eradicating Jim Crow. At minimum, Daisy made the step from the editor's wife to city editor. At most, she was transformed into the politically active woman she wrote about in her memoir. The truth lies somewhere in between. Nevertheless, what Daisy Bates conveyed in *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* was how her previous activities qualified her to lead the Little

⁷⁴ Kirk, "The Little Rock Crisis and postwar Black Activism in Arkansas", 282.

⁷⁵ See Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

⁷⁶ *State Press*, December 29, 1950.

Rock black community during the Central High School Crisis. When asked by historian Elizabeth Jackoway what she and L.C. were trying to change in Little Rock, Daisy replied, “the whole darned system...”⁷⁷ One close friend remembered, “Daisy had a very good sounding voice. It’s just like some people can be vibrant,” he continued. “Daisy had a tone, season and tone. It wasn’t high pitched or squeaky. She sounded sincere about what she was doing.”⁷⁸

Daisy’s increased postwar involvement with the *State Press* was a clear departure from her lack of participation during the war. One friend attributed her lack of involvement to a lack of confidence and fear of “intruding” on L.C.’s “domain.”⁷⁹ Nevertheless, by the middle of the decade Daisy made herself more and more visible at the *State Press*. During the paper’s early days, L.C.’s cousin remembered that Daisy would get out of bed around ten or eleven o’clock, and prepare herself to go out into the public. According to Lottie Neely, Daisy “loved to wear three inch heels.” Everything had to be right, “her hair, her nails, her clothes.” L.C. would come home around lunch time, where Daisy had lunch ready, even though she “wasn’t the best cook.” L.C. then drove them to the office of the *State Press*, usually around “1:30 or 2:00.” At this time, Daisy “didn’t have a regular job with the paper at the time.” She would often get the staff food from restaurants. Being around the fast-pace of the *State Press* made Daisy want to get involved with the paper. After some persistent badgering, L.C. agreed that Daisy could cover the black community’s “social news”, like “weddings and special celebrations.” Taking herself more seriously, Daisy carried around a notebook. Their

⁷⁷ Daisy Bates interview with Jacoway

⁷⁸ Mercer interview with Stockley.

⁷⁹ Fradin and Fradin, *Power of One*, 39.

process was simple: Daisy kept notes, shared her gatherings with L.C., and if they felt a story was newsworthy, he would help her write it.⁸⁰ Over time, local blacks began to see her as more than just the beautiful wife of the radical newspaper editor, and as an activist in her own right.

Daisy's role in the *State Press* has been a topic of historical discussion, especially since she struggled with formal writing her entire life. Daisy's writing challenges have been used as a way of giving L.C. recognition, particularly since his historical contributions are usually overshadowed by her 1957 leadership. Historians have generally dismissed her contributions to the beginnings of the *State Press*. Daisy's lawyer during the school crisis called L.C., "the brains behind the whole operation," and L.C.'s cousin felt it was worth nothing that Daisy would "come in and help out...but didn't write any articles in the paper."⁸¹ L.C. agreed that Daisy would cover the black community's "social news", like "weddings and special celebrations." It appears that after taking notes, she received assistance with composing articles from L.C. or another *State Press* writer.⁸² While Daisy was literate and did not have difficulties with informal writing, she struggle with formal writing throughout her life, and if the process she used in composing later correspondence is any indication, she dictated the content to someone who then formalized her thoughts.

L.C. did not have the desire or the personality for the limelight, Daisy did. Their shared belief that racial equality would be best achieved through desegregating public facilities is one of things that brought Daisy and L.C. together. L.C.'s philosophical shift

⁸⁰ Fradin and Fradin, *Power of One*, 41-2; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 43.

⁸¹ Stockely, *Daisy Bates*, 50.

⁸² Fradin and Fradin, *Power of One*, 41-2; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 43.

is critical to contextualize because in his pursuit of social justice he never sought the limelight. He was committed more to the causes for which he cared than to the public recognition he could garner in the process. As Daisy increased her involvement in local politics, the FEPC and the NAACP, both of their activities were redirected toward the same cause: desegregation. In what was a perfect personal and political storm for the couple, a new chapter of their partnership began. However, this time, Daisy would be would appear to lead while L.C. assisted from his post behind the scenes at the *State Press*.

Chapter Seven
“No one else to be elected”:
Daisy Bates and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

“...[T]hat was a period when it wasn’t easy, and much is said about what happened in the 1960s, but to me the fifties were much worse than the sixties. When I was out there by myself, for instance, there were no TV cameras with me to give me any protection. There were no reporters traveling with me to give me protection, because when the press or the eye of the camera was on the situation, it was different. It was different.”

--Ruby Hurley, NAACP Southern Regional Coordinator,
 excerpt from Harold Raines, *My Soul is Rested*, 136

Introduction: Finding her Place in the Movement

Radical moments in history create radical women. Politicized during a radical moment in American History, Bates’ path to political activism was both similar to and different from the Freedom Movement’s other women.¹ For example, though more educated than Daisy Bates, Rosa Parks was introduced to political activism in the 1930s by her husband Raymond Parks, who assisted with local efforts to free Alabama’s Scottsboro Boys. Ten years Rosa’s senior, Raymond, whom she called “the first activist I ever met”, felt his wife was too young to partake in dangerous political activities. “I was very, very depressed,” Mrs. Parks recalled in her autobiography, “about the fact that black men could not hold a meeting without fear of bodily injury or death.”² On the subject of the absence of women at her husband’s meetings, Parks stated, “I don’t think the men barred women; it was just that it was so dangerous...Not many man were activist

¹ For more on radical women please see, Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; Crawford, Rouse, and Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*; Gates, *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*; Gore, *Radicalism At The Crossroads*; Gore, Theoharis and Woodard, eds, *Want to Start a Revolution*; Holsaert, Noonan, Richardson, Robinson, Young and Zellner, eds, *Hand on the Freedom Plow*; Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*; Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*; Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*; Theoharis and Woodard, eds, *Groundwork*.

² Parks, *My Story*, 59, 67.

in those days either...”³ According to Barbara Ransby, Ella Baker grew into her political consciousness in the context of World War I’s racial discrimination and violence. Baker evolved during a time when there was a southern President hostile to Black Americans in the White House. The radical left was also under attack. Still, in 1920 women had somehow earned the right to vote. Ransby asserts that “Ella Baker began to develop her political ambitions and to define her own worldview at a time when the citizenship rights of women and African-Americans were at an important crossroads.”⁴ Forty-four year old Fannie Lou Hamer’s political radicalization occurred in the 1960s when her church pastor announced that Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activists were coming to Ruleville, Mississippi to register black voters.⁵ Ruby Doris Smith Robinson was overtaken by the Atlanta sit-in movement, and quickly became one of the most important figures, male or female, in SNCC’s short history.⁶ While all of these women had been assertive since their youth, each grew into their political consciousness during a period of radical change.

Like her contemporaries, Bates too became political during a radical moment in American history. However, due to the poor education she received in Huttig, her path to race leadership was different. Before providing leadership for the Little Rock black community, Bates first had to clarify how her traumatic personal experiences were connected to the larger global oppression of women and minorities, and how those experiences had qualified her to provide leadership in the crusade for social justice. Her partnership with L.C., and the evolution of his political philosophy during World War II

³ *Ibid*, 67-8.

⁴ Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 53-4.

⁵ Lee, *For Freedom’s Sake*, 24.

⁶ Flemming, *Soon We Will Not Cry*, 39-68.

supplied the context Daisy needed to make these critical connections. After connecting her individual life to the human dilemmas that culminated in world war, with her husband's help, Daisy began an important personal journey of self-discovery and realization.

L.C. began refining his politics during World War II, and his shift in advocacy for equal facilities to desegregation coincided with the NAACP's focus on school desegregation, and Daisy's increased involvement in the local chapter and the state conference. Daisy believed that that the NAACP represented the best chance for racial progress in Arkansas, and had claimed that when she was a little girl her father was a member who paid additional dues for his wife and daughter. In 1948, Daisy made an attempt to create a leadership position in the state NAACP for herself by incorporating a Pulaski County chapter. Though that attempt failed, Bates' efforts to attain a leadership role resulted in her 1952 election as state president. Of all of her endeavors between 1948 and 1952, the most important was her increased participation and status in the Little Rock and Arkansas NAACP. During these years, Daisy and L.C. expanded her visibility in the public sphere as she became a known actor in Arkansas's burgeoning Civil Rights Movement.

The NAACP was an interracial, intersex, cross-class, multi-regional organization. Although the Association did not promote women's leadership it was open to women in leadership positions. While National Director of Branches, Ella Baker's biographer writes that "she felt that the NAACP's relative openness to women's participation should be exploited and expanded."⁷ Developing youth councils was one way African-American women expanded their influence in the NAACP. Aldon Morris has written, "The

⁷ *Ibid*, 136.

NAACP was not a monolithic organization; it housed a range of protest leaders, some of them cautious, others aggressive, and a few militant...Members of the young, aggressive wing of the NAACP often served as adult advisors to NAACP youth councils. A disproportionate amount of these advisors were women.”⁸ In addition to providing critical leadership on the national and local levels, during a particularly volatile moment, black women were indispensable leaders in the South’s most dangerous areas. In 1951, Ruby Hurley became the NAACP’s first Southeastern Region Secretary.⁹ Hurley represented the national office in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida and Tennessee, the heart of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. Though not without its own sexism, the NAACP provided leadership opportunities for African-American women. Daisy Bates identified with the NAACP’s goal of interracial equality, and like other activists, male and female, she joined a group that was aligned with her personal belief that all humans were entitled to freedom and dignity, as well as a willingness to accept her contributions.¹⁰

Though blacks resisted Jim Crow segregation in many ways, Daisy held firm to her belief that NAACP membership represented the best form of African-American protest. Nationally, during the 1940s, the NAACP “swelled to an all-time high.”¹¹ As black soldiers returned to an unchanged, white-supremacists South, many expressed their dissatisfaction with Jim Crow. Daisy Bates wrote that black veterans maintained a steadfast “stubborn determination to oppose a segregated system...rarely punished but

⁸ Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 124.

⁹ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 399-401.

¹⁰ Identification with a specific organization did not prevent black women from working with other women affiliated with different groups. For more on this point, please see, Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion*, (New York: Knopf, 2011); Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics*; Gore, *Radicalism At the Crossroads*; McDuffie, *Sojourning For Freedom*; White, *Too Heavy a Load*.

¹¹ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 46-7.

often promoted.”¹² White southerners responded with an increase in violence against black veterans. Infuriated by the surge in white violence against black patriots, a large degree of African-Americans turned to the NAACP for recourse. Violence did not deter African-Americans, but actually had the opposite effect.

Daisy presented her NAACP membership as a qualification for her later activism, and made it a centerpiece of her public persona. “From our first days”, Daisy wrote, she and L.C. had been members of the local NAACP. Bates established Little Rock as a place ripe and ready for change. She also explained why she was the leader the black community required. Bates downplayed the black community’s deep divisions by stating that she was hand-selected as an heir to the ASC presidency. Bates recounted an episode in which Reverend W. Marcus Taylor, who preceded Daisy as state NAACP President, visited the *State Press* office to discuss “the oncoming struggles.” Taylor, Daisy wrote, “believed they would require young, fresh leadership”, and “thought I should be the person the head the State Conference of NAACP branches.” Bates only stated that she was elected “without opposition.”¹³ Between 1948 and 1954, Daisy and L.C. became prominent voices in not just the direction and initiatives of Arkansas NAACP, but state racial politics in general. Daisy’s 1952 election as state president gave her an official post from which she could be active. However, her ascendance gave her husband an ally in an influential position with whom he could strategize and collaborate. Still, as was the case with the earliest part of her life, the story of Daisy Bates’ emergence as President of the NAACP’s Arkansas State Conference was much more complicated than she wrote.

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*, 47.

“A FERTILE FIELD”

A young, militant black attorney and activist named William Harold Flowers was one of Daisy and L.C.’s closest and most important early political allies in Little Rock. On her way to becoming ASC President, Daisy Bates collaborated with her husband and other local black leaders. The efforts proved to the NAACP’s national leaders that Arkansas was a place where progress on racial issues could be made. Daisy believed that the Natural State could serve as an example for the rest of the South. In Little Rock, L.C. promoted Daisy and the NAACP in the *State Press*, and worked with leaders like Harold Flowers to wrestle control of Black Arkansas’s political agenda from the established elites.

Four months before the *Arkansas State Press* printed its first controversial words, Flowers delivered a stirring oration to a crowd of Pine Bluff African-Americans. “The success of our effort to make democracy a way of life for the peoples of the world,” Flowers bellowed in a January 1941 speech to a group of mostly black female church members, “must begin at home, not after a while, but now.”¹⁴ Fresh out of law school and eager to make a difference for black Arkansans, Flowers’s also helped change the landscape of Arkansas’ racial politics in the 1940s. He was also one of the couple’s most important, and most controversial, supporters.

Just as Daisy identified the rape and murder of her birth mother as the moment when she consciously began to challenge Jim Crow, Flowers recalled a 1927 lynching of an African-American man named John Carter. When he was young boy, Harold went

¹⁴ Quoted in Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 29.

shopping with his father in on West Ninth Street, in Little Rock's black business district. Suddenly, a car full of white men appeared. Flowers's eyes fixated on the lifeless body dragging on the back. It was the lynched corpse of John Carter. Flowers described the impact witnessing the terror of white men fearless disregard for black life as indelible. He remembered the black community's fear, and, like Bates, "formed a more militant attitude toward civil rights."¹⁵

Flowers's story is indispensable to understanding how Daisy Bates made the difficult move from political outsider to a recognized leader in Arkansas. L.C. and Daisy more than likely first met Flowers around 1940, before their marriage. That year, Flowers gathered a group of black activists from all over the state, and formed the Committee of Negro Organizations (CNO). Around the same time, L.C. had helped create a similar group in Little Rock, the Arkansas Negro Democratic Association (ANDA).¹⁶ The relationship between the Bateses and Flowers blossomed. Together, they represented a young, militant voice in Arkansas's black political arena. Flowers "connected the couple to black activist efforts statewide," and in return, "the *State Press* helped disseminate the program of the CNO in Little Rock," historian John Kirk reports. Not only did "Flowers [write] for the *State Press*," (under the pseudonym Frances Sampson) but when he visited Little Rock, he usually dropped by the Bates household.¹⁷

The couple's relationship with Flowers became a politically lucrative one, and launched a new chapter in her political career. With a grandmother who Maya Angelou described as "the aristocrat of Black Stamps," Arkansas, Flowers's close affiliation with Daisy and L.C. validated their activities, and helped strengthen the *State Press*'s image

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 25.

¹⁶ Smith, "From Separate But Equal," 259; Kirk, "Black Activism," 30.

¹⁷ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 49.

with local blacks.¹⁸ Flowers believed that the “CNO possessed enough brainpower and courage to revolutionize the thinking of the people of Arkansas.”¹⁹ Together, they revitalized the state’s long defunct NAACP branch, and set the natural state’s wheels of racial revolution into motion. Flowers was the first man, Bates recalled, who attempted to seriously address issues that concerned the black community. Fifty years later she described her late friend as “the only ‘effective’ protest leader of the time.”²⁰

The end of Attorney Flowers’s decade of legal and political successes was precipitous, controversial, and unfortunate. It was also a necessary event in Daisy’s rise in the ASC because his departure created the leadership void that she eventually filled. After complaints to the national office from political rivals questioning his use of the organization’s funds, on January 29, 1949, Flowers was removed from office in a special meeting held in Hot Springs and presided over by the national Director of Branches, Gloster Current, and attended by Southwest Regional Secretary, Donald Jones.²¹ For purposes of this project, Flowers’s importance is examined for what it reveals about the activism and lives of Daisy and L.C. Bates. Flowers’s removal from power does not seem to have affected Daisy and L.C.’s image negatively. Flowers was a militant leader and his successes propagated the local demand for aggressive black leadership. The national office’s insertion of moderate leadership did not satisfy Arkansas’s militant faction who wanted their leaders to vehemently attack Jim Crow. Flowers’s removal,

¹⁸ Kirk, “Black Activism,” 30.

¹⁹ John Kirk, “‘He Founded a Movement’: W.H. Flowers, the Committee of Negro Organizations and the Origins of Black Activism in Arkansas, 1940-57,” *The Making of Martin Luther King and The Civil Rights Movement*, Tony Badger and Brian Ward, eds, (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 30.

²⁰ Kirk, “Daisy Bates,” 32.

²¹ *State Press*, February 4, 1949.

combined with the national office's failure to replace him with satisfactory leadership meant that the political space he occupied remained open, for Daisy.

Throughout the 1940s, the question of who would possess influence over black Arkansas remained heated, and involved both local and national NAACP activists. Since its 1909 founding, the NAACP had to repeatedly define and redefine itself and its agenda.

²² Flowers solicited help from the national office. In 1938, he wrote to Walter White and attorneys Charles Houston and Thurgood Marshall asking for support, and all replied negatively. Houston stated that he would not come to Arkansas "without due recompense." Marshall was more candid, stating that the NAACP had previously experienced little progress in Arkansas. Unlike black leaders before him, Flowers persevered, continued his work and, more importantly, did not worsen the already fragile relationship between the New York national office and Arkansas's local branches. Flowers founded the CNO, mobilized black Arkansans, and in 1941, headed a poll-tax drive intended to qualify more black voters. Under his leadership, the CNO registered a record number of black voters. Through his actions, Flowers proved, as he wrote to White in 1938, that Arkansas "was a fertile field for NAACP activity."²³ Flowers's achievements began an important shift in how the national office viewed Arkansas's potential for the Association.²⁴

On January 27, 1946, Pine Bluff elected Flowers branch president. He also kept his job as NAACP state organizer, in part because the state presidency was an unpaid position. In 1947 Flowers impressed NAACP national officers when he took the once-

²² The best work on the NAACP is Patricia Sullivan's *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: The New Press, 2009).

²³ Kirk, "He Founded a Movement," 30; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*.

²⁴ Whayne, *Arkansas: A Narrative History*, 350-3.

moribund Pine Bluff branch to a record 4,382 members, making it the largest branch in the state's history. "To say that I am gratified it is to put it mildly," an elated Lucille Black, National NAACP Secretary wrote in January 1948. "I might add that I was duly surprised. I will admit that I may have underrated Pine Bluff and its leadership but never again will I make that mistake."²⁵ Flowers successfully changed the relationship between the state of Arkansas and the national office. In 1938, national figures were unwilling to even visit Arkansas. Ten years later, Flowers was respected by the national office, and Arkansas became, as he had predicted in 1938, "a fertile field for NAACP activity."²⁶

During the same period that Pine Bluff membership soared, the Little Rock chapter struggled. "Our trouble has been in finding the right type of person who will be a real president," Little Rock branch secretary Henrietta Porter commented to Walter White. "We have had the time of our lives getting someone to accept the presidency and finally got Rev. Taylor to again accept the place...we trust you will forgive us for so little done."²⁷ Pine Bluff had a clear leader in Flowers, while Little Rock did not. Porter also suggested that the Little Rock branch had the wrong leaders in power. "There are plenty of people in Little Rock, and I think to get them into the local branch is to have wide-awake officers and fearless ones who will go out and get the job done in a big way." Porter represented a contingent of Little Rock blacks who were ready to confront Jim Crow, with the NAACP as their vehicle, but without proper leadership.

The national office might have sympathized with Porter, but the problem of leadership facing the Little Rock branch was also an issue throughout the state. Harold

²⁵ Lucille Black to W. Harold Flowers, January 15, 1948, group II, series C, container 10, folder "Arkansas State Conference, April 1945-December 1948, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁶ Kirk, "He Founded a Movement," 30.

²⁷ Henrietta Porter to Walter White, January 26, 1948, group II, series C, container 10, folder "Little Rock, Arkansas, 1948-55, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

Flowers was at the center of the controversy. He could not replicate his Pine Bluff success across Arkansas. This was partially because he continued to organize branches while he remained president of the Pine Bluff branch, and practiced law. Flowers seemed overwhelmed with all of his duties, which had dire consequences for the NAACP in Arkansas.²⁸ His shaky relationship with a sometimes-fickle national office began to sour, due, more than anything else, to Flowers' lack of administrative prowess. Not only was Flowers's correspondence with the national office consistently late, but so were his submissions of membership dues, which eventually sealed his fate.

Slow correspondence added to the national office's growing frustration with Flowers, especially when his tardiness involved finances. In December 1945, Reverend Marcus Taylor, president of the Little Rock branch, and a rival of Flowers, informed Ella Baker, then National Director of Branches, that Flowers sent half of Arkansas's membership dues to the national office and kept the other half as a personal reward.²⁹ While Taylor was president of the Arkansas State Conference, Flowers held the important position of organizing state branches; one officer could not effectively function without the other.³⁰ These two men polarized the Arkansas NAACP. Each man's attempts to work together were superficial and half-hearted; both maneuvered to enervate

²⁸ John Lewis Adams, "Arkansas Needs Leadership:" Daisy Bates, Black Arkansas, and the NAACP," Master Thesis, Department of African-American Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003.

²⁹ Marcus Taylor to Ella Baker, December 7, 1945, group II, series C, container 9, folder "Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-47 NAACP Papers, Library of Congress; Also cited in Kirk, "Daisy Bates," 32; Kirk, "He Founded a Movement," 38; and Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 70. Kirk argues that Taylor accused Flowers of stealing. This conclusion seems premature. In December 1945, the ASC had only existed for a year and a half. Taylor's letter was more of an inquiry, ending, "Will you please inform me at once if this is proper and also if he is reporting to headquarters." There is no indication of malicious intent in his letter.

³⁰ Kirk, "He Founded a Movement," 38; Historian John Kirk claims that Taylor's accusations were unfounded, and were motivated by his jealousy over black Arkansans' support for Flowers. Kirk's conclusion would be more convincing if Taylor's claims came in 1947-8, when Flowers received excessive amounts of praise from the NAACP national office. This, however, was not the case. Taylor's claims surfaced while he was state president, two years before Flowers' 1947 success.

the other's power and influence. As Flowers and Taylor fought for control, a space in the public sphere was slowly emerging for Daisy Bates.

National NAACP records suggest that Taylor's allegations against Flowers may not have been completely fabricated, or created out of jealousy, as historian John Kirk has claimed. In her reply to Taylor's letter Ella Baker declared, "If, however, it is true that he is taking \$.50 of each \$1.00 membership for himself, this most certainly will have to be stopped."³¹ The following June, the Board of Directors discussed Flower's attitude and actions, as he had refused all requests to meet with them, telling Baker in person and in writing that the Board had made no such request.³² "I am told that he is very shrewd and has much nerve, but can't go straight," Taylor wrote in another letter.³³ The correspondence regarding the ASC's finances would be one of Ella Baker's last official actions as NAACP National Director of Branches. She submitted her resignation ten days later, and her predecessor Gloster Current had an easier solution than investigating: get rid of Flowers. "Will you kindly submit an opinion relative to removal of state organizer in Arkansas who is accused of irregularities by the state president," he privately wrote to Thurgood Marshall.³⁴ Walter White and the National NAACP purged Flowers from the organization, appointed conservative leadership and hoped to start a new, less turbulent chapter for the organization in Arkansas.

³¹ Ella Baker to Marcus Taylor December 14, 1945, group II, series C, container 9, folder "Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-47 NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

³² Ella Baker to Marcus Taylor, May 28, 1946, group II, series C, container 9, folder "Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-47 NAACP Papers, Library of Congress; .Marcus Taylor to Ella Baker, June 12, 1946, group II, series C, container 9, folder "Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-47 NAACP Papers, Library of Congress; The NAACP was short staffed at the time. Roy Wilkins recalled that that the NAACP had a difficult time coping with its growth in the 1940s because the organization only had two field workers and a director or branches. Roy Wilkins, *Standing Fast* 189-190.

³³ Marcus Taylor to Ella Baker, May 4, 1946, group II, series C, container 9, folder "Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-47 NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁴ Gloster Current to Thurgood Marshall, October 26, 1946, group II, series C, container 11, folder "Arkansas State Conference, April 1945-December 1948, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

Though his tenure ended disgracefully, Flowers remains a figure who was important in Daisy's journey in life. He had experienced many of the difficulties she would later confront as ASC President. After his 1949 removal from the NAACP he continued to be active as a lawyer in Arkansas, and eventually got involved with the organization again in the 1950s. Interestingly, for Daisy, her ally's sudden demise created an opportunity for her. His departure also coincided with her increased visibility in the *State Press*, and her criticisms of black leadership. In some ways, his failures strengthened her claim that black leaders were ineffective. Even Flowers, one of Arkansas's most powerful black men proved incapable of leading the race. Nevertheless, from his successes to his turbulent removal, by the late 1940s, the NAACP's National Office no longer ignored Arkansas, and this was due in large part to Harold Flowers.

PULASKI COUNTY NAACP

Before the NAACP removed Flowers from his official capacities with the Arkansas State Conference, he and Daisy made a sophisticated ploy to give her a more powerful position in the state organization. Capitalizing on her friendship with Flowers, Daisy made her first attempt to attain formal leadership in the statewide NAACP. On December 9, 1948, she applied to the national office for permission to start a Pulaski County NAACP chapter, an area including the city of Little Rock. A Pulaski County chapter would have been able to exercise control over the local Little Rock branch, of which Flowers's rival, Marcus Taylor, was president. Daisy's application to Mary White Ovington included the 50 required members to form an NAACP branch, membership dues, and a breakdown of branch officers. "Atty. Flowers State President is working with

us,” she communicated, “so if it is possible please issue our charter on the 12th.”³⁵ When she submitted this application and notified the national office of Flowers’s approval for the branch she may not have known that his support would actually raise eyebrows in the national office. His case was being discussed in New York, but was not yet public knowledge.

If Daisy devised the Pulaski Chapter plan with Flowers, it is likely that they involved L.C. because, even after he was removed from office, Flowers continued to write for the *State Press* under the pseudonym. Flower a relationship with L.C. and Daisy as a couple, but also individually. Flowers had endured countless challenges to his leadership throughout his tenure as state president. If a friend like Daisy headed a county chapter he could silence some of his political enemies. Marcus Taylor had opposed Flowers when he was ASC president, so he plotted with Daisy to create a county chapter that would curtail his power. Daisy Bates would have also increased her profile and status as one of the state's most powerful black leaders, female or male.

Daisy’s selection of Pulaski County officers is also revealing—one man and three women made up the proposed chapter's leadership: Mrs. L.C. Bates (President), Dr. Arthur Hicks (Vice-President), Mrs. V.M. Townsend (Secretary), and Mrs. Daisy Bates (Treasurer). The leadership was unequivocally female; a subtle, yet direct reproach to Little Rock’s male leaders. And when Bates fell short of the required 50-person branch quota she deliberately manipulated the branch's roster. “Mrs. L.C. Bates” and “Daisy Bates” were clearly the same person. However, Daisy obviously intended for them to count as two separate individuals. Not only did Daisy provide two different names, but

³⁵ Mrs. L.C. Bates to Miss Mary Ovington, December 9, 1948, group II, series C, container 10, folder “Little Rock, Arkansas, 1948-55,” NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

different addresses for herself as well. This is because she was one person short of the 50-person branch quota, trusted no other person in a leadership position, or no one wanted a more active role. Regardless of why Bates fell short of the quota, she certainly ensured that she would control the leadership of the new branch.

The Pulaski County chapter episode is may also provide insight into the complex gender dimensions of Bates' leadership and rise in the Freedom Movement. There is no clear gender pattern to Daisy's leadership. Dr. Sybil Jordan Hampton, who was a part of the second wave of black students to integrate Central High School, stressed Mrs. Bates' complexity.³⁶ Bates was sometimes supported by women and, and at other times by men. Some black men may have viewed Daisy through her race first, and, in the process, downplayed her gender. For black women, she represented gendered proof of black women's ability to lead the race. Daisy believed she was a race leader, and understood that her gender changed some dimensions and meanings of her leadership. Although one historian has concluded that Daisy lacked a strong connection to black women's networks, the presence of men and women in her Pulaski Chapter suggest that her leadership may not been limited by her gender.³⁷ Furthermore, the support she received suggests that pockets of gender progressive black men were willing to support a female leader existed in the Civil Rights Movement, and during the postwar era. Daisy's application also makes it clear that she saw participation in the NAACP as a possible path to power.

³⁶ Dr. Sybil Jordan Hampton, Interview with author, August 20, 2010, in Little Rock, Arkansas. In author's possession.

³⁷ John A. Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007).

In addition to the gender, the Pulaski County Chapter attempt also reveals a class dimension to Daisy's politics that harkened back to the story published in the *State Press* about her encounter with an older black woman on West 9th Street. Bates' proposed Pulaski chapter members appear to be middle class, which suggest that class was an important part of her leadership. Of the 48 other members, four were ministers, three were doctors, one was an attorney, and at least one a *State Press* reporter. The branch members' addresses also confirm their middle-class status. Many members lived in Bates' integrated neighborhood, or in areas in close proximity to black ministers or professionals. Although many parts of the South, like Birmingham, Alabama, forced African-Americans to live in racially segregated neighborhoods, regardless of class, this was not the case in Little Rock. "Members of the [Little Rock] black elite lived in comfortable residences, often in racially mixed neighborhoods."³⁸ Residential location was not always indicative of black people's class during this period, but it is a useful tool in Little Rock because where blacks could live was not as limited as it was in other localities. Two of the women on Bates' membership list paid the extra \$2.50 for *Crisis* membership. It appears that the group represented middle-class blacks, male and female.³⁹

Bates' first attempt at a formal leadership position in the NAACP ended in defeat. Interestingly, the NAACP's national office did not notify Marcus Taylor about her actions. Not until after Taylor contacted the national office concerning peculiar run-ins

³⁸ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 15.

³⁹ Daisy Bates to Gloster Current, December 9, 1948; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 17; For a useful discussion of class and status in the black community see Sharon Harley, "When Your work is Not Who You Are: The Development of a Working-Class Consciousness Among African American Women," in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), eds Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye.

he had had with local blacks did they enlighten him of Daisy's Pulaski chapter escapade. Taylor explained that every so often someone inquired about "another NAACP organization in Little Rock or Pulaski County...There seems to be someone soliciting and sending in membership to Headquarters which does not come through our branch."⁴⁰ Gloster Current, NAACP National Director of Branches, replied to both Bates' chapter request and Taylor's letter on the same day. He told Bates that her request "[conflicted] with the existing branch," because 42 of the 50 members lived in Little Rock, and suggested that they join the already-functioning local branch.⁴¹ Current was cognizant of the divisions in Arkansas, and hoped to quell dissent between factions the Association needed to work together. He dispatched copies of his reply to ASC president Harold Flowers—who was in the beginning stages of his removal from office— Marcus Taylor and regional secretary Donald Jones. Current disclosed all information pertinent to the county chapter attempt to Taylor, and sensing Little Rock's tensions, suggested that Taylor add some of the fifty members Bates had submitted to the Little Rock branch's executive committee.⁴² Taylor heeded Current's advice; naming Daisy director of branch membership, and L.C. head of press publicity and legal redress. She would eventually be elected vice-president of the local chapter she attempted to undermine.

The Pulaski County chapter episode suggests that Daisy wanted more control and influence in the state's black community, which was as divided at the end of the decade, than it had been when Daisy and L.C first entered Little Rock almost ten years earlier.

⁴⁰ W. Marcus Taylor to Gloster B. Current, January 13, 1949, group II, series C, container 10, folder "Little Rock, Arkansas, 1948-55," NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴¹ Gloster B. Current to Mrs. L.C. Bates, January 19, 1949, group II, series C, container 10, folder "Little Rock, Arkansas, 1948-55," NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴² Gloster B. Current to Reverend Marcus Taylor, January 19, 1949, group II, series C, container 10, folder "Little Rock, Arkansas, 1948-55," NAACP Papers, Library of Congress

Police brutality, voter disfranchisement and white terror remained rife in Little Rock, and different ideas about how to combat these complicated issues sent the black community's moderate to militant factions into various, and seemingly irreconcilable, directions. Still, Daisy's effort to seize leadership made her an official enemy to Taylor, who must have known about her close friendship with his nemesis Harold Flowers.

Ascending to the Top of the Arkansas NAACP

The June 29, 1951 edition of the *State Press* featured a large photograph of a stylish Daisy boarding a Braniff Airlines plane en route to Atlanta for the NAACP annual national convention, where she represented the *State Press*, as well as the Little Rock chapter of which she was now vice-president. In the photography, Daisy seemed to enjoyment of the spotlight and her moment in it.⁴³ L.C.'s promotion of Daisy's involvement in the NAACP was occurring at a time when he was readjusting not just his political philosophy, but also his organizational affiliations. In September 1951, L.C. wrote an editorial praising the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association for changing its name to the National Newspaper Publishers Association because he believed that creating "divisions among people" was a promotion of "exploitation, slavery, degradation, war and loss of faith in God."⁴⁴ Less than one year later, L.C. withdrew his membership from the Arkansas Negro Democratic Association of which he helped found ten years prior. He wrote that "the continuation of any organization would only be Negroes clamoring for inferiority."⁴⁵ In another editorial, he criticized Little Rock's City Council for maintaining segregation during a time of financial strain. "Segregation is a MUST for it

⁴³ *State Press*, June 29, 1951.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, September 14, 1951.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, August 29, 1952.

is the only luxury some white people can enjoy—at the expense of others,” L.C. quipped.⁴⁶ According to biographer Calvin Smith, L.C.’s “belief that segregation produced black inferiority led him to support a movement by the [NAACP] to challenge the legality of Jim Crow public education.”⁴⁷ The combination of the L.C.’s shift to supporting desegregation and Daisy’s position as president of the ASC allowed them to work together closely toward their common cause.

The respectable image Daisy and L.C. crafted and cultivated during her rise was a sign-of-the-times, even if a woman in the public arena went against popular trends during the years of the baby boom. In addition to some political advances made during the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations, blacks were also making advances in the arts, sciences, music and other parts of American culture. Before he was witch-hunted by the anticommunists, Paul Robeson served as a sort of cultural ambassador for the United States, and the African-American community, across Europe. Jackie Robinson, who Daisy would work with during the 1957 school crisis, became an American icon when he integrated baseball in 1947. Mary McLeod Bethune served on FDR’s cabinet, and in 1950 Ralph J. Bunche became the first African-American to receive the Nobel Prize for his mediation of the Palestine Crisis. Early 1950s America was a place full of change, from the boom of the suburbs to the rise of television. The era also saw the proliferation of Negro magazines like, *Jet* and *Ebony*. The mass media’s power was increasing, and its impact on society became even greater.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, October 3, 1952.

⁴⁷ Smith, “L.C. Bates,” 102.

⁴⁸ Bennett Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 371, 374.

Like most other things in society, the standards of respectability were also in flux. The historian Glenda Gilmore writes beautifully about the challenges the desire for respectability presented for Charlotte Hawkins Brown during the Progressive Era. E. Franklin Frazier believed that “respectability became less a question of morals and manners and more a matter of the external markers of a high standard of living.”⁴⁹ The change from a more religious-based moral system to one more material and secular, abetted Daisy’s path to public respectability.⁵⁰ Her airplane trips were as much a status symbol as they were the quickest route to her destination. Daisy’s clothes and style also suggested that she was of high economic standing. She was extremely light-skinned with what many blacks called “good hair.” Daisy’s complexion played a role in the crafting of her public image. She fit the correct physical appearance during an era in which society was fascinated with the visuals being projected by new technological mediums, particularly television and film. To borrow from one biographer, in many ways “The *State Press* would turn out to be the perfect backdrop for her, for during the preceding decade she had absorbed the lesson that how one was perceived was more than half the battle of civil rights.”⁵¹

Part of Daisy Bates’ rise in the Arkansas NAACP was her image as a woman with networks outside of the state. Over the course of her life, Daisy was affiliated with numerous organizations, but appears to have dedicated the majority of her time working for the NAACP. Daisy was involved in social organizations, not just political groups, but there is little evidence to support that she was closely involved in the endeavors adopted

⁴⁹ E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, (New York: Free Press, 1957), 80.

⁵⁰ See Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2001).

⁵¹ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 58

by these groups. It appears that Daisy used her affiliation with these groups to boast her personal and political profile.

In Spring before she became president of the Arkansas State Conference, Daisy garnered attention in the black press when she participated in the annual “Spirit of Cotton Festival.” “Woman Editor Escort for ‘Jubilee Queen,’” the March 15, 1952 edition of the *Chicago Defender* read. Daisy was so excited to see her photograph and biography in the papers that she cut them out and put them in her elaborate scrapbook. Unlike most portraits in which she looked glamorous, the headshot printed on this date was one of a more mature Daisy Bates. Daisy had just been named the new tour director for the annual Spirit of Cotton Festival, run out of Memphis, Tennessee, which, at the time, was the largest inland cotton market in the world. “Mrs. L.C. Bates, widely known newspaperwoman of Little Rock, Ark., will replace Mrs. R.Q. Venson, wife of the founder of the jubilee, Dr. R.Q. Venson,” the *Chicago Defender* reported. “She will accompany the “Spirit of Cotton” on the Eastern portion of the glamour-packed jaunt to key cities.”⁵² Mrs. Venson traveled on the southern leg and on the annual trip to Haiti. “The new tour director,” the writer added, “is a dynamic figure in the civic and social life of Little Rock.” The *Defender* noted Bates’ position’s as “city editor of the State Press, vice president of the NAACP, and chairman of the Civic Education of the NCNW.” Daisy was selected for the job because she had worked with the organization for at least two years as the “local chairman of the Memphis Cotton Makers Jubilee.”⁵³ That said, Mrs. Venson made it clear that she had no plans to bow out of her chairmanship—her

⁵² *Chicago Defender* March 15, 1952; *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 22, 1952.

⁵³ *State Press*, April 21, 1950.

husband had recently fell ill—so Daisy’s year as chaperone most likely a one-shot deal. She made the most of this small opportunity.

The Spirit of Cotton Tour served as Daisy’s formal coming out in the national black press. Her visits were covered extensively in the black press. In addition, Daisy was traveling without her husband, so the first images and perception of Daisy Bates in the minds of black readers was that of a young, respectable, and independent woman. She had a husband, but outside of Little Rock he was not in the picture with Daisy. One *Pittsburgh Courier* reporter wrote, “Incidentally, we must include her among the prettiest of the pretty at the Hawkettes last Friday night.”⁵⁴ The press was favorable, but there seems to have been a level of fascination with Daisy’s physical appearance in the black press. The *Courier* referred to Bates as a “new personality.”

Over the course of almost three weeks, Daisy traveled to seven of the tour’s 15 major cities with eighteen year old Barbara O’Cele, born in Trinidad, and current resident of Houston Texas. Starting April 5, the National Council of Negro Women, of which Daisy served as the chairperson of Citizenship Education for the local chapter, sponsored the event.⁵⁵ The women traveled from Memphis to Washington, making stops in Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Chicago, before one final, week-long celebration in Memphis. In each city, the women met with politicians and other civic leaders on both sides of the color line. The idea behind the tour was to promote the purchase and use of cotton in its various forms, mostly clothing. The *Defender* called “The Cottonatta” a “new and interesting approach to the uses of cotton

⁵⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 12, 1952.

⁵⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 22, 1952.

garments for wear at any time of day or any season of the year.”⁵⁶ The tour gave Daisy publicity in the coverage outside of Arkansas, and served as her introduction to the black press.

Historians continue to debate the degree of Daisy Bates’ involvement in women’s organizations. Few have suggested that she rejected women’s organizations and took a masculine path to power.⁵⁷ However, Daisy’s participation in the “Spirit of Cotton” provides a level of insight into the various ways black women made inroads into leadership during eras when masculinity was in flux or crisis. The Spirit of Cotton was run by black women, and Daisy communicated and fraternized with various elite black women across the country. One historian has written that Daisy “showed a private disdain for women’s networks,” and was a “joiner rather than a joiner-inner.”⁵⁸ However, according to her personal papers, though she was most active in the NAACP, Bates did participate in other organizations.⁵⁹ Daisy rejected some organizations, but usually when there was a conflict between the organization’s beliefs or philosophy and her own. For example, when prominent liberal white lawyer Edwin Dunaway, perhaps her best white friend in Little Rock, asked her to join the moderate, interracial Urban League, Daisy responded by calling its executive board, “just a bunch of niggers who want to sit next to white folks every two weeks.”⁶⁰ Her womanhood seems to have been an intrinsic, organic part of her leadership, but in terms of challenging patriarchy, Daisy did it more with her actions than through words. In her actions, Bates was a feminist, but

⁵⁶ *Chicago Defender*, April 19, 1952.

⁵⁷ See Stockley, *Daisy Bates*; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*.

⁵⁸ Kirk, “Daisy Bates,” 31.

⁵⁹ For more on Daisy Bates’ organizational affiliations outside of the NAACP please see Box 1, Daisy Bates Papers, SHSW, Madison.

⁶⁰ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 52.

never self-identified with the term. When the delicately powerful issues of race and sex collide, confusion is often the result. “The general problem,” historian Deborah Gray writes, “was, of course, the race problem...But for black women, race, class, and gender issues were so inseparable that one could not work on one front without working on all others.”⁶¹ Mrs. Bates’ gender politics remain unclear. While she did speak of women’s importance to the freedom struggle, she usually addressed gender only when speaking to women’s groups, or when asked to speak about the subject. It is untruthful for historians to say she focused on gender, just as it is stretching the facts to argue that she was a feminist. What is clear is that is that Daisy Bates acted like a black woman who wholeheartedly believed that she was equal to whites and men; this in itself was a bold character trait.

The Spirit of Cotton tour was successful for Daisy, and the reception by black women at home provides a glimpse of their support for her leadership. One woman wrote a poetic tribute to Daisy titled “Queen of Queens” and published it in the organ of a local Baptist church.

So full of grace, cultured air
 She walked erect—lady fair;
 Her head uplifts in the sky
 ;Virtues white as clouds on high;
 Charming manner; my that wit!
 Light of knowledge, always lit;
 Face radiant, with moon glow;
 Full is smile gaiety show;
 Stature is tall, slender, fine;
 Angelic on earth—sublime!
 Gate is slow with each paused step.
 Though person embodies pep
 Extends hand in friendship shake
 Man, woman child proudly take
 On her way the day goes

⁶¹ Deborah Gray White, quoted in B. Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black Chicago*, 73.

Stopping, once, twice in pose⁶²

While her name was now circulating amongst circles in the black community, more importantly, her name carried more clout in black Little Rock. Another woman congratulated Daisy for “her most wonderful accomplishment,” and thanked her for “the splendid record she built up for the city,” calling the trip a testament to her “capabilities, influence and community and also to her history of accomplishment.”⁶³ Several newspaper articles make reference to her “energy,” a word that can mean many things. However, they might have been talking about a magnetism or quality that attracted others to Daisy. She had charisma, though she was controversial at times. The historian Nathan Huggins explains, “charisma is an *exchange* between the leader and the group. There are values, myths, hopes, fears, anxieties awaiting expression in the crowd to which the charismatic leader gives voice. The exchange is not completely mindless, and charisma touches something genuine, or else it does not exist.”⁶⁴ Daisy undoubtedly had a connection with others, and events like the “Spirit of Cotton” helped the local black community to view her as a viable leader.

Along with Daisy and L.C.’s activism and maneuvering, a series of events led her to the position that would place her in the annals of history. Harold Flowers’s rise and fall had proven that the Arkansas State Conference needed a degree of financial transparency and stability. Militancy alone was not enough for success in leading the black community. J.A. White, Flowers’s predecessor, was also unable to revive the state financially. In 1948, the NAACP national office responded by sending Lulu White,

⁶² *The Arkansas World*, April 26, 1952.

⁶³ *State Press*, April 26, 1952.

⁶⁴ ⁶⁴ Nathan Irvin Huggins, “Martin Luther King Jr: Charisma and Leadership,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 74, No 2., (September 1987). 478.

Texas State Director of Branches, into Little Rock to raise funds to save the struggling state conference. National Secretary Lucille Black explained to White that “in order to continue [In Arkansas], we must raise at least five thousand dollars (\$5,000.00) at once.”⁶⁵ The ASC’s conditions had not improved since Flowers’s tenure, but had actually gotten worse. Mrs. White was unable to raise the money the national office hoped she would, and she attributed her failure to a “lack of cooperation by black ministers, who hindered her efforts to mobilize the foot soldiers of the movement.”⁶⁶ White’s observation about the obstacle the black clergy presented echoed what Daisy and L.C. had been saying all decade. By 1950 the NAACP had successfully inserted J.A. White as state president, and the national office appeared to be in control of Arkansas. Suddenly, White fell ill and resigned from office. Gloster Current expressed his “deep regret” with White’s resignation, stating, “The Conference...is a much better organized than the one you took over.”⁶⁷ Current’s praise was disingenuous. White’s inability to advance the NAACP’s program disappointed the national office, and just like he had ousted Flowers two years earlier, soon, the national officers wanted to get rid of Dr. White as well. The 2,000 members of 1950 had dwindled to barely 1,200 just one year later. Flowers had recruited 4,400 members into the Pine Bluff branch alone, which did not have half the black population as Little Rock. By 1951, the national office realized that they had a major problem in Arkansas. “I am a little bit disappointed in Dr. White because he gave me his word, and then went back on it,” U. Simpson Tate, southwest

⁶⁵ Merline Petri, *In Struggle Against Jim Crow: Lulu B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 116.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 117.

⁶⁷ Gloster B. Current to Dr. J.A. White, August 6, 1951, group II, series C, container 11, folder “Arkansas State Conference, 1951-2” NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

regional secretary, wrote to Current.⁶⁸ It appears that White promised Tate that he would return Arkansas to sound footing if the national office helped him get rid of Flowers. Somewhat disillusioned, Tate continued, “I think we must think in terms of building up stronger leadership in the states if we are to get the job done there.” The problem in Arkansas was one of leadership, yet no one leader separated themselves from the rest pack.

Daisy Bates’ recent good press, her connection to the *State Press*, and the , and the dismal state of the Arkansas State Conference all contributed to her election as president of the state NAACP. Although Bates described herself as a unanimous candidate with unmatched momentum, the reality was that when she was elected the Arkansas State Conference was at a low point in its short history. In 1951, state president Dr. White fell ill and resigned. White was replaced by state vice-president E.L. Jarrett, of North Little Rock. Daisy was elevated to Jarrett’s former position as vice president. About a year later, when the ASC elections approached, Daisy made her move for the state presidency. The state conference was being held in her base of Little Rock, organized by the local branch, and promoted through the *State Press*. On August 14 1952, Daisy wrote that “with no opposition,” she became ASC President. While it is true that Daisy achieved a unanimous victory, it is important to note the magnitude of the ASC’s organizational troubles. Only “eight or ten branches” attended the conference, compared to the thirty-three that had gathered previously at the special session to oust Flowers.⁶⁹ Most of Arkansas’s branches were beyond inactive. When Bates became

⁶⁸ Ulysses S. Tate to Gloster Current, July 30, 1951, group II, series C, container 11, folder “Arkansas State Conference, 1951-2” NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶⁹ U. Simpson Tate to Gloster Current, August 20, 1952, group II, series C, container 11, folder “Arkansas State Conference, 1951-2” NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

president, the eight-year-old ASC was on the brink of extinction. She and L.C. had successfully defeated their opponents and took over control of the state NAACP.

However, the account Daisy wrote neglected important circumstances that led to her election as president of the NAACP's Arkansas State Conference. Instead, she opted for the presentation of the image of a black community unified behind her leadership.

The focus on L.C. is perhaps an indication that few thought that Daisy possessed enough skills to be considered a threat. Nevertheless, Daisy had been presented with a golden opportunity of which she would make the most.

Reorganizing the Arkansas State Conference

While history remembers Daisy Bates as a warrior for the NAACP, the national leadership was initially skeptical of her leadership. Although she did not include the details about her activism during the two years after being elected president of the ASC in her memoir, the period is critical to understanding Bates' later activism. The relationship she eventually enjoyed with the New York National Office was cultivated by Daisy's tireless dedication to the Association's desegregation program. Bates was fiercely determined to bring national leaders to Little Rock, and demonstrated that she was an adept leader with a keen awareness of how to use the media to her advantage. She also flexed her knack for community organizing. These years are crucial to understanding the development of the 1957 Little Rock Crisis and Daisy Bates' leadership because she repaired the damaged relationship between the ASC and the and the NAACP's New York office.

Unbeknown to Daisy, the NAACP's national officers accepted her leadership with caution. A letter written by U. Simpson Tate, Southwest Regional Council for the NAACP, on August 20, 1952, less than a week after Daisy's election as President of the ASC, illuminates the role gender may have played in the reluctance with which national officers accepted her leadership, as well as the fragile state of the ASC when she took office. The NAACP's national officers were concerned with the couple's militancy, but particularly L.C.'s. Tate stated that he allowed Daisy's election because no one else "offered any promise," and warned Current of L.C.'s tendency to "go off the deep end at times on various issues."⁷⁰ The focus on L.C. suggests that the NAACP's male leadership may have viewed Daisy as an extension of her husband because although she was elected president, their immediate concern was with her militant husband. The NAACP's mentioning of L.C. also reinforces the notion that others viewed the couple as a political team.

Tate saw both potential and liabilities in Daisy. He directed Current to help focus her enthusiasm for the cause in a way that would benefit the NAACP and the Freedom Movement. Current was concerned that the couple's uncompromising leadership could potentially damage the NAACP's program in the state.⁷¹ Tate initially thought that "ordinary leadership" could rescue Arkansas. But, his trip to Little Rock changed his mind. "I am now thoroughly convinced," he candidly reported to Current, "that the whole solution to the Arkansas problem is the development of leadership within the state. The question of how that shall be done," Tate concluded, "is a question of solution by your office and your staff." The Dallas attorney questioned Daisy's ability to reconcile

⁷⁰ U. Simpson Tate to Gloster Current, August 20, 1952, group II, series C, container 11, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1951-2" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress..

⁷¹ All quoted in *Ibid*

already strained relationships. “One thing, among others, to be watched in the present administration is that Mr. and Mrs. Bates, who edit a local paper in Little Rock, are at swords point with Bob Booker.” Booker, a prominent black lawyer had defended the *State Press* in the Willett lawsuit and in their case against the Democratic Party. His father had helped establish the first state branch of the NAACP in the 1920s. Tate described Booker as “the unquestioned leader of integrity,” but he “will have nothing to do with anything in which the Bateses are involved.” Sometime between 1950 and 1952, Booker and the Bateses fell out. Despite obvious challenges, Tate wrote, “You will possibly ask why I, knowing this, permitted Mrs. Bates to be elected. I permitted it,” he explained, “because there was no one else to be elected who offered any promise of doing anything to further the work of the NAACP in Arkansas. I am not sure if she was the proper person to be elected, but I am certain that she was the most likely person of those present at the Conference,” which “passed resolutions condemning segregation and discrimination in public housing, condemning police brutality on a state-wide basis and demanding that it be curbed, and a resolution to call upon the Governor of Arkansas to appoint Negroes in the State administrative and executive departments, according to their competence and experience.” Tate ended his letter with a recommendation: “It is my suggestion that you write Mrs. Bates, congratulating her on her election and begin a skillful program of acquainting her with NAACP policies and techniques.”⁷² Current’s caution resulted in an education for Daisy Bates. It was at this time that she began the process of learning how to be a leader for the NAACP.

Daisy appears to have been unaware that she had a problem with the national officers’ sentiments toward her leadership because their reservations were masked in

⁷² *Ibid*

their correspondence. "Congratulations upon your election," the congratulatory letter by Gloster Current, written a few weeks after her election, opened.⁷³ "We know that under your leadership, the State Conference will grow and carry on the work of the Association. We know that you are familiar with National Office program and policy." Current dropped subtle hints as to his doubts regarding her ability and willingness to remain in step with national objectives, and made his expectations clear. "We count upon our state officials to work within the framework of National Office policy... We know also," he continued, "that you are aware that Arkansas has suffered for the past several years for lack of leadership and that considerable work must be done to revitalize the movement in your state." Current was not very encouraging, but clarified that school integration was the NAACP's present focus. "There has not been a sustained action program in the State for the past several years... Especially we are concerned with strategy to bring about integration in educational facilities and in other facilities. It is very important, therefore, that we have a policy conference at the earliest possible moment to determine our over-all program and strategy in several areas of activity."⁷⁴ Current reminded Daisy of the state's organizational and financial difficulties, and suggested that she brush up on her diplomacy skills. "In view of the fact that you are a newspaperwoman, may I caution you that you occupy a unique position as President of the Arkansas State Conference and also as a person in the newspaper business. We cannot afford to jeopardize our public relations with other papers which have supported us in the past, and I am sure that you will keep this in mind," he closed.⁷⁵ "There are many other matters relating to the work

⁷³ Gloster B. Current to Mrs. L.C. Bates, September 9, 1952, group II, series C, container 11, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1951-2" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

of the State Conference and the Region which cannot be discussed through correspondence and would be best handled in a conference...Again I wish to offer you your congratulations and best wishes for a successful administration.”⁷⁶ The ASC had been badly damaged by years of deplorable leadership. The NAACP’s national office needed Bates to revive the state organization just as badly as she needed the position to promote her leadership.

Upon being elected, Daisy immediately contacted the national office and began the process of reorganizing the Arkansas State Conference. One week after her election, Bates solicited a list of organizational materials from national secretary Lucille Black. “Please forward them to me immediately and any other information you think will be helpful in getting the state conference organized,” Daisy eagerly wrote.⁷⁷ Bates proceeded with her main objective to reorganize the ASC.

During this time, Daisy remained on the Education Committee of the Little Rock NAACP, chaired by white professor Georg Iggers, and continued her attempts to steer the local branch toward directly challenging school segregation. Six months prior to Daisy’s election as state president, Iggers used his political connections to set up a covert meeting with moderate members of the Little Rock School Board. Scheduled for February 20, 1952, the meeting never happened because attorney Thaddeus Williams, then president of the Little Rock Branch, disclosed the plans for the secret meeting to local newspapers.⁷⁸ In response, the Little Rock School Board cancelled the meeting, which, in Iggers words,

⁷⁶ *Ibid*

⁷⁷ Mrs. L.C. Bates to Mrs. Lucille Black, August 21, 1952, group II, series C, container 11, folder “Arkansas State Conference, 1951-2” NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

⁷⁸ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 91-3.

“produced a certain amount of consternation within the local NAACP branch.”⁷⁹ While a moderate faction led by Iggers expressed their frustration with Williams, the more militant group led by the Daisy and L.C. won a vote to pursue legal action against the City of Little Rock, and Harry A. Little, the segregationist School Superintendent. The group demanded that African-American children be able to use facilities that were not available at all-black Dunbar High School, or spaces that were underused at all-white Central High. When the Little Rock NAACP approached the National Office about filing a legal suit, they counseled them against it, citing that they wait until the court ruled on the five cases that eventually became the historic 1954 *Brown* Decision.⁸⁰ Iggers remembered that the “local branch of the NAACP took no further action through the courts until much later.”⁸¹ Although Iggers recalled that no action was taken until 1954, Daisy Bates did not halt her activism.

During Daisy’s first year as president of the ASC, L.C. supported her by being and advocate for desegregation in his newspaper. The September 26th edition of the *State Press* called for the integration of Little Rock’s public schools, and criticized the local school board for not challenging segregation in a contract to build a new school.⁸² The following week, L.C. blasted the City Council for trying to increase local taxes in order to maintain segregation. In an article titled “When You Can’t See for Looking,” L.C. stated that while “keeping city employees is costly...The council is overlooking the most costly item of all and that is segregation.”⁸³ When the United States Supreme Court delayed its

⁷⁹ Georg Iggers, “An Arkansas Professor: The NAACP and the Grass Roots”, in Jane Cassells Record and Wilson Record, *Little Rock U.S.A.: Materials for Analysis*, San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, Inc., 1960), 285.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 286.

⁸¹ *Ibid*

⁸² *State Press*, September 26, 1952.

⁸³ *Ibid*, October 3, 1952.

decision on the school integration cases in June 1953, L.C. warned local blacks not to be deterred or pessimistic, and encouraged them to continue to fight segregation in other ways. In an editorial, L.C. wrote that the postponement should not “dampen the spirit of the Negro,” suggesting that the court was giving a reluctant and “stubborn South” time to prepare for the “real decision” which would outlaw segregated schools.⁸⁴ Unlike Daisy, who was focusing her energies specifically on school desegregation, L.C. continued to be critical of the other ways Jim Crow impacted life for the people of the South. A few weeks following the court’s postponement, he asserted that “Nothing can be more foolish, futile and short-sighted than to begin court action against segregation with the left hand while setting up segregated housing with the right hand.”⁸⁵ Daisy later cited that they intentionally built their home in an all-white neighborhood as a political statement and challenge to segregation.⁸⁶ While Daisy was working to revive the local NAACP, L.C. continued to assist her from his post at the *State Press*.

In early 1953, Daisy intensified the chartering of new NAACP branches, established a youth chapter, and demonstrated the leadership style that would centralize black activism in Arkansas in her position as state president. Contrary to Current and Tate’s presumptions, Daisy was slowly reorganizing and revitalizing the ASC. “I regret very much that I will not be able to attend the Southwest Regional Training Conference in Dallas, March 6-8,” she corresponded to Current. “I am doing my best to revive interest in the NAACP in Arkansas. Please send information about establishing new branches, both adult and youth, as to number of members required for a charter, etc...”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, June 12, 1952.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, June 26, 1952.

⁸⁶ Smith, “L.C. Bates,” 102.

⁸⁷ Mrs. L.C. Bates to Mr. Gloster B. Current, February 16, 1953, II, C12, 1, NAACP Papers

On February 16, 1953, Tate visited Fort Smith, Arkansas, located in the northwestern corner of the state in the Ozark Mountains, where he met local president Mr. S.R. Rutledge, who expressed interest in organizing NAACP chapters in the surrounding areas. After consulting with Current, the two men eventually left the decision of hiring Mr. Rutledge as state field secretary up to Bates.⁸⁸ Nearly two months after Mr. Rutledge's meeting with Tate, Current approached the matter with Daisy. "Mr. U. S. Tate of our Southwest Regional Office informed me that Mr. S.R. Rutledge, President of our Fort Smith Branch...would like to assist in working with branches in surrounding communities," the Director of Branches wrote to the State President. "Have you authorized him to work in that capacity in and around his area? It seems to me that he would be an excellent person to do some of the field work necessary in your state."⁸⁹ Bates' response is not available, but future correspondence suggests that she did not like Current and Tate's proposal. They respected her decision to not hire Mr. Rutledge.

As her first term as State President came to a close in Summer 1953, Daisy's relationship with the NAACP's national office showed signs of considerable progress. In a memorandum issued on June 15, 1953, less than two weeks before the organization's 44th annual convention, held that year in Saint Louis, Missouri, newly elected Executive Secretary, Roy Wilkins, made the first of many exceptions that he would make for his association's rising star. Daisy informed Wilkins that the ASC could not meet its financial obligations to the Southwest Regional Fund. In addition to waiving Arkansas's regional contribution, Wilkins also ordered Current to forward payment for taxes to the

⁸⁸ Mr. U. Simpson Tate to Mr. Gloster Current, February 17, 1953 II, C12, 1, NAACP Papers.
Gloster B. Current to Mrs. L.C. Bates, April 10, 1953 II, C12, 1, NAACP Papers.

⁸⁹ Gloster B. Current to Mrs. L.C. Bates, April 10, 1953 II, C12, 1, NAACP Papers.

ASC treasurer.⁹⁰ “The reason why I am suggesting that this be done,” Wilkins explained, “is that Texas and Louisiana have made other arrangements and it would be unfair to Arkansas to force them to hold their money in abeyance while the other states proceed on their own to do otherwise.”⁹¹ As Daisy derived creative solutions to the ASC’s financial woes, she bolstered her profile locally, as well as with the NAACP’s national office. At the national convention, conducted from June 23rd to June 27th, Daisy asked Current to attend the annual state conference, scheduled for late July. Not only did she request Current’s presence, but insisted that the national office pay for his trip and all other expenses.⁹² “Please let me know what you would like me to do in terms of speaking and workshops,” Current replied, “and whatever material you need let me know early in order for me to have it shipped.”⁹³ After confirming Current, Daisy issued the official announcement for the annual state conference, but did not disclose the identity of the “outstanding speaker” scheduled for the program.⁹⁴ The state convention was held on Friday July 31st and Saturday, August 1st in Newport, Arkansas, at the Saint Paul AME Church. The roughly fifty delegates stayed in the homes of local African-Americans, prearranged by a hostess committee. Current called the gathering, “one of the best state meetings ever held in that state,” and congratulated her on her “re-election to the presidency.” Unlike the previous year, his tone was more encouraging, “I am sure you will be able to carry out many of the fine ideas you have in mind.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Roy Wilkins to Mrs. E. L. Miller, July 28, 1953; Roy Wilkins to Mrs. L.C. Bates, July 28, 1953—check for \$275.94 to cover ASC per capita taxes through June 30, 1952 II, C12, 11953 II, C12, 1, NAACP Papers

⁹¹ Memorandum to Mr. Wilkins from Mr. Current, July 16, 1953 II, C12, 11953 II, C12, 1, NAACP Papers.

⁹² Gloster B. Current to Mrs. L.C. Bates, July 7, 1953, II, C12, 1

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Mrs. L.C Bates to Branch President, Arkansas Branches, NAACP, July 9, 1953 II, C12, 1

⁹⁵ Gloster B. Current to Mrs. L.C. Bates, August 26, 1953, II, C11, 16,

Current and the National Office's newfound optimism was based on the potential they saw in Bates' activities as state president. She was proactive, loyal and self-promoting, all traits that benefitted the dissemination of the NAACP's program throughout Arkansas. Furthermore, the Association could count on free publicity in the *State Press*, which was the state's most widely circulated black periodical. In her first term as ASC President, memberships increased from 201 to 720.⁹⁶ Daisy helped resurrect branches which L.O. Crofton, who had been state secretary for four years, "[had] not seen nor did not know about," and made many trips to various towns to install local officers⁹⁷ Perhaps even more importantly, Bates constantly sought the National Office's involvement and assistance. For example, in a letter to Gloster Current after the state convention, Daisy graciously thanked him and Tate for attending, and included correspondence she had sent to former Executive Director Walter White, requesting his presence at a later event. "I am enclosing a copy of a letter mailed to Mr. White," she wrote. "If there is some way you can perhaps put in a "plug" for us, kindly do so. I feel that you know the necessity here."⁹⁸ The attached document reported a successful state conference, and complimented Tate and Current for their assistance with working with her to organize Arkansas. "Our conference is in dire need of a dynamic personality to come in and bring inspiration to the branches," Bates pleaded to White. "Please check your schedule and give us a date that you can come. Any date you give will be satisfactory as we have made no definite plans yet."⁹⁹ In his follow-up, Current notified

⁹⁶ "Arkansas Branch State Taxes, July-December, 1952"; "Arkansas State Taxes, January-June 1953, II, C12, 1.

⁹⁷ L.O. Crofton to Gloster Current, group II, series C, container 12, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress; *State Press*, November 21, 1952; February 13, 1953; February 27, 1953.

⁹⁸ Mrs. L.C. Bates to Mr. Gloster B. Current, August 4, 1953 (on *State Press* letterhead)

⁹⁹ Mrs. L.C. Bates to Mr. Walter White, August 4, 1953 (on *State Press* letterhead)

Daisy that Mr. White was out of the city, but was “hopeful that he will give you a favorable reply.”¹⁰⁰ White agreed to attend Daisy’s “Second Annual State-Wide Public Meeting,” on the night of November 6th at Mount Zion Baptist Church, located at 908 Cross Street, near West Ninth Street. The meeting was attended by Little Rock Mayor Pratt Remmel, Arkansas Governor, Francis Cherry, and several men of the city’s clergy.

Although the star of the event was Walter White, the most significant event to take place the evening was the establishment of a NAACP youth council. Mr. White installed the local youth council, which was also organized by Daisy. The reception that followed was sponsored by the newest, youngest members of the state conference. On January 4, 1954, a little more than four months before the Supreme Court’s landmark *Brown* decision, Daisy submitted an application for a local youth chapter.¹⁰¹ Many of the children selected to challenge school segregation later emerged from this group.

While clearly an asset to the movement in Arkansas, the youth council was one of the many sophisticated ways Daisy centralized the control of the black community’s agenda in her position as President of the ASC. Her attempt to create a Pulaski County Branch in 1948 exposed her desire to exert control over race relations in Little Rock. After Daisy confirmed Mr. White’s attendance for November, attorney Thad D. Williams, president of the Little Rock Branch, expressed frustration because her event overshadowed his plans to have a similar meeting two weeks later. In a sympathetic response, Gloster Current assured Williams that his “services were definitely desired, but

¹⁰⁰ Gloster B. Current to Mrs. L.C. Bates, August 29, 1953

¹⁰¹ Daisy Bates to Mrs. Lucille Black, January 4, 1954, group II, series C, container 12, folder “Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5” NAACP Papers, Library of Congress; Morris, 192.

due to the fact that two massed meetings and possibly a third have been planned in Little Rock during November,” it was best to cancel his plans and assist Daisy Bates.¹⁰²

Through her leadership with the NAACP, and the support of her husband, Daisy was able to slowly wrestle power away from Little Rock’s traditional black male leadership. Another art of Daisy’s success in making herself a leader and a center of information was her ability to form relationships with various groups and individuals, including women. In reorganizing the ASC, Bates worked with other black women. In addition, black women were some of the *State Press*’s most loyal supporters. Women like ASC Secretary Mrs. L.O. Crofton. With Mrs. Crofton’s help, Daisy was able to ostracize Thad Williams, and act as president of both the Little Rock and state NAACP chapters because it was the location of her home residence, and base of her activism. Mrs. Crofton assisted Daisy with reorganizing the state NAACP constitution and by-laws. Mrs. Crofton also communicated with Gloster Current, and gathered updated information about the ASC, its leadership and existing branches. “If you have any suggestions to make for the benefit of our state conference or how we might go about creating life in our local branches, I shall appreciate you making them,” Crofton wrote to Current one month into Daisy’s second term. “I shall do all I can to help my local branch and other branches. Well, my vacation days are just about over. School begins the 7th of September, but I am still willing to share my time with the branches in the state if suggestions are made as what should be done.”¹⁰³ In early December 1953, Daisy was a

¹⁰² Current to Williams, October 5, 1953 II, C10, 1 NAACP Papers.

Attorney Thad D. Williams to Gloster B. Current, October 15, 1953-- II, C10, 1, NAACP Papers.

¹⁰³ Mrs. L.O. Crofton to Gloster B. Current August 29, 1953; Gloster B. Current to Mrs. L.O. Crofton, September 24, 1953; September 14, 1953, state constitution and by-laws approved by the National Board of Directors. “Constitution and By-Laws for Arkansas State Conference of Branches, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.”

part of an interracial group of 200 women from various organizations who inspected Arkansas's Negro Boys Industrial School. The women made suggestions, and the Governor later proudly reported that "many of your suggestions have been carried out and that plans are under way for many more improvements covered by the suggestions of the women who visited the school with me."¹⁰⁴ Experiences like this one brought Daisy Bates into contact with other women active in Arkansas's civic affairs, like Mrs. Earl D. Cotton, who served as chairwoman for Mayor Pratt's Little Rock United Nations Committee, a Department of State program intended to "foster good will between our nation and the nations of the free world."¹⁰⁵ During her first year, Daisy had helped the NAACP win a rape case in Arkansas. The parents of a seven year-old black girl from Mound Bayou, Arkansas, contacted their local NAACP branch and claimed that she had been raped by a white truck driver. With help from the national office, the ASC provided funds for the legal work done by Wiley Branton of Pine Bluff. The trucker was convicted, making the case "the first known conviction of a white man anywhere in the South for the sexual molestation of a African American female, except in instances of homicide or great physical injury."¹⁰⁶ For their work, the Arkansas State Conference "received the national NAACP's Thalheimer Award at its 1954 annual convention." Women and women's issues are inextricable to understanding Daisy Bates' relevance as a leader for the NAACP, and they are also essential to comprehending her deeper historical meaning.

¹⁰⁴ Governor Francis Cherry to Mrs. L.C. Bates, December 30, 1953, folder 1, Box 1 Madison

¹⁰⁵ Mayor Pratt C. Remmel to Little Rock United Nations Committee, March 19, 1954, Mrs. Earl D. Cotton Chairman folder 1, Box 1 Madison

¹⁰⁶ Kilpatrick *There When We Needed Him*, 57.

Conclusion

Although Daisy Bates was elected to the presidency of the Arkansas State Conference “without opposition,” like the narrative about other parts of her life, there was a more intricate story behind Daisy’s rise in the state NAACP. The Little Rock black community was much more divided than Daisy wrote in her memoir. She and L.C. had relentlessly attacked black leaders in the postwar years leading to her 1952 election. Daisy’s election was a major accomplishment for the couple, and a source of concern for the NAACP’s National Office. Nevertheless, after finding her voice and her place in the Little Rock civil rights movement, Daisy began the difficult process of reorganizing the state NAACP, and generating interest in Arkansas from national leaders. Her efforts eventually bridged the needs of her local community to the goals of the national organization. As African-Americans— increasingly supported by the Judicial and Executive Branches— asserted their rights, white opposition swept across the South. Still, in 1952, Daisy won the local showdown over black leadership. Attaining formal leadership, however, was only part of the challenge of being a race leader. As President of the ASC, Daisy was confronted with expanding the association’s appeal to blacks statewide. She was also taxed with shielding it from attacks by opposition within the African-American community, and from whites inside and outside of Arkansas.

The years Bates spent building relationships with the NAACP and the time she dedicated to reorganizing the Arkansas State Conference do not conjure images of the bold articulate woman remembered in accounts of the Civil Rights Movement, but they are essential to understanding how she got to the moment in 1957 for which she is famous. Her election as President of the ASC afforded her the opportunity to prove that

she was capable of publicly leading the civil rights crusade in Arkansas. Yet to be recognized by local and national media, Bates repaired damaged organizational relationships, and worked to gain the confidence of the black communities around her. Daisy repeatedly requested the physical presence of the NAACP's national leadership in her state.

Recovering the initial of Daisy Bates' tenure as state president, reinforces the importance of formal and organizational leadership to successful social movement. Daisy's position as state president did not excuse her from also performing the duties of the community organizer. When she was first elected, national leaders were reticent, but into her second term they were clearly more confident in her abilities to lead the state conference. By 1954, Daisy Bates was secure in her position with the New York office. As the ASC and the nation waited for the Supreme Court to announce its ruling on school segregation, Daisy was once again slowly transforming herself; from a community organizer into a community mobilizing public civil rights leader.

Between the summers of 1952 and 1954, the Bateses organized the African-American community, and prepared blacks in Little Rock for legal action against school segregation by Daisy. Through the *State Press*, Bates disseminated the NAACP's activities and agenda, including local meetings. In the years preceding the 1957 crisis, Daisy grew more vociferous and aggressive with local whites because she believed that they were buckling to pressures from segregationists to either delay or deny school integration. Her reorganization of the Arkansas State Conference, and the consolidation of the black community's political agenda in her leadership makes these years critical to not only understanding the full arc of her activism, but also how and why Little Rock became the

most significant national test case for the Supreme Court's *Brown* decisions. Bates' leadership during this period has been overlooked because, in crafting her public persona, Daisy purged details about her activism during these years from her memoir. While the origins of Daisy's leadership style are unequivocally located in her childhood, and the foundation for her public activism was the *State Press*.

Chapter Eight:
“Things are going to be serious”:
The *Brown Decision* and the Origins of the Little Rock Crisis

“The fruit is ripe to harvest...The challenge of the hour is leadership. Let us discover those who have the abilities and the skills; whose hearts are filled with the understanding and the faith; whose courage is unwavering; whose service motives are worthy of emulation. Let us discover them. I say, and put all that we have in confidence and cooperation and goodwill behind them so that they may be able to lead us to the fullest realization of our goals. All the challenges of integration depend upon the kind of education and ground work we do from this point on.”

--Mary Mcleod Bethune, “Full Integration—America’s Newest Challenge”, speech given in Detroit, Michigan, June 11, 1954.¹

Introduction: The Link Between *Brown* and Little Rock

During the two years following the 1954 United States Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which declared racially segregated schools to be Unconstitutional, Daisy and L.C. Bates coordinated their positions in the Arkansas NAACP and the *Arkansas State Press* to rally the African-American community behind the issue of school integration and mobilize them into organized action supported by the national movement. The years were important transitional ones for the couple politically as Daisy stepped to the front as the public face and spokesperson for desegregation. While not silent during this period, the *State Press* is noticeably less vocal about the process of integrating Little Rock’s schools than he had been about other issues in the past. It is possible that due Daisy’s position with the NAACP, L.C. was more careful with how he expressed his frustration with the slow pace of progress in Little Rock. In addition, he did not want to damage the movement or his wife.

¹ Bethune, quoted in Houck and Dixon, *Women and the Civil Rights Movement*, 6-7.

When the Supreme Court announced the *Brown* decision, L.C., embraced their ruling with extreme caution. He anticipated a vicious battle with southern segregationists. L.C. did not believe that the white South would respect the law, peacefully concede defeat, and begin the process of eradicating segregation. “Following this opinion,” he wrote just four days afterwards, “things are going to be serious.”² L.C. also foresaw the rise of the white massive resistance movement that followed *Brown*, and predicted Jim Crow’s eventual demise.

As president of the state NAACP, Daisy arrived at the same conclusion. After the decision, she attended a series of public meetings about school integration held by Little Rock School Superintendent Virgil Blossom. Daisy was disturbed by a pattern she noticed in Blossom’s presentations: he said “one thing to whites...and another to Negroes,” depending on the audience.³ Daisy asserted that “up until that point,” she thought Blossom “was going to follow right along” with plans to desegregate the city’s schools. Nevertheless, the Superintendent’s inconsistencies were alarming. She phoned Thurgood Marshall in the NAACP’s New York Office, telling him, “I don’t quite trust Mr. Blossom.”⁴ When Marshall asked, “why not,” she informed him about Blossom’s speeches, as well as the school board’s plans to challenge desegregation in the courts. The future Supreme Court Judge’s response was swift and direct: “We’ll, be there.” Daisy’s recollections regarding the role she played in the Little Rock black community are consistent with Ernest Green’s memories about the post-*Brown* period. Green, who became famous as the first student of color to graduate from Central High School

² *State Press*, May 21, 1954.

³ Bates interview with Jacoway

⁴ *Ibid*

remembered, “Daisy was in the papers indicating that she was going to challenge the Little Rock School Board to adhere to the ‘54 decision.”⁵ The Bateses used the *State Press* and the NAACP to keep the Little Rock black community informed about the moves local white officials were making to curtail school integration. They also used their positions as known and respected activists as a means to the end of mobilizing local blacks behind desegregation.

This chapter argues that, just as she had in the process of securing her position in the NAACP, following the *Brown* Decision, Daisy became the public face of Little Rock’s desegregation movement, working with her husband to educate the local black community about the importance of school integration to racial progress. Using the *State Press* as the Arkansas State Conference’s unofficial organ, the civil rights duo promoted NAACP membership as the best hope for realizing the goal of an American South free of racial segregation. They kept the African-American community abreast of local integration plans, including NAACP organizational and planning meetings, arranged by Daisy. Their collective efforts built an informed black community that not just expressed unity against segregation in 1957, but, more importantly, understood the national implications inherent in the outcome of what began as a local conflict. After the first *Brown* decision, Daisy and L.C. made it clear that any steps Little Rock took toward integration would go through them. Following the May 31, 1955 *Brown II* decision, which stated that segregated schools were to integrate with “all deliberate speed,” as members of the Little Rock NAACP’s Executive Council, the crusading couple helped

⁵ Juan Williams, “Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine”, NPR.

recruit a group of parents and children willing to test school segregation on the first day of the subsequent Spring semester.

By 1956, the Bateses were the black community's voice on the issue school desegregation, which, at the moment, was the civil rights issue of the time. White school official's refusal of the black students' applications for admission became the foundation for the legal challenge against the Little Rock School Board that eventually resulted in the desegregation of Central High. The lawsuit the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund filed in February 1956 featured 33 plaintiffs who were recruited in December 1955 by Daisy, L.C., and other members of the Little Rock NAACP's Executive Council. The case, which became known as *Aaron v. Cooper*, was decided by the Federal Courts, in favor of the NAACP and integration, less than a month before the opening of the 1957 school year. Daisy's tireless organizing efforts, including her commitment to attending every meeting Blossom held in Little Rock about integration, irrespective of community demographics, and L.C.'s timely editorials, kept constant pressure on local white officials. When the time was ripe, they involved the NAACP's national leadership. Daisy and L.C. were instrumental to the developments that eventually transformed Little Rock from a "moderate" southern city into a national symbol and harbinger of the challenges racial integration would face in regions across the United States. Little Rock became a precedent-setting spectacle, of epic proportions, in large part because of this black couple's uncompromising leadership and commitment to the Civil Rights Movement.

Molding Her Public Persona

Daisy Bates gave the details of her activism between *Brown* and the 1957 crisis, years when she was a grassroots leader, no treatment in her memoir. She did not write about her organizing efforts, the countless NAACP meetings she promoted in the *State Press*, or all the doors she knocked on, recruiting and encouraging families to participate in the local movement she was leading. “Across My Desk, the chapter that follows the account of her childhood, begins in 1941, with the first printing of the *State Press*, and ends in August 1957, one week before the desegregation crisis. Bates omitted the foundational community organization and mobilization efforts that Charles Payne says women performed during the early crucial, dangerous stages of the Movement.⁶ Instead, Daisy deemphasized her less glamorous, gendered role as local organizer and community mobilizer because her intention was to write the narrative of a an inspirational heroine; a militant newspaperwoman who was elected as State NAACP President, without opposition, and who used her position to ensure integration in Little Rock. Recovering these years are important because they support the reality that L.C. and Daisy successfully made her a central actor in race relations before 1957. They also challenge the notion that history was somehow thrust upon her. These years demonstrate that by the time the national media found her, Daisy Bates had local experience that qualified to lead the desegregation crisis

The six pages of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* in the chapter titled “Across My Desk” that cover the period between 1954-1956 are clearly intended to set the stage for

⁶ For more on black women’s organizing efforts in the early stages of movement development see Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom* and “Men Led, But Women Organized.”

the book's main drama, the crisis at Central High. Daisy wrote that *Brown* sent the message that "whatever difficulties in according Negro children their constitutional rights, it was nevertheless clear that school boards must seek a solution to that question in accordance with the law of the land."⁷ Next Daisy noted the successful integration of schools in Fayetteville and Charleston, in northwest Arkansas as local examples that supported Governor Francis A. Cherry's public statement that "Arkansas would obey the law", despite "open defiance" advocated by "politicians and racists in the southern states."⁸ On August 23, 1955, Charleston, located in Franklin County, became the first community in the former Confederacy to integrate, when it admitted eleven black students into its public schools. This fact is absent from Daisy's account. Bates presented these towns as evidence that there were models with solutions to the school desegregation issue that were different from the course eventually taken in Little Rock.

After establishing Arkansas as a progressive southern state slowly proceeding with plans toward integration, Bates informs her readers of three events that occurred in the state that preceded Little Rock, and foreshadowed its violent, shameful conflict.⁹ Daisy discussed the summer 1955 desegregation battle in Hoxie, Arkansas a small town located 138 northeast of the state capital, just south the Missouri state line and west of the Tennessee border. She also gave her initial impression of her political nemesis Orval Faubus during his 1954 gubernatorial campaign, and summarized the Little Rock School Board's (LRSB) 1955 integration plan. Faubus, Daisy remembered, "saw a political advantage" in using the politics of school integration in his quest to win the

⁷ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 48.

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*, 48-55.

governorship.¹⁰ Hoxie is notable because it received national news coverage, was featured in *Life* magazine, and was the first time a local school sought the Federal Government's assistance with enforcing *Brown*.¹¹ Bates correctly documented that the LRSB made a public statement that it would comply with *Brown I* ten days after it was announced, but she erroneously wrote that the group "announced a compliance plan for desegregating the schools" that "was to be carried out in three phases." This actually occurred the following year, on May 24, 1955, one week before the Supreme Court's *Brown II* decision.¹² What is important is that these are the three events that Daisy chose to emphasize in her memoir, instead of the ways she and L.C. continued to press the desegregation issue in Little Rock. Bates' self-presentation suggest that she may have devalued the aspects of her activism that were gendered female. Nevertheless, whether she realized it or not, it was the organizing she had performed in her community that positioned her to lead the 1957 crisis.

The first event Bates discussed as having a direct effect on the 1957 crisis was the 1954 election of Orval Faubus to the Arkansas Governorship. When the Supreme Court announced its desegregation ruling, Faubus was mounting a challenge to his party's incumbent, Democratic Governor Francis A. Cherry, who, in 1952, was elected to two-year term. After Governor Cherry released a public statement firmly asserting that Arkansas would honor the court's decision, Faubus jumped on the opportunity to politicize school integration to his benefit. Like other southern states, Arkansas was a one-party state, and winning the Democratic Party's primary assured victory in the fall

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 48.

¹¹ "A Morally Right Decision," *Life Magazine*, July 25, 1955.

¹² Bates, *Long Shadow*, 49.

general election. The *Brown* decision came during what Daisy described as “the height of the campaign.”¹³ Seeking to neutralize integration, Governor Cherry expressed his belief that the issue should not be a factor in deciding the party’s nominee. Faubus did not agree. “It is evident to me,” he declared, “that Arkansas is not ready for a complete and sudden mixing of the race in the public schools.” Mandating integration, Faubus reasoned in a public statement of his own, “will jeopardize the...the good race relations...in many communities” throughout the state.”¹⁴ The future face of white southern resistance to the Civil Rights Movement concluded his statement declaring “desegregation...the [number one] issue in this gubernatorial campaign.” And, in a stroke of political genius and chicanery, Faubus expressed his hope that desegregation did not “become a temptation to acts and declarations of demagoguery on the part of those who might seek to play upon racial prejudice for selfish ends.” Lastly, the future governor linked support for integration to communism. To Daisy’s dismay, on August 10th, Faubus narrowly defeated Cherry in a hotly contested run-off election. In the end, Faubus received 191, 328 votes, while 184, 509 residents cast ballots for Cherry. In the final tally, Faubus squeaked by with 50.9 percent of the total vote, to Cherry’s 49.1, a difference of only 3,753 out of the official total of 375, 328 votes. The following January, Faubus assumed his duties. Daisy presented Faubus’s victory as an unfortunate development, and an important moment in the development of the desegregation battle she and L.C. were waging in Arkansas.

The second, and most substantial of the three events Daisy identifies as leading up to the Central High School crisis is the integration of Hoxie, Arkansas’s public schools.

¹³ *Ibid*, 48

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 48-9.

Daisy believed that Hoxie was a harbinger of southern white massive resistance to *Brown*, and a precursor to Little Rock. Out of population of 1,284 residents, Hoxie had fourteen black families, nine of which had twenty-seven children in the public school system.¹⁵ Daisy described the awful condition Hoxie's black children were forced to endure while attempting to receive their subpar education. She noted that the school building was located "two blocks from a sewage line," had "outdoor toilets," a "wood burning stove," and "no janitor." The children performed the janitorial work. The building had "broken windows," and a "leaking roof," which, in her words, required the children to "wear boots to school in order to get in." According to her memoir, "the integration process proceeded smoothly" until white segregationist from outside of Hoxie pressured white parents to protest integration by withdrawing their children from the public schools. These groups and individuals also intimidated and threatened black parents, even demanding that they "put their names on a petition demanding the return to the segregated school system."¹⁶ The all-white Hoxie School Board responded to pressure from segregationists by requesting the Federal Government's help in enforcing the Supreme Court's ruling. In response, the Federal Court issued an injunction requiring the opposition to cease their campaign. Governor Faubus did not intervene in the Hoxie incident, and did not oppose the Arkansas State Board of Education's announcement in the first month his term that starting in fall 1955, black students would be admitted as undergraduates in the state's public colleges and universities. Daisy called Hoxie, "an

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 50

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 51

important precedent for the larger battles to come.”¹⁷ Bates did not discuss her involvement in the state’s first integration crisis.

The final development Daisy identified as important to the 1957 crisis was the Little Rock School Board’s vacillation on the city’s integration plans after announcing a blueprint after the second *Brown* decision. Rather than telling the story of the NAACP recruiting parents to challenge local school segregation in the courts, Daisy wrote that black parents turned to the civil rights organization seeking legal recourse because they doubted that school officials would follow through on their previously announced plans. “Many parents,” Bates wrote, “became convinced that Superintendent Blossom was more interested in appeasing segregationists by advocating that only a limited number of Negroes be admitted...”¹⁸ When Blossom started telling his audiences that the first phase of integration “may start in 1957,” after previously identifying fall 1956 as the target date, Daisy stated that “Negro parents felt that the phrase...was especially vague and left them with no alternative except to go to court.” Citing no dates, Bates declared that black parents “appealed to the Arkansas State Conference...to represent them.”¹⁹ While it is accurate that black parents selected the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund to represent them, Daisy account does not recognize that the group of parents materialized because of the Little Rock NAACP’s recruitment of families willing to serve as clients in a legal case against the City of Little Rock. The LRSB’s vacillation was countered by Daisy Bates’ community organizing and leadership in the Arkansas NAACP, but unfortunately her memoir does not make mention of these activities.

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 52.

Although “Across My Desk” successfully portrays Daisy Bates as a woman with the proper media and political credentials to provide leadership for the national movement, the chapter is hollow because it is devoid of details of her actual activities as State President. Bates does not explain to her readers how she was involved in creating the organizational infrastructure and the community mindset that was lacking before the 1957 national crisis, but was indispensable to challenging Jim Crow in her home state. This is one of *The Long Shadow*’s biggest shortcomings. Readers interested in the details about her life or the inner workings of active African-Americans and the general local black community, get little sense of the behind-the-scenes efforts that made Little Rock a watershed moment for the Civil Rights Movement.

Like Montgomery and Mississippi, the foundation for the movement in Arkansas was built by African-American women and men like Daisy and L.C. Bates, but it is important to explore gender’s impact on the political activism of individuals, partnership, groups and movements. By restating the popular narrative about a moderate Arkansas and progressive Little Rock, Daisy demonstrated her importance, but also reified the same, male-dominated power structure her very presence in the public sphere challenged. To borrow from Audre Lourde, Daisy seemed to believe that she could “use the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house.”²⁰ By not speaking as a woman, and an African-American woman in particular, she silenced critical parts of her personal story that operated and thrived outside of the recognized power structures dominated by men and whites, as well as the larger story of how, in the 1950s, black women like herself

²⁰ Lourde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” *Sister Outsider*, 110-113.

organized and mobilized their communities, and prepared American society for the 1960s movement.

In the account published in her memoir, Daisy opted for the presentation of a solid black population that was so unified that it elected her to lead the fight against segregation. Reflecting the image of intra-group unity to the outside, often-hostile, world was a central element of the Black Freedom Movement, which was in full swing by October 1962. Daisy responded to the climate of the times by rewriting a period in which blacks were building the Civil Rights Movement. Contrary to her portrait, Little Rock's black community was complex, and not all African-Americans agreed with Daisy and L.C.'s aggressive approach to attaining first class citizenship. Daisy did not discuss the debates that were had within the Little Rock black community regarding the best strategies for achieving the ultimate goal of dismantling segregation. Furthermore, emphasizing unity over its alternative, opposite reality, focused her narrative on black's people's grievances, and not on the generations-long, historical internal disputes over the best approaches to destroying Jim Crow. Perhaps the most interesting development in the section of Daisy's memoir is L.C.'s absence. The *State Press* is mentioned once, but not references are made about L.C. He reappears in Daisy's account the night of Monday September 3, 1957, the night Faubus placed the troops around Central High School.²¹

The Bateses and the Blossom Plan: Little Rock Responds to *Brown I*

²¹ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 49.

The events that became the historical drama which made Little Rock famous, and catapulted Daisy Bates into the national spotlight added a new dimension on May 17, 1954, when the United States Supreme Court announced its final ruling on five school segregation cases that became known simply as *The Brown Decision*, after a little black girl named Linda Brown of the Topeka, Kansas. *Brown* added energy to the NAACP and convinced skeptics that they were either a promising, credible civil rights group, or menace and threat to the established, traditional order. L.C. expressed a degree of vindication with *Brown*, yet cautioned African-Americans of the high likability that whites would wage a vicious counteroffensive to the Supreme Court ruling. “Hi Court Outlaws School Segregation,” the *State Press* reported in a bold, enlarged caption. “Like most of the people,” a bittersweet L.C. published, we “are pleased because we have seen the ruling on something that we have felt was illegal all along.”²² Reminding their readers of the crusade they had waged since 1941, the couple continued, “But when we said it, we were branded a radical, a troublemaker, and in many instances, a Communist...We are sorry,” the *State Press* warned its readers, “that we cannot take the Court’s opinion as optimistically as many. By no stretch of the imagination can we see the southerner relinquishing his claim to his phony luxury that he has cherished throughout the years without further fighting.”²³ The day’s editorial page was dominated by reactions to *Brown*. One commentary titled, “After the Court’s Decision—Now What?” was particularly illuminating and militant. The unnamed writer- advocated for “leaders among the Negro race leader, not clabber mouth, Uncle Toms, or grinning appeasers—to get together and counsel with the school heads and try to get relief from

²² *State Press*, May 21, 1954.

²³ *Ibid.*

the school ills. This might work in some instances. If it does, it will save time, money, and a lot of emotionalism. Let the school officials understand that we are going to get a square deal in education. We want it peaceably if possible.”²⁴ The *State Press*’s words could not have been more prophetic.

Contrary to the recollections of some men involved in Little Rock’s integration efforts, like Georg Iggers, and the conclusions of historians like Tony Freyer, Daisy and L.C. did not simply wait on the NAACP’s National Office for marching orders on how to continue the emerging civil rights movement in Little Rock. Freyer asserts that in the year between *Brown I* and *Brown II*, “the state NAACP also followed the policy the national office advised: cooperate with local school boards until September 1955.”²⁵ Although the couple aggressively escalated their campaign against the LRSB after *Brown II*, the ASC, which was under Daisy’s leadership, did not “cooperate” with Blossom or any state school boards that resisted the Supreme Court order between the two rulings. Along this point, friend Annie Abrams told National Public Radio, Daisy “was conditioned to know the civil rights movement was moving forward.”²⁶ While she undoubtedly worked intimately with the National Office, locally her leadership was having a noticeable impact, and in the wake of *Brown I*, Daisy and L.C. applied additional pressure on white opposition. While not as vocal as he had been in the preceding years, when compelled, L.C. made his opinions known. Terrence Roberts of the Little Rock Nine recalls that Daisy and L.C. “were committed to doing whatever it took to get us into Central High School,” and that the ASC “had sought to hasten the

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Tony Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial: Cooper v. Aaron and School Desegregation*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press), 22.

²⁶ Juan Williams, “Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine,” National Public Radio, September 21, 2007, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14563865>

desegregation of Little Rock's school since the *Brown* decision had been rendered."²⁷

Ernest Green, who became Central High's first non-white graduate in May 1958, was more forthright: Concerning the period between June 1954 and May 1955, close friend and editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*, Harry Ashmore wrote, "it was her practice to walk into the most hostile gathering and confront her white antagonists. Once, in the days when she was jousting with the school board over the tokenism of the Blossom Plan, she came to the *Gazette* to berate me for not joining her in the attack. I observed that one part of the problem was that in negotiating with her the board found itself in the position of the church fathers who deal with Joan of Arc. She seemed to find this flattering, as, in a sense, it was. There were times when the desegregation effort turned on her raw courage."²⁸ Bates collaborated with L.C. to use the *State Press* as the ASC's unofficial organ, and kept African-Americans abreast on local integration plans and NAACP organizational and planning meetings. The Bateses efforts built an informed black community that was prepared to fight when the battle lines reached Little Rock in 1957.

On the same day that the *State Press* cautioned African-Americans of the impending, inevitable white resistance to the new laws governing segregation, white school officials were already displaying the double-talk that made Daisy cynical of their intentions to follow the court order. The *Arkansas Gazette*, the city's most widely circulated newspaper, purported that Little Rock would obey the law, but "intend to do so when the Supreme Court outlines the method to be followed."²⁹ In a meeting held one day after the ruling, the Little Rock School Board instructed newly appointed

²⁷ Terrence Roberts, *Lessons From Little Rock: One of the 'Little Rock Nine*, (Little Rock: Butler Center Books, 2009), 103-4

²⁸ Ashmore, *Hearts and Minds*, 274-5

²⁹ *Arkansas Gazette*, May 21, 1954, quoted in Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 16.

Superintendent Virgil Blossom to “develop a plan consistent with the Court’s order.”³⁰ Blossom requested their permission to meet with who he described as “three prominent Negro leaders” to “discuss our plans so they would know the Board’s position before any public statement was made.”³¹ With the board’s consent, Blossom scheduled a May 21st meeting with L.C. Bates, Reverend C.H. Jones, a political rival and editor of the conservative *Southern Mediator Journal*, and Reverend F.C. Guy, pastor of Little Rock’s largest black Baptist Church. Blossom presented a vague, minimal compliance plan L.C. interjected, “Then the board does not intend to integrate the schools in 1954?” When Blossom replied with “No, it must be done slowly,” and cited the completion of additional school buildings prior to starting integration, L.C. stormed out of the meeting. From that point on, the *State Press* ran countless articles condemning the school board.³²

Daisy did not attend Blossom’s meeting because she was not invited, and because she was in Atlanta at a special meeting called by the NAACP’s national leaders aimed at disseminating the next phase of its school integration program to its state and regional leaders. At the conference, held on May 22nd and 23rd, Daisy approached Current and requested that the NAACP’s National Office send someone to Arkansas to assist her with her “educational program.”³³ Current suggested a developing woman named Mildred Bond, whom he described as “a very capable young person,” who was available for the summer. Even more than offering Ms. Bond’s services, Current continued to allow Daisy to maintain control over who worked with her in the state conference. “Let me know,” he

³⁰ Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 15.

³¹ Virgil Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 11.

³² *Ibid*, 12-13; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 67. For examples of the reactions to *Brown* in newspapers across the nation, please see, Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Brown v. Board of Education: A Brief History with Documents*, (New York: Bedford/St. Martin, 1998), 199-218.

³³ Gloster B. Current to Mrs. L.C. Bates, June 8, 1954, Series II, Box C12, Folder 1, NAACP Papers

clarified, “if you would like to have such assistance...” Upon her return from Atlanta, Daisy organized an emergency state meeting, scheduled for June 12th, where she disseminated the NAACP’s agenda discussed in Atlanta. The meeting was hosted by the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA, and attended by 150 state NAACP activists.³⁴ “The Branches voted to have Miss Bond for the month of July and through August 15th if possible,” an excited Daisy responded to Current. “Plans by the delegates were to file petition with the local school boards, for admission of students for the 1954-55 school year. We are planning to do this simultaneously all over the state.”³⁵ Personally, her increased activism appears to have resulted in Daisy asserting her independence and newfound confidence: for the first time, she signed her correspondence “Daisy Bates,” instead of Mrs. L.C. Bates.

Under Daisy’s leadership, and with the legal counsel of Pine Bluff attorney Wiley Branton, the eventual chairman of the ASC’s Legal Redress Committee, blacks began the long process of ensuring that Little Rock made good on the promise of *Brown*. Branton recalled that after the June meeting, the committee he chaired with Daisy mailed letters “to nearly every school district in the state of Arkansas where there was a substantial black population demanding that the school boards adopt a plan for integration within their respective districts and offering assistance in the development of those plans.”³⁶ Furthermore, according to the *Gazette*, Daisy pushed the state NAACP delegation to immediately petition local school boards “for admission of Negro students to ‘the nearest

³⁴ “State NAACP Sets Early Pry At Racial Bars,” *Arkansas Gazette*, June 13, 1954, page 3A, column 1

³⁵ Daisy Bates to Mr. Gloster B. Current, June 15, 1954, Series II, Box C12, Folder 1, NAACP Papers

³⁶ Wiley A. Branton, “Little Rock Revisited: Desegregation to Resegregation,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, Volume 52, Number, Summer 1983, 251.

and best school' for the September term."³⁷ After conferencing with ASC delegates for five hours, Daisy announced the decision to the press. "The petitions to the school boards will be filed between now and the latter part of August. Parents are being lined up to sign the petitions and organizational plans are being made, she stated. "I can't say just when they will be filed. The organization realized the problems of redistricting the schools."³⁸ Echoing the NAACP's National Office and inserting her own machismo, Daisy continued, "Members of the organization are willing to work with school boards in local conferences but we will not stand for any gerrymandering...The state Education Department is advising Arkansas school districts to take no action toward integrating Negro students with whites in the coming year..." Daisy firmly warned that the NAACP was prepared to use the petitions as forerunners to court suits. "We would rather work it out with the school boards,' she clarified, 'but the next step will be lawsuits if it can't be worked out."³⁹ Emphasizing the activism of local leadership, Daisy presented the ASC as merely assisting African-Americans in need of their services, telling the press that the petitions would be filed by local NAACP branches with the Legal Committee's help. "In areas where there are no NAACP branches," the *Gazette* reported, "nearby branches will obtain petition signatures from parents in the school districts...Mrs. Bates said the Arkansas NAACP action was patterned after the 'Atlanta Declaration' issued May 23 at Atlanta, GA, by the NAACP for action in 18 states which now have mandatory segregation."⁴⁰

³⁷ Arkansas Gazette, June 13, 1954

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ *Ibid*

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

Despite Daisy and L.C.'s doubts, with the exception of resistance from extreme segments of the white community, true to his word, Little Rock's Superintendent reticently proceeded with plans to integrate the city's school system. However, despite Blossom's machinations, the results of his preliminary research foreshadowed future complications with his otherwise well-intentioned actions. In the summer following his disastrous meeting with L.C., Blossom and the LRSB conducted public opinion polls, and organized over 200 gatherings across the city. Personally, the superintendent believed that younger children "had less time to develop prejudices."⁴¹ However, over the summer of 1954 she realized that, "The younger the children, the more violent the parents were in the denunciations of the Court's order."⁴² The conflict between his personal beliefs and political options presented Blossom with an incredible dilemma. The findings of his interactions with Little Rock's citizenry and the results of the polling he conducted revealed a virulent resistance among the white population regarding school integration. Terrance Roberts concluded that the Blossom's plan was rejected by white parents because it was "designed to succeed," and despite public proclamations to obey the federal law, the actions of white Little Rockians led African-Americans to precisely the opposite conclusion.⁴³ Had local whites demonstrated the intention to act in good faith, the black community would have remained divided on best course of action to pursue. Furthermore, instead of recognizing the major challenge these sentiments posed to his quixotic vision of peaceful, gradual racial integration, Blossom accommodated segregationist by changing his original plan to start with elementary schools, and eventually work up to the secondary level. Blossom amended his plan to occur in three

⁴¹ Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 15.

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ Roberts, *Lessons From Little Rock*, 85.

phases, beginning with Little Rock's high schools. The plan also created three gerrymandered zoning areas that would become a central part of the controversy over how schools would be integrated, and which ones would not. The obvious capitulation to segregationist presented another problem for Blossom, and strengthened Daisy's resolve to contest the constitutionality of what became known as the "Blossom Plan."

Daisy spent the Summer and Fall of 1954 working with the national office, and assisting local leaders and lawyers with coordinating an effective state school integration program. On the morning of June 24th, Current phoned Daisy to confirm the dates in which Ms. Bond would assist her in Arkansas. They easily agreed that Bond would arrive on July 5th, the day after and national convention, held from June 29th-July 4th in Dallas, Texas, and remain until August 15th. The annual meeting allowed the two women to meet one another, and hit the ground running once she arrived in Little Rock.⁴⁴ With Ms. Bond's help, the ASC filed fourteen school desegregation petitions in fourteen different districts, representing 2,000 children across Arkansas. "Thanks for sending Miss Bond to Arkansas," an appreciative Bates wrote. "She did a beautiful job in helping with the petitions and the educational program of the branches." Bates showed satisfaction in working with a young woman of Bond's caliber. She also requested that Bond "be with us Saturday, October 23 to conduct the workshop of our meeting."⁴⁵ One week after Bond returned to New York, Wiley Branton dispatched the Little Rock petition to the William G. Cooper, President of the Little Rock School Board. The petition requested a hearing with the school board to discuss their integration plans. "I

⁴⁴ Gloster B. Current to Mrs. L.C. Bates, June 24, 1954.

⁴⁵ July –August 1954, Bond helped with the petitions. Daisy Bates to Mr. Gloster B. Current, August 26, 1954—WOMEN—" group II, series C, container 12, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

am hoping that your board will not adopt a 'wait and see' attitude with reference to the Supreme Court decision and that they will want to earnestly make plans now to comply with the ruling as to the time and method of enforcement yet to be announced," Branton wrote to the school board president.⁴⁶

In the meeting with the Executive Board of the local NAACP Branch held the following month, a wavering Superintendent Blossom told the interracial group, "It is not clear as to what will be the policy of this board.' Without a complete study, he insisted, 'We would be foolish to set any timetable now.'⁴⁷ "The Blossom Plan," he revealed entailed constructing three new schools. In the racially mixed, but majority black eastern section, Blossom proposed that a preapproved Negro junior high be converted into an integrated high school, and a new high School (Horace Mann High School) be constructed.⁴⁸ Blossom also planned to build a high school (Hall High School) in Pulaski Heights, located in the city's wealthy, mostly white western section, which all-but protected the elite from integrating their neighborhood schools. The Superintendent ended his presentation with the announcement of a tentative September 1956 start date at the newly constructed high school in the eastern section. He also announced that the LRSB would draw up "one set of school zones which would serve as a basis of pupils regardless of race."⁴⁹ Ignoring Branton and the Bates' demands for a clearer, more definitive integration plan, Blossom's firm stance convinced the NAACP's leaders of their need to pursue court action against the Little Rock School Board. This development also increased the level of interaction between that State Conference and the National

⁴⁶ Wiley A. Branton to Mr. William G. Cooper (President of the LRSB), August 21, 1954 group II, series C, container 12, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁷ Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 21.

⁴⁸ Iggers, "The NAACP and the Grass Roots," 287.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

Office. Daisy and L.C. were a part of a group described by Iggers as “the militants.” After meeting with Blossom, they “wanted to file a suit against the board immediately,” but lost out to moderates who sought to avoid legal action, and “show the rest of the South that peaceful and voluntary compliance with the Supreme Court decision could be realized.”⁵⁰ Daisy and L.C. refused to partake in such delusions because the plan was questionable, and seemed to invite the gerrymandering she had warned about in the June meeting.

The fruitful relationship Daisy developed with the NAACP’s New York office experienced turbulence when she criticized the group’s lawyers. Luckily, her outspokenness did not prevent Daisy from continuing to build a close, productive bond with the organization’s leaders. The 1954 state conference was held on October 22nd and 23rd at Little Rock’s Mount Zion Baptist Church. In front of the entire state delegation, Daisy questioned the amount NAACP lawyers charged to represent branches in court. With the National Director of Branches in attendance, Daisy stated that she felt the fees were too high and should be lowered. She expressed her unhappiness with this practice to the group, detailing how NAACP lawyers often demanded \$200 per court appearance, and refused to accept less than \$100. Aware of this militant streak, a concerned Current wrote to Thurgood Marshall, “it is questionable whether we need a lawyer at this point of the proceedings. In view of the kind of leadership we have in Arkansas, however, it would appear that some legal representation will be required in each instance.”⁵¹ In private, at the state conference, a frustrated Daisy informed Current that she had written a

⁵⁰ *Ibid*

⁵¹ Gloster Current to Thurgood Marshall, October 26, 1954, group II, series C, container 12, folder “Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5” NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

member of the NAACP's legal team about representing the ASC at an upcoming school desegregation hearing, and complained to that she "received no help from the Regional Office...I am not sure how much credence can be placed in this," Current communicated to Thurgood Marshall, "because Mr. Tate is usually prompt and attentive to matters pertaining to his office." Current also suggested that "some attention be given by the National and Regional Offices to supervise the hearings in Arkansas. Agreeing with Daisy, Current stated that "exorbitant fees will not be charged a state body which, at this point, cannot afford to pay them." U. Simpson Tate, the man Bates complained about to Current, also sided with her in the lawyer fee dispute. "Knowing Daisy as we both do," he wrote, "I was concerned about the timing of her request and its content. The problem faced in Arkansas concerns the demands lawyers led by Wiley Branton for, what seems to me, unreasonable fees to represent Branches in desegregation hearings before local school boards."⁵² To show his support, Tate agreed to supervise all future ASC legal matters. Daisy was hopeful that the arrangement would "eliminate the type of situation we are faced with now."⁵³ The NAACP's national leaders acknowledged Daisy's value to the movement in Arkansas, but possessed some reservations about what would happen if they adopted a less hands-on approach in dealing with a woman whose personality they viewed as confrontational and unpredictable.

The source of Daisy's inquiry was her ambitious Fight For Freedom drive aimed at raising ten thousand dollars toward ramping up the school integration battle.⁵⁴ The

⁵² U. Simpson Tate to Gloster Current, October 27, 1954, group II, series C, container 12, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵³ Mrs. L.C. Bates to Gloster Current, January 14, 1955 group II, series C, container 12, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁴ Daisy Bates to Gloster Current, August 26, 1954, group II, series C, container 12, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

campaign was started in anticipation of upcoming legal action. Daisy notified the National Office that she was of the opinion that half of the Freedom Fund should remain in the ASC. If this was not the case, she asked if the National Office would assume the attorney's fees. After discussing the matter with Thurgood Marshall, Current presented Daisy's request to the NAACP's Committee on Administration, which decided to allocate \$400 to the ASC, but required her to first submit the full \$645 presently in the Freedom Fund to the National Office.⁵⁵ In his follow up to her request, Current was positive. "The Committee was pleased with the work being done in Arkansas and recognized the emergency nature of the request." This engaged, aggressive, proactive leadership style prompted Thurgood Marshall to recognize the "progress" that was being made in the state toward desegregation of schools. Marshall recommended that the National Office help Daisy "as much as possible."⁵⁶ After the 1954 annual state conference, Current wrote, "Under your leadership, the Conference has grown to vitality and productiveness...I think you should be proud, however, of the fine work you are doing and the leadership you are giving."⁵⁷

Thurgood Marshall pressed other members of the National Office to support Daisy because he was more privy to the pressures under which she was operating. Unlike the new cohort of NAACP national leadership, led by Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins, by the 1950s Marshall was one of the Association's veterans. He had been trained by the legendary Charles Hamilton Houston, who passed away before the announcement of

⁵⁵ Current to Bates, October 27, 1954 group II, series C, container 12, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁶ Thurgood Marshall to Mr. Daniel E. Boyd, September 20, 1954 of New Orleans group II, series C, container 12, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁷ Current to Bates, October 26, 1954 group II, series C, container 12, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

Brown, a case of which he was the original architect. Marshall first met Daisy and L.C. in 1942 when they helped teacher Sue Morris challenge the Little Rock School board for equal salaries. In that moment, Marshall called Arkansas a place of promise for the NAACP, but ineffective leadership had rendered the ASC in disarray before Daisy's tenure. Bates kept Marshall informed on Blossom's shenanigans, the speeches he was giving across the city, and of the doubt his actions created in her belief that he would ensure that Little Rock would follow through on plans to integrate its schools. After watching Blossom change his public statements, depending on his audience, Daisy told Marshall that she had lost confidence in the superintendent's intentions to proceed with integration.⁵⁸

In the months following *Brown*, the development of the state gubernatorial race confirmed L.C.'s warnings. L.C. was so infuriated with Faubus for supporting segregation that he switched his support from the Democratic to the Republican Party, publically supporting GOP gubernatorial candidate Pratt Remmel.⁵⁹ "If we are to be hanged," L.C. proclaimed, "we'll be damned if we'll furnish the rope."⁶⁰ Four nights later, Faubus was elected by a 2 to 1 margin of victory. However, the new governor did not win in Little Rock or Pulaski County, where he lost the primary by almost 13,000 and the general election by nearly 3,000.⁶¹ The election confirmed L.C.'s belief that desegregation would not occur smoothly in Arkansas.

⁵⁸ Bates interview with Elizabeth Jacoway.

⁵⁹ Smith, "L.C. Bates," 102.

⁶⁰ *State Press*, October 29, 1954.

⁶¹ Roy Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 131-2.

During the 1954 gubernatorial campaign, Daisy Bates began to receive the public recognition that would elevate her beyond the shadows of her husband. Observers began to talk about her as more than L.C.'s wife. Terrence Roberts, asserts that "Daisy Bates was already regarded as one of the foremost social activists of the time."⁶² Considered with the noticeable change in the signing of her name that also occurred during this period, it is possible that Daisy felt like an empowered woman and demonstrated this feeling by clarifying how others were to refer to her. Like the NAACP's national leadership, the black press viewed Daisy as a rising star in the Civil Rights Movement. Black newspapers presented Bates as a new, independent African-American female voice. One month after her forty-first birthday, the *Pittsburgh Courier* warned its readers that "Daisy Bates...Little Rock, is fast becoming one of the nation's most outstanding women."⁶³ In next week's 1954 Christmas edition of the *Courier*, L.C. called Arkansas the "most liberal southern state. The worst section of Arkansas is better than the best section of Mississippi," he argued.⁶⁴ Daisy gave a more ominous political statement. She declared that "Success of integration in Arkansas depends on the NAACP...We need more Negroes to talk about integration. The average working man is ready for it. He is looking for leadership and he wants a good education for his children."⁶⁵ Daisy could not have been more precise. This statement to the *Courier* echoed Ida B. Wells's assertion that "the whites would not fight for Negroes until the latter had shown themselves capable of fighting for themselves."⁶⁶ Even more, her words were also markedly different from her husbands, and demonstrates that she understood

⁶² Roberts, *Lessons From Little Rock*, 104.

⁶³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 18, 1954.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, December 25, 1954.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶⁶ Schecter, *Ida B. Wells*, 129.

that whites were going to fight to keep segregation, and that African-Americans could use the NAACP to support the unwavering local leadership to white resistance that was growing with verve after *Brown*. If blacks wanted to integrate the nation's schools, they would have to be on the front lines of the fight, and both were prepared to make the necessary sacrifices.

Upping the Ante After Brown II

With Daisy's aggressive leadership, Arkansas was slowly becoming one of the NAACP's most promising locations in the South. And though improving, Daisy's relationship with the NAACP's National Office remained turbulent at times with the new year. In addition to organizing new branches, Daisy was thinking of new ways to generate financial support for the ASC, and trying to figure out how she would pay the fees for the lawyers who represented the state conference. In a letter to Gloster Current, Daisy revealed that lawyers "are pressing me for the money," and reminded the Director of Branches of a financial arrangement made in October. "If you would speed this up," she urgently wrote, "I would appreciate it very much...Have you been able to find anyone to come to us on a state-wide fund-raising drive?"⁶⁷ Within the week, Current had the check cut, made it payable to Daisy, and mailed it to Little Rock. However, the National Office reduced the amount from \$400 to \$350, the difference between the amount Daisy originally agreed to submit and what the National Office actually received from her. Current's letter also addressed the friction between the state president and the NAACP lawyers. "We realize the problems you are experiencing with your lawyers, but it is unique in that none of our other State Conferences are experiencing such problems

⁶⁷ Mrs. L.C. Bates to Gloster Current, January 14, 1955.

with their lawyers in the filing of petitions with school boards. We are glad to note that you are worked out an arrangement whereby Mr. Tate will supervise these matters in the future, thus eliminating the situation you faced this year...With reference to assisting you on a state-wide fund-raising campaign, we are unable to supply someone at the present time, but I do hope to assist you at the earliest possible moment...We hope to continue to be of service to you and the State Conference and wish for you success in the year which lies ahead.”⁶⁸ In her response, Daisy thanked Current for the check, and reported that “the impression made on the school’s officials,” made her confident that “They are convinced that we mean business here.”⁶⁹ Bates also organized another meeting with NAACP attorney Robert Carter as the guest speaker.

Leaders in the NAACP’s New York were increasingly looking to Arkansas to be a model for civilly integrating the South. One month before the Supreme Court announced the *Brown II* Decision on May 31, 1955, the Little Rock NAACP hosted a conference in anticipation of the enforcement order. The featured keynote speaker was Vernon McDaniels of the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund. McDaniels warned local activist of white resistance to racial integration, but “insisted [that], with increased efforts by blacks across the state to urge local school boards into compliance, Arkansas represented ‘the brightest prospect among the southern states for integration.’”⁷⁰ McDaniels and the NAACP’s National Office believed that integration could proceed peacefully in Arkansas. They underestimated the resolve of southern white resistance.

⁶⁸ “Memorandum to Mr. McClain From Mr. Current”, January 19, 1955; Current to Bates, January 21, 1955.

⁶⁹ Mrs. L.C. Bates to Mr. Gloster B. Current, February 2, 1955.

⁷⁰ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 94

Akin to the national NAACP, the Little Rock School Board, and members of the Eisenhower Administration were also hoping that the state could help chart a course for integration absent of violent, unflattering conflict. Arthur Cadwell, an Arkansas native, and Chief of the Civil Rights Division in Eisenhower's Justice Department, "hoped to make Arkansas an early example to the rest of the South of the federal government's determination to implement and enforce the spirit of the *Brown* decision."⁷¹ Cadwell envisioned a moderate, gradual, uneventful course of events. Nevertheless, his words were foretelling. The LRSB and Superintendent Blossom were also wishfully thinking that "Little Rock might show the rest of the South that peaceful and voluntary compliance with the Supreme Court decision would be realized."⁷² It was logical for Blossom to believe that Arkansas could lead the South on the issue of integration. In the wake of the *Brown* decision, Arkansas had integrated more schools than the combined total of all the other southern states. In addition, schools boards in states like Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia had fired teachers who supported integration, and Alabama went as far as outlawing the NAACP. Arkansas had quietly integrated public transportation and all of its graduate schools without incident, and in fall 1955 began admitting black undergraduates and the state's colleges and universities.⁷³ For these reasons, as one historian about southern white massive resistance has noted, "Little Rock was among the least likely scenes for a dramatic confrontation between state and federal power."⁷⁴ The Little Rock Nine's Terrence Roberts, recalled an incident which suggests that black youth and some adults were growing more vocal in their public opposition to segregation. "I

⁷¹ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 36

⁷² *Ibid.*, 51.

⁷³ Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1969), 226-7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

remember well the day the busses were integrated in 1955. Students, armed with copies of the *Arkansas Gazette* with headlines proclaiming the end of segregated seating, sat from front to back on the bus. One student plopped his copy of the front page onto the bus driver's lap to make sure he understood this new reality."⁷⁵ As seen in the incident Roberts describes, "this new reality" entailed a degree of African-American assertion and a loss of white control that was anathema to southern culture. Still, the desegregation of city busses, and small school districts throughout the state made many inside and outside of the state optimistic that Arkansas would not resist court-ordered integration.

The LRSB and Blossom's public sanguinity regarding school integration was an attempt to save face in the eyes of the White Citizens Council led segregationists, who vilified city officials for allowing integration. The racist, well-connected group also criticized the NAACP integrationists, led by Daisy and L.C., for countering massive resistance with more activism. Blossom was sympathetic to the segregationists, and viewed Daisy as part of the problem brewing in Little Rock. Blossom, who spent the 1954-55 school year presenting the LRSB's "ideas...to the public," found himself on the receiving end of scathing attacks from both extremes of the political spectrum: Daisy and L.C. Bates on one end, and the Arkansas chapter of the White Citizens Council on the other. No matter the group or the location, Daisy made sure she attended Blossom's public meetings, where she took notes, asked questions, and reported back to her husband. Daisy humorously remembered the reaction her presence generated from Blossom. "This burned him up," she told Elizabeth Jackoway. "He knew I was there," Bates recollected. "I was keeping him honest."⁷⁶ Her custom was to arrive before

⁷⁵ Roberts, *Lessons From Little Rock*, 83

⁷⁶ Bates, Interview with Jacoway.

Blossom in order to fluster the Superintendent during his speech. According to Bates “all the speech went out of him” when he noticed her sitting in the audience. Blossom was privately telling whites that his plan allowed for “the least amount of integration over the longest period”, but vaguely telling blacks that integration plans were on track.⁷⁷ John Kirk concludes that “Blossom viewed such a stance as ‘moderate’ relative to the ‘extremes’ of significant integration and outright opposition through moderate resistance. But, in fact, minimum compliance was merely a diluted form of resistance, providing a subtle and insidious way of frustrating the process of desegregation.”⁷⁸ Daisy quickly decided that the Blossom Plan was intended to minimize integration, and that his public appearances were attempts to placate the fears of white parents. Blossom choked up when he saw Daisy because he knew that she would challenge him in front of the group during the question and answer session.⁷⁹ Bates forced Blossom to publically deny that he was making different statements about integration to different groups. By following Blossom and keeping the public informed on his statements about integration, Daisy made it clear that integration would also meet black demands, and not just the desires of white moderates and segregationists.

The tensions that eventually made Little Rock a symbol of the civil rights struggle were exacerbated on May 24, 1955, when Blossom announced the LRSB’s official integration plans. Interestingly, the Little Rock Phase Program, as it was called, amended the original Blossom Plan in important ways that made the extreme segregationists and complete integrationists even angrier than they were before the announcement. The plan

⁷⁷ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 93.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*

⁷⁹ Bates, Interview with Jacoway.

was intended to squelch black activism around school integration, and assure segregationists that it would be token and minimal. What Blossom failed to realize was that blacks would not accept minimal integration because they did not see it as effective, and most whites were against it because they preferred no integration at all. The Phase Program plan lacked a base of support from its beginnings. African-Americans were unhappy with several elements of the Phase Program, however, none were as troubling as the voluntary transfer system, which allowed parents to transfer their children from schools where they were a part of a racial minority. In conjunction with this change, Blossom and the LRSB designed school zones that almost ensured that Central High School, located in a racially and economically diverse working class neighborhood, would be the only school integrated. The city's three school zones were scientifically and deliberately calculated to have predetermined outcomes; in the Horace Mann Area blacks were 56 percent (533 of 959) of the eligible students, almost 20 percent (516 of 2,651) for Central, and less than one percent (6 of 706) for Hall.⁸⁰ To make matters worse, Horace Mann was assigned an all-African-American staff, which pretty much assured that the 426 white students, who were in the minority, albeit a significant 44 percent, would transfer to Hall and Central, leaving the school with an all-black faculty and student body. If these changes were not bold enough, Blossom stated that integration would not begin as originally stated in Fall 1956, but in either 1957 or 1958. Lastly, the superintendent informed the city that the newly completed Horace Mann would open in the February 1956, but it would not be integrated as originally discussed, it would only be open to African-Americans, and would have an all-black faculty.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 17.

⁸¹ Iggers, "The NAACP and the Grass Roots," 287.

The ramifications of the Phase Program were diverse and numerous, one of which was that it created a degree of solidarity among African-Americans for court action led by the NAACP that was lacking beforehand. It is not clear what offended the African-American community more, the negative effects of the changes, or the arrogance in compiling a plan “without the advice or consent” of black leaders.⁸² Blossom and the school board had caved to the segregationists. He admitted in his memoir, “we were guided in many matters by the reaction of parents and civic leaders.”⁸³ Harry Ashmore recalled telling Blossom that not including the black community’s preferred leadership in the desegregation discussion and process would make executing his plans more difficult. “You’ve got to deal with Daisy Bates,” he told the Superintendent. “You can’t put this damn thing over just addressing the Rotary Club.”⁸⁴ According to Ashmore, at the time, Daisy “was just raising hell. She wouldn’t accept the plan and she’d come in and give me hell for supporting the Blossom Plan.”⁸⁵ Unfortunately Blossom only listened to the voices of parents and leaders in the white community. His blatant disrespect toward the leaders selected by the African-American community to represent their demands angered blacks who were slowly moving towards supporting legal action against the city school board. With these local tensions already brewing, on May 31, 1955, the Supreme Court announced its *Brown II* decision, just one week following the LRSB’s publicly disclosed the city’s integration plans.

When the nation’s highest court announced *Brown II*, which declared that school integration must proceed with “all deliberate speed,” it complicated, rather than clarified

⁸² *Ibid*

⁸³ Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 21.

⁸⁴ Harry Ashmore interview with Sara Murphy, June 13, 1994, Sara Murphy Papers, Box 1, University of Arkansas Fayetteville, quoted in Anderson, *Little Rock*, 38, and Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 191.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*

the issue because the statement was vague and could therefore be challenged legally by both sides. John Kirk has concluded that “*Brown II* had a much greater impact on the development of white resistance to school desegregation than the first *Brown* ruling.”⁸⁶ *Brown II* deflected responsibility for planning and enforcing school integration onto local and state governments. In many ways, this meant that African-Americans would have to continue to work through the legal system to implement integration because the court order contained no time table, or definition of how quickly, or slowly, desegregation should proceed. L.C. and Daisy interpreted the decision as a victory for segregationists. “HI COURT FAVORS DIXIE,” L.C. published in the *State Press*.⁸⁷ Clarification on the court’s ruling would have to come from future legal challenges, which increased the probability of a delay in implementing integration. The decision had a unique impact on Little Rock because the city had chosen to create a desegregation plan. The proactive development of a gradual plan to integrate the schools almost guaranteed that if challenged, the city would be seen as acting in good faith and the plan ruled Constitutional. This is exactly what happened. The development of the Blossom Plan made the status of integration in Little Rock a question of *when*, not *if* the schools would be desegregated. A public debate ensued over whether or not the previously introduced Phase Plan met federal requirements, but Daisy, L.C. and the NAACP’s legal team were confident that the plan would be upheld by the Federal Courts.

This fact was also not lost on an underestimated, self-made, and extremely savvy politician by the name of Orval Eugene Faubus, who had grown up in a liberal, socialist household in Northwest Arkansas’s Ozark Mountains. Sam Faubus was a poor farmer

⁸⁶ Kirk, “White Opposition to the Civil Rights Struggle,” *Beyond the Little Rock Crisis*, 95.

⁸⁷ *State Press*, June 3, 1955.

who admired the renowned union leader and five-time presidential candidate Eugene Debs. Not only did Sam Faubus organize chapters for the Arkansas Socialist Party, but out of adulation for the socialist leader, he gave his son the middle name Eugene. Less than six months into the first term of a historic six-term stint as Governor, this son of a poor farmer issued a statement consistent with his populist upbringing. His words were moderate, and implied compliance with the court order. However, Sam Faubus's son was a politician, and, in his statement, he also left wiggle room for the political maneuvering that would also set the stage for the 1957 crisis. "Our reliance now must be upon the good will that exists between the two races," Governor Faubus wrote, "the good will that has made Arkansas a model for the other Southern states in all matters affecting the relationship between the races."⁸⁸ This statement was as vacuous and nebulous as "all deliberate speed," and like the Federal Government, the state officials also failed to publically support the court order and speak out firmly against open defiance. In this context, at least in Little Rock, *Brown II* had a greater impact than *Brown I* because it allowed segregationists and integrationists to interpret "all deliberate speed" from their opposite perspectives. Each side made a logical case for why their interpretation was the correct one. There was little space for the moderate "good will" Faubus had proclaimed was essential to resolving the integration issue.

Brown II forced African-Americans in Little Rock to place their faith in Daisy Bates and the NAACP because school officials were already showing signs of waffling under pressures from segregationists. Blacks were confident that they had a reliable, principled and courageous leader in the State President. The Court's equivocation increased Daisy Bates' activism in Arkansas because Superintendent Blossom and the

⁸⁸ Ashmore, *Civil Rights and Wrongs*, 124.

LRSB had already designed the city integration plans in a way that made its impact minimal, technical and token, and neither Governor Faubus nor President Eisenhower had come out in strong support of the decision.⁸⁹ While historians argue that southern white “massive resistance” to *Brown* overwhelmed politicians before the hot, violent summer of 1955 extreme segregationists were not terrorizing African-Americans to the magnitude they did after the federal government’s failure to endorse *Brown II*, which was the law’s all-important enforcement order. The Eisenhower Administration’s failure to send a clear message to segregationists that it would not accept any degree of lawlessness or defiance of the court order created a leadership void that was filled by the extremes.⁹⁰ Before *Brown II*, Americans assumed that the Federal Government was prepared to enforce integration, but afterwards this became debatable because there were no teeth to the second ruling. The historian John Kirk writes, “As the earlier optimism that whites would implement *Brown* vanished, the NAACP increasingly became the leading force in the black community.”⁹¹ *Brown II* was a major turning point in the history of school integration because it emboldened white segregationists by giving them a sense in hope that the Federal Government was not committed to enforcing the court order. White segregationist resulted to the uncivil, lawless tactics they had historically employed to maintain their hegemonic power over black southerners.⁹² In the face of these internal

⁸⁹ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 423.

⁹⁰ This point is made by E. Frederic Morrow throughout his memoir, *Black Man in the White House*, (New York: MacFadden Books, 1963). Morrow correctly observed that the absence of a strong statement from the President in favor of *Brown* would embolden segregationists to not only oppose it, but to create an organizational structure from which to launch their assault. They soon turned to the White Citizens Councils, which had been established in Sunflower County, Mississippi one month after the first *Brown* decision.

⁹¹ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 95-6.

⁹² For an example of hegemonic southern white power during the Antebellum Era see Deborah Gray White, “Simple Truths: Antebellum Slavery in Black and White,” in *Passages to Freedom: The Underground*

and external pressures, Daisy was confronted with the decision to either press forward or fold in the face of adversity. She decided that “it would be this generation, or never.”⁹³ Daisy Bates’ recognition and acceptance of the responsibility thrust upon her made her a central figure in the organization of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, and the mobilization of African-Americans that followed the showdown her uncompromising leadership helped precipitate.

The moment’s immediacy was also not lost on the NAACP, who, after the announcement of the second ruling, called an emergency meeting in Atlanta to map out a locally-empowering national school integration program and strategy. At the June 4th conference, the National Office warned local and state leaders of the “varying degrees” to which the white South would resist integration.⁹⁴ In a “Directive to Branches,” the New York Office reassured their members that *Brown II* “in no way cuts back on the May 17 pronouncement,” and placed “the challenge on the good faith of the public officials, on the militancy of Negroes and on the integrity of the federal courts.” This dialectic, a separation of powers so to speak, was important because it dispersed the onus of integration onto three separate entities and sources of authority; one’s failure did not prevent the other from enforcing the court order. The National Office empowered local and state branches to aggressively pursue integration. “We must be prepared to meet the challenge in a forthright manner,” the Association articulated. “Our branches must seek to determine in each community whether the school board is prepared to make a prompt

Railroad in History and Memory, David Blight, ed., (New York: Harper Collins/Smithsonian Books, 2006), 33-65.

⁹³ Bennett Jr., “First Lady of Little Rock”, 18.

⁹⁴ *Crisis*, June-July 1955, 337-340, 381, reprinted in Catherine M. Lewis and J. Richard Lewis, *Race, Politics, and Memory: A Documentary History of the Little Rock Crisis*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 16-19.

and reasonable start towards full compliance...at the earliest practicable date. Promises,” the NAACP militantly declared, “unaccompanied by concrete action are meaningless.”

In a display of confidence and aggression, the NAACP’s leaders stated that they were not concerned with “the attitudes of individuals” who opposed the new law. “It is the job of our branches,” the directive ended, “to see to it that each school board begins to deal with the problem of providing non-discriminatory education.” And with that, they suggested an eight-point program for the branches to follow. The Atlanta Declaration included:

1. Filing petitions with each individual school board
2. Periodic follow ups inquiring about integration plans
3. During Summer months, use meetings, forums, debates and conferences to inform the public about integration to ensure that control is not in the hand of politicians
4. Organize parents in local communities to challenge segregation in court
5. Seek white support through churches, labor organizations, civic leadership, and individuals in the community
6. Submit any local integration plans to the State Conference and National Office for a decision about its merits and compliance
7. If no plans are made by September 1955, file a federal lawsuit
8. Case then turned over to the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund for court action

Back in Arkansas, Daisy not only implemented the program, but took personal responsibility for its success. Furthermore, rather than trying to micromanage local activists, the Roy Wilkins led NAACP empowered local leaders to lead in their communities, and gave them a blueprint to work from. The National Office also reassured local leaders that they would support them with legal representation, only when matters reached that point.

When she returned to Little Rock, Daisy began a campaign to educate the community about the NAACP’s plans. She made public statements that she had no intentions of compromising. Daisy became empowered by her activism, and the increasing audacity of her public actions suggest that she was confident that she could win the battle with the city of Little Rock over the integration of its schools. Daisy was

concerned with the specifics of the Phase Plan, and the legal action she helped start after *Brown II* was intended to either force immediate integration or have the city publicly announce a start date. Wiley Branton recalled that Daisy and other NAACP leaders had opposed the Phase Program in a meeting with school officials. They “protested that the proposed plan was too gradual and quite indefinite,” citing that integration in the high schools was set to start in 1957, but nothing was specified about “the other phases nor was there any indication as to how much racial integration would occur on any level.”⁹⁵ When Blossom and the LRSB refused to create a more concrete, detailed plan, the group of civil rights activists discussed taking legal action. In preparation, Daisy asked Branton to represent the ASC, to which he agreed.

In the week following the Atlanta Conference, Daisy and Superintendent Blossom sparred publically as each attempted to win the message war over the course and pace of integration; each worked diligently to rally the masses behind their plans. On June 11, 1955 Daisy held a statewide NAACP meeting at Little Rock’s Phyllis Wheatley YWCA, where she disseminated plans for local action. The group of roughly forty community activists included branch presidents, executive board members, teachers, and ministers.⁹⁶ Daisy also secured support for her integration program from leaders in the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches, as well as the local chapter of the National Council of Negro Women. The state conference delegates adopted the Atlanta Declaration and were instructed to prepare petitions to be filed by the State Conference. In addition, September 1955 was agreed to as the goal for integration, and a four-point program resembling the

⁹⁵ Wiley A. Branton, “Little Rock Revisited: Desegregation to Resegregation,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, Volume 52, Number, Summer 1983, 252-3.

⁹⁶ Mrs. L.C. Bates, “Suggested Program for Southern Branches, 1954-1955,” folder 10, Box 4, Madison, WI.

Atlanta Declaration delegated enforcement authority to the State President, Daisy Bates, and the Chairman of Legal Redress, Wiley Branton. The delegation “ordered” Bates and Branton to (1). Draft letters to every district requesting immediate integration, (2). File petitions seeking hearings on school integration, (3). Seek conferences with the Governor, Attorney General and Education Commissioner on integration in Arkansas, and (4). File lawsuits against school districts that do not act in “good faith.”⁹⁷ Having promoted her activities in the *State Press*, Daisy proudly reported to the National office that “we may expect considerable action” due to the broad coalition she had built.⁹⁸ The following day, Superintendent Blossom told a group of affluent whites that “it will be two years—and maybe longer” before integration would begin in Little Rock. “We don’t plan to do anything until we get the new high school,” Blossom told the *Democrat*. “That high school is on the drawing boards now and it should be ready by September 1957.”⁹⁹ Blossom ensured his audience that when it began it would be “gradual.”¹⁰⁰ John Kirk has written that the LRSB’s “minimum compliance” strategy “was merely a diluted form of resistance, providing a subtle and insidious way of frustrating the process of desegregation.”¹⁰¹ As chair of the Executive Committee, Georg Iggers remembered that the constant changes to the School Board’s plans evoked “serious doubt among NAACP members” who had previously “assumed the good faith of the school officials,” and, prior to, had disagreed with Daisy about the need to take a hard line.¹⁰² Press

⁹⁷ Ozell Sutton, “State NAACP Sets Fall Goal on Integration” *Arkansas Democrat*, June 12, 1955.

⁹⁸ Mrs. L.C. Bates, “Suggested Program for Southern Branches, 1954-1955,” folder 10, Box 4, Madison, WI.

⁹⁹ Tom Davis, “Little Rock Integration to Start From Top Town—and Later On,” *Arkansas Democrat*, June 12, 1955.

¹⁰⁰ “LR District Holding out for 1957: Blossom Says New High School Key to Problem,” *Arkansas Democrat*, June 12, 1955.

¹⁰¹ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 93

¹⁰² Iggers, “The NAACP and the Grass Roots,” 287.

coverage illuminates how Bates and Blossom battled to get their message out to the public, and how each deployed their various community resources. It also became clear that African-Americans were determined to immediately integrate Little Rock's schools, and that whites were also prepared to fight tooth and nail to resist implementation of the court order.

One month after the LRSB announced the Phase Plan, the state's first integration crisis in Hoxie, Arkansas continued Daisy's political education as a civil rights activist, and further exposed her to the politics of public leadership.¹⁰³ The semester following the *Brown I*, school districts in Charleston and Fayetteville, in the northwest's secluded Ozark Mountains, had successfully integrated its small populations of black students with little media attention or opposition from local whites. Located on the opposite end of the state, 138 miles northeast of Little Rock, near the Missouri and Tennessee state lines, Hoxie departed from the course taken in Charleston and Fayetteville because it captured national headlines after its school board voluntarily passed a desegregation plan less than a month following *Brown II*. On July 11th, the small town of roughly 1,300 people, quietly integrated fourteen black families into the school system.¹⁰⁴ L.C. wrote, "Hoxie Proves Democracy Can Work in Arkansas."¹⁰⁵ Back in Little Rock to assist Daisy, Mildred Bond reported to Roy Wilkins that the majority of the people were either poor farmers, or received public assistance, with a few "merchants, truckers, lumber and cattlemen." Integration occurred smoothly until Monday July 25th, when *Life* published

¹⁰³ For a detailed examination of the events in Hoxie see, Jerry Vervack, "The Hoxie Imbroglio," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 48 (Spring 1989), pp. 16-33.

¹⁰⁴ Mildred L. Bond, Memo to Mr. Roy Wilkins, August 6, 1955, Box 4, folder 10, Madison.

¹⁰⁵ *State Press*, July 15, 1955.

an article titled, “A Morally Right Decision.”¹⁰⁶ In the week following, white supremacists from the neighboring Mississippi Delta to the south flooded Hoxie with racist literature. This propaganda campaign culminated in an August 3rd community meeting at Hoxie City Hall, attended by between 200 and 350 whites, “demanding a return to segregation.”¹⁰⁷ Herbert Brewer, the group’s leader, petitioned the school board, but they rejected his request to return to segregated schools. The next day, 50 percent of the Hoxie High School’s white students protested integration with their absence. Mildred Bond reported that many of these families received public assistance, and case workers visited their homes, informing them that receiving aid required them to send their children to school. Ten days later, two politically ambitious, segregationist attorneys, Amis Guthridge and Jim Johnson, fired up the crowd by making inflammatory, emotional statements. As director of the Arkansas chapters of the White Citizens Councils, Johnson, who would challenge Orval Faubus for the 1956 Democratic nomination the following year. Guthridge, who served as executive secretary of the Little Rock chapter of White America Inc., became central to the opposition against Daisy Bates during the 1957 desegregation crisis. Guthridge told one crowd in Hoxie, “integration will lead to intermarriage: they want in the bedroom,” and challenged local whites to resist implementation of the court order.¹⁰⁸ Johnson and Guthridge pressured the Hoxie School Board until October 1956, when the United States Justice Department upheld the integration plan. Governor Faubus called the issue a local matter and refused to get involved. The battle and eventual victory in Hoxie was an important dress rehearsal for the crisis in Little Rock because it increased segregationists’ fears, and set

¹⁰⁶ “A ‘Morally Right’ Decision,” *Life*, July 25, 1955, 29-31.

¹⁰⁷ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 50-1; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 74-7.

¹⁰⁸ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 34.

an important precedent for the crisis in Little Rock, a city much larger in population. It also prepared Daisy for the violent resistance she encountered during the crisis at Central High. She did not act in Hoxie because Thurgood Marshall had agreed to honor a request from Arthur Caldwell in the Justice Department that the NAACP avoid involvement, for fears of making the situation worse.¹⁰⁹

During the crisis in Hoxie, L.C. finally commented on the actions of the Supreme Court. Calvin Smith writes that L.C.'s silence on the issue was "due to the growing controversy surrounding the *State Press*'s stand on desegregation."¹¹⁰ Perhaps L.C. was concerned with hurting the NAACP's campaign. Nevertheless, in the July 15th edition of the *State Press*, angered by the precipitation of the events in Hoxie, L.C. made his opinion known. "We have often wanted to comment about the...recent mild decision of the Supreme Court giving dixie Rats time to come to their senses," L.C. wrote.¹¹¹ "We have new for them," he concluded, "desegregation is coming and desegregation means a better educational system for America."

L.C. also engaged in a brief debate with president of the local white citizens council. While attending a meeting held in July by the City of North Little Rock's School Board, L.C. met Finos C. Phillips, president of the Capital City Chapter of White America. After the meeting, L.C. and Finos began a dialogue about desegregation. Though the *Arkansas Gazette* reported that he "talked quietly," L.C. words were confrontational and uncompromising. As the assistant superintendent of North Little Rock listened, L.C. asked Phillips "How long is it going to take for democracy to start to

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 37

¹¹⁰ Smith, "L.C. Bates," 102.

¹¹¹ *State Press*, July 15, 1955.

work? How long has it been since 1776?”¹¹² Phillips removed the pipe of which he had been puffing from his mouth and replied, “We’ve spent thousands of dollars here to build good schools for you people.”¹¹³ “Schools for us?” L.C. quipped. “Why aren’t they OUR schools?” L.C. then stated that he “had a boy in the Army,” which was not true. However, it appears that L.C. made the inaccurate statement in order to make his political argument. “What was he fighting for?” he continued. “Democracy? OUR democracy? The democracy that he knew?”¹¹⁴ With passion flaring, L.C. shook his pencil in the direction of Phillips’ pipe. “You know what did make me hot under the collar?” L.C. recounted a story in which he witnessed 16 German prisoners of war being escorted to “Jerome, a P.O.W. camp located in south Arkansas, by four military policemen; two white, two black. While in route, the officers decided to stop at Frankes Restaurant in Little Rock to eat. “Those 16 German prisoners, who had been trying to destroy everything that our democracy stands for, and the MP’s went into the restaurant and ate in an air-conditioned room. The other two MP’s were sent around to the kitchen to eat. They were colored.”¹¹⁵ Phillips took another puff on his pipe as L.C. waited for his response. “But you know,” Phillips began, “You folks are trying to get out of paying poll taxes.” Both men agreed to end the conversation. While not writing the types of blistering editorials he had in previous years, L.C. was clearly in agreement with the local crusade his wife was leading.

The NAACP’s activities behind the scenes in Hoxie is indicative of the type of covert support state conferences and the National Office provided for local civil rights

¹¹² *Arkansas Gazette*, July 16, 1955.

¹¹³ *Ibid*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*

campaigns across the South prior to and during the years of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Written on a hot August day from Daisy and L.C.'s small apartment on Bishop Street, Mildred Bond's report to Roy Wilkins informed the Executive Secretary of the pressures being placed on local blacks in Arkansas, the rank-and-file's demand for NAACP branches, and expressed her personal belief that the state conference needed a full-time field secretary.¹¹⁶ Bond recalled how brutal the heat was this particular summer. Daisy and L.C. had "window fans blowing over water" to keep their apartment cool. In her summation of the situation in Hoxie, and Arkansas as a whole, Bond suggested that Wilkins and Thurgood Marshall first provide moral support, by writing "letters of encouragement to the parents" on the pre-attached list. She also recommended that they make Arkansas a priority in the Association. "At this particular time more than ever, a field worker is sorely needed in Arkansas. Everything is happening down here simultaneously right now!!" Arkansas, she insisted, was an investment with potentially significant returns. "With the favorable attitude of some of the high state officials and a little litigation," the young, grassroots organizer explicated, "much progress could be made. (As well as informing our own people.)" Bond dispatched her report to Wilkins, Marshall, Current and Daisy Bates. In response to Bond's report, Thurgood Marshall, who was answering Wilkins's correspondence, called Daisy and informed her that he was out of the office. However, after discussing the "importance of the Hoxie situation," with Bond, Current and Marshall were "convinced that there is a real need for someone to be with the Negroes in Hoxie at least for the next couple of weeks," and believed they had a

¹¹⁶ Mildred L. Bond, Memo to Mr. Roy Wilkins, August 6, 1955, Box 4, folder 10, Madison.

duty to “[do] all we can” to help.¹¹⁷ Bond gave up part of her summer vacation to return to Arkansas and help the ASC and the people of Hoxie. Marshall and Current made the decision to immediately dispatch Bond back to Arkansas to help Daisy because she was aware of the local conditions, and had proven her ability to effectively work with her. In addition to advocating for the ASC, the two women created a “special fundraising committee” set up to “help under[w]rite the cost of litigation in our school cases here in the state.”¹¹⁸ The collaboration with local attorney J.R. Booker and Dr. J.M. Robinson, president of the local branch, aimed to raise \$2,000 for the Wiley Branton led Arkansas Legal Redress Fund, and suggests that previously hostile adversaries in the African-American community were coalescing behind Daisy’s leadership as ASC President, and her focus on school integration. Even more, Daisy’s public detachment from the crisis in Hoxie was a part of a higher agreement which veiled the NAACP’s direct involvement.

As the NAACP made progress in Arkansas, Daisy continued to be the subject of controversy among some of the national officers. In the telephone conversation about Bond’s return, Daisy told Thurgood Marshall that Maceo Smith, who was a part of the national legal team “isn’t any help to the State Conference.”¹¹⁹ Marshall did not placate Daisy, but expressed his hope that she would change her opinion. In a particularly revealing letter concerning Bates’ state power, U. Simpson Tate wrote to Gloster Current:

I don’t care how you feel about Mrs. Bates and her work in Arkansas, she did take the State Conference when it was in a very low ebb and she has kept it together as a going concern. She has not been able to raise money, but she is not unique in that respect. Until some other person is selected, whoever works in Arkansas has got to work with Mrs. Bates, and it is putting the cart before the horse to even suggest that a field worker on the National staff go in there and override

¹¹⁷ Thurgood Marshall to Mrs. Bates, August 18, 1955, group II, series C, container 12, folder “Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5” NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁸ Mildred L. Bond to Mr. W.M. Williams, August 27, 1955; Dr. H.A. Powell to Mildred L. Bond, August 28, 1955, Bates Papers, Box 4, folder 10, Madison.

¹¹⁹ Thurgood Marshall to Daisy Bates, August 15, 1955, group II, series C, container 12, folder “Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5” NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

her program...But whoever he is, he must make his peace with the State organization before he can be useful.¹²⁰

Tate's letter confirms that, for reasons unknown, some national leaders remained skeptical of Daisy Bates, and may have proposed that the national office go into Arkansas and usurp her power. Tate's response suggest that some members of the NAACP national office still possessed reservations about Daisy Bates' leadership style, and that others recognized the progress made since her presidency.

After the peak of the conflict in Hoxie, Current and Daisy worked to secure permanent help by employing a state field worker. Current had received two applications for the field secretary position; one for Mr. Rutledge from Fort Smith, and Frank W. Smith, known in Little Rock black activists circles as the former Executive Director of the Arkansas Teachers Association. Current was concerned that Smith would not be able to "get along too well" with Daisy.¹²¹ Tate reiterated that anyone who "has shown a lack of ability to work with the State Organization" made them "unfitted for our program," and that, while sincere, Mr. Rutledge was unqualified "to represent the NAACP on its National staff or on its state-wide program."¹²² When Current requested that Daisy "immediately" provide a "candid comment" about each candidate, she replied by stating that she felt that Mildred Bond was "the person for the job," but since she was unavailable, "Mr. Smith will make an excellent field worker."¹²³ Before responding to Current, Bates contacted Smith, and asked him if he could begin October 1st, in time for the state conference, after briefly vetting his ability to "[handle] people." Daisy was not be able to expedite the process of hiring Smith just three weeks before the state

¹²⁰ U. Simpson Tate to Gloster Current, September 19, 1955, group II, series C, container 12, folder "Arkansas State Conference, 1952-5" NAACP Papers, Library of Congress.

¹²¹ Current to Tate September 8, 1955, II, C12, 1

¹²² Tate to Current, September 13, 1955, II, C12, 1

¹²³ Current to Bates, September 7, 1955, Bates to Current, September 20, 1955 II, C12, 1

conference where Daisy was elected to her fourth consecutive term as state president. Current confirmed, “Upon your recommendation, we are offering employment to Mr. Frank Smith. We do hope that his coming on the staff will assist you in carrying out the difficult task of implementing the Supreme Court decision in your state.”¹²⁴ The honeymoon between the field secretary and the state president was short-lived.

Despite her less-than enthusiastic feelings about Frank Smith, Daisy needed some form of assistance because she and L.C. were preparing to move into their newly built home on a one-acre plot of land they had purchased at 1207 West 28th Street, in one of Little Rock’s integrated neighborhoods. Daisy and L.C. were living in a small, cramped apartment on Bishop Street because years earlier they had decided to prioritize purchasing a plant for the *State Press* before buying a home. In the meantime, they saved for their “dream home” as they paid for the foundation for their newspaper, and their life. Race added difficulty to purchasing a home for African-Americans in the early 1950s. Bates recalled that they “had to pay for every damn thing we got.” The Federal Housing Authority, she acrimoniously remembered, capped home loans to African-Americans. “You couldn’t borrow if you were black; you couldn’t borrow over eight thousand dollars from the FHA,” which was less than the \$25,000 needed to purchase a home. After being originally unable to get approval for a FHA loan Daisy and L.C. “saved everything,” and used their life insurance policies to buy a one-acre plot of land. With about ten thousand dollars saved, they also successfully reapplied to the FHA. Unfortunately, the original contractor died before the plans for the home were finished but Daisy persuaded the owner of a local lumber yard to contact two personal friends to build their home, only if she and L.C. agreed to purchase all of the needed materials from him. The couple agreed,

¹²⁴ Current to Bates, October 5, 1955,

and in Fall 1955, Daisy and L.C. moved into their new home.¹²⁵ The couple celebrated with a gathering of friends. In a stoppage of the festivities, Daisy's minister, Rufus Young, offered the following words, "God bless this home and may peace and happiness forever dwell in it."¹²⁶ Reverend Young's blessing lasted one year.

Conclusion: Setting the Stage

Almost immediately, Daisy made their new residence a center of civil rights activity. In late October, Gloster Current lodged with the Bateses during the annual conference, which he called "the best ever held."¹²⁷ One month later, Daisy hosted the NAACP's Southwest Regional Advisory Board meeting. The most important gathering was the meeting of the Little Rock NAACP's Executive Board. With new energy and support garnered from Superintendent Blossom's vacillation over integration, the board decided to recruit parents for a lawsuit against the Little Rock School Board, raise \$300 for legal representation, and find a local lawyer willing to take their case. Within four weeks they raised over \$1000, and Wiley Branton agreed to represent the local branch for "a quite modest fee."¹²⁸ The Little Rock NAACP's set a January 23, 1956 date, the first day of the upcoming semester, and the first day that newly constructed Horace Mann was scheduled to open with an all-African-American faculty and student body. The committee targeted the parents of African-American children with residences in close proximity to white schools.¹²⁹ The group, which included L.C., Georg Iggers, his wife Wilma, Reverend J.C. Crenshaw, president of the local branch, U. Simpson Tate, Wiley

¹²⁵ Bates interview with Jacoway

¹²⁶ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 78.

¹²⁷ Current to Bates, November 7, 1955.

¹²⁸ Iggers, "The NAACP and the Grass Roots," 290.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 289.

Branton and Lee Lorch, “visited homes throughout middle-class and blue-collar African-American areas.”¹³⁰ Iggers recalled that Daisy “rolled up her sleeves and knocked on doors, in one of the mixed pairs.”¹³¹

On January 21, 1956, Daisy Bates held an informational meeting at her home about the NAACP’s planned attempt to integrate Little Rock’s public schools on the first day of the upcoming spring term.¹³² The gathering represented a new phase in the showdown she had proclaimed was needed a half-decade earlier. Unlike Georg Iggers and other members of the Little Rock NAACP’s Executive Committee, who “underestimated the segregationists extremists,” Daisy and L.C.’s continuous attempts to educate, organize and mobilize the black community into an orchestrated resistance movement, corroborate that they had lost faith in the feasibility of a moderate or graduate solution to the school integration issue.¹³³ She was preparing for a confrontation with local whites. In addition to approving the employment of Frank Smith as the Arkansas Field Secretary, the meeting’s attendees also unanimously pledged to raise \$2,000 for the integration battle.¹³⁴ The meeting was a part of increased efforts mobilize the black community behind school integration. Earlier in the month, Blossom had declined an offer by Reverend Roland Smith to form a city committee on desegregation, telling him that “it is not best at this time to set ups such a committee.” Harry Ashmore informed Blossom that he could not resolve the school desegregation issue without help from leaders in the black community, particularly Daisy Bates. “I said you’ve got to deal with

¹³⁰ Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 31.

¹³¹ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 82.

¹³² Daisy Bates to Executive Board Members, Branch Officers, and Other Interested Persons, “Arkansas State Conference of Branches, Information and Materials,” Series III, Container 4, folder 17, “Arkansas State Conference, 1956-7,” NAACP Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹³³ Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 34.

¹³⁴ Daisy Bates to Gloster Current, January 30, 1956, Series III, C4,f17, NAACP Papers.

Daisy Bates,” Ashmore recalled telling Blossom.¹³⁵ Little did Blossom know, Bates was planning a showdown with the superintendent.

Two days later, on the morning of January 23, 1956, the first day of classes, the ASC acted. A combination of adults and thirty-three students were sent to Central High, Tech High, Forrest Heights Elementary and Forrest Heights Junior High Schools.¹³⁶ All followed the same procedure. The only exception to this organized protest was a group of black families who decided to attempt to register their children independently, after the NAACP’s plans circulated throughout the community.¹³⁷ This development encouraged Daisy because it demonstrated that support for her leadership and for integration was growing in the African-American community. Accompanied by newly trained Frank Smith and Earl Davy, a *State Press* photographer, Daisy approached Principal Jess Matthews, and calmly requested that he allow eight African-American girls to register at Central. The principals noted the “nice and polite” manner with which the activists conducted their protest. Matthews instructed them to report to Virgil Blossom.

When she reached the Superintendent’s downtown office around 9:30am., Daisy was perhaps unaware that he had received a tip from an informant, and had given his principals instructions to respectfully deny the NAACP’s request, and refer them to meet with him in his office.¹³⁸ “We’re here to register the children,” Daisy demanded. “Negro children appearing at white schools today live in adjacent neighborhoods—some within six blocks,” she declared in front of the throng of local newspaper reporters who had been notified by the NAACP. “I want to be as kind as I can,” Blossom replied, “but I’ll have

¹³⁵ Anderson, *Little Rock*, 38.

¹³⁶ Daisy Bates to Gloster Current, January 30, 1956, Series III, C4,f17, NAACP Papers.

¹³⁷ Iggers, “The NAACP and the Grass Roots,” 289; Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 49-50.

¹³⁸ Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 27-9.

to deny your request. This is in line with the policy outlined to you many times before and made public long ago.” Blossom also refused Daisy’s request for a “definite date because Hall High School needed to be completed before moving forward with integration.” Hearing this statement, Daisy challenged him further, “anything can delay a new high school construction,” and reminded Blossom that he had “never said anything about a date to start integration at the junior high and especially elementary level.” Unwilling to even discuss elementary school integration after the experiences with his initial plan, Blossom avowed that the LRSB had “never said we had plans for integration of elementary children...we have said we have to learn about this thing as we go along.” Daisy was unsatisfied and unimpressed by Blossom’s insistence that “delay is not to stall integration,” and that he wanted to “do a good job for the sake of the children.” She retorted this statement by informing the Superintendent of the inconvenience imposed on African-American families. “Most Arkansas pupils transported by bus must travel much further than these children you mention,” Blossom interjected, “and not over paved city streets either.” At the end of the staged media event, Daisy asked, “May we have a picture taken?” Blossom later wrote that Daisy was “all smiles” because “the visit obviously was the preliminary to a legal test to our integration plan.”¹³⁹ Considering Blossom’s interactions with Daisy Bates ever since his arrival in Little Rock, this seemed like a foregone conclusion.

In the weeks before filing legal suit against the City of Little Rock, Daisy used the *State Press* and the NAACP to keep the African-American community updated on the integration battle, and to prepare them for mounting white resistance. Reverend Charles C. Walker, of First Congressional Church noted the “unity of action,” taken under

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 28.

Daisy's leadership, praised "the effectiveness of group participation," and gave his support for a lawsuit against the school board.¹⁴⁰ "The sooner we demonstrate this," Walker wrote to Bates, "the better for all concerned. Keep up the good work!" The photo Bates took in Blossom's office appeared on the front page of the January 27, 1956 edition of the *State Press* in the main story which stated, "Blossom's 1954 Promise Fades Under Pressure."¹⁴¹

Daisy was also working with State Field Secretary Frank Smith to find a location for the new ASC office in Little Rock. They settled on two adjoining suites in the Raines Building, located at 616½ West 9th Street, in the center of the black business district, and blocks from the *State Press*. Similar to Ella Baker's relocation of the New York City Branch to Harlem, Bates established the state NAACP office in the "heart of the black community...to be more in the thick of things."¹⁴² Daisy hoped to open the NAACP's new headquarters on February 1st, and after advancing the first month's rent, she planned to have the space painted, cleaned, and ready to ensure that it was "ready for occupancy."¹⁴³ Upon receiving this correspondence, the NAACP's National Office forwarded the ASC \$600 to set up a phone, pay rent, and buy furniture. Frank Smith purchased the materials, and by the end of the month the State NAACP had an official home base in Little Rock. The creation of the ASC office added further credibility to Daisy's leadership and reinforced how serious she was about school integration. The

¹⁴⁰ Reverend Charles C. Walker to Mrs. L.C. Bates, January 25, 1956, folder 10, Box 10, DBP, Madison.

¹⁴¹ *State Press*, January 27, 1956.

¹⁴² Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 148

¹⁴³ Daisy Bates to Mr. Roy Wilkins, January 30, 1956, Series III, Container 4, folder 17 Daisy Bates to Gloster Current, January 30, 1956, Series III, C4,f17, NAACP Papers —Letter of thanks for hiring Frank Smith. Daisy Bates to Mr. Gloster Current, January 30, 1956 Frank W. Smith to Mr. Roy Wilkins, February 4, 1956, III, C4, f17; Frank W. Smith to Mr. Roy Wilkins, February 29, 1956, III, C4, f17; Frank W. Smith to Mr. Richard W. McClain, March 27, 1956, III, C4, f17, NAACP Papers.

physical presence of a state NAACP office was an important psychological accomplishment for Daisy and the local movement because its establishment sent a message to the segregationists that she had the backing of national leaders, who they saw as outside agitators.

As Bates and Smith organized the ASC office they were also helping to construct a legal foundation that was understood at the time as a potential national test case that could determine the pace of desegregation in the South. After attempting to integrate Little Rock's white schools for sixteen days, on February 8th, with Wiley Branton as the lead attorney, the ASC filed a lawsuit against the Little Rock School Board for denying African-American children their Constitutional Right to attend an integrated school because of their race. The case became known as *Aaron v. Cooper*, and it was filed on the behalf of thirty-three African-American students and twelve parents, including L.C. Bates, who at the time had custody of a boy they had unofficially adopted. The defendants were Dr. William Cooper, LRSB President, Superintendent Blossom and LRSB Secretary Mrs. Edgar Dixon. Represented by Wiley Branton locally, U. Simpson Tate regionally, and Robert Carter and Thurgood Marshall nationally, the NAACP's deployment of its best legal team prompted the *Arkansas Gazette* to correctly conclude that the suit was being prepared as a nationwide test case."¹⁴⁴ While preparing its legal case, the NAACP requested a permanent injunction against segregation throughout Arkansas. They argued that "regulations for the management and control of public schools...threatened to continue" racial and class discrimination, and therefore, did not meet the requirements of the *Brown* decisions. The NAACP was emboldened by two

¹⁴⁴ *Arkansas Gazette*, February 9, 1956

recent decisions in Hoxie and Van Buren, Arkansas, in which different judges ruled in favor of the NAACP's position.¹⁴⁵ United States District Judge, John E. Miller of Fort Smith, Arkansas ruled that "the only question to be decided is whether the Van Buren board needed more time to get ready for integration."¹⁴⁶ Cognizant of these statewide developments, Daisy told reporters that the NAACP had been considering court action before the January attempt to integrate Little Rock's schools. Not long after the NAACP filed its suit, Judge Miller also set May 4th as the date for pretrial depositions, and August 15th for the formal trial.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ "Hoxie Board Upheld; Judge Reeves Holds State Laws Invalid," *Arkansas Gazette*, January 10, 1956; *Arkansas Gazette*, February 9, 1956.

¹⁴⁶ Roy, Reed, "The Contest for the Soul of Orval Faubus," in Elizabeth Jacoway and C. Fred Williams, eds. *Understanding the Little Rock Crisis: An Exercise in Remembrance and Reconciliation*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 99-105.

¹⁴⁷ *State Press*, March 16, 1956

Chapter Nine:
“the trouble we are having:”
Race, Sex, Massive Resistance, and the Battle for Arkansas

“Not only was integration in the Border states a threat to segregation everywhere, it was also the decisive test of whether the extremists in the Deep South would feel isolated or not. Their strategy was to provoke a conflict over integration that would mobilize the broadest possible range of opinion in their support.”

--Oscar Handlin, “Civil Rights After Little Rock: The Failure of Moderation”, *Commentary*, November, 1957

Introduction: Reinterpreting the Road to Little Rock

This chapter argues that Daisy and L.C. local activism culminated in a legal case that set an important official start date when desegregation would begin. Though they concentrated on the City of Little Rock and the State of Arkansas, their local crusade eventually captured the attention of segregationists and integrationists from outside the state. While most would not recognize the importance of the events occurring in Little Rock until September 1957, the local battle over desegregation had been highly contentious years before the national media arrived in Arkansas’s capital city. It was also during these years that Daisy Bates became a national player in the school integration movement, which at the time was the civil rights issue of its day. In addition to being what the historian Linda Reed calls “a crucial example of the importance of women leaders to the civil rights movement”, Bates’ participation in school desegregation exemplified an important “focus of that movement and especially of the NAACP, through the 1950s.”¹

During a moment when states in the Deep South were successfully tightening their grip on the NAACP through draconian legal chicanery, the Arkansas became a

¹ Reed, “The Legacy of Daisy Bates”, 80

highly contested battleground in the national struggle for civil rights. The Deep South fought to thwart the geopolitical isolation that would have resulted from the eradication of segregation in other parts of the former Confederacy. Historical scholarship about the Civil Rights Movement has focused more on the 1960s and the Deep South. Less attention has been paid to the 1950s, which set the stage for the South's later epic conflicts. Accounts of the Civil Rights Movement have underexplored the 1950s civil rights battles in Arkansas, which helped clarify *Brown* and set important precedents for the later phases of the Freedom Movement.

On May 4, 1956, during the taking of the depositions for *Aaron vs. Cooper*, Daisy Bates made headlines in the national black press when she demanded respect from the white male lawyer questioning her while she was under oath.² Four times during the morning session, Little Rock School Board attorney Leon Catlett, who had a reputation as the state's best trial lawyer, referred to Bates by her first name. After recessing for lunch, Catlett proceeded with his planned lined of questioning. Instead of answering, Bates asked "May I make a statement first, Mr. Catlett, before we proceed."³ After attorney replied in the affirmative, according to reporters, Bates leaned forward in the witness chair and scolded Catlett. "This morning several times you addressed me by my first name." Catlett responded with another dismissive "Uh-huh". Bates informed him, "That is only reserved for the right of my intimate friends and my husband and I haven't met you before today, so I want you to refrain from calling me Daisy. My name," she

² *Arkansas Gazette*, May 5, 1956; *State Press*, May 11, 1956; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 9; Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 54.

³ *John Aaron vs William G. Cooper*, In the Eastern United States District Court, Eastern District of Arkansas, Western Division. Depositions of the Witnesses, Rev. J.C. Crenshaw and Mrs. L.C. Bates, Taken at Instance of Defendants, May 4, 1956, Box 6, folder 1, pg 89, Daisy Bates Papers, SHSW, Madison.

clarified for the record, “is Mrs. Bates.”⁴ Shocked at her insistence that he follow proper courtroom etiquette when addressing her, Catlett shot back, “I won’t call you anything then.” Daisy calmly replied, “All right. That will be fine.” Never again did Catlett refer to Daisy by her first name.

Daisy’s exchange with Leon Catlett was loaded with the politics of sexuality, gender and race. Throughout the Civil Rights Era, black leaders—women in particular—averted attacks on their sexuality, which had the ultimate goal of character assassination. Ruby Hurley, who, in 1951, established the NAACP’s Southeast Regional Office in Birmingham recalled the ways segregationists attempted to use the politics of sexual morality and respectability to discredit female leaders. “I had to be very defensive”, she admitted, “and very careful about what I said, what I did, with whom I was seen” because “efforts were made to entrap me sexually. All kinds of tricks were used.”⁵ Ida B. Wells’s life was also impacted by assaults on her morality when she was a teenage girl. After her parents died in an 1878 yellow fever epidemic, as the oldest sibling, Wells was determined to keep her broken family together. She “lengthened her dresses”, passed the exams required for her teaching certification, and secured a position that would allow her to support her siblings.⁶ When Wells was seen receiving money from a white man who she insisted was a visiting physician that her father had entrusted his savings, rumors spread about her morality. “It was easy”, Wells wrote in her autobiography, “for that type of mind to deduce and spread the rumor that, as young as I was, I had been heard

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Hurley interview, Raines, *My Soul is Rested*, 136.

⁶ Giddings, *Ida: Sword Among Lions*, 11.

asking white men for money.”⁷ In North Carolina, after two white men were accused of raping a black women, the lawyer representing the defendant referred to his client’s wife as “a pure flower, God’s greatest gift,” and to the black female rape victim as “that”.⁸ He did not need to clarify what he meant to anyone sitting in that courtroom. They knew, and we know as well. Sex and race were inextricable with civil rights. Examining Daisy and L.C. Bates’ activism sheds important light on the complex ways the politics of sexuality the development of female and male leaders in the Civil Rights Movement, and how the approach to challenging Jim Crow was shaped by this reality. Opponents attempted to use racial stereotypes and sexual taboos against civil rights activists. However, not only were the activist in the movement aware of the presence of the politics of sexuality in the civil rights struggle, they actively challenged stereotypes about black people, sometimes overtly, but also subtly.

Under Daisy’s leadership, the Arkansas State Conference represented a rare bright spot at a very dark moment for the Association. According to Reed, Daisy “took a leading role in efforts to force authorities to make good on the promise of *Brown*.”⁹ Though a discussion of specifics of their activities between January 1956 and September 1957 are not included in Daisy’s memoir, it was during this time that they “rallied the community.”¹⁰ Recovering Daisy and L.C.’s activities in the *State Press* and the NAACP during the period preceding the 1957 crisis reveals that they were in fact inextricable to the Arkansas Civil Rights Movement, the Central High School desegregation crisis, and the battle over the South that it symbolized. A close examination of their actions sheds

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 148.

⁹ *Ibid*, 81

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 80

new light on the 1957 crisis and provides a fresh, new interpretation about the magnitude of the contribution Daisy and L.C. Bates made to the Modern Civil Rights Movement by being the catalysts for one of its earliest watersheds.

Nationally, Daisy's defiance of southern tradition made her a darling of the African-American press, whose coverage significantly increased her profile within the Little Rock black community. Locally, the event solidified her as the driving force behind school integration for large segments of whites and blacks. In that Little Rock courtroom, Daisy Bates' insistence that whites recognize her womanhood and her husband's manhood was a much larger statement rebuffing the customary, historical disrespect of people of African-descent in the American South. *New York Post Daily Magazine* reporter Ted Poston wrote that Bates "[endeared] herself to every Negro woman in Little Rock and others throughout the South" when she corrected a man who symbolized white men's authority in the South.¹¹ Her demand to be referred to as "Mrs. Bates" forced whites to publicly acknowledge loving, committed relationships within African-American culture. Daisy gender may have enervated claims of threat of hypersexual black men engaging in sexual acts—forced and consensual—with white women. Black women were cognizant of how the politics of female respectability were used as a way of discrediting them. The sexual stereotypes black women faced were fused with the politics of gender, race and class. Male and female leaders were well aware that their opponents would attempt to use a long history of prejudice about black sexuality to shame the Civil Rights Movement. As she rose above her humble starting station in life, and became the leader and spokeswoman for the Little Rock black

¹¹ Ted Poston, *New York Daily Post*, September 3, 1957; Stockley, *Daisy Bates* 9; Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 54.

community concerning race relations, Daisy Bates was frequently attacked in racial and gendered ways that played upon stereotypical assumptions about licentious black female sexuality. The rise in Daisy's national popularity, and the treatment she received from the press and the white community, illuminate the intersections between gender and sexuality, and race and leadership during the battle for civil rights.

The conundrum African-American female activists faced when they entered the masculine political arena required them to constantly remind whites of their femininity, and one way they accomplished this was by dressing and acting the part of respectable women.¹² Although Daisy Bates confronted stereotypes about black female sexuality, her approach to the sensitive topic was oblique, yet direct. The construction of her public persona was a statement about the ability of black women to lead on the national stage, and a challenge to the sexualized images of women of African descent. The way Daisy dealt with (or avoided) the issues of gender and sexuality is further evidence of the subject's sensitivity during the Civil Rights Era. Her experiences also provide another example of the process that created black women leaders for the Freedom Movement during a tumultuous, uncertain period in history.

“War in Little Rock”: Daisy Bates Between *Brown* and Central High

Before reinterpreting this period of Daisy Bates' life, it is important to start with what she thought was significant about the years immediately before she became a

¹² Marisa Chappell, Jenny Hutchinson and Brian Ward, “Dress modestly, neatly...as if you were going to church:” Respectability, Class and Gender in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” in Ling and Montieth, eds, *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement*, 69-100; Shaw, *What A Woman Ought To Be And Do*; Painter, *Sojourner Truth*; Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics*; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*.

national spokesperson for school integration. Written between the years of 1959 and 1962, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, is consistent with a Black Freedom Movement that had to strike a delicate balance between the appearance of grassroots dissent and the realities of the involvement of national organizations like the NAACP in local eruptions. The tense local conditions in Little Rock and the increasingly polarized national climate converged in 1957, and it was from this space that Daisy Bates became one of few black women to publicly represent the Civil Rights Movement in an official leadership capacity. The enigma the Freedom Struggle faced during a time of massive resistance to the *Brown* decisions from southern whites forced national civil rights groups like the NAACP to downplay their role in supporting local movements. In her memoir, Daisy Bates emphasized the role local black parents, resistance from white community, and the formation of interracial coalitions played in Little Rock's integration movement, but eschewed details about her own activism.

A close examination of Daisy's account reveals the importance of black parents to the 1957 crisis, and suggests that it was around this time that the local black community and the National NAACP began to rally behind Daisy's leadership. "Years of bitter and tragic experience," Daisy wrote, "had taught the Negro that the word of the Southern white man meant very little when it came to granting the Negro his constitutional rights."¹³ Blossom's vacillations, she concluded, left black parents with no other option but to seek recourse from the courts. "The parents appealed to the Arkansas State Conference...to represent them."¹⁴ Skipping her attempt to integrate Little Rock's public schools in January 1956, Bates discussed the ensuing legal battle over desegregation's

¹³ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 52.

¹⁴ *Ibid*

start date. By Spring 1956, the question was not if Little Rock would integrate its schools, but when. The plaintiff's, who were represented by the NAACP, demanded immediate integration, while the Little Rock School Board's defensive team argued that a September 1957 start date complied with the Supreme Court's *Brown* decisions, and, therefore, was constitutional. The federal court sided with the school board. However, as Daisy stated, all was not lost for the black community in the ruling because the case established was a clear starting date for integration. In her early correspondence with the NAACP's national staff, Daisy was instructed that the organization could not bring blacks' grievances with civil rights violations without individual blacks first soliciting their help. This was a strategy employed in part to strengthen local cases, but also to deflect accusations of outside agitation from what southerners considered uppity northern blacks, Jews and Communists up in New York City.¹⁵ Movement strategies aside, the willingness of individual black families to publically challenge segregation should not be underestimated. Daisy also omitted that she received financial support in addition to legal assistance from the New York office. She minimized the role of the NAACP's National Office in local affairs to shield the organization from claims of outside agitation. This gap in her account underscored the importance of the relationship between the Arkansas State Conference and the NAACP's New York office, and the degree of local activism that existed in Little Rock prior to the 1957 crisis.

Writing at the moment when the Civil Rights Movement was broadening the circulation of its message by forging important interracial coalitions with outside groups,

¹⁵ For more on this approach to opposition to civil rights, please see, Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*; David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1994).

Daisy stressed the support she received from religious, political and labor organizations, and how they rallied with her to oppose segregation in Little Rock.¹⁶ At a meeting of the State House of Representatives on February 18, 1957, she noted that Rabbi Ira E. Sanders of the Little Rock Temple of B’Nai Israel, Odell Smith, President of the Arkansas State Federation of Labor, and Reverend W.L. Miller, Jr., President of the Arkansas State Convention of Christian Churches (all white men) spoke against the bills.¹⁷ Representing not only African-Americans, but the black church’s role in the Freedom Struggle, Reverend Roland S. Smith, a fierce supporter of the Bateses and Pastor of Little Rock’s First Baptist Church was selected to address the delegation. Bates stated that Reverend Smith “delivered the most impassioned speech of the session” in a group that gathered at a special session of the Arkansas House of Representatives, to oppose proposed segregationist legislation.¹⁸

After Governor Faubus won reelection in 1956, when the newly elected Arkansas State Legislature took office the following January, they passed four bills aimed at preserving segregation in The Natural State. Passing the State House by a vote of 80-1, two of the bills established a State Sovereignty Commission, and granted it the powers to request materials from political organizations by requiring them to register with the state and submit reports. The other two were a clear attack on school integration; they “allowed school boards to use school funds to hire lawyers for integration suits,” and “made attendance not compulsory in integrated schools.”¹⁹ All four of the bills were questionable, and probably unconstitutional, but they passed the legislature and were now

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 54.

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 94.

law. Daisy did not mention that Arkansas's segregation bills were the product of a state committee appointed by Governor Faubus in February 1956 that was clandestinely sent to Virginia to study how their segregationists were scheming of legal, ominously compliant ways to resist the Supreme Court's orders in the Commonwealth.²⁰ Led by Marvin E. Bird, a racist State Senator from Arkansas's black belt, the infamous Delta it shares with Mississippi, The Bird Commission, as the group was called, returned from the state that was the battlefield for most of the Civil War with recommendations that became Arkansas 1957 segregation legislation. Instead of writing about these developments, which would have placed Arkansas within the context of the national massive resistance movement which was birthed in the violent Delta of the neighboring Magnolia State, Daisy focused on the presence of the civil rights coalition that was growing in the early 1960s. "I sat in the gallery listening to speakers representing church groups and organized labor as they made fervent pleas against the passage of the bills," she wrote.²¹ After a brief description of each man's remarks, no discussion of the impact the new laws would have on the desegregation fight is present, though she did call them "legal weapons to bolster" the "hate campaigns" of the White Citizen Councils and the Ku Klux Klan.²² What Bates wanted her readers to conclude is that the episode was important because they were further evidence of the need for a strong alliance between religious leadership, the labor movement and interracial organizations in the ongoing Civil Rights Movement.

²⁰ Branton, "Little Rock Revisited," 253; Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 78-80, 85.

²¹ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 54-5.

²² *Ibid*, 56

In this section of “Across My Desk,” Bates discussed the masculine aspects of her leadership and her affiliations with powerful men because they gave her access to the recognized power structure when she needed it later. After establishing the existence of the local civil rights coalition, Bates re-centered her narrative on what made her important: her leadership with the NAACP. The visit to the State Legislature also produced Daisy’s first personal encounter with her historical adversary, Governor Orval Faubus. “Following the public hearing,” she wrote, “NAACP representatives throughout the state visited their senators in an effort to defeat the bills.”²³ In addition to noting that this was her “first formal meeting with the Governor,” Daisy continued to construct the image of a respectable, educated black woman, by reminding her readers that she was “a member of a Pulaski County delegation of business and professional people” that met with him. Bates subtly reinforced her image as a newspaperwoman and political leader by referencing “My stories in the State Press” which contained coverage of the events in the State Capital, by the noticeable absence of other women at the gathering, and by accentuating that Faubus recognized her as “head” of the NAACP in Arkansas. “I, she continued, “would have to submit to the proper authorities a list of the organization’s members and a periodical financial statement.”²⁴ Bates made no mention of the countless women with whom she worked to revive interest in ASC, or how she turned to female networks, like black beauticians, churchwomen, and civic organizations when male leaders failed her in fundraising campaigns. The pre-crisis portion of her memoir ends with a simple understatement, “Events moved swiftly after that.”²⁵

²³ *Ibid*, 55

²⁴ *Ibid*, 55-6.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 56.

Bates closed the section preceding the Little Rock crisis with a discussion about the events that occurred the week leading up to the start of the Fall 1957 school term. “In spite of strong opposition that had been voiced by the segregationists, most Little Rock citizens did not expect any serious trouble,” Bates wrote, “and they were unprepared for the series of events that developed that developed the last two weeks in August.”²⁶ As the opening of the school year approached, tensions over plans to desegregate previously all-white Central High were building to the serious climax L.C. had predicted in 1954 after the *Brown* announcement. Even a night of peace and tranquility quickly turned to horror as Daisy watched television from her living room in disgust. “Governor Marvin Griffin of Georgia, and Roy V. Harris, two of the South’s most ardent segregationists, tonight addressed a state-wide meeting,” the anchor on the eleven o’clock news reported.²⁷ Held at Little Rock’s ritzy Hotel Marion, and hosted by the white segregationist Capital Citizens Council (CCC), 350 attendees paid ten dollars per plate for dinner and to listen to the southern firebrand. Governor Griffin commanded the white south to defend its right to its “way of life,” and oppose the upcoming desegregation of Little Rock’s white, and mostly working class Central High School.²⁸

Bates knew Griffin’s presence meant nothing but trouble for the NAACP and supporters of desegregation. After taking her cocker spaniel Skippy for a brief walk, Daisy “sat down on the divan in the living room, directly in front of our large picture window.”²⁹ As she glanced through the day’s newspaper, a large, unidentifiable object flew through the glass window. Bates threw herself to the floor. “Are you hurt,? Are

²⁶ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 3-4; Fradin and Fradin, *The Power of One*, 1-3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

you hurt?,” L.C. asked on arrival. “Bleeding slightly from numerous small cuts,” Daisy replied, “I don’t think so.”³⁰ Rising to her feet, Bates picked up the object, which luckily was not dynamite or a bomb, but a stone, wrapped in a string, with a soiled piece of paper attached to it. She unfolded the note, which read in bold letters:

“STONE THIS TIME. DYNAMITE NEXT

K.K.K.”³¹

“A message from the Arkansas *patriots*,” Daisy sarcastically remarked, using Griffin’s referral to the redeemers of his twentieth century south. Meanwhile, L.C. wrapped up his telephone conversation with local police, admitting, “Thank God their aim was poor. Bates took a deep breath and a long look at her now calm Husband. L.C., she declared, “we are at war in Little Rock.”³²

Five days later, led by Mrs. Clyde A. Thomanson, on August 27th the newly formed Mothers League of Little Rock Central High School, filed a lawsuit in the Chancery Court requesting a temporary injunction against desegregation. To discredit the organization Daisy wrote, “Ironically only a handful of the League’s mothers had children who attended Central.”³³ Two days later, Thomanson testified that “the mothers were terrified to send their children to Central because of a rumor that the white and Negro youths were forming gangs and some of them were armed with guns and

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Bates, *The Long Shadow*, 4; Fradin and Fradin, 3; Laurie O’Neil, *Little Rock: The Desegregation of Central High*, (Bridgeport, Connecticut: The Millbrook Press, 1994), 24.

³³ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 56

knives.”³⁴ During the hearing, the defense presented Governor Faubus as a surprise witness. He testified that he possessed personal knowledge that “revolvers had been taken from Negro and white pupils.” Although neither “revealed the source of their information to the court” Judge Murray O. Reed ruled in their favor, and imposed a temporary injunction against integration. Bates wrote that reporters checked local stores and pawnshops where guns were available for purchase and found “nothing to substantiate the charges of the Governor and Mrs. Thomanson.”³⁵ Later that evening, carloads of segregationists rode by the Bateses home honking their horns and shouting obscenities. “Daisy! Daisy! Did you hear the news?” one group yelled from a passing vehicle, “the coons won’t be going to Central.”³⁶ The following day, as lead counsel for the Arkansas NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund, along with Thurgood Marshall, Wiley Branton presented Federal Judge Ronald N. Davies with a petition against the Chancery Court’s ruling. A northerner from the state of North Dakota, Davies had been temporarily assigned to the Little Rock District Court. He overturned the temporary injunction, and ordered the Little Rock School Board to “proceed with immediate integration.”³⁷ As Bates and the NAACP prepared for the historic desegregation of Little Rock’s schools, the segregationists’ “hate campaigns sponsored by the Capital Citizens Council, the White Citizens Council, and the Ku Klux Klan were gathering momentum.” With support from individuals and White Citizens Councils from the Deep South states,

³⁴ *Ibid*, 57.

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ *Ibid*

“the so-called ‘solid-South,’ were organizing for a fight to the finish against integration in public education,” Bates wrote. “Little Rock was to be the battleground.”³⁸

Daisy Bates’ account of the events immediately before the crisis at Central High reinforces the notion she was actively constructing a public persona. She colored the years that led to her moment in the national spotlight, and muted the complex identity politics she confronted as a black and female frontwoman for the Freedom Struggle. In her brilliant work on Sojourner Truth, Nell Irvin Painter concludes that “Americans of goodwill deeply need a colossal Sojourner Truth, the black woman who faces down a hostile white audience and, with few choice words, give direction to muddled proceedings. We need a heroic ‘Sojourner Truth’ in our public life to function as the authentic black woman, as a symbol who compensates for the imperfections of individual black women.”³⁹ Like Truth, Bates used her memoir to challenge stereotypes about black women, and to present themselves as a model of black women’s womanhood and leadership abilities. In the same way that the nineteenth century needed a heroic Sojourner Truth, the twentieth century needed a heroic symbol like Daisy Bates who courageously challenged her Governor and the President in her moral crusade for equal education, and won. At a time when black women remained overlooked and underestimated, the image Daisy Bates projected was important, even if the story she told was not totally accurate.

For women like Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks and Daisy Bates, their symbolism and the image of black womanhood that they represent was more important than the

³⁸ *Ibid*, 58.

³⁹ Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 284-5

details and facts of their lives.⁴⁰ They became symbolic women of larger significance, and each woman was conscious of this reality. Each not only allowed inaccuracies about their lives to persist, but actively engaged in perpetuating them. To borrow from Michele Trouillot, it is this “subjective capacity”—the tension between what happened and what is said to have happened—that makes Daisy Bates, and women like her doubly historical.⁴¹ It is important to remember that Bates’ memoir is her account of her life and the Little Rock crisis, and that she is not unique in her selective self-presentation. Juxtaposing what Bates wrote with what she omitted enriches historical understandings about how public figures construct public personas, and perhaps even more importantly, the personal motivations and political motivations behind their chosen presentations.

From the Local to the National Stage

When Daisy and the NAACP were preparing to challenge segregation in Little Rock, Governor Faubus was covertly placating to pressures from segregationists as he readied for the first of four, consecutive reelection campaigns, a feat still unmatched in the state’s history. Faubus was not sure as to the course of action he would take on the race issue in Arkansas, but he had decided that he would not lose his governorship over integration.⁴² A few days after the NAACP attempted to integrate Little Rock’s schools, Faubus announced that a poll conducted by the Governor’s office claimed that 85 percent of the state’s population opposed ending segregation.⁴³ Tony Freyer concludes, “announcement of the poll results was a part of well-conceived approach to

⁴⁰ *Ibid*; Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*.

⁴¹ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 3 24.

⁴² Reed, “The Contest for the Soul of Orval Faubus”; ---*Faubus*, 172-6.

⁴³ Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 78.

interposition.”⁴⁴ Before he captured the nation’s attention, Faubus was ensuring his political survival by sending mixed messages regarding his views on racial integration.

Faubus made segregationists believe that he sympathized with their battle to maintain Jim Crow. After the NAACP filed its lawsuit, Faubus sent “as special committee of Arkansas citizens” led by chairman Marvin Bird of the Eastern Arkansas Delta, to hear a report in Richmond, Virginia from the state’s “Special Commission on Public Education.”⁴⁵ This committee produced the infamous “Gray’s Commission Report,” which eventually “evolved into a Virginia Plan of ‘massive resistance... The Arkansas Committee made a report to Governor Faubus in which it recommended the adoption of most of the Virginia Plan. Many of the recommendations were enacted into law by the Arkansas General Assembly and signed by the Governor.” Considering these developments, Faubus was not shooting from the hip the following year when he deployed state power to resist *Brown*. Upon returning from Richmond, on February 24th, Arkansas’s “Bird Commission” submitted its findings to the Governor.⁴⁶ Faubus concluded that supporting integration was not politically expedient. In addition to the data his office had collected, Faubus was worried about his Democratic Primary opponent, Jim Johnson, who had already filed papers for a fall ballot initiative intended to halt integration in Arkansas. Johnson’s challenge pushed Faubus even further toward the segregationists side of the school integration issue. In the 1956 gubernatorial campaign, Johnson attempted to reclaim the issue by making the election a referendum on the direction of the state’s public education system. Faubus’s silence over the controversy in Hoxie the previous year had aided Johnson’s rise in state politics because he had argued

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁵ Branton, “Little Rock Revisited,” 253.

⁴⁶ Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 85, footnote 62.

that the matter was a local issue, and refused to take a public stand. His inaction led Johnson to conclude that the Governor was a closet integrationists. This was a public image that Faubus could not afford, and as early as January 1956, he had decided that his political life depended on his ability to convince the increasingly anxious segregationists that they could trust him to uphold Jim Crow.

The pressure placed on Faubus in early 1956 was a part of a national movement organized with intentions of thwarting segregation across the entire South. Arkansas was seen as important because it has historically been a buffer for Deep South states. In December 1955, Virginia State Senator Harry Byrd called integration “the most serious crisis that has occurred since the War between the States.”⁴⁷ In a 39-1 vote, on March 6th, the Virginia legislature passed a resolution allowing private use of public funds as a way of avoiding integration. One week later, on March 12th, when 101 southern politicians signed the anti-integration “Southern Manifesto,” the entire Arkansas obliged, including liberal Brooks Hays and internationalists J.W. Fullbright.⁴⁸ Numan Bartley concluded that the massive resistance movement whose “organization strength” was based out of the Deep South spread to Border South states, like Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina.⁴⁹ This expanded the reach and influence of staunch segregationists groups like the White Citizens Councils, and provided an organizational foundation for a larger, national resistance movement that later dispatched its various resources into Arkansas. Segregationists’ fears grew on April 26th, when Little Rock integrated its municipal bus system three days after the Supreme Court outlawed segregation on interstate busses. Four days later, Jim Johnson announced his intentions to challenge Faubus in the

⁴⁷ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 110

⁴⁸ Lawson and Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, 54-9.

⁴⁹ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 95-6.

upcoming Democratic Primary. Johnson's entrance into the race solidified Faubus' eventual alliance with the state's most virulent segregationists.

The three months between filing the suit, and the taking of pretrial depositions were filled with legal maneuvering. In March, L.C. published a front page article with the headline "School Board Seek to Question NAACP State Head."⁵⁰ In the article, Daisy was quoted as saying, "I don't know what the school board attorneys expect to gain." They also illuminate the critical, omnipresent misunderstandings which existed between integrationists, moderates and segregationists. This inability to effectively communicate remained throughout, and beyond, the 1957 crisis at Central High. On April 3rd, Judge Miller issued his opinion letter, which set an August 15th date for the trial, and May 4th for the taking of depositions. The U.S. District Judge hoped the depositions would demonstrate "the sufficiency of the proposed plan."⁵¹ The NAACP sought a definite integration date, while the LRSB aimed to prove that its plan showed good faith. They also insisted that Daisy and Crenshaw were figureheads being controlled from New York, and included this as a reason to dismiss the plaintiffs. Neither Bates nor Crenshaw took this bait. Upon receiving Judge Miller's opinion letter, Archie House, one of the LRSB's five attorneys representing the state's top five law firms, mistakenly mailed Wiley Branton an earlier version of the Blossom Plan with a September 1956 integration date.⁵² Aware of this error, when meeting with House to discuss the upcoming depositions, Branton declared the plan to be reasonable, stating, the

⁵⁰ *State Press*, March 16, 1956.

⁵¹ Margaret Frick, "NAACP Chief Refuses To Reveal Members; Hints Records Missing," *Arkansas Democrat* May 4, 1956.

⁵² Branton, "From Desegregation to Resegregation," 253-4.

“NAACP might go along with it.”⁵³ After the meeting, Branton wrote to U. Simpson Tate that House “had the idea that our New York office sent people down into Little Rock which had been selected as part of a planned move for the sole purpose of filing a suit.”⁵⁴ The belief that the NAACP’s National Office was imposing itself on Little Rock predominated in the white community, including the LRSB, the Superintendent, and the lawyers representing them. Though Bates and Branton were frustrated, what they really sought was a clear, definitive timeframe for integration, even while they tried to secure the earliest possible start date.

White moderates did not consider their plan to be vague or evasive, and akin to the segregationists, did not feel the need to clarify when integration would begin. Instead of working with the NAACP to set a clear start date, white moderates were slowly aligning themselves with the segregationists, although it does not appear that they recognized this reality. Little Rock’s moderates genuinely believed in slow, gradual integration, but failed to realize that some of their staunchest supporters did not share this belief because they wanted to preserve segregation. Judge Miller’s opinion letter also approved a request by the LRSB’s lawyers to interrogate NAACP leaders prior to trial, and ordered the NAACP to produce all correspondence between the local and national office that did not violate lawyer-client confidentiality. After discussing the matter, House and his team decided to question two activists: Reverend J.C. Crenshaw, president of the Little Rock chapter, and Daisy Bates, state president. In response to the growing white resistance to integration in Arkansas, Bates and the Crenshaw’s testimony

⁵³ Charles Allbright, “Leaders of NAACP Declare They Want Desegregation Now,” *Arkansas Gazette*, May 5, 1956; Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 50.

⁵⁴ Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 50.

reassured the African-American community that the NAACP had no plans of submitting to opposition to the federal law.

Judge John E. Miller was one of the many important actors whose decisions severely impacted the course of integration in Arkansas, and therefore the South and the nation. Miller had been educated in his home state of Missouri, before attending law school at Vanderbilt University. Upon completing his law degree and passing the bar exam in 1912, Miller began his practice in Searcy, Arkansas, located in White County, about halfway between Little Rock and the infamous Delta the state shares with Mississippi. Miller's jurisdiction did not usually include Little Rock, but Judge Thomas C. Trimble, who had been originally assigned to the case recused himself after the NAACP filed its lawsuit due to personal illness, and because his son was a member of the prosecuting law firm. Considering the Trimble's conflict of interests, and poor health, Miller was assigned to preside over the case.

Miller's prosecution of unionized black sharecroppers for inciting a race riot sheds valuable light on the reasons behind the NAACP's concerns with him as the presiding judge for *Aaron v. Cooper*. In 1923, Miller served as the prosecuting attorney in the *Moore v. Dempsey* case. The case involved a group of black sharecroppers in Elaine, Arkansas, the Seat of Phillips County, in the Arkansas Delta. The men had formed a union to protect themselves from being exploited by their landlords. The group withheld the season's harvest for a fairer buying price. Angered, members of the white landowning and working classes crashed a private union meeting. Gunfire ensued. The black sharecroppers, who were simply defending themselves, were charged with inciting a race riot, and held legally responsible for the murders that resulted from the conflict.

Upon conviction, all were sentenced to death. The case made it to the Supreme Court, who in a 6-2 decision, ruled in favor of the black defendants. Tony Freyer has called *Moore v. Dempsey* “among the few victories against Jim Crow the NAACP and Little Rock black lawyer Scipio Jones won prior to the 1930s.”⁵⁵ During his prosecution of the *Moore* case, Miller referred to state troops killing “100 niggers right there.”⁵⁶ Up until his death, the retired judge insisted that his prosecution of blacks in Phillips County for inciting a riot that caused murders was the proper course of action.⁵⁷ These were hardly the sentiments of a judge who Daisy and the NAACP’s legal team could invest much confidence. Despite losing his first case in front of the nation’s highest court, from 1930-1934, Miller was elected to three consecutive Congressional terms, and in 1936 won his only bid for the United States Senate. Four years into his term, Miller resigned from the Congressional Upper House because President Roosevelt had submitted his name for nomination for a vacant position as a Federal District Judge. That was 1941. Fifteen years later, now a federal judge, Miller found himself once again involved in a case involving civil rights. Miller’s personal and professional history was a point of optimism for the defending attorneys, who believed that he could be persuaded by their argument of acting in good faith, and was an area of concern for Daisy Bates and the NAACP.

As each participant in what was growing into a historic battle brought with them political beliefs shaped by indelible personal experiences, the legal phase of the Little Rock Crisis officially got underway. The pretrial depositions held on May 4th were a spectacle for those lucky enough to witness how the lawyers representing the defendants addressed two of the state’s most prominent African-American leaders. In preparation,

⁵⁵ Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 59.

⁵⁶ Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods*, 124.

⁵⁷ Cortner, *Mob Intent on Death*, 198-9.

the defense attorneys had prepared roughly 40 questions for Reverend J.C. Crenshaw, president of the Little Rock NAACP, and about 80 for Bates. That morning, Daisy had been angered by the way Leon Catlett questioned Crenshaw. During that session, Catlett had repeatedly referred to NAACP's activists as "Nigger leaders," and African-Americans as "Nigrahs." During her testimony, Daisy repeatedly reminded Catlett that "the word is pronounced 'Negro', not 'Nigrah.'" ⁵⁸ The lawyer demonstrated extreme bias in his line of questioning. Catlett asked Crenshaw "which he considered more important—the immediate integration of school or the educational welfare of both races?" Crenshaw replied that integration was "for the betterment of the public overall." ⁵⁹ Unsatisfied, Catlett tried another approach. "Would gradual integration be better?" he asked. "Integration should come immediately" the doctor responded. When Catlett responded with "Why?," Crenshaw rebutted that, "A law is a law", to which the lawyer replied, "There is no law that says integration will be immediate." ⁶⁰ The Little Rock NAACP president was unfazed, "There is none that says it will be gradual either," Crenshaw quipped. ⁶¹ Catlett's questioning was just the opening act for the day's main event, which took place once Daisy took the stand.

Upon taking the stand, Bates was described as calm and composed, however her exterior presentation masked a smoldering anger at the maltreatment she had observed during Crenshaw's testimony, and now at the disrespect she was present experiencing. In 1992, an interviewer asked Mrs. Bates to complete the following statement: "When I am

⁵⁸ Poston, *New York Post*, September 3, 1957; Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 58.

⁵⁹ Charles Albright, "Leaders of NAACP Declare They Want Desegregation Now," *Arkansas Gazette*, May 5, 1956.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

angry, I...”⁶² Bates’ response was “appear very calm.” When Catlett questioned her involvement in the integration suit, Bates replied that she was not involved as a representative for the NAACP, but as a “resident of Little Rock.”⁶³ Several times, Bates asked Catlett to rephrase his questions. “Are you stating that, or are you asking me?” she asked on at least a half-dozen occasions. Bates clarified that she was in favor of “immediate and total integration.” In her opinion, sufficient time has passed since the Supreme Court’s original decision, and Little Rock had done “nothing” to change the status quo. In meeting with, Bates described her meetings with Superintendent Blossom as “courteous” and good “public relations”, but, ultimately unproductive. “Don’t you think good public relations on both sides is important to this?,” Catlett probed. “Public Relations and giving children their rights,” Bates asserted, “are different things.”⁶⁴ Echoing the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown* decision, Bates informed Catlett that “Negro children were being denied he right to attend schools nearest their homes.” After Catlett replied that the issue she identified was “not just in Little Rock”, Bates made a redirection of her own, “I was under the impression we were speaking about the Little Rock District,” she stated sarcastically.⁶⁵ In a display of legal humor, Catlett asked if the NAACP had paid black students money to enroll at Central High School. Amused by this type of questioning, along with about 20 African-Americans who were in attendance, Bates laughed as she replied in the negative. As the tense morning session drew to close, Catlett asked Bates when she thought “total and immediate integration” should occur.

⁶² Caillouet, “Daisy Gatson Bates,” 6.

⁶³ Albright, “Leaders of NAACP Declare They Want Desegregation Now.”

⁶⁴ *Ibid*

⁶⁵ *Ibid*

Daisy leaned forward in the witness chair, starred directly at Catlett and uttered one word, “Now”.⁶⁶

When Daisy opened the afternoon session by correcting Catlett concerning her courtesy title, she escalated the defiant, dignified testimony that endeared her to the black community, and a hit raw nerve among many whites. Following the incident, in a personal letter to Catlett, a white businessmen from the Arkansas Delta congratulated the attorney for putting Bates in her place. “The only thing that I think was wrong,” the reader expressed, “was that you answered her too mild, make it a little stronger next time.”⁶⁷ The Baltimore *Afro-American* wrote that Bates not only reinforced Crenshaw’s testimony, but confronted Catlett in a way the doctor had not. “She has carried on like a soldier,” the paper editorialized during the height of her popularity.⁶⁸ “Fearless in word and deed, she has dared to call a spade a spade anytime anywhere.”⁶⁹ According to the *Arkansas Democrat*, “Mrs. Daisy Bates...said she is in favor of total integration now.”⁷⁰ Bates testified that the school board’s plans were “too vague, doesn’t have definite target dates, [and] Negroes are denied their rights.” She asserted that “immediate integration would not cause the district any financial burden.”⁷¹ In response to why her push for integration was so urgent, Bates responded that she “can’t see why it wouldn’t be in the best public interest to integrate immediately.”⁷² Agreeing with a local black leader who publically stated his belief that “desegregation could be accomplished without trouble,” Bates reminded the court that “his remark was made in ‘good faith’ on May 18, 1954, and

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁷ Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 54.

⁶⁸ *Afro-American*, October 12, 1957.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Margaret Frick, “NAACP Chief Refuses To Reveal Members; Hints Records Missing,” *Arkansas Democrat*, May 4, 1956.

⁷¹ *Ibid*

⁷² “Negro Group Wants Total Integration,” *Arkansas Democrat*, May 5, 1956.

there had been a lapse of time with nothing done.”⁷³ Unable to make inroads in this line of questioning, Catlett moved on to a new line of attack aimed at decimating the NAACP’s ability to function in Arkansas.

The debate over the pace of integration was a prelude for the real motives behind the defense’s strategy, which was to attack the NAACP’s state infrastructure. During the morning session, Catlett had inquired about the local NAACP membership lists and other official documentation. In the afternoon session, Catlett revisited the subject with Bates. He demanded that she produce records from the January meeting when the NAACP voted to file a suit against the Little Rock School Board.⁷⁴ Crenshaw stated, “no such documents were available...and that it was possible that they had been destroyed.” If the records existed, Crenshaw continued, they were in the possession of the branch secretary, who at the time was ill with an undisclosed ailment. Doctor Crenshaw claimed that he did not possess accurate membership numbers, but recalled roughly 600 members the previous year. When Daisy took the stand, she too rebuffed Catlett’s request for ASC official records. She declared that “the state branches were too dispersed to keep an accurate membership count”⁷⁵ Unable to get the NAACP’s local and state presidents to admit to the existence of organizational records, the defense ended its questioning. Wiley Branton immediately waived his right to cross-question Daisy, and informed the court that “we are going to want to probably take the deposition of Mr. Blossom and some of the School Board members...I wonder if we couldn’t go ahead and take his deposition

⁷³ *Ibid*

⁷⁴ Charles Albright, “Leaders of NAACP Declare They Want Desegregation Now,” *Arkansas Gazette*, May 5, 1956.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

now.”⁷⁶ Branton asked for a maximum of 20 minutes to get an official statement. It is likely that Branton wanted to question Blossom on the record about his original plan to begin integration in 1956, which would have damaged the defense’s case about the unreasonableness of the earlier start date. Blossom’s attorneys conferenced outside of the courtroom, and upon returning denied the request, but vowed to make him available at a later time.”⁷⁷ The attorneys never made Blossom available, but the NAACP had also foiled their attempt to possess a copy of the organizations records.

Daisy’s performance at the pretrial deposition, and the positive press it garnered for her and the NAACP increased her profile locally and nationally. In the months following her confrontation with Catlett, Bates received mail congratulating her for her statements, and encouraging her to continue to be a leader for the integration forces in Little Rock. “I thank God for Mrs. L.C. Bates,” one letter proclaimed. “Every Negro in Arkansas should cooperate with her.”⁷⁸ Occasionally, L.C. ran a column called “From the Files of Mrs. L.C. Bates” where he published excerpts from letters written to his wife. In addition to making headlines in the local papers and the African-American press, Daisy Bates also caught the attention of the NAACP national leaders. In July, Daisy flew to San Francisco for one week to participate in the NAACP annual convention, held at the Statler Hotel. Bates attended the “Freedom Fund” dinner, and was photographed as she presented Mrs. Roy Wilkins with two dozen red roses.⁷⁹ Thurgood Marshall provided the evening’s keynote remarks. Marshall warned the room of the current attempts across the South to use “state legislatures and state courts either to outlaw the

⁷⁶ *John Aaron vs William G. Cooper*, Box 6, folder 1, 112, DBP, SHSW, Madison.

⁷⁷ Charles Albright, “Leaders of NAACP Declare They Want Desegregation Now,” *Arkansas Gazette*, May 5, 1956.

⁷⁸ *State Press*, June 22, 1956, quoted in Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 85.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

NAACP or make it difficult to continue.”⁸⁰ The NAACP’s national leadership understood that the pressures Daisy was facing in Arkansas were part of a larger regional movement by organized segregationists to destroy black resistance and efforts to enforce *Brown* by eradicating the civil rights organization’s ability to function in their state. Currently stalled in the Deep South, success in a state like Arkansas could set a precedent that severely damaged the segregationists’ reasoning behind delaying integration. This fact was not lost on those involved in the developments taking place in Arkansas.

During the summer preceding the trial, it remained unclear as to the direction Arkansas would go in terms of school integration. The state had already desegregated its institutions of higher education, and school districts in the northwest had also quietly integrated. In contrast, the previous year’s conflict in Hoxie foreshadowed the potential for trouble to brew in Arkansas. And, unlike 1955, the current year was an election year, which added additional political significance to any developments around the controversial issue. Although white resistance was always present in Little Rock, blacks had reasons to be optimistic because the local opposition was also an indicator of the gains being made by the African-American community. Five days after the pretrial depositions, Little Rock opened the newly constructed Horace Mann High School on McAlmont Street and Roosevelt Road, within walking distance of Central High. Little Rock spent \$925,000 constructing the school, a fact that prompted Superintendent Blossom to call it “the very best this community could offer.” Instead of moving toward integrated schools, the opening of Horace Mann suggested that the LRSB was more interested in proving that they could achieve separate but equal facilities. The Little Rock NAACP argued that black students should be admitted to white schools because

⁸⁰ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 85-6.

many of them walked an additional two miles to segregated black schools, all while passing the buildings with no space problems.⁸¹ Daisy and L.C. considered the segregation of Horace Mann as an indicator that the LRSB had no intentions of acting in good faith.

While Daisy was in San Francisco, one month before the August trial, Governor Faubus was still in the final month of his reelection campaign against Jim Johnson. At a July 9th rally in Pine Bluff, the largest town in Arkansas's Black Belt, and one of its most active communities, Faubus was booed by the crowd when he proclaimed integration to be a non-issue in the gubernatorial campaign.⁸² Two days later, while speaking to an audience of segregationists in Marianna, located in the heart of the Arkansas Delta, Governor Faubus declared that "No school district will be forced to mix the races as long as I am governor of Arkansas." The operative word in the governor's carefully parsed statement was *forced*. As his actions in Hoxie had indicated, Faubus was willing honor the desire for local school boards to integrate its educational facilities. In a display of his political genius, the governor presented his audience with the false choice to either keep segregation or embrace desegregation. Two weeks after his appearances in Pine Bluff and Marianna, Faubus's Democratic challenger called him a "race mixer."⁸³ On July 31st, Faubus secured a second gubernatorial term by defeating Jim Johnson 180,760 votes to 83,856 for the leader of the White Citizens Council. The developments around the issue of integration were a mixed bag of results for both sides. On the one hand, Faubus had defeated a staunch segregationist. On the other, he had pandered to white conservatives in the process.

⁸¹ Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 49.

⁸² Reed, *Faubus*, 178.

⁸³ *Ibid*,

When the trial began on August 15th, the battle boiled down to a dispute over whether the Little Rock School Board actions were evidence of either good or bad faith in regards to integration.⁸⁴ In his opening arguments, attorney Archie House argued that the only question the court should consider was whether or not the school board's plans were reasonable. The school board's president, William Cooper stated that the city's plan was voluntary, and that the NAACP had initially supported it. Though conceding that the plan was vague, Cooper also asserted that the voluntary nature of the plan was proof in itself of the school board's good faith, and was consistent with Little Rock's traditionally moderate approach to race relations. The defense was represented by Southwest Regional Counsel, U. Simpson Tate, of Dallas, Texas. Tate argued for immediate integration based on *Brown I*'s declaration that separate but equal schools possessed inherent inequity that negatively affected the social and emotional development of African-American children. In terms of *Brown II*, the NAACP argued that "all deliberate speed" only applied in cases in which local circumstances justified delaying integration, as long as the reason was not based on race. Therefore, the plaintiff's argued, the change from meaningful to minimal integration demonstrated bad faith on the part of the Little Rock School Board. By arguing for immediate integration based on the plan's unconstitutionality, Tate diverted from the strategy devised by Wiley Branton, Daisy Bates, and the Little Rock NAACP's local branch. Less than two weeks later, Judge Miller issued his opinion, in which he stated that the plan created by the Little Rock School Board represented a "prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance with the

⁸⁴ Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 59-60; ---*The Little Rock Crisis*, 54-9; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 88.

requirements of the law.”⁸⁵ In addition to ruling in favor of the defendants, Judge Miller also declared his ruling to be “final and appealable,” which meant the NAACP could file an immediate appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eight Circuit, which was located outside of the “Solid South,” in St. Louis, Missouri.⁸⁶ L.C. editorialized that the “Federal Court Decision Fails to Weaken Jim Crow in Little Rock.”⁸⁷

Scholars have concluded that this breakdown in strategy within the NAACP weakened their chances of a favorable ruling from an already skeptical judge.⁸⁸ While the local activists prepared for trial, Tate communicated with the group from Dallas. Bates and Branton assumed that upon arriving in Little Rock the evening before the start of the trial that Tate would be prepared to review their courtroom strategy. This was not to be the case. After arriving, Tate shocked the state team by insisting that he had prepared beforehand, and insisted on resting instead of meeting. His refusal to convene prior to the trial left Tate unaware of the strategy the ASC’s leadership team had created. Rather than suggesting a new course of action, state leaders thought that Judge Miller might be persuaded by their willingness to accept the school board’s original 1954 plan, which in their opinion allowed for more integration than the revised version. Though it did not appear so at the time, Tate and the ASC had used different means to achieve the same end. While local leaders wanted the court to set a definite date for desegregation, when Tate unreasonably asked for immediate integration he forced the courts into the same conclusion. If Little Rock was not legally obliged to begin desegregation immediately, then next logical question was, “if not now, when would integration

⁸⁵ Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 61. Judge Miller maintained jurisdiction over the case pending future developments, and considering the national politics.

⁸⁶ Branton, “Little Rock Revisited,” 254.

⁸⁷ *State Press*, August 31, 1956.

⁸⁸ Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 60; ---*The Little Rock Crisis*, 56-7; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 88.

begin?” The approaches may have been different, but the outcome was nevertheless the same. What some historians have interpreted as a mishap may have been a deliberate calculation on the part of the NAACP’s legal team. While the appearance of miscommunication between the NAACP’s state and regional branches is a reminder of the challenges hierarchal national organizations sometimes faced during the Civil Rights Movement, it is possible the decision was part of a strategy.

In addition to the challenges with internal communications, the NAACP’s case was also sabotaged by local segregationists. Although they were given clear instructions to be in attendance, not one representative from the over one dozen black families was present on the day of the trial. This responsibility was Daisy’s, but for reasons unknown, she did not make sure that the plaintiffs had clear instructions. She had been outfoxed by her opponents. Upon calling the parents of the child plaintiffs, Bates and Branton learned that each of them had been called the night before by an unnamed person who identified themselves as having “some official connection with the court.”⁸⁹ The man told the parents not to come to the courthouse because the trial had been postponed. In light of this development, Judge Miller decided that because the only question was the “reasonableness” of the school board’s plans, the court did not need to hear from the parents. While it is unclear how the parents’ absence affected the proceedings, the fact that Miller did not think it was important to hear their concerns must be seen as problematic. His decision reified the larger problem of the white community’s refusal to consider perspectives from the African-American community over the issue desegregation. The episode is an example of how Daisy could become overwhelmed by the demands of her position. Whether or not she was negligent is a matter of

⁸⁹ Branton, “Little Rock Revisited,” 253-4.

interpretation, however, the event does contain striking similarities to her forgetting to call fifteen year old Elizabeth Eckford about the plans to meet as a group before heading to Central High School. Eckford got caught in the vicious white mob at Central in what remains one of the Civil Rights Movement's most indelible images.⁹⁰

Little Rock's mainstream newspapers were satisfied with Miller's ruling, and their summation of the events perpetuated the local belief that Arkansas was less volatile regarding race relation than their brethren in the Deep South. The city's white papers ignored the fact that, just a few months before Miller's ruling, the entire delegation from the "moderate" state had signed the Southern Manifesto, which was perhaps the most extreme national statement defying the *Brown* decision. The *Arkansas Democrat* called the ruling a "momentous victory," and a triumph for proponents of "common sense...social order...local authority...and gradual integration."⁹¹ The *Gazette* called Miller's decision a "practical decision to a difficult problem" that would be subject to the extremes on both sides of the issue. The paper concluded that the decision departed from futility of legally defying *Brown*, which it identified as a strategy "being urged in the Deep South."⁹² It appears that a significant portion of Little Rock's whites associated defiance with the most extreme levels of physical violence. The white community's emphasis on civility blinded them from seeing how the issue was escalating in Little Rock.⁹³

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Arkansas Democrat*, August 29, 1956; Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 62.

⁹² *Arkansas Gazette*, August 29, 1956

⁹³ For more on the issue of civility and civil rights, please see William Chafe, *Civil Rights and Civilities: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Unsurprisingly, L.C.'s reaction was different from Little Rock's white newspapers. L.C. disagreed with the ruling because he viewed gradualism as a ploy to delay actual desegregation. "We are interested in integration of schools in compliance with the United States Supreme Court's ruling," he clarified.⁹⁴ "Gradualism in allowing the Negro to exercise his rights is what the South says," L.C. concluded, "but what the South means is NEVER."⁹⁵ Additional articles addressed the desegregation of public buses and the growing Freedom Movement.⁹⁶ In a response to the editor *Arkansas Democrat* who had published his support for a pupil assignment plan that would have to effect of limiting integration, L.C. informed him that "integration has the sanction of the better thinking and more progressive people of the country, as well as the support of the law of the land."⁹⁷ L.C.'s editorials make it clear that he and Daisy were completely committed to eradicating Jim Crow.

The *Aaron v. Cooper* trial solidified Daisy Bates as the face and voice of the ASC, and pro-integration forces in Little Rock. During the fall following Miller's ruling, the NAACP prepared to file an appeal, while local whites began the next, violent phase of their massive resistance to the Bateses desegregation crusade. Akin to integration's proponents, its opposition also intensified its massive resistance campaign in reaction to the ruling. Each group hoped to win the war over integration that was developing in the state of Arkansas. Around the time of Judge Miller's ruling, Wiley Branton recalled that "the idea of massive resistance...was escalating in Arkansas and throughout the South."⁹⁸ On October 11th, a cross was burned on the lawn in front of Daisy and L.C.'s home. A

⁹⁴ *State Press*, September 7, 1956.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *State Press*, November 16, 1956, November 30, 1956.

⁹⁷ *State Press*, December 14, 1956.

⁹⁸ Branton, "Little Rock Revisited," 255.

little over two weeks later, a second cross, about eight feet in height, constructed with 2x2 inch thick wood, wrapped in a rug, and doused in kerosene was discovered when a passing automobile alerted the couple of its existence. The second cross-burning coincided with the Arkansas NAACP's annual convention, which was being held at Little Rock's Dunbar Community Center. Daisy had ruffled feathers when she closed the afternoon meeting, and requested that all members of the press wait in outside of the meeting room. The *Democrat* called the "secrecy" a 'new policy of NAACP operations in discussing future action' that stemmed from "the difficulty the organization is having in Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas."⁹⁹ She was also reassured by Roy Wilkins who, a few weeks later, expressed his belief that "these cross-burnings are a help to us in the overall battle", though he pray[ed] no one as valuable as you gets hurt in the meantime."¹⁰⁰ The use of violence was a tactic that indicated the effectiveness of Daisy and L.C.'s activism. The historian Charles Payne has written that "Black leaders forced whites to use violence by refusing to shield to anything else. Thus, the level of white violence is an ironic index of the forcefulness of black activism."¹⁰¹ Despite increases in white violence and intimidation, and financial reprisals, Daisy and L.C. proudly embraced their roles as the leaders for the desegregation battle, and continued their local fight for equal education.

Publicly, Bates was emboldened by the slow gains she was making in Little Rock, but, privately, was also concerned about the attempts to intimidate her. Anticipating future legal battles, Bates was preparing for what looked like a long, nasty fight. In a letter to Roy Wilkins, Bates stated that she was "deeply grateful" for all of the assistance

⁹⁹ "State NAACP Bars Newsmen," "2nd Cross Fired at Home Here," *Arkansas Democrat*, October 28, 1956.

¹⁰⁰ Roy Wilkins to Daisy Bates, November 19, 1956, GIII, C4, f17, NAACP Papers

¹⁰¹ Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 41.

she had been given by the National Office. Frustrated with Frank Smith's inability to raise funds and secure new memberships, Bates expressed her belief that the state field secretary wasn't "very good" and vowed to be more active in fundraising efforts. On the day before writing Wilkins, Bates had met with representatives from 130 black beauty shops, who had agreed to support the organization, and she planned to "make as many church conferences as possible."¹⁰² Just as she had in her 1948 attempt to create a Pulaski County NAACP chapter, and in recruiting parents to serve as plaintiffs *Aaron v. Cooper*, Daisy once again turned to the women in her community at a crucial moment. It appears that Daisy developed a wide network that crossed the intersections and boundaries of race, gender and class.

The situation exacerbated in Little Rock when segregationist amplified their terror campaign against the Bates home and the *State Press*. In the crisis that was looming, Daisy deployed every resource at her disposal. L.C. cut corners at the *State Press* and sought support from his readers. With the help of local women, Bates raised \$300, and attributed the low amount to the current climate in Little Rock. "It is rough here now," she wrote to Wilkins, one week after the attempt on their home. "I am sure you know about the trouble we are having."¹⁰³ In response to the attacks on their life, with the help of friends, Daisy and L.C. guarded their house each night. "If the intimidation keeps up," she warned the National Executive Secretary, "we will have to hire a regular guard." The city police also agreed to increase its area patrols, and a separate group of policemen arranged to guard the Bates home "on special occasions with the permission of the police

¹⁰² Daisy Bates to Mr. Roy Wilkins, September 25, 1956, GIII, C4, f17, NAACP Papers.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*

chief.”¹⁰⁴ As segregationists stepped up their intimidation campaign, L.C. responded with sarcastic determination. After the first cross was burned, L.C. stated that it was “not the first time that the Bateses have been threatened or attempts made to intimidate.”¹⁰⁵ In response to a second cross burning two weeks later, L.C. wrote “The purpose of placing the cross and attempted arson is not clearly defined...in olden days the cross was used to frighten Negroes, and it was a symbol of death. But today is not a day of the reconstructed period and neither is it a day for scary negroes.”¹⁰⁶ In an editorial that was a direct challenge to his tormentors, L.C. sent a firm and clear message. “It is about time for the disguised Ku Klux Klan to understand that burning crosses on Negroes’ lawn, burning and bombing Negroes’ homes and shooting them down in the dark is not going to stop the Negroes’ fight for freedom,” L.C. clarified. “The Negro has had the taste of freedom. He tasted freedom when Uncle Sam picked him up and trained him, put a gun in his hand, and told him this was his country....It is the height of foolishness,” he continued, “for any un-American group to foster any idea that the Negro will stop now at the mere burning of crosses, burning and bombing of homes, and with an occasional slaying.”¹⁰⁷ Through their activism and newspaper, Daisy and L.C. were unflinching in their dedication to desegregation in Little Rock. The rise in white terrorism in fall 1956 is important to the violence that is the central focus of accounts about the Little Rock Crisis because it challenges the traditional timeframe of the events that happened at Central High, and moves scholars toward new interpretations of the Constitutional showdown.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *State Press*, October 19, 1956.

¹⁰⁶ *State Press*, November 2, 1956.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

The coming of the new year brought with it a new set of challenges for Daisy and L.C. The previous November, Governor Faubus was reelected with 80 percent of the popular vote. Though Jim Johnson had been defeated in the Democratic Primary, his impact of the future of the school integration, and state politics was undeniable. In addition to reelecting Faubus by a larger margin than he had won in 1954, state voters also passed a referendum of interposition against complying with *Brown*. The “Johnson Amendment” required the state legislature to use legal means to undermine the federal law. On February 19, 1957, with Daisy and her coalition of supporters in attendance, the Arkansas Legislature passed the four segregation bills described by Bates in her memoir. The new laws allowed the officials to use state power to investigate and intimidate the NAACP and possibly thwart the progress made in the area of school integration. The creation of the State Sovereignty Commission was of particular concern for the NAACP. Wiley Branton wrote, “The underlying, real purpose of the Act was to require members of the NAACP and other civil rights organizations to register with a state agency and to report their various activities and finances.”¹⁰⁸ Danielle McGuire has written about the regional massive resistance movement against the NAACP that swept across the South during the post-*Brown* years. “Overall, eleven Southern states passed more than 450 acts and resolutions in the decade after the controversial Supreme Court decision in order to maintain ‘lily-white’ schools.”¹⁰⁹ In the *State Press*, L.C. stated that the purpose of the laws were to kill the NAACP.¹¹⁰ In response to a letter she had previously written, Roy Wilkins communicated that state officials were “trying hard to keep us so busy defending the Association and spending our money that we will have no time or resources left to

¹⁰⁸ Branton, “Little Rock Revisited,” 254.

¹⁰⁹ McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 129; McMillen, *Citizens Councils*, 267

¹¹⁰ *State Press*, February 15, 1957.

push the program.”¹¹¹ Wilkins also believed that massive resistance’s other goal was to “frighten our people” into inaction. Noting that “nobody has been frightened in other states,” Wilkins subtly issued Daisy a challenge when he wrote, “We shall see what we shall see in Arkansas.”

As Daisy’s importance to the desegregation struggle increased, so did her local activities. The previous fall, Bates had expressed her concerns with the NAACP’s record keeping practices. Instead of using one book for both memberships and minutes, Daisy recommended that the organization separate them.¹¹² Though her reasons for making the suggestion were logistical, she thought it would be “easy to remove names from the membership records,” the impact was much larger. The separation of the local NAACP’s records became important the following year, when the State Attorney General used the powers of the State Sovereignty Commission to subpoena the organization’s records. Separating the data allowed the NAACP to later submit meeting records, without turning over the names of its members, who would have been intimidated, or worse, killed. In March, Wilkins invited her to speak in St. Louis about the state of school integration in Arkansas at the NAACP’s annual convention’s Freedom Fund Dinner and Regional Workshop. Bates told attendees, “In spite of the pressures, we have not taken a step backwards. The spirit of our objectives cannot be hampered as a result of anyone person or group.”¹¹³ Daisy spoke of what she called the White Citizens Council’s “Nigger Daisy Bates” operation, and how she and L.C. slept with guns to protect their home.¹¹⁴ When

¹¹¹ Roy Wilkins to Daisy Bates, February 25, 1957, Group III, Container 4, Folder 5, NAACP Papers, Washington D.C.

¹¹² Bates to Wilkins, September 25, 1956, GIII, C4, f17, NAACP Papers.

¹¹³ Ernestine Cofield, “Women Leaders Share Spotlight in Integration Fight,” *The St. Louis Argus*, March 29, 1957.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

she returned to Little Rock, Daisy held an emergency state meeting at the Little Rock Phyllis Wheatley YMCA. Attended by members from forty-two chapters across the state, the meeting was called to address Arkansas's new law requiring organizations like the NAACP to submit its records to hostile State Sovereignty Commission. Bates reassured the state delegation that the National Office had pledged its full support. She also attacked the bills as "un-American and unchristian," and encouraged her listeners to ferret out the "modern day Uncle-Toms" who were committing what she equated to espionage against the race. Daisy told the delegation to "expose them in their communities for what they are."¹¹⁵ The same week as the NAACP's emergency meeting, the black community and white moderates were reassured when Wayne Upton and Henry V. Rath were elected to the Little Rock School Board. Both had defeated segregationists, and supported the gradual integration plan. As she prepared for action after the upcoming decision from the Federal Court of Appeals regarding the *Aaron v. Cooper* case, Bates was also in the process assisting with the desegregation of Little Rock's public busses, and replacing Frank Smith. In April 1957, Daisy sent Gloster Current a letter urging him to take "definite steps...regarding our state office," and suggested Attorney Christopher C. Mercer as a qualified, vetted replacement.¹¹⁶ As Daisy's popularity grew so did her responsibilities in the local movement. It was her job to ensure that the state conference was functioning and effective, and this became more difficult under the pressures of massive resistance from a violent faction of Little Rock's white community.

¹¹⁵ *State Press*, March 15, 1957, quoted in Stockley, *Daisy Bates*,

¹¹⁶ Daisy Bates to Gloster Current, April 11, 1957, Group II, Container 4, Folder 17, NAACP Papers, Washington D.C.; see also, J.C. Crenshaw to Frank Smith, April, 11, 1957.

On April 26, 1957, the moment Bates and the NAACP had been waiting for occurred when the panel of three judges on the United States Eight Circuit Court of Appeals announced their ruling in the *Aaron v. Cooper* case. The previous month, both sides had reargued their cases. Represented by Wiley Branton and Robert Carter from the NAACP's New York office, the plaintiffs argued that the city's plan was too vague and that the current plan would result in less integration than the city's original version. The defense lawyers emphasized that their clients were acting in good faith, and the local conditions, not ideology must determine the pace of integration. The three judges, who were from Iowa, Nebraska, and North Dakota sided with the defense, and gave the Little Rock School Board the green light to proceed with its plans.¹¹⁷ After the ruling, the Arkansas State Conference discussed appealing the decision, but decided against such action. According to Wiley Branton, the NAACP did not think that the Little Rock plan was a very good one and did not want the Supreme Court to make it a model for the nation by giving it a "stamp of approval."¹¹⁸ They believed that the start of the first phase, which was only four months away, allowed them to measure the plan's effectiveness or failure. The Appellate Court's unanimous decision ended the *Aaron v. Cooper* case, but it started a new phase of the growing crisis in Little Rock. With the case now fully litigated, the city began the process of selecting a group of African-American children to serve as willing participants in a change that was historical not just for the city and state, but the nation.

¹¹⁷ Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial*, 75-6;---*The Little Rock Crisis*, 92-3; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 96-7.

¹¹⁸ Branton, "Little Rock Revisited," 254.

“The nine chose themselves:” The Little Rock Nine and the 1957 Desegregation Crisis

The federal courts clarification that Little Rock must start desegregating its school in September produced a new set of questions that few seemed to be able to answer. Which blacks students would be allowed to attend Central? How many was the city willing to admit? What criteria would be used in making the final determination? Through all the moment’s uncertainty, Superintendent Blossom had already decided that he would not involve the NAACP in the desegregation process. At no point after the court’s ruling did Blossom seek counsel or cooperation from Daisy or L.C. Bates.

Instead, Blossom reached out to L.M. Christophe and Edwin L. Hawkins, the African-American principals of Horace Mann High and Dunbar Junior High School, the two schools that would serve as the feeders of black students into Central.¹¹⁹ Based on city zoning, over 200 black students were eligible to enroll. The principals were instructed to dwindle the number down by making “a survey to determine the number of eligible Negro student in the Central High School area that would desire to attend Central.”¹²⁰ They were told to search for students who excelled in the areas of “citizenship, scholarship and social stability.”¹²¹ Blossom also advised them to identify “Jackie Robinson” type of individuals with the character and self-discipline to restrain themselves when provoked by white students.¹²² Lastly, Blossom wanted black students

¹¹⁹ *State Press*, June 7, 1957; Frank Smith, “Report of the Conference Between the Little Rock School Superintendent and NAACP Representatives, May 29, 1957,” Series III, Container A, Box 98, Folder 2, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹²⁰ Smith, “Report of the Conference Between the Little Rock School Superintendent and NAACP Representatives.”

¹²¹ *State Press*, June 7, 1957.0

¹²² David Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 30; Smith, “Report of the Conference Between the Little Rock School Superintendent and NAACP Representatives;” Carlotta Walls-Lanier, *A Mighty Long Way*, (New York: Random House, 2009), 60.

with an I.Q. that was 100 or above. Each man took a different approach to finding interested students. According to the recollections of Carlotta Walls, who made it through the process and enrolled at Central, at Dunbar, Hawkins had his homeroom teachers make an announcement that “if our homes fell within certain border streets and we were interested in attending, we should sign the sheet of paper circulating around the room...The announcement was treated as just another administrative task.”¹²³ Terrence Roberts remembered that Horace Mann students were assembled into the auditorium and given “an explanation of the plan.”¹²⁴ Interested students were then asked to identify themselves by raising their hands. Roberts recalled that the reaction was overwhelming. Elizabeth Eckford had recollections about how quickly black students were asked to make such an important decision.¹²⁵ Unable to make up her mind, she did not initially volunteer, but vacillated until finally adding her name to the list a few weeks later.¹²⁶ According to a report produced by the state NAACP, “The principals were asked to confer with each student individually” and “suggest that he should or should not attend Central at this time.”¹²⁷ Thirty-eight students expressed interest from Dunbar. Principal Hawkins stated that he did not remove any names from the list of potential candidates.¹²⁸ Of the thirty-two students who signed up at Horace Mann, Principal Christophe recommended just three.¹²⁹ Twelve to fifteen of the students withdrew their applications after conferencing with Christophe.

¹²³ Walls-Lanier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 45.

¹²⁴ Roberts, *Lessons From Little Rock*, 87-8.

¹²⁵ Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*, 27.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹²⁷ Smith, “Report of the Conference Between the Little Rock School Superintendent and NAACP Representatives.

¹²⁸ *State Press*, June 7, 1957.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Daisy became aware of Blossom's screening process from members of the Little Rock NAACP's Youth Council she had created when she became state president.¹³⁰ Upon hearing this information, Daisy called both principals, who confirmed that they were in fact involved in the selection of the students who would attend Central in the Fall. Following their conversation, Hawkins and Christophe suggested that Blossom "call a conference with the state president to explain the action."¹³¹ Blossom agreed, and as president of the state NAACP conference, Daisy appointed the Executive Committee of the Little Rock Branch to accompany her to the meeting that was set to happen sometime in May in the superintendent's office.

Blossom opened the meeting by offending all the attendees. He told the group that "had it not been for the selection of Jackie Robinson with his personality traits, citizenship ability, high intelligence...Negroes would not be enjoying the privileges of organized baseball."¹³² Met with a cold silence, Blossom continued. "I feel that for this transition from segregation to integration in the Little Rock school system, we should select and encourage only the best Negro students to attend Central High School—so that no criticism of the integration process could be attributed to inefficiency, poor scholarship, low morals, or poor citizenship."¹³³ After Blossom finished his statement, Daisy began to read questions the group had prepared beforehand. Each committee member asked Blossom at least one question.

Also in attendance, L.C. reported the meeting in the *State Press*. L.C. believed "the delegation that was made up of a cross-section of the city representing Negro

¹³⁰ Smith, "Report of the Conference Between the Little Rock School Superintendent and NAACP Representatives.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

Citizens in all phases of the community...made it clear what they thought of the program.”¹³⁴ The group emphasized that Blossom’s “procedure in ‘screening’ students was discriminatory, and conferencing with parents was intimidation.” The superintendent replied, “I know it is undemocratic, and I know it is wrong, but I am doing it.”¹³⁵ He was transparent in his conviction that limiting the number of black students in the first year would give the city the best chance at successful desegregation. The group of black leaders then asked Blossom if white children assigned to Horace Mann would be allowed transfers to Central. Yes was Blossom’s reply. When asked the same about black children, according to L.C., “his answer was a definite no.”¹³⁶ Clarification was also sought on the status of students who had initially signed up, but withdrew after conferencing with their parents and principals. Blossom stated that he would invoke the pupil assignment law, which allowed him to deny their transfer request. The meeting then closed with the superintendent asking the delegation if they thought the plan “was a good one.”¹³⁷ They responded by reiterating that the process of “screening students seemed only to instill a feeling of inferiority, fear, and intimidation, and that the procedure should be discontinued.”¹³⁸ In the conclusion the official report of the meeting with Blossom, the Little Rock NAACP wrote that “reliable sources” reported that only “nine out of the possibly seventy pupils have been encouraged to use the privilege of attending Central High.” While Daisy fought to get more students into Central, it is

¹³⁴ *State Press*, June 7, 1957.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Smith, “Report of the Conference Between the Little Rock School Superintendent and NAACP Representatives.

possible that the number was predetermined and that her efforts were ultimately for naught.

After the meeting, Blossom did not stick to his word to keep the NAACP informed. Nevertheless, that summer, Central High mailed registration cards to students enrolled for the upcoming school year. Carlotta Walls recalls that the “card instructed me to show up at Central on a certain date in August to register for fall classes.”¹³⁹ She called a classmate from Dunbar, Gloria Ray, who was also planning to attend Central, and the girls decided to go register for their classes at the same time. Gloria had aspirations to be an atomic scientist. In early August, the two teenagers drove to Central to register. Once they got inside, they were met by the registrar, a woman by the name of Miss Opie, and given another card to attend a special meeting with superintendent Blossom.¹⁴⁰ Carlotta and Gloria thanked the women in the office and returned to their car confused. Walls writes that they saw a car parking directly behind Gloria’s vehicle. The woman, who Walls described as “an attractive, honey-colored woman wearing a dress and heels” was Daisy Bates.¹⁴¹ Walls had delivered papers for the *State Press*, and her mother, Jaunita Walls, was active with Daisy in the local chapter of the NACW.¹⁴² Considering that she had known Mrs. Walls for at least five years, it is possible that she was the source who told Daisy about their appointment. Nevertheless, whatever the means by which she learned of their plans, Daisy had met them at the school and wanted to know the details of what had happened when they went into Central, “whom we saw, what had been said, how we were treated, whether we were allowed to register.” They

¹³⁹ Walls-Lanier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 52.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 53.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 56-7.

¹⁴² *Ibid*; *State Press*, February 27, 1953.

told her about the additional meeting with Blossom and showed her the card they had been given. According to Walls, “That was the beginning of my almost daily contact with the woman who soon would become my adviser, mentor, and biggest public defender.”¹⁴³

One week before the 1957 school year was set to begin, events in Little Rock took a turn for the worse as whites organized a final attempt to thwart desegregation. In addition to the economic reprisals that had been placed on the *State Press*, during the summer Governor Faubus finally appointed members to the State Sovereignty Commission. It took the group less than one month to send Daisy a request via the State Attorney General for the ASC’s financial records and the names of its members.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, a third cross was burned on their front lawn, and the front window was broken out with a stone. Bates told Gloster Current that “there is a real campaign of terror going on down here... We have set up the flood lights in front of my home and it is being guarded around the clock.”¹⁴⁵ On August 27th, the organization of segregationists white mothers filed for a temporary injunction delaying integration. Daisy told the FBI that she received supportive calls from sympathetic mothers of Central High students who were too afraid to make their sentiments publically known.”¹⁴⁶ Things were getting so heated in Little Rock that the next day President Eisenhower dispatched Arthur Caldwell, the head of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Section to convince Faubus to obey the court order.¹⁴⁷ On the following day, August 29th, the case for the injunction was heard by a Faubus Judge Murray O. Reed of the Chancery Court, who ruled in favor

¹⁴³ Walls-Lanier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 57.

¹⁴⁴ Bruce Bennett to Mrs. Daisy Bates, August 28, 1957 and Daisy Bates to Bruce Bennett September 13, 1957, folder 4, Box 1, DBP, SHSW; Daisy Bates to Roy Wilkins, September 12, 1957, series III, container A, box 98, folder 2, NAACP Papers, LOC.

¹⁴⁵ “Memorandum to Miss Geier From Mr. Current, August 29, 1957, series III, container A, box 98, folder 2, NAACP Papers, LOC.

¹⁴⁶ “Interview with Daisy Bates,” September 8, 1957, DB FBI File, 179.

¹⁴⁷ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 263-4.

of the segregationists.¹⁴⁸ Two days later, Friday August 30th, Thurgood Marshall and Wiley Branton were able to secure a special meeting with Federal Judge, Ronald Davies, who overruled the injunction. Archie House, who was representing the Little Rock School Board requested an injunction against Mrs. Thomason of the Mother's League "and the class she represents."¹⁴⁹ Judge Davis granted his request. Integration was to proceed in four days, the Tuesday after Labor Day.

On the evening of September 2, 1957, Governor Faubus shocked the nation when he dispatched the state's national guards around Central High School. In addition, Faubus had scheduled a televised address about his actions. Faubus spoke vaguely of the guards' purpose to maintain law and order.¹⁵⁰ In response to Faubus's decision, Blossom called black parents and requested that they not attempt to go into Central, and attend a meeting with him instead, to which they agreed. The parents called Daisy and asked her to be present. On the morning of Tuesday September 3rd, a mob of angry whites had gathered at Central in anticipation of the desegregation attempt. In the meeting held later that day, Blossom informed parents that he thought that it would be easier to protect the children from violence if they were unaccompanied by their parents. He also told the black boys that they "were not to date—or even look at—our girls."¹⁵¹ Blossom's intention seemed to be to scare more students into withdrawing their applications. Carlotta Walls remembered that "the room was so still, it felt as if no one even breathed."¹⁵² This particular statement came at the end of the meeting. When Blossom finished no one asked questions and no further discussion was had. The group exited in

¹⁴⁸ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 113.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁵⁰ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 61.

¹⁵¹ Walls-Lanier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 60.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

silence. That evening, Branton and Marshall got an order from Judge Davies for desegregation to begin the following morning.¹⁵³ Daisy was given the responsibility of arranging the meeting with all of the parents and children in the morning before entering Central, but she understandably neglected to contact Elizabeth Eckford because her family did not have a telephone.¹⁵⁴ .

The historic day when African-Americans were to finally attend Central High was filled with much uncertainty. In light of the week's development, no one knew how many students would actually show up to actually attend classes at Central. At 7:50am, Bates received a call from Gloster Current who asked for a brief update. "We are getting ready to go to the school," she informed him. "We managed to keep a few standing still. There will be five up to nine this morning."¹⁵⁵ While focused on the events that lay immediately in her path, Daisy remained optimistic that she could get more black students into Central. Bates told Current, "If the children are denied admittance, this morning, the responsibility will rest on the Governor." Clearly sensing the urgency of the moment, Daisy believed that they had "to do something and do it quickly."¹⁵⁶

After briefly speaking with Current, Daisy and L.C. departed for Central. The previous night, she had informed the students and their parents to meet her at the meeting place by 8:20 am. While on their way to the school, Daisy and L.C. heard the radio report that "A Negro girl is being mobbed at Central High."¹⁵⁷ It was Elizabeth, whom Daisy claimed that she "forgot to notify where to meet us." L.C. got out of the car and

¹⁵³ "Transcript of telephone conversation between Mr. Current and Mrs. Daisy Bates," September 4, 1957, series III, container A, box 98, folder 2, NAACP Papers, LOC.

¹⁵⁴ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 66.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 66.

found the shaken young girl. However, because he was a stranger to her, Elizabeth did not leave with him, especially after he showed her that he was armed with a handgun.¹⁵⁸ Daisy drove to the meeting place, and after seeing Elizabeth get safely on a bus with a white woman named Grace Lorch, L.C. met the group. At the meeting spot on 12th and Park Street were seven children, some parents and six interracial ministers who had agreed to serve as escorts through the mob.¹⁵⁹ Concerned with the hysteria her presence could create, Daisy and L.C. left the children with the ministers and returned home, only to find out that the guards Faubus had placed around Central High denied them the right to enter. The battle continued.

Though major events that occurred on the morning of September 4, 1957 have been told from multiple perspectives, important details remain to be clarified about how the Little Rock Nine materialized. When asked later how they decided on nine kids, Bates replied, “the nine settled themselves.”¹⁶⁰ Daisy was telling the truth. The nine students who eventually integrated Central High School were not NAACP recruits or pawns for the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁶¹ All of the students signed up to attend Central without consulting their parents, and several lobbied their parents to stay enrolled when the opposition intensified. On the infamous day when state troops fortified Central High School, it is true that nine children tried to enter, but not the exact group remembered in accounts of the movement. Eight of the students—Ernest Green, Carlotta Walls, Elizabeth Eckford, Minnijean Brown, Gloria Ray, Jefferson Thomas, Terrance Roberts and Thelma Mothershed—definitely tried to enter Central on September 4, 1957. A ninth

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁹ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 125.

¹⁶⁰ Bates Interview with Jacoway.

¹⁶¹ Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*; Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*; Roberts, *Lessons From Little Rock*; Walls-Lanier, *A Mighty Long Way*.

student, Melba Patillo told the FBI that she did not go to Central because “she was afraid of being physically harmed in the event any incident occurred.”¹⁶² However, in her memoir, Patillo-Beals wrote that she went to Central with her mother and that she witnessed the mob tormenting Elizabeth.¹⁶³ Daisy Bates biographer Grif Stockley has also concluded that “Melba Patillo was not among those who attempted to enter the school that morning.”¹⁶⁴ Patillo’s fear is more than reasonable, but her account of those particular events on that important day are questionable. Beals is the only source that places her at Central on September 4, 1957; all other documentation support the conclusion that she was absent.

One of the most illuminating figures of the Little Rock Crisis is perhaps also its most forgotten. Fifteen year old Jane Hill was entering her sophomore year when she volunteered to transfer to Central from Dunbar Junior High.¹⁶⁵ Hill was a dark-skinned, tall and reserved girl. Carlotta Walls recalled that she seemed more “uncomfortable” than the rest of the teenagers.¹⁶⁶ According to the interview she completed with the FBI, on August 29th, Hill and her mother met with Blossom, who instructed her to enroll at Horace Mann in case her transfer was not approved. She returned with her mother on the first day of classes to follow up about her enrollment status. It was at this time, that Blossom informed them that he would have to review her records before making a final decision. Hill did not follow his instructions. Even though she was not on the approved list, and did not attend the special meeting Blossom held for black students and their parents, Hill,

¹⁶² “Interview with Melba Joyce Patillo,” September 4, 1957, A-39, Box 2, file 8, 412-3, Little Rock Crisis, FBI Files, UALR.

¹⁶³ Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, 47-51.

¹⁶⁴ Stockley, 125.

¹⁶⁵ “Interview with Jane Lee Hill,” September 4, 1957, A-39, Box 2, file 8, 408-9, Little Rock Crisis, FBI Files, UALR.

¹⁶⁶ Walls-Lanier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 69.

drove in a car driven by Mrs. Ray to the meeting spot. Jefferson Thomas and Ernest Green were also in the car. The iconic photographs taken by Will Counts contain three clear frames of Hill with the group of seven students that met with the ministers.¹⁶⁷ In the portion *Eyes on the Prize* that covers the Little Rock Crisis, Patillo is mentioned as one of the nine kids denied on September 4, 1957, yet in the actual video footage from that day, in the far right of the wide-shot of the courageous black students is Jane Hill wearing a white blouse and a flowing-patterned skirt that was popular at the time.¹⁶⁸ While Stockley writes that Hill simply “did not enroll at Central,” Bates received at least one letter addressed to her.¹⁶⁹ As late as September 24th, according to a list composed by Bates, Hill was still on the list of “children involved in Little Rock integration.”¹⁷⁰

Recovering and correcting Jane Hill and Melba Patillo’s stories is important to a reinterpretation of the Little Rock Crisis and the role played by the black community, particularly leaders like Daisy and L.C. Bates. First, Hill’s persistence, and ultimate denial raise questions about if Blossom had preselected the final children or had a fixed number of black students he wanted to admit in mind. Bates did state that reliable sources informed her that the target number was nine. Second, Hill’s arrival and ultimate departure is a reminder of the level of uncertainty that existed in Little Rock during this particular period. When asked, Daisy could not give a definitive number of students that she expected to attend Central. She also did not know how she was going to only get them into Central, but was convicted that “they were going to go to that school.”¹⁷¹ She

¹⁶⁷ Counts, *Life is More Than a Moment*, 44-4.

¹⁶⁸ Henry Hampton, “Fighting Back (1957-1962),” *Eyes on the Prize*, Public Broadcasting Service, 2010, Disc 1.

¹⁶⁹ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 125; Mrs. Genora Dollinger to Miss Jane Hill, September 22, 1957, box 1, folder 2, DBP, SHSW.

¹⁷⁰ Untitled List, September 24, 1957, III, A, 98, folder 2, NAACP Papers, LOC.

¹⁷¹ Bates, Interview with Jacoway.

was also aware that once they were inside, black students needed protection. As the crisis ensued over three weeks, after a second failed attempt to keep the kids in Central, an angry Daisy told reporters that the children would remain “out of school until the President of the United States guarantees their protection.”¹⁷² When asked if the kids would attend Horace Mann until the crisis was resolved, Bates replied in the negative, and then helped set up tutoring with the local black college. Third, the fact that Hill never returned to Central, and apparently was never reconsidered, suggests that Blossom and the Little Rock School Board were disingenuous in their commitment to desegregating the city’s schools. The goal seems to have always been minimal integration, even tokenism. Lastly, the nine students, and their parents, who accepted the challenge to be the first to attend Central deserve immense credit for choosing to blaze a trail for not only Little Rock, but the nation. As Bates stated, they were not chosen, but self-selected.

As the crisis continued, Daisy and L.C. suffered personally, but continued to battle segregationists until Central High was integrated. “The economic squeeze is on L.C. and myself,” she wrote to Gloster Current the Monday following Labor Day.¹⁷³ “This place is hot and growing hotter every day...Every conceivable method has been resorted to, and it was done so quickly, that now, everything we have invested is at stake, and leniency is out-of-the question with those who have the string.”¹⁷⁴ On September 23rd, the second attempt to enter Central was made. While not turned away like before, due to the dangers of the massive mob, the Little Rock Nine were removed at noon. A

¹⁷² Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 173.

¹⁷³ Daisy Bates to Gloster Current, September 9, 1957, III, A, 98, 2, NAACP Papers, LOC.

¹⁷⁴ “Transcript of conversation between Mr. Gloster B. Current and Mrs. L.C. Bates, September 23, 1957, III, A, box 98, 2, NAACP Papers, LOC.

few hours after making the call to remove the students, an infuriated Bates pressed for an intervention from the President. “We cannot get federal help,” she told Current. “We requested it all day yesterday...things are a mess here and we can’t get any help from the federal government.”¹⁷⁵ Bates organized police protection at the homes of the children, talked to all nine students, and the assistant principal at Central.¹⁷⁶ After three weeks of stalemate, and horrible press all over the world, President Eisenhower acted by using Executive Power in a way most did not predict. On the afternoon of September 24th, Bates was informed the Ike had dispatched the prestigious 101st Airborne to settle the crisis. The students were to be at her place the following morning for the military escort to Central High. The images from the moment Central was integrated is one of the Civil Rights Movement’s most iconic, and was the result of two decades of activism by the partnership of Daisy and L.C. Bates.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ “Transcript of conversation between Mr. Gloster B. Current and Mrs. L.C. Bates, September 24, 1957, III, A, 98, 2, NAACP Papers, LOC.

Conclusion: Freedom Movement Politics

The purview from the black community also elucidates the fact that Little Rock was an example of how, during the Civil Rights Movement, national issues around race often played out through local communities. This distinction is an important one because it reminds us that, when deconstructed, the national Civil Rights Movement was a series of local battles that were sometimes connected, but sometimes not. Together, these local events created the narrative for the Modern Civil Rights Movement. Focusing on the local black community during the Civil Rights Era demonstrates how black activism set the stage for the national crises, and deserves more attention in accounts of the Little Rock Crisis. Daisy and L.C.'s refusal to compromise on civil rights virtually dissolved the possibility of a "civil" resolution to Arkansas's racial tensions.¹ Differentiating between local and national politics, and telling the story of how they intersected, culminated and clashed in Little Rock in 1957 clarifies the multiple actors, organizations, and groups that played prominent roles in an event that was a major battlefield over the direction and development of the South, the Federal Government's commitment to civil rights, and the meanings of American democracy in the international context of the Cold War.

The *Aaron v. Cooper* case was an important event in the developments that led the desegregation crisis at Central High School. Daisy and L.C.'s used of their home, newspaper, and leadership positions to create the structures needed for the Little Rock

¹ In his classic, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, William Chafe convincingly argues that the appearance of civility was the linchpin of white southern progressivism. Due to the fact that white liberalism was to a large degree based on white paternalism and control of the rights blacks would enjoy, and the black community's agenda, racial confrontations arose when African-Americans refused to accept white solutions to racial quagmires. Chafe argues that the appearance of civility was more important than concretely measured progress.

black community to continuously challenge Jim Crow. Although the NAACP was unable to persuade state and federal judges to start the immediate integration of Little Rock's public schools, the result of their legal battle was a start date that was on the record of the federal court. The fact that they had been outwitted by the NAACP, and would soon have to follow through on plans to integrate was a reality that was not lost on segregationists within and outside of Arkansas. Following the ruling, Arkansas became even more important to the southern massive resistance. In the Summer before the crisis at Central High School unfolded, Mississippi Senator James Eastland stated, "In Arkansas, where the governor will not take action, racial integration has already started. The Deep South is all right, but there is now being waged a tremendous conflict in the border states, which will determine what will happen in the Deep South. If the Southern states are picked off one by one under the damnable doctrine of gradualism I don't know if we can hold or not."² Eastland represented a group of extreme segregationists who rejected gradual, token integration in Arkansas because they saw it as the beginning of the end of white supremacy in the Deep, Solid South, and vowed to resist federal law by any means, including full deployment of all of their resources. As Daisy continued to push the needle of integration forward, she had to fight not just the paranoid, violent whites from her local community, but also their brethren from other parts of the state, and outsiders from the deeper parts of the southern region.

The incident between Daisy Bates and Leon Catlett illuminates how massive resistance was fused with sexual politics, and how something as pedestrian as a courtesy title was loaded with assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, status and power in the Jim Crow South. The southern custom that required blacks to address whites formally as

² Ashmore, *Civil Rights and Wrongs*, 125; Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 30.

mister or misses, while whites referred to blacks by their first names spoke volumes about which groups possessed power, and which ones would have to fight for the most basic vestiges of self-determination. Daisy's successful battle for her courtesy title made an impression on blacks in Little Rock. For example, when Jefferson Thomas of the Little Rock Nine was interviewed by Superintendent Blossom, he was asked if he knew "Mrs. Daisy Bates". The teenager replied in the negative.³ When Thomas asked Blossom, "who is this Mrs. Bates?," Blossom described her as a troublemaker in the community. After the meeting ended, Thomas's mother admonished him for lying to the superintendent. "You mean he was talking about *our* Mrs. Daisy Bates?" Thomas described the meeting as "the first time he had ever heard a white person refer to a black person by a title". In a different incident in downtown Birmingham, Ruby Hurley confronted a white clerk in a department store over what she called "the use of courtesy titles".⁴ The clerk, who Hurley said "didn't have more than an eighth-grade education" insisted on calling her "Ruby". "She'd never seen me before in my life," Hurley later fumed. "Those were the types of things that took their toll inwardly".⁵ The use of courtesy titles was a point of contention within the southern white community as well. Harry Ashmore, who was Executive Editor of the *Arkansas Gazette* during the 1957 crisis received disapproving mail from readers who disliked his use of courtesy titles for African-American women.⁶ The moderate southern white editor informed one

³ Sharon La Cruise, "First Lady of Little Rock."

⁴ Hurley interview, Raines, *My Soul is Rested*, 137.

⁵ *Ibid*, 138.

⁶ A man by the name of J.F. Henderson took issue with an article that referred to Daisy as "Mrs. Bates" and the white judge as simply "Robinson." Implying that Ashmore was elevating blacks and demoting whites, Henderson wrote, "Do you think he deserves the honor and courtesy of being addressed as Judge Robinson? I certainly do. This is one of the many reasons why I will drop my lifetime subscription to the *Arkansas Gazette*." Mr. J.F. Henderson to Harry Ashmore, December 4, 1957, Harry Ashmore Papers, "Correspondence, December 1957", Box 6, folder 13.

disgruntled reader, “We use the title “Mrs.” For all married women regardless of race, considering this not a special courtesy but a necessary means of identification. We do not use “Mr.” for any male”⁷ Like civil rights, courtesy titles were personal and political, and loaded with deeply-coded cultural statements about race, gender, sexuality and power.

Virgil Blossom’s refusal to include black leaders in the discussions about the city’s approach to integration was a fatal flaw, and instead of weakening Daisy and L.C.’s influence in the black community, actually strengthened their image as foot soldiers for integration. The publicity they generated around Daisy’s activism in the school desegregation battle made her an obvious leadership selection when the crisis at Central High precipitated. It may be argued that Daisy was the default leader for local blacks because she was constantly being publicized in black and white newspapers as Arkansas’s preeminent leader for desegregation. Blossom’s exclusion of blacks from the process continued in Spring and Summer 1957. He personally interviewed each student who expressed interest in integrating Central High School, and successfully deterred most from pursuing their application. As she would throughout her life, Daisy asserted herself, and claimed a spot of influence for herself. Working behind the scenes, Daisy Bates dedicated her time to trying to maximize the number of black children approved to attend Central High, and prepared for the historic showdown that would catapult her into the national spotlight and American history books.

⁷ Harry Ashmore to Mr. J.F. Henderson, December 6, 1957, Harry Ashmore Papers, “Correspondence, December 1957”, Box 6, folder 13.

Epilogue:

“More theatrical than instructive:”

Daisy and L.C. Bates and the Recovery of the Civil Rights Movement

“L.C. and Daisy were both committed and passionate about the evils of segregation...L.C. was accustomed to Daisy having the limelight all down through the years...She always had the limelight. He was always in the background...It was always Daisy Bates. It was never L.C. and Daisy. It wasn’t even Daisy and L.C.”

--Christopher Mercer, 2002 interview

“...whether in Mississippi or Montgomery, taking the high drama of the mid-fifties and early sixties out of the longer historical context overvalues those dramatic moments and undervalues the more mundane activities that help make them possible—the network building, the grooming of another generation of leadership, the sheer persistence. The result is a history more theatrical than instructive. The popular conception of Montgomery—a tired woman refused to give up her seat and a prophet rose up to lead the grateful masses—is a good story but useless history.”

--Charles Payne, “Biographical Essay”, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 418.

By Spring 1957 Daisy Bates had established herself as an outspoken, independent female civil rights leader in her home state. Though he would fade into the background as Daisy gained the attention of the national media, L.C., always worked alongside his wife, and sometimes behind her. When Daisy became the focus of the Little Rock Crisis, Jet Magazine described the Bates home as “the base operations for the Little Rock Nine by day and the classroom by which L.C. tutored Daisy in strategy by night.”⁸ L.C. supported Daisy without condition. Before investigating Daisy’s moment in the national spotlight and her life afterwards, it is critical that her emergence onto history’s grand

⁸ “L.C. Bates: Little Rock’s Forgotten Man,” Jet Magazine, June 4, 1959, 13.

stage is situated into proper historical context. Many scholars have written about the Little Rock Crisis, but what occurred before and after is equally significant. This dissertation is part of larger project about Daisy and L.C.'s full life, and establishes what their lives were like before they found themselves under the scrutiny of the national media.

In Summer 1957 the dynamic couple from Little Rock was undergoing a power shift in their relationship that would leave each of them with indelible personal scars. The most important development was the amount of attention the national media gave to Daisy. After the crisis escalated, the story is imbalanced toward Daisy. The *State Press* was destroyed and L.C. began to work for his wife. Future research will explore Daisy's experiences as a public black female leader for the Civil Rights Movement. The story about the Daisy Bates as a national symbol and the gender and sexual politics she had to navigate as an African-American woman in the 1950s and 1960s deserves its own telling. While not the full biography of their lives, this project proposes a different approach to writing biographies about historical figures. It also recovers an important history about the Civil Rights battle in the less-discussed 1940s and 1950s American South.

The history Daisy Bates chose to remember emerges unexpectedly, yet just in time to shepherd nine black children into integration's Promised Land at Little Rock's Central High School. This interpretation of Daisy Bates' leadership makes for incredibly sensational historical folklore. However, it is not accurate history. The narrative about a heroine who surfaces to courageously save Little Rock from itself is terribly shrouded in a cloud of myth that does has done a massive injustice to a story that is as inspirational as it is disgraceful. There is more to Daisy Bates' story than what happened that one year in

Little Rock. Akin to Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, Dr. King, Fannie Lou Hamer, and the countless, nameless, faceless individuals who participated in the Civil Rights Movement, Bates was a product of her own volition, the place of her rearing, the communities in which she resided, strong personal relationships, organizational networks, and perhaps most importantly, the historical time of which she lived. Only when all of these areas are interrogated will scholars be able to fully interpret and scrutinize her life and legacy. Before and after 1957, Daisy and L.C. Bates had consistently active civil rights careers. This project tells the important backstory needed to discuss Daisy and L.C. Bates and their historical impact.

In many ways the pre-1957 years were golden ones for Daisy and L.C. The story about how two individuals born and raised in different parts of the Jim Crow South developed into a crusading civil rights couple is critical to rethinking and rewriting the history of the Civil Rights Movement. It is important that the story about the Bates' activities as husband and wife is told separately from the narrative about Daisy's rise to national prominence, and the incredible demands that came with being a female leader in the movement for racial equity. After 1957, few discussed the Bateses as a couple, but focused on Daisy as the embodiment of modern womanhood. The subsequent history departs from being a story about a partnership, into one about the experiences of a female Civil Rights leader, and her battle over her livelihood, public image and historical legacy. Though the narrative noticeably shifts away from L.C., he continued to mentor his wife even after she decided to relocate to New York in 1960 to write her memoir, or when she was traveling to northern urban centers to register black voters for the Democratic National Committee.

This project is a departure from the existing studies about Daisy Bates which typically establish her significance only in reference to the 1957 Little Rock desegregation crisis. The history of the Little Rock Crisis is well-documented from many perspectives. Scholars have written studies about the impact the Cold War had on how the event unfolded, white women's activism, miscegenation and interracial hysteria, Orval Faubus and other government officials, white resistance, and legal histories. What the scholarship lacks is a detailed account of preceding decades from the perspective of African-American leaders. By starting Daisy Bates' story in 1957, scholars have unjustly written L.C.'s significance out of the story. After L.C.'s 1972 retirement from public activism, the *Arkansas Gazette* made an observation that still perplexes scholars. "It is difficult to explain, now, precisely how Bates' influence affected the civil rights movement during the period he had the newspaper and the period of NAACP field service."⁹ His role in preparing Daisy Bates to provide leadership for the Civil Rights Movement during a critical moment is perhaps L.C.'s most significant historical contribution. While his wife would continue to rise above her station in life, his greatest joy and sense of accomplishment was knowing that he had directly assisted Daisy in changing the course of history.

Throughout her civil rights career, Daisy Bates was bestowed with many honors that set her apart from many of the movement's other women, who were often overlooked or held back by the movement's pernicious sexism. In 1957, the Associated Press named Daisy its "Woman of the Year in Education. The following year the NAACP made her the only woman to receive its coveted Spingarn Award between

⁹ "L.C. Bates Retires," *Arkansas Gazette*, January 25, 1972.

Brown and Selma. During and after the crisis in Little Rock Daisy gave hundreds of speeches to audiences across the nation, met with dignitaries, was the only woman to speak at the official program at the 1963 March on Washington, and registered voters in northern urban centers for the Democratic National Committee (DNC). In 1965, Bates suffered the first of several debilitating strokes that eventually forced her to retire. However, before she bowed out of the arena of political activism, Bates made one final effort to continue Arkansas Freedom Struggle. While she is remembered as an activist for the moderate NAACP, during the Black Power Era, Daisy embraced the economic uplift message being articulated by a revamped Stokely Carmichael led Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the policies of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Throughout her life, Bates also expressed sympathy for the Communist Party, the Nation of Islam, and the Black Panther Party. From 1966-68, Daisy worked as a Rural Training Leader for the Arkansas Office of Economic Opportunity's Little Rock branch. This job eventually led to the final chapter of her career as an activist. From 1968-1974, Daisy relocated to Mitchellville, Arkansas, an impoverished all-black community in the Arkansas Delta comprised of displaced sharecroppers and elderly farmers who had been displaced by mechanization and capitalism.¹⁰ After six years and \$2 million in federal grants and loans, Bates suffered a second, more intense stroke. Shortly after, she retired from public life with L.C.

¹⁰ For more on Daisy Bates' work in Mitchellville, please see: "Considerations of the Mitchellville, Arkansas Project", folder 1, Box 6; Leo Collins, "Mitchellville OEO Self-Help Project", box 6, folder 5; "Mitchellville Makes Its Miracle", *The Action*, June 1972, vol. 3, no. 6, File 2, Box 6, Daisy Bates Papers, University of Arkansas-Fayetteville; Maurice Moore, "Daisy Bates of '57 Fame: She's Fighting Poverty Now." *Arkansas Democrat* October 27, 1968; Marc Wilson, "Black ex-militant hopes Little Rock is not forgotten," *South Bend Tribune*, June 6, 1976, 12-13; Princess Kent, "Where are God's angry men?," Daisy L. Bates: seeds of activism, local leadership, gender constraints, and her challenge to black male leaders," Master thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002, 47-8; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 267.

Recovering the history of partnerships like Daisy and L.C. Bates political activities before 1957 is critical to rewriting the diverse, long arc of male and female experiences over the course of the African-American Freedom Struggle. While Little Rock stands as an apex, and significant part of Daisy Bates' remarkable personal story, the school desegregation crisis does not capture the full narrative. For starters, when the national media and federal troops departed Little Rock in May 1958, the integration crisis continued locally after the 1957-1958 school year ended when Ernest Green became Central High School's first black graduate. The ceremony was attended by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Due to fears that her presence might incite violence amongst angry whites, Daisy did not attend Green's graduation. Still, the victory at Central High was ephemeral. Unable to stop the integration process, white city officials caved to pressures from segregationist and closed the public schools for the duration of the year. When the schools reopened the following year, Bates was taxed with the responsibility of recruiting a new group of students to continue the integration process at Central High, a duty she had not performed during 1957-1958 school year. Without the protection of the national media, Daisy and L.C. continued to endure threatening phone calls, attempts on their lives and eventually the destruction of the *State Press* due to economic reprisals.

One major difference between the 1957-1958 school year and the periods which preceded and followed it was the absence of the national media. When Ernest Green graduated the American public was given the happy ending to Little Rock's ugly national crisis that had shamed the country in front of the world. After the graduation, Little Rock

¹⁰Maurice Moore, "Daisy Bates of '57 Fame: She's Fighting Poverty Now", *Arkansas Democrat* October 27, 1968; Marc Wilson, "Black ex-militant hopes Little Rock is not forgotten," *South Bend Tribune*, June 6, 1976, 12-13;

and Daisy Bates faded from national headlines. However, the battle continued, and due to the personal sacrifices they had made for a historic, yet symbolic, victory, their relationship, and therefore, their lives would never quite be the same.

This dissertation is a new story about how Daisy Bates became a leader in the 1950s desegregation movement. It is not the story of her experiences as a figure in the national movement. Employing the politics of marriage and gender in political protest is not unique to them. However, with the addition of recent works like Barbara Ransby's biography about Eslanda Robeson to the scholarship, the critical intersection between intimate partnerships and political activism is receiving more attention in historical scholarship. Daisy and L.C. represent a model of marriage and political partnership that adds to this growing scholarly dialogue.

Until now, the story about the Little Rock Crisis has been recreated in a fashion that places white historical subjects at the center of a story about a movement to eradicate racial equality. In his brilliant study about Mississippi's grassroots Black Freedom Struggle, the historian Charles Payne writes about the phenomenon of the actions of white actors driving the narrative about the Civil Rights Movement, eventually shaping how histories of the past are written and, ultimately, remembered. For Payne, these narratives are historically inaccurate, intellectually dishonest, and socially dangerous. The "Columbus Discovered America all over again" approach to remembering the past sends a subliminal message to the general public that "history is something that happens

when the white folks show up and stops when they leave.”¹¹ Little Rock’s black community exists on the periphery of the story that is retold in the scholarship.

History has always been the battleground over which the meanings of the past are fought. Inaccurate narratives about the truth of what actually happened in a prior era are dangerous because they create the untrue notion that individuals who make history are exceptional, and that significant events somehow precipitously or suddenly occur out of thin air. Nothing could be further from the truth. In order to historicize the events that compose the narrative about the past the roots of these epic eruptions and transformations must first be traced and contextualized because historic people and episodes are products of history; they are continuities or departures from the periods which precede them. History never has, nor ever will, develop in a vacuum. Barbara Ransby reminds us of this verity when she retold the story of the historian Paula Giddings encounter with legendary organizer and activist Ella Baker. “Now, who are your people?”, Baker asked a young Giddings.¹² Professor Ransby summates, “Baker realized that none of us are self-made men or women; rather, we forge our identities within kinship networks, local communities and organizations.” In her later years, Bates made a similar statement. “There were blacks that didn’t understand what was happening to them. This disturbed me an awful lot. There were not enough people who wanted to change, not enough of them to fight for change. I was fighting,” she clarified, “from my understanding of the past.”¹³ Bates and Baker believed that their activism was a continuation of a long battle

¹¹ Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 424.

¹² Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 14.

¹³ Brian Lanker, *I Dream A World*, 77.

for freedom, human dignity and equality that was much larger than their singular lives; And, so should we.

The story about the 1957 crisis has been told and retold from many perspectives. What the scholarship lacks is a study about the Little Rock black community and black leaders who worked for decades to dismantle Jim Crow. Considering the black community's perspective in a conflict where race was front and center is paramount. The inclusion of the activities of the African-American community also changes the narrative scholars will tell about the Central High School crisis, Arkansas's racial history, the Freedom Struggle in the Border South, and L.C. and Daisy Bates. In order to arrive at a full understanding of the nuances that led to the 1957 crisis and their historical affects, scholars must write detailed studies about not just Daisy and L.C. Bates, but other elements of the black community in Little Rock.

This dissertation has contextualized the origins of the 1957 Little Rock Crisis and the lives of Daisy and L.C. Bates in a way not previously done. The new background information and interpretation about how the crisis at Central High School materialized contributes to the scholarship about self-realization and self-creation, Daisy Bates and L.C. Bates, the history of race relations in Arkansas, and the Civil Rights Movement. The critical story about the black community and its leaders has not been told before now, and is only one part of a larger revision of the history of the Arkansas Civil Rights Movement currently being written by scholars.

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