

Daisy Bates was raised in Huttig, Arkansas, by adoptive parents who had been close to her father, who left his family when his wife was murdered by three white men. In 1941, she married L. C. Bates, a friend of her father. L. C. was a journalist, though he worked selling insurance during the 1930s. L. C. and Daisy Bates invested in a newspaper, the Arkansas State Press. In 1942, the paper reported on a local case where a black soldier, on leave from Camp Robinson, was shot by a local policeman. An advertising boycott nearly broke the paper, but a statewide circulation campaign increased the readership, and restored its financial viability.

In 1952, Daisy Bates became the Arkansas branch president of the NAACP. In 1954, when the Supreme Court ruled racial segregation of schools was unconstitutional, Daisy Bates and others worked to figure out how to integrate the Little Rock Schools. Expecting more cooperation from the administration in integrating the schools than they found, the NAACP and Daisy Bates began working on various plans, and finally, in 1957, had settled on a basic tactic. Seventy-five African American students registered at Little Rock's Central High School. Of these, nine were chosen to actually be the first to integrate the school; they became known as the Little Rock Nine. Daisy Bates was instrumental in supporting these nine students in their action. In September of 1952, Arkansas' governor Faubus arranged for the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the African American students from entering Central High School. In response to the action, and to protests of the action, President Eisenhower federalized the guard and sent in federal troops. On September 25, 1952, the nine students entered Central High amid angry protests. The next month, Daisy Bates and others were arrested for not turning over NAACP records. Though Daisy Bates was no longer an officer of the NAACP, she was fined; her conviction was eventually overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Daisy Bates and her husband continued to support the students who had integrated the high school, and endured personal harassment for their actions. By 1959, advertising boycotts led to closing their newspaper. Daisy Bates published her autobiography and account of the Little Rock Nine in 1962; former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt wrote the introduction. L.C. Bates worked for the NAACP from 1960-1971, and Daisy worked for the Democratic National Committee until she was forced to stop by a stroke in 1965. Daisy then worked on projects in Mitchellville, Arkansas, from 1966-1974. L. C. died in 1980, and Daisy Bates started the State Press newspaper again in 1984, as a part owner with two partners. In 1984, the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville awarded Daisy Bates an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. Her autobiography was reissued in 1984, and she retired in 1987. In 1996, she carried the Olympic torch in the Atlanta Olympics. Daisy Bates died in 1999.

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