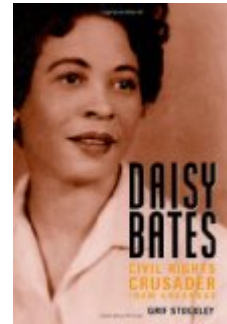


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Grif Stockley. *Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader from Arkansas*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005. x + 340 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57806-801-2.

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## Heroine of Little Rock

Grif Stockley's biography of Daisy Bates carefully places her at the center of the famous school crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas, in the late 1950s. The remarkable television footage of nine black children attempting to integrate Little Rock's Central High School in the fall of 1957 gripped a generation of Americans who watched the events unfold on the evening news night after night. Despite the publicity the crisis received, few people at that time knew of all of the maneuvering and posturing that went on behind the scenes among city, state, and federal officials, and local and national NAACP leaders. Stockley does a masterful job of explaining this situation, while carefully keeping Daisy Bates at the center of the action. At the same time, the author manages to convey the sense of urgency and fear that gripped the participants in this major school-desegregation crisis.

Stockley's biography does a good job of probing the relationship between Bates and the families of the nine black high school students who were the major players in this historic effort. The author clearly demonstrates Bates's skill and sophistication in the way she communicated with the students' parents. Furthermore, Stockley also examines Bates's ability to handle the media. Because of the importance of the media to civil rights campaigns, this was a particularly important skill for civil rights leaders to have.

As the author explores Bates's role in events in Little Rock, he analyzes the processes that transformed Daisy Bates from a wife in the shadow of her husband, a newspaper editor, to a civil rights leader in her own right.

Because of her gender and her lack of formal education, Bates's journey to leadership was fraught with complications and contradictions. The author skillfully enumerates the issues Bates faced during her ascent to leadership, including the strain that her activities placed on her marriage.

In his examination of Bates's life and career, Stockley makes liberal use of oral interviews, manuscript collections, and newspaper and magazine articles. Furthermore, in a number of instances the author refers to Bates's memoir, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* (1962). Stockley is extremely critical of the memoir. Specifically, he charges that Bates exaggerated her role in the Little Rock crisis. Clearly, the memoir does contain inaccuracies. However, it is important to remember that the memoir is a historical document written from the perspective of a key player in the Little Rock crisis. Despite his pointed criticism of Bates's memoir, Stockley uses some passages from it.

*Daisy Bates* ends with a discussion of the problems surrounding the elevation of Bates to a civil rights icon. In recent years, a number of civil rights figures have risen to such status. This trend has had some strange effects. After Rosa Parks was buried in a Detroit, Michigan, cemetery, for example, the price of plots that were close to hers shot up to an incredible \$60,000. This belated recognition of civil rights figures juxtaposed against the worsening conditions facing African Americans in this new millennium is very troubling.

Grif Stockley's biography of Daisy Bates is a thought-

provoking, well-written book. It fits comfortably into recent movement scholarship that examines the impact of gender and class issues on the black freedom struggle. The book will appeal to both students of the civil rights movement and general readers.

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