

Famous Speeches: Daisy Bates' "What Price Freedom?"

By Daisy Bates, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.01.20

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Level **540L**



Daisy Bates was the president of the Arkansas chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She is remembered as an integral figure in the civil rights campaign to racially integrate schools. Photo from: AP Images

Editor's Note: Daisy Bates grew up in the American South. In her time, the South was a hard and sometimes dangerous place for black Americans. They had few rights. They were treated very unfairly. Early on, Bates became a leader in the civil rights movement. She worked for several civil rights groups. She also wrote for a civil rights newspaper. In 1957, Bates organized a group of students known as the Little Rock Nine. These nine black students would be the first to be let into an all-white high school. Below is a speech Bates gave in 1963. In it, she said black Americans were ready to fight for their rights.

"Unfair System"

Negroes in the South live under a deeply unfair system. That system has it two ways. It says Negroes must pay taxes. They must defend their country from its enemies. Yet, they should not be allowed to vote. They should not be allowed to go to a good school or to get a good job. They should not be allowed into public restaurants, parks or even hospitals.

Most white Southerners have accepted this system. They saw nothing wrong with it. They even believed it was for the Negroes' own good.

Then there were the "good whites." They said they were against the KKK and other racist groups. They said they would help if Negroes got into trouble. For many years, we believed them. But all this has changed. Young Negroes have lost their trust in these "good whites." They have seen "good whites" back down. They have seen them make excuses and grow silent in times of danger.

"Fight For Their Rights"

Young Negroes have learned their lesson. They now see that they have to fight for their rights. They are no longer willing to wait for someone else to give their rights to them.

The young want freedom now. They are willing to go to jail for it. They are even willing to die for it, if necessary.

What is it like being in jail? As you sit in your cell at night, the stink of an unclean jail covers you. It gets into your body, your mind, your soul. Soon, you feel like a living nothing. Sitting alone in the jail cell you ask yourself: Why am I here? Why did God let this happen to me? If his love is so great, why does he let such terrible things happen to 20 million Negroes every day?

"It Will Never Be Beaten Down Again"

Somewhere during the night you receive the answer. Everything falls into place. You realize you are doing the right thing. Your mind is now clear and sharp. You no longer see yourself as nothing. Instead, you feel free-er than ever. You realize they cannot win. No matter how many chains they bind you with, your fight for freedom cannot be defeated. It will never be beaten down again.

Quiz

- 1 Read the selection from the section "Unfair System."

Then there were the "good whites." They said they were against the K.K.K. and other racist groups. They said they would help if Negroes got into trouble. For many years, we believed them. But all this has changed.

Who are "good whites"?

- (A) people who said they were against racism
- (B) people who always fought against racism
- (C) people who have created racist groups
- (D) people who have helped racist groups

- 2 Read the selection from the section "It Will Never Be Beaten Down."

Somewhere during the night you receive the answer. Everything falls into place. You realize you are doing the right thing.

What does the phrase "falls into place" mean?

- (A) gets harder
- (B) becomes clear
- (C) gets broken
- (D) becomes quick

- 3 Read the following paragraph from the section "Fight For Their Rights."

What is it like being in jail? As you sit in your cell at night, the stink of an unclean jail covers you. It gets into your body, your mind, your soul. Soon, you feel like a living nothing. Sitting alone in the jail cell you ask yourself: Why am I here? Why did God let this happen to me? If his love is so great, why does he let such terrible things happen to 20 million Negroes every day?

What does the author want to describe in this paragraph?

- (A) how it feels to be in jail
- (B) why people go to jail
- (C) how to get out of jail
- (D) why it smells in the jail

- 4 What does the author want the reader to learn?

- (A) that it is possible to keep people out of restaurants and hospitals
- (B) that it is possible to entertain people with stories about going to jail
- (C) that young black people were being forced to pay more taxes
- (D) that young black people must stand up for freedom and equality