

To Daisy Bates

1 July 1958

[Montgomery, Ala.]

On 27 June King thanked Bates and her husband, Lucius, for their hospitality during his May visit to speak at the Arkansas AM&N College commencement in Pine Bluff, and praised her efforts to "make Christians, real Christians and Americans, real Americans."¹ In the following letter King invites Bates to serve as Dexter's

1. Following the commencement, King attended the graduation ceremony of Ernest Green, Little Rock Central High School's first black graduate. Daisy Lee Gatson Bates (1914–1999) was born in Huttig, Arkansas. She and her husband, Lucius Christopher (L. C.) Bates, founded the *Arkansas State Press* in Little Rock, an investigative newspaper that advocated better conditions for African Americans in the state. In 1952, after becoming president of the Arkansas State Conference of NAACP branches, Bates spearheaded the campaign to desegregate Little Rock schools and eventually coordinated the activities of the nine black students who integrated Central High School in September 1957. In 1958 Bates and the "Little Rock Nine" were presented with the NAACP's Spingarn award. At SCLC's October meeting that year in Norfolk, Virginia, Bates was elected to the organization's executive board. Bates later wrote of her experiences in the desegregation struggle (*The Long Shadow of Little Rock* [New York: David McKay Co., 1962]).

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Women's Day speaker on 12 October; she agreed on 3 July. The day after Bates's talk, Dexter secretary Lillie Hunter reported to King that the church had been "jammed to an overflowing capacity" as Bates gave an "intimately interesting account" of the struggle to desegregate Little Rock's Central High School: "She was genuinely enjoyed. This conclusion I drew by the responsive 'Amen's' and the frequent foot patting."²

Mrs. Daisy Bates
616 ½ W. Ninth Street
Little Rock, Arkansas

Dear Mrs. Daisy:

On Sunday, October 12th, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church will celebrate its Women's Day. We try, on this occasion, to bring some of the most outstanding women of the nation to our city.

Would it be at all possible for you to serve as our guest speaker on this occasion. . . at the 11 o'clock morning service? If so, could you stay over for the mass meeting of the Montgomery Improvement Association on Monday night.³ You may feel free to speak on any subject you wish and for as long as you wish.

The honorarium for Women's Day would be a modest \$125 plus all expenses and I am sure could you find it possible to remain over, the MIA would certainly augment that with a small donation of their own.

I don't have to tell you, Daisy, how much it would mean to the women of this area to have you come. We have had many men and they have been warmly received. But at this time, if we could have a woman whom everyone KNOWS has been, and still is in the thick of the battle from the very beginning, never faltering, never tiring. . . it would be the greatest impetus, the greatest inspiration, the greatest challenge to the women to carry on, even as you are doing so courageously.

I do hope your busy schedule will allow you to come to us on October 12th.

Sincerely yours,
Martin Luther King, Jr.

MLK:p

P.S. Would you kindly send me the full name and address of Mr. Ogden.⁴

TlC. DABCC.

2. Hunter to King, 13 October 1958.

3. Bates left Montgomery Monday morning and was therefore unable to attend the meeting (Bates to Hunter, 3 October 1958).

4. Dunbar H. Ogden, Jr. was a Presbyterian minister and president of the Greater Little Rock Ministerial Association.