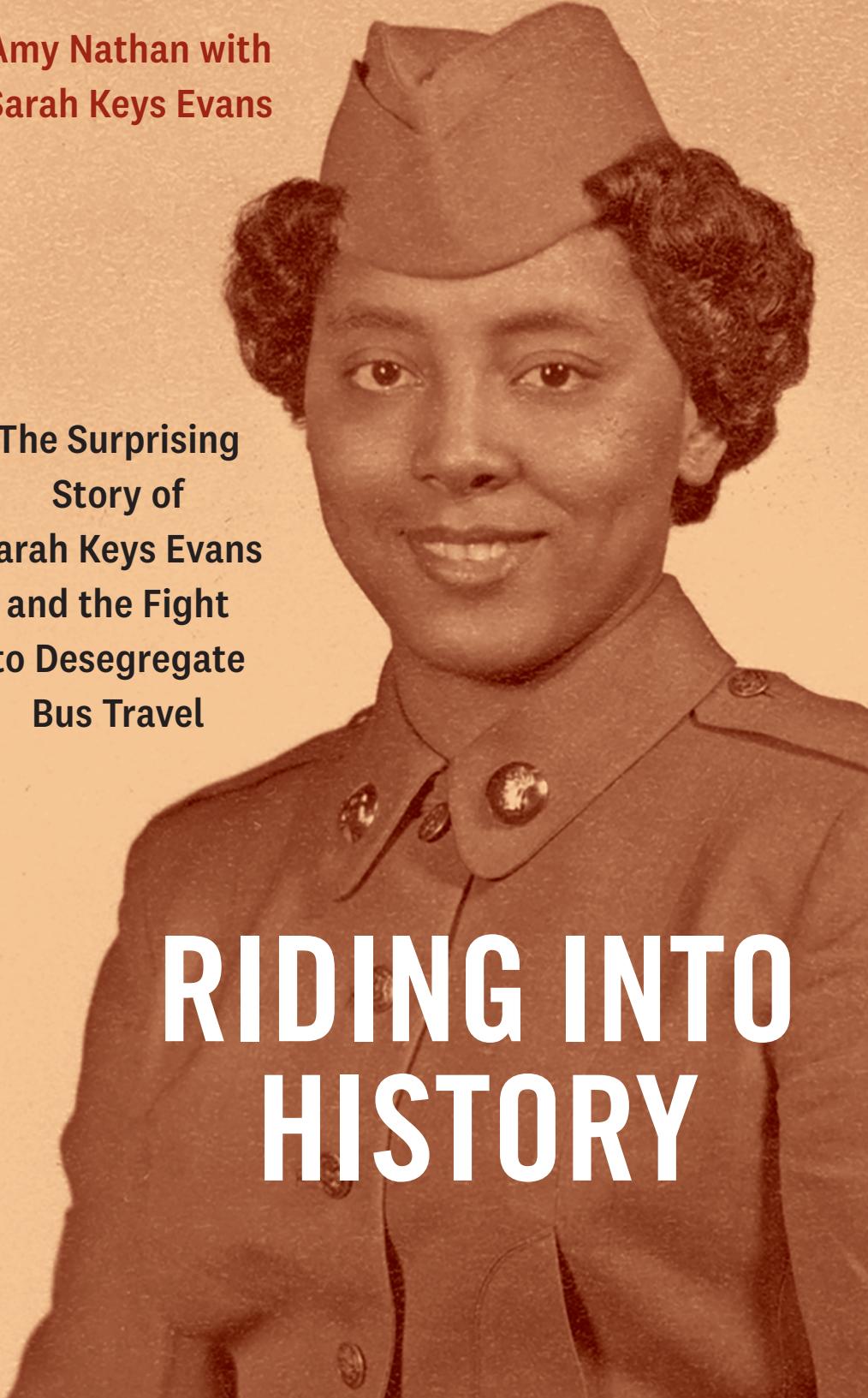


Amy Nathan with  
Sarah Keys Evans

**The Surprising  
Story of  
Sarah Keys Evans  
and the Fight  
to Desegregate  
Bus Travel**

**RIDING INTO  
HISTORY**



**Riding into History**

**BUY**

# RIDING INTO HISTORY

THE SURPRISING STORY OF

SARAH KEYS EVANS

AND THE FIGHT TO DESEGREGATE

BUS TRAVEL

Amy Nathan with Sarah Keys Evans

DUKE

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Army Corps dress uniform in the early 1950s. Courtesy Sarah  
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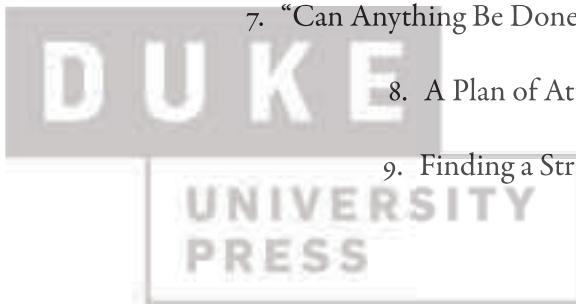
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*To Sarah Keys Evans and her sisters, nieces,  
and nephews, and their grandchildren*



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## **Author's Note**

In early chapters on her childhood and civil rights efforts, the text refers to Sarah mainly as Sarah Keys. In later chapters, after her marriage, the text refers to her as Sarah Keys Evans.



## Preface

I first learned about Sarah Keys Evans in 2001 when I saw a plaque about her at the Military Women's Memorial, located at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery. I was a history major in college and was doing research at the memorial for a book for young people on the history of women in the US military, to be published by National Geographic. But I had never heard of Sarah Keys Evans or her role in civil rights history.

After the National Geographic book went into production, I asked the memorial staff if they could help me contact Sarah Keys Evans. They kindly put me in touch with her. I wrote her to ask if she would be willing to speak with me about working together to create a book that would tell young readers about her. She graciously agreed. I phoned her on January 20, 2004, for the first of many conversations we had over more than nineteen years as part of a long collaboration and friendship.

She made it clear during our first phone call that she valued accuracy. When I asked if I could record our conversation, she replied, "Yes. Would you let me in on what you type?" I promised to send her a transcript. "I would appreciate that," she said. "I have been promised tapes before but never received them." We spoke for hours that day and on

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several subsequent days. I sent her the interview transcripts, which met with her approval.

A reserved and private person, Sarah seemed to appreciate the chance to describe her life in detail to a willing and interested listener who agreed with her on the importance of accuracy. She gladly answered my many questions about her military service and her life growing up in Washington, North Carolina. I then interviewed members of her family, who were also gracious about describing the impact on their lives of what she had done. I did research to learn more about her civil rights experience, reading news articles and a 1983 book by Catherine Barnes, *Journey from Jim Crow*, published by Columbia University Press. I was shocked that no other major books on civil rights history mentioned her. That made it all the more important to right that wrong, at least with a book that could inspire young people. We collaborated in creating *Take a Seat—Make a Stand*, published in 2006, which was reviewed positively in the *Washington Post*. We shared equally in the book's royalties.

We continued to stay in touch, getting together a few times to have lunch in Brooklyn, New York, where she lived. That gave her a chance to tell me more about her life's journey. I attended several events in the New York area where she was honored, meeting her family members there. In two books I wrote for adults and teens on other civil rights events, I mention her briefly. She arranged for two of her young cousins to appear on the cover of my 2011 book about Baltimore civil rights history. I also wrote about her in an online teachers' forum and helped a Black history magazine publish an article about her. In addition, Sarah and I did a joint radio interview for New York's NPR station in 2011.

But it wasn't until we both received a surprising email in 2013 that we began collaborating on an account of her life story for an adult audience. That email came from a young man in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, where her civil rights journey began in 1952. He had just learned about her and asked for our help in finding a way for his city to honor her. That launched a series of events that led to Roanoke Rapids doing that in 2020, with Sarah and I both helping to make the recognition happen. We restarted our phone interviews to create the book you're reading now. She shared more aspects of her life, spurred no doubt by being acknowledged and appreciated by the people of Roanoke Rapids. This new book also includes extensive research to place her civil rights role in its rightful place as an important part of history that deserves to

be remembered and explored, helping with the still unfinished work of putting an end to racial injustice.

Sarah Keys Evans did not live to see this book completed. But before her death in 2023 at age ninety-four, she knew it was on its way. She had read an early version of this book, which strives for accuracy and a touch of inspiration, as she would have wished.

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