

Primary Sources: Letter from Ruby Bates to Earl Streetman

Ruby Bates was a terrible witness. At the first trial in Scottsboro in 1931, her testimony was full of hesitations and primarily corroborated the more colorful story told by Victoria Price. At the next trial in 1933, she appeared as a witness for the defense. The prosecutors made clear to the jury, however, that her nice new clothes, and her recent stay in New York City had been paid for by the Communist Party.

Between these two trials, a letter was found on Miron Pearlman, also known as Danny Dundee, an ex-prizefighter arrested for drunkenness. Pearlman claimed he had gotten Bates drunk and coerced her to write the missive. Bates then signed an affidavit confirming his account. The text of the letter appears here with original spelling and grammar retained.

Jan 5 1932
Huntsville Ala
215 Connelly Alley

dearest Earl

I want to make a statement too you Mary Sanders is a goddam lie about those Negroes jassing me those police man made me tell a lie that is my statement because i Want too clear my self that is all to it if you Want too Believe ok. if not that is ok. You Will be sorry some day if you had to stay in Jail With eights Negroes you would tell a lie two those Negroes did not touch me or those white Boys i hope you will believe me the law dont. I love you better than Mary does are any Body else in the World that is why i am tell you of this thing I was drunk at the time and did not know what i was doing I know it was wrong too let those Negroes die on account of me i hope you Will Believe my Statement Because it is the gods truth i hope you Will Believe me i was jazed But those white Boyes jazed me i Wish those Negroes are not Burnt on account of me it is these white Boys fault that is my statement and that is all I know i hope you tell the law hope you will answer

P.S. this is one time that i might tell a lie But it is the truth so god help me.
Ruby Bates