

The Watsons Go to
Birmingham — 1963

The United States wasn't always the country of equal rights that it is now. In fact, there was a time when racial discrimination was commonplace. The simple truth of the matter is described in The Watsons Go to Birmingham — 1963, a historical novel by Christopher Paul Curtis. All of the members of the black Watson family either experienced or noticed some sort of racial discrimination. The youngest, Joetta, was the one who experienced it more so than the others.

When the Watsons left for Birmingham, all they knew about racism was what Mrs. Watson told them. She knew that people would call them names, and not allow them in certain areas. But they had no clue that racists would go so far as to throw a bomb into a church on a Sunday morning. In all honesty, many people did not care about what happened to blacks, just because their skin was a different color.

Joetta was in that church. She was there when the bomb went off. She experienced as first hand as possible the deadly effects of racism. She escaped with her life, but four other young girls were not so lucky, all because someone was willing to kill to make a point he believed to be true. The whole colored community was struck with fear. They wondered who could commit such a heinous crime. But many retaliated. They fought violence with words. Some civil rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr. delivered stirring speeches to persuade people to stand up for their rights.

In 1963, restaurants could refuse service to blacks. Schools were for

black children or white, never both. Parents of white children might not allow them to associate with, or even talk to black children. The Ku Klux Klan would frequently lynch black citizens. All of the Watsons could bear witness to many of these events, and these are only a few of the horrors that would occur on account of racism.

What was it that caused racism? It was just the human nature to treat people differently because they appeared to be so. The Watsons were not the only ones who were judged on account of their skin color, but this book can tell the story of some of the others who were. We can learn from them. We can attempt to improve the future. After all, this *is* America.

Curtis, Christopher. 1995. The Watsons Go To Birmingham-1963.
New York: Yearling.