



# Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970

*Lynne Olson*

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The first comprehensive history of the role of women in the civil rights movement, *Freedom's Daughters* fills a startling gap in both the literature of civil rights and of women's history. Stokely Carmichael, Andrew Young, John Lewis, and other well-known leaders of the civil rights movement have admitted that women often had the ideas for which men took credit. In this groundbreaking book, credit finally goes where credit is due -- to the bold women who were crucial to the movement's success and who refused to give up the fight. From the Montgomery bus boycott to the lunch counter sit-ins to the Freedom Rides, Lynne Olson's *Freedom's Daughters* offers a remarkable corrective to the standard history as she tells the long overlooked story of the extraordinary women, both black and white, who were among the most fearless, resourceful, and tenacious leaders of the civil rights movement. Reminding us that the story of women fighting for civil rights began much earlier than the 1950s and 1960s, Olson puts the formal civil rights movement into the context of a much larger history of women's activism. From the abolitionist and suffragist movements to women's liberation, Olson proves that the political activity of women has been the thread connecting the big reform movements from the 1830s to 1970. Into this context, then, she introduces portraits and cameos of more than sixty women -- many until now forgotten and some never before written about -- from the key figures (Pauli Murray, Ida Wells, Eleanor Roosevelt, Ella Baker, and Septima Clark, among others) whose activism spanned several different movements and decades to some of the smaller players who represent the hundreds and hundreds of women who each came forth to do her own small part and who together ultimately formed the mass movements that made the difference. As one male activist said of the movement in Mississippi: It was a woman's war. This is the story of women making difficult choices, trying to balance lives as wives and mothers with their all-consuming work, defying society's standards of proper female behavior. It's the story of indomitable black women like Diane Nash who refused to give up the civil rights fight, even as the formal movement collapsed, and of white female civil rights activists mourning the loss of their old movement while helping to launch a new one -- the battle for women's rights. *Freedom's Daughters* puts a human face on the civil rights struggle -- and shows that that face was often female.

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