

IN the waning days of the antebellum South, millions of African Americans were suddenly released from enslavement. But they soon realized that “freedom” was not free: They were subject to hundreds of laws aimed at preventing them from voting and, in many cases, learning. Were it not for the work of an exceptional group of women—activists, educators, mothers, and organizers—the foundations for public education in the South might never have been laid.

For Freedom’s Daughters, Celeste Headlee set out to write into the historical record the untold stories of these remarkable women. A journalist who spent her career in public media, Headlee has long championed unheard voices and sought to tell the stories of those whose contributions have gone unacknowledged. But this project was fueled by an even deeper connection: Carrie Still Shepperson—one of the most important figures in the fight for literacy—was Headlee’s great-grandmother and one of the biggest influences in her life.

Now, after Headlee spent a decade poring over research spanning personal diaries and public records, Freedom’s Daughters paints a vivid portrait of figures intentionally erased from history, recognizing the work of a generation of Black women who believed freedom was inextricably linked to learning and free expression and who worked tirelessly to secure access to literacy and education for the millions of children born into freedom.

By turns shocking, inspiring, and deeply moving, Freedom’s Daughters is Headlee’s impeccably researched journey to better understand her family history and herself, and it is a timely examination of the influence and power of unfettered access to schools, libraries, and higher education.

CELESTE HEADLEE is an award-winning journalist, a professional speaker, and the author of *Speaking of Race*, *We Need to Talk*, and *Do Nothing*. Her TEDx Talk on how to have better conversations has more than forty million views. She teaches journalism and communication at Morgan State University. She is the proud granddaughter of William Grant Still, who is known as the Dean of African American Composers.

READ BY THE AUTHOR



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AUDIO

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FREEDOM'S DAUGHTERS
CELESTE HEADLEE

Adult



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