**A Girl Stands at the Door**

**By Rachel Devlin**

**About the Book**

The struggle to desegregate America's schools was a grassroots movement, and young women were its vanguard. In the late 1940s, parents began to file desegregation lawsuits with their daughters, forcing Thurgood Marshall and other civil rights lawyers to take up the issue and bring it to the Supreme Court. After the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, girls far outnumbered boys in volunteering to desegregate formerly all-white schools.

In A Girl Stands at the Door, historian Rachel Devlin tells the remarkable stories of these desegregation pioneers. She also explains why black girls were seen, and saw themselves, as responsible for the difficult work of reaching across the color line in public schools. Highlighting the extraordinary bravery of young black women, this bold revisionist account illuminates today's ongoing struggles for equality.

**About the Author**:

Rachel Devlin is an associate professor of history at Rutgers University specializing in the cultural politics of girlhood, sexuality, and race in the postwar United States. She holds a BA from Barnard College and a PhD in History from Yale University. She is the author of Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture (2005). In her most recent book, A Girl Stands at the Door: The Generation of Young Women Who Desegregated America's Schools (2018), Devlin draws on interviews and archival research to tell the stories of the many young women who stood up to enraged protestors, hostile teachers, and hateful white students every day while integrating classrooms. Among them were Lucile Bluford, who fought to desegregate the University of Missouri’s School of Journalism before World War II, and Marguerite Carr and Doris Faye Jennings, who as teenagers became the public faces of desegregation years before Brown v. Board of Education. Devlin has received fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History (Harvard University), and the W.E.B. DuBois Institute (Harvard University).

**If you enjoyed this book*:***

* American Heart by Laura Moriarty
* Heartland by Sarah Smarsh
* The Saint of Wolves and Butchers by Alex Grecian
* The Pastor Wears a Skirt by Dorothy Nickel Friesen
* The Color of Law by Richard Rothstein

**Discussion Questions**

1. Do you feel like this book gave new or little known information on school desegregation? What, if anything, surprised you?
2. What do you make of the fact that many of the plaintiffs for grade school desegregation were girls or young women? Why do you think there weren’t as many boys or young men?
3. Of all of the cases that Devlin discusses, which stood out to you the most? Why?
4. Why do you think the NAACP wanted to start with colleges and universities in a top down approach rather than grade schools?
5. “Historians continue to debate whether young people who participated in school desegregation and civil rights movements ought to be considered victims coping with forces outside their control or political actors in their own right” (Elizabeth Eckford case). What do you think?
6. Elaine Chustz Green says that “girls and young women might have volunteered in disproportionate numbers because they were looking for leadership roles” before the feminist movement started. Do you think this is an accurate assessment?
7. Devlin has been criticized for including so much about Esther Brown, the white woman who became involved in South Park. Critics say that Devlin should have spent more time on the actual girls going into the schools. Do you agree or disagree? Why do you think Devlin thought it was important to include Esther Brown to such an extent?
8. Was there anything you feel the book didn’t explain well enough that you’d like to know more about?
9. Which of the pictures (starting on p. 191) do you think is most interesting, and why?