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ONSTAGE, THE WOMEN OF THE MOVEMENT sat together—Rosa Parks, Diane Nash Bevel, Rose Lee, Gloria Richardson, Daisy Bates—ready to take a bow.

Bow was about all they would do once the official program began. The Big Ten, all men, scheduled no women to give formal speeches. At the appointed moment, these “heroines” of the movement would stand and acknowledge the crowd. Then Daisy Bates—who helped the Little Rock Nine to brave the shouts, spitting, threats, and punches of white mobs when they desegregated Central High School in 1957—would read some scripted words. Finally, Phil Randolph, the master of ceremonies, rose “to give awards” to acknowledge “the great role that the Negro women have played in the cause of freedom.” And he asked Daisy Bates to say a few words.

The life of Daisy Bates encompassed all the extremes of the black experience—and the twisted mentality about men and women that lay at the heart of segregation.

Soon after Bates was born, in 1914, three white men raped and murdered her mother. Her father left Daisy in the care of another couple. Her adoptive father experienced racist abuse himself. Dressed for Daisy’s mother’s funeral, he was called a “dressed-up ape” by white hoodlums who painted a red stripe down the suit. As she grew up, Daisy watched her Daddy, Olee Smith, absorb constant torment.

As a child, Daisy Bates was full of rage. But her father told her:

Hate can destroy you, Daisy. Don’t hate white people because they’re white. If you hate, make it count for something. Hate the humiliations we’re living under in the South. Hate the discrimination that eats away at the soul of every black man and woman. Hate the insults hurled at us by white scum—and then try to do something about it, or your hate won’t spell a thing.

And so she did something. She joined the NAACP, started an independent newspaper, and rallied support for the nine black children who integrated Central High School in Little Rock. For that, she was honored at the March on Washington.

Daisy Bates wore a pillbox hat and a sleeveless beige dress, with big costume jewelry and earrings. She spoke words that John Morsell of the NAACP had written earlier that day.

“Mr. Randolph, the women of this country pledge to you, Mr. Randolph,

to Martin Luther King, to Roy Wilkins, and all of you fighting for civil liberties, that we will join hands with you, as women of this country . . .

“We will *kneel* in, we will *sit* in until we can eat at any counter in the *United States*. We will walk until we are free, until we can walk to any school and take our children to any school in the *United States*. We will *sit* in and we will *kneel* in and we will *lie* in if necessary, until we can vote. This we pledge you, the women of America.”

And that was all.

For days, the battle over women speakers raged behind the scenes. The morning of the march, Anna Arnold Hedgeman confronted staffers of the march organizers. When she entered the lobby of the Statler Hilton, she saw Rachele Horowitz.

Hedgeman walked up to Horowitz.

“What are you going to do about *the women*? You are betraying the cause of women if you go along with this.”

Anna Hedgeman was the doyenne of the movement. Inspired by a talk by W. E. B. Du Bois, she became a teacher at Rust College in Mississippi. She later became executive secretary of the Fair Employment Practices Committee, the entity that President Franklin Roosevelt created to get Philip Randolph to cancel the 1941 March on Washington. Hedgeman also served as a dean at Howard University. She sat on every conceivable board in the civil rights movement.

Eleanor Holmes walked by. “Philip Randolph represents *me*,” she said, and then she walked away.

Hedgeman could not stand the betrayal of a black sister. She started calling after her.

“You too have betrayed me—*and all womanhood!*”

Hedgeman also scorned the woman given the most visible role in the March on Washington. Hedgeman considered Mahalia Jackson, the gospel singer picked by Martin Luther King to sing “I Been ’Buked and I Been Scorned,” to be crude, unkempt, too large, and ungainly.

For weeks, Hedgeman, Dorothy Height, and younger activists like Casey Hayden and Pauli Murray tried to get women at least one major speaking role on the program. They called, wrote, and directly confronted Phil Randolph and Bayard Rustin.

Women played some of the most important roles in the movement. Everyone knows about Rosa Parks refusing to yield her bus seat in Montgomery. But other women drove the movement forward. Ella Baker helped to teach Martin Luther King, back during the Montgomery boycott, and

helped create SNCC. Fannie Lou Hamer built the Mississippi movement. Gloria Richardson led the Cambridge movement. As the old movement adage held, the women organize while men lead.

Dorothy Height led a small delegation of women to the Utopia House to lobby Rustin to put women on the program. But Rustin resisted. “Well, we have women,” Height remembers him saying. “There are women members of the NAACP, we have all the denominations of the churches, our congregations are filled with women. The labor unions—we have Walter Reuther, he represents all these. We have Eugene Carson Blake, the National Council of Churches—well, the churches have so many women.”

“Yes, that’s why we want a woman to speak.”

“But women’s voices will be represented.”

“Nobody can speak for us but us. How can we be marching for freedom and jobs and not have a woman speak?”

Looking back, Height theorized that young people got a speaking part because of their radicalism. “They knew that the women were not going to turn over the Lincoln Memorial, but the students might.”

Hedgeman suggested inviting Myrlie Evers, Medgar’s widow, to speak. Or if the march organizers wanted to give young people a voice, what about Diane Nash Bevel? *Who* Randolph and Rustin chose didn’t matter, as long as at least one woman got a speaking role.

Rustin answered that picking one woman would anger the others. He talked about “the difficulty of finding a single woman to speak without causing serious problems vis-à-vis other women and women’s groups.” *Women get jealous of other women.*

Hedgeman and other women also protested Phil Randolph’s decision to speak at the National Press Club the week before the March on Washington. The Press Club did not allow women to sit on the main floor during events. They were seated in the balcony, cut off from the event’s give-and-take.

“The time has come to say to you quite frankly, Mr. Randolph, that ‘tokenism’ is as offensive when applied to women as when applied to Negroes and that I have not devoted the greater part of my adult life to the implementation of human rights to condone any policy which is not inclusive,” Pauli Murray wrote to Randolph. “You are doubtless aware that the great abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison, and Charles Redmond, a Negro delegate, refused to be seated at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840 when they learned that women delegates from America would be excluded.”

The battles over the National Press Club and over who would speak at the March split women in the movement.

Maida Springer was bringing a Guinean labor delegation to the march. She offered to let Pauli Murray use her apartment while she figured out what to do. Murray turned Springer's living room and foyer into a headquarters for the cause. She talked about picketing the National Press Club.

"You will join us, if it comes to that, won't you?" Murray asked Springer.

"No, I will not join you in a picket line to picket A. Philip Randolph a week before the March on Washington."

Angry, Murray cleared her materials out of the apartment and left.

When Randolph got to the National Press Club, he objected to women's exclusion from the event. For the first time, the club invited women down from the balcony to the main floor for Randolph's speech.

Those skirmishes—early signs of a gender split in the civil rights movement—were forgotten for the time being. Now, as the women sat down, the chant rose again from the front of the Lincoln Memorial: "Pass the bill! Pass the bill! Pass the bill!"

ALSO ABSENT FROM THE PROGRAM was a representative of the poor.

Early drafts of the March on Washington program listed "Unemployed Worker" as one of the keynote speakers. The early transportation plans included busloads and trainloads of the poor and unemployed. The hope was to bring at least ten thousand people from the plantations and ghettos of the South.

But the march became ever more middle class. In July, "Unemployed Worker" got crossed off the list of speakers. The logic that applied for women—someone else will speak *for* them, so there's no reason for them to speak for themselves—applied to the poor.

Courtland Cox, a Howard University student who worked at march headquarters all summer, was distressed at the undercurrent of class bias among the Big Ten.

"There was always a sense that this is a civil discussion between *educated people*," he said about the civil rights movement. "The *underbrush*, with their broken English, they would not fit in. It was all right to speak *for* them, but we shouldn't allow them to speak for themselves . . . I was so pissed. These were the people engaged in the demonstrations and people who were supposed to represent them felt it would be better to not have them there."

Rallying poor and unemployed workers also clashed with the everyday demands of organizing in tough states like Mississippi, Alabama, and Loui-