



Dear Senator

Essie Mae Washington-Williams, William Stadiem

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Breaking nearly eight decades of silence, Essie Mae Washington–Williams comes forward with a story of unique historical magnitude and incredible human drama. Her father, the late Strom Thurmond, was once the nation's leading voice for racial segregation (one of his signature political achievements was his 24–hour filibuster against the Civil Rights Act of 1957, done in the name of saving the South from "mongrelization"). Her mother, however, was a black teenager named Carrie Butler who worked as a maid on the Thurmond family's South Carolina plantation.

Set against the explosively changing times of the civil rights movement, this poignant memoir recalls how she struggled with the discrepancy between the father she knew—one who was financially generous, supportive of her education, even affectionate—and the Old Southern politician, railing against greater racial equality, who refused to acknowledge her publicly. From her richly told narrative, as well as the letters she and Thurmond wrote to each other over the years, emerges a nuanced, fascinating portrait of a father who counseled his daughter about her dreams and goals, and supported her in reaching them—but who was unwilling to break with the values of his Dixiecrat constituents.

With elegance, dignity, and candor, Washington–Williams gives us a chapter of American history as it has never been written before—told in a voice that will be heard and cherished by future generations.

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