



# Life on the Line

*Faye Wattleton*

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## **Life on the Line** Faye Wattleton

"I have never believed in the impossible," declares Wattleton, acknowledging that it is a motto she learned at her mother's knee. By any measure, Faye Wattleton has led an extraordinary life. The daughter of a black female fundamentalist preacher, Faye Wattleton went on to become president of Planned Parenthood from 1978 to 1992, the first African American (and the first woman) to head the organization since Margaret Sanger founded it in 1916. During a period of explosive conflict, Wattleton played a crucial role in defining our national debate over sex education, contraception, and abortion. Her mission has inspired millions--while the issues she has strongly defended have become targets for Congressional attacks, legal challenges, and fiery zealots. Faye Wattleton has literally put her life on the line for what she believes, and this fascinating book is both a chronicle of her life and our times.

The young Faye found strength and pride in her mother's achievements: at a time when most black women were struggling under the double repression of racism and sexism, Ozie Wattleton became a fiery fundamentalist minister who riveted congregations, both white and black, all over the country. Ozie's devotion to her calling made her a wonderful role model for her only child, but as the minister's daughter Faye was expected to be the living exemplar of her mother's teachings.

Committed to her own identity, Faye chose a very different path from her mother's. A nursing student at Ohio State University and later a graduate of Columbia University's midwifery program, Wattleton dedicated herself to healing--only to be stunned by the harsh realities of women's lives in America, especially the humiliation and danger inflicted on women by illegal abortions.

She joined Planned Parenthood because it offered dignity and reproductive options to women, rising quickly to the top of the organization. During the fourteen years of her controversial leadership, Wattleton moved Planned Parenthood into the forefront of the movement to preserve and extend women's reproductive rights, standing up to an increasingly vocal and violent right-wing opposition. This battle--waged through our judicial, legislative, and social systems--is recounted with both clarity and passion in *Life on the Line*. As we continue to shape and define the global initiatives that will preserve women's right to choose, Faye Wattleton remains a voice of reason. She is a woman of action who has courageously placed herself in the center of the most explosive issue of our time without losing her compassion.

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