



# Intimate Politics: How I Grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech, and Became a Feminist Rebel

*Bettina Aptheker*

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At eight years old, Bettina Aptheker watched her family's politics play out in countless living rooms across the country when her father, historian and U.S. Communist Party leader Herbert Aptheker, testified on television in front of the House on Un-American Activities Committee in 1953. Born into one of the most influential U.S. Communist families whose friends included W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Bettina lived her parents' politics witnessing first-hand one of the most dramatic upheavals in American history. She also lived with a terrible secret: incest at the hands of her famous father and a frightening and lonely life lived inside a home wrought with family tensions.

A gripping and beautifully rendered memoir, *Intimate Politics* is at its core the story of one woman's struggle to still the demons of her personal world while becoming a controversial public figure herself. This is the story of childhood sexual abuse, abortion, sexual violence, activism, and the triumph over one's past. It's about FBI harassment and persecution, Jewish heritage, and lesbian identity. It is, finally, about the courage to speak one's truth despite the consequences and to break the sacred silence of family secrets.

## Intimate Politics: How I Grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech, and Became a Feminist Rebel Details

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## **From Reader Review Intimate Politics: How I Grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech, and Became a Feminist Rebel for online ebook**

### **Jamilah says**

Revisiting the political climate of the sixties and seventies, as well as my college days of the 80s. This book is written by a former professor of mine, and I enjoyed it a lot - she's a fantastic writer, very honest and brilliant.

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### **Sara says**

I love this woman.

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### **Margaret Laffan says**

Maybe the best book I've read in the last year. TOTALLY inspiring..and not just because she's my professor!

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### **Carolyn says**

This book is an amazing memoir! Bettina describes her role in various social movements with a critical eye. Her passion and intellect come across excellently in her writing, reading her book has helped me admire her as my professor in an entirely new way.

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### **Heather says**

If you like autobiographies - especially emotional ones about radical women, then you'll like this one! I did, and I also learned a lot about other folks involved in the civil rights and free speech movements of the 1960s.

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### **Pilouetta says**

i just picked this up after a few months hiatus. i like aptheker's socialist take on contemporary history like the cuban missile crisis, black panthers, SDS; in addition to her feminist spin on the communist party with great anecdotes about shirley graham du bois and angela davis. aptheker also takes on don herbert, her father and party father, as having molested her as a child, in addition to the misogyny and sexual harassment she encountered as a member of the CP in berkeley during the sixties. a lot of ground for her to cover, so we'll see...

## **Bart says**

*Intimate Politics: How I Grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech, and Became a Feminist Rebel* is the autobiography of Bettina Aptheker living those subtitles and more. Unfortunately, some of the "more" or last part of the book is about how Aptheker becomes a hippie and appropriates Buddhism. The rest (or most) of the book is engaging and full of clear and strong analysis of the racist, classist, capitalist hetero-patriarchy state. I found Aptheker's work on Angela Davis' case particularly interesting as well as her critiques of the US Communist Party, which she distances herself from when she realizes the Party's dogmatic nature.

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## **Ilene Richards says**

Bettina Aptheker carries a revolutionary fire within her. She is a popular professor at UC Santa Cruz and founder of the Department of Women's Studies. The daughter of noted historian and Marxist scholar, Herbert Aptheker, Bettina tells the story of her life within and without the Communist Party...Although much of the book is about the radical politics of the 1960s which she, as a student at UC Berkeley and an open member of the Communist Party--helped to shape she never hesitates to speak honestly about her personal life as well--sorrows, psychological upheavals and her ultimate personal liberation from them. Read this book. And learn from it. Bettina is a personal hero to me.

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## **Nancy says**

This is definitely an interesting book, but I'm not quite sure what to make of it.

I enjoyed the inside-the-movement looks at 60s history. Aptheker's descriptions of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and the trial of Angela Davis are compelling. However, some of the personal is political sections seemed a bit far-fetched. Ms. Aptheker interprets what seem like normal childhood experiences through a political lens. Similar events in my life portended nothing in particular. I loved some of my grade school teachers but it wasn't an early sign of a lesbian self. I hated shopping in big department stores with my mother but my distaste was not related to a secret molestation.

A central issue of this memoir is 10 years of childhood sexual abuse by Bettina's father which she did not remember until she was forty years old. I am skeptical about recovered memories. I believe it is possible but that many reported cases are the result of therapists who believe so much in sexual abuse as the root of problems that they create memories in people at their weakest most vulnerable moments.

No matter what the truth is about the sexual abuse, Ms. Aptheker seems to have plenty of problems related to her parents and the cult-like aspects of the Communist Party. It amazed me that a woman who went to Berkeley and participated in the Free Speech Movement could remain slavishly dedicated to the Communist Party Line for so many years. Whether Ms. Aptheker really lost 10 years of memories or was the victim of falsely created memories, it seems likely that her anxiety and nervous breakdown were related to living in a setting where her beliefs were dictated. For years she managed to believe things that she could see from her own experiences were not true.

## **Mell says**

Liked the activist parts more than the family and relationship parts.

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## **Miranda says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this for its honesty, insight, and sheer fascination as to the academics and operations of the Communist Party. A really touching and ultimately uplifting read.

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## **Jamie says**

Highly recommend this book for any activist. The struggles between the personal and the political and how to combine those two to become a better activist are developed excellently within this memoir.

I think a significant chunk of the end could've been chopped off as the book lost steam around the middle. Nevertheless, I welcome a writer sharing her personal struggle in this manner.

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## **Jimmy Tarlau says**

Very engrossing memoirs of a young Communist activist whose father was one of the leading theoretician/historians of the US Communist Party. Underneath her activism in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, defending Angela Davis and her leftist activism was a tremendous amount of internal turmoil highlighted by her father's sexual abuse of her as a young child. It was quite moving for me to know of her from a distance and having no idea (along with everyone else) about the turmoil she was going through. Bettina later becomes a feminist, lesbian and gets into a spiritual trip which is a little foreign to me but she is understandable as the book is good at keeping its ties to her progressive upbringing and activities while witnessing her new directions. I actually had a hard time putting the book down.

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## **Chani says**

I loved this book! It is one of those I read from beginning to end with barely a break. Having been involved in the radical movement in the 70s and early 80s, running in the same circles, I had an opportunity to know Bettina. She is a warm, lovely woman who has gained wisdom over the years. We can all learn from her.

Yay, Bettina!

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## Carolyn says

Bettina was a professor of mine at UC Santa Cruz and a real-life mentor. Her book is truly inspiring. She reminds me that being yourself at all costs is what makes life rich, and that compassion and love are what really change the world.

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