New York Times Bestseller

Cokie Roberts

Author of the #1 New York Times Bestseller
We Are Our Mothers’ Daughters

Founding Mothers

The Women Who Raised Our Nation

As seen on
The History Channel
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Founding Mothers
The Women Who Raised Our Nation
by Cokie Roberts

About this Book
In the histories of the American Revolution, much has been written about America’s founding fathers, those brave men who signed the Declaration of Independence, battled the British, and framed the Constitution. Yet the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters who supported, encouraged, and even advised them have been virtually ignored.

In Founding Mothers, New York Times bestselling author Cokie Roberts brings to light the stories of the women who fought the Revolution as valiantly as the men, sometimes even defending their very doorsteps from British occupation. While the men went off to war or to Congress, the women managed their husbands' businesses, ran the farms, and raised their children. These women who sacrificed for the fledgling nation spent months or even years apart from their husbands, at a time when letters were their only form of contact.

Drawing upon personal correspondence and private journals, Founding Mothers brings to life the everyday trials, extraordinary triumphs, and often surprising stories of Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, Deborah Reed Franklin, Eliza Pinckney, Martha Washington, and other patriotic and passionate women, each of whom played a role in raising our nation.

Discussion Questions
1. What inspired you to read Founding Mothers? Why do you suppose the contributions of women in the Revolutionary era have been largely overlooked by historians? Would the founding of the nation have occurred without these women?

2. Which woman would you say had the single greatest impact during the Revolution? How about during the first years of the new government?

3. Despite a lack of legal and social rights, including the right to own property and receive a formal education, how did the women presented in Founding Mothers assert their authority and exercise their intelligence?

4. How did life differ for women depending on where they lived --- the North versus the South, the city versus rural areas? How else did geographical circumstances impact their lives?
5. Women often accompanied their husbands to army camps during the war, including Martha Washington, Kitty Greene, and Lucy Knox. Were you surprised they chose to do this? How did these three women in particular contribute to the often harsh life of a military camp and foster the war efforts?

6. By telling the stories of our Founding Mothers, this book also sheds light on the men of the time. Did you learn anything new about these men, including Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton, seeing them from the perspective of their female contemporaries?

7. How important was the "civilizing" role that women played in the years leading up to, during, and after the Revolution? Can you reference examples from the book that show how integral it was for the women to be able to step in and "calm down the men," or even to act as intermediaries, as Abigail Adams did in the dispute between her husband and James Madison?

8. Catharine Macaulay supported the American Revolution and was a vocal proponent of democratic governments in general. Why did Macaulay, an Englishwoman, take such an interest in the American cause? How did she contribute to it?

9. How did Martha Washington define the role of First Lady? Are her influences still evident today? Her political savvy was remarkable, but is there anything that can be learned from Martha Washington on a personal level?

10. Only a limited number of women could have accomplished what Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren did -- those who had access to the men shaping the future of the nation. What about the women who didn't have the advantage of providing direct counsel or publishing their discourses? How did they contribute to the Revolutionary War and the founding of the nation?

11. Cokie Roberts intersperses her thoughts and commentary throughout the book. Does this enhance the narrative? In what ways?

**Critical Praise**

"[Roberts] creates a strong... case that without the patriotism of women on the home front, the Colonies would have lost the Revolutionary War... Founding Mothers is a series of entertaining mini-biographies and engaging vignettes."

—The New York Times

Courtesy of Perennial
Cokie Roberts

1943-

Entry Updated 10/04/2002

Place of Birth: New Orleans, LA

Award(s):
Dirksen Award, Dirksen Center on Congressional Leadership, 1985; Weintal Award, Georgetown University, 1988; exceptional merit media award, National Women's Political Caucus, 1989; Mother of the Year Award, National Mother's Day Committee, 1992, and American Cancer Society, 2000.

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**WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR:**

- *We Are Our Mothers' Daughters* (nonfiction), Morrow (New York, NY), 1998.
- (With husband, Steve Roberts) *From This Day Forward* (nonfiction), Morrow, 2000.


**"Sidelights"**

Cokie Roberts established herself as one of the most successful and well-known news correspondents in the United States. She first came to national attention as one of the voices of National Public Radio (NPR), where she began working in 1978. Roberts continues to contribute news analyses to NPR, but since 1988 she has also served as a correspondent for *ABC News*, and has appeared as a correspondent, interviewer, or panelist on several news programs, including the *MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour* and *This Week*. In addition to writing a weekly syndicated column and contributing articles to periodicals such as *Commonweal, Atlantic Monthly*, and the *New York Times Magazine*, Roberts has penned a book on the subject of women's life roles, titled *We Are Our Mothers' Daughters*.  

Roberts was born into a political family. Her full name at birth was Mary Martha Corinne Morrison Claiborne Boggs, but her brother could not pronounce Corinne (the name her parents had decided upon for everyday use). His approximation, "Cokie," stuck. Roberts's father was U.S. Representative Hale Boggs of Louisiana. He served several terms as a Democrat, and when his plane was lost over Alaska in 1972 and he was killed, Roberts's mother, Lindy Boggs, served out his term and then won several more terms in her own right. Roberts's elder sister, Barbara Sigmund, also went into politics, and served as the mayor of Princeton, New Jersey, before her death from cancer. Roberts's brother, Tom Boggs, works for a prestigious Washington, D.C., lobbying firm.

Though Roberts herself obtained a degree in political science from Wellesley College, she never wanted to become a politician herself. She told an interviewer for *Broadcasting and Cable*: "It is true that I am deeply admiring of politicians--of my parents and sister. But I am a more private person than that." She explained further: "I want to go home at night and not have the interruption of constituents who demand your time and have the right to demand your time. I know how hard that work is and how it never ends. I want my day to end."

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*with David Brinkley*, commentator, 1992-2002. Gives lectures throughout the United States; member of board of directors, Manhattanville College (Purchase, NY), Congressional Fellows Program, Children's Inn at the National Institutes for Health, and the Dirksen Center on Congressional Leadership; has appeared on *Nightline*.
Yet Roberts did not specifically set out to be a newswoman, either. She was working for a television station in Washington, D.C., when she married Steven Roberts, who was a journalist. (Because of her father, the wedding was attended by many prominent leaders in the Democratic Party, including then-U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson.) Afterwards, her husband's work took the couple to several different locations in the United States and around the world, so, as she told *Broadcasting and Cable*, remaining in journalism herself "was by far the easiest thing to do--go out and report the story and come back and write it--because that is portable. That is how [my career] evolved."

When Steven Roberts was required to travel to Athens, Greece, Cokie went with him--and served as the CBS News radio correspondent from that corner of the world. Her reports on a Greek coup, however, were considered sufficiently important to provide her with a nationwide television audience.

Shortly after she and her husband returned to the United States, Roberts began her stint with National Public Radio. NPR had more women in major broadcasting and managerial roles than many other radio or television news operations, partly because they could not at that time afford to pay the high salaries that male broadcasters demanded. Roberts--along with NPR colleagues Nina Totenberg and Linda Wertheimer--is thus considered a pioneer among women correspondents. She has covered political matters for most of her career--her family's wide circle of political acquaintance helping her to get more information than the average political correspondent, and the knowledge of politics she gained while growing up coming constantly to her aid.

Roberts's work for NPR led to television assignments for Public Broadcasting System shows such as *The Lawmakers* and *The MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour*. Roberts began serving as a television correspondent for *ABC News* in 1988; this in turn led to her becoming the first regular female panelist on ABC's political commentary program, *This Week*, which at the time was hosted by famed newsman David Brinkley. Cast into the fray of punditry and surrounded by Brinkley, Sam Donaldson, and George Will, Roberts elicited positive response from the show's viewers. She told a *TV Guide* interviewer that "men come up to me on the street and say, 'We like your common sense on the Brinkley show.' But women say, 'We love the way you don't let them interrupt you, and that you hand it right back to them.'" Roberts concluded for *TV Guide*: "I get the feeling that the country is full of women who've never gotten a word in edgewise when men talk about politics."

Roberts is considered by many to occupy a political middle ground between the more liberal Donaldson and the more conservative Will. Yet, though Roberts spends an ever-increasing amount of time on television--even occasionally substituting for *Nightline* host Ted Koppel--she still finds time to provide occasional reports and commentary for NPR. She has said that she likes the greater depth she is allowed to provide for a radio audience, and, as Laurie Freeman phrased it in her piece on Roberts for *Newsmakers*, "NPR has even installed a line into her home so she can even broadcast in her pajamas if need be." Freeman also reported that on one occasion, the radio audience was treated to the howling of the correspondent's basset hound in the background.
Roberts's work for NPR, according to an article in *Entertainment Weekly*, is characterized by "the kind of questions regular, unelected, unofficial people ask--people who pay their taxes and get involved in the PTA and want to know what . . . their elected representatives in Washington are doing--and how whatever . . . they're doing will affect the lives of regular people."

In 1998, Roberts's first book-length work saw print. In *We Are Our Mothers' Daughters*, Roberts discusses her experiences and her relationships with other women in order to address the subject of the various roles women play during the course of their lives. The volume is divided into chapters with headings such as "Politician," "Consumer Advocate," "Aunt," "Reporter," "Civil Rights Activist," and "Mother/Daughter." The first chapter is titled "Sister," and tells the story of Roberts's sister Barbara's struggle against cancer. It also provides readers with insight into the way Roberts sees women as a community of support for each other during times of crisis. The experience of her sister's death, Roberts writes in *We Are Our Mothers' Daughters*, "was so profound, and so profoundly weird, that it taught me a great deal about sisterhood, in all its meanings." As Brangien Davis commented in a review of *We Are Our Mothers' Daughters* for *Amazon.com*: "For Roberts, it's clear that the personal is political." Davis went on to praise the correspondent's "clean, compelling language."

With the 2000 publication of *From This Day Forward*, Roberts continued in her style of personal narrative. Written with her husband, the book uses their personal life as a springboard for larger issues of marriage, faith and family. The work is divided into sections dealing with marriage in early America, including the experiences of pioneers, slaves and immigrants. Broken marriages and blended families are studied. On a more personal note, the Robertses describe hurdles they faced when announcing their own impending wedding. Some people predicted the marriage wouldn't last, based on the couple's different religions--he's Jewish, she's Catholic. Thirty-three years later Cokie and Steve have proved the skeptics wrong.

How did they manage? In a cover story for *Life*, the authors declared their interfaith bond as unusual, but not really unique. "All marriages, really, are 'mixed' marriages," they state. "No two people are the same, particularly a man and a woman." Asked about how two different religious perspectives work under one roof, the Robertses reply: "It seems to us the key to handling any difference is mutual respect. Don't try to change each other, or ignore disagreements, but understand and accept them."

*From This Day Forward* also relates the way the couple met in college. Quoting a favorite saying of Steve's twin brother, Marc: "Choosing a mate is like being told to walk through a forest and pick up the biggest stick you can find. But you only get to pick up one stick and you never know where the forest will end. In our case it was even more complicated. [With different religions] the kind of stick each of us chose was also an issue--to ourselves and to our families. But in another sense we were following a familiar pattern, meeting and marrying young." The passage goes on to highlight the similarities, not the differences, between the Roberts and Boggs families.
As "unequivocal and unabashed boosters of marriage," described by Michele Orecklin in a *New York Times* review, the authors offer "sometimes divergent though never divisive" looks at the same events. While Orecklin termed the he said/she said style largely successful, she also found "it does occasionally border on the written equivalent of overly scripted repartee." Readers posting their views on the Barnes & Noble web site had no such reservations, declaring the work "highly recommended" and "a great book." *From This Day Forward* proved a quick and decisive success: Just two months after its release, the book was in its fourth printing. The authors boosted their book's popularity with a media blitz that included National Public Radio, the talk shows "Good Morning America," "Larry King Live," and "The View"; as well as a cross-country tour.

Roberts has won many prestigious awards in journalism, including the exceptional merit media award from the National Women's Political Caucus and the Weintal Award from Georgetown University. In addition, she has also managed to be actively involved in the lives of her two children, Lee Harriss and Rebecca Boggs Roberts. In 1992 Roberts was named Mother of the Year by the National Mother's Day Committee. Another Mother of the Year honor came in 2000, this time from the American Cancer Society.

**FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

**BOOKS**


**PERIODICALS**

- *New York Times*, March 26, 2000, review of *From This Day Forward*.

**OTHER**

- *ABCNEWS.com*, http://www.abcnews.com/ (October 4, 1998).*

**Source:** *Contemporary Authors Online*, Gale, 2002.

**Gale Database:** Contemporary Authors
Editorial Reviews

From Publishers Weekly
ABC News political commentator and NPR news analyst Roberts didn't intend this as a general history of women's lives in early America-she just wanted to collect some great "stories of the women who influenced the Founding Fathers." For while we know the names of at least some of these women (Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, Eliza Pinckney), we know little about their roles in the Revolutionary War, the writing of the Constitution, or the politics of our early republic. In rough chronological order, Roberts introduces a variety of women, mostly wives, sisters or mothers of key men, exploring how they used their wit, wealth or connections to influence the men who made policy. As high-profile players married into each other's families, as wives died in childbirth and husbands remarried, it seems as if early America-or at least its upper crust-was indeed a very small world. Roberts's style is delightfully intimate and confiding: on the debate over Mrs. Benedict Arnold's infamy, she proclaims, "Peggy was in it from the beginning." Roberts also has an ear for juicy quotes; she recounts Aaron Burr's mother, Esther, bemoaning that when talking to a man with "mean thoughts of women," her tongue "hangs pretty loose," so she "talked him quite silent." In addition to telling wonderful stories, Roberts also presents a very readable, serviceable account of politics-male and female-in early America. If only our standard history textbooks were written with such flair! 7 illus. not seen by PW.

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From School Library Journal
Adult/High School--Focusing mainly on the wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers of the Founding Fathers, this lively and engaging title chronicles the adventures and contributions of numerous women of the era between 1740 and 1797. Roberts includes a surprising amount of original writings, but uses modern language and spellings to enable readers to enjoy fully the wit and wisdom of these remarkable individuals. While their men were away serving as soldiers, statesmen, or ambassadors, the women's lives were fraught with difficulty and danger. They managed property, and raised their children and often those of deceased relatives, while trying to make their own contributions to the cause of liberty. They acted as spies, coordinated boycotts, and raised funds for the army. Through it all, they corresponded with their husbands, friends, and even like-minded women in England. Readers will enjoy seeing how many of these individuals showed their mettle when they were still in their teens. Black-and-white photographs of portraits, a small selection of recipes, and a cast of characters are included.--Kathy Tewell, Chantilly Regional Library, VA

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