

Cokie Roberts

Female Speaker:

From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Karen Jaffe:

This is Karen Jaffe, head of the Young Reader Center of the Library of Congress. Saturday, August 30th will mark the 14th year that book lovers of all ages have gathered in Washington, D.C. to celebrate the written word in the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival, which is free and open to the public, will hold evening hours for the first time ever this year in its new location, the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. Hours will be from 10:00 a.m. To 10:00 p.m. For more details visit www.loc.gov/bookfest. And now it is my pleasure to introduce author Cokie Roberts, whose latest book "Founding Mothers: Remembering the Ladies," will be featured in the Children's Pavilion at the National Book Festival. Cokie Roberts is an award winning broadcast journalist and author, who's been named by the Library of Congress a living legend. We're honored to have her participate in the National Book Festival this year. Good afternoon, Cokie.

Cokie Roberts:

Hi, how are you? Nice to be with you.

Karen Jaffe:

Very good, too. "Founding Mothers" is based on your adult book, "Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation." What made you decide to make this content for children?

Cokie Roberts:

Actually, the publishers decided it, but I was thrilled about it, because I feel very strongly that our children should know our history, period. And they know too little of it. But secondly, that they should particularly know the history of the women. Our history text books are devoid of female content. I -- in fact, this is why I've been talking to children in various parts in the country about this book. I say to them, "You know, is anything missing when you look at all those pictures from the revolution and the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution?" And the little boys will say something hysterical. But the little girls will eventually say, "Women, there's no women in them." And I would say, "Well, do you think there were women then? Because there's no evidence of it." And then they get all giggly, of course, because they then have to say that you wouldn't have men without women, and so that's embarrassing.

Karen Jaffe:

Well, that leads me to my second question about how you presented this information differently. I know one of the things had to do with your illustrations.

Cokie Roberts:

Well, the illustrator is absolutely fabulous. Diane Goode is a Caldecott Medal winner, she has done many, many, many award-winning fabulous

children's books, and I was just incredibly lucky that she had the time to devote to this book, because she did a huge amount of her own research and really struck, to me, the exact right balance between accuracy, which she had to a T, and humor and whimsy, which is very appealing to children reading it -- to grownups reading it, too. It's a delightful book to look at.

Karen Jaffe:

Absolutely. You're a mother and you're also a grandmother, and --

Cokie Roberts:

Right.

Karen Jaffe:

-- you mentioned that you've taken your grand kids to the National Book Festival, as well of course as being a presenter in your own right. What voices from your children, and probably more recently you grandchildren, helped inform you in writing a book for children?

Cokie Roberts:

I think mainly what I learned as a mother, and more recently as you say, as a grandmother, is that children hate, hate, hate to be talked down to. And why should they be? They're very smart individuals for the most part. And so, I felt very strongly that I just wanted to present these stories and not make them silly in any way, and not make them overly simple, but just tell the stories, but also to tell them in a way that I think is engaging. I try to do that for grownups as well. But for children, I think there is a tone that has a certain amount of humor to it that does get them interested.

Karen Jaffe:

You also wrote another book about mothers that was more personal, "We Are Our Mother's Daughters." So there's clearly a theme about women and mothers that one could draw from your work. How did your own mother and her important role in American history contribute to what you have written?

Cokie Roberts:

My own mother was incredibly influential in pretty much everything good I've ever done in my life. My mother Lindy Boggs was a congressional wife for 30-some years, and then -- and in that period of time was very, very involved, not only in politics in our home state of Louisiana, but also in the national political scene, as were most of the other political wives that I grew up with in the 1950s in Washington. And I saw how incredibly influential they were, how they ran everything, and -- from the political conventions to voter registration drives, to all the social service agencies in Washington, working with the African American women there, to their husbands offices and campaigns, and of course, running us kids.

And so, I knew the role that they played. And then my own mother, and after my father was killed in a plane crash, became a member of Congress herself, and served for nine terms in Congress. And then later in life, in her 80s became the United States ambassador to the Vatican. So, I saw

very up close and personal the power of women, particularly that woman, but I also saw the balancing act that women in those situations have to perform. Now that's true about most women in most situations, but it's particularly true of women in the public eye. And so it was one of the reasons that I was so interested in writing history books, was because I knew how influential and powerful the women of my mother's era were, and I figured in this unique era of our history -- the founding era -- that the women had to be at least as powerful, and I hadn't read anything about them. It was, you know, with rare, rare exceptions. And so I wanted to know what they were up to when the men were creating the country. And it turned out the only way I could find that out was to do the work myself.

Karen Jaffe:

And is your hope that sharing this part of history with young girls in particular, that they may carry that mantle forward, certainly as your mother did, and as perhaps members of your own grandchildren generation?

Cokie Roberts:

Well, I certainly hope that young girls will be inspired to be leaders as a result of anything they learn about women as leaders throughout our history, but I also hope that young boys have an appreciation for what the women did, and understand that the other half of the human race are equally involved and terribly important in the creation of our country.

Karen Jaffe:

Our last question is a fun one. It's in keeping with the theme of our book festival this year, which is Stay Up with a Good Book. Can you tell us what you've read recently that you've enjoyed staying up to read?

Cokie Roberts:

Well, I have been reading lately, almost entirely books that are research for the books that I'm writing, but when I saw that Ellen Gilchrist had a new book of short stories out, I allowed myself the -- just fun of buying it and reading it. It's called "Acts of God," and her writing is just so wonderful and so funny and so insightful that I had to stop and just have some fun and read it.

Karen Jaffe:

Thank you. And thank you for sharing that recommendation as well. We've been hearing from author Cokie Roberts, who will appear on Saturday August 30th, in the Children's Pavilion at the National Book Festival at the Washington Convention Center. Thank you, Cokie.

Cokie Roberts:

Thank you. Nice to talk to you.

Karen Jaffe:

Nice talking with you. Bye-bye.

Female Speaker:

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