



## Founding Mothers

By Cokie Roberts  
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### Introduction

"While the men were busy founding the nation, what were the women up to?" **Cokie Roberts** answers this question in **Founding Mothers**, a revealing and remarkable book that chronicles the American Revolution through the eyes of its unsung heroes.

They were wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. They were patriots, politicians, and philosophers. Though their signatures don't appear on the Declaration of Independence, their influence on the founding of the nation was as instrumental as that of the men whose names are inked in history.

From Abigail Adams and Martha Washington to lesser-known figures like Catharine Littlefield Greene and Sally Livingston Jay, Roberts unfolds the stories of our **Founding Mothers** -- the women who tended home and hearth often under dire circumstances, ran farms and businesses, fought on the front lines of battle, wrote propaganda that called a nation to arms, acted as spies, and raised money for the troops. In many instances, their political and social sentiments proved more insightful than those of the men in the Continental Congress.

In **Founding Mothers**, Roberts gives voice to women who faced an uncertain future, believed in the revolutionary concept of a democratic society, and offered a steady hand to guide the fledgling nation. She weaves together anecdotes, diary excerpts, and correspondence; draws on military records, newspaper accounts, songs, and poetry; and intersperses her own insightful commentary throughout.

In a letter to her husband, Abigail Adams pondered whether future generations would care about the personal sacrifices they and others had made on behalf of the nation. "Posterity who are to reap the blessings," she wrote, "will scarcely be able to conceive the hardships and sufferings of their ancestors." More than two hundred years after she penned these words, **Founding Mothers** makes it clear that the nation we know today would not exist without the bravery, foresight, and steadfastness of Abigail Adams and her compatriots. These are the women who raised our nation.

### Questions for Discussion

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?

### About the Author

**Cokie Roberts**, author of **We Are Our Mothers' Daughters**, is the political commentator for ABC News and serves as Senior News Analyst for National Public Radio. From 1996-2002 she and Sam Donaldson co-anchored the weekly ABC interview program *This Week*. Roberts co-authored **From This Day Forward** with her husband Steven V. Roberts, and together they write a weekly column syndicated in newspapers around the country by United Media and serve as contributing editors to *USA Weekend*.