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>> This is Matt Raymond at the Library of Congress. Each year, thousands of book lovers of all ages visit the Nation's Capital to celebrate the joys of reading and lifelong literacy at the National Book Festival, sponsored by the Library of Congress and hosted by first lady, Laura Bush. Now in its eighth year, this free event held on the National Mall, Saturday, September 27th, will spark reader's passion for learning as they interact with the nation's best selling authors, illustrators and poets. Even if you can't attend the festival in person, you can still participate on line. These pod cast interviews with well-known authors and other materials are available through the National Book Festival website at www.loc.gov/bookfest. [music] It's now my honor to talk with Emmy Award winning journalist and best selling author, Cokie Roberts. Her historical works include, "We Are Our Mother's Daughters" and "Founding Mothers, the Woman Who Raised Our Nation." Her latest book, "Ladies of Liberty, the Women Who Shaped Our Nation," continues the story of early America's most influential women, chronicling their various public and private responsibilities and detailing how in these roles they helped shape our nation. Among Ms. Robert's many honors are more than 15 honorary degrees, an appointment be George W. Bush to the President's Council on service and civic participation. And just this past April and very close to our hearts, a Library of Congress Living Legend Award, recognizing her outstanding contributions to America's diverse cultural, scientific, and social heritage. Ms. Roberts, welcome. Thank you for talking with us today.

>> Cokie Roberts: So nice to be with you.

>> What -- first of all, what is it like being named a living legend?

>> Cokie Roberts: [laughter] Well, [laughter] Well as several people commented at that ceremony, it's nice -- the living part is very nice. [laughter] But it was a great honor. There were such noted colleagues there. David McCullic and people from the world of music and art and sports. It was really very special.

>> And of course, we're delighted that you'll be joining us for the 2008 National Book Festival. Why do you think it's important to participate?

>> Cokie Roberts: The book festival is truly a remarkable event that the Library of Congress and Mrs. Bush have put together over the last few years. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it broke a hundred thousand visitors last year.

>> It sure did.

>> Cokie Roberts: And that's just -- that's just something to applaud, the notion that a hundred thousand people will show up on the National Mall to celebrate books and reading, and the teachers will come from all over the country to see what books they think will be appropriate for their students. And the parents will bring children to celebrate reading. It is really very, very special and it's part of the library's great outreach that the Librarian of Congress, Jim Billington, has been so

successful in undertaking, which is to understand that this beautiful building, here in the Nation's Capital, and it's incredibly vast treasure of books and documents and movies and records, is one thing if it's just sitting housed here, but it's another thing if the American people can get to it. And so he has made it possible for lots and lots, hundreds and thousands, it can be millions of people to have access to these treasures through events like the Book Festival, but also through the quite sophisticated and accessible website.

>> Well, we appreciate those words and what can we expect to hear from you on September 27?

>> Cokie Roberts: Oh, I'll be talking about these wonderful women. I just love these women. The founding mothers, I thought was going to be a book that covered the founding period. The women who influenced the founding fathers. And of course, we spend so much of our time in this country still talking about the founders and what they were thinking and what they intended, but we really have devoted hardly any time, attention, scholarship toward the women. And what I discovered when I started writing founding mothers, was that it would be too big a book to try to cram the entire founding period into one book. So that book stopped in 1797 with the inauguration of John Adams. Adams and Jefferson. Of course, it had the first contested election under the Constitution, and the fact that the loser accepted the consequences, meant that the American experiment would continue. So it was a good stopping place. This book, Ladies of Liberty goes from Adams to Adams. The inauguration of John Quincy Adams, which is quite literally the next generation. The end of the founding period. And the women are just so much fun to meet. So admirable, so plucky, so brave, so funny. It's just -- it's a treat for me to be able to introduce them to their descendents and to be able to talk about them.

>> And what inspired you to write these books? Is it just that there's a wealth of information about the founding fathers but sort of a derth on the founding mothers?

>> Cokie Roberts: That's certainly part of it. And you know, I've covered Congress and politics forever, [laughter] and when you do that, you do have to spend an enormous amount of time with the founders. You go back and read their debates over things like the Right to Bear Arms or religion in the public square or whatever it is. And so I felt like I got to know them awfully well. And I also have written a great deal about women in politics. The influence of women as politicians, as voters. And so I realized that I had very little knowledge about the women of that era. And I figured if I didn't know much about them, few others did since it is something that I have made something of a specialty. So when I went back to do the research, I discovered that there was a reason that you haven't read much about these women, which is that it's not easy to get to their documents and papers because people didn't honor them and preserve them the way they have the founding fathers. But it was well worth doing because, as I said, they are just terrific women.

>> Given those challenges, how did you approach your research then? Was it particularly --

>> Cokie Roberts: Well, I started right there at the Library of Congress and met with the people in the Manuscripts Division and then they helped point me to others, and I started going through the biographies of the men and checking the footnotes, and then contacting the libraries and universities and historic homes that are the repositories of these papers. But -- and historical societies. -- But even so, it was pulling teeth because in many cases, they haven't taken great care of the women's documents. And so it was very difficult. I must say, after the first book came out, after founding mothers came out, and the curators and librarians understood what I was up to they were much more cooperative and forthcoming for this book and they got excited and started trying to find things that would move the process along.

>> And how do you decide which women to focus on?

>> Cokie Roberts: Well, in large part, it was determined by the papers. I was -- I, obviously, focused on the women who were connected closely to the primary founding fathers. So Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, Adams, Monroe, Madison, and Aaron Burr, but then for the others, I really was dependent on papers and letters and journals.

>> And what, going through this process, did you find surprising about these women, or were there any misconceptions, maybe, that we as Americans have --

>> Cokie Roberts: Oh, I think are enormous misconceptions. First of all, I discovered how -- and again, in the first book because it was -- it covers the whole Revolution, how incredibly brave these women were. How left alone they were for long, long periods of time. And left to support the family as well as, of course, take care of the children and the old people because often the men weren't being paid when they were off in Philadelphia thinking great thoughts or off on diplomatic missions or at war. And so the women had to make ends meet and in many cases, they were also in great physical danger. The British were coming. And they did it with such a sense of sacrifice but also courage and belief, a faith in the country and the cause. And at one point, Abigail Adams said to John, you know, we women really are better Patriots than you men because we are suffering all the hardships and making all the sacrifices for this cause, and if we win, you will be held in high acclaim. We won't even be able to vote, so we're better Patriots [laughter] than you are. So what surprised me, I think, in that book was all of that, but also how deeply political these women were. In this book, in the following period, the early years of the 19th Century and the years of early Washington, D.C., I think what surprised me was not only how political the women were, but how they were credited for their political clout. So that, for instance, when Madison was elected the first time, his opponent, Charles Coatsworth Pickney said, I was defeated by Mr. And Mrs. Madison. I might have had a better chance had I run around Mr. Madison alone. And that was very common. The men were very aware of what the women were doing and what their vast political influence was. So I think that was quite surprising. And I think Americans have a huge misconception about what first ladies have done. They have this notion that first ladies sat around tending to the tatting until Eleanor Roosevelt, and that's just simply not the case.

Every first lady has been involved in some way politically, starting with Martha Washington, who lobbied the Congress on behalf of Veteran's benefits for Revolutionary War Veterans because she had been to camp with them every winter for eight long years of the war and she knew that they deserved their pensions.

>> Based on the knowledge that you've gained about our country's early history, are there any straight lines or tangents, I guess, that you can draw between the past and has it informed your view of current political realities?

>> Cokie Roberts: Sure. Sure. First of all, as I say, the idea that the women were so influential and I continue to see that in Washington, today. I grew up in a political family and saw the tremendous influence of political wives in the 1940s and '50s and that continues today. There are some political wives in this city who are more powerful than some elected officials. So I certainly see that. But also, I don't just deal with politics in this book. I deal with writers and educators and social reformers and settlers who also helped shape the nation and I certainly see the continuation of that. You know, the country in the early years, the 19th Century was moving west and it was exciting, and as it expanded and a lot of people were making it and it was this new, young, very exuberant place. But there were also people who were being left behind and the women understood that and they, with no political power and essentially no economic power because married women couldn't even own property, they put together the Social Service agencies that helped protect the widows and orphans and poor and hungry. And I certainly see a continuation of that today.

>> I want to shift gears a little, if we could, and talk about your own career. I think most people know that you come from a very prominent political family, both your mother and father having served as Representatives in the House for Louisiana. How did that prepare you for your career?

>> Cokie Roberts: Oh completely. I grew up so completely in the halls of Congress, my father Hale Boggs was elected to Congress before I was born and served all of my life, was lost in a plane crash in Alaska in 1972 when I was a grown woman. And then my mother, Lindy Boggs, was elected to the seat and served for nine terms. So I spent my entire life in the halls of Congress listening to political conversation, understanding the intricacies of legislation. Meeting the leaders of both parties who were the prominent people of the time and being allowed as a child to participate in conversations with them. [laughter] I look back on it now and think that, you know, they must of thought it was odd when they came to our house and these little children were around the dinner table arguing with them over things like Civil Rights, but hey, our parents thought it was just fine. [laughter] So there we were and it certainly prepared me for a career in covering politics in Congress and for arguing with men who think that they know more than me. [laughter]

>> I think, obviously, journalism and writing books, similar, but I think in many ways, very different pursuits, is there one that's more rewarding to you than the other?

>> Cokie Roberts: Well, I guess writing books is more rewarding. It's so much harder, particularly these history books. They are really, really, really hard work. But I don't think I could write them if I did not have my journalistic background. You get into very difficult political weeds in these books, and being able to sort through them and know how to explain the politics and history the way that I do in a newspaper column or radio piece or a television appearance, is very, very useful when it comes to writing these books.

>> And I -- sort of on the flip side, how does being an author, in particular, one who does such tremendous research, does that make you a better journalist as well?

>> Cokie Roberts: Oh, absolutely because people say things that are just wrong all the time. You know? Nobody ever investigated the personal lives of candidates before. Baloney. [laughter] You know? It started with George and Martha Washington. And has gone on ever since. So -- and it's never been such a scurrilous campaign. Give me a break. The -- Dolly Madison was accused of being overly sexed and unsexing her husband and the public press wrote that she was indiscreet with a variety of men. I mean, all kinds of really, really nasty stuff. And, you know, to know all of that gives you a much better perspective and sense of proportion looking at today's politics.

>> Now I don't want to get too overtly political, but I think I would be remiss if I didn't ask you about your outlook on the current political season. I think, by any measure, it's certainly been a historical year. What's your assessment, and how does that compare to past years and past campaigns?

>> Cokie Roberts: Well, I mean, often people do say about campaigns, well, there's never been anything like this before and they're wrong. This year, they're right. We have, I think, a wonderful sense of the new America in this campaign. On the Democratic side, a young candidate who is of mixed race, African American and white, who grew up mainly on the island of Hawaii, one of our newer states and is, you know, completely, as he says, different looking from the people on the dollar bills. And on the Republican side, a woman who, again, represents one of our newer states, Alaska, called The Last Frontier. A mother of a group of children. Her husband is of the -- is also is part Eskimo. I mean, this is, this is the multicultural country that we now are, and I think that having candidates who represent much more of what America is all about is very exciting and it is historic.

>> What advice would you give, I think, particularly to young women who want to follow in your footsteps?

>> Cokie Roberts: Well, I think, it mainly is, you know, go get a good liberal arts education so you know something; but also, you know, I, unfortunately, you still have to work harder and be better than the guys, but I always joke. That's not hard. [laughter]

>> Well, cookie Roberts, we appreciate your time. Before I let you go, I have to ask what's next for you? Are there any new books in the works?

>> Cokie Roberts: Well, I have a revised edition updated of *We Are Our Mother's Daughters* coming out next spring and then we'll see. I'm getting kind of interested in the -- in Sarah Polk and we'll see what I can dig up about her.

>> Well, cokey Roberts, once again, thank you so much for talking with us today.

>> Cokie Roberts: Lovely to be with you and I can't wait for the Book Festival.

>> And again, the latest book, *Ladies of Liberty, the Women Who Shaped Our Nation* and you can hear more from Cokie Roberts at the National Book Festival Saturday, September 27th on the National Mall from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The event, as always, free and open to the public. For more details and a complete list of participating authors, visit www.loc.gov/bookfest. From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., this is Matt Raymond. Thank you for listening.

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