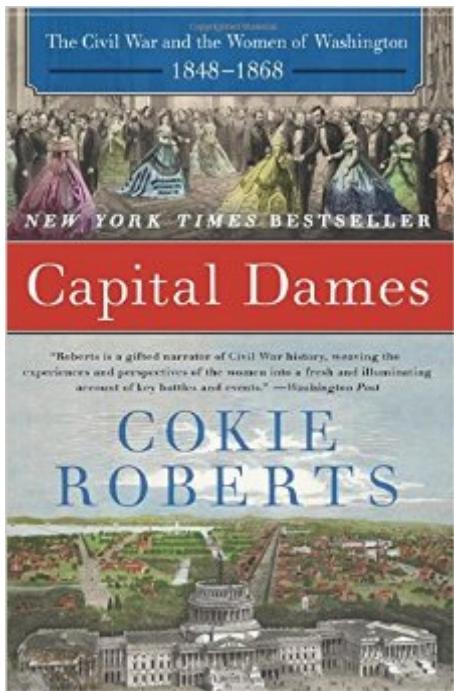


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Capital Dames: The Civil War And The Women Of Washington, 1848-1868



Synopsis

In this engrossing and informative companion to her New York Times bestsellers *Founding Mothers* and *Ladies of Liberty*, Cokie Roberts marks the sesquicentennial of the Civil War by offering a riveting look at Washington, D.C. and the experiences, influence, and contributions of its women during this momentous period of American history. With the outbreak of the Civil War, the small, social Southern town of Washington, D.C. found itself caught between warring sides in a four-year battle that would determine the future of the United States. After the declaration of secession, many fascinating Southern women left the city, leaving their friends—such as Adele Cutts Douglas and Elizabeth Blair Lee—to grapple with questions of safety and sanitation as the capital was transformed into an immense Union army camp and later a hospital. With their husbands, brothers, and fathers marching off to war, either on the battlefield or in the halls of Congress, the women of Washington joined the cause as well. And more women went to the Capital City to enlist as nurses, supply organizers, relief workers, and journalists. Many risked their lives making munitions in a highly flammable arsenal, toiled at the Treasury Department printing greenbacks to finance the war, and plied their needlework skills at The Navy Yard—once the sole province of men—to sew canvas gunpowder bags for the troops. Cokie Roberts chronicles these women's increasing independence, their political empowerment, their indispensable role in keeping the Union unified through the war, and in helping heal it once the fighting was done. She concludes that the war not only changed Washington, it also forever changed the place of women. Sifting through newspaper articles, government records, and private letters and diaries—many never before published—Roberts brings the war-torn capital into focus through the lives of its formidable women.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

CAPITAL DAMES presents an exciting narrative of U.S. events in Washington, D.C., around the time of the Civil War. Even though the focus of the book is Washington women, the author does a good job of reminding the reader of various important events at that time. I had forgotten, for instance, that Abraham Lincoln had actually been defeated at one time in a run for the US Senate. I found the historical references especially interesting. I am reminded of how young are nation really is - especially the western part of America. For example, in describing a sea voyage to San Francisco, the author describes that city as only having "three or four regularly built houses," and that there were only sixteen women in all of San Francisco society. Cokie describes some events which are similarly hard to imagine today. In the famous debates between Douglas and Lincoln, the author notes that "The combatants remained cordial," with Abe and Douglas's wife, Adele "even enjoying a train ride together on the way from one debate to the next." It's hard to imagine the contenders for U.S. president being chummy, with the wife of one taking a train ride with her husband's opponent. (However, I am reminded of two young congressmen--JFK and Richard Nixon, sharing a train car when they were young politicians.) Another historical curiosity mentioned is the infamous raid of John Brown on Harpers Ferry. Probably most readers do not realize that the army officer who captured Brown was none other than Robert E Lee--a colonel at the time. The author sets the stage for the reader by describing the panicky and hostile environment in Washington around the time Lincoln was elected president.

Posted first to Blog Critics as Book Review: 'Capital Dames,' A Glance at the Women of the Civil War by Cokie Roberts. The Civil War was a time in history where women were finding their own allegiances, a time of war and treason, heartache and treachery. The Years of 1848-1968 were defining years both for the emancipation of slavery but for the women who chose their own involvement in working for their beliefs and that of their husbands and families. In Capital Dames by Cokie Roberts we are taken into the parlors and the Whitehouse during a time when unrest was at its height. We are introduced to the women behind the great names in the histories of the colonies, and educated as to the real lives that were led by the men and their leading ladies. Whether they were the communicators, the spies or the informers, each had a strong belief in what they were doing. We meet the First Lady of the White House, as well as the belles of both the north and the south. There is an amazing array of information gleaned from writing, diaries and news of the time

and Cokie has taken the opportunity to shine a light on the women behind the history of the Civil war. What I enjoyed about this particular telling is that Roberts tells the history as it unfolds, not just the woman, but also the men as they too play their part in history. While the emphasis is on the woman, it is the history and the making of it that seems to be the guide. I have always been interested in history and yet found myself in awe by some of the happenings. Many I did not know, and do not recall coming up in history lessons in school.

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