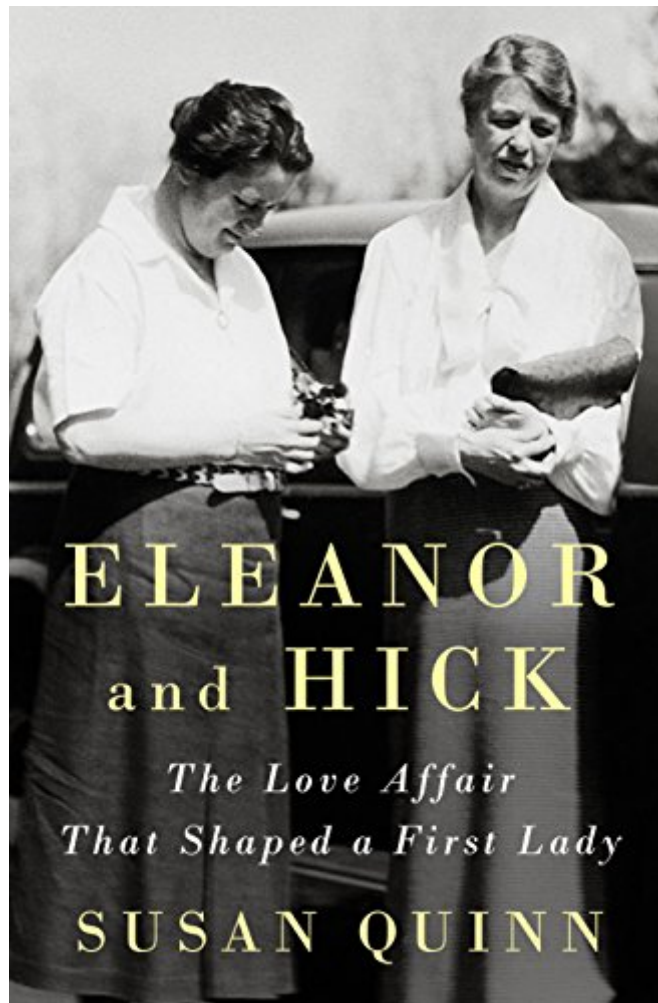




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Eleanor And Hick: The Love Affair That Shaped A First Lady



Synopsis

Soon to be made into a TV series! A warm, intimate account of the love between Eleanor Roosevelt and reporter Lorena Hickok—a relationship that, over more than three decades, transformed both women's lives and empowered them to play significant roles in one of the most tumultuous periods in American history. In 1932, as her husband assumed the presidency, Eleanor Roosevelt entered the claustrophobic, duty-bound existence of the First Lady with dread. By that time, she had put her deep disappointment in her marriage behind her and developed an independent life—now threatened by the public role she would be forced to play. A lifeline came to her in the form of a feisty campaign reporter for the Associated Press: Lorena Hickok. Over the next thirty years, until Eleanor's death, the two women carried on an extraordinary relationship: They were, at different points, lovers, confidantes, professional advisors, and caring friends. They couldn't have been more different. Eleanor had been raised in one of the nation's most powerful political families and was introduced to society as a debutante before marrying her distant cousin, Franklin. Hick, as she was known, had grown up poor in rural South Dakota and worked as a servant girl after she escaped an abusive home, eventually becoming one of the most respected reporters at the AP. Her admiration drew the buttoned-up Eleanor out of her shell, and the two quickly fell in love. For the next thirteen years, Hick had her own room at the White House, next door to the First Lady. These fiercely compassionate women inspired each other to right the wrongs of the turbulent era in which they lived. During the Depression, Hick reported from the nation's poorest areas for the WPA, and Eleanor used these reports to lobby her husband for New Deal programs. Hick encouraged Eleanor to turn their frequent letters into her popular and long-lasting syndicated column "My Day," and to befriend the female journalists who became her champions. When Eleanor's tenure as First Lady ended with FDR's death, Hick pushed her to continue to use her popularity for good—advice Eleanor took by leading the UN's postwar Human Rights Commission. At every turn, the bond these women shared was grounded in their determination to better their troubled world. Deeply researched and told with great warmth, Eleanor and Hick is a vivid portrait of love and a revealing look at how an unlikely romance influenced some of the most consequential years in American history.

Book Information

File Size: 13208 KB

Print Length: 414 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 159420540X

Publisher: Penguin Press (September 27, 2016)

Publication Date: September 27, 2016

Sold by: Â Â Penguin Group (USA) LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01CFBJZLQ

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #48,551 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #36

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Customer Reviews

As an 83 year old, I am part of a homophobic generation, and as such, I initially felt uncomfortable with this book's allegation of Eleanor Roosevelt's being a lesbian. However, I gained a better understanding of Eleanor Roosevelt, the woman and of her lover, reporter, Lorena Hickock. Through this book, I relived my early years, especially the WWII years. The book depicts the relationship between the two women with tenderness and understanding and this indeed impressed me. I found this to be a very easy and fast read, one that I've gained understanding from....not only understanding of the relationship, but also understanding of just what was going on through those years in which I was too young to have understanding of what was going on in the world. And so I recommend this book with only slight reservation. The author does wander a bit. However, that's not really bad. This is a good read for all those interested in the history of the Roosevelt years. I no longer feel disturbed by the author's allegations. I've gained a new perspective and I do strongly recommend this book.

In recent years, Eleanor Roosevelt's (1884 - 1962) bisexuality has been made public. For a number of years, she and her partner Lorena Hickock (1893 - 1968) developed a deep and close personal relationship. Both women had survived childhood abuse. Both chafed at the androcentric,

chauvinistic world in which they lived. Both were drawn to each other. This is a very fast paced book and to the author's credit, no apologies are made for the fact that these two women loved one another. Another good thing about this book is that it shows how two women can successfully find love and it helps dispel homophobia, which sadly was the order of the day when these women met one another. The tone of acceptance can be found throughout the book and that is what makes it such a good read. It is well known that FDR had a mistress for many years. It is also well known that these two distant cousins who married did not have a marriage made in heaven. Their son Elliott Roosevelt chronicles this in his books about Eleanor and Franklin. Eleanor and Lorena wrote each other loving missives over the years which support the fact that they loved each other intimately. To author Susan Quinn's credit she presents this loving pairing in a straightforward and matter of fact manner, much as Hick covered the news during her career as a news reporter. These women in some ways appear to be obverse sides of a coin. Eleanor was the classic "poor little rich girl" whose society mother was disinterested in her. The then future First Lady grew up in an emotionally bankrupt house and had feelings of inferiority because of her appearance. Hick was born into poverty and became motherless at age 14. She went to work at a very early age and earned her diploma. For many years she enjoyed success as a news reporter despite an unsuccessful stint in college. She and Eleanor met when she was covering Franklin Roosevelt's first campaign for the 1932 election. It was then that the women developed feelings for one another which segued into intimacy. The only real complaint I have is that as other U.S. reviewers have noted is the shifting timelines. As the sands of time shift appears to be the mantra of this book.

I've always enjoyed presidential history, both men and the women who were behind the president. If you have read FDR or FDR and Eleanor, the Roosevelt years, you may already know a lot of the material covered in this book. However, this time the emphasis is on the incredible women, Eleanor and Hick, who as First Lady and a news journalist, really shaped a lot of policy changes and made women see different choices were possible. It is well researched, but does not verify the extent of their relationship. It made no difference to me, I didn't need to know any extent of any physical intimacy for the period of time they were in each other's lives before events separated them. The bond of intimacy was very much one of supportive women, social causes, probably more intellectual than deeply physical. People used to be journal and letter writers. Eleanor needed people; Hicks seemed to need Eleanor more than anything besides her career. They were both misfits in their world with a great deal of emotional baggage from childhood of being unloved and not the social debutante. Eleanor came from a wealthy class; Hicks did not. Eleanor had difficulty feeling worthy

and giving love (not that she didn't love) but FDR's polio and the strong influence of her mother-in-law, his need for the spotlight and mistress, often pushed Eleanor aside, except for being a worthy political helpmate. There is no doubt that polio and a political career deeply affected their marriage.

A lot of the author's interpretation of history that was a little simplistic. However it was good that she emphasized Lorena Hicks' work in the Roosevelt administration that I was unaware of. She was out in the field a lot observing and reporting back regarding the dreadful living conditions she observed and helped implement some of Roosevelt's policies in that regard. Her loving relationship with Eleanor of course was the main theme, even though that changed over the years. Would have liked to have seen more direct quotes from the letters they exchanged.

The author has done a good job putting together lots of primary and secondary sources. I appreciated particularly the history of early women's involvement in the Democratic party. In addition, I enjoyed the author's word painting of the complexity of both of the main characters. I am looking forward to discussing this book in my book club.

This is a story of two women who had a significant impact on forty years of American life, the 30's, 40's, 50's and 60's of the past century. The story of how they found and loved each other is unique; more understandable now than it would have been when it was happening. The views of two strong and intelligent women integrated into the culture and political life of a nation during the crucial years of the Depression and the second World War is compelling for the involvement of women in politics and the press.

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