



Robin Gerber

Eleanor vs. Ike
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Robin Gerber, a political columnist and commentator, spent more than a decade working on Capitol Hill, both as a congressional staff member and as a government affairs director for two major national organizations. Robin combined her love and knowledge of history and politics to write *Eleanor vs. Ike*. The following interview provides a window into the inspiration behind this book.

Q: What made you want to write *Eleanor vs. Ike*?

A: After I published the advice book, *Leadership the Eleanor Roosevelt Way*, I began giving keynote talks about the leadership lessons that grow from the story of Eleanor's life. At one such talk, an audience member said, "You make Eleanor sound so perfect. Didn't she ever do anything wrong?" No one had ever asked me that before, yet the answer seemed to pop immediately into my head. "Yes," I answered. "She should have run for President." I knew that Eleanor had been encouraged to run, and

after that audience encounter, I began to look more deeply into why she had not. The more I investigated the more convinced I became that she had made a mistake, or miscalculation. Her reasons, which I include in various places in the book, were unconvincing, even, I believe, to herself. If she had it to do again, I thought to myself, I bet she'd take the plunge. Then one day in 2006, as I read yet another story about Hillary's possible candidacy, I realized Eleanor could run after all – at least as a construct of my imagination. I got really excited when I realized that 1952 was the most logical year for her to run, and there were huge parallels between then and 2008. I think I always had in mind that the story could have a parable quality, because I was quite certain that Hillary would run.

Q: Did you enjoy writing the book?

A: I loved writing this book. It's my first fiction, so I had no idea what I was in for. I had a huge learning curve. But even at the hardest moments, when I was terrified that my plot lines wouldn't work out or felt completely at sea on how to stage a scene, I felt exhilarated. I was born in 1952, so learning so much about that year, from music, television and movies to cars and clothes and slang terms, was fascinating in a very personal way. As a history lover, I enjoyed going back to episodes I thought I knew well, like the Nixon secret fund, or the Alger Hiss case, and learning the details I never knew or had forgotten. It was often hard not to get off on historical tangents, just because they were so astonishing, or weird or serendipitous. Some of the "out-takes" that I've put on my website are hard cuts I made because, although the history was amazing, it didn't advance the story.

Q: What do you think *Eleanor vs. Ike* can teach women today?

A: My complete answer to this question is in my book, *Leadership the Eleanor Roosevelt Way*. The short answer is encapsulated in the revelation Eleanor has at the end of the novel, when she reflects on how she went from a scared, loveless, insecure young woman to a candidate for President. "We shape our lives and we shape ourselves," she said, capturing one of the most important values in her life, that everyone must take personal responsibility.

Eleanor believed in action. "It's as easy to plan as it is to dream," she said. Whatever our pursuits, women today must take responsibility for discovering and pursuing their passion with fearless energy, because Eleanor also said, "You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

Q: If Eleanor Roosevelt were running for president today, what do you think would happen?

A: She would win in a landslide! There is a deep hunger in our country for a leader of conviction, integrity, demonstrated compassion and authentic humanity. These were the hallmarks of Eleanor's leadership and her life, and people were deeply drawn to her because of it. I've lost count of the people who have said to me, "if only Eleanor were here today." Amen.