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Lessons from History: *The Remarkable Leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt and Why It Matters Today (Part 2)*

— **Emilio Iodice, Rome, Italy**

[In Part 1, Iodice examined the salient markers denoting the leadership style of Eleanor Roosevelt. He described her unabashed way of communicating her opinions and observations, arguing that women needed to stand their own and infuse themselves into every aspect of life – especially with respect to having a political voice].

ER then made the same argument to the public, when she accepted an offer for a monthly column from *Woman's Home Companion*. Announcing that she would donate her monthly one-thousand-dollar fee to charity, ER then proceeded to ask her readers to help her establish “a clearinghouse, a discussion room” for “the particular problems which puzzle you or sadden you” and to share “how you are adjusting yourself to new conditions in this amazing changing world.” Entitling the article “I Want You to Write to Me,” ER reinforced the request throughout the piece. “Do not hesitate,” she wrote, “to write to me even if your views clash with what you believe to be my views.” Only a free exchange of ideas and discussion of problems would help her “learn of experiences which may be helpful to others.” By January 1934, 300,000 Americans had responded to this request.



Eleanor Roosevelt at SheSheShe Camp for Unemployed Women in Bear Mountain, New York, August 7th, 1933, Courtesy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

Thanks to her influence, women were appointed to important jobs in the administration. She pushed for relief for working women and working mothers, advocated for youth programs, championed civil rights, fought the poll tax, struggled to get blacks included in government programs and supported the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. She visited black miners in West Virginia and talked about living conditions with them. Eleanor made front-page news with her anti-lynching views. FDR refused to publicly support legislation to fight lynching. When the Senate filibustered the bill to defeat it, Eleanor would not leave the Senate gallery, no matter how long it took.

She worked to clear slums and created “planned communities” that were environmentally, socially and economically sound, places often called, “greenbelt towns.” The administration organized living areas for displaced workers, like the one in Arthurdale, West Virginia, where Eleanor took an active interest and visited frequently. She supported the Federal Arts Program and defended funding against congressional attacks. She battled for workers’ rights and legislation to promote organized labor. Her energy was boundless. She traveled across America as FDR’s “eyes and ears.” She reported to him on the effectiveness of government programs and the conditions she found in homes and communities, everywhere. Eleanor went into the coal mines. She visited the homes of slum-dwellers, sharecroppers, and farmers displaced by the Dust Bowl. She was personally engaged and

came in closer contact with the problems of the Great Depression than any member of the administration.

What she learned, she wrote and spoke about, testified before Congress and shared on the radio. She began her column, “My Day,” in 1936, talking about her work and travels and what she discovered, whom she met and what she learned. Eleanor was in touch with the people of the country. She cared and they knew it. She brought their petitions to Franklin. She urged him to take action. Rexford Tugwell, one of FDR’s advisers explained:

No one who ever saw Eleanor Roosevelt sit down facing her husband, and, holding his eye firmly, say to him, ‘Franklin, I think you should...’ or, ‘Franklin, surely you will not...’ will ever forget the experience... It would be impossible to say how often and to what extent American governmental processes have been turned in new directions because of her determination.



Eleanor Roosevelt at Works Progress Administration site in Des Moines, Iowa, June 8th, 1936, Courtesy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library

Eleanor worked hard during the second campaign. It was 1936. Her friend, Louis Howe, was dead. He and Eleanor were among the few not intimidated by Franklin Roosevelt and his strong personality. She helped James Farley run the re-election bid. She insisted it be based on principles of the New Deal. Again, she toiled behind the scenes. She confronted her husband on issues he did not want to deal with and which his advisers were reluctant to bring to his attention.

Eleanor received understated and direct criticism of her activities to support minorities as the 1936 reelection campaign approached. She defended her outreach efforts.

Allida Black described this in the Eleanor Roosevelt Paper’s Project:

When *The New Yorker* published the famous cartoon of miners awaiting her visit, Mrs. Roosevelt aggressively defended her outreach to minorities and the poor in a lengthy article for *The Saturday Evening Post*. Directly she attacked those who mocked her interest. “In strange and subtle ways,” she began, “it was indicated to me that I should feel ashamed of that cartoon and that there was certainly something the matter with a woman who wanted to see so much and know so much.” She refused to be so limited, she responded to those “blind” critics who refused to be interested in anything “outside their own four walls.”

FDR won by a huge margin. He defeated Alf Landon by six million popular votes and took



Eleanor Roosevelt at dedication of South Side Chicago Art Center, May 7th, 1941, Courtesy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library

523 electoral votes to Landon's 8. In the second term, Eleanor became more outspoken in the area of civil rights. She felt that fighting racism was the true test of American democracy. She said, "We have never been willing to face this problem, to line it up with the basic, underlying beliefs in Democracy... no one can claim that... the Negroes of this country are free."

She attended NAACP and National Urban League conventions, visited the all-Black Howard University in Washington, DC and took photos surrounded with students, fought for rights of poor black farmers and held a conference for black women at the White House. At a Birmingham,

Alabama conference to support the plight of sharecroppers, who were mainly black, she refused to obey police officers who insisted that she not sit with blacks.

She would not allow one of America's most prominent organizations, which she was a member of, to prohibit a woman of color from singing on their stage.

Marian Anderson had performed in concerts throughout Europe. In the United States, she would hold seventy, in 1938 alone. It would be a remarkable achievement, for any entertainer.

It was 1935. She was asked to sing at the White House. A year later, Anderson sang at a benefit for Howard University, in Washington, D.C. It was successful. Each year thereafter, she held an event that attracted larger crowds, so much so, that in January 1939, the University called on the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) to allow them to use the historic Constitution Hall, over Easter Weekend. In 1930, the DAR turned down African American singer/ actor Paul Robeson. Blacks, in fact, were seated in a special, segregated part of the theatre.



Marian Anderson sings at the Lincoln Memorial, April 9th, 1939, Courtesy of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library

The University felt that Anderson's worldwide fame would be enough for the DAR to allow the concert to be held. Constitution Hall was the largest auditorium in the city. It could accommodate 4,000 people. The auditorium was the center of the capital's music and performing arts programs. The DAR refused.

The press put pressure on the organization. Famous artists and personalities, and politicians, supported the Marian Anderson Citizens Committee (MACC). The DAR was adamant. They continued to prohibit Anderson's use of Constitution Hall. Eleanor Roosevelt used moral persuasion to try to change their position. She presented a medal to Anderson

at the national convention of the NAACP and invited her to sing for the King and Queen of England, at the White House. None of this had any effect on the DAR.

On February 26th, 1939, she sent the following letter to the President of the society:

My Dear Mrs. Henry M. Robert, Jr.:

I am afraid that I have never been a very useful member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, so I know it will make very little difference to you whether I resign, or whether I continue to be a member of your organization.

However, I am in complete disagreement with the attitude taken in refusing Constitution Hall to a great artist. You have set an example which seems to me unfortunate, and I feel obliged to send in to you my resignation. You had an opportunity to lead in an enlightened way and it seems to me that your organization has failed.

I realize that many people will not agree with me but feeling as I do this seems to me the only proper procedure to follow.

Very sincerely yours,

Eleanor Roosevelt

Her resignation cast a national spotlight on the issue of racism. It became a watershed moment in the history of the fight for racial equality.

Eleanor worked behind the scenes to hold the concert on the Mall. On March 30th, 1939, FDR approved. She played down her association with the event and did not attend. She wanted to avoid drawing attention away from this important moment. At the same time, she lobbied to have it broadcast nationwide. It was held on April 9th, 1939, Easter Sunday. "In this great auditorium under the sky, all of us are free... genius knows no color," said Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes, as he introduced the world-famous contralto. She stood in front of the statue of Abraham Lincoln and gazed at the scene.

Seventy-five thousand people, from all walks of life, color and creed, attended. Hundreds of thousands heard it on the radio. She began with *America*. She sang the *Ave Maria*, Negro spirituals and *My Country 'Tis of Thee*. With tears in her eyes, Marian Anderson ended with *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*. It was an unforgettable episode in American history. She said, "I could see that my significance as an individual was small in this affair. I had become, whether I like it or not, a symbol, representing my people."

Marian Anderson and Eleanor Roosevelt were friends for the rest of their lives. They remained icons in the struggle for equal rights for all Americans.

Take on Responsibility

Throughout her life, Eleanor Roosevelt took on more and more responsibility. She saw causes as her own. She felt a personal obligation to act.

The fight to find a cure for polio is an example. The money that Eleanor and Franklin secured for Warm Springs and the rehabilitation for polio victims was not enough. In 1934, they began holding annual parties to celebrate the President's birthday and generate funds for research to defeat infantile paralysis. The first was held in 1934.

Over four thousand communities across America held celebrations. More than a million dollars went to the Warm Springs Foundation. Each year, this amount was raised at Presidential birthday parties, yet it was not enough to help the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, created by FDR in 1938.

Actor, singer, comedian Eddie Cantor helped Eleanor and Franklin raise money via the radio. He coined it the *March of Dimes*.

Soon, millions of ten-cent pieces, dollars, and other donations deluged the White House. In 1945, the Foundation raised nearly nineteen million dollars. Ten years later, Dr. Jonas Salk discovered the first polio vaccine. By the next decade, the disease was in retreat, across the world. It was due to the work of Eleanor, Franklin, and millions who gave to the *March of Dimes*.

The Second World War would pose another occasion for Eleanor to show her sense of responsibility. On December 7th, 1941, shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, while her husband and the Congress prepared for war, she said this to the wives, mothers, sweethearts, and sisters of America during her radio program:

“I should like to say just a word to the women in the country tonight. I have a boy at sea on a destroyer, for all I know he may be on his way to the Pacific. Two of my children are in coast cities on the Pacific. Many of you all over the country have boys in the services who will now be called upon to go into action. You have friends and families in what has suddenly become a danger zone. You cannot escape anxiety. You cannot escape a clutch of fear at your heart and yet I hope that the certainty of what we have to meet will make you rise above these fears.



Entertainer Eddie Cantor and a model in a 1946 March of Dimes Publicity shot. Courtesy, the Library of Congress



Eleanor Roosevelt awards Purple Heart in New Caledonia (September 15, 1943), Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

We must go about our daily business more determined than ever to do the ordinary things as well as we can and when we find a way to do anything more in our communities to help others, to build morale, to give a feeling of security, we must do it. Whatever is asked of us I am sure we can accomplish it. We are the free and unconquerable people of the United States of America.

To the young people of the nation, I must speak a word tonight. You are going to have a great opportunity. There will be high moments in which your strength and your ability will be tested. I have faith in you. I feel as though I was standing upon a rock and that rock is my faith in my fellow citizens.”

Eleanor actively engaged and supported women in the war effort. She encouraged them to work in defense industries and helped get the administration to supply childcare and fair pay. FDR was convinced by her to create the Fair Employment Practices Commission, that prohibited racial discrimination in industries with federal contracts. She pushed to give equal treatment to blacks in the military and allow black units to engage in combat. She asked the public to take on meaningful volunteer work for the war effort.

Perhaps her most memorable work was showing care and gratitude to those in battle. She traveled across the oceans to reach them. Admiral Halsey reported about her trip to New Zealand:

“Here is what [Eleanor Roosevelt] did in twelve hours: she inspected two Navy hospitals, took a boat to an officer’s rest home and had lunch there, returned and inspected an Army hospital, reviewed the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion (her son Jimmy had been its executive officer), made a speech at a service club, attended a reception, and was guest of honor at a dinner given by General Harmon...When I say that she inspected those hospitals, I don’t mean that she shook hands with the chief medical officer, glanced into a sun room and left. I mean that she went into every ward, stopped at every bed, and spoke to every patient: What was his name? How did he feel? Was there anything he needed? Could she take a message home for him? I marveled at her hardihood, both physical and mental, she walked for miles, and she saw patients who were grievously and gruesomely wounded.

But I marveled most at their expressions as she leaned over them. It was a sight I will never forget.”



Sullivan Brothers, Joseph, Francis, Albert, Madison and George, February 14, 1942, U.S. Naval Historical Center, Photo #: NH 52362

She corresponded with the troops, helped boost their morale, wrote to their parents and loved ones, and re-wrote FDR’s letters to families of those killed in battle. When a mother in Waterloo, Iowa contacted the Bureau of Naval Personnel about her five sons serving on the same ship, the President wrote:

“The knowledge that your five gallant sons are missing in action against the enemy inspires me to write you this personal message. I

realize there is little I can say to assuage your grief... I am sure we all take heart in the knowledge that they fought side by side. As one of your sons wrote, ‘We will make a team together that can’t be beat.’ It is this spirit in the end must triumph... Such acts of faith and fortitude in the face of tragedy convinces me of the indomitable spirit and will of our people. I send you my deepest sympathy in your hour of trial and pray that in Almighty God you will find the comfort and help that only he can bring.”

On April 4th, 1943, six months after the loss of her sons, Alleeta Sullivan, christened a new destroyer, the *USS The Sullivans*. Fifty-three years later, the *USS Roosevelt* would be launched to honor Franklin and Eleanor. The Secretary of the Navy, John H. Dalton said at the christening, “As Commander-in-Chief during the most trying period of our nation’s history, he maintained a clear sense of the mission at hand. Upon FDR’s election as President in 1932, Eleanor became a powerful voice on issues from youth employment to civil rights. Eleanor traveled around the world, visiting sick and injured servicemen, fostering good will among the Allies, and boosting the morale of U.S. Military personnel overseas.”

Even before the war broke out, Eleanor worked to help those escaping from Hitler’s Germany enter the United States. She faced opposition from those unwilling to change the immigration laws. She aided refugees from the Spanish Civil War and Jews suffering Nazi oppression after “The Night of the Broken Glass,” (Kristallnacht) in November 1938 when stores owned by Jews were destroyed in Germany and Austria.

She supported the Emergency Rescue Committee, the US Committee for the Care of European Children, and the Children's Crusade for Children. Eleanor's work to save refugees attracted publicity and, as a result, hundreds of petitions were sent to her. She was able to help many cases. Eleanor lobbied for the *Child Refugee Bill*. It would have permitted ten thousand Jewish children a year for two years to enter the United States from Germany. Congress



Eleanor and Franklin and their thirteen grandchildren, 1945, Courtesy, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

turned down the bill. She struggled to save as many as possible. She was not able to achieve all that she wished. She said:

“One of the things that trouble me is that when people are in trouble, whether it’s the Dust Bowl or the miners – whoever it is, and I see the need for help, the first people to come forward to help are the Jews. Now in these terrible days, when they need help, why don’t they come?”

While the war raged on, Eleanor was the voice of Americans still suffering from the Depression. She insisted that the New Deal programs continue to maintain the pace of social justice and secure the gains achieved for workers, women, and minorities. She had less influence in FDR’s fourth run for the White House. She disagreed with his campaign manager and supported Henry Wallace to stay on as Vice President, while the party leaders wanted a change. They selected Harry Truman, from Missouri.



Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Courtesy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

Publicly, she was nonpartisan, but behind the scenes, she pushed for domestic issues to stay high on the agenda for the new administration. She urged Franklin to campaign as the race became tighter. In the last days of the effort, he made numerous appearances, despite clearly being in ill health. Following the re-election, FDR went to Yalta to meet with Churchill and Stalin, to end the war. It was a journey of thousands of miles. Exhausted and frail, he reported his findings to Congress, for the first time

sitting down. A few weeks later, on April 12th, 1945, Franklin Delano Roosevelt died in Warm Springs, Georgia, from a cerebral hemorrhage. Lucy Mercer was there. Eleanor was not.

Never Give Up and Stay Committed

She recovered quickly from the loss of her husband. Within a week of handling funeral arrangements, she responded to condolences, packed possessions and documents, held a tea for the women's press corps and left the White House. She returned to her apartment in Washington Square, in New York City. She told reporters, "The story is over." It was not.

Party leaders wanted her to run for the US Senate or for Governor of New York, or become US Secretary of Labor. Eleanor explored the best way to continue the ideals of the New Deal, which embodied her principles of social justice. She would not give up her commitment to labor, women, minorities, and the disadvantaged. She knew a new President would not be as dedicated to these ideals as FDR. She wrestled with how to use her influence, experience, time, and enormous network of contacts to continue progress on her agenda.

Her political skills came to fore. She knew how to keep her name in the forefront. It would be by staying the course and communicating. Shortly after leaving the White House, she published her memoirs, *This I Remember*. She continued her *My Day* columns, and wrote articles and gave interviews and speeches. She supported party fundraisers, and actively campaigned for national, state and local politicians committed to her ideals. She hosted events to commemorate the achievements of the New Deal.

President Truman appointed her to the U.S. delegation to the United Nations. She surprised delegates with her keen political acumen as she oversaw the complex passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was accepted unanimously. She was respected by delegates from nearly all countries, including the Russians. Decades after its enactment, the UNDHR is still the cornerstone of the international human rights movement. It serves as a benchmark as to how nations should behave towards their people.



With President Truman in Hyde Park, New York, April 12, 1946, Courtesy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

Eleanor was assigned to the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee of the United Nations. The Committee took up the thorny issue of displaced people. After the war, millions were afraid to return to their countries of origin, due to their political opinions.

The Soviet Union viewed them as traitors and collaborators. They wanted to bring them to justice. Eleanor argued against this and contended that they should not be forced to return. Eventually, the UN agreed on resettlement, instead of repatriation. This one act saved countless lives.

She was not afraid to disagree with her own government. When President Truman withdrew his support for a partition plan for Palestine, she criticized him and took her views to her *My Day* readers. She insisted that America live up to its international promises, in this case to help create the State of Israel. She supported independence movements from colonial rule and the plight of those behind the Iron Curtain. In the seven years that Eleanor served as a UN delegate, she traveled everywhere to support the institution as the world's "one

hope” for peace. She investigated and reported about political, economic, and social conditions around the globe.

Eleanor journeyed through the U.S. as a volunteer for the American Association of the United Nations, to advocate for the UN.

Her constant concern was making America a land of justice and democracy for all. She was not satisfied with the approach of her party, in the post-war period. Harry Truman did not have her endorsement when he ran in 1948. She wanted the administration to focus on



Eleanor Roosevelt with President John Kennedy, 1962, Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

education, job creation, and health care. She preached that economic security and America’s new role as guardian of the free world went hand in hand. She argued for a Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice and making the Fair Employment Practices Commission a permanent government agency. Eleanor cautioned President Truman and other party leaders not to copy the conservative agenda of the Republicans to gain votes. She felt that they would not win by abandoning the principles of the New Deal.

After Republican Dwight Eisenhower assumed office in 1952, she reinforced her commitment to racial justice and tolerance for political dissent. Eleanor was on the board of the NAACP and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE). She was close to civil rights leaders. She felt American racism firsthand by visiting internment facilities, chairing investigations of race riots, and fighting segregation. There were threats against her life.

The Ku Klux Klan placed a bounty on the head of Eleanor Roosevelt.

She would not change her views or moderate her positions, even in the face of violence. She criticized President Eisenhower and his lack of support for African Americans. On August 23, 1958, she wrote a column in *My Day* about the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. She demanded that the President personally step in, “Instead of sending troops, I wish President Eisenhower would go down to Little Rock and lead the colored children into the school.”

She actively supported the struggle of civil rights leaders and opposed American communism. Eleanor was one of the first to fight Senator Joseph McCarthy in his witch-hunt of leftists. She felt Richard Nixon was one of the most dangerous political leaders in America. At the same time, she was not convinced that John Kennedy had the liberal credentials to be President. She endorsed him after he made concessions on civil rights. Following his victory, she pressured him to appoint women to political positions for which they were qualified. She testified before Congress to push for equal pay for equal work.

In her last two years of life, Eleanor Roosevelt suffered from tuberculosis and aplastic anemia. She was in constant pain. Even so, she continued to speak out for world peace, women’s rights, and racial justice and supported the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. She also accepted appointment to the Peace Corps Advisory Board. She completed her last book, *Tomorrow is Now*, in the Fall of 1962. In it, she argues for political, social, and racial justice. “Staying aloof is not a solution,” she said, “but cowardly evasion.”

Eleanor Roosevelt's concern for justice involved nearly all areas of human affairs. Her last *My Day* column of September 26th, 1962 was about crime. She described how the New York City police prevented a murder, by staking out the home of the potential victim. They killed the assassin before he could commit another crime. It was discovered that he was a serial killer. A boy of 15, she explained, was arrested for one of the murders. He was freed after the grand jury refused to indict him because his fingerprints did not match. She wrote:

"To have sent one innocent boy to his death would have been a crime which the later apprehension of the killer would hardly have wiped out. Our pride in the police's great achievement must therefore be somewhat muted in the hope that they will not forget their mistakes along with their success."

On November 7th, 1962, the "First Lady of the World," as President Truman described her, died in New York City. She was seventy-eight. She was buried next to her husband, in Hyde Park.

On October 10th, 2000, President William Jefferson Clinton proclaimed Eleanor Roosevelt Day. His message included the following words to sum up the life of this extraordinary leader:

"Whether working for the United Nations, the NAACP, the Girl Scouts, the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, or the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Eleanor Roosevelt devoted her boundless energy to creating a world defined by respect for and dedication to democratic values. She was a woman ahead of her time, and her achievements transcend her generation. As we seek to chart a steady course for America, democracy, and human rights in this new century, we need only look to her values, character, and accomplishments to provide us with an unflinching moral compass."

Six decades after her death, the voice of Eleanor Roosevelt would be as meaningful now as when she was championing the rights of minorities and the oppressed. Today, she would have spoken out for women abused sexually in her own country and around the world. In a village in Afghanistan, for instance, she would have taken up the cause of an eighteen-year-old girl tormented, tortured, and raped by the Afghan Local Police.

I can imagine her saying this: "The world cannot stand by and watch this form of injustice continue without feeling outrage and disgust. I call on the authorities, both national and international, to see that those responsible pay for their crimes and that this heinous act not be tolerated again, anywhere. I also demand that the victim in this case and other women who have been so brutally mistreated be given the love, compassion, understanding and assistance they deserve." She would have pursued this mission with vigor and determination. Let us hope that a new generation takes up her torch to lead us as she did without fear and with love (*New York Times*, Saturday, June 2nd, 2012, Rape Case, in Public, Cites Abuse by Armed Groups in Afghanistan, pages A1 and A9).

Who was Eleanor Roosevelt? She was a champion of freedom, equality, democracy and causes worth fighting for. She may have portrayed herself best by the daily wartime prayer she recited each night as described by Joseph P. Lash in *Eleanor and Franklin*:

*Dear Lord, Lest I continue
My complacent way,
Help me to remember that somewhere, Somehow out there
A man died for me today. As long as there be war,
I then must
Ask and answer
Am I worth dying for?*

Achievements

As for accomplishments, I just did what I had to do as things came along.
– Eleanor Roosevelt

Pursuit of Humanitarian Goals: Eleanor Roosevelt fought for social justice. The issues of inequality, poverty, and unemployment were the matters of her era. She used her intellectual and leadership qualities and the media to bring serious problems affecting the democratic values of our nation to the forefront. She used the rights at the foundation of American history, the ones contained in our Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, as the basis of her arguments to support racial justice, health care, preservation of the environment, women’s rights, and the rights of labor and minorities. As William vanden Heuvel explained: In supporting Eleanor Roosevelt’s nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1962, Henry Kissinger, then a professor at Harvard, wrote that she “was one of the great human beings of our time. She stood for peace and international understanding, not only as intellectual proposition, but as a way of life. She was a symbol of compassion in a world of increasing righteousness.” The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations is a fitting symbol of the humanitarian objectives she struggled for the people of her country and all countries.

Reinventing the Role of First Lady: No wife of a President of the United States, before or after her, took on the same burden of responsibility to promote causes that others would not take up. She showed enormous courage. It was this bravery that redefined the character of the job of spouse of the President of the United States. Eleanor Roosevelt cast the position to be active, outspoken, honest, and impartial, and that of a champion of the common citizen. She set standards that no first lady since has met.

Supporting Civil Rights: Her support of civil rights movements helped bring the issue to the attention of those in power. She supported federal intervention in defending the rights of African Americans and assuring equal treatment before the law. She gave a voice to those who sacrificed themselves in protests and sit-ins, and those who faced police violence and the terror of lynch mobs.

A Model for Women: Eleanor Roosevelt blazed a trail for women to study, learn, and achieve. Her legacy is of women taking responsibility for the condition of the world and having the right and duty to work to improve it.

The Meaning in Her Words

The following quotes are courtesy of the George Washington University, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project:

Courage

- *Courage is more exhilarating than fear and in the long run it is easier. We do not have to become heroes overnight. Just a step at a time, meeting each thing that comes up, seeing it is not as dreadful as it appeared, discovering we have the strength to stare it down. You Learn by Living (1960), 41.*
- *To become brave is a daily chore. We need to develop the attitude to face each situation with courage. In this way it will be part and parcel of our life.*

Democracy

- *If we are honest with ourselves today, we will acknowledge that the ideal of Democracy has never failed, but that we haven’t carried it out, and in our lack of faith we have debased the human being who must have a chance to live if Democracy is to be successful. The Moral Basis of Democracy (1940).*

- *The ideals of freedom and equality are to be practiced from the ground up. Our people need to have faith in our ideals and espouse them from the local level to the central government. We have not reached a true democratic society and need to continue to pursue it for all citizens.*
- *Somehow we must be able to show people that democracy is not about words, but action. India and the Awakening East (1953), 227.*
- *Participation and fulfilling the principles of freedom are the keys to creating a society that has at its heart the ideals of democracy. In implementing the concepts of liberty, they become reality.*
- *To me, the democratic system represents man's best and brightest hope of self-fulfillment, of a life rich in promise and free from fear; the one hope, perhaps, for the complete development of the whole man. But I know, and learn more clearly every day, that we cannot keep our system strong and free by neglect, by taking it for granted, by giving it our second-best attention. We must be prepared, like the suitor in *The Merchant of Venice*—and, I might point out, the successful suitor—to give and hazard all we have. The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt (1961), 401.*
- *Democracy is so precious that we must be willing to sacrifice to keep it. Like our founding fathers, who were prepared to give 'their lives and sacred fortunes' to attain liberty, we should be ready to risk what we have to maintain freedom.*
- *It seems to me that America's objective today should be to try to make herself the best possible mirror of democracy that she can. The people of the world can see what happens here. They watch us to see what we are going to do and how well we can do it. We are giving them the only possible picture of democracy that we can: the picture as it works in actual practice. This is the only way other peoples can see for themselves how it works; and can determine for themselves whether this thing is good in itself, whether it is better than they have, better than what other political and economic systems offer them. The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt (1961), 401.*
- *Democracy begins at home. Our nation has a responsibility to set the example. As the leader of free people, we must first and foremost secure the ideals of liberty and justice in our society before preaching it or forcing it on others. The best way is for us to be the real symbol of freedom, by making sure we practice it everywhere.*
- *A respect for the rights of other people to determine their forms of government and their economy will not weaken our democracy. It will inevitably strengthen it. One of the first things we must get rid of is the idea that democracy is tantamount to capitalism. Tomorrow Is Now (1963), 45.*
- *We need to be open-minded to deal with other nations and respect their differences. We cannot expect them to adopt our ways and forms of governance or even our economic systems. There is a misunderstanding in the world about freedom and capitalism. They are not necessarily the same thing.*
- *The function of democratic living is not to lower standards but to raise those that have been too low. Tomorrow Is Now (1963), 59.*
- *The goal of a democracy must be to improve quality of life via principles of liberty and equality. Freedom must lead to social and economic justice.*
- *In the final analysis, a democratic government represents the sum total of the courage and the integrity of its individuals. It cannot be better than they are. Tomorrow Is Now (1963), 119-120.*

- *A democracy reflects its people. Their image is represented in the institutions and individuals who govern them.*
- *Democracy requires both discipline and hard work. It is not easy for individuals to govern themselves. It is one thing to gain freedom, but no one can give you the right to self-government. This you must earn for yourself by long discipline. Tomorrow Is Now (1963), 125.*
- *Freedom is not a given. It cannot be a gift. It must be acquired with sacrifice and must be maintained and nourished.*

Faith

- *The important thing is neither your nationality nor the religion you professed, but how your faith translated itself in your life. "My Day," September 16, 1943.*
- *No one should be judged because of their faith or nationality. No matter what religious beliefs one has, the essential thing is how they conduct themselves and the integrity and ethics that are part of their daily life.*
- *Person after person has said to me in these last few days that this new world, we face terrifies them. I can understand how that feeling would arise unless one believes that men are capable of greatness beyond their past achievements. The time now calls for mankind to rise to great heights. We must have faith, or we die. "My Day," August 10, 1945.*
- *Following a cataclysmic event, like the end of the Second World War, mankind needs to have faith in the ability to rise from the ashes to achieve a better day. Hope in the future and confidence in us is always needed.*
- *We must show by our behavior that we believe in equality and justice and that our religion teaches faith and love and charity to our fellow men. Here is where each of us has a job to do that must be done at home, because we can lose the battle on the soil of the United States just as surely as we can lose it in any one of the countries of the world. India and the Awakening East (1953), 228.*
- *Our actions are what count. We must act what we profess. We cannot be people who claim to love our fellow human beings and at the same time we fail to practice social justice and equality.*

Fear

- *My greatest fear has always been that I would be afraid-afraid physically or mentally or morally, and allow myself to be influenced by fear instead of by my honest convictions. If You Ask Me (1946), 112.*
- *Fear can prevent us from acting in the proper way. It can control us and dominate our lives. Fighting fear with courage is a constant battle that must be fought if we are to live by our beliefs.*
- *The encouraging thing is that every time you meet a situation, though you may think at the time it is an impossibility and you go through the tortures of the damned, once you have met it and lived through it you find that forever after you are freer than you ever were before. If you can live through that, you can live through anything. You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you stop to look fear in the face.*
- *You can say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'*
- *The danger lies in refusing to face the fear, in not daring to come to grips with it. If you fail anywhere along the line, it will take away your confidence. You must make*

yourself succeed every time. You must do the thing you think you cannot do. You Learn by Living (1960), 29-30.

- *Fear is a challenge. We need to deal with it directly. Apprehension, worry and dread of the unknown can only be handled head on. Once we have overcome a situation, we can build on it and use it as a tool for the next event, the next confrontation.*

Government

- *Our trouble is that we do not demand enough of the people who represent us. We are responsible for their activities. We must spur them to more imagination and enterprise in making a push into the unknown; we must make clear that we intend to have responsible and courageous leadership. Tomorrow Is Now (1963), 124-125.*
- *We need to set a high standard for elected officials. It is up to us. We must elect competent and courageous leaders. The duty is ours. We must be demanding of them and force them to act responsibly.*

History

- *One thing I believe profoundly: We make our own history. The course of history is directed by the choices we make and our choices grow out of the ideas, the beliefs, the values, the dreams of the people. It is not so much the powerful leaders that determine our destiny as the much more powerful influence of the combined voices of the people themselves. Tomorrow Is Now (1963), 4.*
- *In a democracy, it is the people who must have a profound sense of responsibility. Their destiny is in their hands. Their ideals, values and future are determined by the collective judgment and influence of those who are governed. We cannot blame our leaders. We chose them.*

Hope

- *Surely, in the light of history, it is more intelligent to hope rather than to fear, to try rather than not to try. For one thing we know beyond all doubt: Nothing has ever been achieved by the person who says, 'It can't be done.' You Learn by Living (1960).*
- *Determination, optimism and trust in us, is the key to achievement. Nothing great was ever attained without these qualities.*

Justice

- *Justice cannot be for one side alone but must be for both.*
- *The concept of social justice requires the active, willing, and good faith participation of government and those who are governed. People must insist on fairness and equality and elect leaders who deliver on these promises.*

Peace

- *We will have to want peace, want it enough to pay for it, pay for it in our own behavior and in material ways. We will have to want it enough to overcome our lethargy and go out and find all those in other countries who want it as much as we do. This Troubled World (1938), 46.*
- *Peace will not be built, however, by people with bitterness in their hearts. "My Day," January 7, 1944.*
- *For it isn't enough to talk of peace. One must believe it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it. Broadcast. Voice of America, November 11, 1951.*
- *The quest for peace cannot be had with war. Eleanor Roosevelt saw the results from the First and Second World Wars. Peace requires sacrifice and the willingness to*

face challenges and compromises, to achieve it. It demands constant effort. Her hope was that the United Nations would assure this.

Religion

- *Religion to me is simply the conviction that all human beings must hold some belief in a power greater than themselves, and that whatever their religious belief may be, it must move them to live better in this world and to approach whatever the future holds with serenity. "If You Ask Me," Ladies' Home Journal 58 (October 1941), 133.*
- *I doubt that anyone does not really believe in God. People may think they don't have any belief, but you will usually find that there is a belief in something beyond himself. In any case, I would not judge a man's character by his belief or unbelief. I would judge his character by his deeds; and no matter what he said about his beliefs, his behavior would soon show whether he was a man of good character or bad. "The Wisdom of Eleanor Roosevelt," McCall Publication, (1963), 112.*
- *Faith must be translated into deeds. Preaching spirituality, goodness and love must become reality. Our lives should be examples of our faith in action.*

Vision

- *...My firm conviction [is] that it is the force of ideas rather than the impact of material things that made us a great nation. It is my conviction, too, that only the power of ideas, of enduring values, can keep us a great nation. For where there is not vision the people perish. Tomorrow Is Now (1963), 6.*
- *Eleanor Roosevelt embodied the values of the Bill of Rights. Our nation and our people and we as individuals must embrace them as our own and live up to the aspirations that are the foundation of our republic.*

Women

- *Women must become more conscious of themselves as women and of their ability to function as a group. At the same time they must try to wipe from men's consciousness the need to consider them as a group or as women in their everyday activities, especially as workers in industry or the professions.*

Women in Politics

- *No, I have never wanted to be a man. I have often wanted to be more effective as a woman, but I have never felt that trousers would do the trick! If You Ask Me (1940).*
- *Every now and then I am reminded that even though the need for being a feminist is gradually disappearing in this country, we haven't quite reached the millennium. "My Day," February 22, 1945.*
- *... [Y]ou will be amused that when Mr. Dulles said goodbye to me this morning he said 'I feel I must tell you that when you were appointed I thought it terrible and now I think your work here has been fine!' So—against the odds the women inch forward, but I'm rather old to be carrying on the fight. Eleanor Roosevelt to Joseph Lash, February 13, 1946, Joseph P. Lash Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.*
- *In numbers there is strength, and we in America must help the women of the world. "My Day," October 22, 1946.*
- *We have an obligation to turn the concept of helping women to assisting "persons." Someday, when all women reach equality and enjoy the fairness of democracy and social justice, we will not need to single out their cause. This is a crusade each of us must strive for, no matter what our sex.*

Leadership Lessons

Take Responsibility: Eleanor Roosevelt felt responsible for the world and its problems. She believed that each of us had a duty to share in making matters better, especially for those who had less than us. She stressed that affluence brought responsibility, and so did understanding. Once one is aware of a social need, they have the obligation to do something about it.

Have No Fear: Fear paralyzes us into inaction, she believed. Each person must overcome those fears that hold us back from using our talents to help make the world a better place for all human beings.

Learn All You Can: Education was fundamental to her. Life-long learning and the love of instruction and culture and stimulating curiosity were essential to appreciating the value and beauty of life, and to give us the tools to aid others.

Speak Out: She spoke out and never held her tongue, even in the face of danger. She understood diplomacy, but felt that her duty was always to bring issues to the forefront. She used her position, through moral persuasion, to force those in power to act.

Cultivate Strong Values: The foundation from which each of us struggles to help improve society must come from ethical and moral values. We need to develop them. Eleanor used the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence as her moral compass.

Use All the Power at Your Disposal: She was not elected to office. Her role had no designated political power. Even so, she felt her situation allowed her a pulpit to explain her views and, at the same time, put her in a position of accountability.

Be an Example for Others: She knew she would be held as an example and felt each of us were also examples, no matter what our station in life. Women, in particular, needed models to emulate, in order to assert themselves and have a meaningful role in society.

Teach Others: Eleanor Roosevelt was, first and foremost, a teacher. Her messages were about informing others, enlightening them, and stressing the value of facts and information.

Never Give Up: In the face of threats, disappointment, falsehoods, Eleanor Roosevelt never stopped pursuing her goals. She never gave up. She inspired others to continue, no matter how perilous the course.

Network: She cultivated contacts, relationships, and a network of those committed to the same ideals, throughout her life. She relied on them, for instance, for the March of Dimes, to raise money to fight polio, to save the lives of Jews persecuted by the Nazis, to support the plight of African Americans, and to help women seeking political office.

Life Lessons

Live Up to Your Ideals: We need to be true to ourselves, always. During the war, for example, the government urged everyone to have at least one meatless day a week. The Roosevelts devoted Thursdays to scrambled eggs. They knew they could not ask the country to sacrifice, if they would not be the first to do so.

Maintain a Child-Like Quality of Simplicity: Eleanor Roosevelt celebrated her triumphs and successes often, with the quality of a child. She appreciated the simple things and found joy in nature, friendships, and the victory of right over wrong.

Learning is Forever: Eleanor Roosevelt II, wrote this about her aunt:

In her sixties, Aunt Eleanor learned to dive to prove a point to Marshall Tito, leader of communist Yugoslavia. Tito had built a swimming pool on the Dalmatian coast and invited

my aunt for a swim. She said she noticed that the Marshall was not able to dive, and she decided then to emphasize her political arguments with him by proving that women in a democracy, even elderly women, had the freedom not only to study whatever intellectual subject they chose but also could learn any sport. She was tired of the endless remarks about soft, capitalist Americans who did nothing but watch television. 'So you see Ellie, I decided to learn to dive, and when you tell me that I have succeeded, I'm going to have a good time writing to the Marshall and telling him that this soft, capitalist American is over sixty and she has just learned to dive. Americans, you see, are not afraid to dive into the unknown. They can surprise the world when they want to.'

Control Your Fears: We worry. We are often gripped by the unexpected and the unknown. It paralyzes us into inaction. Eleanor Roosevelt managed her fears. Whether it was criticism from her family as a child, ridicule from her peers about her progressive views, intimidation to reveal her dossier compiled by the FBI or threats against her life from the Ku Klux Klan, Eleanor Roosevelt dominated her fears with courage and common sense and action.

Enjoy Life: Eleanor enjoyed life to the fullest. She was grateful for her blessings and encouraged others to value the miracle of life itself. She was tolerant and loved mankind.

Forgive Others: Eleanor's niece tells this story which reveals the character, the kindness and the soul of her aunt:

One day when Aunt Eleanor was in New York, she took a shortcut in the middle of a block, stepping into the street from between two parked cars. A taxi driver, who had just delivered a fare, backed out into the street, hit Aunt Eleanor, and knocked her down. She got right up again but the taxi driver was instantly out of his cab and beside her. I can imagine his profuse apology. 'Oh, Mrs. Roosevelt, I'm so sorry. Are you all right? Can I take you somewhere? Do you need to see a doctor? At least let me take you home.' But Aunt Eleanor was most concerned about the driver. 'You must leave right now!' she directed him. 'You might be fired for this! Just go, get in your cab and go right now!' . . . She told me she felt relieved when he drove off, and when she was sure that no one would notice, she allowed herself to limp to her apartment.

Conclusion

The amazing life and example of Eleanor Roosevelt is as meaningful today as it was during her time. We need her courage, resilience, and tenacity to be a special example for women and girls as they seek to rid themselves of the shackles of oppression, injustice, and fear.

At this time in history, as we confront the great social challenges in the world and we need to make decisions, it is time to ask, "What would Eleanor do?"

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About the Author



Emilio Iodice

Emilio Iodice is an Educator, Diplomat, Senior Executive, Best-Selling Author, and Presidential Historian. He was the son of immigrants. Iodice received his BS from Fordham University, his MBA from the City University of New York, and was named to Beta Gamma Sigma – the honorary society of top business graduates. He conducted doctoral work at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

Iodice spent over four decades as a senior executive, an educator, and a university administrator including serving as a key official for several US Administrations, reaching the top ranks of the civil service and the US diplomatic corps.

He was among the most decorated officers in history with a Gold Medal for Heroism, a Gold Medal and Silver Medal, nominations for the Bronze Medal, and commendations and citations. He was Minister in key missions abroad and was named to the list of future Ambassadors. He was knighted by the King of Italy and received Medals of Honor from Spain and Italy. At age 33, he was named by the President to the Senior Executive Service as the youngest career public official to reach this distinction.

Before joining Loyola University Chicago, as its Director and Vice President of the University, he was Vice President of Lucent Technologies in charge of global operations. He taught at Trinity College and, after nearly a decade at Loyola, was awarded the title of Director Emeritus and Professor of Leadership.

Among his best-selling books are: *A Kid from Philadelphia*, *Mario Lanza: The Voice of the Poets*, *Profiles in Leadership from Caesar to Modern Times*; *Sisters*; *Future Shock 2.0*, *The Dragon Brief 2020*, and *Reflections, Stories of Love, Leadership, Courage and Passion*. In 2017, his book: *When Courage was the Essence of Leadership, Lessons from History* was published and in 2019, the new edition was launched. Three new

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Iodice was recently named a Senator of the Royal Family of Italy. He is Director of the Scientific Committee of the Italy USA Foundation, a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Values-Based Leadership*, and sits on the Board of Trustees of several educational institutions. He resides in Rome, Italy.

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