Eleanor Roosevelt:
The Silent Minority

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Historical Paper

Senior Division

2,495
World War II was one of, if not the worst, event that mankind has brought upon themselves. In order to avoid another devastating conflict the United Nations was created.¹ This delegation was formed to protect the rights and keep the best interests of every nation in mind.² Many people felt that the United Nations needed a leader in it, therefore President Truman appointed Eleanor Roosevelt to the United Nations. There were many people that had encountered unfair treatment and Eleanor Roosevelt fought to help them through her life, she became a widely respected person and she explored her role in the United Nations to help everyone. When she was elected into the United Nations, Eleanor exchanged messages and ideas with many people and made the rights of the silent minority known. Eleanor became the person that people wanted to be around. She had a heart big enough for everyone,³ Eleanor Roosevelt became involved in the lives of everyone around her, which is why she became the First Lady of the World. Unlike first ladies before her, by the end of her life, Eleanor had become one of the most esteemed women in history.⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt encountered people who had been experiencing injustice from 1933 all the way until her death, she explored her important role in the United Nations to bring light to these injustices and exchanged thoughts and ideas with many people to get the Universal Declaration of Human Rights passed to help the silent minorities for decades to come.

When President Truman came into office he appointed Eleanor to the United Nations, he believed that this position would be good not only for her, but also for the world. The men in the United Nations did not know what to do with Eleanor Roosevelt. They decided to assign her to

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¹"The United Nations Is Born."
²"Why Was the United Nations Established?"
³Douglas, Helen Gahagan. *The Eleanor Roosevelt We Remember.*
⁴"Mrs. Roosevelt, First Lady 12 Years, Often Called 'World's Most Admired Woman'" *Eleanor Roosevelt Obituary.*
Committee Three, which dealt with humanitarian, cultural, and economic questions. The male delegates believed that since this was one of the lesser Committees that she could do no harm here, but they greatly underestimated Mrs. Roosevelt.

Eleanor Roosevelt saw that millions of people around the world did not have the rights that are given to them by birth. Eleanor knew that many people were being oppressed by the color of their skin, their gender, what they do for a living, and if they pray to God or not. She saw all of this and knew it was not right, she knew that all men were created equal just like it says in the Declaration of Independence and in the charter of the United Nations. When President Truman appointed her to the United Nations as the first woman U.S. Delegate, Roosevelt knew she had to do something to change how the oppressed people were being treated. The United Nations, in Eleanor’s own words, was “the best hope we have for peace.” Eleanor also knew that since she was the only women that she had to be incredible, in an interview, Eleanor told about the need to be amazing, “I knew that as the only woman, I'd better be better than anybody else.” Eleanor talked about how she worked hard to know everything and not be left out. “I knew that if I in any way failed, it would not be just my failure; it would be the failure of all women. There would never be another woman on the delegation,” Eleanor was well aware of how crucial her role was at this point, not just for her, but for all the silent minorities.

Eleanor began to help people. A small team was put together which began the construction of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR is a document that depicts the rights and freedoms for every person; a way to ensure equal treatment

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5 "1945 - 1953 - ELEANOR ROOSEVELT AND THE UNITED NATIONS."
6 Truman, Harry S. Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt. 21 Dec. 1945. TS.
7 “The Eleanor Roosevelt We Remember” Douglas, Helen Gahagan
8 An Interview On Eleanor
9 An Interview On Eleanor
10 Roosevelt, Eleanor. "MY DAY by Eleanor Roosevelt."
for all people. Before starting this endeavor Eleanor had no legal discipline or an expert’s understanding of how meetings would go according to parliamentary strategy. In spite of these obstacles, Eleanor conveyed her talents that she had obtained when she was a political activist and the comprehension of the significance of freedom earned from the profound role she played in the battle of her own particular nation, fighting for financial equity, ladies’ rights, and social equality.\textsuperscript{11} Eleanor pushed not only herself, but also her team hard, sometimes working over 18 hour days, in order to make sure that everything was included in this document and nothing was left out.\textsuperscript{12} In Eleanor’s autobiography, \textit{On My Own}, she wrote about pushing her team and expecting success, “This was a rather grueling schedule for everybody and within a few days I was being denounced-mostly in fun, I hope-as a merciless slave driver.”\textsuperscript{13} Mrs. Roosevelt had everyone working night and day to finish the document on time and to make sure that everyone was able to have their rights clarified. Roosevelt made sure that the declaration was in simple language in order to ensure everyone, no matter their stance in society, would be able to read this document.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1945, the Human Rights Commission was established by the United Nations.\textsuperscript{15} Its job was to construct a contract that held all of the basic principles of humanity.\textsuperscript{16} The United Nation’s hoped that this contract was a document that every person would be able to accept and agree upon.

Eleanor Roosevelt and a team of highly esteemed people from across the globe were working to create the UDHR. This document would state the rights and freedoms of every man,
woman, and child of every race, religion, and job. One major obstacle was that the Russians had different ideas for the word “freedom.” They wanted a short clause after every article saying that each country was allowed to choose whether or not they wanted to follow that right.\(^\text{17}\) The Russians also wanted the incorporation of economic and social rights, arguing that these rights were no less important than the political rights that were being included.\(^\text{18}\) After several meetings with delegates from around the world Eleanor was able to convince the State Department to include the economic rights, in attempt to appease the Soviet Union.\(^\text{19}\) In spite of Eleanor’s efforts to meet the Russians half way, they were still resisting the creation of the document. The refusal was partly due to the fact that the Soviet leaders were anxious about having the written declaration of political rights being an advantage to the West. That the UDHR would give America and other countries a way to interfere with the Soviet’s personal business.\(^\text{20}\) As a last effort to prevent the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from being passed, the Soviets began to make lengthy and aggressive speeches about the racial discrimination and unemployment in the U.S.\(^\text{21}\) One of the Soviet delegates began to talk about the troubling quandary with the black Americans. In response to this statement, Eleanor suggested that the Soviets could bring a team in to observe the segregation in the United States, so long as the United States could do the same for the Soviet Union.\(^\text{22}\) Eleanor also said that the Soviet’s failure to honor human rights had now become a hindrance in the fight for world peace.\(^\text{23}\) Despite the Soviet Union’s efforts to thwart the work that the commission was doing Eleanor never gave up.

\(^{17}\) "UW-Eau Claire Proxy Login."
\(^{19}\) "UW-Eau Claire Proxy Login."
\(^{20}\) "Regional Perspectives on Human Rights: The USSR and Russia, Part One."
\(^{21}\) "Regional Perspectives on Human Rights: The USSR and Russia, Part One."
\(^{22}\) "Eleanor Roosevelt's Legacy: Human Rights." \textit{The New York Times}
\(^{23}\) "UW-Eau Claire Proxy Login."
One way that Eleanor would not let the Soviet delegates affect her is that she would allow the delegates to talk until they lost their voices and then Eleanor would continue on with what the commission had been talking about. The *New York Times* pointed out that “The Russians have met their match with Mrs. Roosevelt.” Eleanor continued her work pushing both herself and her team to the limit. One of the delegates from Panama even pleaded for Eleanor to recall that the delegates in the United Nations have rights as well. The delegates had little to no time for themselves, they only worked on the declaration.

Eleanor Roosevelt addressed part of the United Nations called the General Assembly, in Paris before the Assembly would vote on the Adoption of the Declaration of Human Rights. In her speech Eleanor declared, “We stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind. This declaration may well become the international Magna Carta for all men everywhere.”

The Magna Carta assures the rights, such as the right to a fair trial, to everyone living in the British Empire. Eleanor is told the General Assembly that the UDHR would defend and outline the rights of every person on the planet, the social standing people hold in society does not matter.

On December 10, 1948 the United Nations General Assembly held a meeting in Paris and made a radical decision that changed the lives of millions of people, and still continues to change lives today. On Dec. 10, 1948 the United Nations adopted the UDHR. The UDHR is a

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25 “Eleanor Roosevelt. Nav_midleft.”
26 Roosevelt, Eleanor. *On My Own*. New York:
27 “UW-Eau Claire Proxy Login.”
29 “Statement to the United Nations' General Assembly on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”
30 “What Is Magna Carta?”
31 “UW-Eau Claire Proxy Login.”
document that states the rights and freedoms of every person on the planet no matter their race, sex, job, or religion. It is widely recognized that everyone is entitled to these rights. There were 48 nations that voted to adopt it 8 nations withheld their votes, and not a single country voted against the document. This was all because of the incredible work that Eleanor did on the UDHR and without her the delegates would not have worked as hard, or as long, as they did. After the General Assembly voted to adopt the declaration, the president of the assembly declared that there was only one person who was able to fully accept credit for this feat. “I refer, of course,” he had said, “to Mrs. Roosevelt.” The ambassador of Lebanon, Charles Malik made a statement about Eleanor, he stated, “I do not see how without her presence we could have accomplished what we actually did accomplish.” The UDHR became a standard that every country is bound to, a standard for how their people should be treated. Today the UDHR widely recognizes that those living on this planet are entitled to these certain inalienable rights, an idea made famous by John Lock and an idea made a reality by Eleanor Roosevelt. Upon reflection of her work that she had done in and for the United Nations, Eleanor Roosevelt declared, “During my years at the UN, it was my work on the Human Rights Commission that I considered my most important task.” Eleanor realized how important the UDHR was and how big of an impact that it would have on the lives of many people yet to come.

Even though Eleanor was pleased with her role in creating the UDHR she was still a pragmatist. She knew that the words in this document were not self-enforcing. Eleanor used to tell the United Nations delegates that the hard part of all of this was "actually living and

32“Regional Perspectives on Human Rights: The USSR and Russia, Part One.”
33“UW-Eau Claire Proxy Login.” UW-Eau Claire.
34“UW-Eau Claire Proxy Login.”
37“UW-Eau Claire Proxy Login.”
working in our countries for freedom and justice for each human being.”

Eleanor knew that people were not going to follow what the declaration said automatically. The people would need help, and one way to help them is by the delegates of the United Nations living the words themselves. She traveled to explore the living and working conditions of the people in the country and she observed the relief projects. Due to these actions, she is deemed as one of the most influential women in America, if not the world. According to a Gallup Poll: “When the Gallup Poll first asked respondents in the fall of 1948 to name the woman, in any part of the world, whom they admired the most, Eleanor topped the list.”

Eleanor had gained respect across the world, not just in America, for the duty she served. Eleanor had been able to influence thousands, millions, by simply helping people.

Eleanor and the team’s creation of the UDHR has been used in several different cases of oppression such as Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Nelson Mandela thought of the declaration as a starting point for country building and regulating. He grasped the colossal vision of the optimists who, at the end of World War II, recognized that they had an obligation to fix all of the inequalities throughout the world, one of whom was Eleanor Roosevelt. During his 1998 address to the General Assembly Nelson Mandela spoke of the UDHR which had inspired him during his incarceration on Robben Island. Mandela noted that for anyone that had to fight for their freedom “the Universal Declaration of Human Rights served as the vindication of the justice of our cause. At the same time, it constituted a challenge to us that our freedom,

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38 “UW-Eau Claire Proxy Login.”
39 “Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman.” Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman
41 "Nelson Mandela's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”
42 “Nelson Mandela's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”
43 “Mandela Inspired by Declaration of Human Rights.”
once achieved, should be dedicated to the implementation of the perspectives contained in the Declaration.”

Mandel was telling the members of the United Nations that while the UDHR was the reason for many people having freedom again, while this also poses a challenge for everyone that it helps. The challenge is to uphold the aspects of the UDHR.

In addition, Eleanor served in the United Nations for several years as an advocate for the rights of those whose voices had been lost. She was an advocate of the needs of the poor, and all those whose voices had been forcibly taken away from them - the silent minority. She spoke up for the little people that could not speak for themselves because their voices had been ripped from them. Eleanor wanted every person to be respected and have their rights and freedoms, no matter where they are from. When Eleanor died, President John F. Kennedy described Eleanor Roosevelt as “one of the great ladies in the history of this country.” Eleanor continued until her death, in 1962 to achieve the application of all of the rights and freedoms that were stated in the Declaration of Human Rights.

Eleanor Roosevelt may have first come to the light of the world as the wife of the president of the United States, but it was as a promoter for human rights and social justice where Eleanor found her true purpose in life. She had already gained international admiration as the first lady, but it was for her work on the UDHR that would be considered her greatest legacy. Mrs. Roosevelt had become one of the most loved and admired women in all of history.

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44 “Nelson Mandela's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”
45 “Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.”
46 “Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.”
48 Kennedy, John F. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy. Washington, D.C.: 
49 “Eleanor Roosevelt, Nav_midleft.”
50 “Mrs. Roosevelt, First Lady 12 Years, Often Called 'World's Most Admired Woman'”
There were many people experiencing injustice that Eleanor encountered throughout her life and the position that Eleanor held in the United Nations allowed her to exchange conversations with many people to get the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in order to help the unfairly treated individuals. She fought for many, especially for those who could not speak for themselves; the silent minority. Thanks to Eleanor Roosevelt the UDHR was the first time that the different countries from around the world would agree to announce the rights and equality of every individual on the planet. To this day countries still meet to discuss the rights of individuals around the world.

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51 “Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.”
Bibliography

Primary


This website contains the electronically published newspaper columns of Eleanor Roosevelt. Each day for the last 24 years of Eleanor Roosevelt’s life is depicted through this column. Using this people are given a little insight into Eleanor’s life and are able to get her insight into everything that happened to her. This also gives Eleanor’s opinions of the UDHR, being appointed to the United Nations, and about what the Soviets were doing.


This was Eleanor Roosevelt’s autobiography, which talks about her life once her husband, Franklin D. Roosevelt, died. This includes traveling to other countries and her work in the United Nations. Just like with her My Day column this book gives me first hand insight into what Eleanor’s thoughts were when going through and doing everything.


This is the letter that President Harry Truman sent to Eleanor telling her that he had appointed her to the United Nations as a delegate. This is an important letter because it shows how much President Truman trusts Eleanor. This letter also lets me understand how Eleanor had to protect the interests of the United States as well as her own when drafting the UDHR.


This book was written by someone who knew Eleanor and helped me understand what people thought about Eleanor. It also told about her past and how she had presented things to her husband. How she cared more about how she could help the people around her, rather than her own safety.

https://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/documents/displaydoc.cfm?_t=speeches&_docid=spc05713

I used this website to know what Eleanor said when she addressed the General Assembly in 1948. An extremely important part in the existence of the United Nations is about to happen. This website also gives Eleanor her exact opinion on the UDHR.

"Mrs. Roosevelt, First Lady 12 Years, Often Called 'World's Most Admired Woman'"


This is the electronically published Obituary of Eleanor Roosevelt written by the New York Post. This article allowed me to see how people viewed Eleanor in her life and how much she had touched the lives of every person that she met and didn’t meet. It allowed me to convey how much Eleanor cared for the people and how much the people cared for Eleanor.

"Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman." Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman.

https://www.trumanlibrary.org/eleanor/1949.html

This website told about all of Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman’s correspondence and how they kept in touch even though Eleanor was no longer the First Lady. This website also provided me with the fact that Truman was extremely proud of Eleanor and everything that she had been doing. I also received the Gallup Poll statistic from this website.


On this website there is an article on Eleanor Roosevelt, from the New York times, and what she did to get the UDHR passed. This article told about how hard she worked, and the struggle that she had with the Soviet Union. It gave a brief outline of the things that she did to appease the Russians.

This website contains another article written by the New York Times about Eleanor Roosevelt and the UDHR. This declaration tells everything about Eleanor when working on this document. It includes the successes and struggles she was having. I used this link to learn about Charles Malik’s quote about Eleanor.

Secondary


Using this article I was able to figure out how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights inspired Nelson Mandela. I also learned what Mandela said to the United Nations when he gave his speech, and how he tried to inspire the members of the United Nations to live by the UDHR.


The website informed me of what Mandela was in prison for, and how long he was in prison. It also helped me know how he got out of prison and became president, by using the UDHR to defend his rights.


I used this book to be informed about the words that John F. Kennedy said about Eleanor when she died. This gave me a really good insight as to how some people viewed Eleanor, as there were many more amazing words that Kennedy said about her.

This website article tells a little about what Eleanor did and of her achievements. This also gives us information for the beginning of her life. It also shows how proud President Truman was of her, and it allowed me to know what Eleanor thought of the UDHR.


[http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-united-nations-is-born](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-united-nations-is-born)

I used this article to learn about how and why the United Nations came into existence. In this article the people and countries that started the United Nations is listed, along with their intentions for the group.


This website gave me a little bit of background on the holocaust, giving me the idea of what everyone went through, and why there was the need for the United Nations.


This website gives a detailed timeline of Eleanor’s Life. It shows the order of everything that happened. It also tells when she got her achievements and awards. It allowed me to put everything that happened to Eleanor in order of when it happened.

"Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum." *Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.*

This website is of the presidential library of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his family. This tells everything that happened in Franklin’s life as well as his wife, Eleanor Roosevelt’s, life. This allowed me to know what Eleanor did when she was appointed to the United Nations, and how hard she worked.


I used this book to read about Eleanor’s reappointment to the United Nations. This also reassured several points of information that I had read about Eleanor in other pieces. Such as how long she was in the United Nations for one year before she died in 1962.

This website had many different people asking and answering question pertaining to Eleanor Roosevelt. This piece was crucial for my project because it told me what Eleanor’s thoughts were about being appointed to the United Nations.


This website gave insight into how secret she led her life and but also how brazen she was at times. It also told about Eleanor making several enemies and having bounties over her head with the KKK. I used this information about Eleanor to tell about how she made sure that the UDHR was in simple language for everyone to be able to understand it.


[http://www.bl.uk/magna-carta/videos/what-is-magna-carta](http://www.bl.uk/magna-carta/videos/what-is-magna-carta)

The video at this website was used to help me better understand what the Magna Carta is and why it was created. It helped me know the rights that the Magna Carta ensures for all people living in the British Empire.


[http://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/regional_perspectives_on_human_rights_the_ussr_and_russia_part_one](http://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/regional_perspectives_on_human_rights_the_ussr_and_russia_part_one)

By using the article on this website I was able to find the Soviet Union’s point of view of the declaration. This also allowed me to understand why the Soviets were attempting to delay and thwart the adoption of the UDHR. It gave me a better understanding of the countries’ relationships with each other. They were all in the United Nations and yet they were still worried that other countries would try to attack the Soviet Union with the good that they were try to do with the UDHR.


This website told about how Eleanor’s life with brief descriptions of everything. It also told about how hard she pushed her team. This allowed me to realized how much she actually cared about this document, you only work on something for 18 hours a day if you really care about it.
By using the article on this website I was able to get a small understanding of what the male delegates in the United Nations thought of Eleanor Roosevelt. I learned that they did not know what to do with her, seeing as how she was a woman and females are the “weaker” sex.

Using this website I was able to find another quote from the New York Times about Eleanor, and it talked about how Eleanor would not let the Soviet Union win. I learned that Eleanor did everything that she needed to do in order to get this declaration passed, and that she wanted the Soviets to be on board with what they were doing.