“Suddenly the strong hand was removed, and the two boys and the two younger girls knew no discipline, for how could a woman who had never been treated as anything but a grown-up child suddenly assume the burden of training a family?”

(Eleanor Roosevelt)

Eleanor loved her father greatly. When her father was put in an institution, the Roosevelt household struggled.

During the Great Depression, education didn’t guarantee a job.

“I sing in praise of college, of M.A.’s and Ph.D.’s, but in pursuit of knowledge we are starving by degrees.”

This was a popular tune sung by college students who couldn’t find jobs.

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” This nation asks for action, and action now. We must act and act quickly.

(President Franklin D. Roosevelt)

“Driving my own car was one of the items the Secret Service people and I had a battle about at the very start. The Secret Service prefers to have an agent go with the President’s wife, but I did not want either a chauffeur or a Secret Service agent always with me. I never did consent to having a Secret Service agent in the head of the Secret Service found an agent to accompany me daily to Lambda.
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That same year Eleanor Roosevelt began learning of the harsh conditions of families who had been living in tents because of unfair evictions. "All the men had been blacklisted and could not get work anywhere; they were existing on the meager allowance that the State of West Virginia provided for the unemployed. Now the tents were worn out, illness was rampant, and no one had any medical care. "Eleanor Roosevelt spoke of this to her husband, and his response was "... Talk to Harry Hopkins and tell him that these families must be out of tents by Christmas."

(Eleanor Roosevelt)

"The homestead projects were attacked in Congress, for the worst part by men who had never seen for themselves the plight of the miners or what we were trying to do for them."

(Eleanor Roosevelt)

After WWI and WWII, Roosevelt's hate of violence grew. She worked towards world peace all her life and became an advocate for human rights.

"The picture of desolation fostered in me an undying hate of war which was not definitely formulated before WWII. The conviction of the uselessness of war as a means in finding any final solution to international difficulties grew stronger and stronger as I listened to people talk. I said little about it at the time but the impression was so strong that instead of fading out of my memory it has become more deeply etched upon it year by year."

(Eleanor Roosevelt)

"Driving my own car was one of the issues the Secret Service people and I had a battle about at the very start. The Secret Service prefers to have an agent go with the President’s wife, but I did not want either a chauffeur or a Secret Service agent always with me; I never did consent to having a Secret Service agent. After the head of the Secret Service found I was not going to allow an agent to accompany me everywhere, he went one day to Louis Howe, plunked a revolver down on the table and said, "Well, alright, if Mrs. Roosevelt is going to drive around the country alone, at least ask her to carry this in the car!" I carried it religiously... After considerable practice, I finally learned to hit a target. I would never have used it on a human being, but I thought I ought to know how to handle a revolver if I had to have one in my possession."

(Eleanor Roosevelt)
In 1945 Eleanor Roosevelt’s husband died; this didn’t stop her. She travelled the world promoting human rights. In 1946, President Truman made her a delegate of the United Nations. Eleanor was put on Committee Three.

“As I learned about my work I realized why I had been put on Committee Three, which dealt with humanitarian, educational, and cultural questions. There were many committees dealing with the budgetary, legal, political and other questions, and I could just see the gentlemen on our delegation peering over the list and saying: Oh, no! We can’t put Mrs. Roosevelt on the political committee. What would she do on the budget committee? Ah, here’s the safe spot for her—Committee Three. She can’t do much harm there!”

(Eleanor Roosevelt)

“After I had been elected chairman of the commission I tried to push our work along as rapidly as possible. I might point out that eventually we decided that our main task was to write an International Bill of Rights... First, there was to be a Declaration, which would be adopted as a resolution of the General Assembly and would name and define all human rights, not only the traditionally recognized political and civil rights but also the more recently recognized social, economic and cultural rights.”

(Eleanor Roosevelt)

“Dr. Pyle was a member of the commission and delivered many long propaganda harangues... I watched him closely until he had to pause for breath. Then I banged the gavel so hard that the other delegates jumped in surprise and, before he could continue, I got in a few words of my own...”

(Eleanor Roosevelt)

“We are here to devise ways of safeguarding human rights. We are not here to attack each other’s governments, and I hope when we return on Monday the delegate of the Soviet Union will remember that! Meeting adjourned!”

(Eleanor Roosevelt)
Eleanor Roosevelt’s involvement in the human rights movement from 1920-1959 led to the creation of humanitarian programs during America's recovery from the Great Depression and World War II. Roosevelt invented the modern political woman and in doing so reinvented the role of First Lady, and proved to be a powerful representative who led the United Nations (UN) to a strong declaration for human rights. Conflict arose when Russian representatives to the UN had their communist ideologies challenged by Roosevelt who refused to compromise.
“During the entire [first] London session of the [UN] Assembly I walked on eggs. I knew that as the only woman on the delegation I was not very welcome. Moreover, if I failed to be a useful member, it would not be considered merely that I as an individual had failed but that all women had failed, and there would be little chance for others to serve in the near future.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

“Early in the meetings of the commission we discovered that while it would be possible to reach some kind of agreement on the Declaration, we were going to be in for a great deal of controversy with the Russian representatives, particularly Dr. Pavlov, who attempted at every opportunity to write a bit of Communist philosophy into the document.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

“As the session opened I was full of confidence that we could quickly get the declaration to through the hearings before Committee Three and have it approved by the Assembly. My confidence was soon gone. We worked for two months, often until late at night, debating every single word of that draft Declaration over and over again before Committee Three would approve its transmission to the General Assembly.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

“In the end there was no vote cast against the declaration in the General Assembly, but there were some disappointing abstentions.”

“The Declaration was finally accepted by the General Assembly on December 10, 1948.”

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(Eleanor Roosevelt)

“During my years at the UN it was my work on the human rights commission that I considered my most important task...” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

“Actually I never planned a career, and what basic objective I had, for many years, was to grasp every opportunity to live and experience life as deeply, as fully, and as widely as I possibly could. It seemed to me stupid to have the gift of life and not use it to the utmost of one’s ability.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

“The Russians seem to have met their match in Mrs. Roosevelt.”
(New York Times)

“The Peaceful Years: 1934-1938.”
“The years from 1934 to 1938 were a period of rapid change in labor and industry in the United States. The New Deal measures were beginning to put the country back on a sound financial basis and to make the country more secure. Between capital and labor and between the government and the people there was a new spirit of cooperation.”

“The Coming of War: 1941.”
“One could no longer do anything but face the fact that this country was at war. From here on, difficult and dangerous as the future looked, it presented a clearer challenge than had the long uncertainty of the past... There was no criticism—only the acceptance of the fact that something had happened to us which, as a nation, we had to face.”
“Dr. Pavlov was a member of the commission and delivered many long propaganda harangues... I watched him closely until he had to pause for breath. Then I bunged the gavel so hard that the other delegates jumped in surprise and, before he could continue, I got in a few words of my own.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

“We are here to devise ways of safeguarding human rights. We are not here to attack each other’s governments, and I hope when we return on Monday the delegate of the Soviet Union will remember that! Meeting adjourned!” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

“...It seemed to me at times that agreement would be all but impossible. These articles have, however, now been adopted by the majority of the committee.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

“I do not see how without her presence we could have accomplished what we actually did accomplish.” (Charles Malik of Lebanon)
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) opened the door for multiple conventions that discussed refugees, political rights of women, slave trade, and racial discrimination.

"As time went on, there were more and more women serving on various delegations, and ours usually had a women alternate even while I was still a delegate."  
(Eleanor Roosevelt)

"But when all is said and done, the declaration will set a standard for human rights and freedoms, and if these standards are recognized as good I believe peoples throughout the world, who feel they are not being treated fairly, will gain a knowledge of the declaration."  
(Eleanor Roosevelt) Dec. 10, 1948

"It was almost as though I had erected someone outside myself who was the President’s Vicar.”  
(Eleanor Roosevelt)

Eleanor often said that she lived these years impersonally. What the world should take from this is that being first lady would consecrate her because society shaped previous first ladies in a hoity-toity demeaner. Eleanor Roosevelt didn’t want to stop her goals of helping the marginalized; so she didn’t.

"Nothing we learn in this world is ever wasted and I have come to the conclusion that practically nothing we do ever stands by itself. If it is good, it will serve some good purpose in the future. If it is evil, it may haunt us and handicap our efforts unimagined ways."  
(Eleanor Roosevelt)

Mrs. Roosevelt addressing the 25th anniversary of the amendment sometimes called the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. “The final bill passed in 1920 was a blow to those who had worked to get the vote and toECTOR ideas. On this anniversary, therefore, I should like to mention that our mother, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Anna Howard Shaw and Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt.” Aug. 23, 1945

"Eleanor Roosevelt was a world leader and human rights activist..."  
(Nancy Roosevelt Ireland)

One of the many powerful steps that Mrs. Roosevelt gave women was the interesting but unique opportunity to speak about political issues. Eleanor did this by hosting press conferences at the White House that women journalists would attend.


Protester, Tibet, May 2016
“It was almost as though I had erected someone outside myself whom I called ‘President’s Wife.’” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

Eleanor often said that she lived these years impersonally. What the world should take from this is the feeling that being first lady would constrict her because society shaped previous first ladies in a hostile demeanor. Eleanor Roosevelt didn’t want to stop her goals of helping the marginalized; so she didn’t.

“Nothing we learn in this world is ever wasted and I have come to the conclusion that practically nothing we do ever stands by itself. If it is good, it will serve some good purpose in the future. If it is evil, it may haunt us and handicap our efforts in imagined ways.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

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