FIGHTING FOR A CAUSE

Eleanor Roosevelt
A Voice For Human Rights
One of the most admirable women in American history was one named Anna Eleanor Roosevelt. She is more commonly known as Eleanor Roosevelt. She was born a long time ago, in 1884, but just like Susan B. Anthony, her achievements made our world a better place.
Although Eleanor's family was very wealthy, they believed in helping those less fortunate. And so from an early age, Eleanor learned to care about people who struggled to survive.
Eleanor did not have a happy childhood. For part of it, Eleanor and her brother were raised by their grandmother. Although Eleanor loved her grandmother, she thought her grandmother was strict because she would not let Eleanor read books in bed, and she made Eleanor wear long, black stockings—even in the summertime!
When Eleanor was fifteen years old, she was sent to an English boarding school for girls. 4 Eleanor was very happy there. She made lots of friends, and her French teacher, Marie Souvestre, thought she was a wonderful student. It was from Marie that Eleanor developed a love of learning and an interest in travel. Eleanor said that her three years there were one of the happiest times of her life.
When Eleanor was eighteen years old, she returned to New York. It was an exciting time for Eleanor. Her uncle, Theodore Roosevelt, had just become the president of the United States. In those days, wealthy, young girls like Eleanor went to parties to meet wealthy, young boys. Eleanor’s grandmother hoped that Eleanor would meet a young man whom she could marry.
Eleanor did meet someone. She met Franklin D. Roosevelt, her distant cousin. They liked each other and began to date. Franklin thought that Eleanor was very smart and kind. They were both eager to work for their country.
Franklin and Eleanor decided to get married. They were married in New York City, and President Theodore Roosevelt walked the bride down the aisle. Eleanor was twenty-one years of age. During the next ten years, Eleanor gave birth to six children: Anna, James, Elliott, Franklin Jr., John, and another son who died when he was a baby.
Eleanor’s husband, Franklin, was interested in politics. In 1911, he won a political position in the New York Senate. The family moved to Albany, the New York state capital. Two years later, Franklin was appointed assistant secretary of the navy. This time the family moved to Washington, D.C. Eleanor spent a great deal of time with her family, but she also worked on many projects that reached out to people who needed help.
In 1921, Franklin was stricken with polio. Polio is a virus, or disease, that can cause paralysis, or make it impossible to move a part of the body such as the legs. Fortunately, today there is a vaccine against polio to protect people from getting this disease. Because of the polio, Franklin could not get around very easily. He spent many hours in a wheelchair.
Franklin had hoped to become president one day. He was afraid that he would no longer achieve his dream. Eleanor demonstrated great devotion to her husband. She was determined to do everything she could to help her husband fulfill his ambition to be president.
Nine years after being stricken with polio, with Eleanor’s help, Franklin became the governor of New York. Then, on March 4, 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt became the thirty-second president of the United States. Eleanor was by his side as the First Lady.
Franklin D. Roosevelt had become president during one of the most difficult times in American history. This period was known as the Great Depression. Millions of people were unemployed, or without a job. Many were hungry and desperate. Hundreds and thousands of men, women, and children stood in line at soup kitchens. Soup kitchens are places where food is provided for free to those in need. Franklin and Eleanor were saddened by what was happening to so many Americans. They promised to help them.
Eleanor traveled all over the United States, acting as her husband’s “eyes and ears.” She met with groups of people and asked them how her husband could help them. Eleanor told Franklin all about the things she saw. She told him about the difficulties that so many people faced. She told him about the good things that were happening, too. Eleanor’s reports to her husband helped Franklin to make decisions.
With millions of Americans unemployed, it was difficult for many people to find jobs. Eleanor focused on finding ways to create new employment opportunities, especially for African Americans. Eleanor persuaded her husband, President Franklin Roosevelt, to set up an advisory group called the “Black Cabinet.”
3A-6: Members of the Black Cabinet

The members of this group were talented and successful African Americans who were specifically chosen for their skills. Their job was to find ways to improve the lives of African Americans living in poverty.
Eleanor’s friend, Mary McLeod Bethune, was one of these group members. Later in this domain, you will learn more about Mary. Like Eleanor, she was a remarkable woman. Eleanor believed that two heads are better than one. And so, together, Eleanor and Mary set up the National Youth Administration and the Division of Negro Affairs.
These programs helped many young African Americans pay for their education. Just like today, a better education provides better employment opportunities, or a chance to get a better job. Eleanor dedicated much of her life to working for civil rights and human rights.
As the First Lady, Eleanor had many chances to speak about the problems facing America. During the Great Depression, Eleanor had a radio show, and she wrote a newspaper column. In addition to campaigning for equality for African Americans, children, women, and the poor, Eleanor also campaigned for the rights of Native Americans. Eleanor highlighted the fact that Native Americans were being pushed off their land, and that their way of life was continually threatened.
In 1939, Eleanor took a stand against discrimination. Eleanor belonged to an organization called the Daughters of the American Revolution. When the Daughters of the American Revolution would not allow a talented African American singer named Marian Anderson to sing at a hall they owned in Washington, D.C., Eleanor left the organization. Eleanor later got permission for Marian to sing at the Lincoln Memorial. More than seventy-five thousand people came to support her and hear her wonderful voice.
Even after the death of her husband, Franklin, Eleanor continued to work for human rights. In 1946, President Harry S. Truman asked Eleanor to work at the United Nations, an organization that includes many of the countries in the world. The main goal of the United Nations, even today, is world peace, but it also works to reduce poverty and help all people in need.
The following year, Eleanor became the leader of the United Nations’s Commission on Human Rights. She helped write an important document called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document states that all people should have the right to work, the right to rest, the right to an education, and the right to share in the life of their own community. Eleanor discovered that most people in the world want the same basic rights. Eleanor considered this to be her greatest achievement.
For many years, Eleanor traveled to Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. She often spoke about the importance of peace in our world. “It isn’t enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it,” she said. “And it isn’t enough to believe in it. One must work at it.”
Eleanor was First Lady from 1933 to 1945. She was First Lady longer than anyone else, and she was an excellent role model for other First Ladies. She once said, “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”
Eleanor tried to live by those words and continued to work for world peace and an end to poverty until her death on November 7, 1962. She died in New York City and was buried at Hyde Park, New York, her husband’s family home. Eleanor Roosevelt was truly a remarkable lady.

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