

Eleanor roosevelt essay

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During a time when men were in charge of the political arena, one woman stands out as a symbol of leadership.

While she held no official political office, Eleanor Roosevelt stepped above the expected duties of the First Lady, and forged a name for herself as one of the greatest female leaders of all time. Reluctant and unsure of herself at first, in a relatively short amount of time, she was making her voice heard, making her voice be heard not only in the United States, but around the world. She took it upon herself to champion the causes of those who were all but ignored, insisting that their voices be heard and that their difficulties did not get swept under the rug.

She became a force to be reckoned with, and in encouraging others to stand up and be heard, she made a definite place in history for herself, becoming a role model for women everywhere. Eleanor Roosevelt started out her career as First Lady with many reservations about her ability to do the position justice. She wanted to make a difference and support her husband to the best of her ability, but was unsure of how to go about it or even if she would be able to do so. In a conversation with her friend, Lorena Hickok, she admitted to having great respect for women who were employed and getting by on their own, stating her own doubts about her abilities in the same circumstances, as “ I have no profession – no training for anything” (1962, p. 88). However, it was not in her to back down from a challenge, and she vowed to do her best. In the end, her best was far more than she likely ever expected, and she left a legacy that has lasted long past her death.

Gerber states that Eleanor’s “ ability to connect with other people” (2002, p. 3) was her biggest strength in her role of leader. She not only was able to get people moving, she was able to relate to them and see their points of view and, through that, to Eleanor Roosevelt Page 2 of 8 find ways to motivate them and help them to take advantage of their own strengths and cultivate them. She connected with people, and was not afraid to take up causes that others might shun. She was a visionary of sorts, and she envisioned a world where people were not oppressed, but shared an equality beyond that which appeared likely at the time.

Another very important strength that Eleanor had as a leader was that of fearlessness. She refused to buy into any belief that something could not be done, and instead found ways to prove this wrong. She would not allow detractors to make her back down, and she believed in ignoring criticism that she did not consider to be constructive. While she had been timid and unassuming during much of her younger life, even regarding domestic matters, becoming a part of the public political arena pulled out reserves of strength and resolve that she did not know that she had. Ironically, her younger life was filled with a belief that men were and should be in charge, and that women should accede to them in all matters. She did not support suffrage, not believing that giving the women the vote was necessary, since men were superior and therefore better qualified to make such important decisions. As she was pulled into the public spotlight, however, she began to realize the power that women could have if they were to grab onto the opportunity and step forward to take responsibility.

She encouraged them to exert what control they could outside of their domestic circles, believing that “ their interest or apathy would build or destroy future citizens” (Hareven, 1968, p. 29). She believed that women should put pressure on politicians to pass what legislation that they found necessary, and that they should not back down, emphasizing the need for them “ to take tougher, more direct measures” (Cook, 1992, p. 366). Eleanor Roosevelt Page 3 of 8 Eleanor quickly became a beacon of women’s rights and a role model for women everywhere. She hoped that by pressing forward and not backing down, women would take their place as equal partners, and she hoped that “ men would come to recognize that a true democracy depended on the equal representation of both sexes” (Hareven, 1968, p. 30). She realized what a difficult battle this was, and believed that it would not come about for quite some time.

She was ever practical about the place that women truly held in politics, and advised others not to stop working toward equality, and urged women to educate themselves and be prepared before lunging into the political arena. It was the depression that set Eleanor on firmer footing and a more direct and organized approach to social reform. Before this, her leadership was disjointed and haphazard, and she was more inclined that the system would inevitably keep things running as they should. The depression revealed to her the truth, and as she saw the suffering of so many people due to a weakness in the system she had believed in, she was spurred on to action. Her belief in that system had held her back from doing more in the earlier years, and the realization that the system had its flaws led her to become unsure as to what could be done.

She knew that action was needed, but was hard-pressed at first to know what that action was. It can be said that Eleanor's naive conviction that a spiritual answer was needed, at least in part, was one of the things that held her back during this time of crisis. She firmly believed that belief in Christ was necessary, but could not communicate just how this was best to be accomplished. It was a deep spirituality that was needed, she believed, but such a thing was not something that could simply be injected into people. Eleanor Roosevelt Page 4 of 8 However, even while the insistence on spirituality helped to hold her back somewhat, she managed to keep a practical view of the economics involved. She recognized the problems with the mindset that material gains were paramount, and that the way business operated was a detriment to the economy in many ways. She realized that it was important for all factions of society to prosper, and that allowing one side to decline would only lead to the decline of society overall. The depression can easily be said to be the catalyst for the evolution of Eleanor as an activist and a leader.

Her efforts to give aid and relief to those in need spurred her on to attempt to push government and charity to work together, as well as to give people the opportunity to help pull themselves out of despair. She firmly believed that, while the government should provide opportunities for those in need, the individual should take as much a hand in things as possible. She encouraged the training of people for jobs instead of just giving handouts, and that, most importantly, children should come first.

It was her desire for social reform and human rights that made Eleanor Roosevelt such an important leader for America and for the world as well.

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She continued to advocate action above all else, because without action, things would become stagnant. People had to take their own futures into their hands, and she was completely determined to help give them the courage and incentive to do so. She would encourage society and the government to do all that could be done to help those in positions of difficulty, but she also worked to put a fire under those in need as well, and was a very devout believer in showing those people that they had her support and her faith. While she became known early on for her determination to fight for the rights of women, she proved during the Civil Rights Era that she had others in mind as well.

She Eleanor Roosevelt Page 5 of 8 became a key force in fighting for the rights of African Americans to be treated equally with the rest of society, and she firmly believed that it was “ essential to our leadership in the world and to the development of true democracy in our country to have no discrimination in our country whatsoever” (Lash, 1972, p. 248). She campaigned for a country with complete equality for all of its citizens, and would not back down on this belief, regardless of any criticism that was sent in her direction.

In addition to urging the government to work toward a policy of nondiscrimination, she addressed African Americans, stressing that they had as much responsibility in the fight for equal rights as did whites. She encouraged them to work within the existing framework to work for change, while insisting that whites had an obligation to fight against discrimination and maltreatment of black people. Using her influence during the New Deal, Eleanor worked toward accomplishing some of her goals regarding African

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Americans. She worked to make sure that they would benefit from the reforms, especially regarding “ development of employment opportunities, proper housing, education, and medical care” (Hareven, 1968, p. 115). She worked toward making the agencies involved in the New Deal consider African Americans on equal ground with whites, working very hard herself to help them find employment. Perhaps one of the most important contributions that she made to Civil Rights was the insistence that African Americans continue to have pride in themselves and their race. She believed that this pride and determination would help them continue to educate themselves and to put forth leaders that would take them in a direction that would lead to full equality.

The faith that she showed in them, and her personal conduct toward them Eleanor Roosevelt Page 6 of 8 went a long way toward gaining their confidence as well as making others see that she was, indeed, determined to set an example. She shocked many by hosting black groups at the White House, and even when her husband could not take a political stance supporting many of her efforts, she continued to work toward them. It was a cause that was very dear to her, and she refused to compromise her beliefs on the matter.

It was this dedication and determination that set Eleanor apart from so many others during the years where she took a leadership role. The lack of compromising on things that she considered important to any people earned her both praise and criticism, and on occasion was unwise in a political sense. But people meant more to her than politics, and she kept up pressure on her husband to support her in attempting to pass bills that would benefit

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African Americans. This insistence and refusal to compromise for anything but complete victory alienated people in power as well as citizens, who were inclined to take votes from her husband because of her outspokenness and continued association with African Americans. Eleanor's lack of reluctance to push her way into conflicts regarding equality for all had both its positive and its negative aspects. She would push forward to fight for a cause, and nothing would stop her from working toward complete success.

She pushed for new child labor laws, being even more firm in her lack of compromise with children, and she also became involved in the plight of Native Americans. She believed that they should be allowed to continue to practice their culture and hold onto their customs, thus preserving an important part of the heritage of America. While detractors accused her of being erratic in the causes that she chose to champion, her primary goal remained the same. She worked toward equality and social Eleanor Roosevelt Page 7 of 8 justice, striving for a society that was more balanced and less discriminating. Freedom was also paramount to her, and without equality, she could see no freedom. Hareven considers the idea that one of the weaknesses in Eleanor's abilities as a leader was to insist on approaching things from one angle, "to the neglect of other possible approaches" (1968, p. 143). She felt that one approach was all that was needed, and neglected to consider others as a means to an end.

She attempted to look at things from all points of view, making it somewhat more difficult to get a real grasp of some things. She was perhaps guilty of trying to make herself equal to everyone involved in a particular cause, and this was a very tenuous and difficult approach that could hinder her and the

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causes she supported. It was not only America that concerned Eleanor, particularly in later years. World War II helped to exacerbate these feelings, giving her a more global outlook. She began to consider other nations, and world peace became another of her causes. She chastised Americans for being insular, and insisted that they try to understand other nations, not from an American perspective, but on their own merits. During the war, Eleanor was dedicated to the support of the troops, and she made numerous visits to the forces. She stepped out of her own focuses on the problems in America, and opened her view to become a more worldwide one.

She was sent at various times as a goodwill ambassador, and she used this opportunity to the best of her abilities. She took a great interest in the Red Cross, inspecting their facilities and making suggestions to them on how better to serve the armed forces. It was her intense compassion that drew people to the First Lady, and made her such an important figure to society. She wore no facade that would hide her true self from Eleanor Roosevelt Page 8 of 8 anyone, and was always very down to earth and sincere, especially when speaking with people, and that gave those people a feeling of real security and trust in her. She was more certainly a people person, and this fact helped to lift her up in the eyes of many who needed some sort of symbol to help them believe in their government and its desire to help them. It was her ability to look at things in a more international perspective that drew her into working with the United Nations.

With this, she saw the possibility affecting people around the world in such a way as she had those at home. She envisioned a democratic world where people were equal and justice was fair and equitable. She suggested the <https://assignbuster.com/eleanor-roosevelt-essay/>

creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and was elected chairwoman of the committee that drafted it, giving the other committee members little respite during the time that it was being put together.

It was Eleanor's lack of hesitation to take risks and a determination to do the right thing as she saw it, letting nothing stand in her way, that makes her stand out so strongly among other leadership figures in America. Her devotion to her causes and her desire to see all people treated equally that kept her moving forward. She thought little of herself and her own reputation, and cared deeply for the rights of others. However, her lack of pliability as well as her single-mindedness can be said to have had a detrimental effect upon this role.

Her heart was open to all, but she was only human, and that humanness sometimes required that she stumble and make mistakes, as all humans do. She remains a beacon to those who are dedicated to the cause of human rights and social justice, and her failings, which are sometimes so difficult to see, are there for others to learn from so that they may adapt their approaches to those that may be more amenable to the situation.

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