

Passage II

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from volume 2 of Blanche Wiesen Cook's biography *Eleanor Roosevelt* (©1999 by Blanche Wiesen Cook).

Eleanor Roosevelt [ER] is the most controversial First Lady in United States history. Her journey to greatness, her voyage out beyond the confines of good wife and devoted mother, involved determination and
5 amazing courage. It also involved one of history's most unique partnerships. Franklin Delano Roosevelt [FDR] admired his wife, appreciated her strengths, and depended on her integrity.

However, ER and FDR had different priorities,
10 occasionally competing goals, and often disagreed. In the White House they ran two distinct and separate courts.

By 1933 [her first year as First Lady], ER was an accomplished woman who had achieved several of her
15 life's goals. With her partners, ER was a businesswoman who co-owned the Val-Kill crafts factory, a political leader who edited and copublished the *Women's Democratic News*, and an educator who co-owned and taught at a New York school for girls.

As First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt did things that had never been done before. She upset race traditions, championed a New Deal for women, and on certain issues actually ran a parallel administration. On housing and the creation of model communities, for
25 example, ER made decisions and engineered policy.

At the center of a network of influential women who ran the Women's Committee of the Democratic Party led by Molly Dewson, ER worked closely with the women who had dominated the nation's social reform struggles for decades. With FDR's election, the goals of the great progressive pioneers, Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and Lillian Wald, were at last at the forefront of the country's agenda. ER's mentors since 1903, they had battled on the margins of national politics since the 1880s for public health, universal education, community centers, sanitation programs, and government responsibility for the welfare of the nation's poor and neglected people.

Now their views were brought directly into the
40 White House. ER lobbied for them personally with her new administrative allies, in countless auditoriums, as a radio broadcaster, and in monthly, weekly, and, by 1936, daily columns. Called "Eleanor Everywhere," she was interested in everyone.

Every life was sacred and worthy, to be improved by education, employment, health care, and affordable housing. Her goal was simple, a life of dignity and decency for all. She was uninterested in complex theories, and demanded action for betterment. She feared
50 violent revolution, but was not afraid of socialism—and she courted radicals.

As fascism and communism triumphed in Europe and Asia, ER and FDR were certain that there was a middle way, what ER called an American "revolution without bloodshed." Her abiding conviction, however,
55 was that nothing good would happen to promote the people's interest unless the people themselves organized to demand government responses. A people's movement required active citizen participation, and
60 ER's self-appointed task was to agitate and inspire community action, encourage united democratic movements for change.

Between 1933 and 1938, while the Depression raged and the New Deal unfolded, ER worked with the
65 popular front. She called for alliances of activists to fight poverty and racism at home, and to oppose isolationism internationally.

Active with the women's peace movement, ER spoke regularly at meetings of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the Conference on the Cause and Cure of War. She departed, however, from pacifist and isolationist positions and encouraged military preparedness, collective security, and ever-widening alliances.

Between 1933 and 1938 ER published countless articles and six books. She wrote in part for herself, to clear her mind and focus her thoughts. But she also wrote to disagree with her husband. From that time to this, no other First Lady has actually rushed for her pen to jab her husband's public decisions. But ER did so routinely, including in her 1938 essay *This Troubled World*, which was a point-by-point rejection of FDR's major international decisions.

To contemplate ER's life of example and responsibility is to forestall gloom. She understood, above all, that politics is not an isolated individualist adventure. She sought alliances, created community, worked with movements for justice and peace. Against great odds, and under terrific pressure, she refused to withdraw
90 from controversy. She brought her network of agitators and activists into the White House, and never considered a political setback a permanent defeat. She enjoyed the game, and weathered the abuse.

11. As she is revealed in the passage, ER is best described as:
- A. socially controversial but quietly cooperative.
 - B. politically courageous and socially concerned.
 - C. morally strong and deeply traditional.
 - D. personally driven but calmly moderate.