

The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Vol. 2: The Human Rights Years, 1949–1952. Edited by Allida Black. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012. lxxv + 1,135 pp. ISBN 978-0-8139-3141-8. \$125.

The goal of the present volume of this magnificent series, editor Allida Black tells us, is to demonstrate Eleanor Roosevelt's "increased influence not only within the United Nations but also within the State Department and the international diplomatic community." Against the backdrop of the early Cold War and President Truman's second term, the documents in this volume "give voice" to ER's "political and social priorities and to the often stinging criticism her leadership provoked from politicians, clergy, and the general public" (xxxiii). Truly out of her husband FDR's shadow by 1949, ER played "multiple, potentially conflicting roles—diplomat, political pundit, advice columnist, activist, and party leader" (xxxiii). The 311 documents included here (with 542 additional documents excerpted primarily in the annotated notes of the book) attest to her energy and vision, her successes and failures, and her significance. "Most of all, they reflect the actions she took (and did not take) to promote human rights at home and abroad" (xxxiii). Arguably the most important First Lady in American history, Eleanor Roosevelt remains the most influential *former* First Lady, and she merits the publication of the edition under review here as well as the series of which it is a part.

The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, based at George Washington University, has partnered with the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site. It has been a massive undertaking. Eleanor Roosevelt was a prolific writer and left behind thousands of sources in print, radio, film, and television. Material has been found in more than 600 collections among 263 archives in all fifty states and nine foreign nations. The staff of the *Papers* has collected more than 130,000 documents, with 33,546 of that number falling within the period covered by the present volume. These documents include correspondence to and from ER, many of her "My Day" columns that were syndicated in America's newspapers, "If You Ask Me" excerpts that were

published in her regular magazine column, and transcripts from television and radio interviews and press conferences. This volume, like its predecessor, includes such varied written sources because the editors wanted to “create an edition mirroring the various ways ER made her voice heard” (xxxviii).

The staggering bulk of ER’s papers, as well as the perpetual enemy of all documentary projects—constraints of time and cost—necessitated a high degree of selectivity on the part of the editorial staff. The series makes no claim to being a comprehensive documentary edition; indeed, such an edition is likely impossible. The director of the project consulted with the NHPRC and other Roosevelt scholars and with their concurrence sought to “produce a highly selective edition designed to present an authoritative resource on Eleanor Roosevelt’s political and human rights record and to encourage further research on her life and the issues she addressed” (xxxviii). The series, therefore, focuses solely on ER’s public life and does not include documents of an exclusively private nature. The editorial team “weeded out any material that did not discuss politics, policy, world events, philosophy, faith, social justice, or government” (xxxviii). As they finalized the selection of documents, they did so according to four criteria. First, a document had to illustrate one of the key events, themes, or issues of ER’s public life. Second, ER’s distinctive voice had to be revealed and the document had to afford insight into her decision-making process. Third, the document had to have a demonstrable impact on politics, public policy, and public opinion. Fourth, it had to provide important information ER used to frame her stance on an issue.

The attention paid to these criteria yields a volume that covers a wide range of events and details ER’s involvement in many of the seminal issues of the time period. Her correspondence, in particular, attests to the “serious treatment she received from those in power” (xxxvii). Much of that correspondence necessarily deals with America’s role in the world. For example, there are some two dozen documents that address the newly created state of Israel. The reader learns that ER lauded Israel’s “achievement” in creating a democracy in the Middle East that she hoped would “serv[e] as an example to all the other countries in the area” (629). She was outspoken in her support of an American financial commitment to Israel and lobbied the Truman administration—partly through correspondence with the president himself—to play an active role in getting the Arab states to sign a peace treaty with Israel. ER corresponded regularly with Secretary of State Dean Acheson

on such matters as economic aid to foreign nations, the role of the United States in the United Nations, and the creation of NATO, which she initially opposed but came to support once she read the text of the pact. Several documents deal with the Korean War and make clear that ER considered American participation a Cold War imperative.

On the domestic front, many of the documents in this volume address the burgeoning civil rights movement. Highlighting ER's support of civil rights for African Americans (and for Native Americans) makes sense in a collection focused primarily on her commitment to human rights both in the United States and abroad. Other documents demonstrate ER's involvement with the Democratic Party. In particular, she addressed Adlai Stevenson's campaign for president in 1952, warning the candidate in a "My Day" column that he sounded "a little too academic" on the campaign trail. As the campaign progressed, ER grew increasingly frustrated with Stevenson, as his penchant for talking down to his listeners and his lackluster fundraising efforts raised doubts in her mind about whether he would make an effective president. One Democratic candidate ER endorsed without apparent reservation was Congressman John F. Kennedy, who was running for the United States Senate in Massachusetts. A letter in this volume from Robert Sargent Shriver, a key Kennedy aide (and future brother-in-law), solicits ER's public endorsement of the young candidate, a request she granted in a "My Day" column.

The editors "strove to reproduce the documents as accurately as possible, though [they] did not attempt to create facsimiles" (xli). Luckily, much of the material they sifted through was either typed or published, and the handwritten correspondence tended to be legible. Emendations are relatively minor, and the process and rationale for altering an original document are explained fully at the beginning of the volume. The editors do not list all the emendations made in the text, but they summarize the classes of alterations they have made. Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are reproduced exactly as they appear in the original documents, except in cases of obvious typographical errors (they provide the proper spelling), antiquated hyphenation usage (they remove the hyphen), or excluded periods at the end of sentences (they add the period). The editors also provide opening or closing quotation marks where they are missing and remove superfluous marks. Dashes have been standardized as em dashes no matter

how they were presented in the original document. Ellipses are presented as they appear in the originals. The paragraphing of the original documents is preserved, unless the beginning of a paragraph is not indented; in such cases, the editors have supplied an indentation. Finally, standardization has been imposed in the presentation of letters: salutations are presented flush to the left, on their own line, above the body of the letter. Closings and signatures have been centered at the bottom of the letter. Telegrams reproduced in the volume are provided using all capital letters, like the originals.

To establish the text of the documents, the editors transcribed the “My Day” columns from the final wire-service copy ER provided to the syndicate for publication. Excerpts from the “If You Ask Me” columns are taken from the original published magazine in which they appeared. If several copies of a letter exist, the editors reproduce the recipient’s copy, presumably because they judge it as more accurate than the copy ER may have retained for her files. When a recipient’s copy could not be located, the document contained in ER’s files is used. If an audio recording of a speech ER delivered, or of a radio or television program in which she participated, was available, the editors use their own transcription of that recording. When no such recording exists, they use a transcript prepared at the time or employ a contemporary press account. The United Nations summary records published in the volume come from the UN’s official document collection. Official State Department records housed in the National Archives have provided the editors with the memoranda, minutes, and press releases related to ER’s work at the UN on behalf of the State Department.

Most of the documents the editors chose to include in the volume are heavily annotated, often with a level of detail that makes the annotations lengthier than the documents themselves. This is often invaluable to researchers and will please many scholars who are accustomed to working with archival manuscript sources that do not provide them with the context for what they are reading. On the other hand, some might complain that, with space at a premium, it is far more important to publish as many documents as possible, even if it means sacrificing annotations. Experts in the field likely do not need discursive annotations, and the general audience interested in Eleanor Roosevelt may find them a tedious distraction. The editors have obviously made a concerted effort to flesh out all the details relevant to the documents they have published. While annotating documents is usual practice

for projects of this nature, the editors of *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers* have surpassed everything these reviewers have seen and set a new scholarly standard that will be difficult to match.

In our view, the annotations are beneficial because they allow the editors to paint a more complete picture of the events and people ER writes about in her documents, whether that source is a letter or one of the “My Day” columns. The researcher is able to see ER’s perspective but is also able to understand when she reached that perspective because of misinformation or personal feelings that may have clouded her judgment. For example, in January 1949, ER offered her support to Dr. Miriam Van Waters, the superintendent of the Framingham Reformatory in Massachusetts, who was relieved of her duties in December 1948. ER was certain the Massachusetts Commissioner of Correction had dismissed Van Waters because of the progressive methods of prison management she employed. Were someone to read only the excerpts of letters ER sent on the matter, that person might come to the conclusion that ER was correct in her assessment of the situation and adopt her sympathy for Van Waters as his or her own. Annotations related to the incident, however, indicate through a letter written to ER that Van Waters had been dismissed for an abuse of her authority. Moreover, this correspondent also informed ER that “Framingham had employed progressive penal methods before Van Waters’s arrival” (20–21), thus rendering ER’s interpretation of what had happened incorrect. The Van Waters example is one of many in the *Papers* that demonstrate the editors’ aim of “depict[ing] her vision and her prejudices, her convictions and her doubts, her patience and her anger, her prescience and her miscalculations” (xxxiii). The end result is a glimpse of ER’s personality and a fuller understanding of the type of woman she was. So, even though the editors have chosen to fill the volume with documents that only reflect ER’s public life, they have humanized her and made her more approachable.

The volume is also easy to use. The descriptive titles provided for most documents allow for quick scanning of topics. Numbers assigned to each document are cross-referenced throughout the book. The lengthy index has been constructed with care and is notable for its usefulness and accuracy. The ultimate measure of success for a volume of edited documents, however, is its utility in helping scholars to craft a more well-rounded assessment of the subject in question. *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers*—projected to include five volumes in total—will

undoubtedly force a reconsideration of ER's life and career after she left the White House in April 1945. The historiography of this precedent-setting First Lady will just as surely be altered in significant ways.

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