

The Journal of Values-Based Leadership

Manuscript 1439

Lessons from History: The Remarkable Leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt and Why It Matters Today (Part 1)

Emilio F. Iodice

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/jvbl>



Part of the [Business Commons](#)

This Case Study is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Business at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Values-Based Leadership by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.

Lessons from History: *The Remarkable Leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt and Why It Matters Today (Part 1)*

— Emilio Iodice, Rome, Italy

Introduction

Few people had a greater impact on their generation than Eleanor Roosevelt.



*Eleanor Roosevelt, Courtesy Franklin Delano
Roosevelt Presidential Library*

movements throughout for the world.

She was what she professed to be: a person not afraid of criticism, willing to sacrifice and take responsibility and to lead others by her example.

Her life was filled with moments of courage, wisdom, compassion, empathy, and amazing emotional intelligence.

The following is Part I of an overview of her life, her leadership secrets, and how she dealt with enormous challenges as a person — a human being and a woman who grew up in an age of prejudice and discrimination.

Her determination to help the downtrodden to overcome obstacles and her words, thoughts, and ideas are an inspiration to humanity today.

It is especially important to those who are fighting for freedom and equality against the tyrannical fanaticism of religious fundamentalism and the dictatorship of totalitarian regimes. Her words and acts remain an indelible attestation to resistance and change

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seek equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world... — Eleanor Roosevelt, Remarks at the United Nations, March 27, 1958

Once more we are in a period of uncertainty, of danger, in which not only our own safety but that of all mankind is threatened. Once more we need the qualities that inspired the development of the democratic way of life. We need imagination and integrity, courage, and a high heart. We need to fan the spark of conviction, which may again inspire the world as we did with our new idea of the dignity and worth of free men. But first we must learn to cast out fear. People who 'view with alarm' never build anything. — Eleanor Roosevelt

A society in which everyone works in not necessarily a free society and may indeed be a slave society; on the other hand, a society in which there is widespread economic insecurity can turn freedom into a barren and vapid right for millions of people. — Eleanor Roosevelt

She would rather light a candle than curse the darkness... What other single human being has touched and transformed the existence of so many? She walked in the slums and ghettos of the world, not on a tour of inspection, but as one who could not feel contentment when others were hungry. — Adlai Stevenson, former US Ambassador to the United Nations and two-time candidate for President of the United States of the Democratic Party

Throughout the crowded years of her lifetime, Eleanor Roosevelt was the tireless champion of working men and women. Wherever there were battles to be fought...for minimum wage or social security...on behalf of sharecroppers or migratory workers...against the unspeakable evils of discrimination, segregation, or child labor...for the union shop or against spurious 'right-to-work laws'... there you could find Eleanor Roosevelt. She was an ardent advocate of the ideals of the United Nations...the architect of its Human Rights program...on our side...fighting for our right to organize...but more than that: she was one of us. —Eleanor Roosevelt Memorial Fund Pamphlet, AFL-CIO, 1963

Leadership Secrets

- **Be Devoted to an Ideal**
- **Learn All That You Can**
- **Communicate Widely and Broadly**
- **Expect Criticism**
- **Network Extensively**
- **Stay Focused**
- **Fight Fear**
- **Take Calculated Risks**
- **Seek Power to Put Convictions into Practice**

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt

She was born in New York City, on October 11th, 1884, into a family of wealth and prestige. Eleanor's parents died when she was young. She was raised by her maternal grandmother. She was educated by tutors, until she was fifteen and then sent to England for three years to a London finishing school. There, she developed self-confidence and poise and cultivated her artistic, literary and intellectual curiosity. Eleanor returned to New York.

Three years later, she married her cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. She was accompanied to the altar by her uncle, the twenty-sixth President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. Eleanor and Franklin had six children Anna, James, Franklin (who died in infancy), Elliott, Franklin Jr., and John.

Although she considered herself shy, Eleanor entered politics after her husband was stricken with infantile paralysis in 1921. It was a turning point in her life. She expressed her independence and developed her own agenda. She fought for social causes and

championed women's rights and civil rights. Eleanor continued her work into Franklin Roosevelt's presidency and was First Lady from 1933 to 1945.

According to Jennifer Nadeo, in her splendid work, *Twentieth Century First Ladies as Moral Leaders for Education: A Study of Eleanor Roosevelt, Lady Bird Johnson, and Barbara Bush*, "She was the First Lady of firsts: she was the first to hold press conferences, the first to hold a job outside the home during her husband's presidency, the first to drive a car, fly in a plane, and the first to openly serve as her husband's political partner." She had a radio program and her own nationally syndicated column, *My Day*, which was published six days a week in ninety newspapers, reaching millions of readers, for twenty-six years. She donated her earnings to her causes.

Eleanor traveled extensively and was her husband's adviser on many issues and his "legs and ears." In the 1940's, she was a co-founder of Freedom House and helped create the United Nations. "Sometimes she endured intense hostility," wrote James McGregor Burns, "for her looks, for not staying home, for her friendships with those of different races and ethnic groups. Newspaper criticism forced her to resign as the unpaid Assistant Director of the *Office of Civil Defense* in 1942, but she publicized the World War II war effort by visiting service personnel in England, the South Pacific and Latin America."



White House Portrait of Eleanor Roosevelt

Eleanor Roosevelt was fearless in the face of criticism and pursued endeavors she felt important for the nation and the world.

Following the death of FDR, she continued to write, speak, and fight for social justice and the rights of minorities and working women everywhere. She refused to accept FDR's pension. The only privilege she accepted was to have her signature replace postage stamps on her mail.

Eleanor served as a US delegate to the United Nations from 1945 to 1952 and from 1961 to 1962. She was instrumental in drafting the *UN Declaration of Human Rights*.

She wrote extensively and gave talks and lectures around the world. She averaged seventy-five speeches a year, wrote over eight thousand columns and more than five hundred articles. As First Lady, she received one hundred and seventy-five thousand letters a year and averaged over fifty thousand annually during the post-White House years.

Her twenty-seven books included autobiographies and memoirs. Eleanor Roosevelt never used a ghostwriter. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum contains the papers of FDR and his wife. Two million pages are from Eleanor Roosevelt.

She received thirty-five honorary degrees, compared to thirty-one awarded to her husband. During the administration of John F. Kennedy, she was influential in creating the *Presidential Commission on the Status of Women*.

Eleanor Roosevelt died on November 7th, 1962. An unsuccessful campaign was launched to award her the Nobel Prize for Peace, posthumously. She received a *United Nations Human Rights Prize*, in 1968. Thirty-one years later, the *Gallup* organization conducted a survey of the most admired people of the twentieth century.

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt ranked in the top ten.

Leadership Traits

Meet Difficulty Head On

Eleanor needed to deal with challenges early in life. By the age of eight, her mother was dead from diphtheria. Two years later, her father died from alcoholism and mental disorders.

Shortly after, her youngest brother died. He was four. Ten-year-old Eleanor was an orphan. She went to live with her grandmother, Mary Ludlow Hall. She was an emotionally cold woman. She lacked the maternal qualities that young Eleanor required. Biographer Joseph Lash explained that the young girl was insecure, searching for affection, and considered herself unattractive. She later wrote, "I was a solemn child without beauty. I seemed like a little old woman entirely lacking in the spontaneous joy and mirth of youth." Even so, she began to deal with life's challenges with good humor, philosophy, strength, and common sense.

She knew that one's future could not be based on physical beauty, but on what was inside. Her first challenge was to know herself and lead herself, before she could lead others. Later, Eleanor wrote: "No matter how plain a woman may be, if truth and loyalty are stamped on her face, all will be attracted to her."

Strive to Help Others

It was the end of the nineteenth century. New ideas about equality, the plight of the poor



Eleanor Roosevelt at Allenswood Academy, 1900, Courtesy of Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

and rights of women blossomed as the corner turned into the last hundred years of the millennium. Eleanor Roosevelt was fifteen. She was searching for meaning in her life. That meaning came in England.

She was sent to Allenswood Academy, in London. It was the start of a new way of thinking for the girl from New York. It would be the happiest period of her adolescence. At Allenswood, she developed lifelong friendships, studied history, geography and literature, learned languages and spent summers traveling. She saw Europe's grand cities and boulevards, museums and palaces and the squalor of poverty in its urban areas.

The school was run by a well-known feminist educator, Marie Souvestre. She stressed high academic standards, independent reasoning and liberal political beliefs. Eleanor was her protégé. The headmistress was her model. She was a teacher, friend, parent, confidant, and mentor. She taught her French. "It became a challenge to me," Eleanor wrote, "to think about all the different sides of a situation and to try to find new points that Mlle. Souvestre had not covered, points that had not even been covered in our books. It was rather exciting to have these questions come to mind as I read and I can remember now how pleased I was when she would ask me to leave my paper with her and later return it with the comment, 'Well thought out, but have you forgotten this or that.'"

Eleanor changed. Mademoiselle Souvestre instilled self-confidence. She demonstrated how to be assertive. Eleanor learned ethics and character. She was shown the pleasures of travel and acquired a taste to see places and meet people. She learned to challenge dogmas. She was taught to fight for social justice, even if it seemed like a lost cause. "I think I came to feel that the underdog was always the one to be championed," wrote Eleanor decades later.

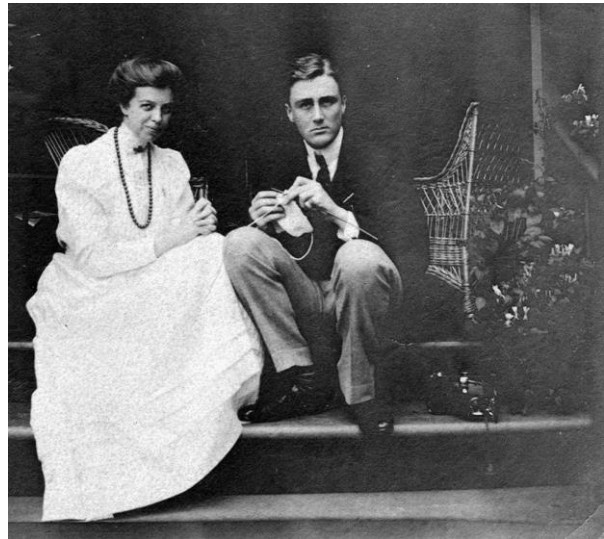
"Gradually she gained 'confidence and independence' and later marveled that she was 'totally without fear in this new phase of my life,' writing in her autobiography that 'Mlle. Souvestre shocked one into thinking, and that on the whole was very beneficial.' Her headmistress's influence was so strong that as an Eleanor later described Souvestre was one of the three most important influences on her life."

At Allenswood, she came to know about private institutions dedicated to social services, education for the poor and immigrants. When she returned to America in 1902, she began a crusade to assist the urban dwellers of New York. Eleanor's determination to help the downtrodden rose from her mentor's influence. Mademoiselle Souvestre showed her how to improve the world by improving mankind. Three years after her return to New York, her former headmistress was dead. Eleanor Roosevelt never forgot her. She would forever keep her photo on her desk and her letters nearby.

Take Stands Against Injustice

In 1903, Eleanor went into the bowels of New York to put her newfound sense of social justice to the test. The tall, nineteen-year-old aristocrat, with a British accent, joined the *Junior League for the Promotion of Settlement Movements*. Its goal was to solve social problems arising from rapid industrialization in urban America. Eleanor taught immigrant children in New York's lower East Side. She saw poverty firsthand. She spoke about it and took a stand, even within the circles of her affluent upper class.

Later, when actively engaged in politics, she would write about it this way: "It is always disagreeable to take stands. It is always easier to compromise, always easier to let things go. To many women, and I am one of them, it is extraordinarily difficult to care about anything enough to cause disagreement or unpleasant feelings, but I have come to the conclusion that this must be done for a time until we can prove our strength and demand respect for our wishes. We cannot even be of real service in the coming



Allida Black, in George Washington University's Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project explained Eleanor's experience this way



Eleanor Roosevelt on her Wedding Day, Courtesy Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Museum and Library

campaign and speak as a united body of women unless we have the respect of the men and show that when we express a wish, we are willing to stand by it.”

She brought her cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, on a tour of the city’s most impoverished areas. He was appalled. It left an impression on him about poverty and its hopelessness. Later, as President, he recalled that first visit. It would serve him well as he engineered legislation to deal with the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Two years after the visit to the slums of Manhattan, Franklin and Eleanor were married. It was St. Patrick’s Day, 1905. President Theodore Roosevelt gave the bride away. The event was reported on the front page of the *New York Times*. The world watched as a new Roosevelt dynasty emerged.

Be Strong

Within eleven years, the family had six children. They lived well. Vacations were at the family estate in Hyde Park, New York and Campobello Island, off the Canadian coast, near Maine. FDR’s political star was rising. He was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy by President Woodrow Wilson, a post held by another Roosevelt who became President twelve years before. Theodore Roosevelt used his position in the Navy to bring him nationwide attention. So did FDR.

Eleanor and Franklin’s last son was born in 1916. Two years later, she learned of a love affair. Franklin was seeing Eleanor’s social secretary, Lucy Mercer. Eleanor offered him a divorce. Her mother-in-law convinced them to continue. Divorce would put an end to Franklin’s career. Eleanor would be forced to raise five children alone. She made choices. In doing so, she showed strength of will and character. She preserved her marriage, on her terms. The involvement with another woman changed their relationship. Eleanor now emerged to search for her own friendships. She was free to fulfill her desire to be politically active and independent. She stayed married. Now, a union of trust and affection was fashioned that carried Eleanor and Franklin through the most turbulent times of their lives.

In 1920, FDR was nominated to be Vice President with James Cox of Ohio. The Democrats lost the election by a landslide. Warren G. Harding, the Republican challenger, won the largest margin in Presidential elections up to that time, with over sixty percent of the popular vote. Instead, FDR laid the foundation for a bright political future. He became a national figure. Plans were ahead for higher office. Followers were flocking to him, especially in his home state of New York.

Eleanor worked in the 1920 campaign and continued her social causes. She developed a close friendship with FDR’s political adviser, Louis Howe, joined the League of Women Voters and worked to pass the nineteenth amendment to the US Constitution for Women’s Right to Vote. She raised their children, transformed their marriage into a partnership based on ambition, admiration, faith, hope, and mutual interest.

Take Charge

The Roosevelts needed a vacation. The Presidential campaign was exhausting. FDR had spent a decade of round the clock work. He had built strong political alliances.

His name was mentioned for Governor of New York and even the White House. The future was upbeat and filled with dreams. They would evaporate suddenly on an island in Canada. The family headed to Campobello. It was August 10th, 1921. FDR took his three older children for a sail and swim. In their cottage, Franklin felt a chill overtake him. He was tired. His back ached. He went to bed early and rose with a high fever. Pain spread throughout his body. By nightfall, he could not move his legs. Doctors failed to diagnose his illness. A specialist was called. He broke the news to the family. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had polio.

He was paralyzed from the waist down. He would never walk again. He was thirty-nine years old.

Months of treatment proved fruitless. His paralysis was permanent. FDR faced a period of denial, depression and then grew determined to walk again. For the next seven years, he focused on rehabilitation. Eleanor took charge. Against the wishes of her mother-in-law, Sarah Delano Roosevelt, she encouraged him to continue his political career. She helped him devote his energy to Warm Springs, a place in Georgia he found in 1924 as a haven for those seeking relief from polio. The warm waters were buoyant. He was able to swim and develop his upper body. His spirit and desire to live and fight grew. FDR gave a part of his fortune to Warm Springs as a spot where others could be rehabilitated. Eleanor aided him. She gave him the security he needed to not be afraid.

Be Active

While Franklin focused on recovering from polio, Eleanor set out to expand her networking, sharpen her political and personal skills, and lead women to seek a stronger role in society. She turned herself into a recognized leader. She was active with the most important women's organizations in New York State: The *Women's Division of the Democratic State Committee*, the *Women's Trade Union League*, the *Women's City Club* and chaired the *Legislative Affairs Committee* of the *League of Women Voters*. Eleanor mobilized women members of the Dutchess County, New York, mobilized Democrats, supported the World Court and wrote her first article, "Common Sense Versus Party Regularity."

She carefully studied the Congressional Record, each week. She interviewed political leaders in the State and in the Congress. Eleanor testified to support new labor laws to protect women and children from exploitation. She reported her findings to the League members, explaining the status of bills of interest to the group. She suggested strategies and plans and worked to implement them. Eleanor was elected Vice Chairman of the organization. She continued to work with them for the rest of her life.

Turn Conviction into Action

Eleanor believed strongly in personal resourcefulness. She had powerful convictions and followed through with actions. For example, she believed in the value of entrepreneurship. She was alarmed at the migration from rural communities to large cities, a trend that created unemployment in towns and led to a shutdown of small businesses. These demographic changes were destroying local culture and history. Traditional talent in tiny villages was vanishing. Eleanor wanted to create an example of a place that could change this pattern. She took the initiative by devoting a section of the family's Hyde Park estate to create Val-Kill Industries, in 1926. The name came from the family's Dutch heritage and meant "valley stream."

The business employed local artisans to make reproductions of colonial furniture. During the Presidency, some of the wood was from beams torn out of the White House, during restorations. The Roosevelts lent their name and prestige to the project. Val-Kill provided jobs for young men and women and supplemental income for farmers. It stressed sound business acumen and sustaining a balance between urban and rural life. Eleanor marketed Val-Kill and the principles it represented of free enterprise and families staying together.

When FDR became governor in 1928, Eleanor put the project into high gear. She used her office as First Lady of New York State to promote the ideas of craftsmanship and quality as standards for success. In 1929, she was interviewed by *Your Home Magazine* for an article entitled: *A Governor's Wife at Work:*

Part of their goal was to produce fine handmade heirloom furniture, but by doing so, they were acting on a larger social goal of providing a second income to local farming people in rural Hyde Park so as to keep them from migrating away to city jobs.

The furniture was colonial reproduction in shape and form and to most degree, in its construction. Some was constructed of pinewood, but most was of hardwood, such as cherry, maple or walnut. Most pieces were brand stamped with their hallmark: VAL-KILL. A second stamp was used, with a double box around the word. Fewer pieces were stamped with the craftsman's first name: Otto, Frank, Arn, Karl, Wolf have been seen. Sometimes model numbers with letters were stamped. A very few pieces were stamped with Eleanor Roosevelt's signature and date...

Even though we selected our workmen for their artistic leanings as well as their technical ability, she explained, they could not understand, at first, that we did not want the furniture slapped together any old way to get it finished. They were so used to rushing through with a job, using the methods of joining and finishing which would give quick though not always lasting results that it seemed incredible that anything else could be asked of them in this age of factory production...now they take genuine pride in turning out a beautiful piece of work.

In the three years since the starting of the Val-Kill shop the number of workmen has increased from one to eight...Eventually we plan to have a school for craftsmen at Val-Kill, Mrs. Roosevelt explained, where the young boys and girls of the neighborhood can learn cabinetmaking or weaving, and where they can find employment, rather than have to go to the go to work in the city.

Eleanor used Val-Kill as an example of how communities could achieve better living and social conditions. To a large extent, the venture was successful until 1937 when the Great Depression forced an end to the business. Eleanor proved to herself and others that transforming principles into reality demanded active engagement and taking a stand for what she believed in. This would be the hallmark of her leadership.

Learn to Communicate

She mastered public speaking, negotiations, debating, and effective and creative writing. She delivered her first radio address in 1925, and launched her first article in the public press, two years later, entitled, *What I Want Most Out of Life*. In April, 1928, she wrote another piece that attracted national attention: *Women Must Learn to Play the Game as Men Do*, in *Red Book Magazine*. Eleanor Roosevelt did not mince words.

She criticized the male-dominated political establishment, including the one in which she was vigorously involved. Harnessing the power of women would be her manifesto. She advised them to persist and be committed, despite the obstacles posed by men:

Women have been voting for ten years. But have they achieved actual political equality with men? No. They go through the gesture of going to the polls; their votes are solicited by politicians; and they possess the external aspect of equal rights. But it is mostly a gesture without real power. With some outstanding exceptions, women who have gone into politics are refused serious consideration by the men leaders...

She said that it was male hostility that prevented sharing control, despite the outward "veneer" of courtesy toward women. Excuses were used, she stated, as obstacles. For instance: "Oh, she wouldn't like the kind of work she'd have to do!" Or, "You know she wouldn't like the people she'd have to associate with — that's not a job for a nice, refined woman." Or more usually: "You see, there is so little patronage, nowadays. We must give every appointment the most careful consideration. We've got to consider the 'good of the party.' 'The good of the party' eliminates women!"

She pointed out that few women would be present at political meetings. Rarely would men consider a woman on the ticket to run for office. "It is a strong and liberal man, indeed, who speaks on behalf of the women at those secret conclaves, and endeavors to have them fairly treated," she wrote. Women who fought for suffrage and equal rights dropped out of the race to attain political power, she insisted. These were people of talent with exceptional leadership qualities. Gaining the vote, in her view, was one step in the battle for "economic independence, and social and spiritual equality with men." The way to attain political power, explained Eleanor, was to play the game as men do:

Our means is to elect, accept and back women political bosses...Women are today ignored largely because they have no banded unity under representative leaders and spokesmen capable of dealing with the bosses controlling groups of men whose votes they can 'deliver.' These men bosses have the power of coordinated voters behind them. Our helplessness is that of an incoherent anarchy.

Eleanor emphasized that women had to use the system to attain leadership. They had to become "bosses" like the men. She explained:

The term boss does not necessarily infer what it once did. Politics have been purged of many of the corruptions prevalent a quarter of a century ago. ...As things are today, the boss is a leader, often an enlightened, high-minded leader, who retains little of the qualities imputed by the old use of this obnoxious word, but who still exercises authority over his district. I therefore use the word, as it is the word men understand... Certain women profess to be horrified at the thought of women bosses bartering and dickering in the hard game of politics with men. But many more women realize that we are living in a material world, and that politics cannot be played from the clouds. To sum up, women must learn to play the game as men do. If they go into politics, they must stick to their jobs, respect the time and work of others, master knowledge of history and human nature, learn diplomacy, subordinate their likes and dislikes of the moment and choose leaders to act for them and to whom they will be loyal. They can keep their ideals; but they must face facts and deal with them practically.

Stand Up for Principles

Eleanor was a valiant proponent of human rights. She was sensitive to the human condition. Whether it was in the run-down ghettos of America's giant cities or healing soldiers with the *Red Cross* in World War I, Eleanor Roosevelt was there. She was involved.

In 1923, she helped organize a special prize to promote peace. A multimillionaire, Edward Bok, had made a fortune as publisher and editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. He was interested in current events and international affairs. Bok wanted to make the world conscious of the need for peace, following the devastation of World War I.

In particular, he sought to get the US Government to encourage international reconciliation and goodwill. The *American Peace Award* was created. It was worth \$100,000. He wanted research papers showing "the best practicable plan by which the United States may cooperate with other nations for the achievement and preservation of world peace." A jury would choose the winner. Half of the money would be awarded upon selection and half when the US Senate adopted the plan. Eleanor was asked to join the jury. They gave the prize to Charles Herbert Levermore. He was Secretary of the *World Court League* and the *New York Peace Society*. He recommended US membership in the *World Court* and collaboration with the *League of Nations*.

Congress opened an investigation into the prize, which was viewed as a "tool of foreign governments or foreign institutions." America was isolationist. It wanted little involvement in foreign affairs. The Peace prize was internationalist in tone and spirit. Some members of

Congress were suspicious of the verdict of the jury. Hearings were held. Eleanor appeared with Professor Esther Lape, who was involved with the *Women's Trade Union League*. She and Lape testified. Eleanor was convincing and determined. She stood up for an unpopular principle. The investigation ended quickly. Eleanor had experienced the scrutiny of political power in Washington. It would serve her well.

Set Realistic Goals and Be Pragmatic

Eleanor took leadership positions in several organizations, such as the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*. In 1927, she hosted a conference of four hundred delegates from the organization in the Roosevelt home, in Hyde Park. She set out to organize a women's peace movement, with clear objectives. She encouraged women to set specific objectives, avoid theoretical abstractions and be practical and realistic in their approach to success.

According to the *Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project* at George Washington University:

She brought enthusiasm, dedication, and a lively interest in other people to her work. She urged coworkers and fellow reformers to spend less time theorizing, set realistic goals, prioritize their tasks, and delegate assignments. Her persistent pragmatism attracted attention within the party and women's political organizations. Soon the media publicized her clout, treating her as an influential woman who speaks her political mind.

Exactly eight decades from when Eleanor Roosevelt held her conference on peace, Newsweek Magazine analyzed her writings to discover her innermost thoughts. They wrote about her sense of practicality:

In allowing us to study her own words, in letters, speeches, columns and diary entries, a different portrait of the much-lionized woman emerges — one of a pragmatic, savvy politician. While she is remembered as a saintly, long-suffering figure, we can forget she was an indefatigable, disciplined activist — as historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wrote, a 'tough and salty old lady' — who resisted stereotyping when she was alive, and constantly protested she was not interested in power while vigorously pursuing it.

Stay Focused on Your Vision

Eleanor Roosevelt wanted to get her husband elected to high office. This was her objective. It was political power that would put into practice her values of social justice for all. At the same time, she realized that her role would change. She would have new responsibilities that could limit her freedom. She wanted to maintain her independence, while still helping Franklin achieve his ambitions. Her speeches, writing and activism kept FDR's name in the limelight while he recovered from polio. 1924 was a special occasion for the Roosevelts. Al Smith, Governor of New York, wanted the Democratic nomination for President of the United States. The convention was held in New York City.

Eleanor and Franklin's closest political adviser, Louis Howe, convinced Roosevelt to put Smith's name in nomination. FDR was frightened. He feared his paralysis would cause him to lose control, fall during the convention and show he did not have the stamina to be a leader. Eleanor helped him meet the challenge. She encouraged him. She relieved his fears. She said later that polio taught Franklin what suffering was about. His illness made him stronger.

Even though he was paralyzed from the waist down, and could not move his legs, steel braces helped hold him erect. He learned to toss his lower body out one leg at a time to give the impression of walking while holding on to the arm of his son. Finally, convinced he could succeed, FDR offered to put the Governor's name in nomination at the 1924 Democratic Presidential Convention. Smith was delighted.

It was late June. New York was sweltering. Over a thousand party members huddled into the hot stands of a convention center. A reporter explained it this way: “It was the Roaring Twenties, the days of hot jazz and bathtub gin, and the Democrats met in Madison Square Garden, which was packed to the rafters with New York characters, described in The Washington Post as ‘Tammany shouters, Yiddish chanters, vaudeville performers, Sagwa Indians, hula dancers, street cleaners, firemen, policemen, movie actors and actresses, bootleggers...’ Plus 1,098 delegates and 15 presidential candidates.”

For the first time, radio transmitters were mounted to capture a blow-by-blow description



Eleanor Roosevelt and Will Rogers in Los Angeles, California, Courtesy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

of the events. It was the same equipment that covered the Republican Convention in Cleveland a few weeks earlier, an event that nominated Calvin Coolidge. Less than five percent of American homes had radios. By 1932, sixty percent of households and two hundred fifty thousand cars would. The 1924 Republican convention became a national drama. Schools were closed so that students could listen. Department stores set up demonstration rooms. They were packed with people and customers buying radios. According to Gleason Archer, “Millions of radio listeners sat before their loudspeakers or listened with earphones—thrilled or enraged, depending upon their political faith, by what they heard.”

Since Coolidge was a sitting President, there was, in effect, no contest. The process was so simple that humorist Will Rogers said that the nomination could have been done by

postcard. This was a far cry from what the Democrats would experience in New York.

At the Garden, FDR entered through a back door. He wanted to avoid reporters taking photos of him in a wheelchair. He was carried up the stairs, thrown over the back of a strong aide. Behind a curtain, he took up his crutches. He was perspiring. His family was in the wings, watching and waiting. William J. vanden Heuvel described what followed:

On the arm of his son, FDR, with his legs firm in locked braces, holding a cane in his other hand, advanced slowly without crutches to the podium, in Madison Square Garden. It was a moment that no one who saw it would ever forget. His palpable courage, his lyrical eloquence, his magnificent voice, brought the delegates to their feet – and at that moment, Franklin Roosevelt resumed a national political career. Seven years after his polio attack, Roosevelt was elected Governor of New York.

As Frank Freidel, one of the important Roosevelt biographers, has written, Roosevelt had perfected so effective an illusion of his strength and well-being, that most Americans never realized until after his death that he was, in fact, a paraplegic.

The crowd, spellbound, heard FDR call Smith, “The Happy Warrior.” After one hundred and three ballots, John W. Davis, the former Congressman from West Virginia, was selected. Smith lost the nomination. Calvin Coolidge won another term in office, by a landslide. In spite of the election outcome, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt had a personal and political triumph. It would carry them to the Governor’s mansion and to the White House.

Be Brave in Confronting Disapproval

Eleanor worked to help women be courageous and compete for public office. She advised them to be strong and not give in to criticism. She said:

You cannot take anything personally. You cannot bear grudges. You must finish the day's work when the day's work is done. You cannot get discouraged too easily. You have to take defeat over and over again and pick up and go on. Be sure of your facts. Argue the other side with a friend until you have found the answer to every point which might be brought up against you. Women who are willing to be leaders must stand out and be shot at. More and more they are going to do it, and more and more they should do it...Every woman in public life needs to develop skin as tough as rhinoceros hide.

Eleanor faced constant condemnation. It came from many quarters. She was criticized for the company she kept, her feminist views, and the causes she took up. Even her family denounced her and Franklin for their political choices. These attacks were, perhaps, the most painful.

The Roosevelts had more than one branch. The Oyster Bay clan was that of Teddy Roosevelt. They were Republicans. The Hyde Park group, from upstate New York, were Democrats. President Theodore Roosevelt understood this. He had no animosity toward Franklin and Eleanor. Teddy's children, Theodore Roosevelt Jr. (Ted) and his half-sister, Alice Roosevelt Longworth were not as kind. They resented the use of the family name for political gain. They felt many believed Franklin was Theodore's son. Ted and Alice set out to correct the record.

The Republicans had Ted follow FDR during the 1920 Presidential campaign. Ted said again and again that Franklin did not have the family endorsement. The animosity grew. When Ted ran for Governor against Al Smith in 1924, Eleanor went around the state following her cousin with a teapot mounted on a car. It symbolized Ted's alleged involvement in the *Teapot Dome* scandal, during the Harding administration. Al Smith won. Some observers blamed Eleanor for the defeat. The enmity increased.

Ted and Alice opposed the *New Deal*. They said it was about government control of economic activity. For example, on June 5th, 1933, FDR took the nation off the Gold Standard. It was a dramatic and controversial event. Conservatives wanted to keep gold to control inflation. Liberals wanted to remove it to allow government to increase the money supply. The Oyster Bay Roosevelts opposed the new policy. Shortly after the law was enacted, Alice appeared at a White House reception, decked out with gold jewelry. The incident embarrassed FDR and Eleanor. Even so, Eleanor kept her calm appearance.

Alice and her brothers were isolationists and spoke out against FDR's interventionist policies. Alice claimed that FDR wanted war to further amass power. She and Ted supported the America First movement, which fought the administration's policies of aid to Europe. The familial acrimony subsided with Pearl Harbor. The Oyster Bay and Hyde Park Roosevelts went to war. Ted and his brother Kermit and all four of Eleanor and Franklin's sons served in the military. FDR would see his sons return home. Teddy's boys were not as lucky.

Theodore Roosevelt Jr.'s Masonic Lodge told this story about what happened next:

Ted was promoted to Brigadier General and paid a visit to FDR at the White House to bury the hatchet in support of a greater common cause. The visit was well publicized, and afterwards Ted told the press that 'this is our country, our cause and our president.' Ted's unit was sent overseas, in June 1942. Their first engagement was the invasion of Algeria. Ted's reputation as a fighting General grew with comments in the press referring to him as the soldier with too much guts for one man.

Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr. was the only American General who landed on Utah Beach during the 1944 invasion of Normandy. He asked permission to lead his troops, despite a cardiac condition.

He died a month later, in France, from a heart attack. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The French gave him the Legion of Honor, making him the only American to receive this distinction in both World Wars.

He was buried next to his brother Quentin, who was killed in France, in World War I. Ted's Medal of Honor citation included these words:

His valor, courage, and presence in the very front of the attack and his complete unconcern at being under heavy fire inspired the troops to heights of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice. Although the enemy had the beach under constant direct fire, Brig. Gen. Roosevelt moved from one locality to another, rallying men around him, directed and personally led them against the enemy.

Ted and his father are one of the two sets of father and sons nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor. The other is that of General Douglas MacArthur and his son Arthur.

Ted's brother, Kermit, also a brave soldier, died from a self-inflicted wound in 1943. He suffered from the same form of depression as Eleanor's father. By 1945, FDR was dead. The family feud was over. The heroism of the Roosevelts had snuffed it out.

Lead Without Fear

Despite constant scorn, and even ridicule, Eleanor worked to realize her agenda and sharpen her leadership skills. She was not afraid. She wrote about fear this way:

My greatest fear has always been that I would be afraid—afraid physically or mentally or morally and allow myself to be influenced by fear instead of by my honest convictions...The encouraging thing is that every time you meet a situation, though you may think at the time it is an impossibility and you go through the tortures of the damned, once you have met it and lived through it you find that forever after you are freer than you ever were before. If you can live through that you can live through anything. You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you stop to look fear in the face.

You are able to say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'

The danger lies in refusing to face the fear, in not daring to come to grips with it. If you fail anywhere along the line, it will take away your confidence. You must make yourself succeed every time. 'You must do the thing you think you cannot do.'

Hate mail and threats against her and her family did not deter Eleanor Roosevelt from leading.

In 1984, the *National Women's History Museum* (NWHM) commemorated the reissuance of a US postage stamp dedicated to her with these words:

While the administration set out to solve the nation's economic ills, she developed a niche as the protector of those most likely to be left out – especially women, blacks, and children. As her reputation grew, she received unprecedented amounts of mail and responded to literally thousands of letters with small personal checks. Even hate mail received a polite response in the hope of changing minds. The assistance she rendered to African Americans was one of the greatest causes of hate mail.

She was not afraid to move forward and take controversial positions against injustice and to put into practice her beliefs. The NWHM quoted Doris Weatherford, from her book, *American Women's History: An A to Z of People, Organizations, Issues, and Events* concerning Eleanor Roosevelt:

She became a union member, joining the American Newspaper Guild, and despite unkind remarks about her voice, conducted a radio show.

In all these news outlets, she urged women to become involved and to run for office; only two years into FDR's presidency, she accepted criticism for returning to New York to campaign for Carolyn O'day's legislative candidacy. Her issue agenda was decidedly feminist, with advocacy of programs that are not yet reality such as childcare subsidies and national health care. To put these ideas in writing and to speak them on radio demonstrated exceptional courage and commitment: she understood that these methods meant that she was surrendering the politician's usual shelter in a storm of controversy, for she could not claim to have been misquoted.

This directness made her critics gleeful – and critics she had. Such an assertive woman challenged the foundation of the conservative world, for not only were her political and economic views radically modern, so was her professional life. Endless commentators – usually male – scorned the First Lady in print and on radio, ridiculing not only her ideas, but especially her stout figure, toothy smile, dowdy dress, arrogant children, and negligence of social standards. When, with innovative symbolism, the White House served hot dogs to the British king and queen during the Depression, these critics were apoplectic. The First Lady and her causes were regularly labeled 'communistic,' and ultimately the charges were so unfair that even most Republicans were embarrassed by her worst maligner, columnist Westbrook Pegler.

Pegler was one of the many detractors of Eleanor Roosevelt. *Time* magazine described him this way:

At the age of 44, Mister Pegler's place as the great dissenter for the common man is unchallenged. Six days a week, for an estimated \$65,000 a year, in 116 papers reaching nearly 6,000,000 readers, Mister Pegler is invariably irritated, inexhaustibly scornful. Unhindered by coordinated convictions of his own, Pegler applies himself to presidents and peanut vendors with equal zeal and skill. Dissension is his philosophy.

Conservative author, William F. Buckley, wrote about Pegler in a 2004 *New Yorker* article, saying that “he would write sarcastically of Eleanor Roosevelt that her column (“My Day”) marked ‘another routine day in the life of one who is [only] stingily described as the ‘most remarkable’ and ‘most energetic’ woman of her time.’”

During the 1924 campaign, Eleanor worked to organize *Women's Democratic Clubs* throughout New York State. Her goal was to get women involved in the political process. She also joined the board of the bi-partisan *Women's City Club*. There, she introduced women to major social issues like child labor and workmen's compensation, and pushed to adopt legislation to legalize distribution of birth control information to married couples, a stance which drew headlines across New York State.

Learn to Accept Criticism

She was at the forefront of fighting for organized labor and workers' rights. Brigid O'Farrell wrote of Eleanor in her 2010 book, *She Was One of Us: Eleanor Roosevelt and the American Worker*.

Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the most popular yet at the same time most vilified public figures of the twentieth century. She was consistently ranked as the most admired woman in the country during her lifetime, and a survey of historians rated her most

influential. Working people wrote to her directly about their problems, seeking empathy and action; she was their champion. In response to her support for labor, closely intertwined with her outspoken defense of civil rights and civil liberties, she was criticized by politicians, fellow journalists, and ordinary citizens.

She had an extensive FBI file and was frequently accused of being a communist. Hate mail and death threats followed her across the country.

Even FDR's friends commented on Eleanor's activism. At times, it was in the form of sarcastic comments and in-house gossip. One was Former Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels. He was Franklin's boss during the Wilson administration. It was May 1924. He taunted his former Assistant Secretary by saying he was happy that he was not the only "squaw man in the country."

At the 1924 Democratic National Convention, she chaired the women's delegation to the platform committee. She was Al Smith's bridge to women voters. The committee defeated her requests. The Convention rejected her nominee. In the face of criticism and defeat, she returned to New York, undeterred. "I took my politics seriously," she wrote in her autobiography and went full speed ahead into the state campaign. She brought the Party message to rural voters. She listened to farmers and carried their concerns to the leadership.

The general election was a defeat. Al Smith was re-elected governor, but the rest of the gubernatorial ticket was replaced with Republicans. They included Secretary of State Florence E. S. Knapp. She became the first woman elected to statewide office in New York State. She would be the only one for the next fifty years.

Be Persistent

1928 was a momentous year for America and for Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt. It echoed the shape of things to come. Peace and prosperity had reached new heights.

Since the end of the First World War, the American stock market boomed. Millions invested savings in the market. Share prices rocketed. By 1924, the index of the key twenty-five industrial stocks, as published in the *New York Times* index, exceeded the one hundred mark. At the start of 1928, they were over two hundred forty-five, reaching four hundred fifty-two by September, 1929. Stock selling prices had almost doubled, in less than two years. In August 1928 Herbert Hoover, Republican Presidential nominee, conveyed the feelings of many of his countrymen about the state of the nation and the world: "We in America are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land. The poorhouse is vanishing from among us."

Events like the release of the first talking picture, Amelia Earhart's crossing of the Atlantic, Commander Richard E. Byrd's first Arctic expedition and Dr. Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin in St. Mary's Hospital in London seemed to open a new age of hope, adventure and discovery. In October 1928, a device would be used for the first time to save polio victims from respiratory failure. It was called the iron lung. That year, a license for a device called a television was granted by the Federal Radio Commission. In Chillicothe, Missouri, a machine was used for the first time to slice and wrap bread. A US federal agent organized a group of men called "The Untouchables," to battle organized crime and enforce the prohibition laws in Chicago. Three years later, Eliot Ness's work would lead to the arrest and imprisonment of gangster Al Capone.

Across the ocean, a man called Adolf Hitler was holding major rallies, in Germany. His party won fourteen seats in the Reichstag, in the 1928 elections. That year, the second edition of his book, *Mein Kampf* was published. Italian dictator Benito Mussolini survived a bomb attack in Milan that killed seventeen people. In Paris, the Kellogg Briand peace pact was

signed. It was the first accord of its kind to outlaw aggressive war. The Japanese Emperor, Hirohito, was enthroned. That same year, his country broke off diplomatic relations with China. Three years later, they would invade the province of Manchuria. While these events unfolded, America prepared for another Presidential election.

Eleanor Roosevelt persisted in her political activities. She worked to support candidates throughout the state of New York. Allida Black explained what was happening:

The New York Times Magazine recognized ER's increasing political clout and featured a lead article on her influence in its April 8 issue. Ironically, because of this continuous activity, by the time her husband received the party's nomination for governor, Eleanor Roosevelt was better known among the faithful party activists than was FDR.

Franklin, once again, put in nomination Al Smith for President of the United States. Smith became the Democratic Party standard bearer. Eleanor worked to gain the women's vote for him. By state law, Smith could not run again for governor. He wanted Roosevelt to succeed him so that he could have a better chance of winning New York in the general election. FDR refused. Louis Howe was against the idea. Franklin would not take Smith's calls. Smith turned to Eleanor. She felt Franklin had to run despite Howe's opinion. She persisted. She promised to convince FDR. She phoned her husband, spoke to him about his duty and what was expected and gave the receiver to Al Smith. Franklin agreed. Eleanor's persistence changed the course of history.

Apply Passion in All You Do

In the Foreword to Robin Gerber's splendid book, *Leadership the Eleanor Roosevelt Way*, James Macgregor Burns explains Eleanor Roosevelt's leadership skills and her approach:

How was Eleanor Roosevelt a great leader? She exemplified the qualities of leadership that scholars have identified as crucial. First of all, she responded to peoples' fundamental wants and needs – especially those who are disadvantaged. Second, because she was innovative and creative in her ideas about how we can improve not only our own lives but also those around us. Third, because she knew that to fight for grand but controversial principles meant that inevitably one comes into conflict with others, and she never shrank from a grand fight for principle. But above all...she was an outstanding leader because of her ethical standards and values: She believed in ethical conduct both in public and private life and she believed in the great principles that have guided America from the start (summed up in the words of the Declaration of Independence) 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' and its commitment to equality.

Eleanor's passion for her causes sustained her when Franklin won the governorship. She created separate political support systems from her husband, while still helping him achieve his agenda. "It is essential," she said in a *Good Housekeeping* article about the role of a wife, for her "to develop her own interests, to carry on a stimulating life of her own."

She worked hard on a national level to help Smith win the votes of women, while Franklin conducted a vigorous campaign for governor across New York State. Her values had gone beyond the promotion of her husband's future to unity with the cause of women and those in need. While campaigning for him and Al Smith, Eleanor Roosevelt defined the core of her principles, as quoted by Jennifer Naddeo who cites Current History magazine, and Eleanor's article, *Jeffersonian Principles: The Issue in 1928*:

The outstanding issue today is much as it was in Jefferson's day trust in the people or fear of the people...Our desire is to see the conception of government return to something with a little more human outlook and understanding, not controlled by any

interests, but concerned primarily with fostering the interests of all people, thinking first of the average man's happiness, his health, his education, his labor conditions, his opportunities for joyous living. This is simply Jeffersonian Democracy – the same today as it was in 1792.

FDR won. His party along, with Al Smith, went down in a resounding defeat. Exactly thirty years after Theodore Roosevelt was sworn in as governor of New York State, his fifth cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the same oath of office.

The echo of Eleanor was in FDR's first inaugural address as governor. They were the same issues and causes that she fought for with passion and eloquence. The soul of the New Deal was in his words:

It is the recognition that our civilization cannot endure unless we as individuals realize our personal responsibility to and dependency on the rest of the world. For it is literally true that the 'self-supporting' man or woman has become as extinct as the man of the Stone Age. Without the help of thousands of others, any one of us would die, naked and starved. Consider the bread upon our tables, the clothes upon our backs, the luxuries that make life pleasant; how many men worked in sunlit fields, in dark mines, in the fierce heat of molten metal and among the looms and wheels in countless factories in order to create them for our use and enjoyment...we as individuals must in our turn give our time and intelligence to help those who have helped us. To secure more of life's pleasures for the farmer; to guard the toilers in the factories and insure them a fair wage and protection from the dangers of their trades; to compensate them with adequate insurance for injuries received while working for us; to open the doors of knowledge for their children more widely, to aid those who are crippled and ill...to lead wrong doers into the right path.

Eleanor struggled for high quality learning for all. She stressed the need for knowledge, especially for girls. As always, she put her convictions into practice and did so with enthusiasm. After FDR became governor, she continued to teach at the Todhunter School, in New York City. It was a private finishing school for girls from well-off families, founded by a graduate of Oxford University, Winifred Todhunter. It had a college prep program and taught courses in the arts. Eleanor's friend, Marion Dickerman, was the school's vice-principal. In 1927, she, Eleanor and her friend, Nancy Cook, bought the school.

The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project describes how she approached her role:

ER taught American history, American literature, English, and current events to junior and seniors. Like Souvestre, ER strove to blend a rigorous curriculum with exercises designed to encourage students to think for themselves. Her history exams had two parts: one factual and one analytical. Students had to answer questions such as: 'Give your reasons for or against allowing women to actively participate in the control of the government, politics and officials through the vote, as well as your reasons for or against women holding office in the government.' 'What is the object today of the inheritance, income and similar taxes?' 'How are Negroes excluded from voting in the South?' In each class, she underscored the connection between the things of the past and the things of today, as well as encouraging the students to understand the difference between subject and citizen. She took students on field trips to the New York Children's Court and various tenements and markets in the city so they could see the problems facing New Yorkers and how the government tried to address them.

She taught three days a week. "I teach because I love it. I cannot give it up," she said. She dedicated herself to instruction with the same passion for politics and fighting for social justice. As she learned from her mentor, Mademoiselle Souvestre, to improve the human condition, she had to work to improve the lives of human beings. Learning was the key."

Jennifer Naddeo, quotes from a Todhunter brochure prepared by Eleanor and her associates which expressed the transformative education goals of the school:

1. *Maturing girls must be recognized first as individuals, each with her particular abilities, capacities and possibilities. They must then be helped to understand themselves as individuals, to relate themselves to the world about them, and thus to lead a successful life.*
2. *Girls must learn to recognize the responsibilities which come with opportunity.*
3. *They must mature with an understanding of the problems which will face them in life, equipped to contribute as well as to receive.*

Eleanor was at Todhunter until 1938. Decades later, a student still recalled the experience of meeting her:

I attended the Todhunter School in 1935 and 1936, in the 5th and 6th Form, when I was 9 and 10 years old. I met Mrs. Roosevelt and experienced firsthand the extraordinary presence she conveyed, a sense that she actually cared about me! I felt this immediately upon looking [way] up at her and shaking hands with her politely and curtseying (as little girls did in the 1930s). I can still recall the exact spot in the front left parlor (assembly room) of the brownstone at 66 East 80th Street that was the school where I was introduced to her. She had just come in the front door, and I happened to be nearby, I guess, and one of the teachers introduced me. She said, so directly and sincerely, it's hard to describe, 'How do you do, Annette.' I said, 'How do you do, Mrs. Roosevelt.' Mrs. Roosevelt was known to me as an important teacher who taught the older girls, in the upper grades. I had the underlying knowledge somehow that she was a very important person to the school.

Twenty blocks away, in lower Manhattan, a global upheaval was about to happen. It was less than a year after Franklin and Eleanor moved into the governor's mansion in Albany. The event changed America, the world, and the Roosevelts forever.

Reach Out to Others

By September 3, 1929, the Dow Jones Industrial Average of major American stocks had increased five times, capping a six-year run of constant growth. Irving Fisher, a well-known economist, stated at the time, "Stock prices have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau." Optimism was strong. Predictions of continued economic growth persisted. Millions bought shares "on margin" or on loan. Brokers often lent more than two thirds of the value of the securities. By the start of October 1929, nearly nine billion dollars were out on credit for stock purchases, which was greater than the quantity of money in circulation in the entire United States. Less than thirty days later, everything changed.



WPA: unemployed shown at Volunteers of America Soup Kitchen: Washington, D.C. Courtesy Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library



Long line of people waiting to be fed in New York City, 1932. Courtesy of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

Share prices fell abruptly late in the month and moved erratically up to October 29th. The market fell eleven percent, on October 24th. Some of the richest men in the country intervened to stop the hemorrhage of sell-offs. It abated somewhat, until the following week. On Monday, October 28th, the Dow slid thirteen points. The next day, known in history as “Black Tuesday,” sixteen million shares were traded. The volume would not be repeated for four decades. The Dow fell twelve percent. Thirty billion dollars evaporated in the span of forty-eight hours. Millions of families lost their life savings. Richard Salsman wrote, “Anyone who bought stocks in mid-1929 and held onto them saw most of his or her adult life pass by before getting back to even.” The market seesawed for the next two years, falling to the lowest level in the twentieth century on July 8th, 1932. The Dow Jones Industrial Average would not return to its peak of September 3rd, 1929, until November 23rd, 1954, a generation later.

Sixteen percent of American households invested in the market when the crash happened. Billions of dollars were wiped out overnight, depressing consumer spending. The psychological impact was more severe. Uncertainty created credit tightening, a drop in business expansion and the fall in share prices led to bankruptcies and massive unemployment. A global run on gold deposits was set off. This forced the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates, further tightening credit. It made the decline deeper. Four thousand banks closed. There was no insurance securing accounts for savers.

During the 1920s, new technology and new methods helped expand the supply of goods and services. Credit buying artificially increased demand. Inventories grew. People began to reduce purchases as prices rose. The market crash sparked a fall in capital flows that led to a downward spiral of less buying, a halt to factory orders, closings, bankruptcies and layoffs. The United States created eight million automobiles in 1928. It produced two million in 1932. Unemployment leaped first to fifteen percent, then to twenty-five. Entire towns and regions in places like Appalachia in West Virginia fell into poverty.

Congress passed the *Tariff Act of 1930* to stop immigrants from taking American jobs. The measure exacerbated the crises and spread the contagion globally as nations reciprocated with high tariffs that choked off US exports and worsened the downturn. The Great Depression had begun.

Set the Example

Governor and Mrs. Roosevelt went to work. FDR started a massive public works effort in New York State to relieve unemployment. He began a program to operate relief projects. He asked the state legislature for twenty million dollars in funds. FDR and Eleanor considered aid to the unemployed a “social duty” of the government. Eleanor used her extensive network of friends in the labor and welfare fields and got them involved in helping the administration. She started plans to feed the hungry.

She convinced her husband to appoint Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor. She would hold the same job in Washington in the New Deal and would be the first woman to have a cabinet post. Old age pension bills and unemployment insurance measures were signed into law. Eleanor campaigned vigorously for her husband's re-election, in 1930. He won by a large margin of over seven hundred thousand votes. It propelled him to the White House.

Roosevelt devoted resources to deal with the great social and economic crisis facing the Empire State. He assumed office with a fifteen million dollar surplus and left it with a ninety-million-dollar deficit. "The United States Constitution, said FDR, has proved itself the most marvelously elastic compilation of rules of government ever written." He saw the use of executive power to deal with the great issues of the day. He would use it to create a "new deal" for America.

Franklin won the Democratic nomination. He broke with precedent and flew from New York to Chicago to accept it. It was a first. With power and eloquence, FDR said:

This is no time for fear, for reaction or for timidity. What do the people of America want more than anything else? To my mind, they want two things: work, with all the moral and spiritual values that go with it; and with work, a reasonable measure of security — security for themselves and for their wives and children. Work and security the true goal toward which our efforts of reconstruction should lead. These are the values that this program is intended to gain; these are the values we have failed to achieve by the leadership we now have...

...I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a new deal for the American people. Let us all here assembled constitute ourselves prophets of a new order of competence and of courage. This is more than a political campaign; it is a call to arms. Give me your help, not to win votes alone, but to win in this crusade to restore America to its own people.

Wives of husbands did not take part in presidential campaigns. Eleanor worked behind the scenes to help him. She mediated disputes among managers; tailored communication to constituencies; coordinated publicity and took messages with which FDR did not want to deal. She organized women voters and prepared materials geared to them; helped create a biography that would attract voters in all parts of the country and register new voters. She travelled for him and conducted a national lecture tour that attracted attention to her husband's campaign.

Not everyone believed FDR could handle the challenge. Calvin Coolidge had his doubts:

If [FDR is elected], we will be taking in America the biggest gamble in government that any people ever took... Roosevelt has shown a great fighting spirit. I admire him for it, but he must have even greater courage to undertake what is ahead of any man the next four years. He will need greater strength, too. I know the burdens of the Presidency even [sic] in good times; in this situation they will be tremendous. There is almost an even chance that neither he nor any man in stronger health can stand the strain — and that chance is a good deal for a nation deliberately to face with all our other uncertainties.

In November 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected the thirty-second President of the United States. He defeated Herbert Hoover by more than seven million popular votes



Governor and Mrs. Roosevelt and son John, 1930, Courtesy of Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

and took 472 electoral votes to Hoover's 59. Three months later, in February 1933, the President-elect survived an assassination attempt in Miami, Florida. A bullet intended for him struck Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak. On the way to the hospital, he told FDR, "I'm glad it was me and not you, Mr. President." Cermak died. The incident cast in greater relief to Franklin and Eleanor the seriousness of what America faced and what they faced.

At 10:15 AM, on Inauguration Day, he and Eleanor started a tradition by attending a morning worship service. The day was depicted by one of FDR's biographers:

On that gray morning of March 4, 1933, Americans were desperate —exhausted, bitter and desperate. Out-of-work miners in West Virginia smashed the windows of company stores to 'steal' food to feed their children. Farmers in Iowa, on strike, refused to send their crops to market. Lynch mobs went after bankers. Food riots and bank stampedes were reported.

The leaders of the government of the United States were present to witness the event. At high noon, the US Marine Band began to play, "Hail to the Chief." FDR clung to the arm of his son James. He stood tall and erect. He walked slowly down a ramp built for the occasion. FDR took the oath of office on the family Bible. It was Dutch and dated 1686. It was opened to the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. Its words would symbolize the new administration: "all things to all men...without love, I am nothing." He pronounced each word of the oath and added, "So help me God." One hundred thousand people heard him say: "Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." Millions listened on the radio, across America. He was ready to ask for sweeping powers:

I am prepared under my constitutional duty to recommend the measures that a stricken nation in the midst of a stricken world may require. These measures, or such other measures as the Congress may build out of its experience and wisdom, I shall seek, within my constitutional authority, to bring to speedy adoption.

But if the Congress shall fail to take one of these two courses, and in the event that the national emergency is still critical, I shall not evade the clear course of duty that will then confront me. I shall ask the Congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis—broad Executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.

Franklin Roosevelt was willing to assume responsibility to meet the greatest challenge facing the nation, since the Civil War. Twenty percent of the nation's children were malnourished. Birthrates plunged. Tens of thousands of men and women, and children rode the rails and lived in makeshift shantytowns. They searched for work or any way to enhance their poverty-stricken existence.

Right after the Inauguration Day parade, FDR huddled with his aides to handle the banking crisis. There were few festivities. The Roosevelts held inaugural concerts, including one for blacks. Eleanor announced that the domestic staff of the White House would be entirely African American. This shocked the conservative society of the nation's capital. Nevertheless, the Roosevelts got busy dealing with the ever-growing national emergency. The toll on the nation and its people was described this way:

The loss of human dignity, the hopelessness and despair, the humiliation that many men felt at not being able to provide for their families is almost beyond our comprehension. There was hardly a sense of promise, a feeling that 'this too shall pass.' Those feelings did not pass for a long time, and for some, there seemed no way out but suicide. So frequent were the suicides that newspapers actually ran cartoons or comments on the phenomenon, perhaps in an attempt to cheer people up. It did not

work—the Depression went on, and on, and on. Many Americans never got over the shock.

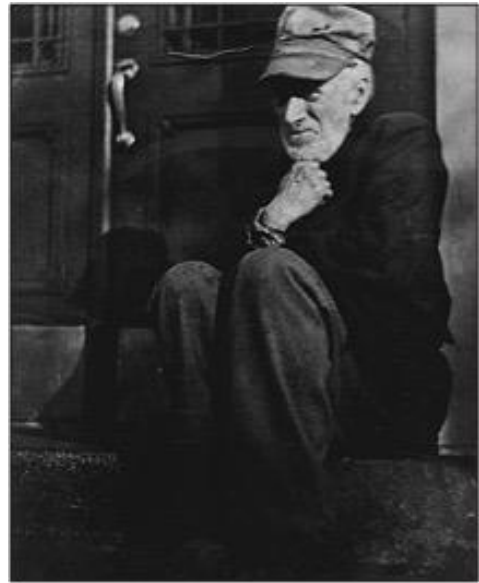
Caroline Bird's *Invisible Scar: The Great Depression* illustrated how it reached across America, into large cities and tiny communities:

In a school classroom, perhaps fourth or fifth grade, a teacher looks down at a slender little girl in clean but ragged clothes. The teacher says, 'You look pale, dear. You should go home and get something to eat.' The little girl answers, 'I can't, Miss Jones. It's my sister's turn to eat today.'

In a rundown village in Appalachia, Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of President Franklin Roosevelt, watches a sad looking little boy who is holding and stroking a pet rabbit. A little girl, the boy's sister, looks up at Mrs. Roosevelt and says, 'He thinks we're not going to eat it, but we are.'

A police officer in Chicago is walking his beat on a cold morning, when he spies a ragged, skinny old man sleeping in a doorway. He prods the man gently with his nightstick and says,

'Come on, buddy, time to move along.' Nothing. He pokes the man again, not quite so gently, and then looks closer. The man is dead. It's the fifth one he has found this week... Thousands of people lived in cardboard shacks, drainpipes, and tent camps on the fringes of America's most affluent cities. Once-prosperous men in three-piece suits stood in line for a piece of bread or a cup of soup.



Social Security Administration, homeless man, 1935. Courtesy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

Work to Help Others

Letters poured into the White House. Eleanor received more than three hundred thousand letters in 1933, alone. They came from everywhere. Many were from children:

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

I am writing to you for some of your old, soiled dresses if you have any. As I am a poor girl who has to stay out of school. On account of dresses & slips and a coat. I am in the seventh grade but I have to stay out of school because I have no books or clothes to ware (sic). I am in need of dresses & slips and a coat very bad. If you have any soiled clothes that you don't want to ware (sic) I would be very glad to get them. But please do not let the newspaper reporters get hold of this in any way and I will keep it from getting out here so there will be no one else to get hold of it. But do not let my name get out in the paper. I am thirteen years old.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

Mrs. Roosevelt, don't think I am just begging, but that is all you can call it I guess. There is no harm in asking I guess either. Do you have any old clothes you have throwed back. You don't realize how honored I would feel to be wearing your clothes. I don't have a coat at all to wear. The clothes may be too large but I can cut them down so I can wear them. Not only clothes but old shoes, hats, hose, and under wear would be appreciated so much. I have three brothers that would appreciate any old clothes of your boys or husband. I wish you could see the part of North Alabama now. The trees, groves, and everything is covered with

ice and snow. It is a very pretty scene. But oh, how cold it is here. People can hardly stay comfortable.



Eleanor Roosevelt visits National Youth Administration in Quoddy Village, Maine, 1941, Courtesy Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

Do you realize that 'Easter' is at hand? Do you realize how many hearts are broken on this account? Do you realize how hard it's going to be for most people? Like me, for instance, I am a young girl of fifteen and I need a coat, so bad I have no money, nor any means of getting any. My father has been out of work for two years.

My brother works on the C.W.A. but he is, or rather has been, insane in an asylum and has taken most of our money. My mother gets 'fits' when I ask her to buy me something new. Poor mother, I sympathize with her because it has been very hard on her, this Depression, and having no money at all but debts piling up on us. I want to tell you something: We were once the richest people in our town but now, we are the lowest, considered, the worst people of Port Morris.

For Easter some friends of mine are thinking of getting new outfits and I just have to listen to them.

How I wish I could have at least a coat. That would cost about \$5.00 at least. I need a dress. I want one and it only cost \$.79 cents. Dear Eleanor, how I wish I had this coat and dress for Easter I would be the happiest girl. I love you so much.

It was impossible to help them all. Each letter was replied to by a secretary or sent to a department for assistance. About fifty a day were selected for Eleanor to read. Sometimes, she sent a personal check to help a legitimate request. Where she could not respond personally or materially, she gave aid by helping create the *National Youth League* (NYA) and the youth programs of the *Works Progress Administration* (WPA). The NYA assisted two million high school and college students. It gave them grants to stay in school. Another two and half million were given jobs. It promoted equality. It gave aid to women and minorities. "It is a question of the right to work," she stated, "and the right to work should know no color lines." Eleanor visited over a hundred NYA sites. She wrote about them in her "My Day" columns and reported about the trips in speeches and radio addresses.



The Dust Bowl: scenes of farms destroyed by draught and soil erosion, 1935. Courtesy of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

She fought for nursery schools to help mothers hold a job, school nutrition programs, organizing stores with surplus food and clothing and other items, to be distributed to people

who needed help; and projects to allow educational and recreational activities reach disadvantaged children.

As American industry came to a halt, throwing millions out of work, the farms of the Great Plains, from Canada to Texas, were dying. Lush prairies and endless fields that supplied the wheat and corn of the nation were turning into deserts. Years of over-farming, especially during and after World War I, to supply grain for the country and the world, sucked the moisture and nourishment from some of the richest land on earth. Then, came the droughts.

The rain stopped in the summer of 1931. It would not return for eight years. The onset of the Dust Bowl was portrayed in this manner:

It had taken a thousand years for Nature to build an inch of topsoil on the Southern Plains, but it took only minutes for one good blow to sweep it all away. The water level of lakes dropped by five feet or more. The wind picked up the dry soil that had nothing to hold it down. Great black clouds of dust began to blot out the sun. In some places, the dust drifted like snow, darkening the sky for days, covering even well-sealed homes with a thick layer of dust, on everything. Dust storms engulfed entire towns.

The primary impact area of the Dust Bowl, as it came to be known, was on the Southern Plains. The Northern Plains weren't so badly affected, but the drought, dust, and agricultural decline were felt there, as well. The agricultural devastation helped to lengthen the Great Depression, whose effects were felt worldwide.

One hundred million acres of the Southern Plains were turning into a wasteland of the Dust Bowl. Large sections of five states were affected – Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico.

In 1932, the National Weather Bureau reported 14 dust storms. The next year, they were up to 38. The dust was so thick, that people scooped up bucketsful while cleaning house.



Resettlement Administration, Rural Rehabilitation Photo; "Walking 30 miles to visit family in Santa Fe"; Chomita, New Mexico, 1935. Courtesy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

Dust blocked exterior doors; to get outside, people had to climb out their windows and shovel the dust away. Dust coated everything... In the spring of 1935, the wind blew 27 days and nights without stopping. People and animals began to die of suffocation and "dust pneumonia."

Millions abandoned the land. The greatest migration in American history began. Two and a half million people moved to the Pacific coast, in less than a decade. John Steinbeck illustrated what happened in *The Grapes of Wrath*:

And, then, the dispossessed were drawn west – from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico; from Nevada and Arkansas, families, tribes, dusted out, traitored out. Carloads, caravans, homeless and hungry; twenty thousand and fifty thousand and a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand. They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless – restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do – to lift, to push, to pull, to pick, to cut – anything, any burden to bear, for food. The kids are hungry. We got no place to live. Like ants scurrying for work, for food, and most of all for land.

FDR moved rapidly to heal the economic, social, and agricultural wounds of the nation. He brought a new sense of optimism to the country. He communicated with the people with "Fireside Chats," held more press conferences than any president before or since that time,



Franklin D. Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, Sara Delano Roosevelt, and Mr. and Mrs. James Roosevelt in New York City, New York. (May 31, 1934), Courtesy Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

and traveled extensively, speaking and meeting citizens everywhere. The New Deal focused on the "3 Rs" of Relief, Recovery, and Reform. The goal was to provide relief to the unemployed, help the economy recover, and reform the system to prevent another downturn. A blizzard of new laws was passed.

Five days after his swearing in, he called a special session of Congress to deal with the financial crisis and introduced the *Emergency Banking Act* to stabilize the industry and restore savers' faith in the financial system, with federal guarantees. It was passed and signed into law on the same day. The Department of the Treasury granted licenses for banks to reopen

and stop runs on banks. The President signed the *Economy Act* on March 20th, reducing government salaries by fifteen percent, cutting private pensions and reorganizing agencies, to save over two hundred million dollars. Two days later, prohibition ended. The *Beer and Wine Revenue Act* was signed that taxed alcohol, to raise revenue.

Forty-six days into his administration, Franklin Roosevelt put into effect one of the most controversial measures in American history. He took America off the Gold Standard. Paper currency could no longer be redeemed in gold.

In his first months in office, he declared a four-day bank holiday; passed the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act, allocating



Social Security Administration: Public Health nursing made available through child welfare services, 1935, Courtesy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

two hundred million dollars to help farmers refinance mortgages and avoid foreclosure; signed the Farm Credit Act of 1933, to create local banks and local credit associations, and set up the *Federal Surplus Relief Corporation* to distribute surplus agricultural goods to the needy. By June, the National Industrial Recovery Act was passed. It provided for industry self-regulation, supervised by the government. It prohibited child labor, restricted plant operations, created a forty-hour workweek and began the *Public Works Administration* (WPA), which budgeted three point three billion dollars for public works. Assistance was given to the unemployed to find jobs, loans were given to help pay taxes, repair homes and

refinance mortgages. A federal coordinator of transportation was instituted to reorganize and make more efficient the transport system.

In 1934, the *Frazier-Lemke Farm Bankruptcy Act* was signed to restrict banks from dispossessing farms in distress; also passed was the Taylor Grazing Act, that took millions of acres of federally-owned land to start grazing districts in order to stop land deterioration. The next year, the *Drought Relief Service* was established, to buy cattle to save farmers from bankruptcy. In April, the *Emergency Relief Appropriation Act* was passed. It allocated more than five hundred million dollars for drought relief and created the *Works Progress Administration* (WPA). It would put nearly nine million people to work.

The *Soil Conservation Service* was conceived to develop topsoil retention programs. Two hundred million trees were planted by the *Civilian Conservation Corps* (CCC), from Canada to Texas, as wind breakers and to preserve soil and moisture. The CCC employed two hundred fifty thousand men. By 1941, two million would serve in the CCC. Salaries were thirty dollars a month. Part of it went to dependents. A family could eat on a dollar a day.

The *New Deal* changed the economic and social fabric of the country, with a flurry of legislation that set-in motion new ways of approaching the life of America: the Wagner Act promoted labor unions; the Social Security Act created old age pensions; the *Fair Labor Standards Act* established maximum hours and minimum wages; the *Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation* (FDIC) insured savings accounts; the *Tennessee Valley Authority* harnessed energy and irrigation systems for the southeastern states and the *Securities and Exchange Commission* regulated the stock market. A bill was passed to help Native Americans. The *Indian Reorganization Act* returned land to tribal ownership and set up an Indian Conservation Corp to build schools and infrastructure on reservations.

The number of laws passed in the first one hundred days was comparable to the quantity passed during the “Gilded Age,” the period from the end of the Civil War to the start of the twentieth century. *The New Deal* made government part of the daily lives of Americans. The effort of Franklin and Eleanor gave a sense that those in power cared for the common person.

Turn Problems into Opportunities

Eleanor was not interested in being First Lady. She feared that the ceremonial duties would prevent her from being herself. She was teaching, speaking out on social issues and writing. She was happy that Franklin achieved his ambitions. Hers still were ahead of her. She turned the problem of being First Lady into an opportunity to implement her own agenda for the good of the country and her husband’s administration. It would be the most remarkable performance of any wife of a President, before or after. She held press conferences. Only women reporters were invited. Allida Black explained it this way:

Despite her initial intent to focus on her social activities as First Lady, political issues soon became a central part of the weekly briefings. When some women reporters assigned to ER tried to caution her to speak off the record, she responded that she knew some of her statements would ‘cause unfavorable comment in some quarters...[but] I am making these statements on purpose to arouse controversy and thereby get the topics talked about.’

*End of Part 1; Part 2 to appear in the Summer/Fall 2023 JVBL issue.

References

- Beasley, Maurine (December 1986). Eleanor Roosevelt's Vision of Journalism: A Communications Medium for Women. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 16(1): 66–75. JSTOR 27550311.
- Beasley, Maurine H. (21 October 2010). *Eleanor Roosevelt: Transformative First Lady*. University Press of Kansas. 304 pp., ISBN 978-0700617272.
- Gerber, Robin (2003). *Leadership the Eleanor Roosevelt Way*. Penguin Random House. ISBN 978-0735203242.
- Glendon, M. A. (2000). John P. Humphrey and the Drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. *Journal of the History of International Law*, 2(2): 250–260. doi:10.1163/15718050020956858.
- Glendon, Mary Ann (2001). *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Random House. ISBN 978-0375760464.
- Goodwin, Doris Kearns (1994). *No Ordinary Time*. Simon & Schuster. ISBN 978-0-684-80448-4.
- Lash, Joseph P. (1971). *Eleanor and Franklin*. New York City: W.W. Norton. ISBN 978-1-56852-075-9.
- Lash, Joseph P. (1972). *Eleanor: The Years Alone*. William S. Konecky.
- Pottker, Jan (1 April 2005). *Sara and Eleanor: The Story of Sara Delano Roosevelt and Her Daughter-In-Law, Eleanor Roosevelt*. Macmillan. 416 pp. ISBN 978-0-3123-3939-5.
- Rowley, Hazel (2011). *Franklin and Eleanor: An Extraordinary Marriage*. Melbourne University Publishing. ISBN 9780522851793.
-

About the Author



Emilio Iodice, Ph.D.

Emilio Iodice is an Educator, Diplomat, Senior Executive, Best-Selling Author, and Presidential Historian. He was the son of immigrants. Iodice received his BS from Fordham University, his MBA from the City University of New York, and was named to Beta Gamma Sigma – the honorary society of top business graduates. He conducted doctoral work at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

Iodice spent over four decades as a senior executive, an educator, and a university administrator including serving as a key official for several US Administrations, reaching the top ranks of the civil service and the US diplomatic corps.

He was among the most decorated officers in history with a Gold Medal for Heroism, a Gold Medal and Silver Medal, nominations for the Bronze Medal, and commendations and citations. He was Minister in key missions abroad and was named to the list of future Ambassadors. He was knighted by the King of Italy and received Medals of Honor

from Spain and Italy. At age 33, he was named by the President to the Senior Executive Service as the youngest career public official to reach this distinction.

Before joining Loyola University Chicago, as its Director and Vice President of the University, he was Vice President of Lucent Technologies in charge of global operations. He taught at Trinity College and, after nearly a decade at Loyola, was awarded the title of Director Emeritus and Professor of Leadership.

Among his best-selling books are: *A Kid from Philadelphia*, *Mario Lanza: The Voice of the Poets*, *Profiles in Leadership from Caesar to Modern Times*; *Sisters*; *Future Shock 2.0*, *The Dragon Brief 2020*, and *Reflections, Stories of Love, Leadership, Courage and Passion*. In 2017, his book: *When Courage was the Essence of Leadership, Lessons from History* was published and in 2019, the new edition was launched. Three new bestselling books were published in 2020 and 2021: *The Commander in Chief*, *The Return of Mussolini, the Rise of Modern-Day Tyranny*, and *Liberation*, which reached the number one bestselling status after one week and became a USA TODAY bestseller. Royalties from the sale of his books go to support charitable causes.

Iodice was recently named a Senator of the Royal Family of Italy. He is Director of the Scientific Committee of the Italy USA Foundation, a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Values-Based Leadership*, and sits on the Board of Trustees of several educational institutions. He resides in Rome, Italy.

He can be reached at efiodice@yahoo.com and his books and works can be found at <http://www.iodicebooks.com>.