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I first argue briefly that a basic course on human rights, now rarely taught in American universities, should be offered everywhere. I then describe the visionary leadership of Raphael Lemkin, who almost singlehandedly created the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the inspirational leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt, without whom the Universal Declaration of Human Rights may never have been written. Their efforts and achievements are reviewed, and several of their common qualities that made them successful are noted.

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human rights; genocide; visionary leadership; identification with all humanity; definition

Ending Genocide and Creating Human Rights: A Call to Leaders in Higher Education

Exploring The Visionary Leadership of Raphael Lemkin and Eleanor Roosevelt

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I first argue briefly that a basic course on human rights, now rarely taught in American universities, should be offered everywhere. I then describe the visionary leadership of Raphael Lemkin, who almost singlehandedly created the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the inspirational leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt, without whom the Universal Declaration of Human Rights may never have been written. Their efforts and achievements are reviewed, and several of their common qualities that made them successful are noted.

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Introduction

For the past 20 years, I have taught a human rights seminar for Western Kentucky University's Honors Program and College. Almost all students, usually Honors junior and senior undergraduates, arrive as "blank slates." Most have not heard of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the most basic document on human rights. Almost all are unaware of the efforts to prevent genocides and other mass killings around the world, as exemplified in the International Criminal Court, which came into existence in 2002.

We live in an era of human rights. Following World War II, the goals of preventing other genocides, such as the Holocaust, and advancing human rights became central concerns of the world community. Progress was slow, particularly during the Cold War, but great progress has been made since it ended in the early 1990s. Beginning in 2006, the UN's Human Rights Council reviews every nation's human rights record every four years, and any nation that abuses its own citizens can expect broad condemnation. For a brief overview of the development of human rights, see the online paper by McFarland (2013).

Given the vital importance of human rights in our modern world, it is unfortunate that the subject is rarely taught in American universities. Very few political science or history departments, departments where courses on human rights best fit, offer such courses. Just five universities offer undergraduate majors or minors in human rights. The University of Dayton created the first in 1998.

This article was written for two reasons. First, it serves to encourage university leaders across the country to incorporate the study of human rights into their undergraduate curricula. Second, because this journal is an international journal focused on leadership, I want to teach a bit of important human rights history, as illustrated by two persons whose leadership in the 1940s contributed vitally to the development of human rights.

The Universal Declaration and Genocide Convention

For all humanity, the importance of two successive nights in 1948 cannot be overstated. On the night of December 9, the community of nations at the new United Nations adopted the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. On the following night, December 10, the nations adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. With the adoption of the *Genocide Convention* (as the *Convention* is usually called), the killing of an entire people became an international crime for the first time in humanity's long history. With the *Universal Declaration*, the rights that should belong to every human being, everywhere in the world, were declared and described, also for the first time in history.¹

¹ The *Genocide Convention* may be read at <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>, and the *Universal Declaration* at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>.

What is little known is that the *Genocide Convention* is due almost entirely to the dogged perseverance of one man, Raphael Lemkin, and that the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* may never have been created except for the dedicated humanitarianism and skilled diplomacy of Eleanor Roosevelt.

“Visionary leadership” (Nanus, 1992) refers to leaders who have a strong vision, are able to bring others to adopt that vision, and can then lead in bringing that vision to reality. Both Lemkin and Roosevelt were truly visionary leaders on the broadest stage, the stage of all humanity. Each had a vision of a better world, and each was able to bring the United Nations, as well as the larger world, to adopt their visions. This paper tells their stories and concludes by noting key qualities that made them successful.

Raphael Lemkin Makes Genocide a Crime

Early Life and Growing Concern for Genocide

Lemkin was Jewish, born in Poland in 1900. As a child, he read and reread *Quo Vadis*, the classic novel by Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz, of the destruction of the Christians under Nero. He also read of how “the French king, who watched the hanging of the Huguenots from his balcony . . . ordered more light on the scene so that he might better see the tormented faces of the dying.” While still a child, he heard of a pogrom against Jews in a nearby city in which “the mobs opened the stomachs of their victims and stuffed them with feathers from the pillows and the feather comforters.” From these experiences, Lemkin learned that “a line of blood led from the Roman arena through the gallows of France to the pogrom at Bialystok.” As a result, “I grew up with a strong sense of feeling that persecution must cease and that justice and love will finally prevail” (Lemkin, 1958, pp. 370-371).

In 1921, Lemkin was studying international law at the University of Lviv, when Soghomon Tehlirian walked up to Talât Pasha on a street in Berlin and killed him with a revolver. Pasha had served as the Turkish Interior Minister who had overseen the 1915 systematic slaughter of more than a million Armenians. After World War I, Tehlirian joined other Armenian survivors to seek revenge upon those who had led this slaughter.

During Tehlirian’s trial, Lemkin asked a professor why the murder of Pasha was a crime, but Pasha’s murder of more than a million was not. No law existed under which he could be arrested and tried. The professor

replied, “Consider the case of a farmer who owns a flock of chickens. He kills them and this is his business. If you interfere, you are trespassing.” National sovereignty at the time meant that whatever a nation did to its own people, no matter how horrible, was nobody else’s business. Lemkin argued with his professor, “It is a crime for Tehlirian to kill a man, but it is not a crime for his oppressor to kill more than a million men. This is most inconsistent” (cited in Power, 2002, pp. 17, 22). Lemkin became obsessed with the problem of mass killings and the need for an international law to condemn them.

Failed Efforts Between the World Wars

After finishing law school, Lemkin served as a Warsaw prosecuting attorney. Because he had written several respected papers on criminal law, he was selected as Poland’s representative to the League of Nations’ new International Bureau for the Unification of Penal Law.

The Bureau was scheduled to meet in October of 1933 in Madrid to define international crimes. Just two months before the conference, 600 Assyrian Christians had been massacred in a town in Iraq. Believing that the world was now ready to outlaw such killings, Lemkin prepared a proposal to create two new international crimes. He defined the “crime of barbarity” as the “premeditated destruction of national, racial, and religious collectivities,” and the “crime of vandalism” as the “systematic destruction of the art and cultural heritage in which the unique genius and achievement of a collectivity are revealed in fields of science, art and literature” (Lemkin, 1933). Lemkin later explained his concern for the crime of vandalism by noting:

...how impoverished our culture would be if the peoples doomed by Germany, such as the Jews, had not been permitted to create the Bible, or to give birth to an Einstein, a Spinoza; if the Poles had not had the opportunity to give to the world a Copernicus, a Chopin, a Curie; the Czechs a Huss, a Dvorak; the Greeks, a Plato and a Socrates; the Russians a Tolstoy and a Shostakovich. (Lemkin, 1946, p. 228)

Because Hitler was now in power in Germany and the Polish government was afraid of offending him, Lemkin was not allowed to go to Madrid to present his proposals, so another delegate presented them. The presentation failed to persuade the Bureau, but Lemkin did not give up. During the next few years, he traveled throughout Europe and to Egypt to argue that barbarity and vandalism must be made international crimes. He tried to warn that the killing of an entire race could happen again. He pleaded:

Killing an individual is a domestic crime . . . But murder of a whole people must be recognized as an international crime, which should be condemned not just by one nation, but by the entire world. Nations will have to cooperate in punishing such criminals to prevent future mass murders. (Lemkin, 1933, p. 377)

Any leaders who committed these crimes should be prosecuted, even if their own nation would not. Lemkin believed that, if world leaders knew they could face punishment anywhere, they would be far less likely to commit these atrocities. However, with the worldwide depression underway, most countries were too concerned with their economic problems to worry about another mass killing. Most also seemed to reason that, if one were to occur, the victims most likely would be a minority in someone else's country. Hitler noted this lack of concern. Just before invading Poland in 1939, he told his generals, "The aim of war is . . . to annihilate the enemy physically. 'Who today still speaks of the massacre of the Armenians?'" (cited in Power, 2002, p. 23).

Fleeing the Holocaust

Years later, Lemkin (1958) wrote, "When the first bombs fell on Warsaw, the city in which I lived, I knew that this was more than war, that this was the beginning of genocide, on a large scale" (p. 367). As a Jew, Lemkin knew he had to flee Poland. He could not persuade his parents to flee with him. His mother told him, "We know you will continue your work, for the protection of peoples. Unfortunately, it is needed now more than ever before" (cited in Cooper, 2008, p. 31). As he tried to leave, the train he was traveling in was bombed, killing hundreds. He then traveled for four weeks at night in a horse cart to Lithuania. Once there, Sweden's Minister of Justice, a friend, sent him money to travel to Sweden (Lemkin, 1958).

In Sweden, Lemkin lectured on international law at the University of Stockholm. While there, he realized that the Nazi regime was writing laws to prepare to annihilate the Jewish race. "In the peaceful library of Stockholm, I saw an entire race being imprisoned and condemned to death" (Lemkin, 1958, p. 378).

Wartime Life and Work in America

In 1941, a friend at Duke University obtained an appointment for Lemkin to teach at the university. While

at Duke he received his last message from his parents, written on a scrap of paper. "Something within myself told me that in this letter they were saying goodbye" (Lemkin, 1958, p. 382). About 3,300,000 Jews lived in Poland when the Nazi army invaded. All but 350,000 died in the Holocaust. Both of Lemkin's parents were gassed at Treblinka, as were 49 members of his extended family (Ignatiff, 2013). Only one brother survived.

After a year at Duke, Lemkin became a consultant to the Board of Economic Warfare in Washington, DC. With the Holocaust underway, he appealed to American leaders to help create an international treaty to outlaw the destruction of peoples and their cultures. He met with Vice President Henry Wallace, but found no support. Lemkin wrote to President Roosevelt, urging him to help make the killing of a whole people "the crime of crimes." Roosevelt responded that Lemkin should be patient. America was so absorbed in winning the war that the issue of the destruction of whole peoples would have to wait (Power, 2002).

To Lemkin, "It became clear to me that I must appeal directly to the American people" (Lemkin, 1958, pp. 383). He gave hundreds of speeches on the Nazi slaughter of Jews. He pleaded, "If women, children, and old people would be murdered a hundred miles from here, wouldn't you run to help? Then why do you stop this decision in your heart when the distance is 3,000 miles instead of a hundred?" (cited in Power, 2002, p. 27).

Coining the Word "Genocide"

In August 1941, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said in a radio speech, "Scores of thousands, literally scores of thousands, of executions in cold blood are being perpetrated . . . we are in the presence of a crime without a name" (cited in Power, 2002, p. 29).

Lemkin decided that, to win support for his cause, this worst of all crimes needed a name. It had to be a short term whose meaning and horror were unmistakable, a name that also could galvanize support for outlawing it. He thought of George Eastman, who named his camera Kodak because it was short, easy to remember, hard to mispronounce, and could not be confused with anything else (Power, 2002).

In August 1944, Lemkin published his monumental book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. He titled chapter nine as *Genocide – A New Term and New Conception for Destruction of Nations*. Lemkin wrote,

By "genocide" we mean the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group. This new word, coined by the author to denote an old practice in

its modern development, is made from the ancient Greek word *genos* (race, tribe) and the Latin *cide* (killing), thus corresponding in its formation to such words as tyrannicide, homicide, infanticide, etc. . . . It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions . . . with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. (p. 79)

His new word, “genocide,” was quickly adopted. In December, a *Washington Post* editorial described the mass murder of Jews as genocide. Others rapidly followed in adopting it. Lemkin hoped that the world was at last ready to make genocide an international crime.

What Lemkin achieved by coining “genocide” cannot be measured. Today, most adults and college students know the word, and everyone knows it refers to the mass killing of an entire group. With the term genocide, Lemkin gave us a new concept and clear way of thinking about the worst of all human crimes.

Genocide Becomes an International Crime

After World War II, when the Nazi defendants were charged by the Nuremberg tribunal with “genocide, viz., the extermination of racial and national groups,” the term was used as a legal term for the first time. However, Lemkin was disappointed the Nuremberg tribunal defined genocide as applying only during a war of aggression, and not as an international crime. Nazi killings prior to the war and the killing of German Jews were not regarded as genocide (Power, 2002).

Lemkin next turned to lobbying the new United Nations to outlaw genocide. At its early meetings in 1946, “I wrote a draft resolution on the soft sofa in the delegates’ Lounge” (Lemkin, 1958, p. 385). He wrote personal letters to every delegate. Because he was “totally unofficial” (the title of his autobiography), he would corner delegates in the hallways, often saying, “You and I, we must change the world!” (cited in Power, 2002, p. 51). He possessed a “relentless appetite for rejection” (Power, p. 51). He first approached delegates from small countries and those who had been colonized, knowing that they would want the protection provided by a law opposing genocide against the aggression of powerful nations. He was not surprised that the delegates from Panama and India were the first to sign the resolution he had drafted. On December 11, 1946, the General Assembly unanimously passed a declaration, *The Crime of Genocide*, declaring “that genocide is a crime under international law,” and directing the Economic

and Social Council to “prepare a draft convention on the crime of genocide” (United Nations, 1946). In UN terms, a declaration is a statement of principles but not binding law, while a convention is binding law on the nations that ratify it.

Creating the Genocide Convention

In early 1947, Lemkin was asked by the UN’s Secretary-General to serve on a committee of three international law experts to write a draft convention on genocide. In keeping with his earlier proposal for a crime of vandalism, Lemkin wanted the crime of genocide to include the destruction of a people’s culture — its literature, music, and other achievements. The others on the committee felt genocide should be limited to physical killings and the prevention of births of a group. Lemkin realized there was a lack of support for including the destruction of culture, so “with a heavy heart, I decided not to press for it” (Lemkin, 1958, p. 393).

During this time, Lemkin lived in poverty. Friends supported him while he devoted his energy to urging the UN to create a convention on genocide. In March 1948, Yale offered him a position to lecture on international law. It gave Lemkin a light workload to support his crusade against genocide. The Yale Law School Dean said, “Making international law is as important as teaching it” (Cooper, 2008, p. 119). Even with the Yale salary, Lemkin lived in a \$5-a-week room to save money to work on the *Convention*.

Lemkin worked intensely to create popular support for the *Convention* and to ensure that its format would receive the two-thirds majority of the General Assembly needed for passage. He wrote many editorials and gave many radio interviews. He helped to create the United States Committee for a United Nations *Genocide Convention* and was able to convince the Committee to assemble a petition for the *Convention* “signed by leaders of 166 organizations from 28 countries representing over 200 million people” (Cooper, 2008, p. 144).

Struggles With the Definition of Genocide

The Soviet Union and Great Britain emerged as the *Convention*’s strongest opponents. The draft definition of genocide included the killing of political groups as well as racial and religious groups. The Soviets knew this inclusion would condemn Stalin’s deportations and killing of political opponents, while the British feared the *Convention* would be used to condemn its treatment of inhabitants of its colonies. By carefully aligning

supporters, Lemkin was scarcely able to prevent the two powers from indefinitely postponing consideration of the *Convention*. Had that happened, all hope for a convention against genocide would have ended (Cooper, 2008).

The inclusion of political groups was the most difficult issue. Several other countries with deep political divisions threatened to vote against the *Convention* if political groups were included. Realizing that the *Convention* could not win the required two-thirds majority with the inclusion of political groups, Lemkin urged the United States and others to drop their insistence on including it. A vote to remove political groups from those covered by the *Convention* was passed. This was a painful compromise, but one that Lemkin knew was essential for its passage.²

On December 9, 1948, with Lemkin watching from the gallery, the UN unanimously adopted the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. Great Britain subsequently voted in favor of it, as Lemkin was able to create enough support within Great Britain for it to change its position.

Genocide now had a clear legal definition:

In the present *Convention*, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:

- (a) killing members of the group;
- (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; or
- (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

In contrast to the Nuremberg tribunals, the *Genocide Convention* constitutes genocide as a crime “whether committed in time of peace or war.”

Getting the Convention Ratified

When the *Convention* was approved, Lemkin received a standing ovation. The press rushed him with cameras flashing. Despite its formal name, many called it the “Lemkin *Convention*.” Suffering from exhaustion, he

was admitted the next day to a Paris hospital. “Nobody had established my diagnosis,” he wrote. “I defined it myself and called it Genociditis: exhaustion from my work on the *Genocide Convention*” (Lemkin, 1958, p. 395).

Twenty nations had to ratify the *Convention* before it became law. Lemkin “again became a one-man, one-globe, multilingual, single issue lobbying machine” (Power, 2002, p. 61), visiting many countries, writing countless letters, and making innumerable personal appeals. When the 20th country ratified the *Genocide Convention* on October 16, 1950, Lemkin said, “This is a day of triumph for mankind and the most beautiful day of my life” (cited in Power, 2002, p. 64). The *Genocide Convention* has been ratified by 144 countries, including the United States. Unfortunately, *50 have not yet done so*.

Accomplishments and Last Days

Lemkin gave the world, for the first time, a word for describing the killing of a whole people. And almost singlehandedly, he inspired and guided the creation of the *Convention* that outlawed it internationally.

Lemkin died of a heart attack on August 28, 1959. Although he was nominated six times for the Nobel Peace Prize, A. M. Rosenthal, his friend and *New York Times* editor, wrote that Lemkin died “without medals or prizes.” He was deeply in debt, and only seven people attended his funeral. His tomb inscription reads simply, “Dr. Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959), Father of the *Genocide Convention*.”

Eleanor Roosevelt and the Creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Creation of the Universal Declaration

Speaking at the June 1945 closing of the San Francisco conference that created the United Nations, President Harry Truman predicted that, “under the [UN] Charter, we have good reason to expect the framing of an international bill of rights acceptable to all nations involved. That bill of rights will be as much a part of international life as our own Bill of Rights is a part of our Constitution” (cited in Morsink, 1999, p. 4). Just as the Holocaust had made clear the vital need for the

² However, the systematic killing of members of any group, including political groups, is now a “crime against humanity” and is punishable in the same way as the crime of genocide.

Genocide Convention, it also made clear the need for a bill of human rights.

The Commission on Human Rights, authorized by the UN Charter, began its work in January 1947. For the next two years, the Commission argued philosophy of human rights, launched tirades against each other's human rights records, wrote draft bills of human rights, and debated virtually every phrase. The Commission members at times worked with considerable harmony; at others, their disagreements and animosities almost destroyed the whole effort. However, when the process had ended, they had given to the world the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Eleanor Roosevelt, the widow of President Franklin Roosevelt, is without a doubt the person most critical to the creation of the *Declaration*. After the *Declaration* was adopted, Charles Malik, the rapporteur (secretary) of the Commission, said, "I do not see how, without her presence, we could have accomplished what we actually did accomplish" (cited in Lash, 1972, p. 79).

Early Life and Concern for Suffering

Unlike Lemkin, Mrs. Roosevelt was born into society and luxury, and certainly never had to flee for her life. As a child, "our household consisted of a cook, a butler, a housemaid . . . and a laundress" (Roosevelt, 1958, p. 11). Two younger brothers each had nurses. Still, she wrote,

Very early I became conscious of the fact that there were people around me who suffered in one way or another. I was five or six when my father took me to help serve Thanksgiving dinner in one of the newsboys' clubhouses My father explained that many of these ragged little boys had no homes and lived in little wooden shanties in empty lots, or slept in vestibules of houses or public buildings I was not in ignorance that there were sharp contrasts, even though our lives were blessed with plenty. (pp. 12-13)

This and other similar exposures gave Eleanor a deep concern for human suffering, the guiding feature of her life. Her support was constant for those in need or abused. In the 1920s, she helped the Women's Trade Union League raise funds for its goals of a 48-hour workweek, a minimum wage, and the ending of child labor. During the Great Depression, she listened to the plight of America's poor, helped create housing for homeless miners in West Virginia, and became an outspoken advocate for African-American civil rights. During World War II, she traveled to the South Pacific and visited wounded soldiers. She

donated blood regularly. After President Roosevelt died in April of 1945, Mrs. Roosevelt remembered, "I did not want to cease trying to be useful in some way" (p. 284).

Delegate to the New United Nations

President Roosevelt had been dead for only a few months when President Truman phoned and asked Mrs. Roosevelt to serve on the American delegation to the first meeting of the United Nations, scheduled for London in January 1946. She offered the new President several reasons why she should not accept. She had no foreign affairs experience. She did not know parliamentary procedures. She doubted her ability to do the job well. But President Truman insisted, and after discussing the request with several family members and close friends, she accepted (Lash, 1972).

Her appointment was seen by many as symbolic, made out of respect for her dead husband. Still, one columnist at the time wrote, "she, better than perhaps any other person, can represent the little people of this country, indeed of the world" (cited in Lash, 1972, p. 37).

Every member of the American delegation, including Mrs. Roosevelt, doubted that she possessed the political savvy to be of much help. However, as she prepared to depart, she wrote:

Some things I can take to the first meeting — a sincere desire to understand the problems of the rest of the world and our relationship to them; a real good-will for all the people throughout the world; a hope that I shall be able to build a sense of personal trust and friendship with my coworkers, for without that type of understanding our work would be doubly difficult. (cited in Kahn, 1948a, p. 33)

Everyone quickly recognized that Mrs. Roosevelt was "the hardest working delegate."

As the American delegation traveled to England on the Queen Elizabeth, she read every background paper and attended every briefing. When asked on board to serve on the Third Committee, the committee for social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs, she requested, "Will someone kindly see that I get as much information as possible on Committee Three?" (Roosevelt, 1958, p. 302). She was placed on the Third Committee partly because of her humanitarian concerns, but also because American UN Ambassador Edward Stettinius thought that the Third Committee was the least important of the seven major UN committees, the place where she could do the least harm.

Learning Her Abilities and Methods

It did not take long for Mrs. Roosevelt to show that everyone's estimate of her low ability, including her own, was way off the mark. The Third Committee's most pressing problem was what to do about Europe's millions of war refugees. The Soviet Union representative Andrei Vishinsky, who had been the chief prosecutor at the notorious Soviet show trials before the war, argued that the refugees from the Soviet Union were "quislings, traitors, war criminals or collaborators" who must be forced to return home (cited in Lash, 1972, pp. 51-52). But Mrs. Roosevelt knew that, if these refugees "go home they will probably be killed" (cited in Lash, 1972, p. 51). She arose, spoke without notes, and powerfully defended the right of the refugees to settle where they chose. One State Department official referred to it as "the most important speech ever given by an American delegate without a prepared text" (cited in Lash, 1972, p. 53). The Third Committee agreed, and the Soviet demand was rejected. In Mrs. Roosevelt's eyes, this was an important victory that helped establish the principle of the right of the individual to make his own decisions over the authoritarian rule of the state. Her self-confidence grew and her stature soared, among both the American and other UN delegations.

Mrs. Roosevelt soon discovered that inviting delegates to informal teas was a way to establish rapport, gain support, and reach agreements on critical issues. These teas would serve her well during the next two years of the negotiations over the *Declaration*. In her judgment, she often accomplished more through these teas than through the formal sessions.

Becoming Chair of the Commission

In April, Mrs. Roosevelt, now widely respected, was named to a nine-person committee to prepare plans for a permanent Commission on Human Rights. The committee quickly selected her as its Chair. After three weeks, the committee recommended a Commission of Human Rights consisting of 18 members, to include a representative of each of the five major powers and 13 representatives from other countries. Mrs. Roosevelt reflected, "I think we have done a helpful piece of work. The real work, of course, remains to be done in the next series of meetings, when the actual writing of an international bill of rights remains to be done" (cited in Lash, 1972, p. 58).

When the Commission held its first meeting in January 1947, Mrs. Roosevelt was unanimously elected

as its Chair. By this time, everyone knew that she possessed the commitment, personality, and necessary skills for this vital task. In addition to her intelligence, hard work, and calm style, her compassion, sincerity, ability to build trusting relationships, lack of any personal rancor, belief in human rights, faith in human dignity, and humanitarianism all recommended her for selection by her fellow delegates. A contemporary writer, E. J. Kahn, said of her, "She has become more and more widely recognized as a person of towering unselfishness" (Kahn, 1948a, p. 30). Another said, "Mrs. Roosevelt never cares if there is nothing in it for herself. She has absolutely no pride of station and no personal ambition" (Kahn, p. 30). This combination of qualities had created almost universal respect for her.

Mrs. Roosevelt thought of no one as an enemy and possessed a great capacity to maintain positive relationships with those who sharply disagreed. She frequently entertained UN delegates for picnics, where she chatted "just like old friends" with delegates who disliked the emerging contents of the *Declaration*. She balanced idealism, a desire to trust others' motives even in sharp disagreements, with political realism. She wanted to believe the best about others, but she was not naive. She had discovered on the nine-person committee that the Soviet representatives were often obstructionists, firm in their own positions and unwilling to listen to other views or to compromise. Still, she wrote, "Despite their difficult official attitude, I always felt that the Americans should refuse to show unfriendliness toward representatives of the Communist bloc" (Roosevelt, 1958, p. 312).

The Challenges of the Commission

It is hard to overstate the political minefield that confronted Mrs. Roosevelt. First, when the task of preparing the first draft was assigned to her, China's Peng-chun Chang, and Lebanon's Charles Malik, it was soon clear that these two brilliant, but head-strong, men were philosophical opposites who loved to argue. More importantly, while the Soviet-bloc nations contributed positively on the issue of gender equality and on a few others, they tried to thwart the whole process in many others. The deep divisions between Western individualism and Communist collectivism presented a constant challenge, as did the role of religious faith in a universal bill of rights. Some Christian delegates insisted on naming God as the source of rights, with both Communist nations and China opposing any reference to God. Islamic countries resisted the emphasis on

religious freedom. Nations everywhere feared that a bill of rights would shine a light on their misdeeds and weaken national sovereignty. More than half the world at that time lived in colonies controlled by European powers, and these powers worried that a universal bill of rights would weaken their control of their colonies and lead to broad demands for national sovereignty. The next two decades proved that concern to be very accurate (Glendon, 2002).

Leading the Commission

As was her style, Mrs. Roosevelt wanted to get started. She invited Chang and Malik, along with Canada's John Humphrey and France's Rene Cassin, to tea at her New York City apartment.³ At that gathering, Mrs. Roosevelt recalled that Chang argued that "the *Declaration* should reflect more than simply Western ideas." Malik "expounded at some length the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas . . . Dr. Chang suggested that the Secretariat might well spend a few months studying the fundamentals of Confucianism!" Mrs. Roosevelt recalled, "I simply filled the teacups again and sat back to be entertained by the talk of these learned gentlemen" (Roosevelt, 1958, p. 77).

Mrs. Roosevelt's strength was that she was simply much more a humanitarian than a scholar. When she looked at the world, she saw, most of all, abused and suffering people. She knew that the Commission on Human Rights held the promise of creating a bill of rights that could greatly reduce their abuse and suffering. Debating Aquinas and Confucianism seemed unlikely to aid in that concrete task.

To generate public support for the human rights bill, Mrs. Roosevelt accepted three or four speaking engagements each week. She always spoke without script or notes, but *Variety* magazine reported, "Few women can speak with Mrs. Roosevelt's telling sincerity" (cited in Kahn, 1948b, p. 40). E. J. Kahn, a writer for *The New Yorker*, noted at the time that "If the United Nations, and, in particular, the Human Rights Commission, should fail to achieve their lofty objectives, it will not be for want of Mrs. Roosevelt's efforts" (Kahn, 1948b, p. 40).

During the drafting of the *Declaration*, "Mrs. Roosevelt ran her Commission as firmly and efficiently as she had run her private life" (Kahn, 1948a, p. 36). She encouraged delegates to shorten their speeches, conducted evening sessions, and kept the commission on a firm schedule. Some colleagues jokingly called

her "a slave driver." The Panamanian delegate urged her to not forget the human rights of the members of the Commission (cited in Lash, 1972, p. 71). When the Commission finished its drafting work on December 17, 1947, another committee chair asked Mrs. Roosevelt how she had met this goal, which he regarded as a small miracle. She replied, "There was nothing to it, I simply made them work from the beginning exactly as people at conferences usually do at the very end" (cited in Kahn, 1948a, p. 36).

While many disputes occurred in drafting of the *Declaration*, Mrs. Roosevelt found the Soviet delegate, Alexei Pavlov, to be the most frustrating.⁴ Pavlov constantly insisted on the authority of the state over the individual, to the dismay of the non-Communist delegates. He "delivered many long propaganda harangues" (Roosevelt, 1958, p. 320). But once, when he paused, Mrs. Roosevelt remembered:

I banged the gavel so hard that the other delegates jumped in surprise . . . "We are here," I said, "to devise ways of safeguarding human rights. We are not here to attack each other's governments, and I hope when we return on Monday the delegate of the Soviet Union will remember that!" I banged the gavel again, "Meeting adjourned!" (Roosevelt, 1958, p. 320)

Adoption of the Universal Declaration

As it was becoming clear that the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* would be completed, one State Department official wrote to Mrs. Roosevelt, "I get more and more the sensation of something happening in the world that has a chance to override all obstacles, and more and more that this 'something' could never have come into being without you" (cited in Lash, 1972, pp. 63-64).

In the final *Declaration*, Articles 1 and 2 emphasized that the rights applied to every human being "without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (Article 2). Next, Articles 3-21 addressed civil and political rights (e.g., freedom from slavery and cruel punishment, freedom of speech and religion, fair and equal treatment under the law, and political participation); and Articles 22-28 covered economic, social, and cultural rights (e.g., rights to education, health care, work, and social security). The U.S. and Western European countries gave priority to

³ These five constituted the leadership of the Commission during the long drafting process, but Mrs. Roosevelt's guiding hand was clearly the most important.

⁴ Pavlov was the nephew of Ivan Pavlov, famous for establishing the principle of classical conditioning.

civil and political rights, while both Latin American and Communist countries emphasized economic and social rights. Both types of rights were included from the first draft. French Jurist Karel Vasak labeled these two as “first generation” and “second generation” human rights.

Finally, around midnight on December 10, 1948, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was presented to the United Nations General Assembly for adoption. Of the 56 UN members, 48 voted in favor, none opposed, and eight abstained. The abstentions came from the six Soviet-bloc Communist countries, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa.

The Communist nations, which had suffered so much from Nazi aggression, objected that the *Declaration* did not directly condemn Nazism, as well as arguing that it gave more emphasis to civil and political rights than to economic and social rights. In truth, the Soviet Union and its allies were in constant violation of the *Declaration’s* civil and political rights.

Saudi Arabia, the staunchest Islamic nation, abstained because Article 16 recognized a right to marry whom one will, regardless of their religious faith, and because Article 18 granted the freedom to change one’s religion. South Africa abstained because its racial apartheid contradicted the *Declaration* in many ways. South Africa’s constitution stated that only a “person of European descent” could serve in its legislature. Article 13 of the *Declaration* granted everyone “freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state,” but South Africa restricted Black movement and residence to designated “homelands” (Morsink, 1999).

After the *Declaration* was adopted, the President of the General Assembly paid tribute to Mrs. Roosevelt:

It is particularly fitting that there should be present on this occasion the person who, with the assistance of many others, played a leading role in the work, a person who has raised to greater heights even so great a name — Mrs. Roosevelt, the representative of the United States. (Glendon, 2002, p. 170)

The General Assembly gave her a standing ovation.

Life After the Universal Declaration

Mrs. Roosevelt continued to Chair the UN Human Rights Commission until April 1951. During this period the Commission began work on two binding human rights covenants, one for civil and political rights, and another for economic, social, and cultural rights. Due largely to the Cold War, these were not completed until 1966.

Mrs. Roosevelt resigned from the Commission and from the UN in 1952 when President Eisenhower

was elected. She was deeply disappointed that the new Eisenhower administration announced it would no longer participate in the drafting of the covenants and would not become a party to any binding UN covenant. In Mrs. Roosevelt’s opinion, the United States had abandoned its proper role as the world’s leader in promoting human rights.

Officially retired, Mrs. Roosevelt lived her remaining days at the family home in Hyde Park, New York, and in a Manhattan apartment. However, she remained extraordinarily busy, speaking often to school groups, to scouting groups, and especially to organizations that worked for the welfare of minorities, disadvantaged groups, and foreign relief agencies. Throughout the 1950s, she continued to speak around the United States in support of the UN’s mission and work. After being struck by a car in New York City in 1960, her health declined rapidly, and she died on November 7, 1962.

Mrs. Roosevelt, more than any one individual, is responsible for the fact that we now live in an era where every nation must address human rights and expect the criticism of the world when they violate them. President Truman had rightfully labeled her as “The First Lady of the World.”

Lemkin and Roosevelt as Visionary Leaders

The key qualities that helped Raphael Lemkin create the *Genocide Convention*, and Eleanor Roosevelt’s lead in producing the *Universal Declaration*, are evident in their biographies. Each had a strong vision of a major wrong in our world and a compelling vision of a better world. Lemkin saw the pervasiveness of genocide and envisioned a world where it would be outlawed, prevented, and prosecuted. Roosevelt saw a world where countless people are abused and suffer, and she envisioned a world that respected and protected the rights of every human being.

Visionary leadership requires hard work and perseverance in the face of failure, and both Lemkin and Roosevelt excelled in these qualities. From 1933 until his death in 1958, Lemkin’s life was devoted to outlawing genocide and related crimes. His failure to persuade the League of Nations to outlaw the crimes of barbarity and vandalism did not slow his efforts. Many fellow delegates and reporters have commented on how hard Eleanor worked. During her chairing of the Commission, Mrs. Roosevelt wrote, “I drive hard, and when I get home I will be tired. The men on the commission will be also!” (cited in Lash, 1972, p. 71).

Visionary leaders often possess a willingness to

sacrifice oneself to achieve the vision (as also was exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela). As noted earlier, Lemkin lived in poverty for much of the time he was working to create the *Genocide Convention*, and he died in poverty. While Mrs. Roosevelt never experienced poverty, her devotion to creating the *Universal Declaration* was both selfless and tireless.

Perhaps the most striking quality both Lemkin and Roosevelt strongly embodied, intellectually and emotionally, was Gandhi's belief that "All humanity is one undivided and indivisible family." Both possessed a deep caring for all human beings regardless of their race, religion, or nationality. Both saw that people around the world were persecuted and abused, and both believed that their work was vital to help end this persecution and abuse. McFarland, Brown, and Webb (2013) found that those who identify with all humanity care more about human rights, value the lives of in-group and out-group members equally, are more concerned about human rights abuses, and are more likely to devote time and money to humanitarian causes.

On successive nights in 1948, the United Nations adopted the *Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Progress has been slow in ending mass killings and realizing human rights since 1948, but great progress has been made. The *Convention* and *Declaration*, which started this progress, have made our world much more humane. The world owes an incalculable debt to Raphael Lemkin and Eleanor Roosevelt for their vital visionary leadership in their creation.

Concluding Comment: The Need for Teaching Human Rights in Universities

How important are human rights? When serving as a Fulbright Lecturer in Estonia in the Soviet Union in 1989, I and my wife enrolled our 15-year-old son in an Estonian school that taught in English. Outside the principal's office hung a poster of the full *Universal Declaration*, with the sentence at the top, "People Only Live Full Lives in the Light of Human Rights." That sentence, the title of a UN publication from the previous year, is true beyond measure! Estonia was on the verge of becoming an independent country, and the principal knew that embracing human rights was a

key to its successful future. People everywhere need basic human rights. That is why I find it so distressing that so few college students know or are taught about Roosevelt and the *Universal Declaration*, about Lemkin and the *Genocide Convention*, and about all that has followed from their critical work regarding human rights.

While most American adults know of Eleanor Roosevelt, most are unaware of her critical role in creating the *Universal Declaration*, as most know little, if anything, about the *Declaration* itself. Still fewer know that the *Universal Declaration* has led to at least 60 conventions to protect human rights, a functioning Human Rights Council that reviews the full human rights record of each nation every four years, five regional human rights regimes, and to human rights being written into the constitutions of the majority of the world's nations.

Despite coining "genocide" and leading to the creation of the *Genocide Convention*, Raphael Lemkin is virtually forgotten. Yet, the *Genocide Convention* has led to the making of genocide and related mass killings as international crimes with universal jurisdiction, to the International Criminal Court in 2002, to the policy of "Responsibility to Protect" peoples from genocide and mass violence in 2005, and to current major international efforts to prevent mass killings in South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and elsewhere.

Human rights is the most vital topic rarely taught in American universities. Because almost all universities today claim the goal of preparing their students for global citizenship, they all need to offer at least a basic course in human rights. Given the importance of human rights for our modern world, the course should count within a university's general education curriculum. My hope is that, by learning of Lemkin's and Roosevelt's visionary leadership, university leaders will be inspired to strongly encourage the teaching of human rights.

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