

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 21, 1993

REMARKS BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT FIRST LADIES OF SONG EVENT

New York City, New York

10:51 P.M. EST

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much, and thank everyone from Frankie and James Roosevelt and the extended Roosevelt family and -- Stone, and all of the first women of song and theater who were here tonight, for making us all feel so good about our country and about someone who, on a continuing basis, inspires us and prods us. Thanks aslo to the first ladies of New York City and New York, Matilda Cuomo and Joyce Dinkens who were here with us tonight, and all of us who try in whatever way we can to do what these days should be done.

As I was sitting here this evening I thought about all of the conversations that I have had and might have with Mrs. Roosevelt this year. (Laughter.) It's one of the saving graces that I have hung on to for dear life. (Laughter.) The early conversations were I'm sure not very satisfactory to her because, early on as the campaign would go and things would happen, I would shake my head and I would say, "Why me?" (Laughter.) And I wouldn't get any answer at all.

A little while later, after some more time had passed and I had read even more and more -- actually devoured more and more about Mrs. Roosevelt, I realized that that was not a question that she would ever give an answer to. One did what one was expected and did it in in the best way possible.

So my conversations turned to really requests for information -- how did you put up with this? (Laughter.) How could you go on from day to day with all that would happen and the kind of attacks and criticism that would be hurled your way? Again, I have to confess, it was not a very satisfactory conversation, because as you can see by looking at this wonderful, wonderful monument that will be erected, she listened calmly and looked at me very serenely, in my mind, but didn't say very much.

And then one day I had a wonderful revelation. And that was when I learned that even before President Roosevelt was inaugurated, newspapers were editorializing against Mrs. Roosevelt. They were saying she should keep her opinions to herself, that her husband had been elected President and no one in America wanted to hear a thing that she had to say. Actually, one of the most incredible editorials to that effect happened right here in this city, if I recall.

And so it struck me that what was really happening to me wasn't anything very new at all. That it was an ongoing story of what happens often as we relive history because we failed to learn from it, and that what we all must do in the best way we can -- take those lessons to heart.

So I began having much better and more satisfactory conversations with Mrs. Roosevelt. (Laughter.) Because I began to talk with her about what she was really interested in and how she could help me. And now the conversations that I've had for the past

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month have been especially gratifying to me. Because she has said on several occasions as I have shaken my head over some problem or another, or as I watch my husband work very hard on the economic plan or some other important issue -- she's probably shaking her head, I said in my mind, "I thought that would have been solved by now." (Laughter.) "Since it's not, then you are just going to have to get out there and do it and don't make any excuses about it."

So from my perspective, what Mrs. Roosevelt has done is what she is still doing -- she says far better than I what I feel. I was struck tonight that perhaps what I should do is just take all these wonderful quotes we heard, write them down on notecards, and when I'm ever asked a question, shuffle through them and just hand them over. (Applause.)

But mostly I'm grateful because you will have this monument. I will, I hope, someday have a small replica of it and will -- because I hope that's one of the things which come from this. -- that I can put on my desk or in the window of my study; and when I feel a little discouraged or a little down, think about this woman who, although born to privilege, did not have much of what I have taken for granted -- a warm and loving and supportive family, an education that went on beyond my 17th year, an opportunity to see many things and have many experiences. But I don't feel that I was as well prepared in many ways as she was, pursuing these responsibilities. And I only hope that as the years go by, my heart and my mind will expand and grow, so that some day I will feel worthy of being mentioned in the same sentence with her.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sunday, February 20, 1993

Contact: Lisa Caputo
Neel Lattimore
Karen Finney
(202) 456-2960

Remarks of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
"First Ladies of Song: A Musical Tribute to Eleanor Roosevelt"
Alice Tully Hall
New York, N.Y.
February 21, 1993

It is a privilege and a pleasure to be here in New York tonight to honor the memory of one of the truly great First Ladies of this city, this state, and this nation -- Eleanor Roosevelt.

New York, of course, has long been the gateway to America. Our international symbol is the great lady who stands proudly in your harbor as a beacon of liberty to all the citizens of the world who yearn for freedom. For more than a century, she has proudly lifted her lamp to "the tired and the poor" -- "the homeless and the tempest tossed" -- to all who have dreamed of America as a land of opportunity and promise.

The statue of Eleanor Roosevelt that we gather to support tonight will, therefore, be another historic monument raised to a woman here. How fitting that she should stand just a few miles up the shore of the Hudson River from the stately lady of the harbor. For Eleanor Roosevelt's lifetime of service and her passionate commitment to justice have been a beacon of

inspiration not only to her contemporaries but to my generation as well.

There is no prouder name in American history than Roosevelt, because the men and the woman who carried it to prominence -- Theodore, Franklin, and Eleanor -- reached out from the world to which they had been born to feel and heal other people's pain.

Each, in their own way, was strengthened by misfortune. And each in their own way, came to understand the sufferings, the struggles, and the strengths, of men and women far less fortunate than themselves.

Eleanor Roosevelt grew up privileged but unloved, with an instinctive sympathy for everyone who refused to be held back by circumstance.

My friend and mentor Marian Wright Edelman loves to repeat Eleanor Roosevelt's words of wisdom: No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.

Hesitantly at first, but, later, with a quiet determination, Eleanor Roosevelt reached beyond the confines of her background and pushed against the limits placed on the women of her time.

When she followed her husband to Washington in 1933, she lent her voice of compassion and concern to a nation at the depths of the Great Depression.

Since Franklin Roosevelt was restricted not only by the demands of his office but by his own physical condition, she became his "eyes and legs" -- and often his ears, as well.

From the coalfields of West Virginia to the slums of the great cities, Eleanor Roosevelt visited with, and listened to, Americans who had lost their jobs, their homes, and their hope. She saw their plight and spoke up for policies that would ease their pain: from housing programs, to the Civilian Conservation Corps, to fair labor laws, and the first hesitant measures against racial discrimination.

And, often, she'd return to the White House, not only with new ideas but with new friends. Her guests included not only heads of state but southern sharecroppers and northern garment workers. At a time when Americans needed to believe that somebody in Washington cared about their lives, Eleanor Roosevelt helped make the White House the people's house.

Quietly, and without moral vanity, Eleanor Roosevelt answered injustice with the force of her own personal example. Attending a meeting in Alabama, she saw to her dismay that the

crowd was completely segregated by race. So she moved her own chair to the middle of the aisle that separated the whites from the blacks.

Learning that the Daughters of the American Revolution had barred Marian Anderson from singing in their auditorium in Washington, Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the D.A.R. and helped organize an outdoor concert for Anderson on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Three decades after Eleanor Roosevelt's death, her life and legacy are timeless because she gave unselfishly and unstintingly of herself to meet the challenges of her times.

For all of us who admire her, our challenge is not to do exactly as she did, but to live in the same spirit as she did.

Growing up at mid-century, in a midwestern suburb, in a middle class family that loved and teased and challenged me, I cannot begin to understand the burdens that were her birthright.

Eleanor Roosevelt became "a voice for the voiceless," an advocate for those who could not speak for themselves because of poverty or prejudice.

Today, there are still those who suffer but cannot speak for themselves. I think particularly of those of our children who grow up in rural or urban poverty, deprived of a decent chance to become the men and women God intended them to be. Decades ago, Eleanor Roosevelt declared that "A minimum standard of security must be at least possible for every child." Her vision still challenges us today; and I believe that, if she were with us now, she would be leading the fight to make sure every child gets a healthy start and a Head Start.

Thanks to the movements that Eleanor Roosevelt helped inspire, fewer Americans are without a voice.

But people still fear that they will be shouted down by those with privilege -- or they won't be heard by those with power. Our challenge is to make sure that the voices of ordinary Americans are not drowned out -- and that our leaders listen to those who must live with the consequences of their decisions or their indecision.

Last week, at a hearing in Harrisburg, I heard working men and women warn that a sudden illness or injury could bankrupt their families. And, yes, I will do what I can to see that their stories are heard, and something is done about their plight.

Eleanor Roosevelt's life was a lesson in integrity: a word that means not only honesty but wholeness. A loving wife, a caring mother, a concerned citizen, she met the challenges and balanced the needs that women have always experienced in our lives, from the White House to every one of our homes.

And even before that statue is completed, she stands tall in the memories of all of us who share her dedication not only to public service but to a life that truly balances the public and the private self.

"Action creates its own courage," she said. And courage can be "as contagious as fear."

How beautiful. How true. And how timeless.

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