

Ladybird Johnson - Tribute to Eleanor Roosevelt (Excerpts)

2:46 min.

I met Eleanor Roosevelt first in print and admired her. I met her later in person and loved her. As she did for many very young and very timid Congressional wives, she extended her hand and hospitality to me...and Washington was warmer.

I saw her last when she came to my home the day the Commission on the Status of Women was organized under her chairmanship and her inspiration. She was 78. I have often thought how much she made those years count for her country.

All of us are familiar with people who are the partisans of departed virtue, but are afraid to defend an unpopular truth today. Mrs. Roosevelt never stood with this timid company. Her conscience was her counselor, and she followed its commands with unfaltering courage. Nor did she really understand what people meant when they praised her for taking so many risks. She would have taken the greatest risk of all if she had remained silent in the presence of wrong. She would have risked the integrity of her soul.

A rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime once said: "The most important thing I learned is that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problems. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful, and the most tragic problem--is silence." Eleanor Roosevelt taught us that sometimes silence is the greatest sin.

Always she thought not of abstract rights, but of living wrongs.... she thought of the suffering individual, not of a theoretical principle. She saw an unemployed father, and so she helped him. She saw a neglected child, and so she educated him. She saw dictators hurling the world into war, and so she worked unflinchingly for peace. She saw the United Nations divided by the conflict of ideology and power, and so she became the prophet of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Are we ready to fight similar battles against new foes in our own day? If not, our grief is an empty thing, and the spirit of Eleanor Roosevelt is not among us.

President Wilson used to say that some people in Washington grow in office, while others merely swell. Mrs. Roosevelt steadily grew under the compulsions and inspirations of her great office. But, it is perhaps the ultimate tribute to Mrs. Roosevelt that she reached true greatness after the shock of her bereavement when she went bravely forward in a new career as a spokesman for America and a servant of world peace. In the White House she was the First Lady in the land, but after the White House she became, as Ambassador Stevenson has reminded us, the First Lady in the world. Great was her goodness, and it was her goodness that made her so great.

Let us today earnestly resolve to build the true foundation for Eleanor Roosevelt's memory--to pluck out prejudice from our lives, to remove fear and hate where it exists, and to create a world unafraid to work out its destiny in peace. Eleanor Roosevelt has already made her own splendid and incomparable contribution to that foundation. Let us go and do likewise, within the measure of our faith and the limits of our ability. Let Eleanor Roosevelt teach us all how to turn the arts of compassion into the victories of democracy.