

**“Women’s Rights as Human Rights:”  
Hillary Clinton, Eleanor Roosevelt and the Struggle for Social Justice Abroad**

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While some first ladies (Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Rosalyn Carter) lent their stature to women’s legal standing at home, only Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Clinton dared use their position to influence international law and diplomacy. Hillary Clinton understood this connection, studied Eleanor Roosevelt’s political legacy, and, taking courage from her predecessor, used this to defend and expand her actions abroad.

This presentation will examine the strategies ER and HRC used to craft their positions, develop White House support for and contain White House opposition to their actions, and assess the impact their policy pronouncements had on American diplomacy and presidential politics. Rather than focus specifically on HRC’s speech before the United Nations conference in Beijing and Eleanor Roosevelt’s role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it will treat the famous “women’s rights as human rights” speech as one of four of five benchmarks in HRC’s efforts to draw the state department’s attention to an issue it did not want to address. Special attention will be given to both women’s efforts to secure micro-credit for women in Africa and Asia, to secure women’s legal standing in international trade agreements and treaties, to prevent sex trafficking, to address the specific concerns of women refugees and their children, and to outlaw the buying of wives. Of special interest will be the way they used the United Nations to sway a recalcitrant foreign service to address issues of specific concern to women.

The evidentiary paper trail is long and rich. As editor of The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, a documentary history of ER’s human rights work, I have documents from more than 263 archives in 9 nations to consult when reconstructing her work (within and without the United Nations) to secure social and economic rights for women. I have secured roughly 300 files from the Clinton administration dealing with HRC’s efforts in this arena and have located an additional 200 soon to be released by the Clinton Library. Senator Clinton, Madeline Albright, Melanne Verveer, Theresa Loar, Aprill Springfield, Heather King, Johnnetta Cole, Krubo Kollie, Ann Lewis, Pam Cicetti, and Laura Schiller have agreed to interviews. In addition to reviewing the coverage these actions received in the major media, I am confident that I can interview those journalists who covered HRC (Maureen Dowd, Eleanor Clift, Gloria Steniem, Kartina vanden Heuvel, E.J. Dionne, and others) as well Dick Morris and other pundits who consistently criticized her in *The American Spectator* and *The Wall Street Journal*.