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Chapter 8: Eleanor Roosevelt's Covert Expansion of Autofabrication – A Double Deal

Introduction

Ken Burns' documentary series *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History* (2014) was generally well-received by reviewers, but one point of criticism raised by Mary Jo Binker and Brigid O'Farrell – both scholars affiliated with the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers project of the George Washington University – is that Eleanor Roosevelt receives less attention than is her due. In an article on History News Network they reflect on how Eleanor Roosevelt herself might have assessed the series:

> As a savvy producer and consumer of television, ER would have been the first to appreciate Burns's series on her family. She would have welcomed his interest in their lives and accomplishments but she would have been puzzled and dismayed at the amount of time devoted to her private life. She would have been particularly unhappy about the portrayal of the last seventeen years of her life (a mere 35 minutes in a fourteen-hour program).
>
> (…) From 1945 until her death in 1962, ER took the ideas about community, inclusion and democracy that she, her husband, and uncle espoused, and pushed them much farther than Theodore or Franklin ever dreamed. However, because she usually exercised political power indirectly and often played down or obscured her own achievements, ER's contributions are often overlooked and undervalued.

Binker and O'Farrell's interest in how Eleanor Roosevelt would have perceived this documentary is in itself striking – they stress that she is both an object of remembrance who ought to have a say in the form that remembrance takes, and an expert "producer and consumer of television." I, however, do not think Eleanor Roosevelt would have been either puzzled or dismayed about the relatively small amount of time devoted to her *private* life at all. As Binker and O'Farrell say, ER "usually exercised political power indirectly and often played down or obscured her own achievements." Although this may have been motivated in part by a sense of insecurity, I see it as part of ER's highly successful self-presentation and exercise of political power. This chapter will argue that Eleanor Roosevelt presented herself and exercised power very astutely, while intensely aware of the far-reaching effects of her approach, both for herself and for her husband as cultural icons at the time and into the future.

As a starting point, it is worth noting that Binker and O'Farrell initially object to the scant attention given to ER's "private life", and then go on to discuss Americans' ignorance of what she did in her *public* life after 1945. Equally telling is their use of "espoused" in their discussion

of ER's furthering of the Roosevelts' political ideals – to employ a word that derives so clearly from "spouse" suggests a complex relationship between ER's political work and her role as FDR's wife, and familial link between both presidents. This obfuscation of ER's private and public lives is significant, because it is central to her self-presentation, as well as to her later representation. More specifically, I will argue here, it is key to understanding the autofabrication and remembrance of both FDR and her.

Eleanor Roosevelt, both as an individual and as a cultural icon in her own right, is habitually elided, and it is only too easy to do so. As discussed in chapter 2, this is exemplified in the Four Freedoms Park on the tip of Roosevelt Island in New York City. The memorial contains a bust of Franklin Roosevelt, and points to the United Nations Headquarters, but not a single reference is made to ER, who carried FDR's vision beyond his death, and operated at the heart of the United Nations' beginnings. Visitors to the memorial who are aware of ER's role in FDR's White House and the UN will presumably understand that she is hovering in the air between the bust of FDR and the UN building. She looms large at the site, but cannot be seen or heard. Her presence rather consists in a silhouette quietly at work in the extended space the memorial occupies, treading beyond its physical boundaries, only visible to those already in the know, but, just as Binker and O'Farrell suggest "exercises political power indirectly." In this memorial as elsewhere, Eleanor Roosevelt functions to expand the arena of our perception. If the space between the memorial and the UN building is not read as a meaningful part of the artwork, ER's agency remains invisible. Yet such invisibility also enabled her to achieve unprecedented impact on contemporary politics, as well as on the politics of remembrance, both as a key player in FDR's autofabrication, and in creating her own public image.

I have previously proposed to think of self-fashioning and autofabrication as complementary concepts to illuminate the cultural production of political leaders. Self-fashioning relates to the making of an individual self, driven by the person involved, and also to the self as the product of environmental circumstances, shaped by cultural and ideological demands. This concept on its own works well to think about the fashioning of most selves, but to consider the making of iconic political leaders something more is needed. I introduced autofabrication to incorporate on the one hand the fact that political leaders embody power over the life and death of their subjects, and on the other the fact that political leaders in modern democratic systems represent their electorate, and thus need to project themselves as recognizable public icons that a diverse audience can identify with, and that can function to obscure their exertion of power. Franklin Roosevelt exemplifies a very successful autofabrication, as his largely celebratory remembrance attests. Eleanor Roosevelt is a crucial agent in FDR's autofabrication and, because she survived him and remained publicly active and visible, of his legacy. What makes her particularly important is her faculty to informally and indirectly expand his influence into areas such as the domestic sphere, entertainment parts of mass media, and into the years after his death. ER made FDR's autofabrication more powerful, because she mitigated his influence into areas that

are not habitually considered the realm of presidential leadership, as well as beyond his own lifetime.

Eleanor Roosevelt's covert expansion of FDR's cultural and political reach, and even less visibly but no less importantly, her own, is in the first place enabled by her gender, an idea I take from Cynthia Enloe. The construction of ER's femininity allowed and continues to allow for an expansion of autofabrication and remembrance, in four directions, two associated with the tangent of autofabrication engaged in occlusion of power, and two associated with the creation of a favorable and sustainable public icon. I will first contextualize my argument by briefly introducing Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's self-fashioning with regard to one another,[1] and how they have addressed the obviously intensely gender-related reputation problem of their troubled marriage so as to continue to meet cultural expectations in the short as well as the long run. If, for instance, FDR's mistress Lucy was, in his life, the clearest symptom of his marital problems, she became a necessary factor in the construction of his remembrance, to assert his continued sexual potency, and therefore his masculinity, which was problematic because of his disability.

Second, I address ER's use of her self-defined "casual unawareness" as a vehicle for contributing to and expanding the reach of FDR's autofabrication, using the same casual unawareness to fabricate herself as a political agent, and acquire enormous clout for someone who was not formally elected for political office. In doing so, I discuss a range of cases that show how Eleanor's role in autofabricating FDR and herself has borne out into cultural memory and remembrance practices. Essentially, the dynamics in autofabrication and remembrance are the same: through their partnership, the remembrance of FDR could become more explicitly shaped as narrative, more depoliticized, more private and more officious. At the same time, ER could autofabricate herself as a political leader in her own right though seemingly modest ("casually unaware"), and as such indirectly exert political power.

Expanding the Realm of Politics Through "Casual Unawareness"

Cynthia Enloe's paradigmatic monograph *Bananas, Beaches, Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (1990) radically expands the study of international politics beyond usual focus on powerful white men in dark-blue suits and red ties who hold final sway over the complex machinations of global international politics. Enloe argues that for a real understanding of this impenetrable and seemingly unalterable apparatus of world order, it is necessary to expand the focus to include the tourists, chambermaids, prostitutes, military wives at foreign bases and all

1 This has been done to an extreme extent by others, some of which are discussed in this chapter (e.g. Goodwin). Some others are: Joseph Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of Their Relationship, based on Eleanor Roosevelt's Private Papers*. New York: Norton, 1971; Hazel Rowley, *Franklin and Eleanor, An Extraordinary Marriage*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

others who have little formal power, but are impacted by and are part of the global choreography of international politics. Enloe's question "Where are the women in international politics?" is fruitful, because it leads to an understanding of politics that is not limited to official institutional loci of power. The status quo of women around the world supporting the international political system as secretaries, wives, chambermaids, seems so natural and fixed that the people involved are, in perfect harmony with patriarchic ideology unaware of their contribution. Since Enloe made this argument, however, some American women have achieved great formal power in international politics – Madeleine Albright, Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice – indeed, I see Eleanor Roosevelt as a paradigmatic enabler of that possibility.

Enloe, for example, examines how wives of soldiers at foreign bases played essential roles in turning the basis into a community and also in creating and sustaining relationships between American military bases and their local surroundings. As such these women were vital to the success, perceived legitimacy and continued existence of many bases. However, they only started to claim recognition in the 1980s, until which time their crucial contribution had been taken for granted by themselves as well as by the male military leadership (73). Enloe argues that this presumption of wifely support is essential for male leaders, without being recognized as such. This internalized conviction that female contributions ought to be invisible sacrifices made out of devotion and borne in silence, rather than requiring a formal due in money or power on an equal footing with men, is what Enloe lays bare. Her book wants to radically pull into the light the contributions of women, be they military wives, prostitutes, or chambermaids, in order to show the size and space of their agency, and their unused room for negotiation.

Enloe's introduces an expanded notion of the realm of politics to show the potential for empowerment of those who are not or only marginally involved in political decision-making. If Eleanor Roosevelt had a similar agenda it was far less pronounced or radical, but she did understand that other spheres than the traditionally political could hold sway over political decision-makers. The key difference between Enloe and ER is that, instead of creating or demanding visibility to gain recognition, Roosevelt used the political invisibility of her gender and traditional spheres of operation to covertly exercise power. By operating informally, on the edge or outside of politics, she used this power to contribute to the enfranchisement of women, laborers, and minorities, by helping them in civically and medially symbolic ways, outside of traditional politics. But more importantly, her success in doing so allowed her on the one hand to radically expand the reach of FDR's autofabrication, and become a political agent herself in need of her own autofabrication. Autofabrication, as I have argued before is by nature inspired by the need both to put forward an iconic public image, and to obscure evidence of power-mongering, and this is especially true in ER's case, who was not officially entitled to the political power she had. Thus, ER, in practice if not explicitly in theory, shared Enloe's vision that power could be exerted from marginal and seemingly non-political spheres – or in other words, that the political realm was bigger than most perceive it to be, but unlike Enloe, she perceived this

invisibility as an opportunity to extend her agency to help the marginalized, rather than a problem reinforcing the status quo.

In the 1920s and '30s Eleanor Roosevelt became acutely aware of her ability to fill the gap left by FDR's paralysis, for instance by traveling, campaigning and attending social and official functions in his stead. Later she learned to use her prerogative to narrate and disseminate his story. This empowerment of women through the shortcomings of men – through paralysis or otherwise – alerted her to the complex expectations of American femininity. In a "My Day" column on August 13, 1942, she wrote about the effort of women to preserve the "prewar world" in the absence of their husbands. She quotes at length from a text a friend has sent her of an inscription on a statue of the Pioneer Woman, a quintessentially American archetype:

> … the line in the inscription which I like best: "And with all she lived with casual unawareness of her value to civilization."
>
> There we have the secret which should be driven home to every woman. In countless homes in this country today, there are women who are "casually unaware" of the great accomplishments which are theirs. They will be recognized by history, but today we forget them because they do their daily tasks so casually that their heroism and the vital place which they fill in our world passes almost unnoticed, and certainly unsung in the present. (Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day" August 13, 1942)

Part of what is praiseworthy about the frontier woman, according to the inscription – which ER and her friend both affirm remains of paramount relevance in 1942 – is her "casual unawareness" of her contribution. She is crucial but does not command, or get, her due reward in money or power, because she is unaware of her value. Her modesty and the casual nature of her accomplishment is part of her "value to civilization." ER does not suggest that it should be otherwise, she does not spur the women "in countless homes" on to demand recognition of the "great accomplishments which are theirs." However, she does explicitly stress that they "fill a vital place", at home and during the war also in jobs left vacant by men, and moreover, that "their heroism" will be "recognized by history." It "passes almost unnoticed" because women's heroism culturally includes their renunciation of any claim to recognition in the present, but ER argues future narratives will not leave women's heroism "unsung." However, she also writes that this casual unawareness is "the secret which should be driven home to every woman," alerting readers publicly to the value of women's contribution, while simultaneously stressing the importance of its hidden nature. Thus, she draws attention to women's uncashed checks, and at the same time praises their generosity for not demanding recompense. This was her own strategy too, although she did require compensations in other forms, though characteristically, not for herself, but for groups and goal she chose. In the broadened definition of the political – including groups and interests that were not always regarded as part of that realm – Eleanor Roosevelt thus did claim political power, while simultaneously disguising it.

Self-fashioning – Marriage from Traditional to Political Partnership

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt (1884) was a lonely and serious child, both whose parents were mostly absent; her mother died when Eleanor was eight, and her father when she was nine years old. Less than ten years later she met Franklin Roosevelt, her father's fifth cousin, whom she married at twenty in 1905. The marriage produced six children, one of which died in infancy, in the next eleven years, and met its formative crisis in 1918, when Eleanor discovered a bundle of love letters in Franklin's suitcase from Lucy Mercer, her social secretary. When she discovered the affair she offered Franklin a divorce, instead of which he vowed not to see Lucy Mercer again – after his mother threatened to disinherit him if he would divorce Eleanor, and his assistant Louis Howe had stressed to him that a divorce would mean the end of his political career.

In practically all representations, and no doubt in real life, Eleanor Roosevelt's position changed through this crisis, from that of a young wife in support of her husband's career which she was hardly involved in, into that of a more independent agent secretly crucial to her husband's success. In this narrative, as it is often presented in biographies and biopics, the marriage crisis paradoxically figures as Eleanor Roosevelt's moment of emancipation, pivotal to the development of her budding career as not just FDR's wife, but an activist public figure in her own right. I am not contesting this course of events, but want to draw attention to how ER and later representers narrativized this experience, because it helps to understand both her self-fashioning – what cultural narratives applied to her situation, and which ones did she choose to apply? – and her remembrance. Eleanor Roosevelt years later said to a friend about her discovery: "the bottom dropped out of my particular world, and I faced myself, my surroundings, my world, honestly for the first time" (Lash, *Love Eleanor* 66). She interpreted the shock as a confrontation with "myself, my surroundings, my world" leading explicitly to a more "honest" "facing" of that world, that was a confrontation with the political realism of her world, and her position of limited but employable power. ER did not passively bear her ordeal, but her novel maturity was brought about by something that happened to her. ER's newly gained independence must be harmonized with her femininity, to address the culturally problematic incongruity between female autonomy and gender expectations. By thinking of her political activism as a function of how her marital love turned into mutually advantageous partnership, it becomes something that forced itself upon her. Similarly Louis Howe, acutely aware of the need after 1921 to have a mobile Roosevelt operate alongside, and literally in the name of FDR, is often credited, by ER and later representers, as crucial in coaching her to occupy a mature position as an independent agent beside FDR. Such factors – Howe's mentorship, FDR's need for an able substitute – contributed to enabling ER to juggle her femininity with a public role and the acquisition of political sway. Thus she, and most later narrators, could read her growing political activism and agency as flowing from her feminine casual unawareness, that was in itself fashioned and fabricated on the basis of an acute political assessment.

In the following I will develop the notion of autofabrication to include the specific ways in which Eleanor Roosevelt expanded FDR's autofabrication in relation to her own. Although many more

aides, assistants, advisers, and cabinet members were involved in FDR's autofabrication, ER was not just one of them, but someone who immensely extended the reach and bearing of the process. This contributed to FDR's public image at the time and continues to play a key role in how he is remembered: while many recent FDR representations include Eleanor Roosevelt in one way or another, the style and positioning of many remembrance practices is also a product of ER's autofabrication of FDR. Moreover, ER's is a double act: although ostensibly involved in negotiating FDR's autofabrication, she became, despite not being an elected official, so powerful that she accrued her own autofabrication. Each in a very different style, both FDR and ER in this process became omnipresent as well as less visible or less strongly profiled than they would have been without Eleanor Roosevelt's expanded form of autofabrication. To elucidate how this worked I will discuss a series of examples to illustrate what directions I discern in the process.

I have defined autofabrication as possessing two tangents: on the one hand a leader needs to develop and sustain an iconic public image, and on the other he needs to obscure negative elements of his exercise of power. The latter of these, the unobtrusive embodiment of power, is expanded by and through ER in two ways: first, where FDR was central to what Robert Cover calls a *nomos*, a normative universe, ER was a formative figure in FDR's narrative. Second, whereas everything FDR did or said was bound to be interpreted in the context of partisan politics, ER functioned as a depoliticizing factor, able to attend to political issues as if they were not political, or outside of the political sphere. Or to put it differently, she silently managed to broaden the very scope of the notion of politics in terms of gender, for instance, but also in relation to social issues. In terms of the other tangent, the production of a public icon, ER enabled the creation of a more private or personal public image of the President, and secondly her First Ladyship enlarged the presidential icon from the official into the officious. These last two aspects overlap partly, and have together, I will argue, contributed to a modern version of the president and First Lady as parents to the nation, both metaphorically as parents of the nation as a whole, and synecdochically as parental figures to potentially every citizen.

Eleanor Roosevelt as Agent: Writing, Hiding, and Depoliticizing FDR's Embodiment of Power

The first dialectic through which Eleanor Roosevelt in a sense expanded FDR's reach, along the lines of culturally constituted gender expectations, is that which Robert Cover has called "Nomos and Narrative." A *nomos*, in Cover's definition, is a "normative universe" which turns on the constant creation and maintenance of "a world of right and wrong, of lawful and unlawful, of valid and void" (95). As head of the executive branch of federal government, FDR was profoundly involved in the creation and maintenance of that "world of right and wrong" on a political and legal level. While neither endowed with the power of legislation nor jurisdiction, he literally signed into law the bills that regulated and ordered American society and lives around the world. He was both in the executive and the dramatic sense of the word the lead actor,

though simultaneously, he needed as part of his autofabrication to consider the desirability of displaying his power. Eleanor Roosevelt's narrative of the *nomos* FDR inhabited and participated in shaping, functioned as one vehicle for displaying some and occluding other elements of this. In fact ER effectively became FDR's narrator, increasingly so over time, continuing to act as the agent of his *nomos* and of his legacy after his death.

But also during and before his presidency, ER functioned as a narrative proxy of her husband's political work. As mentioned, from 1921, when FDR became ill with polio and needed years to recover enough to be able to appear in public again, ER acted as his proxy in political campaigns, traveling around and speaking on his behalf. Her activity here foreshadowed the labor done during World War Two by many American women in substitution for the fighting men, and through that work, their emancipation. As in the case of those war workers, ER had the opportunity to present in the public sphere because there was a clear vacancy that needed to be filled. This was before she started to narrate FDR's nomos, but it may have alerted her to the possibility and necessity of doing so, for which she started to use her writing.

Eleanor Roosevelt was not technically involved with the politics of lawmaking, but she did importantly contribute to the production of narratives underlying and substantiating the politics of FDR's administrations and ideals. She functioned as a narrator of FDR's *nomos* in the sense that from very early on until her own death, 17 years after his, she narrated his person and presidency. Her "My Day" columns for instance, before as well as after FDR's death, are filled with references to "the President" and "my husband", often to explain what FDR thinks, says, believes, or would have said, so that she comes to function as a kind of megaphone in the public debate of FDR's opinions, even if she also often said she did not agree with them. After his death, she retained this function as FDR's narrator. On April 4, 1955 – ten years after FDR's death – Eleanor Roosevelt weighed into the Cold-War debate about the meaning of the Allied conferences at the end of World War II, writing: "I am (…) sure that my husband said nothing to Stalin that he had not previously said to Mr. Churchill." ("My Day").

Although she continued to represent the President on campaign trails and many informal occasions during the White House years, the most important way in which ER filled a gap left by her husband was through writing. Franklin Roosevelt spoke and acted – suitably for an executive and a dramatic actor. He left voice recordings as well as a library filled with documentary material of his presidency, but he wrote very little, and often prohibited note-taking in meetings with cabinet members or advisers. His signature was primarily performative, an act to transform a formulaic text into law, not a narrative kind of writing. ER, in contrast, signed off her writings with her name to stress their personal nature. Unlike Churchill, who, as the subtitle of David Reynolds' book *In Command of History, Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (2007) has it, was both a major actor in and narrator of World War II, FDR did not "write" the war or any event during his presidency. His wife, on the other hand, wrote a daily newspaper column

practically without missing a day from 1936 to 1962, wrote, often monthly, articles in numerous magazines and a total of four autobiographies: *This Is My Story*, *This I Remember*, *On My Own*, and *The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt*. I have argued previously that the fact Franklin Roosevelt did not leave much writing or any memoir is part of his modernity and his preference for media – radio, photography, newsreels – that would accrue even more importance in the future. Yet at the same time ER's writing contributed proverbially to his immortality, furthering the issues and ideals of his *nomos* through narrative.

In many "My Day" columns Eleanor Roosevelt goes further than simply to tell stories of her own days as First Lady and Franklin Roosevelt's public and private life which engender cultural narratives and memories of both. She addresses her audience, recommends and endorses various cultural artefacts representing his presidency and their lives. On March 18, 1949, her column is dedicated to a pictorial narrative book to appear soon titled *Franklin Roosevelt at Hyde Park*. She commends it as "the story of a whole era that has passed", thus stressing the book's narrative force, and by implication FDR's synecdochic quality as a representative of "a whole era" and a normative universe:

> It is not just a pictorial history of my husband. It is the story of a whole era that has passed. Few people in the future will live the kind of life depicted in this book but the record will be there, and I think it is well for us to remember that out of this kind of living came great democratic leaders.

ER thus claims that "a pictorial history of my husband" has the potential to represent "a whole era that has passed", and assert the importance of remembering it as an example because "this kind of living" produced "great democratic leaders." Thus Eleanor Roosevelt suggests the book indeed represents a normative universe, a seemingly a-political paradise that brought forth great leaders.

By writing moreover, that "I know my husband would have enjoyed [it] tremendously", she endorses the book by proxy as if it were authorized by Franklin Roosevelt himself. Thus she produces and amplifies FDR's narrative in his absence, while casting it as officially endorsed. Through this, ER gives the book a place in FDR's autofabrication suggesting it carries his personal approval, while absolving him of any accusations of scheming to put himself in the picture posthumously.

In another column ("My Day", February 4, 1958) ER reviews the opening performance of Dore Schary's play *Sunrise at Campobello*, a dramatic rendering of FDR's illness with polio and initial rehabilitation (see chapter 7). She on the one hand emphasizes the play's fictionality, but on the other gives estimates of the distance between individual characters in the play and in real life: Louis Howe, for instance, looked differently but "could easily have said any of the things that were

put into his mouth", actor Ralph Bellamy "suggested my husband very successfully", and about the dramatic rendering of herself she writes: "Miss Mary Fickett did an excellent job of being a very sweet character, which she is in the play. I am afraid I was never really like Mr. Schary's picture of myself, so I could even look upon the portrayal of myself in a fictional light!" Especially the latter comments, about FDR and herself, are carefully phrased to both affirm the narrative portrayal as legitimate and at the same time to mark the distance between the dramatized version and the real experience in the Roosevelts' private life in the 1920s. Her comment on Mary Fickett's portrayal of herself as "very sweet" shows she refuses to regard herself as such – while endorsing the idea that sweetness is a positive trait, she herself is impervious to that compliment within the negotiation of power. Her presence at the opening night and her positive review of the play,however, in themselves already lend weight as well as a suggestion of veracity to the play. *Sunrise at Campobello* was turned into a successful film in 1960, nominated for four Academy Awards and winning a Best Actress Golden Globe Award for Greer Garson's role of Eleanor Roosevelt. Thus, both within the cinematic universe of *Sunrise at Campobello* the ER character is crucial to the narrative's success, and outside of that the real Eleanor Roosevelt enabled its making – she mentions in a June 1960 column that the filming was "in full swing" at the main house and her private cottage at Hyde Park – and advertised and officiously authorized it.

ER's role as the agent of FDR's legacy, and particularly a key narrator of his story has itself become part of a tradition of remembering FDR. In the 1976 television movie *Eleanor and Franklin* (Daniel Petrie, based on the book by Joseph Lash) – until the 2014 broadcast of Ken Burns' *The Roosevelts* series the most authoritative television biopic of FDR – the Eleanor Roosevelt character is the focalizer of the narrative. Through her narrativization the stress naturally falls on their youths, their relationships with each other and the rest of their family, friends, and Franklin's colleagues. This personal and intimate perspective profoundly influences the portrayal of FDR. Indeed, nowhere in the current or previous chapters have I been tempted to write "Franklin", except in the previous sentence: the film presents him, through Eleanor's eyes, as a Franklin, someone addressed intimately by his first name. I have discussed examples of FDR's attempts in speeches to cast himself as an open and amicable person, for instance through his repeated use of the word "frank", and "frankly", in his first Inaugural Address, but if this was successful at the time, it has not carried on into a tradition of calling him "Franklin" without Roosevelt, except in the combination with "Eleanor" or through an ER character's focalization. Thus, despite his seeming informality, he remained at a distance, except for ER, who became a conduit to his private life.

In *Eleanor and Franklin*, a young FDR reflects on this issue in a conversation with ER, saying: "I've always felt I was an actor – I consciously have to charm people. Some people think I'm insincere." [1:13] This use of the word actor is important, primarily because this cinematic FDR interprets the historical FDR as having to "consciously charm people", suggesting within this cultural representation that he was consciously fabricating his own public image, indeed whose

construction of his own sincerity was not always believed when he was a young man. This issue of autofabrication as a matter of being able to produce a convincing construction is foregrounded because the person playing FDR who says "I've always felt I was an actor" is obviously an actual actor. What may seem insincere about being an actor in the young FDR character is transparent and congruous in the person playing him. That genuineness will emerge for the FDR character as well, when he is no longer just an actor in the *nomos*, but also a character, played by an actor, in later narratives. As president FDR could politically and legally act and through that enact and embody the normative universe bigger than himself, a dynamic in which he needed to consciously charm people, at times unsuccessfully or at the cost of being thought "insincere." Eleanor Roosevelt, however, could, directly through her own narratives of FDR's presidency, but also via later endorsements of Roosevelt narratives, and fictionalized ER narrators, contribute to casting FDR's power in his *nomos* in a favorable light, and at times keep that power out of the limelight, by turning him into an actor or character in her narrative.

However, she did not only serve his autofabrication, but also her own, by presentifying her political priorities and ideals to him during his presidency and in his name during and afterwards. She did so literally after his death, by signing off "Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt", where she had previously used her own name "Eleanor Roosevelt." Perhaps when FDR was still alive there was more of a need to demarcate the distinction – precisely to allow ER her freedom to speak for herself – but using his name as a widow, she also clearly projected herself as his placeholder. At the same time, Eleanor Roosevelt had to remain "casually unaware" of her contribution, publically devoting herself to narrating FDR with the honesty and the openness which indeed has remained essential to her image. When she did act on her own behalf, or better, in the interest of others whose cause she applauded, she had to do so implicitly. ER's political agency, however, remained subliminally present after FDR's death, partly through her public roles, mainly as US delegate to the General Assembly of the United Nations, and Chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights, but also in a vaguer cultural sense. In a December 1945 Gallup poll respondents were asked to name potential candidates who "might make a good president", and Eleanor Roosevelt came fourth (Cook 394).

This fantasy of ER as presidential candidate has proved persistent. Robin Gerber's historical "what if?" novel *Eleanor Vs. Ike* (2008) has Eleanor Roosevelt run for president against Dwight Eisenhower in 1952 and win, thus allowing her a position of power in an imagined *nomos*. Although ER never in real life had the aspiration to become president or otherwise run for political office, and despite the fact that she would not have had a serious chance to be nominated within the Democratic party – not just because she was a woman, but also because she represented the party's radical left wing – the idea that she could have been a good candidate is easily revived by Gerber. Ellen Feldman in her appraisal called the novel "oh-so-timely" in the context of 2008, when Hillary Clinton was running for the nomination as Democratic candidate. It seems indeed that – much as Feldman's own novel *Lucy* may have been inspired by Bill Clinton's Lewinsky

affair – Gerber is led to remember ER as a potential presidential candidate by the events of 2008 – ER even encounters a five-year-old Hillary Rodham. If the novel aimed to stage a fictional premediation of Hillary Clinton's candidacy, Eleanor Roosevelt was the only historical character Gerber could have cast in the lead role. However, the novel does more than that – it draws Eleanor Roosevelt into the center of political power, a position in which it is only too easy to imagine her. Although, consistent with classic patriarchic values, in real life FDR was a leading figure in his *nomos* and ER a narrator of his narrative and focalizer in the story about his history, she also had a tendency toward the other side of the dialectic, and simultaneously, as participant in his autofabrication, could draw him towards the narrative pole.

Closely linked to Eleanor Roosevelt's role as narrator of her husband's presidency, ER occupied a position in which she often depoliticized issues for him, thus politically deftly drawing them out of the realm of executive power, a mechanism I discussed in chapter 5. Her ability to do so, offered his administration an extra pathway, for instance, to keep the more radical left wing of the party in the Democratic fold, and this in return gave ER unusual political clout for a First Lady. ER resided in the White House, in the sense that she lived there, but she effectively also had an important political role there, despite not being elected for political office. She was very important to the Roosevelt Administration as a channel of communication with groups and spheres traditionally outside of the political arena, both through writing for many lady's magazines and appearing in radio shows aimed at women, and through lending her ear to representatives of marginalized groups, most importantly to Civil Rights leaders (Cook 94-95). As such, Eleanor Roosevelt was able to help many groups to some extent, and in traditionally non-political spaces, though in ways that did have impact, not on a formal political level, but in terms of civic empowerment. She, for instance, gave her own press conferences accessible to women only, to force the press to employ female White House correspondents (Cook 411-413).

Perhaps the most famous instance is ER's resignation as a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, following the club's racist refusal to allow black opera star Marian Anderson to perform in its auditorium (Cook 23-24). Instead ER invited Anderson to perform at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC, an iconic moment in Civil Rights history, although also an ambivalent one. ER's acts were often crucial for the careers of those directly involved – the female journalists and Marian Anderson – and symbolically important for the groups they represented, but at the same time she politicized the issue in a realm where it would not immediately lead to demands on FDR to address racism in his presidential balancing act, or even draw attention away from such efforts. Though a civically and medially vast event, Anderson's performance at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939 did not give the vote to disfranchised African Americans. The event can be regarded as premediating the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, but on another level it may have canalized feelings in the African American community, thus helping the Administration in sustaining the inequality. In terms of autofabrication, such mediagenic actions by ER, for instance, may have obscured or counterweighted painful race

issues, such as FDR's refusal to speak out in favor of the anti-lynching Costigan Wagner Act, which was subsequently narrowly defeated as a result of Southern Democratic opposition in Congress.[2] Thus, ER's public and widely publicized civil rights activism gave FDR in a sense the political leeway to retain his popularity with African Americans, while refusing to actually use his political sway to act in their support.

Thus Eleanor Roosevelt's activism could address problems experienced by marginalized groups, by seeming to allow them entrance to the traditional political arena, without doing so. The recognition and solutions offered through her interference existed in the public sphere, but not in the heart of power politics. This benefitted those involved, as well as FDR's administrations because they precluded more pervasive demands, but they also gave an important measure of informal power to Eleanor Roosevelt. In fact for someone who was not elected she might be argued to have had an inordinate amount of political clout within the White House, precisely because she could keep so many issues out of it. Thus, while she had the same kind of understanding of politics as Enloe – that the scope of the political is actually much larger and involves more people than those elected to make and enforce political decisions – ER used it to depoliticize issues, rather than to politicize them as Enloe proposes. However, through the route of depoliticization, ER's interventions did continue to have political repercussions, for instance during the McCarthy era, when she became chairwoman of left wing organizations, such as NAACP and ADA, a successful method for dodging accusations of communist sympathies (Fazzi np).

On the other hand, ER's political clout hinged, as said, also on her invisibility in the political sphere. Much as she continues to be remembered as a First Lady politically astute enough to be a potential president, her overt absence equally survives in cultural remembrance. This means that she is often overlooked as a political agent, or at least granted less attention in mainstream remembrance than the groups she promoted – women, African Americans – consider to be her due. This is an effect of the same casual unawareness that was essential in negotiating her position of power. Thus, few visitors to the Roosevelt Historic Home and FDR Presidential Library make it to ER's cottage Val-Kill, Eleanor Roosevelt is only implicitly present at the Four Freedoms Park in New York, and she has only 35 minutes out of 14 hours dedicated to her in Ken Burns's *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History*.

Eleanor Roosevelt's Role in the Making of a Public Icon

Through her writings, Eleanor Roosevelt could introduce carefully selected aspects of the Roosevelts' private life into the public view. During the war, she for instance regularly stressed that all four Roosevelt sons had commissions in the US army. This helped to deflect accusations

2 Cook 91. See also "NAACP History: Costigan Wagner Bill": http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history-costigan-wagner-act

that, while FDR had, against his promises some felt, sent other people's sons into war and selfishly abused his power to keep his own safe, and it profiled the presidential family as dedicated and patriotic on a personal level.

In the same way in which ER could thus treat politically sensitive issues about his private life outside of the political arena through her writings, FDR could depoliticize issues by drawing them out of the realm of serious political debate, and address them in other modes. Even if she was not always the one to do it, an important contribution of ER to this style of depoliticization, was the introduction of their private family sphere as a vessel for doing so. As such, she supplied FDR as a public icon with a private dimension, not by exposing his personal life, but by adding the private as a dimension to the public image. FDR himself applied the same tactics, for instance when in 1944 he attacked Republicans who had accused him of using public means for his private needs. In a Radio News campaign speech on September 23, 1944 he said:

> These Republican leaders have not been content with attacks on me, or my wife, or on my sons. No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala. Well, of course, I don't resent attacks, and my family don't resent attacks, but Fala does resent them. You know, Fala is Scotch, and being a Scottie, as soon as he learned that the Republican fiction writers in Congress and out had concocted a story that I'd left him behind on an Aleutian island and had sent a destroyer back to find him—at a cost to the taxpayers of two or three, or eight or twenty million dollars—his Scotch soul was furious. He has not been the same dog since. I am accustomed to hearing malicious falsehoods about myself ... But I think I have a right to resent, to object, to libelous statements about my dog.[3]

Not only does this turn serious – and probably to some extent justified – charges into a joke, it also removes the issue from the locus of political debate about governmental expenditure to the homely, cute and obviously non-political site of the Roosevelts' family dog, away from the presidential body politic. The rhetorical deftness lies in the fact that Roosevelt is accused of spending public money on his dog, thus drawing Fala into the political sphere, and deflects the attack through the same movement that the accusers object to. Rather than to defend his spending, or even to answer the charges made, he switches to discussing the accusations' supposed effects on Fala. Thus relocating the discussion to the private sphere, he depoliticizes the issue, and ironically, in doing so, objects to that very movement. In a very broad paraphrase, he asks that Fala be left out of the game, while at the same time bringing Fala into it himself. This rhetorically invalidates the charges by displacing them into the private sphere, which is all the more ironical because the actual displacement of the dog, and its alleged rescue with government means is what led to the discussion in the first place.

3 "Biography of Fala D. Roosevelt", FDR Library Website. http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/education/resources/bio_fala.html

This use of Fala and persons from his private sphere is characteristic also for FDR's depoliticization of his remembrance. Fala survived FDR by seven years, and thus in mass media moved from being one of FDR's often photographed and described attributes to one of ER's, one of the most publicly visible assets to pass from him to her in 1945. Even the earliest exhibitions in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum included a "Fala corner" dedicated to the remembrance of the family dog. Although the Fala speech is an important element in it, this remembrance is almost ostentatiously non-political.

Remembrance practices have, however, also worked in the opposite direction, using aspects from the Roosevelts' private lives to salvage politically and culturally complicated elements of his public image to fabricate a sustainable icon. Roosevelt's paralysis from the waist down makes him a problematic public icon in cultural memory, because his impaired physique an able-ist and patriarchic culture calls into question his virility. One obvious way of culturally asserting FDR's masculinity is via his sexual potency – a route taken, for instance, by teen movie *FDR American Badass!* (2012) in which the FDR character asks "Does my cock still work?" moments after finding out his legs are paralyzed. Through its very triviality the film betrays an important aspect of FDR as a public icon in cultural memory: if his legs no longer worked, it is all the more important to know that the commander in chief at least functioned well sexually. Anecdotes of his marriage with Eleanor Roosevelt cannot provide this reassurance because their sexual relationship ended – at least in cultural memory – after the marital crisis in 1918. Treatment in popular culture and actuality of FDR's mistress Lucy Mercer Rutherfurd, and alleged other extramarital affairs, usually functions at least on one level as proof of FDR's continued virility. Thus, they introduce narratives about FDR's private life into a broader public sphere to address the politically and ideologically charged issue of the president's capability to function as an able man.

Ellen Feldman's novel *Lucy* (2003) is an intriguing case because it combines in a sense the movement from public to private with a movement from official to officious history. It is well researched historically, and sticks closely to historical details in so far as they are known in telling the story of FDR's relationship with Lucy Mercer Rutherfurd from her perspective. She is the narrator of a narrative that could only be part of the officious story, and her agency over that narrative certainly draws it out of the traditionally political into the realm of popular speculation about the president's private life. The fact that the Lucy character is the story's narrator, makes her a kind of illicit derivative of ER's role as narrator. Lucy Mercer Rutherfurd did not actually tell her side of the story, but in projecting her as narrator of the affair, Feldman is careful to position the love story within the context of FDR's political work and against the background of the US's involvement in World Wars I and II, employing the public interest in FDR's private sphere and the novel genre to catch the attention of a new audience to deliver a hagiographic public history lesson about FDR:

> The times were dire. The pressures on Franklin were unbearable. He saw war coming, as he had two decades earlier, but now he was not a young firebrand in the administration eager to get into it. He was the administration, and he knew we would not be able to stay out of it. The problem was, he explained to me, he could not get too far ahead of the American people in racing to meet it. "Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars," he'd promised the mothers and fathers of America during the campaign, though he'd been fairly certain they would. The catch, he confided, was by that time the United States would be in the war, so it would not be foreign. And all the while the isolationists in America First, like Charles Lindbergh and Franklin's cousin Alice Longworth, fought his policies, and impugned his motives, and spread stories about him and Eleanor and the children, who were now old enough to get into trouble on their own. (Feldman 212-213)

In this excerpt and throughout the novel, the narrative is mainly historical – both in the sense of supported by detailed historical evidence, and in the sense that it reads like a very favorable biography of FDR, addressing his political career more than his private life. It puts a positive construction on things FDR has been criticized for, as for instance on his rhetorically brilliant, but misleading campaign promise that he would not send Americans into "foreign wars", and then sending them into a "domestic" war which was nonetheless on the other side of the globe. Here the fictional Lucy actually echoes a "My Day" column Eleanor Roosevelt published on November 21, 1944, in which she explains that FDR actually kept his promise. Through its complicit narrator, the novel strongly exculpates FDR's infidelity – "the pressures on Franklin were unbearable" – a strategy that works well because the narrator is so clearly historically accurate in her analyses elsewhere. Nevertheless, *Lucy* recounts the narrative of FDR's presidency, while filling up the gaps, from a vantage point that is just outside the realm of the political, the public, and the official. Lucy, both protagonist and reminiscing narrator, has a particular position only available to a fictionalized mistress from which to complete the narrative and assert FDR to be sexually able, a private issue that is politically and culturally important to his remembrance.

Thus, Eleanor Roosevelt did not function as a vehicle for showcasing FDR's masculinity to later audiences – other female ER foils do so in cultural memory, not just Lucy, but also FDR's secretary Marguerite LeHand ("Missy"), his distant cousin Margaret Suckley ("Daisy"), and to a lesser extent his private secretary Grace Tully. These women figure importantly in many biographies (e.g. Geoffrey Ward's *Closest Companion,* about Daisy) and some wrote biographies of FDR themselves – Grace Tully published *F.D.R. My Boss* (1949), narrating his story, and thereby occupying yet another element of what might be considered Eleanor Roosevelt's position, reinforcing his masculinity and natural dominance in the process as evident in the title "My Boss." The film *Hyde Park on Hudson* (2012) puts this phenomenon of "FDR's women" center stage, while implicitly suggesting that Eleanor Roosevelt's subversion consisted in part in, or even resulted from, her alleged homosexuality.

There are various women ER allegedly had romantic relationships with, most notably journalist Lorena Hickok and suffragist Marion Dickerman (Cook 27-37). Although there is little historical evidence to show that these friendships were erotic, the suggestion that ER was lesbian remains important in cultural memory, because it provides a seemingly fitting explanation of ER's sexuality – on the margin, as most of her political interests were in socially marginalized groups and subversive of normative standards, as a powerful woman in a patriarchy, however casually unaware, by definition is. At Historic Hyde Park, this issue of ER's private life is mostly relegated to what used to be her cottage at Val-Kill, a site itself geographically and in terms of presentation on the margin of the larger site. Whereas the details of FDR's sex life is a private matter with great public appeal, because it resolves a cultural snag in his public image, the issue of ER's sexuality is relevant only to a limited audience, fascinating to some and repulsive to others. Playing it out in popular culture works well as a symbol of her general subversiveness and attraction to margins, but even if it is sometimes overemphasized in later popular culture because it fascinates, it remains a very limited factor in her autofabrication as a public icon.

Eleanor Roosevelt's role in FDR's presidency was, as I have argued, that of a window on the border of the political apparatus: she functioned as a channel of communication between the President and the public that went both ways, and which allowed her to incorporate her own views and priorities. In doing so, she enlarged the arena of politics, drawing in spheres, groups and issues that would otherwise have been excluded. One important way in which she did so was by addressing issues the Administration could not officially say anything about, unofficially. FDR often spoke to journalists off the record, but even then his space was limited, and in a sense ER had the role to supplement FDR's public image with an unofficial, radical voice. Together FDR and ER could decide, whether or not they actually discussed such things explicitly, that ER would address an issue – always á *titre personnel* – providing those involved with a kind of "soft" acknowledgement by the president. One motive, from the FDR Administration's perspective, for this was often to deflect demands for "hard" political measures or monetary compensation, and thus a form of depoliticization. Eleanor Roosevelt's treatment of issues as officious mouthpiece for FDR could obscure what the President was doing elsewhere, so that such contributions to the public icon were the flipside of autofabrication in that they elided the exercise of power. At the same time they carried their own form of soft power.

The story of ER's visit to the Bonus Army (1933, discussed in chapter 4), leading one veteran to say "Hoover sent the Army, Roosevelt sent his wife", is exemplary here. The veteran's comment has been echoed by innumerable journalists at the time, and historians, schoolbooks, documentaries and websites since. Although of course, this was an important, and intentional, affirmation, it was not an official government statement. As such it is a classic Rooseveltian example of symbol politics. Eleanor Roosevelt was kind, compassionate, good at making the veterans feel they were being seen and heard, but their demand for money was not granted or even seriously considered.

In American cultural memory, the Roosevelts' informal and personal approach is still prevalent, and ER's officious acting as presidential substitute or supplement is a central part of that. Even the fact that ER could guide attention away from other issues, and allowed FDR an unofficial second voice, to own or to distance himself from as he saw fit is in itself reflected in remembrance. An example of this is in *Hyde Park on Hudson* (2012) when throughout the film the suspicion is raised that the Eleanor character takes the initiative to serve hotdogs to the British King and Queen to humiliate them publicly through a vulgar snack associated with the American Independence Day. Thus she is remembered as rebellious and politically active on the sly in the emotive margin of otherwise pragmatic and rational international politics. However, in the end the film suggests that the hotdogs were FDR's plan after all, having made deliberate use of his wife's reputation and defiant attitude, in order to deflect any suspicion away from himself. What has come to be known as the Hot Dog Summit of 11 June 1939 was, according to David Woolner, planned in detail by FDR, including the hot dogs (Michaels). Whether or not there is a historical basis to believe that he attempted, as he does in the film, to suggest that the hot dogs were his wife's malicious idea, it is exemplary of an actual as well as a currently popularly remembered dynamic between them.

A key effect of casting Eleanor Roosevelt as an officious voice alongside FDR's official one, especially together with her introduction of the private into the public icon, is that Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, in autofabrication as well as remembrance, are extremely successful as the nation's projected parents. The broad knowledge that during the presidency they had no sex life is no problem here – indeed it might be thought of as an asset, especially since they did have five children to prove that they had had this in the past. This lack of an erotic relationship between them opens up the potential to fantasize about erotic relationships between FDR and others. And yet, despite the imagined or real lack of sexual monogamy, they were real parents, and successfully functioned as symbolic parents to the nation. This remembrance as a presidential couple whose officious acts and expressions are interwoven in their public policies and administration, is borne out for instance in Doris Kearns Goodwin's paradigmatic *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, The Home Front in World War II* (1994). This biography weaves the Roosevelts' private and public lives into one, starting with what in a film would be a parallel projection of the German occupation of Europe in 1940 and FDR's illness with polio in 1921. Thus, the home front is consistently interpreted as "national American" on the one hand and "domestic", actually within the intimacy of the Roosevelts' household, on the other. The suggestion throughout is that the Roosevelt home is a direct reflection of America as a whole, casting the family as an inclusive allegory for the nation and all its citizens.

No Ordinary Time consistently uses the first names of its narrative's *dramatis personae*, and, like the *Eleanor and Franklin* biopic, it often stages ER as the narrator – obviously because the personal, familial side of the narrative relies heavily on ER's autobiographical writings. As the use of the first names already signals, the biography is intensely intimate. It strongly links

private events in the Roosevelts' lives to public affairs of American engagement in the war. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, for instance is framed in an elaborate discussion of the deaths of FDR's mother and ER's brother in the months previous to December 7th, 1941. A great deal of attention is spent on the personal memories and grieving processes of both FDR and ER, and the recurrent suggestion is that both worked so concertedly on preparing for the war they realized was coming, partly to alleviate their mourning, for instance when Goodwin quotes ER's memoir: "I think it was in an attempt to numb this feeling that I worked so hard at the Office of Civilian Defense that fall" (279-280).

The final chapter similarly links ER's personal grief over her husband's death, and her discovery that his extramarital relationship with Lucy Mercer-Rutherfurd had been revived to her decision to continue to bear out his political and ideological legacy. As the war ended, ER, according to Goodwin, also made peace with the past of her troubled marriage.

> For the rest of her life, her son Elliott observed, Eleanor "chose to remember only the lovely times they had shared, never the estrangement and pain." She loved to quote word for word the things they had told one another. She kept up the traditions he had established for the family – including the picnic on the Fourth of July and the reading of Dickens at Christmas. Maureen Corr, Eleanor's secretary during the forties and fifties, remembers her "constantly talking about what Franklin did or what Franklin said or… how Franklin thought about this or that. And every time she mentioned his name you could hear the emotion in her voice and see the glow in her eyes." …
>
> In these first months on her own, Eleanor derived constant comfort form a little verse sent to her by a friend. "They are not dead who live in lives they leave behind, In those whom they have blessed they live a life again." These simple lines, she wrote, inspired her to make the rest of her life worthy of her husband's memory. As long as she continued to fight for his ideals, he would continue to live. (633)

Goodwin here interweaves public and private, suggesting that ER's constant mentioning of "what Franklin did or what Franklin said" was primarily motivated by her personal grief and wish to retain affectionate memories for herself. The final sentence suggests that ER's motivation for continuing "to fight for his ideals" after FDR's death was to keep alive his memory, where I would read this as a pretext to claim space for her own political ideals. Goodwin does in this manner include the Roosevelts' private life, and particularly ER and the dynamics of their marriage in her discussion of the American executive war leadership. However, she does not, like Enloe, expand the scope of what she regards as political through including the Roosevelts' private lives, but rather treats them as parental figures to the nation. Together, or really, as a family, they are treated as premediating the US at war, and therefore able to guide the US through it. Goodwin does not, like Enloe, include the private and the officious in what she regards as political, but rather treats it as a separate level that mirrors

the public level of international politics, a movement that ER's role alongside FDR in a sense makes possible.

Goodwin in her preface compares America and the Roosevelts noting that they share: "the sense of a cause successfully pursued through great difficulties, a theme common to America itself and to the family which guided it" (11). She suggests that the success of both hinged on the greatness of the difficulties and that the Roosevelts' success in "guiding" America depended on their knowledge of those same "great difficulties." "The family which guided it" firmly implants Eleanor Roosevelt into an adjunct position in leading the US, while expanding the presidency into the private and the officious, to benefit FDR's public icon as a paternal war president.

Conclusion

After Franklin Roosevelt's death in April 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt continued to be politically active, though not in elected office. She was, most famously and importantly, the United States' first delegate to the United Nations General Assembly, and chairperson of the UN Committee on Human Rights. Within that capacity, she helped to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Within the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt became a public intellectual, who wrote and published many opinion pieces and books, appeared on a wide range of radio and television shows, and chaired various boards and committees. She was also involved, as her husband had been in the first decade of the twentieth century, in battling the enormous power of the Democratic Party machine of Tammany Hall. However, on the whole, her position as a public intellectual, educating the American public, was the role that suited her best in the years between 1945 and her own death on November 7, 1962 (Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow*).

Although ER remained very influential in her post-war career, her lowered visibility, was an explicit choice – she was often invited to run for political office but continued to present herself rather as FDR's "aura", even if her projects in reality were more her own than extrapolations of FDR's. As she wrote about this in an article in *Look Magazine* in 1948, following her refusal to run for vice-president with Harry Truman:

> At first I was surprised that anyone should think that I would want to run for office, or that I was fitted to hold office. Then I realized that some people felt that I must have learned something from my husband in all the years that he was in public life! (…) The simple truth is that I have had my fill of public life of the more or less stereotyped kind. (Quoted in Neal)

Clearly she continued to autofabricate herself as FDR's wife, suggesting that any fitness for political office people might assume would be learned from him. Moreover, even if she continued to exert great influence, and while also continuing to pose as someone who only reluctantly, despite herself, and to her own surprise, had a public life at all. Binker and O'Farrell in their

HNN article about ER in *The Roosevelts* indignantly note about the period after FDR's death, that "[t]his period is a complete mystery to most Americans who usually associate ER with Franklin and assume that her role in American life ended with his death in 1945 or that her postwar life merely echoed his New Deal. Neither of these statements is true" (np). While they are right about this, it was Eleanor Roosevelt's own conscious autofabrication that produced the perception in "most Americans" of the "mystery", the strong associating with "Franklin", as well as, finally, the impression that ER's independent and autonomous later politics always remained a continuation of the New Deal.