

Primary Source Document 1

# My Day

by Eleanor Roosevelt

FEBRUARY 27, 1939

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WASHINGTON, Sunday—Here we are back in Washington. I woke this morning to what sounded like a real spring rain. The grass outside my window looks green and, though I suppose we will probably have a blizzard next week, at the moment I feel as though spring had really arrived.

I am having a very peaceful day. I drove my car a short distance out of the city this morning to pilot some friends of mine who are starting off for a vacation in Florida. I think this will be my only excursion out of the White House today, for I have plenty of work to do on an accumulation of mail and I hope to get through in time to enjoy an evening of uninterrupted reading.

I have been debating in my mind for some time, a question which I have had to debate with myself once or twice before in my life. Usually I have decided differently from the way in which I am deciding now. The question is, if you belong to an organization and disapprove of an action which is typical of a policy, should you resign or is it better to work for a changed point of view within the organization? In the past, when I was able to work actively in any organization to which I belonged, I have usually stayed in until I had at least made a fight and had been defeated.

Even then, I have, as a rule, accepted my defeat and decided I was wrong or, perhaps, a little too far ahead of the thinking of the majority at that time. I have often found that the thing in which I was interested was done some years later. But, in this case, I belong to an organization in which I can do no active work. They have taken an action which has been widely talked of in the press. To remain as a member implies approval of that action, and therefore I am resigning.

I have just seen some people who are arranging for the Coronado Cuarto Centennial Celebration in New Mexico in 1940. All the plans for this celebration, which will begin in May 1940, sound interesting and delightful. New Mexico has many historic spots. There is beauty and an almost foreign interest in this state which has so many ties with Spain and the South and Central American countries. I hope that 1940 will see a great awakening of interest in this part of our nation. More of our American citizens than ever before should see this land of sunshine and color. I, for one, will make every effort to make the rounds of all the exhibitions which will be available during the summer following the opening of this celebration.

While we are speaking on interesting things in the West, let me tell you that I have been sent a pamphlet by the "Save the Redwoods League" of Berkeley, Calif., which pictures commercial exploitation of these beautiful redwood trees in the State of California. Anyone who has ever taken the drive up from the Yosemite to the State of Oregon, cannot fail to have an unforgettable picture of these giants of the forest. They have stood thousands of years. Perhaps some of them have reached maturity, but it seems to me a wicked thing to out them down when that time arrives. Can not either the State or the Nation take a hand in preserving these forests?

E.R.

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Primary Source Document 2

STANDARD FORM No. 14 A  
APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT  
MARCH 10, 1926

16

**TELEGRAM**  
OFFICIAL BUSINESS—GOVERNMENT RATES

FROM **The White House**  
Washington

Feb. 26 - 1939

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 73762

MR JOHN LOVELL JR  
HOWARD UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON D.C.

I REGRET EXTREMELY THAT WASHINGTON IS TO BE  
DEPRIVED OF HEARING MARION ANDERSON A  
GREAT ARTIST

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

WVC  
WVC

--Eleanor Roosevelt, telegram to treasurer of Marian Anderson Citizens Committee, reported in the New York Times, February 27, 1939

Primary Source Document 3

*file*

February 26, 1939.

Henry M.  
My dear Mrs. <sup>A</sup>Robert: Jc.

I am afraid that I have never been a very useful member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, so I know it will ~~make very little difference to you whether~~ I resign, or whether I continue to be a member of your organization.

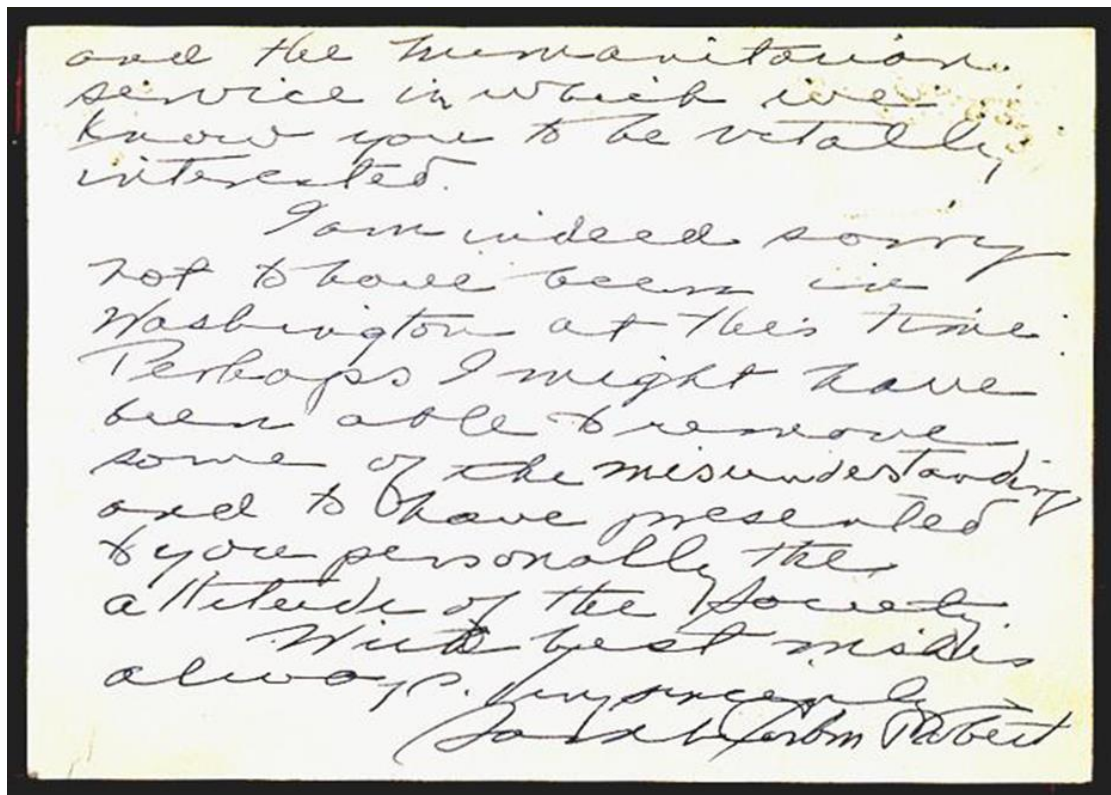
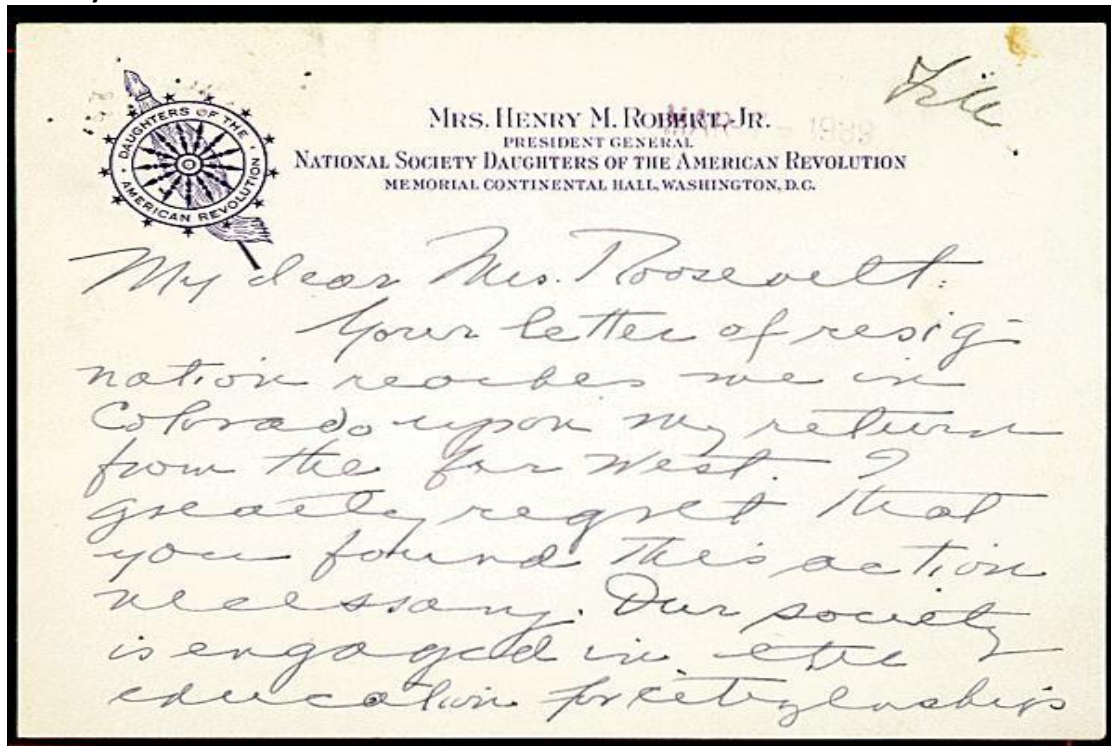
However, I am in complete disagreement with the attitude taken in refusing Constitution Hall to a great artist. You have set an example which seems to me unfortunate, and I feel obliged to send in to you my resignation. You had an opportunity to lead in an enlightened way and it seems to me that your organization has failed.

I realize that many people will not agree with me, but feeling as I do this seems to me the only proper procedure to follow.

Very sincerely yours,

File copy of letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to president general of the DAR.

Primary Source Document 4



letter from Mrs. Henry M. Robert, Jr., president general of the DAR, responding to Mrs. Roosevelt's resignation



**Primary Source Document 5**



**Marian Anderson is presented with the Spingarn Medal by Eleanor on July 2, 1939, in Richmond, Virginia. The Spingarn Medal is awarded annually by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for outstanding achievement by an African American. The award, which consists of a gold medal, was created in 1914 by Joel Elias Spingarn, Chairman of the Board of the NAACP.**

**Primary Source Document 6**



*View of 75,000 people gathered to hear recital by Marian Anderson at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Easter Sunday, April 9, 1939  
(National Archives, Still Picture Branch, 306-NT-965B-4 )*

**Primary Source Document 7**



**Marian Anderson onstage at Constitution Hall in 1943.  
(Marie Hansen/Time and LIFE Pictures/Getty Images)**

**September 1942 – the DAR invited Marian Anderson to perform at Constitution Hall for a series of benefit concerts to aid the war relief. Marian Anderson performed at the first of these concerts in January 1943.**

## **Primary Source Document 8**

### **DAR Marian Anderson Statement**

The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution deeply regrets that Marian Anderson was not given the opportunity to perform her 1939 Easter concert in Constitution Hall, but today we join all Americans in grateful recognition that her historic performance on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial was a pivotal point in the struggle for racial equality.

Ms. Anderson's legendary concert will always be remembered as a milestone in the Civil Rights movement. The beauty of her voice, amplified by her courage and grace, brought attention to the eloquence of the many voices urging our nation to overcome prejudice and intolerance. It sparked change not just in the DAR but in all of America.

Our organization truly wishes that history could be re-written, but knowing that it cannot, we are proud to note that DAR has learned from the past.

DAR welcomed Marian Anderson to Constitution Hall on a number of occasions soon after 1939, including a benefit concert for war relief in 1943. It is also meaningful to us that this notable American chose Constitution Hall as the place where she would launch her farewell American tour in 1964.

In 2005, we were honored to host at our national headquarters the dedication ceremony of the Marian Anderson commemorative stamp at the invitation of the United States Postal Service and Ms. Anderson's family. In 2009, on the 70th anniversary of Ms. Anderson's Lincoln Memorial concert, DAR joined with the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission in hosting a special reception at our headquarters following a Marian Anderson tribute concert and naturalization ceremony. On the 75th anniversary in 2014, we were proud to host the Of Thee We Sing concert in DAR Constitution Hall to pay tribute to the talent, strength and courage of this remarkable and inspiring woman.

The Daughters of the American Revolution celebrates the life, the talent and the legacy of Marian Anderson. America is a better place because of her dreams and her sacrifices. As a nation, we can be grateful that she opened so many doors for all those who follow; and, as an organization, the DAR is genuinely pleased to pay tribute to her memory.

**<http://www.dar.org/national-society/dar-marian-anderson-statement>**



## Readings for Lesson on Eleanor Roosevelt, Marian Anderson, and the DAR

### FDR Presidential Library & Museum

Eleanor Roosevelt first met African American contralto opera singer Marian Anderson in 1935 when the singer was invited to perform at the White House.

Ms. Anderson had performed throughout Europe to great praise, and after the White House concert the singer focused her attentions on a lengthy concert tour of the United States. Beginning in 1936, Anderson sang an annual concert to benefit the Howard University School of Music in Washington, DC. These benefit concerts were so successful, that each year larger and larger venues had to be found.

In January 1939, Howard University petitioned the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) to use its Washington, DC auditorium called Constitution Hall for a concert to be scheduled over Easter weekend that year. Constitution Hall was built in the late 1920s to house the DAR's national headquarters and host its annual conventions. It seated 4,000 people, and was the largest auditorium in the capital. As such, it was the center of the city's fine arts and music events universe.

However, in 1939, Washington, DC was still a racially segregated city, and the DAR was an all-white heritage association that promoted an aggressive form of American patriotism. As part of the original funding arrangements for Constitution Hall, major donors had insisted that only whites could perform on stage. This unwritten white-performers-only policy was enforced against African American singer/actor Paul Robeson in 1930. Additionally, blacks who attended events there were seated in a segregated section of the Hall.

The organizers of Marian Anderson's 1939 concert hoped that Anderson's fame and reputation would encourage the DAR to make an exception to its restrictive policy. But the request was denied anyway, and despite pressure from the press, other great artists, politicians, and a new organization called the Marian Anderson Citizens Committee (MACC), the DAR held fast and continued to deny Anderson use of the Hall.

As the controversy grew, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt carefully weighed the most effective manner to protest the DAR's decision. Mrs. Roosevelt had been issued a DAR membership card only after the 1932 election swept her husband Franklin Roosevelt into the presidency. As such, she was not an active member of the DAR. She initially chose not to challenge the DAR directly because, as she explained, the group considered her to be "too radical" and "this situation is so bad that plenty of people will come out against it."

Rather, Mrs. Roosevelt first led by enlightened example. She agreed to present the Spingarn Medal to Marian Anderson at the upcoming national convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). And she invited Anderson to again perform at the White House, this time for the King and Queen of England when they came to the United States later in the year. But as the weeks went on, Mrs. Roosevelt grew increasingly frustrated that more active DAR members than she were not challenging the group's policy.

On February 26, 1939, Mrs. Roosevelt submitted her letter of resignation to the DAR president, declaring that the organization had "set an example which seems to me unfortunate" and that the DAR had "an opportunity to lead in an enlightened way" but had "failed to do so." That same day, she sent a telegram to an officer of the Marian Anderson Citizens Committee publicly expressing for the first time her disappointment that Anderson was being denied a concert venue.

On February 27, Mrs. Roosevelt addressed the issue in her My Day column, published in newspapers across the country. Without mentioning the DAR or Anderson by name, Mrs. Roosevelt couched her decision in terms everyone could understand: whether one should resign from an organization you disagree with or

remain and try to change it from within. Mrs. Roosevelt told her readers that in this situation, "To remain as a member implies approval of that action, therefore I am resigning."

Mrs. Roosevelt's resignation thrust the Marian Anderson concert, the DAR, and the subject of racism to the center of national attention. As word of her resignation spread, Mrs. Roosevelt and others quietly worked behind the scenes promoting the idea for an outdoor concert at the Lincoln Memorial, a symbolic site on the National Mall overseen by the Department of the Interior.

Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, himself a past president of the Chicago NAACP, was excited about such a display of democracy, and he met with President Roosevelt to obtain his approval. After the President gave his assent, Ickes announced on March 30th that Marian Anderson would perform at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday.

Fearing that she might upstage Anderson's triumphant moment, Mrs. Roosevelt chose not to be publicly associated with the sponsorship of the concert. Indeed, she did not even attend, citing the burdens of a nationwide lecture tour and the forthcoming birth of a grandchild. However, she and others lobbied the various radio networks to broadcast the concert to the nation.

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, seventy-five thousand people, including dignitaries and average citizens, attended the outdoor concert. It was as diverse a crowd as anyone had seen—black, white, old, and young—dressed in their Sunday finest. Hundreds of thousands more heard the concert over the radio. After being introduced by Secretary Ickes who declared that "Genius knows no color line," Ms. Anderson opened her concert with America. The operatic first half of the program concluded with Ave Maria. After a short intermission, she then sang a selection of spirituals familiar to the African American members of her audience. And with tears in her eyes, Marian Anderson closed the concert with an encore, Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen.

The DAR's refusal to grant Marian Anderson the use of Constitution Hall, Eleanor Roosevelt's resignation from the DAR in protest, and the resulting concert at the Lincoln Memorial combined into a watershed moment in civil rights history, bringing national attention to the country's color barrier as no other event had previously done.

Mrs. Roosevelt and Marian Anderson remained friends for the rest of Mrs. Roosevelt's life. Marian Anderson continued to sing in venues around the world, including singing the National Anthem at President Kennedy's inauguration in 1961. She died in 1993 at the age of 96.

**<https://fdrlibrary.org/anderson>**



## Eleanor Roosevelt College

## UC San Diego

She was not only a “wife, mother, teacher, First Lady, world traveler, diplomat, and politician; she dedicated her life to human rights, civil rights, and international rights” (Eleanor Roosevelt: The American Experience). It is important to understand the struggles she faced because they greatly shaped the person she became. She overcame the hardships in her personal path and dedicated her life to helping others.

Even after FDR became President of the United States, Eleanor refused to lose her independence. She was not sure what life would be like in the White House, and she dreaded the role of First Lady, declaring, “I never wanted to be a President’s wife” (Black 20). Nevertheless, she supported FDR to demonstrate her loyalty to her husband and the Democratic Party. In 1933, when they entered the White House, FDR asked Eleanor to resign from her outside positions, and that contributed to her struggles in adapting to the White House. However, she toured the country during the Great Depression and acted as her “husband’s ears and legs,” as she learned about the widespread hunger and sorrow (Eleanor Roosevelt: A Restless Spirit). Traveling across the country, she was FDR’s ambassador, and this helped her become more visible, outspoken, and involved. As a public figure, she was not like previous First Ladies. Since FDR was confined to his wheelchair, he sent Eleanor out to see people and to talk about his plans. Eleanor brought many issues to FDR because she wanted him to be more aware of everything that was happening throughout the country.

During FDR’s first year as President, Eleanor traveled over 40,000 miles, where she experienced poverty first hand; consequently, she wanted to bring attention to the poor living conditions that many Americans faced (Eleanor and Franklin: The White House Years). She encouraged him to give women positions in the White House and in fact was the first to invite women journalists to the White House. Many times, FDR would get angry and annoyed when Eleanor would ask him to read over things, but she wanted him to get more involved with certain issues that she felt were important; similarly, “although [Eleanor], like most white Americans grew up in an environment suffused with racist and nativist attitudes, by the time she reached the White House, she was one of the few voices in the administration insisting that racial discrimination had no place in American life” (Flemion and O’Connor 7). Eleanor wrote a daily newspaper column, “My Day,” which was published in 180 newspapers nationwide. From 1936-1945, “she wrote... more than 2,500 columns, and 200 articles, published six books, and delivered at least 70 speeches a year” (Black 47). She used “My Day” as a political forum because she wanted to express awareness of foreign policy and wars. In one of her columns she wrote, “I think women of this country... will agree with me that this is a time for action--not for war, but for mobilization of every bit of peace machinery” (Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt’s My Day, 34-45). In order to express her concerns and to get her point across, many times she was blunt.

By emphasizing her dislike for segregation, she helped promote the importance of equality, stating that “freedom must be universal and all men must be assured that there will be respect for the individual human being, regardless of his race, his creed, or his color” (Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt’s My Day, 76). She was also very open about her life, and made it seem like her readers were right there with her; in her columns, she would share stories about her day-to-day life, and even give advice. Eleanor strongly encouraged people to write to her, and within the first year of her column, she received over 300,000 letters; she frequently responded to people’s letters in her columns in order to help bring attention to certain issues. From reading through some of her columns, it is evident that Eleanor was very down to earth and inspirational; even

though she was wealthy for most of her life, she emphasized that “one of the real gifts that brings you riches... is the power of appreciation” (Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt’s My Day, 57).

Although FDR and Eleanor seemed very close to one another in the public’s eyes, they actually led somewhat parallel lives. They had more of a political partnership; she admitted that “partnership is the major requirement for modern marriage” (Black 14). Missy LeHand, FDR’s secretary, often spent more time with FDR than Eleanor did. Eleanor’s marriage did not keep her from participating in public life and following her own path. During her years as First Lady, she continued to help those who were unable to help themselves, which definitely shaped her legacy. One of the issues that she addressed was the problem of unemployed youth. FDR created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), but Eleanor did not support that program wholeheartedly because she thought it was too militaristic. Instead, she worked with student leaders and relief officials to create programs she liked better. Consequently, FDR ultimately formed the National Youth Administration, which focused on work projects, vocational training, apprenticeship training, educational and nutritional camps for women, and student aid. She also encouraged governmental support for art by supporting the establishment of the Federal Writers Project (FWP), Federal Theater Project (FTP), and Federal Art Project (FAP). But she is best known for reaching out to the minorities and the poor. Even when she was criticized by the media, she never backed down from her stand against racial injustice.

In 1939, after the Daughters of American Revolution refused to let the world-renowned African American contralto Marian Anderson sing in their Constitution Hall, Eleanor resigned from the group. To express her support for Anderson, Eleanor arranged for her to sing at the Lincoln Memorial. An estimated 75,000 people listened from around the Reflecting Pool on the National Mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument (Somerville 148). Eleanor Roosevelt was not only an outspoken advocate for civil rights, she was a well-respected public speaker. Even though she was terrified of public speaking at first, she became one of the most effective public speakers of the 20th Century.

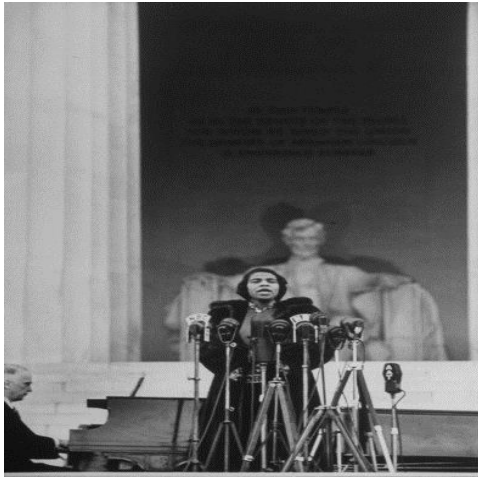
She also continued fighting for civil rights and human rights during World War II. Eleanor visited the troops overseas, and was nicknamed “Rover.” On those tours she would always wear her Red Cross uniform. She emphasized that “every man who fights for us, is our man,” stressing the insignificance of race and religion (Eleanor Roosevelt: A Restless Spirit). And whenever she visited the troops, she spent time with all the enlisted men and visited the wounded soldiers to give them hope. During these years, Eleanor also defended the Japanese-Americans, despite FDR’s opinion. To show her support, she visited the Japanese internment camps and expressed the need for racial tolerance, especially when she said that it was wrong for “innocent people [to] suffer for the few guilty ones” (Black 146). Eleanor stayed involved with public work throughout her years as First Lady. On April 12, 1945, Eleanor was away at a fundraiser the night that FDR died. She was devastated by his death and to learn that his former lover Lucy Mercer Rutherford was by FDR’s side. Eleanor and Human Rights

Although she struggled with the loss of her husband, on her own Eleanor gained even more freedom to express herself. President Harry S. Truman appointed her as a U.S. delegate for the United Nations, where she became an outspoken advocate for world peace. For the United Nations, Eleanor traveled all over the world, helped open the headquarters of the San Diego chapter, and played a major part in drafting and gaining passage for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which she considered her most notable achievement. During Truman’s presidency, her stance on civil rights evolved because “for the first time, Eleanor Roosevelt recognized the issues concerning blacks as a race problem; earlier she had considered them mainly in the context of social justice” (Flemion and O’Connor 166).

<https://roosevelt.ucsd.edu/about/about-eleanor.html>

## The Concert That Sparked the Civil Rights Movement

# TIME



Singer Marian Anderson, denied use of a DAR hall because of her race, giving an Easter concert at the Lincoln Memorial. Thomas D. McAvoy—The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

Ben Cosgrove

Apr 08, 2013

*"A voice like yours is heard only once in a hundred years." — Arturo Toscanini to the American contralto Marian Anderson*

Born in Philadelphia in 1897, Marian Anderson's long life spanned much of the 20th century and, in myriad ways, both mirrored and helped shape the age in which she lived. She sang on the world's greatest stages and graced, with her presence and her soaring voice, historic events like Dwight Eisenhower's and JFK's inaugurations and the 1963 March on Washington. She counted international figures like Albert Einstein among her friends and was honored with a Congressional Gold Medal, the United Nations Peace Prize, a Grammy for Lifetime Achievement and countless other accolades and awards.

But no single moment in her distinguished public life was more significant or memorable than the landmark concert she gave at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday in 1939.

The story behind how Anderson ended up on the steps of the great memorial on that April day, performing before 75,000 people on the mall and millions more listening on the radio, is well-known enough that it needs only a brief recap here. How her friends tried to arrange a concert for her at Washington's famed Constitution Hall; how members of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the group that owned (and today still operates) the hall, refused to allow her to perform because she was African-American; how First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, the NAACP, the American Federation of Teachers and others protested the DAR's refusal; and, finally, how Anderson's 1939 Easter concert marked, in many minds, a seminal moment in the American civil rights movement.

Here, LIFE.com celebrates Anderson's 1939 concert and, in a broader sense, her extraordinary life and career through the signature photograph made in Washington, D.C., that day: Thomas McAvoy's portrait of the singer as she stands before Daniel Chester French's statue of a seated, brooding Abraham Lincoln.

At the end of her concert, an emotional Anderson addressed the appreciative throng, and the multitudes listening on radios across the country, with these simple words: "I am overwhelmed. I can't tell you what you have done for me today. I thank you from the bottom of my heart again and again."

All these years later, a grateful nation might well address those very same words to the regal Marian Anderson herself, in recognition of the courage and artistry she displayed on a blustery Easter Sunday three-quarters of a century ago, and on so many stages throughout her life.



