

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression

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Impoverished young Americans had no greater champion during the Depression than Eleanor Roosevelt. As First Lady, Mrs. Roosevelt used her newspaper columns and radio broadcasts to crusade for expanded federal aid to poor children and teens. She was the most visible spokesperson for the National Youth Administration, the New Deal's central agency for aiding needy youths, and she was adamant in insisting that federal aid to young people be administered without discrimination so that it reached blacks as well as whites, girls as well as boys.

This activism made Mrs. Roosevelt a beloved figure among poor teens and children, who between 1933 and 1941 wrote her thousands of letters describing their problems and requesting her help. *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt* presents nearly 200 of these extraordinary documents to open a window into the lives of the Depression's youngest victims. In their own words, the letter writers confide what it was like to be needy and young during the worst economic crisis in American history.

Revealing both the strengths and the limitations of New Deal liberalism, this book depicts an administration concerned and caring enough to elicit such moving appeals for help yet unable to respond in the very personal ways the letter writers hoped.

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Editorial Review

From Booklist
From the voluminous correspondence addressed to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Cohen has culled nearly 200 letters penned by children. Poignant, heartfelt, and brimming with childlike faith, these missives represent a portion of the population often overlooked by historians eager to capture the heart and soul of Depression America. Viewed as a champion of the poor, the oppressed, and the helpless, Eleanor Roosevelt was beloved by legions of poverty-stricken children and teenagers, who reached out to her in record-setting numbers. Nearly every letter contains a plea for economic or material assistance, reflecting the physical and psychological burdens and fears visited upon the vast majority of American youth during their formative years in the 1930s. Perhaps even more bittersweet than the letters themselves, is the fact that Eleanor Roosevelt was unable to personally answer or address the individual problems described in such vivid and heartbreaking detail. A priceless primary resource for both amateur historians and Depression scholars.
Margaret Flanagan
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Review
A must-read for anyone concerned about poverty and its impact on the young. (David N. Dinkins, former mayor of New York City)

Poignant, heartfelt, and brimming with childlike faith, these missives represent a portion of the population often overlooked by historians. ("Booklist")

An honest, splendid depiction of the hopes, fears, vulnerability, and aloofness that both Eleanor Roosevelt and the children who wrote her needed to survive the Depression. (Allida Black, editor of The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers)

Review
By focusing on letters written by children, Cohen accents the effect of the Depression on some of society's most vulnerable members, and the letters are sure to tug at the heartstrings of even the most stoic readers. . . . The letters offer more than an ongoing tale of pain and suffering; they also present an opportunity to teach students how historians use primary sources to construct a textured portrait of the past.--*The History Teacher*

This well-edited volume adds a new dimension to Eleanor Roosevelt scholarship, picturing her as a vulnerable human being unable to respond to numerous personal appeals from children for aid during the Great Depression. Filled with the touching voices of poverty-stricken juveniles, this book nevertheless testifies to the faith of Americans of an earlier era in their government and its leaders.--Maurine H. Beasley, University of Maryland

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt offers a rich documentary history of Depression America's young people--their troubles and fears, their hopes and dreams. It also reminds us that government can inspire the confidence of the nation's most vulnerable citizens--children of poverty--when it shows the kind of compassion that Eleanor

Roosevelt embodied. This is a must-read for anyone concerned about poverty and its impact on the young.--David N. Dinkins, former mayor of New York City and professor in the practice of public affairs, Columbia University

Cohen has assembled an excellent book that not only adds to our knowledge of how the Depression affected the lives of Americans, but also places the letters children wrote to the First Lady in an analytic framework that helps readers more fully understand the Depression and appreciate the magnitude of its grip upon the country.--*Presidential Studies Quarterly*

After sifting through thousands of letters written by children to Eleanor Roosevelt in the 1930s Robert Cohen has masterfully organized several hundred into a rare and insightful look at Depression America. . . . This book offers a unique look into the American family from an insider's perspective at a time of great turmoil, and of all the academic studies on the Depression, none can offer what the children can. . . . We stand to learn a great deal from their words, and *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt* is a powerful vehicle for anyone willing to listen.--*Journal of Children and Poverty*

The clear, real voice of people experiencing directly the conditions of the Great Depression will serve as a strong motivation for students of the Depression to learn more. . . . Although the letters stem from Depression conditions, they express needs that are universal: food, shelter, clothing, and better social conditions. The universality of the feelings and needs expressed in these letters make a strong bridge to an earlier time.--*History of Education Quarterly*

[*Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression*] is a revealing look into how the youngest in America were shaped by the Depression, and how they sought assistance from the First Lady.--*Teaching History*

Teachers who treat the period will be delighted to find this fresh material on the library shelf.--*Kliatt*

The simple eloquence of these letters, the stories they tell, and the pains and aspirations they convey make them extraordinarily powerful documents. The reader sees and feels the Great Depression through the voices of America's children and teenagers at a time when their imaginative powers and perceptions of reality were bound to be heightened.--Leon F. Litwack, University of California, Berkeley

Like the young people who bared themselves to her, Eleanor Roosevelt was compassionate and complex, tender and disciplined, and disappointed in but committed to democracy. Cohen's *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt* is an

honest, splendid depiction of the hopes, fears, vulnerability, and aloofness that both Eleanor Roosevelt and the children who wrote her needed to survive the Depression. He allows the children to speak for themselves, stands with them as they find the words they want to say, and helps us appreciate their lives. This is a fine book.--Allida Black, editor of The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers

A fine display of children's historical voice and an engaging interpretation of the 1930s. . . . A model history of childhood. . . . Especially valuable in helping the reader obtain a peek at young people's unique way of looking at the world.--*NEWDEAL*

Robert Cohen has reaped a rich harvest from the thousands of letters sent to Eleanor Roosevelt by young people during the Great Depression. The letters are often wrenchingly sad, but at times eloquent or funny, in recounting the limitations placed on these young lives by poverty. The organization of the letters under subject headings and Cohen's excellent commentary place the letters in their historical context and help the reader understand their significance.--John F. Sears, associate editor of The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers

Poignant, heartfelt, and brimming with childlike faith, these missives represent a portion of the population often overlooked by historians eager to capture the heart and soul of Depression America. . . . A priceless primary resource for both amateur historians and Depression scholars. . . . Teens will be caught by the personal history and by the hopes and dreams similar to their own.--*Booklist*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Robbins:

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Pat Tran:

Why? Because this Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap the idea but latter it will distress you with the secret the item inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who else write the book in such awesome way makes the content within easier to understand, entertaining approach but still convey the meaning totally. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This excellent book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book get such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking way. So , still want to delay having that book? If I were you I will go to the book store hurriedly.

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