1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project is a chartered research center of The George Washington University, and an academic unit of the Department of History. Its primary mission is to preserve, teach, and apply the documentary history of Eleanor Roosevelt’s public life and career. In the course of this work, the project has amassed a permanent collection of written, spoken, and audio-visual resources that constitute an unparalleled glimpse into Mrs. Roosevelt’s human rights work, with particular attention paid to her role as a delegate to the UN General Assembly from 1945-1953, chair of the UN Human Rights Commission from 1946-1951, as well as the chief proponent and central architect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Because this material is vital to global heritage and personhood in the twentieth century, and because it represents the largest single collection of resources devoted solely to measuring Eleanor Roosevelt’s impact upon it, the permanent collection of the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project stands worthy of inclusion on UNESCO’s Memory of the World register.

2.0 Nominator

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

United States Commission to UNESCO

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Host Country

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Eric W. Woodard, Executive Director, US National Commission for UNESCO

2.4 Contact details

Eric W. Woodard

US National Commission for UNESCO

US Department of State

2201 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20520

(202)-663-0024

WoodardEW@state.gov

3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

The permanent collection of the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project is the subject of this nomination. The ERPP collection pertains to the most active years of Eleanor Roosevelt’s public life and career
(1933-1962), and is limited to those materials that have been assigned a document control number by project curators.

3.2 Catalogue or registration details

The ERPP catalogue is one of the features that distinguish the project’s permanent collection as a particularly significant contribution to the preservation of world memory. Because it excludes materials of a routine nature and emphasizes Eleanor Roosevelt’s influence on social policy, international law, and universal human rights, the ERPP catalogue indexes each holding to a far more granular level of specificity than item-level metadata. Rather, entries record detailed information about the people, places, institutions, and subjects referenced in each document, provide links to digital images of related correspondence, and allow researchers to engage in a much more targeted search than would a traditional finding aid.

3.4 History/provenance

Most of the ERPP permanent collection was assembled between 1999 and 2010, and as part of a retrieval process that was designed to draw together the most significant records of Eleanor Roosevelt’s public life and career from every repository in the world known to have relevant materials. Indeed, because Mrs. Roosevelt’s career as a diplomat and international human rights activist took her overseas so frequently, there is no complete record of her activities in any one location. Rather, these are scattered throughout libraries, historical societies, and private document collections in more than 100 countries and on all six inhabited continents. As a result, the ERPP permanent collection holds materials that reflect this diversity, and in turn underscore Eleanor Roosevelt’s remarkable impact on world history in the 20th century.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)
The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers 1922 F. Street NW Suite #406

(202)-994-3000 (202)-994-3043 erpapers@gwu.edu

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)
Christopher Brick 1922 F. Street NW Suite #406

(202)-994-3035 (202)-994-3043 cbrick@gwu.edu

4.3 Legal status

The ERPP permanent collection is curated by project staff, which also has sole responsibility for its maintenance and preservation. As a chartered research center of The George Washington University
the project does not by right “own” any of its materials in the most technical sense, as legal title to our entire research apparatus lies ultimately with the University.

4.4 Accessibility

The project encourages researchers to make use of its collection, which they may access by appointment.

The project does not restrict access to its collection, nor are any of its holdings sealed to the public.

Because we seek to preserve, teach, and apply the documentary record of Eleanor Roosevelt’s public life and career, making that record accessible to as broad an audience as possible is fundamental to our core mission. Accordingly, the project has already digitized more than 10,000 individual documents out of the more than 100,000 which comprise its permanent collection, and is in the process of finalizing a prospectus that will dramatically expand ERPP’s digital component in the near future.

To date, the project’s most significant achievement in the realm of electronic preservation and access pertains to its “My Day” initiative, which assembled, catalogued, and published text-searchable transcripts of all 7,332 newspaper columns that Eleanor Roosevelt wrote for syndication under the tagline “My Day.” Between 1936 and 1962 that column appeared six days a week in hundreds of daily newspapers published in the United States as well as around the world, and it represents the primary conduit through which Mrs. Roosevelt discussed her views on public policy, international relations, and human rights with a mass audience. Notwithstanding the historical significance of this aspect of Eleanor Roosevelt’s legacy, however, no comprehensive record of it existed until the project created one and published it electronically. Because of these efforts, that record is now available in text-searchable format for free to anyone with an internet connection, and has been accessioned into the project’s permanent collection.

Yet there is still much more that awaits the project’s digital component. Long-term plans call for the digitization of the entire ERPP documentary series, along with all of Eleanor Roosevelt’s published books, speeches, and articles, as well as the extensive litany of audio-visual materials that she generated through radio and television appearances and spoken-word recording. The project is currently in the final stages of selecting a technology consultant to assist us in this process, and to reorganize the project’s existing electronic infrastructure so that it is capable of producing fully-coded interoperable web editions of all these materials. Please see Appendix A for a technical prospectus outlining the preliminary plans for this overhaul.

4.5 Copyright status

The vast majority of ERPP’s permanent collection is composed of unpublished correspondence, all of which is in the public domain. Published materials which are not in the public domain are generally the intellectual property of Eleanor Roosevelt’s literary estate, which has granted the project permission to reprint, reproduce, or publish any item to which they hold copyright in perpetuity.
5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.

The identity and provenance of the documentary heritage are impeccable.

5.2 World significance

As a delegate to the first eight General Assembly sessions and first chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Eleanor Roosevelt was the driving force behind promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and chief architect of that document’s overall tone, content, and philosophy. As such, the project’s permanent collection comments intimately on the values, ideals, and personality that shaped not just Eleanor Roosevelt’s public life and career, but ultimately the Declaration itself, and it is in this capacity that the collection’s significance to global heritage should be evaluated. Indeed, given the impact and prestige it has obtained in the years since the General Assembly adopted it in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights continues to acquit itself as one of the great achievements of twentieth-century statesmanship; it has certainly bequeathed a legacy to human heritage that would be difficult to overstate. Amongst other distinctions, the Declaration remains the most heavily translated document in the world—ever—outperforming even high-profile religious texts like the Bible and the Koran, and helping to shape most of the national constitutions that have been adopted since 1948. Many even cite it by name, or incorporate passages from it into their own official texts. Clearly the ideas that inform the Declaration have proven both compelling and durable as motivating principles in the aspirations of the international community, its many constituent nation-states, and its many billions of individual persons, and to a large extent they were Eleanor Roosevelt’s ideas. The ERPP permanent collection is the only catalogue of materials in the world devoted specifically to reconstructing Eleanor Roosevelt’s stewardship of the Declaration-drafting process, and it places that record within a broader context of materials that document her background in American reform politics, as well as her later years as a diplomat, humanitarian, and international civil servant. For this reason, it is also the single most authoritative documentary resource on the early history of the international covenants on human rights, which the Human Rights Commission first took up in 1949, and continued to negotiate through the whole of Mrs. Roosevelt’s tenure with that body. Without question, the disappearance of our collection would impoverish the international heritage that UNESCO seeks to promote via its Memory of the World register—a heritage to which Eleanor Roosevelt was passionately committed in her own right.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

1 Time

Yes, the documentary heritage is evocative of its time, which was in fact a period of dramatic and consequential social and cultural transition. The ERPP permanent collection is most evocative of the immediate postwar years in 20th-century world history—a period defined loosely between 1945 and 1960, and one that is largely responsible for creating the international order that existed throughout the Cold War and continues to have a commanding influence upon our own time.

2 Place

The United Nations is not an institution that has vanished, but the documentary history of its early years is interwoven so tightly into the records of Eleanor Roosevelt’s service there that the ERPP
permanent collection functions much like a composite sketch of its people, personalities, culture, and ethnography.

3 People

ERPP’s permanent collection certainly illustrates the life and career of a prominent individual in 20th-century world history—that is its basic purpose—but because of the events and actions that it documents, it also reflects closely on most of that period’s major social and political developments as well. A very selective list of these developments would include: the Great Depression, World War II, founding of the UN and its early history, the UDHR and its drafting, the Cold War, nuclear technology and proliferation, and postwar decolonization.

4 Subject and theme

The subject matter of ERPP’s permanent collection is most pertinent to the history of politics and ideology in mid-20th century world history. Ideological content that enjoys an especially heavy emphasis in its files includes: the rise of liberal internationalism in Western governments and policies, the decline of colonial empires and imperial ideology, the rise of anti-colonialism in the developing world, the concomitant growth of international communism and international anti-communism globally, and the rise of a “non-aligned” approach to world affairs.

5 Form and style

The ERPP permanent collection is most heavily inscribed with letter and correspondence written in Eleanor Roosevelt’s own voice and style, which is less known for its aesthetic value than its crisp, clear articulation of the logic and language that she used to legitimize her vision for global human rights and a cooperative international order.

6 Social/spiritual/community significance:

As one of the most admired women in the world from the 1940s through the 1960s, Eleanor Roosevelt remains an icon to millions of people who carry on the work she started, and who take strength from the words she used to justify it. These words are perhaps best encapsulated in Article 1 of the UDHR, which she edited personally. They read: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights,” and without question they are words that continue to have an emotional hold in every corner of the international community to this day. It is the documentary heritage of Eleanor Roosevelt’s commitment to that maxim which the ERPP permanent collection addresses.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

Highly Unique. Because the collection is large, its contents have varying degrees of rarity. There are some documents for which the project is sole repositor, and insofar as we know house the only known originals. Others, by contrast, are ubiquitous, but have been retained because they bear relevance to the overall project mission. The collection’s rarity lies less in the obscurity of every item-level artifact, however, than the breadth of research and archival footwork that was channelled into assembling a comprehensive documentary history of Eleanor Roosevelt’s public life and career. It is a chore that has taken the project to more than 263 individual repositories in more than 50
countries on all six inhabited continents, and represents a truly remarkable contribution to the heritage and memory of the world community.

6.2 Integrity

Flawless. Paper components of the collection are stored on-site in secure cabinets, while its electronic components are backed up routinely at the end of each workday.