

Eleanor Roosevelt

My Day

May 9, 1945

NEW YORK, Tuesday—All day yesterday, as I went about New York City, the words "V-E Day" were on everybody's lips. Part of the time, paper fluttered through the air until the gutters of the streets were filled with it. At Times Square crowds gathered—but that first report the other night had taken the edge off this celebration. No word came through from Washington and everybody still waited for official confirmation. Today it has come.

Over the radio this morning President Truman, Prime Minister Churchill and Marshal Stalin have all spoken—the war in Europe is over. Unconditional surrender has been accepted by the Germans. I can almost hear my husband's voice make that announcement, for I heard him repeat it so often. The German leaders were not willing to accept defeat, even when they knew it was inevitable, until they had made their people drink the last dregs in the cup of complete conquest by the Allies.

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Europe is in ruins and the weary work of reconstruction must now begin. There must be joy, of course, in the hearts of the peoples whom the Nazis conquered and who are now free again. Freedom without bread, however, has little meaning. My husband always said that freedom from want and freedom from aggression were twin freedoms which had to go hand in hand.

The necessity to share with our brothers, even though it means hardship for ourselves, will now face all of us who live in the fortunate countries which war has not devastated.

I cannot feel a spirit of celebration today. I am glad that our men are no longer going to be shot at and killed in Europe, but the war in the Pacific still goes on. Men are dying there, even as I write. It is far more a day of dedication for us, a day on which to promise that we will do our utmost to end war and build peace. Some of my own sons, with millions of others, are still in danger.

I can but pray that the Japanese leaders will not force their people to complete destruction too. The ultimate end is sure, but in the hands of the Japanese leaders lies the decision of how many people will have to suffer before ultimate peace comes.

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What are our ultimate objectives now? Do we want our Allies in Europe, and later in the Far East, to have the opportunity to rebuild quickly? Looked at selfishly, we will probably gain materially if they do. That cannot be our only responsibility, however. The men who fought this war are entitled to a chance to build a lasting peace. What we do in the next months may give them that chance or lose it for them. If we give people bread, we may build friendship among the peoples of the world; and we will never have peace without friendship around the world. This is the time for a long look ahead. This is the time for us all to decide where we go from here.

E. R.

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