

Dining, Dancing, and Making the “Personal” Political: Eleanor Roosevelt and Martha Graham’s Collaboration against Fascism

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Panel 14: *Dinners, Diaries, and Combat: Expanding and Ungendering American Diplomacy at Home and Abroad*

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Abstract:

Inventively and courageously, ER innovated and extended the role of the American First Ladies in the lives of others, both nationally and internationally. While seldom associated with the idea of domesticity, and with her food choices a source of anecdotes, in reality ER gave a new dimension to the idea of “strategic dining.” She invited prominent and visible people who were sharing her progressive views to the White House, and “presented” them to Americans and to the world in her column “My Day.” Discussing and analyzing in depth the significance of Martha Graham’s invitation to dinner in 1937, and her performance afterwards, the paper demonstrates that Graham’s presence and program, initiated and endorsed by the First Lady, were more than a dinner and an artistic performance. They were a protest against Fascism by the two exceptional women, and a subtle yet courageous statement to the world about ER's political views during a very challenging historical time.