

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

January 12, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the likelihood of the US entering into another war and the resulting insecurity that young men feel when planning for their futures.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt

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[Break 00.00-00:15]

[Eleanor Roosevelt:] Have you any questions today, Elliott?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes I do, Mother. I have a question from a Mrs. McCarthy on Staten Island, and her question is that she has two boys in college and she asked, "The boys in college today have such feeling of insecurity. They'd like to know definitely whether they are going to fight or going to going to have a chance to prepare for a peaceful career in a professional business."

[Eleanor Roosevelt:] Yes, I think more than the boys would like to know definitely what's going to happen to them day after tomorrow-ow. Insecurity is of course the most difficult thing to endure; it's something which as you grow older life teaches you how to live with uncertainty. Eh but for the young, uncertainty is the most baffling and horrible situation. And I know it only too well, because the one thing I dislike--I can bear almost anything, if I know it's got to be borne, but if I sort of sit and wonder what's going to happen, I just hate it. And um I can understand the youngsters' feelings absolutely. But I have learned that sometimes the circumstances of life are such that you have to live with uncertainty, and you have to live with insecurity. And this is one of those times. Now I think certain things can be done. I think, for instance, we can tell our youngsters that ah we should have universal military training, and probably the best time for them to take it is at the age when they finish high school, because they will get a good deal of discipline out of their training which will make more valuable to them their future college and postgraduate work, if they're going into professions, and may make it possible for them to hurry both those so that they make up the two years. They may be able to do their college, if they've learned how to work, in three years. And they may be able even to do a postgraduate course that might take three years in two. Because once you've got a purpose, many of our returned s-GI soldiers ah covered the ground much faster than they would have covered it if they'd gone in straight from high school. For the reason that they knew what they wanted. And they had learned self-discipline and how to work. And that adds enormously to your ability to ah get through what you want to do in college. Um and so I really think that perhaps the best thing we can hope for is that the boys will know that definitely when they finish high school they have before them two years of training. Now they can't tell whether when that is over there'll be a war on their hands; they don't know. They can't tell whether [ER Coughs] they will, then go to college um or not. But they will be better equipped for whatever they want to do next. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And I believe that is the best certainty that we could give them. (3:35)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, but now this is a case where there are two boys already in college and the rules are being written all over again. And ah I-I think that you must take it up for the standpoint of the boy who is ah [ER: Already in co--] a freshman or sophomore or possibly a junior in college. Ah-- [ER Interrupts]

[ER:] Well, they have been doing that of course, ah to this extent that they have um [ER Coughs] where boys' marks were very high, they've been dealing with it on a rather individual basis. If a boy showed um, as I understand it, though it may not always be wisely done--the idea is that we should use that manpower most advantageously, that if a boy has shown great aptitude for certain things that require his finishing college--[Elliott Roosevelt:] Like chemical engineering [ER: Yes.] and [ER: Something.] and ah specialized approaches, in other words it would not cover a boy in the liberal arts.

[ER:] No, probably not. But it would cover a boy who was showing an aptitude um for something that would be very useful ah [Elliott Roosevelt: In the war effort.] if he had to be called in--in war. And still would be very useful to him in peace. And that boy might um possibly um be deferred simply because it would be more useful to the country if he had finished his work before he went in for whatever came next.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, what about the boy though that is not studying for--he is studying for a business career that does not necessarily mean he is going to be an engineer, or a doctor, or a dentist, or something like that. What about the boy who is taking a liberal arts course and happens to be very brilliant? Ah, this--what-what advantages accrue to him? (5:26)

[ER:] Well, that I don't really know. I think so far anyone that had very high marks has had a greater chance of deferment than those who showed that they were not particularly apt intellectually or not particularly serious about the work they were doing.

[ER:] Well now, I've been deluged by ah--[ER:] People who don't like the idea that the intellectual ah-ah high marks ah [ER and Elliott Roosevelt Overlap] deferred.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's true but I've been deluged by ah questions regarding ah what happens to my boy and from boys themselves who've written me asking me for advice as to whether they should enlist and what advantages accrue from enlistment and so forth. And instead of waiting for the draft, I think that ah probably as good a rule of thumb on the question of the status of an individual who is a college student, is ah just what you've said plus the fact that the boy who goes to college and does enroll, and is fortunate enough to join either the uh ROTC, NROTC--which is the Naval Reserve Officers' training--or the ROTC for the Army or an Air Force ah r-reserve ah unit. Ah they do have ah an opportunity up to the present moment that if they are in one of those training units, that as a rule, ah unless they have not been considered very good by their instructors, ah that they will be urged uh for a deferment ah and asked to be [ER: [unintelligible]] deferred by the local--by the local board, by the officer in command of the Reserve Officers training unit. Now, with regard to the boy who has absolutely no experience, no connection with the military prior uh to ah his registration for the draft, ah the chances are that he will be called by his draft board, unless he has one of these special aptitudes and the probability is that if he enlists, he enlists definitely for a longer period than he would be called up for under the draft. Ah he does have ah according to up to date anyway, a greater opportunity of being picked at an earlier time out of the ranks to be for consideration for Officers Candidate School, ah and of course on enlistment in the Air Force, which I know a little about, ah a boy who is in college and goes down and enrolls as an aviation cadet and volunteers to become an aviation cadet, he, of course, when he is called, ah goes through and when he finishes his flight training, he is commissioned as an officer. And those boys ah do have an advantage over other boys in as much as they do receive training in a profession which can be of great use to them in afterlife, regardless of whether they use it or not. Ah and also ah the Air Force, because their training program is not built up as yet to its ah [ER: Maximum.] maximum ability to take the volunteers, ah often times after you've volunteered and are accepted, you are urged to stay in college until y--they call for you and until the training uh program is able to absorb you so that sometimes an aviation cadet does remain in college for considerable period of time after volunteering. (9:30)

[ER:] Well that's all very good information and I think the boys must, take um ah must look into those things and make up their own minds. The great thing for them to learn is ah to somehow get a calm approach to life ah and live in uncertainty with calm. It's the hardest thing in the world to do, but if they learn it, it'll help them all their lives to meet the problems they will undoubtedly have to meet.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You're asking for them to do at a very early age. [ER: Very early age.] I think it probably took us a great deal longer [ER and Elliott Roosevelt Overlap] to arrive at that stage.

[ER:] I think it did, but these are unusual times and the country was built of young men. Ah George Washington and Thomas Jefferson must have learned to do it.

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