

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

March 15, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about hysteria and wasteful spending in the face of potential air raids. In the interview segment, ER discusses housing shortages with Raymond Foley, administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Raymond Foley

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[ER:] Good day, this is Eleanor Roosevelt. Every Monday through Friday, my son Elliott and I have the opportunity to visit with you here in my living room at Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City. Each day it is our desire to bring interesting guests that we're hopeful you will enjoy meeting. Elliott, will you tell our listeners today's plans?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you, Mother. Our guest today is Mr. Raymond M. Foley, administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency. He'll talk about the country's housing plans, and how they're being revised to meet present defense needs. He'll also have something to say about missin- uh about housing objectives for the future. First though uh we're going have a look at the mail, and as soon as we've had a few words from our sponsors who make this recorded program possible, we'll be right back.

[Break 0:58-1:04]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, today we have here a very, very nice letter from a Mrs. Evelyn Adams. Uh she writes from Los Angeles, California, and uh she encloses a clipping from the uh *Los Angeles Times* uh in one of the letter's columns uh from the subscribers to the *Los Angeles Times*, in which uh the writer has expressed a thought that uh I think has a great deal of merit, and I'd like for you to discuss it today. Th-the writer of the letter says, "I agree with the Virginia M. Hoskins's letter re: this mad hysteria that is getting in our local and federal governments for rushing to build air raid shelters which in any real atom bombing would be useless. Spending money for ships and bombers to keep the enemy off would be far better, and better still do all we can to promote peace and good will. Also, I see they are scaring the daylight out of the children at school; asking them to bring blankets with their names on. Do the teachers [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] think they will have time to get the blankets and distribute them to the children when the bomb is dropping? Makes one wonder, as usual, who's getting what out of which. How Stalin must be laughing, and to see how scared we're getting. Also, do you think he's going to wait to two years until we are ready if he wants war?" (2:38)

[ER:] Well, uh it's a little difficult to begin. Yesterday [ER clears throat], uh or I can't remember if it was yesterday, I guess it was some time ago, I was reading a good deal about various preparations for this sort of thing. And then not long ago uh we had a um program, a television program, on which our Federal Administrator for Civilian Defense uh gave an idea of what he uh felt what we should do and both he and the New York City Civilian Defense Director, Mr. [Arthur W.] Wallander, agreed that the large shelters, uh city shelters, were really useless because people would not have time to get to them. And the amount of manpower and of steel and cement that would be needed to build them would stop our doing much of the work, for just the kind of thing uh is here suggested, for defense. Therefore, what they recommended was the use of what existed, the strengthening of what one had, and um making it uh as good as it could be under the circumstances, but they stressed -- I don't know much about the uh having children bring blankets. I think one of the things the correspondent forgets is the children are not frightened by uh preparation of this kind at all. It doesn't uh mean anything to children because they don't know what

they're preparing against. They don't anticipate, and it's just something interesting to them. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And um I do think it's perhaps foolish to bring blankets. I don't know that you'd have time to do anything like that, but I think the training of children in schools so that it becomes a drill what you do, oh, um at a time when any bomb was being dropped or any attack is a very good thing. It does the children no harm. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And its good discipline. (4:57)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I'd like to point out several uh items in [ER coughs] connection with uh [ER clears throat] number one. Uh the writer is going under the impression that if an enemy uh were going to bomb us or any American city, that the preparations are going forward with a great deal of speed on the part of our military to ensure that we do have uh a warning uh of the approach of enemy bombers. Now there is a possibility of the bomb being brought in by saboteurs who uh would set the bomb off -- uh of this being sneaked into this country by eh uh by espionage agents. But if it is a bomb that is dropped by an airplane, probably that airplane -- we will have a warning about the approach of that airplane in all of our major cities. (6:02)

[ER:] It probably would be a great many um [ER clears throat] a great many airplanes because they would never send just one and-and[Elliott Roosevelt: That is correct.] they would send a great many airplanes and they would have different bombs because uh they wouldn't want any one to be distinguishable as having um an atom bomb, for instance. So that um I-I think what one point that is made in that letter is very true, that we must never lose site of the fact that what we are trying to do is to prevent a war. Therefore, while we must go ahead with all possible preparations in case a war comes -- to prepare our people through um uh drill and uh knowing what do and so forth -- we must not neglect the building up of the strength to prevent a war, and we must not neglect the things which must be done for people um [ER clears throat] outside [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] of the Soviets to show them the values of democracy, because that's the best prevention of war we have. (7:13)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I think one of the best examples of hysteria are uh these uh people who go out to build home air raid centers in their backyards or uh things of that nature, because uh people that spend their money to install those, if the bomb is a direct hit in their vicinity, it wouldn't do them any good anyway. [ER laughs] Uh if uh if the bomb landed at some distance, they are just as safe within their house and uh going into the cellar if they have a cellar, or in protecting themselves in the strongest section of the house, uh as they would be in any bomb shelter that they dug in the ground. And uh there are examples of hysteria uh in this type of acti-tivity and useless spending of money uh by people which --

[ER:] And using of materials, which is more important.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And using of materials. So that uh in actuality what people should do is to listen to the-the overall program as put out by the federal, state, and city officials uh for uh proper action in a bombing raid, and they should plan to volunteer their services to the civilian defense efforts, because it will be the-the medical teams, the-the health teams, that uh and the people who-who get water mains repaired and get uh fire-fighting equipment out. Those people are going to save the life of a city in case of a bombing and nothing that we do personally. Just uh because we believe we are going to be personally saved if we have a little private bomb shelter is going to do us the slightest bit of good. (9:21)

[ER:] I-I realize all of that and I forgot to tell you that I wrote to Mrs. Aldridge and-and told her that uh we would be delighted to help in any way we could with -- um in this preparation if uh they would let us know at any time what we could do. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] Uh that I didn't feel that um I would be particularly good at any kind of active work but that uh whatever else we could do, we would be glad to do.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, uh I've been very disturbed by some of the accounts that I've read of the lack of response on the part of the American public to sign up uh for civilian defense uh work and for assignments of jobs and for training on the part of the general public. And I feel that the general public should wake up to the fact that the proper training and the proper and thorough knowledge of what you do in the event of a bombing is the best possible contribution that you can make. (10:26)

[ER:] Well, the Red Cross is offering certain courses which perhaps people should take, since there are new angles to what they've already learned in first aid and that sort of thing.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's-that's very good. Uh there--there are-- we can probably devote many programs to informing people as to what they can do, but the first thing that we should do is to urge them to go to the nearest uh registration point to volunteer their services for civilian defense activities.

[ER:] One of the things that Governor [Millard] Caldwell, our federal administrator, [ER clears throat] and Senator [Hubert] Humphrey, who is with us, and uh Mr. Wallander emphasize was the need for people to remain calm. I think they will only remain calm if they know what to expect and know exactly what they are supposed to do.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's correct. All right, well I think that that is uh all the time that we have now for comment on this uh very interesting letter, and uh I hope that we take up again on future programs uh questions of uh what the individual's responsibility is if our country is attacked.

[Break 11:43-11:52]

[ER:] Today, I am happy to bring to you another guest from Washington, D.C. A gentleman charged with one of the most difficult responsibilities in times of peace, as well as in times of crisis or actual war. He is the administrator of the Housing and Homes Finance Agency, Mr. Raymond M. Foley. Very glad to have you with us today.

[Raymond Foley]: Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt, very happy to be here.

[ER:] Well now, Mr. Foley, one of the first fields of activity that the defense program affected in the past six months was housing. Before trying to look into the future on housing, could you tell us where we were going and how far we've gone in meeting our housing problems at home when the Korean crisis broke?

[Raymond Foley]: Yes, Mrs. Roosevelt, I'd be happy to, and, as a matter of fact, I think I can give you a rather encouraging report along that line. As you well know, uh the whole question of housing has, for at least a generation, been one of great interest to the American public and consequently constantly before the Congress for decision with respect to various parts of the problem. But to me, the most encouraging thing that has happened in the last generation has been a rather surprising development, surprising in that it took so long for it to come about, namely the recognition by the Congress in an official, formal enactment of housing as one of the major problems of the people and the declaration of-of an objective, a national objective, in housing and the declaration of a national policy to which that objective has to be sought. And you will of course well remember what that was in the Act of 1949, the Declaration of Policy, which I have been recommending to every citizen to read. Uh the objective is the attainment, as soon as possible, as soon as feasible, of a decent home in a suitable living environment for every American family. As simple as that, and as fundamental as that. (14:02)

[ER:] It's simple to state but difficult to achieve!

[Raymond Foley]: Extremely so, and that's why the uh Declaration of Policy goes on with uh a number of steps which lay out very clearly the approach that the Congress believes should be adopted by the agencies of government. Fundamentally, it says that the big job uh needs to be done, must be done, by private enterprise, but that there are areas in which private enterprise presently can't function fully and meet the need and that in those, special help should be given publicly. That the major task of the government, and the governmental agencies provided, must be to give all help and aid and incentive to private enterprise, to increase its effectiveness in the field. (14:50)

[ER:] But now, before Korea struck [coughing], uh we had, as you said, made great progress. Uh what um-um -- can you give any figures to show what has happened?

[Raymond Foley]: Yes, yes we have. I think the major progress that we made uh-uh falls in two general lines. One: in the recognition and acceptance of the task. Two: in the building up of uh the private industry itself to uh a level of productivity in housing that we had never had before. In fact, it had never been obtained in the history of the world. Uh during last year we finally reached a point that we were producing a million, three hundred to four hundred thousand houses. The estimates made in all the studies by committees of Congress have been that if we could uh maintain a million four to a million five units a year for say ten years, we would have pretty well have caught up on our problems. (15:47)

[ER:] Now is that only in urban areas or does that include um rural areas?

[Raymond Foley]: Well, that figure is uh urban pretty largely. We have the rural problem also, and it's a very serious problem. The furthest uh-uh evidence of advance in progress have been in the recognition of the necessity for broad programs serving all of the areas of need, and particularly the uh the uh peculiarly acute and poignant areas of need, such as those of the low income families, the people who have been compelled to live in slums, whether rural or urban slums doesn't make any difference. And, for instance, the problem of minority housing of the minority groups, such as in the large cities the Negroes, many of whom who have been compelled to live in the worst possible housing because of the lack of any better for them. We have made a great deal of progress along those lines, and the progress was most encouraging in that it was uh cumulative. Our Slum Clearance Program, for instance, authorized in the Act of 1949, was beginning to take a strong hold and is: about 200 cities have taken the preliminary steps toward using that authority and that help to clear slums and redevelop their cities. The Public Housing Program, which uh has had to be curtailed because of Korea and the defense needs, but is uh on the enlarged program passed in '49, had reached thirty thousand starts this year and would have been proceeding at the rate of about a hundred and thirty-five thousand a year, will probably be cut back to about seventy-five thousand a year. (17:24)

[ER:] Now, what will that actually mean? That will mean that instead of a ten year program, as far as urban communities are concerned, um you will be cutting back to about a twenty year program or-or more even because wi-there is always an increased demand as the years go on, isn't there?

[Raymond Foley]: That is true, uh the uh estimate of a safe target for production for this year, taking into the consideration the inflationary trends due to over competition for the supply of materials available and the defense needs for materials, the target, set as a safe target of production for this year, was eight hundred to eight hundred and fifty thousand units. That of course is a heavy cut back from last year. Uh what you say uh would be true, Mrs. Roosevelt, if we had to assume that for ten or fifteen or twenty years we were going to have to hold down to that level. I am one of those who is very hopeful that we are not going to have to. That by getting ourselves as reasonably ready as may be as we are in this defense mobilization, uh we uh can certainly, I think, hope and pray that we will avoid worse situations going on for many years. (18:40)

[ER:] Yes, well of course it seems that's what we all hope; that we are avoiding a war situation, and that therefore we may hope to return to um being able to do more on the civilian economy [Raymond Foley: That's right.] in a shorter time. But nevertheless, it looks as though, for some time, there would be great demands. Now do you look to um- um the increase production being possible in our country um so that you hope to get to higher goals for increased production? (19:17)

[Raymond Foley]: Yes, as-as Housing Administrator that is my hope, Mrs. Roosevelt, and I believe that this whole effort that we are making will increase our uh general production of materials and our productivity, teach us lessons in conservation, and so on, uh that will assist us to expand the production in the civilian field, even though uh we do have to maintain a large uh defense production.

[ER:] Well now, what about the effect of defense needs on -- particularly, on low rent public housing and slum clearance?

[Raymond Foley]: Well, uh to start with, the present policy, uh as uh it has been announced and has been made pretty clear by the president in his message to Congress, is that we will continue with a general housing program, such as I have outlined, for as long, and to the largest extent that we can. Not uh stopping it and substituting simply a Defense Housing Program. The Defense Housing Program uh for which uh the legislation has been introduced on the Hill and is now in hearing, uh would be supplemental, rather than substitute for a general housing program, so long as the international situation will permit that to be the case. So we will be proceeding with uh the Slum Clearance Program and the Public Housing Program and the general program of private development of housing on a restricted but we hope on a well-rounded basis. (20:50)

[ER:] Well now uh in your Defense Program, uh what does that really entail? I think people are a little confused as to what defense housing would be necessary? (21:01)

[Raymond Foley]: Yes, that is true uh, and everybody thinks back to what happened in World War II and the defense period before it and tries to draw from that uh a parallel now, whereas probably there is not a close parallel. The Defense Housing Program, which we contemplate and uh for which special authorities are proposed in the bills on the Hill, uh would contemplate our having means of taking care of the housing and the communities' facility needs uh that develop because of the impact upon certain communities of defense installations or defense production contracts -- the impact created by essential in-migration. Now, that in-migration, while nobody can predict fully now, ought not to be as large this time as it was in the last emergency because so much uh was done then that doesn't need to be redone. (21:57)

[ER:] Oh well, that uh you don't think there will be um in this uh period um the moving and the building of factories. That it will be more a change of production than a moving of factories?

[Raymond Foley]: I would think that would be true, and a conversion of the labor force to the new need. There will, of course, be some necessary migration and in some areas it may be rather heavy, and it is to meet that kind of situation we have asked for this special authority. (22:29)

[ER:] Well, um with this new housing, will you try to build it on a more-- on a permanent basis?

[Raymond Foley]: Yes, we have recommended, and the legislation, if passed, is written to carry certain declarations of policy, which we hope would help us to avoid some of the inevitable mistakes that were made in the last situation because there we didn't have the time for the planning that we now have. Pearl Harbor gave a certain tempo that was very compelling, as you will recall. Uh for instance, if it is necessary to build public housing of the Lanham Act type that was called war housing, we hope that the

bulk of it could be built on a permanent basis, and in such type that it could be sold for private ownership, rather than building uh a tremendous lot of temporary housing. (23:17)

[ER:] Well, that is very interesting to me, and now we have to stop for just a few minutes, but we'll come right back to this very interesting discussion. Our announcer will have a word.

[Break 23:29-23:36]

[ER:] Now we will come back to this discussion of housing with the um Housing and Home Finance Administrator, Mr. Raymond M. Foley. And uh the first thing I want to go back to is your reference to the minority housing problem as one of our important areas of needs in which progress is being made. Could you tell me a little more about that sir? (24:04)

[Raymond Foley]: Yes, that's a subject in which uh I have both officially and personally been very much interested for years. Uh the problem of the minority groups, and the major minority group in which that problem exists in most of the country is the Negro group, uh is an extremely pressing, extremely appealing one. The uh the real basic situation, of course I don't need to discuss too frankly today I presume, but it has to do with space in which uh housing can be made available for those groups, in meeting local patterns that have been established over the years. As a result we have, for instance, in cities like Chicago, my own home city of Detroit, a very high congestion of families in a very limited area, in probably the worst housing that the community has to offer. We have done a number of things uh through the housing agency uh in the past four years, particularly since the permanent agency was established that we believe are leading toward improvement in that picture, although while improvement is slow, it's cumulative and encouraging. One thing has been to bring to the attention of the private building industry, a very large and probably profitable neglected market and they're beginning to recognize it. Uh that involves bringing all elements of the industry into it, not only the house builder, but the real estate developer, the lender of funds, and so on. Another thing that we have uh done with some beginning degree success is to int- is to interest the uh leaders of those groups themselves. For interest, the home loan bank system, a part of our agency, is encouraging uh the establishment of savings and loans associations manned by members of the minority groups. Uh the amount of money that they make available currently is not so large but the psychological effect is tremendous. Another thing is a uh bringing local groups of builders into the picture to build decent housing in decent locations for the large and growing percentage of those groups who are able to acquire it just as anybody else could, if it's made available. That we find is-is proceeding gradually and quite encouragingly. The uh further questions, such as the provision of housing for the low-income elements of those groups, is something that we attack through the Public Housing Program. The Slum Clearance Program and the Urban Redevelopment Program will have a tremendous impact on the housing problem of the minority groups, because so commonly a large percentage of the people who live in the slums are [ER: Uh-huh] by necessity of those groups -- I mean by the necessity of compelling circumstances. And uh the relocation of them, both temporary and permanent relocation of them, is one of the essentials of consideration of slum clearance, and because it is, it's inevitably going to lead to an improvement in that picture. (27:12)

[ER:] Yes, they must live somewhere while you clear the slums.

[Raymond Foley]: That's right, and it makes one of the major initial problems in slum clearance what to do with the people presently living in the slums.

[ER:] Now tell me, if there is any provision -- uh I happen to know of a small group of people who um have been trying to get a very small loan, they are a self-help group, um they uh gathered together enough money to buy their land, and um they wanted to borrow five thousand dollars at 1 percent. Well, uh I

suppose no one wanted to lend five thousand dollars at 1 percent, and they were all going to help each other build their own houses, you see. Now is there any provision for groups like that to get help? (28:02)

[Raymond Foley]: Well, the self-help movement is one that we are uh working on and you'll be very much interested, Mrs. Roosevelt, in the fact that through our research operations in housing, another one of the things that Congress authorized in the Act of '49 --a very significant undertaking-- uh one of the projects that we have under way is the development of self-help means. Uh we think it can be extremely useful, not only for minority groups but others uh especially in what we call the non-urban areas, where they are not under as much restriction code wise and so on.

[ER:] Well, this happens to be a group in a rather interesting little community, called Arden in Delaware, and um uh that's always been uh it was the place where Henry George started his [ER laughs] his first colony, and um I-I was just curious about it because it seemed to me there ought [coughing] to be some provision to help people like that.

[Raymond Foley]: Yes, there should and uh to a considerable extent there is, but it's not organized or formalized. Now, as a matter of fact, in that situation whether they -- if they needed five thousand dollars and if they had to pay 1 percent o-- [ER: They needed that to buy materials.] They had to pay 1 percent or 3 or 4 percent interest, the differential wouldn't be enough to-to cause a success or failure to the project. So what we need to do is to develop the means, uh regular systems uh and methods, whereby that kind of group can get help. It's that kind of work that we are trying to do through this research project that I tell you about. (29:37)

[ER:] And um would your research project be interested, for instance, to go to a place like that and find out what the problems were?

[Raymond Foley]: Very definitely.

[ER:] They would?

[Raymond Foley]: Very definitely.

[ER:] Oh, I am interested to know that because--

[Raymond Foley interrupts]: We would be very glad to have you uh --

[ER continues over Raymond Foley]: Uh I would suggest it to them that they uh get in contact then.

[Raymond Foley interrupts]: Yes, I think it will be very helpful to them, but particularly helpful to us with the studies that we are trying to make.

[ER interrupts over Raymond Foley]: Well, I am very much interested, and I'd like to know another thing. Um you -- this is in the same area, what about cooperative housing? (30:10)

[Raymond Foley]: The cooperative housing movement, I'm glad you mentioned it, is one of the, uh in this country, relatively new developments. It's old in discussion but rather new in any actual achievement.

[ER:] But it's uh it's rather old in other countries?

[Raymond Foley]: Yes, and it's been very successful.

[ER:] I saw a great deal of it in uh in the Scandinavian countries last summer.

[Raymond Foley]: In Sweden particularly. Under the Act of 1950, passed by the Congress, which we had supported, special attention was given to the cooperative idea, and special authority was given to the Federal Housing Administration uh some uh some refinement and improvement of their basic legislation, but particularly an authority to go ahead and encourage the development of cooperatives. Consequently, we've been able to set up in the Federal Housing Administration, which is a part of our agency also, uh a special division for that purpose and it's been operating since uh early in 1950, and with a surprising amount of success already. I forget the number, but there is something over three hundred million dollars worth of projects under consideration now, and I think something like five thousand units have already been approved for construction. (31:21)

[ER:] That's very interesting and that's uh--

[Raymond Foley interrupts]: It's a very encouraging degree of progress.

[ER:] Well now, um I'm of course naturally more interested, as most of us are, in our own housing progress here at home because we've felt the need of it so badly. Every time I go by one of the little um temporary housing uh places where veterans live I feel guilty [ER laughs] and so I uh-- (31:52)

[Raymond Foley]: Well, one needn't feel guilty. One need feel uh impressed with the need, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] Yes, I feel very impressed with the need, because um I've seen things which um uh made me feel perhaps there was some uh reason why some of the veterans were a little upset that it had come -- moved so slowly for them when they came home. (32:15)

[Raymond Foley]: Yes, that is true. Uh and uh one can readily appreciate their individual feelings in those matters. [ER: Yes.] Nevertheless, taken nationally, and it is a big country and the variety of the conditions and problems is so great, I feel not satisfied but encouraged [ER: You feel--] with the progress that we had been able to make up to the impact of the Korean situation. And I don't feel too discouraged over the uh present prospects of being able to continue to maintain a general program, although a restricted one. (32:50)

[ER:] Well, I-I feel very much encouraged by the opportunity to talk to you about this, but there is another side of it, which probably my work in the United Nations makes me very conscious of. Namely, um I am wondering um whether the gains that we have made are not important in their impact on the rest of the world, and if there isn't some value in trying to help other parts of the world um with what knowledge we have gained. Is there any-any way in which we are doing that today or trying to do it? (33:35)

[Raymond Foley]: Yes, there is, Mrs. Roosevelt, and I quite agree with you as to the importance of it. Uh again, uh not only in this country has there been the recognition of the importance of housing in the lives of the people, but whether because of the destruction in the war or because of uh an evolution of notions, the importance of housing uh even to the fate of a formal government is now being more widely recognized, it seems to me, than ever before. Yes, we are able and should continue to be able to be-to be of help, at least in the-- to the extent of giving information, of setting an example, of showing how these problems have been uh improved at least, if not fully resolved in this country. Uh through our uh connections with the United Nations, through the State Department, the ECA, and so on, we are quite active. We sent special representatives on various requests to different countries, in Asia, in Europe, in South America. We participate in uh various uh international discussions and conferences. We have uh a



continuing flow of delegations coming to see us uh to discuss their problems as against the things we have learned, and I think with encouraging, although slow results as yet. (34:54)

[ER:] Well, I'm very glad to hear that, because I think housing is basic to um all improvement in living conditions, and so for that reason I'm particularly glad to have had this talk, and I am very grateful to you for coming to be with me today, Mr. Foley.

[Raymond Foley]: Well, thank you very much for the opportunity, Mrs. Roosevelt. (35:13)

[Break 35:13-35:24]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Everyone knows about the four freedoms, but how many of us really live them? Girl Scouts do. When they work and play together, Girl Scouts are friends, free from fear. By learning to make the most of what they have, they lay the foundation for freedom from want. Freedom of religion is respected, and freedom of expression is encouraged whenever Girl Scouts meet. On their thirty-ninth birthday, the Eleanor Roosevelt Program is proud to salute the Girl Scouts, truly a growing force for freedom.

[Break 36:03-36:05]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now its time to close the program and to remind you that you've been listening to the Eleanor Roosevelt Program, which comes to you each Monday through Friday at this same time. And this is Elliot Roosevelt speaking and wishing you all good day. (36:20)

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Transcribed from holdings at Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL)  
File(s): 72-30(112)

Transcription: Pre-2015  
First Edit: Isabel Maier  
Final Edit: Seth LaShier