

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

August 15, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the treatment of Native Americans by the United States government. In the following segment, a selection of Victor Borge's music is played.

Participants: ER, Elliott, Victor Borge, Ben Grauer

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[ER:] This is Eleanor Roosevelt speaking. Our program is coming to you from my living room here at the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City. I'm very happy to have this little while with you each day and I hope you'll enjoy the guest we've invited to be with us today. And now for a moment I'm going to turn the program over to Elliott.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] A serious concert pianist during--turning a comedian just because one night he decided to change his program and announced the change from the stage doesn't seem likely, but it happened to Mr. Victor Borge-- known to everyone who owns a radio or television set. Mr. Borge is with Mrs. Roosevelt today to tell us more about his start on his present career and many other interesting things. Also, to give us a sample of one of his most amusing inventions. We will meet Mr. Borge in just a few minutes after Mrs. Roosevelt and I try to answer a question which seems to be puzzling one of our listeners. First, uh a few words of interest from our announcer.

[Break from 1:10 to 1:19]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Our letter for today is from Mrs. May G. Dates of Brooklyn, New York, who writes "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt, as an American, a woman, and a mother, I felt ill when I read the enclosed article by Dr. Haven Emerson, honorary president of the Association on American Indian Affairs, pointing out the injustice in our treatment of the truly first Americans -- namely, the Indians. This shameful neglect has made them practically helpless, and they are dying in droves. This has been held against us Americans by individuals in others countries at one time or another in an attempt to belittle our magnificence. More people of prominence are needed to take up their cause, and therefore I am writing to you as an American, a woman, and a mother, and a very great humanitarian. What is to be done to help these unfortunate people?" In the article, I think it might be interesting to note that Dr. Emerson, who is also a professor emeritus of Public Health Administration at Columbia University, uh said in part "these conditions exist," he said "because longstanding Indian needs for medical care and public health protection are deferred by federal budget makers year after year. Informed authorities know that appropriations must be increased immediately by twelve dollars and fifty cents per capita of our four hundred thousand Indians to meet these needs. Yet next year's budget now pending provides a per capita increase of only two dollars and sixty-seven cents. It is an offense to our national conscience in health matters and a betrayal of our treaty obligations that we are so stingy in the use of modern medical science to help Indian sufferers." In the article, of course, he details the very shocking conditions that exist, not only in education, but also the shocking conditions that exist as far as availability of proper educational systems, housing, etcetera for the Indians in our country. (3:45)

[ER:] Well the housing of course is not so bad, but the educational part of it is very bad. We've done a very bad job on education and um it hasn't been all the fault of uh the Indian Commissioners. We've had some very good Indian Commissioners, but there are divided opinions as to how things uh can be done and whether the education uh could've been so much better done that the Indians themselves um would

have grown up, so to speak, because when you put people under tutelage of a government, and they don't grow up to look after their own affairs, it becomes increasingly difficult to prevent their exploitation. There are two sides to nearly every abuse that you look into; for instance, the Navajos uh were desperate because they couldn't have more sheep. Uh, it had been explained to them with great care that they couldn't have more sheep because the maximum number that they had at that time was already reducing the acreage of which they owned that was uh possible grazing land. But you couldn't get the Navajos to understand. For them, a tribe moved from place to place, it grew richer as it had more flocks, um and you didn't have to keep within bounds. Now, when they have, by treaty, only certain amount of land, uh they cannot understand why the old ideas that made them richer as they got more sheep don't hold good anymore because the sheep don't have enough to eat and, therefore, the sheep die and the land has been cropped closer and closer so that it doesn't produce anymore and each year the conditions get worse and worse and worse. Now that goes back of course to faulty education, you will say, and I would say the same. Just as their poor housing, and their bad living conditions, their bad health conditions all have roots in faulty education. That's where I think we fell down. Whether, however, we could have more rapidly increased the education of those people or whether, no matter what we had done, certain traits would have remained and there would have been no way of eradicating certain weaknesses and illnesses uh and certain bad conditions, that is a question that I think only the experts who watch them for a long time can say. Now, there have been great injustices. At present, there is a simple near war being waged between people-- factions of people-- both of whom are really interested in doing the best they can for the Negroes uh for the Indians. And the near war goes on because the Indians were not allowed to choose, so they said, their own legal representative to represent them in certain difficulties that had arisen. That was a-a right by treaty and um and one faction says that the person they had chosen was just selling them down the river and they didn't have sense enough to choose someone that was good, and that the government was looking after them when it said they couldn't keep that old rascal representing them. The other faction says this old rascal was the only person who really cared about the Indians, and therefore, uh the government is running him down because it doesn't want to comply with the demands of the Indians. Now there have been all sorts of things which have been bad; the Indians have had in their territory, let's say a lake, which they uh required because they did all their fishing in it, most of their food came out of that lake. The lake was part of a system of a watershed and uh little by little in filling reservoirs somewhere else the lake was lowered, the fish were less. Um, did they have the right to lower that lake? uh Well it was part of the system; they couldn't reach the higher waters unless they used that. Um, what exactly in the way of compensation could you give the Indians for lowering the lake they'd fished in always for generations? Uh some people who went to Washington said you couldn't give them any compensation; therefore you had to scrap your system of water supply. I-- there are terribly complicated questions that come up when a group - a small group of people live as dependents. I really think that probably the worst thing we've done is to live up to our treaty arrangements and let them continue to live as a separate people. I think that if they had been absorbed into the communities and become [ER pauses] hard as it may seem, part of the race, you see, just as any immigrants coming into this country had become part of the people of the United States uh they perhaps would be better off today than they are. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] But um we're tied by the old treaties, we're tied by the old um tribes, some of which are quite rich. Um, and by the arrangements made with them by a thousand traditions um and at the same time, we're not doing the right thing for them, and it is one of the things that we are open to attack on. The USSR discovered our treatment of the Indians, and read me pages out of Mr. [Oliver] La Farge's book saying what dreadful things we'd done and um there's nothing to be said about it because without question we did the things and we did them wrong. [Elliott Roosevelt: But, uh--] But it comes from the basic fact that no-no people can live as a dependent people in the heart of another nation. (10:13)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But now that we have this condition, uh and in as much as education and health training are the uh maximum ways whereby we can bring an end to this whole situation, wouldn't it be better if we went ahead and spent the per capita amount of twelve fifty instead of two dollars and - What is it? [ER and Elliott: sixty-seven cents.] that Dr. Emerson said is being appropriated for help?

[ER:] I'm not sure because I think perhaps the best thing we could do would be to compensate-- to have a much broader program to compensate each tribe and say, now you become part of the United States and you are going to live uh as citizens and have the same rights that any other citizens have and this is what is paid to you for what you have and you will now send your children to school, you will have the living conditions and the health conditions. It would be very hard because it would destroy a pattern of culture, and for the old people it would be very hard indeed. But I-I'm not sure -- that either you might do it more slowly by letting the pattern exist a few years longer and seeing that all the children had the educational and health advantages. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes. Is--] If you could manage that, it would perhaps be th-- (11:51)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Is this problem larger in scope than just the United States? Is it one that should uh concern the United Nations?

[ER:] Uh, well it's one, I think, should concern all South America as well as the United States because all through South America uh their Indians are, in some places even the greater part of the um and Mexico um has a big Indian population. So that we have um uh I don't know- [Elliott Roosevelt: Similar problems between all the Americas.] I don't think that-I don't think that it goes beyond the Americas, but I think it has, as far as the Americas are concerned, similar problems.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm, Well uh I think though that uh there can be no question but what we as free people are not pushing democracy and seeing to it that the Indians are given the opportunity to become a free and democratic people themselves. [ER: Oh I--] They don't have the vote, do they?

[ER:] No, not those who live on reservations. Those who have come out and um uh left the reservations, they do have the vote.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, thank you very much, I see that our time is up for this part of the program and we have to go on to another portion of the program.

[Break from 13:10 to 13:29]

[Ben Grauer:] This is Eleanor Roosevelt in her interview with today's delightful personality, Victor Borge. And although Mr. Borge is enormously popular on radio and television, some of you may not have heard him at the piano in serious mood. And for those who never tire of hearing him, we are now going to play a number which he has recorded, a selection from the writings of Edvard Grieg, *A Grieg Rhapsody*. We present the serious side of Victor Borge.

[Piano selection from 14:09 to 17:13]

[Silence from 17:13 to 17:28]

[Ben Grauer:] This has been the Eleanor Roosevelt Program, recorded in Mrs. Roosevelt's living room in the Park Sheraton Hotel on the corner of Fifty-Fifth Street and Seventh Avenue in New York City. Today Mrs. Roosevelt's guest was the famed Danish comedian and pianist, Victor Borge. Tomorrow, Mrs. Roosevelt invites to her microphone a distinguished personality of the theatrical scene, John Golden, the dean of Broadway theatrical producers. And on Friday our guest is a well-known naturalist, artist, and explorer, Ivan Sanderson. Mrs. Roosevelt and Elliott Roosevelt will be with you again tomorrow with John Golden as guest, and every day, Monday through Friday, from 12:30 to 1:15 pm. Till tomorrow then at the usual time, this is Ben Grauer, bidding you good afternoon. (18:17)

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