

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1951

Description: Recording quality is poor. Occasionally the recording skips for several seconds. At end the recording becomes inaudible and not transcribed. In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about what to do when neither the Democrats nor Republicans appeal to an individual. In the interview segment, ER asks editor and author Russell W. Davenport about his new book, *USA: The Permanent Revolution*.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Elliott Roosevelt, Russell W. Davenport

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[ER:] How do you do? 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 the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City. Each day, it is our desire to bring interesting guests that we are hopeful you will enjoy meeting. Elliott, will you tell our listeners today's plans?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] In a very-in a very recently published book, there is this statement rightly understood the principles that embody the meaning of America are the very forces that have done most to change America. To develop this provocative thought and to offer a new approach to a solution of the split between the conservatives and the liberals, Mrs. Roosevelt's guest today is Russell W. Davenport, well-known editor and author. We will hear this discussion with Mr. Davenport in just a few minutes because as usual we will discuss a question that seems to be puzzling some of our listeners. Now a few words from our announcer, very important words from the sponsors who make this recorded program possible.

[Break 1:17-1:27]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now we come to our letter of the day. It's from Mr. Julius Marcus of Alhambra, California, who has a question on politics. Here is his letter: "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt, Listening to your radio program on our local station, which I find interesting, I am prompted to write you and get your opinion on the following subject. The writer has been identified during his entire lifetime as a liberal in politics and economics, and I am convinced that the position of the true liberal has been supported by the record of human progress. Unlike the conservative who wishes to adhere to the conditions as they are, the liberal desires to conserve only those institutions and practices which are in keeping with the changing conditions of the world. Having a primary concern with the improvement of better living standards for the masses, which tends to improve and raise their standards and thereby enhance the level of our form of democracy. As a voter since the year 1900, I always voted for minor parties as a means of protest against the two dominant parties, even though the entire program of any of the minor parties was not acceptable to me. By study and observation, either one of the two major political parties in my estimation represented ambitious politicians who were in league with entrenched wealth and were saturated with corruption, particularly in the large cities.

Time marches on, arriving at the year 1932, facing a great national crisis in our economy and a new leader comes to the helm of our national government, Franklin D. Roosevelt. By his approach and programs, the leader fired the enthusiasm of millions like myself. I have registered Democrat and have voted for him every one of his four terms. Watching now the behavior of the two major parties in Congress, I can hardly see the difference between them. I find that the reactionary group of the South, which is labeled Democrat, is even more conservative than the northern Republican group, and I have no taste for either of them. My final point is that as a liberal, I cannot support either one of the two dominant parties and my choice in national elections is either to abstain from voting or voting for a minor party as a

protest. What is your opinion on this subject, which undoubtedly disturbs many like myself? Sincerely and respectfully, Julius Marcus." (4:14)

[ER:] Well [ER clears throat] of course, I think you waste your vote when you either abstain or when you vote in protest for a minor party, which you wouldn't want to see in in any case. And um I-I think the only answer is to choose the party that you feel on the whole has more people [Elliott coughs] uh who are working for similar things as you are, and then try and strengthen the good elements in that party. And for instance, I've always thought that that was so in the Democratic Party though I entirely agree that there are -- at the present time that there is a group of reactionaries in the Democratic Party that lines itself up with reactionaries in the Republican Party, and the result is deplorable. But and I haven't any use for either side, but nevertheless there is a group--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I might just interject that the conservative thinking people of the country think that they are the saviors and the liberal element of Congress, both Republican and Democratic, is sabotaging the well-being of the country.

[ER:] Oh yes! That's always in the point of view. But if you are a liberal, um I think you have to look for where there are the most liberals, and I would say that there were more young Democratic liberals coming along and they were stronger than young Republican liberals. Therefore, I would throw what influence I had into the young Democratic liberals.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well of course, there is one element of this letter that I am interested in and that is here's this gentleman has been voting since 1900 and, outside of four national elections in-- from '32 on, uh has always voted for minority parties and feels he must return to the minority party as a protest uh against the abuses that go on in the major parties. Do you think of that as a sound conclusion for anyone to reach?

[ER:] No, I think you waste your vote. I think you should try to promote in the major parties the elements that are good. (6:56)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Then what you are advocating in essence is that this man should choose which party he believes more--of the two dominant ones--more nearly espouses the ideals that he wants to see in American life, and then he would-should go out and actively get into the work of that party and strive to improve it.

[ER:] Well, I think that for instance, in California, he should work for the Congressional and the Senatorial people who represents the things that he believes in, and he'll find, I think, a few always that do. Local politics is the same.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Then-then when you say "Go out and work," what do you mean?

[ER:] Well, it means that he tries to create public opinion as far as he can create it. That he uses whatever avenues of influence he has, whether they reach a few people or a good many people, and that when campaign time or at any time, when there is a civic job to be done, as a citizen, when things happen in his own area, whether it's a country or city area, he should be ready to do--to give of his own time and his own money if he has it but his own work to show that he is willing to do something for the things that he believes in. (8:34)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, but now uh supposing that the party that has nominated the person that he believes in is run by the so-called professional politicians in whom he doesn't believe?

[ER:] Suppose- suppose he picks out -- for instance, suppose he begins in his own home area. Suppose there is something being done about housing. Then there are always a few people who are interested in that. Suppose he goes in and helps those people. It may be licking stamps or it may be getting out letters or it may be talking, it may be -- but in any case, suppose he throws his weight into that program which he thinks is a good program. Suppose he finds that his congressman is backing one of the other of them, that he work for that Congressman and work for the local people. He'll do what he can to give strength to the elements in the party that he feels does more or less along the lines of what he believes in.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, well now, when you come into the larger theatre of activities when the presidential candidates are running uh and you are plainly dissatisfied with both presidential candidates and find it very hard to accept either one. What can you do if you do not abstain, if you're not going to vote for one of the minority parties?

[ER:] Well, you don't do anything. You just don't vote at all, on the presidential level. It's a pity.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, what would you advocate is--

[ER:] I would decide which is the least bad, if I couldn't do anything about getting a better one. (10:33)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now let me ask you just as a matter of interest, supposing in your opinion, there were two people both of them rascals, both of them, if they had the opportunity, would lead the country in the wrong direction. Would you take the least of those two?

[ER:] No, I don't think I would if I felt that both were. I think I would, however, I would make a very hardened attempt beforehand to do what I could to prevent that situation arising. If there was nothing I could do about it, I probably wouldn't vote.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm, well I hope that this answers Mr. Marcus's question and I think that it is a very difficult one. It's a matter of searching one's conscience and making up one's own mind in-in meditation of these subjects but I think that our time is up right now and that we must go on to another part of the program.

[Break 11:41-12:08]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Recently, a very provocative book was published by Prentice Hall, which provides much interesting material for discussion. It has been said that this book may be taken to set forth on new conservatism, a conservatism happily in touch with reality. But here is Mrs. Roosevelt to tell you more about it and to introduce her guest.

[ER:] Thank you, Elliott. With me today is Mr. Russell W. Davenport, well-known editor, author, and poet. The editors of *Fortune* magazine, in collaboration with Mr. Davenport, have authored the book entitled *USA: The Permanent Revolution*, which gives us some very interesting food for thought. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Mr. Davenport.

[Russell W. Davenport:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. Needless to say, it's a great pleasure for me to be on this program. I have heard it a great many times and it's a good-- an experience to be here.

[ER:] Well, I'm flattered that you listen to it. [Russell W. Davenport: Oh yes.] And now, Mr. Davenport, what is *USA: The Permanent Revolution* about?

[Russell W. Davenport:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, that is a rather formidable title. What we had in mind is that the--there has been a long revolution in human affairs which is really the struggle of the individual human being to gain freedom from all kinds of tyranny, whether it be social or economic or political or even religious tyranny. And uh the United States was formed at a time when this revolution came to a head. And uh we are uh based upon certain principles which carry that revolution on so that the individual can remain free. That is the basic idea. (14:04)

[ER:] Well, I've been saying for a long time, that we had achieved what was, from my point of view, a very good thing in this country. A revolution, which was a bloodless revolution, really an evolution, not always did we keep what we evolved, we sometimes went back and discarded it, but nevertheless uh something that we have here makes it possible without killing each other to make changes. And that I think is one of the most important things that we have contributed in our development. [Russell W. Davenport: That's right. That's right.] And what is the purpose of the writing of this book which you--

[Russell W. Davenport:] Well, I felt that somehow, and the editor of *Fortune* joined with me in feeling, that somehow uh wrapped in all the difficult problems that we've got in the world today and at home, that we were losing sight of the real meaning of America, which is the emancipation of the individual. And we should go back and have a look at some of the fundamental documents and some of the fundamental principles that were brought forth to establish that freedom and see how they could be projected into the present and into the future. So that was the purpose of writing the book. (15:38)

[ER:] Not forgetting the old basis on which we started out!

[Russell W. Davenport:] Well, that's right.

[ER:] It's pretty important, I think.

[Russell W. Davenport:] We went right back, as you know in the book, to the *Declaration of Independence*, and to the great principles of the uh guarantees of the great rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And we sought to explain what they meant and what they mean today, and we feel that they are just as vital today as they ever were.

[ER:] And now in the introduction of this book, it says, and I quote, "Rightly understood, the principles that embody the meaning of America are the very forces that have done most to change America." Now, I think I know just what you mean, but I'd like you for the sake of our audience, to tell me what you really mean. [Recording skips from 16:35-16:38]

[Russell W. Davenport:] Human being freedom. What you expect of him, you expect him to grow. You expect him to avail himself to his opportunities and at the end of ten or twenty years he will be quite a different person. He will have fulfilled himself if he really has freedom to whatever extent he is able. Now, if you look at that principle through the generations, uh you'll see that--let's say that it takes some general right as the right of liberty, that is to say the political--basic political right -- which protects us from too much government or too much interference with our lives. This right causes change. It doesn't-it doesn't hold us in one place, and on the contrary, opens us up to new interpretations. And so on with all the principles on which we are founded, they drive us onward rather than holding us back into a given mold.

[ER:] Don't you think that possibly one of the reasons that you are able to write this book and that -- [Recording skips from 17:53-17:55] And some of the things that she has been able to do is because of the kind of people who came to this country. Now you might have started a theory of the same kind in certain other parts of the world, and I don't think that it would have had the same results. (18:19)

[Russell W. Davenport:] I think that is very true, and we did touch on that in an article--in a chapter of the book called *The American Way of Life*, where we tried to find out exactly, well not exactly, vaguely what it is that characterizes the American way of life. It undoubtedly is partly with the types of people, it has something perhaps to do with our climate. In any case, uh you remember uh-uh Theodore Roosevelt's great phrase, "the strenuous life." Somehow or another, we like the strenuous life here.

[ER:] Well, we-we were inherently adventurous because we never would have come to this country otherwise. [Russell W. Davenport: That is correct.] We were the adventurous people from many peoples.

[Russell W. Davenport:] That's right. And that has--[Recording skips from 19:09-19:12] For this change. America always changes, and Americans want to change. They have an idea that they can get better in various different ways, and that is strangely, I think, a rather unique idea in the world.

[ER:] Well now, that brings me to asking you a question in regard to this change or desire for change. Do you think that the New Deal was an example of that spirit in us, of willingness to accept change? (19:43)

[Russell W. Davenport:] Well now, Mrs. Roosevelt, of course, this is a delicate question between us because I have been on the opposite side of the fence.

[ER:] That's all right. I'm asking you dispassionately to uh [ER laughs] view history.

[Russell W. Davenport:] Well, the passions are certainly all subsided. I--Yes, I do. I think that the New Deal was an example of this deep desire and need of Americans to change and evolve. Now, I don't mean by that to say that I think it was a complete answer. Uh in fact, I would say that it was a very incomplete answer and one of our problems today, I feel-- [Recording skips from 20:28-20:36] That was made by the New Deal and not sit down and think our way through further, because I think that we must move on and I think there is a new- a new idea that should grow out of our environment today. (20:56)

[ER:] But curiously enough, I don't think that we should forget what brought us to making that change, because in our uh broadening of our outlook as a whole, um some of the similarity of condition um which existed in a relative way for us at that time is what is bringing today a sweep of nationalism and a desire for freedom through many parts of the world. [Russell W. Davenport: Yes, that that--] So it's useful to us to remember what happened to us in our effort to meet the problems of other parts of the world.

[Russell W. Davenport:] Well, that--and that is very true, and I think that we gave ourselves a tremendous-- [Recording 21:51-21:54] Uh which can be of great value to us now.

[ER:] Now, what is your conception of how we should uh move on?

[Russell W. Davenport:] Well, uh if I could put it just as briefly as possible, I feel that--

[ER:] I don't want you to be too brief. I want you to really explain!

[Russell W. Davenport:] Well, it could be quite lengthy, but uh-uh I-I feel, uh, of course the great motivating force in the United States has been the force of private initiative. Up to the thirties uh this force was used primarily in the economic field and in the development of the economic field. Uh in the thirties, we struck the social progress uh really head on. It had been forming up before that but really head on. And I think we made a mistake, or at least, if it wasn't a mistake for then, it should be remedied now. That we assume that private parties were socially irresponsible, and therefore that the government and the state had to carry the social burden. Now my -- the essence of what I have to say, which perhaps-- [Recording skips from 23:14-23:18] That we can use this great force of private initiative here in America

in social matters, and thereby lift from government a great deal of the burden which it might have to carry in the future if the private initiative is not around.

[ER:] Now, I'd like you to elaborate that, and though the time has come when we give our announcer time to say a word, we will come right back and get you to elaborate further on that.

[Break 23:52-24:02]

[ER:] Now, we've come right back on the air and start again the conversation with Mr. Russell Davenport on the subject of *USA: The Permanent Revolution*. That's a very interesting book, and I'm sure those of you who haven't read it are getting more interested every moment. Now you were just telling us what we should do to [Russell W. Davenport laughs] make, um, the individual initiative pick up more of the burden, which you fear is becoming too heavy or will become too heavy for government. Now go ahead sir. [ER laughs]

[Russell W. Davenport:] Well--

[Recording skips 24:38-23:46. At this point the recording becomes difficult to understand.]

[Russell W. Davenport:] Very familiar split that we have between what you might call the laissez faire philosophy on the one -- way over on the right, what we call the Right, and on the other hand, state socialism, which we call the Left. Now, the laissez faire philosophy assumes that private parties whether individuals or corporations need uh no -- or need a very minimum supervision and that they are responsible party in any field! Uh state socialism on the contrary, has come to the conclusion that private parties, while they may have a certain responsibility in economic [unclear term] are irresponsible socialists. That is to say that if you leave a man alone, he will not act. Now, I think that there is a third way. And I think right here in America we have been building it without actually realizing it. There are millions and millions of Americans who work and give time every day for all kinds of socialist causes.

[Recording inaudible after 25:58]

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