Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program

July 4, 1940

Description: Broadcast time 1:15-1:30 PM over the NBC Red Network. ER discusses FDR’s presentation of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library to the Archivist of the United States. She also talks about the conflict between realities and ideals as Americans relate to World War II in Europe, the conditions necessary for world peace, and the personal sacrifices Americans need to make to maintain their freedom.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Ben Grauer, NBC Announcer

(00:20)

[Ben Grauer:] This is Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program presented by the makers of SweetHeart Soap.

[Theme music 00:26-00:51]

[Ben Grauer:] And now, on this glorious Fourth of July, in many homes, on the open road, and on sunny beaches, America pauses to welcome a favorite radio personality: Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. These programs come to you with the compliments of SweetHeart Soap, the mild, delicately fragrant soap that now offers you a truly amazing savings. But more about that later because now, speaking from her home at Hyde Park, New York, here is Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

[ER:] Good day, ladies and gentlemen. I’m extremely glad to be able to speak to you today from Hyde Park because there’re so many things to do here on this particular day, I don’t know how I would have been able to find time for the motor trip to New York City. It would also have been extremely difficult to fit this broadcast into my husband’s plan, because later today the president is going to turn over the papers for the new [Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential] library at Hyde Park to the Archivist of the United States. This will complete the acceptance by the government of this new building. I’ve watched with great interest as this library has grown from a dream into a reality, and I certainly should like to be present at the last step. I shall be very happy when the exhibits are finally in place and students come to work with the papers which will be available for research work, and when people just drop in for a view of the various collections. There will be, I think, a Hudson River room. Many naval items of historical importance from my husband’s collection will also be included. Some of these will be loaned and some will be exhibited permanently. Part of the exhibit will be changed from time to time so that everyone can visit and revisit the library, always to find something new and interesting. In England at the Gladstone Library, they’ve built a small inn not far away where students may stay at a very reasonable rate until their work is accomplished. I hope that someday a similar arrangement can be made here, for I feel that this library offers a great deal of fine material which can be very valuable to students and writers. (2:58)

The Fourth of July is not exactly a day of rest for any of us. When these semi-official ceremonies of handing over the library to the government have been completed, we betake ourselves to the cottage and give our annual picnic for the newspapermen and photographers who accompany my husband on this visit to Hyde Park. This is great fun, as I told you in last Tuesday’s broadcast, and even if we all will be a little weary by the end of the day, it will be a satisfactory kind of weariness. I believe it’s always worthwhile getting tired when you’re having a good time.
In the midst of what I’m doing today, this thought flashes through my mind: how strange it is that we can go on during these days living our usual, normal lives, when only a few thousand miles away another nation, which has for many years celebrated its national holiday on July the fourteenth, is now forced to face a completely changed status and to start rebuilding its national life under very difficult conditions. I wonder whether we ever stop to realize even for a moment what it would mean to us if we were looking to a future as grim as the one which lies before that nation. (4:16)

One of the things which I find most difficult these days is to keep a balance between realities and ideals, some of them motivated by wishful thinking. I’m sure this problem is shared by a great many other people. Many have told me that they are prepared to defend our ideals of democracy and to preserve the American way of life. They’re opposed to the Nazi, fascist, and communist forms of government, but all of this goes under the heading of ideals. Now what about the realities? The same people who dislike dictatorships say that above everything else they do not want to go to war. They hope that conflicting ideas can in some way be reconciled without resorting to force. They cling to the possibility that the dictators will keep their activities out of the sphere of our interests. While I share these hopes most ardently, I feel that it is necessary to continue to face the facts. The economy of the dictators is different from ours. They never worry about what things cost. The life of the individual is absolutely unimportant. The rights of minorities have long since been forgotten. The peace of the neighboring neutral countries has been violated over and over again. Everything is sacrificed to the will of the dictator. Democracies, on the other hand, move slowly towards their objectives because they’re unwilling to sacrifice human lives and human liberties. If a dictator does not have raw materials within his own borders, he must be able to get them elsewhere. If he cannot get raw materials through trade, he will get them by force, and force is justifiable in the dictator’s philosophy. If we as Americans do not want to meet force with force, we must at least face the facts and decide what we want to do. We may have nothing to say about a future peace, but we must think about it.

As far as I can see, there are only two things that those of us who want a peaceful world can look forward to. One is complete world disarmament. The other is a world economy which provides all nations, great and small, with an equal opportunity to secure basic commodities. I’m not an economist, but this seems so simple to me as I view the world situation today. I am sure it’s not simple to work out the details of either of these alternatives, however. I know that it will take the best brains of all the countries in the world. But the principle of giving the people everywhere in the world an equal chance to obtain basic commodities is the only way that I can see by which the causes of war can be removed. But such things as disarmament and balanced trade are back in the realms of hope. The facts are that the dictators do not share the desire to work for the good of the world as a whole. As far as disarmament is concerned, they want everyone to disarm but themselves. As far as world trade is concerned, they want it at the expense of all the other nations. I should like to continue with this subject, but first let us hear a short message from our announcer. (7:47)

[Ben Grauer:] Thank you Mrs. Roosevelt, I’ll be just a moment. Ladies, it’s amazing how the news of SweetHeart Soap’s great one cent sale is spreading. Telephones are ringing, one woman tells another and off they go to get one full-size cake of SweetHeart Soap for just one penny with every three at the regular low price. Your dealer has this wonderful bargain for you. A cash saving of nearly twenty-five percent on every cake of SweetHeart Soap you buy right now, a cash reduction of nearly one fourth on SweetHeart Soap in this remarkable special. Amazing as it may seem, this generous one cent sale offer holds good for all the SweetHeart Soap you buy while the sale is on. If you have wanted to try SweetHeart Soap, now is the time to do it and save. Order several dozen cakes of SweetHeart Soap tomorrow and get a new hat with the cash you save. And now, I again present Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

[ER:] We have a right to ask the question “Is such a thing as world peace really possible?” Has there ever been a single instance in the history of mankind when individuals work for universal good? I say there is.
The field of science is a shining example of how the contributions and the genius of every nation have been used for the benefit of the entire world. The scientific viewpoint, which is completely unselfish, must become the viewpoint of governments and businessmen if we’re ever going to organize a satisfactory world community. But until the world is more receptive to ideas for universal good, we must work furiously to preserve the good things in our own American way of living. We must not let the dictatorships out-guess, out-talk, out-work, and out-finance us, and we believe that we can accomplish all these things without sacrificing our democracy. (9:40)

Our representative form of government was conceived on the principle that nothing shall be done unless the people consent to it. When the ideals of democracy were first formulated, the need was to slow down the speed of government. People were trying to build a defense against the lightning strokes of oppression at the hands of tyrants. Our forefathers thought that whenever the people had enough time to slowly and coolly consider legislation, they would have a better chance to see that it was beneficial to all. That is why our Constitution balances the authority of one branch of the government against the other and divides the legislative and executive powers among many people. Today we must try to preserve that same machinery of democracy, but to accelerate its pace. This does not mean regimentation. It does not mean that all points of view should not be given consideration, but it does mean that we must be quick to realize what should be done for our national welfare, and we must be quick to act accordingly. The representatives in our government take their cues from us. If we’re divided, if we disagree, they will act accordingly. But if we are as one in our thoughts and desires, we can match even the pace of one-man dictatorial government. It is easy to say that we should speak with a single voice, but I am fully aware that this is not as simple as it sounds. I know that our economic system is completely satisfactory to some of us and not quite satisfactory to others. How then, you may ask, is it possible for both groups to act unanimously?

There is a way, and it calls for equal sacrifice by all. It calls for equal unselfishness. It calls for the farsightedness to settle the differences within our own country in order to achieve a common defense against outer forces which are by far more important and more threatening. At a time when outer forces are becoming more ominous each day, America is beginning a political campaign during which this country will be told what can be done to meet those outer forces and how we should cope with our internal problems. We may deal with these issues in high-sounding phrases which mean nothing or we may come down to brass tacks and let the people know exactly what we face.

I think we as a people have come of age, and we’re able to understand and strong enough to face any eventuality. To say we’re going to have armaments and not pay for it is ridiculous. To say that sacrifices will not be necessary from all is equally ludicrous. Rich and poor, big and small, every single American is going to have to do something personally, unselfishly, and willingly for the preservation of our democracy. But today and throughout every day of the future, let us keep in mind these immortal words whose birthday we celebrate today: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Upon our intelligence as a nation to understand these words, upon our willingness as a people to keep them alive, depends your future, my future, and the future of the United States of America. (13:07)

[Ben Grauer:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. Ladies, today is the glorious fourth, but here’s how you can make tomorrow your glorious fifth of July: discover the pure, delicately fragrant soap that can help you enjoy the whole summer more and save nearly twenty-five percent on every cake you buy. It’s SweetHeart Soap, of course, and right now SweetHeart makes a thrilling, get-acquainted offer you don’t want to miss. It’s one full size cake of SweetHeart Soap for just one cent with every three you buy. Think of it ladies: a fifty-year favorite soap, mild and gentle, and it’s yours at a dramatic saving of almost
twenty-five per cent while this big special lasts. Make up your mind to give yourself a real treat by ordering enough SweetHeart Soap in the big one cent sale to last you right through Labor Day.

[Theme music 13:58-14:14]

[Ben Grauer:] [Music continues softly] Remember, you have a date next Tuesday at this same time when once again Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt comes to call. In the meantime, stock up with the fine product that brings you these friendly visits: SweetHeart Soap, famous for fifty years as the soap that agrees with your skin, the soap that has now starred in the dramatic penny sale to save you money. Tell your friends about it and invite them to listen with you next Tuesday when you’ll again hear [Music crescendos, cuts] Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program. This is Ben Grauer speaking.

[NBC Announcer:] This is the National Broadcasting Company.

[NBC Chimes]

(15:03)