

MRS. ROOSEVELT MEETS THE PUBLIC

April 22nd, 1951

Description: In this episode, Senator Margaret Chase Smith hosts in place of ER, and discusses morality in American politics, culture, and society. Her guests include fellow senator Estes Kefauver, and Lawrence Kubie, a psychiatrist with the Yale School of Medicine.

Participants: Unknown Announcer (likely not Ben Grauer), Elliott Roosevelt, Margaret Chase Smith, Lawrence Kubie, Estes Kefauver, Eleanor Wadsworth, Mark Ebersols, and Cena Pepe

(0:27)

[Unknown Announcer:] Senator Margaret Chase Smith substitutes for Mrs. Roosevelt next on WNBT New York, Channel Four

(Silence from 0:34 through 0:38)

(Theme music from 0:38 through 0:52)

(Silence from 0:52 through 1:29)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] As our announcer has told you, mother is in Geneva, Switzerland right now at a meeting of the Committee on Human Rights of the United Nations, and she wanted me to tell you that she felt she was very very fortunate in having secured uh Senator Margaret Chase Smith, the distinguished Republican senator from the state of Maine to serve as her hostess today on this program and to guide the conversation and the questions of two very distinguished people uh who I believe you probably have heard a great deal about. In fact one of them I know to be particularly well known to the television audience, and his name is Senator Estes Kefauver, the Democratic Senator from the state of Tennessee uh Senator Kefauver has a particularly great interest in the topic for discussion today. And also we have with us Dr. Lawrence Kubie who is a very very well-known psychiatrist, in fact he is a--the clinical uh professor of psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine and has been well known in the field of psychoanalysis for very many years. Ah, Senator Smith is going to handle the program and introduce to you, the other guests who have questions to ask on the program today and we are going to discuss the factors determining the moral tone of our behavior as a people, the people of this country, today, as shown for instance by the recent investigations that have been held by Senator Kefauver's committee. And so now, if you wouldn't mind, Senator Smith, I'd like to turn the program over to you. (3:40)

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Thank you, Elliott Roosevelt. I think that most Americans could talk at great length about public morality and moral fiber. We all have a tendency to sit on--in judgment on the other fellow. It does not seem to be a very difficult subject to talk about, but I think it really is. We're hesitant to admit that we're wrong and the other fellow might be somewhat right, that we may have been bad in some respect while our opponent may have been good in some respect. Instead we tend to rationalize and try justify our acts instead of being objective in analyzing our acts and our character. We try to change or conform moral standards to our own convenience and selfishness instead of conforming our own behavior to existing moral standards. I've seen this behavior pattern first hand in the political arena. I regret to say that the political atmosphere of our nation has become so charged with bitterness that we've forgotten how to disagree agreeably and how to oppose constructively. Instead too much political discussion has degenerated into prominent Americans accusing each other of evil behavior and evil design; of treason

and other traitorous acts, of politically name-calling your opponent a communist or a fascist when you well know that he's a loyal American. What I think most of us need to realize today is that the difference between right and wrong is not just the difference between black and white, but rather that there is a twilight-zone of grey in between, which we must mark out more clearly. I think this points up one of the most basic considerations for the discussion of modern morality; that is: what causes concepts of right and wrong to vary between people? I think that it would be well to start this discussion, Mr. Roosevelt, on the consideration of what causes the relatively low state of morality today and Dr. Kubie, as the technician in this group on this subject, I believe you can give us a good start. (5:49)

[Lawrence Kubie:] That's a big order Senator Smith, I don't know if I can give you a good start or not. Ah, I can only think out loud about this. First place, I don't know that I would quite agree that our concepts have varied. Concepts of right and wrong have remained fairly constant really over the ages, but there are an enormous number of factors which seem to me to determine whether or not people uh adhere to those concepts or whether they accept deviations with a good deal of complacency. Uh, I would like to see our discussion focus on the question of: what are the major forces which allow us to tolerate a deviation from the concepts of right and wrong which we all accept. Personally I think I would divide them into two or three, uh, categories. I think the major force at work in general is a sense of helplessness of human beings in general, impotence in the political arena, which has many causes, um, complex political and constitutional causes, and of impotence in the economic arena. Now when people feel they can't do anything about the problems which confront them, then as we know, there can be a moral disintegration whether it's in a-in a social group, in a society, in a country, or in an army. (7:17)

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Senator Kefauver, won't you have something to say about it?

[Estes Kefauver:] Yes uh Senator Smith. I think I agree that in the country today there is a--somewhat of a moral let down, but I think we make a great mistake in feeling that that is general and it's through all of our people. I think I should know something about this because I've been all over the country seeing a lot of gangsters, and uh criminals, and some bad politicians and a lot of good ones. I think we should keep in mind all of the time that um 90 percent of our people are working hard, raising their children, sending them to school, trying to earn an honest living, taking part in their political organizations, supporting their church or synagogue or-or temple, so that basically there isn't anything wrong with the United States. After all we have been through a period in which we have been interested and worried about the international outlook, about the war, we have had various necessary rules and regulations placed upon us in business which have caused a lot of people to depart from the usual standards, but even in business, while we may have a different kind of moral let down, I can't say that business generally is any worse than it was in the time after Grant when we had uh railroad tyrants, and uh I think it should also be kept in mind that labor racketeering and improper conduct among working organizations has decreased a great deal, they've cleaned their own house. While there-while there is much to be done and a great clean up job that America needs to do, I do not think that we should start out with the impression that America is fundamentally bad because that just isn't the case today. (9:08)

[Margaret Chase Smith:] We seem to have gotten off to--at a very good start and we have some guests from the public, and I believe the first one is Mrs. Eleanor Wadsworth, editor of a publication for the parents and teachers of the Ethical Culture School who has a question she's going to ask us.

[Eleanor Wadsworth:] Is it possible to set up an index or measurement which would tell us just how much moral strength there is in the country?

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Senator Kefauver, will you uh attempt that one?

[Estes Kefauver:] Well Mrs., uh--Madame President, as we say in the United States Senate [all laugh], uh that's a very difficult question--[Margaret Chase Smith: shall I return that say, Mr. President? Or Mr. Senator?] Well, if you said that you would be very far-fetched, I'm afraid. Just Mr. Senator I hope it will always be, at least for some time. Ah, I can't say that there's any way we can set up a moral index, I think we can start out with an assumption that uh there has been some let down, some lack of interest in holding up our moral code that's temporary and is explainable. I think the important thing to remember is however, that the American people have the stamina and I think, that now in the light of some revelations that have been made recently, that uh they have the determination to raise the moral standard of-of the country, that's evident on all sides. I think we're seeing more interest in politics and plain doing right, and uh in government and in our society generally. But uh, I would say that our moral standard genr-is generally is like it was after--same time after World War I, and uh, but the good thing about it is we're coming back, I think, rather rapidly. (10:57)

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Dr. Kubie, don't you have something to say on that question?

[Lawrence Kubie:] Well, it takes a certain amount of courage, I think to disagree with Senator Kefauver, since this is about moral fiber I'm going to take privilege of exercising it.

[Estes Kefauver:] Now, Dr. Kubie, that takes no courage, in fact that's the usual habit of people I'm afraid

[All laugh]

[Lawrence Kubie:] Well, you may be used to it, but I'm not. I--I would agree in part that there--there's no evidence that there has been a change in human beings as human beings whether they're Americans or others. But situations can arise in which the simple virtues just don't do their job. We assume that courage, industry, integrity, uh a certain amount of saving, persistence of effort ordinarily will give a man a certain feeling that he is going to create for himself his own security in life, for himself and for his family. Uh, if an economic and a total situation arises, a political situation as well, in which he begins to doubt that, then the same thing begins to happen to his adherence to that code. His code hasn't changed, but his devotion to it changes. Same thing that happens to a soldier when he begins to go to pieces under stress, when he begins to think that he is not sure that he himself is--and his group is going to come through by adhering to the uh-- the soldier's code. I think there are an enormous number of very subtle but very powerful factors at work which is planting the seed of-of doubt and distrust of one's self and one's code in the community as a whole. I would use one very important index, I think, and reply to what Mrs. Wadsworth asked, and that is the amount of uh slipshod uh tolerance for deviations in business morality that we see all around us today, which things that were unheard of, that nobody, no honest businessman would have considered doing twenty-five, thirty-five years ago. There were certain other nations that we looked down on because they tolerated this kind of business irregularity which have become accepted. People almost have come to feel that you're an easy mart, that you're a sucker if you play the game too scrupulously, and that I think is evidence of a very sharp change in uh the whole uh moral--uh the adherence to moral codes in the country.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Of course, wouldn't you say too that moral standards may be set, but there may be a different interpretation placed on them [Lawrence Kubie: Yes.] and while I may think something is good, you may think it's wrong and in so doing, the other fellow is always bad--[Lawrence Kubie: Right.] Which we could very well get away from.--[Lawrence Kubie:] That's right.] We have a question from Reverend Mark Ebersole here. Do you have a question for us?

[Mark Ebersols:] Yes, I do. I'd be interested in knowing uh to what extent religion is a basis, say, for political conduct.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Dr. Kubie, will you try that one.

[Lawrence Kubie:] Religion a basis for political conduct, for political morality, or morality in general?

[Mark Ebersols:] For political morality. (14:16)

[Lawrence Kubie:] Well, now there again we have to be very careful about thinking clearly about cause and effect. I don't think there can be any doubt in anybody's mind that in general a community of people who are devout are a community of people who all along the line are going to adhere to higher standards of morality. Uh, whether the adherence to--the devotion, the religious devotion causes the highest general standard of actual conduct or whether it's a symptom of a generally good ethical level is a question that we--would take us far afield.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Senator Kefauver, perhaps that should have been placed before you first.

[Estes Kefauver:] Well--no, I think it's best that Dr. Kubie had the first crack at it because it is a very difficult question, but I rather agree with him that uh we have several elements, uh religion, education, housing, condition of health, the working conditions of people in communities, the uh interest in playgrounds and parks and things of that sort. Where you have a city or a community that has those things, well then you have a high moral standing, interest in government, and very little crime uh not big time in any event, so I think that interest in religion does have a very definite effect and likewise interest in education of course helps the interest in the activity and religious matters They all go along together.

[Lawrence Kubie:] Could I throw in something? I have a feeling that we've got to face the fact that uh the average man is being squeezed between two things, he's being squeezed, if you will, between the triumphs of medicine and the failures of industry. Because of the triumphs of medicine, more and more people are staying alive. They're staying alive at the two ends of the life scale, in the youngsters and the oldsters, in the unemployable areas because they're too young and because they're too old. But the uh span of the earning uh career, the earning span of the average man has not increased, and that's an organizational and an industrial failure, and the result is the average man is carrying a constantly increasing economic load, and that is one of the reasons why he is beginning to feel frantic. When he feels frantic he grabs at anything and the whole grabbing spirit that we see in our community, I think, is part of that.

[Estes Kefauver:] Senator Smith, if I may reply very briefly to Dr. Kubie. Uh I agree with the--what he says about the effect of medicine and the effect of business, but shouldn't we keep in mind that our uh educational system, our advancements in medical care, our--the--our security under the programs that we have are giving people, I believe, more of the things that they need in order to be interested in our better ethical standard than we have had in years past, so that I think that we are making some advancement. I think that these things are bound to uh bring up the average moral standard of the people. I think our big trouble has been that we have just not had the facts, we haven't been interested in getting the facts. I've always been a strong believer that uh when the American people know all of the facts in the situation, that they are able to overcome any difficulty and whatever our decadent condition may be at the present, that basically we are coming up as a people and the letters I've been getting as a result of our crime committee, investigation goes something like this, thousands of them: we just didn't know the situation was so bad in politics, we didn't know it was so bad in business, we didn't know the gangsters had gotten such a hold on the people, but now we're determined to do something about it and uh I believe the American people are in a position to carry through with that too. (18:25)

[Margaret Chase Smith:] I think we are on the way to forgetting church and the bible. I think that statistics show that with this feeling of insecurity that we have sensed recently there has been a real increase in attendance and membership in churches, is that not so?

[Background voice, probably Reverend Mark Ebersole:] I think that's true.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] I, um-- [Kubie interrupts] Yes, Doctor Kubie?

[Estes Kefauver:] I heard--I heard some um distinguished minister from De--Michigan say the other day that all over the country churches were being better attended recently that they couldn't seat the crowds, is that correct?

[Background voice, probably Reverend Mark Ebersols:] I think that's true.

[Estes Kefauver:] That's a very good sign.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] As the statistics show, surely. Yes Dr. Kubie?

[Lawrence Kubie:] I'll hold my part.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] We have a Mr. Robert Janis, a businessman in New York City, and surely he must have some questions.

[Robert Janis:] Yes [Robert Janis clears his throat], excuse me, yes I do. Senator, do you think the American voting public is weak in character when it blindly follows the political machines and elects people like the late Mayor Curley of Boston even after his convictions for a criminal offense? (19:32)

(Margaret Chase Smith and Estes Kefauver speak over each other)

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Senator, do want to—

[Estes Kefauver:] Unless you want to answer it.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] No, well I could, but I'd rather hear your answer, thank you. [Both laugh]

[Estes Kefauver:] Ah, my answer is that one of our fundamental difficulties all along has been our lack of interest in politics. We uh, I think if we ever lose our great democracy, that that will probably be the principal reason--[Lawrence Kubie: Senator--] Now it is--it is--it is a bad sign when uh people will elect someone who uh manifestly is not fit for office, but without any reference to any particular one, but may I call your attention to the fact that uh more big-time political machines have been broken-up and the people have taken over and substituted uh more representative governments during the last uh, five or six years than I think any time in our history. We aren't doing enough, but that may be due to the leadership in our parties, that we do not define our platforms sufficiently and people don't see translated into legislation the things that they think they vote for. We need to consider all those matters and we in Congress and in our legislative bodies haven't been doing our part and, uh I think we'll all agree on that.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Dr. Kubie will--

[Estes Kefauver:] That is, of course, Senator Smith and I have been doing our part, but some--

[All laugh]

[Margaret Chase Smith:] We've been doing our part ever since that primary election that we had, haven't we?

[Estes Kefauver:] Well, I hope so.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Dr. Kubie?

[Lawrence Kubie:] Well, you had an answer to that. I'd ra--

[Margaret Chase Smith:] No, I'd like to hear yours.

[Lawrence Kubie:] Well, the only point I was going to make is that this lack--this political apathy I think is terribly important, but I think in itself it's a symptom of a disease, rather than the cause of a disease or it's one of those symptoms that has its own consequences. Uh, people get apathetic about politics when they begin to feel that their votes does count and the grow--the feeling has been growing in this country that your vote doesn't count. That your parties, as they exist, are rather empty, that they don't have clear-cut party issues and that they don't have really clear-cut party responsibility. They have a sense that the opposition is irresponsible and that the administration can be irresponsible no matter which party is in power and that whichever party is out behaves in an irresponsible fashion, throwing--with few very remarkable exceptions, madam--throwing monkey-wrenches into the machinery and then sitting back and watching the trouble it's caused, and when you get irresponsibility both in the administration and in the opposition, then people begin to throw up their hands and say they don't really care what happens politically. (22:09)

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Will we find the answer when individuals realize it's an individual responsibility?

[Lawrence Kubie:] No; I think you've got to face the fact that there are structural defects in our whole political and party system which have got to be improved. We're too complacent about it as it exists.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] That takes it back to the individual responsibility [Lawrence Kubie: Alright--] doesn't it? [Margaret Chase Smith laughs]

[Lawrence Kubie:] Yes, that does.

[Estes Kefauver:] But uh but Madam President, if I may uh inject one other word.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Distinguished Senator.

[Estes Kefauver:] I'm certain that uh [Margaret Chase Smith laughs] Dr. Kubie wouldn't um want to say that a great deal of the political debate and decisions we have today are not uh--are well thought out and uh-and studiously presented. I do think there's too much name-calling and labeling of people and that uh we need to have better responsibility in our party, but having been in the House of Representatives and in the Senate with Senator Smith quite a number of years, the uh by-and-large the members of Congress--and uh we have some bad ones, just like you have some bad ones in all levels of government--by-and-large they try to do a good job. Uh, I do think we need to take a look at our techniques and try to also with--what our parties mean and it's something that the American people ought to think about, but not all our political decisions are badly made, I'm sure you will agree.

[Lawrence Kubie:] I would agree 100 percent. I think, considering some of the obstacles we labor under, it's remarkable that uh so many of them are very carefully thought-out. [laughter] (23:40)

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Um, we have uh Ms. Cena Pepe, who teaches the fifth grade at the Saint Francis Xavier Parochial School in New York, is that right?

[Cena Pepe:] That's right.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] I'm sure you have a question for us.

[Cena Pepe:] Yes, I do. I'd like to know if all the uh recent investigations have proven that there is a uh political decadence and if so, is there a proportionate decadence in the people?

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Senator, that looks to be directed to you. [Cena Pepe and Estes Kefauver chuckle]

[Estes Kefauver:] Yes, well uh I'm glad to try to give my ideas about it. Ah, yes there is, there is a political let down and decadence, there is in the administration, there is in a lot of levels of government. I don't mean that there are any great number of people who are doing any wrong, but I think we may as well recognize it and recognize that uh wherever it exists, in the administration or anywhere else, that we're going to get busy now and do something about it and I think there are signs that that uh is being done. We uh have had--have a great many reasons for it, but whatever the reasons may be, I think we have to recognize that fact. It's not fatal and I don't think it's deeply rooted, but, um--and I think there are good signs that uh the fact has been recognized and we're going to have a house-cleaning and- all through all levels of government.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Dr. Kubie, do you have something to say on that question?

[Lawrence Kubie:] Well, just to the, perhaps the second half of Ms. Pepe's question, which whether the evidence of corruption in government also points to corruption outside, in the people or to a lowering of morale, and there I think I have to agree. After all, nobody takes a bribe unless there's somebody to offer it, and I imagine that for every uh harassed and underpaid government worker who takes a bribe, there are an awful lot of scheming fellows on the outside who would try to offer those bribes.

[Estes Kefauver:] Yes, exactly right.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] That's right.

[Lawrence Kubie:] And we have to assume that that's what I had in mind before when I said there's been a change in business morality, and that we talk about government corruption we're forgetting the fact that that means business corruption.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Well, of course uh many of the official acts that have--we've been hearing about are not entirely unlawful and not violating the laws, they're unethical and uh basically immoral and perhaps they're not considered so by the actors themselves, would you say?

[Lawrence Kubie:] Well, if people begin to feel that uh knowing the angles is the uh--the greatest thing that you can achieve then uh then people--morality has begun to change.

[Estes Kefauver:] But shouldn't it also be pointed out that um the business morality today has a different nature than it used to have. I don't know that it's any worse now than it was at certain other times in our history. I think the time that land was grabbed by a certain railroad interest and that uh and working

people didn't have an opportunity to have a place in the sun, that that was a very bad moral time in the history of business. And now it seems that because of uh monopolies in certain lines of industry because of inability of little fellows to get materials and because the government so inexorably tied-up into so many business affairs that there has been a lot of-of a different kind of immorality, I think we all recognize that.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Senator, do you mind if I interrupt? I'd like to tell Senator Smith that I think the time is drawing to a close for our program today.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] Well, I think, Mr. Roosevelt, that most of us will agree that a major cause of any decline in morality is the sense of lack of security, but I believe that as Americans, Dr. Kubie and Senator Kefauver, we have been thinking too much in terms of materialistic security--physical and economic security--isn't that true?

[Estes Kefauver:] I think so.

[Margaret Chase Smith:] That we have forgotten too much about the church and the Bible, and it's about time that we returned, as statistics show we are fast doing.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, thank you very much, uh, Senator Smith, that on behalf of mother, I'd like to say thank you to the entire group that have been here today and especially to Senator Smith, who has done such an able job of being hostess for my mother, also to you Senator Kefauver and Dr. Kubie and you other guests. Ah, next Sunday the program will come from London, when mother will again take up her duties and bring to you a program on Anglo-American relations in the Far East, with the distinguished Mr. Michael Foot representing the Labour Party point of view and Mr. W. J. Brown editor of the London Graphic, and until next Sunday, thank you all very much. (28:43)

(Theme music from 28:48 to 30:07)

(Announcer begins speaking at 29:08)

[Unknown Announcer:] Next week at the same time, NBC Television will again present *Mrs. Roosevelt Meets the Public*. We will bring you the first of several programs filmed abroad with Mrs. Roosevelt and well-known European guests, including and discussing problems being faced in Europe today. Portions of today's program, which originated in the Colonial Room of the Park Sheraton Hotel here in New York, were on motion picture film. (29:30)

[Unknown announcer:] NBC Television

[NBC chimes]

(30:13)

Transcribed from holdings at Library of Congress (LOC)
File(s): RWC 5841 B1-B2

Transcription: Gabriel Plunkett
First edit by Christy Regenhardt
Final edit by Christopher Brick