

MRS. ROOSEVELT MEETS THE PUBLIC

October 22, 1950

Description: Television show, Topic: Crime and Corruption

Participants: ER, Judge Samuel S. Leibowitz, D.A. Miles F. McDonald

[Robert Montgomery:] Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce Ms. Joan Lorrying.

[Joan Lorrying:] Thank you, Bob. It's a big role you're giving me as Gabby in *The Petrified Forest*.

[Robert Montgomery:] It is indeed, Joan. And the part I'm playing, Alan Squire, is one of drama's meatiest chores.

[Announcer:] Robert Montgomery stars in *The Petrified Forest* with Joan Lorrying, this Monday's play when *Robert Montgomery Presents*. Tomorrow evening, 9:30 see Robert Montgomery in *The Petrified Forest* on WNBT. This is WNBT New York Channel 4. (00:28)

[Theme music 0:29-0:49]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] [music continues softly] Across the nations, newspapers are headlining stories about municipal graft and corruption. An aroused public is calling for action against the criminal elements responsible. From the Colonial Room of the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York, NBC Television takes pleasure in presenting *Mrs. Roosevelt Meets the Public* to discuss today the problem of graft and corruption in the government, a problem which has the American public asking questions such as—

[Unidentified male:] I'm an oral surgeon from Brooklyn. Will the gambling investigations really run the racketeers out of business?

[Unidentified female:] I have five children to raise. What is being done to keep the youngsters from the influence of criminals and gangsters?

[Unidentified male:] I'm a retired detective of the New York City Police Department. I'd like to know if the King's County Grand Jury investigation is not making the entire police department take the wrap for a few big time crooks.

[ER:] These are some of the questions that are being presented to me in connection with current crime investigations. And I am happy to be with you this afternoon to discuss these questions. For the answers I've turned to two outstanding figures in the world of investigation and justice. And it is a pleasure to introduce to you Judge Samuel S. Leibowitz, famous criminal lawyer and present county judge of King's County, New York; and District Attorney Miles F. McDonald, who has been directing so successfully the crime investigation in Brooklyn. Judge Leibowitz, in view of your experience as a judge and also as a very brilliant trial lawyer, I think you have a better insight, probably, into the problem of organized crime than anyone else in New York City. It has always been my belief that crime is basically a social problem, and therefore the responsibility of the community as a whole. So many of our dangerous criminals are graduates of neighborhood gangs and in many instances they were attracted to these gangs because their home surroundings were poor, housing was bad or the families had poor backgrounds and gave them bad family life. I wish that you, Judge Leibowitz, in view of your experience on the bench and at the bar

would take a moment to trace the development of crime and rackets in this city, keeping in mind the social implications. After all, New York isn't very different from other leading cities in the country, just a little bigger perhaps. Judge Leibowitz.

[Samuel Leibowitz:] Mrs. Roosevelt it would certainly take hours and hours to-to say or do justice to the question which you propound, but it may be of interest eh to the audience to have just a simple little explanation how a racket starts. What is a racket?

[ER:] Yes [unclear]

[Samuel Leibowitz:] Well let us assume there are two icemen, we don't have icemen anymore it seems in the large cities we have refrigerators but let's turn our minds back a few years to the-to the era of the iceman. The two icemen are pedaling ice on one street and uh one engages in a fisted controversy with the other for the control of uh the customer for a certain business. And there they're fighting on the street along comes Mr. Racketeer, and he says, "Gentlemen why should you fight? Why should you punch each other? Let me take charge and I'll tell you what I'll do, we'll form a little association, all the icemen will be invited to join the association and we'll let you have a certain piece of territory and your competitor another piece of territory. And if some person who isn't a member of that association attempts to, to use the vernacular, muscle in, well we'll take care of them. We'll have a few goons, as they call them, you strong arm gentlemen to take care of them, to deal with them. And so these icemen join this association and Mr. Racketeer becomes the president or the chairman of the board of directors and for forever then on these two icemen must pay dues, so called dues, eh tribute, graft, which the slimy racketeer pockets. Now that's how a racket starts. There are many variations of it of course but that's its-in its simplest form Mrs. Roosevelt. Of course well it's the public that suffers, every housewife who goes into a grocery store, a butcher shop and puts down her-puts down her dollar on the table a good portion of that uh dollar goes to some sleazy, dirty, miserable, leech of a racketeer who is there on the docks. And a man that sends the merchandise to New York must pay tribute to that dirty racketeer before the merchandise can be removed off the dock. (6:36)

[ER:] It really takes away doesn't it Judge, all freedom of action from people, for instance no one would have uh would be able uh to start a new business.

[Samuel Leibowitz:] Generally speaking that's so.

[ER:] That really is quite an-an outrageous situation, you couldn't have anything. Much worse than that it seems to me. Thank you very much. Now Mr. McDonald, I think that one of the very important things in a democracy is its ability to examine, and correct shortcomings within the framework of normal government procedure. Typical of this American tradition of doing something about things when they seem to be getting out of hand is the King's County, New York investigation, which you as District Attorney started ten months ago. I wish that you would tell us, briefly, Mr. McDonald, what brought you to start this investigation? We are all so interested to know what its purpose is and aims are. (7:50)

[Miles McDonald:] Mrs. Roosevelt, in December of last year the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, which is the main publication in the County of Kings which is coterminous with Brooklyn, published a series of articles dealing with crime within the county. These articles alleged that gamblers, racketeers and criminal syndicates were operating openly and notoriously within the county, with the protection, connivance and consent of the police department, or a small segment of the police department. The articles were specific in nature, one of the articles I recall alleged that twelve million dollars a year was paid to the police for protecting these rackets. The articles were written by a man named Ed Reed, a reporter of ability and integrity. The Brooklyn Eagle is not a sensational newspaper, it's a conservative newspaper, and I realized at once that if I was to do my duty in accordance with my oath I would have to start an immediate investigation to determine whether these articles were true or false. If they were false they had to be

branded so immediately so the confidence of the people could be restored. If they were true then every avenue of investigation had to be explored to determine the people who were responsible for the condition for only by so doing could we eradicate the condition. Now you know Mrs. Roosevelt that a District Attorney is not primarily a law enforcement agent, he's a prosecutor and with a few assistants and a few investigators the District Attorney can't possibly stamp out crime or gambling, but when the police department fails in its duty to do it the District Attorney must step in, lay the situation bare to the public and then expect that the community consciousness will step in and remedy the condition. Once the condition is remedied the District Attorney should step aside and let the police, who really bear the responsibility go ahead with it. (9:56)

[ER:] It takes a great deal of courage to do that doesn't it?

[Miles McDonald:] Not if you look to what your oath requires you to do.

[ER:] Yes, but even living up to your oath uh sometimes takes courage [ER Laughs].

[Miles McDonald:] There can't be much compromise between right and wrong.

[ER:] I've often thought that uh a Judge and the District attorney had uh had to have that backbone of courage that goes ahead without fear because uh it can't be easy.

[Miles McDonald:] It isn't but no one should be a District Attorney if they don't have the courage to go ahead.

[ER:] Well thank you very much Mr. McDonald. Now I think we've covered the background of today's program rather well. I'd like to get to the specific questions that have been asked me. I have as my guests some people who've written in particularly interesting letters. Dr. Bluestone won't you join us. Thank you, very glad to see you, sit down. May I read your letter and [Dr. Bluestone: You certainly may.] then I think I'll ask Mr. McDonald and Judge Leibowitz to answer it. This letter says: I'm from Brooklyn and have been following the King's County investigations very closely. I think that the Brooklyn Eagle deserves a lot of credit for its series on corruption in Brooklyn. However, I wonder if the investigation will accomplish anything or if the gambling rings won't just move on to other cities until the heat is off here. Perhaps one way to stop the racketeers would be to legalize betting or would a mandatory sentence against bookmaking via method of control? Now Dr. Blu-uh-Bluestone I'm going to ask Judge Leibowitz to start our answering now. (11:54)

[Samuel Leibowitz:] Well I've given the question of legalized gambling very serious and much thought. I was in Reno two years ago and walking along the streets at seven o'clock in the morning you could see the washwomen, the scrubwomen, the shower women standing there uh with the hand on the handle of the one armed bandits, putting their quarters which they slaved all night to earn into tho-those machines. I'm not yet ready-ready to surrender to uh vice and say we can't do a job. About imposing jail sentences, under present auspices if you propose jail sentences on book makers that would be just one facet of the problem. The result would be that the crooked cop would uh jack up his price to uh avoid arresting the uh the bookmaker or the cop might jack up the price to have a stand in take the place of the uh big time book maker.

[ER:] So you're not-you're really not for—I'm interested because I have had um rather facetiously I said in my column that possibly the answer was legalized gambling. I was brought up to be opposed to all gambling so personally I am but I have said this just in the light of what we had to do finally in prohibition and so forth. And I got promptly letters from Las Vegas and Reno saying don't believe this

would help to legalize so I'm—that's why I'm interested in what you two gentlemen feel, how much you—

[Samuel Leibowitz:] May I just say one word [ER: Yes.] Please. If you legalize gambling Mrs. Roosevelt the next step will be legalizing prostitution and the third step will be legalizing all different kinds of vice. And you'll have our youngsters walk by the gambling stores and be attracted into these gambling stores. I'm thinking of the youngsters more than I am of the adults.

[ER:] Yes. (14:15)

[Miles McDonald:] There's an article that appears in the Northwestern University Review on Criminal Law and Criminology, it traces the history of legalized gambling in the United States and points out that where you have legalized gambling the condition is worse than where you have it uh forbidden by a law. Now I think the investigation will have a salutary effect because I think it will alert intelligent and honest police department using modern methods of criminal detection that we can keep organized crime and organized gambling to a minimum. I think that under Police Commissioner Murphy we're going to have that type of a police department. But of course if the community conscious-consciousness becomes dulled you go back again to corruption. But that's something that happens in any form of human activity. As long as the people want law enforcement of this type they'll get it. The minute they stop and don't want it it's going to fall down again.

[ER:] It comes back to the same old question, uh if the people really want it doesn't it?

[Miles McDonald:] That's—exactly—

[ER:] That's always the way. Well thank you Dr. Bluestone, I hope that answers your question and now I will ask Mrs. White who's letter comes next to come over. How do you do Mrs. White? Mrs. Josh White has written us a letter with an interesting question. She says, "With all this talk of crime and crime investigations I'd like to know what is being done to keep my children from the influence of criminals. I have a family of five and we live in the city. As you can imagine it isn't easy to keep my eye on them all the time. If you believe the papers, gangsters approach high school youngsters and try to use them in their dishonest ways, gangs of young children are even formed and some of them do real harm. Isn't it important to do something to protect our youngsters against crime?"

[Break 16:07-16:44]

[ER:] Now I'd like to say a word but both you gentlemen can break in if you want to add. It seems to me that one of the important things with young children is to keep them busy and that's hard in a city because um there aren't as many healthful uh pastimes for children as in the country, but I can't help believing that a very good thing would be if we could do a great deal more more with our vacant lot in town. I saw in Denmark last summer, and I understand there's one in Stockholm, and lately uh I think McCole's magazine has promoted one in Minnesota. It was nothing but a vacant lot with uh uh board fence around it and the kids there had everything that you ordinarily see on a scrap heap. They had bits of old lumber and bits of old pipe they were using tools at an age-- I said to the director aren't you afraid that child is going to hurt himself with that tool and she said, "Oh no. They learn before they're allowed to have the tool how to use it-it and the older ones teach the younger ones." They were building houses, they were building caves they had all kinds of—they had an old car that they pulled in and were tinkering with it. And it was nothing in the world but a pile of junk and it was called a junk playground. But the kids were having the most marvelous time and I came to the conclusion that that might be one-- you would have to have highly trained supervisors but once you've had someone who trained the older kids uh you-you could have them run it themselves and their own rules, they had a sort of self-government or election for

the boys who had charge of different things and I thought it perfectly wonderful. And my-my theory has always been that Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do and that the busier you can keep youngsters whose imaginations are working all the time the better off they are. And uh then you know they're either there or they're home in the times when they're not in school. So it seems-it seems to me that that might be something which if we really could promote would answer the anxieties of-of many mothers in a city. Now what do you two gentlemen think? (19:37)

[Miles McDonald:] I think that's excellent in its way but I think it uh causes more fundamental—I think we have to get back to teaching some form of morality uh for all of the children and that's the normal guide and we've raised a generation that hasn't got a normal morality. The only norm that they know is will I get caught or won't I get caught and I think you have to get back a little bit further in your fundamentals and the other things will help but if they can't recognize right and wrong in the beginning [ER: Ah yes--] then—

[ER:] That's essential but that has to be done uh in the home if possible and in a good home that usually is done. What do you think sir?

[Samuel Leibowitz:] I agree with what district Attorney McDonald just said, that the question is uh more basic and fundamental than merely playgrounds. Uh it seem uh that over the years the age incidents of crime and criminals has been steadily decreasing, people have attributed to the wars, I don't think that the wars caused it at all. Uh I remember when I was a kid lawyer, first uh entering practice at the criminal bar. When the clerk would call out the name of uh a prospective defendant on arraignment day charged with robbery, a murderer up the steps of adult a man of thirty five or forty, thirty. And today as I sit in that criminal court in Brooklyn on arraignment day when we have thirty, forty, or fifty cases come up for arraignment, that is new cases, you'll find a veritable procession of kids. The walls of our prisons are bulging with youngsters, with kids, and that's been a-a uh a uh something that we've seen over the years, so that the child today is living in a different milieu than he did years ago. The-the home life has been uh [ER: You-you] disapated—

[ER:] You feel that it's the teaching of standards of ethics and of religious uh standards in the home. [Samuel Leibowitz: Definitely.] for-for morality. (21:44)

[Samuel Leibowitz:] Definitely, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] Well I think that's an interesting question. I hope you had your question answered [Mrs. John White: I certainly did, thank you very much.] Mrs. White. And now I'm going onto the next one. Mr. John Coleman will you come while I, how do you do sir [John Coleman: How do you do Mrs. Roosevelt?] I'm glad to see you. Uh Mr. Coleman has asked something that I think is—you will be interested in. It's addressed to Judge Leibowitz, "I'm a retired New York City detective and I had thirty years of honorable service on the force. When I started I was paid a thousand dollars a year and when I retired I was earning just about seventy dollars a week in take home pay. But I managed to bring up a family of three children and give them a college education. This wasn't easy. I think the present investigation are trying to make the whole police force of honest, loyal men like myself, take the wrap in the public eye for racketeers and a few dishonest cops. Isn't there something that can be done to restore our good name?" Judge Leibowitz will you try to answer that?

[Samuel Leibowitz:] Well I've known Detective Coleman for a great number of years and I have the highest admiration uh for him and respect for him. He was a great detective and a fine public servant. And he will forgive me if I use some good, straight, plain talk. I think there's uh business um saying that the whole force is maligned is just uh just sheer nonsense. Now if you have a crooked uh bank employee and the boss investigates him the other honest employees don't set up the cry, the claim that the whole force

has been maligned. We've had thousands and millions of people in our armed services during the war, we—we have them now. Of course you'll find a few miscreants and scalawags among uh a great body of men, that's inevitable but uh the decent men of the department, and I've spoken with so many of them on the street corners, they're cheering this investigation. The honest cop wants this investigation and why? You take the poor fellow that stands on a hard corner on uh the middle of the summer, with the sun beating down on him great long hours, directing traffic, smelling that gasoline all day, taking it into his system. Uh he doesn't know from moment to moment when two trucks passing in either direction will crush him to death. He stands there on that payment. Now he can't take home a sufficient amount of pay to put butter on his table and buy his wife a dress and his kids' shoes. The pay is too low, it's miserably low, and a way must be found to raise the pay of our police officers. And right for that one hundred and one hundred percent there's plenty of nonsense that can be eliminated in city government. It's money that can be saved to pay these policemen a decent wage. They don't want a tally to tolerate the crook, the decent cop and their numbers in legion. Ninety-nine percent of our policemen are decent public servants and we have the finest police force in the world. There's something that can describe a New York policeman Mrs. Roosevelt and that word is class. You can travel all over the country and there's something about a New York policeman that speaks class. Now what I would recommend is this. First we've got to have an honest man in City Hall, all these investigations mean nothing because we've had investigations in the past and as soon as the investigation is over as soon as it's finished the crooks and the grafters are there back to making their settles bigger and better than ever. You've got to have an honest man in-in the City Hall.

[ER:] You're really answering Mr. Colman [laughing]

[Samuel Leibowitz:] And you've got to have a two fisted and footloose police commissioner, who'll run a clean department, a fellow with two fists. Now I was very much uh delighted this morning when I picked up the newspaper and I read the suggestion of Judge Pecora to the effect that there should be a commission organized, appointed by the Mayor, serving without pay to uh supervise the police department. I'm in favor of the idea but I think a commission of that kind should not be appointed by the Mayor. It should be a citizen's commission, appointed by the-the chambers of commerce, the labor organizations and other civic bodies. And I think that you've got to have, in addition to that, what may turn out to be a permanent Grand Jury, and I'm seriously thinking as to whether or not uh we don't have to have a permanent Grand Jury whose attention will be devoted, not only to graft in the police department, lord knows there's plenty of graft in other departments in the city of New York. And finally I would see to it that the promotions in the police department were based solely on merit. Uh not chauffeurs becoming commissioners overnight, and the Mayor's body guard becoming a Police Commissioner overnight. The District Attorney mentioned civic consciousness, it's a hard thing to arouse civic consciousness in such a large city. (27:27)

[ER:] You've done a wonderful—

[Samuel Leibowitz:] These are the answers that I have for the-for Detective Coleman question.

[ER:] Well you've done a wonderful job on telling us those things today. And I wonder if we have time for one more. Thank you Mr. Coleman and I wonder if Mr. Max Schwartz would come very quickly let me give his question [cough]. Mr. Schwartz says, "Being a taxi driver I have to listen to a lot of opinions," and um his real question is he wants to ask the district attorney whether the-the real corruption in our government because of political bosses, control the guys who are doing the investigating. Now Mr. McDonald can you answer it? In two words.

[Miles McDonald:] I'm pleased to answer that question frankly and fairly. At no time since this investigation started has any member of the democratic organization of which I'm pleased to be a member

tried to interfere or dissuade me from the investigation. On the other hand, it's quite the contrary. Both John Cashmore, the leader of my party previously and [ER: Now-] Frank Simmons the present—

[ER:] I'm sorry but our time is up. I want to thank Judge Leibowitz and before closing and Mr. McDonald, before closing I'd like to remind you for a minute of last week's program. And it was in honor of the United Nations and today we're celebrating the fifth anniversary by having a cake which has been given me and I'm very sorry everyone can't join in eating the cake, but I shall be very glad and hope that those who are with me would do so. (29:03)

[Outro Music]

[Announcer:] If you have any questions that you would like answered on Mrs. Roosevelt's television program why don't you write them in to her. The topic of discussion next week will be the coming November elections. Guest on the program will be the famous political prophet Louis H. Bean. Be with us then next week at the same time for another program in the series Mrs. Roosevelt Meets the Public. Portions of today's program which originated from the Park Sheraton Hotel were on motion picture film.

(29:51)

[Outro Music]

[Announcer:] NBC television.

[NBC bells]

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