

Eleanor Roosevelt Oral History Project
Justine Wise Polier

Polier, Justine Wise

Interviews conducted September 14 and December 8, 1977

77 pages, combined total

Conditions of Access- Open

Biography- Justine Wise Polier, the daughter of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, has been active for five decades in various social reform activities. She was a workmen's compensation referee for the New York State Department of Labor from 1929 to 1934. She served as a judge with the Domestic Relations Court of New York from 1935 to 1962, and with the New York State Family Court from 1962 to 1973. Her special concern has been for the welfare of children.

Subjects Discussed:

Interview of September 14, 1977: Early life and influences; her work at the Women's Trade Union League; Mrs. George Norris; Rose Schneiderman; Pauline Newman; Mary Dreier; Mrs. Roosevelt's manner, and what the other women thought of her; how Judge Polier met Mrs. Roosevelt; she becomes a workmen's compensation referee in the New York State Department of Labor; criticism of Frances Perkins; the labor movement in the late 1920s; Mrs. Roosevelt's work for children and German-Jewish refugee children; Cardinal Spellman; the U.S. Committee for European Children; the State Department; Mrs. Roosevelt and Jews; the Office of Civilian Defense; Mrs. Roosevelt's resignation address; security investigations of government employees; Thomas Emerson; reflections on Mrs. Roosevelt and on her relationship with FDR and on her character and early life; Malvina Thompson; Wiltwyck School; Anna Roosevelt.

Interview of December 8, 1977: Mrs. Roosevelt's character; her influence on Congress; the Full Employment Act (1945); her battle against prejudice and discrimination; her interest in and friendship for the Jewish people; the visit of the Ambassador of Morocco, and the freeing of the Jews at Casablanca; the civil rights movement; Joseph McCarthy; President Eisenhower; the Cold War; the relationship of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt; Mrs. Roosevelt's religious views; Rabbi Stephen Wise's view of FDR; FDR and Zionism.

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INTERVIEW WITH

The
Honorable Justine Wise Polier

By

Dr. Thomas Soapes
Oral Historian

On

September 14, 1977

For

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

This interview is being conducted with the Honorable Justine Wise Polier in her office in New York City on September 14, 1977. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Roosevelt Library. Present for the interview are Judge Polier and Dr. Soapes.

DR. SOAPES: I suppose the first thing we should do is identify you, your background. The most important point, I suppose, is that you are the daughter of the Rabbi Stephen Wise.

JUDGE POLIER: Right. And Louise Wise, both of whom knew Mrs. Roosevelt very well.

DR. SOAPES: I know that he had a great deal of interest in child welfare and labor. Is that where you picked up your interest in those fields?

JUDGE POLIER: I'm sure that it influenced me. It was certainly one of the important influences.

DR. SOAPES: What was your first contact with the Roosevelt family?

JUDGE POLIER: My recollection is that, after I had dropped out of various colleges and came to New York for my last year at Barnard and Columbia, I wanted at that time to go into the labor movement and was planning to work in factories the following year. So I volunteered to work at the Women's Trade Union League, an organization that existed in a small brown house, now destroyed, on Lexington Avenue between 34th and 35th Streets. The purposes [1] of the league were to get the craft unions of the AF of L--there was no CIO of course--to admit women workers to the unions, to encourage women workers to join trade unions, and to develop an educational program for women workers after working hours, since they worked six days a week. Classes or groups were usually in the evening. And there was a very interesting small group of women who ran the program. Mrs. Roosevelt was quite active and came down from time to time--(I believe at that time FDR was in Albany.) That was in 1923-'24. Mrs. Roosevelt wasn't the most important member of that group. She was still very shy, and we younger people didn't quite understand her manner or her way of talking which seemed a bit remote. But she had a very good and close friend whom I recall most distinctly, Mrs. Gordon Norrie, another New York aristocrat, who had become a political liberal, dissatisfied with the Democratic Party, and deeply committed to the rights of labor. She was a very important force in that group.

Then there were two fascinating women workers who came from a different world, Rose Schneiderman, who was called "the redheaded leader of the women's movement," who was on the picket line, in strikes and had been active after the terrible disaster of the Triangle Fire, when many women workers had been locked in and died during the fire. She was a fiery and fascinating person who had come up from utter poverty on the lower east side and was [2] afraid of nothing. She was able to challenge and move people like Mrs. Norrie and Mrs. Roosevelt and others to understand what was happening to girls and women in factories. Then there was another very strong person, Pauline Newman, who, I think, affected the thinking of Mrs. Roosevelt. She began the health services for workers and ultimately set up the first health clinic, I think, in the International Ladies Garment Workers. Then there was perhaps the most fascinating of all, Mary Dreier who was either the daughter or granddaughter of a general in the Civil War, and came from an old New York family in Brooklyn Heights. She was able to bridge all chasms between these very different people whether it was on the picket line or in the parlor. And the workers called her "the blue-eyed goddess of the working woman." Petite, a beautiful person, with a marvelous sense of humor and a great love of people, she was completely at home with and accepted by both groups. I worked there and later continued my work there because my best friend, Bertha Paret--who later became the wife of the well-known Thomas I. Emerson of Yale, (the great expert on the first amendment)--became executive secretary of the Women's Trade Union League. So even after that first year I had ongoing contacts with the League. The year following my graduation, or right after my graduation, the third party ticket came up, the Norris-LaGuardia party, which amazingly was able to collect five million votes in America. Mrs. Norrie asked if I would go upstate and organize the labor [3] groups for Norris-LaGuardia, my first job, hardly a job, but fascinating work. Mrs. Roosevelt of course remained staunch in her loyalty to the Democratic Party, so she wasn't part of that. But it was at the League that our relationship began, although I had met the Roosevelts through my parents before that.

SOAPES: You said that Mrs. Roosevelt, in those early days, was still very shy. Were there other characteristics that stood out to you at that early date?

POLIER: When I was in my most iconoclastic mood, yes. She seemed too much above things, too stilted, rather inarticulate, unable to communicate with the group. Some of the young people would make fun of her and the way she did things. She was friendly but she did not develop close relationships such as came naturally to Mary Dreier.

SOAPES: In other words, those who were the most liberal thought her a bit too conservative?

POLIER: I think rather that at that time Mrs. Roosevelt didn't have sufficient self-confidence to share what she was concerned about with people in a simple way or to seem to be listening as she later did do to a fantastic extent. I think it is one of the strange and wonderful ways in which she changed.

SOAPES: Did you take part in Franklin Roosevelt's campaign for [4] governor in '28?

POLIER: No.

SOAPES: Or in the Smith campaign that year?

POLIER: Well, in the campaign in '24. I had a very fascinating experience because we were about to go to Europe, when my father got a call that [William Jennings] Bryan was going to come up and make an attack on blacks and on the League of Nations, and they wanted somebody who could answer. This was the Ku Klux Klan period. And father was very tied up--and I also think, looking back, that he wanted me to get more education. When they asked him to come so that he could answer Bryan they also found a rule that nobody could speak who wasn't a delegate. Father said he could not come down and sit in the hall because he wouldn't have the time. He told them he would come when needed, if they would let me sit in his place and call him if Bryan took the podium.

So I had the great pleasure by sheer accident of sitting next to the unbelievably handsome Franklin D. Roosevelt. And that's when I really got to know him. Bryan never went through with it, and so I had the education and father didn't have to make a speech.

SOAPES: DO you remember anything about Franklin's response to the convention in '20?

POLIER: No, not really. I think it was quite a learning experience [5] for me because I had been on the Intercollegiate Liberal League representing Bryn Mawr and Corliss Lamont had represented Harvard, and we got to know each other. And he was sitting in a box with the Morgan crowd, and we met and chatted from time to time. He said, "I don't know what you are so excited about. It's all been arranged. John W. Davis is going to get the nomination." So I learned a little bit from that too. No, FDR was just utterly charming, very handsome, with a delightful sense of humor, making people love him. People flocked to him. He was very young, this was of course before he was ill.

SOAPES: In 1929, I believe, you went into the New York State Department of Labor. You had a position there, I believe, as a referee.

POLIER: Compensation, workmen's compensation, yes.

SOAPES: Was that as a Roosevelt appointee?

POLIER: No and yes. I had finished Yale Law School and I had never intended to practice law or go into commercial law. I was tremendously interested in social legislation, and I had as my major my last year at college done a study on the relationship between compensation payments and the loss of earning power of women who had been injured. The only social legislation we had in those days was workmen's compensation. So I decided I would [6] like to see how it operated, and father spoke to Roosevelt about that. He was thrilled and he said that most of the referees were political hacks and he would love to see me get into it. Only a few of them were lawyers. And so he suggested my name to Frances Perkins who was New York State Commissioner of Labor.

She was not very happy about it because there never had been a woman and I guess she didn't know how it would be received. And also I don't think she was particularly eager to have an energetic young gal come in. So she stalled and finally offered me a job as an investigator. I declined, saying I hadn't studied law to be an investigator. Finally FDR put the heat on, and I was appointed and it was a very worthwhile experience. Many, many years later at a dinner where we were both speaking Miss Perkins announced that she had great pride because she had launched me in public life.

SOAPES: Did you work frequently and closely with Frances Perkins in this position?

POLIER: Well, I was so shocked by what I found there, because at that time under the law workers had to go to a doctor chosen by the employer. Then the employers transferred the right to choose the doctor over to their insurance companies. The insurance companies had stables of doctors who would come in and testify that the man wasn't disabled or that the disability wasn't due to the accident in about eighty percent of the difficult cases. The only [7] workers who had their own physicians were members of the building trade unions. They had their stable, and in the same controverted cases their doctors would testify that the man was totally disabled due to the same accident. So, I felt I was living in a court of perjury and great unfairness. At that time I met and got to know Howard Cullman who had been appointed by FDR to do a study of workmen's compensation. We talked about it and I questioned why injured workers weren't getting decent medical care and why they were subjected to a cross barrage of perjured testimony. And so he and Dr. Eugene Poole, a great surgeon, then asked if I would do a study. I agreed to do a study on my own time if they would provide money for a secretary and a research person. When I told Frances Perkins that I had agreed to do this she was really very upset and said she couldn't believe that people lied, and tried to dissuade me. She said if I had extra time I should read poetry. Anyway, I did the study and that led to a change in the compensation law of New York. It gave the right to workers to choose their doctors and to the state to review and check on the reports.

SOAPES: Miss Perkins of course, later on, when she was in the Cabinet was not the most popular person with the American labor movement.

POLIER: No. [8]

SOAPES: Were you able to see this attitude that made her unpopular with them when she was working at the state level?

POLIER: Well I think she was a very decent person who got into the labor world through the consumer's movement. But she was uptight, personally--her tri-cornered hats and her correctness and she seemed very moralistic. So there was a lack of empathy. I think she tried to do an honest job, and was very able but too conventional to permit or evoke great warmth.

It was a very interesting period and I think Miss Perkins grew and made some very important contributions. But she was not a person who evoked love or warmth from wide circles. She was very New England in her strictness, correctness, manners. And of course I was in a rebellious stage and probably irritated her beyond words and probably didn't do things right or as she felt they should be done.

SOAPES: What was the labor movement's reaction to Roosevelt in his period as governor?

POLIER: That was such a different period. It's hard to even recall the labor movement in terms of the narrow framework in which it then operated. As I recall, and I may be wrong, in the early efforts for old age pensions (when Abraham Epstein's dream began to be shared--father helped a great deal on that)--I don't think organized labor played any real role in the beginnings. Now I [9] don't mean that there was not support from people like Sidney Hillman, Dubinsky and La Guardia. But, the labor movement in the state was controlled by the building trades. So if you talk about organized labor you have to talk about one

thing. If you talk about reform off-shoots in the beginning of liberal trade unionism, Amalgamated, ILG, which weren't regarded as traditional labor unions and were led by difficult newcomers in the field, that's different. I think that one would have to break it down that way.

SOAPES: Did you have much contact with Mrs. Roosevelt while she was in Albany during the governorship period?

POLIER: No, not much. Only occasionally on one of these issues, and later on children's problems through my work on the court.

SOAPES: And then after that when she's into the White House--

POLIER: There was really a substantial hiatus in our relationship. Matter of fact when I went back and looked at the letters from the beginning of the '30s it was alternately "Dear Judge Polier" or it was "Justine," it was much more formal. But she was always responsive to anything in the children's field throughout the period. I was trying to make some notes this morning on the many ways in which that happened and I can't date them all without doing much looking back. Of course as soon as the defense program [10] got started her leadership and concern for the care of children when women went into the factories, really was the beginning for the subsequent Day Care-Headstart movements. Not in those words--Day Care was used. She was concerned with the development of services to mothers when the children were really "latch-key" children as women went into factories. This was even before Pearl Harbor.

Mrs. R was very concerned with what was happening at the community level during that period. I found a fascinating letter in which she asked a friend of hers and mine, Agnes Inglis, to do a study of Dutchess County to see what was happening to people at the local level as the defense program moved along.

I also ran across last night a column of Mrs. R in which she took up the question of capital punishment of an adolescent Puerto Rican boy. She questioned the use of capital punishment, She called my husband one evening and said she had just seen Donna Felicia, the mayoress of San Juan, who had told her about this boy who was about to be executed, and asked Shad to look into it. Shad went over and saw Donna Felicia. We spent the night reading that record and both of us were horrified. The child's mother was mentally ill and his father had abandoned them. He had been put in an orphanage in Puerto Rico where, as I recall, the punishment for wetting himself at the age of four was to sit on an anthill. Shad agreed to take it on, of course without fee, and wrote [11] a brief and presented it to [Governor Nelson A.] Rockefeller, who commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. Recently, Governor Carey ordered that this boy after seventeen years should be paroled. He had done college work while in Sing Sing, taught Spanish speaking prisoners English, and was not regarded as psychotic or a danger to the community. This is but one more example of the way Mrs. R responded in an independent way and a very thoughtful way to the question of capital punishment.

All through her letters or notes to me I find questions--"Somebody's asked me to help on this. Could you tell me what you think about it?" Or, "What you think I could do?" It was always a request for help or advice on whether she should move in and how she could move in for a troubled person. They were like small mosaics that helped build a larger picture of the needs of children. Mrs. R also became very active in the Citizens Committee for Children as well as on issues of discrimination. All the way through there were searching questions. I did work with her consistently on Wiltwyck. The last thing Mrs. R did was to send out the

appeal for the new campus when she was very ill that last summer. She was active in the Citizens Committee for Children having become interested in it when Charlotte Carr was the director and Adele Levy was the President. Later she suggested the possibility of Trude Lash coming into the work, and she became even more active because of her deep friendship with Joe Lash and her [12] friendship with Trude.

The hiatus in any ongoing relationship of any substance continued until the Hitler days. Then in the 1930s a group of us got together to see if we could still save some 10,000 German-Jewish children whom we were told we could get out if we could get the quota waived--the American quota. And Dr. Marion E. Kenworthy, the great child psychiatrist and a very dear friend began to have meetings Sunday night at her home. [Benjamin] Cohen--who was on the cover page of this week's New Republic, as a gray eminence in the FDR days, a marvelous person--though he was in the midst of everything used to come up every Sunday night with Clarence Pickett of the American Friends Service Committee and Marshall Field, and Dr. Viola Bernard, and Adele Levy--I can't recall all the names. We tried to muster the support of the important religious figures in America. And the one person who refused to help was Cardinal Spellman, so we had to go to Chicago and Bishop Sheil, a great Catholic bishop came as the representative of Catholics. We discovered that we would have to have some federal legislation to secure admission of the children. In the voluminous correspondence on this subject I found some fascinating letters from Mrs. Roosevelt. She was of course very responsive. As Marion Kenworthy reminded me recently, while seeing a patient she would be called by a secretary who said Mrs. Roosevelt wanted to speak to her and she'd go out. The calls were from the White [13] House--no secretary, and she heard: "This is Eleanor Roosevelt," to ask should I do this or that or to give some advice. Mrs. R did everything she could to save these children.

I found a couple of fascinating letters that go back to '39 on this subject. In one dated January 4, 1939 Mrs. R wrote:

My husband says that you had better go to work at once and get two people of opposite parties in the House and in the Senate and have them jointly get agreement on the legislation which you want for bringing in children. The State Department is only afraid of what Congress will say to them and, therefore, if you remove that fear the State Department will make no objections. He advises that you choose your people rather carefully and if possible get all the Catholic support you can.

Sincerely,
Eleanor Roosevelt

This is just one more indication of the way the President and Mrs. R worked together. In effect, she was told--alright, go ahead, but be careful about this and that so it will be effective.

And then I found another letter about a month later.

February 28, 1939

I tried to reach you on the telephone in New York, but was not able to do so.

I talked with Mr. James McDonald and he told me he is in favor of the bill personally. He has been told that pressing the President at the present time may mean that the people in Congress who have bills to cut the quota will present

them immediately and that might precipitate a difficult situation which would result in cutting the quota by ninety percent, and that of course would be very serious. Therefore the committee [McDonald's Committee on Refugees] hesitates to recommend support of the bill and they do not know whether this will be the result or not. [14]

I also talked to Sumner Welles. He said that personally he is in favor of the bill and feels as I do about it but that it would not be advisable for the President to come out, because if the President did and was defeated it would be very bad. I told him I did not think it was any question of the President's actually coming out but he was anxious to see the bill go through.

I cabled the President and he said I could come out and I could talk to Mr. Welles and say he would be pleased to have the bill go through. But he did not want to say anything publicly at the present time.

Mr. Welles feels very strongly that pressing the bill at the present time might do exactly what Mr. McDonald says because his desk is flooded with protests accusing the State Department of conniving in allowing a great many more Jewish people than the quota permits to enter the country under various pretenses.

I asked, if the bill was simply held in abeyance until the time when the country had actually prepared a plan for all people who were refugees, if then the whole situation would not be clarified by setting some kind of a time limit such as the end of the education period when these youngsters would go to whatever settlement was being developed and rejoin their families or be assigned to the care of some family over here until they became independent. He said that would of course make it very much simpler, but he was not inclined to recommend pressing the President at present.

Of course I leave it entirely up to your good judgment what should happen and I know the President will be glad to have someone keep informed about it after I go away.

Very sincerely,
Eleanor Roosevelt

I think that was a very interesting and telling letter in different ways.

Then of course the hearings were held and the attacks began--the American Legion attacked, and we did not receive as strong Catholic support as we should have gotten, though Bishop Sheil [15] and some other Catholic leaders tried to be helpful.

SOAPES: What was the source of the Catholic objection?

POLIER: Well you know it's a very strange thing to try and analyze that because at that time as for a long time thereafter Cardinal Spellman was the representative in the Catholic church--there were other cardinals but he was at the helm. I personally feel and I know my father felt that he was profoundly anti-Semitic. He had no feeling for helping or lifting his finger to help due to his own prejudices. I think he pretty much controlled and set the tone for the right wing and the hierarchy within the church.

SOAPES: So it was Spellman who was responsible for the Catholic lack of support?

POLIER: I think for a great deal of it. I think he could have changed the mood of the church. Of course it was also a period in which there was a great deal of anti-Semitism in this country, which we forget about, with Father [Charles E.] Coughlin, the buy-Christian boycott, and the Ku Klux Klan as well as the strong isolationist movement behind the opposition.

We had some very good support, a marvelous group of human beings including leaders of the American Friends Service Committee, liberal Protestant churchmen, citizen groups. At the hearing, after Dorothy Thompson spoke in support of the bill, a woman who [16] got up looking like Madam Hokinson and said, "If you admit these Jewish children from Germany, born with hate in their hearts you will find that the women of America have fangs to defend their young."

My ten-year-old son who was with me, said in a whisper that carried: "That lady sure has fangs." The place almost broke up.

Well it was a very very unhappy period and the bill was defeated. Of course, the children died.

Then following that defeat, when the war came the same group that had supported the bill to save German Jewish children, organized the U.S. Committee for European Children. It's aim was to bring English children and rescue European children who had reached southern France or Spain. It was organized by Marshall Field. It undertook to get boats to Spain to rescue children who had escaped from Germany to France and over the Pyrenees, bring them to the U.S. and place them in foster homes in this country. Mrs. Roosevelt was extremely active. She may have been co-chairman with Marshall Field or Honorary Chairman. I don't remember.

In the correspondence a marvelous correspondence after 1942, the letters were all, dear Justine--and affectionate.

I am enclosing a copy of a letter which I have just sent to Sumner Welles. I will let you know as soon as I get an answer. It was grand having another chance to see you.

Affectionately, [17]

Dear Sumner,

This memo seems perfectly shocking to me. [I'd sent over a story of what had happened in the sinking of the Struma, the loss of all the people who escaped Hitler's Germany only to be drowned as they neared Palestine.] We have taken British children and I think the British government ought to pay some attention to us in return.

They have set a very low quota in Palestine, and the Arabs have agreed. So why because of a technicality of not having visas when these people come from countries where they cannot get visas anyway they should be turned back, I cannot see. It just seems to be cruelty beyond words.

After all, these are anti-Axis refugees and they certainly will help us rather than the Axis. From what I read in the papers, we may be needing some help in that part of the world before long.

Very cordially yours,

This letter is dated March 9, 1942.

Then she sent me the second letter March 13.

Dear Sumner,

I have your letter of March 12. Why not try to give asylum and guarantee that such refugees will continue to Africa and South America? This policy is so cruel that if it were generally known in this country it would increase the dislike of Great Britain which is already too prevalent.

Cordially yours,

And so it went, with ongoing responsiveness to human tragedies and the attempts to help. But I think generally, though, very clear about it, what she would want to do, action was taken after discussion with FDR.

SOAPES: The tone of the letters that you just read, especially the last two to Sumner Welles is very sharp, pointed-[18]

POLIER: Which is very rare.

SOAPES: I was going to ask you that--

POLIER: Yes. They are the only ones I've found that, have that sharpness. I do remember one day when my husband and I were at lunch after FDR came back from North Africa. Something came up and she said about either Welles or Breckinridge [Long]--I cannot remember which--"Franklin, you know he's a fascist."

And really cross, he said, "I've told you, Eleanor, you must not say that."

She said, "Well, maybe I shouldn't say it, but he is."

I think this leads me to something that I thought of that I would like to mention. We were talking one evening during the early war days at the White House. I used to stay either at the White House or at the Emersons', depending on how late we worked. One evening I asked if Mrs. R could help to get the State Department to end the delays they were imposing during the early days of the war that impeded rescue operations for Jews still in Europe. I told her what was happening. Just before the war broke out my father had been in Paris, and learned that the affidavits that he had sent to get people out were being held up by the U.S. Consul in Marseilles. He knew what would happen to them when the Germans came in. So he took a car, drove to Marseilles and went to see the consul. When my father said, "I understand you're not honoring [19] my affidavits," this consul answered "Rabbi Wise, nobody could honor as many affidavits as you have given."

And father looked at him and said, "Are you questioning my word? Well, I will sit here till you call President Roosevelt and find out whether you are to honor my word or not." He just sat. The consul decided to yield and this group was cleared for admission to the U.S. and saved. But this consul's attitude was all too typical of many members of the consular service.

Later, much later, we found out that father's and Judge Mack's mail had been opened by a consular official in Switzerland. On the particular evening I spoke to Mrs. R about such conduct by staff of the State Department and what could be done before it was too late, she immediately promised to inquire and do whatever

she could. Then, she said she had a question to ask me. I can still remember her words: "You know, Justine, whenever I appealed for help for people whether they were sharecroppers, southern negroes, poor unemployed, Jews are among the first people in this country who come forward and offer to help. And yet now when their people are so desperately in need, they're hesitant about asking for help, and I'm glad you came." She said, "Jews seem embarrassed to ask help for their own people. Why?"

With the frankness of youth of those days I said, "Well, I think this is one more heritage from a Christian world where Jews have been oppressed and suffered for centuries. So they have be[20]come very hesitant to turn to anyone outside of the Jewish community for help no matter how great the need. It is one more consequence of the un-Christian, Christian world." We talked about it, and I felt no discomfort on her part, rather a search for understanding. She was listening. Later, I felt that Mrs. R's very strong pro-Israel feeling was not only her deep reaction to the persecution of those who survived Hitler and had reached Israel, but was rooted in her horror of prejudice and injustice against Jews. One could not know Mrs. R without sensing her deep feeling of the importance that human beings should be freed from inner as well as outer oppressions. This commitment went to the essence of everything she did in a great many areas, whether the persons involved were sharecroppers, negroes, the miners, or Jews under Hitler, or Jews seeking freedom in Israel. I think this, in a way stemmed back in part to her own experience as a child, and her struggle to define for herself who she was and what she was. So we get to the Office of Civilian Defense. I don't recall how I happened to be having tea with her one afternoon; it was either September or October before Pearl Harbor. Mrs. R spoke of her concern about the need for strengthening American communities.

She shared a letter written to a mutual friend, Agnes Inglis, in March, 1941.

In order to understand the changes that had taken place through the country as the defense program goes [21] into effect, it is necessary to become familiar with the conditions prevailing within one's own community. I should be very interested in having a study of Dutchess County. It would give me basic information on population, industrial and agriculture conditions, employment, income, et cetera in that area. This I believe would interest not only people within the community but could serve as an illustration of something that might be done in other counties. Supplementary to this basic picture I would like to have a report on public opinion as it is shown in the press and in the statements of various associations and organizations. A study of the effect of the defense program on people's personal lives, their jobs, their outside interests may help us a great deal in understanding the changes the next few years may bring. [Fascinating, this is March '41.] I believe you are in a position to make such a study. Would it be possible for you to secure and compile the information.

Very sincerely,

So she had really been thinking about this problem and surely discussing it with the President before Pearl Harbor. This may be why Roosevelt appointed La Guardia to head the physical and protective aspects of Civilian Defense, and asked Mrs. Roosevelt to serve as associate director to build up and to try to meet the problems of civilians. We talked about that, and she told me she'd agreed to do it. This was to be her first public office, though of course without remuneration. And we began to talk about things that should be done. And she said, "Oh, I wish you could help me."

I told her I would have a month's winter vacation the following month, and asked whether she would like me to come down for a month and help her get the work started.

"It would be wonderful." [22]

My husband agreed. So I packed up and went, leaving him with our three children for the first time. And that was really when Mrs. R and I became close friends. First, Mrs. R began to develop a new concept about how to make the country stronger as an essential part of its defense. Then she began to bring to Washington people she trusted. People like Jonathan Daniels, Melvyn Douglas, Martha Elliott of the Children's Bureau, Paul Kellogg, Agnes Inglis, people who were not conventional political appointees. Within a short time, Mrs. R was accused of bringing pariahs or subversives to Washington by a Republican congressman. She also had as her right-hand person, a close friend, Elinor Morgenthau, who was an able, honorable, and lovely person. The battles and sniping went on. Some people who pretended to be very friendly faded out when the attacks came and were not loyal to Mrs. R. It was a very difficult period for her. And then of course within four weeks came Pearl Harbor.

I was working down there late that evening, going over to the Emerson's for the night. At seven o'clock she said to Paul Kellogg and me: "The President has just had a very long session with the representatives of Japan. Would you like to go in and say good night to him?" We said we'd love to.

We walked in. It was the first time that I saw the President look haggard. He was absolutely alone--things were so much more informal in those days--alone except for Fala, whom I stooped to [23] pet. And he turned to me and said, "Well, Justine, I, a mortal man, have just sent my last word to the son of the immortals. Now we shall see what happens."

The next morning we learned of the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

So, Mrs. Roosevelt and the President asked me to stay on. This created a difficult problem for me because they were not happy with La Guardia and they were not going to make him a general. And under our law at that time I could only take a thirty-day leave of absence without pay at a time, and I felt I couldn't just walk out on the court unless the mayor agreed to appoint somebody in my place. So every month, every thirty days, poor FDR had to request permission from La Guardia for my staying another thirty days. Immediately after Pearl Harbor the rumor spread on the West Coast that the Japanese submarines were off California. Mrs. Roosevelt flew right out and her calm courage meant much to everyone. That was the beginning of her war travels for FDR, which were constant. When the attacks against Mrs. R continued and her war responsibilities for the President became greater, she resigned. If you do not have the statement of her resignation at Hyde Park I will have it xeroxed and sent to you. It is absolutely Mrs. Roosevelt and magnificent.

SOAPES: This is her radio script?

POLIER: That's it. [24]

SOAPES: Yes, we have a copy of it. I brought one along with me.

POLIER: I think that's really a reflection of where she was both politically and economically and with Martin Luther states: "Here I stand."

SOAPES: The point that stood out to me in that statement was this conflict between liberals and the privileged classes.

POLIER: Well, I think you would also have to look at that historically, remembering that this occurred within the period when the Liberty League got started. When [John J.] Raskob and Al Smith and Judge [Joseph M.] Proskauer, that whole group called Roosevelt a traitor to his class. Many of these same people attacked every effort to help civilians during the war. It was vicious.

[Interruption]

POLIER: It was during this period that I was particularly fascinated by the way Mrs. Roosevelt managed to meet people, whether friends or foes, in a kind, unruffled, and unperturbed way, so that she really listened, although she sized people up certainly and knew what she was about. Even during those most difficult days she remained true to the things that she thought important, even though they were discomfiting. We had a long talk one night just before Pearl Harbor when the government decided to revive security investigations of all people in government. The investigations [25] were to be done by three agencies: Civil Service, FBI, and Treasury. The witch hunts were soon on. As I said before, I stayed at the Emerson's part of the time. He was head of enforcement for the country for OPA at this point. And I went home one night, shortly after Pearl Harbor, and Tom, who was a wonderfully strong, and fine human being said, "There's something on my desk I'm not allowed to show anybody," and he went upstairs and went to bed. I took a look at it. And it was a report from Treasury that Tom Emerson must be gotten out of government as a security risk, that he was a secret member of a communist cell in Seattle, Washington. It described him as six foot one, although he is five foot three. It stated that Morris Ernst had reported that he was not trustworthy; it was reported that he had half a dozen books on the Soviet Union within reach of his favorite armchair. Besides, it alleged that his wife believed in health insurance, and that he was a friend of Shad and Justine Polier. The next morning I went in to Mrs. Roosevelt and told her of the report, and that something had to be done to stop the slander and destruction of valuable public servants. Since the report came from Treasury, I felt it should be taken up with Henry Morgenthau, despite all the pressures on him at this time.

She picked up the phone and asked Henry to see me, then told me I should go over at noon.

I then went over to see Henry, whom I had known since I was a child. I told him about this. I said, "Apart from what I think [26] about Morris Ernst--I know his law firm is your personal lawyer." I know the background of that because he wanted to be president of the National Lawyers Guild and a group of us opposed him. It was because while he was being a "great liberal" that he was also up on the mat in front of the National Labor Relations Board for being an officer or counsel for a company that had fired employees who had joined the union. I then told him of blatant inaccuracies in the report: about Tom's height, that Tom Emerson had never been west of Chicago in his life. With two such glaring errors it seemed that the whole report should be reexamined including who had been selected for opinions.

Morgenthau called in one of his deputies and said "I want this report recalled and a new investigation done." As a result, they found that the derogatory material was not credible and Tom was not removed from office. That was the atmosphere in which we were working. People caught in it over and over again came to Mrs. Roosevelt and she was never too tired and never too busy to take

any case in which she felt there might be an injustice. And it was this attitude that affected so much of what Mrs. R said and did throughout her public life.

I would also like to refer to one evening spent with her shortly after Roosevelt's death. Shad and I had supper with her the night after the funeral in the Washington Square West apartment in which she had planned to live with him after he ceased to be President. [27] It was modest but nice. And she was very quiet very thinking about what her role should be, what she should do. Of course, quickly thereafter Mrs. R became so deeply involved in the UN, so that her home in the East 60s became a meeting place. There we saw her quite often. It was two blocks from our house. Later she moved to the East 70s with Dr. Gurewitsch and his family. On a good many evenings she would invite half a dozen people whom she hoped would talk about some problem they were involved in and she was concerned about. She wanted to get further insights and know more about their work. Young people, always her great interest, were brought together. And a great many people from different parts of the world--luncheon for the representatives from the new North African countries, such as the Algerian who was later killed, Ben Barka, Joe Golan, an Israeli, who was working in North Africa, were there for dinner. All sorts of people. And of course her work on the human rights commission was just endless. I am sure you will hear from other people who worked at the UN, she really won their trust and their hearts. I do remember one evening when she expressed exasperation on how slowly things were moving. She said, "Everytime we move the people in the Soviet delegation seem to accept a point, and we say, well, this done. At the next meeting there is a new Soviet representative and we have to begin all over again." This happened over and over again.

Mrs. R not only gave but learned much from her travels. [28]

[Interruption]

POLIER: When she came back from her trip to Japan she told us of a request to meet with a group of young Japanese women, who were working in various professions. They had asked for an opportunity to discuss their relations with their mother-in-laws because they had to live with their mother-in-laws, a subject about which Mrs. Roosevelt naturally felt rather strongly. They spoke of having to turn over what they earned to their mothers-in-law, and so they felt completely dependent. They wanted guidance on how they could move to change customs that made them feel that they never were free to make decisions on what they earned or what they did.

One day Mrs. R told me about Mrs. James Roosevelt, who would make anti-Semitic remarks at the luncheon table or tea table. Mrs. R said, with a twinkle, that every time this occurred she would remind her mother-in-law that one of our ancestors was Jewish. When Mrs. James would say, "Eleanor, how can you say such a thing?" Mrs. R replied, "But, Mother, he was."

In the 1950s the attacks on Mrs. R sharpened during the McCarthy days. We were up at Hyde Park for the weekend right after Spellman had attacked her on her opposition to federal aid for parochial or private schools. He had made a devastating attack that said that her children might have been better and not gotten divorced so often if they had proper moral and religious education. The reaction to this attack on Mrs. R was one of incredulity, and it [29] was reported that several cardinals had flown to Rome to protest to the Pope against Cardinal Spellman's treatment of Mrs. R. Suddenly, Mrs. R got a call, just before our visit, saying that Cardinal Spellman happened to be in the vicinity and would like to come and pay his respects. And she said he came. He didn't say

a word about the controversy. Just chit-chatted. She chit-chatted. Then she decided to use the occasion and asked the Cardinal's help for an actor who had been black-listed unfairly. She said she would at least try to get help for one person. Mrs. R then added with mischievous pleasure that the funny thing about the visit was that the Cardinal said he just happened to be in the neighborhood visiting an institution so he thought he'd drop by. But, in fact, the institution was really quite a way south, so he didn't just drop by.

Mrs. R took attacks very well, and I found a delightful note dated November 7, 1953 from her among my letters which I think you will enjoy. "Dear Justine, Who on earth is this rabbi? You don't have him under very good control. Affectionately, Eleanor Roosevelt." And she sent me a clipping, which I found in the envelope--that a Rabbi Benjamin Shulz speaking to the Minute Women of the United States, as executive director of the American Jewish League against Communism, had denounced Mrs. Roosevelt as an unreliable old woman and moved for the formation of a committee for Mrs. Roosevelt's retirement. He charged Mrs. R had said we have [30] no right to fight the Russians or communism because we have great injustices here, and that this was a fifth column that had to be destroyed in the United States. He charged Mrs. R with being responsible for the leadership of this neutralist fifth column. Incidentally, this Rabbi was the person who also accused my father and John Haynes Holmes of being communists or fellow travelers. I loved the line from Mrs. R, "You don't have him under very good control." She had her own way of expressing herself.

I think I'd like to close this discussion on two other subjects. One is a little more about her relationship with FDR. I think one of the things that stood out as I tried to think about the things I know was the time when Churchill came over right after Pearl Harbor. FDR and Churchill decided they wanted a little time, peace and quiet to talk, so they drove out to an Episcopal church in the countryside instead of going to church in Washington. The next day Mrs. R said, "You know, Justine, on the way out Winston kept saying, 'After the war we've got to form an Anglo-American alliance to meet the problems of the world.' And Franklin was saying, 'Yes, yes, yes.' And finally I couldn't stand it any longer. And I said to him, 'You know, Winston, when Franklin says "yes, yes, yes," it doesn't mean he agrees with you; it means he's listening.'" She could not accept what she felt was really the old British colonialism in a new form.

Mrs. R would do this kind of thing and I found it fascinating [31] that the President did not object. They would have arguments and discussions on many things. I remember the time he came back from North Africa. They had a long talk one evening. Shad and I were there when FDR described the rubber plantations of the British with the legs of children about two fingers in circumference, and the horrible conditions. Her first question was, "Did you tell Winston?" He said, "Yes, I did." And she asked, "Well, are ours any better?" He proceeded to say, yes, that ours were better, the places where the workers were housed were thatched. Mrs. R then asked "Do they have any schools for the children? FDR answered, "You can't educate people who haven't even learned to wear clothes." She countered, "What has dress got to do with education?" We all got into a great discussion of how what one wore or one's customs did not have to interfere with teaching children.

Another time at lunch the President and Mrs. R got into a heated discussion about [Harry] Bridges and the battle to deport him. Finally the President said, "Oh look, Eleanor, let's not go on with this. He is not going to be deported. I will make a bet with you--a bet of \$5--that he will never be deported. Now let's not talk anymore about it."

One day Mrs. R said to me, "You know, Franklin doesn't like to face unpleasant things. But now we have an agreement that any three things I put on the top of his bedside table he will take care of the first thing in the morning." [32]

But the interesting thing was that during that whole North Africa trip--it wasn't as easy then--the telephone wires were setup; he called up every night. She would report fully on what she saw happening in this country and what she saw as problems that they ought to be meeting. He would report at great length on what was happening abroad. And I had the feeling that, despite good biographies, Mrs. R was always much too modest on this part of her role, never indicating the kind of crisis where she had really helped him, or contributed to his thinking or decisions, or even the extent of the sharing including the disagreements. I don't know that that can ever be recaptured, but I have a feeling it is unfair to both FDR and to Mrs. R because I believe they both grew individually in their own ways, in very different ways, but also there was a growing together that went on throughout their marriage which was extremely important historically. I don't think it's been adequately portrayed. I'm not certain it can be.

SOAPES: In other words you think she was much more of a confidant on these major matters of state than we realize.

POLIER: I do.

The last thing I'd like to mention was our last visit, when Mrs. R was really not well. One evening she had invited Shad and me and a few others for dinner. Mrs. R, Father Ford and I happened to get off in a corner and talk--and what moved her to do it I have [33] no idea, but she began to reminisce about her childhood. And she spoke of the home in which she grew up. And of course I think the lack of love in that home for her, which she survived somehow certainly hurt her but she didn't talk very much about that. She did say that at eighteen she had plunged into work with the Consumers League, a time when she was certainly not happy as a debutante. And then she talked about going to a Christmas party for news boys even earlier when Theodore Roosevelt was around. It was her first picture of children who were poor. And then after eighteen she said she began to go to a big hall on fourteenth street--I don't know what it was--where everyone sang "Joe Hill." With a very nice twinkle she said, "But no one called people names for doing things then." Then she added, "But of course my family didn't know what I was doing."

One sensed her own struggle to discover who she was, to achieve self-esteem as a person who hadn't any of the things we talk about, steady continuity of love in a home or a family. And one felt that the price of learning had been a heavy one. Out of it had really been forged an inner core strength that was almost untouchable by the outside world and that nobody could actually touch. Both the good that came of it and the hurt that was suffered in achieving it are very hard to evaluate.

In my papers I found this note about my visit with her on May 8, 1962. [34]

Tonight at Mrs. Roosevelt's after supper, Mrs. R. and I began talking and Father Ford joined us. Somehow Father Ford in referring to someone's troubles said to Mrs. Roosevelt, "You must have suffered for your convictions at times." She immediately said, "I've thought about that. I don't think I ever suffered. I am not sure whether that was because I was so sheltered or," (with a twinkle) "because I didn't care."

Then she added, "I wouldn't have wanted to cause Franklin trouble, but I knew that if I did, Stephen Early and Louis Howe would have told me, and, of course, Harry Hopkins would have been quick to tell me. I think Franklin would have told me too. But he used to say - you go ahead and do what you think right, and then we'll see how people react. If they react badly, I can always say, I can't control my wife."

When I suggested that when one felt sheltered and loved, it was easier not to care if people disapproved of what one believed in or did, Mrs. Roosevelt again said, "I didn't mean loved. I had a very strange bringing up." She then spoke of her grandmother who was Orthodox, and smilingly said, "I don't mean Jewish. But she really believed every word in the Bible. She believed the whale really swallowed Jonah. Her husband engaged someone with whom he could discuss theology. He couldn't discuss anything with his wife. She just had babies and he took care of everything, even the shopping. Then he died quite young and she found herself a widow with 6 or 7 children she could not manage. My mother took over and ran the household till she got married two years later and then things fell apart. Two of the boys drank themselves to death and the girls lived quite strange lives. When my mother died my brother and I went there and it was strict. One could not do anything but walk on Sunday and read a Sunday book. And I read everything. Just as I got interested in the Sunday book, it would be whisked away for the following Sunday and I would be given the weekday book. If I asked an embarrassing question about a novel, I was never told anything. The book just disappeared. Everyone was very nice, played games in the evening and chatted, but if one asked my grandmother anything, the answer was always 'no'. So I learned not to ask." Again she added, "It was very strict."

"Then at 15 I was sent off to school, the school to which my Aunt had gone - wonderful headmistress though old. It was in the midst of the Boer War and while the English girls went [35] to celebrate victories each week, she would take the rest of us who came from lands all over the world and tell us that small nations had the right to be free. She taught History in a wonderful way. Really lectured and then we wrote papers. If you wrote what she had said, she would tear up your paper and say she was not educating parrots. She became fond of me and I travelled with her, and when we got to Rome or Florence or Paris, she would hand me the Baedeker, tell me what I should see. Because I was American, I was allowed to go off by myself and when I got home in the evening, we would discuss what I saw. All went well till the Newbolds bumped into me alone at the Luxemburg and reported it to my family. Luckily that was toward the end of my stay."

"When I came back, I was nearly 18 and I was a complete flop as a debutante. It was awful. I knew no girls and had never met any boys, except at Christmas parties. I knew only two at the first ball. The Halls expected a success and could not stand a flop. My unmarried Aunt was still the belle of every ball. So probably because of this, I plunged into the Consumers League and other things. Went to a big hall on 14th Street where everyone sang Joe Hill. But no one called people names for doing things then. Of course my family didn't know what I was doing. My grandmother was in the country trying to keep two of her sons from drinking themselves to death. Of course they did, but having strong constitutions, it took some time."

"And when one of them came to New York, I learned how to handle him."

I found one other thing that will interest you. During the Mississippi days when I used to send her things, I sent her the report on McComb, Mississippi by Tom

Hayden. It was the story of the emergence of Bob Moses and the organization of SNCC. I got a note, not from her, but from Miss Thompson. "Judge Polier, it may amuse you to know that Mrs. Roosevelt told me this morning she dreamt all night she was marching on the south after reading this." That's the story. It was delightful to get the note from [36] Malvina, who very rarely broke through on her own.

SOAPES: I was wanting to ask you if you got to know Miss Thompson very well and to give the major traits of her character and personality that you remember.

POLIER: I saw a great deal of her. I never felt that I got to know her well as a person. I got to know her only as the person forever available to Mrs. Roosevelt as friend, as secretary, as butler, as companion--but also as a person who expressed her independent reactions to things, certainly to Mrs. Roosevelt. Her death was of course a terrible loss. Malvina Thompson felt she was serving a great human being and that this was her life.

SOAPES: Total devotion.

POLIER: Yes.

SOAPES: You mentioned Wiltwyck earlier and I want to go into that and into some detail about what your role was and what you saw as Mrs. Roosevelt's role.

POLIER: Well when I first went on the court I would get a report that a child was neglected or delinquent and needed to be removed from where he was living but there was no place to send him because he was protestant and negro--we didn't use the word black in those days--until he became twelve or committed a felony when he could be sent to the state training school. So I collected a bunch of cases-[37] I think about twenty--and called La Guardia and said I wanted to see him. I went down to see him, told him the story and he was outraged and talked about it and said, "We've got to do something." So he sent me up to see the Episcopal bishop. The church had just inherited some property in Esopus, New York, about ninety miles from the city. There was a magnificent palatial place overlooking the Hudson. On the other side of the road there were servants' quarters, built like an English village. Dr. Marion Kenworthy joined me on the visit to the bishop and we told him of the need for services for Protestant negro children. The bishop offered the use of the servant quarters for a summer camp for about thirty-five to fifty kids. The camp was opened, and the children did extremely well. The counselors were young ministers and the children enjoyed the country and did not run away. At the end of the summer we could not bear to have the service disappear, but they had no heating plant; so I went to John Berk of Altman and Company and he agreed to provide funds for a heating plant. However, it soon became clear that these nice young men did not really have the capacity to meet the educational and emotional problems of deprived city children. In the meantime, Marshall Field had inherited his great wealth under his grandfather's will on his forty-fifth birthday. He decided he didn't want to go on making money, and the two things he was most interested in working with the needs of children and housing. I met him through a friend, Louis Weiss, who [38] was Mr. Field's lawyer and a wonderful person. We talked about the problems of children with Mr. Field and his wife Ruth Field, a lovely person. Mr. Field decided he just wanted to study the problems of children in New York for a year before he did anything. He was a most unusual philanthropist. And he began visiting institutions and foster homes, reading and sitting in court. After a year, he offered to improve the plant which belonged to the Protestant-Episcopal Missions Society and build a separate gym and a dining hall. At that time there was an old people's home in the middle of the

two wings used for the children. Mr. Field offered to build a place for the indigent old people. He also agreed to provide money for professional staffing, including the needed social workers, staff, medical, and psychiatric personnel for a period of five years, on a somewhat diminishing basis. There was an agreement the Mission would gradually meet the budget. When the war came, the Protestant-Episcopal Mission decided that it really didn't want to go forward with this, but should put its money into chaplaincies in the army. They decided to close Wiltwyck. And I heard this just as I was about to stop working with Mrs. R and return to New York to take care of my children since my husband was going into the air corps. As I was saying good-bye to Mrs. Roosevelt, she asked if there was anything she could do for me. I said she could do one thing for me - go on a new board for Wiltwyck School that would be non-sectarian and interracial. She agreed to do it. [39] Soon she became extremely active because Hyde Park was just across the river from Wiltwyck. She would go over and visit and she'd invite the children who had no homes to come for Christmas Eve with none other than the President reading them the Christmas stories. The result was that the second year even children who had homes to go to did not want to go and miss the visit to Hyde Park. So we had to change that by arranging the Christmas visit on a different day. Mrs. R also gave picnics for all the children serving them herself. She used to take distinguished guests over to see that America was doing something about black children. And then of course she was very supportive when my husband drafted the first anti-discrimination law, so that sectarian agencies receiving money from the city could no longer discriminate against children solely on the basis of race. And that made her even more enthusiastic, I think. And she really became a very familiar person whom the children loved.

One of the nicest stories she ever told me was about one visit when she took some important visitors over to Wiltwyck. They were talking when a little boy pushed his way in and asked: "Mrs. Roosevelt, you don't remember my name?"

She said, "I'm really getting so old that I don't remember names, not even of old friends."

He said, "Well I was at your picnic two weeks ago."

She said, "Tell me your name, son." He told her his name, [40] and darted away.

About ten minutes later he came back and demanded: "Mrs. Roosevelt, do you remember my name?"

She said, "Yes, you told me just a few minutes ago, it was John Williams."

He darted away only to come back a third time while she was still talking and broke in to ask the same question. Mrs. R repeated his name.

He gave a big sigh of relief and said, "Now you've said it three times; I think you'll really remember."

Mrs. R used this story in the most effective way to point out that children needed to feel that they are known, that they are somebody, that they're distinct individuals. It's not enough to be seen as part of a group. Once more, she got a message, understood it and used it to help others to understand it.

And then of course Wiltwyck got to the point where we found it was too remote, too difficult for families to visit, too far from the City and decided to build a new plant. We went to Mrs. R and asked her to head up the fund raising. Then she became ill, but she pursued it and sent out the first letters. When she died

I asked C. R. Smith of American Airlines to take her place. He had gone with her on all those plane hops in the Pacific.

He always thought she was a superb lady. So he said, "You know, she asked me to do it, and I said 'no.' So why should I [41] say yes to you?"

I answered, "Because Mrs. R is no longer here."

He said, "Alright." So, he made it possible for us to go ahead with building the new campus, which was named the Eleanor Roosevelt Campus.

SOAPES: Looking through some of the papers of Wiltwyck from Mrs. Roosevelt's collection, I notice that there were problems in the 40s and the early 50s in fund raising for Wiltwyck.

POLIER: Oh there were always financial problems.

SOAPES: Was that a continuing problem?

POLIER: They may close up now. The whole financial problem has become very serious.

SOAPES: Her role was primarily one of helping with funds and fund raising, or was she involved in the program itself?

POLIER: She was more involved in a personal relationship to the children and the staff. She was a familiar figure to the children; it meant a great deal to them. That and fund raising, not sitting on committees.

SOAPES: Did you have much relationship with any of her children? You're about the same age as her daughter. [42]

POLIER: Anna was a very good friend. She became very close to both Shad and me, especially after Mrs. Roosevelt died. She became active, took her mother's place at Wiltwyck, helped greatly with fund raising. She was a lovely human being, very independent. I think Mrs. Roosevelt and she became very close the last few years. She was the most unworldly member of the family, and Mrs. Roosevelt appreciated it.

SOAPES: In what way do you mean that?

POLIER: She was generous, she lived simply. She was very helpful to the people of the Hyde Park Library and interested in responding to any requests for information that she could give, very thoughtful about it. She had begun to think about doing some writing when she became so ill. She stayed with Shad and me until she went into the hospital. She was very fond of John, though they didn't see eye to eye on many things. John was the youngest. He would do anything in the world for Anna.

SOAPES: Were you in a position to see what was the source of tension between the children?

POLIER: Between all these children?

SOAPES: Yes.

POLIER: No. I think it was probably as difficult a household to [43] be brought up in as there could be. Anna was her father's adoration. I was in the White House during the war when Anna moved in to help him. She walked in in her riding boots after a ride. His whole face lighted up; the world's problems stopped for a few minutes. He just adored her.

SOAPES: Thank you very much for your time this afternoon. [44]

INTERVIEW WITH

The
Honorable Justine Wise Polier

By

Dr. Thomas F. Soapes
Oral Historian

On

December 8, 1977

For

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

This interview is being conducted with the Honorable Justine Wise Polier in her office in New York City on December 8, 1977. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Roosevelt Library Present for the interview are Judge Polier and Dr. Soapes.

DR. SOAPES: You had a couple of points you wanted to pick up from the last interview and expand on them.

JUDGE POLIER: There were two that I was especially eager to add. I did speak of Mrs. Roosevelt's remarkable ability to meet with both friends and foes and with important people and simple people, really quite untouched by what they had said or done to her personally. This was true even when people whom she regarded as friends proved disloyal. One evening I asked her how she could endure a certain person coming up to her and kissing her warmly at the White House after yielding to attacks against Mrs. Roosevelt on the Hill. And Mrs. Roosevelt turned to me and she said, "You know, dear, I have all the adverse clippings put on my bed at night so I will know what people are saying, and then I forget them." I think that this was a source of great strength to her because she had a unique ability to turn from one task to another, from one person to another, without the ordinary amount of friction or bitterness that ruffles and limits most people in public life. And that was one thing that I really just wanted to add.

A second one was that I noticed that I wrote of an evening spent by my husband and myself with her shortly after President [45] Roosevelt's death, and her speaking with uncertainty about what she envisioned for the future. And as I went through papers I found a letter that I had written to Paul Sifton of the Washington Bureau of the Union for Democratic Action shortly after the President's death. This letter was written in June, 1945. [See Appendix A] And I wrote to him that I'd spoken to Mrs. Roosevelt about the hearings on the full employment bill in the Senate Banking and Currency [Committee] hearing the previous Saturday and noted that she was deeply interested and eager to be

helpful. She stated that if the hearings were to be held after recess she would be glad to testify, except for the fact that she felt that her appearance before a congressional committee might be hurtful rather than helpful. She then added that she would offer to write a series of columns on the human problems involved in the full employment bill if she received the material so that she could prepare useful help on the air or in columns. At the same time, it's interesting, she immediately began to think about who could be brought together to support the bill, and she stated that Bernie Baruch was deeply in favor of the bill. He had been seeing her constantly since the President's death, and had tried to be helpful in every way. She added that he was fully in favor of the program and she felt if he were properly approached and told his appearance before the congressional committee might contribute substantially to securing the passage of the bill, he might be [46] ready to do so. I find this interesting because it was her positive response to a cause and yet her reservation as to whether her appearance in Congress would be helpful or hurtful, so I thought I would bring it to your attention.

SOAPES: Is this more of the concern that she appears to have had that she was not effective, her lack of self-confidence?

POLIER: I don't think so. I think at this point, this was the transition period. She was determined not to be seen as the First Lady. I think, from all we've read, that she was very clearly determined to help Truman to be the President. But I think it also reflected her awareness of certain hostility toward her efforts on behalf of progressive legislation that she always faced on the Hill.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: You have something you wanted to start off on. Why don't you go ahead?

POLIER: I thought that I'd like to spend a little time on what I personally saw or knew about in terms of Mrs. Roosevelt's on-going battle against prejudice, discrimination in regard to human beings by reason of race, color, or religion, which we didn't have a chance to really go into last time. I suppose there's never been anybody in public life in this century who was as [47] clear and as determined as she in this regard. It came out in so many ways. I suppose the classic example was her support of Marian Anderson when Marian Anderson was denied the right to sing by the, ah--

SOAPES: DAR-- [Daughters of the American Revolution]

POLIER: DAR, and then Mrs. Roosevelt's resignation from the DAR and her arrangement to have her sing in Washington. But that was only one dramatic symbol, really. I think actually of her bringing members of the black community, then called negro, to the White House for the first time, beginning with Walter White, and the feeling she gave that they were welcome, that she wanted to hear them. The President, through her intercession, was part of that. I think her friendships that she had with Elinor Morgenthau or myself, Joe Lash or other people, all reflected her feeling that she wanted to work with people who meant something to her, and that really their religious, racial background were not the important factors. And this was an ongoing thing that she brought into the world of power around the White House, people who'd never really felt at home there before. There might have been a few very great people who would be invited on occasions by a person like Woodrow Wilson, but there was not this quality of at-homeness that I think she gave. And of course this was consistent with her firm opposition to every form of organized [48] hatred or discrimination, whether it came from Father Coughlin or any other fascist group-hater in this

country. I think it also formed a foundation for her readiness to stand up on behalf of both people and movements that were unpopular, and her welcoming those who were the dissenters in each period so that she could really know what they were thinking, and so her readiness to listen and to learn, and to begin to incorporate new ideas into her own thinking. I think that this was perhaps most noticeable in my relationship with her in her warm response and eagerness--it was more than a response--her eagerness to save as many Jews as could be saved during the Hitler period. It was illustrated in that letter that I mentioned last time and read to you of sharp criticism of the British blockade when Jews escaping from Hitler were drowned outside of Israel. It was again illustrated when she helped to organize the committee to save Jewish children, on which she worked constantly and about which she met in Washington, about which she wrote me, for which she was always ready to give of her time. I also saw it in another, simpler way. My mother had established some houses on West 68th Street, near the Free Synagogue, to provide homes for Jewish refugees or for refugees as they came to this country who were homeless and had nothing. And she used to go over there and visit, meet with the people, talk to them, learn about what had happened to them. And her visits meant a great deal. And then she would write about it. So that there was always this readiness both on a personal and [49] a broader level in that period when most people were, so it seemed, so indifferent and cold and unaware of what was going on.

Of course after the war I think this became even clearer when she visited the DP camps, and talked to people--it was not in an impersonal way, though her presence there was important, she got to know individuals. And later when she went to visit Israel she would look up those people and see them and it was just an unbelievable experience for them to find that she remembered them or that she had written to their children or that she'd looked up somebody in the United States who was related to them. It was this endless effort to treat them as human beings, as individuals, and at the same time to battle for their right to have a permanent home of their own and never be subjected to what they'd lived through again.

And I think she got great joy out of her visits to Israel. She would come back, "I must tell you about what I saw and what I did." One trip she went to visit the center for young people, which was established there by the American Jewish Congress in memory of my mother, which is a youth center in Israel which was the last thing on which my father worked. And she was very interested, because we decided that with young people coming from sixty-four different countries to Israel, and being settled in remote places, there should be a place where they could meet together, learn to live together, work together, see Jerusalem as the capital of the new state, and understand the parliament [50] and what was going on, many of them coming from totalitarian countries. And we also had an art center on the top, since my mother was a painter, so that gifted children could come and paint and get lessons for painting during the summer holidays. She was very excited about this idea, and, despite her endless schedule in Israel, went to the Youth Center. I got a letter from them that she'd insisted on climbing the three flights of stairs and talking to the children and hearing about the countries from which they'd come and what their experiences were. And again, it was a combination of the two things that was a very exciting thing. As soon as she came back I got a note from her saying, "I must tell you all about it," which she did. And she was very happy that there was to be a center of this kind and especially that during the summer months children from other countries would come and learn about Israel, including German children. And all of these things seem to me very intimately related to her whole outlook on life that is worthy of remembrance.

I think her visits to Israel also created problems. She had on one trip, and I don't remember which one it was, visited her daughter Anna and Jim Halsted, who was doing research on iron deficiency in Iran, as I recall it. And after visiting them she went directly to Israel and then made some comment about the difference between light and darkness, and what it meant to come to a country in which people were striving and pioneering to build [51] a new society as against the oppression, the absolute misery and poverty that she'd seen in Iran. And this caused a storm and later repercussions for Jim Halsted, who'd been asked to go to, I think it was the University of Beirut, (but I'm not sure, you'd have to ask him,) in Lebanon, as either dean or head of the medical school there. And he went up there and there was to be a great reception for him to meet the President and faculty. A few minutes before it was to start the President said he'd like to talk to him, he'd see him in his study, or some other room. As I recall it, either Jim or Anna told me, or both, that the head of the university had said that there was one thing they'd have to make clear. That they would, in view of the tension between the Arab lands and Israel have to ask that he should not invite Anna's mother to visit them while he was teaching at the university. To which Jim said, in view of that, he of course would not come. And that ended this plan of teaching for Jim and going to Lebanon by Jim and Anna. So that she became a symbol of America in support of Israel in Arab eyes to a very large extent.

And I think it was not only her visits but the,--and the contrasts she drew and what she wrote about the emerging country, but the warm friendships that developed between her and the leaders of the state, including Golda Meir, with whom she developed a very, very warm relationship. So that she became a staunch friend, I would say, of the Jewish people--generous with her time and efforts [52] not only in fund raising and appearing at meetings, but expressing herself over and over again in a thousand different ways on behalf of the importance of Israel as a new democracy in the Middle East and of the meaning of the rebuilding of the country. And I recall when the first Bandung Conference was announced and Israel was excluded, that it was she and John Haynes Holmes who took up the cudgels, privately. Dr. Holmes had been one of the first followers of Gandhi and was close to Nehru and Gandhi, and he tried to intercede. And my recollection is that she tried to get Madame Pandit, who was a very close friend, to try and intercede so there would not be this first and devastating exclusion of Israel from the international meeting. There was one other specially interesting incident, and I think I'd like you to remind me whether I mentioned it, and that was the visit of the representative of Morocco to her in Hyde Park. Did I mention that?

SOAPES: I don't think so.

POLIER: I don't think I did either. She told Shad and me one time when we were up at Hyde Park that a very interesting thing had happened. The State Department had called her and said that the representative of Morocco, the Ambassador--Morocco had just recently established its new regime--wished to come up and place a wreath on President Roosevelt's grave and that the ambassador had asked if he could visit Mrs. Roosevelt at that time. And she said yes of course. And she said, as usual in those days--this [53] was quite late, in the late '50s or early '60s, no it was around '55 or '56, '56--a whole group of people arrived at Hyde Park, including members of the State Department and the whole entourage for the ambassador. So she didn't even have enough cookies or fruit juice for which she had to send out to the grocery store. She said, "The State Department never takes the trouble to tell me anymore who's coming." And they came in and were very courteous. And as they were about to leave the ambassador turned to her and said, "I'd like to have a few moments alone with Mrs. Roosevelt." And it was at

that point that he told her that the King of Morocco had asked that he come and pay his respects to her because the King had deeply appreciated President Roosevelt's visit to Morocco during the war. President Roosevelt had told the King that after the war there would be an attempt to dig for oil and that the concessionaires would go so deep that they might injure the underlying water tables, and he must do what was necessary to protect water for the future generations of Morocco. The King had never forgotten that in the midst of the war Roosevelt was concerned about the future of the Moroccan people. And he went on to say that as a result the King wanted Mrs. Roosevelt to know that he would agree to the American bases for another year. I learned about this because I had spoken to her about the terrible conditions of the Jews in Casablanca who'd come from the hinterland expecting to go to Israel and then had not been [54] allowed to leave so that they were crowded into Casablanca. And I'd gotten calls from both Ambassador [Abba] Eban and Nahum Goldmann saying, "Is there anything you can do because typhoid or some horrible thing is going to break out and these people have no place to go. They have left what they had. They have no place to live. No funds. Utter misery." And when I told her about this and asked her was there any way she could help she told Shad and me about this visit and then said, "Now I think I know just what I can do. I will write to the King of Morocco and tell him I appreciated the visit from the Ambassador and ask him if he will not intervene and let these people go since there's no future for them in Morocco. And I'm sure that he would want to do what my husband would want to do." And two days later I got the draft of a letter which she had written, dated July 31, 1956, which recalls the date, with a little handwritten note on the side saying, "Ask Justine how she thinks this should be transmitted, with a covering letter to the King or whether it should go by some special way or whether it should go through our embassy. I don't like to ask the embassy to do the latter." What her reason was I do not know. But she sent me a copy of the letter and subsequently, after I talked to Joe Lash but had not mentioned this because I hadn't remembered it, I found the letter and sent it to Joe Lash in '72 explaining the situation, sent him a copy of the letter. And although his second volume was in print he was so interested in it that he put it as an appendix in the second volume. [See Appendix B] [55]

I mention these things because they reflect both her concern and her immediate response to need, but also her always trying to find a way that it could be done effectively. It wasn't just, "Oh isn't that too bad," or, "I will see what I can do." It was an immediate searching out for the paths through which one might achieve some results. I think that this also goes back to what I recall saying to you in our first interview, a very real concern that people who are oppressed would not be free to speak about what concerned them, or to ask for help when they should be asking for help, and that that in itself was a kind of bondage. She always reminded me of my speaking to a wonderful friend, Miles Horton, in the civil rights movement in the South, who had been subject to terrible attacks for what he had done, a very courageous person. We were talking about his work with blacks in the South and he said, "I know that they trust me as much as they can a white person. They also have a secret language which I will never be allowed to share." And I think Mrs. Roosevelt never accepted that secret language between groups or among individuals, because of differences which she felt should not create walls between human beings.

SOAPES: This question is informed more by some recent events, but in light of some of the current debate on the Middle East, did Mrs. Roosevelt confront the issue of the Palestinians in the Middle East and how to handle that? [56]

POLIER: I don't recall our discussing it. And I certainly am not a person who would say she would say this or she would say that; because I think that's a

very faulty kind of history, I think she would always be concerned with some reasonable and fair way of working things out. I think also, though, that she was terribly aware of the smallness of Israel, the dangers around it, and the need to protect it from going through one war after another. But more than that I could not answer.

SOAPES: You mentioned the civil rights movement which came to the fore in the '50s. How did she respond to that issue?

POLIER: She responded, I think, constantly and steadily in terms of her ongoing support and identification with the National Association of Colored People, NAACP, through her work with people in the Urban League, through her work with Mary Bethune in the deep South, through her support of Hubert Delaney when Mayor [Robert] Wagner refused to appoint him and she tried to intercede. And as I went over my correspondence I found that her letter to Mayor Wagner was only answered by an assistant, never by him directly.

SOAPES: That's an episode I'm not familiar with.

POLIER: Oh, it's not of national importance. Hubert Delaney was the first black judge on the Domestic Relations Court, later the Family Court, son of the first black Episcopal bishop in America, a great liberal, very courageous. And because he had, [57] among the first of the black civil rights group, worked with left-wing groups, if you want to call them that, liberal groups, the Lawyers Guild, any group that would struggle for civil rights, he was condemned and criticized by various right-wing and sectarian groups in New York. And a campaign was mounted against his reappointment although he'd been probably the most outstanding of the judges I had known on the Children's Court. Mrs. Roosevelt intervened and asked Bob Wagner to reappoint him, which Bob did not do. I just mentioned it in passing, not because it's a matter of national issue, but because she remained close to both local situations, state situations, national and international, and wherever she could strike a blow, whether it was for the ending of segregation, the exclusion of blacks from public housing, or semi-public housing like the Stuyvesant town battle, or discrimination of any kind, she was really just there. And in her daily columns, if anyone goes over them during this period, you'll find her wonderfully thoughtful but also outspoken on the most controversial issues.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: She was on the receiving end of a number of attacks from the far right, McCarthy. How did she react to Joe McCarthy?

POLIER: I think she really found him as obnoxious as all of us did. But she saw it earlier than most. And she was very concerned about the people who were blacklisted as a result of that. [58] And I think in our first interview I mentioned the cardinal's [Spellman] visit when she, then as on every opportunity, just took up the case of a single individual person who was being unfairly dealt with and tried to intercede on his behalf. And she would do this both privately and publicly and in every way that she could, and never was among those who in that period preferred not to be seen with or to meet with people who might be regarded as suspect by the Roy Cohns of this world and the McCarthys.

SOAPES: Did she ever comment on the way in which political leaders like Eisenhower or Truman were handling McCarthy?

POLIER: I remember being with her the evening, now that you've raised it, after Eisenhower's election. She said to Shad and me, "Well when you look at him and he smiles you can't help but like him. And he's very likeable, but I don't think you should expect too much." And I think she must have been deeply troubled by the lack of strength of leadership at critical moments, such as in the Arkansas situation. But I don't remember any specific conversations at this moment about Eisenhower's lack of leadership at a time after the Brown against Board of Education Supreme Court decision when he really could have turned things around.

SOAPES: Overshadowing so much of what's happening in the Truman-Eisenhower years is the Cold War. Did she express any disappointment at the way Truman had handled foreign affairs, that had her [59] husband lived things would have been different?

POLIER: Never, never. I don't think she ever talked in those terms. Maybe she did to some people, certainly not to me. But I think she would have done it in a positive way of what she was for, not in terms of ever disparaging what a President was doing. It was not her way of dealing with problems.

SOAPES: Was she disappointed that there was so much Cold War hysteria?

POLIER: I think she was very much saddened by the extent to which this was affecting American respect for freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, things that she wrote about constantly, and it was seeping over. And although she realized the difficulties which I mentioned earlier--the first thing to do was working with the Russians--she really still hoped that by strengthening respect for the rights of the individual and individuals coming to know each other and appreciate each other with all their differences one could build toward peace rather than toward war. And I think that's one of the reasons when people came here from other countries, whether they were right, left, or of any group, they were always met with cordiality, with warmth and openness. And her home was open; she'd go to meetings which were not regarded as popular, such as with the Soviet women's first delegation, that kind of thing. But I think this was a well-conceived role on her [60] part, because by that time her work at the United Nations had become so tremendously important to her, to where she was both embattled and trying to reach for new sources of strength in support of the kind of a world she hoped could be achieved.

SOAPES: You mentioned in our first interview that you were in the White House frequently, staying overnight a lot. What was the atmosphere of the living quarters of the White House?

POLIER: Warm and informal. Tea in that little room and--it was a different world in those days. I think I should mention how much less security one was aware of. There was politeness from the chief usher; they knew you were coming. But everything was extremely informal, both on the part of the President and Mrs. Roosevelt. I think he wanted that more informality just as much as she did. She might have wanted more people to come in and bored him a bit here and there, but it was their home, a very important part of it. There were no trappings, no red coats, no gilt.

SOAPES: You also mentioned the first time that the relationship between Franklin and Eleanor, of the confidant--

POLIER: Sharing.

SOAPES: One of the comments that their oldest son made, it was made in one of his books, about their personal relationship was [61] that it was kind of an armed neutrality between them. Is this something that you could detect?

POLIER: I think I should not be one to quarrel with one of their children, but I just don't feel that that portrays what I saw or felt. I think that there were areas of his life that were separate from Mrs. Roosevelt's life, areas of her life that were quite separate from his. But what I tried to say and what I saw and felt was a very much larger area of real sharing, and within that area a great deal of warmth, even moments of humor and fun, and infinite respect for one another's viewpoints. And I don't think that kind of thing could be created artificially for the onlookers. I mean he might serve the strongest cocktails and do an amusing thing which she would not be part of or tell humorous stories and she would not be particularly interested in. On the other hand, when you moved into other areas it was just a searching quality on both their parts, trying to find answers, trying to see people, trying to listen, thinking about the world ahead. And I think that's what I was trying to convey to you and where I think Jimmy's words are inadequate.

SOAPES: You mentioned humor. Mrs. Roosevelt's sense of humor is not something that's well known.

POLIER: No, no. But his was so fantastic. And so it was a gay mood that he created, which I think is not the kind of thing that [62] she shared. I think life had not given her that.

SOAPES: Hers is a much more serious-

POLIER: Yes. Thoughtful, serious, with a terrible sense of duty. Good New England conscience at work all the time, which he could toss on and off and I think that made it possible for him to survive those years.

SOAPES: Did she ever discuss her religious views with you?

POLIER: No. Maybe she did once, but I'm not sufficiently clear in my memory to be able to talk about it. I never got the feeling that she felt that all truth was the property of any single religion certainly. And she was deeply interested in the--we talked sometimes about the expressions of religion and especially the Christian gospel in terms of application to life. And at times we talked about teachings of the prophets or something of that kind which she was deeply interested in. I remember her calling me one day off the bench and telling me that two very dear friends of hers were going to be married in her home, and that a Rabbi was coming to marry them, and they were Jewish, and should she have gotten some red cushions on which they could kneel. She called me off the bench and asked me this. I said, "Oh, Mrs. Roosevelt, haven't you learned that Jews never kneel; they always stand up straight?" And she roared and felt very relieved that there were no red cushions to be gotten. But it was the kind of [63] give and take which you could have that suggests the kind of freedom that I felt in her on matters of religion.

SOAPES: You mentioned this freedom of give and take. Was that a posture one could get into easily with her?

POLIER: Well I certainly didn't feel it when I was young, and I think the disparity in age seemed much greater, as it does to young people, than it did to me later on. I think when I got to the feeling that the friendship was such that one wasn't holding back or saying, "Should I say this or not?" This sense of

freedom really came about when I worked at the White House and stayed there. You know, it was lunch; it was supper; it was working till late at night, listening to things that were happening and sharing ideas that made me feel really close to her and at home and completely comfortable. But I think she welcomed it. I think she realized too that a friendship had developed, because when I left she did say to me, "You know, as one gets older it's very difficult to make new friends, and I feel that with you I have one." So that I felt this way too, in a different way, looking up to her in many, many ways. But it had grown over the months, mutual confidence and respect and I think deep affection.

SOAPES: There's one final area I want to explore.

POLIER: I wish I could recall more but I can't. [64]

SOAPES: Your father of course was very close to her, had a very close relationship with the President, knew him quite well, speaks of him in the autobiography.

POLIER: And broke with him over Jimmy Walker and then got back again on a different basis.

SOAPES: What was the source of attraction that FDR had for your father?

POLIER: I think father found him a fascinating human being. I think he found him to be the kind of ideal of the nineteenth century liberal, of the patrician with a concern for the common man. A person to whom one could really talk about the problems of human beings, whether it was the old age pension or some other social problem. A person whom he saw as being limited when he first knew him but who kept growing, and a person in the White House who really cared about people who were oppressed, whether they were negroes or whether they were--I don't think he thought of that as much about Jews as he felt about minority groups, the kind of thing which was one of father's great concerns, and about social legislation. So that I think there were many things to attract my father, despite many concerns he had about some of the people around him.

SOAPES: Was FDR interested in the Zionist movement? [65]

POLIER: Well there's been so much written about that by learned historians, and some people feel that my father was fooled and betrayed. I think that's easier to say looking back than at a time when the President's one objective had become to defeat Hitler and win the war. I think probably Roosevelt really hoped that Jews would have a chance to find a homeland in Palestine, and I think when he was with father on that issue he was warm and sympathetic. But I think his overriding concern at that period was the war and he probably didn't like to be urged as much as he was to do what he should do in regard to the refugees, in regard to the British action or indecencies at that period. So that I don't feel that I know enough to evaluate it. I keep reading what's written, and I think it's very hard to hindsight these things. I was talking to someone the other night, whom I respect very much. We were talking about the difference in our approach to race relations at different periods and how we condemned the people who limited themselves to fighting lynching in the South or denial of the vote and about the way our thinking is bound by the context of the world in which we live. I went back and read Up From Slavery by Booker T. Washington which I found up in the Adirondacks last summer, who's just pushed aside as an Uncle Tom by so many blacks. And yet when you read him again, in the context of that period and realize the emphasis to get skills for these people so that they could become independent, there's so much validity in the battle he was fighting in that

place and at that [66] time. I think it's terribly important in trying to evaluate any thing as critical as the President's real position, which probably was mixed with a great deal of sympathy and kindness and concern and the necessity for keeping his eye as commander in chief on that war and defeating Hitler, that I find that the hindsight and the criticisms and the questions are very difficult to answer. And I'm sure there were conflicts, and I think there would have been for anybody with that power and that responsibility. I cannot say whether there was a conscious attempt to mislead my father when he said, "Stephen, you don't have to worry. I was with King Ibn Saud; his legs were all swollen. He'll be gone soon and then you'll be dealing with another generation." And two months later Roosevelt was dead and Ibn Saud was going on in all power, and as the years went by with more on account of oil. [67]

Appendix A

June 29th 1945.

Mr. Paul Siften, Director
Washington Bureau,
Union for Democratic Actions
819 13th St. N.W.,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Paul:

I spoke to Mrs. Roosevelt about the hearings on the Full Employment Bill in the Senate Banking and Currency Hearings, last Saturday. Needless to say she was deeply interested and eager to be helpful. She stated that if the hearings were to be held after the recess, she would be glad to testify except for the fact that she felt that her appearance before a Congressional Committee might be hurtful rather than helpful. She did offer, however, to write a series of columns on the human problems involved in the Full Employment Bill if you would send her material as you collected and prepared it. She also stated that she would be glad to go on the air if she could be helpful in that way.

Mrs. Roosevelt stated that Bernard Baruch was deeply in favor of the Full Employment program and that she felt that if he were properly approached and told that his appearance before the Congressional Committee might contribute substantially in securing the passage of the bill, he might be ready to do so. I think if you need help on this she would be willing to give it, though it might be quite unnecessary.

Mrs. Marshall Field, to whom I spoke about this, also wondered whether a script involving the human material might not be prepared by Corwin for a national hook-up at the right moment and whether it might not, with adequate preparation, do a great deal to help.

In regard to the right person to sum up the human values involved, I must say that I have questioned as to whether Ogburn is sufficiently part of the current stream of affairs. I wonder if you have considered Frank Graham?

Sincerely yours, [68]

June 20th, 1945.

Dear Paul:

I have been trying to think about the ideal person for the summing up, but frankly it is hard to think of the ideal person. I cannot help but wonder whether Ogburn has either the public appeal or a recent class relationship to the problems you discussed to make him the ideal person. The only two human beings whom I can think of who would be outstandingly available in entirely different ways would be Frank Graham and Mrs. Roosevelt. I think if he were willing to be fed material he could do a magnificent summation and would undoubtedly bring to the Congress a strength of feeling people could appreciate in view of his background and position.

I think if Mrs. Roosevelt were willing, though during the next few months, I do not think that she will take an active part in public meetings, she could present a very moving appeal from the human point of view. I do not believe that she should be asked to do the kind of summation which would involve careful documentation and then almost presentation of a report.

I shall add a postscript with a few names of people on special topics.

Sincerely, [69]

June 14, 1945.

Mrs. Justine Wise Polier
175 East 64 Street
New York, N.Y.

Dear Justine:

Eruption of events has prevented my writing earlier about the plans for presenting the human phases of chronic mass unemployment and full employment in the Senate Banking and Currency hearings on the Full Employment Bill.

The idea is to get up a schedule of qualified witnesses who can testify as to the effects of unemployment, poverty and economic insecurity upon the human beings. This panel of witnesses, taken together, and perhaps summed up by Professor William Ogburn, who would demonstrate to the committee and the American people the cost of permitting a return to the boom and bust cycle which carries with it chronic unemployment and chronic insecurity diffused throughout society.

Enclosed is a press release from Senator Wagner's office giving a tentative schedule for hearings. The human phases are listed under 2 and 3, as marked.

Under 2, in addition to testimony by representatives of veterans organizations, the thought is (and this is tentative and confidential) to have Lt. Col. William C. Menninger, Chief, Psychiatric Division, War Department, and General Omar Bradley, new Veterans Administration Chief, testify.

Under 3, the tentative schedule calls for testimony by Surgeon General Parran as to the effect on the health of the American people of mass unemployment in the past and as to the improvement of American health that can be expected to result from continuance of full employment after the war. Chaterine Lenroot could present some story in terms of children. Mrs. William Hastings, President of the National Conference of Parent Teachers Associations, could supplement this presentation.

Austin McCormack might be asked to testify on delinquency and crime, presenting facts showing the relationship between unemployment and delinquency [70] and crime and the extent to which continued full employment after the war would contribute to the reduction of delinquency and crime.

Bishop Sheil might testify as to the relationship between mass unemployment and conflicts among economic, racial and religious groups.

Professor William F. Ogburn and Mrs. Agnes Mayer might sum up, and Ogburn stress the effect of mass unemployment on the family and the continued strength and welfare of the nation.

Personally, I feel that this line-up is inadequate in numbers and variety and needs careful thought and planning in order to make the most of the subject in its legitimate bearing upon the bill which, in section 3 so ties the purposes of the bill back again and again to the subjects to be discussed in this phase of the hearings.

For example, instead of one person covering the field of delinquency and crime, it seems to me that several persons from various parts of the country should appear. The point will be made not by iteration but by documented reiteration. God knows the other phases will be pounded home by lengthy reiteration both in support and in opposition.

I hope you will give this thought and send your suggestions along at the earliest possible date, since this thing is shaping up very fast.

Sincerely yours,

Paul Sifton
Director, Washington Bureau [71]

Statement by Senator Robert F. Wagner, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Banking and Currency

WASHINGTON, D.C.
FOR RELEASE, A.M. NEWSPAPERS, MONDAY, JUNE 11, 1945.

Extensive hearings on the Full Employment Bill (S. 580) will begin after the Banking and Currency Committee has completed its work on the Bretton Woods legislation, it was announced today by Senator Robert F. Wagner (D., N.Y.), Committee Chairman.

"The maintenance of full employment in a free competitive economy," stated Senator Wagner, "is the basic problem of our age. It must not be approached in a selfish or partisan spirit, nor with offhand opinions and ready made reactions.

"In preparation for the full employment hearings, I urge our national leaders in business, agriculture, labor, government, and all other fields, to consult and confer on the basic policies and programs needed to strengthen free enterprise and assure the existence of employment opportunities for all who are willing and able to work.

"I should like to see business, labor, agriculture, and government arrange for frank and open discussions of the full employment problem in every state and in every community. No legislation, no program, no policies aimed at the twin

objectives of full employment opportunity and the fostering of competitive enterprise can be successful unless we can achieve widespread understanding of the issues that are involved and can map out a course for the future that will receive the whole-hearted cooperation of the great majority of the American people.

"The coming discussion of the Full Employment Bill in the United States Congress should reflect the well-considered views of thoughtful citizens throughout the country. The problem of full employment, therefore, should be high on the program of every forum, every trade association, every trade union, every club, every PTA, every woman's association, throughout the summer so that Congress can arrive at a truly national decision as promptly as possible."

The full employment hearings, the Senator revealed, will be held in two parts-- the first part before Labor Day; the second after Labor Day.

Between now and Labor Day, Senator Wagner stated, the Committee hopes to receive testimony from: (1) the sponsors of the Full Employment Bill and other members of Congress; (2) servicemen and veterans; and (3) national experts on the relation between employment and unemployment, on the one hand, and disease, crime, individual maladjustments, family problems, population growth, etc., on the other hand.

During the period after Labor Day, the schedule will be as follows: (1) Business and the Professions; (2) Agriculture; (3) Labor; (4) International Relations; (5) State and Local Governments; (6) Welfare and Public Service; (7) Public Works and Conservation; (8) Fiscal Policy; (9) Governmental organization; and (10) witnesses not otherwise covered.

This calendar, the Senator pointed out, is still subject to change and modification. The actual dates will be set in the near future. [72]

Appendix B

February 29, 1972
Mr. Joseph Lash
20 East 9th Street
New York, New York 10003

Dear Joe:

Shad and I have just finished your remarkable biography of the earlier years of Mrs. Roosevelt, and we look forward to the second volume. We both feel that you have made a great contribution to an appreciation of Mrs. Roosevelt and to the understanding of the period to which she contributed so much. The book is a great achievement. Our congratulations.

Recently, as I went through some papers at the house, I found the enclosed letter which I felt you should have. The background is that I received calls from Nahum Goldmann, President of the World Jewish Congress, concerning the desperate plight of the Jews who had reached Casablanca in order to go to Israel, and then had been stopped from leaving. My recollection is that there were over ten thousand living miserable conditions who had brought their few possessions, and there was danger of an epidemic breaking out.

I went to Mrs. Roosevelt with all the facts I had received at that time. She smiled and said that this would be a most opportune time for her to write to the King since she had recently received the new Ambassador from Morocco who had come to lay a wreath on the President's grave. He had arrived with such a large entourage from his staff and the State Department that she had not even enough food for tea, and had to send out for more. When the tea was over and they were about to leave, the Ambassador asked for a few moments alone with her. He told her that the King had asked him to come and express his deep appreciation that President Roosevelt had taken, him aside in North Africa and warned him about the need to protect the underground waters of Morocco after the war when concessions would be given for explorations for oil. The Ambassador went on to say, according to my recollection, that the King would never forget President Roosevelt's consideration for the people of Morocco, and he would agree to the continuance of the air bases because of this appreciation. [73]

Mrs. Roosevelt, with the smile that lighted her face when she felt she could be of help to others, then said she thought this would be an ideal time to write to the King, and sent me the enclosed letter, which she sent off immediately. Within a few days the Jews in Casablanca were released to go to Israel.

With affectionate regards to you and Trude.

Cordially,

JUSTINE WISE POLIER
Judge of the Family Court [74]

July 31, 1956

Your Majesty:

I wish to acknowledge your kind message transmitted to me through your representative. It is very gratifying to know that you remember my husband's visit to you. He often told me of that visit and of his hopes that some day you would bring back much of your desert into fertile land through use of underground water which might be found, and he recalled his advice to you never to give away all of your oil rights since you would need a substantial amount of those rights to bring this water to the surface. To have you remember this and his interest in the welfare of these areas was very gratifying to me.

As you know, my husband had a great interest in bringing to people in general throughout the world better conditions for living, He tried to do this for the people of the United States, but he was also anxious to see it come about in the world as a whole.

I have had an appeal to bring to your [75] attention the fact that there is a group of very poor Jewish people now in camps in Morocco who were to have been allowed to leave for Israel. They are of no value to the future development of Morocco as they have not succeeded in building for themselves a suitable economy. However, Israel can perhaps help them to develop skills and to improve their lot. Your government has given assurances that they would be allowed to leave but when it has come to a point in the last few months the actual necessary deeds to accomplish their departure have not been forthcoming.

I am sure that it is your Majesty's desire, as it was my husband's, not only to see better conditions for your people but to see people throughout the world

improve their condition. I hope Morocco will show the world that she is committed, as I believe she is, to the freedom of people who are living there which must include the freedom of people to emigrate. The Jews who had no country now have Israel where they can take their less fortunate brethren and help them to a better way of life. It seems to me that the Arab states would be forwarding their own interests if they were to [76] make this transfer possible. It would relieve the Arab states of indigent people and would show the world that they did have an interest in helping unfortunate people to improve themselves. I, therefore, bring this situation to your attention in this note which primarily expresses my gratitude for your memory of my husband, since I believe that you would not have remembered my husband if you did not have somewhat similar aims.

Very sincerely yours,

Eleanor Roosevelt [77]