



# PRESS RELEASE

## The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library presents**

**Film Screening and Discussion: *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933)**

**Sunday, March 29, 2009**

**2:00 p.m.**

HYDE PARK, NY -- The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum will present a film screening and discussion of the 1933 film “Gabriel Over the White House” on Sunday March 29, 2009 at 2:00 p.m. in the Henry A Wallace Center at the FDR Presidential Library and Home. Film and communications scholars Susan Edwards Harvith and John Harvith will moderate. Following the film, attendees can view the Library's special exhibition, “Action, and Action Now: FDR's First 100 Days,” at no charge.

During the period of national anxiety between Franklin D. Roosevelt’s November 1932 election victory and his March 4, 1933, inauguration, there were calls for a benevolent dictator to lead the nation. Indeed, advertisements for the Columbia Pictures documentary “Mussolini Speaks” read, “A lot of us have been asking for a dictator. His name is not Mussolini or Stalin or Hitler. It is Roosevelt.”

In the midst of this restive political climate, William Randolph Hearst, through his Cosmopolitan production company, agreed to have MGM producer Walter Wanger make a feature film based on the uncredited American novel “Gabriel Over the White House” and received MGM production head Irving Thalberg’s approval. Based on the British novel “Tweed,” “Gabriel” tells the story of a crooked politician elected President who

undergoes a miraculous transformation and becomes an enlightened dictator who solves the Depression's unemployment problem, rids the nation of gangsters, and ends the rearmament of foreign nations. Walter Huston, who assumes a Lincoln-like persona in the film, gives one of the most-admired performances of his career. The film, which came out shortly after FDR's inauguration, was one of the six top film hits of spring 1933 and was reportedly a favorite of the new President.

The Harviths will introduce the film screening of "Gabriel" by placing it within the political and filmmaking context of its time, speaking about Hearst's role in Roosevelt's political career in 1932-33 and explaining the internal controversy the film's production caused within MGM when studio chief and staunch Republican and Hoover supporter Louis B. Mayer first saw the completed film.

Susan Edwards Harvith and John Harvith are mass communications and arts historians who have worked together since 1971 in producing exhibitions and film series, writing books and articles, teaching, and doing oral histories of cultural and arts figures. Susan Edwards Harvith is a film history faculty member at Oasis in Syracuse and has served as an adjunct professor of film history at Syracuse University, in University College and the College of Visual and Performing Arts. John Harvith is senior associate vice chancellor in the University of Pittsburgh's Office of Public Affairs.

Together, the Harviths have coauthored, among other publications, the books "Karl Struss: Man With a Camera," which documented their national touring rediscovery exhibition of the early art photography of the legendary Hollywood cinematographer, and "Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph," the first oral history of the phonograph that grew out of Susan's master's thesis, including interviews with 46 recording figures, from Thomas Edison's youngest son to Benny Goodman, Andre Previn, and Vladimir Ashkenazy. They also have done taped interviews with more than 50 legendary film figures, as well as interviews with dozens of early television pioneers that form the core of a television oral history archive at Syracuse University.

Please contact Cliff Laube at (845) 486-7745 or email [clifford.laube@nara.gov](mailto:clifford.laube@nara.gov) with questions about these events.

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum is dedicated to preserving historical material and providing innovative educational programs, community events, and public outreach. It is one of thirteen presidential libraries administered by the National Archives and Records Administration. For information about the FDR Presidential Library call (800) 337-8474 or visit [www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu).

Historic Hyde Park is a group of government and private non-profit organizations based in Hyde Park, New York. Each has a unique mission, but all are united in their dedication to extending the legacy of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt to new generations. HHP includes the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site, Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site, the Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill, the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, and Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site. For more information about HHP visit [www.HistoricHydePark.org](http://www.HistoricHydePark.org).

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