Hi s Vi s i o n
O u r F r e e d o m s
S t i l l A l i v e
His Vision
Our Freedoms
Still Alive

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, America’s 32nd president, led the United States through two of the gravest crises in its history— the Great Depression and World War II.

This exhibit highlights FDR’s enduring achievements, using historic photographs, documents, cartoons and posters from the rich collections of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.

The FDR Library and Museum, located in Hyde Park, New York, is one of twelve presidential libraries administered by the National Archives and Records Administration. The Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, a private nonprofit organization, supports the Library’s work and mission.
When Franklin Roosevelt took the oath of office as President in March 1933, the nation was in the depths of the Great Depression. The country's banking system was on the verge of collapse and nearly one in four American workers were unemployed.
First 100 Days

During his first one hundred days in office, President Roosevelt launched an unprecedented legislative program to combat the Great Depression and restore economic confidence. He called his program the "New Deal."
Radio was the great mass communication device of the 1930s and FDR made masterful use of the new medium to speak directly to the American public about his policies. His conversational radio addresses were known popularly as “Fireside Chats.”
Fireside Chats

FDR’s “Fireside Chats” on the radio struck a powerful chord with Americans. Many people felt he was speaking directly to them. FDR delivered twenty-seven of these informal addresses during his presidency. Thousands responded to the talks with personal letters to the President.
The New Deal

FDR’s New Deal reformed America’s banking and credit systems, aided organized labor, and put millions of unemployed people back to work. Agencies like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built roads, bridges, dams, playgrounds, and other public works that changed the face of America. New Deal programs gave work to unemployed artists and brought art into the lives of millions.
Social Security

In the years following the passage of the Social Security Act, many Americans wrote FDR and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to thank them for the program.
On August 14, 1935, FDR signed the landmark Social Security Act. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, the first woman to serve in the Cabinet, stands to the President’s left. The new law, FDR declared, “will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and to his family against the loss of a job and against poverty-ridden old age.”
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Support For Unions

FDR forged a powerful bond with organized labor. The National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act), which he signed into law on July 5, 1935, curbed unfair labor practices by employers and required them to bargain collectively with their workers’ chosen representatives. It established the National Labor Relations Board to enforce the Act. The Wagner Act helped labor dramatically expand the number and size of unions. During FDR’s presidency, union membership jumped from 3 to 14 million.
On January 3, 1938, Roosevelt urged Congress to enact a federal law "to end starvation wages and intolerable hours." The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 led to the reduction of the standard work week and the establishment of a national minimum wage for many American workers. The Act also prohibited the employment of children under the age of 16 in most occupations.
On December 7, 1941, America entered World War II when Japan unleashed a surprise attack on U.S. military installations in the Pacific. The worst blow came at the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii. The American dead included 1,177 crewmen of the USS Arizona, which sank when a bomb ignited its forward ammunition magazine.
Day of Infamy Speech

Late in the afternoon of December 7, 1941, FDR dictated the first draft of a war message to Congress. His handwritten revisions—visible in the first draft—made the Day of Infamy speech one of the most memorable in American history.
FDR attended many famous Allied wartime meetings. His first conference with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill took place in August 1941 aboard two warships at sea in the North Atlantic. The two leaders developed a close personal bond during the war years.
Under FDR's wartime leadership, America's economy was transformed and profound social changes were unleashed. The war opened up economic opportunities for women, African Americans, and other minorities. In 1941, FDR signed a landmark executive order barring racial discrimination in defense industries. Under his leadership, women were encouraged to take untraditional jobs in war plants. They also joined America's military in large numbers.
Fifth Draft

The first is freedom of speech and expression everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want—which translated into world terms means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peace time life for its inhabitants everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear—which translated into world terms means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor anywhere in the world.

That kind of a world is the very antithesis of the so-called "new order" which the dictators seek to create in Europe and in Asia.

To that "new order" we oppose the greater conception, the moral order. A good society is able to face schemes of world domination and foreign revolutions alike without fear. It has no need either for the one or for the other.
As America's Commander in Chief, FDR directed strategic planning for a conflict that literally spanned the globe. The President’s wartime travels included trips to Africa, the Middle East, and the Pacific. His many decisions included authorizing a program to build an atomic bomb. FDR acted after Albert Einstein wrote him, describing the potential for an atomic weapon and warning that nuclear research was underway in Germany.
GI Bill

FDR believed America owed a special debt to the generation who served in World War II. With his strong support, Congress passed S. 1767—the "GI Bill of Rights"—in 1944. It provided millions of veterans with generous educational and medical benefits and loans for homes, farms, and businesses. The bill gave an entire generation the means to enter the middle class.
Economic Bill of Rights

The Rights we Fight for

THE BILL OF RIGHTS, December 15, 1791

CONGRESS shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated; and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall he be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury, of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor; and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.

In suits in admiralty, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES ON THE STATE OF THE UNION, January 11, 1944

IN OUR DAY, those economic needs have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, as we speak, a national Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established, without regard of section, race, or creed. Among these are--

The right to a decent and wholesome job in the industries, or shops or farms or mines of the Nation;

The right to a home and enough to provide adequate food and clothing and accommodation;

The right of every farmer to live and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;

The right of every householder, large or small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;

The right of every family to a decent home;

The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;

The right to adequate protection from the economic forces of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment;

The right to a good education.

All of these rights spell security. And after this war is won, we must be prepared to move forward, in the implementation of these rights, to new pacts of human happiness and well being.

America's own unfulfilled place in the world depends on a large part upon how fully her labor and leisure rights have been carried into practice for our citizens. For unless there is security here at home, there cannot be lasting peace in the world.

After World War II, FDR hoped to enact an “Economic Bill of Rights” that would provide Americans with greater economic security. This wartime poster advertised FDR's vision.
From the earliest days of World War II, FDR worked to create a postwar organization dedicated to global cooperation and peace through collective security. This sketch, made by FDR during the 1943 Teheran Conference, reflects his early concept of how a United Nations organization might be structured. The circles refer to broad concepts for a General Assembly, Secretariat, and Security Council (in FDR’s words “The Four Policemen”).
Let Us Move Forward

On April 12, 1945, Franklin Roosevelt died of a cerebral hemorrhage at his retreat in Warm Springs, Georgia. He had led America through the Great Depression and to the brink of victory in World War II. This image—taken the day before his death—is the last photographic portrait of him. The final page of a speech he was working on shortly before his death bears witness to his unquenchable optimism.