

Franklin D. Roosevelt

The president who oversaw most of the 1930s was Franklin Roosevelt. What did Franklin Roosevelt accomplish as president? Why was he so popular?

Franklin Roosevelt was born in Hyde Park, New York in 1882. His parents were both from wealthy families, and young Franklin lived a privileged life. He was an average student in school, but attended Harvard and graduated with a degree in History.

In 1921, Roosevelt contracted polio. As a result, he became permanently paralyzed from the waist down. In private, he used a wheelchair, but took great lengths to hide his disability from the public. Even while he was president, most Americans did not realize he was unable to walk.



He first made a name for himself in government as the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. He then went on to be elected governor of New York in 1928 (and again in 1930). In 1932, the US was in the midst of the Great Depression, and Franklin Roosevelt ran for president. He ran on the promise of a “new deal” for the American people and won all but 6 states.

His New Deal programs radically altered the appearance of the nation. Programs such as the WPA, CCC, and TVA put thousands of people to work and helped create the infrastructure of the nation. The WPA built roads, bridges, dams, lakes, and storm drainage sewers. The CCC improved parks, built lakes, planted trees, and created terraces to help fight wind erosion, while the TVA built more than 40 dams in seven Southern states. This prevented flooding in the region and set up electrical power grids to run off of hydroelectricity.

Roosevelt increased the size and scope of government tremendously. His administration created dozens of new government agencies that assumed many different responsibilities. During his presidency, extensive labor laws (such as minimum wage and a 44 hour work week) were also passed, labor unions were strengthened, and the government became a tool to influence and govern the economy.

Words to watch for:

*polio paralyzed
navigate amendment*

As the 1930s became the 1940s, Franklin Roosevelt continued serving as president during World War II. His leadership and decision-making ability helped the nation navigate through the war years and become the dominant military power in the world.

Franklin Roosevelt is the only president to serve more than two terms in office. He was elected to the position four times (1932, 1936, 1940, and 1944). This had a dramatic impact on the country and led to the passage of the 22nd Amendment to the US Constitution. This amendment states that no president may serve more than two terms.

Roosevelt was not without his critics. Many of his opponents disliked the New Deal, claiming he was leading America down the path of socialism. He was also criticized heavily for his attempt to pack the Supreme Court with justices favorable to his policies. After Congress and the court system began challenging or rejecting many of his New Deal programs, he attempted to increase the number of Supreme Court justices from nine to fifteen. This would have allowed him to appoint all six of the new justices and balance the Court in his favor.

Despite these criticisms, Roosevelt was very popular throughout his presidency and remains so today. There is a monument in Washington DC dedicated in his honor. His image appears on the dime, and there are numerous parks, schools, and other buildings named after him. He is frequently listed amongst the most influential presidents the United States has ever had.

Summarize: *Answer the following questions in the space provided. Attempt to respond in a complete sentence for each question. Be sure to use correct capitalization and punctuation!*

1. Who did not realize that Roosevelt was unable to walk throughout his presidency?

2. What did Roosevelt promise when ran for president?

3. When was Roosevelt elected president (which years)?

4. Where was Roosevelt born?

5. Why did Roosevelt hope to appoint six new Supreme Court justices?

6. How did building dams in Southern states help that region?

Student Response: *Write a paragraph addressing the questions raised below. A thorough response should consist of three to five complete sentences.*

7. President Roosevelt was confined to a wheelchair, but the American people were not aware of this fact. Do you feel he would have been elected had they known? Why or why not? In modern society, do you feel Americans would vote for a disabled individual? Why or why not? Explain your answers.

Franklin Roosevelt's 1933 Inaugural Address

March 4, 1933

I am certain that my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our people impel. This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days.



In such a spirit on my part and on yours we face our common difficulties. They concern, thank God, only material things. Values have shrunk to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen; government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone.

More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return. Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment...

... Restoration calls, however, not for changes in ethics alone. This Nation asks for action, and action now. Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources...

...If I read the temper of our people correctly, we now realize as we have never realized before our interdependence on each other; that we cannot merely take but we must give as well; that if we are to go forward, we must move as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline, because without such discipline no progress is made, no leadership becomes effective. We are, I know, ready and willing to submit our lives and property to such discipline, because it makes possible a leadership which aims at a larger good. This I propose to offer, pledging that the larger purposes will bind upon us all as a sacred obligation with a unity of duty hitherto evoked only in time of armed strife.

With this pledge taken, I assume unhesitatingly the leadership of this great army of our people dedicated to a disciplined attack upon our common problems.



Action in this image and to this end is feasible under the form of government which we have inherited from our ancestors. Our Constitution is so simple and practical that it is possible always to meet extraordinary needs by changes in emphasis and arrangement without loss of essential form. That is why our constitutional system has proved itself the most superbly enduring political mechanism the modern world has produced. It has met every stress of vast expansion of territory, of foreign wars, of bitter internal strife, of world relations.

It is to be hoped that the normal balance of executive and legislative authority may be wholly adequate to meet the unprecedented task before us. But it may be that an unprecedented demand and need for undelayed action may call for temporary departure from that normal balance of public procedure.

I am prepared under my constitutional duty to recommend the measures that a stricken nation in the midst of a stricken world may require. These measures, or such other measures as the Congress may build out of its experience and wisdom, I shall seek, within my constitutional authority, to bring to speedy adoption.

But in the event that the Congress shall fail to take one of these two courses, and in the event that the national emergency is still critical, I shall not evade the clear course of duty that will then confront me. I shall ask the Congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis—broad Executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.

Words to watch for:
induction frankness
feasible arduous

For the trust reposed in me I will return the courage and the devotion that befit the time. I can do no less.

We face the arduous days that lie before us in the warm courage of the national unity; with the clear consciousness of seeking old and precious moral values; with the clean satisfaction that comes from the stern performance of duty by old and young alike. We aim at the assurance of a rounded and permanent national life.

We do not distrust the future of essential democracy. The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action. They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift I take it.

In this dedication of a Nation we humbly ask the blessing of God. May He protect each and every one of us. May He guide me in the days to come.

Summarize: *Answer the following questions in the space provided. Attempt to respond in a complete sentence for each question. Be sure to use correct capitalization and punctuation.*

1. Who is delivering this speech?
2. What is the occasion for which this speech was delivered?
3. According to the fourth paragraph, when does this nation ask for action?
4. Where do you suppose the speaker was when delivering this speech?
5. According to the fifth paragraph, why does the speaker say we must give as well as take?
6. According to the fourth paragraph, how must this problem be faced?

Student Response: *Write a paragraph addressing the questions raised below. A thorough response should consist of three to five complete sentences.*

7. Franklin Roosevelt said “the only thing we have to fear, is fear itself.” What does this phrase mean to you?

The First 100 Days

Franklin Roosevelt's administration is famous for accomplishing many things in its "first hundred days". What did he do that was so significant? How did it change the nation?

As Franklin Roosevelt was preparing to enter the White House, he consulted the opinions of several individuals that he had trusted for years. Adolph Berle, Raymond Moley, and Rexford Tugwell were professors at Columbia University and men who had secretly advised the president during his years as governor of New York. These men came to be known as the Brain Trust. Roosevelt would frequently suggest ideas to them and listen to their opinions and advice. While the Brain Trust never officially met during his presidency, the trio undoubtedly had influence over his decision-making process. Roosevelt had other close advisers that he consulted as well, many of whom became a part of administration. Of course, his closest advisor was his wife Eleanor.



When Roosevelt assumed the presidency in March of 1933, his first action was to order all banks to take a holiday for four days. By doing this, he hoped to calm people's anxieties about the banking industry. Fearful citizens had been attempting to pull their money out of banks, believing they would close. This "holiday" gave everyone a chance to calm down, and banks re-opened four days later, with few people rushing to take their money out.

Following that, the new president called a special session of Congress. After Roosevelt had been in office for only four days, the first of the New Deal laws (the Emergency Banking Relief Act) was passed. This was followed by a slew of legislation, most of which occurred from March 20th through June 16th of 1933.

The Economy Act, signed on March 20th, was designed to balance the federal budget by reducing government salaries. The Federal Emergency Relief Act authorized \$500 million to provide relief for poor families, in the form of food and clothing. Other major pieces of legislation included the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Federal Securities Act, and the National Employment System Act.

During the first hundred days, Roosevelt also created the Civilian Conservation Corps, which provided 250,000 jobs for men between the ages of 18 and 25. The Tennessee Valley Authority was also established. This project would build hydroelectric dams and provide electricity to the Tennessee Valley region.

Words to watch for:

*consulted legislation
anxieties administration*

The "first 100 days" altered the way that many view the office of the president. At the time, many in Washington DC were critical of the new president for doing too much too quickly. However, today an incoming president is often viewed by how much is, or is not, accomplished during the first hundred days of the administration.

Summarize: *Answer the following questions in the space provided. Attempt to respond in a complete sentence for each question. Be sure to use correct capitalization and punctuation!*

1. Who were the members of the Brain Trust?
2. What did Roosevelt do after declaring the “bank holiday”?
(what was his second action?)
3. When were most of the laws passed (between what dates)?
4. The Brain Trust consisted of professors from which university?
5. Why were fearful citizens attempting to pull their money out of the banks?
6. How did many in Washington DC feel about what Roosevelt was doing?

Student Response: *Write a paragraph addressing the questions raised below. A thorough response should consist of three to five complete sentences.*

7. From the moment he took office, President Roosevelt began making changes. Do you feel this was the appropriate strategy, given the economic conditions at the time? Or should he have moved slowly? Support your answer.