



Image from: [Franklin Roosevelt \(center\) meets with Josef... in *Encyclopedia of Intelligence & Counterintelligence*](#)

Summary Article: **Roosevelt, Franklin Delano**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(dəl'Ənō rō'zƏvĕlt), 1882–1945, 32d President of the United States (1933–45), b. Hyde Park, N.Y.

Early Life

Through both his father, James Roosevelt, and his mother, Sara Delano Roosevelt, he came of old, wealthy families. After studying at Groton, Harvard (B.A., 1904), and Columbia Univ. school of law, he began a career as a lawyer. In 1905 he married a distant cousin, a niece of Theodore Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt. They had five children: Anna Eleanor, James, Elliott, Franklin D., Jr., and John A. Both Franklin D., Jr., and James served terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Political Start

His political career began when he was elected (1910) to the New York state senate. He became the leader of a group of insurgent Democrats who prevented the Tammany candidate, William F. Sheehan, from being chosen for the U.S. Senate. Roosevelt allied himself firmly with reform elements in the party by his vigorous campaign for Woodrow Wilson in the election of 1912. Appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy, he served in that position from 1913 to 1920 and acquired a reputation as an able administrator. In 1920 he ran as vice presidential nominee with James M. Cox on the Democratic ticket that lost overwhelmingly to Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge.

Affliction and Return to Politics

The following summer, while vacationing on Campobello Island, N.B., Roosevelt was stricken with poliomyelitis. He was paralyzed from the waist down, but by unremitting effort he eventually recovered partial use of his legs. Although crippled to the end of his life, his vigor reasserted itself. He found the waters at Warm Springs, Ga., beneficial, and there he later established a foundation to help other victims of poliomyelitis. Encouraged by his wife and others, he had retained his interest in life and politics and was active in support of the candidacy of Alfred E. Smith in the Democratic conventions of 1924 and 1928.

Persuaded by Smith, Roosevelt ran for the governorship of New York and was elected (1928) by a small plurality despite the defeat of the Democratic ticket nationally. Roosevelt's program of state action for general welfare included a farm-relief plan, a state power authority, regulation of public utilities, and old-age pensions. Roosevelt was reelected governor in 1930, and, to deal with the growing problems of the economic depression, he in 1932 surrounded himself with a small group of intellectuals (later called the Brain Trust) as well as with other experts in many fields. Although his program showed him to be the most vigorous of the governors working for recovery, the problems still remained.

Presidency

New Deal

In July, 1932, Roosevelt was chosen by the Democratic party as its presidential candidate to run against the Republican incumbent, Herbert C. Hoover. In November, Roosevelt was overwhelmingly elected President. He came to the White House at the height of crisis—the economic structure of the country

was tottering, and fear and despair hung over the nation. Roosevelt's inaugural address held words of hope and vigor to reassure the troubled country—"Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself"—and at the same time to prepare it for a prompt and unprecedented emergency program—"This Nation asks for action, and action now. We must act and act quickly." He did act quickly. During the famous "Hundred Days" (Mar.–June, 1933), the administration rushed through Congress a flood of antidepression measures.

Finance and banking were regulated by new laws that loosened credit and insured deposits; the United States went off the gold standard; and a series of government agencies—most notably the National Recovery Administration, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and the Public Works Administration—were set up to reorganize industry and agriculture under controls and to revive the economy by a vast expenditure of public funds. The Civilian Conservation Corps (1933) conserved and developed the country's natural resources while employing more than three million. (A committed conservationist, Roosevelt created 29 national parks and monuments, as many national forests, and 140 national wildlife refuges during his presidency.) The government took a direct role in infrastructure development to promote economic development with the establishment of the Tennessee Valley Authority (1933) and the Rural Electrification Administration (1935). The Securities and Exchange Commission was set up (1934) to regulate banks and stock exchanges. The Works Progress Administration (later the Work Projects Administration) was intended to offer immediate work programs for many unemployed, while the legislation for social security was a long-range plan for the future protection of the worker in unemployment, sickness, and old age.

The vast, many-faceted program of the New Deal was fashioned with the help of many advisers. Some of the Brain Trust had accompanied Roosevelt to Washington, and counselors, such as Raymond Moley, Rexford Guy Tugwell, and Adolf A. Berle, Jr., were important advisers in the early years, as were some members of the cabinet, including Henry A. Wallace, Harold L. Ickes, Frances Perkins, Cordell Hull, and James A. Farley. Among his other counselors was Harry L. Hopkins. There was sometimes dissension within the ranks of these advisers; a counselor breaking from the group and denouncing the policies of the administration—and sometimes the President himself—became a familiar occurrence. The steady and rapid buildup of the program and the forceful personality of Roosevelt offset early opposition. His reassuring "fireside chats," broadcast to the nation over the radio, helped to explain issues and policies to the people and to hold for him the mandate of the nation.

In 1936, Roosevelt was reelected by a large majority over his Republican opponent, Alfred M. Landon, who won the electoral votes of only two states. However, the impetus of reform had begun to slow. The opposition (generally conservative) turned more bitter toward "that man in the White House," whom they considered a "traitor to his class." Quarrels and shifts among supporters in the government continued to have a divisive effect. The action of the Supreme Court in declaring a number of the New Deal measures invalid—notably those creating the National Recovery Administration and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration—spurred the opponents of Roosevelt and tended to reduce the pace of reform. Roosevelt tried to reorganize the court in 1937, but failed (see Supreme Court). He failed, too, in his attempt to "purge" members of Congress who had opposed New Deal measures; most of those opponents were triumphant in the elections of 1938. However, the dynamic force of the administration continued to be exerted and to impress foreign observers.

The War Years

Apart from extending diplomatic recognition to the USSR (1933), the main focus of Roosevelt's foreign policy in the early years was the cultivation of "hemisphere solidarity." His "good neighbor" policy toward Latin America, which included the signing of reciprocal trade agreements with many countries, greatly improved relations with the neighboring republics to the south. In addition, from his earliest days in office, e.g., in his 1935 state of the union speech, Roosevelt made it clear that the United States was not only threatened by the domestic Depression but by fascism abroad as well, and he condemned isolationism. By 1938 the international skies were black, and as the power of the Axis nations grew, Roosevelt spoke out against aggression and international greed.

Although the United States refused to recognize Japan's conquest of Manchuria and decried Japanese aggression against China, negotiations with Japan went on even after World War II had broken out in Europe. After the fighting started, the program that Roosevelt had already begun—to build U.S. strength and make the country an "arsenal of democracy"—was speeded up. In the summer of 1940, after the fall of France and while Great Britain was being blitz-bombed by the Germans, aid to Britain (permitted since relaxation of the Neutrality Act) was greatly increased, and in 1941 lend-lease to the Allies was begun. In the presidential election of 1940 both of the major parties supported the national defense program and aid to Britain but opposed the entry of the United States into the war.

In accepting the nomination for that year Roosevelt broke with tradition; never before had a President run for a third term. Some of his former associates were vocal in criticism. John N. Garner, who had been Vice President, was alienated, and the new vice presidential candidate was Henry A. Wallace. James A. Farley, who had been prominent in managing the earlier campaigns, fell away. John L. Lewis, with his large labor following, bitterly denounced Roosevelt. The Republican candidate, Wendell Willkie, had much more support than Roosevelt's earlier opponents, but again the President won, if by a closer margin.

The story of his third administration is primarily the story of World War II as it affected the United States. The first peacetime selective service act came into full force. In Aug., 1941, Roosevelt met British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at sea and drafted the Atlantic Charter. The United States was becoming more and more aligned with Britain, while U.S. relations with Japan grew steadily worse.

On Dec. 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor plunged the United States into the war. Much later, accusations of responsibility for negligence at Pearl Harbor, and even for starting the war, were leveled at Roosevelt; historians disagree as to the validity of these charges. Roosevelt was, however, responsible to a large extent for the rapid growth of American military strength. He was not only the active head of a nation at war but also one of the world leaders against all that the Axis powers represented. His diplomatic duties were heavy. There was no conflict within the United States over foreign policy, and the election that occurred in wartime was again largely on domestic issues.

In 1944, Roosevelt, who had chosen Harry S. Truman as his running mate, was triumphant over the Republican Thomas E. Dewey. The turn in the fortunes of war had already come, and the series of international conferences with Churchill, Joseph Stalin, Chiang Kai-shek, and others (see Casablanca Conference; Quebec Conference; Tehran Conference; Yalta Conference) began increasingly to include plans for the postwar world. Roosevelt spoke eloquently for human freedom and worked for the establishment of the United Nations.

On Apr. 12, 1945, not quite a month before Germany surrendered to the Allies, Franklin Delano Roosevelt died suddenly from a cerebral hemorrhage. He was buried on the family estate at Hyde Park

(much of which he donated to the nation). The Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Library is there. Roosevelt's character and achievements are still hotly debated by his fervent admirers and his fierce detractors. However, no one denies his immense energy and self-confidence, his mastery of politics, and the enormous impact his presidency had on the development of the country.

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