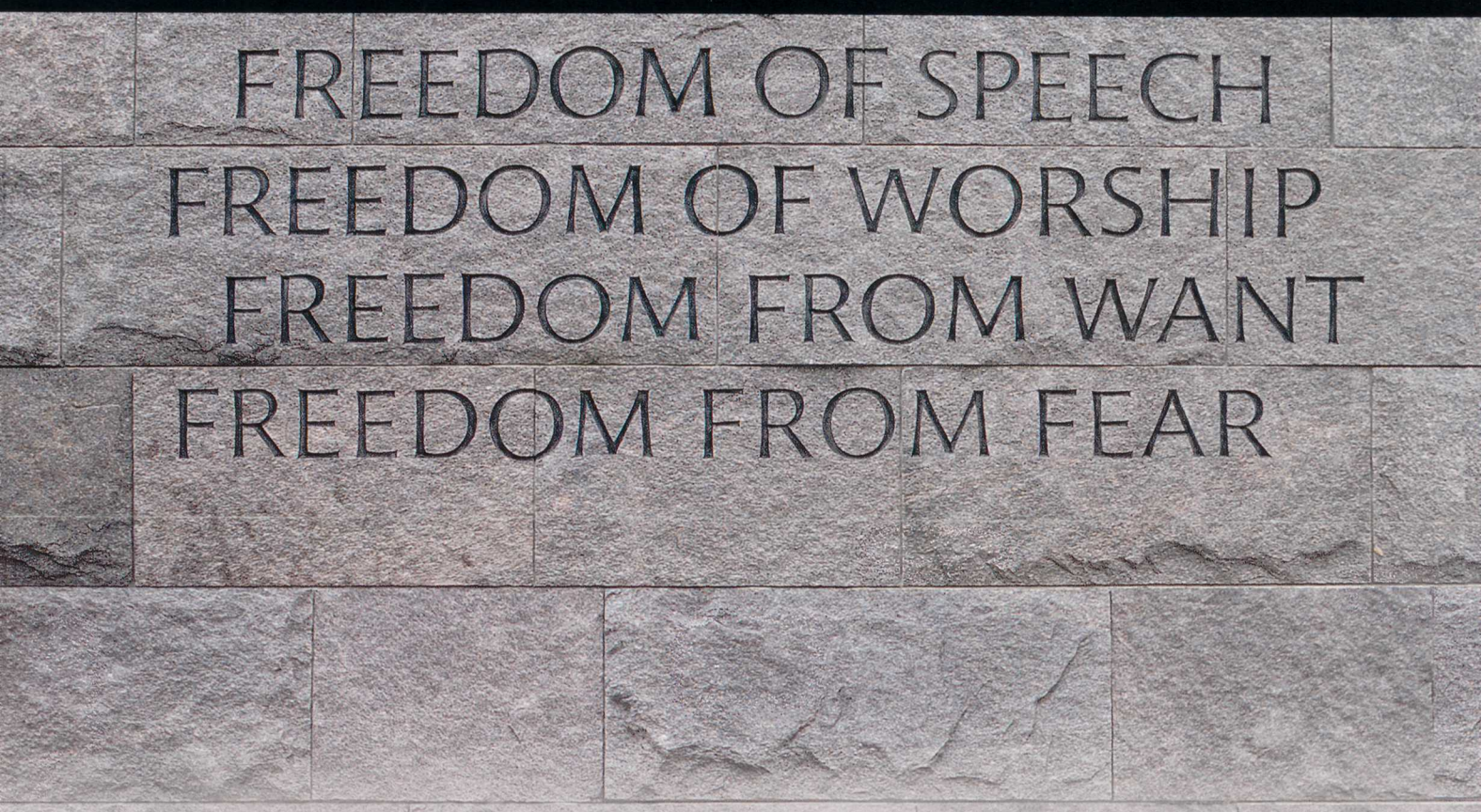
Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.



In his 1941 State of the Union Address, as the nation prepared for World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt spelled out "Four Freedoms" as a reminder of why Americans were fighting. From the days of his first presidential campaign during the depths of the Great Depression, Roosevelt spoke directly to the people. "I pledge you, I pledge myself," he said in his 1932 acceptance speech, "to a new deal for the American people." Four years later he proclaimed that "this generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny." As president from 1933–1945, he addressed the American people by radio in what came to be known as fireside chats. Each idea, each phrase was underscored by courage and optimism that inspired no less in the people he served.

Long after Roosevelt's death his own words call out from the walls of his memorial as though he were somehow present. Those who know FDR only as a historical figure will recognize these words by their association with great and catastrophic events. For those who lived through the Roosevelt era, the words recall 12 years of personal struggles and triumphs.

Sculptures of FDR and Fala by Neil Estern. PHOTOS/NPS

"Franklin's illness . . . gave him strength and courage he had not had before. He had to think out the fundamentals of living and learn the greatest of all lessons—infinite patience and never-ending persistence."

Eleanor Roosevelt

FDR triumphed on the world stage from a wheelchair—as United States president and as a founding father of the United Nations. At age 39 he contracted polio and would never walk another step without assistance. He spent each day of his 12-year presidency in a wheelchair. One of this nation's greatest leaders, FDR's determination and courage remain an inspiration for people around the world, especially for those with disabilities.

AP/WIDE WORLD

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FDR: A Brief Chronology

1882 Born January 30, Hyde Park, N.Y.
1904 Graduates from Harvard University; enters Columbia Law School.
1905 Marries Anna Eleanor Roosevelt; five surviving children born 1906–1916.
1911–13 State Senator, New York.
1913–20 Assistant Secretary of the Navy; U.S. involved in World War I, 1917–18.
1920 Democratic nominee for Vice President; Cox-Roosevelt ticket loses.
1921 Contracts polio at Campobello summer home in Canada; never again walks unaided.
1928–32 Governor of New York.
1929 Onset of Great Depression. By early 1930s, about 30 percent of U.S. work force is unemployed.
1933–45 Elected 32nd president of the United States. In "First 100 Days" FDR initiates New Deal programs to provide immediate relief, create jobs, and foster economic recovery. He leads reform efforts in civil rights, labor relations, banking, and civil service; creates the Social Security Administration in 1935.
1939 World War II breaks out in Europe. FDR signs Lend-Lease Act in 1941 to aid Allied powers. U.S. enters war in December 1941; FDR launches nationwide war effort, sends more than 16 million U.S. troops to war.
1944 After serving an unprecedented third term, FDR is elected to a fourth term.
1945 Dies at Warm Springs, Ga., April 12, age 63; Allied forces victorious by August.

Top left Winston Churchill, FDR, and Joseph Stalin at Yalta conference, 1945.

Above FDR, his dog Fala, and Ruthie Bie, granddaughter of the caretaker of Hill Top Cottage, Roosevelt's retreat at Hyde Park, New York.

Right FDR used this microphone to address the nation from the White House in his fireside chats; FDR inaugural ribbon.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Commemorating FDR's Presidency

The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial is one of the more expansive memorials in the nation. Yet its shade trees, waterfalls, statuary, and quiet alcoves create the feeling of a secluded garden rather than an imposing structure. The memorial's five outdoor rooms include a Prologue Room and and one for each of FDR's terms in office. The rooms are defined by walls of red South Dakota granite and by ornamental plantings; quotations from FDR are carved into the granite. Water cascades and quiet pools are present throughout. Each room conveys in its own way the spirit of this great man.

A statue of Roosevelt in a wheelchair, located in the Prologue Room, depicts the physical disability that defined FDR's character and inspired his leadership. A sculpture of the presidential seal is mounted inside the entryway. Room One introduces FDR's early presidency, when he launched the New Deal in response to the worst economic crisis of the century. A relief sculpture depicts his first inauguration.

In Room Two, sculptural groups—an urban breadline, a rural couple, and a man listening to a fireside chat—recall both the despair and the hope of the times. New Deal social and economic programs are depicted in bronze panels.

A grassy berm between Rooms Two and Three represents the historical point at which Roosevelt and the nation confronted World War II. In Room Three, Roosevelt appears as a seated figure with his beloved dog Fala sitting nearby. Room Four honors the life and legacy of FDR. A sculptural relief of Roosevelt's funeral cortege hangs in an alcove. The statue of Eleanor Roosevelt commemorates her role as First Lady, as well as her later work as United Nations delegate and champion for human rights. Inscribed in the plaza steps, a timeline chronicles important events from the extraordinary life of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

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George Segal's sculpture of a 1930s breadline, in Room Two, shows the literal and figurative hunger that many Americans felt in the Depression years.

Building the Memorial The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission, established by Congress in 1955, invited designers to look to "the character and work of Franklin Delano Roosevelt" for a memorial "that will do him the honor he deserves and transmit his image to future generations." Not until May 1997 would the memorial take its place among other presidential monuments in Washington, D.C. Designed by Lawrence Halprin, the memorial incorporates work by prominent American artists Leonard Baskin, Neil Estern, Robert Graham, Thomas Hardy, and George Segal, as well as master stonecarver John Benson.

NPS/ARCHITECTURAL RENDERING DERIVATIVE

About Your Visit The memorial stands in West Potomac Park, between the Tidal Basin and Potomac River. An information area and bookstore are at the front entrance. Park rangers are available daily except December 25. The memorial is wheelchair-accessible.

Contact: National Mall & Memorial Parks, 900 Ohio Drive SW, Washington, DC 20024-2000; www.nps.gov/fdrm.

The Memorial is one of over 380 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, visit www.nps.gov.

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