

2020 Teacher Institute

Robert C. Byrd Center for Congressional History and Education

Teaching About Congress and the Constitution in Critical Periods of American History

Session III: "Necessitous Men Are Not Free Men" FDR, Congress, and Rights during the Great Depression

Guiding Question(s): How did the New Deal change the federal government's role in American society?

How did popular conceptions of rights change during the New Deal era?

Topic I: The people, the president, and the Congress

Document:

1. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Inaugural Address," March 4, 1933

Topic II: The New Deal and the Great Depression

Documents:

2. List of Emergency Recovery Agencies Established Prior to Dec. 31, 1934
3. Vera Block, "Work Pays America! Prosperity," Federal Art Project. 1936-1941, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3b48737/>
4. "WPA Worker Receives Paycheck," January 1939, National Archives and Records Administration
5. "Tennessee Valley Authority: pictorial map," Tennessee Valley Authority. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939, Library of Congress

Topic III: Freedom to or Freedom From?: Rights in the New Deal Era

Documents:

6. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Annual Message to Congress," January 6, 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. (Four Freedoms Speech)
7. Norman Rockwell, "Freedom of Speech," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 20, 1943.
8. Norman Rockwell, "Freedom of Religion," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 17, 1943.
9. Norman Rockwell, "Freedom From Want," *Saturday Evening Post*,
10. Norman Rockwell, "Freedom From Fear," *Saturday Evening Post*,
11. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, January 11, 1944, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. (Economic Bill of Rights Speech)

Documents:

Document I: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Inaugural Address," March 4, 1933
National Archives Identifier: [197333](#)

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
Washington, D. C.
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 Nation impels. 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 shrunken 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.

Yet our distress comes from no failure of substance. We are stricken by no plague of locusts. Compared with the perils which our forefathers conquered because they believed and were not afraid, we have still much to be thankful for. Nature still offers her bounty and human efforts have multiplied it. Plenty is at our doorstep, but a generous use of it languishes in the very sight of the supply. Primarily this is because rulers of the exchange of mankind's goods have failed, through their own stubbornness and their own incompetence, have admitted their failure, and abdicated. Practices of the unscrupulous money changers stand indicted in the court of public opinion, rejected by the hearts and minds of men.

True they have tried, but their efforts have been

cast in the pattern of an outworn tradition. Faced by failure of credit they have proposed only the lending of more money. Stripped of the lure of profit by which to induce our people to follow their false leadership, they have resorted to exhortations, pleading tearfully for restored confidence. They know only the rules of a generation of self-seekers. They have no vision, and when there is no vision the people perish.

The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths. The measure of the restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit.

Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort. The joy and moral stimulation of work no longer must be forgotten in the mad chase of evanescent profits. These dark days will be worth all they cost us if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto but to minister to ourselves and to our fellow men.

Recognition of the falsity of material wealth as the standard of success goes hand in hand with the abandonment of the false belief that public office and high political position

are to be valued only by the standards of pride of place and personal profit; and there must be an end to a conduct in banking and in business which too often has given to a sacred trust the likeness of callous and selfish wrongdoing. Small wonder that confidence languishes, for it thrives only on honesty, on honor, on the sacredness of obligations, on faithful protection, on unselfish performance; without them it cannot live.

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.

Hand in hand with this we must frankly recognize the overbalance of population in our industrial centers and, by engaging on a national scale in a redistribution, endeavor to provide a better use of the land for those best fitted for the land. The task can be helped by definite efforts to raise the values of agricultural products and with this the power to purchase the output of our cities. It can be helped by

preventing realistically the tragedy of the growing loss through foreclosure of our small homes and our farms. It can be helped by insistence that the Federal, State, and local governments act forthwith on the demand that their cost be drastically reduced. It can be helped by the unifying of relief activities which today are often scattered, uneconomical, and unequal. It can be helped by national planning for and supervision of all forms of transportation and of communications and other utilities which have a definitely public character. There are many ways in which it can be helped, but it can never be helped merely by talking about it. We must act and act quickly.

Finally, in our progress toward a resumption of work we require two safeguards against a return of the evils of the old order; there must be a strict supervision of all banking and credits and investments; there must be an end to speculation with other people's money, and there must be provision for an adequate but sound currency.

These are the lines of attack. I shall presently urge upon a new Congress, in special session, detailed measures for their fulfillment, and I shall seek the immediate assistance of the several States.

Through this program of action we address ourselves

to putting our own national house in order and making income balance outgo. Our international trade relations, though vastly important, are in point of time and necessity secondary to the establishment of a sound national economy. I favor as a practical policy the putting of first things first. I shall spare no effort to restore world trade by international economic readjustment, but the emergency at home cannot wait on that accomplishment.

The basic thought that guides these specific means of national recovery is not narrowly nationalistic. It is the insistence, as a first consideration, upon the interdependence of the various elements in and parts of the United States -- a recognition of the old and permanently important manifestation of the American spirit of the pioneer. It is the way to recovery. It is the immediate way. It is the strongest assurance that the recovery will endure.

In the field of world policy I would dedicate this Nation to the policy of the good neighbor -- the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others -- the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.

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.

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 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.

Document II: List of Emergency Recovery Agencies Established Prior to Dec. 31, 1934

LIST OF EMERGENCY RECOVERY AGENCIES
ESTABLISHED PRIOR TO
DEC. 31, 1934

Agricultural Adjustment Administration.	National Labor Relations Board.
Advisory Council on Economic Security.	National Planning Board.
Business Advisory and Planning Council.	National Recovery Administration.
Consumers' Advisory Board.	National Resources Board.
Central Bank for Cooperatives.	National Steel Labor Relations Board.
Consumers' Counsel.	Petroleum Administration.
Civilian Conservation Corps.	Petroleum Administrative Board.
Commodity Credit Corporation.	Public Works Administration.
Economic Security Committee.	Public Works of Art Project.
Economic Security Committee.	Public Works Emergency Housing Corporation.
Central Statistical Board.	Reconstruction Finance Corporation.
Civil Works Administration.	Science Advisory Board.
Executive Council.	Special Adviser to the President on Foreign Trade.
Executive Committee on Commercial Policy.	Special Board for Public Works.
Emergency Conservation Work.	Second Export-Import Bank of Washington, D. C.
Electric Home and Farm Authority, Inc.	Soil Erosion Service.
Export-Import Bank of Washington.	Special Industrial Recovery Board.
Economic Security Committee.	Steel Labor Relations Board.
Federal Advisory Council.	Textile Labor Relations Board.
Federal Alcohol Control Administration.	Tennessee Valley Authority.
Farm Credit Administration.	Tennessee Valley Associated Cooperatives, Inc.
Federal Coordinator of Transportation.	Information Service.
Federal Civil Works Administration.	
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.	
Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works.	
Federal Emergency Relief Administration.	
Federal Employment Stabilization Board.	
Federal Farm Mortgage Corporation.	
Federal Housing Administration.	
Federal Home Loan Bank Board.	
Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation.	
Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation.	
Federal Surplus Relief Corporation.	
Historic American Buildings Survey.	
Home Owners' Loan Corporation.	
Industrial Advisory Board.	
Industrial Emergency Committee.	
Indian Emergency Conservation Work.	
National Construction Planning and Adjustment Board.	
National Emergency Council.	
National Industrial Recovery Board.	
National Labor Board.	
National Longshoremen's Labor Board.	

Source: [Catalog of the Public Documents of the 73rd Congress, Number 22 Hein Online, Document 9875 v \(1933-34\) Document Catalog, no. 72, 73rd Congress](#)

Worksheet: A New Role for Government? (National Archives and Records Administration, www.archives.gov/legislative)

Launching the New Deal: FDR and Congress Respond to the Great Depression

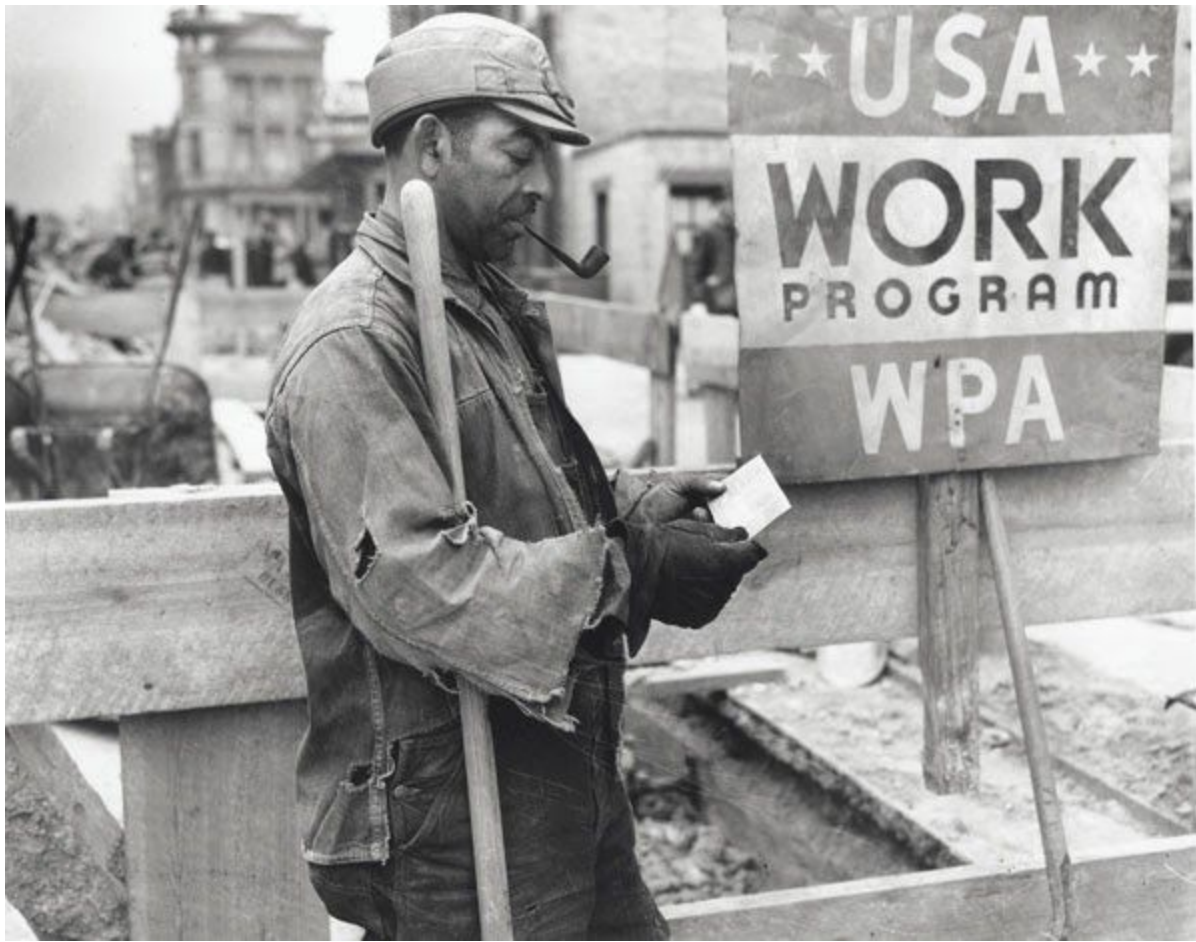
Worksheet 3: A New Role for Government?

1. Identify Agencies having to do with the following topics:
 - a. Labor
 - b. banking and the economy
 - c. natural resources
 - d. public works
 - e. agriculture
 - f. industry
 - g. housing and home ownership
2. How does the creation of these agencies show a changing role for the Federal government?
3. Write a sentence that summarizes the new areas of responsibility Congress and the President gave to the Federal government when they created these agencies.

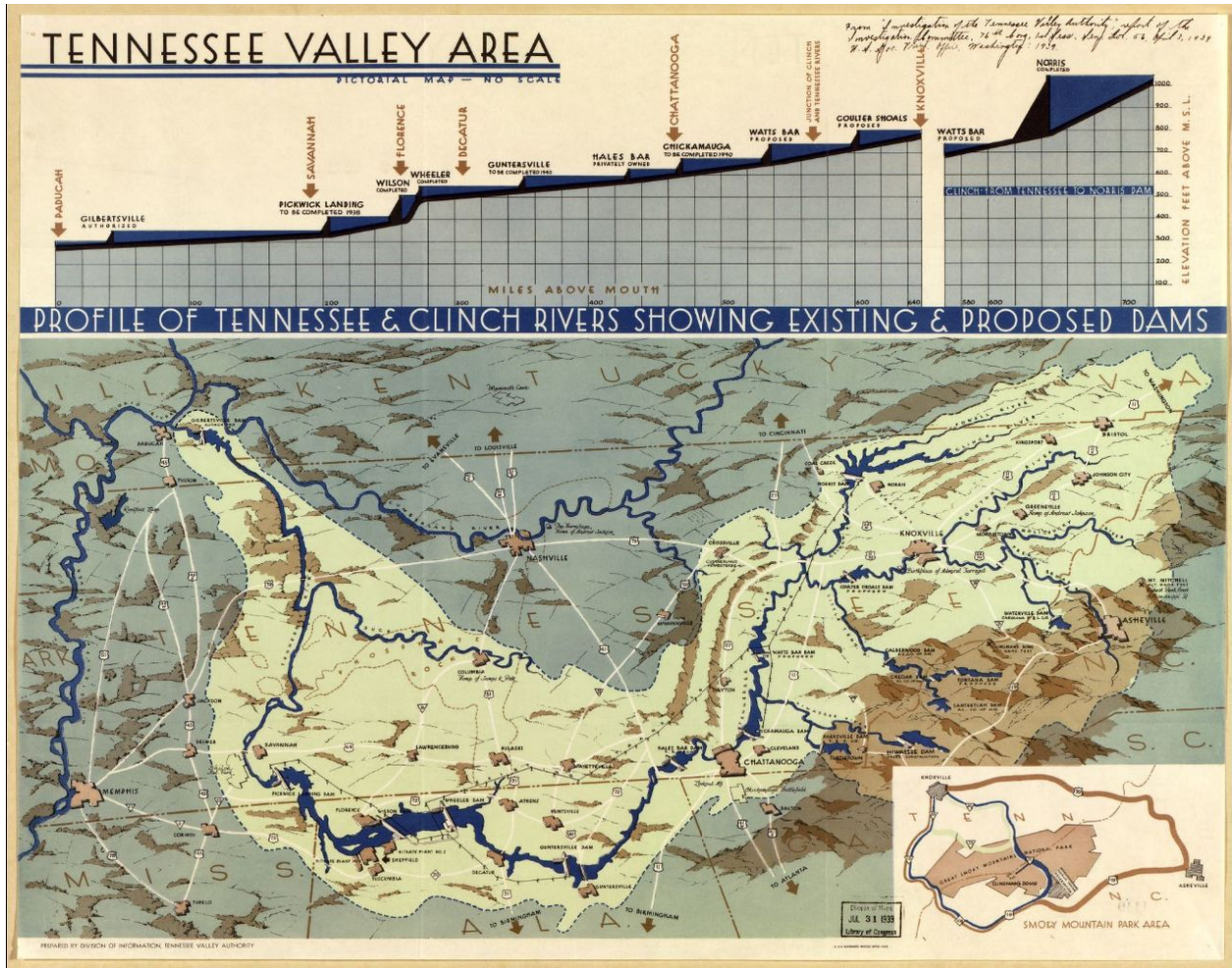
Document III: Vera Block, "Work Pays America! Prosperity," Federal Art Project. 1936-1941, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3b48737/>



Document IV: "WPA Worker Receives Paycheck," January 1939, National Archives and Records Administration, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/594956>



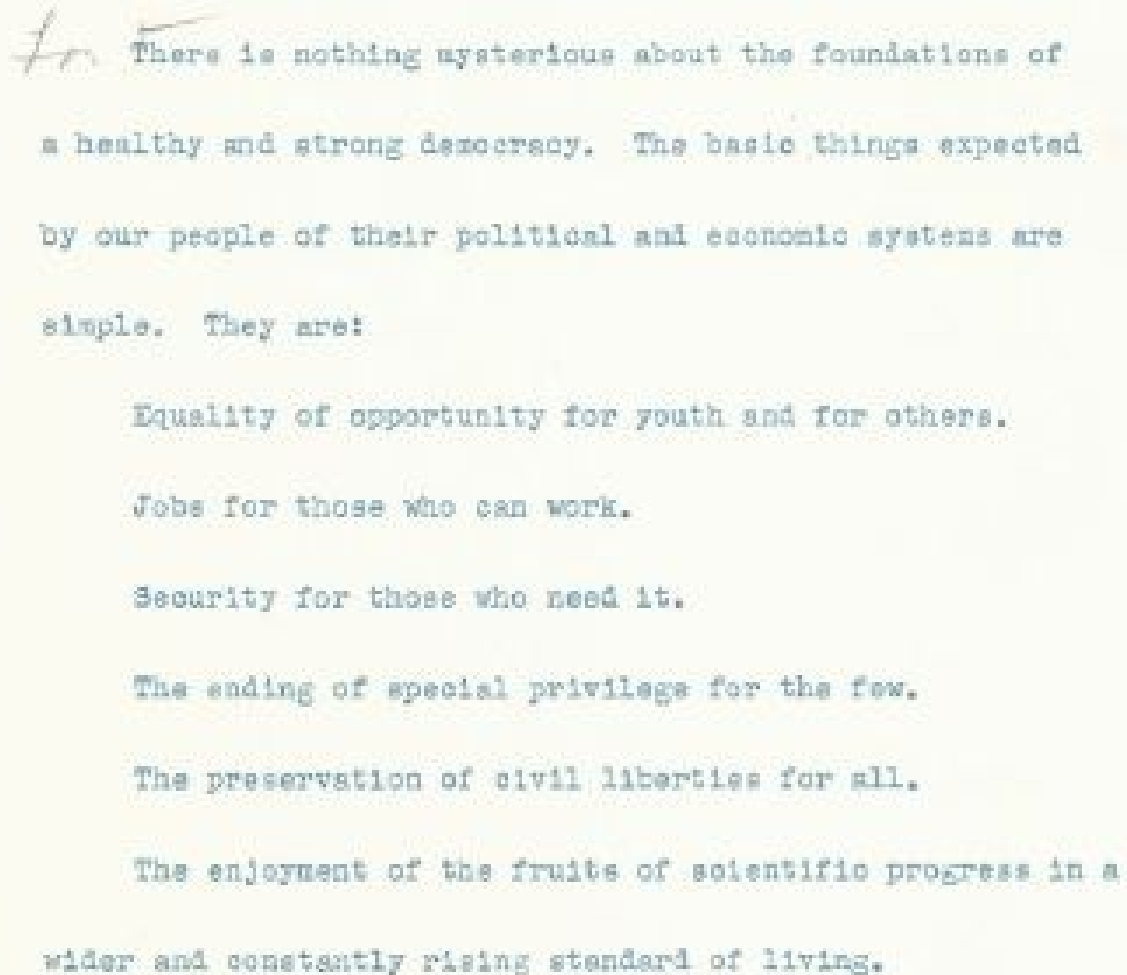
Document V: "Tennessee Valley Authority: pictorial map," Tennessee Valley Authority. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3962t.ct002436/?r=-0.03.0.118.0.527.0.327.0>



Document VI: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Annual Message to Congress," January 6, 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.

Full Document:

<https://www.fdrlibrary.org/documents/356632/390886/readingcopy.pdf/42234a77-8127-4015-95af-bcf831db311d>



fr There is nothing mysterious about the foundations of a healthy and strong democracy. The basic things expected by our people of their political and economic systems are simple. They are:

- Equality of opportunity for youth and for others.
- Jobs for those who can work.
- Security for those who need it.
- The ending of special privilege for the few.
- The preservation of civil liberties for all.
- The enjoyment of the fruits of scientific progress in a wider and constantly rising standard of living.

These are the simple and basic things that must never be lost sight of in the turmoil and unbelievable complexity of our modern world. The inner and abiding strength of our economic and political systems is dependent upon the degree to which they fulfill these expectations.

Many subjects connected with our social economy call for immediate improvement.

As examples:

We should bring more citizens under the coverage of old age pensions and unemployment insurance.

We should widen the opportunities for adequate medical care.

We should plan a better system by which persons deserving or needing gainful employment may obtain it.

I have called for personal sacrifice. I am assured of the willingness of almost all Americans to respond to that call.

A part of the sacrifice means the payment of more money in taxes. In my budget message I recommend that a greater portion of this great defense program be paid for from taxation than we are paying today. No person should try, or be allowed, to get rich out of this program; and the principle of tax payments in accordance with ability to pay should be constantly before our eyes to guide our legislation.

If the Congress maintains these principles, the voters, putting patriotism ahead of pocketbooks, will give you their applause.

In the future days which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

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

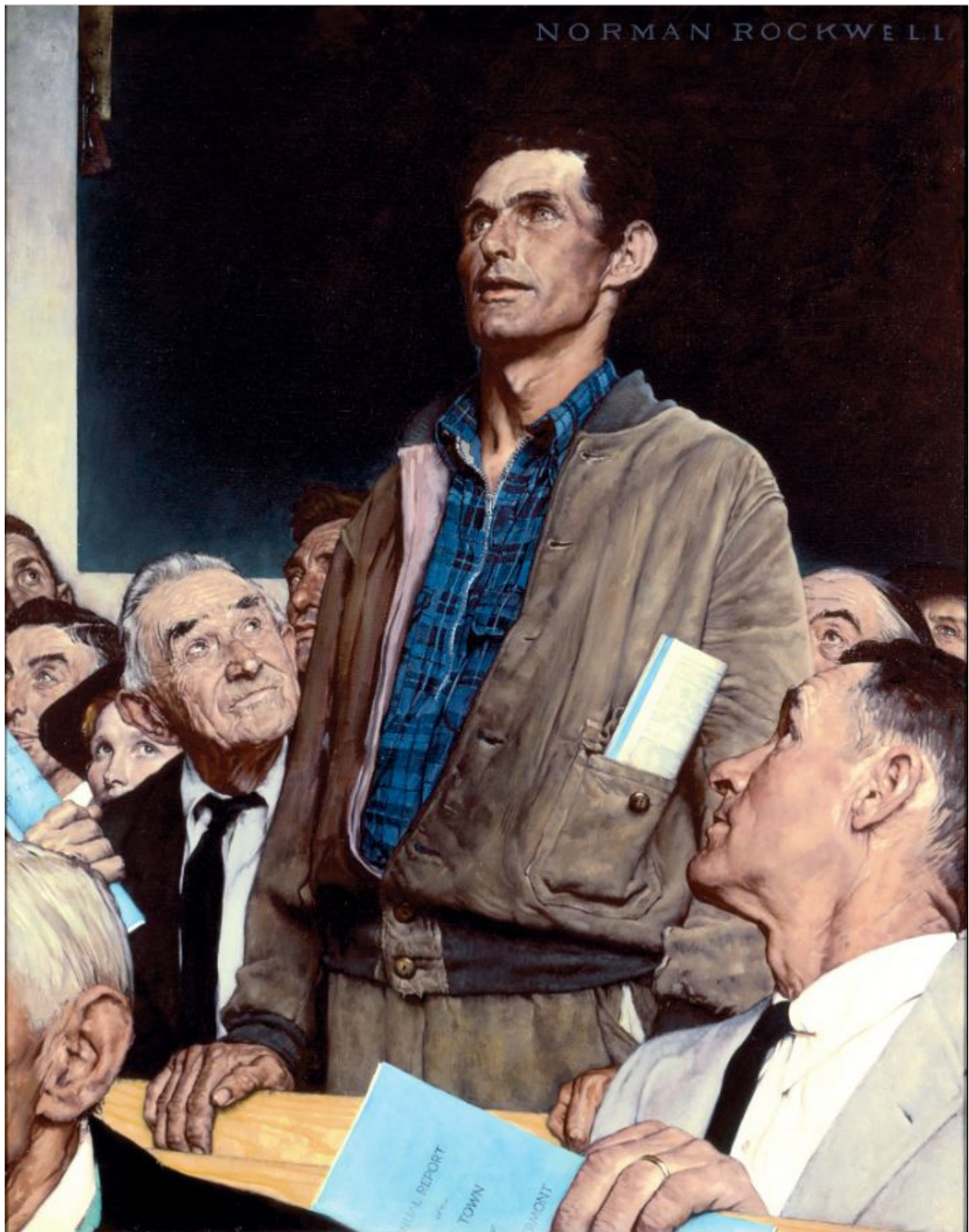
The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way -- everywhere in the world.

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 is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation. That kind of world is the very antithesis of the so-called new order of tyranny which the dictators seek to create with the crash of a bomb.

Document VI: Norman Rockwell, "Freedom of Speech," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 20, 1943.



Document VII: Norman Rockwell, "Freedom of Religion," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 17, 1943.



Document VIII: Norman Rockwell, "Freedom From Want," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 6, 1943.



Document IX: Norman Rockwell, "Freedom From Fear," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 13, 1943.



Document XI: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, January 11, 1944, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.

For full text: http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/pdfs/state_union.pdf

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We have come to a clear realization of the fact, however, that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. 'Necessitous men are not free men'. People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.

In our day ^{Certain} ~~these~~ economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. ~~We have accepted, so to speak,~~ a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all -- regardless of station, race or creed.

Among these are:

The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries, or shops or farms or mines of the nation:

The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;

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

9.25

The right of every business man, large and 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 fears 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 goals of human happiness and well-being.

America's own rightful place in the world depends in
large part upon how fully these and similar 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.