

Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Four Freedoms Speech”

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Background

The four freedoms were first declared by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) on January 6, 1941, in his State of the Union address. These freedoms known specifically as the freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear are rights that every person everywhere has the right to enjoy.

FDR’s proclamation of these freedoms broke the non-interventionist tradition that had been held in the United States since World War I and propelled the United States to participate in World War II when it was started (just 11 months after these remarks). Everyone deserved these freedoms and the United States’ had a responsibility to help secure them. His speech proclaiming these freedoms was key in giving vision to the United Nations many years later, but more immediately it provided a rationale for America’s involvement in the war.

Key Points

In the speech, he says,

“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 peacetime 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.”—Franklin D. Roosevelt, excerpted from the State of the Union Address to the Congress, January 6, 1941

Discussion Questions

1. What impact did FDR's Four Freedoms have on the open movement?
2. How are the Four Freedoms still influencing the open movement?
3. Are those who do not support open ideas practicing a form of tyranny?
4. What, if any, is the economic freedom that open provides?

Additional Resources

- Four Freedoms Park. fdr4freedoms. Retrived from <http://fdr4freedoms.org/>
- Roosevelt, F. D. (1941). 1941 STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS TO THE CONGRESS ("THE FOUR FREEDOMS"). (6 January 1941) retrieved from <https://edtechbooks.org/-BWli>
- Kennedy, David M., Freedom From Fear: the American people in depression and war, 1929–1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 393–94
- Fifth Freedom (Economic Freedom). Wikipedia. Retrieved from <https://edtechbooks.org/-VIX>



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