

FDR speech on "Freedom"

Steel Institute or to the additional billions of inanimate dollars that perforce may be allied with the empire of steel in the impending struggle which the Institute, in the brutality of its arrogance, seeks to make inevitable.

Questions

1. Why does Lewis contrast the "values" represented by the labor movement with those of the steel industry?
2. What does Lewis mean when he speaks of enabling workers to "establish yourselves as free men and women in every economic, social, and political sense"?

101. Franklin D. Roosevelt on Economic Freedom (1936)

Source: *Acceptance of the Renomination for the Presidency, Democratic National Convention, Philadelphia, June 27, 1936, in Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1936-1945): New York, 1938-50, Vol. 5, pp. 230-40.*

Along with being a superb politician, Franklin D. Roosevelt was a master of political communication. He adeptly appealed to traditional values in support of new departures. He worked to reclaim the word "freedom" from conservatives and made it a rallying cry for the New Deal. Throughout the 1930s, he consistently linked freedom with economic security and identified economic inequality as its greatest enemy.

The fight for possession of "the ideal of freedom," reported the *New York Times*, was the central issue of the presidential campaign of 1936. The Democratic platform insisted that in a modern economy the government has an obligation to establish a "democracy of opportunity for all the people." In his speech accepting renomination, Roosevelt launched a

blistering attack against "economic royalists." They had taken the place of the tyrants against whom the American Revolution had been fought, he charged, and now sought to establish a "new despotism" over the "average man." Economic rights, Roosevelt went on, were the precondition of liberty—poor men "are not free men." Throughout the campaign, FDR insisted that the threat posed to economic freedom by the large corporations was the main issue of the election. As Roosevelt's opponent, Republicans chose Kansas governor Alfred Landon. Landon denounced Social Security and other New Deal measures as threats to individual liberty. Roosevelt won a landslide reelection, with over 60 percent of the popular vote. He carried every state except Maine and Vermont. His victory was all the more remarkable in view of the heavy support most of the nation's newspapers and nearly the entire business community gave to the Republicans.

Write 11 Main Ideas + Your Opinion

State

I CANNOT, WITH candor, tell you that all is well with the world. Clouds of suspicion, tides of ill-will and intolerance gather darkly in many places. In our own land we enjoy indeed a fullness of life greater than that of most Nations. But the rush of modern civilization itself has raised for us new difficulties, new problems which must be solved if we are to preserve to the United States the political and economic freedom for which Washington and Jefferson planned and fought.

Philadelphia is a good city in which to write American history. This is fitting ground on which to reaffirm the faith of our fathers; to pledge ourselves to restore to the people a wider freedom; to give to 1936 as the founders gave to 1776—an American way of life.

That very word freedom, in itself and of necessity, suggests freedom from some restraining power. In 1776 we sought freedom from the tyranny of a political autocracy—from the eighteenth century royalists who held special privileges from the crown. It was to perpetuate their privilege that they governed without the consent of the governed; that they denied the right of free assembly and free

Main Idea

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Main Idea

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speech; that they restricted the worship of God; that they put the average man's property and the average man's life in pawn to the mercenaries of dynastic power; that they regimented the people.

And so it was to win freedom from the tyranny of political autocracy that the American Revolution was fought. That victory gave the business of governing into the hands of the average man, who won the right with his neighbors to make and order his own destiny through his own Government. Political tyranny was wiped out at Philadelphia on July 4, 1776.

Since that struggle, however, man's inventive genius released new forces in our land which reordered the lives of our people. The age of machinery, of railroads; of steam and electricity; the telegraph and the radio; mass production, mass distribution—all of these combined to bring forward a new civilization and with it a new problem for those who sought to remain free.

For out of this modern civilization economic royalists carved new dynasties. New kingdoms were built upon concentration of control over material things. Through new uses of corporations, banks and securities, new machinery of industry and agriculture, of labor and capital—all undreamed of by the fathers—the whole structure of modern life was impressed into this royal service.

There was no place among this royalty for our many thousands of small business men and merchants who sought to make a worthy use of the American system of initiative and profit. They were no more free than the worker or the farmer. Even honest and progressive-minded men of wealth, aware of their obligation to their generation, could never know just where they fitted into this dynastic scheme of things.

It was natural and perhaps human that the privileged princes of these new economic dynasties, thirsting for power, reached out for control over Government itself. They created a new despotism and wrapped it in the robes of legal sanction. In its service new mercenaries sought to regiment the people, their labor, and their prop-

Main Idea #5

Main Idea #4?

Main Idea #3?

erty. And as a result the average man once more confronts the problem that faced the Minute Man.

The hours men and women worked, the wages they received, the conditions of their labor—these had passed beyond the control of the people, and were imposed by this new industrial dictatorship. The savings of the average family, the capital of the small business man, the investments set aside for old age—other people's money—these were tools which the new economic royalty used to dig itself in.

Those who tilled the soil no longer reaped the rewards which were their right. The small measure of their gains was decreed by men in distant cities.

Throughout the Nation, opportunity was limited by monopoly. Individual initiative was crushed in the cogs of a great machine. The field open for free business was more and more restricted. Private enterprise, indeed, became too private. It became privileged enterprise, not free enterprise.

An old English judge once said: "Necessitous men are not free men." Liberty requires opportunity to make a living—a living decent according to the standard of the time, a living which gives man not only enough to live by, but something to live for.

For too many of us the political equality we once had won was meaningless in the face of economic inequality. A small group had concentrated into their own hands an almost complete control over other people's property, other people's money, other people's labor—other people's lives. For too many of us life was no longer free; liberty no longer real; men could no longer follow the pursuit of happiness.

Against economic tyranny such as this, the American citizen could appeal only to the organized power of Government. The collapse of 1929 showed up the despotism for what it was. The election of 1932 was the people's mandate to end it. Under that mandate is being ended.

Main Idea #7

Main Idea #6

The royalists of the economic order have conceded that political freedom was the business of the Government, but they have maintained that economic slavery was nobody's business. They granted that the Government could protect the citizen in his right to vote, but they denied that the Government could do anything to protect the citizen in his right to work and his right to live.

Today we stand committed to the proposition that freedom is no half-and-half affair. If the average citizen is guaranteed equal opportunity in the polling place, he must have equal opportunity in the market place.

These economic royalists complain that we seek to overthrow the institutions of America. What they really complain of is that we seek to take away their power. Our allegiance to American institutions requires the overthrow of this kind of power. In vain they seek to hide behind the Flag and the Constitution. In their blindness they forget what the Flag and the Constitution stand for. Now, as always, they stand for democracy, not tyranny; for freedom, not subjection; and against a dictatorship by mob rule and the over-privileged alike.

The brave and clear platform adopted by this Convention, to which I heartily subscribe, sets forth that Government in a modern civilization has certain inescapable obligations to its citizens, among which are protection of the family and the home, the establishment of a democracy of opportunity, and aid to those overtaken by disaster.

...

I believe in my heart that only our success can stir their ancient hope. They begin to know that here in America we are waging a great and successful war. It is not alone a war against want and destitution and economic demoralization. It is more than that; it is a war for the survival of democracy. We are fighting to save a great and precious form of government for ourselves and for the world.

Questions

1. What does Roosevelt mean when he quotes an English judge as saying "Necessitous [needy] men are not free men"?
2. What forces does Roosevelt feel endanger the freedoms of Americans?

102. Herbert Hoover on the New Deal and Liberty (1936)

Source: Official Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-First Republican National Convention Held in Cleveland, Ohio (New York, 1936), pp. 115-19, 122-24. Courtesy of the Republican National Committee.

Even as Roosevelt invoked the word to uphold the New Deal, "liberty"—in the sense of freedom from powerful government—became the fighting slogan of his opponents. Their principal critique of the New Deal was that its "reckless spending" undermined fiscal responsibility and its new government regulations restricted American freedom. When conservative businessmen and politicians in 1934 formed an organization to mobilize opposition to Roosevelt's policies, they called it the American Liberty League.

As the 1930s progressed, opponents of the New Deal invoked the language of liberty with greater and greater passion. Freedom, they claimed, meant unrestrained economic opportunity for the enterprising individual. Far from being an element of liberty, the quest for economic security was turning Americans into parasites dependent on the state. In a speech at the Republican National Convention of 1936, former president Hoover accused his successor of endangering "fundamental American liberties." Roosevelt, he charged, either was operating out of sheer opportunism, with no coherent purpose or policy, or was conspiring to impose "European ideas" on the United States. The election, he continued, in strident language that reflected how wide the gap between the parties had become, was a "holy crusade for liberty" that would "determine the future" of freedom in the United States.

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Finally → write 1/2 page your opinion overall

