Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Media, His Physical Image, and Teaching Implications

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Franklin D. Roosevelt: 
The Media, His Physical Image, and Teaching Implications

by

Eric Waples
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ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of three distinct chapters, each with a focus on the general theme of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the media, and his image. Chapter I is a historiography that traces the scholarly discussion of Roosevelt and the media from the late 1970s until the early 21st century. It argues that there was a shift in research that occurred in the 1980s. Where scholarship originally focused intently on how FDR used the media to run the country, it transitioned towards an exclusive concentration on how he used the media to minimize the public’s perception of his disability. Chapter II consists of primary research with two objectives. First, it exposes how FDR projected an image of health, activity, and masculinity in order to inspire confidence in his ability to lead during his time period; and second, it compares that public image to the one that has evolved over the past 68 years since his death—particularly in relation to his disability. The author analyzes a combination of memorials, museums, and historic sites that focus on FDR to expose society’s contemporary public image of Franklin Roosevelt. The author discovers that FDR’s contemporary public image is a complex one, filled with some sites that are reluctant to embrace his paralysis and some that do so passionately; nevertheless, it appears that a general trend is developing toward accepting the role of Roosevelt’s disability in his public image. Chapter III focuses on making the information in Chapter I and II applicable to teaching. It identifies four evidence-based teaching strategies and discusses them in relation to six destinations. Each of these destinations will facilitate lessons and fieldtrips targeted at fostering deeper level thinking while studying Franklin Roosevelt’s use of the media and the manipulation of his image. Chapter III concludes with a list of material resources that would supplement these destinations including films, digital resources, CDs, and primary and secondary literature.
CHAPTER I

FDR and the Media:

Running a Country and Maintaining an Image
Information is the key to a successful tenure in any leadership position. They who control the information flow control the collective minds of the people. They control how much the public knows and, ultimately, how the public feels. Several governments have recognized this source of power and thrived—in their own way—because of their monopoly on information. Consider the fascist regime in Nazi Germany or the early former communist system in Russia. Each exerted totalitarian control over its population through a domination of information. Nevertheless, a strong argument can be made for a lack of freedom or quality of life in these regimes as well. In light of this, an essential question may be posed: how does this struggle for power over information function in a democratic society where certain barriers are in place to prevent a tyrannical government? Therein lays the particular importance of the First Amendment which promises five freedoms including: speech, religion, petition, assembly, and—most importantly for the question at hand—freedom of press.

The struggle for power through information in a democratic system mentioned above is a battle waged by two major contenders: the government and the media. Each serves their respective roles. In tandem, these roles ensure a balance that holds government accountable and also allows it to function effectively. Through an effective alliance, these two parties keep the people informed and thus public opinion high. When these parties pick a skirmish, public opinion falls. The true conflict, however, comes from each group’s interpretation of their role. Where the government would argue that its own function is to decide what is best for its people and that the major objective of the media is to get the message out to the population as unhampered as possible, the media may also contend that its own function is to serve as a “watchdog” toward the government—to steal a phrase from Thomas Jefferson—and interpret how well the government is operating.
This struggle has built and broken presidencies, however, one of the first administrations to truly master it was that of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roosevelt charmed his way through press conferences winning over correspondents in a way that had not happened since his cousin Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency. He ushered in an administration more open than any since Woodrow Wilson, and capitalized on popular media trends within and outside of the press including photojournalism, newsreels, and radio in order to reinvent the term “mass media.” Of course, the conditions of Roosevelt’s presidency called for nothing less. With two of the nation’s worst crises—the Great Depression and World War II—Roosevelt used his media prowess to control and direct the flow of information that held the country together. At several points throughout his presidency, certain branches of the media worked with, as well as against, him. Nevertheless, Roosevelt proved savvy enough to navigate through such opposition and project his message and his image to an eagerly awaiting public.

This historiography will identify the trends in scholarship surrounding Roosevelt’s use of the media from the late 1970s and into the twenty-first century. It will focus on six sources in particular. Five of these are books, and one of these is an article. Among the trends identified are an expansion of the news outlets and techniques Roosevelt used to influence and control information as well as a gradual shift from these outlets to Roosevelt’s image. Essentially, this historiography will prove that where the field of Roosevelt and the media began asking the question, how did Roosevelt use the media to run the country?, it ended with the question, how did Roosevelt use the media to control his image?

**Using the Media to Run the Country**

*Graham J. White.* This historiography begins in the late 1970s for a reason. Although to that point, there had been several authors who endeavored to capture Roosevelt’s
interaction with the media, the late ‘70s embody the last strand of scholarship before a new
trend began to develop. Therefore, the first major work to be discussed is Graham J. White’s
_FDR and the Press_ (1979). As the title suggests, White’s focus was on the press in particular.
Throughout his book, White pursued the relationship between Roosevelt and three groups: his
Washington correspondents, columnists, and publishers.

To begin with, White painted a very encouraging picture of the relationship between
Franklin Roosevelt and his Washington correspondents. He called it Roosevelt’s
“spectacular initial victory over the press corps.”¹ White argued that Roosevelt came to the
White House and treated reporters differently than they had been treated in the previous
administrations. For example, where Hoover “…forfeited popularity by permitting the
quality and quantity of presidential news to decline,”² Roosevelt personally held press
conferences twice a week and delivered them in a way that made “…politics absorbing and
vital, [with] his unusual talent for dramatization, and his active presidential style which
exploited conflict as a means of publicity…”³ Furthermore, Roosevelt greatly curried his
Washington correspondents’ favor when he abolished a rule retained by previous
administrations stating that questions were to be submitted in writing before each press
conference.⁴ White exposed several tactics that Roosevelt used to win correspondents over:
he was charming; he used humor in his press conferences to evade topics; he was pleasant to
reporters; he, generally, did not play favorites among them, he had an ability to “catch the
drift of public thinking;” he had an excellent “news sense” and timing for when stories would
break best; and he was hospitable—a demeanor that correspondents had not felt in several
administrations.⁵

Of course, White’s main argument for the mostly pleasant relationship that Roosevelt
enjoyed with his Washington correspondents was a mutual advantage. The reporters gained
several things from their relationship with Roosevelt. First, they received a massive amount
of information. In fact, many times, they were privy to that information before Congress
was—White provided the Lend-Lease Act as a specific example. Furthermore, reporters had
an opportunity to learn the President’s “tells.” In a press conference, a carefully placed
question could provoke Roosevelt to give one of his trademark grins, or even avoid the topic
altogether with a witty joke, thus hinting at his personal feelings on the topic even when he
did not explicitly give them.\(^6\) Roosevelt, on the other hand, also benefited from his
correspondents. For one, the frequency of his press conferences allowed him to break large
stories when he felt it suited his cause the best. Therefore, he catered his news to the news-
cycle. This served him well as it made Roosevelt look like he was at the center of everything.
Finally, his relationship with reporters helped him to indirectly explain his policies to the
people and get grass-root support for his programs.\(^7\) Each party had much to gain from their
relationship with the other.

Despite this mutual advantage with Washington correspondents, Roosevelt sought to
strenuously control the news media. In fact, White argued that the reason Roosevelt kept
such a large tide of news flowing through his press conferences was to discourage reporters
from looking for stories to break when he did not want them too.\(^8\) Within his press
conferences, Roosevelt became a master of directing the conversation. He would often bring
up issues he believed should be prominent in news coverage, and he had a skill at charming
the crowd so that he could avoid topics he was not ready to discuss with a quick joke before
moving on. White explained, “Franklin Roosevelt was compared to a consummate
performer, a brilliant and accomplished actor, who met the challenge of a critical audience
and took pleasure and pride in his own performance, seldom missing cues.”\(^9\) In this way,
Roosevelt directly influenced what made it into the papers through his witty charm at weekly performances during press conferences.

Of course, White argued that Roosevelt also used less pleasant measures to attempt control over news outlets. To further prevent information Roosevelt wasn’t ready to release from getting out to reporters, he kept a firm eye on his administration to prevent leaks. White explained,

On a personal level, the president gathered information on the social activities of members of the administration, even down to the lower echelons, especially on their relations with newsmen, and then brought pressure to bear on his subordinates to sever such contacts in order to eliminate the journalists’ sources of information.

Furthermore, Roosevelt was an avid newsreader himself—reading nine major newspapers a day. When he felt that one of his correspondents falsified or even exaggerated a piece of information, he would often single that reporter out at his press conferences. White cited a few occasions where Roosevelt read a correspondent’s article aloud and broke down all the statements he disagreed with sentence by sentence. This was one of FDR’s harshest punishments, and he reserved it for only a few instances—making it all the more effective.

Very often, Roosevelt would read his correspondents’ articles and give them advice on how well they covered a certain issue. Many seasoned reporters resented him for this, as White puts it, for they “were reluctant to accept…Roosevelt’s fitness to offer such gratuitous advice.” White also argued that correspondents eventually grew wise to his press conference tactics and resented the president for them. White stated, “Roosevelt’s resort to humor to evade press conference questions was resented, his smile, facial expressions, and use of first names were suspect.” However, White maintained that, overall, Roosevelt saw his relationship with reporters as a positive one.

White emphasized that Roosevelt’s relationships with columnists and publishers were not as productive. First, however, he contended that it is important to note: although
Roosevelt felt that the majority of these individuals opposed him, he also had a respectable amount of support from many of them. Roosevelt’s major objection to these groups came from his assertion between “straight” news and “interpretive” writing. Where the President could respect reporters for their general intention of delivering straight news, he abhorred columnists for their tendency to interpret. After all, the columnist’s only purpose was to interpret the news and give their opinion. Roosevelt saw their influence as a threat.

However, Roosevelt’s animosity towards columnists was marginal compared to how he felt about publishers. White argued that Roosevelt was often openly hostile towards this final group. “Newspaper publishers,” White explained, “were unfitted by background or training for their task, lacked journalistic talent, and had little grasp of their wider public responsibilities.” The responsibilities he referred to included providing the public with straight news. Therein lays Roosevelt’s greatest point of contention with publishers: he believed that they forced reporters and columnists to slant their news a certain way. White cited Roosevelt defending editors while stating, “Hell most of the editors have got families. They cannot lose their jobs. They have to write what the owner tells them to.” Therefore, interactions between Roosevelt and opposing publishers were often very bitter.

Most importantly, White added three major corrections to Roosevelt’s own analysis of his press interactions. First, he discovered that Roosevelt likely exaggerated in his statement that the majority of the press opposed him. After analyzing a series of letters to and from correspondents, columnists, and publishers, White stated, “Even on the basis of the amount of publisher and press support which Roosevelt is now seen to have received, the president’s repeated assertions that he faced overwhelming press opposition begin to look suspect.” White took this conclusion and used it to build on a more specific claim that Roosevelt often made next.
He challenged Roosevelt’s claim of the “famous eighty-five percent,” which stated 85% of papers opposed him. White conducted a study that involved reading the newspaper coverage in the nine papers that Roosevelt routinely read of 24 major events in his presidency. His objective was to categorize each paper’s coverage into one of three groups: favorable, unfavorable, and general discussion. In his results, White stated that the only way Roosevelt’s assertion of the “famous eighty-five percent” could be close to true would be by “equating ‘absence of support’ with ‘opposition,’ and by lumping together those newspapers which remained uncommitted to either candidate with those opposed to the New Deal.”

Furthermore, White noted that opposition in the press arose during elections—particularly his third term election—but fell drastically between elections. Therefore, his assertion of an overwhelming 85% of opposition in the press was even more ungrounded during non-election years.

Finally, White conducted two comparative analyses to determine the amount of “slant” that occurred in reporters’ newspaper accounts of major events during the Roosevelt Era; he discovered that Roosevelt also exaggerated this point—generally. White concluded, "What these analyses indicate, rather, is that the reporting of news emanating from the president’s press conferences was fair and accurate in the vast majority of cases, that the reporting of the president’s speeches was fair and accurate in the majority of cases, and that, where bias did occur, it tended to be localized in certain newspapers, rather than being characteristic of most.”

Although White admitted that some newspapers did present a slant, the majority of the major papers did not because they sought to service a diverse audience and were not interested in closing off any market outlets for their product.

While tracking the exchanges between the president and each group, White explained that the basis of each interaction rested on one key element: Franklin Roosevelt’s Jeffersonian philosophy. White explained how Roosevelt “believed that the mass of the people were
naturally democratic, able to decide the great issues of the day provided that they were in possession of the requisite ‘factual’ information, convictions which he thought of himself as sharing with Thomas Jefferson.”23 Due to this theory, he felt that the press had a clear function: the press was to act as a “vehicle” for transmitting information to the people. Roosevelt’s major issue with the press was that he felt it was failing due to its emphasis on interpretation. He saw a distinct dichotomy between his Jeffersonian agenda where the people were truthfully informed, and a Hamiltonian agenda where the press was more concerned about selling papers to make money. White cited a number of occasions where Roosevelt appeared openly hostile to the press because he felt they were “slanting” the facts and depriving the people of a chance to formulate their own informed opinions. In doing so, White argued that Roosevelt saw the press “impeding the free and necessary flow of information from government to people, and threatening, in this way, to break a vitally important informational circuit in the democratic system.”24 Furthermore, White argued that Roosevelt’s greatest complaint about the press came from their influence and power. “To Franklin Roosevelt,” he stated, “the power of such newspaper owners, excessive and unmerited, constituted a threat not merely to press freedom, but to democracy itself.”25 Therefore, it was imperative that he fight for the successful delivery of straight news in order to preserve the essence of democracy.

Richard Steele. The next major effort to capture Roosevelt’s use of the media came from Richard Steele’s book, Propaganda in an Open Society: the Roosevelt Administration and the Media 1933-1941 (1985). Steele took several opportunities to build off of White’s work in terms of Roosevelt’s interactions with the press; nevertheless, he expanded his analysis beyond the press to include, specifically, the radio and motion pictures. Steele’s thesis stated that in order to successfully control information the way that the Roosevelt
administration did, it needed to use every form of media available. Furthermore, although his
examination covered the New Deal era as well, Steele spent the majority of his work studying
how the Roosevelt administration overcame the obstacle of isolation during the years
preceding the United States’ entry to WWII.

Before delving into Steele’s specific contributions to the topic at hand, however, it is
worth observing his comments on the previous scholarship—particularly Graham White. For
instance, in his first chapter, Steele acknowledged White’s assertions that “Roosevelt saw
himself as a latter-day Jefferson battling for the rights of the ‘people’ against a Hamiltonian
minority of wealth and privilege.”26 Furthermore, Steele concurred with White’s conclusions
about Roosevelt’s opposition amongst the press being less than he asserted. Steele wrote,
“White treats the entire twelve years of the Roosevelt administration as a unit and does not
delineate the significant differences between the press response to domestic and foreign
policies. Nevertheless, the figures he arrives at are valuable corrective to the President’s
portrait of press hostility.”27 Of course, therein lays a major differentiation between White
and Steele. Where White treated Roosevelt’s entire presidency as a single continuous block,
Steele separated it into different sections depending on whether Roosevelt was facing a
domestic or foreign challenge.

To begin with, Steele made some very insightful observations of Roosevelt’s
character and how that affected his use of the media. He explained that FDR had a unique
passion for understanding people and their situation. Furthermore, he knew what was
important to them and how to present those values in his programs. Steele wrote,
“Americans, [Roosevelt] believed, would not easily be moved by ideology or altruism alone,
and although his remarks often carried such appeals they tended more often toward the
practical.”28 Also, Roosevelt could be an extremely resourceful politician who used
adversaries to his advantage often stating, “…with enemies like these…we must be doing something right.” Steele agreed with White’s assessment of the Roosevelt charm.

However, Steele made an effort to explain that much of Roosevelt’s ability was strengthened by those he surrounded himself with. Among these men were Louis Howe, a journalist, advisor, and one of FDR’s closest friends who covered his 1912 State Senate campaign and remained a part of Roosevelt’s administration until his death in 1935; Marvin McIntyre, a journalist with newsreel experience who covered FDR as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, served as director of publicity in Roosevelt’s Vice Presidential campaign, and served as an assistant secretary to Roosevelt’s presidency; and Steven Early, who also met FDR during his tenure as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, served as Roosevelt’s “advance man” during his VP campaign, and also as the first official Press Secretary under Roosevelt for four terms. Each of these men lent a degree of expertise with several areas of the media, and each were instrumental in the information policy that Roosevelt employed.

Steele mentioned three things in particular that Roosevelt and his administration did to construct an ambitious media management system. First, they drastically improved the news flow—as White argued as well. This gave the administration a command of what stories would be printed and slowed the reporters’ ever-vigilant quest to undercut government regulated information. Second, they made news timely so that breaking stories could be included in the next soonest publication. And third, they made news creditable again, coming from the highest sources of government—in most cases, either government officials or the president himself. Ultimately, Steele identified the major objective of Roosevelt’s information system to be very similar to what White argued. Steele debated, “The goal of the Early/Roosevelt propaganda approach was to raise public consciousness of New Deal goals and achievements by supplying news and information in copious quantities.” Through this,
the people—rational beings as they were—could make informed decisions that would lead to successful national recovery.

Roosevelt was also extremely adept at building bureaucracy. Among many of his New Deal agencies were the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Public Works Association (PWA), and the Social Security Administration (SSA). Each of these had a publicity agent whose function was to explain their agency’s services—and also justify its existence. Many of these explanations made it between the covers of local and national newspapers. This fits into Steele’s explanation for Roosevelt’s philosophy of giving the people practical information. Two other government agencies were meant to do just that. First, the National Emergency Council was, in a sense, a second cabinet that met with Roosevelt every other week to discuss the progress of New Deal programs. This agency targeted local communities by assigning state directors who managed local opinions and launched education programs when there was evidence of dissatisfaction within a community. This allowed Roosevelt to make his programs as applicable to the local citizen as possible. The second agency, the Division of Press Intelligence, endeavored to track the attitudes of local leaders by analyzing editorial clippings from a variety of newspapers. These agencies allowed the Roosevelt administration to monitor their ideological progress throughout the nation.

Nevertheless, where White spent his entire book observing Roosevelt’s presidency as a whole, Steele specifically examined FDR’s periods of media productivity and opposition separately. For example, after describing that in Roosevelt’s first two years in office, “Reporters initially saw FDR as a sincere, vigorous leader, capable perhaps of solving the problems that had baffled his predecessor,” Steele spent a chapter discussing Roosevelt’s management of reporters between 1934 and 1940—a period of somewhat strained
relationships between Roosevelt and the press. He argued that although Roosevelt enjoyed a much longer “honeymoon” with the press than other presidents, for correspondents that remained more skeptical and refused to be pulled into what White called the “Roosevelt Myth,” “…[he] would emerge as a compromiser and a manipulator, as a fallible and sometimes devious politician who, despite his accomplishments, failed to bring recovery.”

During this period, he used his education and position to push back at correspondents that pushed too far during press conferences. Steele pointed out a few occasions where Roosevelt told a persistent reporter to put on a dunce hat or to go stand in the corner. He argued that, “all of this was in good fun with a detectable undercurrent of intimidation.” Of course, things became worse for Roosevelt and the press after a series of political missteps at the beginning of his second term.

Difficulty with the press came to a head during an ultimate low point for press relations in 1937. Roosevelt used his conflict with editors and publishers to lead a public campaign against them. In many ways, this showed his skill at directing public opinion. Roosevelt took the opportunity to distance himself from the press in the eyes of the public. He attacked the press in his speeches charging them with slanting the truth against him. Furthermore, he debated that the press’ reckless abuse of their position was jeopardizing the public’s faith in them as an information source altogether. Steele explained, “His message seemed to be—recognize newspaper owners are your enemies and do not trust what you read in your papers.”

Although this strategy seemed to work extremely well with the public, Steele concurred with White on the issue of Roosevelt taking criticism personally. He argued, “The informational strategy was working, but FDR was too thin skinned to passively accept the criticism that increasingly greeted his faltering domestic program.”
An interesting result of Roosevelt’s distrust of the press was that he turned to a new source for public opinion information: scientific polling. Steele explained that Roosevelt was the first president to take advantage of the newly developed scientific polling tactics that had recently replaced straw polls. On several occasions after 1936, he employed George Gallup or, more often, Hadley Cantril—who even catered his summaries to the president making them concise, fitting on a single page to match Roosevelt’s schedule—to poll issues ranging from election results to public opinion on legislation or foreign policy.42

However, Steele argued that the issue of isolationism proctored another alliance between Roosevelt and the press between 1939-1941 leading up to United States involvement in WWII. Steele’s strongest assertion was that “Isolation was at the heart of the administration’s problems.”43 Although Roosevelt clearly favored an interventionist approach to the growing war in Europe, a large portion of the American public remembered their experience in WWI with a bitter taste. As a result, Roosevelt needed to tread carefully around the issue of mobilization. Nevertheless, in this endeavor, he found the press to be an ally as the majority of papers supported intervention.

During the early stages of mobilization in 1939, Steele argued that Roosevelt faltered in his information system as he was less willing to give out information. As he put it, “Informational propaganda presupposed purposeful activity,”44 and Roosevelt was slow to give away any information or perform any activity toward mobilization that lost him ground to the isolationists. As Steele noted, “His foreign policy options limited by distance, military weakness, and isolationist sentiment, FDR was in many instances no more than an anxious observer of foreign events. Often he had relatively little to tell.”45 In general, Roosevelt struggled with the press initially because, “…the President’s press conferences, which had once served the New Deal and continued to serve defense preparedness, had become a burden
in regard to other war-related issues. Reporters had many questions but, for much of what they wanted to know, the President had few answers. Nevertheless, Steele discovered that 1940 marked a turning point in this lack of activity. Roosevelt used two main tactics in order to combat isolationists: 1) he ramped up the idea of mobilizing in the honor of defense; and 2) he tried and discredit his opposition. He attempted to achieve the latter with the help of the press by a series of controlled leaks from his administration and using isolationist rhetoric against them in his speeches. The press was more than happy to cover such dramatic stories.

Furthermore, Steele argued that Roosevelt commanded a new degree of loyalty in the prewar years using the idea of the fifth column. The fifth column was the belief in propaganda and subversion that turns a population toward their enemy. Steele explained that many doubted German military superiority and attributed Hitler’s rapid victory over the European continent to the fifth column. Moreover, Steele reasoned that “It seemed America with its own dissidents and alien populations, might conceivably already be at war without realizing it.” This concerned many citizens and managed to make the conflict across the Atlantic and Pacific very relevant. Consequently, “It served to bolster the President’s appeal for faith in his leadership and unquestioning loyalty to his policies.” This allowed Roosevelt time to spin up his information wheel again in order to show an active effort toward national defense.

Steele argued that Roosevelt employed the same tactic of flooding the country with administration friendly information as he did during the New Deal to tackle the growing crisis abroad as well. Once again, he took to creating information agencies that showed an active administration. For example, the Division of Information (DoI) was charged with providing the press with news releases, pictures, charts, and other printable data about the 16
mobilization agencies affiliated with the Office of Emergency Management. Furthermore, the Office of Government Reports (OGR) carried the torch from the former National Emergency Council in terms of tracking opinion among local communities and launching education programs to counter negative feedback. The press took to a reinvigoration of the information system happily, and Steele argued, “The information blizzard, blinding in its particulars, left the clear impression of successful activity”—despite Roosevelt’s reluctance to outline a binding foreign policy that would limit his flexibility in offering further assistance to Britain in Europe.50

Both White and Steele argued that Roosevelt and Early worked hard to make journalists dependent on the White House for information; however, Steele went into greater detail on how Roosevelt did this beyond the press with other venues. One of those other venues—and perhaps the most powerful—was radio. Steele argued that radio was uniquely friendly toward the government from its beginning due to a few key reasons. For one, the airwaves were not considered to be protected under the First Amendment. Furthermore, the government regulated radio stations in order to prevent several stations from broadcasting on a single frequency. In 1934, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was created to regulate radio, telegraph, and telephone communications. Although this agency was separate from the president’s office, he appointed its head. This organization also granted licenses to each station, therefore making stations more apt to try and please the government in order to retain their license—which was renewed or declined every six months.51 Finally, as the industry grew, certain networks gained a considerable amount of power—such as NBC, CNN, and MBS—and were possibly subject to anti-trust legislation that Congress had begun wielding again in the ‘30s. As a result, Steele argued that “Cooperation flowed from simple expedience. The broadcasters realized they were vulnerable. Their voluntarism provided a
powerful argument against sanctions or additional regulation.” Therefore, the radio enacted a form of “self-censorship” as it either avoided controversial stories or made an effort to present both sides—while still managing to favor the current administration.

As one might imagine, Roosevelt recognized the influence of radio and used it to its fullest potential. Steele discussed its importance to FDR’s propaganda system when he wrote, “Not only did radio carry the government’s message without adulteration, it carried it farther, more immediately, and more efficiently than newspapers.” Roosevelt’s personality fit with this medium brilliantly. Steele called him the “envy of professionals,” explaining that “His speeches were well placed, his voice clear, natural and convincing.” Among the strategies that made Roosevelt’s use of the radio most successful were the fact that he purposely limited his radio appearances to preserve their impact, he publicized his broadcasts beforehand, he was sure to speak between 9pm and 11pm for the largest audience possible, and he only spoke for about half-an-hour in order to hold his audience’s full attention. These tactics were extremely effective for Roosevelt both during the New Deal and also the years preceding WWII.

During the prewar years, the radio served as a formidable medium for projecting Roosevelt’s message across the nation. Steele made a point that although radio networks could not engage in an open alliance with Roosevelt at the risk of rousing support for his isolationist opponents, broadcasters used a “whole range of public service broadcasting on various non-controversial aspects of defense preparedness.” This allowed radio broadcasters to hide behind a veil of objectivity while still lending support to Roosevelt’s policies. As Steele put it, “Most Americans relied on radio news for their understanding of these happenings, and, insofar as they did, they received a consistently and conscientiously
biased construction on reality.” Of course the Roosevelt administration did not stop at the press and radio.

In relation to the New Deal era propaganda system, Steele also discussed Roosevelt’s use of motion pictures. Although Hollywood was generally less sympathetic toward New Deal policies, the Roosevelt administration found newsreels to be very valuable. The administration began to encourage newsreel production beginning in 1936 with Roosevelt’s second term in office. These producers were also extremely cooperative with the White House because, as with journalists, they were completely dependent on it for news. Steele argued that they perfected FDR’s image as the “happy warrior.” To do so, they recorded the human side of politics including Roosevelt fishing, entertaining at Hyde Park, and playing with his grandchildren. This helped the public identify with the voice they welcomed into their homes every few months for a Fireside Chat. Newsreels became even more influential during the prewar years in setting mobilization—or at least defense—to the forefront of people’s minds. They offered a constant stream of publicity shots including, “troops on maneuvers, bombs and tanks rolling down assembly lines, the launching of another great warship.” However, the newsreels only went so far without the solidification of a feature picture to follow. For this, the support of Hollywood was needed.

Steele outlined a gradual progression in terms of Hollywood’s support for the Roosevelt administration. As mentioned above, Hollywood did not offer much backing for New Deal programs. In fact, they endeavored to be typically non-political until the late 1930s. Much like the radio industry, Hollywood reacted out of anticipation of government meddling. However, the movie industry was also subject to the whims of an overly competitive film market. Steele explained that while “Confronted with the ever-present threat of boycott, censorship, and even government controls, the industry sought security in
the production of universally unobjectionable film material.” 62 To protect themselves, industry leaders turned to a policy of self-censorship as well. They sought to “avoid any willful offense to any nation, race, and creed.” 63 Nevertheless, in 1938, that changed with the Warner Brothers leading the charge. The company produced a film called *Juarez*, meant to criticize Mussolini and Hitler. Steele argued that by 1939, “nationalistic feelings growing out of concern with Communism and Nazism evoked a strong interest in ‘Americanism’ among the film makers.” 64 As a result, the industry moved, incrementally, toward an interventionist message.

Of course, the film industry made the most drastic moves when it benefitted them. One of Hollywood’s greatest mutual benefits came from the military. In regards to the Army and the Navy, Steele argued that “These departments provided the movie makers with military props or facilitated the overseas production and distribution of films. In turn, the industry was willing to carry the departments’ messages.” 65 This motive, in tandem with the growing market for interventionist films in Britain, warmed many film producers to the idea of playing into the Roosevelt administration’s agenda. It also gave them a legitimate excuse to make them, even for those producers who refused to admit support for the current administration; they could argue independence from government pressure and claim they were making an economic decision based on the state of the market.

Of course, many producers were clever about the way they brought these interventionist themes into their films. More often than not, they adapted previously successful themes to meet the current trend. For example, they often exchanged “FBI men and spys for cops and robbers, [and] Nazis for gangsters.” 66 Steele elaborated on these themes writing that films were categorized into five groups. They were, “(1) Chauvinistic or patriotic, (2) lauded the character of the English and their war effort, (3) reviled the Nazis and
Germany, (4) projected a glamorous, or at least benign image for the American military, or (5) urged the need to take up arms in defense of the nation.”

Steele even made the argument that military comedies put the minds of parents at ease as their children were drafted overseas. Consequently, these films were extremely popular within the United States and Britain, and they strongly fueled Roosevelt’s interventionist ambitions throughout the nation.

Steele’s argument for Roosevelt’s use of every media available was strong. He made the case that even when FDR was biding his time for the nation to warm up to the idea of intervention over isolation, he knew when to stand for an issue—as with the press—and when to let an industry make its own moves—as in the case of the radio and film industry. Furthermore, he understood the value of a subtle message. As Steele stated, “Propaganda was extensive, but not excessively intrusive.”

Although Roosevelt was not ultimately successful in moving the nation toward intervention in the European sphere of war beyond sending arms to Britain before 1941, he was extremely successful at creating a national atmosphere that was ready to react to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Additionally, before moving on to the next development in the field, it is important to note that between White and Steele, Steele was the first to make mention of Roosevelt’s disability—although it was little more than that. He, first, hinted at FDR’s bout with polio when he explained how newsreels showed him “playing water polo with fellow polio sufferers at Warm Springs.”

The second, and final, mention of Roosevelt’s disability occurred while discussing Early’s policy toward photography. Steele argued that Early and Roosevelt successfully controlled information as evidence of the fact that “many Americans were not aware of the extent of the President’s handicap.” Steele explained that in order to achieve this, “pictures showing FDR in a wheelchair or leg braces were banned, a policy
which the photographers regularly covering the White House readily cooperated." Building on this, Steele argued that it is “…easy to sympathize with the White House’s desire to hide FDR’s condition. At the same time, the policy reflected a larger concern with image making and a willingness to employ censorship at the source to effect its purposes.” In this last comment, Steele merely uses Roosevelt’s disability as a springboard to justify FDR’s disposition toward censorship. Judging from these two short references of Roosevelt’s disability, it can be determined that Steele did not see the President’s physical condition as a major factor on his use of the media—a position that will gradually change over the next decade and a half.

Betty Houchin Winfield. Betty Houchin Winfield wrote the next thorough analysis of Franklin Roosevelt’s use of the media in her book, *FDR and the News Media* (first edition published in 1990, second edition published in 1994). This historiography uses the second edition. First off, Winfield offered some criticism of the predeceasing scholarship—particularly in the case of White’s book. Winfield debated that White spent too much energy on “Roosevelt’s philosophy about reporters, editors, and publishers rather than how Roosevelt actually interacted with them.” This claim may be unfair because many of the tactics that Winfield exposes in Roosevelt’s interactions with news personnel appear to be grounded on the observations that White originally made. Some of these include FDR’s preparation for press conferences, his use of humor for evading questions and topics, as well as his use of timing to break stories at the most effective times. However, a criticism of Winfield that sticks more naturally is one stating that White “all too readily accepts Roosevelt’s press conferences at face value.” This follows suit with the contradiction between White’s own acknowledgement of the preparation that Roosevelt took to push his own agenda into each press conference and White’s statement that press conferences
“…enabled Roosevelt to speak for himself, to reveal his mind.” As Roosevelt put his own spin on the information he fed to Washington correspondents, it would be a mistake to consider each explanation he gave to be an un-fogged mirror into his own mind.

Winfield added several new points to the discussion of Roosevelt’s media skills. To begin with, she expanded the historic narrative to explain FDR’s development of those skills. For example, Winfield explicitly mentioned Roosevelt’s rise to editor in chief of the Harvard Crimson newspaper during his junior year at Harvard. Furthermore, she cited Roosevelt’s state senate campaigns (1910, 1912) as well as his 1913 appointment to Assistant Secretary of the Navy and his failed 1914 campaign for the US Senate. Each of these provided a young Roosevelt practice with publicity. Under his appointment to Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt made three close friends that would greatly influence his media policies during his presidency twenty years later. These individuals were Louis Howe, Marvin McIntyre, and Steven Early. Each were experienced reporters and newsmen. Furthermore, his 1920 Vice Presidential campaign gave Roosevelt practice with media on a mass scale and spread his name throughout the country. Winfield argued that “Roosevelt kept a positive image even though his ticket lost.” Of course, of all the things Roosevelt managed to project on to the nation, Winfield quoted journalist Henry Pringle recalling, “I do remember he had a pleasing personality, that he was 38 years old, and that he had a magnificently strong physique.”

The latter comment regarding Roosevelt’s physical appearance would prove to be the key to reviving his political career after his tragic bout with polio the following year in 1921.

On the topic of polio, Winfield’s work also added another layer to scholarship as the first to dedicate more than a few lines to how Roosevelt’s disability affected his use of the media—particularly during his tenure as Governor of New York just before he was elected President. For example, Winfield argued that when Roosevelt ran for governor, his main
tactic was projecting an image of recovery. He made light of his paralysis with the press, and he put on shows of himself walking short distances in front of the media—either in crutches, but, more commonly, wearing braces concealed by black paint and elongated pant legs. Nevertheless, Winfield stated, “He would have to keep proving his physical ability again and again.” By this, Winfield meant that Roosevelt needed to constantly portray an image of strength and vitality for the duration of his political career.

Winfield highlighted Roosevelt’s command of newly popular media even early on during his time as Governor. For example, she explained that Roosevelt understood the impact of photojournalism. As a result, he was careful about the way he was depicted in photographs: “Photographers were careful to respect Roosevelt’s wishes concerning pictorial coverage,” After this statement, Winfield cited Roosevelt requesting, “No movies of me getting out of the machine, boys” as he was helped from his car at an event. This concurs with the brief statements that Steele made about Roosevelt’s disability. Furthermore, Roosevelt became a champion of the radio. By 1929, he had developed the persona he would use for his Fireside Chats only a few years later. Winfield argued that Roosevelt gave “speeches that were logical, simple, and authoritative” and their aim at educating listeners turned radio into “New York’s classroom” FDR drew on his experience in the Naval Department as he conducted inspection tours of the state. He even capitalized on motion pictures as he launched movie campaigns showing an active Governor Roosevelt touring the state to inspect schools, hospitals, and prisons. Drawing from Steele’s assertion about informational propaganda presupposing “purposeful activity,” Winfield appeared to argue that Roosevelt understood this early on during his active campaign and tenure as Governor. Each of these methods of projecting information would become imperative during FDR’s presidential campaign and tenure.
Winfield expanded on these methods further in relation to Roosevelt’s presidency. In this way, she built on Steele’s research into FDR’s use of the radio and newsreels—but she also added a focus on the new medium of photojournalism at the time. In terms of radio, Winfield focused specifically on Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats. She agreed with Steele about the strategic timing, advertising, limited use, and length of his broadcasts, but added more about the particular tone of his voice. She explained that many described it with “adjectives such as ‘fresh,’ ‘brilliant,’ ‘pleasant,’ ‘rich,’ and ‘melodious.’” Furthermore, she made a point of the attention Roosevelt paid to his own voice by exposing a little known fact: “Few listeners were aware that the president added a false tooth for his radio speeches. With the separation between his front two lower teeth, he would whistle slightly on certain words, a most noticeable broadcast sound.” Additionally, the language he used was essentially important. Winfield alluded to homely analogies and empathetic phrases “such as ‘you and I know,’ ‘together we cannot fail,’ and ‘when your neighbor’s house is on fire.’” Roosevelt’s verbal image was carefully planned and managed.

In her discussion of Roosevelt and Early’s treatment of photojournalism, Winfield marked Roosevelt’s disability more thoroughly than White or Steele in terms of his news management policy. She emphasized the fact that Early placed distinct restrictions on photojournalists. For example, there were to be no exclusive photos—all photographs would be pooled and approved by the White House. Also, Early made an effort to limit the distance to the president according to the size of the crowd—the larger the crowd, the larger the space between Roosevelt and the cameras. Moreover, there were to be no candid pictures in the White House without special approval. And most importantly, “FDR had rules forbidding photographers from showing him in pain or discomfort.” However, these restrictions did not disappoint photographers, for as Winfield put it, “…Roosevelt loved the dramatic and the
unusual, he gave the photographers something newsworthy to shoot.” Of course, the most interesting claim that Winfield made in relation to photography of FDR was that “the American public apparently did not like graphic references to the president’s crippled condition” as evident from public reaction to newspapers writing about it in the press. Therefore, despite a recent decrease in the size of cameras and the increase of potential for candid shots of the President and his disability, they were, at the very least, not circulated often among the press.

On the topic of the press, however, it is important to note that Winfield broke from White in favor of Steele’s method of presenting Roosevelt’s relations with the press in separate sequences instead of one block. Having said that, Winfield built on to White’s analysis of how Roosevelt interacted with the press and added a few more of Roosevelt’s subtle techniques to the list. First off, Winfield exposed four rules that Roosevelt and his Press Secretary enforced at all of his press conferences. They were, as Winfield explained:

1. all news stories based on news announcements from the White House were to be without quotations;
2. direct quotations could be used only when given out in writing by the press secretary Steve Early;
3. background information would be given to reporters on their own authority and responsibility, not attributed to the White House; and
4. the off-the-record information was to be confidential, given only to those reporters present.

Of course, even under these rules, Winfield argued that Roosevelt was a huge success among Washington correspondents as he conducted his conferences informally and opened the gates to a flood of information compared to the previous Hoover administration. Winfield revealed that at the end of Roosevelt’s first press conference, “the reporters broke into spontaneous applause.” Of course, a benefit to these rules was that Roosevelt could justifiably go after reporters that failed to observe them. Winfield cited another tactic explaining that Roosevelt could control the agenda of each conference through planting questions using friendly reporters. She also added a few more of the formal structures Roosevelt used in his
conferences. For example, when he was ready to end the conference—whether due to avoiding a topic or moving on to his next appointment—he would give a certain look to either his senior wire-service member or the most senior reporter in the room, and they would initiate a symbolic, “Thank you, Mr. President,” which would signal the reporters to leave.  

Beyond rules and formalized procedures, Winfield argued that Roosevelt managed to influence the press by the relaxed environment he created at his conferences. She explained that his conferences mimicked a kind of “informal club, a center of capital news, a place to see other correspondents as well as the president.” Winfield’s research concurred with White’s and Steele’s in the way it asserted that Roosevelt made reporters feel like they belonged at the White House. Before Roosevelt’s presidency, reporters were forced to visit a number of sources and conduct an obscene amount of digging to find newsworthy stories. In many ways, reporters were treated as outsiders during press conferences. Roosevelt, however, created a place where Washington correspondents could acquire breaking stories in a time-saving thirty-minute conference. Winfield called it the “show” of Washington. Furthermore, Roosevelt gave correspondents a sense of pride and status for attending his conferences by making them exclusive. Only correspondents working for a daily paper or those that required telegram services were allowed to attend during the first two terms of Roosevelt’s presidency. Although Winfield spent less time debating the actual strength or volume of the resistance Roosevelt faced amongst publishers and editors, she did state that though “…the owners and publishers might have abused him in editorials, Roosevelt was able to make the press conference his.” Of course, Roosevelt also won over many of his Washington correspondents from outside of the Oval Office as well.

Winfield was unique in the way she expanded on White’s description of Roosevelt-correspondent relations when she stated that “The president’s personal relations were also
important to influencing how news would be written.” She revealed that although the correspondents that were allowed to attend Roosevelt’s twice-weekly press conferences made a point to be there, most papers could not afford to have someone constantly monitoring the White House every day. Nevertheless, Roosevelt treated those that did like “members of his family.” They came with him on his trips and vacations and enjoyed the benefits of deeper “off the record” conversations about national affairs that added to their background information. This also allowed Roosevelt the opportunity to drop “trial balloons” by leaking strategic information to close reporters (a trial balloons was the act of releasing information that Roosevelt could use to gauge public reaction and deny responsibility for later, if necessary). It is worth noting that this point marks another break between Winfield and White, as White made a claim stating, “Roosevelt won additional credit for not launching ‘trial balloons,’ as some previous incumbents, notably Calvin Coolidge, had done.” The difference between these two presidents is that Coolidge used trial balloons in actual press conferences, where Roosevelt used personal relationships to break them.

Nevertheless, his relationships with reporters as a whole were also a strategic jab at curbing their interpretation of events in his favor. As Winfield speculated, “If the correspondents had been swimming with the president, had dined at his table, had been charmed by his manner while playing a hand of bridge, then…they would probably be very careful about their choice of words and their interpretation concerning their friend the president.” These were the ways that Roosevelt charmed the press into compliance.

However, Winfield also shed more light on the vast New Deal publicity system as a whole. An interesting benefit of the Great Depression on Roosevelt’s administration was that a high number of journalists were unemployed and seeking work. During Roosevelt’s New Deal, he assembled a number of government agencies that continued to multiply. Each of
these agencies needed their own press agents to sculpt their individual message. As a result, the government hired many capable journalists to serve as publicity agents—which made the New Deal even more effective in the eyes of the media. This worked particularly well for Roosevelt because it provided him with a variety of other spokesmen to defer reporters too when he was ill informed on a particular issue. It also provided him with a place to send reporters that he knew would be consistent with his own message. As Winfield put it, “By aiding the press in their work, and particularly by aiding the journalists personally, they maximized positive results for the administration.”

This statement also follows suit with White and Steele’s works.

During Roosevelt’s campaign for his second term, he had a firm grip on how to handle the media—even in the face of opposition. Winfield explained, “…Roosevelt’s method for treating such opposition was to go over the heads of the publishers and use his personal charm.” This tactic included several of the methods discussed above. But Roosevelt also used a few other tricks. He presented an image of being “above politics” using a strategy that would portray him as an “…active president, touring and speaking for a few minutes without referring to the opposition by name or to the campaign.” When it came to Election Day, Roosevelt won an unprecedented victory carrying every state but Maine and Vermont. Nevertheless, there were struggles that came with FDR’s interactions with the media as well—particularly during his second term.

Winfield described Roosevelt’s relations with the media using a more or less chronological model in the second half of her book. This gave her the benefit of highlighting the high points in Roosevelt’s media relations as well as the low points as they came. In light of this, her work portrayed a very positive and effective relationship during Roosevelt’s first term. However, his second term brought several conflicts in light of a few miscalculations.
For example, after FDR’s historic victory for his second term, he made two nearly fatal mistakes: 1) an attempt to “pack” the Supreme Court after they began striking down several key New Deal programs; and 2) his hasty appointment of Hugo Black as a Supreme Court Justice and the subsequent discovery of Black’s past involvement in the Ku Klux Klan.

In both cases, Winfield exposed that Roosevelt deviated from his usual media tactics. For one, he failed to consult any advisors in Congress or members of his administration before publicly announcing his decisions over the radio. During each of these events, Winfield argued, “FDR sat tight,” and avoided making comments to the press regardless of how hard reporters pushed him. In the end, he managed to shift the focus to world events as the European and Eastern Asian theatre was setting the stage for war. Nevertheless Winfield argued that another instance that “overwhelmed the president’s news management ability” was an economic decline in November 1937 that Republicans labeled the “Roosevelt Recession.” In each of these crises, Roosevelt received massive press opposition as he abandoned his most successful news methods. Winfield summarized by writing,

Roosevelt forgot about his successful first-term political tactics of timing, garnering advice, compromising, and gauging public opinion. Without them, his publicity methods of an astounding announcement, a news conference full of charm and wit, a radio address, a fireside chat, and even an exclusive interview were no longer successful.

Nevertheless, Winfield also argued that “The newspapers…did not mirror what seemed to be public opinion, especially because of the tremendous gap between his election returns and the editorial support of his opponents.” Of course, White and Steele argued the same point; but what made Winfield’s contribution so unique was her comparison of Roosevelt’s media tactics during the Great Depression and World War II.

The thesis of Winfield’s book argued that the type of crisis at hand determines the type of information system an administration employs. She differentiated between the much
more open torrent of news during the internal/domestic Great Depression, and the more guarded and censored news flow incorporated during the external/international World War II. One might argue that this could be a breaking point from Steele, for Steele ended his book arguing that by 1940, Roosevelt had spun up his information system to effectively work very similarly to the way it did in the New Deal. Nevertheless, it would also be important to note that Steele’s narrative ended with the obstacle of isolation just before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Therefore, he did not continue his examination of the Roosevelt’s information system after the United States officially entered the Second World War. Winfield’s work was the first to conduct a comprehensive comparison between the information system used during the New Deal and that of WWII, and her debate is convincing.

Winfield used a variety of examples to argue a transition in Roosevelt’s media policies during World War II. The major issue that Winfield confronted was Roosevelt’s attempt to control information more closely. Up to this point, he had already established several government agencies to manage information. Some of these included the Office of Facts and Figures, the Office of Government Reports, the Division of Information under the Office of Emergency Management, and the Foreign Information Service under the Office of the Coordinator of Information. Each of these agencies were tasked with gathering a certain type of information and filtering the most important through to Roosevelt and, thus, the news media—naturally there was not always complete agreement amongst each department because of the competing parties. As Winfield noted, this method had its strengths and weaknesses because, on the one hand, it “…allowed the president to procrastinate, to watch his subordinates thrash out the details of an issue, and to intervene only when he felt the time was right.” However, the downside to this system was that it prevented a coherent information source.
Winfield highlighted the debate over creating a more central intelligence agency. The conflict with this proposal was that the agency could be misconstrued as a propaganda agency—much like the one run by Goebbels in Nazi Germany. In the end, however, the need for coordinated information became too great and Roosevelt commissioned the Office of War Information (OWI). Its role was to provide a “consistent flow of information on the war policies, the activities and aims of the government, and the status and progress of the war effort.”112 It was also charged with approving all government sponsored messages over radio and motion pictures and with coordinating with the Office of Censorship.

However, this agency was doomed from its conception as Roosevelt never quite gave it his full support. The OWI came into conflict with two groups: the military and Roosevelt. Winfield argued that the majority of the information that the OWI obtained came directly from the military—which was less that comfortable giving away anything that could be loosely used against them in the hands of the enemy. When OWI Director Davis complained to Roosevelt, the President more than often sided with the military. As a result, “OWI information needs were at the mercy of the War and Navy departments’ public relations officers,”113 and much of the information the OWI was able to release was either out of date or under-stated. Furthermore, Roosevelt, himself, posed as a challenge for the OWI as he was not quite ready to relinquish his control over breaking stories during his press conferences. Winfield stated, “No matter what the OWI or any other agency did, Roosevelt had his own ideas about how to generate an image and release information.”114 Therefore, many did not see the OWI as anything more than a government propaganda campaign. Winfield offered some insight into the issue when stating, “As one of the greatest propagandists of the era, Roosevelt was not interested in any agency competing with his own publicity efforts. FDR might have thought that he needed an office of war information, yet
he never really wanted a strong centralized one outside of his office. In the end, the OWI did not outlast the war.

There was another agency that Roosevelt commissioned after the outbreak of WWII, however—one that better exhibits the transition towards more secrecy during an external crisis: the Office of Censorship (OC). Winfield tracked the development of this agency from the very early stages of the war for the United States. In fact, she cited the instance in which Roosevelt “ordered the FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to coordinate all censorship until the appointment of a censorship director” after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Hoover was so successful at this position that the American public never learned the full extent of said attack until after the war was won. Within the nine months between the attack on Pearl Harbor and the establishment of the Office of Censorship, the Navy Department “set up a cable censorship headquarters and a training school in Clarendon, Virginia, and had trained four hundred men by December 7, 1941.” On December 16, 1941, Roosevelt used his authority under the War Powers Act to establish the OC under Director Byron Price. Winfield explained that Price “organized the office to censor any information that the enemy would like to have about defense matters, shipping data, weather conditions, and the details of war projects.” Internally, the OC supervised “voluntary censorship” amongst the press and broadcasting associations; and externally, the OC monitored any communication between the US and foreign nations. There were a number of occasions where either the OC intervened in news stories, or Roosevelt intervened directly—particularly in the case of “international negotiations.”

Winfield argued that news differed greatly between the New Deal and WWII. She claimed, “What once would have been normal stories and newsgathering practices continued to be censored through 1944.” But the greatest alteration of news came in the form of a
restriction on reporting the president’s whereabouts. Roosevelt took advantage of his position as Commander-in-Chief, and as Winfield put it, “Before World War II, correspondents who traveled with Roosevelt reported his trips, the sites and the cities he visited. During the war, the president as commander in chief of the armed services used prohibitions against revealing officer or troop movements to keep his travels secret.”\(^{121}\) This allowed him to go on large trips without the press knowing—or at least being able to tell—where he was. This secrecy became an issue for American reporters particularly in the case of foreign negotiations as British reporters often came out with information that US correspondents were either unaware of or barred from printing.\(^{122}\) This calls Roosevelt’s wartime relationship with the press into question.

One of the most ironic points that Winfield made regarding the press was their willingness to submit to censorship during the war. She argued that “Given all the censorship arrangements, Early was amazed that the press and radio cooperated so well, at times even asking for censorship.”\(^ {123}\) Early on in the war, Roosevelt asked his Washington correspondents—and the rest of the press by extension—for a form of voluntary censorship. While acknowledging that he understood and respected the values projected in the First Amendment, there would be two stipulations on releasing information to the press and news media during WWII. According to Winfield, “Those conditions were that the information must be accurate and would not give aid and comfort to the enemy.”\(^ {124}\) As mentioned above, Roosevelt also made it very clear in the beginning that these conditions would be determined by the military. Very often, correspondents would ask for more information than Roosevelt was willing to give. In these situations, Winfield argued, “…FDR had to deal with a military caught short in the rapidly expanding war. His preference in any kind of choice was obvious”—that choice being the military over the press.\(^ {125}\)
In order to avoid disclosing that information, Roosevelt would employ several of the same tactics he did during the New Deal. Winfield observed that,

He still planned for the meetings and some of the questions ahead of time. He used many of his same evasive tactics, refined during his previous administrations. He relied on his humor, his preconference kidding, his labeling devices, and his jawboning to turn aside those questions he did not like. With the war, he would evade questions with such new quips as “That is just what Hitler wants to know.”

Furthermore, the number of press conferences decreased significantly during Roosevelt’s war years. He began skipping several due to his frequent trips or his frequent illness during the late years of his third and the early months of his fourth term. Winfield exposed the statistics of FDR’s press conferences stating, “The president held 89 press conferences in 1941, 74 meetings in 1942, and 58 in 1943. In 1944, an election year, he had only 55 press conferences, while in 1945 he had 25.”

Also, during Roosevelt’s last few years, Steven Early more frequently stepped from the background to the forefront, even taking over several press conferences as the president’s health declined. Winfield argued that “Early’s important role as center of White House news became more and more apparent.”

This impacted the amount of news the administration allowed the press as well.

During the war years, information was seen as extremely dangerous, and it was treated with a high degree of caution by the Roosevelt administration. Therefore, Winfield argued that Roosevelt controlled information to different extents during the Great Depression and WWII; nevertheless, he managed to consistently project a strong verbal and visual image, win public support through a dynamic personality, use mass media to its greatest extent, and influence the press through institutionalized news conferences. Of course, through both types of crises, Roosevelt laid the groundwork for future administrations in terms of building a strong and positive relationship with the American public through effective media relations.
Using the Media to Control His Image

*Hugh Gregory Gallagher.* The next notable work of scholarship was particularly unique to the question of Roosevelt’s use of the media because its focus laid elsewhere. Hugh Gregory Gallagher wrote an extremely influential biography on Franklin Roosevelt entitled *FDR’s Splendid Deception.* The original edition was printed in 1985—the same year as Steele’s work—but the edition that this historiography uses is the third (1999). What made this biography so unique was that its emphasis was on Roosevelt’s disability and how it impacted his life—both personally and politically. One might pose the question: what does this have to do with his use of the media? The answer Gallagher would most likely give is a resounding: everything!

Gallagher’s work represents an important shift in historiography surrounding Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In his introduction, he argued that “The central key to understanding FDR’s personality and motivation—the impact of his handicap—has been all but ignored by historians”[130] Gallagher’s assessment was correct; however, in the two decades following his book’s original publication in 1985, this claim was to become completely obsolete. Even using the three works explained to this point, one can see a steady trend. For example, White’s book was released in 1979—six years before Gallagher’s was published—and in 186 pages, he made virtually no reference to Roosevelt’s disability. Then, as previously noted, Steele’s work was released the same year as the first edition of Gallagher’s. It presented only two brief mentions of Roosevelt’s disability. Four years later, however, Winfield published the first edition of her book, and the second edition was released in 1994—ironically enough, the same year that Gallagher’s second edition was published. Her work included a considerably larger amount of information about how Roosevelt’s disability influenced the way he interacted with the news media—particularly in
terms of photojournalism, newsreels, and even the press. Nevertheless, as will be seen in the next two important works, Gallagher’s contributions reached their full realization when scholars began writing full works focused on the impact that Roosevelt’s disability had on his use of the media after Gallagher’s third edition was published in 1999. Of course, first, it is important to take note of the contributions that Gallagher’s work added to the field.

To begin with, a word of caution: Gallagher spent a great deal of time analyzing Roosevelt’s actions from an emotional standpoint looking for connections to FDR’s paralysis. The fact that Gallagher, himself, was a victim of polio, severely paralyzed from the waist down, lends a mix of credibility and suspicion to his work. One would assume that Gallagher had a unique insight into Roosevelt’s position as he fell prey to the same disease and even went to the same treatment facility in Warm Springs. Furthermore, he had a keen eye for the nitty-gritty involved in dealing with a severe physical disability right down to the precise mechanics of how he “walked.” Nevertheless, one could also be concerned that Gallagher was biased in his examination of Roosevelt’s motives for he may be projecting his own feelings onto a figure no longer able to speak for himself. Fortunately, Roosevelt’s motives are less important to this historiography in comparison to the specific steps FDR took to work with or conceal his handicap.

In light of this, Gallagher’s thesis was simple: despite the degree of Roosevelt’s handicap, the public was completely unaware of its extent. Gallagher went on to state,

This was not by accident. It was the result of a careful strategy of the President. The strategy served to minimize the extent of his handicap, to make it unnoticed when possible and palatable when it was noticed. The strategy was eminently successful, but it required substantial physical effort, ingenuity, and bravado. To uncover the major points of this strategy, Gallagher followed Roosevelt’s life from the onset of infantile paralysis in 1921 to his death in 1945. He made the argument that:
...polio was his [Roosevelt’s] ‘log cabin.’ His paralysis softened the handsome patrician, made him approachable, more human. His physical weakness was something people of every class could understand. At some level of consciousness, perhaps, FDR’s paralysis served him as a link with ordinary men and women. Nevertheless, he needed to be extremely careful how much he allowed the public to see. Therefore, it was extremely influential in the way Roosevelt portrayed himself. Although Gallagher’s focus was not the news media in particular, allusions to the media were frequent as they became relevant in his narrative.

For example, Gallagher’s story concurred with Winfield’s narrative concerning the first steps taken with the media after Roosevelt’s paralysis. As Gallagher put it, Roosevelt was at his summer home in Campobello when he fell ill, but when he was well enough to be moved to a New York hospital, “FDR was most anxious that the press should know how severely paralyzed he had become.” In order to limit the press’ information on Roosevelt’s condition, Gallagher wrote that Louis Howe lied to the press and told them that Roosevelt would be brought to one side of the pier when he was actually brought to the other. By the time the reporters figured out, they found Roosevelt already propped up and enjoying a cigarette in his train car. This set the trend for Roosevelt’s political career as Gallagher wrote, “From the onset of the illness, Louis Howe had consciously misled reporters.” Roosevelt was then taken to New York, thus marking the beginning of his seven year rehabilitation.

Gallagher made the case that for seven years, Roosevelt had very few public appearances as he became obsessed with finding a way to walk again. Gallagher described a number of treatments Roosevelt sought and how each of them failed. The one place that stuck, however, was Warm Springs, Georgia. This facility was unique, as one might assume, due to the warm springs that were comprised of a mineral compound making them particularly buoyant. These waters allowed many polio survivors with weakened legs to walk
underwater and rebuild some of the deteriorated muscle. Roosevelt spent much of his seven years out of the spotlight at Warm Springs and even founded and built a rehabilitation center there. Well into Roosevelt’s presidency, he maintained fundraisers for the facility and was extremely proud of the work being done there—the fundraisers were called the March of Dimes, eventually weighing in on Congress’ decision to mint the Roosevelt dime. Of course, while Roosevelt was focused on rehabilitation, his wife Eleanor and Louis Howe fought tirelessly to keep his name in political play. Eleanor became a powerful figure in the Democratic Party in her own right.

Gallagher explained how well this paid off when an opportunity presented itself for Roosevelt at the 1924 Democratic Convention. Due to Eleanor and Howe’s political persistence, Al Smith, Governor of New York, was seeking the Democratic nomination and called upon Roosevelt to speak on his behalf. Roosevelt accepted and embarked on his first major public appearance since his struggle with polio in 1921. With the help of his son, James, Roosevelt set out to put on the strongest image of recovery that he could. Gallagher explained how “James surveyed the convention hall…staking out the exits, the speakers’ platform, and the location of the New York delegation. From the very first, Roosevelt was determined not to be seen in a wheelchair unless absolutely necessary, and not to be lifted up stairs in view of the public.”

With the help of his son, Roosevelt accomplished this goal. He even managed to walk on his own to the speaker’s platform unassisted—accept for his leg braces and crutches. Gallagher described his speech, writing “From the first he had the complete attention of every person in the hall. He spoke in his fine, clear tenor, and he spoke with powerful effect…the audience, already moved by his courage, was soon swept up by the power of his delivery.” Roosevelt was a huge success, and he spent the next four years preparing to speak again at the Democratic Convention of 1928 in Houston. Gallagher
explained that “…he was absolutely determined to appear before the delegates as a man who had not merely struggled, but had triumphed over his crippling disease.”

To do this, he needed to walk without crutches.

Roosevelt’s struggle to appear walking would last for the majority of his political career. Nevertheless, Gallagher provided a strong explanation for the importance of that struggle: “With crutches he could have moved about in a reasonably practical and safe manner. Crutches, however, are a universal symbol of the cripple. They arouse fear, revulsion, and pity—emotions quite opposite to those a leader would wish to stir.”

Therefore, Roosevelt needed to develop a method through which he could appear to be walking. Over the next four years, he did, and of the four authors mentioned hereafter, Gallagher was the first to provide a thorough description of this process:

Elliot [Roosevelt’s son] would stand, holding his right arm flexed at a ninety-degree angle, his forearm rigid as a parallel bar. Roosevelt would stand beside Elliott, tightly gripping his son’s arm. In his right hand Roosevelt held a cane. His right arm was straight and held rigid with his index finger pressed firmly straight down along the line of the cane. In this posture, he could “walk,” although in a curious toddling manner, hitching up first one leg with the aid of the muscles along the side of his trunk, then placing his weight upon that leg, then using the muscles along this other side, and hitching the other leg forward—first one side and then the other, and so on and so on. He was able to do this because his arms served him in precisely the same manner as crutches. His right arm transmitted the weight of his body through the index finger along the full length of the cane to the floor. His left arm, leaning on his son’s arm, similarly took the weight off his body.

It is worth noting the upper body strength required to successfully perform this task and appear completely at ease. Roosevelt was exceptionally fit above the waist, and that served him extremely well. Through this technique, Roosevelt portrayed an image of recovery that inspired confidence in the public. After his speech at the 1928 Democratic Convention, Roosevelt ran for Governor of New York and won in a predominantly Republican year.

Gallagher’s description of Roosevelt’s campaign for Governor was extremely important in answering the question, how did his disability affect FDR’s use of the media?
He made a crucial point that “Throughout the rest of his political life the state of his physical and mental health was to be the subject of persistent rumor and conjecture.” To combat this, Roosevelt made a habit of appearing extremely active in public and private. His campaign for Governor of New York was no exception. Roosevelt gave more speeches in more locations than many candidates that came before him. Gallagher explained that he did so from the back of his open-topped tour car. Roosevelt “ordered a steel bar to be mounted above the back of the front seat.” This allowed him to stand for short speeches that he would deliver from his car. Roosevelt would lock his braces straight and pull himself to his feet. While holding the bar for support, he could wave energetically to an enthusiastic crowd.

Roosevelt also continued using his technique for walking short distances with the help of one of his sons and a cane; nevertheless, getting inside of many venues unseen proved challenging. Roosevelt was often carried up fire escapes by strong men so he could avoid being wheeled through the front. Gallagher cited a story that Roosevelt’s daughter recalled where “…the iron staircase was too narrow to allow Roosevelt to be carried up in someone’s arms. The only way he could reach the rally was to haul himself up the stairway using only his arms, dragging his body up, step by agonizing step.” Naturally, this left Roosevelt exhausted; however, it presented another opportunity for FDR to use his charm, as he reached the top and shouted down, “It’s all in knowing how.”

Once Governor, Gallagher argued that Roosevelt had the opportunity to make his world more accessible. Several alterations were made to the Governor’s Mansion in Albany including the addition of an elevator, a swimming pool in the backyard for Roosevelt to exercise, and ramps over all the unnavigable civic obstacles he frequented. Furthermore, Roosevelt developed a technique for being lifted up stairs while appearing to climb them himself. Gallagher explained that two of the state troopers assigned to guard Roosevelt
during his campaign stayed with him while he was in office. Their names were Earl and Gus. They became skilled at knowing exactly how to move Roosevelt, whether it was in and out of a car or up a flight of stairs. This method, as Gallagher explained, involved FDR walking to the base of the stairs “with Gus on one side and Earl on the other. The two men would each take an elbow and lift the governor up the stairs in a standing position. To all but the closest observers it looked as though Roosevelt himself were climbing the stairs.” Of course, as president, Roosevelt had more resources to work around his disability in public.

Gallagher captured many of the small, yet important innovations Roosevelt made as a result of his disability while President. For example, his wheelchair was a topic of interest to Gallagher. Roosevelt designed it himself to avoid using the larger and bulkier models that were his contemporary. Instead, he ordered that a simple wooden kitchen chair be fitted with two large wheels in the front and two small wheels in the back. The wheels did not go above the seat which allowed Roosevelt more freedom in sliding from his chair to another. Moreover, it was extremely portable and could be carried in the trunk of a car. He did not intend to spend much time in his invention, for as Gallagher explained, “He used his chair as a means of movement, not as a place to stay.” As mentioned above, Roosevelt was extremely careful not to be seen in public using his wheelchair. He hid his braces as well. Gallagher described Roosevelt getting dressed for a speech when he wrote, “As always, the President’s shoes were black, his socks were black, and the metal parts of the brace were painted black. This arrangement was intended to camouflage the fact that the President was dependent upon leg braces.” It was easy to overlook the fact that Roosevelt made use of both a wheelchair and braces. They were a well-kept secret.

Gallagher argued that the Secret Service also played a major role in concealing the extent of Roosevelt’s paralysis. They planned his routes extensively and made certain that
Roosevelt’s vulnerable moments were concealed. He was never lifted in public. As Gallagher stated, “If it was necessary to lift him in or out of the car, this was done in the privacy of a garage or behind a temporary plywood screen constructed for the purpose.”

The Secret Service also built ramps throughout official Washington that were maintained during Roosevelt’s twelve year tenure as president. During campaigns, the Secret Service would even construct thirty-foot raised platforms with ramps that allowed Roosevelt’s tour car to be driven to the top. Gallagher animatedly described these as “somewhat like a rollercoaster scaffold.” This allowed Roosevelt to give speeches from his car with a microphone mounted to the side. And on those occasions where Roosevelt left the seat of his car, Gallagher reassured his readers that “[Roosevelt] was never seen in public seated in a wheelchair. Either he appeared standing, leaning on the arm of an aide, or he was seated in an ordinary chair.” These Secret Service precautions worked extremely well throughout New Deal and World War II America.

Transportation needed to be particularly planned in order to accommodate Roosevelt and avoid public notice. To accomplish this, Gallagher described two custom made vehicles beyond Roosevelt’s Ford fitted with hand-controls. First was the Ferdinand Magellan—his rail car. It came with several features to help Roosevelt address crowds with an image of strength. Among these were an elevator, raised railings on the back platform so Roosevelt could “walk” out and speak, and also steel bars inside the car at the windows so Roosevelt could pull himself up to a standing position and wave as he did in the back seat of his tour car.

The second custom mode of transportation was the “Sacred Cow”—the predecessor to Air Force 1. Gallagher explained that this C54 came equipped with a telescope elevator able to lift Roosevelt in his wheelchair and a wheelchair accessible cabin and bathroom.

Interestingly enough, Gallagher argued that “The plane was a part of the Air Corps plan to
woo FDR away from his devotion to the Navy,” although Roosevelt maintained his partiality toward the Navy until his death.151

Of course, the image that Roosevelt projected of himself was carefully planned and orchestrated beyond ramps and platforms. Gallagher created a perceptive window into that image and the props Roosevelt used to craft it. In an insightful passage he wrote,

He [Roosevelt] used his cigarette holder to suggest confidence and good cheer; his old-fashioned pince-nez glasses reminded people of their schoolteachers and of Woodrow Wilson. They bespoke stability, responsibility. His old fedora campaign hat was as familiar as an old shoe; his naval cape expressed dignity and drama. The complete package of props, together with the characteristic tilt of the head, the wave of the hand, the laugh, the smile, made FDR seem to the American people as familiar, as close as a family member.152

Almost every aspect of his attire was carefully planned to provide the maximum public confidence in his abilities; but moreover, even his personality fit the bill. Roosevelt was always quick with a grin and a joke to pull down any doubts about his condition, and with the support of the media, this worked. Nevertheless, what about a scenario where a grin and a hearty laugh was not enough?

Addressing this question, Gallagher explored a contingency for such a scenario: what would happen if the President fell in public? Gallagher exposed that this happened three times, and there is not a single mention of any of those instances among the press. Gallagher described the procedure of hiding such an event through a discussion of Roosevelt’s fall at the 1936 Democratic Convention. The narrative went as follows:

Slowly at first, FDR began to twist off center. As he swiveled past a certain point, his hip joints buckled. Under the pressure, a knee lock on his brace snapped, and down he sprawled. The text of the President’s speech was scattered across the platform under the feet of those assembled there. Instantaneously, his aides moved into action. Mike Reilly caught FDR’s armpit with his shoulder as the President fell. Gus Gennerich quickly seized the other arm. Together they lifted the President to a standing position, holding him aloft while another agent struggled to straighten and relock the knee brace.153
Gallagher made a point that in a case like this, Roosevelt’s staff was trained to move in so quickly that to anyone standing a short distance away, it would have only looked like he had been “momentarily engulfed by the welcome he was receiving.” Therefore, Gallagher explained that if the President fell, the policy was to close in, form a tight circle, and block the President from view. Of course in a situation such as the one described above, one would assume that at least a handful of people—whether part of the press or not—would have noticed and told this story. Therein lays one of Gallagher’s most interesting assertions.

There were several ways that people could have capitalized on the fact that Roosevelt had a massive physical impairment, yet an extremely small number of people did. And, according to Gallagher, when a photographer broke the rules and stole a shot of the President in a wheelchair or being hauled out of his car, they found an exceedingly small market for their product, for “In a very real way a great nation does not want a crippled man as its President; it does not wish to think of its leader as impaired.” Therefore, the majority of the public was willing to turn a blind eye to Roosevelt’s disability. In Gallagher’s words, “The people would pretend that their leader was not crippled, and their leader would do all that he could not to let them see that he was. The generally accepted line was that FDR had had polio and was now a bit lame; he had been paralyzed, but now he was recovered.” For the remaining scholarship on Roosevelt’s use of the media and how he maintained his image despite a severe disability, this is the standard understanding for why the public did not push further about his impairment; whether they did not understand its extent or they did not have the stomach to do so, they simply did not want to.

Davis W. Houck and Amos Kiewe. Davis W. Houck and Amos Kiewe co-authored the next significant study of Roosevelt and the media. Their book was titled, FDR’s Body Politics: The Rhetoric of Disability (2003). As the title suggests, their work followed
Gallagher’s example of honing in on Roosevelt’s disability. Nevertheless, they took a different approach. Where Gallagher’s work was biographical and covered a large span of time, Houck and Kiewe targeted Roosevelt’s strategy for moving the public past his disability only from its onset in 1921 to his first presidential campaign in 1932. Furthermore, although they spent a considerable portion of their second to last chapter discussing how Roosevelt physically displayed a healthy image, Houck and Kiewe were also unique from Gallagher in the way they approached their arguments mainly through textual sources instead of analyzing his public appearances. They asserted that “Language is fundamentally an action, a verb, something that does material work in the world,” and that “Roosevelt’s was a performative politics in the literal sense; body and mind would emerge on the campaign trail.” Therefore, they focused their energies on a campaigning Roosevelt, for it was this Roosevelt that combined both a physical and verbal rhetoric to manage the public’s perception of his handicap.

In their introduction, Houck and Kiewe made explicit mention to their topic’s historiography. They explained that the term disability has different meanings during different contexts and periods of time. Therefore, to say that Roosevelt had a disability and that Roosevelt was lame may mean completely opposite things. Nevertheless he was extremely careful never to expose the extent of his impairment. They reasoned that “Perhaps ironically, that silence about disabled bodies he carried into academic scholarship, where only recently has disability emerged as a legitimate area of inquiry.” Houck and Kiewe described that their own originality could be found in how they treated Roosevelt’s impairment: “Instead of seeing infantile paralysis as something that he ‘overcame,’ we see it as something far more complex. Roosevelt never ‘overcame’ his disability. Crippling physical disabilities are never ‘overcome’; they are lived with.” Therefore, instead of
listing the ways that FDR triumphed over polio, Houck and Kiewe exposed how Roosevelt lived with it and moved the nation past it.

Houck and Kiewe began their analysis of Roosevelt’s “Body Politic” with the onset of his illness—much like Gallagher. They traced the reactions of Eleanor and Louis Howe and found that each of them had an intuitive urge to hide the fact that Franklin was paralyzed. They explained that polio, in particular, came with a set of negative connotations. For one, it “was associated with the poor, the slum-dwelling immigrant, and with the unhygienic—all whom were seen as ‘guilty carriers.’”162 Furthermore, Houck and Kiewe hypothesized that Howe, being a savvy political strategist, was particularly sensitive to the fact that Roosevelt’s was a visible handicap. He recognized how people saw such a thing during Roosevelt’s time. Houck and Kiewe insightfully added that, “…the body in the early twentieth century did not contain the man; it was the man.”163 Therefore, nothing short of Franklin’s political career hung in the balance.

Houck and Kiewe closely followed the letters exchanged between Eleanor and her Uncle Fred—who suggested that a specialist should come diagnose Roosevelt after he heard the symptoms and his original doctor’s diagnosis—and discovered that he and Eleanor had managed to keep the extent of Franklin’s illness from their aunt. Eleanor had also kept Franklin’s condition from his mother, Sara, who was traveling in Europe at the time. Sara would discover her son’s condition upon her arrival home. Houck and Kiewe alluded to Howe’s misdirection of the press when they stated, “If the Roosevelts and the Delanos were good at keeping Franklin’s true condition a secret from proximate family members, it is no surprise that the nation was completely in the dark as to his health.”164 While Roosevelt was recovering enough to be moved from Campobello to New York, Howe convinced the press that he was only suffering from a cold that threatened pneumonia. After Roosevelt was
successfully moved to New York, however, the story got out and made front page headlines. The redeeming aspect of this was that Roosevelt enjoyed what he read, as the article quoted his doctor claiming that he would not suffer any permanent paralysis. Houck and Kiewe quoted Roosevelt telling reporters, “While the doctors were unanimous in telling me that the attack was very mild and that I was not going to suffer any permanent effects from it, I had, of course the usual dark suspicion that they were just saying nice things to make me feel good.” Nevertheless, he continued with a joke saying, “Now that I have seen the same statement officially made in the *New York Times* I feel immensely relieved because I know it must be so.” Houck and Kiewe suspected that Howe may have had a hand in helping that diagnosis along.

The next step for Roosevelt, according to Houck and Kiewe, was to keep his name in political play while he recovered and learned to walk again. Therefore, they argued that “…his recovery began textually, typically with Roosevelt dictating and Howe or Margueritte ‘Missy’ Le Hand writing.” Roosevelt embarked on a letter campaign that would accomplish a “pronounced rhetorical motive: to convince all who would listen that Franklin was on the way to complete and total recovery.” He chose his words very carefully in his letters; and as a result, it would very often appear to their reader that Roosevelt was recovering very well. He would interpret any gain to be a sign of recovery. For example, as his back and arm muscles grew more powerful from his constant exercises, he interpreted them to be a sign of recovery despite the lack of progress in his leg and thigh muscles. Furthermore, Houck and Kiewe identified a component in his letters that was “now becoming a rhetorical staple: ‘In every other way I am entirely normal.’” This campaign worked well.
Houck and Kiewe argued that in some ways, his letter campaign worked too well. Many politicians began to think he was well enough to run for offices again. In this, however, Houck and Kiewe discovered an effective strategy. Where his close friends and correspondents thought he was in the best shape of his life, his political party thought he was too ill to travel. Houck and Kiewe explained, “This dialectic, no doubt, would buy him the time that he and Howe had calculated. It would also buy him the time he needed to remaster his own body.”\textsuperscript{169} Of course, in 1924, his opportunity came to give a speech for Al Smith at the Democratic Convention. Gallagher also spoke of this event naming it a pivotal moment in Roosevelt’s career. Houck and Kiewe agreed with this assessment and furthered it through stating, “…his delivery and, more importantly, his presence highlighted his incipient physical and thus political comeback.”\textsuperscript{170} His performance was praised by the media; however, a few papers took notice of the difference between this Roosevelt and the one they saw run for Vice President four years ago. Nevertheless, many also called for Roosevelt’s imminent return to the national stage. Houck and Kiewe agreed with Gallagher when they argued that Roosevelt’s next step was to learn to walk without crutches. As Gallagher explained in his work, Roosevelt did discover how to “walk” again and made his way to the podium in the 1928 Democratic Convention to nominate Al Smith again, but without crutches this time.

Next, Houck and Kiewe described Roosevelt’s campaign for Governor after reluctantly taking the nomination from Al Smith. They expanded on Gallagher’s statement about running an active campaign through visiting and speaking at more places than any other before, for:

Between his acceptance speech on October 16 and November 3, 1928, Roosevelt’s travel itinerary was ambitious: Binghamton, Deposit, Port Jarvis, Hancock, Owego, Elmira, Corning, Hornell, Wellsville, Olean, Salamanca, Elmira, Dunkirk, Buffalo, Batavia, Rochester, Canandaigua, Seneca Falls, Syracuse, Oswego, Watertown, Boonville, Rome, Utica, Herkimer, Schenectady, Troy, Albany, Flushing (Queens),
With Howe’s advisement, Roosevelt mixed his pre-polio travels with his post-polio travels in his speeches, which made him appear extremely mobile. Furthermore, Houck and Kiewe argued that Roosevelt often tackled the stigma about his health head-on. For example, they described Roosevelt addressing the crowd at Jamestown asking, “Do I look to you good people like an unfortunate, suffering, dragooned candidate?” At Syracuse, he opened his speech saying, “Well, here’s the helpless, hopeless invalid my opponents have been talking about. I have made fifteen speeches today. This will be the sixteenth.” The audience greeted these remarks with applause as Roosevelt shot down claims against his health. Houck and Kiewe asserted that “Roosevelt’s physical presence was a tool—perhaps the tool—of the political campaign.” Roosevelt capitalized on his body during both his successful campaigns for Governor in two ways. First, it served a physical purpose to show the public that he was not invalid. Second, it served a rhetorical purpose as he used his opposition’s assertions about his health against them, thus challenging their credibility. In these campaigns, Roosevelt left the media to draw their own conclusion from his performance; nevertheless, Houck and Kiewe argued that Roosevelt tried his hand at media infiltration during his campaign for the presidency.

Houck and Kiewe devoted an entire chapter to the reporter Earle Looker and his alleged plot with Roosevelt in 1931. Earl Looker was a Republican reporter who wrote an article about Roosevelt’s health entitled “Is Franklin Roosevelt Physically Fit to be President.” Both Winfield and Gallagher mentioned him briefly in their analysis of Roosevelt and the media. Winfield explained, “Earle Looker, professedly a Republican writer who had been a playmate of Theodore Roosevelt’s children, challenged Roosevelt to have the Director of the New York Academy of Medicine select a committee of eminent
physicians, including a brain specialist, to examine him.”175 The physicians returned with a report certifying that Roosevelt was extremely fit and well suited for public office.

Where Winfield called this a “spectacular media stunt,” Gallagher called it a “cooked up affair.”176 Houck and Kiewe agreed with Gallagher. They followed the letter correspondence between Looker and Roosevelt and noted that although neither explicitly mentioned their plan, Looker came very close to directly acknowledging it when he stated, “Well sir, we got away with the ‘Liberty’ article despite all obstacles.”177 Furthermore, Houck and Kiewe found evidence that Roosevelt may have funded the medical examination personally, despite Looker’s assertions that he did so in his article. This affair implies that Roosevelt may have become impatient with waiting for the media to come to his designed conclusions, and he decided to play his hand at newspaper espionage. In any case, this article provided Roosevelt with a credible counter argument to those who questioned his health.

Of course, Houck and Kiewe’s close examination of the images on the _Liberty Magazine_ show just how cleverly this plot was orchestrated to manipulate readers. They alluded to the sports images on the magazine’s cover. This played into Houck and Kiewe’s theory of masculinity in politics: “…physical fitness had an important corollary—that of masculinity. The more physically fit, in other words, the more masculine. And, of course, only fully masculine men were ‘capable’ of doing politics in the public sphere.”178 The background of the magazine cover included boxing images of a man swinging a right hook and another man dodging it. Furthermore, there was another larger image of a man, his son, and a police officer. The police officer was pointing at the father with a “menacing” index finger. Houck and Kiewe interpreted these images writing, “If boxing metonymically stood in for bodily fitness and masculinity on the cover of _Liberty Magazine_, then the other image suggests a verbal fitness…”179 Therefore, that issue of _Liberty Magazine_ and Looker’s article
used both direct and subliminal messages to reach readers about Roosevelt’s fitness for office.

Looker continued to support Roosevelt through two books after the *Liberty Magazine* article; Houck and Kiewe focused on the first that was published during Roosevelt’s campaign in 1932. They explained how Looker stated the intent of his biographical work, *This Man Roosevelt*, to be exposing the true Roosevelt and his personality. Nevertheless, they summarized the work as “essentially a public relations tract designed to promote Roosevelt’s presidential potential and to reprint the ‘findings’ of the *Liberty Magazine* article.”

Although it came with no citations, the book quoted several interviews with Roosevelt and those who surrounded him at the Governor’s mansion in New York. Houck and Kiewe noticed the emphasis on Roosevelt’s impatience after his paralysis, and how Early “suggests a heroic Roosevelt who would win the admiration of his friends for his persistent efforts to regain his health.” Nevertheless, they argue that the “heart of his biographical project” is when Roosevelt agreed to have Looker observe him. This allowed Looker to revisit his article and expand it. He recalled stories and anecdotes from Roosevelt’s friends and family to humanize him. He also explicitly mentioned and reduced Roosevelt’s disability by describing how he ‘walked’ up the ramp to the governor’s mansion with Roosevelt several times. Houck and Kiewe pointed to Lookers tactic of recording “observations regarding Roosevelt’s health and pass[ing] them off as if they were made by an expert.” Whether Looker was acting on his own volition or he was encouraged by Roosevelt in these works, he managed to deliver the message Roosevelt was looking for successfully into the media.

Of course, a major point of disagreement between Gallagher and Houck and Kiewe was the role that disability played in Roosevelt’s presidential campaign compared to his governor campaigns. Gallagher emphasized the tactics Roosevelt used during his 1928 and
1930 governor campaigns in order to prove his fitness, and then he described his 1932 campaign for president writing, “Roosevelt’s handicap played little direct role in his candidacy or the campaign he waged.” However, Houck and Kiewe asserted, “As the primary season drew near, the whispering campaign again kicked into high gear. The whispering, of course, was tied directly to Roosevelt’s presidential aspirations.” As a result, Roosevelt had to make several decisions in order to successfully combat those whispers. For one, he drafted Columbia University Political Scientist Raymond Moley, who became his most brilliant speech writer. After this, Houck and Kiewe cited two major decisions that Roosevelt made to counter the whispers about his health at the 1932 Democratic Convention in Chicago.

First, Roosevelt broke tradition by taking an eight hour plane trip to Chicago to give his acceptance speech personally at the convention. Normally, the candidate was informed of his nomination, and then the delegates assembled a few weeks later to hear his acceptance. Houck and Kiewe identified several reasons why Roosevelt’s dramatic plane ride made a difference in the face of his health. For one, air travel was still relatively new and dangerous. Also, it was not comfortable at all; nevertheless, it had its desired effect as Houck and Kiewe quoted two journalists saying, “The quick jump across the country also helped greatly to dispel any belief that the governor was physically weak or that he was not a man of action.”

The second decision was the delivery and word choice of Roosevelt’s acceptance speech. To begin with, Roosevelt delivered his speech in person. If he wanted to break tradition and deliver it at the convention, he “could have easily acknowledged his nomination via radio, but such a disembodied gesture would not have focused the delegates’ (and the nation’s) collective gaze on their candidate.” In this way, his mere presence did wonders
for combating whispers about his health. And the wording of his speech was also carefully chosen. He was sure to mention his navy training to allude to his strong body—although this occurred before his paralysis. Houck and Kiewe debated that Roosevelt also included strategic words and phrases that implied fitness including: “on the one hand,” “join hands,” “groping,” “feel,” “out of step,” “go into,” “going up and down,” “first step,” “long run,” “the Democratic Party stands,” “stood out,” and “climb back to.” All of these phrases inspired confidence in Roosevelt’s ability to physically lead.

Houck and Kiewe described how Roosevelt continued to combat rumors against his health up until the election by using his body. They explained, “His body was simply the best proof that Roosevelt could muster—better than radio, better than press conferences, and certainly better than any surrogate.” Thus, he capitalized on his physical presence by embarking on two whistle-stop train tours out West. In doing so, Roosevelt would present as many speeches as possible. Houck and Kiewe captured his motives behind these tours well:

The function of these speeches was not necessarily policy: Roosevelt would rarely say more than a sentence or two about a specific issue, depending on what part of the country he was in. Instead, several times a day, he would go through the terribly arduous process of strapping on his heavy leg braces, and with the performance he had perfected at Warm Springs, he would ‘walk’ to the back platform of the last car and allow the hundreds, many times thousands, of people assembled to see him. Unlike the gubernatorial race in 1928, Roosevelt did not joke with his audience about his purportedly enfeebled body; perhaps he simply wanted to avoid making the issue potentially bigger than it already was.

Although Roosevelt avoided explicitly mentioning his disability, he implied his fitness to deal with a failing economy by equating it to a body. Throughout his speeches he used a bodily metaphor comparing the depression to an illness. Houck and Kiewe cited Roosevelt equating the Hoover administration’s policies to “poisons” that he would work to treat. Furthermore, they effectively reasoned, “A sick and prostrate people needed a healer, and who better to fulfill that role than a recovering paralytic who knew something of sickness, pain, and
In this way, Roosevelt used his experience with polio to work for him with the media as it appeared to grant him credibility.

_Sally Stein._ The final author to make a stride in the field of Roosevelt’s interaction with the media mentioned in this historiography is Sally Stein. Stein’s is also the only article presented in this work. It is titled, “The President’s Two Bodies: Stagings and Restagings of FDR and the New Deal Body Politic” (2004). Like Houck and Kiewe, Stein believed that disability changes with the public’s perception. Stein traced Roosevelt’s image from his original presidential campaign up to the unveiling of his national monument in Washington DC. She discovered that, “…the management of his physical impairment has been of paramount importance in innumerable depictions of FDR, overriding issue of artistic style, choice of visual medium, accompanying text, and presentational context.” Therefore, in every visual representation, Roosevelt’s disability has been a factor. Stein moved forward to state, “Visual strategies of selective framing, condensation, or displacement recur with remarkable regularity, underscoring the political stakes involved in this confounding of physical and civic fitness.” Herein lays the originality in Stein’s work: where Gallagher focused on interpreting Roosevelt’s attempts to conceal his disability in person and Houck and Kiewe focused on Roosevelt’s speeches and texts, Stein emphasized Roosevelt’s visual representation in photographs, newspapers, artwork, and monuments.

To begin with, Stein exposed a photograph taken of Roosevelt in 1928. It showed him standing in front of the corner of a glass door and a wall. He stood with straight posture holding a cane in front of his right leg and holding his left arm behind his back. He was dressed in a suit wearing a serious expression on his face. His body looked strong and fit. Nevertheless, Stein explained that upon a closer inspection of his left foot, one can see that Roosevelt is not simply holding his left arm behind his back; he is concealing a second cane.
to support himself—the base of that cane is just visible behind his left shoe. Stein hypothesized that “Once we recognize the second cane, we may find ourselves straining to rotate one shoulder backward while continuing to face straight ahead.” Her point was that photos like these were carefully staged to hide Roosevelt’s impairment. Nevertheless, she also agreed with an assertion made by both Gallagher and Houck and Kiewe: “The public was exposed to sufficient evidence of Roosevelt’s handicap to make complete ignorance impossible. In fact, it was the public as much as the leader that produced a ‘cover-up.’” Therefore, Roosevelt alone cannot be blamed for this “Deception”—to borrow a word from Gallagher—as the public accepted it willingly.

The next piece of evidence that Stein exposed came three years later and has already been discussed; it was the Looker article published in *Liberty Magazine* in 1931. Although Houck and Kiewe focused a great deal on this article, they did not mention two pictures in the article itself—one of which showed Roosevelt in his swimming trunk wearing a hat, athletically sitting on the ground next to a pool at Warm Springs; the other showed Roosevelt sitting in a chair wearing a suit with his leg braces exposed extending down from under his pants and locking into the base of his shoes. Stein explained that these pictures were paired on purpose to offset one another. Where the picture featuring Roosevelt’s braces may make readers uneasy, the athletic photo of Roosevelt at the bank of the pool would offset that uneasiness. Of course, Stein marked this article to indicate a transition that Houck and Kiewe would agree with: “Once the ‘race’ for the presidency was under way, FDR downplayed both discussion and evidence of his physical impairment.” After this point, Roosevelt focused his energies on portraying an image of recovery and strength.
Stein rehashed several methods to hiding Roosevelt’s disability that other authors have exposed—like painting his braces black and lengthening his pant legs, for example—however, she put them very succinctly stating,

FDR’s success in projecting an image of wondrous resilience was due to several factors: his painstaking efforts to appear inexhaustibly active and in command; a press corps that generally agreed not to depict him as immobilized or confined to a wheelchair; and a nation that desperately wanted to believe in miraculous recoveries in troubled time.¹⁹⁶

She described the rarity of photographs depicting his disability, his management of the news flow to keep reporters occupied—a strong allusion to the research done by White, Steele, and Winfield—and also his animated facial expression during speeches and resonant voice during radio addresses.

Nevertheless, Stein carried that argument that the public was not interested in his disability further than all the previous authors mentioned in this historiography. She mentioned a case where “Time magazine referred in passing to his ‘shriveled legs.’ A few weeks later the magazine reported receiving five hundred letters about this word choice.”¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, there was also a case where Life published a “rather fuzzy and distant photograph” of Roosevelt being pushed in a wheelchair and they also received official complaints.¹⁹⁸ Stein reasoned that “The scarcity of images showing his physical dependence, though most commonly attributed to press management by his staff, seems equally attributable to public tastes, desires, and aversions.”¹⁹⁹ She continued to argue, “Surely quite a few press photographers with small-format 35mm Leica or Contax cameras could have managed revealing scoops had there been a marked for such pictures.”²⁰⁰ Of course there was much more to maintaining a presidential image than through photographs and newspapers.

Stein uncovered several tactics that society has taken to minimize the extent of Roosevelt’s disability in its representation of him. First, she explained “A time-honored
strategy was to limit depiction to the portrait bust or headshot.

Stein identified several examples of this tactic. In each one, Roosevelt was either framed only from the neck up or a partial picture of him was placed within another picture—such as murals that included Roosevelt’s portrait hanging on the wall. Another effective way of achieving this tactic was through depicting the “desktop executive” where Roosevelt was photographed at a desk that hid his weakened lower extremities and emphasized the powerful trunk, arms, and shoulders below his neck and head. In many images, the props that were generally associated with weakness were deflected away from Roosevelt and on to others. Stein explained, “…cartoonists, graphic artists, and photographers adopted similar strategies of dissociating the cane from Roosevelt and grafting it onto diverse figures intended to symbolize the common man, the forgotten farmer, or the down-and-out man on the street.”

This tactic was common.

Stein called the next tactic “Vanishing Acts.” She stated, “…posthumous representational strategies demonstrated that public disavowal of his physical condition continued for many decades.” Therefore, to go along with her term, Roosevelt’s disability “vanished.” Stein cited the Roosevelt dime as the first monument to his presidency. She also observed that “…the Roosevelt dime stops unnecessarily short with the chin, especially compared with the way necks and sometimes shoulders figure as prominent supporters in the case of the Lincoln penny, the Jefferson nickel, and the Washington quarter.” Furthermore, very shortly after Roosevelt’s death, the ramps constructed over official Washington DC that Gallagher mentioned earlier were deconstructed and removed. Stein stated, “…as soon as Harry Truman assumed the presidency…ramps were stripped from most other political sites in the postwar period.” Stein explained that the same issue of avoiding Roosevelt’s disability would play a major role in establishing his memorial.
Stein told the story of the debate over Roosevelt’s national monument that would last for half a century. To summarize the three major attempts—two of which were aborted and the third finally pushed through—she explained, “However much they varied in plan and style, all of the favored designs tended to repeat earlier efforts to evade or gloss the particularities of a body that could not conform to conventional postures of leadership.”\textsuperscript{207} Ironically enough, the first design included terraced steps around the monument that made it handicap inaccessible. It was opposed because the design was too abstract. The second was opposed because it was “too modernistic (which in the second half of the 1960s meant old-fashioned) and too trendy in its references to pop art.”\textsuperscript{208} Finally, the third design was approved surprisingly quickly, but it took about a decade to fund. Ground broke on the monument in 1991.

Stein argued, predictably, that the greatest area of controversy in the approved monument was the sculptural depiction of Franklin Roosevelt. Originally, Lawrence Halprin, the monument’s architect, envisioned only one sculpture. Initially, he planned for something “bigger than life, standing with cape and cane and braces—because that’s how most of us remember [FDR].”\textsuperscript{209} Nevertheless, Halprin changed his mind shortly after to include a sculpture of Roosevelt sitting down, but he could not decide which image to model him after. Following a year of debate, he decided “no single figure cast ‘bigger than life’ would dominate the space; rather ‘a number of pieces by many sculptors’ would depict ordinary Depression-era citizens as well as their leader.”\textsuperscript{210} Stein explained that there were several social changes between Halprin’s original drafting of the design in 1974 and its execution in 1991-7. For example, the civil rights movement continued to thrive and the 1980s ushered in the era of the disability rights movement. Stein argued,

A decade earlier, Roosevelt had not been universally viewed as a role model for the disabled. But in the mid-1990s, disability activists began advocating changes in
In 1995, activists took a very public approach to protesting Roosevelt’s depiction. This continued up until the monument was almost complete. Eventually, officials gave in to the demonstrators’ demands. Stein described that “President William Clinton announced at the eleventh hour that he would ask Congress to mandate inclusion of a second statue of Roosevelt, this time sitting in a wheelchair.” Sadly, Stein alluded to the anticlimactic atmosphere of this event as it occurred on the same week of, and was overshadowed by, President George W. Bush’s inauguration.

The debate that Stein highlighted raises several questions in our willingness as a culture to accept disability. She mentioned the dichotomy that seems to exist in Franklin Roosevelt’s national monument as he is represented by two separate figures—each telling a different story of his life. Nevertheless, an important distinction made by Houck and Kiewe seems to fit well here: “Roosevelt, after all, was not disabled by nature; his disability was not written on his body on the day that he contracted infantile paralysis. Instead, a condition must become dis-abling; it must be adjudicated in a culture for any condition to be deemed as such.” This assertion states that there is a difference between a disability and the dis-abling stigma that a culture attaches to it. It is worth considering this fact while reviewing the trends noted in this historiography.

**Conclusion**

In the first major work analyzing Roosevelt’s use of the media discussed in this historiography, White focused specifically on Roosevelt’s philosophy and how that colored his interaction with the press. He wrote about Roosevelt’s presidency as if it was one unit, and he made little to no mention of Roosevelt’s disability. This serves as an indication that in the late 1970s, Roosevelt’s disability was not a major consideration in his interactions with
the media. Scholarship was more focused on the specific tactics FDR used to control information and influence news flow; in other words: how did Roosevelt use the media to run the country? Steele wrote the next work in 1985. He expanded on White’s analysis of *Roosevelt and the press* to *Roosevelt and the press, radio, and film industry*. Nevertheless, Steele still focused specifically on how he managed news outlets and paid even less attention to any motive behind Roosevelt’s tactics beyond moving the nation past isolationism. Although he made slight references to Roosevelt manipulating the media to diminish public perception of his disability, Steele did not devote it any focus beyond using it as an assertion that if he was capable of this, he was also capable of censorship.

The year 1985 marked an important shift in Roosevelt historiography as it was also the year that Gallagher published his pivotal biography. It makes sense that Gallagher’s book was released in the ’80s when the disabilities rights movement was picking up steam. Although one could argue that the field was already moving toward realizing the impact of Roosevelt’s disability because Steele’s work made mention to it where White’s did not, it is undeniable that Gallagher’s biography sped the process a great deal. Winfield’s work in 1990 presented the first work targeted specifically at Roosevelt and the media that discussed his disability for any length of time. She included a chapter on the development of his media skills before and after polio, and she even attempted to explain that by the time Roosevelt became president, he had four years of experience hiding his disability as Governor of New York. Winfield’s work, however, marks a transition in its own as it was the last book that focused specifically on Roosevelt’s manipulation of news outlets instead of viewing his manipulation of those outlets as a consequence of his disability.

After Gallagher’s third edition in 1999, the question of *how Roosevelt used the media to run the country* had transitioned toward a question of *how he used the media to maintain*
his image. In 2003, Houck and Kiewe focused on Roosevelt’s image during the eleven year span of contracting polio and running for president. Within this period, they analyzed mostly textual sources including letter correspondence, newspaper responses, and speeches. Finally, a year later in 2004, Stein carried on the torch to answer the question of how Roosevelt maintained his visual image before and after death.

To conclude this historiography, it is worth considering how different the media is today from Roosevelt’s era. In an age where even television might be considered obsolete to internet news that can be accessed without the use of a computer from a cellphone about the size of a wallet, how would Roosevelt’s intuitive gift for media relations and image construction fare? Houck and Kiewe offer an answer:

At the seventy-year anniversary of his first election to the presidency, we pause to consider that had Roosevelt entertained presidential aspirations in our day, he would be laughed out of the political arena. Can we see Roosevelt slogging through the slush in his wheelchair down the streets of Nashua? How would he respond to the first town hall questioner who asked him, no, commanded him, to step back from the podium and walk—unaided? What of the Gen-X, MTV voter who, instead of querying the squire about boxers or briefs, asked about his sex life with the missus? How would a very cynical electorate react to writers like Earle Looker and doctors like E. W. Beckwith whose stated desire is to get the truth of things? And, of course, what of the press when the candidate pulled up in a car or bus or airplane and declared, “Sorry, guys, no pictures today”? Our purported progress on the issue of disability seems nothing if not retarded when considered in the bright light of contemporary presidential electoral politics. Old politics, primarily oral politics, was what Richard Weaver might call “spacious” politics; candidates were expected to have a zone of privacy, perhaps even secrets.\[214\]

Therefore, it is appropriate to end with a statement and a question. There have been many additions to Roosevelt’s image in the last decade or so beyond his national monument; these include several movies—*Pearl Harbor* (2001), *Warm Springs* (2005), *Hyde Park on the Hudson* (2012), monuments—Four Freedoms Park opened in 2012—, museums—such as the newly renovated permanent and temporary exhibits at the Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library (2013)—, and even archival discoveries—such as the unexpected discovery of a six
second newsreel showing FDR being removed from a naval ship in his wheelchair and rolled down a ramp (2013). In light of all these additions to Roosevelt’s image, how does the image he provided during his lifetime compare to the one we have constructed for him today?
CHAPTER II

Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Physical Image:

Then and Now
Franklin D. Roosevelt excelled at projecting his message to the public through mass media. Nevertheless, to do this effectively, he needed more than communication skills; he needed to build an image that inspired confidence. More specifically, he needed to construct a presidential image. This begs the question: what constitutes the image of a president? Of course, it might be better to, first, make a distinction between the image of a president and that of a leader. A leader embodies charisma, credibility, intelligence, empathy, inspiration, and experience. American history has witnessed the rise of many leaders from every race and gender. In fact, Roosevelt, himself, had proven that he possessed all of those leadership traits decades even before his first bid for Governor of New York in 1928. However, in the twentieth century, a president was more than the traits listed above; he was healthy and active. Therefore, a president’s image included the component of physical fitness. This proved to be the challenge of Roosevelt’s later political career, for as Houck and Kiewe argued, “…without the appearance of a healthy body, Roosevelt would not have been elected governor in 1928, nor would he have become the thirty-second president of the United States.”

FDR was the first, and remains the only presidential candidate to be elected to office with a major physical disability. Scholars have argued several theories as to how he achieved this. Some debate that he blatantly deceived the public, where others argue that he merely misled the people to the extent of his paralysis. Hugh Gallagher believed that the majority of the country had grown to accept the notion that the president was merely a little lame and not disabled. Many take this argument further to assert that the public was willingly deceived, that they participated in an unspoken agreement to look the other way in order to maintain their image of a healthy and active president. The fact that there was so little mentioned about his disability in the media lends itself as evidence of the latter theory.
However, it is important to draw a parallel and a distinction in terms of a president’s physical fitness between Roosevelt’s era and our own. Scholars agree that up to the early twentieth century, disability was not accepted by society—in fact, it was hardly even tolerated. Gallagher argued that “The handicapped were kept at home, out of sight, in back bedrooms, by families who felt a mixture of embarrassment and shame about their presence.” Furthermore, he debated that “In a very real although subconsciously motivated sense, the handicapped were viewed as flawed in moral character as well as in body.” Houck and Kiewe argued the implications of Roosevelt’s paralysis on his electoral ambitions. They advanced Gallagher’s statement by adding the variable of masculinity to the equation. After all, in Roosevelt’s era, politics was a man’s occupation, and “…primarily because of structural economic changes, early-twentieth century American men sought to exercise that masculinity by increasing control over their own bodies. With infantile paralysis, Roosevelt surrendered this control and was subjected to the public’s equating ‘not masculine’ with feminine.” Therefore, voters and electoral politicians during Roosevelt’s era were concerned with health and vigor as a means of masculinity.

Therein is the parallel to contemporary society as the perception of health, activity, and masculinity are still prevalent prerequisites to presidential candidates today. One could argue that this course has already begun to change because the 2008 presidential elections saw two major strides in female candidacy, including Hillary Clinton’s close bid for the Democratic nomination as well as Sarah Palin’s vice-presidential candidacy. Nevertheless, a closer examination of these politicians’ counterparts reveals the underlying evidence that ours is still a society focused on health, activity, and masculinity. First, when looking at the media’s portrayal of Barack Obama against Hillary Clinton, there are several allusions to his masculinity. Where Clinton’s media portrayal focused on political issues and her family role,
Obama’s added the element of masculinity through vigorous athletic images of the candidate playing basketball or shirtlessly wading through sandy beach shores. Furthermore, in the case of Sarah Palin and John McCain, Palin’s place on the ticket provided McCain with a perceived advantage amongst female voters while the media continued to focus on masculine aspects of his past including his military service.

Of course a major distinction between Roosevelt’s era and our own can be drawn to the behavior of the media during presidential elections. Whether a scholar believes that Roosevelt deceived the public by hiding his disability or merely misled them as to its extent by putting on shows of endurance through ‘walking’ short distances and standing for public appearances, all agree that the media played a part in the rouge. That is to say that the media very often turned a blind eye to instances that revealed the state of Roosevelt’s disability—particularly after he achieved his presidency. This directly contrasts today’s media, for as Stein stated, “Today’s mass media intensifies the popular impulse to scrutinize the bodies of leaders and would-be leaders for signs of these abilities.” After all, one of the major arguments against Senator McCain’s bid for president in 2008 was his advanced age—in many ways this concern stemmed directly from Roosevelt’s death only months into his fourth term. As discussed in Chapter I, Roosevelt successfully managed to construct and maintain a presidential image of health, activity, and masculinity throughout his four terms through skillful manipulation of the media. Nevertheless, in light of the shift in media scrutiny between Roosevelt’s time and our own, a question may be posed: how has the physical image of Franklin D. Roosevelt been affected from the time of his death to today?

To answer that question, Chapter II is two-fold. First, it will expose the physical image that Roosevelt projected during his own lifetime through a summarization of the secondary sources mentioned in Chapter I and using primary sources from the Franklin
Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library. Second, it will compare that image to the image that has evolved over the past sixty-eight years by examining Franklin Roosevelt’s appearance in several memorials, museums, and historic sites. The evidence that will surface from this comparison is that there has, indeed, been a shift in FDR’s image as society has become more comfortable with the concept of disability over the past seven decades. Nevertheless, this shift is complex in that it is not completely linear. Where some monuments, museums, and historic sites have advanced a balanced representation of FDR as a politician and a man with a disability, others have taken steps backward toward the conservative image from his own period. Therefore, it is clear that the political stigma surrounding disability has not completely taken its course in American public representation.

Defining Roosevelt’s Original Physical Image

The first task is to answer the question: how did Roosevelt represent himself during his lifetime? How did a man who could not walk unassisted create an image of strength and vitality for a physically conscious society? In short, he countered references to his disability by putting on a strong image of health through recovery, action, and masculinity. Roosevelt never hid the fact that he contracted infantile paralysis, but he always paired it with an allusion to recovery—and he began this tactic shortly after his illness.

As Houck and Kiewe discussed, FDR carried out an extensive letter campaign during his seven year recovery between his contraction in 1921 and his 1928 campaign for governor in order to keep his name in the political sphere. Through this letter campaign, he often acknowledged his battle with polio, but he always ended on a positive note that alluded to his full recovery—usually in another couple of years. Houck and Kiewe argued that he developed his own “…rhetorical staple: ‘In every other way I am entirely normal.’”220 This allowed him to seamlessly step back into the spotlight when he was ready to resume a
political career because his contacts assumed he was showing signs of significant recovery for years—according to his letters.

Furthermore, Roosevelt developed methods to minimize or even hide his disability through a sort of stage-management so that he could use his body as a prop to fight negative rumors about his health. After all, the best way to convince the public that he was physically able was to show them. The term *stage-management* fits Roosevelt’s tactics well as he carefully planned his public appearances to move his audience toward the illusion of full recovery. For one, he invented a way that he could appear to walk short distances by using his arms to disperse his weight between a cane and an assistant while he swung his braced legs forward one at a time. This tactic was extremely effective. Nevertheless, in many cases, even simply standing was enough. To accomplish this, Stein and Gallagher both cited several innovations that Roosevelt made to appear to be able to stand. One such innovation included fortifying the podiums that he would use while delivering speeches. Stein described how Roosevelt “…would grip the podium, which had to be reinforced to serve as a surrogate base.”\(^{221}\) Another was a steel bar that was mounted in the back of his tour car during his motor campaigns. Gallagher explained how “Driving through a new town to the site of the rally, FDR would wave to the townspeople. At the rally, with his car parked in front of the gathering crowd, Roosevelt would use the bar to pull himself to a standing position, snapping his braces locked.”\(^{222}\)

In order to display both recovery and action, Roosevelt conducted massive traveling campaigns during his governors and presidential races where using his tour car and his train car with reinforced railings on the back platform allowed him to show thousands at a time that he was capable of standing; the secret, however, was that he was not doing so unassisted. Those moments where Roosevelt could not avoid using his specially designed wheelchair or
being carried were closely guarded. Gallagher cited the Secret Service constructing barriers and garages to block the view to his car or train as Roosevelt was lifted or wheeled in or out. To glimpse FDR in a wheelchair or being carried was an extreme rarity. Naturally, this leads to the question of how these simple barriers allowed Roosevelt’s impairment to escape the prying eyes of journalists and photographers.

The media’s part in Roosevelt’s deception was undeniable. Journalists, photographers, and cartoonists alike respected Roosevelt’s wishes, for the most part, and avoided mention of his disability. As Gallagher asserted, “This remarkable voluntary censorship was rarely violated,” and by this he meant by any branch of the media. Journalists rarely wrote about Roosevelt’s disability without mentioning his recovery. Gallagher referred to the photography corps when he stated, “If, as happened once or twice, one of its members sought to violate it and try to sneak a picture of the President in his chair, one or another of the older photographers would ‘accidentally’ knock the camera to the ground or otherwise block the picture.” Cartoonists followed suit, and even expanded on the practice of avoiding Roosevelt’s disability by depicting him in an active light, standing, running, and jumping. Stein found that when they did involve a walking aid, “…cartoonists, graphic artists, and photographers adopted similar strategies of dissociating the cane from Roosevelt and grafting it onto diverse figures intended to symbolize the common man, the forgotten farmer, or the down-and-out man on the street.” Therefore, one of the few hints that Roosevelt allowed of his disability, his cane, was often transformed into a symbol of the common man that the nation could identify with instead of an allusion to Roosevelt’s physical impairment.

Of course, there were occasions where Roosevelt’s disability was discussed; but these were carefully monitored and, in some cases, it has been debated whether or not FDR
orchestrated them himself. Four cases that pointedly mention Roosevelt’s disability will be discussed here. Three of which were written by Earl Looker, and the fourth was by Sara Delano Roosevelt, FDR’s mother.

**Earle Looker.** Earle Looker was a republican journalist who had close ties to Theodor Roosevelt’s branch of FDR’s family. He wrote three influential texts to combat rumors against Roosevelt’s fitness for office, beginning with an article in *Liberty Magazine* entitled, “Is Franklin Roosevelt Fit to be President?” that circulated heavily on July 25, 1931—just as Roosevelt was picking up steam on his first presidential campaign. As mentioned in Chapter I, there has been debate over whether Looker’s famous article was a stunt or simply fake altogether. Houck and Kiewe provided a convincing argument against its authenticity when they cited letters between Looker and Roosevelt that came close to admitting their association. Furthermore, they found evidence to suggest that Roosevelt paid for the medical examinations himself. If this was truly the case, it is not a leap to assume that Roosevelt had direct influence in what the article said, as well.

To a discerning eye, Looker adhered to a clear formula throughout each of his works: first, he began with a bold statement or a challenge to serve as a hook; and then, for the remainder of the text, he worked to prove that statement wrong. In the process, he projected an image of a recovered, healthy, masculine, and active leader. For example, Looker began his *Liberty* article by throwing the issue of Roosevelt’s health directly at readers in his opening line, which read, "It is an amazing possibility that the next President of the United States may be a cripple." This directly addressed the rumors about Roosevelt’s health and effectively captured readers’ attention. Shortly after this statement, Looker went on to put the issue of presidential health into an historical perspective as he speculated,

A sound mind in a sound body has more and more come to be a requirement for the Presidency. This is outside the legal requirements, but two recent breakdowns in
Judging by this passage, Americans were all the more concerned about the health of their presidents due to the collapse of two of their executives in the not-so-distant past. However, after peaking his readers’ interest and concern, Looker launched into a narrative that proved Roosevelt was up to the task.

The remainder of the article centered around the story of how Looker sent Roosevelt a letter bluntly asking him the question posed in the title of his article. His precise words were, "...whether or not, in the event of your nomination, you are sufficiently recovered to assure your supporters that you could stand the strain of the Presidency." According to Looker, Roosevelt matched this question with a letter of his own granting Looker full authority to investigate his physical fitness for office. Naturally, Looker agreed and conducted a series of unannounced drop-in interviews with Roosevelt where he was granted full access at the Governor’s mansion. In one such interview, Looker noted the rigor of Roosevelt’s schedule, and when he questioned him about it, Roosevelt responded, "I'll work...until I have finished what there is for me to do." This emphasized Roosevelt’s enthusiasm and work ethic. It characterized him in an active and enduring light.

One of the things that made Lookers article so revolutionary in terms of media coverage was his explicit mentions of Roosevelt’s paralysis. For example, in an interview, Looker questioned Roosevelt about the fact that he was not wearing his leg braces and whether it was a disadvantage not being able to move around his office freely. The response that Looker quoted Roosevelt giving was, and remains, one of the few sources available of Roosevelt discussing his disability candidly. FDR replied, "I don't move about my office...But I can and do move about the state. I don't see any particular advantage in moving
about my office, do you?" In this statement, Looker portrayed Roosevelt as practical, logical, and efficient. Even while describing his immobility in the office, he managed to redirect the emphasis on his mobility around the state. Looker further quoted Roosevelt in an anecdotal statement about the “fidgets” asking, "Isn't it better...if you have a big job to do, to be held to that job and not to be able to waste time indulging in the fidgets?" However, Looker pushed even deeper into Roosevelt’s health with the feature component of his investigation.

Looker attacked the question of legitimizing Roosevelt’s health head on when he proposed an examination of FDR by the most qualified physicians in New York—as determined by director of the New York Academy of Medicine. He described Roosevelt accepting this challenge with enthusiasm. And so, Looker told the story of how three experts were chosen and Roosevelt was examined with their worst tests. Of course, before providing the doctors’ conclusions, Looker added his own:

I had interviewed forty-three disinterested persons in Albany and in New York who had observed the governor; the total of their report was that he seemed to be more physically able now than he had been four years before...Personally, I watched him working and resting. I had noted the alertness of his movements, the sparkle of his eyes, the vigor of his gestures. I had seen his strength under the strain of long working periods. In so far as I had observed him, I had come to the conclusion that he seemed able to take more punishment than any men ten years younger. Merely his legs were not much good to him.

By his own observations, Looker classified Roosevelt as physically able, vigorous, and strong. Despite the fact that Roosevelt’s legs were “not much good to him,” Looker projected all the traits of an able bodied leader onto him. And the doctors’ conclusions were no different as Looker quoted their telegram stating, "WE HAVE TODAY CAREFULLY EXAMINED GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT WE BELIEVE THAT HIS HEALTH AND POWERS OF ENDURANCE ARE SUCH AS TO ALLOW HIM TO MEET ANY DEMAND OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LIFE." These observations provided Roosevelt
with clinical proof of his health and added to his physical image of vigor. Looker’s final statement proved his first wrong as he proclaimed, "So, from the specialists’ examination, as well as from my own observation, I am able to say unhesitatingly that every rumor of Franklin Roosevelt's physical incapacity can be unqualifiedly defined as false." Looker’s support did not end with his original Liberty article.

In 1932, Looker published a biography of Roosevelt just in time for the election. It was called This Man Roosevelt. The task, as Looker identified it, was to answer the question, "What is this man really like today?" This book, however, raised an important question in terms of its credibility, for although it often quoted individuals, it did not provide any citations. Therefore, in some ways, this work is susceptible to the argument of serving as another element of Roosevelt’s campaign propaganda. Although no scholars have tried to implicate Roosevelt himself as a conspirator in his biography—as they have in the case of Looker’s Liberty article—Looker’s support for Roosevelt is obvious. Nevertheless, the messages it projects are still important in understanding Roosevelt’s image during his lifetime. Looker illustrated the same themes of health and activity through recovery in his biographical account of Roosevelt’s political life. In fact, at many points, he recycled material from his Liberty article.

In his first chapter, Looker described Roosevelt’s physicality and his personality. He opened with the issue of Roosevelt’s health, but promoted it in a way that implied a past struggle: "Lamed in 1921 by infantile paralysis, he has proved a remarkable recovery, treats it as it is—an incidental, is progressively gaining the use of those leg muscles affected, and at fifty has the strength, stamina and enthusiasm of a man of forty." It is worth noting that Looker only called Roosevelt “lamed” at the opening of this work instead of “crippled” as he
did in his *Liberty* article. Of course, he quickly moved on to describe Roosevelt as a
presidential figure—in a nontraditional sense:

Roosevelt is an impressive figure in his great Governor's chair behind a massive desk
in the Executive Chamber. He is not a national figure in the old-fashioned
Washington manner associated with statesmanship—though if ever classical features
would look well in profile upon a medal, those of Roosevelt would distinguish it.
There is no pose in this man's alert naturalness and his ceaseless activity.²³⁸

Looker’s final statement above marked a portrayal of particular vigor as Franklin Roosevelt
never stops moving to distinguish any notable pose. He continued on to tell anecdotes of
Roosevelt in his position as Governor such as how he dealt with reporters effectively, how he
managed to quell disputes with an infectious smile, and how he interacted with other
government officials. Also, Looker emphasized his genuine care for people, his surprisingly
keen memory, and his acute awareness. But Looker did not stop at directly describing
Roosevelt to build an image of health, activity, and masculinity.

Looker managed more subtle hints at a presidential image through linking Franklin
Roosevelt to Theodore Roosevelt. In the early part of his biography, Looker made several
references to TR—a president particularly known for his active and energetic nature. He
played a key role in Looker's description of Franklin's school life, his marriage, and his
ambition for politics; and he was also mentioned in Franklin's experience as a state senator.
At first glance, one would imagine that this was simply Looker following a chronology.
Naturally TR was a substantial part of FDR’s life. Despite this, Looker took the time to make
the distinction that Roosevelt was not looking to be compared to his cousin, for that would be
"one of the unforgivable political sins, 'thou shalt not take unto thyself the reputation of
another.'"²³⁹ Looker further stated that "If he acquires the reputation of a second Roosevelt it
will be against his will, for every leader wishes to succeed his own character."²⁴⁰ In this
statement lays a clever trick. For one, Looker clearly distanced Franklin from the act of
using his cousin's reputation. Of course, by explicitly mentioning it, Looker put the idea into his readers’ minds in the first place. In this way, he indirectly added to Franklin Roosevelt's fitness to lead as president. After all, an association with his incredibly active and able-bodied cousin could only serve to help FDR's physical image in the mind of the public.

Nonetheless, Looker addressed Roosevelt’s image post-polio more explicitly when he described Roosevelt's struggle with infantile paralysis—although the emphasis was placed squarely on recovery, not illness. For example, he quoted an unnamed individual saying that when Roosevelt was first moved from Campobello to New York after contracting polio, "he was so all-fired impatient to get to the train and to the hospital in New York for treatment."241 This assured readers that from the onset of a problem, Roosevelt looked to a solution. Looker rationalized, "It seems this impatience translated into the intense desire to be active and working again, which forced him back to his office at the Fidelity and Deposit Company at 120 Broadway."242 With this, Looker characterized Roosevelt as an extremely driven man who saw physical limitation as a minor inconvenience. Next, Looker rushed forward to describing how Roosevelt's friends admired him in 1922 after watching "his first slow tripod walk when he appeared at his office at first two days a week, then three and finally four."243 Suddenly, Roosevelt was able to walk again—albeit assisted. Finally, Looker explained, "Roosevelt's salvation, after his illness, was in action, not only physical but mental."244 Each of these remarks moved the reader further away from an image of a sickly man and toward a recovered Roosevelt, active and sharp.

Even through his chapter titles, Looker dramatically pushed the image of an active and recovered Roosevelt. After the chapter entitled “FATE STRIKES A BLOW,”245 describing Roosevelt’s diagnosis and reaction to infantile paralysis, Looker wrote a chapter about Roosevelt’s experience at Warm Springs called “FIGHTING BACK.”246 This title certainly
painted a portrait of activity. After all, the word “fighting” strongly implies athleticism, and the contemporary prominence of boxing should not be underestimated in this strategic title. The chapter itself emphasized Roosevelt’s efforts to build a polio treatment facility at Warm Springs. Looker described how eagerly Roosevelt pushed for recovery, writing “Impatience is a main trait now.” He revealed Roosevelt’s fight to help others at the facility; his fight to obtain a doctor and adequate staff; his fight to renovate, expand, and have the facility accredited. Looker was careful never to mention Roosevelt’s own condition without consequently declaring some gain in “muscular progress.” The next two chapters comprised a revised version of Looker’s article in *Liberty Magazine*. They also came with dramatic titles including, “FIT TO BE PRESIDENT” and “DOCTORS AGREE.”

In the two chapters mentioned above, Looker essentially expanded and retold his story from the *Liberty* article; however, he added a substantial amount more in terms of his own observations. For example, he included a description of Roosevelt locking his braces from his car in preparation to walk—the sound of which “…most nearly resembled the cocking of a revolver.” Looker also described Roosevelt’s awkward, but effective walk as “…slow but steady and in no sense halting. His legs, being locked in their braces, swing forward like pendulums set in motion from the hips. The moment his foot is firmly planted he swings his other foot forward.” Naturally, whenever Roosevelt went through the trouble to walk, there was a strong media presence. Looker addressed the lack of press coverage in relation to Roosevelt’s disability as he explained,

When Roosevelt first came to Albany as Governor the newspaper correspondents were confronted with the necessity of deciding whether or not to comment upon his walking. They decided that no comment was required. Also, as happens with all public men, the cameras sometimes caught Roosevelt in an awkward pose. Without suggestion from anyone interested, these plates were destroyed by the photographers themselves. They did this because they felt the awkward pictures did not give a true impression.
This description of press reaction to Roosevelt’s disability confirms the argument toward voluntary censorship that authors in the field of Roosevelt’s media relations assert. It also serves to further pin Looker as a unique entity during his time. Where most journalists turned to destroying and concealing evidence, Looker flaunted it in favor of moving the public past the image of a sick man and onto one of strength and vigor.

Of course, as he noted in his original article, Looker’s observations alone were not sufficient to convince the public of Roosevelt’s fitness to lead; therefore, he expanded on the three doctors’ reports in his first biography on Roosevelt. To begin with, he listed their credentials—a task that required a full two pages. Then he described the dramatic interactions between he and the doctors as they finished their tests and Looker insisted on obtaining their results. The doctors refused to give them until each had time to check their facts. Even the smiling Governor Roosevelt was left in the dark as to their individual conclusions. Looker noted that later that evening he was sent a telegram—which was mentioned in his original article—nevertheless, in his book, he expanded on the full letter sent several days later. The doctors’ report read:

April 29, 1931.

We have today examined Franklin D. Roosevelt. We find that his organs and functions are sound in all respects. There is no anemia. The chest is exceptionally well developed, and the spinal column is absolutely normal; all its segments are in perfect alignment and free from disease. He has neither pain nor ache at any time.

Ten years ago Governor Roosevelt suffered an attack of acute infantile paralysis, the entire effect of which was expended on the muscles of his lower extremities. There has been progressive recovery of power in the legs since that date; this restoration continues and will continue...

The final paragraph omitted above matched the telegram Looker received the day of the examination word-for-word. As Hugh Gallagher argued in his discussion of Looker’s original article, this furthered the debate focused on Roosevelt’s health beyond unqualified
assertions and grounded Roosevelt’s position with a credible medical opinion. Therefore, Looker sought to further bolster Roosevelt’s body image through a mix of critical assessments on his personality as well as an expansion of the already creditable medical foundation of Roosevelt’s presidential aspirations through his biography.

Looker’s third work was published in 1933 and titled, *The American Way: Franklin Roosevelt in Action*. This book served a few purposes. For one, it was in part biographical as Looker recycled a substantial amount of information from *This Man Roosevelt*. Nevertheless, its main purpose was to highlight the achievements that Roosevelt made during his first year in office including, "farm relief, mortgage relief, unemployment relief, the Tennessee Valley empire, [and] the National Recovery Act." In doing so, Looker established an extremely active portrait of Roosevelt, which only served to boost his physical image.

Nevertheless, Looker continued to dwell on Roosevelt’s physical condition from the outset of his book. Much like the tactic he used at the opening of his *Liberty* article, Looker described a startling picture at the beginning of *The American Way* while setting the scene after FDR’s first inaugural address:

Roosevelt turned away from the microphones. He took his place at the head of the procession toward his car. A ceremonial march it should have normally been down the great stone steps. But it was necessary for him to walk down an inclined bridge nearly fifty yards long. It seemed a gangway, for Roosevelt was preceded by his Naval and Military Aides. Behind him followed the greatest officials now in formal authority. The new President's progress down the gangway was slow, awkward. He leaned upon the arm of his son, James. He halted...went on again. A whole nation, represented by that Washington throng, was waiting for him to reach the White House. He halted again, stopping also the procession behind him. The thought was common to everyone, even those who knew him: was this an omen of his progress as President?

Looker painted a deceivingly glum picture with the passage above; but, as with his *Liberty* article, he spent the remainder of his work proving it inaccurate.
Two general themes for *The American Way* can be summed up in the words *impatience* and *action*. Each sharply contrasts the “slow, awkward” progress mentioned in Looker’s opening scene. Impatience was strongly displayed during Looker’s description of Roosevelt’s battle with polio. Much of this section was reused from *This Man Roosevelt*; nevertheless, Looker added a passage about Roosevelt’s experience before Warm Springs off the coast of Florida in a cruising house-boat:

> Impatient with his slow progress, Roosevelt now followed the sun south, chartering a cruising house-boat. In February 1923, he cast off from Miami, to laze about the Gulf side of Florida. He fished, sunbathed and sometimes went over the side for impatient swimming of a sort--dragging himself through the water with arm strokes. He did not yet notice how remarkably his chest, arm and shoulder development was beginning to compensate for the loss of his leg and thigh muscles.255

This passage mimicked the formula Looker used in his last book: whenever mentioning a setback or a negative aspect of Roosevelt’s experience with infantile paralysis, Looker ended with a hint of recovery. Although the comment above did not end with recovery of his leg and thigh muscles, it carefully deflected readers from his legs to the growth of his chest, arm and shoulder muscles—which were clearly featured in the photograph of Looker’s original article.

The second theme, *action*, fell most apparently into *The American Way*’s chapters on politics. One such point was the chapter describing Roosevelt’s rapid reaction to the banking crisis. Looker explained how Roosevelt attacked the issue decisively by pushing legislation through the House of Representatives and the Senate granting him the authority to shut down all the banks. Looker wrote that, "In just nine minutes less than eight hours, Roosevelt's financial grant of dictatorial power was law."256 This depicted a president extremely adept at mobilizing government. It showed Roosevelt taking an active role in an effort to help the “forgotten man.” Most of all, it lent to Roosevelt’s physical image as a healthy and active president.
In fact, recovery and activity were consistent themes in Looker’s portrayal of Roosevelt in all three works. Each acknowledged Roosevelt’s contraction of polio, but each put a thorough emphasis on recovery. This was apparent through Lookers own observations in the *Liberty* article, the doctors’ extended conclusion to their examination in *This Man Roosevelt*, and even during the long dramatic passage that describes Roosevelt’s “slow, awkward” progress down the platform to his car in *The American Way* it depicts FDR making that progress while walking—an ability that polio originally robbed him of, but that he valiantly recovered. Action was another obvious message in all three of Lookers works from Roosevelt refusing to rest until his work was done in the *Liberty* article, his tireless efforts to build Warm Springs into a legitimate treatment facility in *This Man Roosevelt*, and particularly in *The American Way* as Looker described Roosevelt’s impressive lists of reforms within his first year in office. Recovery and action did well for Roosevelt’s physical image.

**Sarah Delano Roosevelt.** The second influential player to acknowledge Roosevelt’s disability in text was Roosevelt’s mother, Sara Delano Roosevelt. She published a biography called *My Boy Franklin* in 1933. This biography outlined Franklin’s early life as well as his political life up to his election from his mother’s perspective. The charm of the latter period’s attention in this account was that it was known that Sara was not particularly fond of Franklin’s profession in politics. Nevertheless, she made the case that his participation in politics was what made FDR’s recovery so complete—and that is the segment of her book that is important to this study.

Just as Looker emphasized Roosevelt’s impatience after polio, Sara pushed the same point when she described her son’s activities during recovery. Very often, Sara made it clear that Franklin did not follow her advice to relax in favor of a more rigorous lifestyle after his
illness. For example, she wrote, "When he was discharged from the hospital he did not go to the country as I had hoped he would, but went directly to the Sixty-fifth Street house where life went on much as before." According to Sara, rest did not suit her son, and "Little by little he improved to a point when he could go to business a good part of the day and it was not long before he was once again in close touch with all the things that interested him most."

A component to Roosevelt’s recovery that Sara added, however, was his attitude toward his own paralysis. Where Looker’s interactions with FDR would suggest that he was rather open about his disability in person, Sara’s account did not. On the topic, she explained that "He steadfastly refused to concede even to himself that he was functioning under a handicap and to this day I don't believe any one has ever heard him make any reference to his illness." Nonetheless, she had no problem mentioning her son’s condition herself in addition to the concern she felt for him upon his return to politics when Al Smith pressured him into running for Governor of New York: "What we who were close to him feared was that by interrupting his treatments at this time he might be retarding or even arresting his recovery." It is important to note that Sara was careful to highlight a shift in that attitude that put FDR in a much more healthy light. She recalled, “But as it happened he thrived on the excitement of the vigorous campaign he inaugurated at Binghamton, New York, and was heard to say, 'If I could campaign another six months, I believe I could throw away my cane.'" This statement is important because it was blatantly untrue; and although untrue, it was important for the public to hear because it inspired confidence in their President’s health—which improved his physical image.

As Sara rounded off her biography, she chose very masculine words to describe FDR’s campaign against Hoover leading up to his election. For instance, she described the
campaign in military terms writing, "It seemed no time at all before Franklin was in the thick of the battle." Furthermore, she also emphasized his individuality and activity when she explained, “Against the advice of his campaign managers, who wanted him to confine his activities to a few radio addresses, he set out to make a nation-wide tour of the country, scheduling speeches right up to the eve of election.” Anyone reading this passage would not only have been struck with Roosevelt’s enthusiasm in the face of his advisors’ criticism, but also with the rigor of the campaign. In an era where the train dominated travel, going on two nation-wide tours was a substantial burden. Even an extremely fit person would feel strain under those conditions, and the fact that Roosevelt spoke so often and so close to the election spoke volumes for his physical condition.

These four documents are among the few that explicitly mention Roosevelt’s disability, and they are handled with a high degree of tact and strategy. They were written either under Roosevelt’s own approval, in the case of Looker, or by someone extremely close to Roosevelt, in the case of his mother. They show a man who is highly driven and extremely active. A man who is practical and possesses an exceptional ability to focus on the tasks he is responsible for. And above all, they push an obvious message toward a recovered Roosevelt, and in many cases, they add another layer of strength and endurance to FDR’s physical image. These four works also represent an intense effort to control Roosevelt’s image, and in the absence of tangible evidence of Roosevelt’s limitations in the media, they were extremely effective.

**Rare Footage Discovery.** The rarity of that evidence continues on to today as well. For example, in his introduction, Gallagher stated, “Although there are over thirty-five thousand still photographs of FDR at the Presidential Library, there are only two of the man seated in his wheelchair.” Since Gallagher published the third edition of his book in 1999,
two more have been discovered making a total of four—all of which are displayed at the Presidential Museum in Hyde Park. Furthermore, in July of 2013, Ray Begovich, an Indiana college professor, accidentally uncovered a 35-milimeter film of FDR from the National Archives. This story made national news, and a CNN reporter described the find saying, “You see the President being wheeled down a ramp on a visit to the USS Baltimore at Pearl Harbor on July 26, of 1944—such a brief window into his life, but one that really didn’t exist until now.”

The fact that this discovery received national news attention indicates how rare such depictions were and continue to be to this day. It contrasts everything that Roosevelt endeavored to build around his image, and quite possibly had the potential to do serious damage to his political career if it were released during his presidency—and this is probably the reason it sat buried in the National Archives for sixty-nine years. Therefore, Roosevelt’s physical image during his lifetime was carefully controlled to radiate health in the form of recovery, activity, and masculinity.

Photographs. Of course, these are lofty terms; an even more basic question to ask would be: when people saw Franklin Roosevelt, how did they see him? Was he standing? Was he sitting? Did he smile? Did he wave? In order to answer this question, it is best to turn to the most common medium for representation in Roosevelt’s time: photography. In a study of the photographs collected of Franklin Roosevelt at his Presidential Library from the campaign years of 1928, 1930, 1932, 1936, and 1940, there are several common elements to be found. Naturally, it is worth reiterating that Roosevelt was particularly careful about his photographed image, and many of his pictures were staged. Keeping that fact in mind, Roosevelt was extremely creative. As Winfield put it, so long as FDR was not obviously in pain or discomfort, “…Roosevelt loved the dramatic and the unusual, he gave the
photographers something newsworthy to shoot. Therefore, photographers had plenty to work with.

Roosevelt was often photographed standing. In this position, he would resort to a number of tactics to manufacture an air of recovery and masculinity. For one, he would wear his braces locked at the knee to support his legs. More often than not, Roosevelt wore longer pants that would hide the black painted steel clamping into his black shoes. He would also have something sturdy nearby that he could hold onto with one hand in order to stabilize himself. This could have been an aid’s arm, a podium, or his trademark cane. Figure 1 shows Roosevelt subtly leaning against a door while holding a cane. A close look at his feet reveals the metal braces that clamped into the heels of his shoes; nevertheless, these details often went unnoticed by viewers. Figure 2 shows Roosevelt staged with two children outside of a car at Warm Springs. Similar tactics were taken as he holds the car and his cane for stability. Figure 3 shows Roosevelt with his wife at a voting booth in Hyde Park. He is supporting himself with the booth as well as a cane behind his back. Finally, Figure 4 shows Roosevelt waving at his audience while using an aid’s arm for support with his cane readily available. What should be striking about all of these examples is the posture he manages to achieve. It seems that the tactic of reaching out to hold on to something, such as the car or the voting booth, displays a mix of action and relaxation at the same time. And even when Roosevelt is standing straight with a cane, his posture is carefully planned so that it does not look like he is depending on the cane to hold him up. All of these poses were accompanied with his famous grin to add a sense of relaxation and informality that people related to.

Standing was such an extreme strain on FDR’s physique that, even with his extremely strong trunk, arms, and shoulders, it exhausted him. Therefore, he was frequently represented in other positions.
Figure 1 (Hollaway, J. T., photographer. “FDR at Warm Springs.” Photograph. 1928, From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
Figure 2 (Iohorton, Don, donator. “FDR at Warm Springs.” Photograph. New York City: International News Photos, Inc., 1930, From Franklin D. Roosevelt Librar
Figure 3 (Richardson, donator. “FDR, ER-Hyde Park-Nov-1930.” Photograph. From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
Figure 4 (McAvoy, Thomas D., photographer. “F.D.R. Election.” Photograph. Life Photo, 1936. From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
FDR was seated in many of his photographs as well. Of course, in all of these photographs, there were a few strong consistencies. For one, he was always seated in a regular chair. As previously mentioned, there are only four photographs of Roosevelt in his wheelchair, and all of them were private shots taken by family, never meant to be released to the public. His official seated pictures were a different story. Many of these were poses with world leaders, such as the “Big Three” photographs with Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt seated next to each other. In this example, Roosevelt was presented as equal in measure to the two other powerful men as all three were similarly seated in chairs. Many were also of Roosevelt at his cluttered desk. For example, Figure 5 shows Roosevelt at Hyde Park sitting in front of his desk littered with stacks of unorganized newspapers. These photos also alluded to a sense of mental activity as they indicated both Roosevelt’s photographic memory as well as his ability to absorb massive amounts of details on a variety of subjects. Nevertheless, one of Roosevelt’s real talents was creating novel scenes for photographers to capture. One such scene is represented in Figure 6 where Roosevelt was initiated into the Improved Order of Red Men seated in an armchair wearing a Chieftain’s headdress. Another staged scene is represented in Figure 7 with Roosevelt seated in a wooden chair flanked by boy scouts. Roosevelt is drawing an arrow through a bow aimed at the sky from his chair. These two images achieve several goals, including the effort to humanize a public figure, but what they achieve most of all is a statement of masculinity and ability even from a seated position. Of course, Roosevelt was not always stationary while in a seated position.

Roosevelt’s love for driving was a well-known fact, and there is an abundance of photographs featuring either Roosevelt driving one of his hand-controlled Fords or riding in the back of a tour car during one of his motor-tours. These pictures carry strong undertones of both masculinity and activity. As Figure 8 illustrates, having FDR in the driver seat solicits
Figure 5 ("FDR at Hyde Park." Photograph. Wide World Photos, Inc., 1936. From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
Figure 6 (“New York’s Governor Joins Red Men.” Photograph. New York: Keystone-Underwood. 1930. From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
Figure 7 ("FDR." Photograph. *New York Times*, October 18, 1930. From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
Figure 8 (“FDR, Warm Springs.” Photograph. Basil O’Connor Collection: National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. 1925-8. From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
Figure 9 (“FDR.” Photograph. *New York Herald Tribune*, Aug. 24, 1930. From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
**Figure 10** ("FDR at Warm Springs." Photograph. T. W. Oneah Collection. Atlanta: Georgian-American, 1930. From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
Figure 11 ("Upstate New York Hails President." Photograph. New York: Acme Newspapers, 1940. From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
Figure 12 (McAvoy, Thomas, photographer. “FDR at Chickamauga Dam Dedication.” Photograph. Life Photo, 1940. From Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)
a sense of power and masculinity. Roosevelt’s strong jaw and confident expression behind
the wheel begets the image of a healthy man with the ability to go places. And that leads up
to another benefit of photographing Roosevelt in a car: he essentially used cars to make up
for his legs. Whether driving or riding in the back of a tour car,

Therefore, during Roosevelt’s lifetime, he was depicted as a healthy politician who
recovered from a crippling disease, but now only possessed a hint at his past illness. Through
his interactions with the media and the public, FDR put on an exemplary show of strength
and vitality which suited the political cult of masculinity very well. Roosevelt used those
close to him to perpetuate this image through their articles and books, as was the case with
Earle Looker and Sara Delano Roosevelt. He stage-managed his personal appearances as
well as many of his photographs. Specifically in those photographs he was shown both
standing and sitting, and only a close inspection showed any hint of his disability. His most
famous props were his cars as they allowed him to travel extreme distances while meeting
and speaking to the public in order to pull off an air of activity as well as masculinity despite
his weakened legs.

Defining Roosevelt’s Contemporary Physical Image

This leads to the second task of Chapter II: to determine what Franklin Roosevelt’s
physical image consists of today, sixty eight years after his death. In order to accomplish
this, it is important to make a distinction between two sides of a coin: Roosevelt’s public
image and his popular image. This chapter will only focus on the former. In order to
accomplish the task of defining Roosevelt’s modern public image, a series of monuments,
museums, and historic sites featuring FDR will be analyzed. These will include two
monuments—the Franklin D. Roosevelt National Monument in Washington D.C. and the
Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park in New York City—and three museums and
historic sites—the Smithsonian Museum of American History in Washington D.C., the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Museum and Historic Site at Hyde Park, and the Little White House Museum and Historic Site at Warm Springs, Georgia.

The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial. The first monument that will be examined is Roosevelt’s National Monument. Both Gallagher and Stein discussed this monument at length, putting an emphasis on the controversy that erupted around the role that Roosevelt’s disability should play in his physical representation. Therefore, in some ways, it is worth thinking of the Franklin D. Roosevelt National Monument as two separate monuments. The first is the one dedicated in 1997, and the second is the one rededicated in 2001. Each monument is consistent in that it is comprised of several rooms that tell the narrative of Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency through various sculptures and famous quotations inscribed on the walls. Waterfalls are featured throughout to emphasize Roosevelt’s love of the sea. The aspects that will be focused on here, however, are the sculptures of FDR.

Therein lays the only difference between the two monuments: the addition of a sculpture of Franklin Roosevelt sitting in a wheelchair and an inscription on the wall behind him in the latter. Although this is a seemingly small change, the message that it portrayed was, for many, as monumental as the monument itself. After all, there were strong arguments on both sides. The monument’s architect, Lawrence Halprin, went through several phases as he considered what the statue of Franklin Roosevelt should depict. In his own words, “Everybody in my generation was vaguely aware that he was crippled…But we also saw him every week in newsreels, going everywhere, doing everything. We didn’t really think much about it. If that was how he wanted to be seen, fine.” Therefore, his final sculpture—as it
stands today in the section dedicated in 1997—was an image of Roosevelt seated in a chair dramatically draped in his naval cape.

However, for disabilities rights activists, this was not near close enough to the true Roosevelt. They argued that “His disability gave him his character…and created a special bond with the American people.” Therefore, they organized a series of demonstrations that prompted President William Clinton to sign a law granting an addition to the newly finished monument. The amended monument was finished and rededicated in 2001. Nevertheless, together, these two sculptures of Franklin Roosevelt play an interesting dynamic—one that can be argued to present a perpetually conflicted perspective, unwilling to provide Roosevelt’s disability adequate attention and also a progressive perspective of Roosevelt’s modern physical image that humanizes a now almost mythological figure.

In order to make either argument, of course, the statues must first be compared. The first statue, the one in Halprin’s original plan, is represented in Figure 13. As mentioned above, it shows the President seated in a chair draped in his signature naval cape. At the opening of the cape, his hands are exposed resting on the sidearm of his chair, and his left leg is revealed below that. Although his right foot can be seen underneath the cape, the leg itself is concealed. Neither shows evidence of braces locking into his shoes at the heel. Roosevelt’s expression is serious as he surveys his own accomplishments throughout the monument. His chair rests on a platform two steps above onlookers, and his dog, Fala, faithfully watches the crowd seated next to his owner. Both are sculpted larger than life, and their position on the raised platform makes them appear all the more stately.

The later statue, the one added in 2001, contrasts sharply with the first. It portrays a life sized image of Roosevelt seated in his wheelchair shown in Figures 14 and 15. The statue is not raised on a platform; it resides on the same level as visitors and is free from any
barriers to separate the two. Roosevelt is wearing a suit with the signature fedora he wore while campaigning. His pince-nez glasses are resting high on the arch of his nose and his lips are fashioned into a subtle smile as he looks ahead at the visitor center with one hand placed on his left knee and the other on his lap. Roosevelt’s legs are parted slightly, and his feet are resting on a platform at the base of the wheelchair. The wheelchair follows his own design. It consists of a kitchen chair with two larger bicycle wheels in the front and two smaller tricycle wheels in the back. The wheels, as is consistent with his design, did not go any higher than the seat of his chair so that he could easily hoist himself to and from his wheelchair to another seat. On the back of the wheelchair is an inscription featured in Figure 16. The inscription shows three views of the wheelchair’s design and a description which reads: “NOT WANTING A CONVENTIONAL WHEELCHAIR, F.D.R. DESIGNED HIS OWN BY USING A WOODEN KITCHEN CHAIR AND ADDING TWO BICYCLE AND TWO TRICYCLE WHEELS.” The larger inscription on the wall behind this sculpture quotes Eleanor Roosevelt saying, “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.”

While comparing these two statues of Roosevelt, an unfavorable argument can be made in relation to the image they present toward his disability. In this regard, the statues represent two separate stories of FDR’s life. The first image is dripping with undertones of power and prestige. Nevertheless, the second is not. Although the Eleanor Roosevelt quote sets an admittedly inspirational tone, the sculpture in front of those words can have a different effect. FDR appears small and vulnerable in his wheelchair, and his seated position on the same level as visitors makes him seem even smaller. Where the first sculpture displays a
Figure 13 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR National Monument: FDR and Fala.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
Figure 14 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR National Monument: FDR Wheelchair Statue 1.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
Figure 15 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR National Monument: FDR Wheelchair Statue 2.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
Figure 16 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR National Monument: Back of Wheelchair.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
grand figure, larger than life and positioned higher than onlookers to provide an extra sense of ceremonial pomp, the second shows a man just like any other, human and fallible. Furthermore, if one were to focus on the size differentiation between the two, they could argue that the larger statue tells a more vital story of his role as a leader, and that the smaller tells the lesser tale of his disability. Therefore, the sculpture of FDR in his wheelchair could be interpreted as demeaning.

Nevertheless, a more positive—and powerful—argument can also be made when comparing these two sculptures. In this argument, it is better to consider each sculpture telling the same story of Franklin Roosevelt; one is an extension of the other. As visitors enter the monument, the first image they are faced with is that of Franklin Roosevelt seated in his wheelchair. Due to the factors mentioned above, this image contrasts sharply with what visitors expect. Instead of finding the image of a man displaying the symptoms of deification like the Lincoln and Jefferson monuments, they discover a man much like themselves. And in that discovery is the key to the statue: visitors can relate to it. The statue sits among visitors, not above them. It tells the humanizing story of an essential American President who dealt with challenges of his own while dealing with those of the nation. From this perspective, visitors experience the monument’s narrative with a more personal understanding of a great man. Furthermore, they can better relate to the other sculptures of average Americans from the New Deal era and to the man that led them. Then, when they are faced with the more traditional statue of Franklin Roosevelt seated on a raised platform in all its grandeur, visitors have an opportunity to contemplate the impact that this man, a man like themselves, had on America. In this context, the older statue adds a political aspect to the personal story told in the newer statue.
Figure 17 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR National Monument: Visitor Center Wheelchair.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
Therefore, taking the second perspective as the stronger, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt National Monument presents a very progressive spin on Roosevelt’s modern physical image. The addition of the new sculpture and the rededication in 2001 represents an important statement. It says that America is moving toward a more tolerant mentality, one willing to speak openly about even our most sensitive topics. Furthermore, it breaks with the image that Roosevelt adhered to during his own lifetime, but it does so in a way that adds to it and does not subtract. All of the aspects of his old image are present. In every room there are several allusions to Roosevelt’s speeches in the form of quotations inscribed on the walls. The sheer abundance of these attributes to Roosevelt’s activity. Likewise, the older sculpture of Roosevelt gushes with health and masculinity as all hints of his disability were denied and his naval cape insinuates control of the armed forces. But in addition to the old virtues of activity, health, and masculinity comes the humanization from the newest sculpture. This is further emphasized by the replica of Roosevelt’s wheelchair also on display in the monument’s visitor center (Figure 17). All of these add up to an enhanced modern perspective of FDR’s physical image. Unfortunately, this momentum does not carry through to the most recently constructed monument.

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park. The second monument to be discussed is the Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park, residing on Roosevelt Island in the East River of New York City. The architect behind this monument was Louis Khan, one of the twentieth century’s great modernist architects. It was designed to commemorate Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech in 1941. Nevertheless, the plan proved to be Khan’s last project; he died shortly after in 1974. Due to issues in funding, monument was not finished until 2012, but it was built relatively close to Khan’s design.
Four Freedoms Park follows a classical scheme. After all, Khan was admittedly inspired by the ruins of ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt throughout the majority of his career. A journalist, Lewis McCrary, cited Khan stating, “I thought of the beauty of ruins … of things which nothing lives behind … and so I thought of wrapping ruins round buildings.” Keeping this philosophy in mind, it is fitting that adjacent to the north side of the two acre monument are the reinforced ruins of a nineteenth century smallpox hospital merely steps away. However, the contrast between the two structures, the hospital and the monument, are stark. Where the hospital is dark, charred, and crumbling in its decay, Khan’s white granite monument stands gleaming in the sunlight with its colossal features.

The park is built in the shape of a long symmetrical triangle coming to a point at the southern tip of the island. Upon entering, visitors are faced with two options: 1) they may proceed down one of the two walkways in either side of the raised section running down the center toward the point (Figure 18); or 2) they may climb the twelve-foot high set of stairs to reach the green in the center of the park (Figure 19). If they climb the stairs, they will find themselves at the top of a downward sloping field flanked by two tree-lined pathways converging at a courtyard by the point of island (Figure 20). The courtyard opens up as the two pathways on top of the raised field and the two pathways along the side of the monument meet. Taking a walk down one of those pathways will reveal a large stone block with a section cut out of the top stretching two thirds of the way down the middle to frame a bronze bust of FDR serenely surveying the center of the field (Figure 21). Below the bust lays an inscription which simply reads, “Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1882 – 1945.” This serves as the focal point of the monument. It also features the only physical representation of FDR in the entire two acre park.
Beyond the courtyard is an ‘open room’ surrounded by three sets of stone walls. The east and west walls are bare, but the north wall—also serving as the back of the stone block already mentioned—has an inscription from Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech. These are the only words quoted from Roosevelt in the monument, which makes a statement to their importance and impact. The inscription reads:

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…EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD,
THE FOURTH IS FREEDOM FROM FEAR…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.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
JANUARY 6, 1941
(Figure 22)

The southern-most wall of the room is absent to expose a view looking out onto the river—which also happens to expose the United Nations complex to the east of the island and the Freedom Tower in the distance on the southern edge of Manhattan (Figures 23 and 24).

Now, onto the question, what does this monument say about Roosevelt’s physical image today? Before answering this question, it is important to note that despite being the most recently erected monument to Franklin Roosevelt, Four Freedoms Park was designed almost four decades ago. Therefore, a legitimate argument could be made against using this monument to interpret how Roosevelt’s physical image is perceived today. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that despite the date the monument was designed, the plan was approved and funded by parties in the last decade. Therefore, this study will proceed to include Four Freedoms Park in an assessment of Roosevelt’s physical image in the twenty-first century.
Figure 18 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Four Freedoms Park, Flanking Walkway.” Photograph. Taken by author August 19, 2013)
Figure 19 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Four Freedoms Park, Stairway.” Photograph. Taken by author August 19, 2013)
Figure 20 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Four Freedoms Park, Green.” Photograph. Taken by author August 19, 2013)
Figure 21 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Four Freedoms Park, Roosevelt Bust.” Photograph. Taken by author August 19, 2013)
Figure 22 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Four Freedoms Park, Inscription.” Photograph. Taken by author August 19, 2013)
Figure 23 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Four Freedoms Park, Open Room.” Photograph. Taken by author August 19, 2013)
Figure 24 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Four Freedoms Park, UN Complex.” Photograph. Taken by author August 19, 2013)
Ultimately, Four Freedoms Park shows a very conservative picture of Roosevelt’s image. The overall style of the monument is comparable to those of other presidents—admittedly, with a modernist twist. Take the Jefferson and Lincoln memorials for instance. The symmetry and geometric shapes used in Four Freedoms Park are consistent with each. The size and scale are also alike. Four Freedoms Park even has the same major features as the Jefferson and Lincoln memorials, including a set of grandeur steps leading to a focal point, a focal point consisting of a larger-than-life statue of the President placed higher than onlookers, and a room with that President’s words inscribed on the stone walls.

The point that Four Freedoms Park differs from the other monuments is in its sculpture. Although each of these sculptures immortalize their subject through its size and position above onlookers, Roosevelt’s is the only one that cuts off at the neck. In Jefferson’s sculpture, he stands tall and slender with the Declaration of Independence in his left hand; in Lincoln’s, he sits in a chair confidently staring out at a solution to the conflict dividing the nation; but in Roosevelt’s, his head floats above visitors, as McCrary put it, “like the giant head in the Wizard of Oz.” Some might attribute this to Khan’s inspiration from classical ruins—after all, the Greeks and Romans were known for using busts to represent their honored leaders. Nevertheless, an argument can also be made that this is another tactic to minimize Roosevelt’s disability.

Stein would call this tactic a “vanishing act,” or a deliberate attempt to hide Roosevelt’s physical condition by omitting the majority of his body. She cited his representation in the dime as a prime example of this explaining, “the physiognomy on the Roosevelt dime stops unnecessarily short with the chin, especially compared with the way necks and sometimes shoulders figure as prominent supports in the case of the Lincoln penny, the Jefferson nickel, and the Washington quarter.” Although Khan’s only representation of
Roosevelt’s physical image expands on the one featured in the dime to include FDR’s neck, it still falls severely short compared to the representations of Jefferson and Lincoln. Therefore, although Four Freedoms Park offers a powerful statement of Roosevelt’s accomplishments, it also offers a conservative perspective on the way that society is willing to remember Franklin Roosevelt today—a sharp contrast from the image that his rededicated National Monument projected in 2001. Thus, a comparison between these two monuments paints a complex portrait of the American public’s openness to expose Roosevelt’s disability when defining his physical image. That portrait will become even more complex after the hues of how museums and historic sites have handled that image are added.

The Smithsonian Museum of American History. The first museum to be discussed is the Smithsonian Museum of American History. However, it is important to offer an acknowledgement of the dynamic nature of this museum in advance. Exhibits are constantly updated and changed in order to tell a new story about our national heritage. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the conclusions made here were drawn from one visit to the Smithsonian based on the exhibits displayed on August 20, 2013. Having said that, of the three museums and historic sites discussed in this chapter, the Smithsonian offered the most conservative view of FDR’s physical image.

During the visit mentioned above, there were three exhibits that directly mentioned Franklin Roosevelt. The first was called American Stories, and its aim was to highlight “the ways in which objects and stories can reinforce and challenge our understanding of history and help define our personal and national identities.” In other words, the exhibit featured artifacts in order to tell the narrative of American history and also to help visitors grapple with the many individual identities involved in such a story. It featured artifacts from Plymouth Rock through to the 2008 presidential election.
The exhibit’s two mentions of FDR came in a section labeled “1900-1945: The Emergence of Modern America.” The first was in the form of a headshot on the wall amongst a collage of influential leaders from the period. It was a standard artifact that any American living between the years of 1932 and 1945 would recognize as many of them displayed the same picture on their wall. The second mention was more explicit. In a glass display case, the museum showed a cane with the phrase “LET’S HAVE A NEW DEAL” painted on it next to a CBS microphone from the period (Figure 25). If there was ever an appropriate time to make mention of Roosevelt’s disability, the description that came with the cane was it; alas, any mention of neither polio nor handicap was absent. Instead the description focused squarely on the New Deal:

Franklin Roosevelt won his first presidential election promising his ‘New Deal’ would lift the country out of the Great Depression. The ensuing legislation and relief measures created the most dramatic peacetime expansion of government in U.S. history and directly benefited many. But economic recovery was slow and millions remained out of work through the 1930s.275

The obvious, yet unanswered, question from this artifact and its description is, why would someone send Franklin Roosevelt a cane in the first place? However, the exhibit ignored this question and quickly moved on to another topic.

The second exhibit that referred to Franklin Roosevelt directly was called The Price of Freedom: Americans at War. The aim of this exhibit was to tell the story of America’s military conflicts and, ultimately, to extend “far beyond a survey of battles to present the link between military conflict and American political leadership, social values, technological innovation, and personal sacrifice.”276 It used a diverse group of artifacts in order to engage visitors including documents, photographs, newspaper clippings, authentic uniforms, newsreels, and even armored vehicles. Both allusions to Roosevelt occurred in the section about World War II.
Figure 25 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Smithsonian, New Deal Cane.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
Figure 26 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Smithsonian, FDR Wall Segment.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
Figure 27 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Smithsonian, Big Three Photo.” Photograph. Taken by author August 23, 2013)
The first took the form of a wall segment. As shown in Figure 26, the background of the wall segment featured a photograph of FDR sitting at a desk which faded into an image of Pearl Harbor at the base. Posted on the wall was a photograph of Roosevelt delivering his famous address to Congress after the attack on Pearl Harbor. To the right of the photograph was a copy of the speech Roosevelt delivered including the last minute alterations he made. Each artifact was accompanied with a short description identifying its significance and the larger font to the right of the artifacts described the attack on Pearl Harbor providing statistics of its scale. The second allusion to Roosevelt was a photograph on a wall-long collage which showed the “Big Three” posing at the Yalta Conference (Figure 27). Naturally, because both of these allusions use photographs from Roosevelt’s lifetime, neither of them hinted at anything beyond a healthy, active, and masculine physical image. Roosevelt was either standing while expressively delivering a speech, sitting with soon to be victorious world leaders, or working his desk. Even in his seated photograph from the Yalta Conference, Roosevelt’s posture with his elbows propped on the chair’s armrests and his legs parted paired with the expressively wide grin on his face implied movement and action.

The third exhibit to feature FDR did so much more frequently, as it was targeted at American presidents. It was called *The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden*, and it walked visitors through several different aspects of a president’s life during and after their tenure in office. To do so, it used a variety of artifacts from several different administrations. These artifacts exposed the pressures of the nation’s highest office through five topics: 1) Campaigns and Elections: From the Front Porch to Your T.V.; 2) Roles and Responsibilities: One Day in the Life of a President; 3) Limits of Power: Analyzing Political Cartoons; 4) Assassination and Mourning: Recording Oral Histories; and 5) Communicating the Presidency: The Media and Public Opinion. Naturally, Franklin Roosevelt was not the sole
focus in any of these topics; however, he did play a large role in the first, third, fourth, and fifth.

Although in *The American Presidency* FDR was mentioned more frequently, his image was treated just as carefully as in the other exhibits with only a few exceptions. There were two artifacts used to mention his illness, and only one of those hinted at his resulting disability. The first artifact, shown in Figure 28, was a bronze figurine of Roosevelt standing at the wheel of a ship sculpted around a clock. The description represents the most transparent view of Roosevelt’s day-to-day life that the exhibit was willing to permit. It read: “Franklin Roosevelt is steering the ship of state in this bronze clock from about 1936. While it was common knowledge that Roosevelt suffered from polio, he was usually portrayed without leg braces.” After this point, there was no further mention of Roosevelt’s paralysis.

There was, however, one more mention of polio, shown in Figure 29. This mention came in a display case describing how presidents often used their high exposure to further charity events. The display showed a program as well as three pins to the March of Dimes charity event accompanied with a description which read:

Presidents have used the visibility of the office to advance charitable activities. This has included making the first annual contribution to the Red Cross and kicking off the United Fund drive with a telecast from the White House.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, who contracted polio when he was thirty-nine, turned his birthday celebrations into national fund-raising events for the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. These evolved into the highly successful March of Dimes campaign to eliminate polio.

The description above was cautiously worded in a way that would have made Roosevelt’s Press Secretary proud. Even though it mentioned polio, it treated the illness as if it was merely a past event. It made no reference to the residual effects polio had on Roosevelt’s
Figure 28 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Smithsonian: FDR Clock.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
Figure 29 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Smithsonian: FDR Charity.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
Creating a Private Life

When George Washington took office, he decided that the president should work and live in the same residence. Every chief executive since has abided by that rule. And while it made performing the job of president more efficient, it made family life more difficult. Quiet time and privacy must be seized from or interwoven with official business. Ultimately it is almost impossible to lead a "normal" existence when living in the White House.

Figure 30 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Smithsonian: FDR Driving w/ Fala.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2113)
physical condition, and it even managed to turn it into a benefit while describing Roosevelt’s efforts to eliminate the disease.

Despite Roosevelt’s regular appearance in four out of the five topics of presidential life shown in this exhibit, there were no further mentions of polio or disability; but that was not for want of opportunities. There were a few other artifacts in this exhibit that came close to admitting Roosevelt’s disability, but fell short. For example, Figure 30 shows a picture displayed of Roosevelt driving one of his famous Fords with his dog, Fala. The description of the photograph simply read: “Franklin D. Roosevelt with his very popular dog, Fala. 1944.” This artifact represents another point where it would have been appropriate to mention Roosevelt’s disability; after all, Roosevelt was only able to drive that Ford in the first place because of the custom hand controls he had installed in all of his vehicles. Alas, the opportunity was missed.

The other references to Franklin Roosevelt in this exhibit followed the same strategies that FDR used during his own lifetime. They showed cropped images of the President standing behind a podium or sitting behind a desk that only showed the upper half of his body. The visible half of his body showed activity full of masculine gestures and expressive facial features. Many depictions, although not designed by Roosevelt himself, were blatant exaggerations of his health. For instance, Figures 31 and 32 show political cartoons of Roosevelt standing freely or even running through tall grass.

In terms of Roosevelt’s physical image, the American Presidents exhibit reflected the Smithsonian’s tone as a whole; it presented an old-fashioned perspective. Although the exhibit succeeded, for the most part, in its objective to explore “the personal, public, ceremonial and executive actions of the 43 men who have had a huge impact on the course of history in the past 200 years,” it did so in a way that would have been more appropriate
Figure 31 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Smithsonian: Court Packing Scheme.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
Figure 32 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Smithsonian: Fireside Chat Cartoon.” Photograph. Taken by author August 20, 2013)
during Roosevelt’s lifetime, and it failed FDR in terms of telling a “personal” story. There was an inspiring story missing of the man who held the reigns to this nation for longer than any president ever will and the fact that he did so while combating a major physical challenge. This challenge affected him throughout every day, from when he was dressed by his valet in the morning to when he was undressed at night before bed. Roosevelt traveled the halls of the White House in a wheelchair, moving from one seat to the next. In many ways, he carefully crafted his schedule to conceal his disability; but in others, he embraced it. Gallagher cited examples from his secretaries and speech writers recalling how Roosevelt would have his military aids push him around the White House at “breakneck” speeds yelling “Hello” to all he passed. These are the examples that were missing from the Smithsonian Museum of American History’s portrayal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt: those instances where his strength was embodied through his disability and his world view. Therefore, the Smithsonian contributed a very conservative perspective to the modern image of Franklin Roosevelt. The remaining two museums are more balanced.

*The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Museum and Historic Site.* The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Museum and Historic Site—located in Hyde Park, New York—presents a much more progressive view of Roosevelt’s physical image than the Smithsonian. In order to document that image, two different components of this site will be discussed: first, Roosevelt’s Presidential Museum; and second, the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt, a National Historic Site.

FDR’s Presidential Museum can be found in the same building as his Presidential Library—each of which were constructed on his Hyde Park estate in 1941. To the benefit of this study, the museum was recently renovated and reopened on June 30, 2013. The renovations have yielded a state-of-the-art permanent exhibit focusing on the Roosevelt era as
well as a series of showrooms for a temporary exhibit. At the time of the visit featured here, the special temporary exhibit was called, *The Roosevelts: Public Figures, Private Lives.* Therefore, the following analysis of the museum will be similar to the analysis of the Smithsonian in that it represents a single visit, yet unlike the analysis of the Smithsonian in that the larger exhibit in Roosevelt’s Presidential Museum is permanent. Another difference between the two museums mentioned thus far is that the one discussed here tailors a much more direct focus on Franklin Roosevelt; hence, it would be ineffective to chronicle every mention to him throughout the exhibits. Therefore, this study will focus on indications of polio and disability in order to measure the Presidential Museum’s spin on Roosevelt’s physical image. First, the temporary exhibit will be examined.

Photographs built the foundation for *The Roosevelts.* In the opening description, it boasted to be the largest exhibit of its kind, compiling “nearly one thousand photographs of the Roosevelts,” and charged with taking visitors “…on a visual journey through their lives and times. Well-known images appear alongside more personal ones. Together, they present a rich picture of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt as both public and private figures.” That picture was ripe with references to Roosevelt’s physical condition. The exhibit began with a series of photographs depicting Eleanor and Franklin growing up. Next, it moved onto FDR’s early political career tracing his run for New York State Assembly up to his Vice Presidential campaign. This led to a very intimate window into the genesis of Franklin Roosevelt’s life as a paraplegic.

The exhibit approached FDR’s disability in a very comprehensive way, beginning with his contraction of polio. On this topic, a panel titled “Polio” provided an explanation stating:

> From his birth in 1882 until the summer of 1921 Franklin Roosevelt led a charmed life. Family wealth and social connections placed him among the nation’s elite. A
famous political surname helped launch his political career. Not yet 40 years old, he had worked at the highest levels of American government and run for vice president. The presidency itself seemed within reach.

But in August 1921 everything changed.

The photograph below and the larger one to your right—both shot at a Boy Scout camp near the Hudson River on July 27, 1921—are the last known photos of FDR before he contracted polio and became paralyzed below the waist.283

The larger of the two photos mentioned above can be found in Figure 33. As the largest image in the room, this photograph presented a powerful contrast to those which come further down in FDR’s timeline. The remaining photographs in the room told the story of how Roosevelt dealt with this crisis.

Another panel on the wall explained a gap in photographic evidence during this period. Its title was “Missing Years.” The description on the panel read:

The Roosevelt Library’s photography collection contains thousands of images of Franklin Roosevelt. They documented nearly every period and aspect of his public and private life.

But this rich photographic record nearly disappears between August 1921, when Roosevelt contracted polio, and mid-1924. This visual gap likely reflects FDR’s desire to remain out of camera range as he dealt with the challenges of paralysis and struggled to regain his ability to stand and walk unassisted.

These eight photographs are the library’s only images of FDR from this three-year period.284

A series of photographs surrounded the description on the panel with a few common elements. For instance, Roosevelt was seated in all of them. But more importantly, the explanation next to each distinctly mentioned how the image was either staged or carefully posed so that FDR looked comfortable and healthy. In one such photo, the description even explicitly noted how the pose “required that he lift his unbraced right leg into place with his hands.”285 This is an important distinction as it marks the first museum discussed in this
Figure 33 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR Presidential Museum: Last image of FDR Pre-Polio,” Photograph. Taken by author July 26, 2013).
analysis to indicate the care that Roosevelt took while presenting his image—suggesting that there was another image to hide in the first place.

Next, the exhibit highlighted Roosevelt’s recovery. In another long panel, a timeline was featured claiming the title, “From Tragedy to Triumph, 1921-1932.” This displayed photographs that summarized the major milestones FDR took on his road to recovery. Of course, one of the most important stops on that journey was Roosevelt’s experience at Warm Springs, Georgia where he built and attended a treatment facility for victims of polio. Figure 34 shows a view from this section of the exhibit. Many of the photographs displayed here depicted Roosevelt swimming in the spring water. What was striking about these was how athletic he appeared. In the water, his bright smile and muscular upper body furnished an appearance of health. Some of these images were even used publicly in news articles, such as the photograph of Roosevelt seated on the shore with his arm over his bent knee—this was used in Earl Looker’s original *Liberty Magazine* article. But others, not intended for public display, showed FDR wearing his braces over his trousers instead of underneath. The fact that Roosevelt only wore them this way during his private leisure time at Warm Springs implies that they were more comfortable this way. Therefore, this provides another indirect reference to how Roosevelt carefully engineered his appearance in public to conceal his disability.

The next section of the exhibit focused on Franklin Roosevelt’s reemergence into politics and his later public-life, but from a very personal vantage point. Opposite from a wall presenting a timeline of Roosevelt’s years in office were a series of standing displays. One such display, shown in Figure 35, looked explicitly into how “FDR’s Disability” affected him throughout his political life. The description read:

From August 10, 1921 until his death on April 12, 1945, every day of FDR’s life had to be structured around his disability.
In the morning his valet helped him get out of bed and dress. He moved from room to room by wheelchair. Aides lifted him into cars and, sometimes, carried him into buildings. When he traveled, advance teams built ramps and bolted podiums to the floor. The press operated under a tacit understanding that FDR shouldn’t be photographed in a wheelchair, being carried, or in other vulnerable situations.

Roosevelt had learned to stand with leg braces and to appear to “walk” short distances in public, gripping a cane and a companion’s arm. And he used his charm and magnetic smile to deflect attention from his disability. Americans knew he had battled polio, but the extent of his paralysis was less understood.286

The photographs in this display were equally as targeted at Roosevelt’s disability as their description. They showed him walking while making use of parallel bars and railings; they showed him walking with the help of his cane and aid; they showed him being assisted out of his car; they showed him seated in settings where it was customary to stand; and they showed him seated in his wheelchair on a naval ship. Of course, many of these photographs were personal and taken privately. The exhibit offered an explanation for this as well.

On the wall adjacent to the standing display mentioned above was another panel dedicated to Margaret Suckley. The panel was titled, “Photographic Insider: Margaret Suckley,” and it read,

Several amateur photographers in FDR’s inner circle left behind interesting glimpses of his private life. Perhaps the most prolific of these “behind-the-scenes” photographers was Roosevelt’s shy distant cousin, Margaret “Daisy” Suckly.

Suckley lived ten miles north of the Roosevelts near Rhinebeck, New York. She became close to the President in the 1930’s, spending time with him at Hyde Park, the White house, and Warm Springs. Suckley became FDR’s closest confidante during his last years—the only person to whom he spoke frankly about the daily hardships polio imposed upon him.

These photographs were shot by Suckley with her Kodak camera between 1937 and 1944. The pictures demonstrate the implicit trust Roosevelt placed in her. They include two of the four known photographs of FDR in a wheelchair.287
Figure 34 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR Presidential Museum: Warm Springs Section.” Photograph. Taken by author July 26, 2013)
Figure 35 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR Presidential Museum: FDR’s Disability.” Photograph, Taken by author July 26, 2012)
The surrounding photographs included the two referenced above with Roosevelt in a wheelchair as well as several other candid shots. Many involved FDR seated reading or laughing with friends. Fala made a number of appearances in these photographs, either laying on the ground next to Roosevelt or seated on his lap.

The exhibit continued on with a wide range of aspects from Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt’s public and private lives. Another room featured Eleanor’s career as an advocate and United Nations delegate, which carried on for decades after FDR’s death. The exhibit also featured a short film that highlighted the major elements of both these figure’s public and private lives. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that in the case of FDR’s physical image, an overwhelming amount of attention was paid to his illness, recovery, and impending disability. Visitors of *The Roosevelts* found an entirely different story about Franklin Roosevelt than they would have at the Smithsonian. And although it did not cover every major political aspect of his career, in many ways, that story was much more complete.

Naturally, the holes in Roosevelt’s political initiatives were more than adequately filled with his Presidential Museum’s permanent exhibit; however, this exhibit also offered a more complete picture of Roosevelt’s physical condition than the Smithsonian. The museum was renovated a month prior to the visit featured in this study with a private fund of $6 million. The new design is incredibly tactile and participatory with immersive audio-visual theatres, ten interactive touch screens, several touch screen tables that function as digital flip-books, and immersive Fireside Chat Environments. The exhibit’s objective is to “tell the story of the Roosevelt presidency beginning in the depths of the Great Depression and continuing through the New Deal and World War II with an emphasis on both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt’s relationship with the American people.”\(^{288}\) It accomplished this goal in a very thorough fashion.
As visitors enter the exhibit, they are faced with a dark hallway lit only by the display-lights shining on the walls. The atmosphere is both tense and bleak at the same time, and rightfully so, as this section sets the context that the Roosevelt administration was born out of: the Great Depression. As visitors walk down the hall, they find an opening to their right under a well-lit sign that reads, “FRESH SOUP COFFEE & DOUGHNUTS.” This room leads to the first theatre which describes the state of the country before Roosevelt ascended to the presidency. It also foreshadows the impending conflict in Europe through allusions to the rise of the Nazi party in Germany.

After the film is finished, visitors exit the theatre through another opening and find themselves in a room which starkly contrasts the previous two. This room is well lit and projects a hopeful tone. It illustrates Roosevelt’s first presidential campaign in 1932. Signs and banners stand out saying, “The Promise of Change” and “Welcome Roosevelt, Our Hearts and Votes are Yours.” A glass cased display table in the middle of the room shows a range of artifacts including Roosevelt’s famous campaign fedora, his Pince-nez spectacles, and a collection of campaign pins and signs. The walls are covered with enlarged photographs of Roosevelt on the campaign trail and descriptions highlighting the significance of each.

The next room is designed to answer the logical question, who is Franklin Roosevelt and where does he come from? It tells the story of FDR’s family and upbringing. The room is very reminiscent of the Home of Franklin Roosevelt, which will be discussed later. It has a wealthy Victorian tone with dark stained furniture and an intricate candle chandelier hanging from the ceiling. Most of the walls are lined with glass cased displays holding photographs and artifacts from Roosevelt’s family and childhood. There is even a touch screen table placed inside of a dark stained table in the center of the room where visitors may flip through
documents representing this period of FDR’s life. Finally, it alludes to the next room, which
explicitly discusses his disability. A panel on the wall labeled “Foundations of a Public Life”
embodies this transition. It reads,

Franklin Roosevelt was 50 years old when he was elected President. His life story to
that point was marked by both great privilege and great hardship.

Born into a wealthy and prominent family, he enjoyed an idyllic childhood and was
educated at the finest schools. He made remarkable early advances in politics. In
1920, at age 38, he was the Democratic nominee for Vice President.

But early success was followed by a devastating personal setback. In 1921, FDR
contracted polio, which left him paralyzed below the waist. His political career
seemed over. Yet Roosevelt would wage a courageous battle to come to terms with
his disability—and make a triumphant return to politics.291

It is worth mentioning how well this panel would have fit in the American Presidents
exhibit in the Smithsonian. It is short, yet hits on a much fuller story of Roosevelt’s experience. Not
only does it mention Roosevelt’s contraction of polio—which represents only a few weeks of
his life—but also the paralysis that lingered as a result—which lasted the rest of his life.

The next room offers a direct insight into Roosevelt’s illness and disability. A wall
panel at the opening of the room titled “POLIO” provides a parallel description to the
similarly labeled panel in The Roosevelts with one important difference; it adds a statement
from Eleanor Roosevelt which reads, “I think probably the thing that took the most courage
in his life was his mastery and his meeting of polio.”292 The rest of the room endeavors to
capture that mastery and meeting. It consists of both a display and a theatre. On the back
wall is a glass cased display of artifacts including Roosevelt’s leg braces, his cane, and the
extending pincers he used to grab things at a distance (Figure 36). The adjacent wall provides
visitors with an interactive means of understanding Roosevelt’s burden. It is a tall wooden
box that matches the paneling on the wall, but protrudes outward and above it (Figure 37).
The bottom half of the box reveals a lever, and the top half shows a display panel. The panel
discloses a photograph of an aid adjusting Roosevelt’s leg braces as he gets out of a car. The description and directions below the photograph read,

**FDR’S LEG BRACES**

FDR could not stand without the support of leg braces that locked at his knees and weighed up to ten pounds. Because of the discomfort they caused, he generally used his braces only when making public appearances. He projected a smiling image despite the difficulty of standing and moving with the braces.

Lift the bar below to feel the weight of FDR’s leg braces.

Where the weight mentioned in the description provides visitors with a statistic to keep in mind, the lever offers a way to interact with that fact, which can prove startling for some. On the other side of the room, the theatre loops a six minute video describing Roosevelt’s contraction of polio and his recovery at Warm Springs.

To the right of the theatre is an exit to the next room; nevertheless, before visitors can pass through the exit, there is one final nook that helps them transition from Roosevelt’s experience with his disability to his reemergence into politics. This nook provides two photographs and an information panel titled “GOVERNOR.” The top photograph depicts Roosevelt sitting in a chair reading a newspaper that accounts his victory in the 1928 New York Governor campaign. His leg braces are exposed at the base of his pants locking into the heels of his shoes. The bottom photograph shows Roosevelt standing behind a podium waving at a crowd with one arm raised above his head and the other linked with a state trooper for support. The information panel describes Roosevelt’s progress with his disability and implies an end to his struggle as it reads,

FDR’s victory in the 1928 New York governor’s race re-launched him into national politics. His Election was notable in a year dominated by Republican victories. A seven-year struggle to come to terms with the effects of polio and paralysis ended with a triumphant return to public life.
Figure 36 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR Presidential Museum, Disability Display.” Photograph. Taken by author July 26, 2013)
Figure 37 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR Presidential Museum, Braces Lever.” Photograph. Taken by author July 26, 2013)
Naturally, Roosevelt’s struggle with paralysis did not end with his election to Governor, but he did become increasingly skilled at keeping it from the public and projecting an image of health, activity, and masculinity.

From this point, the exhibit’s narrative segues into the story of Roosevelt’s political endeavors throughout the remainder of his life. It covers a range of topics from his first hundred days; his New Deal initiatives; his second, third, and fourth term elections; his Fireside Chats; his struggle against isolationism; his reactions to Pearl Harbor; internment camps and the Holocaust; his role in the United Nations; and more. These topics use primary documents and artifacts from Roosevelt’s presidency. As with the Smithsonian, these artifacts emphasize Roosevelt’s strength and vitality over his disability; and in some cases, particularly in cartoons, they openly misrepresent Roosevelt’s abilities. Nevertheless, his paralysis is not completely ignored throughout the rest of the exhibit either. The permanent exhibit makes three more direct references to Roosevelt’s physical condition after this point.

The first comes after the room emphasizing his first hundred days and his first term. It takes the form of a large wall panel shown in Figure 38. The background of the panel features an enlarged photograph of Roosevelt in a wheelchair taken by Margaret Suckley. A gray box on the right exposes the four currently known photographs of Roosevelt in a wheelchair. It includes reproductions of those photographs and a small screen. The screen’s function is revealed in the description titled, “FDR’S DISABILITY” that reads,

> Among the over 130,000 photographs in the FDR Library’s collections, there are only four of Roosevelt in a wheelchair. They are displayed here. The video program includes other photographs that reveal aspects of his disability and rare film footage of the President walking in public.

The red description box to the left tells the story of Roosevelt’s image. It is called “FDR’S DISABILITY, IMAGE AND REALITY.” This box begins with an enlightening quote from Time in 1932 which mimics Sara Delano Roosevelt’s message discussed earlier: “To this day no one has ever heard him admit that he
could not walk…Never have his crippled legs deterred him from going where he would.\textsuperscript{296}

The remainder of the box thoroughly explains,

Early in his presidency, the image of FDR as an exceptionally strong and active leader became firmly fixed in popular culture.

That image contrasted sharply with the reality of his physical disability.

In 1921, Roosevelt contracted polio. It left him paralyzed below the waist. During the 1920s, he developed the capacity to stand with leg braces and to appear to “walk” short distances in public, using a cane and gripping a companion’s arm

Americans knew FDR had battled polio, but the degree of his paralysis was less understood…\textsuperscript{297}

The remainder of this description borrows from the panel also titled “FDR’s DISABILITY” in \textit{The Roosevelts} exhibit. Once again, this exhibit illustrates his Presidential Museum’s effort to distinguish between Roosevelt’s public image and the reality of his personal image—an objective the Smithsonian did not achieve.

The second remaining mention of Roosevelt’s disability is in his private study. Because Roosevelt built his Presidential Library while he was still in office, he used it during his presidency. Due to this, he constructed a private study, which the museum has preserved “almost precisely as FDR left it on his last visit here on March 28, 1945.”\textsuperscript{298} In the center of this study is one of his wheelchairs, shown in Figure 39. The description of this artifact reads,

Wheelchair
The President used this wheelchair during his frequent visits to the Library. It is one of several built to his specifications. He had workers cut the legs off of an ordinary wooden chair and mount it to a custom-designed chassis. Note the swivel mounted ash tray on the right side. FDR spent relatively little time in his wheelchair. It was used to transport him between destinations. He would typically sit in one of the chairs arranged in this room.\textsuperscript{299}
Figure 38 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR Presidential Museum, Disability Wall.” Photograph. Taken by author July 26, 2013)
Figure 39 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “FDR Presidential Museum, Wheelchair.” Photograph. Taken by author July 26, 2013)
The wheelchair is built to similar specifications as the statue displayed in Roosevelt’s National Monument as well as the one displayed in the visitors center there. However, this display offers a more authentic representation for visitors as it is found in the environment in which it was used by FDR over six decades ago.

The final remaining reference to Roosevelt’s disability comes at the very end of the exhibit. Just before visitors board the elevator or ascend the stairs toward the exit of the building, they are faced with the archives—which have been fashioned into displays in their own right. Glass walls reveal massive collections of Roosevelt’s paintings and model ship collections. They also show the filing cabinets where countless documents from the Roosevelt administration lay catalogued. However, one of the most relevant displays in terms of Roosevelt’s physical condition is the glass encased 1936 Ford Phaeton, complete with hand controls. Its description reads,

President Roosevelt enjoyed driving this car whenever he was at Hyde Park. Specially modified to be operated with hand controls, it gave him the freedom to drive despite his disability. The controls were designed and installed by Fred Relyea, a mechanic in Poughkeepsie. After FDR’s death, Eleanor Roosevelt used the car until late 1946, when she presented it to the Museum. It had been driven 19,143 miles.300

In many ways, this car provided FDR an escape from his disability. It allowed him to move about as far and as fast as he wished. It also allowed him to do so in a public way so that he did not need to stage every angle of his appearance. Therefore, it is a suiting final allusion to his physical condition as it fits the needs of both his public and private life.

Therefore, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Museum adds a much more complete window into Roosevelt’s physical image than the Smithsonian. Where the Smithsonian only used two artifacts that mentioned Roosevelt’s battle with polio and one that hinted at his ensuing disability, his Presidential Museum included entire rooms designed around the topic. Furthermore, it did so in a way that did not overwhelm Roosevelt’s other
accomplishments. It’s presentation of Roosevelt’s physical image was balanced and consistent.

The second component to this property is the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt Historic Site. Roosevelt’s Presidential Library and Museum is built on his estate. Therefore, this site essentially surrounds the museum mentioned above. Roosevelt inherited his Hyde Park estate from his mother, who ran it until her death in 1941. The other major structures on the property are Roosevelt’s house, stable, guesthouse, and rose garden. A guided tour walks visitors past the rose garden—where Franklin, Eleanor, and Fala are buried—and through the main house. The rose garden is built in a rectangular fashion with a simple marble memorial erected in the center. A short walk from the garden is the main house (Figure 40).

Despite the size of Roosevelt’s estate, the main house is the focal point of the property. Therefore, this analysis of the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt Historic Site will concentrate on that structure. Although the tour of the main house does not grant visitors free reign over the building, it allows them to see the majority of the first floor and the living quarters—with the exception of the servant’s quarters. There are two allusions to Roosevelt’s disability in these sections of the house. The first is in his study, which takes up the entire west wing of the first floor. At the end of his enormous study is a couch facing the fireplace. To the left of that couch sits another of Roosevelt’s specially designed wheelchairs (Figure 41). Visitors would expect to see a wheelchair here; but as they consider the fact that this building has three floors, another valid question comes to mind: how did FDR get to his bedroom on the second floor? Although Roosevelt did develop a method of scooting himself up the stairs one step at a time, a more effective means was to use the dumbwaiter in the servants’ quarters. Naturally the elevator was large enough to comfortably fit FDR and his wheelchair inside of it. Once in position, he would use his muscular upper body to hoist the
Figure 40 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt.” Photograph. Taken by author July 26, 2013)
Figure 41 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Study Wheelchair.” Photograph. Taken by author July 26, 2013)
elevator up to the second floor. This is where the second reference to Roosevelt’s disability is found; another wheelchair sits in the dumbwaiter on the second floor. Both these tools of mobility offer visitors a private insight into Roosevelt’s world, and they also play their role in breaking down the barriers that Roosevelt built around his physical condition during his lifetime.

Therefore, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Museum and Historic Site offer a progressive perspective on Roosevelt’s physical image. Much like his National Monument, there is a constant dynamic between the image of a presidential figure that radiated with health, activity, and masculinity and the image of a man with a personal struggle from which he derived a substantial amount of strength. The layered physical image projected here sharply contrasts with the one sided perspectives presented in both the Smithsonian and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park. And so, it would appear that there is a stalemate in the controversy over Roosevelt’s modern image. This study has presented two sites that offer conservative views and two sites that offer progressive views. The next will tip the scales in the latter direction.

The Roosevelt Warm Springs Historic Site. The Roosevelt Warm Springs Historic Site is the last to be discussed in this study. It is located in Warm Springs, Georgia, and is a Georgia State Park. The 940-acre campus boasts several areas of significance; however, the most important to this study are: 1) The FDR Memorial Museum and the Little White House Historic Site; and 2) the Historic Pools Museum. Each of these was built on land purchased by Roosevelt during his lifetime. In fact, the Little White House and much of the historic pools themselves have been preserved the way Roosevelt left them. Before interpreting the image that these places project of Roosevelt, it is important to mention that FDR used Warm Springs for recovery and retreat. He was free to let down his guard and be less protective of
his image. Even more so, he played a different role at Warm Springs than he did in Washington D.C. Therefore, the resources these museums have to work with are particularly unique—as are their stories.

The FDR Memorial Museum is part of the Little White House Historic Site. While recovering from polio in the mid-1920s, Roosevelt grew to like Warm Springs very much. He commissioned a small cottage to be built in 1932; and during his Presidency, it was dubbed the Little White House due to its color as well as its association with the President. FDR endeavored to travel to Warm Springs twice a year during the fall and spring to relax. Many of the artifacts on display at his cottage and the museum were left behind after Roosevelt died in Warm Springs on April 12, 1945. The museum was renovated in 2003 and reopened in 2004 encompassing 12,000 square feet to accommodate a theatre and permanent exhibits.301

Much like The Roosevelts exhibit at his Presidential Museum, the FDR Memorial Museum at the Little White House offers an extremely personal story of Franklin Roosevelt, a story in which his struggle with polio and paralysis is emphasized. That emphasis attracts attention immediately as visitors enter the museum and are confronted with FDR’s custom built 1940 Willys Roadster—complete with a set of hand-controls. After watching a short film describing the significance of Warm Springs to Roosevelt, visitors progress through the permanent exhibit.

The exhibit follows an open design where a ramped pathway wraps around the edge of the room and guides visitors chronologically through FDR’s life. It begins with his childhood at Hyde Park, continues to boarding school at Groton, and moves onto his undergraduate career at Harvard and his graduate career at Columbia Law School. Next, the
path outlines FDR’s political trajectory. Each of these topics is accompanied by a myriad of artifacts from certificates and photographs to figurines and campaign memorabilia.

At this point, the exhibit launches into the story of FDR’s illness. On a wall panel labeled “POLIO SEASON,” is a photograph of Roosevelt with fellow polio survivors and an antique Quarantine sign. The description below the title reads,

During the early 20th century, Americans feared the outbreak of polio—a debilitating and deadly disease. The virus, called poliomyelitis or infantile paralysis, attacked people from all walks of life—old and young, rich and poor. There seemed to be no hope for those affected until FDR contracted the disease. Through his efforts, he developed a treatment center for polio patients at Warm Springs. As President, he started the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, or March of Dimes. On April 12, 1955, exactly 10 years after FDR’s death, the Salk vaccine was announced to be safe and effective and ready for distribution.

The message behind this panel is important to consider when looking into Roosevelt’s accomplishments. Many do not realize that before running for Governor of New York in 1928, Roosevelt considered making his treatment facility at Warm Springs his sole focus. Even after running for public office again, he never put his cause behind him. As the panel above suggests, Franklin Roosevelt was one of the most instrumental figures in developing a rehabilitation strategy and funding research for a polio cure.

There are two displays below the polio panel that describe how Roosevelt fought his paralysis. The first shows a crutch and a leg brace (Figure 42). It comes with a description titled “THE BRACE SHOP” which reads,

These braces were fabricated at the Warm Springs Foundation Brace Shop. Made of steel, they weigh about 8-10 lbs each. FDR painted the lower area of the steel uprights black to disguise the shiny metal. He did not want to draw any attention to the fact that he had to wear them.

This display is open so that visitors may touch the artifacts. Although they cannot lift the brace and get a sense for how heavy it is, like at Roosevelt’s Presidential museum, this description offers a more thorough description as it tells visitors that each brace weighs 8-10 lbs.
**Figure 42** (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Warm Springs, Brace and Crutch.” Photograph. Taken by author August 22, 2013)
Figure 43 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Warm Springs, Wheelchair and Braces.” Photograph. Taken by author August 22, 2013)
pounds. At the Presidential Museum, the description read: “FDR could not stand without the support of leg braces that locked at his knees and weighed up to ten pounds,” which implied that both braces weighed up to ten pounds together.\textsuperscript{304}

The second display is to the right of the panel. This one is in a glass case. It shows a wheelchair designed by Roosevelt and a complete set of braces (Figure 43). The wheelchair’s description reads,

\begin{quote}
Wheelchairs of the Roosevelt era were large and cumbersome. This wheelchair was specially designed by FDR and made according to his specifications at the Warm Springs Foundation Brace Shop.\textsuperscript{305}
\end{quote}

Compared to the other wheelchairs seen in this study, the chair on display at the FDR Memorial Museum is significantly different. For one, it has arm rests, which implies that its occupant would be using it to sit in for long periods instead of only using it to move from one chair to the next. Also, the wheels are shielded by a steel buffer, which makes it impossible for the wheelchair’s occupant to wheel themself anywhere. Roosevelt’s personal chair, however, was designed specifically so that he could independently move himself from one area to the next. Therefore, it is apparent that Roosevelt designed this chair with a clinical aim. Where his personal wheelchairs made him more independent, the model displayed here was meant for a clinical patient who depended on others for movement.

The exhibit continues Roosevelt’s life narrative with a few interactive displays. To the left of the polio display cases is a replica of the typical Warm Spring’s kitchen from the Roosevelt era. There are no barriers, so visitors can touch the items on display—which are sparse due to the economic period depicted. Next, the exhibit moves onto FDR’s first presidential campaign against Hoover. After a series of display cases filled with campaign memorabilia is a section that focusses on Roosevelt’s greatest speeches as President. Visitors
stand underneath a small dome with a speaker installed so that FDR’s dramatic tenor booms
down from above. As visitors descend the ramp at the end of the chronology, wall panels
describe the important people in Roosevelt’s life and end with a description his death. Once
visitors have finished with the narrative along the edge of the room, they may progress to the
center of the room at ground level.

The displays in the center of the exhibit are based around thematic topics. For
example, one is built around a patio furniture set that Roosevelt received from his mother as a
housewarming gift. Another displays his stamp collection to illustrate his hobbies. Another
is built around household ornaments that he decorated his cottage with. Each series of
artifacts is designed to expose another aspect of Roosevelt’s ordinary life while visiting
Warm Springs.

Of course, there is also a major theme throughout the center of the museum that
focuses on more than Roosevelt’s leisure activities; that theme is how he conquered polio and
learned to live with his disability. To accomplish this, the exhibit expands on the role of the
springs at Warm Springs. A display dedicated to this topic describes how Roosevelt first
came to the springs. It explains,

At the suggestion of George Foster Peabody and Tom Loyless, owners of the
Meriwether Inn, FDR visits the warm springs near Pine Mountain to test the
therapeutic value of the water. After swimming, Roosevelt says that he has never felt
water so pleasant. Soon, he is able to stand in four feet of water. He says the people
are wonderful, the weather is heavenly, and a cure for infantile paralysis will soon be
discovered here. The water never cured FDR’s paralysis, but the minerals and
warmth of the water relaxed and toned his muscles.306

Although the springs never fully healed Roosevelt’s legs, he did make progress. Another
display shows Roosevelt’s swimming trunks in front of an enlarged photograph of FDR
smiling on the banks of the springs (Figure 44). A caption at the base quotes the first
newspaper article to discuss his recovery at Warm Springs for the *Atlanta Journal.* The
Figure 44 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Warm Springs, FDR’s Swimming Suit.” Photograph. Taken by author August 22, 2013)
article was titled “Franklin Roosevelt Will Swim to Health,” and the caption reads, “‘I am deriving wonderful benefit from my stay here,’ Mr. Roosevelt said. ‘This place is great. See that right leg? It’s the first time I have been able to move it at all in three years.’”

This article, published in 1924, marks the beginning of Roosevelt’s manipulation of the media to construct an image of health, and this exhibit alludes to that strategy by contrasting the description above with his statement in the *Atlanta Journal* article; FDR would never fully recover, but he would surely make voters believe he had done so enough to lead them.

Another display directly addresses Roosevelt’s disability in the context of his later life. FDR’s 1938 Ford, also complete with hand-controls, sets the background for a series of information panels lining the barrier between visitors and the car. Before describing the car, the panels provide a quote from Roosevelt’s final address to Congress on March 1, 1945. It was the only time he spoke before the legislative body from a seated position. It reads, “I hope you will pardon me for the unusual posture of sitting down during the presentation of what I wish to say, but I know you will realize that it is a lot easier for me in not having to carry about ten pounds of steel around on the bottom of my legs…”

Furthermore, the panels borrow the title of Hugh Gallagher’s book in a section labeled “A SPLENDID DECEPTION.” The description below it reads,

Many Americans did not realize—or chose not to notice—that FDR could not walk without help. Only a few photos exist of Roosevelt in his wheelchair. After his first trip to Warm Springs in 1924, the press headlined his visit as: “Roosevelt Swims His Way Back To Health.” Other articles referred to his being cured at Warm Springs. Those around him did not see his handicap because FDR, even when his health was failing, was able to exude power, charisma, charm and above all, confidence.

The final allusion to Roosevelt’s disability occurs as visitors travel the hallway toward the exit. To their right, they notice a long series of glass display cases installed in the wall. These cases expose more than one hundred canes sent to Warm Springs as gifts to Roosevelt.
The Little White House Historic Site consists of several buildings including a guest house, servants’ quarters, a garage, and Roosevelt’s cottage. In terms of the estate as a whole, one of the most subtle tributes to Roosevelt’s physical condition is the fact that all the main buildings are accessible by wheelchair without any additions to the property after Roosevelt’s death. The pathways are all smooth and curved around the landscape without steps. The front doors to FDR’s cottage are not preempted by any theatrical stairways leading up to a grandeur porch. In fact, the cottage itself rests on the downward slope of a hill (Figure 45). Inside, the cottage is kept much as it was the day Roosevelt died. Some sections are roped off, and others are separated from visitors by glass walls; nevertheless, there is still a very homely aura that fills visitors as they stroll through the building. There is one final direct reference to Roosevelt’s disability within the house itself: another customized wheelchair resting in the corner.

And so, the FDR Memorial Museum and the Little White House Historic Site accomplish an image very similar to Roosevelt’s Presidential Library. They provide a balanced portrayal of a powerful political figure. They do include the image of a healthy, active, and masculine politician, but they also have a strong focus on the personal image of a very likeable man who dealt with a serious handicap. In this sense, a comparison can be made to Roosevelt’s National Monument as both representations of FDR build on and add to the other. It can be argued, however, that in some ways the museum tends toward favoring an image of Roosevelt as a polio survivor and a neighbor to the people of Warm Springs over a successful politician. Of course, in doing so, the museum does not attach any shame to the image of Roosevelt the polio survivor. On the contrary, it honors the contributions he made to the treatment and ultimate eradication of the virus. These accomplishments are examined in greater depth at the Historic Pools Museum.
Figure 45 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Warm Springs, Little White House.” Photograph. Taken by author August 22, 2013)
If the FDR Memorial Museum and Little White House Historic Site have a slight tendency to favor Roosevelt’s image as a polio survivor, then that image completely dominates the Historic Pools Museum. Officially, this museum is part of the Little White House Historic Site, although it is on the other end of the Roosevelt Warm Springs campus. Both are run by the Georgia State Parks system. The Historic Pools Museum is dedicated to the story of Warm Springs, and therefore, Roosevelt’s role as one of the treatment facility’s major founders overshadows his role as President of the United States. The museum consists of a long room that features photographs and artifacts from the treatment center developed around the springs.

A series of wall segments perpendicular to the length of the room tell the narrative of the springs and how they evolved into the first polio treatment facility. The account begins with a quick lesson on hydrogeology. Due to the unusual temperature of the springs, the area became a tourist destination in the early nineteenth century up to the early twentieth century. A resort was built that harnessed the spring water through a series of pools. Throughout the years, several expansions were made to the pools—including those made under FDR’s ownership. Before Roosevelt visited the springs, however, there was a young polio survivor named Louis Joseph who realized that the spring water benefited the muscles in his legs. It is unknown how much his recovery can be attributed to the springs, but after a few seasons of swimming in the pools, Joseph recovered enough to walk assisted with only a cane. Word spread and eventually made it to FDR. This is the context that Franklin Roosevelt enters the scene.310

The museum introduces FDR as a politician, but it goes on to further describe him as a “Doctor, Consulting Engineer, and Landscape Architect.”311 It discusses how he acted as a doctor experimenting with and developing treatment plans. A wall segment displays a series
of photographs with Roosevelt working with patients in the pools. FDR was a consulting engineer in the way that he expanded the pool complex “into three connecting pools, and additional surrounding structures were formed to create the hydrotherapy complex.” Roosevelt also served as a landscape architect in the way that he nudged Henry Toombs, the contracted architect, into designing the buildings surrounding the hydrotherapy pools in the image of Thomas Jefferson’s buildings at the University of Virginia campus. One wall segment shows a series of sketches that Roosevelt made while conferring with Toombs on the project.

One of the more inspirational segments, however, is the one that exposed Roosevelt’s “Focus On Optimism.” It explained how FDR was able to attract other polio victims to come to Warm Springs, and he established the Georgia Warm Springs Foundation. In the process, “…its staff members developed a multitude of splints, braces and tools…” Roosevelt pushed for new ideas to be developed and shared, and eventually “Therapy and research began to show results…” which led patients to begin living more independently. As word spread of this success, “Therapists inspired by FDR came to Warm Springs to work with sufferers who lost control of their limbs to sew, type, walk and return to everyday activities.” Finally, the segment attributed Roosevelt’s second rise to politics to his experience at Warms Springs: “With renewed optimism, Roosevelt coached and convinced countless others to do what they could despite their physical limitations. His spirits lifted, Roosevelt decided to re-enter political life.” Many argue that it was Roosevelt’s practice with trial and error at Warm Springs that gave him the strength to follow the same tactics in his New Deal policies.

The museum moves on to show examples of the tools used to rehabilitate polio victims in the pools and also to describe how polio was ultimately conquered. Although
Roosevelt had been dead for ten years when the polio vaccine was deemed safe to use, the museum’s description of that story pays appropriate homage to FDR’s role. It states,

FDR contributed greatly to the prevention of polio by helping organize the first national fund-raising efforts to support persons with polio and find a cure. The first Presidents Birthday Balls were held in 1934, and the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis was formed in 1938. All of these efforts led to the creation of the Salk vaccine and the announcement that it was safe and effective in 1955.\footnote{318}

Along the length of the room without the wall segments are a series of photographs of Roosevelt during his time at the springs. They depict him working with patients in the pool, swimming with family members and friends, and above all, they depict his infectious smile.

Of course, the most powerful section of the museum is the pool itself (Figure 46). Visitors are allowed to walk through the pool complex that Roosevelt first swam in almost ninety years ago. Although the pools are no longer filled with spring water, visitors may walk down a staircase into the dry pool. There is a fountain at the base of the pool that still spouts water from the springs. There are also replicas of the platforms Roosevelt developed during his therapy sessions with other polio survivors. His influence as an advocate for his fellow polio sufferers is apparent, and his many roles at Warm Springs tend to overshadow his roles in New York and Washington D.C. at the Historic Pools Museum.

Therefore, the Historic Pools Museum differs from every site mentioned to this point because it focuses squarely on Roosevelt’s disability and his efforts to overcome it instead of his political career. Nevertheless, it is ironic how in the process, the museum manages to use the same tactics that FDR did to avoid this subject in his own lifetime. For instance, it shows Roosevelt as an extremely active figure through the descriptions of his multiple roles as well as the photographs of him working in the pools. It portrays Roosevelt as an extremely masculine figure through a series of candid shots where he athletically swims through the
Figure 46 (Waples, Eric, photographer. “Warm Springs, Historic Pools.” Photograph. Taken by author August 22, 2013)
spring water brandishing his muscular upper body. And it even exudes an image of health as Roosevelt acts as both a doctor and physical therapist in order to reach other patients—roles that are typically akin to health and wellbeing.

**Conclusion**

And so, Franklin Roosevelt’s public image is very complex concerning his physical representation. Where one could effectively argue an overwhelming trend toward not only accepting FDR’s image as a man with a disability—as is seen in his Presidential Museum’s permanent exhibit and the permanent exhibit at the FDR Memorial Museum—but flaunting it—as in his National Monument and the Historic Pools Museum. Nevertheless, one could also argue that the controversy surrounding Roosevelt’s sculpture in a wheelchair at his National Monument, his bodiless representation at Four Freedoms Park, as well as his conservative portrayal at the Smithsonian is evidence that proclaiming such a trend is premature. In order to rekindle an argument in favor of a progressive trend, evidence of another monument or museum that focuses on Roosevelt’s struggle with polio and paralysis is necessary. Fortunately, that evidence is forthcoming.

A visit to the New York City’s Roosevelt Island during the summer of 2013 revealed an advertisement for a new memorial to be constructed in addition to Four Freedoms Park. This memorial will be called the “FDR Hope Memorial” and it is scheduled to open in 2014. Under the headline “Enabled not Disabled,” the advertisement stated,

President Franklin D. Roosevelt is an inspiration for the world’s disabled. He moved freely throughout the world, overcame great challenges, and developed to the fullest of his potential.

Roosevelt Island in New York City was so named to reflect its commitment to becoming a community where the disable move freely and develop to their fullest potential.

The FDR Hope Memorial will tell these two stories and contribute to the continuation of FDR’s legacy to the disabled here on his namesake island (Figure 47).
Figure 47 (Waples, Eric, photographer. "FDR Hope Memorial Advertisement, Roosevelt Island." Photograph. Taken by author August 19, 2013)
This advertisement hints at a depiction of Roosevelt in a more intimate condition, one separate from the public image he adhered to during his lifetime and the one perpetuated by Khan’s design and the exhibits at the Smithsonian.

A closer inspection of the monument’s website reveals that the artist chosen to design the memorial is Meredith Bergmann. Although the website was constructed before Four Freedoms Park was completed, it cited Bergmann explicitly referencing Khan’s portrayal of Roosevelt, and she attributed it to the tradition of a former era: “because of its idiom and the era of its design it will not depict the human body, and the human body is an important part of our subject.” Bergmann also offered a brief history of bodily representation when she explained, “Until the 20th century, sculptors routinely turned to the human body when they wanted to evoke inspiration. Here in the Hope Memorial we are not only allowed to use the human body to inspire, we are joyfully required to do so.” Therefore, this monument is advertised to display a sculpture of Franklin Roosevelt in a wheelchair interacting with a child who also has a disability. It will be the first monument erected since the 2001 rededication of his National Monument with the sole intent of exposing Roosevelt’s condition and the strength he derived from it. And so, although a stigma behind Roosevelt’s disability still exists in his public image today, the efforts of organizations such as the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Museum, the Roosevelt Warm Springs, and the FDR Hope Memorial ensure that another half-life may be on the horizon.
CHAPTER III

Teaching Implications: Fieldtrips and Resources
Knowledge for the sake of knowledge may be a noble pursuit, but it is an impractical one; therefore, this chapter is dedicated to making the information discussed in Chapters I and II applicable to social studies curriculum. To review, Chapter I focused on a shift in historiographical trends surrounding the content of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the media from the late 1970s until the 2000s. Where scholarship focused on how Roosevelt excelled at using the media to run the nation in the late ‘70s, there was a gradual shift toward how he used it to hide or reduce the public’s perception of his disability in the ‘80s and onward. Chapter II, on the other hand, focused much more directly on his image by comparing the mid-twentieth century’s perspective about his handicap to that of the early-twenty-first century.

Now, a sensible teacher might respectfully interject at this point asking: in an already crowded social studies curriculum, what would be the advantages of spending time on something as specialized as Franklin Roosevelt’s public image then and now? The simple answer is: deeper level thinking. Throughout this pursuit, students will inevitably become familiar with Roosevelt’s role in the Great Depression and WWII in addition to his Fireside Chats, New Deal relief programs, and domestic and foreign policies—all of which are already directly mentioned in the New York State Core Curriculum. However, this content goes farther to facilitate deeper level thinking because a person’s public image is made up of a number of factors. For instance, in order to begin discussing Roosevelt’s image in either century, students must first grasp the essentials of how a political figure presents his or herself: through media. Walking up the revised version of Bloom’s taxonomy, they begin with recognizing and recalling important aspects of media such as newspaper, radio, and film (Remember). They learn to interpret the messages behind each article or broadcast as they make inferences in order to summarize, categorize, and compare them to each other.
(Understand). As they categorize, they make generalizations about different groupings (Apply). They begin to differentiate and even attribute motives to the perspectives of political cartoons (Analyze). When they compare the two centuries, they critique the past’s and their present’s perception using all the steps mentioned above for both time periods (Evaluate). And finally, at the highest level, they are able to create their own conclusions and predict the direction of that image in the future (Create). Therefore, not only does this content build off of the established curriculum, it adds the task of analyzing students’ contemporary society, which requires deeper level thinking and makes the learning more relevant.

Of course, another essential reason for teaching about Roosevelt’s use of the media and his image is that it cannot be done without exploiting a wide range of primary sources. Better still, many of these primary sources include multimedia so that students who excel at any learning style may thrive. Although there are many literary first-hand accounts available, it is not enough to simply read about the way Roosevelt projected his tenor to millions through his Fireside Chats, or the way he animated his face and gestures before crowds of thousands at his speeches, or even the way he used his cane, braces, and an aid to pull off the illusion of health for the nation. Students need to hear and see all of those things for themselves; and fortunately, there is an abundance of resources that enables them to do so. Therein lays the main objective of this chapter: to provide a compilation of six locations that serve as resources so that teachers may be effectively equipped to instruct students about FDR’s use of the media and the manipulation of his image. However, any raw list of resources will prove useless to teachers unless they have strategies to exploit them. Therefore, the first task of this chapter is to disclose four evidence-based teaching practices
that will complement the aforementioned resources. These strategies include questioning, identifying similarities and differences, summarization, and nonlinguistic representation.

**Teaching Strategies**

**Questioning.** Although questioning may seem like an obvious tactic that teachers use naturally, asking the right question is more difficult than it appears at first glance. But what constitutes a “right” or “wrong” question? The answer will vary from professional to professional, but the questions that provoke the highest level of thinking are inferential and analytical questions. Asking “who was the first president of the United States?” is fine for assessing students’ recall for specific information; however, it does not require students to interact with their prior knowledge and “fill in the blanks” at all. Inferential questions, on the other hand, are generally open-ended and require students to use their prior knowledge. Asking students, “how is television used during presidential elections?” and “how does inflation affect the value of money?” forces them to, first, think about what they know about television during presidential elections or inflation, and second, attack the question using that background knowledge. Analytical questions go even further to insight higher order thinking as they require students to think critically about presented information. Dean et al. explain how to make the most of these questions by framing them “…around the skills of analyzing errors, constructing support, and analyzing perspectives.” Given an event, such as the Watergate Scandal, teachers could ask, “what was Nixon’s mistake in handling the issue?”, “what could he have done better?”, and “why would people react the way they did?” These types of questions insight the highest level of thought, and they also provoke the most interesting responses.

**Identifying Similarities and Differences.** Whether it means comparing one brand of sneakers to another or the long route home verses the short route, this is a tactic that people
use during their everyday life that also proves extremely effective in the classroom. Dean et al. added quantifiable evidence that the strategy works, stating that “The 12 studies included in the 2010 study produced an average effect size of 0.66, which is equivalent to a 25 percentile point gain.”

Identifying similarities and differences does not necessarily have to be limited to comparing and contrasting. Other variations include classifying, creating metaphors, and creating analogies. The benefit of all these is that they ask students to combine prior knowledge with new content and demonstrate their understanding. The tactic lends itself well to graphic organizers such as venn diagrams, comparison matrixes, and the imaginative visuals that come with metaphors and analogies. But most of all, it entices students to analyze concepts in detail so that they notice intricacies that help retain new material in relation to prior knowledge.

_Summarization._ Dean et al. described summarization as “…the process of distilling information down to its most salient points to aid in understanding, memorizing, and learning the relevant material.” It is a valuable tactic because it is inherently metacognitive. It forces students to reflect on what they have learned, prioritize the most important aspects, and then articulate them. Nevertheless, simply prompting students to summarize an experience can prove problematic if they do not understand the process thoroughly. It is worth orienting students with a series of steps that help them build their summarizing skills to be more effective tools. Also, many teachers have found that summary frames are helpful because they give students a standardized framework to work with and apply to many concepts. But another important tactic that makes this strategy even more effective is to use reciprocal teaching. Asking students to teach each other through jig-saw activities or group summaries adds a sense of individual accountability that will help motivate students to create
quality products. They also add a purpose beyond developing a metacognitive skill for students are expected to teach others using their summaries as a tool.

**Nonlinguistic Representation.** The most versatile strategy discussed here is nonlinguistic representation. According to psychologists, there are two ways in which people store information: 1) linguistically, through words; and 2) non-linguistically, through images. Where the former is a commonly wielded tool in the teacher’s shed of learning, the latter is frequently ignored—and at a cost to student’s comprehension of content. But what exactly does it mean to cater a lesson toward nonlinguistic representation? Most would logically react by adding more visually stimulating material to their teaching. Although they are on the right track, nonlinguistic representation is about much more than simply using images; it is about using *imagery*, which is “expressed as mental pictures or physical sensations, such as smell, taste, touch, kinesthetic association, and sound.” In other words, imagery involves anything that appeals to the senses. These could include graphic organizers; building models or manipulatives; generating mental pictures; creating illustrations and pictographs; and engaging with the environment through kinesthetic activity. Dean et al. revealed the quantitative value of this strategy when they explained how recent studies in 2010 showed a positive improvement of 19 percentile points for students when their teachers “explicitly teach students how to use nonlinguistic representations and promote the use of these strategies as a way for students to enhance their learning and achievement.” Furthermore, this strategy is versatile because it can be combined with others, including summarization and identifying similarities and differences, through the use of graphic organizers.

An important clarification to make is that nonlinguistic representation does not mean the abandoning of anything to do with words. It simply involves focusing more on the
sensory images that come with them. Imagine reading a speech aloud or asking students to independently read a narrative. These are typically linguistic activities; however, a nonlinguistic component could easily be added by asking students to focus on the mental images that the words provoke. Consider describing a setting before reading the speech. Mention the attitude of the audience and whether it was hot or cold that day. Give students the opportunity to imagine how it felt to be standing shoulder to shoulder with thousands of onlookers. If you can inspire a mental image that complements the message of the speech, students will retain it far more effectively than if they were asked to memorize its highlights.

**Teaching Resources and Suggestions**

Now, armed with four powerful evidence-based teaching strategies, we turn to six excellent resources that complement them. Although there are countless materials that can be used to explore Franklin Roosevelt’s manipulation of his image and the media, the six highlighted here were chosen because they offer several opportunities to engage with multiple means of instruction. Each resource is a physical location that would easily facilitate a fieldtrip for both large and small groups. After all, no matter how well teachers incorporate multimedia and primary sources into their lessons, there is nothing that compares to visiting places where history either happened or is commemorated. These could include historic sites as well as museums that surround visitors with artifacts, allowing them to tangibly interact with their past. Furthermore, one of the most powerful ways for students to understand the lasting implications of historical figures and events is to have them visit monuments and memorials built to honor them. This provides students with a double purpose of first, understanding the figure or event in question; and second, evaluating the perspective that the monument presents. The six sites discussed will be ordered by proximity from north to south.
so that teachers looking to take advantage of them will be able to tell which are most practical to visit based on their location.

**The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Museum.** It seems fitting to begin with a site that wraps everything mentioned above into one well-rounded package. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Museum, located in Hyde Park, New York a few miles north from Poughkeepsie, acts as both a historic site and a monument to FDR; but most of all, it is a state-of-the-art museum. It has moved well beyond the traditional museum practice of showing glass cased artifacts with written descriptions to explain them. In fact, after its $6 million renovation and reopening in June of 2013, this Presidential Museum is arguably more interactive than the Smithsonian. The new design is incredibly participatory with immersive audio-visual theatres, motion sensing display lights that draw attention to important objects as visitors approach, interactive touch screen displays, digital flip-books, and immersive Fireside Chat environments. That is not to say that the museum has abandoned the practice of showing authentic artifacts, because it surely has not. However, it would be difficult for a student or adult of any age not to lose themself in this brilliantly designed window to another time.

The FDR Presidential Museum houses two exhibits: a temporary one and a permanent one. At the time this chapter was written, the temporary exhibit focused on the public and private lives of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt through a display of photographs nearing a thousand. In order to find out what temporary exhibit is on display in the future, a quick visit to the museum’s webpage will provide a wealth of information—which is also extremely helpful for some preemptive pre-teaching before a visit. The permanent exhibit, on the other hand, is more consistent. As mentioned in Chapter II, the exhibit’s objective is to “tell the story of the Roosevelt presidency beginning in the depths of the Great Depression
and continuing through the New Deal and World War II with an emphasis on both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt’s relationship with the American people.”

It accomplishes its goal thoroughly. Each room adheres to a theme that progresses visitors through that story using a number of artifacts and interactive displays.

In terms of Roosevelt’s interaction with the media and his image, this museum provides a very balanced perspective. There are sections that explicitly mention his disability and his efforts to conceal it, just as there are constant references to FDR in the media through political cartoons, newspaper clippings, and newsreels as they were seen seven decades ago. Of course, restricting your focus to the media may not be effective here because the museum offers so many fantastic opportunities to explore the breadth of Roosevelt’s presidency. It is, however, worth offering a word of caution: the permanent exhibit extends over two floors and covers a twelve year span of time—a particularly active span, at that. Depending on the age of your students, you may want provide them with an explicit task in order to focus and help them make sense of the, at times, overwhelming amount of information.

One suggestion is to put students into small groups and assign them a particular theme—which would ideally coincide with one of the rooms in either the permanent or temporary exhibit. If your students are younger, it would also help to assign them a series of questions that would guide them to ultimately summarize their assigned room. For older students, it may be appropriate to simply ask them to summarize their room using specific artifacts as examples. In an era where every student seems to have a smartphone, it would be an interesting idea to have them photograph artifacts and use them to present later. In either case, the next class could be dedicated to each group presenting and explaining their summaries. For an opportunity to add more depth to the presentations through identifying similarities and differences, ask students to specifically note which presidential term their
room fell in—with the exception of the first and last few rooms, the permanent exhibit is organized into terms. While groups are presenting after the visit, ask students to identify the major issues and agendas of each term so that they can compare them during a class activity following the presentations. Naturally, the assignment should not discourge students from experiencing the museum as a whole. Do not expect them to absorb everything, but be sure to allow ample time for them to explore—an hour will not be enough!

A final, and by no means small, benefit to visiting this location is the Museum Store. Located next to the entrance of the Visitor Center, this space appears to be a library at first glance. The walls are lined with books written about a variety of topics relating to the Roosevelts. They range from cook books and children’s literature about Fala, FDR’s dog, to scholarly publications that would prove salient for teachers and professors alike. The variation in reading levels is extremely useful for planning differentiated instruction for research projects at any level. But beyond secondary sources, there are also several books that compile speeches from FDR, Eleanor, Churchill, and several other relevant figures of the time period. These in tandem with the propaganda poster prints and audio CDs available for sale provide exceptional opportunities to introduce primary sources into lessons.

To plan a trip for a large group, it would be more than worth contacting the Education Specialist, Jeff Urbin, to discuss further ways to use this site to its highest potential. Darian Rivera is the contact listed for when you are ready to schedule a fieldtrip. Each contact is equipped to describe the facilities available at the museum as well as the resources that this site has to offer. The phone number and email address for both of these individuals are provided at the end of the chapter.

*The Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt Historic Site.* After a trip to FDR’s Presidential Museum, you will already find yourself on his Hyde Park estate—which includes the home
that he grew up in. The National Parks Service maintains the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt as a Historic Site, and it offers a very personal insight into FDR’s life as both a politician as well as a man with a disability. Visitors are free to roam the grounds including the fields, the stable, the guest house, and the Rose Garden—where FDR, Eleanor, and their dog, Fala, are buried. However, if you want the opportunity to get inside of the main house—and trust me, you do—you will need to arrange a tour. Tours are available often throughout the day, and they are given by a knowledgeable park ranger. A joint ticket may be purchased which includes admission to the Presidential Museum as well. It is worth mentioning here that groups of 10 or more require a reservation. You may either call or reserve a tour online—contact information for both methods is provided at the end of the chapter.

Before embarking on the tour, take the time to watch the 22 minute introduction video, *A Rendezvous With History*, at the Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center—the building where you buy your tickets. It shows frequently in the theatre free of charge. The film briefly covers some of the major aspects of Roosevelt’s life and career with interviews from family members and citizens who lived through his presidency. It will help establish a context for students who need some help “getting into the mood.”

The tour begins in the Visitor Center as a park ranger describes the Hyde Park region through a mosaic map installed in the floor tiles just outside of the theatre. Then, it progresses outdoors for a quarter mile. On the short walk, you will pass the Presidential Library and Museum, the Rose Garden, and then halt at the main house’s front porch. A quirky source of inquiry on this porch is the tropical style landscaping that is grown in the greenhouse to the east. This raises the important point that for the majority of his lifetime, this house belonged to FDR’s mother, Sarah Delano Roosevelt—who he outlived only by a few years. Therefore, despite the fact that FDR convinced his mother to expand the house
significantly in the early 1900s during the start of his political career, many of the aesthetic touches on the house were representative of her own style. A major benefit to this location is that it was donated to the National Parks Service shortly after FDR’s death, and consequently, maintained the way he left it.

Inside the house, you will not be able to explore every room due to barriers placed in the interest of preservation; however, visitors are at the very least granted a view of most rooms connected to the foyer and the west wing. The foyer showcases Roosevelt’s vast collection of naval paintings and Revolutionary War cartoons—a topic of interest during the King and Queen of England’s visit to Hyde Park in 1939. It offers a view of several rooms including the dining and sitting room. The first floor of the west wing is dedicated to FDR’s massive study. A platform has been constructed, which allows visitors to walk partially into the study and steal a view. A keen observer will notice a custom-designed wheelchair sitting in the southeast section of the room—another subtle allusion to the reality of Roosevelt’s everyday life.

Furthermore, another common topic of inquiry that surfaces just before the park ranger instructs visitors to ascend the staircase to the second floor is, how did FDR get from one floor to the next? The park ranger will point out a large dumbwaiter just before the servants’ quarters on the east wing of the second floor. Inside the manually pulled elevator sits another custom-designed wheelchair. The ranger will explain that although Roosevelt did develop a method of scooting himself up the stairs one step at a time using his powerful arms, he often used his upper body strength to hoist himself between floors in the oversized dumbwaiter. The remainder of the second floor was dedicated to rooms for FDR, his family, and guests.
As an educational opportunity, this site offers much in the way of nonlinguistic representation. In essence, the entire location is a kinesthetic activity where students engage in a very visual window into the past. In order to build on this further, students could participate in an assignment where they are asked to explore the grounds not explicitly visited on the tour using a map obtained at the Visitor and Education Center. Their task would be to note specific artifacts or environmental features that describe how a patrician—such as Franklin Roosevelt—lived in the early twentieth century. Over lunch at Uncle Sam’s Canteen—the restaurant modeled after a WWII era cafeteria attached to the Visitor Center—the teacher and chaperons could meet with each group and debrief on what they noticed using the map as a nonlinguistic tool.

Moreover, the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt Historic Site offers a unique exercise in critical thought. Instruct students to refrain from using the ramps and features designed for accessibility as they travel Roosevelt’s estate and Presidential Museum. Ask them to take special notice of every obstacle they encounter—curbs, stairs, rocky pathways, uneven floors, and even long walks. Encourage them to ask questions about the environment so that the park rangers will tell stories about how Roosevelt used his quarter-mile driveway as a physical therapy exercise, white-knuckling his crutches to take step after agonizing step, or how he would greet visitors seated in a chair at his front door and then be carried inside while they were occupied so they would meet him already seated in the next room. Ask students to note the difference in technology as park rangers explain that the gas-filled bulbs stationed throughout FDR’s home served as early fire extinguishers to temper his phobia of fire. After students have carefully considered all of this, ask them the analytical question, what was it like to live with a physical disability in the early twentieth century—even for a man of Franklin Roosevelt’s wealth and status?
The Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park. If you find yourself teaching or traveling to New York City with your class, Four Freedoms Park is a must-see. For one, it is a beautiful public space that provides some of the most breathtaking views of the city. Its position on Roosevelt Island in the middle of the East River gives it an unparalleled vantage point for seeing such historic buildings as the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building, the United Nations Complex, as well as a distant—and currently under construction—Freedom Tower. It provides ample space for a large group, and an email to the address provided at the end of the chapter could arrange a private tour for the class.

Four Freedoms Park is the most recently constructed monument to FDR, at least until the completion of the FDR Hope Memorial just north of the park in 2014, and there are a number of educational purposes for visiting this park. First, it does a very tasteful job at memorializing Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms Speech in 1941. Naturally, it would take some pre-teaching to familiarize students with the significance of the speech, the ideas behind it, and its legacy in the United Nations; however, standing in a white-granite room reading Roosevelt’s words etched in stone and gazing out at the United Nations Complex on the other side of the river can be incredibly inspiring. One of Roosevelt’s most successful media tactics was his timing. FDR’s Four Freedoms Speech was delivered less than a month after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the US entry into WWII. His declaration of the four universal freedoms provided Americans with a deeper moral reason to fight. A suggestion that might enrich the experience, and also add a verbal-linguistic aspect, is to bring a loud audio-device and a recording of the speech. Ask students to refrain from speaking and listen to the speech while they read along or look out onto the view from the open wall in the back of the room. Particularly for students who do not live in a New York sized city, there is
something uniquely empowering about standing in the shadow of those colossal sky-scrapers and listening to Roosevelt’s electrifying message.

Another educational opportunity is to scrutinize the only representation of FDR’s image in the park. This adds a nonlinguistic representation that will help students identify with the concept of Roosevelt’s physical image. As mentioned in Chapter II, Louis Khan’s decision to embody Roosevelt in a larger-than-life bust of his head was a conservative choice. It offers a one-dimensional image that focuses squarely on FDR as a political and presidential figure. Although this may be appropriate here, considering the fact that the park is dedicated to a politically and ideologically motivated action, it is ripe with a chance for comparison. Asking students to document the bronze sculpture with photographs and compare it to other representations of Roosevelt—and other presidents, for that matter—will provoke a deeper discussion of why we choose to show people in a certain light. Furthermore, a fitting line of guided and inferential questions for a discussion or short essay could include the following: Would it have been appropriate to sculpt Roosevelt standing? If so, should there have been leg braces exposed beneath his pant-legs or a cane to the side? How would that change the message of the monument?

**The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial.** If the capital district is within your reach, an extremely valuable fieldtrip location is the Franklin D. Roosevelt National Memorial. As part of the National Mall, the FDR Memorial is free to the public, within walking distance of several other monuments, and ideal for large groups. Unlike Four Freedoms Park, this monument does not offer staggering views of metropolitan skyline—although its position on the western bank of the Tidal Basin delivers a beautiful vantage of the Jefferson and Washington Memorials—however, it does provide a more thorough
The monument entails a series of open rooms that walk visitors chronologically through Roosevelt’s presidency, term by term. The rooms are filled with sculptures that represent both specific individuals, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, and general people, including American citizens waiting in a soup kitchen line. The walls feature inspirational quotes relating to the major issues of Roosevelt’s presidency as well as a series of waterfalls to highlight his love of the sea. Nevertheless, the most gripping component of this monument is the way that Roosevelt is physically represented through the two statues sculpted in his image.

The dichotomy between these two statues represents an extremely charged debate that came to its climax at the turn of the last century. The original statue, located toward the end of the monument’s storyline, depicts a stoic looking Franklin Roosevelt, confidently surveying his own accomplishments from a seated position. He is dramatically draped in his naval cape, which conceals the majority of his body—with the exception of his hands crossed on the ends of the arm rest and his left leg jetting out between the front ends of the cape. The statue is larger than life and seems to radiate an air of presidential pomp as it overlooks visitors from the second tier of its platform. This statue is more typical of presidential monuments because it tends toward immortalizing its subject through a show of power and authority. It was present at the original dedication in 1997. Nevertheless, according to some very vocal public activists for the disabled, this statue did not say enough about Roosevelt in terms of his physical condition. Consequently, a series of demonstrations prompted President William Clinton to ask Congress to mandate the addition of a second sculpture more clearly depicting Roosevelt’s disability. The sculpture was added, and the monument was
rededicated in 2001. Naturally, the second sculpture—greeting visitors at the entrance—embodies a very different perspective than the first. For one, it is much smaller as it shows a life-size representation of FDR seated in one of his custom designed wheelchairs. It is also more personable in the way that Roosevelt wears his familiar campaigning fedora, his pince-nez glasses, and a subtle smirk above his stereotypically pronounced jaw. The newer sculpture rests not only on the same level as visitors, but also toward the center of the courtyard, which makes it more inviting than the first.

In terms of teachable moments, this monument offers a bounty of options. First, assuming that you have already taught a unit on the Great Depression and World War II, it provides an opportunity to reinforce content through nonlinguistic representation. Students can touch and interact with the less abstract statues of citizens in a soup kitchen line or the citizen listening to a Fireside Chat next to their radio. They can examine the bronze relief of Roosevelt’s funeral march. They may also consider the more abstract designs lining the five columns that represent Roosevelt’s social programs. In terms of the many inspirational quotations inscribed on the wall, consider asking students to choose their favorite(s) and explain why they identified with them. In order to capitalize on a nonlinguistic component of those words, ask students to describe what mental images each of their favorite quotations provoked. What did they see, and what did they think about when they read them?

Furthermore, consider combining the strategy of nonlinguistic representation with identifying similarities and differences. Start with comparing and contrasting the two statues of FDR. Each was intended to portray a different aspect of Roosevelt’s life: the older embodies a political and presidential image; the newer symbolizes a more personal and intimate focus on his physical struggle. As a result, despite their common subject, there are several stark contrasts between the two. Ask students to make claims about what each statue
symbolizes to them, and then ask them to support those claims using evidence from their observations. Unlike Four Freedoms Park, this monument provides all the tools needed for a strong comparison at one site. However, considering the fact that you are already standing in the National Mall, why limit students’ comparisons to the representations in this single monument? Whether or not time is a factor, a short three minute walk north will bring students to the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, a 10 minute walk southeast will lead them to the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, and a 15 minute walk northwest will take them to the Lincoln Memorial. Each of these includes a physical image of its subject, and each throws fodder into a worthy discussion of how we choose to represent our leaders and why. A suggested series of questioning could include the following: Why are Thomas Jefferson and Martin Luther King Jr. standing whereas Franklin Roosevelt is seated? How are the statues of Lincoln and FDR different and alike? What does a monument say about its subject if they are standing vs. sitting? How does a person’s physical condition affect their ability to lead?

There is also a small gift shop at the visitor center next to the entrance of the monument. Although not as complete as the store at his Presidential Museum, the store here offers a selection of books about FDR and the monument itself. A useful product that was not available at the Presidential Museum were two newspaper reproductions from the day the United States declared war on Japan and the day that Roosevelt died—complete with advertisements and the funny pages.

_The Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation._ In the Deep South, about an hour south of Atlanta, Georgia, lays the small but historic town of Warm Springs. This town fostered and witnessed the rebirth of Franklin Roosevelt after his paralysis. Here he built the first treatment facility for polio and recovered enough to pursue a second political career that led him to the White House. The treatment facility, called the Roosevelt Warm
Springs Institute for Rehabilitation, still functions today under the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. Although the institute now has a modern state-of-the-art facility, it has maintained the buildings where Roosevelt pioneered many of his treatment methods. A self-guided tour walks visitors outdoors through the quadrangle inspired by Thomas Jefferson’s design for the University of Virginia. Although visitors cannot enter many of the treatment facilities, numbers coinciding with the tour brochure are placed nearby windows so that they can see the emptied pools and equipment that still stands within them. These artifacts, though they are powerful symbols of Roosevelt’s ambition and practicality, do not say much about his physical image. There are, however, two unique sculptures of Roosevelt that do.

The first features his bust among the other busts of fifteen scientists and two laymen who furthered the development of a polio vaccine. It rests outside of Founders Hall and has been dubbed “The Polio Hall of Fame.” The second is a wall fresco in a small courtyard depicting Roosevelt seated in a wheelchair with leg braces visibly protruding from his pant legs into his shoes. He is working with a boy who is standing using crutches and another set of braces that lock into his shoes as well. On the opposite side of the courtyard is another fresco of Helen Keller knelt on the ground and holding the hand of a small girl standing on a platform in front of her. A statement on the wall between the two frescos paraphrases Roosevelt saying “THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR BUT FEAR ITSELF.”

An important note to make about this site, however, is that Roosevelt had a very different role at Warm Springs before his presidency. Where it is easy to get lost in his four terms as a very active Commander-in-Chief, Roosevelt wore many hats at his facility in Warm Springs, from that of an unofficial doctor and physical therapist to a landscape architect and engineer. But above all, in the privacy of his facility and with his fellow polio
victims, he was able to embrace his paralysis, and that is important to keep in mind while interpreting particularly the latter piece of art. This also serves as a major difference from the controversy over his depiction in the national monument at Washington D.C. In this case, portraying Roosevelt with a disability was an obvious choice because it was essential to his role as a care provider. His disability was extremely appropriate to his image at Warm Springs. In this role, he never needed to hide his condition because it lent gravity to the authority of his understanding.

But what does this mean in terms of teaching implications? For one, a visit to this site would introduce students to a different perspective of Franklin Roosevelt. It would add a new layer of depth to their understanding because it emphasizes FDR not as a president or even a politician, but as a polio survivor and a health care provider. The institute reveals an important stop on Roosevelt’s road to recovery that heavily impacted his world view. It is interesting to compare his role as an unofficial doctor at Warm Springs to his frequent depiction as a doctor in political cartoons a decade later when he used his New Deal programs to remedy the symptoms of the Great Depression. Assisting students in making this connection reinforces the life lesson that leaders are not created in a vacuum; they face real life challenges and learn to either cope or rise above them. At Warm Springs, Franklin Roosevelt discovered a way to reduce the lasting effects of polio. He wasn’t the first to do so, but he made an effort to improve and expand on the tactics being used. He poured about two thirds of his fortune into the rehabilitation center and used his role as Governor of New York and President of the United States to continue raising funds for it up to the end of his life. Nevertheless, this part of his life is significantly underplayed.

During Roosevelt’s motorcade-campaigns for governor, he openly mentioned misconceptions about his health to crowds. Houck and Kiewe cited Roosevelt introducing
himself to a crowd at Syracuse sarcastically stating, “Well, here’s the helpless, hopeless invalid my opponents have been talking about. I have made fifteen speeches today. This will be the sixteenth.” Little did the audience know that he was standing up using a bar mounted to the front seat of his tour car and steal braces wrapped around his legs for support. During his presidential campaigns four years later, however, Roosevelt was not nearly as explicit acknowledging his disability. A tour of the Roosevelt Institute exhibits the efforts that he made to overcome, or at least cope with, his paralysis—only so that he could underplay that accomplishment a decade later. This context is a brilliant springboard that sets students up for some social criticism. Ask them: what role does disability plays in politics today? Would they vote for a man with a disability to be Governor? What about President? What is their rationale? What procedures are in place if a president suffers a health problem and is consequently unable to lead—either temporarily or permanently? Furthermore, how do the artistic renderings of FDR at the Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation compare to others at the FDR Monument or Four Freedoms Park? How does each portray him in a different role?

The Roosevelt Little White House Historic Site. The final fieldtrip location discussed here is on the same campus as the Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation, but it is run as a Georgia State Park. In many ways, the Roosevelt Little White House Historic Site is comparable to the Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. It consists of two museums—one focused on Roosevelt in general, and one targeted at the Historic Pools—and the Little White House Complex. Naturally, the story behind the Little White House is important to understand prior making the trip. After discovering the positive impact that the springs at Warm Springs had on his legs in 1924, Roosevelt regularly visited the town. He traveled to Georgia twice a year, during the spring
and fall. Finally, he decided to build a cabin near the pools in 1932, just before he was inaugurated in 1933. Due to the cabin’s white exterior, it was dubbed the “Little White House” after he became president. In many ways, Warm Springs was a safe haven for Roosevelt where he did not have to be concerned about hiding his disability so meticulously. Only a select few reporters were allowed to enter the grounds, where the majority was kept at the gatehouse of the estate. Due to his longstanding activity in the area the decade before he became president, many in Warm Springs saw FDR as a friendly neighbor. Gallagher cited several stories where Roosevelt would slip away from the secret service and drive the backroads in his hand controlled Ford car stopping to talk to farmers along the way.

Nowadays, visitors begin their experience at the FDR Memorial Museum, which was renovated and reopened in 2004. Here, they purchase a ticket which includes admission to both museums and the Little White House. Much like at the Presidential Library, visitors enjoy an introductory film that is shorter, but similar to its counterpart at Hyde Park. After the film visitors move on to explore the first museum.

The FDR Memorial Museum is unique from each of the other five locations discussed because it offers an extremely balanced representation of Franklin Roosevelt with attention to his role as a neighbor in Warm Springs. Through a mix of authentic glass cased artifacts and interactive displays, the three most easily distinguishable roles are Roosevelt the president, Roosevelt the man with a disability, and Roosevelt the neighbor. The first is the part that visitors would expect to see. A walkway along the perimeter of the room takes visitors step-by-step through Roosevelt’s political trajectory. Several displays reveal campaign items and posters. One display includes a dome positioned above visitors with a speaker installed in the center. Visitors are encouraged to hit a button on the panel in front of them that corresponds to a specific speech. When they decide, the shape of the dome projects
the sound at them from above, and they are immersed in the acoustics of Roosevelt’s booming tenor.

The second main role, Roosevelt the man with a disability, is one that may surprise a few students, but is also appropriate. Several displays describe FDR’s contraction of polio and his consequential paralysis, including one that does so through reproductions of the first newspaper article to mention his “recovery” at Warm Springs. Another display reveals his bathing suit and a photo of Roosevelt smiling on the bank of the pools. A more interactive display describes the springs and emphasizes the uniqueness of their temperature by presenting two bars that visitors may touch. One bar is kept at the temperature of normal spring water, where the second is kept at 88 degrees to represent the temperature of the springs that Roosevelt swam in. There are also several other allusions to FDR’s paralysis throughout the room, including another one of his hand-controlled cars and a display with an early model of his custom designed wheel chairs and braces.

The most unique role that the FDR Memorial Museum exposes is Roosevelt the neighbor. This is the most humanizing part of the museum. Over the past seven decades, Roosevelt’s image as one of the nation’s most influential presidents has made it difficult to relate with the fact that he was a man like any other. The artifacts at this museum drive that point home by exposing not only the campaign memorabilia, the domestic and foreign policies, the speeches, and the radio addresses, but also the everyday knick-knacks that he had in his home. Visitors can scan through FDR’s extensive stamp collection. They can see the patio furniture that his mother gave him as a housewarming gift. They can see the massive collections of wooden canes that neighbors at Warm Springs crafted for him. A visit to this museum will help peel away the formal image of Franklin Roosevelt and reveal a more personal perspective.
Next, visitors move on to Little White House itself. They are allowed to wander through the guest house and servants quarters, and then they are allowed to walk through the President’s cabin where a park ranger is stationed to tell stories and answer questions. A point of interest is that in 1945, Roosevelt died in his Warm Springs cabin. Visitors are allowed to stand in the room where he was posing for the now infamous “Unfinished Portrait” when he suffered a massive stroke. They are also allowed to walk through the bedroom where he died shortly thereafter. There is something profoundly humbling about standing in the room where the longest reigning president succumbed to nature—a moment that had resounding implications on decisions and events both domestic and worldwide.

After exploring the Little White House, visitors are led to a building attached to the entrance of the complex, where a series of displays emphasize his legacy and The Unfinished Portrait rests solemnly on the wall.

In order to visit the second museum, the Historic Pool Museum, visitors must walk down the hill to the other side of the campus. Although much smaller than the FDR Memorial Museum, the Historic Pools Museum offers an extremely detailed insight into Roosevelt’s clinical life at Warm Springs before he reentered politics in 1928. Its message is parallel to the one disclosed at the Institute for Rehabilitation: that Franklin Roosevelt was as much a healer as a politician. A series of wall segments perpendicular to the length of the room tell the narrative of the springs and how they evolved into the first polio treatment facility. Several clinical artifacts, such as a therapy table and an iron lung, are stationed between each segment. On the right wall, across from the segments, are several photographs of Roosevelt swimming and interacting with patients in the pools. In many ways, the museum distances itself from Roosevelt’s presidential image in favor of an image as a healer.
and philanthropist. It stresses how FDR was quick to reinvent himself to serve as a “Doctor, Consulting Engineer, and Landscape Architect.”

The most powerful section of the museum is the pool itself. Visitors are allowed to walk through the pool complex that Roosevelt first swam in almost ninety years ago. Although the pools are no longer filled with spring water, visitors may walk down a staircase into the dry pool. There is a fountain at the base of the pool that still spouts water from the springs. There are also replicas of the platforms Roosevelt developed during his therapy sessions with other polio survivors. His influence as an advocate for his fellow polio sufferers is apparent, and his many roles at Warm Springs tend to overshadow his titles in New York and Washington D.C. at the Historic Pools Museum.

The final component worth mentioning is the gift shop at the Little White House. Although smaller than the one at the Presidential Library, this shop offers several unique items that are not available at the stores in the capital or Hyde Park. For example, there are very affordable prints of the Unfinished Portrait and also reproductions of posters that artists in the Works Progress Administration produced. The shop sells copies of the HBO film *Warm Springs* that tells a relatively accurate—and emotionally charged—story of Roosevelt’s recovery. Like the other stores, this gift shop sells books about the Roosevelts in addition to the typical souvenirs including reproductions of campaign pins and ties with “Vote Roosevelt” advertisements printed all over them.

Teachers will find many opportunities to increase higher level thinking at this site. For example, one of the most important aspects of a person’s image is the number of roles people remember them playing after they are gone. Roosevelt wore many hats, and the two museums and historical site featured at the Little White House complex provides evidence of that. One suggestion for identifying similarities and differences is to assign students the task
of identifying as many roles that FDR served as possible. They can be specific (stamp collector, student, speaker, etc.) or general (politician, man with a disability, healer, etc.).

Ask students to take pictures of the artifacts that support their claims. After the trip, conduct an activity where students split into small groups and then categorize the roles they identified. Ask them to group their roles into more general categories and produce a poster or portfolio to visually display their categories labeling and featuring their photographs as evidence.

Another suggestion is to ensure that every student partakes in the interactive components of the two museums. Encourage every student to stand under the speech dome, to touch the metal bars, and to let the spring water at the fountain in the pool run through their fingers. Ask them inferential and analytical questions as they are doing so to focus on the nonlinguistic component of the activity: What images run through your mind during that speech? What words or phrases do you think resonated most with people listening during the time period? What does the temperature of this water remind you of? And finally, ask your students to reflect on their experience and summarize the trip. Ask them to focus on what resonated with them the most—these summaries serve a double purpose for: 1) assessing what students took away from the experience, and 2) deciding what to improve for next time.

Conclusion

Higher order thinking skills are essential for preparing students to think for themselves and to function in society. The four strategies of questioning, identifying similarities and differences, summarization, and nonlinguistic representation serve as effective springboards to that end. However, the content is just as important as the strategy. Studying Franklin Roosevelt’s use of the media and his image allows students to think critically about their own world and to interact with the past. It requires students to think deeply about how a person forges a public image and what happens to their legacy after they
are gone. They begin to notice how rare it was to see an allusion to Roosevelt’s paralysis in public representations until the turn of the century. Even now, the issue can be a threatening taboo. More importantly, they realize that a person’s legacy changes over time. Roosevelt wouldn’t have considered himself an activist for rights for people with disabilities in his own time. In fact, he worked tirelessly to minimize the public’s perception of his paralysis; however, in the late twentieth century, he was whole heartedly adopted as a symbol of their cause.

The six locations described in this chapter provide a wealth of opportunities for students to deeply analyze how the way a person represents themself affects their public image. But they also show how regional that image can be. For example, students with easy access to the first four locations in the northern half of the country will receive a relatively balanced perspective that leans toward favoring Roosevelt as a presidential figure over a neighbor or a man with a disability. Although his paralysis was mentioned at the two locations at Hyde Park and his national monument, an emphasis was placed on his later political career. At Four Freedoms Park, the most recently constructed monument, the sole focus was targeted at FDR’s political career with his only physical representation omitting his body completely. Nevertheless, students who have easier access to the two locations in the South at Warm Springs will see an image much more tethered to Roosevelt’s struggle with polio and his role as a healer. Although one could argue that the FDR Memorial Museum at the Little White House presents a balanced portrayal, the Historic Pools Museum and the Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation all but ignore his role as president in favor of his role as a polio victim who led the charge to conquer the virus.

In light of this, it is appropriate to end this chapter with a list of resources that could further supplement a teacher seeking to inspire higher level thinking with students by
exploring Roosevelt’s use of the media and the manipulation of his image. It includes the six field trip locations discussed above, eight digital resources that provide primary and secondary materials, two audio disks that feature primary material in the form of recorded speeches, five films with scenes that may prove valuable, and six publications that will provide background knowledge for the content at hand:

**Field Trips**

**Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Museum,** 4079 Albany Post Road, Hyde Park, NY 12538  
Hours: 9am – 5pm daily, November – March, 9am – 6pm daily, April –October  
Field Trip Contacts:  
  Jeffrey Urbin, Education Specialist, (845) 486-7761 or jeffrey.urbin@nara.gov  
  Darian Rivera, Field Trip Contact, (845) 486-7751 or darian.rivera@nara.gov  
http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/

**Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt Historic Site,** 4097 Albany Post Road, Hyde Park, NY 12538  
Hours: 9am – 5pm daily  
Reservation contacts:  
  Phone number: 1-877-444-6777 (individuals)  
  Phone number: 1-877-559-6777 (groups of 10 or more)  
  Online reservations: www.recreation.gov  
http://www.nps.gov/hofr/index.htm

**Franklin Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park,** 1 FDR Four Freedoms Park  
Roosevelt Island, NY 10044  
Hours: Wed-Mon, 9am – 5pm (closed Tuesdays)  
Private tours: tours@fdrffp.org  
http://www.fdrfourfreedomspark.org/

**Franklin D. Roosevelt National Monument,** 900 Ohio Dr. SW, Washington, D.C., DC 20024  
Hours: 10am – 11pm daily  
http://www.nps.gov/frde/index.htm
Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation,
Roosevelt Warm Springs
6135 Roosevelt Hwy
Warm Springs, Georgia 31830
Historic Tour Phone #: (706) 655-5670
http://gvra.georgia.gov/warmsprings/

Roosevelt Little White House Historic Site/ FDR Memorial and Historic Pools Museums,
401 Little White House Rd
Warm Springs, GA 31830
Hours: 9am – 4:45pm daily
Phone #: (706) 655-5870
http://www.gastateparks.org/LittleWhiteHouse

Digital Resources

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum Webpage,
http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/education/resources/pictures.html

Four Freedoms Digital Resource,
http://fdr4freedoms.org/

FDR Cartoon Archive,
http://www.nisk.k12.ny.us/fdr/

Miller Center, Franklin D. Roosevelt: Presidential Recordings,
http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings/roosevelt

The American Presidency Project,
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/#axzz2hubFMRJ1

The New Deal Network,
http://newdeal.feri.org/

FDR’s Ties to Georgia,
http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/FDRtitle.htm

Smithsonian Museum of American History Online Exhibits
http://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/online

Movies

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Audio-disks

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