

tious long-term installation at one of the country's liveliest urban history museums.

As always, we welcome comments about these reviews and encourage readers to suggest representations of history in American public culture that might be reviewed. In addition to continuing coverage of museum exhibitions, we are interested in covering living history projects, historical pageants and reenactments, memorials, historic preservation projects, virtual museums, historic sites, and public history programs. Please contact:

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“Action, and Action Now’: FDR’s First 100 Days.” William J. vanden Heuvel Gallery, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, NY. <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/100HOME.HTML>.

Temporary exhibition, March 4, 2008–March 4, 2009. 2850 sq. ft. Herman Eberhardt, exhibit curator and writer; James Sauter, designer; Bob Clark, supervisory archivist; Cynthia Koch, FDR Presidential Library and Museum director.

“Action, and Action Now” emerged from discussions by the staff of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum on how to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of FDR’s first hundred days in office and a desire to explore in depth that heady period when aggressive political action seemed so necessary and so many innovative initiatives seemed so possible. The exhibit creatively and elegantly presents to students, teachers, and general audiences the outline of FDR’s initial days in office, contextualizing his vigorous legislative agenda within the social, cultural, and economic environment of the early years of the Great Depression. What is especially striking and wonderful about this exhibit is the way form and content tightly recapitulate and reinforce each other. The exhibit—organized into four main units—utilizes symbolic motifs to emphasize central themes in Roosevelt’s first hundred days in office. The extensive use of metaphorical design helps transform what might have been a flat, policy-focused exhibit into a dynamic, compelling physical and multimedia experience.

Entering the William J. vanden Heuvel Gallery through a doorway and past an introductory text panel and a large cartoon poster showing FDR as a train engineer driving the “U.S. Recovery ‘New Deal’ Special,” visitors are immediately transported into the cities, towns, and fields of “America, 1933.” Ceiling-mounted projectors throw forth a multitude of powerful still and motion picture images onto three unusual projection screens, fabricated in three dimensions. Accompanied by enveloping and context-establishing sounds, the images portray the widespread social, economic, agricultural, and ecological plight of a depression-plagued nation. Each of the screens is characterized by a fascia—a stone building facade, a barn-board facade, and a horizontal, near floor-level cracked-earth surface—consonant with the images cast upon it: collective urban violence, unemployment lines, closed banks, weather-worn farmers, ill-clothed and hungry children,

desperate mothers, parched earth, and farm auction signs. The screens and their positioning suggest the exhibit's metaphorical use of design elements to reinforce content.

The second section of the exhibit, "A New President, A New Deal," takes visitors through the period leading up to FDR's inauguration, the inauguration on March 4, 1933, and the days that immediately followed. Using a range of images, ephemera, and objects such as the family Bible on which FDR took his oath of office, the exhibit covers the collapse of U.S. banks, the assassination attempt on FDR in Miami on February 15, 1933, and the tense relationship between Roosevelt and the outgoing president Herbert Hoover. Selections from FDR's first inaugural address can be heard at a listening station, and earlier drafts are available for reading. Also revealed is the president's immediate engagement with the widening bank crisis that threatened to paralyze the nation and the temptations for the abuse of power that extreme crisis made available to him.

Next—linking "A New President, a New Deal" with the third major exhibit section, "Constructing a New Deal"—are two rooms devoted to "FDR's Conversation with America." In the first room, the president's brilliantly effective use of radio, the era's most important mass communication medium, is showcased. The visitor is transported into a 1930s kitchen, where FDR's "fireside chats" are explored through a carefully orchestrated multimedia presentation. Monadnock Media worked with FDR Presidential Library and Museum staff to create a typical working-class kitchen. An RCA Victor radio sits prominently on a small table at the center of the far wall. A six-minute video with selections from FDR's seemingly casual (but in reality well-scripted) radio addresses is synchronized to lighting that transforms the kitchen environment into a stage, linking the physical space of the kitchen and its objects with the aural and visual content of the media.

A conversation is a two-way exchange and, as the adjacent room's exhibit makes clear, Americans responded en masse to FDR's fireside chats, relying on the postal service to deliver their grievances, hopes, thanks, and prayers to the president. While Hoover had received, on average, about 5,000 letters a week while in office, Roosevelt averaged 50,000 a week after his radio broadcasts began. Piles of mailbags and reproductions of this outpouring lining the walls give visitors a sense of what Americans expected and hoped for from the Roosevelt administration.

The next and most extensive segment of the exhibit, "100 Days of Action," the heart of the "Constructing a New Deal" section, explores the many reconstructive and relief measures undertaken by Roosevelt during the early New Deal and presents its material via one of the most powerful and visually interesting metaphorical devices of the exhibit: construction scaffolding. Filling the largest of the rooms and interspersed occasionally by display boxes, blue metal scaffolding rods support panels of photographs, cartoons, posters, and texts. Individual panels focus on FDR's cabinet, the architects of the "first hundred days," as well as the extensive repertoire of legislative remedies and reforms they generated to create jobs, provide immediate economic relief, address rural and agricultural problems, shore up banking and financial markets, and—lest we forget—bring back beer and prepare the nation for the repeal of Prohibition. Informative panels describe, among many other things, the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and the creation of fair competition codes; the formation of the Federal Employment Relief Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC); the passage of the Glass-Steagall Banking Act and the establishment of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation; the regulation of securities markets through the Securities Act; the elimination of the gold standard; the

creation and operation of the Tennessee Valley Authority; and the passage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, Emergency Farm Mortgage Act, and the Farm Credit Act to address rural economic crisis. The physical arrangement of the panels and displays is highly effective, as one visitor noted in the comment booklet near the exit: "This is our second day here. We altered our schedule because you have the finest exhibition we have ever seen. The physical-scaffolding to emulate the building and construction FDR caused—is extremely artistic and relevant."

"Constructing a New Deal" also offers several interesting though less central narratives, including the story of Eleanor Roosevelt as a "Reluctant First Lady." FDR's disability—his polio—also finds a place in this section, perhaps linking the metaphorical associations of his braces with the scaffolding motif of the room. This small display, which includes a pair of FDR's steel and leather leg braces, examines the gap between the public's perception of the president as a vigorous leader and the reality of his physical paralysis and also suggests the transcendent power of ambition, hope, vigor, and will. Another metaphor presented in "Constructing a New Deal" was one of the era's popular fads, the crossword puzzle. As a displayed cartoon suggests, the president was viewed as the nation's great puzzle solver, charged with working out the nation's great economic problems.

"Now Showing: FDR Fights the Depression," which is immediately adjoining and part of the "Constructing a New Deal" section, is an exhibit in the style of a 1930s movie theater that introduces visitors to the era's "new media"—the newsreel. This room offers visitors a six-minute program of excerpts from such newsreels as *NRA Spirit Sweeps Nation* (1933) and *Roosevelt "Roughs It" at Forest Camp* (1933), focusing on such topics as the banking and financial crisis, farmer rebellions, the passage and workings of the NRA, and FDR's visits to CCC camps.

Although "Action, and Action Now" is effective overall, a few important aspects of FDR's first hundred days might have been more fully presented. In particular, the impact of section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act ("Employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing") on stimulating a rebirth of American trade unionism and setting the stage for the rise of an industrial labor movement could have been easily integrated into the metaphor of reconstruction and restoration. Also, the checkered legacy of legislative recovery efforts on particular social groups (blacks and women especially) might have been more thoroughly examined. Finally, the critiques of FDR's first hundred days—of his aggressive use of executive and legislative remedies—are presented in a rather flat, two-dimensional way, mainly in a flipbook of excerpts from the writings of various scholars toward the end of the exhibit. A more prominent presentation, perhaps utilizing audio and video components, of both left-wing and right-wing critics, might have offered more perspective on the continuing debates over FDR's legacy.

Still, I do not want to end with an emphasis on the weaknesses of this exceptionally well-conceived and executed exploration of FDR's first hundred days. The scholarship is strong, the writing is excellent, and the design and multimedia elements are superb and highly effective. The exhibit aptly ends with a section describing Roosevelt's departure for the Canadian island resort of Campobello in June 1933 for a "well-earned" vacation. His triumphant and much-publicized return to Campobello was laden with symbolic meaning not lost on the 1933 public. As an exhibit panel emphasizes, it was at Campobello in 1921 that Roosevelt was first stricken with infantile paralysis, and this was his first time



Blue metal scaffolding supports visual and narrative displays in one of the main sections of the “Action, and Action Now: FDR’s First 100 Days” exhibition. The panels focus on the more than one dozen reform and relief initiatives that Franklin D. Roosevelt pushed through Congress during his first hundred days. This design serves as a metaphorical device that reinforces the central theme of national reconstruction. *Photo by Gerald Zahavi. Courtesy Gerald Zahavi.*

back to his family’s old summer camp. His return, as both ship’s captain and “Captain of the Ship of State,” documented with cartoons, photographs, and objects (maritime-themed gifts from the public), is an appropriate metaphorical end to this imaginative and highly educational exhibit introducing the general public to one of the most exciting and ambitious moments in twentieth-century U.S. history. Go see it!

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The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. Simi Valley, Calif. <http://www.reaganlibrary.com>.

Permanent exhibition, library and museum opened Nov. 1991. 240,000 sq. ft. Duke Blackwood, director.

President Ronald Reagan often spoke of America as a “shining city on a hill,” and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library perched on top of a hill in California seems like a realization of that vision. The Reagan Library complex, with its huge expansion to house