"This is Roosevelt's World" - FDR as a Cultural Icon in American Memory

Polak, S.A.

Chapter 4: Creating Legacies: FDR's Autofabrication for Cultural Memory and Remembrance

Introduction

At the start of Roosevelt's presidency in March 1933, the American economy was at an all-time low, millions of Americans had lost their savings, become unemployed, or seen their mortgages foreclosed (Schlesinger, *New Deal* 3). Roosevelt had during his campaign in 1932 promised "a new deal" for all Americans, especially those "forgotten men at the bottom of the economic pyramid."[1] He was elected by a landslide in November 1932, and kept extremely quiet in the months between his election and inauguration, to the point that Hoover later accused him of doing nothing on purpose so as to let the economy sink lower in order to make his entry to the presidency more dramatic (Alter 182). Whether Roosevelt was actually that calculating remains hard to prove or disprove, but Hoover was by that time as unprecedentedly unpopular as expectations of Roosevelt were soaring. His first inaugural address has remained one of his most iconic moments, and set the tone for the next period of major new legislation and reforms. Roosevelt called Congress into special session to pass emergency laws, and while he did not actually bypass Congress at all, his First Inaugural demanded "broad executive power" from the Congress, such as the President is usually only granted as Commander in Chief during war (Schlesinger, *Imperial Presidency* 113).

At Roosevelt's instigation, Congress enacted a massive number of new laws, including dramatic ones like the ending of Prohibition and the release of the Gold Standard, and he made enormous appropriations, amongst others for the Civilian Conservation Corps, through which millions of young unemployed urban men were put to work in national parks and forestry projects. The scale of the New Deal meant that hundreds of agencies were set up to carry out the plans and new legislation (Davis, *New Deal Years* 69). This led to what soon was called the "alphabet soup" of New Deal agencies, most of which were involved in providing relief for the poor and unemployed, recovery of the economy and reform of the financial system. The scale and scope of the New Deal as well as the speed with which new legislation was drafted and enacted meant that Roosevelt had to give the leaders of the individual programs a free hand, and that much of the New Deal was carried out under Roosevelt's responsibility, but without his direct involvement (Badger, *New Deal* 9-10).

There is little evidence that Roosevelt ever thought of the products of New Deal programs in terms of autofabrication, but some of these have so tangibly shaped the physical and cultural landscape of the US, that they cannot be disregarded entirely as an ingredient of Roosevelt's public image.

1 FDR, Nomination address, July 2, 1932, Chicago.

There is of course a political legacy of the New Deal, that is still debated in partisan terms, which perhaps influences Roosevelt's current public image, but more significant is the impact generated by the omnipresence of products of New Deal programs in the American landscape. Among the best conserved and most visible in the long term are the many parks, roads and public buildings that were built as part of it. Roosevelt's administration commissioned public works on a massive scale, many of which still remain famous landmarks associated with the New Deal, and thus with Roosevelt, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Golden Gate bridge (Davis, *New Deal Years* 90). Moreover, there were New Deal programs to provide jobs for white collar workers, intellectuals and artists without work – historians, writers, photographers, visual artists, film makers, actors – most notably the Federal Writers Project (Penkower 1-8). Some of their most famous products included the American Guide Series, in which historical guidebooks were written for every state and many smaller regions, and the so-called "Negro Culture in America" project, which collected oral histories of surviving ex-slaves (Penkower 140). Extremely famous, also, are the Post Office mural paintings in almost every post office throughout the country and Dorothea Lange's and others' photographs of the Dust Bowl sand storms.

Most Roosevelt representations in this thesis are, to use Charles Sanders Peirce's terms, iconic – that is, they are in some way an image of Roosevelt, and even when not necessarily visual images, they at least resemble him in one way or another, because they share qualities or properties of some kind (Silverman 19). However, Peirce also distinguishes indexical signs:

> This is a real thing or fact which is a sign of its object by virtue of being connected with it as a matter of fact and by also forcibly intruding upon the mind, quite regardless of its being interpreted as a sign. It may simply serve to identify its object and assure us of its existence and presence. But very often the nature of the factual connexion of the index with its object is such as to excite in consciousness an image of some features of the object. (359)

Thus, an index "identifies" or points towards its object to "assure us of its existence and presence", often drawing out "some features of the object." Applied to the legacy of the New Deal, these cultural artefacts can be seen as indexical references to Roosevelt, not because they resemble him, but because they are connected to him, both historically and in cultural memory. Such indexical references can moreover recall particular features of FDR, for instance, his enormous influence on the American cultural, intellectual, and physical landscape. In that respect objects and cultural artefacts produced in the New Deal also function symbolically to represent FDR, that is, as signs that are habitually understood as representing him, separate from the indexical relationship.[2]

2 "A *symbol* is a representamen whose special significance or fitness to represent just what it does represent lies in nothing but the very fact of there being a habit, disposition, or other effective general rule that it will be so interpreted. Take, for example, the word '*man*.' These three letters are not in the least like a man; nor is the sound with which they are associated." Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers*, IV, 359.

The cultural legacy of the New Deal is enormous, and spans a huge range of infrastructural, cultural, historical and other sites and artefacts, such as post offices built in the neocolonial style that was then in vogue, books, and artworks, like the mural paintings in those post offices. Also, many photographs were taken of the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma and elsewhere in the Mid-West, as well as of the Great Depression throughout the country and of New Deal laborers at work. These photos, artworks, and films often portrayed, and were themselves, products of the New Deal, which has spawned a set of cultural practices and customs evolved during it that remain associated with it. As Michael Kammen has argued, the cultural impact of the New Deal was not only on the direct level of physical and cultural landscape, it also changed the American mindset with regard to its cultural heritage:

> There is a very real sense in which Americans broke with an ingrained habit of mind (let the private sector do it) in order to rescue and restore to prominence a range of particular traditions. Needless to say, impoverished yet creative people were also salvaged in the process. That was the principal objective, in fact. The circumstances were such that assisting Americans helped to save Americana. (444)

The shift in "habit of mind" which these programs – designed with "the principal objective" to help "impoverished yet creative people" – sparked, from the idea that the federal government should "assist Americans" to the cultural perception that "saving Americana" too was its task, was not an explicitly expressed aim of the New Deal, but FDR welcomed it abundantly. The move towards a paradigm in which the objects people were employed to save were considered worth saving with public money in and of themselves, is a key legacy of the New Deal. This shift from private to public sector in perceived responsibility for "rescu[ing] and restor[ing] to prominence a range of particular traditions" has important political implications, which FDR applauded. This intensifies the indexical connection between FDR and the artistic products created and artefacts preserved through the New Deal, but FDR did not use the agency he had as New Deal president for self-promotion in iconic terms. At the same time, FDR's autofabrication included large-scale projects to position him as an icon for the future, particularly the foundation of the FDR Presidential Library and the publication of the *Franklin D. Roosevelt Public Papers and Addresses*. These are iconic representations; they do not portray him visually, but they nonetheless portray him through his words, documents, artefacts and other media. And within the new cultural framework in which Americana were publicly preserved, his own documents and collections were too.

This chapter focuses on Roosevelt's autofabrication acts to ensure his continued presence in the American landscape beyond his death, indexically, iconically and symbolically. It concentrates on the most tangible artefacts that either index, resemble, or symbolize him, because that is presumably what he was most aware and in charge of. The more indexical of these are products of the New Deal, whereas sites and artefacts that represent FDR in an iconic

fashion are clear products of his autofabrication. Then there are symbolic representations such as streets, bridges and parks named after him, which he had no influence over, and which are arbitrarily chosen. Unlike products of the New Deal, the many Roosevelt Streets and F.D.R. Drives in the United States have no iconic or indexical connection to Roosevelt, the link is symbolic, produced only by the name. What complicates the Peircean division is the fact that FDR contributed politically to the context in which his own cultural heritage could both thrive and become depoliticized.

Depoliticization as a Political Strategy for Present and Future

As said, Michael Kammen in *Mystic Chords of Memory* argued that the principal objective of the New Deal was to salvage "impoverished yet creative people", and cites "help[ing] to save Americana" as a resultant effect (444). Others, like artist Edward Laning, have argued that the Roosevelts' personal loyalty to their artist friends played a role in the Roosevelt Administrations' patronage of the arts; he alleges that the Roosevelts, further than being humanitarians with artist friends, had no particular interest in art. [3] However, like any political leader, Roosevelt was, humanitarianism and loyalty to art-loving friends aside, also well aware that acting as a patron for artists could boost his public image. This practice among political leaders is obviously much older than Roosevelt, and he must have been aware of its potential. However, what distinguishes him from others is that he did not use New Deal buildings and other artistic products directly to blow his own trumpet, but rather to forge a climate of public responsibility for American heritage in which his own initiatives could thrive.

However little Roosevelt may personally have been interested in art in a highbrow aesthetic sense, he strongly felt that the American federal government should be more involved in the preservation and management of American cultural heritage. This conviction was part of a larger trend in American society: the 1920s saw a great rise in the collective interest in objects that are specifically American cultural artefacts, such as American books, antiques, objects of American folk culture, and less tangible objects of patriotic Americanism, such as frontier narratives, evidenced for instance by the foundation and immediate success of a monthly called *The Americana Collector* (Kammen 311). Such Americana were mostly collected by individual collectors, but, in the belief that the laboring masses must be educated and entertained, also often displayed for the public in, often privately owned, museums, (324). Before the stock market crash of 1929, many private collectors also simply invested in Americana. After that, the New Deal essentially took over the project of "saving Americana" and making patriotic folk history accessible to the masses, creating a cultural practice of historical awareness in the federal government and a new sense of responsibility for the public sector to take care of, and assume power over, cultural heritage and remembrance.

3 Cited in O'Connor 90.

Roosevelt himself was highly sensitive to the potentially unifying and consensus-building effect of historical analogies and to the uses history and cultural memory could have for him, and surrounded himself by formal and informal advisors in such matters. In 1936, for instance, he acted on the advice of his assistant secretary of state, R. Walton Moore, who argued that "'while the campaign is under way, a stop at Jefferson's home might be highly productive in terms of public relations" (452). During campaigns he stressed his connection with heroic statesmen such as Lincoln and Jefferson, partly in order to associate himself with the entire electorate rather than with Democratic voters only (452). In 1936 too, Roosevelt unveiled the head of Thomas Jefferson at Mount Rushmore, saying in his dedication speech:

> …we can perhaps meditate a little on those Americans ten thousand years from now when the weathering on the face of Washington and Jefferson and Lincoln shall have proceeded to perhaps a depth of a tenth of an inch – meditate and wonder what our descendants, and I think they will still be here, will think about us. Let us hope that at least they will give us the benefit of the doubt – that they will believe we have honestly striven every day and generation to preserve for our descendants a decent land to live in and a decent form of government to operate under.[4]

Here FDR explicitly raises the question of future remembrance, and by shifting the perspective so far into the future, to "Americans ten thousand years from now" he directly aligns himself with "Washington and Jefferson and Lincoln" who are portrayed at Mount Rushmore. The effect of this far horizon is that he can easily suggest he is in a league with those illustrious presidents because he shares their broad ambition for "a decent land to live in and a decent form of government to operate under." While this ambition seems so vague and bland that it is an empty claim to make, FDR does implicitly include "to preserve" as one of the government's duties. Preservation of American landscape and Americana was much more his specific agenda than that of Washington, Jefferson or Lincoln, but this speech suggests that, like honoring the Founding Fathers, preservation through the public sector is one of the sacred duties of American patriotism. Thus, he affiliates himself with Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln through a rhetorical figure that seems to make irrelevant their ideological differences, and at the same time he suggests they shared his political agenda. Thus, Roosevelt both acted as an agent in idealizing a supposed consensual American history, and activated that history to his own electoral advantage.

Kammen argued that using cultural memory to depoliticize the past, is a crucial American strategy for dealing with American history, and saw Franklin Roosevelt as a particularly exemplary proponent of that tendency. The above example illustrates what I think he meant, both because it is an instance of how looking back into the past can provide a sense of

4 FDR, August 30, 1936.

collectivity in the present that sidesteps partisan differences, and in the sense that it shows how FDR could make this effect operative for his own political and partisan ends. However, Kammen uses the term depoliticization without making clear what precisely he means by it. When he says "Americans have been inclined to depoliticize their past", he suggests that American memory tends to become a-political, that is, to lose its political charge. But the fact that Roosevelt could use the depoliticization of the past, or could depoliticize himself through forging a link with national historical figures to his electoral advantage implies that it is after all a political phenomenon. Indeed in FDR's case, it seems to have been a political strategy, though perhaps not so much a strategy driven by ideological convictions as by practical opportunism.

Roosevelt's lack of ideological profiling has often been regarded as a political advantage. As, for instance, Patrick Renshaw has said in *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (2004):

> [W]here Hoover's greatest handicap in dealing with the depression had been his philosophy, FDR's greatest asset was his lack of one. "Philosophy?" he once quizzically told a questioner "Philosophy? I'm a Christian and a democrat – that's all." (100)

Here FDR's movement resembles the previous example: he associated himself only with those labels that the overwhelming majority of Americans at the time would have to agree with, however much they might oppose Roosevelt's actual politics. I have argued in the first two chapters that Roosevelt was very successful in presenting a kind of emptiness or enigma. This works well to keep later Roosevelt narratives intriguing, but he also himself used it as a politician to seems less partisan, and thus in a sense to depoliticize himself, albeit to his political advantage.

Claude Lefort argues in his essay "The Question of Democracy", in the tradition of Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies* (1957), that:

> Under the monarchy… power was embodied in the prince, and it therefore gave society a body. And because of this, a latent but effective knowledge of what *one* meant to the *other* existed throughout the social. This model reveals the revolutionary and unprecedented feature of democracy. The locus of power becomes *an empty place*." (17)

Lefort goes on to argue that that innate emptiness at the heart of power in modern democracies "implies an institutionalization of conflict" and that the "locus of power cannot be occupied … it cannot be represented." I would argue that Roosevelt employed a stance of ideological "emptiness" in an attempt to occupy the locus of power, especially during the New Deal years (1933-1937), which dramatically fell apart when in 1937 his attempt to "pack" the Supreme Court with new, Democratic, or at least Roosevelt-loyal, Justices failed, and many central New Deal measures were declared unconstitutional.

Chantal Mouffe argues that modern democracy is characterized by an irreconcilable combination of liberalism, focused primarily on individualism and human rights, and democracy, focused primarily on equality and popular sovereignty. This uncomfortable combination inevitably leads to conflicts of interest between the majority vote on the one hand and the pluralism of individuals on the other. Mouffe accepts Lefort's idea of an empty space at the heart of power and argues that this must be seen as a positive site for confrontation between opposing interests. In *The Democratic Paradox* (2000), she argues against late-twentieth century political movements like Tony Blair's "third way" which supposedly transcended the left-right opposition in politics, and the "Clintonization" of politics in America (108-9), because she considers such movements purely "aggregative", reducing democratic politics to "the negotiation of interests", without transforming antagonism in plural societies to a productive political agonism (117). Mouffe does not explicitly say so, but one might argue that Roosevelt is a kind of archetype of consensus-driven politicians like Blair, Clinton and Schröder, which she sees as a risk for the health of society's pluralism, and particularly for those groups in society that need to seek emancipation. Arguably, for example, FDR's non-committal friendliness to African Americans put off the growth of the Civil Rights Movement until well into the 1950s.

For Kammen political seems to mean the same as partisan, and depoliticization of history then refers to the fact that historical narratives in an American context tend to become more collective because they lose their partisan colors to a blander more general patriotic American mode of cultural memory. However, as we have seen in Roosevelt's case, the movement from controversial partisan issues in the present to a projected memory of and affable national consensus, is itself a shift of framework with a highly political impact, of a kind that Mouffe deplores. Suggesting the evolvement of a bland general consensus about the interpretation of events in cultural memory, however fabricated this may be, robs the democratic process of its empty locus of power, which Roosevelt manages to occupy precisely because he also projects himself as an ideologically empty body politic. This is the opposite of Mouffe's ideal that the political should be agonistic.

Roosevelt used history to depoliticize himself in the then-present, as in the Mount Rushmore example, but he also through the New Deal contributed to a cultural context in which preservation of American cultural heritage was perceived as a government function. And because this preservation was a national effort, it was logical to depoliticize the cultural legacy concerned, in the sense of divorcing it from its partisan context, and seeing it as a broader collective legacy. However, this shift in itself is politically charged, and its seeming flatness is in part the reason Roosevelt continues to be hated so viscerally in some circles, who oppose the idea that preservation is a government task in the first place.

The Legacy of Policy: The Indexical Nature of the New Deal

Buildings, infrastructure, national parks and lasting cultural artefacts, such as the many artworks, murals, American state guidebooks, oral histories and photographs that were produced as part

of New Deal programs are classical objects for statesmen to want to leave behind. The link with the world's great mausoleums, monuments and examples of royal patronage is easily made, as Roosevelt must have been aware, and he may have consciously stayed away from such arguably dictatorial gestures. Given that he later suggested that he did not after his death want a personal memorial to visually portray him, it seems likely that he did not wish artists and others paid by his unprecedented, and by no means universally accepted, public spending to heroically and iconically portray and idolize him all too explicitly. Yet, even if the legacy of the New Deal in the American landscape refers so little to Roosevelt in an iconic sense, the New Deal's distinctive style remains recognizable and indexically connected with FDR.

Rhetorically the New Deal relied heavily on the sense that restoring the American economy was a matter of modernizing concepts of civilization and patriotism. In his first State of the Union address as president, on January 3, 1934, Roosevelt said:

> Civilization cannot go back; civilization must not stand still. We have undertaken new methods. It is our task to perfect, to improve, to alter when necessary, but in all cases to go forward. To consolidate what we are doing, to make our economic and social structure capable of dealing with modern life, is the joint task of the legislative, the judicial, and the executive branches of the National Government. Without regard to party, the overwhelming majority of our people seek a greater opportunity for humanity to prosper and find happiness.

Although he does not mention the New Deal explicitly, Roosevelt here practically equates his social and economic program with civilization and inevitable progress. He states explicitly that such programs are the task of National Government and a need of "the overwhelming majority of our people", "without regard to party." Of course his paraphrase of what that majority of people seek is so broad – "greater opportunity for humanity to prosper and find happiness" – that it would be hard to oppose, wherever one stands with "regard to party." Such attempts to unite the nation by stressing the national importance of federal political choices is of course in part the president's function. To argue that policies or programs serve the entire nation's interests is politically strategic, and the New Deal was after all intended to help everybody. However, what makes the New Deal exceptional as a broad social and economic program, is the fact that nation-building, preservation, memory-making, and stimulating what has since come to be called the heritage industry, were themselves among it aims. The implication is that FDR's key political program came to occupy a wide range of historical sites and cultural arenas, not with the New Deal's political ideals, but rather through a depoliticizing, that is neutralizing, national framework.

The New Deal needed to create nationally constructive and preferably uncontroversially useful projects, and this may have suggested the initial idea to organize projects that would develop, research and glorify American heritage, which then became an end in itself. History

and Americana were good topics for New Deal art projects exactly because they tended to be regarded as uncontroversial – at a time when native and African American points of view were largely ignored – and because they could be argued to be useful to "the entire nation", even if that did not in fact include most minorities. Karal Ann Marling has argued that the reason most of the 2500 Post Office murals presented historical tableaux is that they supplied the "most popular mode and theme in federal and other public facilities because the past was comparatively non-controversial." (210). Marling seems to mean that historical themes were uncontroversial compared to themes from the present, arguing throughout, that, while both history and future were acceptable since "Yesterday ensured all of America's happy tomorrows", a certain taboo rested on representing the Depression and the present of the 1930s (211).

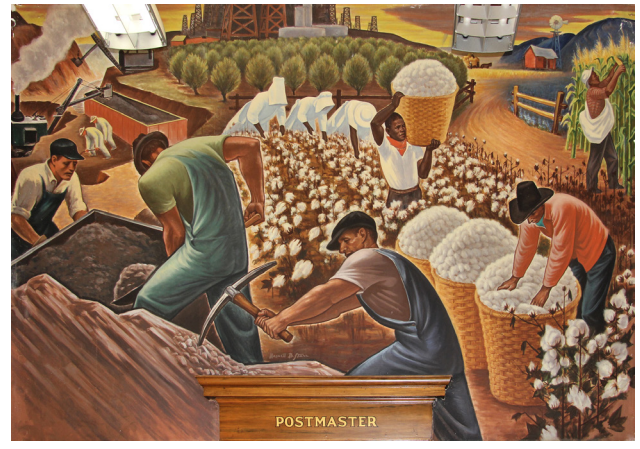

Figure 5. Post office mural, Maxwell Starr, Rockdale Texas (Wikimedia Commons)

A seeming consensus about historical themes was also perhaps still comparatively achievable at that particular time. This possibility has since been overturned by a range of cultural agents and emancipatory movements, memory wars, and other broad cultural developments, which have in various ways reassessed which people, events, structures and perspectives deserve priority in historiography, and rethought the meaning of historians' authority in a fundamentally fragmented world. Many post office murals with historical themes that perhaps seemed comparatively uncontroversial at first became so in the 1960s and 1970s. To give an example, murals like the one above, by Maxwell Starr in the Rockdale, Texas Post Office, may then have looked harmless – black and white laborers working together on mining and harvesting cotton. However, the Civil Rights Movement has unmasked such bland depictions of suggested racial harmony as painful misrepresentations of past and present.[5]

5 http://www.texasescapes.com/TexasArt/Rockdale-Texas-Post-Office-Mural.htm

Another example of a historical scene in a post office mural is this painting in the post office in Mart, Texas, done in 1939 by Jose Aceves:

Figure 6. Post office mural, "McLennan Looking for a Home", José Aceves, Mart, Texas. Photo: Barclay Gibson.

It is a classic frontier scene, showing an American family going west to carve out a better life and tame the wilderness. The men stand and hold guns, the women sit in the wagon which forms the family's temporary domestic sphere. The baby in the left woman's lap suggests the fertile future this family is moving towards. This mural depicts a cliché of American history, in which a supposedly empty continent was discovered, developed and civilized by white agrarian frontier families like this one – simple but courageous and honest people who domesticated the wilderness. Variations on this American grand narrative have become suspect – the American continent was hardly empty or in need of salvation and this formation narrative does not apply to most Americans. However, in 1939 it still worked as a historical and therefore not immediately controversial illustration of 'the' American past.

In the 1930s history was not only a convenient source for artwork, but the sense that historical sites and national heritage must be created and managed was also fashionable. Alfred Kazin has called the American Guide Series symbolic of the "reawakened American sense of its own history" (quoted in Mangione 371), a sense that Roosevelt clearly caught very well and stimulated (Kammen 450). Kammen argues that "Part of FDR's success in projecting an appealing image lay in his distinctive capacity to connect innovation with tradition." (451) He was distinctive in his very early conviction that the federal government should preserve, manage and make accessible American cultural heritage, and particularly also in valorizing politically the strategic benefits of taking charge through the New Deal of the portrayal of the

past, even if, again, FDR did not dictate that portrayal – the mere fact that its portrayal was a federal effort depoliticized it.

FDR believed the federal government should be involved in preserving American heritage. Another important innovation that FDR was personally involved with was the creation of the National Historic Sites Act of 1935, which commissioned the National Park Service to preserve and manage publicly accessible National Historic Sites, along with its management of the National Parks (Meringolo 146). This would, he argued, enhance patriotism: "The preservation of historic sites for the public benefit, together with their proper interpretation," he declared to Congress in 1935, "tends to enhance the respect and love of the citizen for the institutions of his country, as well as strengthen his resolution to defend unselfishly the hallowed traditions and high ideals of America."[6]

The choice for the National Park Service to carry out the management and presentation of historic sites is interesting, because the National Park Service had traditionally only taken care of protecting and making accessible the United States' natural heritage. To let the NPS manage American historical legacy as well, carries a rather deterministic and self-congratulating suggestion that American history too must be seen as a kind of natural wealth and resource. Because the decision which sites are "of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States", as the National Historic Sites Act has it, is a federal one, only sites whose historical importance is consensually agreed upon can achieve that status. Kammen might argue that this depoliticizes the past, but on the other hand, that consensus is a political compromise between some agents, usually not the more radical ones.

It is, in that context, a significant act of autofabrication on Roosevelt's part that he bequeathed his Springwood estate, including the Roosevelt home and his own grave, to the National Park Service, in two related ways. In the Peircian sense of the words, his life-long home indexes him, and on a secondary level represents him iconically, because the place molded FDR's character, and the home outlines him by providing a kind of photo-negative perspective conjuring up an FDR-shaped space. This is reflected in the FDR Library museum too, through the exhibition of shoes, clothing, leg braces and wheelchairs that he filled, and which continue to carry a visible impression of his body. Moreover turning the Springwood Estate into an NPS Historic Site posits Roosevelt's home and therefore himself as an iconic figure in the more general sense, as somehow akin to a kind of natural national heritage. As such FDR is presented through his Hyde Park home as quintessential American heritage to be managed federally, which seems to claim a future position for himself as an occupant of the empty space at the heart of political power.

6 Quoted in Barry Mackintosh, "The National Park Service Moves into Historical Interpretation" *The Public Historian* 9 (1987), 54.

The Legacy of Documents: The Public Papers and Addresses and the FDR Library

Most of Roosevelt's autofabrication during his presidency was directed at people living and voting at the time, though he was aware that newspaper articles, radio speeches, and photos would also influence how he would be remembered by future generations. Although he sometimes commented on this, the level of conscious impact on particular decisions this awareness created is difficult to measure. Two of his autofabrication projects, however stand out as particularly aimed at future generations. Both had to do with preserving the documentary evidence underlying his decisions, and more broadly, the paper trail of his presidency and life. The first of these projects is the compilation of the still most-used and authoritative *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* – a selection of Roosevelt's writings and speeches in 13 volumes, published between 1938 and 1950. The second is an expanded version of that: all Roosevelt's papers are housed in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum in Hyde Park, New York.

The FDR Library and Museum was the world's first presidential library. Reactions to the idea of creating such an institution have been extremely diverse from the beginning. On the one hand the idea was well received, presumably also in the light of the newly strengthened interest in the preservation of heritage. However, the FDR Library was also easily interpreted as a monument created by Roosevelt to celebrate himself. Benjamin Hufbauer has called presidential libraries, shaped on the blueprint of the FDR Library "presidential temples" and "American pyramids", arguing that presidential libraries essentially are a kind of memorial (*Presidential Temples*). Whether or not that is true, the FDR Library and Museum Roosevelt built at Hyde Park, on the site of his family home, where he was later buried, functions metonymically. Of course the site of the library has undergone change since his death, yet the FDR Library has over time represented Roosevelt broadly as he wished to be represented. Whereas New Deal buildings, infrastructure and other cultural artefacts that remain indexically associated with Roosevelt are spatially widespread, the FDR Library functions as a metonymic representation confined to one particular place, but it has been a constant reminder of how FDR wanted to be remembered.

Roosevelt publicly stressed his belief that he would primarily be judged by future generations on the basis of his political choices and decisions, and therefore wished to make the papers underlying these decisions available to the future public. This suggests that Roosevelt believed in the justifiability of his political choices, but especially in the willingness of future generations to judge him fairly. Unlike Winston Churchill or Eleanor Roosevelt, FDR did not write books to interpret his own presidency – instead he left his papers to be reordered into new narratives by new generations as they might deem appropriate. Roosevelt was no doubt also aware of another kind of legacy he was creating: the memory of himself as a cultural icon and a persona, associated with much more than politics in the narrow sense. The physical adjacency of the FDR Library and his lifelong home Springwood strengthens the iconic nature of the Library.

The Public Papers and Addresses

A key figure in both the creation of the FDR Library and *The Public Papers and Addresses* was Samuel Rosenman, Roosevelt's main speechwriter and the editor of *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*. He also added to the memory of FDR in another way, by writing one of the first Roosevelt biographies. In the introduction to this memoir *Working with Roosevelt* (1952), Rosenman stressed the importance of words in Roosevelt's presentation:

> One measure of him as a President and as a man is what he said and wrote in his public life. More than any other president – perhaps more than any other political figure in history – Franklin D. Roosevelt used the spoken and written word to exercise leadership and to carry out policies. (13)

This is a stark statement – made by someone who was very clearly a partisan figure – but it does convey a sentiment expressed more widely, that Roosevelt's rhetorical skill was without equal. Even if Roosevelt did not use the spoken and written word "more than any other president", both of these major autofabrication projects iconically represent him through his words, and not through visual images resembling him, although the museum has increasingly acquired that role.

The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1928-1945 is the most comprehensive and most available overview of Roosevelt's public media expressions. They contain the official papers of FDR and the texts of his speeches, from his governorship through his presidency. What sets this selection apart from other works is that Roosevelt officially sanctioned this publication, and wrote – or at least signed – introductions and notes to the first nine volumes, which were published during his life. This official selection, made by Samuel Rosenman, cannot be thought of as an objective representation of all Roosevelt said or wrote publicly, but it does reveal what aspects of his public life Roosevelt thought it important to publicize. As such it is not only a place to read what exactly Roosevelt said and wrote in public, but also itself an instance of Roosevelt managing his own public image. The volumes' paratext, and their selection of Roosevelt's public expressions, shed at least as much light on his autofabrication as the documents contained in the series. Thus, for gaining an impartial overview of, for instance, Roosevelt's press conferences, publications such as *The Complete Presidential Press Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (25 volumes) may be a more appropriate source. However, *The Public Papers and Addresses* are of paramount importance for assessing a legacy Roosevelt deliberately created. Alongside the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library – where Roosevelt's papers are kept in full – this series is a monumental as well as a partisan extraction of those complete papers, which still functions as the most widely disseminated and authoritative anthology of Roosevelt's public expressions.

The thirteen volumes of *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* appeared in three installments: volumes 1 to 5, treating the period 1928-1936 came out in 1938, the next four,

about the period 1937-1940 were published in 1941, and volumes 10 to 13, covering 1941-1945, became available in 1950. Thus each subseries is dedicated to one term of Roosevelt's presidency, with the first also including his governorship of New York, and the last also including the early months of his fourth term until his death in April 1945. The titles of the volumes are partisan, even tendentious. If one were to take one's idea of the Roosevelt governorship and presidency from the volume titles alone, the story would read:

1928-32: The Genesis of the New Deal
1933: The Year of Crisis
1934: The Advance of Recovery and Reform
1935: The Court Disapproves
1936: The People Approve
1937: The Constitution Prevails
1938: The Continuing Struggle for Liberalism
1939: War, and Neutrality
1940: War, and Aid to Democracies
1941: The Call to Battle Stations
1942: Humanity on the Defensive
1943: The Tide Turns
1944-5: Victory and the Threshold of Peace

These titles obviously indicate strong pro-Rooseveltian interpretations of events, which are in some cases highly debated still. Did Roosevelt really develop the New Deal in the years before 1933? The phrase was coined by Rosenman for FDR's 1932 acceptance speech of the Democratic Nomination, and while Roosevelt certainly wanted to claim continuity in his social and economic philosophy between his governorship and his presidency, many New Deal programs were based on older progressive ideas, whereas others were improvised briefly before their actual enactment. Similarly, it is hard to see 1934 – the year the Dust Bowl hit the Great Plains, the year Hitler assumed the title of Führer, the year Japan took over Manchuria – primarily as the year in which recovery and reform advanced. Perhaps from an administration viewpoint, these examples are far-fetched – it is easy for a historian to point out with hindsight what was important in the past – but a notable amount of Roosevelt-centered storytelling occurs in these titles. For instance, the titles "The Court Disapproves", "The People Approve" and "The Constitution Prevails" together suggest a sequence of events which puts a positive spin on the Supreme Court Crisis.

Even more striking in terms of Roosevelt's long-term image creation is a title like "Humanity on the Defensive." Roosevelt did not himself create this title – Rosenman did, after FDR's death – but it is an early example of the strong tendency towards universalizing Roosevelt's leadership – using a kind of all-encompassing rhetoric Roosevelt himself often employed – which is also often found in later hagiographic assessments of him. An example of Roosevelt's own tendency

to universalize his position is his coinage of the name "United Nations" for the world body to be created after the war, named after the "United Nations" – the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and China fighting the Axis Powers (Reid 461).

One important question to answer about *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* is who wrote them, but even more important is whom they were written for. Both questions are addressed to some extent in the introduction to the series. Many of the public papers and addresses themselves were obviously drafted by Roosevelt and his staff, often including Rosenman, and all were sanctioned by Roosevelt. The paratext of the series – the introductions to each volume, the general introduction, the notes to individual documents – largely carry Roosevelt's name and signature, except for the last four volumes, published in 1950. While the exact extent to which these have been ghostwritten by Rosenman and others remains unclear, Roosevelt personally conceived the project as part of his larger plan to establish the Presidential Library at Hyde Park, and as such did take it very seriously.[7] He had already published selections of his gubernatorial papers and addresses prior to his election, and prior to his meeting Rosenman – some of which appeared again in the first volume of *The Public Papers and Addresses*, accompanied by extemporaneous remarks, probably ghost-written by Rosenman during the Hoover-Roosevelt interregnum.[8]

Although Roosevelt in the General Introduction to *The Public Papers* rather off-hand explained that he knew "of no one better equipped for this task" than Rosenman (*Public Papers* I xiv), the choice to appoint his main speechwriter – if not officially a member of the White House staff, but a New York Supreme Court judge appointed by Roosevelt – as editor of *The Public Papers* is important, and unique in presidential history. It gave Rosenman, both writer of many of Roosevelt's words, and editor of *The Public Papers*, great power over the composition and selection of what would become history. Historian Samuel Hand indeed identifies Rosenman as the "Thucydides of the New Deal" – the only, and therefore forever used and reused, source on Roosevelt's role in the New Deal: "Although Franklin D. Roosevelt deliberately set in motion the machinery which established Rosenman's position, it is highly improbable that the President ever anticipated the full impact which Rosenman would assert on New Deal historiography."[9]

It is nonetheless clear that Roosevelt trusted both Rosenman's talents and his loyalty and they seem to have agreed on the historical importance of *The Public Papers*. Both draw particular attention, within *The Public Papers* and elsewhere, to the fact that they are addressed in the first place to future generations of historians. All modern presidents of course know that their words will be weighed by future generations, but Roosevelt and Rosenman seem to have been particularly explicitly aware of future generations as a key audience for *The Public Papers and*

7 Samuel Hand, "Rosenman, Thucydides, and the New Deal", 334.
8 Hand, "Rosenman, Thucydides", 335.
9 Hand "Rosenman, Thucydides", 334.

Addresses.[10] Rosenman in his editorial Foreword to the series excuses possible redundancy in the eyes of current-day readers:

> The important papers in these volumes are covered by comments and notes written by President Roosevelt. This feature is unique in editions of Presidential papers. (…) It is hoped that these books in the years to come will be a source of historical data about this significant period in history. If some of the notes seem to deal with subjects well known to readers of today, it should be remembered that they are written not only for the present, but for those who in the future may seek to interpret the policies of President Roosevelt from his public utterances and acts, and from his comments with respect to them. (*The Public Papers* I xviii-xix)

Rosenman here explicitly combines *The Public Papers'* aim to inform future readers and the fact that Roosevelt contributed his own comments and notes to enhance the future understanding of his presidency. Thus *The Public Papers* set out to offer FDR's own interpretations of his presidential acts and documents to a future audience. Roosevelt, too, explicitly identifies his future audience in his Word of Thanks: "As these volumes will be principally useful in the future to Government officials and students of history, the contribution of those who have assisted is of great value to permanent accuracy in assaying the period in which we live." (*The Public Papers* I xiv). More grandly, the series' motto – ostensibly in Roosevelt's voice – is "These volumes are dedicated to the people of the United States with whom I share belief in the principles and processes of democracy." Though of course both Roosevelt and Rosenman were aware of the emotive effects of such grand claims, neither seem to have been cynical or insincere in making them.

The FDR Library

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library was set up and dedicated by him personally, making available his own presidential archives and most of his personal documents. It is one of the key building blocks that have contributed to Roosevelt's continuing renown and popularity, perhaps instead of a memoir or autobiography, such as Churchill's extensive memoirs. The FDR Library as an institution has received relatively little critical scholarly attention – except from Benjamin Hufbauer and Richard Cox, and recently from Anthony Clark. Otherwise there are only a number of FDR Library chapters in larger books about presidential libraries and collections, which tend to be neutrally descriptive, and a number of articles written by staff members and policy makers of the library itself.[11] The latter are, understandably, mainly celebratory of the project.

10 Hand "Rosenman, Thucydides", 335-6.

11 E.g. *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory*, Benjamin Hufbauer, 2005; *Presidential Libraries and Museums: An Illustrated Guide*, Pat Hyland, 1995; *Presidential Libraries and Collections*, Fritz Veit, 1987.

Nonetheless, it is the key Roosevelt archive for researchers and museum for general audiences, tourists and students, and as such it is an important example of how Roosevelt contributed to the cultural memory of his presidency. Roosevelt envisaged it mainly as a site for ritualized remembrance, in the sense that much of his archive was not actually meant to be accessed by the larger public. Rather he wished to display particular elements of his relationship with the people:

> Of the papers which will come to rest here, I personally attach less importance to the documents of those who have occupied high public or private office than I do to the spontaneous letters which have come to me … from men, from women, and from children in every part of the United States telling me of their conditions and problems and giving me their own opinions.[12]

The letters which Roosevelt refers to here are indeed among the easiest documents in the FDR Library to access because a selection of them is exhibited at the entrance of the ground floor museum. The actual archive is primarily meant for academic researchers. Roosevelt himself sketched drawings for the building in Dutch style, to honor the family's Dutch origins, and initiated the Library's building and dedication. The format – with a ground floor that is basically a museum, and a second floor housing the actual archive, which is accessible for researchers – is Roosevelt's. Tourists visit the museum and the house on one ticket, including a tour of the estate, where Franklin, Eleanor and Franklin's dog Fala are buried (Koch and Bassanese).

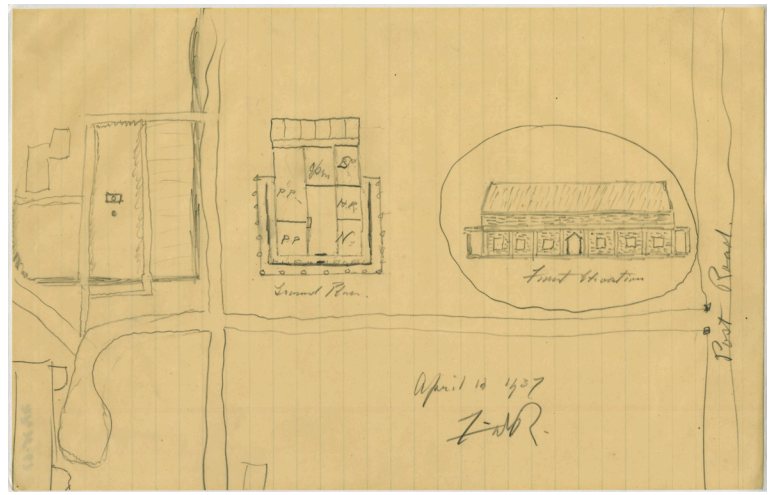

Figure 7. FDR's sketch of the library, April 12, 1937 (courtesy of the FDR Library).

12 Franklin Roosevelt, speech held at the FDR Library cornerstone ceremony, Hyde Park (NY), November 19, 1939.

The FDR Presidential Library was the first presidential library in America. All following presidents have housed their archives in a personal presidential library since, although unlike Roosevelt usually after their presidency. Indeed, some preceding presidents' presidential libraries have been set up, for instance Herbert Hoover's, following FDR's example. Before Roosevelt, no law or policy existed to prescribe what should happen with the personal archives of former presidents. The archives of most presidential papers of nineteenth century presidents have been collected or bought by the National Archives and Records Administration or the Library of Congress in Washington. The archive of George Washington is a painful example of how some of these collections were treated before. Washington himself left his papers to his nephew, who lent them to someone else. They ended up in an attic, where they were recovered many years later, damaged heavily by rats and water.[13]

Roosevelt started to make serious plans for his paper legacy in 1937. He had clear ideas about where and how his documents should be kept: "Because these papers relate to so many periods and activities which are not connected with my service in the Federal Government, (…) it is my desire that they be kept as a whole and intact in their original condition, available to scholars of the future in one definite locality." He also knew where this should be: "I have carefully considered the choice of locality and for many reasons have decided that it would be best that they remain permanently on the grounds of my family home at Hyde Park, Duchess County, New York.", although the "many reasons" are not given, at least, not for choosing the family home specifically. Rather, he stressed the advantage of keeping the entire collection together: "It is my thought, however, that an opportunity exists to set up for the first time in this country what might be called a source material collection relating to a specific period in our history."[14] While these are good arguments to create the Library FDR had in mind – and many Roosevelt scholars including myself have to be grateful that this collection centering on his person stayed together – it still remains a powerful and conscious feat of autofabrication.

Roosevelt's wish to keep his archive together, concentrated around his person is not surprising. This is easily read as vanity: he felt that his person, indeed his public persona, should be the central figure in the history of his presidency. Roosevelt was clearly also convinced that it was important that there should be an academic institution for the study of himself and his presidency. Alongside that, he wanted an exhibition space to show a general public his many personal collections – stamps, ship models, books – but also letters and gifts he received as president, including a two meters high papier-maché sphinx with Roosevelt's own face. The sphinx and other gifts were exhibited for many years in a special room called 'Oddities' in the museum (Koch and Bassanese). After a long absence, the 2013 refurbishment brought the Oddities room, including the sphinx, back.

13 Benjamin Hufbauer, "The Roosevelt Presidential Library, A Shift in Commemoration", 176.
14 Franklin Roosevelt, press conference, December 10, 1938.

That Roosevelt called his archive the Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library is confusing but significant. To the historians who backed his plan and to the press, he represented it as a plan for an archive, but it was also intended as a museum. As he wrote already in 1937 to his friend, the building's architect Henry Tombs, he expected at least three thousand visitors to the museum per day. This made him suggest that the library's "reading room would not be a reading room at all for students but rather a very carefully designed living room, which would contain portraits, several of my favorite paintings and perhaps a thousand of my books (…) This room, incidentally, I could use myself in the work preparing the collections during hours when the public was not admitted."[15] So, the new institute was to be a museum for the majority of the visitors, an archive for later historians, and a library in the secondary sense of a gentleman's "reading room." Although Roosevelt did not himself want to name the library after himself, he did insist on "Library" as part of the new institute's name; more accessible than "archive" and more serious than just "museum."

Despite that well-considered name, invoking the aura of academic rigor and objectivity, the museum did and still does function in part as an FDR monument. It celebrates the life and memory of Roosevelt. But before as after the renovation of 2013, the museum has been evenhanded in assessing Roosevelt's decisions – it offers many opportunities for "confronting the issue" of problematic acts and episodes in FDR's presidency, such as the Japanese Internment, the fact Roosevelt did not allow more Jews to enter the US in the late 1930s and early '40s, his unfitness at the Yalta peace conference. At the same time the exposition of letters and gifts

Figure 8. Exhibition of letters to the President

15 Hufbauer, *Presidential Temples* 29.

from fans gives a strong impression of how popular he was. The museum now, in accordance with modern theories about experiential learning, also offers an interactive and immersive experience, making visitors – most of whom are presumably sympathetic already – come away with a positive and nostalgic sense of FDR, his era, and legacy.

Roosevelt attached great importance to ensuring that his plans for the library would have the support of historians, partly to give form and lend weight to the academic character of the pursuit, but presumably also to avoid accusations that it was a display of self-congratulation (Hufbauer *Temples* 181). The latter succeeded in part. The December 11, 1938 *New York Times* headlined "Roosevelt Estate to House Archives, Go to Public Later," had as sub-headline "Historians Back Idea."

Both *The Public Papers and Addresses* and the FDR Library are highly iconic representations of Franklin D. Roosevelt – they resemble him, in the case of T*he Public Papers* textually, and the case of the library also in the sense that the museum part is rife with photos of FDR and objects he owned. These include his car, his leg braces, his shoes, letters and gifts people sent him – objects that iconically as well as indexically and symbolically delineate his shape, the shoes on a bodily level, and the letters in terms of the personality he was attributed by those who wrote to him. Through such objects, which chart the physical and social fabric he fitted into, the museum outlines a silhouette-like iconic FDR-shaped space. At the time Roosevelt created the FDR Library, the museum profiled him in another manner by showing his personal collections. As such it has always brought him into relief through showing the mold he inhabited, because unobtrusively filling a vacuity was itself a key strategy in his autofabrication.

Conclusion

Through the New Deal and its contiguous tendency to make heritage preservation a federal issue, Roosevelt shaped a context in which the past could be depoliticized. This choice was political in the present at that time, and the selection of representable history itself had political implications, not so much in partisan terms, but rather in the sense that it silently defined a mainstream – a selection that was supposedly inclusive, but in effect left very little room for political agonism.

Even critical voices such as Dorothea Lange's and Arthur Rothstein's iconic photographs of the Dust Bowl, or John Steinbeck's novels, which effectively showed the impotence of the Roosevelt Administration to protect American citizens, were also directly associated with or employed by New Deal programs, neutralizing their criticism by incorporating it. Moreover, many of their images, in part through their wide dissemination, soon acquired a nostalgic quality. Lange's most canonical photo of a woman who has fled the Dustbowl to California with her children is a case in point, despite the fact that it portrays real despair, it is also an aesthetically beautiful,

pieta-like portrayal of sorrowful motherhood (Fig. 9) And because Lange's and others' implicit and explicit criticism of the Administration was itself part of the New Deal, it was both expressed and immediately also domesticated. This control through inclusion was only rarely, and much later, replaced by actual censorship, for instance in Lange's case, once she started to take photographs in Japanese relocation centers that exposed their atrocities. Many of those photos were impounded by the army and only resurfaced in 2006 (e.g. Fig. 11).

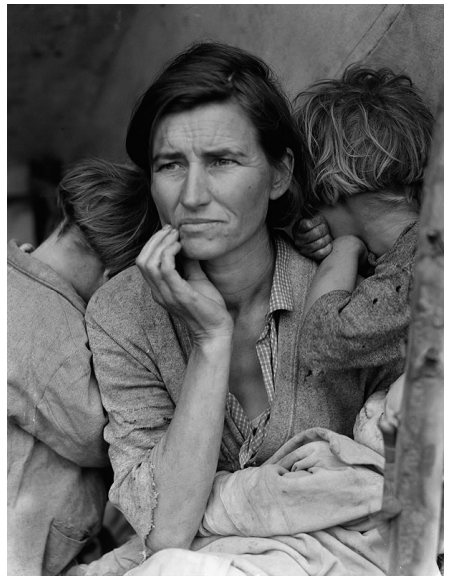

Figure 9. Dorothea Lange, Farm Security Administration. Woman with children in tent. California, 1936.

Figure 10. Arthur Rothstein, Farm Security Administration. Young boy in dust storm, Oklahoma, April 1936.

Figure 11. Dorothea Lange, Office of War Information, Japanese girl tagged for internment, 1942.