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How to Save a Dying Republic part 6:

Franklin Roosevelt's Vision for an Anti-Imperial World Order

Today’s Anniversary of the death of American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (April 12, 1945) should give the world a chance to revisit the immortal life and courage of the man whom decades of revisionism have turned into a popular aristocratic cartoon character. The decades of intense of effort to distort the life of the true Roosevelt from the minds of todays’ citizens has much to do with the fact that not only did he break from his own class loyalties during his lifetime, but powerfully challenged the structures of the financial oligarchy during a time of global crisis [both within the USA and globally.](https://substack.com/redirect/12a43e7c-d9cb-4949-896f-0b4c6014ce0b?j=eyJ1IjoiZG9paTgifQ.91g_34VRuzI_MLkPmRIGM0gm4tNgR1dQS7br89dPnSg)

Even before the earliest days of America’s entry into World War II, Franklin Roosevelt clearly and loudly defined the conditions upon which he chose to bring his nation into collaboration with Britain and other allied powers of Europe in the **struggle against fascism**: freedom and sovereignty for all nations, an end to want, and especially an end to all systems of empire and exploitation.

Hitler and the fascist axis powers were admittedly the greatest immediate threat to world peace and as such FDR agreed must be put down. However, very few today realize what stark contrast occurred between Roosevelt and Britain’s Prime Minister Winston Churchill over what exactly the post-WWII order would look like. Even if the threat of fascism could be put down, FDR always knew that the evils of colonialism were just as great, if not greater, than the worst expression of fascism and this was the real enemy which he targeted as soon as America entered the war.

One of the greatest living testimonies to FDR’s anti-colonial vision is contained in **a little known 1946 book authored by his son Elliot Roosevelt who, as his father’s confidante and aide, was privy to some of the most sensitive meetings his father participated in throughout the war.**

Seeing

1. the collapse of the post-war vision upon FDR’s April 12, 1945 death and
2. the emergence of a pro-Churchill presidency under Harry Truman, who lost no time in dropping nuclear bombs on a defeated Japan, ushering in a Soviet witch hunt at home and launching a Cold War abroad,

Elliot authored [‘As He Saw It’](https://substack.com/redirect/1b2e6654-9e29-441c-a037-f169a1742cf0?j=eyJ1IjoiZG9paTgifQ.91g_34VRuzI_MLkPmRIGM0gm4tNgR1dQS7br89dPnSg) (1946) in order to create a living testimony to the potential that was lost upon his father’s passing.

As Elliot said of his motive to write his book:

“The decision to write this book was taken more recently and impelled by urgent events. Winston Churchill’s speech at Fulton, Missouri, had a hand in this decision,… the growing stockpile of American atom bombs is a compelling factor; all the signs of growing disunity among the leading nations of the world, all the broken promises, all the renascent power politics of greedy and desperate imperialism were my spurs in this undertaking…

And I have seen the promises violated, and the conditions summarily and cynically disregarded, and the structure of peace disavowed… I am writing this, then, to you who agree with me that… the path he charted has been most grievously—and deliberately—forsaken.”

## The Four Freedoms

Even before America had entered the war, the principles of international harmony which FDR enunciated in his [January 6, 1941 Four Freedoms speech](https://substack.com/redirect/8457c883-be77-4d68-97ea-d0205db8e6f7?j=eyJ1IjoiZG9paTgifQ.91g_34VRuzI_MLkPmRIGM0gm4tNgR1dQS7br89dPnSg) to the U.S. Congress served as the guiding light through every battle for the next 4.5 years. In this speech **FDR said:**

*“In future days, which we seek to secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.*

*“The first is the freedom of speech and expression–everywhere in the world.*

*“The second is the freedom of every person to worship God in his own way–everywhere in the world.*

*“The third is the freedom from want–which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants–everywhere in the world.*

*“The fourth is freedom from fear–which, translated into world terms, means a worldwide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor–anywhere in the world.*

*“That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our time and generation. That kind of world is the very antithesis of the so-called new order of tyranny which dictators seek to create with the crash of a bomb.*

*“To that new order, we oppose the greater conception–the moral order. A good society is able to face schemes of world domination and foreign revolutions alike without fear.*

*“Since the beginning of American history, we have been engaged in change–in a perpetual peaceful revolution–a revolution which goes on steadily, quietly, adjusting itself to changing conditions–without the concentration camp or the quicklime in the ditch. The world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society.*

*“This nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of millions of free men and women; and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God. Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or to keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose.”*

Upon hearing these Freedoms outlined, American painter [Norman Rockwell](https://substack.com/redirect/84889bdf-352b-45b3-9899-3d714fdbdeeb?j=eyJ1IjoiZG9paTgifQ.91g_34VRuzI_MLkPmRIGM0gm4tNgR1dQS7br89dPnSg)was inspired to paint four masterpieces that were displayed across America and conveyed the beauty of FDR’s spirit to all citizens.

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FDR’s patriotic Vice President (and the man who SHOULD have been president in 1948) Henry Wallace outlined FDR’s vision in a passionate video address to the people in 1942 which should also be watched by all world citizens today:

## Churchill vs FDR: The Clash of Two Paradigms

Elliot’s account of the 1941-1945 clash of paradigms between his father and Churchill are invaluable both for their ability to shed light into the true noble constitutional character of America personified in the person of Roosevelt but also in demonstrating the beautiful potential of a world that SHOULD HAVE BEEN had certain unnatural events not intervened to derail the evolution of our species into an age of win-win cooperation, creative reason and harmony.

In As He Saw It, Elliot documents a conversation he had with his father at the beginning of America’s entry into WWII, who made his anti-colonial intentions clear as day saying:

“I’m talking about another war, Elliott. I’m talking about what will happen to our world, if after this war we allow millions of people to slide back into the same semi-slavery!

“Don’t think for a moment, Elliott, that Americans would be dying in the Pacific tonight, if it hadn’t been for the shortsighted greed of the French and the British and the Dutch. Shall we allow them to do it all, all over again? Your son will be about the right age, fifteen or twenty years from now.

“One sentence, Elliott. Then I’m going to kick you out of here. I’m tired. This is the sentence: When we’ve won the war, I will work with all my might and main to see to it that the United States is not wheedled into the position of accepting any plan that will further France’s imperialistic ambitions, or that will aid or abet the British Empire in its imperial ambitions.”

This clash came to a head during a major confrontation between FDR and Churchill during the January 24, 1943 Casablanca Conference in Morocco. At this event, **Elliot documents how his father first confronted Churchill’s belief in the maintenance of the British Empire’s preferential trade agreements upon which it’s looting system was founded:**

“Of course,” he [FDR] remarked, with a sly sort of assurance, “of course, after the war, one of the preconditions of any lasting peace will have to be the greatest possible freedom of trade.”

He paused. The P.M.’s head was lowered; he was watching Father steadily, from under one eyebrow.

“No artificial barriers,” Father pursued. “As few favored economic agreements as possible. Opportunities for expansion. Markets open for healthy competition.” His eye wandered innocently around the room.

Churchill shifted in his armchair. “The British Empire trade agreements” he began heavily, “are—”

Father broke in. “Yes. Those Empire trade agreements are a case in point. It’s because of them that the people of India and Africa, of all the colonial Near East and Far East, are still as backward as they are.”

Churchill’s neck reddened and he crouched forward. “Mr. President, England does not propose for a moment to lose its favored position among the British Dominions. The trade that has made England great shall continue, and under conditions prescribed by England’s ministers.”

“You see,” said Father slowly, “it is along in here somewhere that there is likely to be some disagreement between you, Winston, and me.

“I am firmly of the belief that if we are to arrive at a stable peace it must involve the development of backward countries. Backward peoples. How can this be done? It can’t be done, obviously, by eighteenth-century methods. Now—”

“Who’s talking eighteenth-century methods?”

“Whichever of your ministers recommends a policy which takes wealth in raw materials out of a colonial country, but which returns nothing to the people of that country in consideration. Twentieth-century methods involve bringing industry to these colonies. Twentieth-century methods include increasing the wealth of a people by increasing their standard of living, by educating them, by bringing them sanitation—by making sure that they get a return for the raw wealth of their community.”

Around the room, all of us were leaning forward attentively. Hopkins was grinning. Commander Thompson, Churchill’s aide, was looking glum and alarmed. The P.M. himself was beginning to look apoplectic.

“You mentioned India,” he growled.

“Yes. I can’t believe that we can fight a war against fascist slavery, and at the same time not work to free people all over the world from a backward colonial policy.”

“What about the Philippines?”

“I’m glad you mentioned them. They get their independence, you know, in 1946. And they’ve gotten modern sanitation, modern education; their rate of illiteracy has gone steadily down…”

“There can be no tampering with the Empire’s economic agreements.”

“They’re artificial…”

“They’re the foundation of our greatness.”

“The peace,” said Father firmly, “cannot include any continued despotism. The structure of the peace demands and will get equality of peoples. Equality of peoples involves the utmost freedom of competitive trade. Will anyone suggest that Germany’s attempt to dominate trade in central Europe was not a major contributing factor to war?”

**It was an argument that could have no resolution between these two men…**

The following day, Elliot describes how the conversation continued between the two men with Churchill stating:

**“Mr. President,” he cried, “I believe you are trying to do away with the British Empire.** Every idea you entertain about the structure of the postwar world demonstrates it. But in spite of that”—and his forefinger waved—”in spite of that, we know that you constitute our only hope. And”—his voice sank dramatically—”you know that we know it. You know that we know that without America, the Empire won’t stand.”

**Churchill admitted, in that moment, that he knew the peace could only be won according to precepts which the United States of America would lay down. And in saying what he did, he was acknowledging that British colonial policy would be a dead duck, and British attempts to dominate world trade would be a dead duck, and British ambitions to play off the U.S.S.R. against the U.S.A. would be a dead duck. Or would have been, if Father had lived.”**

## Roosevelt’s Vision for Africa: Make the Deserts Bloom!

Documenting his fathers’ passion for development and uplifting the standards of living of the world’s poor, Elliot described a January 1943 conversation where FDR outlines his grand vision for Africa:

“Over coffee, he got back on the theme of the development of colonial areas, increasingly one of his favorite topics. For a man who had never been in Africa before, he had picked up an amazing amount of information, geographical, geological, agricultural. Of course, I thought I knew the country pretty well: I had flown over a good bit of it, months before, photographing it from the air. But somewhere he had had a chance to learn even more than I had. We discussed the great salt flats in southern Tunisia, which must have at one time been a vast inland sea. He reminded us of the rivers that spring up in the Atlas Mountains, to the south, and disappear under the Sahara, to become subterranean rivers. “Divert this water flow for irrigation purposes? It’d make the Imperial Valley in California look like a cabbage patch!” And the salt flats: they were below the level of the Mediterranean; you could dig a canal straight back to re-create that lake—one hundred and fifty miles long, sixty miles wide. “The Sahara would bloom for hundreds of miles!” It is true. The Sahara is not just sand, it has an amazingly rich potential. Every time there is a rain, there is a consequent riot of flowers for a few days, before the dryness and the sun kill them off. Franklin and I winked at each other: Father was having the time of his life, his active mind and quick imagination working overtime as we all speculated on what intelligent planning could do for this land.

“Wealth!” he cried. “Imperialists don’t realize what they can do, what they can create! They’ve robbed this continent of billions, and all because they were too short-sighted to understand that their billions were pennies, compared to the possibilities! Possibilities that must include a better life for the people who inhabit this land…”

While close allies of FDR like Henry Wallace (Vice President from 1940-1944), Sumner Wells (New Deal leader of the Republican party), Harry Hopkins and Harry Dexter White shared his post-war vision and documented Elliot’s testimony in their own books, speeches and writings, nothing comes close to the first-hand accounts of FDR’s dream and battle than that outlined in [As He Saw It.](https://substack.com/redirect/1b2e6654-9e29-441c-a037-f169a1742cf0?j=eyJ1IjoiZG9paTgifQ.91g_34VRuzI_MLkPmRIGM0gm4tNgR1dQS7br89dPnSg)

With the knowledge that FDR’s internationalization of the New Deal is now finally coming alive in the surprising form of the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative, we hope that FDR’s life mission may finally take hold on the evolution of civilization and perhaps, with America’s increasing collaboration with China vis a vis the Health Silk Road, the better constitutional traditions of the Republic may yet come alive once more.

The author delivered a lecture on this topic in Vancouver in July 2020 which can be viewed here:

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