



The Defining Moment: FDR's Hundred Days and the Triumph of Hope

By Jonathan Alter

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This is the story of a political miracle -- the perfect match of man and moment. Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office in March of 1933 as America touched bottom. Banks were closing everywhere. Millions of people lost everything. The Great Depression had caused a national breakdown. With the craft of a master storyteller, Jonathan Alter brings us closer than ever before to the Roosevelt magic. Facing the gravest crisis since the Civil War, FDR used his cagey political instincts and ebullient temperament in the storied first Hundred Days of his presidency to pull off an astonishing conjuring act that lifted the country and saved both democracy and capitalism.

Who was this man? To revive the nation when it felt so hopeless took an extraordinary display of optimism and self-confidence. Alter shows us how a snobbish and apparently lightweight young aristocrat was forged into an incandescent leader by his domineering mother; his independent wife; his eccentric top adviser, Louis Howe; and his ally-turned-bitter-rival, Al Smith, the Tammany Hall street fighter FDR had to vanquish to complete his preparation for the presidency.

"Old Doc Roosevelt" had learned at Warm Springs, Georgia, how to lift others who suffered from polio, even if he could not cure their paralysis, or his own. He brought the same talents to a larger stage. Derided as weak and unprincipled by pundits, Governor Roosevelt was barely nominated for president in 1932. As president-elect, he escaped assassination in Miami by inches, then stiffed President Herbert Hoover's efforts to pull him into cooperating with him to deal with a terrifying crisis. In the most tumultuous and dramatic presidential transition in history, the entire banking structure came tumbling down just hours before FDR's legendary "only thing we have to fear is fear itself" Inaugural Address.

In a major historical find, Alter unearths the draft of a radio speech in which Roosevelt considered enlisting a private army of American Legion veterans on his first day in office. He did not. Instead of circumventing Congress and becoming the dictator so many thought they needed, FDR used his stunning

debut to experiment. He rescued banks, put men to work immediately, and revolutionized mass communications with pioneering press conferences and the first Fireside Chat. As he moved both right and left, Roosevelt's insistence on "action now" did little to cure the Depression, but he began to rewrite the nation's social contract and lay the groundwork for his most ambitious achievements, including Social Security.

From one of America's most respected journalists, rich in insights and with fresh documentation and colorful detail, this thrilling story of presidential leadership -- of what government is for -- resonates through the events of today. It deepens our understanding of how Franklin Delano Roosevelt restored hope and transformed America.

The Defining Moment will take its place among our most compelling works of political history.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Newsweek senior editor Alter attempts to explore FDR's famous first "hundred days" in office, when the president laid the foundation for national recovery from the Great Depression. Eventually, Alter succeeds in providing a brief consideration of those key months. But exposition dominates: the early chapters recite Roosevelt's biography up until his White House candidacy (the well-known tale of privilege, marriage, adultery and polio). Then Alter chronicles the 1932 election and explores the postelection transition. Only about 130 pages deal with the 100 days commencing March [4], 1933, that the title calls FDR's "defining moment." Alter attaches much weight to a few throwaway phrases in a thrown-away draft of an early presidential speech—one that could, through a particular set of glasses, appear to show FDR giving serious consideration to adopting martial law in response to the monetary crisis. Despite this, Alter goes on to document FDR's early programs, pronouncements and maneuvers with succinct accuracy. The book, however, contains misstatements of historical detail (Alter suggests, for instance, that it was Theodore Roosevelt, rather than Ted Jr., who served as a founder of the American Legion). (May)

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From Bookmarks Magazine

The *Chicago Tribune* admires *Newsweek* senior editor Jonathan Alter's "chutzpah" in taking up the well-worn subject of FDR's presidency. Critics claim that Alter supports his major "breakthrough"—that FDR toyed with martial law—with the flimsiest of evidence: an early draft of his inaugural address. Alter is not a historian, as evidenced by some factual errors and elision, but what some critics describe as his sloppy research is overshadowed by a compelling portrait of the backroom Roosevelt, the one making deals and restoring the ideals of American democracy.

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From Booklist

As the generation that endured the Great Depression passes on, it is essential to be reminded what this nation faced as FDR assumed office in 1933. At a minimum, a quarter of the workforce was unemployed. The threat of mass violence loomed as secure families saw their life savings wiped out. In both the U.S and abroad, liberal democracies were under siege from fascism on the Right and communism on the Left. Alter, a columnist and senior editor at *Newsweek*, eloquently captures the fevered, frightened state of the nation in 1933. In a brief biographical sketch of Roosevelt's life, Alter strongly emphasizes aspects that gave him a powerful will and supreme self-confidence. Alter recounts the flurry of the first 100 days of FDR's administration, which forever altered the relationship between American citizens and the federal government. This superbly researched and well-written work serves as a vital reminder of the importance of leadership during this great national ordeal. *Jay Freeman*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bill Bobby:

Book is definitely written, printed, or illustrated for everything. You can know everything you want by a

publication. Book has a different type. As we know that book is important thing to bring us around the world. Alongside that you can your reading talent was fluently. A publication The Defining Moment: FDR's Hundred Days and the Triumph of Hope will make you to possibly be smarter. You can feel much more confidence if you can know about almost everything. But some of you think in which open or reading some sort of book make you bored. It's not make you fun. Why they are often thought like that? Have you searching for best book or acceptable book with you?

Leon Santiago:

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Samuel Rascon:

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Ronny Baird:

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