



FDR's Fireside Chats

Russell D. Buhite, David W. Levy

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On thirty-one occasions during his presidency, Franklin Delano Roosevelt went on the radio to talk things over with the people of the United States. Those fireside chats, characterized by a disarming frankness and an informal and conversational tone, represent an unprecedented presidential attempt to achieve intimacy with the nation. The American people listened, gathered around their radios in living rooms and kitchens across the country, as President Roosevelt discussed virtually every major problem facing the United States at home and abroad—including both the gravest domestic struggle since the Civil War and perhaps the most serious foreign crisis in the nation's history. In the fireside chats the president touched upon all of the issues surrounding the depression and the New Deal, and upon the events, fears, and hopes that were part of the American experience of World War II.

Editors Russell D. Buhite and David W. Levy have gather the fireside chats tighter for the first time in a single volume and, by careful attention to recordings and stenographic reports, present the speeches exactly as Roosevelt spoke them. A general introduction discusses the importance of Roosevelt in American political history, the rise of the radio as a political tool, and the way Roosevelt, aided by speech writers and advisers, prepared and delivered the chat. Issues of the day are explored in two additional introductory essays—one describing the domestic situation Roosevelt confronted as he entered the White House in March 1933; the other surveying the international scene during the late 1930s, when Hitler, Mussolini, and Japanese militarists propelled the world toward a catastrophic war.

To read the fireside chats a half century after they were delivered is to reenter a world of economic disaster, social reform, and international danger. It is also to hear, once again, the voice of one of the most skilled speakers and trusted leaders in American history.

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