

# C-SPAN'S STUDENT CAM 2010

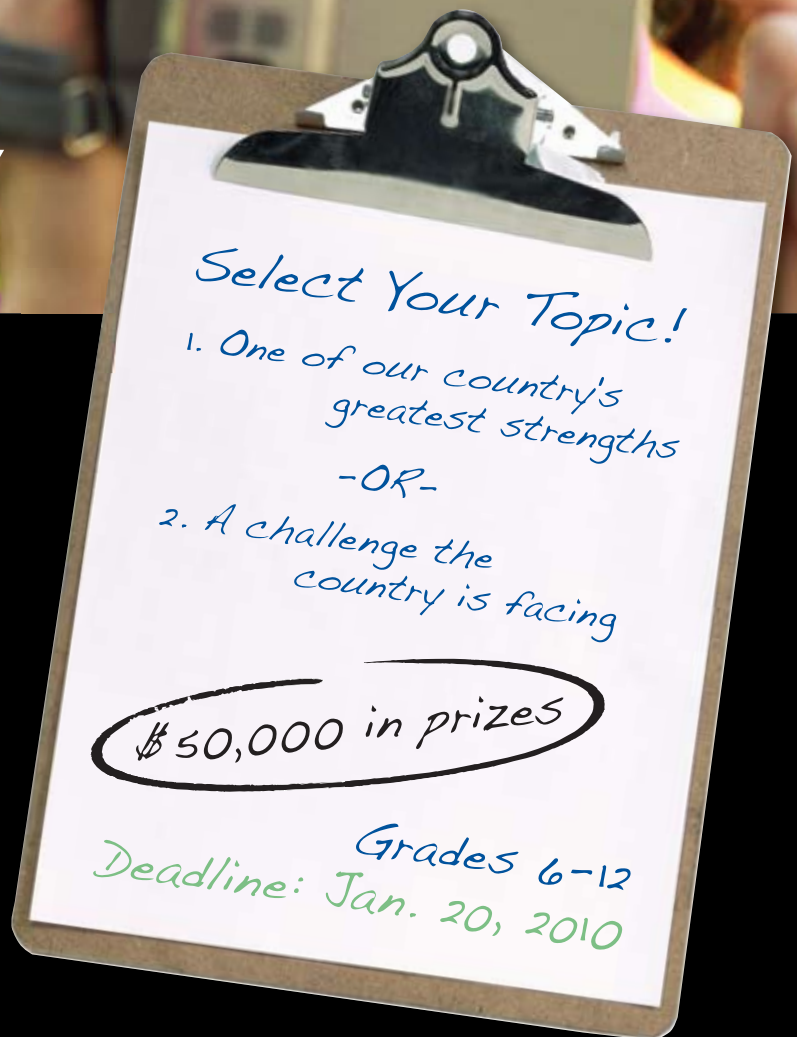
STUDENT  
DOCUMENTARY  
COMPETITION

Create a short (5-8 min.)  
documentary including  
C-SPAN footage.

For complete rules and  
details, visit us online.

[www.studentcam.org](http://www.studentcam.org)

C-SPAN   
CLASSROOM 



CREATED BY CABLE. OFFERED AS A PUBLIC SERVICE.

# Bridge to the Future: Franklin Roosevelt’s Speech at the Dedication of the Triborough Bridge

David L. Rosenbaum

**W**hen President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office on March 4, 1933, 15 million Americans, or one quarter of the nation’s workers, were jobless. Hope faded as despair spread. Three years later, on July 10, 1936, Roosevelt took a special overnight train from Washington, D.C., to New York City for the dedication of the Triborough Bridge. The next day, he entered the city with a police escort and went to his home where he held a press conference on the progress of relief work. The president’s procession then took the Manhattan approach to the new bridge as cheering crowds gave him a rousing reception. The mayor of New York City, Fiorello H. LaGuardia, introduced Roosevelt by saying, “We are fortunate in having with us today the chief engineer, the master builder, leader of this great march of the American people, the president of the United States.”

Standing on Randall’s Island, Roosevelt spoke to a crowd of more than 2,000 invited guests sweltering in the summer heat. The ceremony and the opening of the bridge were broadcast by a number of radio stations including nationwide hookups. Speaking to a hat-covered audience, Roosevelt celebrated the building of the massive bridge that connected the boroughs of Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx. In his five-page speech, the first two pages of which are featured in this article, he reminded his audience of the necessity of federal, state, and local government cooperation in improving America’s infrastructure to meet modern needs. Roosevelt also defended New Deal public works projects such as the Triborough Bridge as a way to supplant an “up-to-date government in place of old fashioned or antiquated government.” The Triborough

Bridge would not only be an important transportation link to various parts of New York City but also a symbol of progress through cooperative federalism.

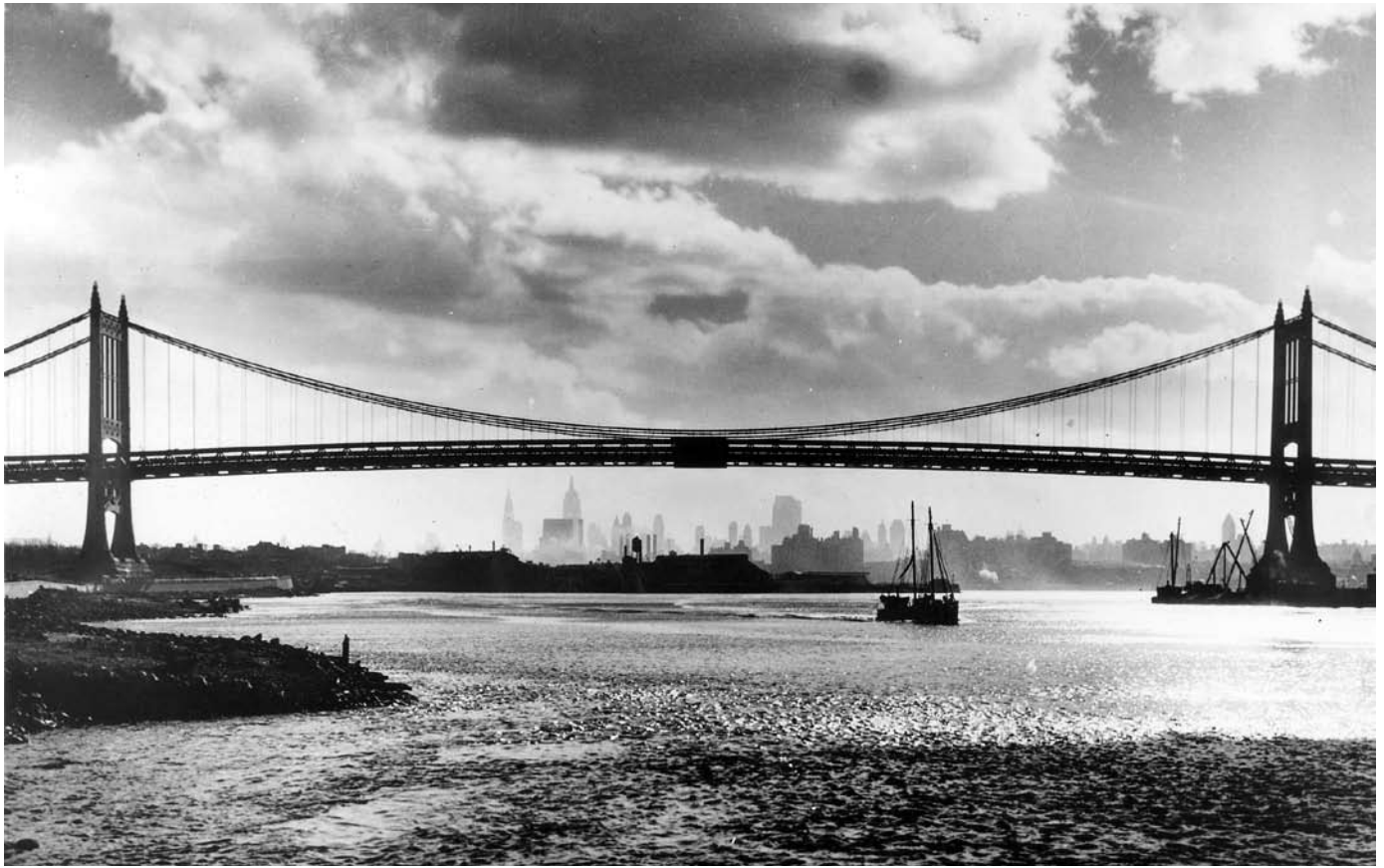
The president noted that a great structure like the Triborough was not needed in the “old days” when his great-great grandfather owned a farm in Harlem. He stated “government itself, whether it is that of a city or that of a sovereign State, or that of the Union of States, must if it is to survive, recognize change and give to new needs reasonable and constant help.” He added, “Government itself cannot close its eyes to the need for slum clearance, and schools and bridges.”

Plans to connect Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx had first been announced in 1916. New York City provided funds in 1925 for surveys, structural plans, and test borings. The plans led to a bridge comprised of three separate sections—a

bridge crossing the East River, a bridge spanning the Harlem River, and a fixed bridge across the Bronx Hills. The Triborough remains the largest vertical-lift bridge in the world, a type of movable bridge in which a span rises vertically while remaining parallel with the deck. The total cost of the project was \$60.3 million, \$16.1 million coming from the city and \$44.2 million provided by federal funds (more than was spent on the Hoover Dam).

Bridge building was not solely about infrastructure; it was also about people. Roosevelt told the crowd, “At a time of great human suffering the construction of this bridge was undertaken among the very first of the tens of thousands of projects launched.” Indeed, while it was designed during prosperity, the bridge’s construction began as the stock market crashed on October 29, 1929 (Black Friday). Initially, the New Deal offered direct relief in the form of cash payments, surplus food, and clothing to those in need. Two years into his presidency, Roosevelt then launched his greatest attack on unemployment with the creation of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). He said, “Our greatest task is to put people to work.”

Accordingly, the WPA doled out the tasks that began to change the physical face of America. Lasting eight years, it



The Triborough Bridge (Public Works Administration photo)

employed 8.5 million people and spent \$10.5 billion. Roosevelt called the WPA “The most comprehensive work plan in the history of the nation.” When the dust had cleared, the results from WPA projects included 650,000 miles of roads, 125,000 civilian and military buildings, 800 airports, 16,100 miles of water mains and distribution lines, and 78,000 bridges, among them the Triborough. Approximately 20,000 persons were engaged in some manner during the construction period. Triborough Bridge and La Guardia Airport in New York, Camp David Presidential Retreat in Maryland, and Dealey Plaza (a city park in Dallas, Texas) were some of the most noteworthy WPA projects. The results were dramatic as unemployment dropped, the size and power of the federal government increased significantly, and America’s infrastructure was renewed. Indeed, the work of millions of Americans in the 1930s benefited the United States long after the Depression ended.



Franklin Delano Roosevelt speaks at the dedication of the Triborough Bridge from Randall’s Island in New York City. (© CORBIS/Bettmann) Donated by Corbis-Bettmann

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEDICATION  
OF THE TRIBOROUGH BRIDGE  
NEW YORK, N. Y.  
July 11, 1936

Governor Lehman, Mayor LaGuardia, Secretary  
Ickes, Commissioner Moses, ladies and gentlemen:

Many of you who are here today, old people like myself, can remember (that) when (you) we were boys and girls the greater part of what are now the Boroughs of the Bronx and Queens were cultivated (as) farm land. A little further back but not much more than (one) a hundred years ago, my own great-grandfather owned a farm in Harlem, right across there (indicating), close to the Manhattan approach (to) of this bridge. But I am quite sure, Bob Moses, that he never dreamed of the bridge.

In the older days there was no need for a (great) structure like this connecting Long Island and Manhattan and the mainland; and even if a vast population in those days had needed it, human ingenuity and engineering skill could not have built it.

Some of us who are charged with the responsibilities of government pause from time to time to ask ourselves whether human needs and human inventions are going to change as (greatly) rapidly in the generations to come as they have changed in the generation that has passed.

It is not alone that as time goes by we are confronted with new needs -- needs created by hitherto undreamed of conditions -- it is also because growth in human knowledge labels (now) things as needs (many) today, things which in the olden days we did not think of as needs.

For (instance) example, it was not so long ago that no one used to protest against the dumping of sewage and garbage into our rivers and harbors. No one used to protest that our schoolhouses were badly ventilated and badly lighted. No one used to protest because there were no playgrounds for children in crowded tenement areas. No one used to protest against firetraps (or) and factory smoke.

In those days government was not interested in helping to provide bathing beaches, (and) swimming pools and recreational areas; nor had those who toiled in those days conceived the thought that they were entitled to at least one (day of) day's rest in seven (and) or entitled to an annual vacation.

There are a few among us, luckily a few, luckily only a few, who still, consciously or unconsciously, live in a state of constant protest against the daily processes of meeting modern needs. Most of us, I am glad to say, are willing to recognize change and to give it reasonable and constant help. (Applause)

1. Provide students with a copy of the featured document. Allow time for everyone to read it. Lead a class discussion by asking the following questions: What type of document is it? What is the date of the document? Who was the intended audience? Who created it? What is its purpose? (You may want to ask students to complete the Written Document Analysis Worksheet available from the National Archives at [www.archives.gov/education/lesons/worksheets/written\\_document\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/education/lesons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf).)

2. Assign students to take on the role of a newspaper reporter who attended the dedication ceremony in New York City on July 11, 1936. Encourage them to study the featured photographs and read President Roosevelt’s entire dedication speech (the three additional pages are available online from the National Archives in the ARC database at [www.archives.gov/research/arc/](http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/), identifier number 197577), in order to write a 400-word newspaper article or editorial about the event. Invite student volunteers to share their articles with the class.

3. Inform students that the Triborough Bridge was one of the largest projects ever completed by the Works Progress Administration; share with them the statistics included at the end of the article, and ask them to consider the WPA’s impact. Assign small groups of students to research WPA projects completed in your state and list as many as they can. (You may wish to assign student groups different geographic regions of your state, or different types of projects.) After the groups have completed their lists, ask them to select one project and write a one-page description about the impact it has had on your state—then and now.

4. Ask students to conduct research into other speeches delivered by President Roosevelt. Encourage them to compare and contrast

this speech with three or four others. Lead a class discussion about common phrases and themes, as well as differences, and symbolism in the speeches. Ask students to select two to three quotes that they find particularly meaningful and write a one-page evaluation of the speeches in the context of the Great Depression. Resources available from the FDR Library and Museum website at [www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu) might be helpful.

5. Ask students to draw a map of their route to school, labeling all bridges, roads, street signs, traffic lights, etc. Next, ask them to indicate on their map the mode(s) of transportation they take to school each day. Finally, ask students to define infrastructure, and lead a class discussion about the types of infrastructure and their importance. Ask them to consider what the government’s role is and what they think it should be in terms of planning, funding, and creating infrastructure; ask them to also consider which government—the federal, state, or local. (You might remind them that the federal government and the New York state government jointly funded the Triborough Bridge project.) Assign students to write a one-page opinion paper defending their views on the government’s role. Invite student volunteers to share their papers with the class.

6. Inform students that urban planners work with communities to determine the need and location for roads, bridges, airports, public buildings, and more. Invite someone from your local planning and zoning commission to speak to your class about such projects built in your area (past, present, and future). Assign your students to generate questions ahead of time so that they are well prepared.

The president thanked the local and state leaders, engineers, skilled and unskilled workers, and also those workers in mills and shops many miles away whose work also helped make the bridge a reality. Roosevelt concluded, “May the Triborough Bridge, in the years to

come, justify our efforts and our hopes by truly serving the city, the state, and the nation.” After posing for photographs, shaking hands, and signing autographs, the president left the bridge.

Sources estimated that hundreds of thousands of people used the bridge by

car, bus, bicycle, and on foot on the first day it opened. Presently, some 200,000 vehicles use the bridge each day. In 2008, the Triborough Bridge was officially renamed the Robert F. Kennedy-Triborough Bridge. 🌐

### Note about the featured document

President Roosevelt’s address on the dedication of the Triborough Bridge, N.Y., N.Y., July 11, 1936, is in the holdings of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde Park, N.Y. Digital images of all five pages are available online from the National Archives in the ARC Database at [www.archives.gov/research/arc/](http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/), identifier number 197577. The photographs featured in this article are also in the holdings of the FDR Library and are available in ARC.

**DAVID L. ROSENBAUM** is an education specialist and **LEE ANN POTTER** is the director of education and volunteer programs at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. Potter serves as the editor of *Teaching with Documents*, a regular feature in *Social Education*. You may reproduce the documents featured in this article in any quantity. For more information about the National Archives education program, visit [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov).

Get an exclusive member discount  
on GEICO car insurance.

It pays to do your homework.

GEICO and Forrest T. Jones & Co. have teamed up  
to offer a special discount on car insurance.

**Special member  
discount**



To find out how much you could save,  
visit [geico.com](http://geico.com) or call 1-800-368-2734 today.

Visit [geico.com](http://geico.com) for your FREE, no-obligation rate quote and be sure to select NCSS when asked for your affiliation. New customers save an average of \$500 when they switch.

GEICO offers you:

- Outstanding, round-the-clock service online or on the phone, even on holidays and weekends!
- Fast, fair claim handling.
- Money-saving discounts.

GEICO can also help you with homeowner's and renter's insurance.

**GEICO**  
[geico.com](http://geico.com)

Average savings amount based on national GEICO New Policyholder Survey data through August 2007. Discount amount varies in some states. Discount is not available in all states or in all GEICO companies. One group discount applicable per policy. In New York a premium reduction is available.

Homeowner's insurance is not available in all states. Homeowner's and renter's coverages are written through non-affiliated insurance companies and are secured through Insurance Counselors Inc., the GEICO Property Agency, doing business as Special Services Insurance Agency in CA and GEICO Insurance Agency in MA, MI, NJ, NY, OK, SD, UT. Government Employees Insurance Co. • GEICO General Insurance Co. • GEICO Indemnity Co. • GEICO Casualty Co. These companies are subsidiaries of Berkshire Hathaway Inc. GEICO auto insurance is not available in Mass. GEICO, Washington, DC 20076