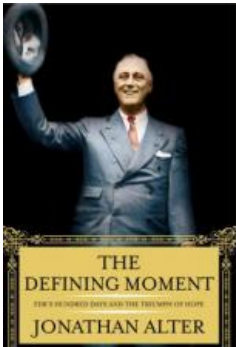


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The Defining Moment and the Art of Leadership

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As acknowledged by his friends and his foes, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was one of the most significant Presidents in the nation's history. While debates over his policies, actions, and legacy will surely continue, his leadership gifts continue to impress historians across ideological boundaries.

Roosevelt's self-understanding as a leader should be of interest to any student of the art and science of leadership. For that reason, Jonathan Alter's *The Defining Moment: FDR's Hundred Days and the Triumph of Hope* has much to teach about the art of leadership.

Alter, a senior editor at *Newsweek*, notes that just hours before FDR was sworn into office for his first term, governors in New York, Illinois, and Pennsylvania ordered the banks in their states to close. This meant that 34 of 48 states "now had no economic pulse." President Herbert Hoover was "a study in failure" even as he possessed a "brilliant understanding of complex issues." What Hoover failed to understand was the crucial role of the President as national leader. Understanding this was Roosevelt's great gift. He knew that the nation needed decisive leadership — and fast. His first 100 days were filled with a flurry of presidential actions and words. Roosevelt aimed at hope and exuded optimism. Hoover had declared a bank "moratorium." Roosevelt declared bank "holidays." Alter's analysis in *The Defining Moment* of Roosevelt's words and actions during his first 100 days is a great read.

An excerpt:

FDR knew the consequences of failing to seize the day. A visitor — unidentified in the press — came to him not long after the Inauguration and told him, "Mr. President, if your program succeeds, you'll be the greatest president in American history. If it fails, you will be the worst one." "If it fails," the new president replied, "I'll be the last one."

This sounds melodramatic to Americans in the 21st century, when freedom is flourishing in so many parts of the world. But during the 1930s, democracy was on the run, discredited even by subtle minds as a hopelessly cumbersome way to meet the challenges of the modern age.

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