

Name: _____

FDR's Fireside Chat, September 6, 1936

Instructions: Read the conclusion of Roosevelt's Fireside Chat below. You may want to listen to a recording of the speech at <<http://www.choices.edu/isolationismmaterials>>. In the first part of the speech Roosevelt focuses on the severe drought in the farm states. In the excerpt below he worries about the Labor Day holiday. Underline the five most important sentences below then answer the questions that follow.

“Tomorrow is Labor Day. Labor Day in this country has never been a class holiday. It has always been a national holiday. It has never had more significance as a national holiday than it has now. In other countries the relationship of employer and employee has more or less been accepted as a class relationship not readily to be broken through. In this country we insist, as an essential of the American way of life, that the employer-employee relationship should be one between free men and equals. We refuse to regard those who work with hand or brain as different from or inferior to those who live from their property. We insist that labor is entitled to as much respect as property. But our workers with hand and brain deserve more than respect for their labor. They deserve practical protection in the opportunity to use their labor at a return adequate to support them at a decent and constantly rising standard of living, and to accumulate a margin of security against the inevitable vicissitudes of life.

“The average man must have that twofold opportunity if we are to avoid the growth of a class conscious society in this country.

“There are those who fail to read both the signs of the times and American history. They would try to refuse the worker any effective power to bargain collectively, to earn a decent livelihood and to acquire security. It is those short-sighted ones, not labor, who threaten this country with that class dissension which in other countries has led to dictatorship and the establishment of fear and hatred as the dominant emotions in human life.

“All American workers, brain workers and manual workers alike, and all the rest of us whose well-being depends on theirs, know that our needs are one in building an orderly economic democracy in which all can profit and in which all can be secure from the kind of faulty economic direction which brought us to the brink of common ruin seven years ago.

“There is no cleavage between white collar workers and manual workers, between artists and artisans, musicians and mechanics, lawyers and accountants and architects and miners.

“Tomorrow, Labor Day, belongs to all of us. Tomorrow, Labor Day, symbolizes the hope of all Americans. Anyone who calls it a class holiday challenges the whole concept of American democracy.

“The Fourth of July commemorates our political freedom—a freedom which without economic freedom is meaningless indeed. Labor Day symbolizes our determination to achieve an economic freedom for the average man which will give his political freedom reality.”

Questions:

1. President Roosevelt's first national radio address was given on March 12, 1933 and was entitled, "An Intimate Talk with the People of the United States ...", by his second radio address, the label "fireside chat" was applied. Roosevelt gave 30 such addresses throughout his presidency. Why do you think the title "fireside chat" was given to these presidential radio addresses? What purpose does this title serve?

2. How would you describe the tone of FDR's September 6, 1936 Fireside Chat? How does the tone affect the overall message of the speech?

3. Roosevelt refers to "class" five times in the excerpt. What does he mean by "class"?

4. What values does Roosevelt emphasize in this Fireside Chat? List at least four.
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

 - d.

5. Roosevelt refers to "...that class dissension which in other countries has led to dictatorship and the establishment of fear and hatred as the dominant emotions in human life." What other countries might he be referring to? What systems of government do these countries have?

6. What international and domestic events might have led Roosevelt to say that calling Labor Day a "...class holiday challenges the concept of American democracy"?

Domestic events:

International events:

7. After closely examining this speech, what appears to be FDR's purpose in delivering it to the American public?

8. *Extra Challenge:* Was American democracy under threat during the Great Depression? Explain.