

The Four Freedoms- Reimagined

Norman Rockwell is renowned for his storytelling abilities and his depictions of American nostalgia. Despite criticism that his style was limited to "mere illustrations," his art continues to be revered as fine masterpieces. In 1943, he created illustrations honoring the "Four Freedoms" from FDR's inaugural speech, which aimed to support the war effort and alter public sentiment. It's notable that the figures in these paintings are predominantly white, but Rockwell's later works shed light on important issues of racism and diversity. My reinterpretation of the Four Freedoms is not meant to criticize but to respectfully pay homage to Rockwell. I believe that if he were alive today, he too would strive to amplify the voices of marginalized communities.

In Rockwell's Freedom of Speech (1943), a working-class man takes the stage at a town hall meeting to express his beliefs. Everyone pays attention to his passionate words, showing the freedom of speech and expression that Roosevelt defined as one of the four freedoms. Roosevelt encouraged Americans to fight for the freedom of speech that was being suppressed by Nazi forces in Europe. Rockwell's painting conveys the same message, with the small-town American setting reminiscent of Frank Capra films. Those who are marginalized in society should have their voices heard, just like the man in the painting. In this artwork, I aim to bring attention to a female janitor who works unnoticed and unheard, often facing violence and undervaluation of her service. Despite these challenges, she remains a protector and matriarch of her family. It's important to recognize the voices of those who are marginalized and ensure they are heard.

Roosevelt's second freedom is the right of every person to worship their deity in their own way, anywhere in the world. Rockwell depicted this in a painting featuring people from various sects and religious backgrounds, including Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish, all praying together. Cultural diversity in the country is a source of strength and our diverse beliefs, values, and religious practices form the backbone of our society. Despite our differences, we can come together as Americans, proud of our heritage and traditions. In my reimagining, I include a diverse representation of Eastern religions that have flourished in our country since Rockwell's time, including Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism.

Rockwell's Freedom from Want- depicts a joyful Thanksgiving scene, embodying the American ideal of prosperity and economic justice as outlined by Roosevelt's "third freedom" of securing a healthy peacetime life for all nations worldwide. Roosevelt aimed to spread his New Deal vision and promote healthy global trade, transcending the economic nationalism of the 1930s. The family gathering in the painting represents a universal human experience, depicted here with an African American family celebrating

their hard-won freedom from want with comfort food- including Collard Greens, Corn Bread, Macaroni & Cheese, Black Eyed Peas and Turkey. On this special day there is abundance- even in the midst of want; here is a safe place where young and old, friends and family are welcomed in anticipation of the feast.

Rockwell portrays a bedtime scene in Freedom from Fear, where a couple tucks their children in. Roosevelt envisioned a world without war or the threat of it, as stated in his speech “The fourth is freedom from fear – which, translated into world terms, means a worldwide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor – anywhere in the world.” My re-imagination of the painting shows a contemporary version, with a Sikh father holding a newspaper with the headline "Bombing Horror" while tucking his children to sleep, in fear of hate crimes and possible bomb threats. Although we may not fear them, they may have reason to fear us.

Rockwell transforms Roosevelt's global democracy manifesto into relatable, touching everyday scenes. Their appeal is emotional, resonating with parents seeking safety for their children and those grateful for a meal after the hardships of the Great Depression. His realistic style embeds Roosevelt's ideals in the hearts of viewers. However, in doing so, he simplifies the message, portraying it through the lens of small-town America. He is the artist of small-town America, and he translates Roosevelt's internationalism into that cozier language, making the four freedoms look inherently American. Through re-imagining these themes, we see their universality and relevance to current times.