Freedom of Speech, The Saturday Evening Post, 1943, 1943

Norman Rockwell (1894–1978)
Oil on Canvas (45 ¾ x 35 ½ in)
Norman Rockwell Museum
After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, America was soon bustling to marshal its forces on the home front as well as abroad. Norman Rockwell, already well known as an illustrator for one of the country’s most popular magazines, *The Saturday Evening Post*, had created the affable, gangly character of Willie Gillis for the magazine’s cover, and *Post* readers eagerly followed Willie as he developed from boy to man during the tenure of his imaginary military service. Rockwell considered himself the heir of the great illustrators who left their mark during World War I, and, like them, he wanted to contribute something substantial to his country.

A critical component of the World War II war effort was the creation of visual images based on Franklin D. Roosevelt’s appeal to the four essential human freedoms he spoke about in his State of the Union address on January 6, 1941 — freedom of speech and expression, freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom of worship. Yet, by the summer of 1942, two-thirds of Americans still knew nothing about the Four Freedoms, even though government agencies had disseminated photographs, prints, and even a textile design referring to them. It is unclear whether Rockwell or a member of the Office of War Information suggested he take on the Four Freedoms. What is uncontested is that his renditions were not only vital to the war effort, but have become enshrined in American culture.

Painting the Four Freedoms was important to Rockwell for more than patriotic reasons. He hoped one of them would become his statement as an artist. Rockwell had been born into a world in which painters crossed easily from the commercial world to that of the gallery, as Winslow Homer had done (see 9-A). By the 1940s, however, a division had emerged between the fine arts and the work for hire that Rockwell produced. The detailed, homespun images he employed to reach a mass audience were not appealing to an art community that now lionized intellectual and abstract works. But Rockwell knew his strengths did not lie in that direction: “Boys batting flies on vacant lots,” he explained in 1936, “little girls playing jacks on the front steps; old men plodding home at twilight, umbrella in hand — all these things arouse feeling in me.”

Rockwell’s ability to capture something universal in the commonplace is behind the success of the Four Freedoms pictures. For Freedom of Speech, the first painting he completed, the artist attempted four different compositions in which a man dressed in work clothes, the community’s “Annual Report” folded in his pocket, stands to give his opinion at a New England town meeting. In this, the final version, Rockwell depicts him from slightly below eye level, encircled by his fellow townsmen and by us, the viewers, who take our place two benches in front of him. The timeless properties of this work are the result of Rockwell’s classical sense of composition: the speaker stands at the apex of a pyramid drawn by the upward glances of his neighbors. The warm, light tones of the speaker’s skin glow against the matte black chalkboard in the background, giving him a larger-than-life, heroic appearance. The work also exudes a sense of immediacy. A snapshot effect is achieved by the inclusion of fragmented forms at the painting’s borders: the partial head of the man in the lower left and the glimpse of two faces in the right and left back corners (the one on the left is Rockwell’s own). Rockwell’s eye for detail (he used ordinary people as models and had scores of photographs made before beginning to paint in order to remind him of things as small as a folded collar) gives each inch of the painting a sense of the accidental and familiar.

In 1943, the four canvases were published in *The Saturday Evening Post* before being sent on a nationwide tour called the “Four Freedoms War Bond Show.” More than a million people saw them in sixteen cities and over 133 million dollars in war bonds were sold. This painting — Rockwell felt it and Freedom to Worship were the best of the four — helped galvanize the nation to action during the war. Long after that conflict, its message continues to resonate; time has revealed that the value of the Four Freedoms series lies not simply in the ideas it presented, but in Rockwell’s exceptional ability as an artist.
**TEACHING ACTIVITIES**

**E = ELEMENTARY  M = MIDDLE  S = SECONDARY**

**DESCRIBE AND ANALYZE**

**E M S**

Ask students what these people are doing.

The standing man is speaking and others are looking and listening to him.

Have students find the words TOWN and REPORT.

They are located on blue paper near the lower edge.

Where might these people be?

They are attending a community meeting. Because MONT is visible on the paper, it may be a town meeting in Vermont.

Ask students to describe the expression on the speaker’s face.

He seems very intent and serious. He looks up as if he is speaking to someone above him.

Ask students to describe the textures and patterns of the standing man’s clothes and hands. Have them compare his hands and clothing with that of the other men. What do their hands and clothing suggest about their professions and financial status?

The speaker wears a slightly rumpled, zippered, plaid shirt and frayed jacket. The other men wear smooth, white buttoned shirts, ties, and suit jackets. The speaker’s hands are darker and rougher than the lighter, smoother hand of the man on his right. The speaker is probably a manual laborer and the others, wealthier businessmen.

In what ways does this scene seem real?

The closely observed details and the composition with some faces only partially shown are almost like a photograph.

Who is attending this meeting?

We see young and old men and a woman in a black hat.

Who is the youngest man?

The speaker is.

How do you know?

His hair is dark rather than gray and his face isn’t as wrinkled as the others’.

Describe the reaction of the other people in this scene to the speaker.

They are all listening respectfully to him.

How did Rockwell emphasize the speaker?

His light face contrasts with a plain black background. Light shines on his forehead and most of the people are looking at him.

**M S**

Where is the viewer of this scene?

The viewer is seated two rows in front of the speaker, looking up at him.

How does this viewpoint influence our understanding of how Rockwell felt about this man and what he was doing?

We look up to this man, making him seem important.

**INTERPRET**

**E M S**

Encourage students to imagine what the speaker might be saying. Discuss recent town meetings or hearings in your community where citizens voiced their opinions.

**M S**

What is the paper in the speaker’s pocket?

It is probably a town report.

Because the men in this scene have town reports, what does Rockwell assume about Americans and their form of government?

Ordinary American citizens can read and are capable of understanding complex issues concerned with government.

What inspired this painting?

Franklin D. Roosevelt’s 1941 State of the Union address. Roosevelt appealed to four essential human freedoms.

Explain why this scene shows an American freedom. Why did Americans believe there was a connection between this image and World War II?

An ordinary working-class American citizen is able to voice his opinions without fear of censorship. Americans were fighting totalitarian dictatorships that did not allow this freedom of speech.

**CONNECTIONS**

**Historical Connections:** World War II; war bonds; Pearl Harbor

**Historical Figures:** Franklin Delano Roosevelt; Dwight D. Eisenhower; Winston Churchill; Adolph Hitler

**Civics:** Bill of Rights; U.S. Supreme Court cases: Whitney v. California, Stromberg v. California, Brandenburg v. Ohio, and New York Times Co. v. United States; structure and function of local government

**Literary Connections and Primary Documents:** “Four Freedoms” speech, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (secondary); “Death of the Ball Turret Gunner,” Randall Jarrell (secondary)
Free Speech Personified

Norman Rockwell's inspiring and enduring painting

By BRUCE COLE

A hundred thousand people came to see them in Washington and New York, a million more in other major cities across the country. They were visited by a vice president, stars of screen and radio, and even survivors of the Bataan "Death March." They raised millions of dollars for the purchase of war bonds, and were reproduced in over four million copies.

Sponsored by the Treasury Department and the Saturday Evening Post, the 1943 "Four Freedoms War Bond Exhibition" was our first national "blockbuster." Exhibited not in museums or galleries, but in department stores for a year during the depths of World War II, it made an already well-known illustrator a household name.

What the crowds came to see were paintings: "Freedom of Speech," "Freedom of Worship," "Freedom From Want" and "Freedom From Fear" (now all prominently displayed in the Norman Rockwell Museum). In 1943 each had been reproduced, along with an accompanying essay by leading literary lights including Booth Tarkington and Stephen Vincent Benét, in successive issues of the Saturday Evening Post, a popular magazine for which Norman Rockwell had worked since 1916.

Rockwell discovered his subjects in Franklin Roosevelt's State of the Union speech of Jan. 6, 1941, delivered 11 months before Pearl Harbor. In it, the president warns of the looming danger posed by aggressor nations, proposes Lend-Lease, and calls for a major increase in armament production. At the speech's conclusion he looks toward the future, to a world founded upon "four essential freedoms."

"Freedom of speech and expression" and "freedom of worship" are, of course, from the Bill of Rights. But the other two? "Freedom from want" and "freedom from fear," which the president defines as "a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point . . . that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor"?are Roosevelt's, or perhaps his wife Eleanor's, utopian wishes for universal rights that were to become part of the United Nations Charter.

As a superb illustrator who used the familiar world of his viewers to tell them stories with messages that touched their hearts, Rockwell said in his autobiography that he had difficulty conceptualizing the abstract, and internationalist, Four Freedoms, especially the negative rights of "want" and "fear": "I never liked 'Freedom
from Fear' or, for that matter, 'Freedom from Want,'" he wrote. "Neither of them," Rockwell thought, "had any wallop." He was right.

"Freedom From Want" depicts a homely Thanksgiving dinner; it's more about what we have than what we want, surplus rather than scarcity. In "Freedom From Fear," a mother tucks in her children while her husband holds a newspaper with headlines reading "Bombings" and "Horror." This reference to the war is so specific that it conveys little about fear or Roosevelt's plan for universal disarmament. Rockwell just could not get his hands around these airy abstractions.

And, although he was proud of "Freedom of Worship," his depiction of spectral close-up faces and hands raised in prayer is bland, without any real message about religious freedom? again, no wallop. This is because faith, like the absence of fear and the absence of want, is essentially private, something personal, intangible and unpicturable.

In "Freedom of Speech," however, Rockwell found a subject that is active and public, a subject he could grasp and shape into his greatest painting forging traditional American illustration into a powerful and enduring work of art.

For inspiration, he thought of the New England town-hall meetings he knew so well, with their long tradition of democratic public debate?a tradition, as we have seen this summer, still very much alive. But we are not sure where Rockwell's scene occurs; a blackboard frames the speaker, but he stands behind a pew: school and church, two pillars of American life. The pamphlet held by the man closest to us reveals the subject of the meeting?a discussion of the town's annual report.

Using a classic pyramidal composition, Rockwell focuses attention on the standing speaker whose age, worn and stained jacket, rough hands with dirty fingernails, and plaid shirt set him apart from the neat coats, ties and white shirts of the older men in the audience. Although he is a working man, this figure, his face reminiscent of Lincoln's, is unafraid to voice his opinion?which we suspect is contrary to that of the others in the room. Standing tall, his mouth open, his shining eyes transfixed, he speaks his mind, untrammeled and unafraid. In Rockwell's vision he has become not only an active public participant in democracy, but a defender of it. He is the very embodiment of free speech, a living manifestation of that abstract right?an image that transforms principle, paint and, yes, creed, into an indelible image and a brilliant and beloved American icon still capable of inspiring millions world-wide.

—Mr. Cole, an art historian and former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, is president of the American Revolution Center at Valley Forge, Pa.
FOUR FREEDOMS

We look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression--everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way--everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want...everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear...anywhere in the world.

--President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Message to Congress, January 6, 1941

President Roosevelt was a gifted communicator. On January 6, 1941, he addressed Congress, delivering the historic "Four Freedoms" speech. At a time when Western Europe lay under Nazi domination, Roosevelt presented a vision in which the American ideals of individual liberties were extended throughout the world. Alerting Congress and the nation to the necessity of war, Roosevelt articulated the ideological aims of the conflict. Elocuently, he appealed to Americans` most profound beliefs about freedom.

The speech so inspired illustrator Norman Rockwell that he created a series of paintings on the "Four Freedoms" theme. In the series, he translated abstract concepts of freedom into four scenes of everyday American life. Although the Government initially rejected Rockwell`s offer to create paintings on the "Four Freedoms" theme, the images were publicly circulated when The Saturday Evening Post, one of the nation`s most popular magazines, commissioned and reproduced the paintings. After winning public approval, the paintings served as the centerpiece of a massive U.S. war bond drive and were put into service to help explain the war`s aims.

You can [hear this excerpt](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/four Freedoms/four freedoms.html) from President Roosevelt`s address (920K WAV File). [Download WAV]  [Text]

Save Freedom of Speech
By Norman Rockwell
©1943 SEPS: The Curtis Publishing Co., Agent

Printed by the Government
Printing Office
for the Office of War Information
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-208-PMP-44)

(Click on poster for high-resolution image)
Save Freedom of Worship
By Norman Rockwell
©1943 SEPS: The Curtis Publishing Co., Agent

Printed by the Government Printing Office
for the Office of War Information
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-208-PMP-43)

(Click on poster for high-resolution image)

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Ours...to fight for--
Freedom From Want
By Norman Rockwell
©1943 SEPS: The Curtis Publishing Co., Agent

Printed by the Government Printing Office
for the Office of War Information
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-208-PMP-45)

(Click on poster for high-resolution image)

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Ours...to fight for--
Freedom From Fear
By Norman Rockwell
©1943 SEPS: The Curtis Publishing Co., Agent

Printed by the Government Printing Office
for the Office of War Information
NARA Still Picture Branch
(NWDNS-208-PMP-46)

(Click on poster for high-resolution image)

Norman Rockwell

Pictures of the American People
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The Four Freedoms

The Four Freedoms are perhaps Norman Rockwell’s best-known images. The four freedoms were outlined by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his 1941 State of the Union address, and Rockwell completed his paintings of them during World War II as his contribution to the war effort. An immediate success from their first appearance in The Saturday Evening Post in 1943, The Four Freedoms have achieved the status of icons in American visual culture.

In his 1941 address, Roosevelt identified four basic human rights—freedom of speech, freedom to worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—that should be guaranteed “everywhere in the world.” Roosevelt was both identifying the objectives of the war and revealing his hopeful view of the postwar world. Roosevelt’s worldview could not be legislated into reality. Freedom from fear (by which Roosevelt meant a global reduction in armaments) and freedom from want were viewed as liberal politics, and congressional conservatives fought many of Roosevelt’s war initiatives, which they saw as an extension of his New Deal.\(^1\) For the Roosevelt administration, however, the four freedoms were always a critical component in understanding why we were fighting.

The Office of Facts and Figures (OFF), one of three government agencies responsible for war information—along with the Division of Information of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the Office of Government Reports (OGR)—commissioned artwork, including murals, photographs, paintings, and woodcuts, that would present the freedoms to the public. Many works featured such symbols as a cornucopia or house of worship, while others depicted simian Japanese soldiers battling the Allies, or caricatures of the Axis dictators. The OFF also assembled a corps of writers, led by Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish, to communicate the idea of the four freedoms. Despite pamphlets, posters, displays, and other public outreach, by the summer of 1942, an Office of War Information survey reported that “only about one-third of the American public has any knowledge of the Four Freedoms as such, [and] no more than two percent were able to identify all four of them correctly.”\(^2\) The four

Freedom of Speech (detail), 1943
freedoms had not yet penetrated the minds, much less the hearts, of Americans.

The summer of 1942 was also proving difficult for Norman Rockwell. He was concerned about the war effort and eager to do his part but unable to determine a course of action. In his autobiography and a 1945 New Yorker article, Rockwell told the story of The Four Freedoms commission with a dramatic flair. Both versions tell of a 3 a.m. epiphany, when he realized that he should create a series of posters based on the four freedoms using his Vermont neighbors as models. There followed three days of frantic work on huge charcoal drawings and a disheartening trip to Washington, D.C., with his good friend and fellow illustrator Mead Schaeffer. Although the New Yorker article suggests benign neglect on the part of the federal bureaucracy, Rockwell tells in his autobiography of outright hostility from the Office of War Information. “The last war you illustrators did the posters; he [the man in charge of posters] said. ‘This war we’re going to use fine arts men, real artists.’”

Both versions of the story feature the same hero—Ben Hibbs, editor of The Saturday Evening Post—whom the rejected Rockwell and Schaeffer saw in Philadelphia on their return trip. Hibbs, on hearing Rockwell’s idea, immediately jumped at the chance to publish the images, telling Rockwell to stop work on all other projects and finish the Freedoms for the Post. In both versions, the huge government bureaucracy fails to recognize the golden opportunity being offered, while the Post, a private enterprise, sees its chance and takes it.

The accuracy of this story becomes suspect, however, on the basis of one letter to Norman Rockwell from the Assistant Chief of the Graphics Division, Office of War Information. The letter dated April 28, 1943, was written by Thomas D. Mabry after The Four Freedoms were published in the Post. Before the war, Mabry held several positions at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, including Executive Director, and he came to his government post with an impeccable background in the art world.

I have been wanting to write you for sometime to tell you how successful I think your Four Freedoms paintings are. I recall last spring, when you came to see me at the Office of Facts and Figures, I said at that time that one of our most urgent needs and one that was most difficult to fill was a series of posters on the four freedoms. Your paintings, which we are fortunately able to use as posters, will go a long way toward fulfilling that need. I hope we will be able to work together in the future on other projects as the government greatly needs to call upon you (emphasis added).

Mabry enclosed a set of advance copies of the posters.

Why would Norman Rockwell have created a story of such melodrama surrounding his Four Freedoms if he had, in fact, met with federal representatives about such a commission? Why would Mabry have written so cordially about meeting with Rockwell the previous year if he had dismissed Rockwell’s offer of work so coldly? No other letters have been found to shed additional light on the matter, although any earlier correspondence may have been destroyed when Rockwell’s studio burned to the ground in May 1943.

The interwoven wars within the agencies responsible for war information may hold the answer to this dilemma. The Writers’ Division of the Domestic Branch, headed by MacLeish, was a division of the Office of Facts and Figures and was responsible for producing pamphlets that presented the government’s position on issues relating to the war. Yet the three agencies responsible for war information—OFF, OCM, and OGR—were each autonomous. There was no single government entity controlling or even coordinating the flow of information.

By the spring of 1942, when Mabry wrote that he and Rockwell met, criticism of the government’s information systems was high. On June 30, 1942, Roosevelt issued an Executive Order creating the Office of War Information (OWI), centralizing the OFF, OCM, and OGR. The administration also brought film producers and advertising executives into the OWI to better coordinate public outreach. Explicitly criticizing the Writers’ Division, one memo to MacLeish claimed, “We must state the truth in terms that will be
EACH, ACCORDING TO THE DICTATES OF HIS OWN CONSCIENCE.

NORMAN ROCKWELL

Freedom to Worship, 1943
Freedom from Fear, 1943
understood by all levels of intelligence." Image became all important. Pamphlets, the bulletin of the Writers' Division began to be seen as peripheral to getting the message out, and the liberal intellectuals of the Writers' Division became disenchanted.

The situation finally came to a head in the spring of 1943. Price Gilbert, a former vice president for Coca-Cola then working for the OWI, argued that posters portraying Nazi brutality by noted artist Ben Shahn were too unattractive for the general public. Gilbert expressed a preference for Norman Rockwell's visually appealing scenes. The OWI decided to use Rockwell's Four Freedoms instead of Shahn's posters, widening the split between the "ad men" and the liberal intellectuals, who refused to concede that the general public might be more receptive to Rockwell's images than to Shahn's. Shahn and Francis Brennan—the former chief of the graphics bureau who "objected to treating the American people 'as if they were twelve years old,'"—created a poster with their interpretation of Gilbert's requirements for success. It showed the Statue of Liberty holding a bottle of Coca-Cola, with the caption "The War That Refreshes: The Four Delicious Freedoms." In April 1943, when a pamphlet on American agriculture was cancelled because it was viewed as not being positive enough, the entire Writers' Division resigned en masse.

It seems probable that Norman Rockwell was caught between these two factions in the spring and summer of 1942. Rockwell claims that he was moved by the Atlantic Charter (issued in the summer of 1941) to consider painting The Four Freedoms; it is likely that the suggestion came instead from Mabry or another official at the OFF. If a discussion did take place between Mabry and Rockwell in the spring of 1942, Rockwell probably would have returned to Arlington to begin work on the paintings. As the gulf widened within the OWI, Rockwell, unaware, may have returned to Washington in the summer of 1942 (having had his 3 A.M. brainstorms) to review his sketches, only to meet with derision (perhaps from Francis Brennan) and no commission to complete the work. By the spring of 1943, when Rockwell's paintings for the Post were completed, changes at the OWI created a warmer climate, at least in some quarters, for Rockwell's work. The adoption of Rockwell's reassuring images for the Second War Loan Drive, while deepening the schism in the agency, showed the importance of using accessible words and images in getting the message of the four freedoms out at home as well as on the battlefield.

Once Rockwell had been commissioned by the Post to do The Four Freedoms, it took him six months to complete the job, "and it was a struggle." Freedom of Speech (page 101) alone took four attempts. Rockwell's initial inspiration—a lone dissenter at a New England town meeting allowed to speak without argument or harassment—did not change, but composing the painting proved difficult. In one version, there are too many people in the picture and no single focus; in another, the viewer looks down on the speaker, who gazes ahead, close-mouthed. The final painting shows a strong central figure in the act of speaking, surrounded by his neighbors. The viewer is invited into the picture as a participant, seated in the bench and looking up at the solitary speaker, who stands out against a large blackboard, providing a background so dark that Rockwell's signature is almost invisible.

Freedom to Worship (page 97) caused more problems. Rockwell's first idea was to show a barbershop with men of different races and religions being shaved or waiting their turn, "laughing and getting on well together." The situation struck Rockwell as ridiculous, and he found that everyone had a different view of how a particular religion or race should look. There were at least two more attempts before Rockwell decided to focus on heads and hands, close-up, in prayer. Unlike in Freedom of Speech, the viewer does not easily feel part of Freedom to Worship. Here, the scale of the heads and hands and the composition itself create a barrier for the viewer. While one figure in the lower right corner stands at a slight angle, the majority of the heads are in straight profile, an unwelcoming pose. One gets the idea that this is what Rockwell referred to as a "Big Picture," particularly with the phrase "Each according to the dictates of his own conscience" lettered across the top.

The final two images, Freedom from Want and Freedom from Fear (pages 98, 99), gave Rockwell little trouble. For an American, Thanksgiving dinner
seemed the ultimate fulfillment of freedom from want. Rockwell claimed to have painted the turkey on Thanksgiving Day, after which it became the family's holiday dinner. Here a welcoming face in the lower right corner is turned toward the viewer. Freedom from Want is notable for Rockwell's virtuoso use of white on white, from china to table linens to water glasses and silverware.

The concept for Freedom from Fear, parents tucking their children into bed, was an unused Post cover idea from the Battle of Britain in 1940. The angled chair in the lower left corner brings the viewer into the picture, but the scene is so intimate that some people may have felt more like voyeurs than participants. Rockwell's use of light within the darkened confines of the bedroom enhances that feeling of intimacy and emphasizes a sense of warmth and safety.

All four of the paintings share a muted palette. Rockwell's characteristic vermillion, which he often used to add interest to his works, is completely absent. Although often darkened or otherwise enhanced in reproduction, Freedom to Worship is composed of soft grays, beiges, and browns and is painted so thinly that the weave of the canvas is visible with no brushstrokes showing. Rockwell may have felt that these stylistic changes in The Four Freedoms were improvements to his regular painting style, reflecting his understanding of the importance of this commission and perhaps his anticipation of the public reaction to the works.

Rockwell believed that Freedom of Speech and Freedom to Worship were the most successful of the paintings. He wrote that Freedom from Fear was "based on a rather smug idea" that American children were safe in their beds as Europe burned. Rockwell also wrote that Freedom from Want was not popular overseas because of resentment of American overabundance. "Neither of them has any wallop," he said. Yet Freedom from Want is now one of the best-known images in American visual culture. Popularly called "The Thanksgiving Picture," it has become a symbol of the November holiday. As a subject of parody and satire, it has been reproduced with Mickey and Minnie Mouse serving turkey to their cartoon family, in innumerable political cartoons, and as advertisement for frozen vegetables. While Rockwell may have felt the image lacked impact, more than fifty years later, Freedom from Want has left an indelible impression on the nation's visual vocabulary.

Rockwell's assessment of Freedom to Worship as one of the most successful of the four is also questionable. Rockwell's success with The Four Freedoms was rooted in his fundamental ability to weave stories and create scenes in which many Americans could see something or someone to identify with, but Freedom to Worship, due to its monumental scale, is the least successful in this regard. Later, when he attempted to deal with other large topics from the Peace Corps (page 65) to the Golden Rule (page 103), Rockwell again used this focus on heads and faces, often in profile, sometimes with a phrase or caption lettered on the canvas. The effect seems too labored, as if to say, "This picture is important." Rockwell was usually able to achieve the same impact without being bombastic.

The Four Freedoms were launched on a nationwide tour in April 1945, during which over 1.2 million people viewed them and $152 million worth of war bonds were sold. Four million posters were printed during the war; with subsequent publications, The Four Freedoms are among the most reproduced works of all time. The New Yorker reported in 1945 that The Four Freedoms "were received by the public with more enthusiasm, perhaps, than any other paintings in the history of American art."

Today, Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms are all but divorced from Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the urgencies of wartime. Seen now in textbooks and newspapers, on plates and neckties, Rockwell's images still inspire enthusiasm. The Four Freedoms have become part of our public consciousness and collective memory.