# Q105 – Who was president during the Great Depression and World War II?

**DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:**
Franklin Roosevelt was president during most of the Great Depression and World War II.
Film footage: “The Great Depression left millions of able and willing Americans bewildered and jobless.”
After he took office in 1933, unemployment fell from its peak of 25 percent – but throughout the 1930s it remained stuck at 14 percent or higher.

To combat the Depression, Roosevelt demanded “bold, persistent experimentation.” Well, one of those experiments ended up at the Supreme Court: The Sick Chicken case. It involved the National Industrial Recovery Act – a sweeping measure that replaced free enterprise with a planned economy managed by the government.
Four brothers who ran a kosher poultry shop in Brooklyn were jailed for violating the act. Among their crimes were letting customers choose their own chickens, keeping prices “too low”, and “competing too hard.” The brothers contested the charges – and the Supreme Court unanimously held the National Industrial Recovery Act was unconstitutional.
Why? Because the law regulated commerce within a state rather than between states. The Court also ruled the law was unconstitutional because the Congress had delegated lawmaking authority to the president. Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes declared, “Extraordinary conditions do not create or enlarge constitutional power.”
World War II brings to mind another constitutional principle: Civilian control of the military. In 1942, just months after America had entered the war, the army and navy chiefs of staff urged opening another front by landing an army in Europe. As commander-in-chief, Roosevelt instead chose North Africa, where the enemy was weaker.

That campaign succeeded and was followed by successful landings in Italy in 1943 and in France, 1944.
Franklin Roosevelt died shortly before World War II ended. It fell to the next president – Harry Truman – to complete the task.