

# Preserving *Our Documents*

The following essay is intended to impart teachers and students with an understanding and appreciation of the process by which our nation's documents are preserved.

## Preserving the Charters of Freedom

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In 1952 the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights (collectively known as the Charters of Freedom) were first exhibited in the Rotunda of the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. Shortly before they were displayed, the documents were placed into protective encasements under the best conditions that science and technology could provide.

For half a century, staff at the National Archives monitored the condition and evaluated the safety of the Charters to ensure their survival for future generations. As technology improved, new monitoring techniques were used. In the late 1980s small irregularities were observed on the inner surface of the encasement glass. Closer examination revealed tiny surface cracks, crystals, and droplets. Glass experts advised that the irregularities are symptoms of glass deterioration. Although the documents are not in any danger, eventually the deteriorating glass will turn opaque, obscuring the documents.



### 1941 President Franklin Roosevelt's Annual Message to Congress—

This speech delivered by President Roosevelt on Jan. 6 is known as his "Four Freedoms Speech," due to a short closing portion describing the President's vision in which the American ideals of individual liberties extend throughout the world.

### Lend Lease Act—

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, the United States officially remained neutral. President Roosevelt, however, believes the United States is obligated to assist Great Britain in its fight against Germany. Calling upon the United States to be the "great arsenal of democracy," President Roosevelt proposes a system for supplying England with war goods without requiring cash payment. The system allows the lending or leasing of war supplies to any nation deemed "vital to the defense of the United States." Congress approves the proposal as the Lend Lease Act on March 11, and the United States immediately begins shipping war supplies to England.

### Executive Order 8802: Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry—

War is raging in Europe and Asia, and United States defense-related industries expand as the nation supplies war goods to the fighting nations. A. Philip Randolph, President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, threatens to March on Washington if President Roosevelt doesn't make employment opportunities in the growing government-run defense industries available to African-Americans in addition to whites. In response, Roosevelt issues Order 8802 in June, banning discriminatory employment practices by federal agencies and all unions and companies engaged in war-related work. The order also establishes the Fair Employment Practices Commission to enforce the new policy.



## Design

The National Archives and Records Administration and the National Institute of Standards and Technology are nearing the end of a multi-year project to design and fabricate new encasements for the Declaration Of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights with funding provided from the United States Congress and the Pew Charitable Trusts. The deteriorating glass in the existing units presents the opportunity to entirely redesign the encasement. Using the best technology available, an interdisciplinary team of conservators, archivists, engineers, design and exhibit specialists, architects, chemists, and physicists are working with materials and fabrication experts to design and build new, state-of-the-art encasements that will preserve and protect the Charters for generations to come.

The existing encasements, which contain helium and a small amount of water vapor, are soldered shut and cannot be opened without breaking the seal. The design of the new encasements permits conservators to open and reseal them if it is ever necessary to examine the documents or modify the special monitoring and preservation components that are part

of each unit. The documents will be mounted so that glass never touches them. The new design makes it possible to incorporate future conservation techniques as they are developed. On page 75, is a cutaway view of the encasement that shows some of the design details.

## Prototypes

The National Institute of Standards and Technology has designed and fabricated prototypes of the new encasements. A manufacturing model was created, followed by Prototype 1. Delivered in late 1999, Prototype 1 currently encases the transmittal page of the Constitution. That prototype has been under constant monitoring since early 2000. The environment within the encasement is tested to ensure there is an airtight seal and that the document remains in the best condition possible.

Prototype 2 was delivered in the fall of 2000, and it houses the second page of the Constitution. Prototype 2 is the production model for the remaining encasements to be delivered to NARA conservators in 2001. Those encasements will house pages one, three, and four of the Constitution and its

### Joint Address to Congress Leading to a Declaration of War Against Japan—

On Dec. 7, Japanese torpedo planes and dive-bombers kill almost 2,400 Americans and destroy hundreds of aircraft, battleships, cruisers, and destroyers at the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In response, President Roosevelt asks Congress to declare war on Japan, to avenge what he calls a "date which will live in infamy" when "the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan." He receives near-unanimous approval from Congress to declare war on Japan, and the United States enters the Second World War.

1942

### Executive Order 9066: Japanese Relocation Order—

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Executive Order 9066 is issued. It authorizes the evacuation of all Japanese-Americans from the West Coast to relocation centers guarded by military police further inland.



1944

### General Dwight D. Eisenhower's Order of the Day, June 6—

This order authorizes the D-Day invasion of the beaches of Normandy, by American troops, in an effort to liberate France, which had fallen to the Germans earlier in the Second World War.

### Servicemen's Readjustment Act—

Also known as the G.I. Bill, this act, signed into law by President Roosevelt on June 22, provides veterans of the Second World War funds for college education, unemployment insurance, and housing.

transmittal page, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights.



## Removing the Charters from the Old Encasements

National Archives conservators work very carefully when handling archival records, especially so with the Charters of Freedom. These photos show conservators at work as they remove the documents from their original encasements and place them in the

new encasements. The documents undergo painstaking conservation treatment before they are transferred.

After months of planning and coordination with colleagues throughout NARA and NIST for the construction of new encasements for

the Charters of Freedom, NARA's conservators finally reached the day that pages 2 and 3 of the U.S. Constitution, along with the Transmittal Page, were transferred from their storage vault to the special, secure room where the conservation treatment would be carried out. The documents were removed from the vault in their old encasements for the last time.

The room in which the work is done is designed to assure close control of the temperature and humidity to which the documents will be exposed when they are removed from their old encasements.

Parchment responds to changes in moisture by expanding and contracting. When it is exposed to a moister atmosphere, it expands; when it is exposed to a drier atmosphere, it contracts. Because parchment is stretched, preserved skin of an animal (often a cow or a sheep), different parts of the same skin may respond differently to changes in humidity, causing unexpected ripples and bumps on the surface.



1945

### Manhattan Project Notebook—

The Manhattan Project, so-called because it is run after 1942 by a section of the army code-named the "Manhattan District", is assigned the task of developing an atomic bomb. This notebook records an experiment of the Manhattan Project, the all-out but highly secret effort of the federal government to build an atomic bomb during World War II. Recorded here is the world's first controlled, self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction, achieved on Dec. 2, 1942.



### Surrender of Germany—

In France, on May 7, German General Alfred Johl signs the unconditional surrender of all German forces on all fronts, ending the European phase of World War II. The official German surrender, scheduled to take effect on May 8, follows Nazi leader Adolph Hitler's suicide, Berlin's surrender to the Soviet Army, and the surrender of several major German armies to British forces in northern Europe.



### United Nations Charter—

In Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco the Allied powers create an international agency that will resolve conflicts among members, and discourage aggressor nations with military force if required. This new agency is known as the United Nations.



### Surrender of Japan—

On Sept. 2, Japanese representatives sign the official Instrument of Surrender, prepared by the War Department and approved by President Truman. In eight short paragraphs, Japan surrenders to the Allies.



NARA understood what conditions the earlier encasements were designed to achieve — 25% to 30% relative humidity inside the helium-filled encasement. But NARA also knew that the glass of the encasement was beginning to show signs of deterioration that is consistent with much higher humidity. In the months preceding the move of the first three pages of the Charters, NARA's conservators explored a number of analytical techniques that could be used without breaking the seal to try to determine the amount of moisture within the encasement. NARA's final attempt to get a handle on the moisture was extraction of a small portion of the gas within the encasement that was analyzed to determine the components that were present in the sample. But NARA never achieved consistent results with this analysis, and because of this inconsistency, our conservators were not sure what to expect when the first encasement was actually opened.

After all the preliminary testing, conservators selected a humidity level for the room based on their best analysis and prepared to



Cross Section of New Encasement

open the Transmittal Page the first encasement selected for treatment. This would be the first time in 50 years that anyone had actually touched one of the pieces of parchment that make up the Charters of Freedom.

The encasements had been sealed with a lead ribbon soldered to the copper-coated surface at the edge of the glass that make up each box. This lead seal also included a sensor to allow for checks of the helium in each encasement. The only way to open an encasement is to break the seal, either by using heat to soften the metal or by cutting through the lead ribbon with a sharp tool. NARA's conservators chose to use the sharp tool. One of the conservators working on the project made a tool with a hook-shaped blade that could be inserted into the lead. The tool was worked against the seal to cut it through without injuring the other parts of the encasement or the document. The team of conservators, a film crew documenting the process, and several observers settled in to the work. The process was



1947

**Truman Doctrine—**

Fears that Greece and Turkey might fall to the communist Soviet Union prompt President Harry Truman to articulate the "Truman Doctrine." This doctrine states that world peace and the well-being of all Americans depends on the containment of communism around the world.



1948

**Marshall Plan—**

On April 3 President Truman signs the Economic Recovery Act of 1948. It becomes known as the Marshall Plan, named for Secretary of State George Marshall, who in 1947 proposed that the United States provide economic assistance to restore the economic infrastructure of post-war Europe.

**Press Release Announcing U.S. Recognition of Israel—**

At midnight on May 14, the Provisional Government of Israel proclaims a new State of Israel. On that same date, the United States, in the person of President Truman, recognizes the provisional Jewish government as de facto authority of the Jewish state (de jure recognition is extended on January 31, 1949).

**Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the Armed Forces—**

President Harry Truman establishes the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, committing the government to racially integrating the military.



slow, but deliberate. The conservators took turns cutting the seal, making steady progress until finally the top and bottom pieces of glass were separated and the conservators could lift the parts away to remove the Transmittal Page itself.

The construction of the now-open encasement included a piece of free glass resting directly on the surface of the parchment document, in addition to a top and bottom piece of glass and several sheets of paper behind the document. The conservators feared that the glass might have adhered to the surface of the document over the years. There was no indication that this had happened, but there was no evidence that it had not either, so the next steps required great caution. If the glass were stuck, too quick a move could cause the parchment skin to tear or be damaged.

First the conservators lifted away the top glass and removed the retaining frame and the leak detector. Then they carefully placed each part of the encasement in an individual box prepared for it. Next the conservators carefully lifted away the glass resting on the surface of the parchment. As they had hoped, there were no points of adhesion and the glass came away

easily. Now came the document itself, lifted away with one of the sheets of backing paper beneath it. The remaining sheets of backing paper were quickly sealed in a special plastic bag designed to retain any moisture present in the paper. Conservators were still interested in the moisture of the encasement and hoped to learn something from the moisture content of the paper that had been directly behind the document. Finally the last sheet of glass was boxed, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. The first encasement had been successfully opened, and the document was removed. The parts of the encasement were retained for further examination and research at a later date. The conservators will examine the document itself, assessing its condition and proposing conservation treatment to be executed before it is sealed into the new titanium and aluminum container.



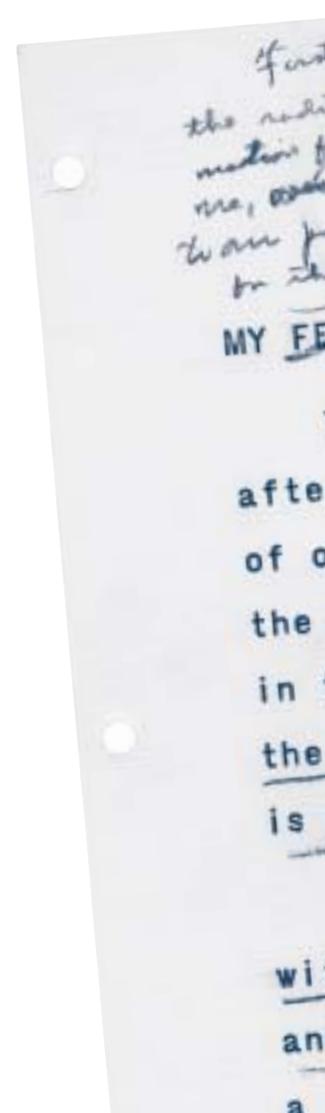
**1953**  
**Armistice Agreement for the Restoration of the South Korean State—**  
This Armistice formally ends the war in Korea. North and South Korea remain separate, and occupy almost the same territory they had when the war began.

**1954**  
**Senate Resolution 301, Censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy—**  
In 1950 Senator McCarthy, spurred by national fears of communism, begins making accusations against members of the government, the entertainment industry, and business. Despite an inability to produce evidence for his charges, McCarthy grows increasingly aggressive in his accusations. By 1954, when the Senate votes to censure him, much of his power has dissolved. This censure describes his behavior as “contrary to senatorial traditions.”

***Brown v Board of Education—***  
The Supreme Court’s decision in this case overrules the “separate but equal” principle set forth in the 1896 *Plessy v Ferguson* decision. The Court rules that “separate but equal” is inherently unequal and promotes racial supremacy. The unanimous decision states that state-sanctioned segregation of public schools is a violation of the 14th Amendment and is therefore unconstitutional.



**1956**  
**National Interstate and Defense Highways Act—**  
This act authorizes the building of highways throughout the United States, the biggest public works project in the nation’s history.



~~I must express my gratitude to  
 the networks of the  
 the years, to bring special message  
 my special thanks go to them  
 this way~~

FELLOW AMERICANS

THREE DAYS from now,  
 r half a century in the service  
 ur country, I shall lay down  
 responsibilities of office as,  
 traditional and solemn ceremony,  
 authority of the Presidency  
 vested in my successor.

THIS EVENING I come to you  
 th a message of leave-taking  
 d farewell, and to share  
 few final thoughts with you,

IN THE COUNCILS of government,  
 we must guard against the acquisition  
 of unwarranted influence,  
 whether sought or unsought,  
 by the military-industrial complex.

The potential for the disastrous  
 rise of misplaced power  
 exists and will persist.

WE MUST NEVER let the weight  
 of this combination endanger  
 our liberties or democratic processes

We should take nothing for granted



**1957**  
**Executive Order 10730: Desegregation of Central High School—**  
 Although the Supreme Court rules the principle of "separate but equal" illegal in the *Brown v Board of Education* case, Little Rock, Arkansas' Central High School refuses to comply with the court. President Dwight Eisenhower sends in federal troops by Executive Order to maintain order and peace, allowing the integration of Central High School to proceed.

**1961**  
**President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address—**  
 In his farewell address, President Eisenhower warns against the establishment of a "military-industrial complex," where power can easily be misplaced and misused.

**President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address—**  
 President John F. Kennedy calls for the service of a "new generation of young Americans" to help protect liberty and freedom in the United States and throughout the world.

**Executive Order 10924: Establishment of the Peace Corps—**  
 Following the ideals set forth in his inaugural address, President Kennedy establishes the Peace Corps as a way for young Americans to assist developing nations by providing educational, technical, and medical assistance. Goals of the Peace Corps include: 1) To help the people of interested countries and areas in meeting their needs for trained workers; 2) To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served; and 3) To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.



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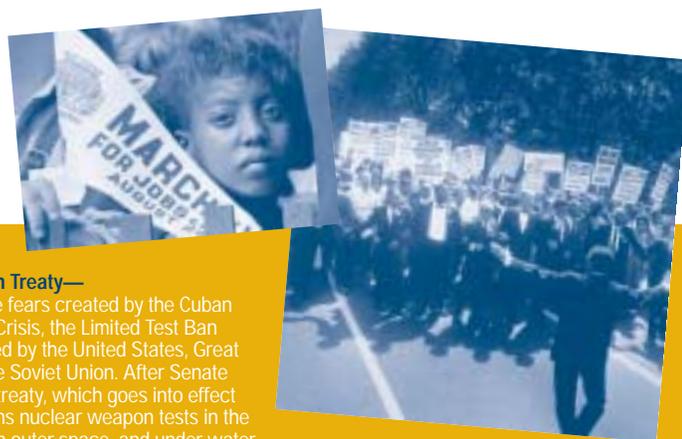
1962  
Transcript of John Glenn's Official Communication with the Command Center—

John Glenn conducts the first manned space orbit of the earth, increasing the prestige of the United States internationally. In this transcript he communicates with Mission Control in Florida.

**Aerial Photograph of Missiles in Cuba—**  
Instrumental in the early stages of the Cuban Missile crisis, these photographs show that the Soviet Union is amassing offensive ballistic missiles in Cuba. President Kennedy warns that any attempt by the Soviet Union to place nuclear weapons in Cuba will be seen as a threat to the United States.



1963  
Test Ban Treaty—  
After the fears created by the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Limited Test Ban Treaty is signed by the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union. After Senate approval, the treaty, which goes into effect on Oct. 11, bans nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space, and under water.



**Official Program for the March on Washington—**  
On Aug. 28, approximately 250,000 people gather in front of the Lincoln Memorial to march in support of expanding civil rights for African-Americans. The highlight of the march is Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech, in which he proclaims the Declaration of Independence applies to people of all races.

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**1964  
Civil  
Rights Act—**

Through the efforts of civil rights activists throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, many Americans come to support legislation that guarantees civil rights for African-Americans, and President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights act into law in July. The act prohibits discrimination in public places, provides for the integration of schools and other public facilities, and makes employment discrimination illegal.

**Tonkin Gulf Resolution—**

Passed by Congress after apparent attacks by the North Vietnamese on American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin, this act gives President Johnson authority to increase United States involvement in the war between North and South Vietnam.



**1965  
Social Security Act  
Amendments—**

Amid rising concern for the elderly and the poor, these amendments are adopted.

They establish Medicare, a health insurance program for the elderly, and Medicaid, a health insurance program for the poor.



**Voting Rights Act—**

This act outlaws the discriminatory voting practices adopted in many Southern states after the Civil War, including literacy tests as a prerequisite for voting. It also provides for federally supervised elections.



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insure domestic Tranquillity  
and our Posterity, do order

Section 1. All legis  
lative