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## The Courage to Lead: The Leadership Legacies of American Presidents John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Theodore Roosevelt

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# The Courage to Lead:

## *The Leadership Legacies of American Presidents John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Theodore Roosevelt*

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EMILIO IODICE, ROME, ITALY

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**John Fitzgerald Kennedy:** During the Presidential campaign of 1960 our eighth-grade class at Our Lady of Grace Elementary School in the Bronx took a special interest in the election. It was exciting especially because it was the second time a Catholic was running for our nation's highest office (New York Governor Al Smith, the first Catholic to run for President lost to Herbert Hoover in 1928). In early November, our teacher, Sister Anne Bernadette, asked who was supporting Nixon and who was in favor of Kennedy. I raised my hand for the Republican. I was the only one.



John and Jaqueline Kennedy arriving at Mass,  
Courtesy, JFK Library

Sister paraded me in front of the class. She asked me to explain why I was supporting Nixon, (I heard her say “traitor” under her breath). I said he had more experience than the one term Senator from Massachusetts. Nixon had been Vice President for eight years under President Dwight Eisenhower, who was very popular in our household. I felt Kennedy was smart and articulate but needed more experience before becoming Commander in Chief. I was wrong. I forgot that Abraham

Lincoln came into office with little experience yet his integrity, wisdom, compassion, character, powerful emotional intelligence and courage that gave him the tools to confront the greatest challenges our country has ever encountered.

As soon as JFK got into office I became a fan. His inaugural address, his style, his eloquence and his willingness to confront problems of social justice showed me he was a leader in the class of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt and Lincoln who were among my heroes. I hung on Kennedy's words and followed his travels and the obstacles he overcame.

Less than two years in office, John Kennedy faced one of the most complex trials that any American Commander in Chief has ever had to deal with. The Soviet Union had installed nuclear weapons on the island of Cuba, 90 miles from the American mainland. For 13 days, the world watched as the United States and the Soviet Union confronted each other in the most dramatic crisis of the Cold War.



Senator John Kennedy and Vice President Richard Nixon before the Presidential Debates of 1960,  
Courtesy, history.com



President Kennedy Greeting Nuns,  
Courtesy John F. Kennedy Library

resilience and cool-headed decision making changed the course of history.

It was clear to the President that instant communications were needed to avoid similar situations in the future. As a result, a Moscow-Washington hotline was created to allow the two heads of state to communicate openly and freely. It prevented misunderstandings and miscommunications from developing into global emergencies. The Cuban Missile Crisis showed how fragile



President John Fitzgerald Kennedy,  
Courtesy Library of Congress

I recall the feeling of our classmates, family and friends that we were on the brink of the world coming to an end. Drills to shield us from atomic bombs were held in school and advice was given as how to stock up on emergency supplies of food and clothing for the nuclear winter that could be up ahead.

After two weeks of difficult and tense negotiations, World War III was averted. An agreement was reached between Kennedy and Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev. Our nation was fortunate to have John Kennedy at the helm during this enormous contest between the globes' super powers. JFK's composure,



Front Page of the Philadelphia Inquirer, October 22, 1962,  
Courtesy National Archives

peace and stability could be in the world. JFK demonstrated competence, and courage in handling a potential calamity that could have ended humanity.

In 1961, East Germany built a wall to divide the city of Berlin to prevent mass migration to the West. It was a symbol of oppression and exclusion not only for those of Berlin but for everyone yearning for freedom. The Wall would forever represent the separation of people and the suppression of their natural rights in contrast to creating bridges to bring human beings together in peace and harmony.

Two years after the Wall went up; John Kennedy went to Berlin to show American solidarity for West Germany. In one of his most eloquent speeches, Kennedy spoke of democracy and the example of those who lived behind the "Iron Curtain" who struggled for liberty. Four hundred and fifty thousand Berliners heard these words:<sup>1</sup>

Two thousand years ago, the proudest boast was *civis romanus sum* ["I am a Roman citizen"]. Today, in the

<sup>1</sup> Daum, Andreas W. (2008). *Kennedy in Berlin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 147–55.

world of freedom, the proudest boast is *"Ich bin ein Berliner!"* ... All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words *"Ich bin ein Berliner!"*<sup>2</sup>



President Kennedy speaking in West Berlin on June

JFK had to confront the growing issue of civil rights. On June 11, 1963 President Kennedy gave a stirring address to the nation to defend the movement to make all Americans equal.<sup>3</sup> Here are some of the things he said:<sup>4</sup>

*This nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened. ... Today, we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. ... It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his*

*race or his color...Difficulties over segregation and discrimination exist in every city, in every state of the union, producing in many cities a rising tide of discontent that threatens the public safety.*

*Nor is this a partisan issue. In a time of domestic crisis, men of good will and generosity should be able to unite regardless of party or politics. This is not even a legal or legislative issue alone. It is better to settle these matters in the courts than on the streets, and new laws are needed at every level, but law alone cannot make men see right. We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution.*



President Kennedy delivering his Civil Rights Speech from the Oval Office, June 11, 1963, Courtesy of the Library of Congress

*The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities; whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. ...This is one country. It has become one country because all of us and all the people who came here had an equal chance to develop their talents. We cannot say to ten percent of the population that you can't have that right; that your children cannot have the chance to develop whatever talents they have; that the only way that they are going to get their rights is to go in the street and demonstrate. I think we owe them and we owe ourselves a better country than that.*

It was September 15, 1963. The 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama exploded from a bomb set off by a group of racists. Four young girls lost their lives. Against

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdXXkppRLEc>.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BEhKgoA86U>.

<sup>4</sup> Ngugen, Vi-An (June 11, 2013). 5 Quotes from JFK's Civil Rights Speech that Still Resonate Today, Retrieved from <http://parade.com/21211/vianguyen/5-quotes-from-jfks-civil-rights-address-that-still-resonate-today/>.

the advice of his aides, President Kennedy felt he had to make a statement to the people of America. He was told that confronting the issue could cost him the support of the South in his bid for re-election in 1964. Even so, he decided that he, above all others, had to show his outrage and express his solidarity with those who were fighting racial discrimination with nonviolence. Kennedy believed that only the federal government could confront the problem with fairness and justice. He had to demonstrate that our democratic institutions were on the side of those who were struggling and dying for equality. His statement to the people of America, one day after the murders in Birmingham, still echoes in my mind:

*I know I speak on behalf of all Americans in expressing a deep sense of outrage and grief over the killing of the children yesterday in Birmingham, Alabama. It is regrettable that public disparagement of law and order has encouraged violence which has fallen on the innocent. If these cruel and tragic events can only awaken that city and State — if they can only awaken this entire Nation — to a realization of the folly of racial injustice and hatred and violence, then it is not too late for all concerned to unite in steps toward peaceful progress before more lives are lost. The Negro leaders of Birmingham who are counseling restraint instead of violence are bravely serving their ideals in their most difficult task — for the principles of peaceful self-control are least appealing when most needed. ... This Nation is committed to a course of domestic justice and tranquility — and I call upon every citizen, white and Negro, North and South, to put passions and prejudices aside and to join in this effort.*

John Kennedy was President of the United States for 1037 days from January 20, 1961 until his assassination on November 22, 1963. His loss was a shock to the nation and to the world. His legacy went far beyond civil rights. Even though he was in office a short time, he accomplished more than most American Chief Executives.



President John F. Kennedy's motorcade in Dallas, November 22, 1963, *Courtesy Time Magazine*



The burial of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in Arlington Cemetery, Virginia, November 25, 1963, *Courtesy, Time Magazine*

The Miller Center of the University of Virginia outlined some of the domestic achievements of President Kennedy:<sup>5</sup>

- Promoted the ambitious “New Frontier” domestic program promising federal funding for education, medical care for the elderly, economic aid to rural regions, and government intervention to halt the recession of the time;
- Abolished the federal death penalty;

<sup>5</sup> The Miller Center, University of Virginia, <http://millercenter.org/>. *John F. Kennedy, Life in Brief*, <http://millercenter.org/president/kennedy>

- Signed executive orders prohibiting racial discrimination and laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and
- Initiated Project Apollo as the first manned expedition to the Moon.

Several key foreign policy accomplishments of President Kennedy:

- Continued support to West Berlin after the Soviet Union hastily erected the Berlin Wall, and delivered his famous *Ich bin ein Berliner* speech in 1963;
- Signed off on the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion and faced down Soviet Premier Khrushchev during the Cuban Missile Crisis;
- Began American involvement in Vietnam as a means of staunching communist expansion in Southeast Asia;
- Signed the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in order to limit nuclear tests by the nuclear powers;
- Initiated the creation of security ties with Israel;
- Sought to contain the perceived threat of communism in Latin America by establishing the Alliance for Progress, which sent aid to some countries and sought greater human rights standards in the region; and
- Asked Congress to create the Peace Corps, in which Americans would volunteer to help underdeveloped nations in areas such as education, farming, health care, and construction.



Official Portrait of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy painted by Aaron Shikler, Courtesy, the White House

In 2017, we will celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of John Kennedy. In addition to his deeds, perhaps the most fitting way of remembering him is in his own words:

- ✚ *My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.*
- ✚ *As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.*
- ✚ *Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.*
- ✚ *Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future.*
- ✚ *Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.*
- ✚ *Mankind must put an end to war before war puts an end to mankind.*
- ✚ *The cost of freedom is always high, but Americans have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose, and that is the path of surrender, or submission.*
- ✚ *I look forward to a great future for America – a future in which our country will match its military strength with our moral restraint, its wealth with our wisdom, its power with our purpose.*

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Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, 1898,  
Courtesy, Library of Congress

***President of the U.S. All these men were named Theodore Roosevelt.***

— Edmond Morris, biographer of Theodore Roosevelt

***Power when wielded by abnormal energy is the most serious of facts. ... Roosevelt, more than any other man living within the range of notoriety, showed the singular primitive quality that belongs to ultimate matter – he was pure Act.***

## ***Theodore Roosevelt:***

***They don't hold White House lunches the way they used to at the beginning of the century. On Jan. 1, 1907, for example, the guest list was as follows: a Nobel prizewinner, a physical culturist, a naval historian, a biographer, an essayist, a paleontologist, a taxidermist, an ornithologist, a field naturalist, a conservationist, a big-game hunter, an editor, a critic, a ranchman, an orator, a country squire, a civil service reformer, a socialite, a patron of the arts, a colonel of the cavalry, a former Governor of New York, the ranking expert on big-game mammals in North America and the***



President Theodore Roosevelt and his family, 1903. From left to right: Quentin, Theodore Sr., Theodore Jr., Archie, Alice, Kermit, Edith, and Ethel.

Courtesy, Library of Congress

— Henry Adams, author of the *Education of Henry Adams*

*A man (Theodore Roosevelt) you can't cajole, can't frighten, can't buy.*

— Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*

*It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.*

— Theodore Roosevelt

## **An American Original**

For someone who adores history and relishes leadership, it was an amazing experience to read the “trilogy” of the life of Theodore Roosevelt by Edmond Morris. *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt, Theodore Rex and Colonel Roosevelt* captures the essence of a leader who was courageous, compassionate, honest, defiant, principled, and patriotic. He often went counter the current and followed his instincts more than conventional wisdom. He was not always right yet he was rarely wrong. Roosevelt mastered six languages and wrote thirty-five books; was the first President to fly in a plane; facilitated the construction of the Panama Canal; won the Nobel Peace Prize; and was the only President to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Theodore Roosevelt was not afraid to make decisions. He had powerful emotional intelligence and made choices based on facts and evidence. He was not without flaws and was criticized heavily by those on the left and the right of the political spectrum. Even so, he was by far one of our greatest Presidents and one of the biggest characters in American history.<sup>6</sup>

Morris’s books on TR encompass some of the most detailed research done on one of America’s most remarkable leaders. Roosevelt’s legacy is as fresh and meaningful today as it was when he rode and fought with his loyal friends to help win the war with Spain; when he led New York State as “the boy” Governor; or, when, as our youngest President, tackled the giants of industry and commerce who controlled the economic life of the nation.

He was uniquely American and embodied the unique qualifications of Commander-in-Chief of the United States of America. He had character; a love of learning; respect for diversity and was prepared to sacrifice his life on the altar of our republic to protect our democracy and our people.

## **Early Life: “A Sickly Child”**

He was born in New York City in 1858, two and half years before the start of the Civil War and died at the close of the First World War in 1919. During his lifetime, he changed the concept of executive and presidential leadership as no one before him. He stressed vitality and vigor and the American values of courage, activism, patriotism, integrity, freedom, taking initiative, and progressivism. Theodore Roosevelt believed in a government responsible to serve the interests of all the people and not just the few. He preached this

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<sup>6</sup> See History Channel on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mxpnb7ZxHFU&list=PL3C89275DC080A73C>.



from the “bully pulpit” of the White House and put it in practice by action. His legacy still lives with us, more than a century after he held office.

He overcame personal, social, and professional obstacles to prove to himself and others his value and his ability to contribute to the world. In the effort, he became a heroic soldier, a strong political leader, a peacemaker and President of the United States. At his death, Theodore Roosevelt was, arguably, the most famous and most admired man on earth.

TR was not born with good health. He was a sickly child. He suffered from asthma and other illnesses that forced him to be schooled at home. It was during his early childhood that he learned to love animals and nature. In his teens, his father encouraged him to strengthen himself with weightlifting and boxing. Through a combination of exercise and love of the outdoors, he became a powerful athlete and a consummate lover of what he called “the strenuous life.” He said, “My father, Theodore Roosevelt, was the best man I ever knew. He combined strength and courage with gentleness, tenderness, and great unselfishness. He would not tolerate in us children selfishness or cruelty, idleness, cowardice, or untruthfulness.”<sup>7</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, Sr. died suddenly in February, 1878. TR was 19. He never fully recovered from the loss of his father.

## A Career in Politics

Roosevelt’s family was one of wealth and influence. He could have lived a quiet, unassuming and rewarding life as a gentleman, reveling in the splendid ways of New York City society and culture. Instead, after graduating *magna cum laude* from Harvard, Theodore Roosevelt chose a life in politics. He became a member of the New York State Assembly at 24. A year later he was minority leader. In the legislature, he fought corporate and political corruption and sought the impeachment of a judge and the dismissal of dishonest officials.



Coat of Arms of Theodore Roosevelt, Bolton’s American Armory. Boston: F. W. Faxon Co, 1927 and *America Heraldica*. 1886-89; rpt. New York: Heraldic Publishing Co, 1965

He trained in the art of being a soldier and became Captain of the National Guard. He was a rising star in New York politics and was developing a name as a reformer and a reputation as an honest leader.

Suddenly, tragedy struck. It was Valentine’s Day, 1884. TR’s mother died from typhoid fever. One floor above her, in the same

home, Roosevelt’s wife, Alice, was ill after giving birth to their first child, two days earlier. Twelve hours after the passing of his mother, Theodore Roosevelt saw his wife die from Bright’s disease and the complication from the delivery. “The light has gone out in my life,” he wrote in his diary that night.

Theodore Roosevelt was devastated.<sup>8</sup> To deal with the trauma, he abandoned politics and left for the Dakota Territory



Martha Bulloch Roosevelt and Alice Lee Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt Association

<sup>7</sup> Putman, Carleton (1958). *Theodore Roosevelt (biography), I: The Formative Years*, New York: William Morrow, (only volume published to age 28), pp. 63-70.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, Nathan (1992). *Theodore Roosevelt, A Life*. New York: William Morrow & Co., p. 88.

and lived as a cowboy and cattle rancher for two years. It transformed him. He saw the vanishing frontier and was determined to do all he could to preserve this amazing national treasure. The experience helped him understand the richness of the American West. It guided him as he established America's national parks and preserves as President.

TR also learned about himself as a man, a human being and a leader. He became fearless and was not afraid to take on new challenges or fight for a just cause. He wrote about life in the West for national magazines and produced three books.<sup>9</sup>

### Civil Service Commissioner

TR returned to New York City in 1886. He ran for Mayor and lost. He married his second wife, Edith Carow. They knew each other as children and recalled watching the funeral procession of Abraham Lincoln from the window of TR grandfather's house. TR went back into politics with the same vigor as before.



Roosevelt with Naturalist John Muir in Yosemite National Park, 1906, *Daily Mail*, August 2, 2016

He campaigned for the Republican Party candidate for President. After the election, he took on the role of Civil Service Commissioner under President Benjamin Harrison.



Theodore Roosevelt out West, *Library of Congress*

Roosevelt reformed the federal bureaucracy. He ended the Spoils's System and imposed a meritocracy on government hiring. As a result, African Americans, and other minorities, had a chance to have federal careers. For seven years, he fought to hire qualified and honest public officials, without political compromises. Joseph Bucklin

Bishop, TR's friend and biographer, explained his attack on the Spoils System this way:

*“The very citadel of spoils politics, the hitherto impregnable fortress that had existed unshaken since it was erected on the foundation laid by Andrew Jackson, was tottering to its fall under the assaults of this audacious and irrepressible young man. ... Whatever may have been the feelings of the (fellow Republican party) President (Harrison) – and there is little doubt that he had no idea when he appointed Roosevelt that he would prove to be so veritable a bull in a china shop – he refused to remove him and stood by him firmly till the end of his term.”<sup>10</sup>*

### Head of New York City Board of Police Commissioners



Cartoon about Civil Service Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt, *Puck Magazine*, c. 1887

<sup>9</sup> Brands, Henry William (1997). *TR: The Last Romantic* (full biography), New York: Basic Books, p. 191.

<sup>10</sup> Bishop, Joseph Bucklin (1920). *Theodore Roosevelt and his Time*, New York: Charles Scribner, p. 51.

Back in New York City in 1894 he accepted the job of head of the New York City Board of Police Commissioners. He immediately began to radically reform the force. It was known as one of the most corrupt in America. TR was tough and uncompromising. He was fearless and unimpeachably honest. Often times, in the wee hours of the morning, Roosevelt would walk the beat of an officer to make sure he was on duty. He began regular inspections of fire arms, annual physical exams and appointed nearly 2000 new recruits based on their mental and physical qualifications instead of their political affiliation. Roosevelt established Meritorious Service Medals and installed the first telephones in police stations.



Cartoon from a newspaper during the period TR was Police Commissioner, 1895

One of his most important decisions was to fight the beginning of organized crime. In 1895, TR promoted Officer Joseph Petrosino to lead the Homicide Division. Petrosino was born in Southern Italy. He was 5ft 3inches in height but extremely bright and determined to be a police officer. He spoke several dialects of Italian that were popular in New York City at the time. He grew up in an orphanage in New York City. The experience made him “street smart” and strong. He was the first Italian speaker in NYPD history. Petrosino was courageous and clever. Through determination and bravery, he managed to infiltrate organized crime elements and

discovered valuable information.

Petrosino warned the Secret Service about a plot to kill President McKinley on his trip to Buffalo to inaugurate the Pan American Exposition of 1900. Vice President Theodore Roosevelt vouched for Petrosino’s honesty and credibility. The Secret Service ignored the warning.

Petrosino became a valuable resource to the NYPD and a heroic figure who fought the underworld up until his murder at the hands of the mafia in 1909.<sup>11</sup>



Lt. Joe Petrosino, NYPD

## Assistant Secretary of the Navy



Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet, Courtesy Wizards of Oz, Retrieved from <http://oz.deichman.net/2007/12/great-white-fleet.html>

<sup>11</sup> Berman, Jay Stuart (1987). *Police Administration and Progressive Reform: Theodore Roosevelt as Police Commissioner of New York*.

Following the election of 1896, President William McKinley appointed TR to Assistant Secretary of the Navy. He immediately pressed for an expansion of the navy, in particular, the building of battle ships. His dream of a “Great White Fleet,” to protect America would come, about when he became Commander-in-Chief.

Theodore Roosevelt contended that if our nation was prepared for war, then war could be avoided. Enemies would be reluctant to take on a nation that was strong and ready to defend itself. “Speak softly but carry a big stick,” became his most famous motto. He advocated for freedom from colonial influence in the Western Hemisphere, especially the liberation of Cuba from Spain. He believed war with Spain was inevitable. He felt the conflict would instill a sense of patriotism in the people of America and would challenge and help modernize the armed forces.



The USS battleship Maine entering Havana harbor, January 25, 1898, Courtesy, U.S. Department of Defense

The United States sent the battleship Maine to Havana to protect American interests during a Cuban uprising against Spain. Three weeks after its arrival an enormous explosion ignited tons of gun powder charges for the vessel’s guns. It blew up the forward of the vessel. Most of the crew were in that part of the ship. They were sleeping or resting. Two hundred and sixty-six lost their lives. A Naval Court of Inquiry determined that the disaster was caused by a mine. Spain was blamed.<sup>12</sup> Two months later, the United States went to war.

## The Rough Rider

“Follow Me Men,” Artist rendition of Theodore Roosevelt leading the “Rough Riders” in Cuba, 1898, Courtesy, the History Channel



As soon as the United States declared war against Spain in April, 1898, Theodore Roosevelt resigned as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Less than a month later, he formed the First US Volunteer Cavalry Regiment along with Colonel Leonard Wood. His wife and friends urged TR to stay on at the Navy but he was determined to fight and serve his country in battle. Applications flooded in to join the “Rough Riders,” as the press called the new regiment.<sup>13</sup> Roosevelt’s prior experience in the New York National Guard was important preparation for him to take on this new challenge. Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt was able to teach his men basic training, marksmanship and other skills needed for combat.

<sup>12</sup> *Official Report of the Naval Court of Inquiry into the loss of the Battleship MAINE* (Sampson Board).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Miller, pp. 272-274.

The Rough Riders were from all walks of life. Some were Ivy Leaguers, athletes, gentlemen, frontiersman, cowboys, Native Americans, miners, hunters, veterans, tradesmen, and sheriffs.

As soon as they landed in Cuba, the Rough Riders organized themselves to fight alongside the regular infantry. They fought in several skirmishes but were remembered most for the battle to take San Juan Hill. An historian described it this way:

*Shouting for his men to follow, he jumped over a barbed wire fence and ran down the slope. Roosevelt ran about one hundred yards when he turned around to notice that only five of his troopers had followed him down the slope into the swale between Kettle and San Juan Hills. Roosevelt turned around and returned to the crest of Kettle Hill where his troopers claimed they did not hear his order to charge. Forming them quickly into an assault line, Roosevelt again ordered the charge. This time, the entire regiment with*



Lt. Colonel Theodore Roosevelt with the Rough Riders and the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment on Kettle Hill, San Juan Heights, Cuba, 1898, Library of Congress

*support from other nearby forces went forward towards San Juan Hill. The First Infantry Division, halted in place along that hill's slopes, began to press harder up the incline as they saw Roosevelt's troopers coming to help them. By two thirty in the afternoon, the entire heights were in possession of the American troops. With the victory at San Juan Heights, the Americans were able to move into the city of Santiago and*

*establish a good offensive position to fire on the Spanish fleet in the harbor. With the subsequent destruction of the Spanish fleet from an attack from Rear Admiral William T. Sampson, the Americans were able to win the battle, and force an early end to the war.<sup>14</sup>*

During the battle for San Juan Hill, the Rough Riders found themselves attacked from all sides by Spanish troops. It was the 10th Cavalry, which consisted of black troops that came to their aid. "It was this action that led a grateful Rough Rider corporal to proclaim, 'If it hadn't been for the black cavalry, the Rough Riders would have been exterminated.' Five black soldiers of the 10th Cavalry received the Medal of Honor and 25 other black soldiers were awarded the Certificate of Merit."<sup>15</sup> (In 2001, Theodore Roosevelt was awarded posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor for valor in the Spanish American War.)

## Governor of New York

TR returned to America a national hero. The Republican Party asked him to run for Governor of New York in 1898. The Party bosses, led by Thomas C. Platt, feared Roosevelt but needed a strong candidate to defeat the Democrats. They felt the sitting Governor Frank

<sup>14</sup> Herner, Charles (1970). *The Arizona Rough Riders*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, p. 113 and Ahearn, Robert G. (1971) *American Heritage New Illustrated History of the United States: Volume 12, A World Power*. New York: Fawcett Publications, Inc., p. 1009.

<sup>15</sup> Powell, Anthony L. An Overview: Black Participation in the Spanish-American War, *Spanish American War Centennial*, Retrieved from <http://www.spanamwar.com/AfroAmericans.htm>.

Frank S. Black would lose in his bid for re-election. Roosevelt won the nomination in the caucuses, defeating his rival, Governor Black. TR campaigned vigorously throughout the state. He used his war record as an example of his ability to lead. He won the Governorship by a narrow one percent.<sup>16</sup> TR was forty years old. He was one of the youngest Governors in US history. Many of the battles that he would fight as President had their origin during his



Campaign button for Theodore Roosevelt for Governor, 1898, Courtesy, [theodoreroosevelt.com](http://theodoreroosevelt.com)

tenure in New York State: the economic problems of trusts and monopolies; relations with labor and the growth of unions; conservation of natural resources; insistence of public responsibility of large firms; using publicity as the first weapon against trusts; regulation of railroad rates; mediation of labor disputes and the protection and care of those less fortunate in society.<sup>17</sup> As Governor, he passed a tax on businesses that received a franchise from the State declaring: “a corporation which derives its powers from the State, should pay to the State a just percentage of its earnings as a return for the privileges it enjoys.”<sup>18</sup>

He held press conferences twice a day. This was an innovation for any politician. It kept him close to his middle-class base and kept his name in the press. He appointed many capable officials to key jobs in the State with the cooperation of the Republican machine, which was considered a miracle at the time. TR enacted sweeping civil service reform and fought corruption.

## Vice President

Republican Governor William McKinley of Ohio had been elected President in 1896. Roosevelt had no interest in challenging him for re-election in 1900, despite many supporters who wanted him to run for President. Instead, he considered 1904 and his prospects at being re-elected Governor in 1900. Suddenly, in November of 1899, Vice President Garret Hobart died of heart failure. TR refused to be considered for the role in the 1900 Presidential campaign. The New York State Republican Party bosses, and in particular, Thomas C. Platt, wanted to rid themselves of Roosevelt and avoid having to support him for a second term.

President McKinley’s campaign manager, Mark Hanna, told TR that he would not be offered the second spot on the ticket. Hanna and others in the Party were afraid of Roosevelt’s progressivism, his impulsiveness and his aggressive stance against political corruption and industrial and commercial interests. Platt, instead, started a newspaper campaign to support Roosevelt’s nomination.<sup>19</sup> At the convention, Platt worked to maneuver other states to support TR. Roosevelt agreed to accept the nomination if the convention offered it



Political Cartoon of NY Republican Party Boss Thomas C. Platt and TR, 1898, *National Park Service*

<sup>16</sup> Morris, Edmund (1979). *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, New York: Charles Scribner, pp. 674-687.

<sup>17</sup> Chessman, Wallace G. (1965). *Governor Theodore Roosevelt: The Albany Apprenticeship, 1898-1900*, New York, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, (1908). *The Roosevelt Policy: Speeches, Letters and State Papers, Relating to Corporate Wealth and Closely Allied Topics, of Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States*. p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* Miller, p. 338.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* Miller, p. 342.

to him. He won unanimously.<sup>20</sup> The New York State Party bosses were delighted. Mark Hanna was concerned. He was no fan of Roosevelt: “There’s only one life,” Hanna warned, “between that madman and the Presidency.”<sup>21</sup>

Roosevelt campaigned throughout the country for the re-election of William McKinley against Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan. He made 480 stops in 23 states. He stressed how the President had brought peace and prosperity and had won the War with Spain. TR was against the annexation of the Philippines which the US won in the War. He felt the Philippines should be independent and that the US was not an imperialist power and should not act as such. McKinley won in a landslide victory.<sup>22</sup>

As Vice President, Roosevelt presided over the Senate but found the role powerless and no match for his energy and intellect. After six months in office, President McKinley was shot. Here is what happened next as described by the Roosevelt Study Center:

*The news of the attack on President McKinley during his visit to the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo (New York), spread quickly throughout the United States. In a letter to Henry Cabot Lodge, Roosevelt explained he was in Vermont with Senator Proctor at the time he heard the news, and that “the news seemed literally incredible.” He immediately made his way to Buffalo to find the president in seemingly good health given the circumstances. In a letter to his sister Anna, sent from Buffalo on 7 September, he confirms that “[t]he President is coming along splendidly.” In other letters available in the RSC, Roosevelt really believed that the president was recovering well. After being told that McKinley was practically out of danger, Roosevelt left Buffalo to join his family in the Adirondack mountain range in the state of New York. He was climbing Mount Tahawus when a guide brought him the news that the president’s condition had deteriorated and that he had to come to Buffalo as soon as possible. By the time Roosevelt had returned to Buffalo, McKinley had passed away.<sup>23</sup>*



Theodore Roosevelt taking the oath of office after the death of McKinley, 1901  
*Nashville, Tennessee News*

## President of the United States

*Let the watchwords of all our people be the old familiar watchwords of honesty, decency, fair-dealing, and commonsense.... We must treat each man on his worth and merits as a man. We must see that each is given a square deal, because he is entitled to no more and should receive*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* Miller, pp. 340-341.

<sup>22</sup> United States Senate History, 1878-1920, November 3, 1896. *Mark Hanna and the 1896 Election*, Retrieved from [http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Hanna\\_1896Election.ht](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Hanna_1896Election.ht).

<sup>23</sup> Roosevelt Study Center, Theodore Roosevelt’s reaction to McKinley’s Assassination, Retrieved from <https://www.roosevelt.nl/theodore-roosevelts-reaction-mckinleys-assassination>.

*no less.... The welfare of each of us is dependent  
fundamentally upon the welfare of all of us.*

—Theodore Roosevelt (*New York State Fair, Syracuse, September 7, 1903*)

At 42 years and 10 months, Theodore Roosevelt was the youngest President in American history. That “mad man,” as Mark Hanna called him, would not transform the Presidency and transform the face of America as no one before him. He was in office from 1901 to 1909.



White House Portrait of President Theodore Roosevelt by John Singer Sargent, *Courtesy the White House*



Campaign poster for 1904 election, *Library of Congress*

Theodore Roosevelt was elected in 1904 in a landslide with nearly 57% of the popular vote. His margin of over 2 million votes was one of the highest in US Presidential history. Roosevelt won most of the states except for the Democratic stronghold in the South. His mandate to govern was clear. He would carry out his domestic reform policies and his foreign affairs plans to strengthen America's military with vigor and resolve.



Native American chiefs headed by Geronimo in review before Roosevelt on Inauguration Day in Washington, D.C., March 4, 1905, *Library of Congress*

In a few short years, he changed the way America viewed its highest political office. Roosevelt believed the President was chiefly responsible to vigorously enforce the law and also provide for the public welfare. As Commander-in-Chief, he felt that the President had to prepare the nation for war in order for it to be prevented. TR believed that a strong America would keep adversaries away from its shores.

Theodore Roosevelt left the White House in March, 1909. His friend and handpicked successor, William Howard Taft, became the 27<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. TR left for Africa on a safari for the Smithsonian Institution. He was to obtain specimens of African wildlife for the Institution and the American Museum of Natural History. He secured for the Smithsonian over 11,000 specimens. Upon return to the US, he stopped in Egypt and then



toured the capitals of Europe. He was treated with the same honors as a head of state. By the time he returned to America, he was among the most popular figures in the world.

TR was unhappy with the work of his successor. He attempted to regain the Republican nomination for President in 1912, but failed. The new Progressive Party was created. It was called by many, The Bull Moose Party, because its leader was Theodore Roosevelt. In the Presidential election of 1912, he ran against the Republican nominee, President William Howard Taft and the Democratic nominee, Governor Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey. In the campaign, TR campaigned for women's right to vote and against child labor. He promised to *destroy this invisible Government, to dissolve the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics is the first task of the statesmanship of the day. This country belongs to the people. Its resources, its business, its laws, its institutions, should be utilized, maintained, or altered in whatever manner will best promote the general interest. This assertion is explicit. ... Mr. Wilson must know that every monopoly in the United States opposes the Progressive party ... I challenge him ... to name the monopoly that did support the Progressive party, whether... the Sugar Trust, the US Steel Trust, the Harvester Trust, the Standard Oil Trust, the Tobacco Trust, or any other... Ours was the only program to which they objected, and they supported either Mr. Wilson or Mr. Taft.*<sup>24</sup>



Cartoon depicting TR's foreign and domestic policies of strength and mediation, *Library of Congress*

The election resulted in a two-way race between TR and Wilson. Roosevelt got 27% of the vote vs 42% for Wilson and 23% for Taft. Wilson won a landslide victory in the Electoral College. It was clear that a divided Republican Party had brought the first President born in the South into the White House, since the Civil War and the first Democrat since 1892.

TR was disappointed but not discouraged. In 1913, he went on to a new safari to map out the great rivers of the Amazon basin in Brazil and returned a year later, in May, 1914 shortly before the start of World War I. He saw war on the horizon for the US and demanded from Wilson and the Congress that more be done to

enhance military preparedness. Roosevelt understood the Europeans, especially the Germans. He felt that if the US demonstrated great military power they would be reluctant to challenge America who would come out on the side of the allies. TR's views were not appreciated by President Wilson and certainly not by the Democrats.

Preparedness did not begin in earnest until ships were sunk carrying Americans including US cargo ships in spite of the fact that the US had declared neutrality. In May, 1915, the British passenger liner Lusitania was hit by a German submarine as it sailed off the UK coast. It sunk in 15 minutes carrying over a thousand people to a watery grave including hundreds of women and children. Numerous Americans were among the casualties. Unrestricted submarine warfare was one of the reasons the US finally declared war in April, 1917. Among those soldiers who lost their lives was



Theodore Roosevelt, *the Library of Congress*

<sup>24</sup> Roosevelt 1913, XV. *The Peace of Righteousness*, Appendix.

Quentin Roosevelt, TR's youngest son whose plane was shot down over France. Roosevelt's two other sons were seriously wounded and returned as heroes.

TR never recovered from the loss of his son. Even though he continued to write, express his political views and fight for noble causes, his life gave out after years of hard work, pain from battles,



One of TR's achievements was control of the railroads, Courtesy Harper's and Library of Congress

President Theodore Roosevelt, shown as baby Hercules trying to stop J.P. Morgan (left) and John D. Rockefeller (right). Puck Magazine, May 23, 1906



malaria from the jungle, rheumatism and a weakening heart. On the night of January 5, 1919, Theodore Roosevelt died in his sleep in his home at Sagamore Hill in Oyster Bay, NY. "The old lion is dead," said his son, Archibald.<sup>25</sup>

Some of his achievements as President include:<sup>26</sup>

**Domestic:**

- Developed the "Square Deal" — a domestic program formed around three C's: conservation of natural resources, regulation of the railroads, control of corporations, and consumer protection.
- Promoted the conservation movement and placed millions of acres of land under federal protection to preserve America's natural resources. Over 200 million acres of land were devoted to national forests and parkland thanks to Roosevelt's energetic efforts to preserve America's beauty for generations to come.
- Dissolved 44 monopolistic corporations and regulated railroad rates to protect the middle and working class.
- Passed the Meat Inspection Act and Pure Food and Drug Act to better regulate food production and labeling.

**Foreign Policy:**

- Issued a corollary to the Monroe Doctrine allowing the US to exercise international policy



Theodore Roosevelt and the building of the Panama Canal, Library of Congress

<sup>25</sup> Dalton, Kathleen (2002), *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life* (full scholarly biography), p. 507.

<sup>26</sup> Miller Center, <http://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/en/Research/Digital-Library/Record/ImageViewer.aspx?libID=o282590&imageNo=1>.

- power to intervene and keep smaller countries in the Americas on their feet
- Negotiated US control of construction on the Panama Canal after supporting the secession of Panama from Colombia in 1903.



First boat to pass through the Panama Canal, September 26, 1913, *Courtesy, nationalgeographic.com*

- TR was the first President to leave the US. In November, 1906, he sailed aboard the USS Louisiana to inspect the construction of the Panama Canal which he had promoted and developed as President. The Canal opened in 1913.



Great White Fleet departing for its round the world tour, *Library of Congress*



Portsmouth Accord ending the Russo-Japanese War of 1906, *Library of Congress*

- Sent the Great White Fleet on a tour to demonstrate American power.



Cartoon by Clifford Berryman, published in *Washington Post*, 1902



Political cartoon about Theodore Roosevelt's foreign policy, *Library of Congress*

- Negotiated an end to the Russo-Japanese War, for which he won a Nobel Prize. He was the first American to win the Prize. He used the prize money to sponsor a trust to promote peace.

More political cartoons were done about Theodore Roosevelt than, perhaps, any other President. The one above is about a popular topic that still exists today: The *Teddy Bear*. The origin of the *Teddy Bear* is attributed to the story of Theodore Roosevelt's hunting trip to Mississippi in 1902. The trip was a competition. The other hunters had succeeded in shooting their game while Roosevelt had not. His aides found a black bear which they tied to a tree and prepared for him to shoot. He refused insisting it was not sportsmanlike to do so. The *Washington Post* drawing inspired an entrepreneur to create the *Teddy Bear* with TR's permission. (Roosevelt detested the name Teddy even though the vast majority of his followers and admirers called as such.)<sup>27</sup>

Other notable facts about Theodore Roosevelt:

- **A Prolific Writer:** "From his earliest days, Roosevelt had a passion for reading and writing. He penned his first book, *The Naval War of 1812*, at the age of 23 and earned a reputation as a serious historian. Over the course of his lifetime, Roosevelt authored 38 books, which included an autobiography, a biography of Oliver Cromwell, a history of New York City and the four-volume series *The Winning of the West*. The outdoorsman also wrote numerous books and magazine articles about hunting and his frontier exploits."<sup>28</sup>
- **An Avid Outdoorsman:** "While a student at Harvard, Dr. Dudley Sargent warned Roosevelt, who had been a sickly child that, because of a weak heart, failure to lead a sedentary life could have fatal consequences. 'Doctor, I'm going to do all the things you tell me not to do,' Roosevelt responded. 'If I've got to live the sort of life you have described, I don't care how short it is.' A year after graduation, Roosevelt took time from his European honeymoon with Alice to scale the 15,000-foot Swiss Alp, the Matterhorn with two guides."<sup>29</sup>
- **Volunteer in World War I.** "At the outbreak of World War I, the 58-year-old ex-president was eager to return to the front lines. Roosevelt vehemently lobbied President Woodrow Wilson to send him to France at the head of a 200,000-man expeditionary force. Around the country, supporters of the hero of San Juan Hill staged rallies of support, but Roosevelt would not get called to fight in the war that e



Albuquerque Morning Journal headlines, October 15, 1912.

<sup>27</sup> History of the Teddy Bear, Teddy Roosevelt and the Teddy Bear, Retrieved from [http://inventors.about.com/od/tstartinventions/a/Teddy\\_Bear.htm](http://inventors.about.com/od/tstartinventions/a/Teddy_Bear.htm).

<sup>28</sup> Klein, Christopher (October 25, 2013). 10 Things You May Not Know About Teddy Roosevelt, Retrieved from <http://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-teddy-roosevelt>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* Klein.

laimed his son Quentin, who was killed in action when his plane was shot down over France in 1918.”<sup>30</sup>

- **Survived an Attempted Assassination:** TR attempted to run for an unprecedented third term during the election of 1912. He had formed the Progressive Party and was campaigning in Milwaukee, Wisconsin when a man approached TR in his open car. He fired point blank at the ex-President. The bullet landed near his heart. Despite the attempt on his life, he insisted on giving his speech: “I will make the speech or die, one or the other,” he said. Instead, he delivered his scheduled speech with blood seeping into his shirt. He spoke for 90 minutes. His opening comments to the gathered crowd were, “Ladies and gentlemen, I don't know whether you fully understand that I have just been shot, but it takes more than that to kill a Bull Moose.” Afterwards, probes and an x-ray showed that the bullet had lodged in Roosevelt's chest muscle, but did not penetrate the pleura, and it would be less dangerous to leave it in place. Roosevelt carried the bullet with him for the rest of his life.<sup>31</sup>

- **Respected Diversity.** Roosevelt made it his personal responsibility to protect and defend minorities. He did so with actions as well as words. On the 97<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, the Jerusalem Post wrote this:

*As 26th president of the United States, 'Teddy' Roosevelt again made it clear that he wasn't going to let anyone be bullied around. He would not tolerate*

*racism and discrimination, and indeed, Roosevelt was the first president to appoint a Jewish cabinet member – Secretary of Commerce and Labor Oscar Solomon Straus, who served from 1906 to 1909. He also intervened with the governments of Rumania and Russia on behalf of their Jewish populations and protected the Jews of North Africa from oppression and from unfair restrictions and fees.*



Theodore Roosevelt at Suffragette Rally, 1900,  
Courtesy, New York Times

An unpopular notion at the time, TR stood out in his later years as an ardent Zionist. He had visited the Jews in Ottoman Palestine as a teenager in 1873 with his family, and Roosevelt wrote a diary of his trip, which included his observations of the Jews' prayer at the Western Wall.

Former Israeli Ambassador to the US and now Member of the Israeli Knesset Michael B. Oren wrote in his book *Islam and America: Building a Future Without Prejudice* “that in 1918, shortly after the Balfour Declaration, which favored establishing a national home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, Roosevelt said that ‘It seems to me that it is entirely proper to start a Zionist state around Jerusalem,’ for peace would only happen if Jews were given Palestine.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Klein.

<sup>31</sup> Theodore Roosevelt Association, *Timeline*, Retrieved from <http://www.theodoreroosevelt.org/site/c.eIKSIOWIiJ8H/b.8090799/k.C003/Home.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> Glatt, Benjamin. Today in History: Teddy Roosevelt and the Jews, *The Jerusalem Post*, January 6, 2016, 13(36), Retrieved from <http://www.jpost.com/Christian-News/Today-in-History-Teddy-Roosevelt-and-the-Jews-439591>.



Theodore Roosevelt with Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute, Library of Congress

Roosevelt also appointed numerous African Americans to federal positions and took an active interest in race relations. At his death, the NAACP eulogized him:

*With the passing of THEODORE ROOSEVELT passes the world's greatest protagonist of lofty ideals and principles. Take him all in all he was a man, generous, impulsive, fearless, loving the public eye, but intent on achieving the public good. ... We mourn with the rest of the world as is fitting, but there is too in our sorrow a quality peculiar and apart. We have lost a friend. That he was our friend proves the justice of our cause, for Roosevelt never championed a cause with was not in essence right.<sup>33</sup>*

Millions mourned the passing of Theodore Roosevelt. Some of what they said follows:

*Teddy Roosevelt's energetic vision helped bring the nation into the new century. America owes nearly 200 million acres of national forest and parkland to his foresight – some of which can be viewed atop Mount Rushmore, where Roosevelt's visage is carved in memorial.<sup>34</sup>*



Mt. Rushmore: Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt and Lincoln, Courtesy, Mt. Rushmore National Park

*In terms of presidential style, Roosevelt introduced "charisma" into the political equation. He had a strong rapport with the public and he understood how to use the media to shape public opinion. He was the first President whose election was based more on the individual than the political party. When people voted Republican in 1904, they were generally casting their vote for Roosevelt the man instead of for him as the standard-bearer of the Republican Party. The most popular President up to his time, Roosevelt used his enthusiasm to win votes, to shape issues, and to mold opinions. In the process, he changed the executive office forever.<sup>35</sup>*

*Of all the public men that I have known, on both sides of the Atlantic (and there are few that I have not known in the past thirty years), he [Theodore Roosevelt] stands out the greatest, and as the most potent influence for good upon the life of his generation.*

*Of all the public men that I have known, on both sides of the Atlantic (and there are few that I have not known in the past thirty years), he [Theodore Roosevelt] stands out the greatest, and as the most potent influence for good upon the life of his generation.*

— Viscount Lee of Fareham, English diplomat and soldier

<sup>33</sup> Dalton, Kathleen. *A Strenuous Life*, p. 207; Abraham Lincoln, *First Annual Message*, December 3, 1861, Retrieved from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29502>, pp. 523-524.

<sup>34</sup> *Theodore Roosevelt Biography*, Retrieved from <http://www.biography.com/people/theodore-roosevelt-9463424#synopsis>.

<sup>35</sup> The Miller Center. Retrieved from <http://millercenter.org/president/biography/>.

- ✚ *To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.*
- ✚ *Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.*
- ✚ *Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure ... than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much, because they live in a gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.*
- ✚ *The things that will destroy America are prosperity-at-any-price, peace-at-any-price, safety-first instead of duty-first, the love of soft living, and the get-rich-quick theory of life.*
- ✚ *No man is worth his salt who is not ready at all times to risk his well-being, to risk his body, to risk his life, in a great cause.*
- ✚ *I care not what others think of what I do, but I care very much about what I think of what I do! That is character!*
- ✚ *The most practical kind of politics is the politics of decency.*

— Theodore Roosevelt



Theodore Roosevelt with his grandchildren, Theodore Roosevelt Association

Roosevelt once wrote,

*There is no form of happiness on the Earth, no form of success of any kind, that in any way approaches the happiness of the husband and the wife who are married lovers, and the father and mother of plenty of healthy children. Roosevelt's role as devoted family man may have been his most enduring legacy.<sup>36</sup>*

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<sup>36</sup> Theodore Roosevelt Association, *The Family Man*, Retrieved from <http://www.theodoreroosevelt.org/site/pp.aspx?c=e1KSIdOWiJ8H&b=8344383>.

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## About the Author

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