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**“To hell with the Constitution!”<sup>1</sup>**  
**How Theodore Roosevelt Acting Abroad Undermined  
Progressive Reforms at Home**

**Liam Byrnes**

Theodore Roosevelt is remembered fondly as one of the greatest American presidents. He stepped into office as the youngest president in American history in the first year of a new century. Exuding youth and ingenuity, he brought hope to the American people. Extremely opinionated, bombastic, and fixated on ideals, Roosevelt garnered America’s attention, becoming the “first president to be treated as a media personality,” although such is all too familiar today.<sup>2</sup> The power residing in the Oval Office had been mostly silent in the previous half century and Roosevelt’s youth and character brought new energy and grandeur to the office. In Roosevelt, the United States had not only a President, but a celebrity.

The aftermath of the Gilded Age gave necessary rise to the Progressive Era, in which historians revere Roosevelt as a champion. Progressive politics demanded new instruments like commissions and regulations to protect people from the unbridled industry of the modern age. Roosevelt wielded these Progressive instruments as extensions of his office, adding unprecedented powers to the executive branch. These powers would not be limited to domestic politics, as the United States emerged as a new global industrial force with untested international power and influence. Theodore Roosevelt’s unbridled popularity allowed him to revolutionize the American presidency and significantly pursue an international agenda in direct conflict with contemporary American Progressivism. Americans today, as those in the past, ignore such contradictions at their own peril.

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Morris, *Theodore Roosevelt: President* (CT: University of Hartford Press, 1981), 14.

<sup>2</sup> William E. Leuchtenburg, *The American President: From Teddy Roosevelt to Bill Clinton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 30.

A celebrity in his ‘bully pulpit’, Roosevelt led an internationally immature and tentative nation into an unstable global arena in pursuit of adventure. To turn his words against him, one cannot “by insisting on the impossible, put off the day when the possible can be accomplished.”<sup>3</sup> Roosevelt chased an impossible world peace while neglecting domestic social issues that, with his attention, might have been solved. In neglecting necessary domestic progressive reforms he put off a higher quality of life for the common Americans as well as the pursuit of civic peace, a goal to which he ironically referred as “our bounden duty.”<sup>4</sup>

Such policy would lead Senator Bob La Follette (R-WI) to stipulate at the looming of the first World War, “under a pretext of carrying democracy to the rest of the world, we have done more to undermine and destroy democracy in the United States than it will be possible for us as a Nation to repair in a generation of time.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, new power, immense popularity, and a Republican dominated Congress gave Roosevelt free rein over the nation’s new position of growing international influence. As he expanded executive power, he ignored Congress. The United States had been acting gingerly abroad for nearly a decade when Roosevelt set a new course: his own. In that previous decade, Grover Cleveland, with Congressional approval, had strengthened American coastlines but yielded when Congress pulled the reins.<sup>6</sup> William McKinley timidly exercised the Monroe Doctrine in “splendid little wars” that met opposition.<sup>7</sup> A structured international system seemed to be on the horizon but juvenile America knew it was not yet ready.

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<sup>3</sup> “The Afternoon Session: Mayor, Gov. Hughes, Secretary Root, and Mr. Carnegie Speak,” *The New York Times (1857-1922)*, April 16, 1907.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Unger, *Fighting Bob La Follette: The Righteous Reformer* (Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2008), 252-253.

<sup>6</sup> “Taft Finds Precedent, Cites Cleveland Policy,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 30 Oct. 1904.

<sup>7</sup> Robert A. Hart, *The Great White Fleet: It’s Voyage Around the World, 1907-1909* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 24.

In 1896, Lord Salisbury mildly ventured, “a system of arbitration is an entirely novel arrangement... it would be wise to commence with a modest beginning, and not to hazard the success of the principle by adventuring it upon doubtful ground.”<sup>8</sup> Even a modest beginning proved to be too much. Despite support from Cleveland and McKinley, Congress rejected the Anglo-American Arbitration Treaty put forward in 1897 that would bring the United States into European affairs. Executives and their administrations pushed but “opinion was not yet ready at that time to go as far as Secretary Olney was anxious to go,” and opposition held, for the time.<sup>9</sup>

The only opinions forty-two-year-old Roosevelt cared for were those holding him in high regard. Roosevelt’s charisma and immense popularity put him above much criticism. He truly was a celebrity. That status, combined with bombastic confidence, led him to venture well onto doubtful ground and “brush aside the isolationist tradition” that his predecessors had respected.<sup>10</sup>

As an accidental president following the assassination of President McKinley, Roosevelt started slowly in his ventures and, originally, kept at least one eye on public opinion. One year into his presidency, Roosevelt was asked to arbitrate the Venezuela Crisis.<sup>11</sup> The public responded vehemently within days: Senator Shelby Moore Cullom (R-IL), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, brought to Congress “a large number of telegrams” in “emphatic protest” of arbitration.<sup>12</sup> According to *The New York Times*, the opposition was “based mainly on the apprehension that some contingency might arise which would seriously involve the United States in the case the President should become arbiter.”<sup>13</sup> Though Roosevelt desired involvement in the

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<sup>8</sup> Alfred L.P. Dennis, *Adventures in American Diplomacy, 1896-1906* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1969), 473.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

<sup>10</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> "President Roosevelt Asked to Arbitrate," *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 21 Dec. 1902.

<sup>12</sup> "President Urged Not to Arbitrate," *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 24 Dec. 1902.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

affair, public opinion maintained overriding influence on the forty-two year old Bull Moose. Isolationism held as tradition for a bit longer.

Imperialist debates were not merely of political concern, but were widespread in elite social circles, popular newspapers, and the common people's church. As overseas economic opportunity tempted big business, the debate was riddled with questions concerning morality and the undermining of American values. Both sides argued that international action either promoted or denounced American ideologies. Imperialists asserted that involvement was necessary for the good of humanity. In the words of Roosevelt, "No triumph in peace is quite so great as the supreme triumph of war." Anti-Imperialists, however, denounced the "the bleeding ulcer in the Philippines" to which the United States had contributed.<sup>14</sup> Mark Twain declared that Philippine intervention had "stained the flag" while William Jennings Bryan "would not exchange the glory of this Republic for the glory of all the empires."<sup>15</sup>

TR's popularity grew as he settled into the presidency. Americans held him in high esteem for a multitude of reasons: he claimed to be a northerner, a southerner, a westerner, and proudly an American. He was a statesman, a gentleman, and a frontiersman, "like Paul Bunyan, a folk hero, the quintessential American."<sup>16</sup> TR possessed the public trust and respect in unrivaled fashion (image A). Proud and aggressive, he exuded demi-god status in every situation — domestic and international — and he absolutely loved being the center of attention.

Roosevelt was elected in his own right in 1904 with the greatest popular vote in American history.<sup>17</sup> Believing the victory spoke for itself, Roosevelt no longer yielded to Congress (image

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<sup>14</sup> Russel Crandall, "Staining the Flag," *Survival*, Volume 60, Issue 6, 193.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 195; William Jennings Bryan, "Imperialism," Indianapolis, Indiana, 8 Aug. 1900.

<sup>16</sup> Kathleen Dalton, "Why America Loved Teddy Roosevelt," *The Psychohistory Review*, vol. 8 no. 3, 269.

<sup>17</sup> Dalton, "Why America Loved Teddy Roosevelt," 280.

B). Future endeavors occurred without Congressional consultation or approval. Roosevelt acted and Congress followed, or so he thought. Swept up in Roosevelt's grandeur and hope for American prominence on the international stage the people looked on in awe. Like their president, they ignored Progressive failures affecting daily domestic life. As Samuel J. Tilden put it, Roosevelt promised "a situation to vindicate our reputation and interests," eclipsing the true Progressive movements.<sup>18</sup> Though Roosevelt revered the "strenuous life" he turned away from the most difficult domestic challenges and sought international adventure wherein he abandoned Progressive values of democracy and liberty.

Armed with four more years and national celebrity status, the confident TR set out, beginning with the Panama Affair. In seeking an Isthmian canal for the benefit of American trade and naval movement, TR undermined the Colombian sovereignty that the United States had promised to uphold in the Bidlack Treaty of 1846. Without consulting Congress, Roosevelt ordered the United States Navy to prevent Colombian forces from landing troops to quash the rebellion. This rebellion, aided by Roosevelt, established the independent nation of Panama. Without consulting Congress, Roosevelt immediately recognized Panama as a sovereign nation. In return, Panama gave the United States full control over the construction of the Isthmian Canal.<sup>19</sup> The Monroe Doctrine was intended as an instrument of protection for South American neighbors from European manipulation. Yet as soon as policy removed European influence, Roosevelt's America stepped in to fill the void. Progressivism intended to celebrate democracy for all, yet Roosevelt applied this maxim only to "civilized nations of the world."<sup>20</sup> In South America, the United States did as he pleased (image D).

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<sup>18</sup> "Taft Finds Precedent, Cites Cleveland Policy."

<sup>19</sup> "Scores Roosevelt: D.B. Hill Tales the Panama Deal as his Text: Executive Acts Lawless" *The Washington Post* (1877-1922), 5 Oct. 1904.; Image C.

<sup>20</sup> "Afternoon Session."

Roosevelt asserted that the United States “scrupulously respected the rights of all other peoples” acting “in a spirit of genuine disinterestedness, of genuine and single minded purpose.”<sup>21</sup> Senator David B. Hill (D-NY), however, cited the “lawlessness... displayed in the Panama Affair” in which Roosevelt “did violate plain treaty obligations, plain international usages, and the Constitution of the United States.”<sup>22</sup> The Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt’s Big Stick Diplomacy simply put a new face on the bully of “uncivilized nations” (image E). Charged with taking “Panama without consulting the Cabinet”, Roosevelt later attempted to explain his actions to his cabinet members.<sup>23</sup> When he asked if he had defended himself, Secretary of War Elihu Root responded, “You certainly have. You have shown that you were accused of seduction and you have conclusively proved that you were guilty of rape.”<sup>24</sup>

The United States desired an Isthmian canal but wanted it attained in a democratic fashion, not as the product of a breached treaty and an aided revolution that setting precedents for, in Congress’ mind, unconstitutional, undemocratic intervention. Desire for the Canal came mostly from big businesses that sought access to global markets for their surplus goods. Economic motivation is a legitimate reason for naval bases and trade protection but can’t justify the great increase in battle cruisers amidst a lack of growth among the merchant marines, which exists solely to protect American commerce.<sup>25</sup> There is undeniable correlation between these Naval expenditures and Roosevelt’s status as former Secretary of the Navy. Naval expenditures rose from \$22 million to \$139 million in twenty-four years while

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<sup>21</sup> “Scores Roosevelt.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Kennedy, “The United States as New Kid on the Block,” *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (Random House, Inc., 1988), 246.

<sup>24</sup> Morris, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Kennedy, “The United States as New Kid on the Block, 1890-1940,” 245.

domestic Progressivism struggled for funding and support (image F).

This growing naval strength led Indiana Republican Senator Beveridge to pronounce, “We will not abandon our opportunity in the Orient” where limitless markets lay. America would do so by declaring “the Philippines are ours forever.”<sup>26</sup> He justified his blatant rejection of constitutional values on the basis that the Filipinos “are not of a self-governing race” and that white westerners were by God’s decree “master organizers of the world.”<sup>27</sup> Roosevelt shared a similar sentiment. Senator Bob La Follette, however, regarded the affair disdainfully with steadfast progressive concern: “If the Lord would only let us out of the Filipino mess... we might in the course of time pay off the own to the black man.”<sup>28</sup>

Debate and question spread beyond the political arena. Even at the height of Roosevelt’s popularity *The New York Times* questioned if international intervention was “dangerous to our peace and safety?”<sup>29</sup> Americans feared the possible implications and affects that lay ahead should this kind of intervention continue. Senator Hill called the “...executive precedents begun by him [Roosevelt] most inconvenient and damaging to our future democracy.”<sup>30</sup> The international arena was unstable as European imperialism, and the strife that went with it, spanned the globe. Anti-Imperialists viewed intervention as ‘unnecessary as it is unjust.’<sup>31</sup> New England minister Reverend Charles Ames brought imperialist fears to his congregation: “The policy of imperialism threatens to change the temper of our own people, and to put us into a permanent attitude of arrogance, testiness, and defiance towards other nations ... Once we enter the field of international

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<sup>26</sup> Albert Beveridge, “On the War in the Philippines,” US Senate, Washington DC, 9 Jan. 1900.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Unger, *Fighting Bob La Follette*, 239.

<sup>29</sup> “A Perplexing Protectorate,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 28 Dec. 1905.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Crandall, “Staining the Flag,” 193.



conflict as a great military and naval power, we shall be one more bully among bullies. We shall only add one more to the list of oppressors of mankind.”<sup>32</sup> Such fears found manifestation in the likes of Senator Beveridge.

Roosevelt crusaded on, ignoring Congress and parading the Colombian affair as a victory. “In Panama we are successfully performing what is to be the greatest engineering feat of the ages, and while we are assuming the whole burden of the work, we have explicitly pledged ourselves that the use is to be free for all mankind.”<sup>33</sup> Here Roosevelt begins to ascend his “bully pulpit” to a new level. With a self-aware celebrity status, he knew that, despite some public criticism, he had the nation’s ear and used it to its full extent.

Though he could manipulate the masses with his rhetoric, Congress and prominent Anti-Imperialists continued to raise their voices. They expressed not just disdain or disagreement but real fear of Roosevelt’s trajectory and where it would ultimately lead. “Are we ready to undertake the task of enforcing good behavior on our Latin neighbors to the south in order to guarantee ourselves against undesirable complications with European Powers?” asked *The New York Times*<sup>34</sup> Beyond the Panama Affair, international action meant interaction with European nations that held great economic and military power, yet were greatly inconsistent, hubristic, and reluctant to share power. Roosevelt eagerly stepped onto this stage where lofty ideals were only sporadically applied.<sup>35</sup>

Public sentiment noted that Roosevelt acted alone and beyond the limits honored by previous presidents. The nation’s founding instilled a wariness of unfettered executive power. TR was setting a new precedent. Put simply, Roosevelt’s character in the White House worried some, and his growing “follow-the-

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>33</sup> “Afternoon Session.”

<sup>34</sup> “A Perplexing Protectorate.”

<sup>35</sup> The Niagara Conference led by WEB Du Bois meanwhile fought for the basic rights of African Americans.

leader” attitude didn’t quell those worries. Again, it wasn’t only inside politicians who expressed such concerns. In the first year of his elected term *The New York Times* urged, “We very much doubt whether the Senate is now prepared to follow the President so far as perhaps he would be ready to go. Mr. McKinley, we think, would have been at pains to make sure that the Senate would accept and support any policy he might have formulated in the pursuance of such a design. If the Senate would not have followed, he himself would have come to a halt. Not so Mr. Roosevelt. He has made the venture alone.”<sup>36</sup> Roosevelt took no time to consult or to debate, ignoring the basic tenets of democracy that the Progressive movement aimed to perfect. According to the British statesmen Lord Morely, Roosevelt ““was America”, yet it was Progressive values that were truly American, values that took the Constitution to heart and sought a “more perfect union,” not an empire.”<sup>37</sup>

Roosevelt was indifferent to such concerns, stating defiantly: “I took the canal zone and let Congress debate, and while the debate goes on the canal does also.”<sup>38</sup> His tactic proved successful in Panama, but Congress would soon use its check to reign in Roosevelt. In the first months of 1905 Congress stood firmly against the president. Secretary of State John Hay introduced a debt plan for Santo Domingo that the “Senate saw only as a gross violation of the Constitution, an egregious abuse of executive authority.”<sup>39</sup> Along with the debt proposal, Roosevelt presented various European arbitration treaties. These treaties were so amended by the Senate that Secretary Hay withdrew them from debate on behalf of Roosevelt, forcing Roosevelt to admit that the United States was unwilling to enter into European treaties.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “A Perplexing Protectorate.”

<sup>37</sup> Morris, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *The New York Times*, March 25, 1911.

<sup>39</sup> John Taliaferro, *All the Great Prizes: The Life of John Hay, from Lincoln to Roosevelt* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 529.; Image G.

<sup>40</sup> Dennis, *Adventures in American Diplomacy*, 480.

It's shocking that this rejection of treaties was not the end of Roosevelt's aggressive efforts in foreign affairs. Alas, the self-proclaimed "Bull Moose" never stayed still long enough to be held accountable (image H). By staying in constant motion he kept Congress where he wanted them- always trying to catch up. Roosevelt took on Russo-Japanese Arbitration, no longer willing to bow to Congress as he had in 1902. His efforts in Russo-Japanese Arbitration culminated in the Portsmouth Treaty, ending the conflict and making him the first American recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. The Prize eclipsed 1905's arbitration failures and raised Roosevelt from celebrity to demi-god.

His 'bully pulpit' never stood stronger and he wielded it well. In a letter penned by Roosevelt and read aloud by Secretary Root to a crowd at Carnegie Hall, Roosevelt espoused a "self-respecting friendship of all republics of this continent" with the goal of "justice and peace throughout the Western Hemisphere."<sup>41</sup> Published in the *New York Times* his message certainly reached the people. And though, "We try to avoid meddling in affairs that our not our concern," Roosevelt curiously continued to defend American involvements in Mexico, Panama, Cuba, Santa Domingo, and the Philippines.<sup>42</sup> The Nobel Peace Prize brought another arbitration opportunity.

French and German disputes over Morocco in 1906 resulted in the two nations calling upon Roosevelt for arbitration. The settlement totally neglected the sovereignty of Morocco and any respect for the rights of its people that Roosevelt's public statements claimed to respect. The arbitration not only violated the Progressive values publicly advocated by the President, but constituted further pursuit of an impossible task that "merely gave part of the prologue to a drama which was soon to bring modern civilization almost to the breaking point in the World War."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> "Afternoon Session."

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Dennis, *Adventures in American Diplomacy*, 509.

With another arbitration “victory” under his belt, Roosevelt set his sights on a Second Hague Conference. A major aspect of Roosevelt’s popularity among the American people came from a different concern emerging from American entanglement in European affairs. His Nobel Prize was European affirmation of a civilized, genteel, disinterested America. The American peoples’ great concern for European approval added to the grandeur of Roosevelt’s ventures: “‘American Prestige in Europe’... It was a topic too often discussed.”<sup>44</sup> The people loved the respect Roosevelt received which he frequently conveyed to them in his propagandist speeches.

In an address Secretary Root welcomed the people to whom he spoke “as spiritual kindred of those Americans of great heart and clear intelligence who in times past, striving for ordered liberty and the peace of justice in this land, have conferred inestimable benefits upon all mankind...”<sup>45</sup> Roosevelt and his administration resorted to fallacies to coax the people into “abandoning the existing state of very comfortable isolation.”<sup>46</sup> Roosevelt masterfully wove ideals of fortitude, intelligence, and masculinity into his public addresses. This tactic began simply with testaments to “great heart and clear intelligence” but evolved into labeling proponents of the later anti-war movement not only as “cowardly” but as “active agents of the devil.”<sup>47</sup>

Two months before the Hague Conference the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* published articles demonstrating the nation’s unquestioning support of their President. As Roosevelt neared the end of his term the people demanded his future involvement in international politics. A system had been devised that no one could see being perpetuated without the aid of Roosevelt. Truly no one could. Even King Leopold of Belgium,

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<sup>44</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet*, viii.

<sup>45</sup> “Afternoon Session.”

<sup>46</sup> Kennedy, “The United States as New Kid on the Block,” 246.

<sup>47</sup> Unger, *Fighting Bob La Follette*, 241-242.

famous for his atrocious exploitation of the Congo, kept a signed photograph of Roosevelt framed on his desk.<sup>48</sup>

The people were told that “it lay in the power of one man to form a League of Peace...” and that the “force of public opinion educated as it is now” was “irresistible” in favor of Roosevelt.<sup>49</sup> His administration told the people what to think, encouraged that they were righteous and masculine in those thoughts, and urged how best to manifest those philosophies. Roosevelt posed the problem of world peace, riled up the population, and presented them with the solution- himself. It worked.

One man voiced the sentiment of many: it was “beyond a doubt that President Roosevelt is the choice of the people as his own successor.”<sup>50</sup> However, for those respecting precedents regarding a third term, “senator for life” was the recommendation.<sup>51</sup> Another recurring suggestion: “If the third term is denied him, the sole purpose should be to place him at the head of the Hague arbitration board, for who else can placate the hostile world?”<sup>52</sup> Even a year earlier in 1906 the *Washington Post* published “Roosevelt’s Next Task” stating “He will be, we have no doubt, the president of the world’s high court of arbitration...”<sup>53</sup>

The Second Hague Conference was an utter failure. The conference agreed on little, adopting a few resolutions of no real consequence. In 1905 Professor John Bassett Moore, LL.D., a Columbia University professor of diplomacy and international law, anticipated the conference’s failure:

The resort to arbitration is voluntary...the scope and progress of arbitration will depend, not so much upon special devices, or upon general declarations or descriptive exceptions, as upon

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<sup>48</sup> “Europe is Warned.” *The Washington Post* (1877-1922), 29 Aug. 1905.

<sup>49</sup> “Afternoon Session.”

<sup>50</sup> “Straw Vote Elects Him.” *The Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 1907.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> “Roosevelt’s Next Task,” *The Washington Post* (1877-1922), 10 March 1906.

the dispositions of nations- dispositions which, although they are subject to the modifying influence of public opinion, springs primarily from the national feelings, the national interests, and the national ambitions.<sup>54</sup>

Essentially, arbitration depended upon a nation's temperament. This reasoning, coupled with the unpredictable state of Europe made arbitration a venture, in Roosevelt's words, "insisting on the impossible."<sup>55</sup> The conference was also far from Roosevelt's acclaimed Progressive values. It was an international conglomerate of paternalism fueled by idealism, making it the greatest bureaucracy on the face of the earth and as far from progressive ideals as possible. Secretary of Commerce and Labor Oscar Strauss reveled in describing Roosevelt as "the first among presidents, kings, and emperors" (image I).<sup>56</sup> Such a claim satisfied the American people's hunger for European approval yet could not have been less American, nor less Progressive.

Just months after Moore's article was published in *Harper's Magazine*, *The New York Times* addressed the status of Europe following the end of the Russo- Japanese War (which had earned Roosevelt the Nobel Peace Prize). The article "From the Seed of the Hague" noted:

...all the European Governments of importance have some embarrassing relations to the combatant nations or to the issues involved in the war. France and Britain are allies of Russia and Japan respectively. Germany is an object of certain suspicion as to its ultimate aims with regard to both these nations and to Russia as well. Austria-Hungary is entangled with the possibilities of the Near East as regards Germany and Russia. The other powers are, perhaps, conscious of their modest rank

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<sup>54</sup>John Bassett Moore, "International Arbitration." *Harper's Magazine*, March 1905.

<sup>55</sup> "Afternoon Session."

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

and influence, and not anxious to meddle with what may make a disturbance among their more powerful neighbors.<sup>57</sup>

Is such a state of affairs worthy of a Nobel Peace Prize? Clearly arbitration would not be a viable option, yet Roosevelt pushed for the Second Hague Conference. Despite the United States having their own issues rooted in the Gilded Age, Roosevelt looked to the issues of Europe rooted in centuries of imperialism, which Roosevelt hoped to join. It was an adventure for the “folk hero” and the people loved it.<sup>58</sup>

Roosevelt’s next wildly expensive and decidedly unprogressive adventure would be the grandest yet. Just two months after the end of the Second Hague Conference, the “Grand Fleet” cast off the Atlantic Coast for a global tour. Lasting from the end of 1907 to 1909, the fleet cost roughly \$96,606,000, according to the U.S. Naval Institute. The motive for the trip was pure vanity. The United States had suffered economic downturn yet still funded the “Grand Fleet” at the expense of the people and potential progressive reforms, including civil rights for women and African Americans, workers’ rights and safety, and health crises. Roosevelt’s passion for battleships and foreign respect was unyielding. With the fleet at sea, the people “watched the horizon for signs of foreign admiration” and were fed sanitized stories of fantasy: “in 1908, the public was told a success story matched only by the novels of Horatio Alger.”<sup>59</sup> As was his custom, Roosevelt reported exaggerations and propaganda to please the people and maintain his course.

Roosevelt’s presidency finally ended. One American believed that Roosevelt, as a patriot, could not decline the call of his people to remain in service, yet Roosevelt did decline.<sup>60</sup> Roosevelt had led the nation on a grand adventure of diplomacy

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<sup>57</sup> “From the Seed of the Hague,” *The New York Times*, 13 June 1905.

<sup>58</sup> Dalton, “Why America Loved Teddy Roosevelt,” 269.

<sup>59</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet*, 9; ix.

<sup>60</sup> “Straw Vote Elects Him.”

only to step away from the helm at a vital junction. “Pride was not absent in Senator Henry Cabot Lodge’s statement to Roosevelt: ‘We are putting terrible pressure on Europe, and this pressure may produce war at any time.’”<sup>61</sup> This last action heightened international militarism and armament. Through years of arbitration Roosevelt had established himself as a keystone of the international community only to disappear on an African hunting trip after a last splendid stir of the pot.

It’s ironic that Roosevelt would set so many new executive precedents and ignore half-century-old treaties and traditions, yet upheld the oldest executive precedent that applied less to him as he was only elected once. However, he had pledged to do so out of respect for democracy and the nation. Roosevelt, a proud student of history, should have been quite aware that his larger-than-life personality could not be successfully followed by the likes of Taft. Roosevelt, not the President of the United States, had become the settler of international affairs (image J). Once he was gone, arbitration and its hope for peace were too. Arbitration had been hastily extended beyond its natural scope, then abandoned. Roosevelt had often acted alone, making multiple facets of government uniquely dependent upon him.

The unpredictable nature of arbitration might have prevailed had Roosevelt stayed involved. Perhaps Roosevelt’s dynamic personality and popular support could have supported the League of Nations, although in view of Congressional track record on arbitration treaties, neither the world nor the American people were ready. Neither Taft nor Wilson had the ability or gall to stand against Congress, or foreign powers, or to so empathically reach the people.

Upon leaving office Roosevelt stated, “Well, I’m through now. I’ve done my work. People are going to discuss economic questions more and more: the tariff, currency, banks. They are hard questions, and I am not deeply interested in them; my problems are

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<sup>61</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet*, 8.



moral problems, and my teaching has been plain morality.”<sup>62</sup> Roosevelt played the people, big business, and the world to teach his morality. It was his world. He boasted, “No other president every enjoyed the presidency as I did.” However, this enjoyment was at the detriment to international stability, American democracy, and the American people.

Many of the Progressive Movement’s greatest achievements came when Roosevelt was out of office and the Senate was able to turn its attention back to legislating, not chasing an imperial president. Some of Progressivism’s greatest failures came in the midst of his presidency. Roosevelt’s second term ignored the Niagara Conference, the Brownsville affair, the Atlanta race riots, the organization of labor unions, railroad reform, and economic depression amidst financing of the Grand Fleet. While Roosevelt arbitrated the Russo-Japanese War and earned the Peace Prize, W.E.B. Du Bois fought for the basic rights of African Americans in the Niagara Conference to no avail. The year of the Algeciras Conference saw the Brownsville Affair and Atlanta Race Riots, which Roosevelt omitted from his autobiography.<sup>63</sup> Roosevelt’s attention to these issues could have brought progress. Roosevelt was unyielding. The issues to which he gave his attention, like environmentalism and trust busting, saw progress. Had his energy gone to issues between the coasts rather than beyond, the Progressive Movement would have been more successful by dealing with domestic issues that still plague the United States.

In the end Roosevelt splintered Republican Party and the Progressive Movement ideologically between “internationalism, isolationism, and self-interested nationalism.”<sup>64</sup> Roosevelt’s agenda allowed that, “progressivism could be embraced both by men whose root concern was the assertion of national power, such as Roosevelt and Beveridge... and men who were concerned with

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<sup>62</sup> Leuchtenburg, *The American President*, 29.

<sup>63</sup> Morris, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 12.

<sup>64</sup> John Milton Cooper, “Progressivism and American Foreign Policy: A Reconsideration” (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970) 276.

the preservation of democratic values,” like La Follette, Cullom, Twain, and Revered Ames.<sup>65</sup>

Without Roosevelt at the helm the nation went back to isolationist tendencies. Neither the people nor Roosevelt’s successors sought international engagements.<sup>66</sup> The ordeal had been a personal crusade permitted by his popularity. Senator La Follette represents a true American Progressive, fighting his entire life, and even dying a Senator in the capital, for a more perfect union. Before the First World War, Senator La Follette highlighted the neglect of domestic affairs that began accumulating under Roosevelt: “Are the people of this country being so well represented in this war movement that we need to go abroad to give other people control of their governments?”<sup>67</sup> After the war La Follette refused to be seduced by the empty promises residing in the proposed League of Nations, and stuck to the domestic agenda he had been pushing. With the League up for debate in Congress he saw the reality of the situation: “By ratifying this document... we shall involve this country in the quarrels and dissension of Europe for generations to come... [preventing the U.S. from] turning its energies to the solution of its domestic problems without reference to the bewildering imperialism and diplomacy.”<sup>68</sup> Such involvement would burden the lower classes that would struggle to fund and be forced to fight in the army- not to mention African American veterans, who had fought for their country and their rights, only to return home to oppression. The country needed domestic peace and prosperity, livable conditions for all its citizens, and for government to truly represent its people.

Secretary Root defended Roosevelt’s foreign affairs just months before the Second Hague Conference:

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Kennedy, “The United States as New Kid on the Block,” 247.

<sup>67</sup> Bob La Follette, “It Has No Popular Support,” US Senate, Washington DC, 4 April 1917.

<sup>68</sup> Unger, *Fighting Bob La Follette*, 269-270.

It is natural that the altruistic and humanitarian view, broader and less immediately practical, shall be taken by students, and thinkers, by teachers and philosophers,- by men who, not burdened by the necessity of putting theories into practice, are at liberty to look upon the world as it ought to be and to urge mankind on toward acceptance of their ideals.<sup>69</sup>

Ridiculing the failures of the past is an easy task, yet this is a feeble excuse for imperialism fueled by vanity, racism, and big business at the expense of democracy. It is particularly tragic that senators, ministers, and newspapers were aware of executive missteps and fighting for progress. The study of the undermining of Progressive politics is vital to the state of the nation, its democracy, and the world – all of which suffer repercussions from this era and beyond as nations learn nothing from the vanity, nationalism, and extortion of the past. Privatization of democracy and perpetuation of the unholy matrimony of big business and politics continue to oppress Americans. The Constitution, its values, and the people protected under it must be government's sole motivation. The Oval Office is no place for enacting subjective moral teachings or for a vainglorious individual; it is no pulpit.

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<sup>69</sup> "Afternoon Session."

Appendix<sup>70</sup>  
Image A

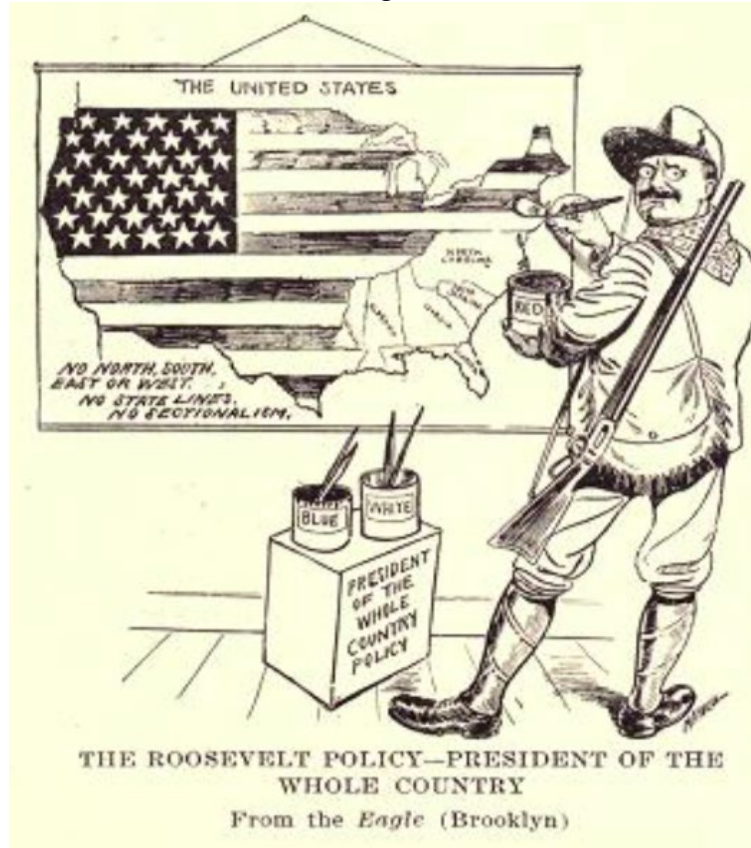
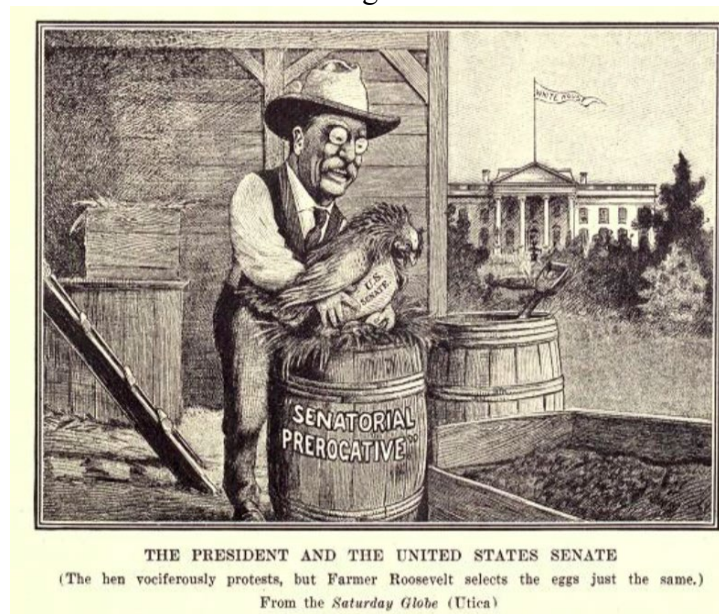


Image B:



<sup>70</sup> All images from Albert Shaw, *A Cartoon History of Roosevelt's Career* (New York: The Review of Reviews Company, 1910), 19-23.

Image C:



Image D:

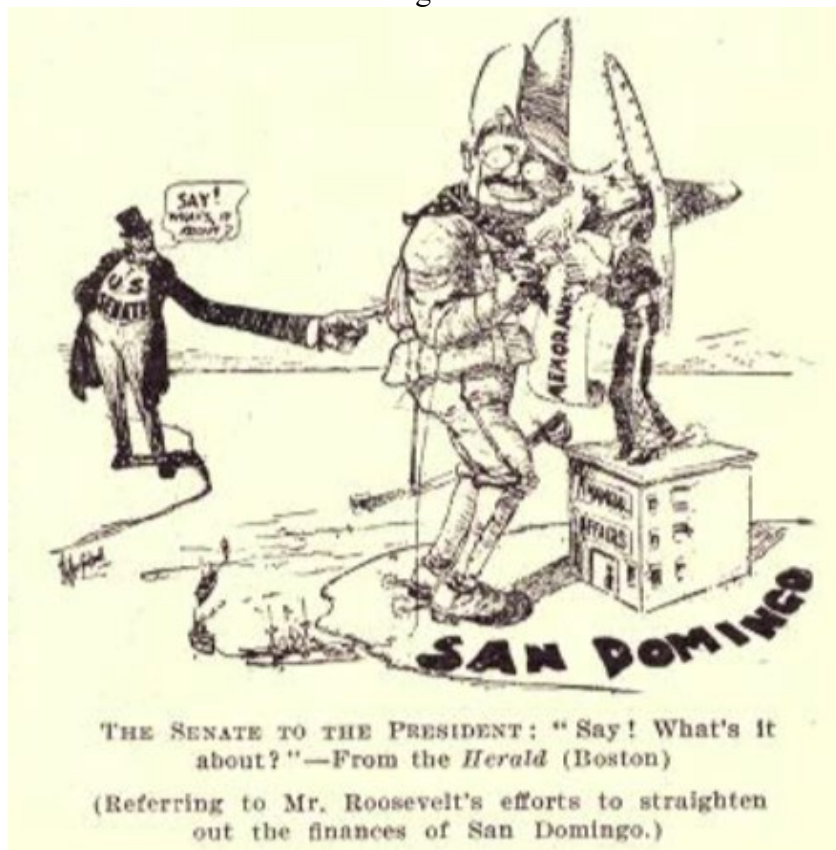
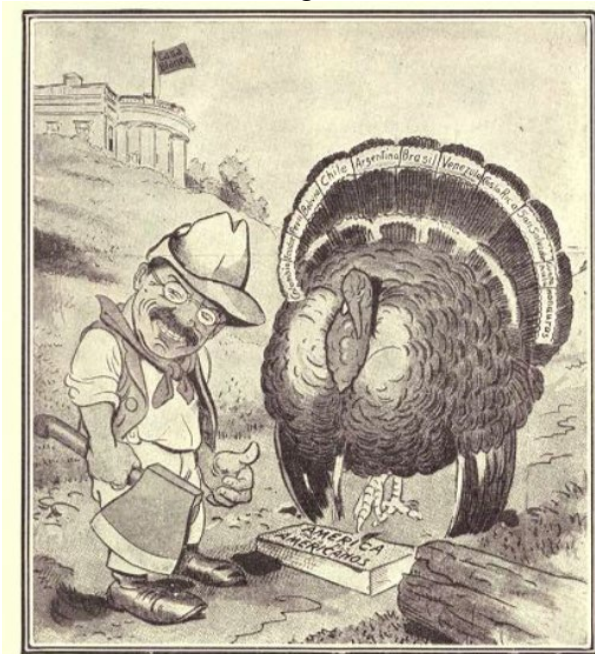
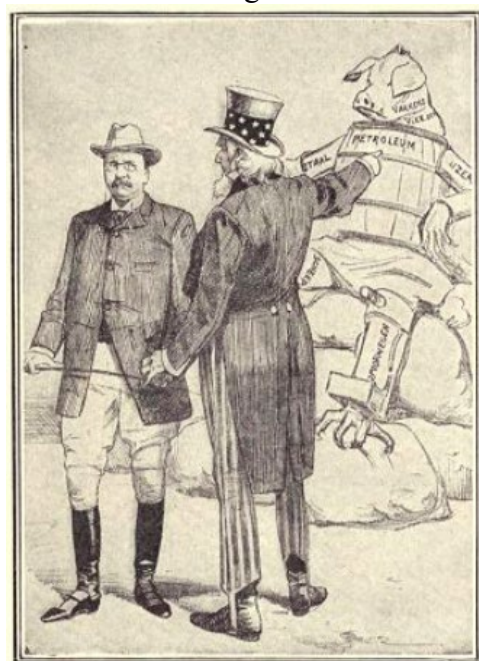


Image E:



PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S FORTHCOMING FEAST,—A SOUTH AMERICAN VIEW OF THE LATEST APPLICATIONS OF THE MONROE DOCTRINE—From *Successor* (Valparaiso, Chile)

Image F:



UNCLE SAM (to President Roosevelt): "Before you can bring about world peace, you must establish peace in your own land by killing the trust monster."  
From the *Amsterdammer* (Amsterdam)

Image G:



Image H:

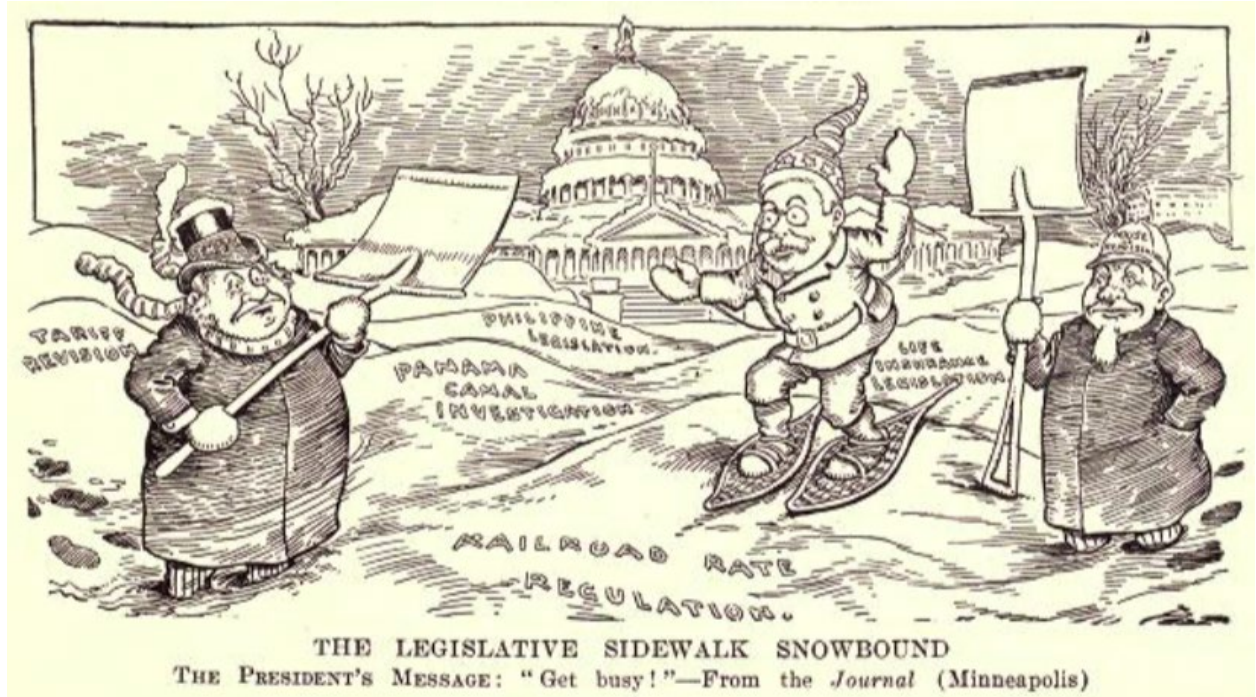


Image I:

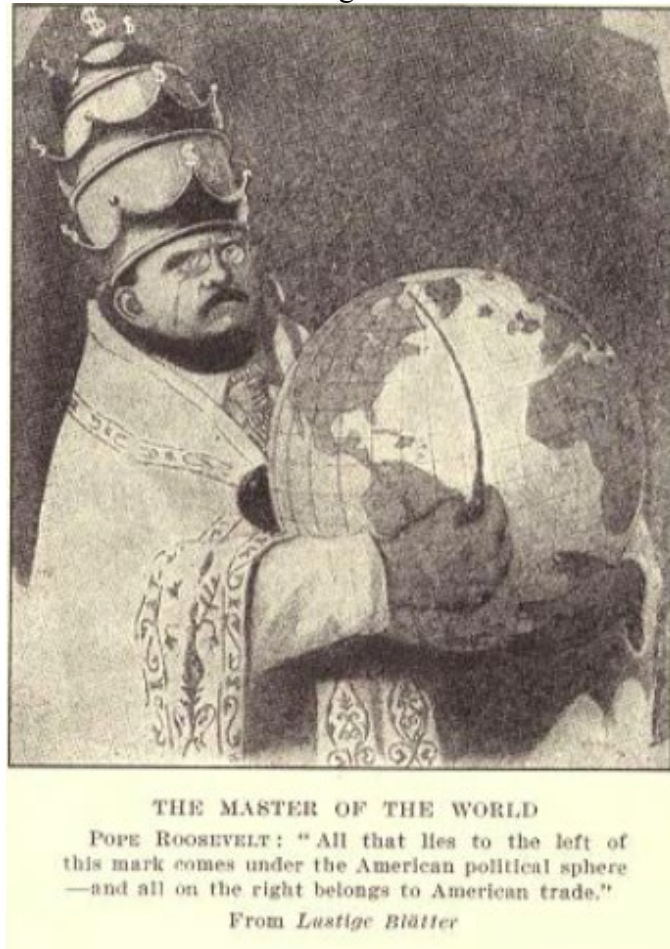


Image J:

