

Introduction

Theodore Roosevelt is one of the most beloved American presidents. He possessed both the ability to capture the public trust and to form functional working relationships with other politicians, traits that enabled him to command significant presidential power. Roosevelt entered office the top celebrity of the short and celebrated Spanish-American War, and carried with him a reputation as a rugged reformer. Even before the presidency, running as McKinley's vice president, Roosevelt mastered the campaign trail with a tireless tour of American cities that brought his political vision to millions of Americans. In office, Roosevelt made his biggest mark as a domestic reformer, and was the first president to take the workers' rights movement seriously. Roosevelt used the power of the presidency to mediate domestic disputes, setting a precedent that future presidents would likewise follow. On the foreign front, Roosevelt established an important foreign policy approach in which the United States would assume unilateral responsibility to police the Americas, and he followed through on this militarily and diplomatically. Lastly, Roosevelt left a tremendous impact on America's legacy of natural resource conservation and was the most ecologically-minded of all U.S. presidents. Even with the massive weight of the oil, railroad, lumber, and coal industries opposing his agenda, Roosevelt established new national parks, monuments, and wildlife preserves, and helped inspire in Americans the idea that the nation's natural beauty was the American corollary of the great cultural landmarks of the old world, and needed to be preserved for future generations, just like ancient castles and cathedrals were protected by government trusts.

Roosevelt was followed by Taft, who sought to follow in Roosevelt's footsteps, but lacked his conviction and personality. Taft lost hold of the Republican political machine and was too weak to stand against



his opponents in Congress. Though initially following Roosevelt's lead in domestic affairs, completing big-business and anti-trust reforms that Roosevelt started, Taft's decisions weren't as popular and he didn't command the same level of legislative or popular support as his predecessor. Though not a poor president, Taft left little impression on the office, or the public.

Topics covered in this chapter include:

- Spanish-American War
- National Park System
- National Monuments
- Sherman Antitrust Act
- The Depression of 1897
- The Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902

This Chapter Discusses the Following Source Documents:

Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, 1904

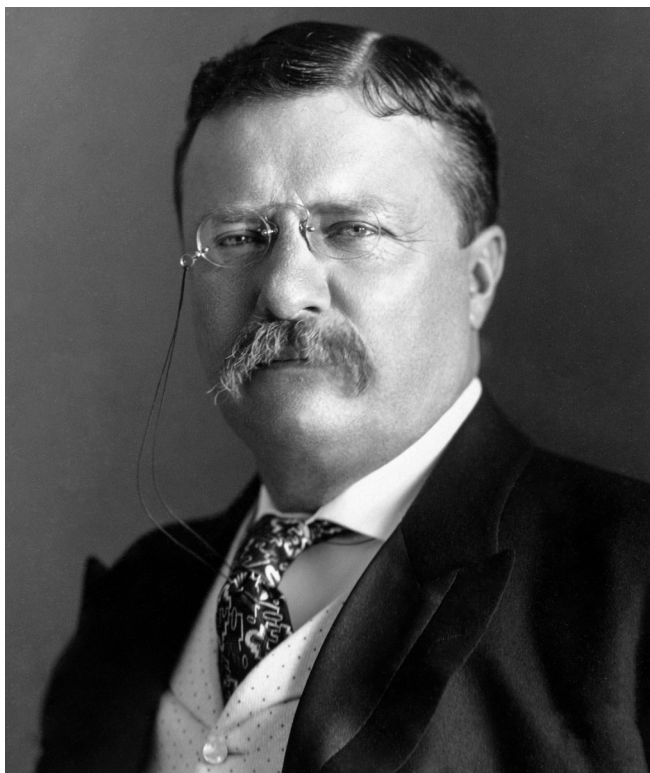
Seventh Annual Message, Theodore Roosevelt, December 3, 1907



Natural American History

Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft (1901–1913)

Teddy Roosevelt became president after the assassination of William McKinley. A self-assured leader, Roosevelt brought new ideas and considerable vigor to the White House and established a reform-oriented agenda that kicked off the progressive era of the early 1900s. Roosevelt became so popular among the public that the Republicans had no choice but to back him as their candidate for his second term. In the 1904 election Roosevelt earned 7.6 million votes and 336 electoral votes to 5 million and 140 electoral votes for Democratic challenger Alton B. Parker.¹



Theodore Roosevelt, by Pach Bros, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, via Wikimedia.



Public opinion was Roosevelt's chief weapon, and he frequently traveled to speak directly with the people. Andrew Jackson had used a similar tactic, employing public opinion to discourage legislators from opposing his policy directives, but Roosevelt was far more effective. His level of public support was robust, though women were still prohibited from voting and "Jim Crow" laws significantly curtailed African American political power. For all his often-touted egalitarian principles, Roosevelt was racist and embraced the theory of social Darwinism, which proposed a hierarchy of race in which white Europeans were the "most evolved." Roosevelt did nothing to challenge the exploitation of African Americans in the South and was silent on women's rights. He was, however, the first president to engage in a progressive economic agenda.

A Curious Mind

Theodore Roosevelt was born in 1858 in New York City. A frail, asthmatic child, Roosevelt's passion for adventure and physical fitness began in his teenage years, when he engaged in a strenuous physical regimen to overcome the limitations of his sickly childhood. He became quite fit, was an avid swimmer, wrestler, boxer, and devoted sportsman, and spent much of his life hunting, fishing, riding horses, and exploring the outdoors. His interest in animals led Roosevelt to Harvard College where he planned to study natural history and zoology but switched to law.²

He married Alice Lee, whom he met at Harvard, in 1880, and returned to New York to attend law school but instead ran for office. He was elected to the state assembly for two terms beginning in 1882. In 1884, tragedy struck when Roosevelt's mother and wife both died on the same day (February 12), hours apart, his mother from typhoid fever and his wife from kidney disease shortly after giving birth to their daughter. A depressed Roosevelt abandoned politics, left his infant daughter in the care of his sister, and retreated to the Badlands of North Dakota, where he purchased two ranches. For more than two years, Roosevelt hunted and



fished in the wilderness and became a respected member of the community. Many of his adventures are recorded in his book, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, published in 1888, including a six-day pursuit and capture of armed men who stole a boat from his ranch. Though he fit into the frontier well, his intellectual roots were obvious, evidenced by this description of the boat thieves:

*“They had quite a stock of books, some of a rather unexpected kind. Dime novels and the inevitable ‘History of the James Brothers’ . . . As for me, I had brought with me ‘Anna Karénina,’ and my surroundings were quite grey enough to harmonize well with Tolstoï.”*³

Roosevelt returned to New York in 1886, where he married childhood girlfriend Edith Carow, and began a productive second career, writing and publishing books on history and nature. His first, *The Naval War of 1812*, was followed by *The Life of Thomas Hart Benton* (1887), and his beloved four-volume history of the frontier, *The Winning of the West*, which took from 1889 to 1896 to finish. Meanwhile he published articles, essays, and many of his personal stories in magazines and newspapers. Roosevelt’s reintroduction to politics came in 1888, after he campaigned for Benjamin Harrison and was rewarded by an appointment to the Civil Service Commission. In 1895, he was appointed president of the New York City Police Board and in 1897, thanks in part to his knowledge of military history, Roosevelt was appointed by President McKinley to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

During the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt volunteered for service and served as commander of the 1st Volunteer Cavalry unit. Nicknamed the “Rough Riders,” Roosevelt’s division was one of the most irregular in military history. Roosevelt recruited officers from the Ivy Leagues in the north, frontier lawmen, cowboys, and prospectors from the west, and police



officers and a group of Native American scouts. This colorful contingent charged up San Juan Hill near Santiago, Cuba, suffering heavy losses but ultimately claiming victory in an attack featured in newspapers across the country. Roosevelt and the “Rough Riders” were perfect media fodder, and the newspapers made them all national heroes. The Republican Party in New York pushed Roosevelt to enter the gubernatorial race, which he won thanks to the help of Thomas C. Platt, the corrupt head of a powerful Republican political machine. Once in office, however, Roosevelt demonstrated a commitment to anti-corruption reform. He refused to participate in the patronage system that distributed political offices as bribes and passed bills against the party platform. The Republicans, seeking to protect their patronage system, consulted with national Republican leadership, and they conspired to eliminate his reforms by essentially promoting him to the vice presidency. As Platt described:

“Roosevelt had from the first agreed that he would consult me on all questions of appointments, Legislature or party policy. He religiously fulfilled his pledge, although he frequently did just what he pleased. . . . I may add that instead of ‘shelving’ Roosevelt, I must plead guilty to the charge of ‘kicking him upstairs.’”⁴

Roosevelt had little interest in the vice presidency but realized that the nomination process had been rigged to assure he would become the candidate. This action was more fateful than those responsible could have imagined, leading to one of the most reform-oriented presidencies of all time. Platt seemed to recognize that Roosevelt’s nomination, whatever its political motivation, changed the presidency.

“No candidate for Vice-President in the whole history of this Republic ever made such a canvass in a national campaign as did Roosevelt in the campaign that has recently closed. The reason is simple. No Theodore Roosevelt was ever before nominated.



*When before has any Vice-Presidential candidate ever become the central figure, the leading general, the field marshal of a national political campaign? Those who thought that Roosevelt made a mistake in accepting the nomination for Vice-President will do well to remember that in the campaign just closed Governor Roosevelt had increased his prestige, power and popularity one hundred fold. Early in the campaign he became the national Republican leader who on every occasion was pitted against Bryan and who vanquished the Democratic Presidential candidate off every field. He answered all of Bryan's questions. Bryan could answer none of his. Besides all this, Roosevelt broke all records as a campaigner. He traveled more miles, visited more States, spoke in more towns, made more speeches and addressed a larger number of people than any man who ever went on the American stump. He beat Bryan all through the campaign, and he beat him on election day. What more could he have done if he had been the candidate for President? Is it not plain that the man makes the office, not the office the man?"*⁵

Roosevelt's 1900 vice presidential campaign is the most famous in history. Traveling more than 21,000 miles, Roosevelt spoke in 567 cities in 24 states, and it's estimated that more than 3 million Americans turned out to watch him speak. Political columnists joked that it was Roosevelt's candidacy more than McKinley's, a portent of things to come. When McKinley was killed in September of 1901, Roosevelt was suddenly thrust into the presidency, becoming the youngest man to serve in the office. In the early days of his presidency, Roosevelt promised to fulfill McKinley's objectives, but it soon became clear that he had no intention of doing so. This began the most progressive presidency in U.S. history, and marked a turning point in the history of the executive office.



The Most Powerful Man in America

When Roosevelt entered the White House in 1901, the United States was a nation desperately in need of reform. The laboring class was languishing in economic inequality, and there were few in the political sphere with the power or will to change the status quo. One of Roosevelt's first major actions was to use the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 to block the 1901 merger of the Great Northern and Northern Pacific railroad companies, which would have created a railroad monopoly covering much of the country. The merger was the brainchild of robber barons like J.P. Morgan, E.H. Harriman, and James J. Hill. This placed Roosevelt at odds with the business elite and the Republican political machine, but he pushed ahead with his decision, which reached the Supreme Court in 1904, where the Court ruled in favor of Roosevelt and his use of the Antitrust Act.

Because the railroads were the center of local, national, and international commerce, railroad regulation was one of the major goals of the Roosevelt administration. Large companies supported politicians who opposed railroad regulation, and railroads offered substantial discounts to larger companies shipping their products, making it impossible for smaller companies to compete. Roosevelt and allied progressives in Congress tried twice to address this, first with the Elkins Act of 1903 and later with a bill to authorize the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to regulate pricing on interstate shipping. Business-centric politicians tried to weaken the bill by calling for judicial review, recognizing that the appointed justices would likely rule in favor of business. Roosevelt faced a common issue—his goals were opposed by a majority in Congress, both within his and the opposition party. To break this deadlock, Roosevelt traveled the country speaking directly to the public. Politicians saw his popularity rising and saw support from their own constituents on railroad regulation. In the end, Roosevelt succeeded in placing significant regulation on railroad pricing.



Roosevelt's overall reform agenda is often summarized by his efforts regarding the 1902 anthracite coal shortage resulting from a miner's strike in Pennsylvania. Recognizing that he was not constitutionally empowered to intervene in a strike unless it threatened national security or safety, Roosevelt invited mine owners and labor representatives to the White House to participate in negotiations. Roosevelt wrote to the mine owners:

"We are upon the threshold of winter with an already existing coal famine, the future terrors of which we can hardly yet appreciate. The evil possibilities are so far-reaching, so appalling, that it seems to me that you are not only justified in sinking, but required to sink for the time being, any tenacity as to your respective claims in the matter at issue between you.

In my judgment the situation imperatively requires that you meet upon the common plane of the necessities of the public. With all the earnestness there is in me I ask that there be an immediate resumption of operations in the coal mines in some such way as will without a day's unnecessary delay meet the crying needs of the people.

I do not invite discussion of your respective claims and positions. I appeal to your patriotism, to the spirit that sinks personal considerations and makes individual sacrifices for the general good."⁶

Previous presidents had used federal power to break strikes, including Andrew Jackson, who sent federal troops to break a construction workers' strike in 1834; Rutherford B. Hayes, who sent troops to avoid a mail strike; and Grover Cleveland, who used troops to break the Pullman Strike of 1894. However, Roosevelt knew that the depression of 1897 had led to worsening conditions for workers in the industry. The coal-miners' strikes that had occurred resulted in few substantive improvements. Mine owners used cheap immigrant labor, and workers who joined unions might be dismissed.



Roosevelt's proposed summit failed, and he commented to his allies that he was at a loss. Part of his solution was unprecedented: he threatened government occupation and operation of the mines unless a negotiation was reached. With this ultimatum, workers realized that they might not have employment and owners realized they were risking ownership of the mine. Both sides agreed to a deal, and Roosevelt created a commission to handle arbitration, resulting in moderate concessions to the workers in return for the resumption of work.

The anthracite coal crisis of 1902 was an important moment for labor unions. It was the first nationally recognized victory for the unions and confirmed the effectiveness of labor organization. Longtime president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL–CIO) Samuel Gompers said that the anthracite strike was the most important moment in the history of the labor movement. However, the coal strike was also an enormously important change for the presidency. Roosevelt established that, in situations that might legitimately lead to a public crisis, the presidency can utilize powers to act for the people. Presidents since would use their power to initiate investigations and engage in negotiation and arbitration in national and local issues. It is unknown if Roosevelt would have followed through on his threat to assume control of the mines, and unclear how Congress might have reacted to this unprecedented use of executive authority, but Roosevelt's handling of the situation was transformative in terms of executive powers and function. Historian for the *Department of Labor* Jonathan Grossman said of this event, "This meeting marked the turn of the U.S. Government from strikebreaker to peacemaker in industrial disputes."⁷

Global Police

One of the other areas in which Roosevelt also explored uncharted presidential domain was in expanding the American empire. Faced with the aftermath of the Spanish-American War and the management



of America's first colonies, Roosevelt's most lasting impact on foreign affairs was his handling of several issues.

First, in 1902 Germany and Britain blockaded Venezuela after dictator Cipriano Castro refused to pay debts owed to both nations; Roosevelt pressured England, Germany, and Venezuela into accepting American negotiation attempts and rejected the right of England and Germany to engage in a naval blockade in the western hemisphere. In January of 1903, Castro asked Roosevelt to intervene, and he hosted a series of negotiations that resulted in Venezuela agreeing to reserve custom duties until the country's debt had been repaid.⁸

Second, in 1904, the Latin American nation of Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic) was unable to repay debts to France, Germany, and Italy. As European powers threatened military action, Roosevelt insisted that the United States had the right to intervene based on the Monroe Doctrine, a declaration stating that the United States would prohibit any future colonial occupation from Europe in the region. This was questionable legal ground. Journalist Richard Weightman argued in a February 18, 1905, issue of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that "learned lawyers in Congress insist that the United States is not required by traditional policy to help republics out of its financial difficulties,"⁹ criticizing Roosevelt's actions in Santo Domingo and Venezuela as an overreach of presidential authority. To deal with his objectors, Roosevelt issued an executive order adding what came to be called the "Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine." In his 1904 message to Congress, Roosevelt explains his justification for this shift in American foreign policy in the Americas:



ROOSEVELT COROLLARY TO THE MONROE DOCTRINE

1904

Source Document Excerpt

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

The Nation continues to enjoy noteworthy prosperity. Such prosperity is of course primarily due to the high individual average of our citizenship, taken together with our great natural resources; but an important factor therein is the working of our long-continued governmental policies. The people have emphatically expressed their approval of the principles underlying these policies, and their desire that these principles be kept substantially unchanged, although of course applied in a progressive spirit to meet changing conditions.

Foreign Policy

In treating of our foreign policy and of the attitude that this great Nation should assume in the world at large, it is absolutely necessary to consider the Army and the Navy, and the Congress, through which the thought of the Nation finds its expression, should keep ever vividly in mind the fundamental fact that it is impossible to treat our foreign policy, whether this policy takes shape in the effort to secure justice for others or justice for ourselves, save as conditioned upon the attitude we are willing to take toward

our Army, and especially toward our Navy. It is not merely unwise, it is contemptible, for a nation, as for an individual, to use high-sounding language to proclaim its purposes, or to take positions which are ridiculous if unsupported by potential force, and then to refuse to provide this force. If there is no intention of providing and keeping the force necessary to back up a strong attitude, then it is far better not to assume such an attitude.

The steady aim of this Nation, as of all enlightened nations, should be to strive to bring ever nearer the day when there shall prevail throughout the world the peace of justice. There are kinds of peace which are highly undesirable, which are in the long run as destructive as any war. Tyrants and oppressors have many times made a wilderness and called it peace. Many times peoples who were slothful or timid or shortsighted, who had been enervated by ease or by luxury, or misled by false teachings, have shrunk in unmanly fashion from doing duty that was stern and that needed self-sacrifice, and have sought to hide from their own minds their shortcomings, their ignoble motives, by calling them love of peace. The peace of tyrannous terror, the peace of craven weakness,



continued

the peace of injustice, all these should be shunned as we shun unrighteous war. The goal to set before us as a nation, the goal which should be set before all mankind, is the attainment of the peace of justice, of the peace which comes when each nation is not merely safe-guarded in its own rights, but scrupulously recognizes and performs its duty toward others. Generally peace tells for righteousness; but if there is conflict between the two, then our fealty is due first to the cause of righteousness. Unrighteous wars are common, and unrighteous peace is rare; but both should be shunned. The right of freedom and the responsibility for the exercise of that right can not be divorced. One of our great poets has well and finely said that freedom is not a gift that tarries long in the hands of cowards. Neither does it tarry long in the hands of those too slothful, too dishonest, or too unintelligent to exercise it. The eternal vigilance which is the price of liberty must be exercised, sometimes to guard against outside foes; although of course far more often to guard against our own selfish or thoughtless shortcomings.

If these self-evident truths are kept before us, and only if they are so kept before us, we shall have a clear idea of what our foreign policy in its larger aspects should be. It is our duty to remember that a nation has no more right to do injustice to another nation,

strong or weak, than an individual has to do injustice to another individual; that the same moral law applies in one case as in the other. But we must also remember that it is as much the duty of the Nation to guard its own rights and its own interests as it is the duty of the individual so to do. Within the Nation the individual has now delegated this right to the State, that is, to the representative of all the individuals, and it is a maxim of the law that for every wrong there is a remedy. But in international law we have not advanced by any means as far as we have advanced in municipal law. There is as yet no judicial way of enforcing a right in international law. When one nation wrongs another or wrongs many others, there is no tribunal before which the wrongdoer can be brought. Either it is necessary supinely to acquiesce in the wrong, and thus put a premium upon brutality and aggression, or else it is necessary for the aggrieved nation valiantly to stand up for its rights. Until some method is devised by which there shall be a degree of international control over offending nations, it would be a wicked thing for the most civilized powers, for those with most sense of international obligations and with keenest and most generous appreciation of the difference between right and wrong, to disarm. If the great civilized nations of the present day should completely disarm,

We the People

Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine continued

the result would mean an immediate recrudescence of barbarism in one form or another. Under any circumstances a sufficient armament would have to be kept up to serve the purposes of international police; and until international cohesion and the sense of international duties and rights are far more advanced than at present, a nation desirous both of securing respect for itself and of doing good to others must have a force adequate for the work which it feels is allotted to it as its part of the general world duty. Therefore it follows that a self-respecting, just, and far-seeing nation should on the one hand endeavor by every means to aid in the development of the various movements which tend to provide substitutes for war, which tend to render nations in their actions toward one another, and indeed toward their own peoples, more responsive to the general sentiment of humane and civilized mankind; and on the other hand that it should keep prepared, while scrupulously avoiding wrongdoing itself, to repel any wrong, and in exceptional cases to take action which in a more advanced stage of international relations would come under the head of the exercise of the international police. A great free people owes it to itself and to all mankind not to sink into helplessness before the powers of evil.

Arbitration Treaties—Second Hague Conference

We are in every way endeavoring to help on, with cordial good will, every movement which will tend to bring us into more friendly relations with the rest of mankind. In pursuance of this policy I shall shortly lay before the Senate treaties of arbitration with all powers which are willing to enter into these treaties with us. It is not possible at this period of the world's development to agree to arbitrate all matters, but there are many matters of possible difference between us and other nations which can be thus arbitrated. Furthermore, at the request of the Interparliamentary Union, an eminent body composed of practical statesmen from all countries, I have asked the Powers to join with this Government in a second Hague conference, at which it is hoped that the work already so happily begun at The Hague may be carried some steps further toward completion. This carries out the desire expressed by the first Hague conference itself.

Policy Toward Other Nations of the Western Hemisphere

It is not true that the United States feels any land hunger or entertains any projects as regards the other nations of the Western Hemisphere save such as are for their welfare. All



continued

that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous. Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power. If every country washed by the Caribbean Sea would show the progress in stable and just civilization which with the aid of the Platt Amendment Cuba has shown since our troops left the island, and which so many of the republics in both Americas are constantly and brilliantly showing, all question of interference by this Nation with their affairs would be at an end. Our interests and those of our southern neighbors are in reality identical. They have great natural riches, and if within their borders the reign of law and justice obtains, prosperity is sure

to come to them. While they thus obey the primary laws of civilized society they may rest assured that they will be treated by us in a spirit of cordial and helpful sympathy. We would interfere with them only in the last resort, and then only if it became evident that their inability or unwillingness to do justice at home and abroad had violated the rights of the United States or had invited foreign aggression to the detriment of the entire body of American nations. It is a mere truism to say that every nation, whether in America or anywhere else, which desires to maintain its freedom, its independence, must ultimately realize that the right of such independence can not be separated from the responsibility of making good use of it.

In asserting the Monroe Doctrine, in taking such steps as we have taken in regard to Cuba, Venezuela, and Panama, and in endeavoring to circumscribe the theater of war in the Far East, and to secure the open door in China, we have acted in our own interest as well as in the interest of humanity at large. There are, however, cases in which, while our own interests are not greatly involved, strong appeal is made to our sympathies. Ordinarily it is very much wiser and more useful for us to concern ourselves with striving for our own moral and material betterment here at home than to concern ourselves with trying to better the condition of

We the People

Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine continued

things in other nations. We have plenty of sins of our own to war against, and under ordinary circumstances we can do more for the general uplifting of humanity by striving with heart and soul to put a stop to civic corruption, to brutal lawlessness and violent race prejudices here at home than by passing resolutions and wrongdoing elsewhere. Nevertheless there are occasional crimes committed on so vast a scale and of such peculiar horror as to make us doubt whether it is not our manifest duty to endeavor at least to show our disapproval of the deed and our sympathy with those who have suffered by it. The cases must be extreme in which such a course is justifiable. There must be no effort made to remove the mote from our brother's eye if we refuse to remove the beam from our own. But in extreme cases action may be justifiable and proper. What form the action shall take must depend upon the circumstances of the case; that is, upon the degree of the

atrocities and upon our power to remedy it. The cases in which we could interfere by force of arms as we interfered to put a stop to intolerable conditions in Cuba are necessarily very few. Yet it is not to be expected that a people like ours, which in spite of certain very obvious shortcomings, nevertheless as a whole shows by its consistent practice its belief in the principles of civil and religious liberty and of orderly freedom, a people among whom even the worst crime, like the crime of lynching, is never more than sporadic, so that individuals and not classes are molested in their fundamental rights—it is inevitable that such a nation should desire eagerly to give expression to its horror on an occasion like that of the massacre of the Jews in Kishenev, or when it witnesses such systematic and long-extended cruelty and oppression as the cruelty and oppression of which the Armenians have been the victims, and which have won for them the indignant pity of the civilized world.¹⁰

The Roosevelt Corollary is one of the most impactful, but controversial, foreign policy directives in history. There was considerable resistance to it, but subsequent presidents have made use of the corollary to justify aggressive foreign policy maneuvers. The precedent established by Roosevelt was used to justify military actions against Cuba in 1906, Nicaragua in 1909 and 1912, Mexico in 1914 and 1916, and Haiti in 1915.



Roosevelt's position was that the United States would not only prohibit European colonialism, but would behave as if all of Latin America was a protectorate territory, asserting U.S. rights to intervene and "police" affairs in the region. The validity of this approach has been much debated and U.S. intervention was, on the whole, unsuccessful, leading to further devolution of Latin American governments or the emergence of authoritarian regimes. Further, the morality of what amounts to the United States dictating policies to sovereign nations is highly questionable.

Military dominance was a major focus of Roosevelt's, who promoted efforts to expand U.S. naval forces. Even after his presidency, U.S. naval forces patrolled the coasts of the Americas, as an unofficial police force. The Roosevelt Corollary was abandoned by the next Roosevelt in office, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who favored a less militant approach to American foreign relations, helping to alleviate hostility toward American intervention. However, Teddy Roosevelt became the first U.S. president to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to mediate a dispute between Russia and Japan, meeting with representatives in 1905 in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Some historians believe that without an arbitrating voice the situation might have deteriorated into large-scale warfare.

The American Cathedral

Roosevelt's most lasting contribution to the United States came through his interest in wilderness, wildlife, and America's natural environment. From his early childhood interest in zoology and natural history through his experiences living in the American frontier as a cattle rancher in a rapidly disappearing landscape, Roosevelt had come to believe that America's natural landscape was a key part of the American psyche and identity. He believed strongly that much of what differentiated Americans from their ancestors in Europe was the physical, ecological nature of America and the experience of exploring its rugged beauty.



While America's first national park, Yellowstone, was created under the Grant administration in 1872, Roosevelt is the president most associated with the park system and the preservation of America's wilderness. Roosevelt, his friend John Muir, and other conservationists worked to create five new national parks, Crater Lake in Oregon, Wind Cave in South Dakota, Sullys Hill in North Dakota, Platt National Park in Oklahoma, and Mesa Verde in Colorado, in addition to adding thousands of acres to Yosemite National Park in California. Roosevelt's personal connection to the outdoors is evident in his decision to establish a park near where he lived and grazed cattle in the North Dakota Badlands. Roosevelt also created the U. S. Forest Service (USFS), through which he established 150 national forests, 51 federally protected bird preserves, and four national game reserves. It was Roosevelt who helped to bring together sport hunters and fishermen, conservation-minded politicians, scientists and ecologists, and the American public to build a massive surge of interest in protecting America's natural landscapes.¹¹

Like fellow conservationist Muir, Roosevelt argued that America's natural environment was part of the legacy of the nation, comparable in many ways to the ancient ruins, cathedrals, churches, and works of art in Europe. Roosevelt was so passionately committed to the preservation of America's natural monuments that he delivered a now famous speech in which he suggested to the American people that conservation was not simply an aesthetic choice but a "national duty" of citizenship.¹²

Roosevelt helped to touch off a national park craze, and parks were visited by millions of Americans, necessitating laws to protect the land from tourist misuse. Despite the parks' popularity, some politicians felt that the program was a waste of federal attention and revenues. Had the process of creating new national parks been less contentious in Congress, Roosevelt would likely have established many more.



Roosevelt found a way around this in 1906, after Congress passed the Antiquities Act, which gave Congress the power to protect important archaeological sites on public lands. The act allowed a sitting president to establish a new protected monument without congressional approval. Meant to preserve landmarks such as houses or buildings owned or used by famous Americans, Roosevelt used the act to establish 18 new national monuments, which were essentially new national parks. Among the most famous are Washington's Mount Olympus, the Devil's Tower in Wyoming, Muir Woods in California, and Arizona's cherished Grand Canyon.¹³

Roosevelt's use of the Antiquities Act was seen by some as an overreach of presidential authority, but the program was immensely popular with the American people. The national park and national monuments system was also one of the most innovative ideas in American history, marking the first time that segments of the natural environment were set aside for public, rather than private, use. Popular across the lines of partisanship and ideology, documentary filmmaker Ken Burns called the national park system America's "best idea."¹⁴

A Transformative Presidency

Roosevelt was a master of presidential authority, making liberal use of executive orders, wielding his strong public approval to convince legislators to support his agenda, and establishing an effective and persuasive rapport with the American people. In the election for his second term, Roosevelt secured the largest popular vote lead in history. However, the percentage of voters participating also dropped, with 66 percent turning out to the polls as compared to around 74 percent in 1900. Roosevelt's election was, in fact, a turning point, and voter turnout for presidential elections would never again reach 70 percent.

Roosevelt remains one of the most popular presidents of all time. Historians and political scientists have given him marks for accomplishing his



goals and demonstrating the effective use of presidential power, and students of history still respond to his unique style of leadership. Roosevelt was so transformative because he perceived a fundamental role for government, regulating the free market to balance the interests of individuals against the general welfare. In his message to Congress in December of 1905, Roosevelt said this of the role of government:

SEVENTH ANNUAL MESSAGE

Theodore Roosevelt

December 3, 1907

Source Document Excerpt

“If the folly of man mars the general well-being, then those who are innocent of the folly will have to pay part of the penalty incurred by those who are guilty of the folly. A panic brought on by the speculative folly of part of the business community would hurt the whole business community; but such stoppage of welfare, though it might be severe, would not be lasting. In the long run, the one vital factor in the permanent prosperity of the country is the high individual character of the average American worker, the average American citizen, no matter whether his work be mental or manual, whether he be farmer or wage-worker, business man or professional man.

“In our industrial and social system the interests of all men are so closely intertwined that in the immense majority of cases a straight-dealing man, who by his efficiency, by his ingenuity and industry, benefits

himself, must also benefit others. Normally, the man of great productive capacity who becomes rich by guiding the labor of many other men does so by enabling them to produce more than they could produce without his guidance; and both he and they share in the benefit, which comes also to the public at large. The superficial fact that the sharing may be unequal must never blind us to the underlying fact that there is this sharing, and that the benefit comes in some degree to each man concerned. Normally, the wageworker, the man of small means, and the average consumer, as well as the average producer, are all alike helped by making conditions such that the man of exceptional business ability receives an exceptional reward for his ability. Something can be done by legislation to help the general prosperity; but no such help of a permanently beneficial character can be given to the less able and less fortunate save as the



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results of a policy which shall inure to the advantage of all industrious and efficient people who act decently; and this is only another way of saying that any benefit which comes to the less able and less fortunate must of necessity come even more to the more able and more fortunate. If, therefore, the less fortunate man is moved by envy of his more fortunate brother to strike at the conditions under which they have both, though unequally, prospered, the result will assuredly be that while damage may come to the one struck at, it will visit with an even heavier load the one who strikes the blow. Taken as a whole, we must all go up or go down together.

“Yet, while not merely admitting, but insisting upon this, it is also true that where there is no governmental restraint or supervision some of the exceptional men use their energies, not in ways that are for the common good, but in ways which tell against this common good. The fortunes amassed through corporate organization are now so large, and vest such power in those that wield them, as to make it a matter of necessity to give to the sovereign—that is, to the Government, which represents the people as a whole—some effective power of supervision over their corporate use. In order to insure a healthy social and industrial life, every big corporation should be held responsible by, and be accountable to, some sovereign strong

enough to control its conduct. I am in no sense hostile to corporations. This is an age of combination, and any effort to prevent all combination will be not only useless, but in the end vicious, because of the contempt for law which the failure to enforce law inevitably produces. We should, moreover, recognize in cordial and ample fashion the immense good effected by corporate agencies in a country such as ours, and the wealth of intellect, energy, and fidelity devoted to their service, and therefore normally to the service of the public, by their officers and directors. The corporation has come to stay, just as the trade union has come to stay. Each can do and has done great good. Each should be favored so long as it does good. But each should be sharply checked where it acts against law and justice.

“The makers of our National Constitution provided especially that the regulation of interstate commerce should come within the sphere of the General Government. The arguments in favor of their taking this stand were even then overwhelming. But they are far stronger to-day, in view of the enormous development of great business agencies, usually corporate in form. Experience has shown conclusively that it is useless to try to get any adequate regulation and supervision of these great corporations by State action. Such regulation and



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supervision can only be effectively exercised by a sovereign whose jurisdiction is coextensive with the field of work of the corporations—that is, by the National Government. I believe that this regulation and supervision can be obtained by the enactment of law by the Congress. Our steady aim should be by legislation, cautiously and carefully undertaken, but resolutely persevered in, to assert the sovereignty of the National Government by affirmative action.

“This is only in form an innovation. In substance it is merely a restoration; for from the earliest time such regulation of industrial activities has been recognized in the action of the lawmaking bodies; and all that I propose is to meet the changed conditions in such manner as will prevent the Commonwealth abdicating the power it has always possessed, not only in this country, but also in England before and since this country became a separate nation.

“It has been a misfortune that the National laws on this subject

have hitherto been of a negative or prohibitive rather than an affirmative kind, and still more that they have in part sought to prohibit what could not be effectively prohibited, and have in part in their prohibitions confounded what should be allowed and what should not be allowed. It is generally useless to try to prohibit all restraint on competition, whether this restraint be reasonable or unreasonable; and where it is not useless it is generally hurtful. The successful prosecution of one device to evade the law immediately develops another device to accomplish the same purpose. What is needed is not sweeping prohibition of every arrangement, good or bad, which may tend to restrict competition, but such adequate supervision and regulation as will prevent any restriction of competition from being to the detriment of the public, as well as such supervision and regulation as will prevent other abuses in no way connected with restriction of competition.¹⁵



Presidential Justice

Theodore Roosevelt promised, while campaigning for his second term, that he would not seek a third term in office. Although he regretted this promise, he kept his word and promoted his long-time friend and political protégé William Howard Taft to succeed him. Taft had good intentions and a judicious mind but lacked the charisma and leadership skill of Roosevelt. In the 1913 elections, Roosevelt returned to the fold with the new “Bull Moose Party,” and competed with Taft for the presidency—so breaking his word. With Republicans split, a new Democratic progressive, Woodrow Wilson, claimed victory for the Democrats and altered the course of American history.

William Howard Taft was born in 1857 in Cincinnati, Ohio, a member of a political and legal legacy. His father had been Secretary of War for Ulysses Grant and a minister to Austria-Hungary and Russia—a major figure in the Republican Party. Taft attended Yale University, where he graduated second in his class, and then studied law at the University of Cincinnati. Rising within the judicial circuit, he became a solicitor general and then judge in the superior courts, later serving on the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. President McKinley pulled Taft into national politics when he tapped him to serve as president of a commission overseeing the Philippines after the U.S. annexed the Philippine Islands in the Spanish-American War. Taft was reluctant to accept the post but did so on the promise of an appointment to the Supreme Court.¹⁶





William Howard Taft, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, via Wikimedia.

We the People

Taft did well as administrator of the Philippines and was chosen by Roosevelt to serve as his Secretary of War. When Roosevelt left office, he personally selected Taft, over the objections of some Republican strategists, as his replacement. With Roosevelt's endorsement, he commanded a significant lead. In the 1908 election Taft drew 7.6 million votes to 6.4 million for Democratic challenger William Jennings Bryan, continuing the Republican dominance of the office. The Republicans held the Senate, though they lost one seat, and controlled the House, though the Democrats gained five seats. Taft entered the presidency with a public mandate and executive support but failed to exert his authority sufficiently to establish dominance over Congress, as Roosevelt had. His four years in office were dominated by the legislature, and most of Taft's initiatives were undone. The most cited example is Taft's unsuccessful effort to lower tariffs, which was defeated by Congress, losing Taft the support of radical and moderate progressives.¹⁷



Large While in Charge

William Howard Taft was America's most overweight president. When he entered the office, Taft ate a twelve-ounce steak nearly every morning for breakfast. White House records indicate that he could also down nearly a pound of bacon and dozens of pancakes in a single meal. At his heaviest, Taft weighed in at over 330 pounds, and he was frequently sluggish after a meal. Some historians have suggested that Taft's weight problem contributed to his problems in the presidency, as he preferred sedentary activities to the touring and campaigning that more successful presidents engaged in. His weight was the subject of frequent jokes in the press and even among friends. There is a famous anecdote from Taft's time as military governor of the Philippines in which Taft wrote to Elihu Root, who would later become his Secretary of State. Taft told Root, then head of the War Department, "Rode twenty miles up the mountain today. Feeling fine."

To which Root responded,

"How is the horse?"

Taft also famously had a good nature and was a man of good humor, and this humorous exchange became one of his favorite anecdotes.^a

Taft was concerned about how his weight would affect his health, and in December of 1905, he wrote to English physician Nathaniel Yorke-Davies, a recognized expert in dietary issues. There is a trove of letters between Yorke-Davies and Taft documenting the president's efforts to stick to a diet. According to these, Taft was supposed to have 2–3 gluten biscuits and 6 ounces of lean meat for breakfast, followed by 4 ounces of meat, 4 ounces of vegetables (without butter), 3 ounces of fruit, 1 biscuit, and 1 glass of sugarless wine. For dinner, he was allowed 4 ounces of fish, 5 ounces of meat, 8 ounces of vegetables, 4 ounces of fruit, plain salad and two biscuits.

Taft reportedly lost 60 pounds on the diet, but the weight loss was slow, and he never achieved anything that might be thought of as a slim physique. Taft's weight has been the subject of historical criticism, derision, sympathy, and humor, at times diverging considerably from the facts. A widely circulated story, for instance,



Large While in Charge *continued*

alleging that Taft was once stuck in the White House bathtub, is untrue. Had it happened, however, it is possible that Taft's good humor would have allowed him to share the story himself to amuse his frequent dinner guests.

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A Transitional Man

Much of what was accomplished during Taft's single term in office occurred with little influence from Taft himself. The Sixteenth Amendment, establishing an income tax, was a congressional prerogative, though Taft signed the bill into law. Taft also signed the Seventeenth Amendment, which called for direct popular election to the Senate, with little resistance. Taft did, however, successfully attack monopolies early in his presidency, challenging the trust formed by Standard Oil Company and U.S. Steel, though the latter brought him into conflict with Roosevelt. Notably, Taft was the first to suggest that the president, rather than the federal departments, should submit a national budget to Congress. Legislators rejected this proposal at the time, but in the 1920s this became the standard formula, with the creation of a new executive budget office.

Perhaps one of the greatest mistakes of Taft's career was his decision to replace Gifford Pinchot, an experienced conservationist, with pro-business Richard Ballinger to head the Department of the Interior. Ballinger had convinced Taft that Roosevelt had set aside too much land for conservation and that some of it would be better utilized if opened to commercial development. Pinchot criticized Ballinger in the press, and Taft's removal of Pinchot created a rift between Taft and Roosevelt. As Roosevelt considered his conservation advancements one of his proudest presidential achievements, he opposed Taft's reelection in 1912 and created his "Bull Moose Party" to campaign for the presidency.¹⁸

In the 1912 election, Taft and Roosevelt split the Republican vote. Roosevelt might have won if Taft had dropped out, which would have forced Republicans to support Roosevelt's progressive coalition, but New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson, tapped by the Democrats to lead a new progressive Democratic movement, captured 42 percent of the popular vote, and took 435 of the 531 electoral votes. The labor movement saw the emergence of the first non-capitalist political party to compete in a U.S.



election with the American Socialist Party, which promoted candidate Eugene Debs. Though the Socialist Party received no electoral votes, Debs garnered a full 6 percent of the popular vote.¹⁹

Taft has never been considered a particularly good president. Unable to exert the kind of power that Roosevelt wielded and vulnerable to influence from the big business sector, he alienated progressives in his own party, leading to the creation of more radical Democratic opposition. He remains an important figure for historians, however, as his presidency demonstrated the broader shift in political alignment that saw the Republican Party becoming more conservative, and the Democratic Party become more progressive. This led to a period of political transition. Many Southern democrats were still conservative, so needed to decide whether to remain with their party, which was locally conservative, or switch to the Republican Party, which became more conservative on the national level. Northern liberal Republicans had to make similar choices. As politicians on both sides debated whether to switch, voters were left confused by the evolution of the political system. For several years, both parties contained both political and conservative elements, which had a dramatic impact on policies both from the legislature and the executive branch into the latter half of the twentieth century.



CONCLUSION

Roosevelt broke the presidential mold. His extraordinary life captured the imagination of the American public and he was one of America's most beloved celebrities while in office. Much of U.S. history with regard to Latin America can be traced to his important reformulation of America's role in the hemisphere. The nation would be a far different place without the monuments and parks he preserved, with places like the Grand Canyon and Washington's Mount Olympus serving as an enduring testimony to his vision and commitment. Taft failed to continue the Roosevelt legacy, but was a well-meaning executive. Though there were no major accomplishments to his presidency, Taft did leave one lasting change on the presidency—it was during his administration that the tradition of the presidential budget first became established. Taft was followed by Woodrow Wilson, one of America's most influential presidents, whose extraordinary use of presidential power is discussed in the next chapter.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ How was Roosevelt's use of the Antiquities Act a questionable exercise of presidential authority?
- ◆ How did Roosevelt make novel use of the presidency in terms of his diplomatic relations with Russia?
- ◆ What was Roosevelt's fundamental belief about the role of the government? Do you agree with this position? Why or why not?
- ◆ Do you agree with the preservation of America's natural history and landscape, as Roosevelt did, or should such land be developed for housing and business? Explain your answer.

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