

## Theodore Roosevelt

Theodore Roosevelt is remembered as one of the top ten Presidents in American history. He loved controversy and publicity. He was known as a fighter and first of the modern Presidents in US history. Born in 1858 to a wealthy family in New York, Theodore Roosevelt would struggle in his early life with health problems. He was frail and sickly as a boy, but Teddy developed a rugged physique as a teenager and became a lifelong advocate of exercise and what he termed the "strenuous life." Although he was known for his family's wealth, he was an active opponent of the "criminal class" of corrupt businessmen. Teddy promoted changes in America that altered the culture and changed the political landscape forever.

On the international scene, this man who charged up San Juan Hill and built up the American armed forces won the first American Nobel Peace Prize for his involvement in foreign affairs. He was a writer, historian, explorer, big-game hunter, soldier, conservationist and a rancher. Teddy attended Harvard Law School to pursue Law and Politics. At the time, New York politics was dominated by men involved in machine politics. Although these were not his type of preferred associates, he persisted in getting to know and understand them, while at the same time attending Columbia Law School. Eventually he secured the friendship and patronage of an influential man who got him nominated as a District State Republican Assemblyman. Together with him, Roosevelt was able to easily win the election at age 23. Theodore served three terms in the New York Assembly in Albany. Roosevelt backed the "wrong candidate" for President in 1884, preferring a progressive reformer over President Chester Arthur. Arthur got the nomination and the Republican political machine shut him out of their organization and relationships.

On one day in that same year, his mother died and his wife, Alice died in childbirth. These three devastating events forced Teddy to re-evaluate his life and drop out of politics. As far as he was concerned his political career was over. He went out West for two years working as a rancher and frontier sheriff. Roosevelt excelled at this rough and tumble way of life and earned the respect of the men he met. However, he did not make much money. He lost about half of his entire investment in ranching. But what he gained was, in the long run, of much greater value. The men he met there were to later join the famous Rough Riders whose exploits were the major impetus to his battle and political success.

In 1886 he came back East to marry Edith Crow, whom he had known since childhood. Edith was intelligent and could handle Teddy's rough spending ways. Together they had 6 children, in addition to Alice, the daughter from his first marriage. Invigorated, Theodore got back into politics backing Benjamin Harrison for President. When Harrison won, Roosevelt was appointed to several key civil Service positions in New York, including Police Commissioner. He gained a reputation for fighting corruption and cleaning out lazy workers.

When William McKinley was running for President in 1896, Teddy campaigned vigorously for him. On McKinley's election, he was appointed to the highly coveted position as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. In his new job Theodore promoted strengthening the American Navy, often to the point of insubordination. He firmly believed that the United States was soon to be a world power. To do this, though he knew that the navy had to be able to move ships quickly from one ocean to the other. He began promoting a canal in Central America to accomplish the task. To do this America would have to dominate the Caribbean Sea and that meant conflict with Spain.

When the USS Maine blew up on February 15, 1898 in Havana, Roosevelt had the opportunity he had anticipated. Roosevelt wasn't going to be stuck behind a desk while a war was on. He quit the Naval Department and joined the Army as a Lieutenant Colonel. He was responsible for raising volunteers for the 1st US Volunteer Cavalry regiment. By the time the war was over Roosevelt was the Colonel in charge, and his regiment, popularly known as Roosevelt's Rough Riders, was famous. His famous charge up San Juan Hill (on foot because the units' horses could not be brought from Florida aboard ship with them) made him a legend in the United States.

For Roosevelt the war was the event that catapulted him politically. Upon his return he was a National Hero. The Republican Party seized on his popularity and ran him for Governor of New York in 1898. He won handily. He gained a reputation for an annoying tendency to do what he felt was right rather than heedlessly protect powerful business interests. This did not endear him to the Republican Political Machine. In a twist of fate though, the Vice President of the United States died in office. Never underestimate the impact events will have on your life.

The Republican Party bosses urged President McKinley to select Theodore as his Vice Presidential running mate for the 1900 election, primarily to get rid of him and give him a chiefly ceremonial position. One year into McKinley's second term he was shot in Buffalo, New York. Theodore Roosevelt became the 25th President when McKinley died several days later.

He was the youngest President to serve in office at that time. Now the country coming into its own internationally, had a President who felt called to push the nation into its rightful place as a world power. In 1901 the U.S. was the fifth strongest naval power in the world. By 1907 it was in second place behind Great Britain. He exercised his strength in making America the policeman of the world, involving troops in countries' disputes.

His "New Imperialism" became the hallmark of American foreign policy in the new century, positioning America as a leader in the world and the power in the Western Hemisphere. Roosevelt's extension of control over all of the Western Hemisphere and in particular the Caribbean was directly connected with his intent to build the Panama Canal. He took control of the failed French project, inserted American troops in the revolution of the Panamanians against Colombia and got the Canal built. He also negotiated the end of the Russo-Japanese War, which made him the first American to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Domestically, Teddy wanted to tear down the large trusts that corrupted American big business. He wasn't against all big organizations, only those that abused their power and took advantage of the poor. He won a major court case in the Supreme Court against the wealthy and powerful J. P. Morgan, which earned him the title of "The Trust Buster." He pushed for legislation that abolished child labor, protected consumers against un-inspected meat and created the "Square Deal." He was the first President to get the federal government involved in labor disputes, assisting the Kentucky coal miners in their strike against the mine owners for unfair labor practices.

Some of Theodore Roosevelt's most effective achievements were in conservation. He added enormously to the national forests in the West, reserved lands for public use, and fostered great irrigation projects. As an early environmentalist, he formed the first National Monuments, including the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone Park. His image adorns Mount Rushmore in tribute to his far-reaching efforts to preserve the American Wilderness. As a "bully" activist, Roosevelt took on hundreds of issues, asserting his strong opinions in areas as diverse as morals, literature, art, marriage, divorce, birth control, and football. Although, many critics feel that he didn't go far enough in seeking gender and racial equality, his ideas were far ahead of their time.

T.R. wanted to earn the Presidency in his own right. He won the 1904 election in a landslide, and became the first President to be re-elected to the presidency after succeeding on the death of a President. He promised not to run for a third term (a promise he would later regret) and selected William Howard Taft to succeed him in office. When teddy's second term ended he went to Africa on a well-documented safari. Taft was more of his own man and on his return from the safari, Teddy broke the tradition of former Presidents remaining silent. His followers urged him to get involved in the political scene and Teddy jumped right in. He was critical of Taft's appointments and methods for handling the office of President.

In the election of 1912, Teddy sought the Republican nomination but was defeated by the political machine. Teddy was backed by the Progressives of the party who bolted and formed their own party. When Teddy was criticized for his age in running for President again, he quipped, "I feel as fit as a Bull Moose!" The phrase was picked up by the new Progressive Party and Teddy was nominated to run on the "Bull Moose Ticket." Teddy campaigned vigorously for the office. He was even shot in the chest before an appearance in Milwaukee, but gave his hour-long speech before allowing medical attention. The election resulted in victory for the Democrat, Woodrow Wilson, but Teddy came in second ahead of Taft.

In defeat, Teddy went to South America for a speaking tour and to make a wilderness expedition to map the Rio da Divuda river in Brazil. It was a horrendous trip. Roosevelt injured his leg, got dysentery and malaria and at one point begged to be left behind so that he would not slow down the rest of the group. But he made it, and Brazil renamed the river "Rio Roosevelt" in his honor. He returned to the United States in 1914, the same year that World War I began. He protested strongly for military preparedness and entry

into the war. He even wanted to join up to fight but was refused this wish by President Wilson because of his age. There was strong resentment between the two men.

In the end he had to be content with sending all four of his sons to war. One of them died in the conflict and it was a devastating blow to Theodore. Theodore lived life hard and fast, with a zest for action and excitement. He always said he would rather wear out than rust out. He accomplished this goal like few others. His journey ended on January 6, 1919 when he died of an embolism at his home, Sagamore Hill on Long Island, New York while still working. He had commented several years earlier, after recovering from the gunshot wound in Milwaukee, "No man has had a happier life than I have led; a happier life in every way."

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