

Theodore Roosevelt

Theodore Roosevelt, the twenty-sixth President of United States, the youngest person ever to serve as the President, Champion of the strenuous life, was immensely popular, who stamped the Presidency with his own colorful personality (PBS, 2002). He enjoyed the responsibilities of world power and all his efforts were directed to protect the public interest. His social and economic reforms were the first federal attempts to deal with the problems of the modern industrial society (Encarta, 2006).

Roosevelt explored several careers before entering politics. Although people in his social position believed politics to be beneath them, Roosevelt declared that he intended to be one of the governing class. He won his first election in 1881 as a member of the Republican Party to the state assembly of Albany, New York. As a state legislator he won respect for exposing a judge but also earned the ill will of his party members. Mistrusted by both liberals and party leaders, Roosevelt remained unsure of his career in politics.

Although he socialized with America's upper crust, he looked after the interests of the working class Americans. After family mishaps he returned to politics as a Republican reformist in 1889 where he served on the US Civil Service Commission (DesertUSA, 1998). In 1895, he became New York City Police Commissioner, and two years later, he was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

Returning home from the war as a hero in 1898, Roosevelt was elected governor of New York. He then ran as the Republican Party's vice presidential candidate in 1900

and less than a year later following the assassination of President William McKinley, Roosevelt became the youngest ever President in history.

President Roosevelt inherited an empire-in-the-making when he assumed office in 1901. He influenced foreign policy even before he came to power. After the Spanish-American war the empire that America had, comprised of Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, Cuba and Hawaii. Roosevelt wanted to make America a world power. He wanted to spread the American values and ideals all over the world. His diplomatic maxim was to 'speak softly and carry a big stick' (Millercenter, 2006). He maintained that a chief executive must have the quality both to use force and the art of persuasion to be used as the situation demands. He was very active in foreign affairs and attempted to end the relative isolationism, following the footsteps of his predecessor.

When Roosevelt entered the White House as the President in 1901, he took control of a federal government that often aligned itself with big business. In 1902 he convinced Congress to create a Bureau of Corporations to regulate big business, and then shocked the nation by bringing out an anti-trust suit against J. P. Morgan's Northern Securities Corporation (PBS). Roosevelt's actions were consistent with the moral teachings he had received in his early life. He learned to value working class people and never forgot them. He passed laws to ensure the safety of food and drugs sold in the American marketplace. He preserved America's natural resources and regulated interstate commerce. To him Progressivism meant a fair deal for the American people and the American business where businesses profited by fair competition. He failed in making the capitalists realize that their greed might lead to a bloody industrial revolution.

He was a progressive leader and a fiery individualist who embodies American culture in the early 1900s. He is considered one of the best presidents as his progressive policies set the stage for important reforms during the 20th century. He was determined to build a canal across Panama (Kelly, 2007). America aided Panama in gaining independence from Columbia. The President then created a Treaty with the newly independent Panama to gain the canal zone. In exchange, America would pay \$10 million as annual payments. The Monroe Doctrine, one of the keystones of American Foreign Policy, says that western hemisphere is off limits to foreign encroachment. Roosevelt added a corollary to the doctrine which stated that it was the responsibility of America to enforce the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America. This was a part of the 'Big Stick Diplomacy'.

Even after his presidential tenure, he continued to push for domestic reform. He fought for women's suffrage, he attempted to end child labor, and he tried to introduce pensions for the elderly, unemployment insurance and increased regulation of the trusts. President Roosevelt was a diplomat and a peace maker. He was not interested in disarmament but he developed an early interest in reduction of armaments and conducted several negotiations in this respect. When Japan went to war with Russia over control of Manchuria and Korea in 1905, Roosevelt was the arbitrator. In 1906 he again mediated between France and Germany when they fought over the control of Morocco. He also encouraged the convening of the Second Hague Conference on peace in 1907. He was also the first American to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Roosevelt loved being seen and loved being heard. He was always passionate about his speeches. The most remarkable campaign speech in American history was

delivered by President Roosevelt on October 14, 1912 as a Progressive Party Presidential candidate. A skillful manipulator of the media, Roosevelt gave insider stories in daily briefings to the media who responded with favorable stories. He was also the first President to be photographed in action.

Roosevelt became universally known as Teddy, a name he hated but he endured it for public purposes. He was known for his irrepressible energy and for his famous expeditions to Rock Creek Park in Washington D.C. during the course of his two terms in office, Roosevelt formed his own Tennis Cabinet, an informal group of people whose company he liked and whom he trusted in matters of state.

Roosevelt's grasp of economics was weak but his moral approach for individuals and industries sufficed for him. The banking and stock market systems were beyond his interest and experience. His leadership during the fall of Knickerboker Bank, which threatened to throw the country into a deep depression, was minimal. He faced several controversies during his tenure. One such occasion was when he invited the bank leader and educator Booker T. Washington to dine with him. Another controversy arose over the way he handled the anthracite coal strike in Pennsylvania. He made unprecedented use of his presidential powers in using the financier J P Morgan to arbitrate and negotiate with the owners.

President Roosevelt was well known as the Great Conservationist. One of his primary concerns was the preservation of West's natural resources. He withdrew 235 million acres of public timberland from sale, to set aside as national forest. In 1908, he set aside 800,000 acres in Arizona as Grand Canyon National Monument to protect it from developers. Roosevelt has to his credit 16 national monuments, 51 wildlife refuges and 5

new national parks, preserving Crater Lake in Oregon and the Anasazi ruins of Mesa Verde, Colorado.

In 1907, Roosevelt had made an agreement with Japan known as the Gentlemen's Agreement when Japan agreed to slow the immigration of laborers to America and in exchange America agreed not to pass a law like the Chinese Exclusion Act. Roosevelt was considered the first modern US President as he greatly strengthened the power of the executive branch.

Roosevelt was poised for another term in the White House after World War 1, but on January 6, 1919, he died in his sleep at his residence.

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