Franklin Delano Roosevelt Essay, Research Paper

The Life and Times of

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was born on January 30, 1882 in Hyde Park, New York. Roosevelt came from the same line that produced Theodore Roosevelt. Franklin’s father James was a graduate of Harvard, and took over the family’s coal and transportation holdings. He then moved to Hyde Park, an estate on the Hudson River. When his first wife died in 1876, he met and married Sara Delano. She attended school abroad, in London, China, and Paris.

Franklin had a secure childhood. His half -brother was a grown man when Franklin was born, so he had all the attention from his parents. During summers he traveled to Europe, New England or Campobello island, where he developed a love for sailing. Franklin’s academic record was ordinary, and he wasn’t good at sports. He was called the “feather-duster” by some of his classmates who thought he was shallow. Roosevelt then attended Harvard. There he didn’t do much better, but his previous education had prepared him so well that he was able to get his degree in only three years. However, he showed little excitement about his studies.

While at Harvard, Roosevelt fell in love with Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, his fifth cousin once removed. She was the daughter of Theodore Roosevelt’s brother. By the age of ten both of Eleanor’s parents had died. She was raised by her grandmother, and because of her emotionally abusive parents, she grew up feeling rejected, thinking she was ugly and fat. So, when Franklin, a Harvard man who was two years older than she was, paid her attention she was flattered. On March 17, 1905, the two Roosevelts were married. Eleanor’s uncle, Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, gave her away.

In the following eleven years Eleanor had five children. Having been born into wealth, the Roosevelts never lacked money, and moved easily among the upper class. Although, Eleanor was often unhappy in the relationship. She had to live with Franklin’s widowed and domineering mother, who made her do things around the house while Franklin was out with friends, enjoying life. Later, during World War I, Eleanor found out that Franklin was having an affair with their social secretary, a Virginian named Lucy Mercer. Through even this, Eleanor stayed married and loyal to Franklin throughout the 40 years of their marriage. When Franklin contracted polio in 1921, she worked hard to help him in restoring his emotional health and to help him regain his political aspirations. She served as his eyes and ears while he was confined to a wheelchair.

In Franklin’s professional life he felt unfulfilled. He went to the Columbia Law School until 1907. He passed the New York State bar examination, and then quit school, foregoing the degree. He then took a job with the Wall Street Law Firm. Much of their practice was in corporate law, and Roosevelt found the work tedious. By 1910 he was 28, and he was not happy with his profession. He felt politics gave him purpose, so he ran for the New York State Senate in 1910. Party leaders recognized that he had no political experience, but he had two important things. He had the wealth to run a political campaign, and the most well-known political name in the United States. However, it was the democratic party asking Roosevelt to run. He had voted Republican and Theodore Roosevelt was Republican, but his father was a Democrat. He knew it would be an exciting, worthwhile experience, so he decided to do it.

During the campaign, Roosevelt worked as never before. He bought a car and drove all over the county, acquiring support. He got advice from political veterans, and showed skill with his willingness to listen and his ability to make himself agreeable to voters. One thing that he felt like a great asset to him was his growth away from the Republican party, which was badly split in 1910. With the brilliant use of all these things, Roosevelt was won impressively. He took direct action, and made an immediate impact in the legislative session. At that time, United State senators from New York were elected by legislative officials, not by the majority vote of the people. The Democrats had all but decided on William F. Sheehan, who was the choice of Tammany Hall, New York’s powerful political machine. A small minority of Democrats objected to this choice. Roosevelt became the leader of this minority within the Democratic party. Not only did Roosevelt dislike the choice of this party, he didn’t like the fact that Tammany Hall had such an influence on the decisions of the Democrats. Tammany Hall then recanted their support toward Sheehan and directed it toward Judge James O’Gorman, who was a former Tammany Grand Sachem. O’Gorman eventually won the seat to the house, but Roosevelt and allies took some consolation, because they forced a withdrawal of Sheehan and drew national attention in doing so. Roosevelt evoked mixed reactions from other United States officials. Progressive reformers liked his devotion, courage and willingness to work hard. Although, party regulators like Alfred Smith and Robert Wagner considered Roosevelt a lightweight and a headline-seeker.

In 1912 Roosevelt defied Tammany Hall again. He Supported Gov. Woodrow Wilson for the Democratic presidential nomination. When Wilson won Roosevelt ran for re-election to the state senate. During the campaign, Roosevelt contracted Typhoid fever, but he was helped to victory by Louis Howe, who would become his most loyal aide.

Roosevelt was offered a more attractive job, assistant secretary of the Navy. Theodore Roosevelt had held this position fifteen years before. Roosevelt accepted the offer and moved to Washington DC in 1913. During his term as assistant secretary, Roosevelt reminded many people of Theodore Roosevelt. He advocated a big Navy, preparedness, a strong presidency, and an active foreign policy. Roosevelt served as assistant secretary for seven years, and during that stint he gained experience and connections all over Washington. By the time this term had ended Roosevelt had lost some of his haughtiness. He now was exuberant, and become charming and projected vitality.

With all these new qualities and experiences under his belt, Roosevelt became a popular choice for the Democratic vice-presidential nomination. In 1920 he ran with Governor of Ohio, James M. Cox. They were beaten by Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge.

With the Republicans having a hold on the political scene, Roosevelt returned to private life. He started a law firm in New York City and became vice president of Fidelity and Deposit Company of Maryland, a surety bonding firm. Roosevelt contracted polio in August, 1921, but he fought back with the help of Eleanor and Louis Howe. In 1924 he went to the medicinal waters of Warm Springs in western Georgia, in the hopes that it would help relieve his paralysis. He had other business endeavors but his interest remained in politics. Throughout his “off time” from politics, Roosevelt broadened his contacts in Washington by stopping by on his way to Warm Springs, or writing letters to help fuse the chasm that was prevalent in the Democratic party. In 1924 he gave an eloquent nomination speech for Alfred Smith. Smith was not nominated by the Democratic party to run for president, but he was reelected as governor of New York in 1926. Again, in 1928 Alfred Smith ran for president, and this time he was elected as the Democratic candidate. Then Roosevelt agreed to run for governor of New York, against the advice of Eleanor and Louis Howe. Roosevelt won by a narrow margin, and Smith lost to Herbert Hoover.

Roosevelt now had succeeded Smith as governor of New York. Roosevelt declared that he was going to mold his own administration by replacing Smith’s key associates with his own. Smith had been involved in a series of important reforms, and Roosevelt had the problem of developing his own programs, and making a name for himself. So he began work in the fields of conservation and tax relief for farmers, which were areas of interest shared by his Republican Legislature.

In October of 1929, the stock market crashed. This caused mass depression among the people of New York and all over the country. Some people owed millions of dollars, because of buying on margin, which drove many to suicide. Roosevelt now knew he had new problems to face, and in 1930, he was reelected as governor of New York.

Roosevelt, being the head of the nation’s most populous state, was automatically a candidate for the presidency. He had proven that his disability was had no effect on how he governed. Also, Hoover’s popularity was down because of the economic state of the country. It looked like it was the Democrat’s year to take the presidency. Being a front-runner for the nomination of Democratic party, Roosevelt needed to make his name known all over the country, and not just the east coast. A man named Aloyius Farley traveled across the country in the summer of 1931, and made friends for Roosevelt. He said that in all the states he traveled to, Roosevelt was the popular choice, except for California. A very powerful newspaper editor in California was not for Roosevelt, his support was towards the Speaker of the House, John Nance Garner. So in his writing, he tore Roosevelt apart and lifted up Garner, which effected the views of the people. To ensure that Garner would not target Roosevelt, he denounced the United States’ entry into the League of Nations. Those who ran against Roosevelt never could organize enough to get the two-thirds of the vote that was needed to be nominated. Roosevelt was nominated on the fourth ballot, after Garner accepted his offer to run for vice-president. Roosevelt broke tradition and flew to Chicago to accept his nominee personally, rather than waiting weeks to reply, as was the custom. In his acceptance speech, he talked about a “New Deal” that would make the government much more involved in national, social, and economic affairs. Roosevelt won the election in a landslide. His eloquence and ease at campaigning made the American people love him. He used depression against Hoover and blamed the Republicans for it. He was a great speaker and a great motivator, which helped him gain acceptance. Out of the forty-eight states, Roosevelt lost in only six which only proved more that he was the choice of the people.

When Roosevelt became President, the Depression was at its worst. Millions had been out of work for a year, and the banking system of the United States was on the verge of collapse. Whether Roosevelt could bring America out of this tragedy or not was to be the deciding factor of the American people’s view of him. He would be the hero or the goat depending on how he handled this situation. Roosevelt’s inaugural speech assured the people that he would wage war on the depression. This is what brought about his legendary phrase, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” Roosevelt seemed to offer hope to the people.

Franklin Roosevelt brought a new style to the Presidency of the United States. He, against the will of the Democrats, asked for the support of the Republicans. Also, he got help from people not associated with politics. He had a group called the Brain Trust. It consisted of faculty members from Harvard and Columbia. He also conferred with many different people who held many different views to broaden his stance on certain issues.

Roosevelt kept his promise about solving the problem of the depression. In the summer of 1933 he called a special session to rid the country of this problem. In a time period called the “Hundred Days,” a term that is still used, a remarkable turn of events took place. A legislature that was passed by congress, was a record breaking event in the number of bills passed. Up to that time, no congress session had ever covered such an important topic in such a short amount of time.

Roosevelt had few opponents during his efforts in solving the problems caused by the depression. Most, Democratic and Republican, agreed with what he was doing with American economy. Those who did oppose him wanted him to take the opportunity to move towards socialism, which is the government’s involvement in the economy of the nation. Roosevelt, however, wanted to focus the New Deal. It consisted of three main points, relief, recovery, and reform. Throughout the recovery process of the American economy, the New Deal was very effective. Although, once the economy began to recover, the Supreme Court declared the New Deal unconstitutional. So he lost support on the New Deal.

In the election of 1936, Roosevelt won his most successful campaign by receiving sixty percent of the vote. However, shortly after the Supreme Court’s ruling on the New Deal, it was rethought and much of it was permitted to stay in effect.

In the election of 1940, it was thought that Roosevelt would not run again. The tradition was that a president would only serve for two terms. But when by the time October came, America was having an economic depression. Because of Roosevelt’s experience in economic troubles, he received his third Democratic nomination. He ended up winning the Presidential election over Wendell Willkie, but not in nearly as grand of fashion as he had the two previous elections.

Roosevelt accepted two new ideas. First the Stimson doctrine, which stated that the United States would not recognize the Japanese efforts to dominate east Asia. Furthermore it declared that we would not join the League of Nations. Secondly, in the Good Neighbor Policy, Roosevelt stated that he would not intervene in the fight for American policy in Latin America. Roosevelt withdrew support of dictatorship of Cuba, and he withdrew the last of the Marine posts in Haiti.

In 1938 a war seemed to be close at hand. The Germans were beginning to take land in Europe, specifically Austria and Czechoslovakia. Soon after the Germans made a treaty with the USSR that said if Germany goes to war with France or Britain, that the Russians would stay out of it. Roosevelt then asked congress to lift the embargo on the sale of weapons. Congress agreed and now the United States allowed citizens to sell their weapons to nations who were able to pay for them in cash. Roosevelt did not try to hide his bias against the Germans. He did not like what Hitler and the Nazis were doing, and he considered them a threat to the security of the United States. He appointed Republican leaders who shared his concern of the Nazis, to head up his war defense efforts. He asked congress for more support money for Britain to help fight the att