Theodore Roosevelt Essay, Research Paper

The second of the four children of Theodore Roosevelt, Sr. and Martha Bulloch Roosevelt,

Theodore Roosevelt (hereafter TR), was nicknamed “Teedie”. TR suffered from asthma and terrible nearsightedness, conditions which his father urged him to supercede by saying, “You have the mind, but not the body; you must make your body.” To help his son, Theodore Sr. built a gym at their home where “Teedie” developed a constitution, which would later be referred to as “strong as a Bull Moose”. In his youth, Theodore (who disliked being called Teddy), traveled with his family throughout Europe where he perfected his command of French and German.

At this time, the Civil War raged between the Northern and Southern states. Martha Bulloch, a Southerner

by birth and heritage, played a decisive factor in Theodore Sr.’s decision to hire an army substitute

(quite common in those days). It is alleged that rather than fight against his brothers-in-law, Theodore Sr. chose to instead focus his wealth and connections on procuring supplies for and administrating the logistics of

delivering those supplies to the Union Army. It is further acknowledged that this decision was a driving force for TR to enlist to fight in the Spanish American War (perhaps as a way to become even greater than his father, whom TR held in the greatest of esteem).

An amateur ornithologist, TR would often kill small birds for purely scientific purposes; thereafter dissecting and embalming them. A few original specimens survive today and can be seen at the

Theodore Roosevelt National Historic Birthplace. TR’s education was via private tutors, which was quite common for an individual of his socioeconomic position. A voracious reader with a photographic memory,

TR had no trouble completing his studies and was ultimately admitted to the Harvard College in 1876,

at age eighteen.

At Harvard, TR majored in science, yet received the bulk of his education in history and literature. He was admitted to the prestigious Porcellian Club, the O.K. Club, The Big Six Club, and was a staff member of

The Harvard Advocate. His athletic pursuits included rowing, boxing, horseback riding, and camping. TR was an attentive and somewhat enthusiastic student who participated energetically during lectures. In one instance, a professor of his is quoted as saying: “See here, Roosevelt; I am the one teaching this course!”

In 1878, TR met Alice Hathaway Lee, the daughter of a prominent Boston family. After a lengthy courtship and a marriage proposal rebuff, Alice and TR were married on October 27, 1880. Around this same time, Theodore Sr. died of stomach cancer on February 9, 1878. The death of his father dealt a crushing blow to a twenty one year old TR who suddenly found himself head of his family. Heartbroken yet resolute, TR graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard in 1880 and was promptly admitted to Columbia University’s

School of Law. Also in 1880, TR joined the Republican Party Club of New York. In 1881 he embarked on a vacation/honeymoon to Europe where amongst his many outdoor adventures he climbed the Matterhorn.

Upon his return from Europe, Roosevelt decided to dedicate his life to politics, especially after his

local Republican Club nominated him to a State Representative candidacy. Leaving Columbia University, he won the election easily, thus becoming, at age 23, the youngest State Representative in the history of

New York. TR made his mark in State politics by exposing the corrupt relationship between a New York Supreme Court Justice and railroad magnate Jay Gould. With his whirlwind enthusiasm and calculating mind, TR was easily reelected in 1882 and 1883, eventually being elected the youngest Speaker of the Assembly in the history of New York.

In 1882, TR published his seminal work, The War of 1812, which espoused the maintenance of a strong navy as a pressing matter of national security. In 1883, TR invested part of his inheritance in a working ranch in the Dakota Territory abutting the Little Missouri River, near the city of Medora. Naming the establishment

The Elkhorn Ranch, he left his property in charge of Will Dow and Bill Sewall, two experienced ranch hands. In April 1884, TR was appointed Chairman of the Committee on Cities, whose efforts resulted in vital changes in the Charter of New York City.

It seemed that nothing could stop TR’s comet from rising even higher and faster. In 1884, however, TR’s life fell completely apart. After the joyful birth of Alice Roosevelt Lee on February 12, his wife was diagnosed with Bright s disease and died two days later, on Valentine’s Day. TR’s mother, Martha, was also very ill; having caught typhoid fever, she too died later that same evening of February 14, 1884. In despair and inconsolable, TR wrote in his journal “the light has gone out of my life.” The newborn was left in the care of TR’s sister Anna (affectionately called Bamie). Despite his grief, TR proceeded to conclude his duties as Chairman of the New York Delegation to the 1884 Republican National Convention.

Still inconsolable and unwilling to return to his home in New York, TR contracted the firm of Joseph Wood & Sons to build a new home for him and baby Alice atop a hill overlooking Oyster Bay in Long Island. Originally named Leeholm, in honor of Alice Lee Roosevelt, the house would eventually be renamed Sagamore Hill. Leaving baby Alice in the care of Bamie, TR ventured west and tried his hand at ranching in the Dakotas; hoping the desolate landscape would help him overcome his intense grief. Enduring the scorn and taunts of western roughnecks who called him “four eyes” and “tenderfoot”, TR eventually gained everyone’s respect by thrashing each offender with both his sharp wit or steel fists, depending upon the offender and the offense committed. No one came to know the wrath of TR better than Mike Finnegan and his gang of thieves who, after stealing TR’s fishing boat, were chased for two weeks through the Dakota Badlands and were eventually apprehended by the “tenderfoot dude from up East.”

Throughout this time, TR also embarked on a long-distance courtship of his childhood friend,

Edith Kermit Carow. In 1885, TR published his experiences in the Dakotas in a book titled

Hunting Trips of a Ranchman. In 1886, TR ran as the Republican candidate for Mayor of New York City,

but was defeated by Abram S. Hewitt; coming in third out of three candidates. Just when things couldn’t get worse, a terrible blizzard over the winter of 1886-1887 wiped out TR’s entire cattle herd back in the Dakotas. Heartbroken, financially ruined, and inconsolable, he embarked on a trip to Europe and married Ethel on December 2, 1886, in London, England. The couple would eventually have five children: Theodore, Kermit, Ethel, Archibald, and Quentin. Edith also raised Alice Roosevelt, nicknamed Princess Alice by the press. This would prove to be the turning point in the life of Theodore Roosevelt.

Not being a very good businessman, and with his political days apparently over, TR dedicated himself to writing professionally. In 1888 alone he published three books: Gouverneur Morris, Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail, and Essays in Practical Politics. In 1889, he published the first two volumes of the seminal

The Winning of the West, with the last two volumes published in 1894 and 1896. In 1888, however, his enthusiastic and tireless campaigning for Republican Presidential candidate Benjamin Harrison was rewarded with an appointment to the U.S. Civil Service Commission, an office in which he served for six years. TR’s efforts in reforming the U.S. Civil Service are still felt today. TR continued to write extensively, especially since his meager salary was not enough to support his growing family. In 1891 he published

The History of New York, and in 1893 he published The Wilderness Hunter, followed the next year by

Hero Tales from American History.

In 1894, however, his brother Elliott, a chronic alcoholic, died. Unfortunately, TR’s son Kermit would inherit his Uncle’s alcoholism, which led to Kermit’s suicide. Elliott is perhaps more famous for being the father of Eleanor Roosevelt, the premier American Lady of Politics, and wife of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In 1895, TR received an invitation from New York City Mayor William Strong to become a Commissioner of the New York City Police Board. Resigning his commission in Washington, D.C., TR returned to New York and promptly set out to reform the police force. Amongst his many reforms still felt today are the establishment of the first Police Academy in the U.S., the use of bicycle patrols, and the establishment of civil service reforms for recruitment and promotion of officers. TR was famous for disguising himself and patrolling the streets of New York City at night hoping to catch a sleeping “beat cop” or other policemen conducting themselves shamefully (accepting bribes, etc.). Along with the good press provided by his journalist friend (and ‘midnight rambles’ companion) Jacob Riis, TR eventually took over the Presidency of the New York Police Board. It is a wonder he found time to write and publish American Ideals in 1897!

Coupling TR’s good press with his charisma gained him a national reputation for indefatigable honesty;

traits valued by newly elected President William McKinley who appointed TR, in 1897,

Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Shortly after taking his appointment, the U.S.S. Maine, anchored off Havana, Cuba, (at that time a Spanish possession) blew up killing 234 U.S. sailors. Naturally, hawks in the US blamed and demanded war against Spain, who denied all responsibility for the tragedy. A student of military affairs and international politics, TR knew that the key to winning the brewing conflict with Spain would be to control the seas. When TR’s boss, Secretary Long, unexpectedly went out of town, TR lost no time and cabled Admiral Dewey who was stationed in Hong Kong at the time. TR ordered Dewey to load coal and sail for the Philippines immediately; and added that should war be declared, and then Dewey must, at all costs, prevent the large yet aged Spanish fleet from leaving Manila Harbor. On April 20, 1898, the US declared war on Spain. Admiral Dewey followed TR’s instructions and sank the entire Spanish Fleet in less than 4 hours, starting the conflict with his infamous cry, “You may fire when ready, Gridley”. On May 6, TR resigned his post and began assembling the U.S. First Volunteer Cavalry, more famously known as the Rough Riders.

TR assembled the Rough Riders from a motley collection of Eastern intellectuals, Western roughnecks, athletes, writers, ranch hands, Native Americans, Hispanics, and any other qualified individual who wished to serve his country. The Rough Riders trained at Fort Sam Houston, and proceeded towards Tampa Bay, Florida, where they would embark towards Cuba aboard The Yucatan. Upon reaching the shores of Cuba,

the volunteers marched towards the hills of San Juan, where on July 1, 1898, they charged victoriously up Kettle Hill in the face of severe enemy fire, losing one fourth of its contingency. Theodore Roosevelt would eventually be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his bravery on that day. However, the relative ineptitude of the entire Cuban operation led to the expressed dissatisfaction of several officers, culminating in the infamous Round Robin Telegram, a document detailing the failures and overt mismanagement of the conflict. Traveling alongside the Rough Riders were eminent journalists such as Frederic Remington and Richard Harding Davis; journalists who are at least partly responsible for TR’s rise to national prominence (which included a promotion for TR to full colonel).

With complete victory over Spain, the Rough Riders and their commander returned to the United States, disembarking at Montauk Point, New York, on August 15, 1898. Before the unit disbanded, the Rough Riders awarded their Colonel a statue made by Frederic Remington, “The Bronco Buster”, as a token of their appreciation. His meteor now achieving near critical mass, TR accepted his party’s nomination for the Governorship of New York. TR’s firebrand approach to politics inevitably clashed with the State’s political bosses, particularly Mark Hanna and Thomas Platt. These two bosses decided that the best way to be rid of TR would be to “bump him up” into a position of political neutrality: The Vice Presidency. Hence, at the Republican National Convention of 1900, the State machine bosses for nomination as William McKinley s running mate put his name forth. Unhappy but always loyal to the party, TR accepted his fate with resignation and campaigned successfully for the McKinley-Roosevelt ticket of 1900.

Having assumed the Vice Presidency, Theodore was resigned to the fact that his political ambitions had perhaps peaked. During the inauguration, political boss Mark Hanna; who had been apprehensive about TR’s joining the 1900 Republican ticket; is quoted as saying: “Do you realize that the only thing standing between that madman and the White House is a bullet? An extremely prescient statement, President McKinley was indeed shot by Leo Colgosz on September 13, 1901. Theodore Roosevelt was sworn in as the nation’s

26th President at the Wilcox Mansion near Buffalo, New York, on September 14, 1901.

Upon assuming the presidency, Theodore Roosevelt sought to restore the dignity and prestige of the office heretofore tarnished by the scandals surrounding the Grant and Hayes administrations, as well as the “do-nothing” presidencies of Garfield, Harrison, Arthur, and Cleveland. He sought to turn the Presidency into a “bully pulpit” from where the nation’s chief executive could proactively influence national policy. Losing no time, in 1902 TR instructed Philander Knox to invoke the Sherman Anti-Trust Act against the Northern Securities Company, a railroad trust illegally offering freight rebates to “special” customers. In 1902, TR also initiated the Forest, Land, and River Reclamation Policy, the Isthmian Canal Act, settled a crippling Coal Strike, and enforced the Monroe Doctrine in Venezuela; thus ushering an era of U.S. foreign policy described as gunboat diplomacy.

In 1903, Congress supported the Panamian insurgency against their Colombian masters, culminating in the recognition of the Republic of Panama and subsequent construction of the Panama Canal by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers led by General Goethals. That year also saw the creation of the Department of Commerce and the Bureau of Corporations, the enactment of the Elkins Rebate Act, and the Cuban Reciprocity Treaty which lowered sugar and tobacco tariffs.

In 1904, the U.S. Senate ratified a Treaty with Panama, which granted the U.S. perpetual rights to the Canal Zone. In February, the Russo-Japanese War erupted. Later that year, TR received and accepted the Republican nomination for President. Running against Alton B. Parker, T.R. was elected with 71% of the popular vote and 58% of the Electoral College.

1905 saw TR being elected in his own right, forever removing the label of “accidental president”. This same year, TR successfully negotiated the Portsmouth Treaty effectively ending the Russo-Japanese War, outlined the resolution to the Algeciras Conference, and created the U.S. Forest Service. TR also expanded his “big stick” concept of diplomacy, ordering U.S. Marines to seize the customs houses in the country of Santo Domingo; ruled by a corrupt regime, which was in danger of being ousted militarily by its European creditors. TR’s actions, although criticized, are generally viewed as a strong and unequivocal affirmation of the principles outlined in the Monroe Doctrine and its Roosevelt Corollary.

The following year, 1906, was a monumental year for TR. He won the Nobel Peace Prize (donating the prize money in 1918 to Soldiers’ Aid Society), established the Roosevelt Foundation for Industrial Peace, coined the phrase “muckrake”, created the Forest Homestead Act, signed the Hepburn Rate Act, created the Food and Drugs Act, traveled to Panama to view progress on the Isthmian Canal project, and signed the charter admitting Oklahoma into the Union as the 46th State. The year was marred, however, by TR’s dishonorable discharge of an entire Black Infantry Troop stationed in Galveston, Texas. Members of the troop were charged with conduct unbecoming army personnel and various other offenses. TR’s discharge order was reversed by Congressional order in 1972. The year closed with the creation of the U.S. Antiquities Act, the mechanism through which many U.S. presidents have designated public lands as being “untouchable”.

In 1907, the Monroe’s Doctrine principle of self-determination for the Western Hemisphere gained international recognition with the ratification of the Santo Domingo Treaty. This same year saw TR appoint the Inland Waterways Commission, host the Tennessee Coal and Iron Conference, and the sailing of the U.S. Navy’s Great White Fleet, which ushered in an unprecedented era of U.S. internationalism.

1908 saw TR sign the Employer’s Liability Act, create the Grand Canyon and Muir Woods National Monuments, and introduce the first U.S. Postage Stamp (cost=$.01). In 1909, TR ordered the U.S. Marines to overthrow the Nicaraguan regime (also in trouble with its European creditors). Having chosen his successor for the Presidency and confident that his choice, William Howard Taft, would continue his proactive political approach, TR saw his presidential term expire and embarked on a Smithsonian sponsored African Safari.

Accompanied on the safari by his son Kermit, TR collected hundreds of specimens for the Smithsonian, and in 1910 published a book on his experiences titled African Game Trails. After his safari, TR embarked on a tour of Europe, delivering speeches at places such as Guild Hall, in London, England, and attending the funeral of England’s King Edward. TR returned to the United States to great fanfare. TR also promptly discovered that President Taft has “betrayed” the agenda of the Roosevelt Administration, and in 1911 set out to expound his political viewpoints around the country with speeches such as The New Nationalism.

After failing to gain the Republican presidential nomination at the 1912 National Convention in Chicago, TR defected to the Progressive Party. During a campaign stop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, TR was shot in the chest by John Schrank, a madman bent on assassinating the ex-president. The bullet hit TR in the chest, but the thick speech manuscript TR was carrying in his breast pocket slowed its impact. Despite being shot, TR delivered his 90-minute speech before a capacity crowd, refusing to go to the hospital and insisting that it “takes more than a bullet to stop a Bull Moose.” Despite his popularity and tireless campaigning, he nevertheless lost the 1912 election; in the process splitting up the Republican vote in half and awarding a de facto victory to the Democratic candidate, Woodrow Wilson. Despondent but resilient, TR accepted a position as an Editorialist at Large with The Outlook magazine in New York. TR used his pen to scrutinize and, when appropriate, criticize President Wilson and his administration’s policies; especially those regarding America’s unpreparedness for the brewing hostilities and balance of power shifts occurring in Europe. Later that same year, George S. Newett, the editor of the Michigan Iron Ore publication, who called the ex-president a drunk , attacked TR in print. TR sued the editor for libel, and won the case.

In 1913, TR embarked on an expedition to Brazil to map the course and find the source of a river deep in the Amazon jungles heretofore uncharted. The expedition was first proposed by Father John Augustine Zahm,

a clergyman from the Univeristy of Notre Dame and longtime friend of TR. The expedition, dubbed the Roosevelt-Rondon South American Expedition of 1913-1914, was sponsored by the National Museum of History of New York, the National Geographic Society, and the governments of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay. The expedition members included: Kermit Roosevelt, Col. Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon (expedition leader sent by the Brazilian government), Leo Miller (mammologist), Anthony Fiala (logistics), Frank Harper (TR’s private secretary), George K. Cherrie (naturalist/ornithologist), Lt. Joao Salustiano Lyra (Brazilian astronomer), and approximately two dozen Brazilian camaradas, or portege carriers. To secure additional funding for the expedition, as well as to be compensated for his time, TR contracted with Scribner’s magazine to write a series of articles about the expedition, eventually publishing his account in the book titled

Through the Brazilian Wilderness. Facing dangers ranging from cataracts and rapids to aggressive Amazonians and the unfortunate murder of an expedition member by another expedition member, the party eventually completed their goal and mapped what came to be known as the Rio Teodoro. During the expedition, many members of the expedition contracted tropical diseases such as malaria. TR himself became so sick that he is reputed to have contemplated suicide. As a matter of fact, he carried with him a dose of hemlock for just such a purpose. TR’s sickness was due to a leg injury, which abscessed, causing TR to lose almost 50 pounds. This leg injury plagued him the rest of his life, and may have contributed to his death.

Returning to the United States in 1914, TR found that the world was being torn apart by the rising conflict in Europe which culminated in the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, thus precipitating World War I. TR volunteered to raise a regiment to fight in Europe, but his efforts were rebuffed by President Wilson. In response, TR returned to his editorial duties and engaged in tireless efforts to raise money and supplies for the war effort. His sons, Ted Jr., Kermit, Archie, and Quentin all served in the Army with distinction. Unfortunately, Quentin, an aviator, was killed over Chemery, France, after his plane was shot down. The airfield near Sagamore Hill where Quentin trained was renamed Roosevelt field in his honor, and it is the field from where Charles Lindbergh departed on his famous solo flight across the Atlantic.

Never recovering from the grief of losing his favorite child, TR continued to write books and editorials. Unfortunately, the strain from his leg injury accelerated his failing health. Theodore Roosevelt returned to his home and died in his sleep on January 6, 1919. His last words are reputed to have been directed at his manservant, James Amos, when TR said, “Please turn out the light.” The official cause of death was listed as a pulmonary embolism brought on by the combined effects of inflammatory rheumatism and recurrent malaria. Archie Roosevelt, on temporary leave to recuperate from a leg wound, cabled his siblings still overseas with the simple message, “The Old Lion is Dead.” When the news reached Washington, D.C., the Vice President, Thomas R. Marshall, was reputed to have said, “Death had to take him sleeping, for if Roosevelt had been awake, there would have been a fight.”

Despite his death at age sixty, Theodore Roosevelt’s legacy lives on. His moral integrity and strength of character are models, which should be emulated by everyone around the world. Theodore Roosevelt was not only one of the finest presidents the United States has ever elected; Theodore Roosevelt was also a faithful husband, a model parent, an enthusiastic citizen who sought to accomplish something great for his country and the world at large. TR was a prolific writer and tireless campaigner for the protection of basic human rights, a masterful politician who shaped the world around him, always basing his actions on the American concepts of freedom, equal justice under the law, and the pursuit of happiness. Theodore Roosevelt’s legacy shall continue, and it is to his memory that we faithfully dedicate this website.