

Elihu Root

1912

“There is so much of good in human nature that men grow to like each other upon better acquaintance, and this points to another way in which we may strive to promote the peace of the world.”



Elihu Root was born in Clinton, New Jersey, the son of a mathematics professor. He attended Hamilton College and graduated first in his class in 1864 at the age of nineteen. Elihu's father and elder brother, also a mathematician, were nicknamed “Cube” and “Square”. He taught for one year at the Law School of New York University. After his teaching he founded a law firm where he specialized in corporate law. For 30 years he practiced law and became a wealthy man.

His clients were largely banks, railroads, and financiers. He earned recognition from the American Bar Association for his creativity and skills in oration, writing, and problem solving.

He entered politics in 1899 when President McKinley named him secretary of war. Root accepted this position and called the United States Government the most important client of his life. At this time the Spanish American War was ending and Mckinley wanted a lawyer to lead in peace time instead of a man with a military background.

1845-1937

- **Secretary of War for President McKinley**
- **Secretary of State for President Roosevelt, Senator,**
- **First President of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**
- **Ambassador to Russia**

“Men do not fail, they give up trying...”

Root was secretary of war from 1899 until 1904. During this time he reorganized the United States War Department, established new procedures for promotion, founded the War college, enlarged West Point, opened schools for special branches of the service, created a general staff, strengthened control over the National Guard, and restored discipline within the department. He was thought to be the most intelligent man to ever occupy this post. In addition to this, he created a plan for retuning Cuba to Cuban rule, wrote a democratic charter to govern the Philippines, and eliminated taxes on imports from Puerto Rican to the US.

In 1904 he returned to his legal practice.

In 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt named him as secretary of state. As secretary he simplified the emigration of Japanese to the United States, toured and strengthened US relationships with South America, and sponsored the Central American Peace Conference of 1907. This conference was the beginning of the Central American Court of Justice. This was a court where countries in Central America could peacefully settle disputes they had with each other.

In 1912 Root won the Nobel Peace Prize. In his acceptance speech he stated his views on how to link peace in personal and national relationships.

“When friends quarrel we try to dissipate their misunderstandings, to soften their mutual feelings, and to bring them together in such a way that their friendship may be renewed. Misunderstanding and prejudice and dislike are, as a rule, the fruits of isolation. There is so much of good in human nature that men grow to like each other upon better acquaintance, and this points to another way in which we may strive to promote the peace of the world”.

Root believed that personal relationships were the way to mend misunderstandings between countries. His Peace Prize came as the result of his working with countries all over the world to develop understanding of each other.

In 1909-1915, Root was elected United States Senator. He took a leadership role in a financial use agreement for North Atlantic fisheries concerning the Panama Canal. This benefited the fisheries and supported the use of the Canal.

In 1915 he declined the nomination of the Republican Party for President of the United States. He was 70 years old but continued his role of elder statesman in his party.

He opposed Woodrow Wilson's (Peace Laureate 1919) neutrality policy but supported him during the war. Wilson appointed him to an ambassadorship to Russia in 1917.

In 1919 he took a neutral stance between Wilson and the League of Nations at the treaty of Versailles.

In 1921 he led other delegates in writing the Five Power treaty limiting naval armament.

Root spent much of his life dealing with the cause of international armament. He encouraged United States delegates to the Hague Conference in 1921 to support the founding of the World Court. This court would be a place where countries all over the world could settle disagreements peacefully.

He served on a committee to devise plans for a permanent Court of International Justice that was set up in 1921. In 1929 the US Senate ratified the Protocol for United States participation in the court.

On Root's 84th birthday he left for Geneva where he convinced delegates from 55 nations to accept a revised protocol for the establishment of the World Court. Although he urged the United States Senate to ratify it they refused to act and declined to ratify it at all.

Root was the first president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and helped found its European counterpart. He believed that international law rather than violence represented mankind's best chance to achieve world peace. He believed that it would take much time, wisdom and patience.

Suggested Classroom Activities

Introduction/Warm Up

Use these quotes to introduce Elihu Root.

“Men do not fail; they give up trying”

“The worst, the hardest, the most disagreeable thing that you may have to do may be the thing that counts most, because it is the hard discipline, and it alone, that makes possible the highest efficiency”

Discussion Questions

What characteristics of his life and work led Elihu Root to win the Nobel Peace Prize? (level 1)

McKinley believed Root to be the most intelligent man to ever be Secretary of War. Root's intelligence was shown by what other events in his life?(Level 1)

Root won his Nobel Peace Prize for his work helping countries settle disputes in a peaceful way. How did he do this? (Level 2)

What are the results of his work and life that influence us today? (Level 3)

In his acceptance speech what did he suggest caused conflict, and what might help solve it among individuals and nations? (Level 3)

Vocabulary

1. Financiers
2. Oration
3. Emigration
4. Neutrality
5. Armament

6. Ratified
7. Protocol
8. Counterpart

Technology Option

Elihu Root had personal relationships and worked with other Nobel Laureates: Nicolas Murray Butler, Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, and the Institute of International Law. Find pictures of or about these winners and create a power point slide show. On each slide include: the year and the reason they won their prize, Include how they knew each other.

Resources

<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h891.html> A US history site

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/ This is the official Nobel Laureate site

<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=R000430> Biographical site for members of Congress