

Theodore Roosevelt

1906

“The United States of America was among the first to infuse the ideal of peace into practical politics. Peace and arbitration treaties have now been concluded between the United States and the governments of several countries. But what has especially directed the attention of the friends of peace and of the whole civilized world to the United States is President Roosevelt's happy role in bringing to an end the bloody war recently waged between two of the world's great powers, Japan and Russia.”

Must one be peaceful to earn the Nobel Prize for Peace? It seems like an easy question, but laureates such as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Kissinger reveal that it is not.

Theodore Roosevelt was a figure of great contrasts, who in many ways exemplified the American spirit of his age. He was born to privilege and wealth, yet fought to limit the power of corporate control. Though weak and often sick as a boy, he lived a lifetime of adventure and physical danger that few have equaled. He was equally comfortable traveling through the wilds of Africa, the American West, and the Amazon, but graduated magna cum laude from Harvard and authored over twenty books.



Roosevelt's path to achieving peace was quite different from many other laureates. During his time, the United States pursued imperial ambitions for the first time, annexing Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific. He favored strength as the best way to secure and maintain peace between the powerful, ambitious nations of his time.

Born to wealthy parents in 1858 in New York City, Theodore (or "T.R.") spent his early years in a sick bed. He was unable to sleep lying down because of asthma, and so went to bed upright in a chair or sofa. Despite this, young Theodore was active and even mischievous. His interest in wild animals and natural science started when he saw a dead seal at a market, and managed to procure the animal's head for further study.

Theodore's father (also named Theodore) encouraged fresh air and physical activity for his son. These pursuits helped to alleviate the young boy's sickly nature, and he soon excelled in boxing, hiking, and other outdoor pursuits. This transformation was to have a profound effect on Roosevelt's thinking for the rest of his life. From then on, he believed in action and the power of individual initiative in all things.

In 1895, Roosevelt became Commissioner of the New York City Police Department. His energies were a necessary match for what was considered the most corrupt police force in the country at that time. Roosevelt was known to walk the streets in the dead of night,

making sure his officers were on the job. During his tenure, women and Jews were allowed into the department for the first time.

In 1897, Roosevelt was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy. He had always been fascinated by naval battles, and saw the key to American security in her naval strength. During this period of history, the great powers of the world possessed and utilized extensive navies to capture, control and maintain their possessions.

Roosevelt campaigned to modernize both the vessels and the personnel of the American Navy. He saw war with Spain (who at the time was still in possession of Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines) as inevitable. A year later, Roosevelt was proven right.

The Spanish-American War began with a mysterious explosion about the USS Maine while in port at Havana, Cuba. At the time, it was reported as an act of Spanish espionage, and offered the excuse for what American newspapers and politicians had clamored for. This was a chance for the United States to become an imperial power by taking the possessions of the previously mighty Spanish Empire. By 1898, Spain was an empire in name only, her few remaining possessions in revolt, and easy pickings for an aggressive new power seeking a name for itself on the world stage.

Roosevelt saw the war as a great adventure, and actually resigned his position to organize a group of volunteers to fight the Spanish in Cuba. His regiment, known as the Rough Riders, was hailed in American newspapers for its brave exploits such as the Battle of San Juan Hill. It was this image of a charging cavalry officer that crystallized

Roosevelt's image in the eyes of the public.

Upon returning to New York, Roosevelt was elected governor of the state. He attacked corruption with so much vigor that the political bosses who had controlled state politics looked for any way to get rid of him. They succeeded by forcing presidential candidate William McKinley to take Roosevelt as his running mate in the 1900 presidential election.

McKinley and Roosevelt won the election, and Roosevelt was quickly bored by his duties (or lack thereof) as Vice President. He even considered leaving politics to return to law school, but fate intervened when President McKinley was shot by Leon

1858 - 1919

- **United States President, Statesman, Soldier, Civil Servant, Historian, Author, Adventurer, Conservationist**
- **After being shot by an assassin on the way to a campaign rally, Roosevelt decided to complete his 90-minute speech before seeking medical attention.**
- **He was first American to win the Nobel Prize**

“Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike.”

Czolgosz, an anarchist, on September 6, 1901. McKinley died on September 14, and Theodore Roosevelt became President of the United States.

While serving out the remainder of McKinley's term, Roosevelt pledged not to alter his predecessor's policies. One major achievement was his resolving a six-month long coal strike in 1902. He decided to run for President in the 1904 election as a Republican. His opponents in the race called him a militarist, but he was elected with both a popular and electoral majority.

Roosevelt quickly moved from carrying out McKinley's policies to enacting his own. He became a reformer, attacking corporate monopolies and trusts that sought to eliminate competition in oil, railroads, mining and other industries. Roosevelt felt that the government's job was to regulate interstate commerce, in order to avoid both corporate oligarchy and anarchism.

President Roosevelt decided to use the power of his office to protect the environment. At the time, there were almost no protections against the exploitation of land, water, resources and destruction of species by private developers. National Parks and nature preserves were created and enlarged in record numbers. The US Forest Service was created by Roosevelt, who saw conservation of resources in terms of managing them for long-term use.

Roosevelt's foreign policy had much in common with his trade and environmental policy. He saw the role of the United States as active, energetic and strong. He also revealed the attitudes of his time, declaring that it was the role of "civilized" nations to oversee the affairs of "backward" ones. To that effect, Roosevelt declared that the United States had sole oversight over the Caribbean Basin and Central America. This included the right to intervene in the affairs of neighboring countries, even overthrowing governments the US decided were corrupt.

The events surrounding the Panama Canal provide an example of Roosevelt's foreign policy. At the time, Panama was a province of Colombia, which had been working with France to build a canal since the 1880s. Roosevelt entered into negotiations with both countries to take over completion of the Canal, but the Colombian Senate soon began to demand more money. Roosevelt's response was to negotiate with business leaders in the Panama province to declare independence from Colombia in 1903.

The "revolution" lasted only hours, as Colombian soldiers were bribed not to fight. The new Panamanian constitution (already written by the United States) created a new government, which signed a treaty with the US to build and control the Canal for \$10 million in 1904. The Panama Canal was completed over the next 10 years.

Roosevelt's innovative spirit had more success in other areas. In 1901, Booker T. Washington became the first African-American to dine at the White House. Roosevelt appointed the first Jew to a Cabinet post. He was also the first American to be awarded the Nobel Prize in any category.

Roosevelt was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906, for ending the war between the Russian and Japanese empires. These two powers were fighting over control of Korea and Manchuria (now part of China). Neither side, nor Roosevelt, sought any input from the Koreans or Manchurians about who should control the territories. The understanding of the time was that imperial powers controlled weaker ones because they could. It was even felt that imperialism brought civilization and enlightenment to colonized peoples.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 is not regarded as one of the great conflicts of the 20th Century. But it certainly could have been. These two imperial powers, fighting over control and influence in the Asian North Pacific, had the potential to ignite a larger conflict among allies around the world. Roosevelt invited both parties to Portsmouth, New Hampshire to negotiate a peaceful solution to the conflict. His efforts were successful, and seen by some historians as having put off the First World War, along with his intervention in the French-German division of Morocco.

After a second term as President, Roosevelt left office on an African safari which was sponsored by the Smithsonian Institute and the National Geographic Society. The party killed over 11,000 animals, and over 500 big game animals. When questioned about the number of animals killed, Roosevelt replied that "I can be condemned only if the existence of the National Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, and all similar zoological institutions are to be condemned."

In 1912, Roosevelt again entered president politics, breaking with the Republican Party to form the Bull Moose Party. Roosevelt felt that both major parties lacked the will for real reform, but his bid was unsuccessful. During the campaign, he was shot in the chest (see inset). After losing the election, Roosevelt embarked on a second adventure, this time to the Amazon with Brazilian explorer Cândido Rondon. Roosevelt's son Kermit (later a central figure in the CIA's coup against Iranian President Mossadeq) joined his father on the trip.

The party's search for the source of the River of Doubt resulted in near-fatal tragedy. Roosevelt became so ill that he lost nearly 50 pounds, and certainly would have died without Rondon's leadership and the tireless work of Dr. Cajazeira, the party's physician. Roosevelt told a friend that the trip probably took ten years off his life. In fact, recurrent bouts of malaria and inflammations were a constant problem throughout the rest of his life.

When the First World War erupted in 1914, Roosevelt strongly supported the Allies against Germany. He criticized President Wilson as weak, and supported his rival in the 1916 election. In 1918, his son Quentin was shot down behind enemy lines in Germany and killed. Roosevelt never recovered from the loss of his youngest son.

The presidential race of 1920 saw Roosevelt again considering a run for the presidency. But early in January of 1919, Theodore Roosevelt died in his sleep at the age of 60. His son Archie informed the rest of his siblings with a simple, five word telegraph:

“The old lion is dead.”

Vocabulary Terms

1. Arbitrate
2. Annex
3. Populism
4. Empire (related words: imperial, imperialism)
5. Anarchism
6. Trust
7. Oligarchy

Suggested Classroom Activities**Study Questions**

1. Do you think that Theodore Roosevelt's early years had an important effect on what he believed and achieved? In what ways?
2. What were some important aspects of American life during Theodore Roosevelt's era? Think of technology, global politics, racial and ethnic relations, etc.
3. What if any skills or attributes did Theodore Roosevelt bring to each of his careers?
4. How did Theodore Roosevelt reflect and reject the cultural values of his time?
5. How did Theodore Roosevelt seek to achieve and maintain peace?
6. What arguments by people of the time could be made against giving Roosevelt the Peace Prize in 1906?
7. How are other American Peace Prize laureate similar or different to Theodore Roosevelt?

Introductory and Extended Exercises

A. Before reading, write "peace", "justice" and "security" on the board. Divide the class into groups of three, with each student in the group responsible for one term. Each student will make a quick list of terms that he or she associates with their word. Then compare and contrast the lists.

As each student reads the biography, ask him or her to keep an eye out for issues related to their word and its meaning. They can do the same for more than one laureate biography, and decide whether the laureates studied created one, two or all three. Groups can share their findings through discussion or voting.

B. Assign students various roles, such as: American, Cuban, Korean, Moroccan, German, Russian, Manchurian, Colombian, Panamanian, or Spaniard to make a case for or against

Roosevelt receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, using specific reasons with a foundation in the text.

C. Following either of these exercises, ask students to do further research. Ask each and create an essay outline on an important subject raised in the reading or subsequent discussion.

Technology Option

After reading the biography, ask students to describe his voice and speaking style. Then listen to Roosevelt (see 6,7 in bibliography) and ask students to respond.

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