

# 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.” Root taught for one year at the Law School of New York University. After his teaching he founded a law firm where he specialized in law.



For 30 years he practiced law and became a wealthy man. Root's 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 job and called the United States Government the most important client of his life. At this time the Spanish American War was ending. McKinley wanted a lawyer to lead in peace time instead of a man with a military background.

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

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 returning 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 help them understand of each other.

In 1909, Root was elected to a six-year term as United States Senator. He took a leadership role to make an agreement for North Atlantic fisheries concerning the use of the Panama 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 Wilson during the war. Wilson appointed Root 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 helped write the Five Power treaty limiting naval armament. Root spent much of his life dealing with 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.

On Root’s 84th birthday he left for Geneva where he convinced delegates from 55 nations to accept the creation of the World Court. Although he urged the United States Senate to be part of it, they refused.

Root was the first president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He believed that world laws, rather than violence, were the best chance for the world to achieve peace. He believed that world peace could be had with time, wisdom and patience.

## **Classroom Activities**

### **Elihu Root**

#### **Introduction/Warm Up**

Discuss the qualifications that Root had for the high governments positions to which he was appointed. If the conclusion is that he actually wasn't especially qualified (a reasonable possibility!) the discussion should turn to the role of cronyism sometimes plays in government. Finally, the discussion should turn to the question of whether Root did a good job because of his qualifications, or if his lack of qualifications proved not to be a hindrance.

#### **Activity**

Imagine that you are in the Root dining room at home when he was a young man. You are eating dinner with your father and older brother. Write a dialog among the three of you to show what Elihu Root's family life might have been like.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. What characteristics of his life and work led Elihu Root to win the Nobel Peace Prize? (level 1)
2. What did Root believe about the best way to settle problems? (Level 1)
3. McKinley believed Root to be the most intelligent man to ever be Secretary of War. Was that the best possible use for a person with his intelligence? (Level 2)
4. Can a Secretary of War be a Person of Peace? Explain your answer. (Level 2)
5. If Root was the Secretary of War today (now the position is called Secretary of Defense), what might he do? Explain your answer. (Level 3)

#### **Vocabulary Terms:**

1. **Financiers**
2. **Oration**
3. **Emigration**
4. **Dissipate**
5. **Elder statesman**
6. **Neutrality policy**
7. **Armament**
8. **Protocol**
9. **Counterpart**

## **Technology Option**

Go to:

<http://videosearch.comcast.net/ss-query/videosearch.jsp?q=National+Cemetery&dr=1&cp=1>

Select Nightline, 05.28.07

Watch the video about Section 60 of the Arlington National Cemetery.

Write a letter to any of the people identified in the video, telling them how you feel about what they've done.

## **Resources**

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

The official Nobel Laureate site: [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/)

Biographical site for members of Congress:

<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=R000430>

<http://videosearch.comcast.net/ss-query/videosearch.jsp?q=National+Cemetery&dr=1&cp=1>