

THE AMERICAN DYNAMO—
SHADOWED BY WAR
(1897–1914)

In 1896, William Jennings Bryan unites old biblical ideas with very contemporary issues. He decries a “Cross of Gold” and a “Crown of Thorns.” Bryan’s whirlwind campaign tours capture the imagination of tens of thousands, and Bryan is quite a show. William McKinley is solid, reliable, and not a little dull. But he presides over an expanding economy and, rather against his wishes, over an expanding overseas empire. Theodore Roosevelt is the Republicans’ answer—almost their antidote—to Bryan and Bryanism. When an anarchist’s bullet propels Teddy into the presidency, the White House truly becomes what he called it: a Bully Pulpit. Roosevelt shapes the modern presidency as none of his predecessors has done. When William H. Taft proves to be an incapable successor, his failure is more a matter of style than of substance. The great Republican smashup of 1912 pits TR and Taft, these two longtime friends and political allies, against one another in one of the most tragic and consequential political feuds in our history. Woodrow Wilson, son of a Southern pastor, revels in the presidency as a place of moral leadership. Wilson’s first term is marked by major legislation on labor and banking. Wilson’s dissent from the Founders’ vision of checks and balances will bring a fatal clash, but not until later. When European states careen into the abyss of The Great War, Wilson maneuvers successfully to keep the United States out. Things will change as America enters history’s bloodiest century. Reformers are

especially keen to stay out of Europe's internecine conflict, believing that wartime restrictions will mean the end of their fondest hopes for change. Change comes, to be sure, but not the changes they have sought.

I. "A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR"

Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt stalked the streets of New York City at night. As the most visible member of the city's Police Board, he had gained a reputation for surprising members of "New York's Finest" who were not exactly fulfilling their duties. To make sure that his night patrols would not go unnoticed by the press, TR took along his friend Jacob Riis, a Jewish immigrant from Denmark. Riis was a journalist who was making a name for himself as a reformer.

Outside a restaurant late one night, Roosevelt and Riis saw the owner impatiently rapping on the street with his stick. "Where *does* that copper sleep?" the owner barked with irritation. He was not aware that the man he was addressing was in fact the president of the city's Police Board.¹

The public loved reading the adventures of their night-stalking "com-mish." TR was called "Haroun al Rashid Roosevelt," after the famous vizier of Baghdad who moved in disguise among his people.² But he wasn't always loved by his men. Some of the sleeping constables, shown up by TR's antics, tried to get even. One night, they raided a society dinner at which "Little Egypt," an exotic-dancing sensation of the Chicago Columbian Exposition, planned to do her thing. Roosevelt was said to be present, and they hoped to nail him. For once, however, Commissioner Roosevelt was asleep in his New York mansion. TR laughed when told of the renegade policemen's attempt to embarrass him. He had been at home all night with his wife, Edith, and their growing young family.

Jake Riis must have been puzzled when his friend announced that a German pastor—a notorious anti-Semite—would indeed be allowed to give a speech in New York City. Teddy was, after all, a firm advocate of free speech. But to underscore his own feelings about the speaker's hate-filled message, TR took care to provide an escort of large, muscular patrolmen from NYPD—every one of them Jewish.

When William McKinley returned Republicans to power in Washington in 1897—after the dignified rule of Grover Cleveland—even the rising skyline of Manhattan would prove too confining for Theodore Roosevelt. His friend John Burroughs, the famous naturalist, captured Roosevelt’s essence when he said TR was a many-sided man and “every side was like an electric battery.”³ Henry Adams, the grandson and great-grandson of presidents, hit the mark when he called TR “pure act.”⁴

TR’s friend, Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, lobbied hard to get an important appointment with the new McKinley administration for the energetic cowboy from the Dakotas. TR was especially interested in naval matters. When barely out of Harvard, he penned *The Naval History of the War of 1812*. The book was, and is, considered a classic. Roosevelt was convinced early that the United States needed a modern, powerful navy. He and Lodge worked closely with Navy Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan argued in his great book, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, that the ability of a nation to master the seas in order to “project force” was the key to its world power. TR wrote Mahan that he had “devoured” the massive work in just two nights.⁵ Mahan’s work was persuasive not only to important American thinkers but also to influential figures in Britain, Japan, and, most ominously, Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm II read the book avidly and had a copy placed on *every* German ship.⁶

President McKinley was not eager to bring the rambunctious Roosevelt into his cabinet. He had already promised the post of navy secretary to the easygoing John Long—a New England politician, who wouldn’t “rock the boat.” McKinley told one of TR’s many advocates that he worried about the young dynamo. “I want peace,” the president said, “and I’m told that your friend Theodore—whom I know only slightly—is always getting into rows with everybody. I’m afraid he’s too *pugnacious*.”⁷

If McKinley could have peeked at Theodore’s private correspondence, he would have had good reason to fear. “Teddy” was even then writing to a friend that he wanted to conquer Canada and drive the Spaniards out of Cuba!⁸ And to his sister, Bamie, Teddy wrote of his own feelings toward the president: McKinley “is an upright and honorable man, of very considerable ability and good record as a soldier . . . he is not a strong man, however,

and unless he is well backed I should feel rather uneasy about him in a serious crisis.”⁹

Assured that TR was a faithful party man, the president relented and named the New Yorker *assistant* secretary of the navy. It was to be a fateful move. Teddy the battery soon gave the navy a jolt.

The United States had been viewing developments in nearby Cuba with mounting concern for nearly fifty years. Prior to the Civil War, various proslavery “filibusters” wanted to seize this “Pearl of the Antilles” from the weakening grasp of royal Spain. After the Civil War, the persistence of slavery in Cuba presented a bar to annexation by the United States. But when Cuban rebels seeking independence from Spain began their agitation, American sympathies were all with these freedom-seeking *insurrectos*. When a full-scale revolt broke out in 1895, millions of Americans cried, “*Cuba libre!*” (“Free Cuba!”).

Spain sent General Valeriano Weyler to put down the rebellion. The American press went wild. General Weyler reacted to the *insurrectos*’ “scorched earth” tactics by rounding up Cuban peasants in rebel areas and confining them to concentration camps. This *reconcentrado* policy resulted in thousands dead from hunger and disease. Weyler was vilified in the “Yellow Press” (so called because of the cheap newsprint on which the penny-a-sheet sensationalist newspapers were printed). Atrocity stories from Cuba daily filled the pages of Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* and the rival *New York Journal*. The bumptious young millionaire, William Randolph Hearst, owned the *Journal*. Hearst and Pulitzer were in a circulation war, and they used Cuban horrors to gain readership. As the old journalistic saw has it: *if it bleeds, it leads*.

Hearst sent the great American artist, Frederic Remington, to Cuba during a lull in the fighting. “There is no trouble here,” Remington cabled Hearst. “There will be no war. I wish to return.” Hearst quickly responded by telegram. “Please remain. You furnish the pictures and I’ll furnish the war.”¹⁰ Pulitzer’s *World* fanned anti-Spanish sentiment with paragraphs like this: “Blood on the roadsides, blood in the fields, blood on the doorsteps, blood, blood, blood! The old, the young, the weak, the crippled—all are butchered without mercy. . . . Is there no nation wise enough, brave

enough, and strong enough to restore peace in this bloodsmitten land?"¹¹

All of these horrors, the reader was led to believe, were committed on the direct orders of General Weyler. When a new ministry came to office in Madrid, it attempted to quiet the storm in Cuba. Weyler was recalled. His *reconcentrado* policy was eased. Soon, it appeared, order and peace would be restored to Cuba.

Just at this moment, the United States sent the battleship *Maine* to Havana, Cuba. We wanted to "show the flag" and let pro-Weyler Cubans know that the *Yanquis* would not tolerate abuse of Americans or their property in Cuba. President McKinley's closest friend, Senator Mark Hanna, opposed the move. He saw it as a needless provocation. It was, he said, "like waving a match in an oil well [just] for fun."¹²

The Hearst press intercepted and published a letter from Dupuy de Lôme, the Spanish minister in Washington. A most *undiplomatic* row soon broke out. De Lôme's very negative assessment of McKinley's Message to Congress was spread out for all America to read. The hapless envoy said the message showed "what McKinley is, weak and a bidder for the admiration of the crowd."¹³ It was no more than what many American critics had been saying about the mild-mannered president, but it was intolerable for Americans to hear it from an outsider. Soon, the unfortunate Señor de Lôme was packing his bags for home.

President McKinley did not want to be rushed into war. He even joked about it with his White House physician. Army Colonel Leonard Wood was a close friend of TR. "Well, have you and Theodore declared war yet?" said McKinley. "No Mr. President, but we think *you* should."¹⁴

No sooner had de Lôme left for Spain than terrible news came from Havana. The USS *Maine* had exploded in the harbor with heavy loss of American life. More than 250 sailors died instantly, more still would die from burns and wounds. The Yellow Press went wild. "*Maine Destroyed by Treachery!*" screamed Hearst's nationwide chain of papers.¹⁵

Without waiting for the navy's official investigation, TR resolved to act. When Secretary Long, feeling ill, took a Friday afternoon off, *acting* Secretary Roosevelt immediately cabled to Commodore George Dewey, commanding the navy's Asiatic Squadron:

Dewey, Hong Kong: ORDER THE SQUADRON . . . TO HONG KONG. KEEP FULL OF COAL. IN THE EVENT OF DECLARATION OF WAR WITH SPAIN, YOUR DUTY WILL BE TO SEE THAT THE SPANISH SQUADRON DOES NOT LEAVE THE ASIATIC COAST, AND THEN OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS. KEEP OLYMPIA UNTIL FURTHER ORDERS.

ROOSEVELT¹⁶

Members of Congress hounded McKinley for war with Spain. “Don’t your President know where the war-making power is lodged?” growled one senator at the secretary of state.¹⁷ This presented the McKinley administration with a dangerous prospect, that Congress would declare war *whether or not* the president asked for it. Nothing would make the president look more feeble. Worse, the president’s defeated 1896 rival, William Jennings Bryan, was speaking out for “Free Cuba and Free Silver.” If McKinley failed to act, might the Democrats take up the cause of Cuban independence, if only for political gain?¹⁸ A cartoon published in Hearst’s *New York World* showed McKinley as a determined old lady, futilely trying to sweep back a hurricane with her broom. The winds were labeled “the people” and the waves were labeled “Congress.”¹⁹

Theodore Roosevelt was disgusted by the president’s failure to call openly for war. “McKinley has no more backbone than a chocolate éclair!” Teddy cried.²⁰ When the official navy board of inquiry reported an external submarine mine had caused the explosion of the *Maine*, it did *not* place the blame on Spain. It didn’t have to. Around the country, the cry went up:

*Remember the Maine
To Hell with Spain!*^{21*}

Wall Street did not want war. Most Europeans thought America would lose. Business leaders worried what would become of Americans’

* A 1976 investigation by Admiral Hyman G. Rickover concluded that the Battleship *Maine* was destroyed by coal dust’s igniting *within* the ship.

major investments in Cuba. Roosevelt confronted Senator Hanna bluntly. Hanna, Wall Street's man in the Capitol, dug in his heels against war. "We will have this war for the freedom of Cuba," TR said in a Washington speech. "The interests of the business world and of financiers may be paramount in the Senate," but the American people cared about morality. "Now, Senator," Theodore said, appealing directly to Hanna, "may we please have war?"²²

Teddy's boss, Secretary Long, may have hoped to restrain him by letting him attend meetings of the president's cabinet. But TR lectured the cabinet graybeards on the need to fight Spain. Still, the humane McKinley hesitated. "I have been through one war," the heroic Civil War veteran said. "I have seen the dead piled up, and I do not want to see another."²³

Trying to avoid war, the Spanish government in Madrid made belated concessions. The Spanish people, however, were hostile to any compromise with the Yanqui "pigs."

McKinley wasn't alone in opposition. An influential group of Americans spoke out eloquently against imperialism. Mark Twain skewered the pretensions of the *jingoes* with wit, as did the Irish American humorist Finley Peter Dunne. Industrialist Andrew Carnegie and the respected ex-Mugwump Carl Schurz criticized the rush to war. The powerful Republican speaker of the House, Thomas B. Reed of Maine, opposed war with Spain. TR derided these men as "goo goos," an unflattering reference to these high-minded supporters of "good government."

Teddy admitted to his sister, Bamie, that he was "something of a jingo." Actually, there was no one in America *jingoer*. What decided the fate of the nation, however, was a speech by Vermont Senator Redfield Proctor. No jingo, the seasoned and highly respected Proctor had actually gone to Cuba. His speech to the Senate, delivered in a calm and deliberative tone, changed minds. He confirmed the atrocity stories. The people there were "living like pigs and dying like flies." "To me, the strongest appeal is not the barbarity practiced by Weyler, nor the loss of the *Maine* . . . but the spectacle of a million and a half people [of Cuba] struggling for freedom and deliverance from the worst misgovernment of which I ever had knowledge."²⁴

Speaker Reed cynically observed that Proctor's stance for war would at

least be good for the family's business (the Proctors owned a Vermont marble company, from which tombstones would be made).²⁵ But neither Reed nor the president could hold out longer. Congress soon voted for war.

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Roosevelt promptly resigned. Henry Adams was stunned. "Is his wife dead? Has he quarreled with everybody? Is he quite mad?"²⁶ Theodore was determined to join the fight. TR said he had to "act up to my preachings."²⁷ Although vigorous and strong, TR could never have been accepted in today's military. Not only had he suffered from asthma as a child, but his vision was so poor that he was virtually blind without his spectacles. And he was nearly forty. No matter. Teddy immediately joined with his friend Leonard Wood to recruit a company of volunteers.

Teddy accepted a commission as a *lieutenant* colonel, modestly taking second in command of the regiment he and Colonel Wood raised. Teddy called on all his Ivy League friends, his fellow cowboys from the Dakotas, and Indian fighters from the prairies. Soon, the regiment was nicknamed the "Rough Riders." TR would later describe them as "Indian and cowboy, miner, packer and college athlete, the man of unknown ancestry from the Western plains, and the man who carried on his watch the crest of the Stuyvesants and the Fishes."²⁸

Before the Rough Riders could get to Cuba, however, the navy went into action against Spain in the Philippines. No one expected the Americans to beat the Spaniards. When the U.S. ships weighed anchor in Hong Kong, their British hosts said of them: "A fine set of fellows, but unhappily we shall never see them again."²⁹ Commodore Dewey struck hard at Manila Bay. Taking the Spanish fleet by surprise on 1 May 1898, Dewey gave the order to Captain Charles V. Gridley of the USS *Olympia*: "You may fire when ready, Gridley." Gridley *was* ready, and the Spanish fleet that had spanned the globe for four centuries was destroyed in a matter of minutes.* Below decks on the *Olympia*, the temperatures rose to 150 degrees! Still, the sailors were in high spirits. They stripped down to nothing but

* Captain Gridley had little chance to enjoy his worldwide fame. He died of illness in Kobe, Japan, less than a month after his great victory. His name is remembered in a succession of naval vessels. Lieutenant John Kerry served on USS *Gridley*, a destroyer, off Vietnam.

shoes and sang a popular rag tune of the day: “There’ll be a hot time in the old town tonight.”^{30*}

When the Rough Riders landed in Cuba, they soon found that the war was no lark. The Spanish soldiers who faced them were well trained, highly disciplined, and excellent shots. They were well equipped with 7x57 mm-caliber German Mausers, the best rifle in the world. TR said the sound of a Mauser—*a-z-z-z-eu*—was like “ripping silk.”³¹ Most dangerous was the fact Mausers used smokeless powder. Those firing from the dense jungle undergrowth could not be easily located. On 1 July 1898, the Rough Riders went into action at San Juan Hill. When retreating Spaniards broke into a run, Army General “Fighting Joe” Wheeler, an old veteran of the *Confederate* army, excitedly cried out: “We’ve got the damn Yankees on the run!”³²

One of the first Rough Riders killed was New Yorker Hamilton Fish Jr. The nephew and namesake of U. S. Grant’s distinguished secretary of state, Sergeant Fish was one of the glamorous “Fifth Avenue boys” TR had recruited.³³ (B. F. Goodrich and the jeweler’s son, Bill Tiffany, were other famous names who survived the war. Frank Knox would live to serve as secretary of the navy under TR’s cousin, Franklin.)

Another famous Rough Rider was Bucky O’Neill. O’Neill had fought Indians and chased outlaws as sheriff of Prescott, Arizona. As he exhaled smoke from his ever-present cigarette, Bucky boasted that the Spanish bullet hadn’t been made that could kill him. At that moment, a German-made Mauser bullet hit him in the mouth and took off the back of his head.³⁴

For all the comic opera aspect of this war, once the Americans got to Cuba they found it all too real. Huge land crabs attacked corpses, as did vultures.³⁵ In the assault on San Juan Hill, Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt scolded some of the regulars who were hunkered down. “Are you afraid to stand up when I am on horseback?” he asked. Even as one of the crouching soldiers rose, though,

* The American victory at Manila Bay would begin the long association of the U.S. Navy with the Philippines. Many an American sailor would head for the wild liberty port of Alongopo City. It was the location of some of the most notorious saloons and brothels in Asia. To be fair, “Po Town” was also hometown to some of the most enduring marriages in American service life.

the poor man was cut down by a well-aimed Spanish shot.³⁶ Soon, TR found it more prudent to *dismount* from Little Texas and proceed on foot.

Coming upon a company of black regulars who were headed for the rear, Roosevelt pulled out his service revolver and threatened to shoot them. If they doubted him, he said, they could ask his men if he kept his word. “My cow-punchers, hunters and miners solemnly nodded their heads. . . . ‘He always does; he always does,’” TR wrote in his best-selling book, *The Rough Riders*.³⁷

TR did not know that the black soldiers were actually moving *under orders*. These hardened veterans had gained fame on the plains as “Buffalo Soldiers.” They good naturedly joined Roosevelt’s assault on San Juan Hill—and shared in the immortal glory of his triumph. Teddy’s “crowded hour” at San Juan Hill catapulted him into international fame. For the rest of his life, TR would be known as the Rough Rider. The middle-aged husband and father, the desk-bound bureaucrat had proven himself in the white heat of combat.

The war quickly wound down. American victories on land were equaled by more at sea. When “Fighting Bob” Evans’s ship, USS *Iowa*, met and destroyed the Spanish fleet at Santiago, Cuba, his men cheered. “Don’t cheer boys,” Captain Evans ordered, “those poor devils are dying!”³⁸ Spanish Admiral Cervera’s fleet was magnificently turned out. With decks polished and brass gleaming, they sailed into the *Iowa*’s deadly line of fire. Despite all the foolish talk about Spanish cowardice, the Americans gained great respect for the courage of the doomed men in the antiquated Spanish vessels.

Half a world away, Americans gratefully accepted British intervention. When Commodore Dewey shelled Spanish shore positions at Manila on August 13, a Royal Navy squadron put itself between the Americans and a German naval flotilla that had attempted to interfere with the American attack. The German battleships actually *trained* their guns on the Americans! Unwilling to risk war with *both* the British and the Americans, the German commander backed down.

Britain was the only European power openly to back the Americans in the Spanish-American War. Young Winston Churchill was a war correspondent. He spoke for many Englishmen when he said, “The Americans should

be admired for their action in Cuba . . . though as a nation . . . they always contrive to disgust polite people. Yet their heart is honest.”³⁹ Britain had its own *goo goos*. America’s minister in London, John Hay, had worked hard to gain British support for the U.S. position. As a young man, Hay had served as Lincoln’s secretary. Then, he saw what horrors war could bring. Now, he called TR’s project “a splendid little war.”⁴⁰ For Spain, which lost 50,000 men—2,000 in combat, the rest to disease—it was a painful experience. For America, the 385 battle deaths and 2,000 lost to disease were the cost of the country’s emergence as a world power.⁴¹

To President McKinley now came the difficult task of deciding what to do about America’s conquests. Cuba would be granted independence. That much was sure. But what about Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines? McKinley struggled over the Philippines, in particular. He told a delegation of Methodists he had prayerfully decided it was his duty “to take them all and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and *Christianize* them.”⁴² The Filipinos, under Spanish guidance for three centuries, were mostly Christian.⁴³ And soon, Americans would have their own *insurrectos* to contend with there. McKinley’s decision was widely criticized as an imperialist power grab. The truth is the Philippines cast adrift would have been snapped up by either Germany or Japan in 1898. Under American rule, at least, they would have the *promise* of independence. For good measure, McKinley took the occasion to annex the Hawaiian Islands.

“Japan has her eye on them,” he told an aide.⁴⁴ Senator Lodge and Captain Mahan, among others, had convinced the president that in the modern world of great ironclad fleets, Hawaii was necessary for the defense of California.

II. ROUGH RIDER POLITICS

Colonel Roosevelt and the Rough Riders came to Montauk, on Long Island’s East End, to be “mustered out.” After a brief and glorious tour of duty, they were honorably discharged from active service. There, President McKinley came to greet the returning heroes. TR jumped off his horse and struggled to get his glove off to shake hands with the commander in chief. Finally, frustrated at not being able to pull the glove off, he took it in his teeth and

yanked it off so he could pump the chief executive's hand. Those prominent teeth, the pince-nez eyeglasses, the slouch hat—all had become the stuff of legend and the delight of cartoonists. Though he hated the nickname, Roosevelt was “Teddy” to the whole country.⁴⁵ The Rough Riders gave him a Frederic Remington sculpture, *The Bronco Buster*, and wept as they bade him good-bye.⁴⁶

TR could not have returned at a more politically advantageous time. Senator Thomas Platt was known as New York's Easy Boss for his soft-spoken manner. He saw sure defeat for New York Republicans if they renominated their scandal-tainted governor, Frank Black. Black's administration couldn't explain how a million dollars intended for repairs on the Erie Canal got misdirected.⁴⁷ Platt hated to dump a loyal Republican, but he hated losing even more. Respectfully, Theodore went to Platt's headquarters in Manhattan's Fifth Avenue Hotel. There, Platt held court with his group of hangers-on. They were known as the Amen Corner. By going to *him*, Teddy was showing that he could cooperate. Platt insisted that Teddy reject the pleas of enthusiastic reformers that he run for governor as an *independent*. In return, the senator would throw the Republican nomination for governor to the Rough Rider.

Teddy, smelling victory, agreed.⁴⁸ The fall campaign was a whirlwind. Teddy appeared at the back of his train, the Roosevelt Special. He waved his uniform hat and surrounded himself with Rough Riders who announced his speeches with a bugle. One of his sergeants, Southerner Buck Taylor, happily told one crowd, “He kept ev'y promise he made to us and he will to you. . . . He led us up San Juan Hill like sheep to the slaughter—and so he will lead you!”⁴⁹

Despite this *dubious* endorsement, Teddy went on to win the governorship—but narrowly. The corruption of the state's Republicans had not been forgotten. TR won by less than 18,000 votes out of more than 1,300,000.⁵⁰ But he had won, and in winning he had kept the critical Empire State in the hands of the Republicans. This was vitally important. President McKinley was surely relieved as he extended his congratulations to “the Colonel.” He would need the Empire State's electoral votes when he ran for reelection in 1900.

The president's reelection prospects at midterm did not look so

promising. The acquisition of an overseas empire was proving difficult—the Filipino *insurrectos* were no fonder of American rule than they had been of Spanish rule. American soldiers were dying in the fight to put down Emilio Aguinaldo’s nationalist forces. The little war had shown the complete lack of preparedness of the American army. Criticism mounted of McKinley’s inept war secretary, Russell Alger. When TR had to go to Alger personally to get a requisition signed for weapons, one of the secretary’s aides sighed and said, “Oh dear! I had this office running in such good shape—and along came the war and upset *everything!*”⁵¹

The McKinley administration had a hard time getting the Senate to approve the Treaty of Paris ending the short war. McKinley had taken care to send a mixed delegation of Democrats and Republicans to Paris to negotiate the peace. But it was clear that if the acquisition of the Philippines had been voted upon separately from the conclusion of the war, it would have failed. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge wrote to TR: “It was the closest, hardest fight I have ever known.”⁵²

On one critical vote, the administration even had to enlist the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Garrett A. Hobart. It would be one of the vice president’s last official acts. He died in November 1899, leaving a critical vacancy to be filled.*

The fight over the peace treaty would have been lost had it not been for the endorsement of William Jennings Bryan. Bryan had been the Democrats’ presidential nominee in 1896. Now, because of Bryan’s backing, ten Senate Democrats voted to ratify the peace treaty.⁵³ Massachusetts Republican Senator George Hoar tried to blame the treaty’s approval on Bryan. Hoar wrote to his fellow Bay Stater, George Boutwell, president of the Anti-Imperialist League, to complain that *Bryan* was “the most thoroughly guilty man in the United States of this whole Philippine business.”⁵⁴ That two old Republican “stalwarts” like Boutwell and Hoar were so vocally anti-imperialist shows how both major parties were split by America’s new world role.

It is easy to poke fun at the pretensions of the imperialists. British

* The vice president votes only when there is a tie in the Senate. Prior to the Twenty-fifth Amendment, when a vice president died or resigned, there was a vacancy in the number two position.

poet Rudyard Kipling urged us to “take up the white man’s burden.” Uninformed people spoke of “civilizing the Filipino.” These ideas sound absurd to us today. Yet American intervention made a great difference in the lives of Cubans in one important respect. The dreaded Yellow Fever took thousands of lives there. American troops, Spanish troops, and Cuban nationals all suffered. When U.S. Army doctor Walter Reed investigated the causes, he learned of Cuban physician Carlos Finlay’s work. Dr. Finlay’s research showed that mosquitoes carried the disease. Dr. Reed advised General Leonard Wood, TR’s old commanding officer, to attack the carrier. General Wood took up the challenge and waged “war” on the insect. By 1901, Havana was free of the killer disease.⁵⁵

In the case of the Philippines, American rule would prove brief. Four hundred years of Spanish colonial rule had not equipped Filipinos for self-government. In light of later events in the Pacific, especially three long, brutal years of Japanese occupation during World War II, America’s role in protecting and guiding the Filipinos formed the basis for our continuing friendship with that country.

In another way, America’s newfound prestige benefited others. McKinley had summoned John Hay home from Britain to become U.S. secretary of state. Hay examined the growing turmoil in China and saw the imperial powers of Europe—and Japan—eager to carve up the ancient Celestial Empire. In 1899, Hay circulated a letter to the Powers, calling on them to prevent the further disintegration of the country and to treat all of China’s trading partners equally. This became known as the “Open Door Policy,” for which Hay is justly famous.

Hay’s generous sentiments were misinterpreted by one small group of Chinese, however. Young martial arts students, called the Fists of Righteous Harmony, rose up. They wanted to drive out the “foreign devils” entirely. Called *boxers* by the Europeans, their bloody action in 1900 is known as the Boxer Rebellion. Thousands of Christian missionaries and Chinese Christian converts were slaughtered as the Boxers laid siege to the foreign legations in Peking. When an international force finally rescued the diplomats and other westerners, the Boxer Rebellion was ruthlessly put down. All over the world, readers of the Yellow Press gawked in horror to see

photographs of *Chinese* pyramids. But these pyramids were made of the severed heads of the Boxers. The world shuddered as well when Kaiser Wilhelm II ordered his troops—part of the multinational force—to suppress the Boxers with all the ferocity of the “Huns” of old. German soldiers would never shake that sobriquet.

Facing the election of 1900, Republicans sought to shift the public’s attention to the prosperity of “the full dinner pail.” To fill the vacancy in the vice presidency, they nominated Governor Theodore Roosevelt. The Easy Boss, Tom Platt, had quickly tired of Theodore in Albany and hoped to get rid of him by “kicking him upstairs.”

The Democrats again chose William Jennings Bryan. This time, Bryan shifted ground once more and campaigned *against* imperialism. Charles Francis Adams Jr., another member of the famous Adams family, thought little of McKinley, but he liked Bryan even less: “He is in one sense scripturally formidable, for he is unquestionably armed with the jaw-bone of an ass. He can talk longer and say less than any man in Christendom.”⁵⁶

Bryan once again conducted a whistle stop campaign, barnstorming the country by rail.

This time, however, Republicans sent TR to combat the man who was called the Great Commoner. Teddy’s popular appeal proved more than a match for Bryan’s. Teddy campaigned in his Rough Rider hat to enthusiastic whoops from his audiences. Bryan’s free silver issue commanded less voter attention this time around because gold had been discovered in the Yukon and South Africa. Those “strikes” had created vastly more wealth, something silver advocates had hoped to do with their precious metal. When the votes were finally counted, the Republicans won in a landslide. McKinley *improved* on his 1896 performance, winning with 7.2 million votes (292 electoral votes) to Bryan’s 6.3 million votes (155 electoral votes).

At the inauguration on 4 March 1901, New York’s Boss Platt joked that he had come to watch “Theodore take the veil.”⁵⁷ It was no convent that TR was entering, however. Six months later, the kind-hearted president visited the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. He was greeting well-wishers. He extended the hand of friendship to a young man whose own

hand was wrapped in a large bandage. Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist, fired two shots that struck the president in the chest and abdomen.* “Be easy with him, boys,” the stricken president called out as Secret Service agents pummeled the assassin with their fists. For a time, the president seemed to rally. Medical reports were so encouraging that his vigorous vice president thought it safe to take some time off for recreation. He set out to scale New York’s highest peak, Mount Marcy. Mount Marcy is near Lake Tear of the Clouds, in Essex County, close to the border with Vermont. Suddenly, below him, TR saw a ranger running toward him, waving a yellow telegram. Teddy knew what it meant.⁵⁸ He jumped in a buckboard for the mad dash to the train station. A special train sped him nearly four hundred miles westward to Buffalo, to the stately home of the Roosevelts’ wealthy friends, the Wilcoxes, where Theodore Roosevelt was sworn in as president. He was just a few weeks shy of his forty-third birthday, the youngest man ever to take the oath as president.

Riding in the presidential funeral train, Senator Mark Hanna ruefully reflected on his conversation with his dearest friend: “I told William McKinley it was a mistake to nominate that wild man at [the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia the previous summer]. I asked him if he realized what would happen if he should die. Now look, that damned cowboy is President of the United States!”⁵⁹

III. TR IN THE WHITE HOUSE

We are so used to identifying the presidency with the White House that it’s hard to believe that the *official* title of the president’s residence for more than a century was the Executive Mansion. But that would not last long with TR. By proclamation, he renamed the building the White House. This was but one of the whirlwinds of change that Roosevelt brought to the office. He of course presided over the nation’s period of deep and sincere mourning for the slain McKinley. But he did not let this tragedy slow him down:

* Czolgosz was quickly tried, convicted, and sentenced to die in New York State’s new electric chair. He was executed on 20 October 1901, barely five weeks after the president died. The electric chair was one of Thomas Edison’s less salubrious inventions.

It is a dreadful thing to come into the Presidency in this way; but it would be far worse to be morbid about it. Here is the task, and I have got to do it to the best of my ability; and that is all there is to it.⁶⁰

Shortly after moving into the White House, the president heard that Booker T. Washington was in the capital. Dr. Washington was the president of the Tuskegee Institute, the leading black college in America. Without hesitation, TR invited the distinguished educator to dinner. Teddy liked to boast of his Southern ancestry. His mother was from Georgia, and his two dashing uncles served on the CSS *Alabama*. But he was completely unprepared for the storm of protest in the South that greeted this first White House dinner given to a black man.* Southern newspapers denounced the president for this “most damnable outrage.” Even worse was the reaction of a Democratic senator from South Carolina. “Pitchfork Ben” Tillman said, “The action of President Roosevelt in entertaining that n——— will necessitate our killing a thousand n———s in the South before they will learn their place again.”⁶¹ Tillman was not exaggerating. Each year hundreds of black Southerners died at the hands of lynch mobs. To the everlasting shame of the U.S. Senate, Tillman was *not* expelled at that instant!

What made the reaction even more astonishing was that Dr. Washington had gone out of his way to *avoid* challenging the white Democrats who ruled the one-party South. He was an advocate of reconciliation, and he accepted the burden of segregation. The U.S. Supreme Court had even approved racial segregation in its appalling *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling of 1896. Bowing to this reality, Booker T. Washington advocated black self-help. His best-selling autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, urged black Americans to improve themselves through education and training *before* demanding social equality and their constitutional right to vote.

This very “moderate” position led young black intellectuals like W. E. B. DuBois to criticize Booker T. Washington:

* President Lincoln had famously invited Frederick Douglass to confer man-to-man with him in the White House and to attend the reception following his second inaugural, but this was the first dinner invitation extended to a black man. Ironically, the White House head waiter, who was black, seemed to disapprove.

But so far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, North or South, does not rightly value the privilege and duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions, and opposes the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds,—so far as he, the South, or the Nation, does this,—we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them. By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men, clinging unwaveringly to those great words which the sons of the Fathers would fain forget: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Stressing “continuity of government,” TR asked a number of McKinley’s cabinet members to stay on. He particularly wanted Secretary of State John Hay to remain. TR’s father had known Hay in the Lincoln White House. When Theodore Senior got the idea of *allotments* for Union soldiers, Hay whisked *Greatheart* in to see President Lincoln. Lincoln instantly approved the idea.* Now, the slender young man of the Lincoln White House was a portly, witty, and wise senior statesman. TR turned to him as to a trusted old family friend. He wanted John Hay to use his excellent contacts with the British to negotiate a better U.S. treaty for a Central American canal. Hay succeeded brilliantly. By the terms of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty of 1901, the United States now had a free hand to negotiate, build, and *fortify* a canal across the isthmus.⁶² (Hay refused to pay any attention to what he called the *hyphenated* Americans. This was a not-too-veiled reference to anti-British German and Irish Americans.⁶³) And TR fully intended to use that free hand in constructing an *American* canal to link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Another great test of TR’s presidency came in 1902 as the United Mine

* Prior to Lincoln’s adoption of the Roosevelt *allotment* system, thousands of Northern families were left destitute. Their young men frittered away their military pay in camp on high-priced snacks, whiskey, gambling, and prostitutes. The Roosevelt system—still in use today—permitted these men to send cash *allotments* home to their needful families before the money was ever paid out to them.

Workers union called a national strike against the anthracite coal owners. The nation was completely dependent upon coal. Homes, factories, and public buildings were heated by coal. Railroad trains and steamships were fueled by it. Without coal, the nation would be crippled.

TR summoned the mine owners to the White House to meet with John Mitchell and other union leaders. “Are you asking us to meet with a set of *outlaws*?” asked John Markle of the owners’ group.⁶⁴ Infuriated, Teddy said of Markle’s arrogance: “If it wasn’t for the high office I held, I would have taken him by the seat of the breeches and the nape of the neck and chucked him out of that window!”⁶⁵ The attitude of the owners was exemplified by a private letter from George Baer that soon leaked out: “The rights and interests of the laboring man will be protected and cared for—not by labor agitators, but by the Christian men to whom God in His infinite wisdom has given the control of the property interests of the country.”⁶⁶ Such a cocksure notion of what the Almighty intended made the owners seem ridiculous to the public at large.

The miners were striking against deplorable working conditions. As Irving Stone would write in his biography of radical lawyer Clarence Darrow: “Six men of a thousand [miners] were killed every year; hundreds were maimed by explosions and cave-ins; few escaped the ravages of asthma, bronchitis, chronic rheumatism, consumption, heart trouble. By the age of fifty the miners were worn out and broken, good for little but the human slag heap.”⁶⁷

One of the most frightening hazards miners faced occurred when a bootlace or shirtsleeve became entangled in the gears of a coal-crushing machine and the miner was dragged to a slow and agonizing death. Owner representative George Baer denied that the miners suffered at all: “Why, they can’t even speak English!”⁶⁸ Perhaps Teddy could identify with United Mine Worker President John Mitchell because he could remember fighting for breath when he was a sickly boy, stricken with asthma.

TR rattled his saber (something he *loved* doing). He let it be known he was contemplating taking over the coal mines and having the army operate them.

Worried that he might do something rash like that, the owners soon agreed to an arbitration panel. TR quickly named Catholic Bishop John

Spalding to the panel. The largely Catholic miners trusted their bishop. In addition, Teddy recruited a willing former president, Democrat Grover Cleveland. Soon, the miners and owners came to a compromise agreement, and the nation was saved from paralysis. It was the first instance of “jaw-boning” by a president, and it was a great success for Roosevelt.

Mindful of the fierce reaction from the South over his invitation to Dr. Washington, TR decided to visit his mother’s homeland for a hunting trip. He wanted to mend political fences. Because of the many death threats TR had received and the recent McKinley assassination, the Secret Service nervously watched the New Yorker president as he descended on Dixie “loaded for bear.”* The trip, however, was an embarrassing failure as TR repeatedly failed to bag a catch. Finally, TR’s Mississippi hosts cornered a small black bear, wounded it, and called eagerly for the president to come and shoot it. Teddy the sportsman resolutely refused. He had eagerly shot grizzly bears, but he could not bring himself to take unfair advantage of the terrified, trapped animal. *Washington Post* cartoonist Clifford Berry immediately offered a picture he called “Drawing the line in Mississippi.” Berry intended it as a commentary on “drawing the line” on *race* in the South. But the country missed the barbed point entirely. Instead, the whole nation thrilled to their Teddy’s nobly sparing the poor little bear. In no time, it became the story of “Teddy’s bear.” That Christmas, New York’s posh F.A.O. Schwarz store offered an elegant bear crafted by Germany’s Steiff toy company. In Brooklyn’s much less swankier precincts, Morris Michtom offered a stuffed toy bear for just \$1.50.⁶⁹ Instantly, a worldwide craze began that shows no sign of ebbing a century later. The teddy bear captured the hearts of children everywhere.

When TR turned his attention to the powerful railroad trusts, he next decided to go after the new Northern Securities Company. Banker J. Pierpont Morgan had brought together controlling shares in the Northern Pacific, Union Pacific, and Burlington Railroads. The board was composed of such

* Following the assassination of President William McKinley in 1901, the *third* chief executive assassinated in just thirty-five years, Congress voted to provide Secret Service agents to protect the president and his family. The irrepressible Roosevelt clan gave their Secret Service detail quite a workout.

titans of industry as Morgan himself, James J. Hill, and E. H. Harriman. Morgan was called *Jupiter* on Wall Street. “The boldest man was likely to become timid under his piercing gaze,” men said of him.⁷⁰ Wall Street was therefore shocked when TR instructed his attorney general, Philander Knox, to file suit in federal court *against* the Northern Securities Company. TR said they were violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890. But what was *this*? The magnates were used to the federal government using the Sherman Act against *unions*. How dare the president wield this club against *them*?

Exhaling clouds of cigar smoke—like an active volcano—Jupiter came to the White House to put the new president in his place. “If we have done anything wrong, [just] send your man [Attorney General Knox] to see my man and they can fix it up.”⁷¹ TR did not think he was settling on the sale of a private yacht or arranging the swap of thoroughbred racehorses. He marveled at the way the Wall Street baron talked down to him. “That can’t be done,” TR responded.

When the Roosevelt administration finally won its case in the Supreme Court in 1904, TR was elated. The Court ruled that the Northern Securities Company had indeed violated the Sherman Act and ordered that the giant trust be broken up.

Roosevelt’s reputation as a “trust buster” was well earned. The only downside of the Court’s decision was the fact that TR’s own appointee, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, had voted with the minority. TR was furious with Holmes. He would not be the last president to find disappointment in one of his nominees to the High Court, but few presidents expressed their displeasure more colorfully: “I could carve out of a *banana* a judge with more backbone than that!”⁷²

Teddy’s acts as president had made him wildly popular with the American people, if not with leaders of his party and their friends on Wall Street. Still, Teddy was something of a force of nature. He preached the *strenuous* life—and practiced it. He loved to lead foreign diplomats, military officers, and panting civil servants on his soon-famous “point-to-point” walks through Washington’s Rock Creek Park. “Over, under or through,” Teddy called out to sweating hikers clambering over boulders and through muddy streams, “*never* around!” It would be a watchword for Roosevelt’s style of

governance. Commenting on the president's boundless enthusiasm, the British minister reportedly said, "You must remember that Theodore is really a six-year-old boy." Not many six-year-old boys read *Anna Karenina* as they bed down on a saddle under the Dakota stars, or headed off in hot pursuit of outlaws. Nor are many six-year-olds conversant with Icelandic *sagas*. TR was the most widely read and genuinely scholarly president to occupy the White House since Thomas Jefferson. (Despite this, TR vocally denounced the Sage of Monticello for his neglect of the navy.) Still, the British minister did capture TR's exuberance, his boyish *love* of action and adventure.

The Roosevelt family, too, made a great splash in TR's White House years. Theodore Jr., Archie, Kermit, and Quentin were always getting in scrapes. One time, Archie and Kermit brought their pony, Algonquin, upstairs in the White House elevator. They wanted to charm their sick brother, Quentin. Another time they loosed a four-foot king snake on a cabinet meeting. The country watched with wonder as the Roosevelts sent their children to Washington, D.C.'s public schools. There, the children of a president sat next to the children of milk wagon drivers, seamstresses, and postal workers. The capital's public schools were then segregated, a fact that TR deplored in a Message to Congress:

It is out of the question for our people as a whole permanently to rise by treading down any of their own number. The free public school, the chance for each boy or girl to get a good elementary education, lies at the foundation of our whole political situation. . . . It is as true for the Negro as for the white man.⁷³

TR's daughter by his first wife was known throughout the country as *Princess Alice*. Headstrong and spoiled, she defiantly quit school and took up smoking. When friends pleaded with him to rein her in, Theodore, exasperated, responded, "I can govern the country or I can govern Alice. I cannot possibly do both." Over it all, First Lady Edith Kermit Carow Roosevelt presided with intelligence, grace, and patience. A friend once remarked to Mrs. Roosevelt how surprised she was to see all the tusks, heads, and hides TR had proudly displayed at Sagamore Hill, the family's Oyster Bay, New York,

home. Mrs. Roosevelt tolerantly showed her friend the only stuffed animal she allowed in the dining room. It was *behind* the chair of the lady of the house, where she would never have to look at it. Mrs. Roosevelt made sure the White House was a genuine cultural center. In the days before Washington, D.C., had any but vaudeville theaters, this was an important achievement.

IV. TR AND THE SQUARE DEAL

Few of America's leaders in 1901 could claim to know *How the Other Half Lives*. That was the title of an 1890 book of photos and text by Roosevelt's friend Jacob Riis. It catalogued the truly deplorable conditions in which hundreds of thousands of slum dwellers lived. Especially poignant were Riis's pictures of homeless little boys. Theodore Roosevelt, almost alone among Republicans, knew. He had investigated slum conditions on excursions through Brooklyn with Riis when he was a police commissioner. His father had founded the Children's Aid Society. The elder Roosevelt had spent Sunday evenings for many years reading stories to the impoverished newsboys. He made sure they had at least one hot, nourishing meal that day.

What TR already knew, the country was soon to learn, when *McClure's Magazine* began the series called "The Shame of the Cities." Writer Lincoln Steffens appealed for reform of the municipal corruption that rested on a rotting foundation of slums. TR called many of the progressive writers who constantly dug up stories of want and wrongdoing "muckrakers," and warned against a fixed focus on what was wrong in society. Nonetheless, he also spearheaded reform.

Teddy was well-born. His family had made millions in glass and real estate. He could "ride to hounds" in the fox hunts the social elite of Long Island thoroughly enjoyed, but then Teddy would ride the fourteen miles back to Oyster Bay to avoid spending the night in the "intolerable companionship" of the *Four Hundred*.^{*} He criticized vain rich people whom he accused of living "lives of ignoble ease."⁷⁴

* The Four Hundred was shorthand for the number of prominent names that appeared in the Social Register, a listing of the best-connected, usually wealthiest New Yorkers of TR's day.



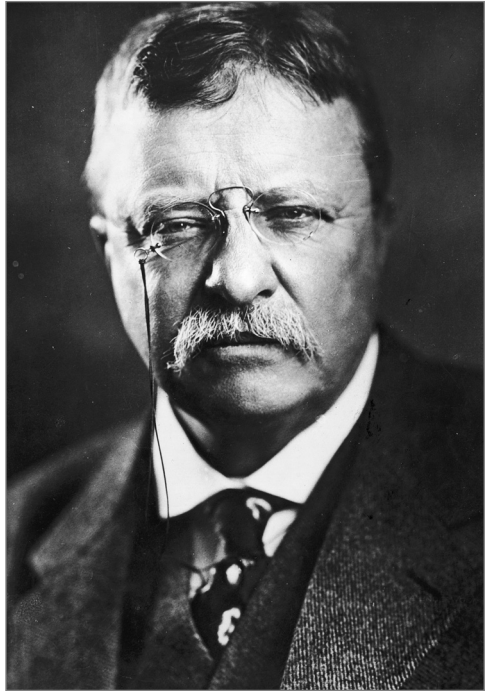
Rough Rider Theodore Roosevelt. As assistant secretary of the Navy, Theodore Roosevelt prepared the fleet for war with Spain. Then, he volunteered for duty in Cuba. He raised a regiment of his friends. It was an eclectic group of Ivy League athletes, society swells, and rough-hewn cowboys he had befriended in the Dakota Territory. TR's "crowded hour" at San Juan Hill made his reputation and provided the launching pad for his national political career.

Jane Addams. She was "beautiful with virtue." Miss Addams dedicated her life to serving the poor at Hull House, amid the slums of Chicago.

Once, when distraught firemen begged her to authorize them to shoot horses badly burned in a fire, Jane Addams gave the order. She rode with them to the stables, bearing only the moral authority of the community's respect. She lent her great prestige to Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moose candidacy for the White House in 1912, but she broke with TR over U.S. entry into World War I.



TR as president. *Roosevelt was the youngest man ever to serve as president. He dominated the political landscape, reveling in the White House as his Bully Pulpit. He was a trustbuster who nonetheless warned against too much muckraking. He “made the dirt fly” in Panama, wielded the big stick in diplomacy, and won the Nobel Peace Prize for settling the Russo-Japanese War. The antics of Roosevelt’s large and lively family thrilled American newspaper readers. With the return of his Great White Fleet from its round-the-world voyage in 1909, TR voluntarily turned over the keys to the White House to his friend, William Howard Taft. It was a move he, Taft, and the country would soon regret.*



Taft and Wilson at the 1913 inauguration. *“Vote for Roosevelt, pray for Taft, but bet on Wilson.” That was the sound advice given to the young Harvard professor, Samuel Eliot Morison. The bitter split of TR and Taft, once the dearest of friends, splintered the Republican majority and guaranteed the election of New Jersey’s Democratic governor, Woodrow Wilson. Wilson’s first term saw many progressive measures passed through Congress, eliciting strong approval from many reformers. In foreign policy, however, Wilson was frustrated in Mexico. He labored tirelessly but ultimately without success to keep America out of the Great War in Europe.*

TR fearlessly took on the all-powerful railroads. With the Elkins Act (1903), rebates to favored customers were outlawed. This was the very technique that John D. Rockefeller of Standard Oil had exploited so effectively. Rockefeller would demand and receive from railroads great rebates based on the huge volume of business he gave them. This comparative advantage over other independent oil producers helped Rockefeller drive them into bankruptcy. Rockefeller excelled at this “cutthroat competition.” When Congress balked at passage of the reform bill, TR let it be known that Rockefeller was using his vast wealth to “influence” wavering senators. Congress had little choice but to give the president his reform.⁷⁵

Around this time Upton Sinclair, another muckraking journalist, published *The Jungle*. He hoped it would lead Americans to embrace Marxism. It didn't. But it did lead readers to demand reform of the meatpacking industry Sinclair so vividly exposed. Sinclair wrote of the rats, filth, diseased cattle, and swine that went into the canning process. He even described workers who fell into the open vats: “Sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham's Pure Leaf Lard.”⁷⁶

Humorist Finley Peter Dunne's Irish character, *Mr. Dooley*, commented on the wild success of Sinclair's novel. “It was a sweetly sintimintal little volume to be r-read durin' Lent.”⁷⁷ And Mr. Dooley's description of the president at his breakfast table had the country rollicking. “There was Tiddy, readin' the book and, whoop, all iv a sudden, he jumps up an' flings his sausages outter the winder, yellin' 'I'm p'isoned, I'm p'isoned!’”

The result of all this agitation was the Pure Food and Drug Act, which Teddy signed with relish. Now, clearly, TR had broken away from the philosophy of Senator Mark Hanna. Hanna told his fellow Ohioans they could do no better than to “stand pat” with the GOP.⁷⁸ Theodore, Rough Rider, cowboy, big game hunter, was not about to *stand pat* for anything he thought was morally wrong.

Stand-patters in the Republican Party hoped someone would rescue them from their cowboy president. Referring to his accession through assassination, they called him *His Accidency* and pleaded with Senator Mark Hanna to fight TR for the 1904 Republican nomination for president.

Senator Hanna seemed willing enough, but his untimely death left the Stand-patters without a horse in the race.

Hoping to attract support among disaffected business leaders in 1904, Democrats turned their backs on Bryan and radicalism and nominated Wall Street lawyer Alton B. Parker. Without public opinion polling, TR could not be sure how he stood with the American people. He worried that the Democrats might beat him by clever politicking. "They are trying to carry New York by putting Cleveland on the stump and keeping out Bryan; and Indiana by putting Bryan on the stump and keeping out Cleveland . . ."79 For his part, Teddy steered a steady course between the extremes of both parties. He explained his viewpoint: "My action on labor should always be considered with my action as regards capital, and both are reducible to my favorite formula—a square deal for every man."⁸⁰

Americans obviously approved of the Square Deal. They returned TR to the White House by a landslide. Roosevelt won 7,623,486 popular votes (56.4 percent) and 336 electoral votes to Parker's 5,077,911 popular votes (37.6 percent) and only 140 electoral votes. Parker won only the states of the old Confederacy plus Kentucky and Maryland. Of particular significance in this race was the strong vote pulled by Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist candidate, who polled 402,283 popular votes (3 percent).

Theodore Roosevelt had just turned forty-six when he was elected overwhelmingly to a full term in his own right. He had every reason to feel that his leadership was vindicated. Then, at the height of his power, he committed a grave error: he announced "under no circumstances" would he be a candidate for reelection in 1908. It was a decision he and millions of his countrymen would come to regret bitterly.

Surely one of TR's most enduring achievements was his passion for conservation. No American president since Washington had spent as much time in the wilderness. Even as a young man, TR had written authoritatively on American birds. Hunting, hiking, rowing, riding: these were all second nature to this intrepid adventurer. He worked closely with his friend, Gifford Pinchot, the U.S. chief forester, to set aside vast tracts of woodlands as national parks.

At the time, most other politicians formed an Amen Corner for the

blinkered views of the speaker of the House. Joe Cannon growled “not one cent for scenery!”^{81*} Theodore personally intervened with Speaker Cannon to save his National Reclamation Bill for irrigating arid western lands.⁸² He appointed an Inland Waterways Commission in 1907 to study the complex interrelation of rivers, soil, waterpower, and transportation. The same year, he convened a White House conference on conservation, an unprecedented act that gave the subject a big boost in publicity.⁸³

Where he could not get the desired legislation from a grudging Congress, Teddy would act by Executive Order—as he did in creating national wildlife sanctuaries. And when neither route was possible, Teddy could *preach* conservation. For this, especially, he regarded the White House as his “Bully Pulpit.” Teddy’s vigor, his enthusiasm, his integrity, and his powerful intellect helped keep Americans excited about the Bully Pulpit concept. Later in the twentieth century, as we shall see, Americans became less eager to be “preached to” from presidents mounting the Bully Pulpit.

As president, Roosevelt used the bully pulpit to raise public concerns about what we today call family values.⁸⁴ Studying government reports and census statistics, President Roosevelt noted that the birthrate of Americans was dropping for the first time since independence.⁸⁵ He comprehended the challenges to family life that were presented by the new industrial order. He viewed economic issues in terms of their impact on the family. As he would later say: “I do not wish to see this country a country of selfish prosperity where those who enjoy the material prosperity think only of the selfish gratification of their own desires, and are content to import from abroad not only their art, not only their literature, but even their babies.”⁸⁶

Roosevelt practiced what he preached. Not only did he have a large and boisterous family, but his and Edith’s family was a “blended family,” combining his daughter from his first marriage with *five* children from his second. Even in the White House, the president always made time to romp with his lively brood. More important, he obviously took joy in their life together.

* This is the Republican speaker for whom the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C., is named.

V. WIELDING THE BIG STICK

“I have always been fond of the West African proverb: ‘Speak softly and carry a big stick, you will go far,’” TR had said.⁸⁷ He proved it again and again during his White House years.

No sooner had he inherited the office, however, than President Roosevelt faced a great moral crisis over U.S. policy in the Philippines. Anti-imperialists got hold of an army report of U.S. atrocities toward Filipino guerillas. What kind of “civilizing” and “Christianizing” was this, they demanded to know. TR had tried to keep the reports from coming out—always a mistake in Washington. But when the country was sufficiently horrified by the lurid stories, TR counterattacked.

He gave his close friend, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the army files that documented what the Filipino *insurrectos* had done to captured Americans. Our soldiers suffered greatly. They had their eyes gouged. They had been disemboweled, slow-roasted, some even castrated and gagged with their own testicles. Lodge’s cool, dispassionate cataloguing of these horrors created a sensation: “Perhaps the action of the American soldier is not entirely without provocation.”⁸⁸

Fortunately for the United States, the Philippine insurrection was even then collapsing. More fortunate, still, was the dispatch of the able Ohio lawyer, William Howard Taft, to Manila as governor of the Philippines. Brimming with genuine goodwill, the 350-pound Taft brought intelligence and humanity to his task. He referred to the Filipinos as his “little brown brothers.” Although rudely condescending to our ears, that sentiment reassured Americans and Filipinos that our rule in the island territory would be humane and temporary. Soon, major land reform in the islands created a rising middle class. U.S. soldiers still griped, “He may be a brother of Big Bill Taft / But he ain’t even a [cousin] of mine!”⁸⁹ Taft’s success in the Philippines opened up wider vistas to his considerable talents. Americans chuckled at the story of a supposed exchange of telegrams between Taft and TR.

Hearing reports that the indispensable governor was seriously ill, TR was said to have cabled Manila:

TR: Alarmed you're unwell. Report.

TAFT: Am Fine. Rode 25 miles horseback.

TR: How is horse?

Soon, Teddy's gaze shifted north. Gold strikes in Alaska's Klondike region and Canada's Yukon Territory made a boundary dispute between the United States and Canada especially contentious. Canadian claims to a greater portion of the Alaskan panhandle were something utterly novel, and TR was having none of it. "This Canadian claim is entirely modern," he complained in March 1902. He showed friends Canadian maps that twenty years before had marked the boundary just where he now said it was. "If we suddenly claimed part of Nova Scotia you would not arbitrate," he said to a British friend.⁹⁰ He felt so strongly about it that he threatened to send in U.S. troops to reinforce the border. Instead, he sent Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes to Britain with an emphatic personal letter to underscore his determination not to yield.

Sir Wilfred Laurier, Canada's first prime minister from Quebec, sought a way out through mediation. Sir Wilfred admitted he needed "to save his face."⁹¹ The British, worried about the rising naval power of Germany, made sure their representative on the boundary commission ruled in favor of the Americans. The Canadians howled, but TR won an important victory.

France's West Indian colony of Martinique was considered by some to be a veritable paradise. St. Pierre, the island's capital, was called the "Paris of the Caribbean." Americans and Europeans therefore reacted with horror when, on 8 May 1902, Mount Pélée erupted, covering the beautiful town with lava and ash and killing twenty-nine thousand people. Only two survivors were rescued.

Philippe Jean Bunau-Varilla was an engineer for the French company that had gone bankrupt trying to dig a canal through the Isthmus of Panama. He kept an eye out for volcanoes. He had come to Washington to try to persuade the Americans to select the Panamanian route for a canal and to *reject* the Nicaraguan route preferred by many. If the Americans chose the Panama district of Colombia, the canal would be further *away* from the mainland United States, true, but it would also bail out Bunau-

Varilla's French investors. Nicaragua was eager to have the Americans build their canal through that impoverished country.

But Nicaragua also had a volcano. When Bunau-Varilla saw a picture of Mount Momotombo on a Nicaraguan postage stamp, he made sure every member of Congress got a *personal* copy. Even nature cooperated when Mount Momotombo sent up a fiery jet of lava—just in time for the Panama-Nicaragua Senate debate.⁹²

Everything seemed ready when Secretary of State John Hay successfully negotiated a treaty with Colombia's foreign minister, Tomás Herrán. Under the Hay-Herrán Treaty, quickly ratified by the U.S. Senate in early 1903, the United States would pay Colombia \$10 million outright and \$250,000 annually to lease the canal. Herrán was a cultured, honorable advocate. But when the Hay-Herrán Treaty was rejected by the Colombian senate, TR was outraged. He suspected the Colombians were squeezing the *Yanquis* for more money. Colombia's dictator José Marroquín might be trying to wait out the Americans until October 1904, when the French lease would run out. Then, he could gain a major share of the \$40 million the United States was prepared to pay French stockholders for their rights.⁹³ Privately, Teddy fumed that the "blackmailers of Bogotá" should not be permitted to block the progress of the world.

Panamanians were also upset. They had revolted fifty-three times in fifty-seven years against Colombian rule. Now, it seemed, the faraway dictator in Bogotá and his corrupt senate were about to derail their best opportunity in years. In the White House, TR met with Bunau-Varilla. TR probably did *not* encourage Bunau-Varilla to incite a Panamanian revolt against Colombia, but he doubtless did nothing to *discourage* such a revolt. Bunau-Varilla soon cabled his friends in Panama City that the USS *Nashville* would conveniently arrive off Colón on 2 November 1903. That was assurance enough for the small band of Panamanian rebels. Roosevelt instructed Hay to grant official U.S. diplomatic recognition to the new Panamanian Republic on 6 November 1903, just three days after the not wholly spontaneous revolt took place.⁹⁴

Bunau-Varilla was authorized to act *for* the new republic in quickly renegotiating a canal treaty. Panamanians later claimed that the French

citizen had conceded far too much and gained too little in his rush to claim the \$40 million prize for his French stockholders. Panamanians would ever after complain that the ten-mile “Canal Zone” over which the United States would exercise sovereignty “in perpetuity” was an intolerable infringement on their national dignity. They would charge that John Hay had so hurried the negotiations that Bunau-Varilla even had to use the Hay family signet ring to “seal” the document. Europeans sneered at Teddy’s “cowboy diplomacy.” Many in the United States denounced the “indecent haste” with which Teddy had acted.

“Piracy.”

“Scandal.”

“The most discreditable incident in our history.”

These were just some of the criticisms lodged against TR’s highhanded action.⁹⁵ But Teddy was having none of it. He had resolved to “make the dirt fly” in Panama. He later reflected on it as one of his greatest achievements: “If I had followed the traditional, conservative methods, I would have submitted a dignified State paper of probably 200 pages to Congress and the debates on it would have been going on yet [in 1911]; but I took the Canal Zone and let Congress debate: and while the debate goes on the Canal does also.”⁹⁶

Later, when Woodrow Wilson’s administration expressed regrets and agreed to pay Colombia \$25 million in damages, opponents called the payment *canalimony*.⁹⁷

As loud as TR was over Panama, he exercised *quiet* diplomacy with Germany over Venezuela. When the British and Germans threatened a joint occupation of the South American republic because of a chronic failure to pay just debts, TR let the German ambassador know that any European occupation of an independent nation in the Western Hemisphere would be a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. Any such violation, TR said, would *surely* mean war with the United States. When the British backed away, the Kaiser felt exposed. Roosevelt was careful *not* to let the confrontation leak out. He would give the Kaiser “the satisfaction of feeling that his dignity and reputation in the face of the world were safe,” TR later wrote.⁹⁸ Thus, Roosevelt showed his subtle understanding of the many uses of diplomacy. The frequent indebtedness of Latin American nations led to a constant threat of foreign intervention.

To forestall such assaults on the Monroe Doctrine, Theodore Roosevelt asserted his own belief that the United States might, from time to time, be called upon to intervene in order to defend the hemisphere. This “Roosevelt Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine was highly controversial in its own day and has since been abandoned by the United States. But it did ensure no foreign interventions in this continent during the Roosevelt presidency.

Roosevelt faced another foreign crisis when a North African desert chieftain called the *Raisuli* took hostage the U.S. consul, Ion Perdicaris. The Raisuli was trying thereby to exert pressure against a rival Arab ruler. TR instructed Secretary of State John Hay to send this terse message: “We want Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead.” He got Perdicaris alive.

Roosevelt’s reputation for wielding the big stick strengthened his hand as a peacemaker. When Japan smashed the Russian fleet in a sudden, overwhelming attack in 1904, a major war broke out. TR called both parties to New Hampshire in 1905 and hammered out the Treaty of Portsmouth to end the Russo-Japanese War. His efforts made him the first American to win the Nobel Peace Prize.⁹⁹

Roosevelt’s last years in power were stained by one ineradicable act of injustice on his part. Black troopers from the army were assigned to Brownsville, Texas, at the height of racial tension. When a riot broke out in 1906 and some civilians were killed, accused troopers refused to step forward, and their brothers refused to point them out. TR thought the soldiers were showing a loyalty to race over their duty to the country and the army. He ordered the dishonorable discharge of the entire company of 167 black soldiers. As someone who knew the ugly truth of race relations at the time, who even loudly condemned lynchings, how could TR have expected the black troopers to have confidence in the military or civilian justice systems of the day? Teddy is justly famous as an advocate of civil rights. In fact, he had sent his own children to an integrated public school on Long Island. Still, his Brownsville judgment was a cruel and unjust act.*

President Roosevelt constantly sought ways to dramatize American

* President Richard Nixon in 1972 signed legislation to restore the discharged troopers to pay status, and President Bill Clinton expunged the dishonorable discharges. Both worthy measures were long overdue.

naval power. In 1905, he sent a squadron to France to bring back the body of naval hero John Paul Jones. Jones's body had been interred in a Paris cemetery since his death in 1792. With a flair for the historic, Roosevelt presided over an impressive ceremony at the Naval Academy in April 1906. There, before a glittering international audience, he marked the return of Jones's remains to America. France sent a large portion of their fleet to the Chesapeake Bay to honor the Revolutionary War captain.¹⁰⁰

Approaching the end of his presidency, TR resolved to brandish his big stick one last time. He sent the large, modern fleet of U.S. battleships on an unprecedented round the world cruise. The Great White Fleet—so called because the ships' hulls were painted white—showed the flag in dozens of foreign ports.*

Congress balked at the distance and the expense of the voyage. So Teddy used his allotted funds to send the fleet to Yokohama, Japan. Then he forced Congress to pay to bring the Great White Fleet home!

The trip was a public relations bonanza for the United States, while demonstrating to the crowned heads of Europe and Japan all the muscle of the brash young republic. At a time of growing Anglo-German naval rivalry, TR forcefully demonstrated that the United States was not a country to be trifled with on the high seas.

Roosevelt was determined to choose his own successor. Throughout his second term, he had come increasingly to rely on his loyal and efficient secretary of war, William Howard Taft. Taft would have preferred to be chief justice, but TR and Mrs. Taft had other ideas. The Republican Party was happy to have the popular, jovial Ohioan at the head of its ticket. Democrats again chose the Great Commoner, William Jennings Bryan. Older now, but not notably wiser, Bryan mounted a *third* vigorous campaign for the White House.

Taft benefited from the great popularity of TR and the progressive record of his administration. When the votes were counted in 1908, Taft bested the

* "Unlike the Army, the Navy had a long tradition of accepting blacks as crew members. Moreover, the very nature of naval service militated against any effort to segregate blacks and whites."
—from *The Navy*, edited by Rear Admiral W. J. Holland, Jr., USN (Ret.), p. 47. While true enough, many black sailors were restricted to ratings like steward and mess cook for too long.

Democrat Bryan by 7,678,908 votes (321 electoral votes) to 6,409,104 for the Prairie populist. Perennial Socialist candidate Eugene Victor Debs remained strong, with 420,793 votes. Most of Debs votes, it was agreed, came from the Democratic ranks, while the Prohibition candidate took 253,840 votes, mostly from the Republicans. Bryan responded to his loss with good humor. He compared himself to the town drunk who was tossed out of the saloon not once, or twice, but three times. “I’m beginning to get the idea,” called the disheveled man from a mud puddle, “that you all don’t want me *in there!*”

As Taft prepared his smooth transition, TR insisted on one more headline grabber as president. When he issued new fitness regulations for the army, some of the desk-bound brass loudly complained that they were too demanding. Nobody can be expected to ride ninety miles in three days, they said. “Nonsense,” TR said, taking up the challenge. He assured skeptics he could ride ninety miles *in one day!* With just weeks remaining in office, the fifty-year-old Teddy mounted a succession of horses and took off in the dead of winter for Warrenton, Virginia. His faithful military aide, Major Archie Butt, and a small contingent of hardy souls joined him. He stopped at Warrenton, shook hands all around, and addressed the schoolchildren there. Then he remounted and galloped back to Washington. The presidential party returned to the capital after dark. The ice-covered roads made riding treacherous. Rejecting calls to dismount, TR charged on. When they reached the White House, Edith Roosevelt greeted the ice-covered party and brought them in for a hot meal and warm hospitality.¹⁰¹

Reporters who asked the outgoing—very *outgoing*—president to speculate on the role of former presidents of the United States got no detached and philosophical comment from TR. “[So] far as it is concerned with *this* president, you can say that the United States need do nothing with the ex-president. I will do all the doing that is going to be done myself.”¹⁰² Roosevelt exulted in his nearly eight-year stand at the helm of the ship of state: “While president, I have *been* president—*emphatically.*”¹⁰³

Wistfully, Henry Adams looked across Lafayette Park from his Victorian mansion. He scanned the White House that Theodore Roosevelt had transformed. “This old house will seem dull and sad when my Theodore has gone,” he said.¹⁰⁴ Taft was inaugurated 4 March 1909, with all pomp and

circumstance in the middle of a blinding snowstorm. Theodore wanted to give his man some time to put his own stamp on the presidency. He cooperatively announced he was heading to Africa for a hunting safari.

Not everyone was sorry to see him go. One critic wrote: "Mr. Roosevelt is to leave us for awhile, and certainly the manner of his going is appropriate. Shots will sound and blood will flow and his knife will find its living hilt. The . . . skins of the kings of the jungle will dry upon his tent pegs." But when he came back, TR would resume his role as America's "Dominant Note and Big Noise," this acerbic observer said.¹⁰⁵ Teddy's old Wall Street adversary, J. Pierpont Morgan, is said to have offered this toast to the departing president's trip: "America expects every lion to do his duty."^{*}

VI. THE TAFT INTERLUDE

America was ready for a breather. William Howard Taft's 1908 election victory was even stronger than TR's vote of 1904 had been. Americans embraced their genial new president with respect and affection. A favorite story of the time said the president stood up on a streetcar to give *three* ladies his seat.¹⁰⁶ But Taft was highly intelligent, loyal, and able. As with any period of revolutionary activity, there is the trailblazer who marks out the new course to be followed. Then there is the necessary period of consolidation. Taft was a consolidator. He enacted *more* of the Roosevelt program than TR had been able to do.¹⁰⁷ During his four years in office, Taft's administration would prosecute *twice* as many antitrust cases as Roosevelt had done in seven and a half years.¹⁰⁸ This was no easy task, since the power of the trusts was daunting. At this time, U.S. Steel *alone* had a greater budget than the entire U.S. government!¹⁰⁹ Taft got little credit for this among reformers. They saw him leisurely swinging a golf club in the company of wealthy friends. It was hard to see him as a trust-buster.

An early conflict caused a serious rift between the Taft administration and TR's conservationist supporters. While Teddy was slaying wild beasts in Africa, his great friend, Gifford Pinchot, leveled a serious charge against

* The witty "Jupiter" of Wall Street was referring, of course, to the famous signal sent by Lord Nelson before the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805: "England expects every man will do his duty."

his boss, Richard Ballinger. Ballinger was Taft's secretary of the interior. Pinchot, America's chief forester, charged the secretary with corruption. Worse, he suggested the secretary had given away federal lands to a syndicate controlled by Benjamin Guggenheim and TR's old nemesis, J. Pierpont Morgan. Congress cleared Ballinger of wrongdoing, but the reformers sided with Pinchot.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, Taft dismissed Pinchot, creating a rift between himself and TR's partisans.

Teddy's return from Africa was delayed by his appointment as President Taft's personal representative to the funeral of Britain's King Edward VII. As a *former* head of state, TR was placed behind all the crowned heads of Europe as they marched through London streets. Many Americans thought it ridiculous to have their Teddy give place to the grand dukes of what Winston Churchill called "pumpernickel principalities." But that was royal protocol. No matter. Teddy stole the show just by showing up. He was the bride at every wedding, goes the saying, and the corpse at every wake. He met many of the crowned heads, but he *avoided* Churchill, then Britain's first lord of the admiralty.* In an incredible example of pot-and-kettling, TR thought Churchill a questionable self-promoter!¹¹¹

Following the brilliant diplomatic success of Roosevelt's Great White Fleet steaming around the globe, President Taft sent a squadron of battleships on a goodwill tour of England in 1910. There, U.S. Admiral Sims got carried away in a speech in London's Guildhall, pledging that if Britain were ever threatened, the British could "count upon every man, every dollar, every ship, and every drop of blood of their kinsmen across the ocean."¹¹² The Germans were outraged (but were they *planning* to threaten Britain?); Irish Americans and German Americans certainly did not consider themselves *kinsmen* to the British. The president, faultless in his intent, had to issue a stern rebuke of his admiral.** In America, president and Congress make foreign policy, not admirals.

* Churchill's title made him responsible for the Royal Navy, the greatest fleet on earth. TR and Churchill should have had many things to talk about.

** Despite this *contretemps*, Admiral William S. Sims was destined for great leadership in WWI. He had a quick mind and a fine sense of humor. He once suggested an improvement on the French use of carrier pigeons for military communications: crossbreed the pigeons with parrots so we wouldn't have to write the messages!

To put his own mark on the presidency, Taft tried to lower tariffs with Canada. It was a generous, wise move (and the precursor to Ronald Reagan's North American Free Trade Agreement—NAFTA). Seven million Canadians would gain access to a market of ninety-two million Americans.¹¹³ Poor Taft's good deed did not go unpunished, however. Canadians were still bruised from TR's big sticking over the Alaskan boundary dispute of 1902. When the Democratic speaker of the House, Missouri's Champ Clark, spoke in favor of the treaty, he said he was for it because he wanted to see the Stars and Stripes flying over "every foot of North America."¹¹⁴ This incredibly oafish statement caused a furor across the border. Canadian conservatives raised a war cry of "No Truck or Trade with the Yankees!" They trounced the great French-Canadian prime minister, Sir Wilfred Laurier, in a special election in 1911.¹¹⁵ Worse, TR had campaigned vigorously *against* the treaty as a sellout to the trusts.¹¹⁶ It was shabby treatment for America's great Canadian friend.

Taft suffered another diplomatic setback when a dispute broke out between the United States and czarist Russia. American Jews who had come to the United States from Russia often prospered under American freedom. Now, as American citizens, they returned to their little *shtetls* and shared their new-earned wealth with impoverished relatives in the Old Country. Russia, bitterly anti-Semitic, tried to require that these naturalized American citizens apply all over again to leave the country. Americans were indignant at this insult to our sovereignty. Congress cancelled a U.S.-Russian trade agreement. The Russian *Duma* retaliated by banning all U.S. Jews from visiting their benighted country.¹¹⁷ It was an ugly controversy. Taft was, again, faultless. But it was also true that U.S.-Russian relations, which had been so good for so long, collapsed on his watch.

VII. UNSINKABLE, UNTHINKABLE

It's not surprising that pressures should have risen at the White House during Taft's term. America was undergoing rapid change. Following the Wright Brothers' historic flight in 1903, an aviation industry was born. Henry Ford was putting ever-more Americans on the roads with his *Model T*. (Ford was a pioneer in cutting costs by mass production, putting thousands of cars on

America's poorly paved roads. Critics said you could have any color you want, so long as it's black. Ford soon provided consumer choice on color too.) Along with this increased mobility came danger. Highway fatalities for 1911 rose to 1,291.¹¹⁸

Theodore Roosevelt thought he had the answer to this quickening pace of change. He delivered a far-ranging speech in Osawatimie, Kansas, in August 1910, in which he called for more regulation of corporations and railroads, a graduated income tax, reform of banks, labor legislation, and direct primaries. He called his program the New Nationalism.¹¹⁹ It marked a sharp departure from Taft administration policies, and it split the GOP. Democrats, not surprisingly, took over Congress that November.

Taft felt the burden greatly. So did Major Archie Butt of Georgia, Taft's loyal military aide. When he saw TR upon his return from Europe, the gallant Southerner remarked how the old Rough Rider had changed: "He is bigger, broader, capable of greater good or greater evil, than when he left."¹²⁰ Major Butt was deeply devoted to *both* Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. To give Archie Butt a much-needed break, President Taft sent him on a diplomatic mission to the Vatican. He could relax in Europe afterward and enjoy a homeward cruise on the maiden voyage of the White Star Line's luxurious new liner, the Royal Mail Steamer *Titanic*.

The *Titanic* represented the latest in marine technology. Her steel compartments and watertight doors led many in the press to label her "unsinkable."¹²¹ Her passenger list for her first voyage from Southampton to New York read like the Social Register. Some of the first-class suites went for as much as \$4,000–\$50,000 in today's dollars.

The magnificent ship struck an iceberg on the moonless night of 14 April 1912. The collision occurred at 11:40 p.m. She sank in less than three hours, at 2:20 a.m. At the end, the ship's orchestra played "Nearer My God to Thee" to keep doomed passengers from panicking. It was not the greatest maritime disaster in history, but it was surely the most sensational.* John Jacob Astor

* For example, 9,343 people died on 30 January 1945, when the German liner *Wilhelm Gustloff* was sunk in the Baltic Sea by a Soviet submarine. The liner was carrying wounded sailors, soldiers, and civilians. They were fleeing from Soviet troops advancing into what was then East Prussia. (Online source: <http://in.rediff.com/news/2005/may/09spec1.htm>.)

and Benjamin Guggenheim, Mr. and Mrs. Isidore Strauss, and many other very wealthy British and American passengers died. Despite this, the heavy loss of life among third-class passengers—mostly immigrants crammed into the steerage compartments—led to widespread denunciations of privilege in the *Yellow Press*. In all, more than 1,500 passengers died. A Canadian newspaper estimated at \$191 million the net worth of just twelve of the leading first class passengers who were lost.¹²² (That's \$2.3 billion in today's dollars.) Owners of the *Titanic* were rightly criticized for the wholly inadequate number of lifeboats provided. J. Pierpont Morgan's holding company owned the White Star Line and was thus ultimately responsible.¹²³

Instead, most press criticism at the time focused on Bruce Ismay, managing director of the White Star Line. Ismay had quietly stepped into a lifeboat at the instruction of a crew member. Many thought Ismay, like Captain Smith, should have "gone down with his ship."¹²⁴

By all accounts, Major Archie Butt faced death in the icy waters with heroic resolution. He and others of the men of the *Titanic* brought credit to themselves by the stoic way in which they gave preference to women and children. Captain Arthur Henry Rostron, master of the SS *Carpathia*, steamed at a top speed of seventeen and one-half knots through treacherous waters to arrive at the disaster scene. Without Captain Rostron's heroic rescue dash, few of the 712 survivors would have lived in the freezing temperatures. Winston Churchill reflected that "the strict observance of the great traditions of the sea towards women and children reflects nothing but honor on our civilization."¹²⁵

Not entirely. The testimony of Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon at a London inquest revealed he had gotten into a boat designed for forty but which held only twelve. Worse, Sir Cosmo offered each of the seamen in the boat a promissory note for £5 (approximately \$312 in today's money). On the witness stand, he maintained that the payment was only offered to reimburse poor seamen who had lost everything when the great ship went down. But critics charged that Sir Cosmo's payment was a bribe to keep the seamen from going back to pull dying passengers out of the frigid waters. Sir Cosmo's reputation, like Ismay's, never recovered. And they seemed a symbol of the callous indifference of the rich to the plight of the poor.^{126*}

President and Mrs. Taft were devastated by brave Archie's loss. They had loved him as a son. The president immediately ordered an ice patrol. Soon, U.S. Coast Guard cutters took on the responsibility for safety of life at sea. Mrs. Taft appealed to the women of America to contribute to a *Titanic* memorial dedicated to the men who gave up their lives so that women and children might live. The handsome monument was erected on the banks of the Potomac.**

VIII. A BULL MOOSE ON THE LOOSE: THE ELECTION OF 1912

Taft tried hard to avoid a break with his dear friend, Theodore. "I have had a hard time," he wrote the former president. "I have been conscientiously trying to carry out *your* policies."¹²⁷ Indeed he had. By early 1912, however, many in the Republican Party were convinced they had to have new leadership if they were to win the White House. The loss of Congress to the Democrats had been a terrible shock to the GOP. Many blamed Taft, even though their party had had an abnormally long run in control of the legislative branch.

"My hat is in the ring, the fight is on and I am stripped to the buff," TR finally told supporters in February 1912.¹²⁸ He would challenge the president of his own choice for the Republican presidential nomination. Teddy's insurgent campaign picked up some important endorsements. TR gained support from Jim Garfield, son of the slain president, and Dan Hanna, the late Senator Mark Hanna's son. Most significant was the fact that these two men hailed from the president's home state of Ohio.¹²⁹ Taft supporters were called Republican regulars or the Old Guard. Roosevelt's backers—*progressives*—heaped scorn on them. (But hadn't young Roosevelt and Lodge declined to join the "Mugwumps" in 1884, aligning themselves with the *regulars* of the day?) In the middle of one pro-Roosevelt rally, some Old Guard Republicans became dispirited. "Oh hell, what's the use?" they said. "Even babies cry for

* *Lady Duff Gordon*—Lucille—suffered no lasting damage to her reputation. She opened a stylish dress shop in Paris that thrived. The French love a little *soupcou* of scandal.

** The *Titanic* memorial still stands in Washington, D.C., although it was moved to make way for the Kennedy Center.

Roosevelt. He is the whole three rings, ringmaster and elephant. Maybe he will let us into the show if we carry water for the elephant.”¹³⁰

Most despondent of all was William Howard Taft. He had not wanted to run for president. He did so only out of loyalty to his beloved friend, Theodore. He never relished political combat the way Teddy did. Now Teddy was attacking him most cruelly. “Roosevelt was my closest friend,” Taft told a reporter on the presidential train. With that, he dissolved into tears.¹³¹ But fight he would when TR attacked the independent judiciary. Taft became convinced that Teddy was a menace to the system of checks and balances at the heart of the American system. Taft’s supporters went much further, denouncing Teddy as a demagogue and *his* supporters as snake-oil salesmen.¹³²

TR won most of the direct primaries held that spring. He piled up 278 delegates to Taft’s 78. Wisconsin’s “Fighting Bob” LaFollette, another progressive Republican, had 36 delegates. Realizing that a split in the party would only elect a Democrat, Taft’s forces generously offered to withdraw in favor of a *compromise* candidate who might unite the GOP. “I’ll name the compromise candidate,” TR shot back: “He’ll be *me*.”¹³³

When the regulars closed ranks behind Taft, they outmaneuvered Teddy’s backers. LaFollette might have aligned with TR and carried the day, but he refused.

Mr. Dooley, the fictional Irishman, looked forward to the coming crackup. It will be a “combination of the Chicago fire, the Saint Bartholomew’s massacre, the battle iv th’ Boyne, th’ life iv Jesse James, an’ the night iv th’ big wind.”¹³⁴ When delegates whose credentials were in dispute were not allowed to vote, Teddy’s forces cried *foul*. But Taft’s people were using no technique TR himself had not used to secure the nomination he wanted for Taft in 1908.

Despite all that, TR’s “Dutch” was up. He bitterly attacked Taft in the most personal terms. And he whipped up his troops with this appeal: we are “fearless of the future, unheeding of our individual fates; with unflinching hearts and undimmed eyes, we stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord!”¹³⁵

Armageddon? It’s a little hard to believe the rhetoric nearly a century later, yet this is a classic example of how people—even highly intelligent people of undeniable integrity—can work themselves into a lather in the

heat of political combat. It gets worse. TR called Taft “a fathead” with “the intellect of a guinea pig.” Taft shot back: TR was a “dangerous egotist” and a “demagogue.”¹³⁶

Charging bad faith and foul play, Teddy led his delegates in a walkout from the Republican National Convention in Chicago. Several weeks later, they reconvened in the same rented hall, now calling themselves the Progressive Party. When the Progressives took the bunting off the speakers’ platform, they were amazed to find that Taft’s Republican floor managers had placed *barbed wire* underneath! The Republican regulars had been ready for an assault by Teddy’s delegates.

TR gave the new party its name when he said he felt as fit “as a bull moose.”¹³⁷ Suffragettes—as advocates of women’s suffrage were known—embraced the Progressive Party’s call for equal voting rights. Jane Addams of Hull House pitched in. She said: “To keep aloof from [politics] must be to lose one opportunity of sharing the life of the community.”¹³⁸ So did Oscar Strauss, a leading reformer and a Jew, who outsang other Progressive delegates in a spirited version of “Onward Christian Soldiers.”¹³⁹ TR’s soldiers, Christian or not, marched for direct election of U.S. senators, a federal income tax (both soon to be enacted as constitutional amendments), direct primaries and initiative, referendum, and recall (several western states, notably California, would soon enact these reforms). Along with all the earnest social do-gooders, the high-minded intellectuals, and the veterans of grassroots organizing, even TR had to admit the Progressives attracted more than their share of the “lunatic fringe.”¹⁴⁰

Experienced pols knew what the split in the GOP meant: Democrats would win. TR knew it too.¹⁴¹

The only question: *Which* Democrat? Incredibly, William Jennings Bryan was making his *fourth* try for the White House. Speaker of the House James Beauchamps “Champ” Clark, fresh from wrecking U.S.-Canadian relations, was a strong contender. Irish and German Americans loved anyone who gave the British lion’s tail a yank. William Randolph Hearst, millionaire publisher of Yellow Journals, had spent the last decade trying to incite a war with Japan. After his unsavory role in Cuba, Hearst’s newspapers ceaselessly prated on about a so-called “yellow peril” from immigration and

Japanese imperialism.* Now, Hearst actually thought he might be nominated for president.

Finally, the Democrats considered Governor Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey. Wilson had been in Trenton little more than a year, but he had built a national reputation as a scholar and reforming president of Princeton University. Theodore Roosevelt respected Wilson and had actually conferred with him in Buffalo in the dark hours following McKinley's assassination. After forty-six ballots in sweltering Baltimore, the tall, angular "schoolmaster in politics" was nominated.

The fall campaign rolled on to its predetermined end. In October, TR's train pulled into Milwaukee, LaFollette's base and a hotbed of Progressive agitation. While proceeding to the auditorium where he would give another stemwinder of a speech, Teddy was shot once by a would-be assassin. Fortunately, the bullet was slowed by the thick sheaf of papers—Teddy's speech—and an eyeglass case that he carried in his vest pocket. Rejecting medical attention, Teddy mounted the podium and delivered the speech to an audience amazed at his courage and blown away by his endurance.¹⁴²

Harvard's Samuel Eliot Morison, the great historian, cast his first vote that year. He asked a colleague how he should vote: "Vote for Roosevelt, pray for Taft, but *bet* on Wilson."¹⁴³

That proved to be shrewd advice. Although he won only 41.9 percent of the popular vote (6,293,152), Wilson won a huge majority in the electoral college, 435. TR did something never done before or since: he came in *second* running on a third-party ticket. He garnered 4,119,207 popular votes (27.4 percent) and 88 electoral votes. Taft came in third with 3,486,333 popular votes (23.2 percent) and only 8 electoral votes. Eugene V. Debs ran again on the Socialist ticket. He campaigned vigorously in a train called "the red special." Debs won over one million votes but carried no state. In effect, TR and Taft had knocked each other out. Wilson was elected with 110,952 *fewer* popular votes than Bryan had won in his disastrous third run for president in 1908.

* Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II had invented the racist phrase. He had it incorporated into a painting which he showed off to every statesman who visited his palace in Berlin.

The Bull Moose Party effort of 1912 is convincing proof, if ever it was needed, that the *only* thing a third-party campaign can do is to break up the ruling coalition and elect a minority president. William Howard Taft might well have lost to Wilson anyway. His administration had been “a series of political explosions,” true.¹⁴⁴ But most of them were not of his making. He deserved better of his country. He surely deserved better of his friend, Theodore Roosevelt.

IX. WOODROW WILSON AND THE NEW FREEDOM

The new president, tall and dignified, mounted the speaker’s rostrum in the House of Representatives. There, on 7 April 1913, Woodrow Wilson delivered an address to a joint meeting of Congress.¹⁴⁵ The practice of delivering State of the Union Messages and other important speeches *in person* before the assembled lawmakers had been dropped by Thomas Jefferson more than a century earlier. Jefferson said it smacked too much of the English monarch’s Speech from the Throne, but it was also the case that Jefferson was a poor public speaker, and he knew it. Wilson was a great public speaker, and he knew it.

Not only did it provide a dramatic setting for the president’s messages, but it ensured that the president would thenceforth take the initiative in proposing important legislation. Wilson was the first Ph.D. to win the presidency. His specialty was political science. He was determined to bring major change to the institutions of government that he had studied, taught, and written about.*

Wilson was determined as well to bring about major economic reforms. President Wilson was the first leader since Lincoln to go up to the Capitol to confer in person with members of his party.¹⁴⁶ Democrats now controlled both houses of Congress, but even so, success for Wilson’s economic program would take hard work. Wilson succeeded in his objectives, achieving a major overhaul of the nation’s banking system. The Federal

* Wilson received a *doctorate* in political science in 1886 from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD. He was the first, and to date the last, Ph.D. in the White House.

Reserve Act of 1913 divided the country into twelve districts, each with a federal reserve bank to regulate the currency and provide a modern banking system. This measure, authored by Virginia's courtly Senator Carter Glass, remains essentially unchanged to this day and counts as one of Wilson's major achievements.¹⁴⁷

Wilson plowed ahead with reforms. The Underwood Tariff, sponsored by Senator Oscar Underwood of Alabama, lowered import duties by 10 percent across the board. Wilson took on the manufacturers and lobbyists and prevailed with hard bargaining. It stands as his second major achievement.^{148*}

The Clayton Anti-Trust Act of 1914 was another major piece of legislation Wilson strongly backed. The act was sponsored by Alabama Congressman Henry de Lamar Clayton. Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, called the Clayton Act "labor's charter of freedom." Under this act, labor unions would no longer be considered "combinations in restraint of trade," as they had often been under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890. Labor was specifically allowed to engage in strikes, boycotts, and picketing, although violence against persons and property continued to be against the law. Court injunctions had been a major weapon used *against* unions in labor disputes. The Clayton Act required federal courts to use more restraint in issuing such injunctions.¹⁴⁹

All did not run completely smoothly in Wilson's first term, however. Wilson had felt obliged to appoint the three times defeated Democratic presidential nominee, William Jennings Bryan, as his secretary of state. This had secured Wilson his party's nomination at Baltimore. Bryan, of course, had no qualifications to be secretary of state. (He had no qualifications to be president, either, but that is another matter.)

Bryan used the State Department as a stable for party donkeys. Even Colonel Edward M. House, President Wilson's closest advisor, admitted Bryan was "a spoilsman."¹⁵⁰ Bryan filled embassies and consulates with time

* Tariff issues have always loomed large in American politics. In the years before the 1913 ratification of Amendment XVI that allowed a federal income tax, the tariff was the primary means of financing the federal government.

servers and hangers-on, seriously undermining the professionalism of America's diplomatic corps at a critical time.*

Bryan horrified foreign ambassadors by banning wine at diplomatic receptions. The secretary "not only suffers for his principles and mortifies the flesh, but insists that *others* should suffer and be mortified," complained an English newspaper.¹⁵¹ Worse, the secretary signed a contract to give lectures on the popular Chautauqua circuit.

The world was treated to the spectacle of an American secretary of state appearing on stage on the same bill with magicians, jugglers, and Alpine yodelers. Bryan's enthusiasm, his lack of pretense, his hearty good fellowship—these qualities had endeared him to millions. The fact that he was an outspoken evangelical Christian was significant too. This important group of Americans often took eastern snobbery toward Bryan as condescension toward *them*.

Bryan's pacifism was sincere and constituted a major *disqualification* for high office in a time of rising international tension. Bryan believed intensely in *conciliation* treaties as instruments of statecraft. He threw himself into negotiating such treaties with as many foreign states as he could. Although there was little chance of war with either Britain or France at this stage, Bryan proceeded without hesitation to ink new agreements that required signatories to "wait a year" before even considering the use of force. Many editors found Bryan's eagerness naïve. The *Memphis Commercial-Appeal* derided Bryan's "cooling off" treaties with Switzerland, Denmark, and Uruguay: that "takes a great load off our minds. The thought of war with them was terrible."¹⁵² Former President Theodore Roosevelt was scathing; he called Bryan "that yodeler, that human trombone."¹⁵³ Even the even-tempered former President Taft was exasperated with Bryan's simplistic approach to foreign policy. Taft wrote a friend that Bryan was showing "greater sublimity as an ass."¹⁵⁴

In one important way, Woodrow Wilson distinguished himself during

* In fairness, Lincoln had allowed *his* secretary of state, William Seward, to do the same thing. Seward chose Charles Francis Adams as minister to London, an inspired choice, but many other critical postings were filled with party hacks. Lincoln, of course, had a Civil War to command his attention.

his first term. He boldly challenged the nation to live up to its founding creed when he nominated Louis D. Brandeis to the Supreme Court. Brandeis was a highly respected reformer, beloved of the Progressives. Labor loved him for his “Brandeis briefs,” sociological studies that showed the often terrible impact of management decisions on the lives of workers, especially women and child laborers. Although Wilson had passed over Brandeis for a cabinet post, he had looked to him as architect of the New Freedom legislation. Now, Wilson was determined to name the first Jew ever to sit on the High Court.¹⁵⁵ In the face of fierce opposition, some of it anti-Semitic, Wilson backed his man and secured a signal victory for America as an open society. Indeed, this was a New Freedom.

For one group of Americans, however, Woodrow Wilson’s New Freedom rang hollow. Although black Americans certainly were helped by Wilson’s labor and social legislation, they found no interest among the Democrats in civil rights. As the names of the sponsors of Wilson’s landmark reform legislation show, Wilson was highly dependent upon white Southern Democrats to get his program through Congress. Since most black Americans at the time were firm supporters of the party of Lincoln, the Democratic victories in Congress and the presidency meant that hundreds of black federal officeholders would be swept out.¹⁵⁶ One of Wilson’s Georgia appointees said it bluntly: “A Negro’s place is in the cornfield.”¹⁵⁷ The president did not rebuke him.

Segregation in federal government offices was only partially reversed by Wilson, despite his personal claim of sympathy for the plight of black Americans.¹⁵⁸ His speech at the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg made no mention of the fact that black Americans were still denied their rights as citizens of the United States. If, as the Declaration of Independence said and Lincoln reaffirmed at Gettysburg in 1863, “all men are created equal,” no one listening to Wilson’s forgotten Gettysburg Address of 1913 would have thought so.¹⁵⁹

Worse, Wilson gave a platform to one of the worst examples of racial intolerance in American history. The movie *The Birth of a Nation* may have been a silent film, but it shouted its contempt for black people from the housetops. The epic silent movie depicted the Ku Klux Klan not as terrorists

and murderers but as freedom fighters. The movie was the first film ever screened at the White House. Wilson watched it and praised it extravagantly. “It is like writing history with lightning. My only regret is that it is all so terribly true,” he enthused.^{160*}

Frustrated by the slow pace of change, even by backsliding in Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois and other dedicated black and white reformers (including Jane Addams) had banded together to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). They resolved to challenge the “go along to get along” attitude they saw in Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Machine.¹⁶¹ The NAACP began its half-century fight for full equal rights for black Americans.

X. “THE LIGHTS ARE GOING OUT . . .”

As Ellen Axson Wilson lay dying of cancer in the White House in the summer of 1914, the president was bowed down with grief. He and the first lady had been married for twenty-nine years. She was the center of his close-knit and supportive family. Aside from Mrs. Wilson, his faithful aide Joseph Tumulty, and his intimate friend and adviser, Texas “Colonel” Edward M. House, Woodrow Wilson had few people upon whom he could rely.** Wilson was described as one who loved humanity—in the abstract.¹⁶² Wilson was aware of this trait: “I have a sense of power in dealing with men collectively which I do not feel in dealing with them singly.”¹⁶³ His own very able secretary of the interior, Franklin K. Lane, said he was “clean, strong, high-minded and cold-blooded.”¹⁶⁴ Now, with Mrs. Wilson’s untimely death, there would be a terrible void in his life.

Meanwhile, in Europe death stalked the corridors of power in a very different way. In late June, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of the unsteady Austro-Hungarian Empire, paid a “goodwill” trip to

* President Ronald Reagan spoke to a Catholic men’s group about *The Birth of a Nation*. The Knights of Columbus were meeting in New Haven, CT in 1982. The KKK’s hatred encompassed not only black Americans, but also Catholics, Jews, and foreigners. Reagan told the knights that he was proud of his Hollywood movie career. “But,” he said, “I have never seen that film . . . and I never will!” The knights erupted in loud, sustained applause.

** House was given an honorary title as colonel as an adviser to the governor of Texas.

the beautiful medieval city of Sarajevo, in the province of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Young Slavic nationalists in the province resented being ruled from distant Vienna by the Teutonic and mostly Catholic Austrians. Aided by a shadowy Serbian terrorist underground group called the Black Hand, some of these students resolved to kill the archduke.

As Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, were being driven through the narrow streets of Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, a band of young terrorists prepared their bombs. "One was so jammed in the crowd that he could not pull the bomb out of his pocket. A second saw a policeman standing near him and decided that any movement was too risky. A third felt sorry for the Archduke's wife and did nothing. A fourth lost his nerve and slipped off home."¹⁶⁵ But nineteen-year-old Gavrilo Princip did not flinch. When a first bomb exploded but failed to injure the imperial couple, Princip thought the plot had failed. Minutes later, he was astounded to see the archduke and archduchess in their official car, just five feet from him. (The car had taken a wrong turn down a narrow side street.) Princip knew he could not throw his bomb; there was no room. So he pulled out his Browning pistol and fired two shots, point blank. He hit Franz Ferdinand in the throat, severing his carotid artery. His second shot hit Sophie in the abdomen. Both were dead within the hour.¹⁶⁶

In Vienna, the humorless and harsh Franz Ferdinand had been unloved. Still, the assassination of the heir to the imperial throne had to be avenged. Austria-Hungary decided to use the "outrage" as a pretext to destroy Serbia. For this, though, the Austrians needed the backing of their powerful ally, Germany. The Austrians feared that if they went to war against Serbia, Russia would hasten to protect their Slavic brothers.

At this critical moment, when the life of Europe teetered in the balance, Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II gave Austria-Hungary a "blank check." Germany would back Austria-Hungary in whatever she decided to do about Serbia, the Kaiser said.¹⁶⁷

Europe was quite literally sitting on a powder keg. If Austria-Hungary moved against Serbia, Russia would come to Serbia's aid. If Russia came in Germany would declare war against Russia. If Germany attacked Russia, France was bound by treaty to race to Russia's defense. And if France was

attacked, Great Britain would feel honor bound to stand by her. If Britain joined the war, so, too, would Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and India. In a matter of days, what began as a localized conflict would become a *world war*.

Worse, Germany's ruler was Europe's "powder monkey." That is, he was running around the continent with explosives in hand. One of Wilhelm II's early acts was to "drop the pilot," to get rid of "the Iron Chancellor" Otto von Bismarck in 1890. Bismarck would never have risked his German Empire on a conflict in the Balkans. "The whole of the Balkans is not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier," he had said contemptuously. But Bismarck also had played the prophet: "If there is another war in the future," he had said, "it will come out of some damned foolish thing in the Balkans."

Now, even as the president was attending the Georgia funeral for Mrs. Wilson, Europe was sliding into war. Nor would it be a localized, limited war. Europe had seen a score of these in the hundred years since the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. This would be a war more terrible, more total than anything previously seen.

Several hundred years earlier, America was fresh on the world horizon, a land infinite with opportunity and electric with optimism. Now an ocean away, despair gripped the Old World, and the only opportunities seemed for destruction. Britain's foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, spoke of the hushed sense of anticipation all truly knowledgeable people felt in August 1914:

"The lights are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."

