

# Theodore Roosevelt

Riding Roughshod  
Twenty-Sixth, 1901-1909



**Nicknames:** "Teedie", "Teddy", "The Cyclone Assemblyman", "The Great Conservationist", "Trustbuster Teddy", "The Roughrider", "The Hero of San Juan Hill", "Old Four Eyes", "Theodore the Meddler", "Terrible Teddy"

**Birth:** October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1858, New York, New York

**Death:** January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1919, Oyster Bay, New York

**Significant Events During Roosevelt's Terms:** Oil Drilling Begins in Persia ... Safety Razor Invented ... Ansel Adams and John Steinbeck born California ... Mark Twain makes his last Visit to Hannibal ... Air Conditioner Invented ... First Motion Picture Theater in the U.S. ... John Muir Guides Roosevelt Through Yosemite ... First Transcontinental Automobile Trip Across the U.S. ... Jack London's "The Call of the Wild" ... First World Series ... Orville and Wilbur Wright's First Flight ... Supreme Court Gives Congress the Power to Ignore or Change Treaties the Government Formerly Made with the Indians ... Panama Canal ... Chief Joseph Dies ... San Francisco Earthquake ... Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle" ... Model T Introduced ... Oklahoma (#46) becomes a State

**Quotes:** *"Under no circumstances could I or would I accept the nomination for the Vice-Presidency."* -- Theodore Roosevelt, February 1900

*"You are not the timber of which Presidents are made."*

-- The humor magazine *Puck*, in an open letter directed at Theodore Roosevelt

*"Don't any of you realize that there's only one life between this madman and the White House?"*

-- Mark Hanna, warning against nominating Roosevelt as McKinley's running mate

*"Mr. Roosevelt is the Tom Sawyer of the political world of the twentieth century; always showing off; always hunting for a chance to show off; in his frenzied imagination the Great Republic is a vast Barnum circus with him for a clown and the whole world for audience; he would go to Halifax for half a chance to show off and he would go to hell for a whole one."* -- Mark Twain

*"Our people have adored this showy charlatan as perhaps no impostor of his brood has been adored since the Golden Calf, so it is to be expected that the Nation will want him back again after he is done hunting other wild animals heroically in Africa, with the safeguard and advertising equipment of a park of artillery and a brass band."* -- Mark Twain, speaking of Roosevelt

*"I wish he would not think out loud so much."*

-- William Howard Taft (#27), speaking of Roosevelt

*"I am quite sure that in the end the hypocrisy, the insincerity, the selfishness, the monumental egotism...that possesses Theodore Roosevelt will make themselves known to the American people in such a way that his place in history will be accurately defined."*

-- William Howard Taft, Roosevelt's Secretary of War from 1904 to 1908

*"To announce that there must be no criticism of the President, or that we are to stand by the President, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public."*

-- Theodore Roosevelt

*"I have always been fond of the West African proverb: 'Speak softly and carry a big stick, you will go far.'" -- Theodore Roosevelt*

*"In strict confidence...I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one."*

-- Theodore Roosevelt, in an 1897 letter to a friend

*"No triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumph of war."* -- Theodore Roosevelt

*"[Roosevelt] gushes over war as the ideal condition of human society, for the manly strenuousness which it involves, and treats peace as a condition of blubberlike and swollen ignobility, fit only for huckstering weaklings, dwelling in gray twilight and heedless of the higher life."*

-- Anti-Imperialist Philosopher William James

**How his term ended:** Roosevelt chose not to run for a "third" term (although he had actually only been elected once, having taken over early in McKinley's (#25) second term after

he was assassinated). Roosevelt did run again later, though, in 1912, as the candidate of the “Bull Moose” party.

**Other Professions:** Soldier, Rancher, Explorer, Writer, Deputy Sheriff in the semi-wild sort-of-West (Dakotas in the 1880s)

**Worst Mistakes:** When he was Vice President, Roosevelt was a key player behind the Spanish-American War, nagging McKinley to take Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico.

Roosevelt also wrenched the Panama Canal from Colombia, its former owner, by fomenting a rebellion by those in that region against that land. After the revolution by the nascent Panamanian government succeeded (with direct assistance from the U.S.), Roosevelt immediately recognized the new country and came to a quick “agreement” with them for control of the Canal Zone.

As were many other Presidents, Roosevelt was a white supremacist. He contended that whites should have more babies in order to strengthen the country. Perhaps that is not “white supremacy” in the usual understanding of the phrase, or in its most despicable manifestations, but at the very least it is a very racist sentiment (stating that one segment of society augments the quality of the gene pool, which simultaneously indicates that another dilutes it).

**Saving Graces:** Roosevelt's environmental policies, influenced by John Muir, were perhaps the most enlightened of any President. He once said, “To waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.”

Influenced by Upton Sinclair's novel “The Jungle,” which was based on actual working conditions in the Chicago meat packing plants, Roosevelt passed the Pure Food and Drug Act.

Influenced by Jacob Riis' book “How the Other Half Lives,” Roosevelt passed laws on Child Labor.

Although he did make white supremacist comments, as mentioned above, Roosevelt did host Booker T. Washington at the White House, something that was quite noteworthy given the common attitudes of the time.

**Notes:** As a child, Roosevelt had wanted to be a zoologist.

Roosevelt, at forty-two, was the youngest President ever. Kennedy (#35) later became the youngest *elected* President (Kennedy was forty-three when he took office).

Theodore Roosevelt was the first American awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (for his role in

helping end the 1904-5 war between Russia and Japan). As can be seen from some of his quotes above, Roosevelt was not against war *per se*, but rather he just didn't want those two countries fighting each other at that time.

Roosevelt became known as a Trust-buster, preventing corporations from riding roughshod over their consumers and employees. In connection with this, Roosevelt promoted what he called the "Square Deal" by curbing the power of Wall Street Barons, which he called an "invisible government" of business and finance.

Roosevelt was the first President to drive a car, fly in an airplane, and sit down to a meal with a black man (as President, anyway); as mentioned earlier, the guest marking that last occasion was educator Booker T. Washington.

The so-called Roosevelt Corollary extended the Monroe Doctrine by establishing the United States as the policeman of the Western Hemisphere.

In "gushing" over war (in some of the quotes above), Roosevelt foreshadowed Mussolini's ravings of a few decades later, when *Il Duce* said: "War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the people who have the courage to meet it."

While President, Roosevelt attempted to remove the motto "In God We Trust" from U.S. coinage, viewing the phrase, used thus, as both unconstitutional and sacrilegious.

Roosevelt was related to Martin Van Buren (#8) as a distant cousin. He was, of course, also related to Franklin D. Roosevelt (#32), another distant cousin.