



Theodore Roosevelt

(1858-1919)

Medal of Honor - Author – President – Nobel Peace Prize – Statesman

Theodore Roosevelt was born in New York City. The Roosevelts were a wealthy family of Dutch descent whose name means, “Field of Roses.” From a young age, Theodore, called “Teedie” by his family, suffered from severe asthma, which his father sought to remedy by taking his son for brisk carriage rides and trips to the countryside to provide fresh air. As a boy Theodore read books well beyond his age and became very interested in explorers, adventure tales, and the natural world. Theodore Sr. encouraged his intelligent but sickly son to “make his body” through regular exercise. Young Theodore vowed to devote time to developing his physical strength through exercise while continuing his intellectual pursuits. Roosevelt began his studies at Harvard in 1876 while challenging himself physically by playing sports, hiking, and going on hunting trips during school breaks. During his sophomore year, Roosevelt was dealt his first major tragedy with the death of his beloved father from cancer at age 46. Roosevelt had said his father was the “best man he ever knew.” During his time at Harvard, Roosevelt began to court Alice Hathaway Lee, and the two married in 1880. As a newlywed, Roosevelt began purchasing acreage in Oyster Bay, New York, where generations of his family had vacationed, and planned to build a home that would eventually become Sagamore Hill, his main residence for the remainder of his life. Roosevelt’s political career also began during this period, as he was elected to serve his Manhattan district in the New York State Assembly.

After losing his wife and mother on the same day, Valentine's Day, February 14, 1884, Roosevelt traveled to the badlands of the Dakota Territory to live and work as a rancher, believing the hard work would keep him from depression. For the first time in his life, the elite Roosevelt mixed regularly with common folk and the experience humbled him. "Had it not been for the years spent in North Dakota and what I learned there," Roosevelt later told a crowd during a speech in Fargo, North Dakota, "I would not have been President of the United States." While in the west, Roosevelt began to publish a trilogy of popular books about his experiences including *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885), *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1888), and *The Wilderness Hunter* (1893), which cemented his reputation as an author. In all, he wrote about 30 books over the course of his life.

During this period, Roosevelt held several public offices, including US Civil Service Commissioner, New York City Police Commissioner, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy, while delighting in his role as a father.

When war with Spain was declared in 1898, Roosevelt resigned his position in the Navy Department to raise a division of volunteers to fight in Cuba. Roosevelt was appointed **lieutenant colonel of the First US Volunteer Cavalry Regiment**, who came to be known as the **Rough Riders**, and experienced what he called his "crowded hour" when he led a charge up Kettle Hill during the Battle for San Juan Heights on July 1, 1898, which would posthumously earn him the Congressional **Medal of Honor**, the nation's highest military award for bravery. Roosevelt returned home a popular war hero and was elected governor of New York the same year. President McKinley was shot while attending the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York and died from his wounds two weeks later. **Roosevelt would be sworn in as the 26th President of the United States on September 14, 1901 as the youngest president in history at the age of 42.**

Roosevelt served as president from 1901 to 1909, winning an election in his own right in 1904. His time in office was characterized by modernizing the presidency, viewing the role of president as the chief steward of the country who could take any action not explicitly forbidden by the Constitution. Roosevelt is best remembered for expanding the role of the United States in world affairs, taking on large businesses known as trusts, conserving natural resources, and preserving unique landscapes of national significance. In foreign affairs, Roosevelt would oversee the building of the **Panama Canal**, expand American naval might – sending **The Great White Fleet** on an international tour – **Go Sharks**, and help negotiate an end to the devastating **Russo-Japanese War**, for which he was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize** in 1906. At home, Roosevelt worked towards securing what he called a "**square deal**" for all Americans by inserting himself into business affairs that affected nearly all Americans. He took action to break up J.P. Morgan's Northern Securities railroad trust, placed regulations on producers of food and drugs, and brought feuding parties together to solve the potentially disastrous Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902 earning him the title, "**Trust-Buster**." Roosevelt's presidency is perhaps best known through his **conservation** legacy, as he created the **United States Forest Service** and 150 national forests, the first federal bird reserve at Pelican Island, which would lead to the National Wildlife Refuge system, and using the power of the Antiquities Act would name 18 national monuments, including Devil's Tower, El Morro, Muir Woods, Petrified Forest, and the Grand Canyon. Additionally, the Roosevelt administration would add five national parks, including an expansion of Yosemite National Park, totaling in a preservation of approximately 230 million acres of land for what Roosevelt remarked was for "the benefit and enjoyment of the people."

After his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt went on several hunting trips for scientific research, including Africa and South America. Many of the specimens he collected are located in the Natural Museum of History located in New York City. He ran for a third presidential term in 1912 leaving the Republican

Party and forming the **Progressive Party**, affectionately known as the **Bull Moose Party**. Although he lost the three-way race to Woodrow Wilson, he came in second becoming the most successful Third-Party candidate in history.

Theodore Roosevelt died on January 6, 1919 at the age of 60. He is buried outside his estate at Sagamore Hill in Oyster Bay, Long Island leaving an enduring legacy for Americans of all political stripes as a man who put country before self. **Roosevelt High School: Early College Studies is proud to bear the name of this American icon.**

Courtesy National Parks Service <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/theodore-roosevelt-biography.htm>

Edits and additions by David Bordas