

H. PAUL JEFFERS

Author of *Commissioner Roosevelt*, *Colonel Roosevelt*, and *Explorer Roosevelt*



THE
BULLY PULPIT

A Teddy Roosevelt
Book of Quotations

THE BULLY PULPIT



The
Bully Pulpit

A TEDDY ROOSEVELT BOOK OF QUOTATIONS

Edited by
H. PAUL JEFFERS

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Words with me are instruments. I wish to impress upon the people to whom I talk the fact that I am sincere, that I mean exactly what I say, and that I stand for things that are elemental in civilization.

—THEODORE ROOSEVELT

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Contents

INTRODUCTION: THE BULLY PULPIT—	1
QUOTATIONS—	9
TR'S LAST WORDS—	140
THE ARENA—	141
ROOSEVELT ON THE ROUGH RIDERS—	142
QUOTATIONS ABOUT THEODORE ROOSEVELT—	150
THEODORE ROOSEVELT CHRONOLOGY—	158
BOOKS BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT—	161
BOOKS ABOUT THEODORE ROOSEVELT—	162
INDEX—	163

Introduction

THE BULLY PULPIT

A hundred years ago, as Americans prepared to begin a new century, the most talked-about and quotable personality in the country was a short, reddish-haired, spectacle-wearing, robust middle-aged man named Theodore Roosevelt.

Today, as we prepare for not only a new century, but also a new millennium, our language is rich with phrases he added to it. They include “the square deal,” “the lunatic fringe,” “bully,” “trust buster,” “muckraking,” “hyphenated American,” “speak softly and carry a big stick,” “the strenuous life,” “weasel words,” and a description of the White House as an address from which a president has the duty to shape public opinion: “the bully pulpit.”

Historians are unanimous in describing TR as the inventor of the modern presidency, that is, an activist chief executive of a strong federal government whose chief duties are the people’s welfare and a strong national defense.

As to how he was addressed (the stuffed toy bear named after him notwithstanding), no one close to him called him “Teddy.” As a child he was “Teedie.” As an adult he was “Theodore” or “TR.”

At forty years of age (in 1898) he already had been a leader of the New York State Legislature, a candidate for mayor of New York City (defeated in 1886), a member of the

U.S. Civil Service Commission, and president of the New York Board of Police Commissioners (1895–1897).

Upon Roosevelt's appointment as assistant secretary of the navy in 1897 by President William McKinley, the Washington correspondent of the *Chicago Times-Herald* wrote that Theodore Roosevelt "is by long odds one of the most interesting of the younger men seen here in recent years."

After he was appointed to the Navy post, he used the position to almost single-handedly lead the United States into a war to kick Spain out of the Western Hemisphere and then went on to become the hero of that war as he led his cavalry unit, the Rough Riders, who fought without horses, up San Juan Hill to win a stunning victory that made Theodore Roosevelt the most famous man in all of America.

A prolific writer, he had established himself as an essayist and author of books, including *The Naval War of 1812* in 1882, *The Winning of the West*, published in four volumes between 1889 and 1896, and numerous volumes on hunting and other ways of enjoying what he called "the strenuous life." (A complete list may be found at the end of this book.) He also wrote scores of magazine articles and editorials and delivered dozens of speeches while campaigning either on behalf of himself or others. And throughout his life he turned out a prodigious amount of correspondence (one estimate placed the total at more than 150,000 pieces).

Elected governor of New York after returning in triumph from the Spanish-American War, he found himself in 1900 chosen to be vice president in William McKinley's second term. Although he had said that being vice president was akin to being a fifth wheel on a wagon, he was well on his way to

fulfilling a prophecy offered by the famed and respected editor of the Emporia, Kansas, *Gazette*. William Allen White had described Roosevelt as “the new American for the Twentieth Century.”

When a man with a pistol in his hand assassinated McKinley in 1901, TR moved into the presidential mansion, officially gave it the name “the White House,” ordered extensive renovations to the old mansion (adding the West Wing, a tennis court, and a room for reporters), and immediately converted it into a bully pulpit on almost every issue on his public and private agendas.

Twenty years had passed since he made his debut as a speaker during his freshman year as a lawmaker in Albany when a veteran of the legislature observed that he had appeared to speak with some difficulty, “as if he had an impediment in his speech.” What he had was asthma, so that his delivery was marked by moments of breathlessness that seemed to convey nervousness. Another observer of TR’s first speech as an elected official noted that Roosevelt had “a wealth of mouth.”

That mouth was big and wide, dominated by a set of teeth so remarkable in their appearance that they, a bushy mustache, and the nose glasses he wore for acute nearsightedness were to become hallmarks of the Roosevelt image and the perennial favorites of newspaper and magazine cartoonists. (A vivid description of TR’s teeth will be found in the section “Quotations about Roosevelt.”)

Historian H. G. Wells looked at him and saw a “friendly, peering snarl of a face.”

Speeches by TR were also notable for their body language.

He had a lifetime habit of punctuating his remarks by pounding the fist of one hand into the palm of the other. He frequently stood with a fist clenched and jammed on a hip.

For such a short (five foot eight), stocky, and athletic young man, he had a voice that seemed inappropriately high pitched. Some of his listeners described it as raspy. But whatever might have been said about his style of delivery, no one ever accused Theodore Roosevelt of having had nothing memorable to say.

Having become president in his own right in the election of 1904, he promised every American “a square deal,” gave the nation its first pure food law and the Panama Canal, carried on a vigorous campaign of “trust busting,” and sent a fleet of white-painted U.S. warships on an around-the-globe cruise to show the flag and to assert that the United States was a world power to be reckoned with. After mediating peace in a war between Japan and Russia he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Two years later he was to leave his mark on the future of law enforcement in the nation by creating a staff of detectives within the Justice Department. Founded on July 16, 1908, it was assigned the task of rooting out corruption in the federal government. It was called the Bureau of Investigation and in time became the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Out of office, restless and unhappy with his successor in the White House (President William Howard Taft), he made a bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 1912. Brushed aside by the GOP, he ran as the candidate of the new Bullmoose Party, shrugged off an assassination attempt by making a speech with a bullet in his chest, and lost the election to Woodrow Wilson.

Returning to his family (wife Edith and six children) at Sagamore Hill, Oyster Bay, New York, he wrote his autobiography and maintained a presence in public life by writing and speaking.

Always the advocate of a “strenuous life,” he left his home to undertake a big-game safari in Africa that was followed by a triumphal tour of European capitals. His adventures also included exploring rugged Brazilian jungles and nearly dying while surveying an unexplored river that was promptly named Rio Teodoro in his honor.

When America entered “the Great War” in 1917 and his four sons went off to fight in it he implored President Wilson for a command but was refused. The youngest son, Quentin, an aviator, was killed when his plane was shot down in France in July 1918.

Still a potent force in politics, TR found himself being urged to make another run for the presidency in 1920. But near midnight on January 5, 1919, after writing a memorandum to the chairman of the Republican National Committee, he asked his valet to turn out a light, settled down to sleep, and never woke up. He was sixty-one years old.

As we approach not only a new century but also a new millennium, and as private and public political and social discourse speaks of a need for a return to what is termed “values,” Roosevelt’s wisdom and counsel before, during, and after his presidency are a wellspring of inspiration and an example for Americans today.

This volume contains examples of his wisdom and wit on subjects ranging from America and Americans to wrestling.

Also provided are Roosevelt's insights and comments on himself.

Many things he said or wrote are included simply because of their beauty and style, or because of his colorful choice of words or phrases, because there were few things that TR loved more than lively use of the American language for a moral purpose.

A separate section provides his observations, both contemporaneous and from the basis of hindsight, on his role as leader of Roosevelt's Rough Riders during the Spanish-American War and on his decisive and heroic charge up San Juan Hill, the defining moment that he called "my crowded hour."

There is also a sampling, arranged chronologically, of what others said about him throughout his career.

The high points of his life are cited in a chronology, along with the titles of his books, and for those who wish to know more about TR there is a list of books about his life and times.

Biographer John Morton Blum wrote, "The special mark of Theodore Roosevelt was joy—joy in everything he did." In *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, Edmund Morris said, "No Chief Executive, certainly, has ever had so much fun. One of Roosevelt's favorite expressions is 'dee-lighted'—he uses it so often, and with such grinning emphasis, that nobody doubts his sincerity."

The makers of Maxwell House coffee didn't doubt it. Since TR told a hotel waiter he would be "dee-lighted" to have a second cup of Maxwell House because the first had been "good to the last drop," the phrase has been the coffee company's only slogan.

But, as you will find in the words of Theodore Roosevelt in this book, TR's legacy is far more than a clever line. He was and remains the measure of righteousness, publicly and privately. In the preface to his biography of TR, Nathan Miller wrote that TR "continues to cast a magic spell over the collective consciousness." In a modern world offering few genuine heroes, he went on, "Roosevelt's greatness lies in the fact that he was essentially a moral man in a world that has increasingly regarded morality as superfluous."



Quotations

AMERICA AND AMERICANS

Like all Americans, I like big things; big prairies, big forests and mountains, big wheat fields, railroads—and herds of cattle, too—big factories, steamboats, and everything else.

—Dickinson, Dakota Territory,
July 4, 1886

To bear the name of American is to bear the most honorable of titles; and whoever does not so believe has no business to bear the name at all.

—*Forum*, April 1894

We Americans have many grave problems to solve, many threatening evils to fight, and many deeds to do, if, as we hope and believe, we have the wisdom, the strength, and the courage and the virtue to do them. But we must face the facts as they are. We must neither surrender ourselves to foolish optimism, nor succumb to a timid and ignoble pessimism.

Ibid.

AMERICA AND AMERICANS

[continued]

Don't let them bluff you out of the use of the word "American." I don't [think] anything better has been done than your calling yourself the American Ambassador and using the word American instead of the United States.

—Letter to John Hay, American
ambassador to the Court of St.
James in London; Washington,
D.C., June 7, 1897

Is America a weakling, to shrink from the work of the great world powers? No! The young giant of the West stands on a continent and clasps the crest of an ocean in either hand. Our nation, glorious in youth and strength, looks into the future with eager eyes and rejoices as a strong man to run a race.

Ibid.

Our country has been populated by pioneers, and therefore it has more energy, more enterprise, more expansive power than any other in the wide world.

—Minnesota State Fair, St. Paul,
September 2, 1901

The American people are slow to wrath, but when their wrath is once kindled it burns like a consuming flame.

—First annual address to Congress,
December 3, 1901

Stout of heart, we see, across the dangers, the great future that lies beyond, and we rejoice as a giant refreshed, as a strong man girt for the race; and we go down into the arena where the nations strive for mastery, our hearts lifted with the faith that to us and our children and our children's children it shall be given to make this Republic the mightiest among the peoples of mankind.

—Detroit, Michigan,
September 22, 1902

This nation is seated on a continent flanked by two great oceans. It is composed of men [who are] the descendants of pioneers, or, in a sense, pioneers themselves; of men winnowed out from among the nations of the Old World by the energy, boldness, and love of adventure found in their own eager hearts. Such a nation, so placed, will surely wrest success from fortune.

—The White House,
December 2, 1902

Ours is not the creed of the weakling and the coward; ours is the gospel of hope and triumphant endeavor.

Ibid.

The steady aim of this nation, as of all enlightened nations, should be to strive to bring nearer the day when there shall prevail throughout the world the peace of justice.

—Fourth annual message
to Congress,
December 6, 1904

AMERICA AND AMERICANS

[continued]

We are the heirs of the ages.

—Inaugural address, March 4, 1905

If we fail, the cause of free self-government throughout the world will rock to its foundations.

Ibid.

Tomorrow I shall come into office in my own right. Then watch out for me.

—The White House, March 4, 1905

I believe the majority of the plain people of the United States will, day in and day out, make fewer mistakes in governing themselves than any smaller class or body of men.

—Columbus, Ohio,
February 21, 1912

We, here in America, hold in our hands the hope of the world, the fate of the coming years; and shame and disgrace will be ours if in our eyes the light of high resolve is dimmed, if we trail in the dust the golden hopes of men.

—New York City, March 20, 1912

We stand against all tyranny, by the few or by the many.

Ibid.

Americans learn only from catastrophes and not from experience.

—*An Autobiography*, 1913

ART

After exploring an international exhibition of modern art, which included Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase:

There is in my bathroom a really good Navajo rug which, on any proper interpretation of the Cubist theory, is a far more satisfactory and decorative picture.

—*The Outlook*, March 29, 1913

The lunatic fringe was fully in evidence, especially in the rooms devoted to the Cubists and the Futurists, or Near-Impressionists.

Ibid.

The Cubists are entitled to the serious attention of all who find enjoyment in the puzzle-pictures of the Sunday newspapers.

Ibid.

There are thousands of people who will pay small sums to look at [P. T. Barnum's] faked mermaid, and now and then one of this kind with enough money will buy a Cubist picture, or a picture of a misshapen nude woman, repellent from every standpoint.

Ibid.

ASSASSINATION

Excepting in a crowd I do not think a bodyguard is the least use. Of course there is always the chance that a desperate man willing to give his own life may attack anyone under circumstances which will render him ... helpless. But if there is any chance to break even with a would-be assassin I think the man himself, if alert and resolute, has a better opportunity to defend himself than any bodyguard would have to defend him.

—Letter to ex-Rough Rider
William H. H. Llewellyn,
the White House,
October 19, 1901

No man will ever be restrained from becoming president by any fear as to his personal safety.

—First annual message to
Congress, December 3, 1901

BIG BUSINESS

We demand that big business give the people a square deal; in return we must insist that when anyone engaged in big business honestly endeavors to do right he shall himself be given a square deal.

—Letter to Sir Edward Gray,
November 15, 1913

BOATING

I cannot help thinking that the people with motor boats miss a great deal. If they would only keep to rowboats or canoes, and use oar or paddle ... they would get infinitely more benefit than by having their work done for them by gasoline.

—*An Autobiography*, 1913

BOOKS

I hardly know whether to call it a bad book or not.

—Comment on Leo Tolstoy's
Anna Karenina, in a letter to sister
Corinne from Dickinson, Dakota
Territory, 1884

Tolstoi is a great writer. Do you notice how he never comments on the actions of his personages? He relates what they thought or did without any remark whatever as to whether it was good or bad, as Thucydides wrote history—a fact which tends to give his work an unmoral rather than an immoral tone.

Ibid.

BOOKS

[continued]

No man ever really learned from books how to manage a governmental system.... If he has never done anything but study books he will not be a statesman at all.

—*Atlantic Monthly*, August 1890

Normally I only care for a novel if the ending is good. I quite agree with you that if the hero has to die he ought to die worthily and nobly, so that our sorrow at the tragedy shall be tempered with the joy and pride one always feels when a man does his duty well and bravely.

—Letter to son Kermit, on the
subject of the Charles Dickens
novel *Nicholas Nickleby*,
November 19, 1905

There is quite enough sorrow and shame and suffering and baseness in real life, and there is no need for meeting it unnecessarily in fiction.

Ibid.

Many learned people seem to feel that the quality of readability in a book is one which warrants suspicion. Indeed, not a few learned people seem to feel that the fact that a book is interesting is proof that it is shallow.

—*History as Literature*, 1913

Books are almost as individual as friends.

—*An Autobiography*, 1913

The statesman, and the publicist, and the reformer, and the agitator for new things, and the upholder of what is good in old things, all need more than anything else to know human nature, to know the needs of the human soul; and they will find this nature and these needs set forth nowhere else but in the great imaginative writers, whether of prose or of poetry.

Ibid.

I am old fashioned, or sentimental, or something about books! Whenever I read one I want, in the first place, to enjoy myself, and, in the next place, to feel that I am a little better and not a little worse for having read it.

—Quoted in *Power and Responsibility*,
William Henry Harbaugh, 1961

BOXING

A boxer since his days at Harvard, Roosevelt encouraged it in the training of members of the New York police department when he was commissioner and advocated it as part of the character-development program of the Young Men's Christian Association and in the training of men for the army and navy. He boxed for exercise while governor of New York, but he imposed restraints on prize fighting in an effort to wipe out corruption. He boxed for exercise in the White House until an injury to his left eye persuaded him to give it up, although he did take up jujitsu.

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