

THEODORE ROOSEVELT: A PROGRESSIVE BULL MOOSE



Growing up in New York, Theodore Roosevelt was a sickly child who suffered from asthma. To overcome his physical weakness, he embraced exercise and being in the outdoors. He was home-schooled but became an eager student of nature. Roosevelt attended Harvard College, where he studied biology, boxed, and developed an interest in naval affairs.

He later entered politics and became a State Assemblyman, Police Commissioner, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy. During the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt formed a volunteer cavalry unit called the Rough Riders, which he led on a charge at the battle of San Juan. His actions made him famous across America for his bravery. When the Republican Party needed a hero to draw attention away from scandals in New York, Roosevelt was asked to be its candidate for Governor. In 1898, Roosevelt won and served with distinction.

In 1901, he was William McKinley's Vice-President and when McKinley was assassinated that same year, Roosevelt became America's youngest president. He soon was known as a "trustbuster," when he used the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to break up several monopolies that he felt were hurting working-class Americans. For the first time the federal government was taking an active role in regulating business.

He also worked to pass two progressive pieces of legislation - the Pure Food & Drug Act and a meat inspection bill. These laws were intended to protect consumers against the food industry after Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle* exposed unhealthy conditions at meatpacking plants.

Roosevelt was also the first president to use his position to broker a resolution to a conflict between workers and industry. In May of 1902, coal miners in eastern Pennsylvania went on strike. Roosevelt threatened to send in federal troops to take charge of the mines and eventually the workers and owners came to an agreement.

Roosevelt steered America more actively into world politics. He liked to quote a favorite proverb, "Speak softly and carry a big stick." Aware that a shortcut was needed between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Roosevelt ensured the construction of the Panama Canal. His corollary to the Monroe Doctrine prevented the establishment of foreign bases in the Caribbean and made the United States the "police force" of the Western Hemisphere.

However, some of Roosevelt's most effective achievements were in conservation. He added enormously to the national parks and forests in the West and reserved land for public use.

After leaving the Presidency in 1909, Roosevelt went on an African safari, but later jumped back into politics. In 1912 he ran for President on a Progressive ticket. To reporters he once remarked that he felt as fit as a bull moose, which became the name of his new political party.

While campaigning in Milwaukee, he was shot in the chest by a fanatic. Roosevelt soon recovered, but his words at that time would have been applicable at the time of his death in 1919: "No man has had a happier life than I have led; a happier life in every way."

Another popular legacy of Roosevelt is the stuffed toy bears — teddy bears — named after him. On a hunting trip in 1902, Roosevelt famously refused to shoot a defenseless black bear. A toy maker heard the story and named the teddy bear after Roosevelt. Even though Roosevelt hated being called "Teddy", the nickname and image stuck with him.

