



Image from: [Teddy Roosevelt's administration created the... in Encyclopedia of Intelligence & Counterintelligence](#)

Summary Article: **Roosevelt, Theodore**
From *Encyclopedia of American Studies*

President of the United States from 1901 through 1909, Theodore Roosevelt believed in giving all Americans a “square deal” and worked to create a federal government responsive to citizens caught in the anomie of industrialism. Roosevelt's legacy was the sustained use of an increasingly powerful federal government on behalf of the American people. His political vision and acumen galvanized Progressive Americans during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and his willingness to transgress the mores of the Republican Party resulted in reforms that remain a part of the social and public policy landscape today.

Born in New York City on October 27, 1858, scion of an elite eastern family, Roosevelt modeled his ideals and ethical code on his philanthropist father. Following graduation from Harvard, Roosevelt found his calling in politics. He became New York's youngest assemblyman (1882–1884) and published the first of many books, *The History of the Naval War of 1812*. After the deaths of his wife and mother in 1884, Roosevelt became a rancher in the Dakotas. Despite his economic failure there, he loved the rugged West and internalized its ethos. He returned east to remarry and resume his political career. As civil service commissioner (1889–1895) Roosevelt battled federal governmental corruption. He was given the chance to apply several of his reforms as a New York City police commissioner (1895–1897). Then, resigning as assistant secretary of the navy, Roosevelt created the famous Rough Rider volunteer force, which fought in Cuba in the 1898 Spanish-American War. He became a national celebrity overnight. This propelled him into the New York governorship (1899–1900) and the vice presidency under William McKinley in 1900.

Roosevelt personified the masculine traits of the Progressive Era. Strong, athletic, and fearless, he was a chivalrous, Christian gentleman who protected the powerless and lauded the life of the mind. Much of the intellectual basis for decisions of his presidency stemmed from his notion of the strenuous life—a sound mind in a sound body. Roosevelt called himself a president of all the people. He treated the striking anthracite coal workers and their impatient bosses equally. To protect consumers, Roosevelt supported pure food and drug laws. To conserve resources for future generations, he set aside 235 million acres (94 million ha) of land in federal reserves and parks. He lobbied against child labor and for protective legislation for women. He successfully sued the powerful railroad trust, the Northern Securities Company, and created the Bureau of Corporations, which monitored monopolistic business practices and broke up holding companies that undermined the public interest. His regulation of businesses flew in the face of his aristocratic background, but his father had emphasized the duty of the strong to protect the weak (*noblesse oblige*).

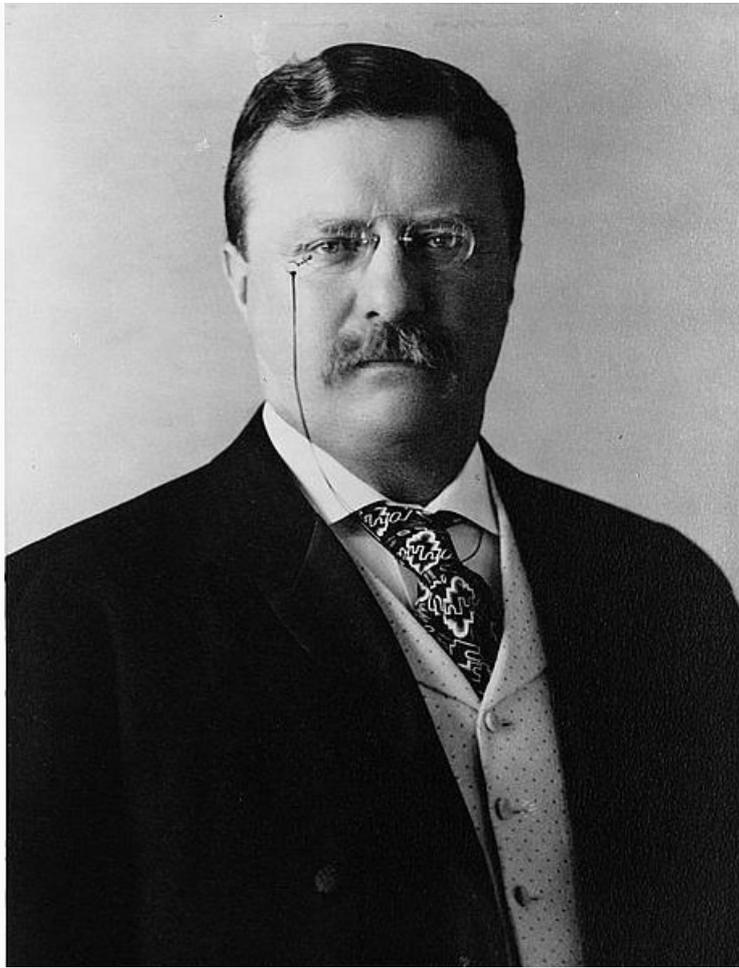
Roosevelt's social Darwinism led him to contradictory actions. He was the first president to dine with a major African American political leader at the White House. He gave patronage jobs to Southern blacks and asked Congress for an antilynching law, yet he also unfairly dismissed a company of black soldiers in Texas, without evidence or trial and despite their protestations of innocence.

Roosevelt's foreign policy is famously encapsulated in the adage, “Speak softly and carry a big stick.”

Only diplomacy backed by a strong military would protect the peace. The Roosevelt Corollary applied the Monroe Doctrine to Latin America, and the Venezuelan debt crisis put it to the test. Roosevelt backed Colombian insurgents and so gained the right to build the canal across newly independent Panama. His settlement of the Russo-Japanese War was fueled by a desire for a balance of power in Asia and won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906.

Enormously popular, Roosevelt left the presidency in 1909 and embarked on an African safari. Conservative Republicans were glad to see him go, as his powerful wielding of the bully pulpit compromised their probusiness constituency. On his return, however, Roosevelt easily fell back into politics, and by 1911 he was in the race for the presidency. A late start and the Republican Party's lock on the election apparatus denied him the nomination; thus he created his own third party, the Progressive, or "Bull Moose," Party. Advocating liberal legislative reforms such as women's suffrage, old-age pensions, inheritance taxes, a graduated income tax, the abolition of child labor, and unemployment benefits, his "New Nationalism" resonated with voters, but the Republican split handed the election to Woodrow Wilson and the Democrats.

Roosevelt maintained his role as leader of liberal Republicanism. He explored an uncharted Brazilian river at age fifty-six and contemplated another presidential run. He spearheaded support for the United States's entry into World War I. Roosevelt died in Oyster Bay, New York, on January 6, 1919, a hero to many Americans. He was the first celebrity president, an advocate of a strong, imperial United States, unafraid of powerful business interests, yet mindful of the poor. His charm, energy, and optimistic pro-Americanism captivated Americans at the time, and his popularity remains undimmed. As the twenty-first century began, elements among both political conservatives and liberals held Roosevelt up as a model for enlightened civic engagement.



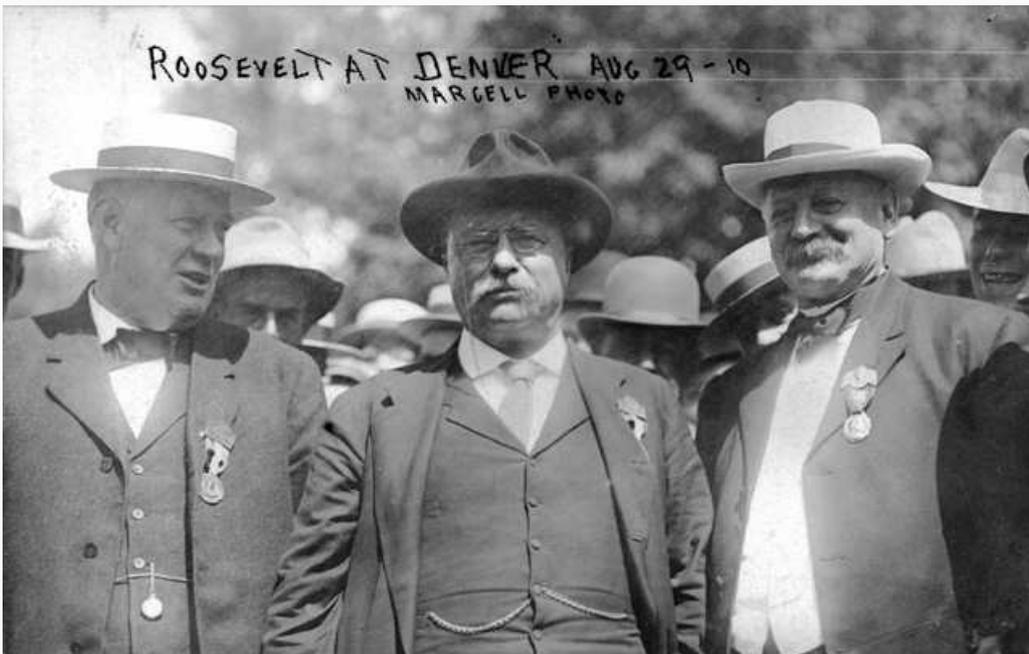
Theodore Roosevelt. 1904. Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.



Theodore Roosevelt. c.1905. George Burroughs Torrey, artist. Detroit Publishing Company Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.



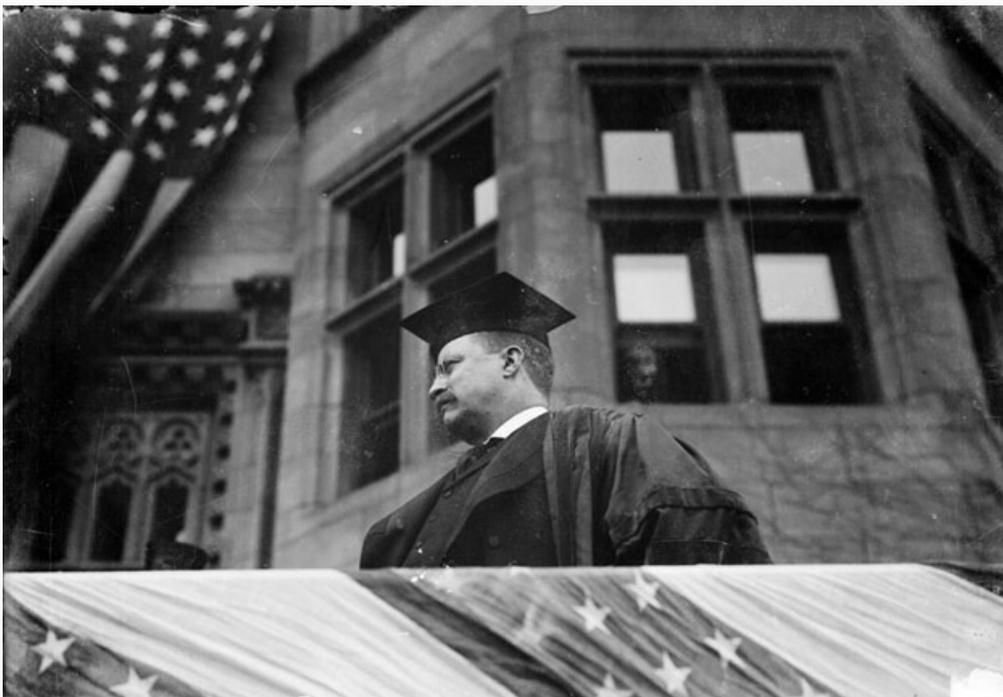
President Roosevelt and his guide Henry Bunn, Sr. Glenwood Springs, Colorado. c.1905. Harry C. Stewart, photographer. Western History/Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Library of Congress.



Roosevelt at Denver. Mayor Robert W. Speer, President Theodore Roosevelt, and Senator John F. Shafroth pose outdoors in Denver, Colorado. 1910. Marcell, photographer. Western History/Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Library of Congress.



President Theodore Roosevelt on speaker's platform in Glenwood Springs after a 3-week hunting trip in western Colorado. 1905. Harry Mellon Rhoads, photographer. Harry M. Rhoads Photograph Collection, Western History/Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Library of Congress.



President Theodore Roosevelt in front of a building at the University of Chicago. Chicago, Illinois. 1903. Chicago Daily News, Inc., photographer. Chicago Historical Society, Library of Congress.

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