

Teddy Roosevelt and the American Ambition

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In 1901, the year that Theodore Roosevelt inherited the presidency after the assassination of William McKinley, America's biggest oil field was tapped at Beaumont, Texas, producing 110,000 barrels a day. Guglielmo Marconi received the first wireless transmission across the Atlantic. J. P. Morgan bought out Andrew Carnegie to form U.S. Steel, thereby controlling two-thirds of American steel production. King C. Gillette launched his safety-razor company in Boston, and the first American bowling tournament was held in Chicago. With oil, steel, and radio, consumer goods, brand names, and sports for the masses, the American century had begun.

'We stand on the threshold of a new century big with the fate of mighty nations,' Roosevelt had told the Republican convention of 1900, seconding the nomination of McKinley. '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.'

When he accepted the nomination for vice president, Roosevelt was forty-one. He was the governor of New York and a certified national hero after leading the charge of his Rough Riders up San Juan Hill in the decisive battle of the Cuban campaign of the Spanish-American War. He had also played a crucial part in the most significant feature of that war. As assistant secretary of the navy, and a powerful voice for war within the administration, he had ordered Commodore George Dewey to take the Pacific Fleet to Hong Kong, and to keep his ships fully stoked in order to launch an instant attack on the Spanish fleet in the Philippines once war was declared. That telegram was sent two months before the formal declaration of war on April 25.

By May 1, news had arrived of Dewey's stunning victory in Manila Bay, destroying Spain's Asiatic squadron without the loss of a single American life.

America's Pacific empire had been launched that same year, again with passionate lobbying and careful naval deployments by Roosevelt, when President McKinley formally annexed the islands of Hawaii. Now the old Spanish colony of the Philippines was falling under American sway. It was all going according to the plans Roosevelt had been devising with his partners in what became known as the 'expansionist' lobby. His oldest friend, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, was a key member, along with Charles Dana, editor of the *New York Sun*; the naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan; and the aggressive Commodore George Dewey.

Roosevelt's appointment as assistant secretary in 1897 represented the expansionists' opportunity, and Roosevelt's address to the Naval War College on June 2 was the occasion when their grand design was first paraded on the public stage. His credentials were sound, after the publication of the second of his thirty-eight books, *The Naval War of 1812*. It remains a classic, although he was but twenty-three when he wrote it. A copy was ordered to be placed aboard every U.S. Navy ship, and Britain's proud Royal Navy paid Roosevelt the compliment of asking him to write the relevant chapter in their own official history. As well as splendid history, its preface contained a sharp warning that the U.S. Navy could not do nearly as well in a similar war in the 1880s: 'It is folly for the great English-speaking Republic to rely for defense upon a navy composed partly of antiquated hulks and partly of new vessels rather more worthless than the old.' The U.S. Navy, if not its elderly senior ranks, understandably saw him as a useful political friend and valuable strategic thinker, and his address to the Naval War College was eagerly anticipated. He delivered a masterful performance.

'All the great masterful races have been fighting races, and the minute that a race loses the hard fighting virtues then it has lost its proud right to stand as the equal of the best,' Roosevelt declared. 'No triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumphs of war.'

He defined the danger for America at a time when Britain, Germany, and Japan were engaged in a naval arms race—the need for a crash building program, and the development of the dockyards, seamen, and

ammunition stocks that were required in an age when most wars were decided in the first ninety days. Widely published in the press, the speech caused a national sensation. It was accompanied in the Navy Department by his orders for a flurry of war planning, for possible conflict with Japan over Hawaii, with Spain over Cuba. 'I do not fear England—Canada is hostage for her good behavior,' he wrote to Mahan.

The fact that such a lobby had to be organized, and the apathetic nation had to be persuaded of its global destiny, is of central importance. America had been built largely by people who had turned their backs on Europe and its quarrels. Its first president had warned them against foreign entanglements, and ever since George Washington's day, Americans had been keen and venturesome traders but reluctant expansionists in any region but their own ever-open frontier to the west. As a historian of that West, Roosevelt was an admirer of Frederick Jackson Turner, whose seminal 1893 address, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History,' had made the point that the empty West had finally filled with settlements. 'The frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history,' Turner concluded. What now would be the new horizons for 'American energy [...] continually demanding a wide field for its exercise?'

Turner offered no answer to his own question, but Roosevelt did. The wide world, the great race among the Great Powers, was to be the new canvas for American visions. But Americans, still introspective, still suspicious of the merits and the costs of foreign quarrels, were not easily persuaded. The wide oceans themselves provided adequate security for the young nation, and the isolationist current remained powerful enough to deter activist foreign policy presidents until the 1940s. Roosevelt's genius was to turn isolationist sentiment to his strategic advantage. He argued that the security of isolation could be upheld only by regional expansion, by fortifying the protective moats with advance posts in Hawaii and the Philippines, and by building the Panama Canal to facilitate the swift passage of the fleets from one coast to the other. The canal itself required further protective expansion into the Caribbean, which itself required war to evict the Spanish from their colonies. Roosevelt promoted America's advance as a series of defensive measures.

Beyond these practical and strategic considerations, however, Roosevelt's speech carried a potent spiritual theme, insistent on the kind of state and people he wanted America and Americans to be: 'There are higher things in this life than the soft and easy enjoyment of material comfort. It is through strife, or the readiness for strife, that a nation must win greatness. We ask for a great Navy, partly because we feel that no national life is worth having if the nation is not willing, when the need shall arise, to stake everything on the supreme arbitrament of war, and to pour out its blood, its treasure, and its tears like water, rather than submit to the loss of honor and renown.'

Much of this was the general rhetoric of the day, the same bellicose calls to greatness that were being heard from the Kaiser's Germany, the same references to the future of the race that were commonplace in Britain. The concept of life as a contest to be won, a series of challenges to be met and overcome, ran through the school textbooks of the day as it did through the poetry of Roosevelt's friend Rudyard Kipling. Social Darwinism, the view that the iron laws of evolution and the survival of the fittest governed nations and races as well as species, was deployed throughout the countries of the self-proclaimed 'civilized' world to justify their martial patriotism and their empires with scientific sanction.

Roosevelt was very much a product of this time, of that Victorian era that combined belief in scientific progress with a marked preference for deep sentimentality and heroism in its literature. On his first family grand tour to Europe in 1869, when he was ten, a visit to the home of the novelist Sir Walter Scott made a deep impression on the young Theodore, and his diary records that Loch Lomond stuck in his mind because it was there they had laid to rest the Lady of the Lake. His second trip across the Atlantic, to the Middle East at the age of fourteen, was memorable not only for his father's gift of a gun, with which he shot his first bird (a Nile warbler) but also for the learning of German in Dresden and the discovery of the *Song of the Nibelungen*. The legends of the old Teutonic gods, with manly feasting in Valhalla for those who died in glorious battle, were to recur repeatedly in his speeches, as they did in the speeches of the young Winston Churchill, a similar type of young patrician-turned-politician in the heroic mode. Like Roosevelt, Churchill combined books and journalism, expeditions

and splendid little wars in the tropics into a stellar public career. Indeed, Churchill's famous wartime speech about 'blood, toil, tears and sweat' was a direct quotation from Roosevelt's address to the Naval War College.

Wars for empire and wars against savages, brave deeds and the nobility of valor, were simply part of the customary mental furniture of a well-read European or North American youth of the late nineteenth century. For Roosevelt, they were also part of a family tradition. His mother, a southerner, recalled the family estate being burned by Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman in the Civil War, while his uncle James Bulloch held a treasured place in Theodore's memory as the builder of the Confederate warship *Alabama*. He recalled how his mother would 'talk to me as a little shaver of ships, ships, ships and the fighting of ships, till they sank into the depths of my soul.'

It was a comfortable childhood, with holidays abroad and summers in the Adirondacks and private tutors, with an easy passage to Harvard. When his father died while Theodore was still in college, and having already published his first book (on the birds of the Adirondacks), he inherited an income of eight thousand dollars a year. He went to Columbia Law School, but the success of his book on the War of 1812 and the attractions of politics lured him from the law into public life. At the age of twenty-three, he was elected to the New York State Assembly and campaigned energetically against machine politics. Then election defeats sent him off to try ranching in the Dakota Territory. He loved it, became friendly with cowboys, and made several arrests as a deputy sheriff. He lost a lot of money, but he wrote a splendidly patriotic book about Thomas Hart Benton, the Missouri senator who was the apostle of what Roosevelt called America's 'manifest destiny to swallow up the land of all adjoining nations who were too weak to withstand us.'

Roosevelt came back into public life as a civil service commissioner in 1889. Characteristically, he made this sinecure of a job into a driving force for reform, and he wrote more books and articles to make money to support his fast-growing family. *Hero Tales from American History*, swiftly written for boys, made it clear he wanted the next generation to grow in the same heroic and patriotic mold in which he had been shaped. He became commissioner of police in the new reform

administration of Mayor William L. Strong, who had been elected in New York City. Roosevelt swiftly sacked the corrupt old chief of police and astutely used his friendships with two prominent reporters, Jacob Riis and Lincoln Steffens, to trumpet his achievements. None too popular in New York for his vigorous enforcement of the laws against Sunday drinking, he was becoming a celebrity in the rest of the country. 'Must be President some day—a man you can't cajole, can't frighten, can't buy,' noted Bram Stoker, the author of *Dracula*, after observing him in action at the police court.

At the same time, Roosevelt was itching for a wider canvas for action. During the brief crisis in 1895 over British claims in Venezuela, he wrote to the Civil War veteran Gen. James Wilson: 'If I were asked what the greatest boon I could confer upon this nation was, I should answer, an immediate war with Great Britain for the conquest of Canada.' Almost any war would do. He thought of fighting Japan for Hawaii, and Spain for the sake of Cuba. 'If you have the lust of battle in you, you will have a pretty good time after all,' he told University of Chicago students on a speaking tour. Still in Chicago, for a Washington's Birthday address, he mourned 'an unhappy tendency among certain of our cultivated people to lose the great manly virtues, the power to strive and fight and conquer.'

Roosevelt was the kind of man to take these ideas of social Darwinism to their logical conclusion. In his multivolume history of the American frontier, *The Winning of the West*, the expansion into the North American continent is portrayed as 'the crowning and greatest achievement' of the English-speaking peoples. In this racial epic, the original inhabitants of the West are seen as 'a few scattered savage tribes, whose life was but a few degrees less meaningless, squalid and ferocious than that of the wild beasts with whom they held joint ownership.'

'The most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages, though it is apt to be also the most terrible and inhuman. The rude, fierce settler who drove the savage from the land lays all civilized mankind under a debt to him,' he wrote. 'It is of incalculable importance that America, Australia and Siberia should pass out of the hands of their red, black and yellow aboriginal owners, and become the heritage of the dominant world races.'

And yet Roosevelt, a man inclined to let his gift for rhetoric run away with him, and who entered the White House with such racially authoritarian views, was signally fair in dealing with Native American rights. He vetoed a bill passed by Congress that would have allowed settlers in Oklahoma to 'buy' 500,000 acres of Kiowa, Apache, and Choctaw land for \$1.50 an acre, and raised the minimum price to \$5 an acre. For this and other actions, the state of Oklahoma took the administration to the Supreme Court, which finally upheld Roosevelt's decisions.

Paradox was in the nature of the man. He was a sickly weakling who built his powerful frame through constant exercise and willpower; a big-game hunter who believed in conservation and using the power of government to preserve the wilderness and its wildlife. The craze of the period for teddy bears began, and the most enduringly popular of all soft toys was named after him, when he pointedly insisted on saving a bear cub when out hunting. He was famous for the phrase 'Speak softly and carry a big stick,' whereas he seldom spoke softly, and despite his boasts, the U.S. Navy never seriously challenged for mastery of the seas. When he demanded four new battleships from Congress, it grumpily agreed to two, although it funded only one a year, at a time when the British and German fleets were building four new *Dreadnought*-type battleships a year. Roosevelt's shipbuilding program resulted in an obsolescent fleet, with mixed twelve-inch and eight-inch guns, and limited to a speed of eighteen knots. They were no match for the twenty-one-knot *Dreadnought*-style ships, with their full battery of twelve-inch guns. Roosevelt's naval legacy was made plain in the 1914 edition of *Jane's Fighting Ships*, which listed the numbers of frontline battleships and battle cruisers available to each power: Britain, thirty-four; Germany, twenty-one; United States, eight; France, four; Japan, four.

Perhaps the greatest paradox regarding Roosevelt is that he spoke much of the glories of battle and the need for the national test of combat but was careful as president to keep the country out of war. Indeed, he became the first president to win the Nobel Peace Prize, for his efforts in brokering peace in the Russo-Japanese War. The paradox is shared, as in a mirror image, by Woodrow Wilson, that man of peace who spoke of the glories of remaining out of wars almost as much as

Roosevelt spoke of the joys of fighting them, but who became the president who took the United States into the conflict that is still known as the Great War.

There are striking parallels between the presidencies of Roosevelt and Wilson. They were each simultaneously popular and scholarly writers who could earn their living by the pen, and at the same time impress the academic world and attract a far wider general audience. There was a sharp contrast in their appearance, between the stocky and bustling Roosevelt and the tall, spare, and self-controlled Wilson. The two personalities could hardly have been more different: Roosevelt was gregarious, combative, and enthusiastic; Wilson was austere, cool, and reserved. But in their joint commitment to broadly progressive reforms, and in their similar plunges into global affairs, their joint domination of the two opening decades of the new century becomes almost a single era. Indeed, Wilson might never have been elected in 1912 but for Roosevelt's quixotic decision to run as an independent candidate for the Bull Moose party, which resulted in splitting the anti-Wilson vote.

Both their presidencies faced similar challenges. As the century began, America had the fastest-growing economy on earth and, thanks to mass immigration, one of the fastest-growing populations. Its railway boom had created railway magnates and iron and steel magnates (who were naturally strong supporters of Roosevelt's naval program), and its teeming cities were giant markets for grain and meat from the prairies and for luxuries like sugar and tobacco. Businessmen began to forge conglomerates and trusts to take advantage of the new opportunities for profit. Some took the opportunity to conspire to create monopolies and raise prices, but in many cases the motive was also to rationalize making what had been a series of far-flung regional and local markets into a coherent national one. But the sugar trust and the tobacco trust became notorious, and the way the railroads fixed prices so that farmers subsidized manufacturers, and the South and West subsidized the industrial Northeast and Midwest, provoked outrage.

In turn, these developments provoked their own response. Labor unions organized against exploitation, and public interest groups lobbied against bad food and bad housing, against drink and prostitution. A new kind of journalist, the muckraker, exposed in the new mass me-

dia the evils of tumultuous growth. *McClure's* magazine was selling 350,000 copies by the time Roosevelt entered the White House. In its pages, Lincoln Steffens condemned 'Pittsburgh—Hell with the Lid Lifted' and 'The Shamelessness of St. Louis,' which inspired other journals and journalists to expose other outrages. Upton Sinclair worked in the Chicago meat-packing industry and wrote *The Jungle*, the savage novel about its filth and degradation. Roosevelt read it and wrote to Sinclair, 'The specific evils you point out will, if their existence be proved, and if I have power, be eradicated.' Ida Tarbell spent five years investigating Rockefeller's Standard Oil group, and she produced devastating accounts of fraud, chicanery, bribery, and violence, which made an overwhelming case for such a gross and powerful organization to be brought under public control.

Roosevelt and Wilson were progressives, not only by virtue of their outrage and conviction and because it was politically popular to claim the title but also because the tenor of the times required it. Prosperity was creating a mass middle class, which wanted its food and its cities to be wholesome, and which had the energy and articulate skills, and, thanks to the muckrakers, the ammunition, to mount their own campaigns. In city after city, the immediate targets of these progressive reformers were the political bosses and their election-winning machines. Roosevelt and Wilson, each in his own time, made temporary truces with the machine bosses in order to get elected, then used their power as state governors and as presidents to attack them.

But it was more than specific abuses and specific targets that explain the great political restlessness of the time. There was something in the air, perhaps as vague as the coming of a new century, perhaps as ambitious as the desire, now that America was complete, her West tamed and her frontier closed, to make her worthy of the land. These moods are indefinable. But in almost every aspect of life, from art to architecture, from foreign policy to civic politics, from education to medicine and psychology, new ideas and new ambitions strode onto the stage to displace the old.

A new generation of historians insisted on challenging the great myths of the American nation. Charles Austin Beard, in his *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, investigated the Founding Fathers and concluded that the 'first firm steps toward the formation of

the Constitution were taken by a small and active group of men immediately interested through their personal possessions in the outcome of their labors.' Thorstein Veblen used the new art of sociology to pillory the idle rich in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, which noted, 'Elegant dress serves its purpose of elegance not only in that it is expensive but also because it is the insignia of leisure [...] pointedly suggesting that its wearer cannot when so attired bear a hand in any employment that is directly and immediately of any human use.' The patrician historian Henry Adams wrote, 'Politics, as a practice, whatever its professions, has always been the systematic organization of hatreds.' He expected little from its practitioners, since 'practical politics consists in ignoring facts.' Adams expected even less from the avowed reformers: 'Power is poison—its effect on Presidents has always been tragic.'

Certainly there was tragedy in the fate of Wilson, who collapsed of a stroke and witnessed the frustration of his great dream of a League of Nations, and of Roosevelt, who died after condemning his Republican party to defeat and suffering Wilson's rejection of his plea to be given command of an American division in France. And yet the two presidents were able to introduce sweeping reforms of the trusts and the abuses that the muckrakers exposed, and they invented the modern presidency in the process.

'I did not usurp power, but I did greatly broaden the use of executive power,' Roosevelt wrote in his autobiography. 'I acted on the theory that the President could at any time in his discretion withdraw from entry any of the public lands of the United States and reserve the same for forestry, for waterpower sites, for irrigation and other public purposes. Without such sanction, it would have been impossible to stop the activity of the land thieves.' Before Roosevelt, some 40 million acres of public lands had been made into reserves; he added another 190 million acres, and Senator Robert La Follette, his usually admiring radical critic, concluded, 'This is probably the greatest thing Roosevelt ever did.'

There were other achievements. He challenged the color bar and outraged much of the white South by inviting Booker T. Washington to the White House. He became the first president to intervene directly in strikes, and he summoned the coal owners and miners to the White House to arbitrate a settlement. He revived the little-used pow-

ers of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and brought suit against the massive Northern Securities Company, through which J. P. Morgan had brought together the Union Pacific, the Burlington, and the Northern Pacific railroads. The outraged Morgan, who had put ten thousand dollars into Roosevelt's New York gubernatorial campaign, went directly to the White House to demand a deal. 'That can't be done,' said Roosevelt. Then Morgan wanted to know if his other interests would come under similar attack. Not unless they had done something wrong, Roosevelt replied, and he later wrote, 'Mr. Morgan could not help regarding me as a big rival operator, who either intended to ruin all his interests or else could be induced to come to an agreement to ruin none.' Then Roosevelt moved against Morgan's beef trust.

These high-minded reforms, which challenged the financial base of his Republican party, were deployed by a ruthless political operator, one who deliberately delayed the statehood of Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona for fear that they would vote Democratic in the 1904 election. In his first term, Congress set strict limits on his reforms, only authorizing his Bureau of Corporations, which had the power to examine the books of any business in interstate commerce, when Roosevelt promised no more regulatory measures. Once reelected, he returned to the fray, pushing into law the Hepburn Act, which gave the Interstate Commerce Commission the power to fix maximum railroad rates. This was the crucial precedent on which the state's right to intervene in business affairs—to set prices and regulate the market—was based. This required a clever ploy: to intimidate the Republicans in Congress with a threat to reform the tariff and then to drop the tariff in order to win the regulatory principle.

The constant theme of Roosevelt's reforms was to insist that there was a common interest of the nation as a whole, and that the president was the man elected to define it and protect it. 'When I became president,' he wrote later, 'the question as to the method by which the United States government was to control the corporations was not yet important. The absolutely vital question was whether the Government had power to control them at all.'

The big reactionaries of the business world and their allies and instruments among politicians and newspaper editors [...] demanded

for themselves an immunity from government control which, if granted, would have been as wicked and as foolish as immunity to the barons of the twelfth century. Many of them were evil men. Many of them were just as good men as many of these same barons, but they were as utterly unable as any medieval castle owner to understand what the public interest really was. There have been aristocracies which have played a great and beneficent part at stages in the growth of mankind, but we had come to the stage where for our people what was needed was a real democracy; and of all the forms of tyranny the least attractive and most vulgar is the tyranny of mere wealth, the tyranny of a plutocracy.

During his presidency, Roosevelt shrank from the title of Progressive, dismissing many Progressives as 'rural Tories' who wanted to abolish big business rather than control it. And while some of the trusts were tamed, and Northern Securities and Standard Oil were broken up, Roosevelt did not want to dismantle the extraordinary wealth- and job-creating machine that the U.S. economy had become. He was ready to work with J. P. Morgan when required. During the panic of 1907, Morgan and John D. Rockefeller jointly stepped in with cash to shore up the market. It may not have been a direct reward, but Roosevelt's immediate approval of the merger between U.S. Steel and the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company reassured business that the Republican White House remained broadly on their side. 'The action was emphatically for the general good,' Roosevelt commented. 'It represented the only chance for arresting the panic.'

Roosevelt claimed that, as president, it was his job to be on everyone's side. 'It was again and again necessary to assert the position of the President as the steward of the whole people,' he recalled in his autobiography. This put him, on occasion, above party allegiance, and Roosevelt went to some pains to claim that the president had to rise above and then blend the two competing traditions that had dominated the philosophy of American politics since the birth of the republic, between the strong federal state of Alexander Hamilton and the decentralized democracy of Thomas Jefferson. 'Men who understand and practice the deep underlying philosophy of the Lincoln school of American thought are necessarily Hamiltonian in their belief in a

strong and efficient national Government, and Jeffersonian in their belief in the people as the ultimate authority, and in the welfare of the people as the end of government.'

This was a neat debating point, but politics is about taking sides in order to make decisions. Roosevelt tried to have it all ways. His Square Deal policy sought to be evenhanded between labor and capital and to flay both the radical socialists and corrupt businessmen alike. 'We seek to control law-defying wealth, in the first place to prevent its doing evil, and in the next place to avoid the vindictive and dreadful radicalism which if left uncontrolled it is certain in the end to arouse,' he wrote to his attorney general, Charles Bonaparte. 'We stand with equal stoutness for the rights of the man of wealth and for the rights of the wage-worker.' The probably inevitable result was that he satisfied neither, and much of the task of reform still awaited the future presidency of Woodrow Wilson. More immediately, Roosevelt's attempt at evenhandedness threw his own party into a crisis, which ended, during the Taft presidency, which succeeded Roosevelt's, with a split that Roosevelt led.

By the time he left the White House in 1909, Roosevelt claimed, 'the Republican party became once more the progressive, and indeed the fairly, radically progressive party of the Nation.' If true, it was at the price of a severe breach between the president and his party's leaders in Congress, which he admitted in his autobiography. 'We succeeded in working together, although with increasing friction, for some years, I pushing forward and they hanging back. Gradually, however, I was forced to abandon the effort to persuade them to come my way, and then I achieved results only by appealing over the heads of the Senate and House leaders to the people, who were masters of both of us.' By the end, he confessed, 'Relations were quite as bitter as if we had belonged to opposite political parties.'

Roosevelt was simply too big and ambitious a political phenomenon for any conventional party structure to contain him. So in one of those intuitive leaps into the future that marked his career, he invented that crucial component of the modern presidency: the media presence that soared beyond politics directly to the people. It was indeed a bully pulpit, but only for those who knew how to use it, and Roosevelt always had an instinct for the media. When his troopship landed at

Montauk upon its return from the fighting in Cuba, he strode straight to the little knot of reporters to extol the prowess of his regiment and give them a story. 'This is a pistol with a history,' he confided, brandishing his weapon. 'It was taken from the wreck of the *Maine*. When I took it to Cuba I made a vow to kill at least one Spaniard with it, and I did.'

In his own assessment of his presidency, Roosevelt claimed three great achievements: brokering the peace between Russia and Japan; sending the battleships of 'the Great White Fleet' around the world to advertise the presence of a new naval power; and building the Panama Canal. Each achievement was somewhat clouded. Russia and Japan each wanted peace anyway, for their own reasons. And far from heralding a new era of American influence in the region, it was the very modesty of American naval power in the Pacific that encouraged each of them to accept Roosevelt as an almost disinterested neutral. The voyage of the Great White Fleet had made for splendid newspaper headlines, but in reality, this first display of American naval ambition was marked by appalling logistical difficulties. Its dependence on friendly ports for refueling, as well as the dire shortage of cruiser and destroyer escorts, made it a highly vulnerable parade. It was not, for established naval powers, an immediate military threat, although it laid down a portentous marker for the future. If Roosevelt's intention had been to intimidate, he did not wholly succeed. But if—as Roosevelt publicly claimed—the voyage was a gesture of goodwill, he failed; for the historian of the Japanese navy, Shigera Fukudone, it marked the moment when 'the Japanese Navy made the U.S. Navy its sole imaginary enemy.'

The Panama Canal was an overdue act of commercial and strategic logic for the Americas as a whole, which Roosevelt carried off in a high-handed manner that would sour U.S. relations with Latin America for decades to come. Finding Colombia too corrupt and too slow for his purposes, Roosevelt encouraged and supported a coup on the isthmus, thus carving the infant state of Panama from its Colombian trunk, and then carving, in turn, a strip of U.S. territory through Panama, the Canal Zone, through which the waterway would run. Possibly there was little alternative if the canal were to be achieved. In any event, the stupendous engineering feat was finally complete by 1914.

By that time, the paternalist relationship between the United States and its southern neighbors had been made clear in Roosevelt's corollary to the original Monroe Doctrine, which asserted the right to unilateral police action throughout the region: 'Brutal wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilizing society, may finally require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the United States cannot ignore this duty.'

Roosevelt, in retrospect, had through temperament and personal conviction prodded his country onto the world stage before it was fully ready to play the part. Possibly because no American president could quite so crudely affront the anticolonial tradition in which the country had been born, he was not a full-blooded imperialist. The Philippines were given decent government, education, and a promise of independence. Marines were sent to Cuba, restored order, and left again. This was arrogant and intrusive, but it was not the naked conquest of the European way. Roosevelt's actions always had limits, even if his rhetoric and ambitions raced far ahead.

The voters of the day were reluctant about foreign commitments, most visibly when faced with the ambiguous role he played in the Moroccan crisis of 1905, when for the first time American diplomats were told that supporting the Franco-British alliance against Germany was in the U.S. national interest. In fact, the American people were not much interested in foreign affairs at all. And who could blame them when the real drama of the age was unfolding on their doorsteps? It was in Roosevelt's America that the first true movie, *The Great Train Robbery*, filled theaters and Ziegfeld launched his famous Follies. And it was in Roosevelt's final year in office that Mary Pickford became the first film star. It was in America that the first black man became the heavyweight boxing champion of the world, and whatever Jack Johnson's feat represented in the popular mind, a deeper national tradition began in 1910 as W. E. B. Du Bois organized what would become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

It was in Roosevelt's America that Henry Ford launched his Model T, and where the Wright brothers launched their first flight. Roosevelt himself had ensured that they got a contract to build planes for the military. Here lay the final irony: that a man who prided himself on his

modernity and clear vision of a great American future should end his life so thoroughly out of tune with his times. The new kind of war that the invention of the Wright brothers heralded, and that the mass-production techniques of Henry Ford made possible, saw the Wrights' technology used to bomb civilians in their cities. The war that unfolded in Europe as Roosevelt languished out of office, with no party to lead, brought tanks and barbed wire and poison gas to obliterate those *Boys Weekly* heroics that had marked Roosevelt's life and temperament.

He may have been the last leader of any democratic nation to be able to glorify war in public speeches and to summon its young men to feats of valor and the grandeur of sacrifice. The squalid reality of the Western Front was a universe away from the grandiose racial mission of conquest and mastery to which Roosevelt always thrilled. By the time of his death, eight weeks after World War I ended, Roosevelt was a very old-fashioned man whose most enduring legacy was to take into federal protection almost 200 million acres of the American wilderness he loved. In that sense, he was still ahead of his time.