

Vice Presidents of the United States Theodore Roosevelt (1901)

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Introduction by Mark O. Hatfield.



I would a great deal rather be anything, say professor of history, than Vice-President.

—Theodore Roosevelt¹

Senator Thomas C. Platt of New York declared that he went to the presidential inaugural of 1901 "to see Theodore Roosevelt take the veil."² Roosevelt, the governor of New York, had been elected vice president the previous autumn on William McKinley's Republican ticket, and Platt looked forward to having the maverick governor in seclusion for four years. The new vice president was not entirely certain of his own prospects, stating that "it [the vice-presidency] is not a steppingstone to anything except oblivion"—hardly a ringing endorsement of the nation's second highest office.³ Yet this was the prevailing opinion about the vice-presidency at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most of Roosevelt's nearest predecessors were men of limited qualifications and interests whose functions were primarily social. Some observers hoped that this office would finally tame the firebrand Roosevelt, but if the Rough Rider's active and adventurous past was any indication, the vice-presidency was in for some changes.

Youth

The life of Theodore Roosevelt is one of the great American stories. He was born on October 27, 1858, in New York City to a prominent family of moderate wealth. Theodore Roosevelt, Sr., a partner in the importing firm of Roosevelt and Son, was a well-known philanthropist, teaching in mission schools and founding the Children's Aid Society. His wife, Martha Bulloch, was a woman of remarkable beauty and refined taste. The couple made a striking contrast: Theodore being a vigorous entrepreneur of somewhat mercurial temperament, while Martha, a Georgian, was the stereotypical "southern belle." Theodore, Jr., the second of four children, was a frail boy, frequently suffering from severe asthmatic attacks. As an adolescent, however, he had taken his father's advice to "make" his body, so that by the time he entered Harvard in 1876, he was an accomplished athlete and outstanding boxer. At Harvard, Roosevelt excelled in natural science and politics, graduating twenty-first in a class of 177.

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Upon graduation, Roosevelt had a number of careers open to him. He had long considered science his greatest strength—his first published work, *The Summer Birds of the Adirondacks*, appeared in 1877 while he was still an undergraduate—but was gradually losing professional interest in the topic. He began studying law at Columbia and undertook his first work of history, *The Naval War of 1812* (published in 1882). It was politics, however, that most piqued his interest. This possible vocation horrified Roosevelt's family and social peers, most of whom considered politics a low and dirty activity dominated by corrupt bosses and ill-bred immigrants. Theodore, however, decided that he "intended to be one of the governing class," a determination that would dominate the rest of his life.⁴

Legislator, Cowboy, and Naturalist

In 1881, at the age of twenty-three, Roosevelt was elected to the New York state assembly as a Republican. He quickly established himself as the leader of a group of young independent-minded Republican legislators, known as the "Roosevelt Republicans," who fought to clean up New York politics by opposing the power of both the Republican state machine and the Tammany Hall Democrats of New York City. Roosevelt gained a widespread reputation for honesty, integrity, and vigor. In his second term, he was made minority leader of the assembly and in his third term collaborated often with Democratic Governor Grover Cleveland to pass reform legislation, especially civil service reform.⁵

This seemingly charmed career was sidetracked in February of 1884, when Roosevelt suffered the deaths of both his wife and his mother. He had met the beautiful Alice Lee while he was at Harvard and they had married on October 27, 1880, a handsome couple who delighted in the social life of New York. Alice became ill with Bright's Disease immediately after giving birth to their first child, also named Alice. At the same time, Martha Roosevelt lay ill with typhoid fever in an upstairs room. On Valentine's Day, 1884, Martha died, followed the next morning by Alice, who died in her husband's arms. The blow was tremendous, causing Theodore to lament in his diary, "The light has gone out of my life." He never spoke of Alice Lee Roosevelt again. He declined to run for reelection to the assembly, deciding instead to go west and forget his sorrows by becoming a cowboy. He purchased a ranch in the Dakota Territory and spent the next two years tending to a large herd of cattle, chasing outlaws, writing popular books about the West such as *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885), and creating an image as one of the nation's most enigmatic cowboys.⁶

These sojourns in the West helped to expand one of Roosevelt's greatest interests, his love of nature. As a young man Roosevelt had enjoyed studying the plant and animal life of his native New York. The Dakota Territory opened up new experiences and also fostered a concern for the vanishing wildlife of the nation. Throughout his subsequent political career, he would maintain an interest in preserving America's natural beauty, despite his penchant for shooting at much of it on western hunting trips. Whether it was the founding of Boone and Crockett Clubs throughout the country or setting up wildlife preserves as president, this interest would remain a constant throughout his life. Another constant interest was history. In all, Roosevelt wrote fourteen books on various topics, as well as numerous articles. While not recognized as great works of history, his *Naval War of 1812*, *Thomas Hart Benton* (1886), and *Winning of the West* (1889) were considered standard works for decades. All of this he accomplished while pursuing an active career in politics.⁷

Even in his attempts at seclusion, Roosevelt could not entirely escape from politics. Before leaving for the Dakotas in 1884, he led the New York delegation to the Republican National Convention in an attempt to block the presidential nomination of James G. Blaine. When this effort failed, Roosevelt declined to follow the example of other reformers, who switched their allegiance to the Democratic candidate, Grover Cleveland. As he boarded his train for the Dakotas, he indicated that he would support the Republican nominee. The reform press reacted with outrage, excoriating their former hero from afar. During his years as a cowboy, Roosevelt made frequent trips back east to attend to family business and regaled reporters with tales of his exotic adventures. This ensured that his name remained in the papers in New York, as well as spreading to more western locales. He remained enough in the public eye, in fact, that upon one of his return trips in 1886, the party nominated him for mayor of New York City.⁸

Politics and War

After losing the three-way mayoral race of 1886 and spending a few years on his literary pursuits, Roosevelt held a succession of appointed posts in which he performed well and continued to enhance his public reputation. In 1889 he became a civil service commissioner under President Benjamin Harrison. He left this position in 1895 to become a New York City police commissioner, and then, in 1897, President William McKinley appointed him assistant secretary of the navy. Roosevelt found himself in this office when the United States declared war on Spain in 1898. Never one to miss the action, Roosevelt promptly resigned his post to form a volunteer regiment of western cowboys and eastern adventurers that the press dubbed "Roosevelt's Rough Riders." The Spanish-American War did not last

long, but it was long enough for the Rough Riders to ride (or march, since only Colonel Roosevelt was actually mounted) into American folklore. After the well-chronicled Battle of San Juan Hill, Roosevelt returned to the United States as the most famous man in the nation.⁹

In the summer of 1898, the New York Republican party was searching for a gubernatorial candidate. As the current Republican administration was plagued with scandals and falling popularity, the prospects of a Democratic victory in the fall were rising daily. It quickly became obvious to party leaders that only a man of tremendous popularity and an impeccable reputation for honesty and "clean government" could rescue the party from defeat. That man was the vigorous colonel just returned from Cuba, Theodore Roosevelt. The man whose opinion mattered most, however, was not so sure. Senator Thomas Platt had risen to power in the party the old-fashioned way, by climbing up through the party machinery. By 1898, he had established himself as the unquestioned leader of the state GOP. Known as the "Easy Boss," Platt was in a position to decide who the state convention would nominate for governor. As a veteran New York politician, Platt had seen Roosevelt in action and was suspicious of the young man's reform attitude, his lack of sympathy for the machine, and his immense personal popularity. The last thing the Easy Boss wanted was a challenge to his power within the party. On the other hand, Roosevelt had shown his party regularity by not bolting the Blaine campaign in 1884, and his most virulent tirades were usually reserved for the Democratic Tammany Hall machine in New York City. Most of all, Platt saw in the famous colonel a way to keep the party in office, an outcome far preferable to the election of a hostile Democratic administration.¹⁰

On September 17, Roosevelt went to see Platt at the senator's apartment in the Fifth Avenue Hotel in order to come to some sort of working agreement. The reformers once more cried out in protest that their leader was consorting with the enemy. Roosevelt's ambiguous relationship with many vocal reform advocates was a recurring theme during his career. Those who worked to overthrow the machines did not see how a politician could further the cause of reform while still working with men like Tom Platt. Roosevelt was, above all else, a man of action who measured success by results. He was willing to compromise in order to accomplish gradual changes. He was contemptuous of what he called "professional reformers," men who refused to bend their ideals to the realities of power. While others railed at the system from without, Roosevelt would try to reform it from within, but to do this required power.¹¹

Governor of New York

Senator Platt agreed to Roosevelt's nomination after the candidate promised to consult him on appointments to office and important policy matters. Roosevelt's campaign was rather simple; he promised merely to run a "clean" administration and capitalized on his popularity with the voters. Although he may not have had a clear program in mind while running for office, once in, he quickly showed that he had no intention of being a mere caretaker for the machine. It became apparent that he and Senator Platt had different definitions of "consultation." One of the governor's first decisions was to appoint a new administrator for the state canal system. It was in this office that most of the worst scandals of the previous administration had taken place. Senator Platt had promised the position to Francis J. Hendricks of Syracuse. When Roosevelt refused to make the appointment (because Hendricks was from a "canal county"), Platt was incensed. Roosevelt managed to calm the situation by drawing up a list of names, all good party men, and allowing Platt to choose from it. By this method, most future appointments were made amicably, but the governor had shown his independence and given the Easy Boss an uneasy feeling about the future.¹²

Conflicts over policy would be a more difficult matter. Governor Roosevelt supported legislation authorizing the state supreme court to inspect the books of corporations, endorsed antimonopoly legislation, pushed for better civil service laws, supported an eight-hour-day law for public employees, and advocated a minimum wage for New York City's school teachers. These and other measures ran afoul of Senator Platt's wishes, but the issue which most disturbed him was Roosevelt's support for a tax on public franchises. Platt's political machine was financed primarily by large corporations in New York, many of which held public franchises. Nothing was more hateful to these interests than corporate taxes, especially on companies that were, in their eyes at least, providing a public service such as water or gas. By forcing the franchise tax through the legislature, Roosevelt made powerful enemies who informed Senator Platt of their disapproval. The boss worried that his hold on the party was fading because of his inability to control his governor. He began reconsidering his relationship with Theodore Roosevelt.¹³

Getting rid of Governor Roosevelt did not promise to be easy. While the impetuous governor may have made enemies in the business community, he was immensely popular with the public. In fact, it was this popularity that

made him such an effective governor. One reason Senator Platt had acquiesced in Roosevelt's nomination was that the senator anticipated controlling the state assembly. As long as Platt's will was supreme in the legislature, the governor's most threatening schemes could be defeated. Roosevelt, however, had developed a weapon capable of changing the minds of wavering legislators. During his campaign for election, the governor had demonstrated the power of his personality; as one observer remarked, "Teddy . . . [was] a wonder . . . there were immense gatherings of enthusiastic people at every stopping place. . . . [Even when] the speech was nothing, . . . the man's presence was everything. It was electrical, magnetic." Roosevelt was aware of his hold on the public imagination. As the most vigorous governor most New Yorkers had ever seen, Roosevelt used constant publicity to push for his programs. He regularly held two press conferences a day and consulted experts of all kinds on complex issues.¹⁴ The growing media of the day feasted on this constant flow of information, and the public loved it. Under such intense public scrutiny, only the most intransigent of legislators cared to challenge Roosevelt. This method of public persuasion would serve Roosevelt well in the future, as it defined his political style and formed his most lasting contribution to the political process in the twentieth century.

Deciding Whether to Run for Vice President

During Roosevelt's term as governor, many of his friends and admirers began once more to consider his future. As governor of New York, he naturally became a potential candidate for president. Even Senator Platt realized this when he was considering Roosevelt's gubernatorial nomination, saying, "If he becomes Governor of New York, sooner or later, with his personality, he will have to be President of the United States. . . . I am afraid to start that thing going."¹⁵ In 1900 however, the Republicans already had a candidate in incumbent President William McKinley. Few doubted that Roosevelt would be a candidate in 1904; the problem was what he should do until then. Even if Roosevelt were reelected governor, he could only serve until 1902, leaving two years before he could run for president. Roosevelt himself did not believe that his current popularity could last another four years.¹⁶ His friends, however, found a solution to his problem: they would make him vice president.

The most conspicuous proponent of this idea was Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Roosevelt and Lodge had been close friends for many years, and Lodge had no doubt about his friend's presidential destiny. Lodge was sure that the vice-presidency was the way to the Executive Mansion. This must have sounded odd to many since the vice-presidency was widely perceived as "a spot to gain four years of rest and a good income,"¹⁷ hardly the sort of office to appeal to an active man like Roosevelt. Lodge, however, knew his friend well enough to realize that all Roosevelt needed to succeed was a place in the spotlight. As Lodge later put it,

I do not pretend to say that the office [of vice president] in itself is suited to you and to your habits, but for the future it is, in my judgement, invaluable. It takes you out of the cut-throat politics of New York, where I am sure they would have destroyed your prospects, if you had remained two years longer, and it gives you a position in the eyes of the country second only to that of the President.¹⁸

Some of Roosevelt's other friends also speculated that the vice president's role as presiding officer of the Senate would keep him in the public eye much more effectively than his current position as governor of New York. Finally, many of his western supporters were eager for the opportunity to promote their man for a national office, especially after his appearance at the Rough Riders' reunion in Las Vegas in 1899. Newspapers all over the West championed him for the vice-presidency in 1900 and the presidency in 1904. Some even suggested replacing McKinley in 1900.¹⁹ The movement was gathering momentum, and Vice President Garret A. Hobart's death in November 1899 only increased the pace—but what about the candidate?

While flattered by all the support for his candidacy, Roosevelt did not relish the idea of being vice president. He worried that as vice president he "could not *do* anything."²⁰ For a man who thrived on the "strenuous life," it was an unpleasant prospect indeed. He would have few responsibilities in the office, and it would restrict his ability to speak out on issues that greatly concerned him. He worried that "if I did anything [as vice president] I would attract suspicion and antagonism." He considered the potential for a vice president to be active in formulating policy to be "infinitesimal."²¹ As governor of New York, at least, he was actively doing the work that so stimulated him; as vice president that would not be possible. Presiding over the Senate did not appeal to him either. The job would undoubtedly be a "bore" and might, in fact, prove quite maddening. As he wrote to Lodge, "I should be in a cold

shiver of rage at inability to answer hounds like [Senator Richard] Pettigrew [D-SD] and the scarcely more admirable [Senator William] Mason [R-IL] and [Senator Eugene] Hale [R-ME]. . . . I would be seeing continually things that I would like to do, and very possibly would like to do differently from the way in which they are being done." The vice president had little, if any, real authority in the Senate, and Roosevelt was adamant that he would "not like to be a figurehead."²²

There were also financial reasons for Roosevelt's reluctance to run. He was, by his own standards, a man of "very moderate means." The vice president was expected to carry on an active social life in Washington, which required "the expenditure of a good deal of money for entertaining and the like." Roosevelt could certainly not entertain on a scale comparable to that of Levi Morton and Garret Hobart, the two most recent Republican vice presidents. Still, if the office held opportunities to do valuable work, Roosevelt would have tolerated the financial problems.²³

Unfortunately, the vice-presidency offered few such possibilities and promised to be a financial strain as well. The more Roosevelt thought about it, the less appealing the vice presidency became. He continually expressed this opinion to anyone who asked, finally stating, "I would a great deal rather be anything, say professor of history, than Vice-President."²⁴ It was not, however, a teaching position that attracted his attention. The position that Roosevelt really wanted was secretary of war, but McKinley appointed Elihu Root to that recently vacated post. Roosevelt's second choice was governor general of the Philippines, but the president, not trusting Roosevelt's impetuous nature, was unlikely to grant him that office.²⁵ With these options unavailable, the governor's mansion seemed the best place for him. It was left for the Easy Boss to step in and supply the final piece to the nomination puzzle.

Senator Platt was looking for a way to get Governor Roosevelt out of New York. The corporations and large financial interests of the state were increasingly disturbed by the governor's performance, especially his support of the franchise tax, and were anxious to return to business as usual. They placed growing pressure on Senator Platt to do something about his governor. While reluctant to resort to a potentially disastrous fight against Roosevelt's renomination for governor, the boss saw an opportunity in all the talk about the vice-presidency. If he could push Roosevelt into that position devoid of power, he would get the young reformer out of the way, appease his financial supporters, and be free to select a more pliable governor as Roosevelt's replacement. It seemed the perfect solution.²⁶ The boss proceeded to push Roosevelt's name to party leaders and hinted to the governor that he might not support him for a second gubernatorial term. This challenge from the machine, however, only raised the fighting spirit in Roosevelt, who was never one to retreat from political battle. In February 1900 Roosevelt therefore attempted to remove himself from the vice-presidential race, telling the *New York Tribune* that "under no circumstances could I, or would I, accept the nomination for the vice presidency."²⁷ The boom for his nomination, however, continued, with friends and foes alike fanning the flames.

Meanwhile, in Washington, President McKinley remained silent on the issue. The president had never been greatly impressed by Governor Roosevelt for reasons of both personality and policy. Yet, after Hobart's death, he gave no indication of preference in the selection of his new running mate. Most Republican leaders believed Roosevelt would bring a new kind of glamor and excitement to their ticket. The governor was a recent war hero, whose record in office had been very popular and less radical than some had feared. There were also no other similarly attractive candidates available.²⁸ McKinley may have been opposed to Roosevelt, but he proposed no alternatives, and his silence seemed to indicate acceptance.

Election of 1900

By the time the Republican National Convention opened in June in Philadelphia, it had become obvious that Roosevelt was the favorite to receive the vice-presidential nomination. When he continued to protest that he would rather be governor of New York, Lodge warned him that, if he attended the convention, his nomination was assured. But Roosevelt could not stay away, claiming that to do so would look like cowardice.²⁹ As a result, despite his protestations, his magnetic presence at the convention fired the enthusiasm of his partisans to a fever pitch. When he appeared for the opening session clad in a black hat reminiscent of the Rough Riders' Cuban campaign—what one delegate called "an acceptance hat"—his nomination was sealed. Scores of western delegates spent that night parading and chanting "We want Teddy." As Senator Platt put it, "Roosevelt might as well stand under Niagara Falls and try to spit water back as to stop his nomination by this convention."³⁰ Ohio Senator Mark Hanna, who opposed

the Roosevelt nomination, tried to block the movement from his position as convention chairman, but without support from the president he could do little against the combined forces of Platt, Pennsylvania boss Matthew Quay (who had an old score to settle with Hanna), and genuine popular will. In desperation, Hanna could only protest, "Don't you realize that there's only one life between this madman and the White House?"³¹

Theodore Roosevelt really did not want to be vice president, but he was a confirmed political realist with presidential ambitions. He knew that regaining the nomination for governor of New York would be difficult, if not impossible, against the open opposition of Senator Platt, and even a successful gubernatorial campaign promised only two years of political struggle against growing corporate hostility. Although Roosevelt continued to fight his own nomination, his protests grew gradually weaker, until, by the time of the convention, they were no longer convincing. Everything pointed to the vice-presidency, and Theodore Roosevelt knew how to read the signs. He did not pursue the office, but when it was thrust upon him, he accepted it. For good or ill, he was now President McKinley's running mate and he was determined to make the best of it.

Republican strategy in 1900 was to let their youthful vice-presidential candidate take to the hustings while President McKinley conducted his "front porch campaign," just as he had in 1896, except this time he received guests at the White House rather than his home in Canton, Ohio. This strategy suited the vigorous Roosevelt extremely well, as he proclaimed himself to be "strong as a bull moose." It allowed him to tour the West and Midwest, taking on Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan on issues of the tariff, the gold standard, and American empire. These two great orators set standards of stamina never before seen. Roosevelt covered 21,000 miles in twenty-four states, making over 600 speeches.³² Roosevelt's tour helped the GOP compensate for Bryan's popularity in the West and it added life to an otherwise dull campaign. The vice-presidential candidate radiated energy, while McKinley sat on his porch in Washington, reminding the nation how prosperous it was.

For Roosevelt, the campaign also provided an opportunity to perform on a national stage. Everywhere he went, he drew huge crowds and constant public attention. As historian John Milton Cooper, Jr., has put it, "The sheer fascination of his presence among people who had already read or heard about him, together with the pungency of his personality, made him the sensation of the 1900 campaign."³³ Roosevelt's nationwide tour helped accelerate the growing trend toward direct, personal campaign techniques. Throughout the nation, "boy orators" such as Roosevelt, Bryan, and Robert M. LaFollette of Wisconsin were altering the system of party campaigning that had persisted for decades. Rather than relying solely on their parties to obtain office, they used whistle-stop campaigns and the burgeoning mass media to take their message directly to the voters. They pushed for direct primaries in order to bypass the party machines and relied on public indignation to insist on reforms. Theodore Roosevelt was helping to lead the way for changes in American political campaigns that would reverberate throughout the twentieth century.³⁴ Of course, the press played its part in promoting these changes. Roosevelt, as the most interesting candidate in 1900, received more press coverage than even the presidential candidates, and certainly more than the Democratic nominee for vice president, Adlai Stevenson. Reporters loved Roosevelt because he was always good news copy. While other politicians relied on editors for favorable press coverage, Roosevelt had an ongoing rapport with reporters. They could go to any politician for opinions; they could go to Roosevelt for stories. His campaign dominated the news. As journalist Finley Peter Dunne's favorite character "Mr. Dooley" put it, "'Tis Teddy alone that's r-runnin', an' he ain't runnin', he's gallopin'."³⁵

An Unenthusiastic Presiding Officer

McKinley's reelection was nearly a foregone conclusion. The nation was prosperous and the administration was popular. On election day, McKinley received 51.6 percent of the vote, up from 51 percent in 1896. He lost only one state (Kentucky) from the previous election while adding Washington, Wyoming, Utah, South Dakota, Kansas, and Nebraska. Roosevelt's popularity in the West may have influenced these states, but the prosperity of McKinley's first term had also reduced the impact of "free silver" as a decisive issue, depriving Bryan of his greatest western appeal.³⁶

Roosevelt was not overjoyed at being vice president but was proud of helping the ticket achieve victory. He did, however, show early signs of frustration at the prospect of inactivity. He declined an invitation to speak in February 1901, "chiefly for the excellent reason that I have nothing whatever to say."³⁷ His penchant for speaking out would

return soon enough, but this initial hesitation reflected the uncertainty of Roosevelt's new position. Accustomed to the aggressive pursuit of his own policies, he now had to be careful not to offend either his president or the party leadership, a goal he had failed to achieve in New York. It was a potentially trying situation for an active and outspoken young man.

The first task of the new vice president was to preside over the Senate, meeting in a special session for four days beginning March 4. This brief appearance did not give Roosevelt much time to make an impression, but in those four days he impressed no one. He had not been looking forward to this role, but as he characteristically put it, "Now all that there is for me to do is to perform with regularity and dignity the duty of presiding over the Senate, and to remember the fact that the duty not being very important is no excuse for shirking it."³⁸ He proved as ill-suited for the role as he was unenthusiastic. His mind wandered, and he had a limited grasp of Senate procedures. As Senator Joseph Foraker tactfully put it, "his peculiar qualifications for the public service fitted him better for wider, broader and more useful fields."³⁹ Roosevelt confessed to being "the poorest presiding officer the Senate ever had."⁴⁰ The first impressions made by the new vice president in the Senate were hardly encouraging.

Once the Senate adjourned, Roosevelt returned home to New York to spend the summer with his wife and seven children, his most enjoyable vacation in years. Two years after the death of his first wife, Theodore had married his childhood sweetheart, Edith Carow. Edith was a very private woman who never seemed entirely comfortable with the publicity that always surrounded her husband. Privately, however, her influence went even beyond the difficult task of raising the rambunctious Roosevelt children. She controlled the family's finances—Theodore having never been good at managing his money—and it was later suspected that she was influential in his presidential appointments because she was considered a better judge of character than he was. (From 1901 to 1909, as first lady, Edith would help transform the White House into a centerpiece for the social and cultural life of Washington and the nation.) The lack of pressing business as vice president allowed Theodore to spend time playing football with his sons and sparring with his tempestuous older daughter, Alice. Theodore's relationship with Alice would become increasingly strained during his presidency as she struggled for greater independence. As he later put it, "I can be President of the United States, or I can attend to Alice. I can't do both." During Roosevelt's presidency, "Princess Alice" would become a celebrity as a Washington socialite and a prominent model of the independent young woman of the new century. She would eventually marry Republican Congressman Nicholas Longworth of Ohio, a future Speaker of the House, in 1906, and become one of the most famous matrons of Washington society.⁴¹

Because of his lack of interest in the official duties of his new office, Roosevelt in the summer of 1901 began looking for other activities and focused on two. First, he resumed a regular speaking schedule. These speeches reveal that, without more immediate matters to deal with, his thoughts were increasingly turning to one of his favorite topics: foreign policy. He spoke to crowds in New York and New England about the need for an effective navy and the threat from a newly powerful Germany.⁴² Perhaps Roosevelt saw this as an area in which he would have some freedom, because he and McKinley, while not always in complete accord, had similar views on foreign policy. Roosevelt's more virulent criticism was aimed at anti-imperialist Democrats, who were McKinley's enemies as well. By spending his time attacking the Democrats on foreign policy, he might avoid disturbing the Old Guard in his own party with his progressive views on domestic matters.

Vice President Roosevelt's second activity revealed his ambition. He spent considerable time lining up support for a presidential bid in 1904. Despite his concerns that opposition from the party in New York would deny him the nomination, he cautiously pursued a course designed to build a broad base of popular support. He concentrated his efforts especially in the West, where he was already popular and where the Bryanite Democrats represented a significant electoral challenge. Friends such as William Allen White in Kansas, Philip B. Stewart in Colorado, and Booker T. Washington in the South began acting as unofficial campaign managers, and he planned a national speaking tour for 1902. Roosevelt also undertook a potentially more risky strategy of supporting progressive-minded Republicans in state elections. He volunteered to assist Albert B. Cummins of Iowa in his campaign for governor. Cummins had defeated an Old Guard opponent for the nomination and in supporting him too heartily, Roosevelt ran the risk of offending the national party leadership. He may have been willing to take that chance in order to build a separate base of party support and appeal to the growing public interest in progressive candidates. Roosevelt was preparing once more for political battle, and, on the whole, the odds looked good.⁴³

It appeared that Vice President Roosevelt's official responsibilities were to be limited, at least for the moment, since President McKinley did not consult him either on policy or appointments. Although McKinley had used Vice President Hobart as his liaison with the Senate, Roosevelt was poorly suited for this role, since he shone more as a public spokesman than as a parliamentary operator. In addition, the Senate was dominated by Old Guard Republicans, most of whom were wary of Roosevelt's insurgent impulses. In any event, McKinley was not likely to entrust his impetuous vice president with legislative responsibilities, because he distrusted the younger man's lack of caution. Roosevelt, for his part, chafed under the restraints of McKinley's slowness in dealing with contentious issues. As a result, while the relations between the two men were amicable and professional, they were not close.⁴⁴ Early in September 1901, everything changed. On September 5 President McKinley, a longtime advocate of protective tariffs, delivered a major policy speech at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. In his address, the president called for a new era of reciprocal trade with other nations, in which the old trade barriers must fall. "The period of exclusiveness is past . . . the expansion of our trade and commerce is the pressing problem," he declared. The next day, September 6, the president held a public reception in the Temple of Music. At slightly after 4 p.m., a young anarchist named Leon Czolgosz walked up to the president with a gun in his right hand, hidden in a bandage. He fired two shots at the president: one bounced off a button, but the other lodged in McKinley's stomach. For a week, the president struggled to survive, but on September 14 he expired, whispering the title of his favorite hymn, "Nearer, My God, To Thee."⁴⁵ McKinley's pathbreaking initiative for lower tariffs died with him.

Upon hearing of the shooting, Roosevelt had rushed to Buffalo, but when the doctors had been encouraged by the president's progress after three days, the vice president had departed for the Adirondacks. On September 13, he was recalled by a note from Secretary of War Elihu Root, "The President appears to be dying, and members of the Cabinet in Buffalo think you should lose no time in coming." Making a furious trip by buckboard and special train, Roosevelt arrived in Buffalo on the fourteenth to find the president already dead. After paying his respects to Mrs. McKinley, he met with the cabinet, telling them, "I wish to say that it shall be my aim to continue, absolutely unbroken, the policy of President McKinley for the peace, the prosperity, and the honor of our beloved country." He then took the oath of office, becoming, at forty-two, the youngest president in the nation's history.⁴⁶

A Popular President

Roosevelt's pledge to continue McKinley's policies was not only meant to calm the nation, but was consistent with his conception of the role of the vice president. In an article for *Review of Reviews* in 1896, Roosevelt, then New York City's police commissioner, had described the vice president as a "functionless official" except for the possibility of becoming "the head of the whole nation." He therefore stressed:

The Vice-President should so far as possible represent the same views and principles which have secured the nomination and election of the President, and he should be a man standing well in the councils of the party, trusted by his fellow party leaders, and able in the event of any accident to his chief to take up the work of the latter just where it was left.⁴⁷

Of course, the man holding the office in September 1901 did not fit this model. Roosevelt had not been selected because of his similarities to McKinley and, now that he was president, would not take long to go his own way. He almost immediately began pursuing a nature conservation program and in a few months would instigate an antitrust suit against the Northern Securities Company. He would genuinely attempt to steer a middle course between the Old Guard and the insurgent Republicans, but pressure for change was rising and Roosevelt's heart had always been with the reformers.⁴⁸ His first annual message to Congress, calling for some regulation of corporations, served notice that life under Roosevelt would be different from life under McKinley.

President Roosevelt inherited a number of advantages from his predecessor. The first was a powerful and efficient party organization, built by Mark Hanna, which Roosevelt immediately began making his own. He used appointments and the connections he had already made to give power to his supporters and prepare for the convention of 1904. He also inherited a talented and able cabinet. He would rely a great deal on men like Secretary of State John Hay, Secretary of War Elihu Root, and McKinley's personal secretary George Cortelyou. Roosevelt had also learned some things about press relations from McKinley's White House. The McKinley administration, thanks primarily to the enterprising Cortelyou, had made innovative changes in handling the media. McKinley had

used press releases, pre-released speech transcripts, and "trial balloons" to shape news reports as no other president had ever done. Roosevelt combined this efficiency with his own tremendous personality to dominate the news. His control of the information the papers reported gave him extraordinary power to shape his own publicity.⁴⁹

Because Roosevelt was vice president for so short a time, he had little impact on the office, but thanks to his skill at publicity, the potential certainly existed for him to have played an influential role in that office. Roosevelt had defied conventional practice by waging an active national campaign for the vice-presidency,⁵⁰ demonstrating his ability to publicize the Republican cause and reach out to the voters in a way that McKinley could not. It seems likely that McKinley, a man well aware of the power of the press, might have continued to use Roosevelt in a similar fashion, as a sort of "public persuader" for the administration.⁵¹ McKinley had indicated that he would pursue trade reciprocity agreements in his second term, had begun to prepare an antitrust agenda, and had hinted that he might take up the tariff issue.⁵² If so, Roosevelt would have been the ideal man to sell these programs to the public. Theodore Roosevelt became one of the nation's most active and popular presidents, easily winning reelection in 1904. He pursued important domestic legislation, such as the Hepburn Act (for greater regulation of railroads) and the Pure Food and Drug acts, and he led the nation into a more active role in international relations. In 1906, he became the first American to receive the Nobel Prize for Peace for his mediation of the Russo-Japanese War. After leaving office in 1909, Roosevelt embarked on a hunting safari in Africa, returning home in 1910 to a hero's welcome. In 1912, disenchanted with the policies of his presidential successor William Howard Taft, Roosevelt decided to run for president once more. Denied the nomination by the Republicans, he formed his own party, the Progressive or Bull Moose party, chose Hiram Johnson of California as a running mate, and ran against Taft. The three contenders, Roosevelt, Taft, and Democrat Woodrow Wilson, the eventual winner, together produced one of the most memorable presidential campaigns in U.S. history. When the ballots were counted, Roosevelt's independent candidacy came in second, ahead of Taft's Republican ticket.⁵³

After the campaign of 1912, Roosevelt retired once more into private life. He would not, however, remain in the background. Upon the outbreak of World War I in Europe in 1914, Roosevelt called for immediate entry by the United States on the side of the Allies. When President Wilson adopted a policy of neutrality, Roosevelt became the president's most vociferous critic. After the United States entered the war in 1917, Roosevelt proposed to lead a division of volunteers, a reincarnation of the Rough Riders, to fight in France and was outraged when President Wilson refused him a command. Roosevelt continued to criticize Wilson throughout the war, but late in 1918, as peace negotiations proceeded in Paris, Roosevelt fell ill. On January 6, 1919, at the age of sixty, Theodore Roosevelt died in his sleep.⁵⁴

As Henry Cabot Lodge had predicted, the vice-presidency proved a stepping stone for Roosevelt to the White House, though not in the way he had foreseen. Theodore Roosevelt was elected vice president thanks to a combination of Senator Platt's desire to get him out of the way and a popular movement among friends and admirers within the GOP. Despite Platt's hope that he would fade from view, Roosevelt appeared to be on the path to the presidency, poised to use the vice-presidency in novel ways to build his own support for 1904. Lodge thus proved a better prophet than either Roosevelt or Platt. The vice-presidency led, not to oblivion, but to the White House.

Notes:

1. Elting E. Morison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, vol. 2, *The Years of Preparation, 1898-1900* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 1174.
2. Quoted in Irving G. Williams, *The Rise of the Vice Presidency* (Washington, D.C., 1956), p. 81.
3. Morison, 2:1439.
4. Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York, 1979), PP. 32-36, 60-70, 128, 135-56. This is the most detailed and colorful account of Roosevelt's life and early career.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-201, 227-67; William Henry Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility: The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York, 1961), pp. 27-28. Harbaugh provides the most thorough scholarly account of Roosevelt's public career.
6. Morris, pp. 240-45, 270-341. As chairman of the Stockman's Association, Roosevelt was automatically a deputy sheriff of Billings County, a responsibility he took very seriously.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 382-85, 153-56, 386-93. Boone and Crockett Clubs were dedicated to preserving wildlife throughout the nation and to westward expansion.

8. Ibid., pp. 261-68, 345-47.
9. Ibid., Chapters 16-25.
10. Ibid., pp. 665-66; Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility*, pp. 108-11.
11. Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility*, pp. 109-11.
12. Ibid., pp. 111-14.
13. Ibid., pp. 114-21.
14. Ibid., pp. 113-22; John Morton Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt*, 2d ed. (New York, 1964), pp. 15-16.
15. Quoted in Morris, p. 666.
16. Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918* (New York, 1925), 1:426.
17. David J. Rothman, *Politics and Power: The United States Senate, 1869-1901* (Cambridge, MA, 1966), p. 157.
18. Lodge, 1:467.
19. Morison, 2:1157; Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility*, p. 123.
20. Morris, p. 718.
21. Lodge, 1:435, 442.
22. Morison, 2:1157; Lodge, 1:448.
23. Morison, 2:1140; Lodge, 1:442.
24. Morison, 2:1174.
25. G. Wallace Chessman, "Theodore Roosevelt's Campaign Against the Vice-Presidency," *Historian* 14 (Spring 1952): 174-75; Lodge, 1:442.
26. Williams, p. 73; Morison, 2:449.
27. Quoted in Chessman, "Theodore Roosevelt's Campaign Against the Vice-Presidency," p. 179.
28. John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920* (New York, 1990), p. 29. This work offers an outstanding general synthesis of the politics of this era.
29. Lodge, 1:460.
30. Quoted in Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility*, p. 135.
31. Quoted in Blum, p. 22.
32. Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility*, pp. 137-38.
33. Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, pp. 29-30.
34. Ibid., pp. 28-30.
35. Chalmers M. Roberts, *The Washington Post: The First 100 Years* (Boston, 1977), p. 57; David S. Barry, *Forty Years in Washington* (Boston, 1924), p. 270; Morris, p. 731.
36. William H. Harbaugh, "The Republican Party, 1893-1932," in *History of U.S. Political Parties*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., vol. 3, *1910-1945, From Square Deal to New Deal* (New York, 1973), p. 2080; Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, pp. 24-25.
37. Morison, 2:1422; Lodge, 1:484.
38. Morison, 2:1446.
39. Quoted in Barry, p. 273.
40. Quoted in Williams, p. 81.
41. Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility*, pp. 143-44; Morris, pp. 26, 313, 359, 372; Lewis Gould, *The Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt* (Lawrence, KS, 1991), pp. 102-4, 226.
42. Lodge, 1:484-88, 492-94.
43. Morison, 3:121, 129; G. Wallace Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power* (Boston, 1969), pp. 79-83; Blum, p. 40; Williams, p. 81; Gould, *The Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 128.
44. Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power*, p. 77; Lewis Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence, KS, 1980), p. 215; Morison, pp. 56-57.
45. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, pp. 251-52; Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility*, pp. 144-45.
46. Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility* pp. 144-46.
47. Theodore Roosevelt, "The Three Vice-Presidential Candidates and What They Represent," *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 14 (September 1896): 289-91.
48. Harbaugh, "The Republican Party, 1893-1932," p. 2080; Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power*, pp. 82-84.
49. Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power*, pp. 80-82; Blum, pp. 38-44; Gould, *The Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt*, pp. 16-21; Robert C. Hilderbrand, *Power and the People: Executive Management of Public*

Opinion in Foreign Affairs, 1897-1921 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1981), pp. 52-61; John Milton Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 65-70.

50. Although most scholars have credited Roosevelt with being the first vice-presidential candidate to wage a national campaign, Richard Mentor Johnson also did so in 1840. See Chapter 9 of *Vice Presidents of the United States, 1789-1993* (Washington, DC, 1997) S. Doc. 104-26, "Richard Mentor Johnson," pp. 19-21.

51. This role is suggested in Horace Samuel Merrill and Marion Galbraith Merrill, *The Republican Command, 1897-1913* (Lexington, KY, 1971), p. 95.

52. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, pp. 249-51; Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest*, p. 77. McKinley's untimely death permits only speculation about his full intentions, but his public and private statements indicate preparations for a more active agenda of antitrust and tariff legislation.

53. For the most penetrating discussions of Roosevelt's presidency see Blum's *Republican Roosevelt* and Gould's *Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt*. Chessman's *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power* is also helpful. For the election of 1912, see Cooper's *The Warrior and the Priest*.

54. The fullest account of Roosevelt's post-presidential activities appears in Harbaugh's *Power and Responsibility*.