

**Theodore and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt:
A 20th Century Triumvirate that Transformed America**

**On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Theodore Roosevelt's
becoming President of the United States**

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An Address by William J. vanden Heuvel*

We have come to Buffalo, New York, to recall the events of a century ago, the assassination of William McKinley, a much admired, kind, conservative, principled man who had but six months before been inaugurated for his second term as America's 25th President; and the accession to that office of Theodore Roosevelt who, though the youngest man ever to become President, was already a national hero, an experienced leader in local, state and federal governments, and a fearful terror to the political bosses who had created and administered the McKinley era, particularly Mark Hanna, a Senator from Ohio, an industrialist of great wealth who was the shield and protector of the corporate and business interests which dominated both the economic and political scene as the 20th century began.

The shock of McKinley's death was enormous. In certain powerful quarters, the shock of who was to succeed him was even more shattering. On the McKinley funeral train, Mark Hanna was in an intensely bitter state of mind. He damned Roosevelt and said to a friend: "I told William McKinley it was a mistake to nominate that wild man. I asked him if he realized what would happen if he should die. Now look, that damned cowboy is President of the United States." ¹

And so he was. Theodore Roosevelt was a fearless man of iron discipline, brilliant, a person of unquestioned moral principle, an author of 38 books, an admired journalist and a prolific correspondent, a naturalist and ornithologist, profoundly devoted to his family and

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forever loyal to his friends, a man of kinetic energy and temper, a soldier who won the nation's highest medal for bravery and the first American to win the Nobel prize for peace, a magnetic personality whose memory continues to inspire young men and women in the cause of progressive government, a patrician who believed the highest duty of every citizen was service to his country. The name Roosevelt would dominate the 20th century. Together, Theodore, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt transformed America, making our government into a creative instrument of social justice and our nation into the most powerful military and economic force the world has ever seen – and all this while enhancing democracy and preserving democratic values.

The endlessly dramatic story of Theodore Roosevelt is the cornerstone of the century. We are greatly indebted to James MacGregor Burns and Susan Dunn for their magisterial work, The Three Roosevelts,² which illuminates these days of our meeting and will be the source book of this story for generations to come.

The Roosevelts were directly descended from Claes Martenson van Rosevelt who came to New Amsterdam in 1648 from the Province of Zeeland, the Netherlands, and his son Nicholas who was born in the New World a decade later. Two principal branches emerged from this immigrant beginning, identified to us by the names of the New York villages which became their homesteads, Oyster Bay and Hyde Park. The saga of these two pre-eminent families hardly needs retelling. For our purposes today, let us remind ourselves that Eleanor was the niece of TR, the daughter of his younger brother, Elliot, whose early death and tragic life made TR her special guardian. Eleanor's father had been godfather at the christening of Franklin, his distant cousin, at Hyde Park in 1882. When Franklin married Eleanor in 1905, the President of the United States – TR, gave the bride away and dominated the event by his presence. There was probably no one whom FDR admired more than Theodore Roosevelt. He often said that TR was the greatest man he had ever known.³ The extraordinary parallel of their careers was undoubtedly influenced greatly by that admiration. Those parallels include the following: both TR and FDR, separated by a generation in time, were elected to the New York State legislature (TR at 23, FDR at 28); both were appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy (TR at 38, FDR at 31); both were Vice Presidential candidates (TR at 41, FDR at 38); both knew political defeat, TR as a candidate for Mayor of New York (1886) and in his Bull Moose campaign for President (1912), FDR in the Democratic primary campaign for the United States Senate (1914) and as the running mate of James Cox in the 1920 presidential election; both married at a young age, TR at

22, FDR at 23, and both had four sons as brave participants in the two world wars. And, of course, both were Harvard graduates and recognized ornithologists.

And both loved Eleanor Roosevelt. Eleanor, orphaned and vulnerable at age 10, enjoyed her visits to Sagamore Hill where TR gave her special attention as his godchild and favorite niece. He taught her not to be afraid. “When you are afraid to do a thing, that was the time to go and do it,” her cherished uncle told her.⁴ It was not politics and government that she learned from him but rather character and the energetic pursuit of life and public purpose. On her childhood visits to Oyster Bay, TR’s influence “was primarily exerted in outdoor life and in character building. He would,” Eleanor wrote later, “never permit any child to shirk or be afraid of anything. [His children] learned that courage was a cardinal virtue and the lack of it intolerable...”⁵ A new book to be published shortly, The Roosevelt Cousins by Linda Donn,⁶ describes the complex relationship between TR’s children and Eleanor and Franklin. After TR’s death, political rivalry, frustrated ambitions, and undoubtedly a sense among his children that the greatness of his name and accomplishments had been misappropriated by the Hudson Valley cousins caused some writers to declare that a family feud was the order of the day. It is not difficult to understand. TR’s oldest son and namesake, a soldier in World War I, then elected to the New York legislature and appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy by President Harding, aspired to follow his father’s footsteps, the next move being election as governor of New York. TR had died in 1919. The Oyster Bay Roosevelts despised Warren Harding but anxious to deny the benefit of TR’s legacy to the Democratic ticket which carried FDR as its vice presidential candidate in 1920, they campaigned for Harding to assure his obligation to TR Jr. and to block Franklin’s progress. The Republican National Committee sent TR Jr. to the western states to follow FDR’s campaign trail and assert himself as the proper spokesman for his father’s legacy. In Wyoming, young Ted said: “He [FDR] is a maverick. He does not have the brand of our family.”⁷ The words were long remembered in Hyde Park.

FDR, disabled by polio three years earlier, had nominated Al Smith for President at the 1924 Democratic Convention in Madison Square Garden in a memorable speech which brought him national attention and admiration. The Happy Warrior, Al Smith, lost out in the bitter nomination fight that year but he was re-nominated for Governor. Eleanor gave the seconding speech. TR Jr. was nominated by the Republicans to run against him. She had described her cousin, TR Jr., as a “personally nice young man whose public service record shows him willing

to do the bidding of his friends.”⁸ The Teapot Dome scandal had destroyed the reputations of Harding and “the Ohio gang” and left a shadow on the Navy Department where TR Jr. held office. A Senate investigation had declared him innocent of any complicity but Teapot Dome was the best issue the Democrats had in their hope to win the presidency. Eleanor, and Louis Howe who had dedicated his life to the political career of FDR, had an enormous teapot built on the chassis of a car which followed TR Jr.’s campaign around New York State.⁹ Eleanor later said the teapot affair was a “rough stunt”.¹⁰ Eleanor’s cousins never forgave her and their families talked about it still, 60 years later. Alice Longworth’s clever but painful mimicking of Eleanor for her dinner party guests in later years silenced the joyful, supporting relationship they had had in their many days together as young girls in Oyster Bay.

“The Lion is dead,” son Archibald wired his brothers on January 6, 1919. Theodore Roosevelt, only 60 years old, had died in his sleep after months of illness that certainly reflected the strains of the strenuous life he had lived and advocated for others. Many thought that he would definitely have been the Republican candidate for President again in 1920, but TR had told a close friend that though he was pleased to have the anti-Wilson sentiment rally around him, he would absolutely never make another campaign tour nor be a candidate again. He intended to make a public announcement to that effect long enough before 1920 “to get out of the way of anyone who wants the nomination.”¹¹ But it is hard to believe that he could have accepted the nomination of Warren Harding as his family did – a nomination engineered in a smoke-filled room by the very political bosses TR had spent his lifetime fighting.

The legacy of Theodore Roosevelt as represented by his character, moral values, integrity, patriotism, exemplary citizenship passed to his children as their rightful inheritance but his political legacy – his vision of the presidency, his progressive definition of issues, the flag of the Square Deal, the commitment to social reform, the determination that the sovereign power of the United States had to be exercised for all of its people and their general welfare – this legacy was inherited by Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and made the presidencies of the two Roosevelts the most influential administrations of the 20th century, leaving behind a foundation of liberal values and programs that no successor administration has been able to diminish.

In fulfilling their political destinies, each of the Roosevelts established their independence by doing battle with bosses who dominated both the Republican and Democratic parties. In his autobiography, Theodore Roosevelt describes the opposition of Senator Thomas

Platt, the Republican boss of New York State, to TR's proposal as Governor to tax the franchises given by the state to private corporations. In a letter, Platt, urged reconsideration, telling TR that he had not objected to his being independent in politics but pointed out that he had been warned before allowing TR's gubernatorial nomination in 1898 that TR "was a dangerous man" because he was "altruistic" – or as Senator Platt went on to explain "you were a little loose on the relations of capital and labor, on trusts and combinations... and the right of a man to run his own business in his own way."¹² TR was told that if he continued to press for the franchise tax that he would never be nominated for another public office. The red flag was down. TR convened a special session of the legislature and submitted his bill. The legislature tried to adjourn without the required reading of the proposal by the Speaker. TR appeared directly at the Assembly door, threatened to read it to the legislature himself. The opposition collapsed.¹³ This struggle had an extraordinary result. Platt now wanted TR out of the governorship and out of New York politics. What better place than the vice presidency, a powerless sinecure where the hero of San Juan Hill could do no harm. TR thereupon announced that he would not accept the vice presidency, challenging Platt to fight him for the gubernatorial nomination. Mark Hanna's appraisal of TR was the same as Platt's but the last thing he wanted was to have TR on the McKinley ticket. He urged McKinley to name his choice whom the Convention would then nominate by acclamation. McKinley refused, instead authorizing Charles G. Dawes to tell the delegates that he had no personal choice. He would not allow Mark Hanna to tell the delegates that he was speaking for the President in rejecting Roosevelt. As one journalist expressed it, "that Convention was distinguished by the fact that more men refused to be nominated for Vice President than in any other convention of either party. Even TR tried to dodge it..."¹⁴ TR refused to allow the New York delegation to nominate him but his admirers were at work – and in a direct challenge to Hanna and Platt, the steamroller was set in motion by the other states. The ironic ending came a century ago here in Buffalo as Theodore Roosevelt took the oath as President, and Mark Hanna took his bitter ride back to Ohio.

FDR's first battle in a lifelong struggle with the bosses came shortly after his astonishing victory in 1910 for the State Senate seat in Dutchess County, an election that had been won by the Democrats only once since the Civil War. Having cast his first vote for TR for President, and greatly influenced by TR's ideals and principles, FDR's decision to be a Democrat could not be taken for granted but, as Boss Plunkett said, "he seen his opportunity and he took it."¹⁵ The party elders thought the nomination was worthless. FDR, exuding self-confidence, seized the

opportunity, campaigned night and day, organized a brilliant campaign, listened to the voters, improved his speaking ability – and riding a national Democratic tide with a name – Roosevelt – more popular than any other in the nation, FDR won by 1140 votes. “Big Tim” Sullivan, the Tammany boss of the Bowery, spotting FDR’s name among the Democratic winners is supposed to have said: “Well, if we’ve caught a Roosevelt, we’d better take him down and drop him off the dock. The Roosevelts run true to form...”¹⁶ Tammany did not have to wait long. FDR led the reformers against the bosses’ candidate for the U.S. Senate, then still chosen by the Legislature. FDR called the final compromise “a victory.” It wasn’t, in the sense that Tammany ended up with its own acceptable candidate, but to his constituents, to journalists, to politicians throughout the country another Roosevelt had emerged who was tough, independent, willing to fight for democratic principles, and who enjoyed the battle.

Eleanor too took on the bosses. She led the effort in the 1950’s that destroyed the last vestiges of Tammany’s strength. She was nearing the end of her life. She was the most admired woman in the world, certainly not needing an alley fight with the politicians who fought to control the streets of New York. Some thought she had decided on the challenge after Tammany leader Carmine de Sapio had used his power to deny the 1954 gubernatorial nomination to FDR Jr. Gore Vidal, the Democratic candidate for Congress in Dutchess County in 1960, told me of the occasion during his Congressional campaign where he called on his most famous constituent. In their discussion of politics, according to Gore Vidal, Eleanor said: “I told Carmine that I would get him for what he did to my son, Franklin – and I got him...” And indeed she did. Joined by Herbert Lehman and Thomas Finletter, they campaigned from bus stop to dingy clubhouse. The reformers won – with ER proving to be a campaigner and strategist of Rooseveltian dimensions.

Comparing the political skills of Theodore and Franklin, let it be said that both were masters of the art who left behind a scattered field of precedents, of broken traditions, of errors, heroic victories, and extraordinary battles. In perhaps the most significant political issue that confronted them both – the decision to seek a third term – a telling of the story puts their skills in focus. On election night in 1904, TR, having scored an overwhelming victory, stunned his family, his followers, and the nation by stating: “Under no circumstances will I be a candidate for or accept another term.”¹⁷ No one had asked him that question. He had not consulted with anyone including his wife whose love was his dearest treasure and whose judgment he valued

greatly. It was a deliberate, carefully worded statement. He had not been elected to two terms so even the precedent of two terms that he was trying to honor was ambiguous. He knew that the nomination in 1908, the next presidential election, was his just by not refusing to accept it. He knew he needed more time to consolidate a progressive foundation in the Republican Party. He knew that his announcement made him a “lame duck” incumbent with his power diminishing with every day of his new term. He later explained that he believed in the limitation on two consecutive terms because “the power of the President can be effectively used to secure a nomination, especially if the President has the support of certain great political and financial interests.”¹⁸ The statement can be rationalized but given the nature of politics, TR’s youth (he was 46 when he issued the statement) and his understanding and commitment to presidential power, there are many who believe it to be the most significant misjudgment of his life. Justifying his attempt to regain the presidency in 1912, TR wrote that he was opposed to a third term for Presidents but only if it was a consecutive third term. He rejected out of hand a constitutional amendment limiting the presidency to two terms because “the American people are fit to take care of themselves and have no need of an irrevocable self-denying ordinance.”¹⁹

At the same time, TR laid out the argument that FDR used in justifying his decision to accept a third term. If, TR wrote later, a tremendous crisis should occur at the end of a second term, it would be calamitous if the American people were precluded from continuing to use the services of the one man they knew and trusted, a leader who had their confidence to carry them through the crisis. FDR certainly understood TR’s admonition regarding a third term. But he had also watched TR’s distress as his progressive programs and principles were pushed aside by the political forces that he himself had chosen to succeed him. Like TR, FDR did not share his thought processes with anyone on whether to seek a third term. He proceeded as though the two-term limitation was a constraint that was unbreakable. As his second term came to a close, he built a retirement cottage at Hyde Park and established the first presidential library to receive the papers of his Administration (establishing thereby that such papers were the property of the people of the United States) and creating an office where he could work and write after his presidency.

The 1938 elections had reduced the Democratic majorities in the Congress. FDR in his famous “purge” had tried to defeat several of the key Democratic lawmakers who represented the vested interests and conservative viewpoints that threatened the reforms of the New Deal. He

was not successful and the nation's press, as have later historians, regarded the election as a turning point for the reform era that FDR had so successfully led for the country. FDR, better than anyone, understood that no electorate can sustain on a continuing basis the energy, focus and high resolve needed to advance a reform movement. It also seemed clear that no leading Democrat was available for the nomination who could win the election and protect the legacy of the New Deal.

On the horizon, events in Europe and the Far East threatened devastating war and destruction for much of the world. Japan, dominated by an inflexible militarism, had invaded China and had sought to establish its domination of Asia. The dictators were on the march in Europe. Germany, re-armed under Hitler, began its march across Europe, occupying Austria, Czechoslovakia, and on September 1, 1939 invading Poland, beginning the Second World War. As the American political parties were preparing their conventions in 1940, France surrendered to the Nazis. The world was stunned. Was this the "tremendous crisis" that TR had written of that would justify a sitting president to seek a third consecutive term? FDR was silent, like a sphinx, as reporters and politicians asked constantly whether he would run. Undoubtedly, he did not make a final decision until the world shattering events played out around him. He had encouraged those who had presidential ambitions to announce themselves and to seek support. As long as the possibility existed that FDR might be available, however, no candidate could build a base that could independently win the nomination. As Arthur Schlesinger has described in his brilliant memoir, the nation was more bitterly divided over the issue of the war in Europe and America's role and responsibility than by any other crisis of the 20th century.²⁰ FDR's handling of the third term decision was brilliant, not deceptive or manipulative as some writers describe it. He kept all of his options open. He accepted the nomination in the only way that the anti-third term tradition could have been broken – that is by a Democratic Convention that drafted him. For those who thought that FDR had lost control in the purge of 1938, his nomination for a third term showed that he still dominated the Democratic Party and his victory over Wendell Willkie, a man of charm, culture and conviction, showed FDR's command of the nation.

In comparing the political leadership of TR and FDR, it is also significant to consider how each managed the succession to their presidency. As 1908 began, there was no front-runner for the Republican nomination to succeed TR. The conservative leaders in Congress suspected

and were fearful that TR would create “a crisis” to justify his re-nomination, setting aside his written pledge not to run. In January 1908 William Loeb, TR’s private secretary, interrupted the President’s breakfast on an early January morning to discuss the upcoming convention. Loeb argued that TR could only sustain the credibility of his promise not to run by endorsing a candidate. Loeb told TR that any nominee could win – naming William Howard Taft, Elihu Root, Charles Evans Hughes and George Cortelyou (the Secretary of the Treasury) – if only TR would back him. In response, TR said that he would favor Elihu Root and authorized Loeb at that moment to go to see Root and make the offer of his endorsement. Root, then Secretary of State, was astonished by Loeb’s message but without hesitation asked him to assure the President of his gratitude but also of his inability to accept because he judged himself to be unelectable. Loeb interrupted the President’s schedule that same day to report on his meeting. TR accepted Root’s decision. He then told Loeb that his choice was William Howard Taft, saying that he had the experience to run the government. Taft could hardly believe his good fortune. Meeting immediately with the President, he expressed his profound appreciation. TR told him that he would announce immediately that Taft would be his choice but that he would not interfere with the Convention processes in any other way. Taft, however, could not be nominated without TR’s active involvement. In order to force every possible delegate to select Taft, TR followed two courses in his many private discussions. To the Conservatives he would declare “it’s Taft or me” which sent them running to Taft. To the Progressives he would declare “it’s Taft – I’m out!” whereupon most of them reluctantly accepted Taft. Taft had never been elected to anything except a municipal judgeship in Ohio. TR had known him as an administrator and as an intelligent, loyal member of his Cabinet. TR’s choice seems careless in the context of consolidating the progressive leadership he had worked so hard to put in place. Ironically, fearful that he would seem subservient to TR, Taft did not talk to or see TR again after the nominating Convention until December of that year. Outside of his inaugural address Taft had no kind words for TR nor for his policies.²¹ Because he was a man of moral righteousness and principle, because he was so profoundly committed to a progressive direction for the nation and his party, TR must have reflected often and sadly on the fateful judgments he had made that brought Taft to the presidency.

FDR was equally anxious to preserve the liberal accomplishments of this administration. The problem was temporarily solved by his acceptance of the nomination for a third term. But he was not going to trust to chance or to southern domination at the Convention in a choice of his

Vice President. He made it very clear to the Democratic Convention in 1940 – an event to which he sent Eleanor to be his spokesman – that he would not accept the nomination unless Henry Wallace was his running mate. Wallace had been Secretary of Agriculture for 8 years, a quintessential New Dealer, a former Republican from Iowa, a spokesman for the “common man,” and a proven liberal in every one of the battles FDR had faced.²² By 1944, when FDR again agreed to be re-nominated, he no longer had the political or physical strength to compel the Convention to accept his sole choice, but he insisted upon choosing from three candidates – Henry Wallace, Harry Truman, William O. Douglas – any one of whom was a liberal guarantor of the New Deal and of the progressive principles for which FDR had lived.²³ FDR’s shadow, as William Leuchtenberg has written, remained a dominating force in all of the administrations that succeeded his presidency in the 20th century.²⁴

For those who like to play history’s game of “what might have been,” the political fate of Theodore Roosevelt is certainly fascinating. What if TR had won in 1912, had wrested the Republican nomination from Taft and stood alone against Wilson, and been elected again as President? Vernon Bogdahn, a professor at Oxford University, has discussed this possibility.²⁵ He suggests that TR as President would have brought the United States into World War I much sooner than Woodrow Wilson did, possibly after the sinking of the *Lucitania* in 1915. With the United States as an active belligerent at this early stage of the struggle, World War I would have ended much sooner, preventing the Bolshevik Revolution and the disintegration of Europe and the rise of Hitler that the Versailles Treaty encouraged. Given the tragic consequences of the two World Wars, this is a remarkable scenario to contemplate.

Winston Churchill imagined a different role for Theodore Roosevelt. Writing in *Scribner's* magazine in 1930²⁶ on the assumption that the South had triumphed in the Civil War, he supposes that General Robert E. Lee, in a masterstroke, abolishes slavery thereby eliminating the moral issue of the war. Churchill then sees two Republics emerging, both of them gaining Great Britain’s friendship in due course. He sees Theodore Roosevelt elected as President of the Northern Republic, entering into negotiations with Prime Minister Balfour regarding an alliance with Great Britain, a true precursor of the Atlantic Alliance we know today. The Roosevelt/Balfour discussions are then joined by the new President of the Southern Republic, Woodrow Wilson. The idea of a United States of Europe emerges, and allied with the glittering spectacle of the English-speaking alliance of Great Britain and the two American republics, these

forces would assure by their boundless power and enormous wealth the peace and prosperity of the 20th century. Of course, more than ending slavery was at issue in the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln's commitment to our Constitutional union prevailed. Time and reality otherwise altered this vision, but ultimately, ironically, it was a Churchill/Roosevelt – Franklin Delano Roosevelt – partnership that did make a United States of Europe possible and which created an Atlantic Alliance that remains the best hope for peace in a fractious, often brutal world.

Although Winston Churchill and Theodore Roosevelt were not well known to each other, they should have been. Both were patricians turned politician in the heroic mold. Like TR, Churchill combined books and journalism, expeditions and splendid little wars into brilliant public careers. When TR said in a masterful address at the Naval War College in 1897 “no triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumph of war,” he could have been echoing Churchill. In fact, Churchill's famous wartime speech about “blood, sweat and tears,” was a direct quote from TR's Naval War College speech.²⁷ They shared a magnificent rhetorical style.

During their presidencies, Theodore and Franklin Delano Roosevelt advocated reforms and new directions that made TR's Square Deal and FDR's New Deal the most dramatic periods of the 20th century in furtherance of social justice and in the establishment of an international role for America's power. It is in these commitments that the three Roosevelts come together and give their achievements a unifying bond.

In one of her last “My Day” columns, Eleanor Roosevelt denounced reactionary politicians – “those evil men who combine together to scratch each others backs.”²⁸ The particular target of her concern was the effort to block legislation on government testing and regulation of pharmaceutical drugs. We can hear the echo of her Uncle, TR, as she denounced “those who consider free enterprise more sacred than human lives.” The Roosevelts, each of them, fought a continuing struggle against the corporate and economic interests that they believed constantly sought domination of the American government for their own selfish purposes. Theodore Roosevelt was forever urging men of great wealth to repudiate lives of leisure and refinement. Like a missionary, he traveled the land arguing that only work, public service and contact with the working class could save the rich from themselves. He struck out against the “mean and sordid commercial ideal” which he believed the reactionary business community had tried to advance in superceding national honor, courage, loyalty and unselfishness. As a young Assemblyman in Albany, TR denounced “the wealthy criminal class,”

identifying Jay Gould, one of the country's richest and most powerful men, as its representative.²⁹ As governors and as presidents, both TR and FDR called for comprehensive reform of the tax structure so that "the man of means and the great corporations shall pay their full share of taxes and bear their full share of the public burdens."³⁰ The Roosevelts – Theodore, Franklin and Eleanor – were determined to create democratic forces that could contend with the entrenched power of wealth and corporate domination. Again, TR sounded the trumpet: "The reactionaries of the business world and their allies and instruments among politicians and newspaper editors demand for themselves an immunity from government control... Many of them are evil men, unable to understand what the public interest really is... Of all forms of tyranny the least attractive and the most vulgar is the tyranny of mere wealth, the tyranny of plutocracy..."³¹

The burning issue was who was going to run the United States – the elected representatives of the people or those whose control and power depended upon their wealth and corporate position. The Roosevelts were not against business and corporations. They understood the indispensable, creative role that business had in creating wealth and jobs and economic opportunity, but they were determined that this immense power be regulated and restrained in the context of the national interest, a national interest that the President was elected to define and that the Congress was elected to advance. Taxation then as it is now was the issue that defined the battle. His Bull Moose campaign in 1912 gave TR the platform to continue his advocacy of the income tax and the inheritance tax, both of which were adopted in the next four years. TR was one of the most powerful advocates of the inheritance tax, writing in 1914 that: "I would not apply the inheritance tax to small inheritances but I would apply it progressively and with such heaviness to big inheritances as to completely block the transmission of enormous fortunes to the young Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, Astors or Morgans..."³² He was not talking economics. He was talking about morality, community, a just society. He understood that wealth could be the foundation on which to build a real life but the life that he advocated – the strenuous existence, the life of spiritual and moral effort and achievement – did not need "vast fortunes." In fact, he believed the accumulation of such wealth could only be harmful to the generations which inherited it. Giving away money was not an alternative to participating in democracy. Great fortunes caused the disintegration of character, and frequently brought about lives without purpose, passion or achievement.

TR's rhetorical missiles against the "malefactors of great wealth" set the stage for FDR's battle against the "economic royalists." When Franklin Roosevelt proposed the 1935 Wealth Tax Act he echoed TR's denunciations of "the swollen fortunes" of the plutocrats. "Our revenue laws have operated in many ways to the unfair advantage of the few and they have done little to prevent an unjust concentration of wealth and economic power."³³ Income taxes on small corporations were lowered; on larger corporations they were raised. Significant graduated income taxes were imposed on individual incomes above \$1 million, reaching a maximum tax of 75% on incomes over \$5 million – but it must be remembered that those numbers translated into today's figures represent annual incomes of at least \$10 million, with the maximum tax imposed on annual incomes only over \$50 million.

TR's attitudes undoubtedly emerged during the time when he was seeking his life's direction as a young man, the era of the Robber Barons. The selfishness, corruption, the plundering of public assets, the derogatory attitudes toward government and public servants – all these were characteristics of the age which TR ended in the years of his presidency.

As he saw his accomplishments endangered by the Taft administration, TR traveled the country preaching the New Nationalism. His words, in countless speeches, articles and letters, were the vanguard of political revolution, not the adjustment of the rules by which the Republican party intended to govern the country. TR was against "violent and foolish radicalism" but it was radical change that he preached. Like a Jack Russell terrier, he had the "sordid money interests,"³⁴ as he described them, in his teeth and he was not about to let go even in the face of bitter repudiation by his own social class and old political friends and supporters. He recognized that large corporations were here to stay, but they were not elected to run the country and he was determined that government regulation remind them of their proper relationship to the nation and to the people's interests. TR's explosive rhetoric against his political opponents and the forces of "entrenched privilege" make today's political debating and sound-byte prose dull and painfully boring by comparison. He spared no words in making the fight.

Nor did FDR who enjoyed his enemies as much as TR did. Having promised "this generation of Americans a rendezvous with destiny" in his Acceptance Speech at the Democratic Convention in 1936, having warned "the royalists of the economic order that he would not allow them to prevent a New Deal for the American people," he concluded his campaign for re-election

at Madison Square Garden. It was one of the memorable moments of political campaigns. FDR, in that voice that had no peer, confronted the powerful forces that were determined to defeat him. “Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against the candidate as they stand today,” he declared. “They are unanimous in their hate for me – and I welcome their hatred. I should like to have it said of my first administration that in it the forces of selfishness and lust for power met their match. I should like to have it said of my second administration that in it these forces met their master!”

It was as though FDR and TR were standing there together, speaking in one voice to the ancient enemies of the sovereignty of the people, telescoping the years of the progressive struggle and now, with the power of government in their hands, sensing a victory that history rarely records, declaring “for all these things we have only just begun to fight.”³⁵

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt brought a response of invective and hatred rarely if ever seen in American history. Having become president in the midst of the greatest economic crisis in the nation’s history, FDR had responded with an extraordinary program of leadership that resulted in the TVA, the WPA, the Social Security Act, rural electrification, the SEC, the AAA, the CCC, unprecedented programs of conservation, a bank moratorium and regulation, public and subsidized housing, and new rights for labor, for farmers, for the poor and the working man, the middle class, for a new society of decency and equality of opportunity for all Americans. FDR and ER received the special venom of the demagogues and anti-Semites who found the despair of the Depression to be a fertile ground for their hatred. There was a classic struggle between federal power and state’s rights – and all the Roosevelts knew that the states’ right banner gave cover to forces of selfishness, racism, and civil injustice and in turn, that the Supreme Court had time and again given a constitutional sanctuary to the enemies of social reform. The struggle as TR, FDR and ER defined it was whether property rights were paramount over human values and whether the Constitution was so inflexible that the reforms that were needed to save democracy as determined by the elected representatives of the people could be thwarted by Courts which saw themselves as the ultimate defender of the propertied interests.

Which Roosevelt denounced the Supreme Court for upholding “property rights against human rights?”³⁶ Which Roosevelt proposed public referenda on judicial decisions? Which Roosevelt was convinced that American judges were “absolutely reactionary” and that their decisions virtually barred the “path to industrial, economic and social reform?” Which

Roosevelt ran on a platform describing as essential objectives of American democracy a free market in a free society where workers could earn enough to provide their basic needs, where farmers could assure themselves and their families of a decent living, where every businessman could participate without unfair competition and monopolistic domination, where every family had a decent income and adequate medical care, and where government would assure protection from the economic fears of old age and sickness, and where every child had the opportunity of a good education? Those are the words and pledges of Theodore Roosevelt in the 1912 campaign and the Progressive Party platform on which he ran.³⁷ “We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord,” TR declared. In 1912, liberated from the domination of political bosses and the endless commitments demanded by the conservative essence of the Republican party, TR was able to speak as he truly felt. The full passion of his bursting vision for the country he loved so much found expression. One cannot read the platform of the National Progressive Party Convention or the speeches that TR made in the course of that extraordinary year without understanding how closely the three Roosevelts agreed about the nature of government.³⁸ TR believed, as FDR expressed it in his 1944 speech,³⁹ that all citizens had economic rights, that it was the obligation of government to help in the fulfillment of those rights. The political party does not exist today that has the leadership and courage to adopt the platform on which Theodore Roosevelt ran in 1912. Franklin and Eleanor later presided over an era where FDR’s pragmatic idealism and political skills engineered a profound social and economic transformation of the nation. Eleanor, acting with courage, idealism and commitment became the conscience of the nation, becoming a most powerful advocate for a better world. But the words and magnificent obsession of Theodore Roosevelt for justice and opportunity gave a powerful springboard for their great efforts.

No one can talk of the Roosevelt legacy without mentioning the extraordinary contribution of Theodore and Franklin in the fields of conservation and environmental concern. Some, like Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin, one of the great progressive leaders of the 20th century, regarded TR’s commitment to the Conservation movement as the most significant accomplishment of his presidency.⁴⁰ Both TR and FDR literally changed the landscape of our country. They regarded the majestic beauty of America, its resources, its soil, its water, its forests to be the common heritage of all of our people. They brought a new sense of responsibility to land management and a new partner – the federal government. After the 19th century plunder and reckless handling of the national heritage of natural resources, they regarded

the remaining wilderness and wildlife as national treasures. They added hundreds of millions of acres to the national parks and the public lands. TR created the National Park System. Naturalists like John Burroughs were no longer eccentric scientists pleading for conservation – Burroughs was the President’s camping companion, and Gifford Pinchot was in TR’s “inner circle.”

The enemies of the countryside – catastrophic floods and droughts, deforested lands eroding, turning valleys and fertile plains into dust bowls – these destructive forces were met by the Roosevelts and their administrations with top priority programs to prevent their damage. FDR invited our unemployed youth to join the Civilian Conservation Corps. It helped save their lives and remade the natural infrastructure of our nation. Both TR and FDR understood that the quality of life of our citizens directly reflected our protection and preservation of our natural resources and of nature’s bounty. When FDR dedicated a wing of the American Museum of Natural History in 1936 to the memory of Theodore Roosevelt, the occasion bore witness to what both of them had done to conserve the natural wealth of America for all of its citizens.⁴¹

A word remains to be said about the world as the three Roosevelts saw it, as they influenced it and as they left it. One of the many paradoxes regarding TR is that he spoke of the glories of battle and the constant need for a national test of combat but he was the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Peace. One of his proudest boasts was that he had kept our country out of war. Nevertheless, his greatest disappointment came when Woodrow Wilson denied his request to lead a division of American soldiers after the United States had entered World War I.⁴² He took enormous pride in the gallantry of his sons and the loss of his youngest son in combat, a profoundly sorrowful event for him and his family, he regarded as the price of citizenship.

TR’s bitterness against Wilson was so intense that one has to differentiate his opposition to the League of Nations from his determination to inflict an overpowering defeat on “that old gray skunk in the White House” who had denied him an opportunity to serve in the war.⁴³ If TR had lived he undoubtedly would have been the leader of the fight that Senator Henry Cabot Lodge won against the League of Nations. Woodrow Wilson’s failure to build a basic coalition with the Republican Senate in negotiating the Treaty of Versailles and Wilson’s intransigent misunderstanding of the American public’s demand for protection of the national sovereignty against involvement in future European conflicts doomed ratification of the Treaty. In observing

the defeat in the Senate, FDR learned the lessons of limitation regarding America's international involvement. In creating the United Nations, FDR carefully avoided the mistakes Wilson had made. He involved the Senate, both Republicans and Democrats, in the political process of its creation. He educated the American people as to the opportunities and responsibilities of international leadership. He organized an instrument through the Security Council veto so that American interests could never be damaged. He drafted a Charter creating the United Nations which enabled American ideals to have a dramatic possibility of fulfillment. It was left to Eleanor Roosevelt to show what could be done in a world where the United States was prepared to lead.

Anticipating the devastation of the war, Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed the Congress on January 6, 1941 and spoke of his vision for the world made possible and necessary by the terrible sacrifices that the war would demand. He called for a world where every person and every nation would be assured of Four Freedoms – the fundamental requirement of a civilized and just social order – freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. These words were made part of the Charter of the United Nations and they became the essence of what Eleanor Roosevelt regarded as her most important public accomplishment, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration was a monumental achievement. It became possible only because of Eleanor's leadership, her extraordinary political skills, her idealism, her sympathetic understanding of both power and despair, her toughness, flexibility, resilience and imagination. Eleanor's quiet nobility both charmed and inspired her colleagues. Eleanor Roosevelt was the American spokesman in the most memorable debate of the first meeting of the U.N. General Assembly in London in January 1946. Without a note, she replied in a powerful, brilliant speech to the demand by the Soviet Union for the forceful repatriation of displaced persons to their homeland. Her opponents vanquished, Eleanor Roosevelt emerged as the world's most effective advocate for human rights, unafraid of the totalitarian states and equally unafraid of standing up to her own government.

The example of her uncle was part of who she was. Together with her husband she co-authored an era that left her the most powerful, influential and respected woman in the world. History will recognize the Universal Declaration, as many countries and people now do, as one of the basic Charters of human freedom.⁴⁴ It challenged the view that a sovereign state's treatment of its own citizens was not subject to international control and intervention, certainly

one of the lessons of the Holocaust that Eleanor Roosevelt taught us never to forget. Just as the Declaration helped bring an end to the colonial era, so has it provided a rallying point for freedom movements that brought about the collapse of Communism and the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe and the demise of apartheid. It is a pillar of the international system that holds the possibility of enhancing peace and social justice in our world. Eleanor Roosevelt was much more than the heir or the helpmate of the two great Roosevelt presidents. She was their partner, and in a time of unprecedented change in America and the world, she, as well as Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt, represented hope, determination, commitment, and decency.

What is it that binds these three extraordinary individuals together – Theodore, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt? Clearly, they were optimists – optimists about human nature and human possibilities. They were individuals of courage, tested both spiritually and physically, each one surmounting every obstacle to achieve a new level of possibility. They were confident of their objectives and of themselves so their enemies held no fear for them. They brought a sense of purpose, challenge and inspiration to the political struggles of their time. It must have been exciting to be with them, to share a sense of public adventure with each of them. They inspired and continue to inspire generations of Americans. They believed deeply in democracy and democratic principles. A grateful nation remembers them for their historic achievements and for the noble purposes of their lives.

¹ H.H. Kohlstaat, McKinley to Harding, p. 101

² James MacGregor Burns and Susan Dunn, The Three Roosevelts, Atlantic Monthly Press (2001)

³ John M. Blum, The Presidential Leadership of Theodore Roosevelt, p. 9, *The Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review*, LXV, December 6, 1958

⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt, Keepers of Democracy, *The Virginia Quarterly Review* (Winter 1939), pp. 1-5. And with great appreciation to Dr. Allida Black, editor in chief of the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers project.

⁵ Eleanor Roosevelt, Wives of Great Men, *Liberty Magazine* (October 1932), pp. 12-16

⁶ Linda Donn, The Roosevelt Cousins, Alfred A. Knopf (2001)

⁷ Linda Donn, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-73

⁸ *New York Herald Tribune* June 7, 1924

⁹ Eleanor Roosevelt, This Is My Story, p. 32

¹⁰ Eleanor Roosevelt, This I Remember, pp. 31-32. [The Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg, The Netherlands, is dedicated to the memory of Franklin and Eleanor and Theodore Roosevelt. On biennial occasions, the Study Center is the site for the award of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Four Freedoms Medals. In 1986, the delegation attending these ceremonies was made up of representatives of both families, headed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr. and P.J. Roosevelt, a kinsman of TR and then Chairman of the Theodore Roosevelt Association. While visiting in Utrecht, the family history was broadly discussed and FDR, Jr. and P.J. Roosevelt stood to make appropriate toasts and speeches that is now known within the family as “The Treaty of Utrecht,” hopefully and formally ending whatever ill feelings survived from the years of their parents.]

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- ¹¹ Henry L. Stoddard, As I Knew Them: Presidents and Politics from Grant to Coolidge, Harper & Row (1927), p. 320
- ¹² Theodore Roosevelt, Autobiography (1913), p.300
- ¹³ Theodore Roosevelt, op. cit., pp. 301-304
- ¹⁴ Henry L. Stoddard, op. cit., p. 248
- ¹⁵ Burns and Dunn, op. cit., p. 115
- ¹⁶ Geoffrey Ward, A First Class Temperament, Harper & Row (1989), p. 131
- ¹⁷ Burns and Dunn, op. cit., p. 115. Also see Theodore Roosevelt, Autobiography, op. cit.
- ¹⁸ Theodore Roosevelt, op. cit., p. 388
- ¹⁹ Theodore Roosevelt, op. cit., p. 389
- ²⁰ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., A Life in the 20th Century, Houghton Mifflin (2000)
- ²¹ Stoddard, op. cit. p. 322 and following
- ²² Doris Kearns Goodwin, No Ordinary Time, Simon and Schuster (1994), p. 129
- ²³ Doris Kearns Goodwin, op. cit., pp. 527-28
- ²⁴ William Leuchtenburg, In the Shadow of FDR,
- ²⁵ Professor Bogdador discussed this possibility with Professor Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. at a conference held in El Escorial, Spain, August 2001
- ²⁶ Winston Churchill, If Lee Had Not Won the Battle of Gettysburg, Scribners Magazine, December 1930, p. 587
- ²⁷ Theodore Roosevelt's Address to the Naval War College, June 2, 1897; See also Martin Walker, Makers of the American Century, Chatto & Windus (2000), p. 6
- ²⁸ My Day, August 6, 1962
- ²⁹ Burns and Dunn, op. cit., p. 36
- ³⁰ Theodore Roosevelt, Gubernatorial Message, May 22, 1899
- ³¹ Martin Walker, op. cit., p. 12
- ³² Theodore Roosevelt letter to Raymond Robins, August 12, 1914
- ³³ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, A Message to the Congress on Tax Revision, June 19, 1935
- ³⁴ See TR letters to Joseph Dixon, March 8, 1912 and to John Strachey, March 28, 1912
- ³⁵ FDR, Campaign Address at Madison Square Garden, October 31, 1936. See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s magnificent volumes, The Age of Roosevelt (Houghton Mifflin) Volume I, The Crisis of the Old Order (1956); Volume II, The Coming of the New Deal (1959); Volume III, The Politics of Upheaval (1961). See also Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Vital Center (Houghton Mifflin, 1949) pp. 23-24. Burns and Dunn, op. cit., pp. 123-36; George E. Mowry, Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement (New York, Hill & Want, 1960), p. 140 et seq.; Frank Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Four Volumes (Little, Brown & Company); John Allen Gable, The Bull Moose Years: Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Party (Kennikat Press, 1978, Port Washington). John Gable, the Executive Director of the Theodore Roosevelt Association, has done as much as any contemporary to make the life and times of Theodore Roosevelt a continuing force in American political thought and action.
- ³⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, op. cit. p. 463
- ³⁷ See Harbaugh, op. cit., p. 399; TR letter to Governor Hiram Johnson of California, October 27, 1911
- ³⁸ See generally the excellent work of William Henry Harbough, Power and Responsibility: The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt (Farrar, Straus & Coudahy, 1961); also Morrison, Commager, Leuchtenburg, The Growth of the American Republic, Oxford Press 1969
- ³⁹ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 11, 1944
- ⁴⁰ Martin Walker, op. cit., p. 11
- ⁴¹ Address by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Museum of Natural History (New York, January 19, 1936), FDR Presidential Papers
- ⁴² Stoddard, op. cit. p. 318
- ⁴³ Louis Auchincloss, Theodore Roosevelt, Times Books (2001), p. 136
- ⁴⁴ See generally Mary Ann Glendon's excellent book, A World Made New, Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Random House (2001)