

FORUM: THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND EUROPE

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PREFACE

My interest in Theodore Roosevelt's relations with Europe began as a graduate student, writing a dissertation that explored Anglo-Canadian-American relations during the Roosevelt era. At McGill University I taught classes on Roosevelt's foreign relations, just as the United States geared up for war in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. With my students I discussed Roosevelt's nuanced foreign policy. Far from being a "cowboy" president—masculine, quick to draw, and never backing down—Roosevelt always remained very aware of the limits of American power, albeit an awareness tempered by Victorian biases.

At the time, however, it was fashionable to compare the "big stick" foreign policies of Roosevelt and President George W. Bush. *The Wall Street Journal* published a chart comparing their characteristics, and Arizona Senator John McCain told talk show host Charlie Rose that Roosevelt was his foreign policy idol. In October 2002 I published an op-ed piece in the Toronto *Globe and Mail* entitled "Whatever Happened to 'Speak Softly.'" In it, I noted that during Roosevelt's presidency the United States did not go to war, that Roosevelt limited his big-stick brandishing to the Western hemisphere, and that he helped broker peace in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 and the Franco-German conflict over Morocco in 1906. I concluded: "TR's willingness both to forge war and fashion peace should be the model for every U.S. president."¹

As my research turned to Roosevelt's life and career in New York City, I stressed how this eastern and urban context underscored his intellectual, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan character. Part of this was his enduring connection to Europe. The New York Knickerbocker was keenly aware of his family's European roots, and as a youth Roosevelt spent nearly two years in Europe—about the same amount of time as he spent on his cattle ranches in the Badlands. If the Western experience shaped Roosevelt's understanding of the United States, its history, and its natural wonders, so did his youthful time in Europe. The European trips helped confirm for Roosevelt America's unique characteristics in contrast with the Old World. The trips also confirmed for him religious and ethnic distinctions among Europeans, biases he had developed in New York. I explored these ideas in my contribution to *America's Transatlantic Turn: Theodore Roosevelt and the "Discovery" of Europe*, edited by Hans Krabbendam and John H. Thompson, and part of Palgrave Macmillan's "The World of the Roosevelts" series edited by David B. Woolner. The volume resulted from a symposium sponsored by the Roosevelt

Study Center in the Netherlands, where I met for the first time many of the contributors to this special issue of the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* on America's relations to Europe during the era of Theodore Roosevelt.

The issue is the result of much hard work, generosity, and patience of many people. I would like to thank the editors of the journal Robert D. Johnston and Benjamin H. Johnson for remaining dedicated to a project they inherited. Many thanks, too, to Jack Thompson, who helped organize that first meeting of Roosevelt scholars in Middleburg, Netherlands; helped me get in touch with the contributors to this issue; and kindly agreed to write a reflection on the forum. My thanks also to the contributors—Michael Cullinane, Séverine Antigone Marin, Simon Rofe, Alan Tomlinson, and my colleague Kenneth Weisbrode—for their insights and writing skills on display in their excellent essays, and for their patience as the issue has lumbered toward publication.

Finally, I would like to give a special thanks to my good friend Alan Lessoff, longtime editor of the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*. Alan initially invited me to serve on the journal's editorial board, followed by an invitation to guest edit this special issue. All the following contributions reflect his consummate editorial skill.

It is a good time to be a Theodore Roosevelt scholar. The Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation was established in the spring of 2015. Roosevelt's Oyster Bay estate Sagamore Hill reopened in July 2015 after years of major refurbishing. And the Theodore Roosevelt Center at Dickinson State University continues its massive project to digitize all of Roosevelt's papers—including over 150,000 of his letters. With the 100th anniversary of Roosevelt's death due for commemoration in 2019, we are bound to see a flurry of related books, articles, conferences, and perhaps a movie based on Edmund Morris's *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* starring Leonardo DiCaprio as the young TR. This special issue is just one reminder of the continued interest in, and relevance of, Theodore Roosevelt.

NOTE

¹*Toronto Globe and Mail*, October 10, 2002.