

Theodore Roosevelt

OVERVIEW

While many of President Theodore Roosevelt’s predecessors saw themselves as servants of Congress, Roosevelt saw the President as the servant or agent of the people. He transformed the legislative role of the President from nominal legislative advisor to outspoken advocate of policies that he thought would strengthen America. Where the Founders believed that powers not granted were forbidden, Roosevelt asserted that powers not forbidden were granted. He was aware that he was shaping the Presidency in a way his detractors would criticize. In his autobiography, Roosevelt wrote that he did not “usurp” power, but that he did “greatly broaden” executive authority. One way he did this was to use his position as a “bully pulpit.”

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Understand ways Theodore Roosevelt used his office as a “bully pulpit.”
- Analyze the constitutionality of Roosevelt’s actions as President.
- Evaluate ways that Roosevelt transformed the Presidency.

MATERIALS

- **Handout A:** Theodore Roosevelt and the Bully Pulpit
- **Handout B:** President Roosevelt and the Constitution
- **Appendix B:** The United States Constitution

CONSTITUTIONAL CONNECTION

To create a context for this lesson, students complete **Constitutional Connection: The President and Federal Power.**

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT QUESTION

How did Theodore Roosevelt’s use of the residency as a “bully pulpit” transform the office of resident?

BACKGROUND/HOMEWORK

Have students read **Handout A: Theodore Roosevelt and the Bully Pulpit** and answer the questions.

WARM UP [10 MINUTES]

- A.** Have students listen to an audio recording of Roosevelt’s speech entitled “Social and Industrial Justice” found at <https://www.loc.gov/item/99391604/> (A transcript is also available at this site.) As a large group, discuss the questions:
- What reforms does Roosevelt propose?
 - How does the tone (the mood or emotion) of his speech compare to speeches given by more recent Presidents or presidential candidates?
 - How does this speech illustrate Roosevelt’s use of the “bully pulpit”?

ACTIVITY [30 MINUTES]

- A.** Working in pairs, have students re-read **Handout A** to identify instances where Roosevelt used the bully pulpit to urge action or reforms. They should record their ideas on Handout B: President Roosevelt and the Constitution.

- B.** Distribute copies of Appendix B: The United States Constitution. Have students read Article II of the Constitution, as well as Article I, Section 7. Ask students to summarize the powers of the president. Responses should include: sign or veto laws; act as Commander-in-Chief of the military; appoint Supreme Court Justices and make other appointments; enforce the laws; report to Congress on the state of the union and recommend measures for their consideration.
- C.** Have students complete Handout B by analyzing the Constitution and the powers it grants the president. See the Answer Key for suggested responses.

WRAP-UP [10 MINUTES]

- A.** As a large group, discuss the questions:
- Did Theodore Roosevelt exercise his presidential powers in a way that was consistent with the Constitution?
 - If not, what was “extra-constitutional” or even “contra-constitutional” about his actions?
 - How did Roosevelt transform the Presidency? Was this change for better or worse?

HOMEWORK

At the Constitutional Convention, the Founders debated the advantages and disadvantages of a single executive. While Edmund Randolph regarded a single executive as the “fetus of monarchy,” James Wilson countered that “unity in the Executive ... would be the best safeguard against tyranny.” Have students assess each of these predictions in light of Theodore Roosevelt’s actions as President.

EXTENSION

Have students browse political cartoons and select one which depicts a constitutional issue to interpret for the class next time. Suggested resources:

www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Blog/Item/Theodore%20Roosevelt%20A%20Career%20Told%20Through%20Political%20Cartoons

[www.loc.gov/photos/?fa=subject%3Acartoons+\(commentary\)%7Ccontributor%3Apuget%2C+j.+s.%7Csubject%3Aoffset+photomechanical+prints%7Csubject%3Aroosevelt%2C+theodore](http://www.loc.gov/photos/?fa=subject%3Acartoons+(commentary)%7Ccontributor%3Apuget%2C+j.+s.%7Csubject%3Aoffset+photomechanical+prints%7Csubject%3Aroosevelt%2C+theodore)

Theodore Roosevelt and the Bully Pulpit

A

The Vice President exited his stage coach at North Creek Station in New York. Almost immediately, someone shoved a telegram in his hands. He solemnly read the news that President William McKinley had died from bullet wounds received from an assassin's gun. Theodore Roosevelt stepped aboard his train bound for Buffalo, where he would take the Oath of Office. He told a friend, "It is a dreadful thing to come into the presidency this way; but it would be a far worse thing to be morbid about it."

THE FIRST THREE YEARS

The youngest person ever to become President, Roosevelt brought energy and vigor to the White House. Where his predecessors had been reserved and cautious, Roosevelt was outspoken and unabashed. He was excited by the chance he had to use what he called the "bully pulpit" ("bully" meaning "wonderful" and "pulpit" meaning "a preaching position") to spread his ideas, to persuade, and to change. He said famously: "I suppose my critics will call that preaching, but I have got such a bully pulpit!" His use of the bully pulpit contributed to the greatest expansion of federal power in the country's history to that time.

Roosevelt spoke boldly in his first message to Congress. He believed monopolies damaged the general welfare and called for the creation of a new executive department to monitor big corporations, called trusts. The Department of Labor and Commerce was created in response to this call in 1903.

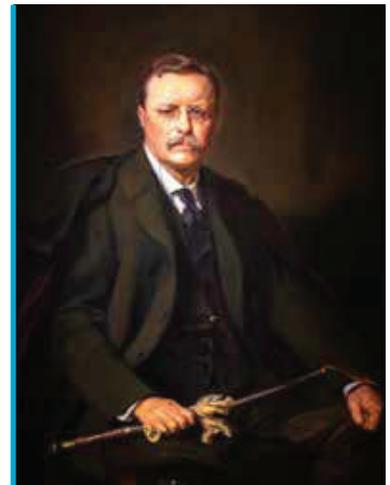
THE BULLY PULPIT ABROAD

Roosevelt was elected President in 1904 with the greatest popular majority to that point. In his inaugural address he expressed his "fixed determination to show that under a free government a mighty people can thrive best." One way the US could "show" the world was through

its relationships with other nations: "We have become a great nation, forced by the fact of its greatness into relations with the other nations of the earth...We wish peace, but we wish the peace of justice, the peace of righteousness." His views on foreign affairs were summed up with the proverb he often called his motto, "Speak softly and carry a big stick."

Roosevelt was willing to interfere in the affairs of other nations when it benefited the United States. By helping revolutionaries in Panama win independence from Columbia, Roosevelt created conditions that allowed for US construction of the Panama Canal and a 100-year lease on the Canal Zone. His corollary to the Monroe Doctrine prevented foreign bases from being established in the Caribbean.

Demonstrating to the world that the US was a great naval power, he sent the Great White Fleet around the world. In 1905, he helped negotiate an end to the Russo-Japanese War. This achievement won Roosevelt the Nobel Peace Prize.



THE BULLY PULPIT AT HOME

At home, Roosevelt expanded the federal government's ability to acquire land. He signed laws establishing five national parks. He broadened executive power by signing the Antiquities Act in 1906. This law gave the president the power to proclaim historic landmarks, structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest as national monuments. He interpreted

this law broadly, and by the end of his term had reserved eighteen areas in this manner. Later presidents claimed 105 areas under the Antiquities Act, forty-nine of which remain so designated today.

Roosevelt used the bully pulpit to persuade Congress that “the great development of industrialism means that there must be an increase in the supervision exercised by the government over business enterprise.” Explaining his fight for a “square deal” for Americans, he used authority under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to take on powerful consolidated companies. He worked to protect companies from extreme demands from labor unions. He urged federal lawmakers to enact legislation protecting workers, including child labor laws and a bill providing workmen’s compensation for all federal employees. He proposed laws regulating the nation’s food supply. In response, the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 was passed, paving the way for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Historians note that Roosevelt’s efforts to curb corporate power did not mean he was against capitalism. Roosevelt was a capitalist. But he tried to curb what he saw as the excesses of capitalism so that socialism—on the rise around the world—would not take root in the United States. His proposals moved Congress to act.

THE ENERGETIC EXECUTIVE

Roosevelt gave a broad interpretation to the opening words of Article II—vesting the “executive power” of the United States in the President—and his oath of office. The President is not a lawmaker. The Constitution permits him or her only to “recommend measures” to Congress for their consideration. Roosevelt sent more than 400 messages to Congress. Roosevelt seized these and other opportunities to accentuate the leadership responsibilities of the President.

Roosevelt was criticized for many of his actions. Some disapproved of his turning the US into an international police power. Some condemned his decision to send the Great White Fleet around the world, arguing that he forced Congress’s hand to spend the money needed for this endeavor. Many charged that the many regulatory agencies he proposed threatened liberty. President William Howard Taft, who succeeded Theodore Roosevelt as President in 1916, said that Roosevelt’s view of “ascribing an undefined ... power to the President” was “an unsafe doctrine,” that could do permanent “injustice to private right.” Some later historians have called Roosevelt an activist president, because of the way his actions increased the power of the federal government over states and individuals’ lives.

COMPREHENSION AND CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What did Roosevelt mean by “bully pulpit”?
2. How did Roosevelt change the way other countries viewed the United States?
3. What kinds of domestic reforms did Roosevelt propose to Congress?
4. The Founders believed powers not granted to the President in the Constitution were forbidden. Roosevelt believed powers not forbidden were granted. What are the implications of each view?

President Roosevelt and the Constitution

DIRECTIONS: As you read the Background Essay, identify issues in which President Theodore Roosevelt used the “bully pulpit.” Then analyze the Constitution to find where, if anywhere, the President gets the power to act as Roosevelt conducted himself. Finally, fill in the third column with your opinion about how this action may have transformed the presidency.

USE OF THE “BULLY PULPIT”	WHERE IN THE CONSTITUTION?	HOW DID THIS TRANSFORM THE PRESIDENCY?
He explained the need he saw to regulate “corporations engaged in interstate commerce.”	Article II, Section 3: He ... recommend to [Congress’s] consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient...	

