Teddy Roosevelt Essay, Research Paper

Ascension To The White House As Governor of New York, Roosevelt would once again stand on his own and distance himself from the political bosses and machines that got him elected. The head of the Republican machine, Thomas Platt, had misgivings about making Roosevelt governor of New York because of Roosevelt’s total independence and his reform nature. But in the gubernatorial race of 1898, with the bad press the Republican Party was receiving, there seemed to be no one else who had a chance. Roosevelt was riding the crest of the wave of being a true war hero, and with Platt’s help together they might keep the Democrats from winning the office. Platt in return for his help expected Roosevelt to let him make the appointments and carry the party line. Roosevelt had no intentions of being Platt’s puppet, and as soon as he got in office the two would begin to battle. Roosevelt had to be careful, because to totally alienate Platt would cripple his chances to go any further politically or even threaten his chances to be reelected governor. Roosevelt made his point by declining to appoint Platt’s first suggested appointee. After making his point, however, Roosevelt tried to work with the Republican boss to the extent of not abandoning his own principals. Platt for his part could not toss the war hero out on his ear in 1900, but at the same time, he wanted to find a way to gracefully get Roosevelt out of his hair. Platt’s opportunity to get rid of Roosevelt came with the approach of the presidential election of 1900. McKinley was discretely looking for a new running mate to replace Hobart in the upcoming election. It was fairly obvious that the Democrats would choose William Jennings Bryan as their candidate of choice again, and McKinley would need a fiery speaking running mate to offset Bryan’s oratory abilities. McKinley would simply sit back and look Presidential while his running mate would attack Bryan. Hobart was not a gifted orator, and this decision to replace him became all that much easier when he died just prior to the national Republican convention. Mark Hanna had run McKinley’s campaign in 1896 and wanted nothing to do with Roosevelt in 1900. Platt on the other hand saw his opportunity to get rid of Roosevelt at the same time saving face in his own home state of New York. The men of the west deeply distrusted Mark Hanna, and loved Roosevelt, so a vote for Roosevelt would both serve to promote their hero, while at the same time taking a shot at Hanna. Roosevelt for his part did not want the Vice Presidency, but instead he wished to be reelected as governor of New York. As time went by, it became more and more apparent that Platt did not want Roosevelt to remain in office and that, even if nominated, he would have a tough time being reelected. From Roosevelt’s perspective, the governor’s job paid much better than that of Vice President, plus the work of governor was more exciting. Roosevelt knew that the position of Vice President was one of obscurity, and judging from history wasn’t the best approach to the White House. However, the Vice Presidency was still better than no job at all so when the nomination came he was happy to except it. Platt had arranged things so well, that by the time the convention rolled around, Hanna could do nothing to stop Roosevelt’s nomination. Hanna was furious at the convention believing that the rest of the party had gone mad. When someone asked Hanna what was the matter, he retorted, “Matter! Matter! Why, everybody’s going headlong for Roosevelt for Vice President. Don’t any of you realize that there’s only one life between that madman and the Presidency?” Hanna then threw in the towel and made the nomination of Roosevelt for Vice President unanimous. As the campaign began to wind up, Roosevelt consulted Hanna on what his part should be in the election. Roosevelt was sent west to canvass the men with whom he connected so well. Roosevelt played a successful role in the election, and McKinley won by a bigger majority then he had in 1896. A problem arose when Roosevelt’s press and popularity began to rival that of the President himself. Jealousy raised its ugly head on the part of McKinley, and Roosevelt would need to find a way to play second fiddle and not to upstage the boss. Immediately after the election Roosevelt headed west for a hunting trip to try to lay low. While hunting cougar and lynx the dogs had managed to tree a mountain lion. As Roosevelt and his guide approached on horseback the cat, more afraid of them then the dogs, leaped from the tree and took off again. Finally the dogs managed to tree the big cat again. This time when the hunters approached and the cat leaped from the tree the dogs caught it and began to fight with the mountain lion. The dogs were taking a beating from the big cat, but were relentlessly going in again and again. Roosevelt not wanting to shoot one of the dogs, but also wanting to keep the cat from inflicting any more damage on them jumped in with a knife and stabbed the big cat behind the shoulder thrusting the blade into the heart and killing it. Roosevelt wrote home to his son Ted, “I have always wished to kill a cougar as I did this one, with dogs and the knife.” The story received so much press that again he was upstaging his boss. For his part, if he wished to be president in 1904, he would have to forego the hunting trips for fear of outshining the boss and losing favor with the party. President By Assassination As the events played out it would not take Roosevelt until 1904 to ascend to the Presidency. The assassin’s bullet would bring down McKinley at the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo. The anarchist, Leon Czolgosz, approached McKinley and shot him. The surgeons who worked on him decided not to use the newly invented X-ray machine, which was on display at the exposition. Instead they repaired the holes in his stomach and hoped for his recovery. Roosevelt, upon receiving the news, came to the President’s side in Buffalo, but left to go on a family vacation in the Adirondacks when it appeared that the President was out of the woods. On September 12th Roosevelt, while eating lunch on his decent down a mountain, caught site of a man coming out of the woods on the trail down below. By his appearance it was at once obvious that this man was no ordinary hiker. Roosevelt knew that he was the bearer of bad news. They returned to the cabin, and later in the evening when the news reached that the situation was grave, Roosevelt headed out in the dark with a driver in a wagon bound for Buffalo. Before he could reach Buffalo McKinley was dead. Roosevelt was given a briefing and rushed by train to Buffalo. He would have to pay the respects of the nation to the fallen President. At 1:30 in the afternoon of September 13th he arrived at where McKinley’s body lay. He met with the cabinet and took the oath of office. Theodore Roosevelt became the twenty-sixth president of the United States. In replacing McKinley in light of the current catastrophe, Roosevelt wanted to reassure the nation that not all was lost, that the anarchists would not overthrow the government, and that the country would go on. He sought not to rock the boat, but promised to pick up the mantle where McKinley had left it. As part of carrying on Roosevelt left the cabinet which McKinley had selected in place and followed through with many other appointees which McKinley had in the works. The nation was in the midst of an economic recovery, and TR did not want to do anything to disrupt it. Roosevelt like most other public officials enjoyed the thrill of power. As President TR sought to redefine the authority of the office of chief executive. Unlike most of his predecessors, who believed that the President should only perform tasks granted by the Constitution, Roosevelt inverted this and believed that the President should do everything in his power for the people, except what was strictly forbidden by the Constitution. He thus did a great deal to expand the powers of the Chief Executive. Trust Busting The first major issue that would command the full attention of the new President and much of the news of the day was the issue of trust busting. In 1895 the Supreme Court laid the groundwork for TR’s battle by ruling in the Knight case that the American Sugar Refining Company’s monopoly of sugar production could not legally be stopped by Congress since Congress only had the authority to regulate interstate commerce. It ruled that the American Sugar Refining Company only marginally dealt in commerce. With the doors thus open many mergers were taking place in the nation forming huge monopolistic trusts. For his part Theodore Roosevelt did not feel that all of these trusts were bad, only those who sought to gain wealth through taking advantage of the people. Those corporations, which kept as their goal the purpose of furthering the common good, would be left alone to make an honest profit. One such company which Roosevelt felt must be taken on was the Northern Securities Company. This holding company had formed under Roosevelt’s watch, and had bought up most of the railroads of the Northwest. Roosevelt’s prior bad feelings in dealings with the railroads as a cattleman didn’t help the Northern Securities chances of avoiding his watchful eyes. What made this case different from the Knight case was the obvious fact that the railroads dealt constantly in interstate commerce, thereby falling under the Sherman Act. It didn’t hurt the fact that before this case could come before the Supreme Court Roosevelt would have the chance to appoint a new judge to fill a vacancy. His selection of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. helped to decide the case in favor of Roosevelt and the government. His attack on the Northern Securities Company in February of 1902 sent a chill through Wall Street. Roosevelt knew that he must be careful in his dealings, because as a Republican, he would certainly need the help of big business to get reelected. J.P. Morgan, the man behind the Northern Securities Company, paid a visit to the White House to ensure that Roosevelt was not planning to attack all of his interests. He left assured that Roosevelt would only attack those that he deemed were doing something wrong. With this assurance a real panic on Wall Street was avoided. To regulate much of the trust issues the Roosevelt Administration began the Department of Commerce and Labor and within that department the Bureau of Corporations. The Philippines Not all of Roosevelt’s problems in his first year in office were of a domestic nature. As a strong nationalist, Roosevelt believed that the United States should hold on to the Philippines, which had been taken during the Spanish American war. Many in the nation were still clamoring that the Philippines should be given its independence. Roosevelt believed it was the moral duty of the United States to hang on to the Philippines until the Filipinos could be brought to a higher standard of civilization and self-government. This issue, however, came to a head when it was revealed that American military authorities in the Philippines had been engaging in all kinds of horrific torture in order to keep the rebels down. Ironically these tortures were far worse then the ones the Spanish had inflicted on the Cuban’s which had TR screaming for Cuban independence before the Spanish American War. Roosevelt would not change his nationalistic view of the Philippines, but he did see that justice was brought against those responsible for the torture. The Coal Strike In the spring of 1902 Roosevelt again faced a problem which would gain the attention of the nation, and more importantly of the big business interests. For the second time in two years the coal miners under the leadership of John Mitchell would go out on strike, protesting the poor work conditions and salaries of the coal miners. Roosevelt watched the situation carefully, but didn’t believe that Constitutionally he could do a thing about the situation. Mark Hanna, the man behind McKinley had stepped in only two years earlier and convinced the owners of the mine to give the miners a 10 percent raise, and thus avoid the more chilling thought of William Jennings Bryan, the Great Commoner, in the White House. The settlement two years prior had made neither side happy, so when Roosevelt approached Hanna to work out another deal, both sides flatly refused. The economic and political ramifications of the coal strike could prove to be disastrous to Roosevelt. If he sided with the coal miners, he could further alienate the big business men whom he would need to gain the presidency of his own accord in 1904. Yet, with coal being the main source of fuel in the nation at that time, to let it go on could shut down the nation economically and have many Americans suffering from the cold if the strike dragged on into the winter. Roosevelt decided to try to bring the two parties together, with himself being the mediator. After this first meeting, Roosevelt quickly realized that John Mitchell was the level headed one, and that the coal operators were pig headed and arrogant. The talks quickly broke down, and Roosevelt knew that he must come up with an alternative plan to get the owners to come to their senses. As luck would have it, one of the operators wrote a letter, which was published, in which he described the operators of the mines as ordained by God to manage the mines in the way they saw fit. Being thus ordained by God, the miners should accept the terms of the operators as the very will of God. This letter which mysteriously came into print served to outrage the public against the operators. Roosevelt also laid plans with General J.M. Schofield to be prepared to take over and run the mines should the need arise. These plans were also mysteriously leaked to the operators, and they instantly became far more willing to negotiate. The operators of the mines thus agreed to binding arbitration by a panel of experts. Here also there was a sticking point. The operators wished to have the panel stacked in their favor. The minors as expected rejected the panel as presented by the operators, but came back with an alternative panel. This offer the operators flatly refused. After pushing the operators very hard, Roosevelt finally got a panel, which was satisfactory to both sides and the crisis was averted. With the Congressional elections of 1902 quickly approaching Roosevelt would once again take to the stump to further the cause of the Republican Party. Not only would the election of Republicans make his work as President easier, it would also indirectly show if the people of the nation were behind his policies as President. A poor showing by Republicans would no doubt be construed as a vote against Roosevelt. This campaign however almost proved to be fatal for the President. On September 3, 1902 while traveling in a carriage with the Governor of Massachusetts and his private secretary George Cortelyou, the carraige was struck by an out-of-control trolley car. The impact instantly killed on of Roosevelt’s bodyguards, and badly injured Roosevelt’s leg. After a short rest at Oyster Bay, he once again attempted to take to the campaign trail. The leg quickly became infected, and emergency surgery became necessary to save his leg, and possibly his life. After the surgery, Roosevelt was forced to rest and confined to a wheelchair for several weeks. The Big Stick Before the end of 1902 another international crisis would face Roosevelt and the nation. Germany was a nation on the rise, and looking to expand their commercial base. Germany had thus opened a line of credit to several of the South American countries. The problem arose when Venezuela, under the leadership of Cipriano Castro, decided not to pay back the loans owed to Germany, using the loans as a rallying cry for national unity. The Germans wanting their money with the help of the British, who were also owed money, set up a blockade around Venezuela. Roosevelt believed that the rebellious South American country deserved a good spanking, but the thought of the Germans gaining a foothold in South America gave Roosevelt cause for alarm. Under the Monroe Doctrine, the United States had set the Americas off limits to the Europeans and Roosevelt with all of his national pride could not back down to the European intervention. Kaiser Wilhelm III intended to send German troops ashore to occupy the land temporarily until the Venezuela came up with the money. Roosevelt did not trust the Kaiser and recommended that the Germans resolve the problem through arbitration. The Germans refused arbitration and insisted that the occupation would only be temporary. What “temporary” meant was any one’s guess, but Roosevelt didn’t intend to find out. Roosevelt sent word to Admiral Dewey to assemble the battle fleet for ‘maneuvers’ near Puerto Rico and to be ready at a moments notice for Venezuela. Roosevelt then informed the German ambassador, Theodor von Hollenben, that if the Germans did not seek arbitration with Venezuela that he would send in the American fleet to insure that the Germans would not occupy Venezuela. The ambassador then asked Roosevelt if he were aware of the consequences of that move, with Roosevelt assuring him that he was. A week passed with no response. When finally the ambassador met again with Roosevelt their conversation came to a close with no comment on the response from Germany on Roosevelt’s statement. When Roosevelt asked the ambassador if he had a response from his government the von Hollenben said that he did not. Roosevelt then informed him that in that case he would step up the time table twenty-four hours from his original schedule and occupy Venezuela with the American fleet. This certainly got the ambassador’s attention and shortly before the deadline a response came from the Kaiser that indeed they would seek arbitration in the Venezuela matter. The arbitration occurred at the Hague and once again a national conflict was avoided by Roosevelt’s use of the ‘Big Stick.’ Panama Canal In 1903 Roosevelt turned his attention to the Isthmian Canal. The main issue was which route would the canal take. One proposed route was through Panama and the other through Nicaragua. Panama at the time was under the government control of Colombia. Over the past several decades, however, the Panamanians had revolted scores of times seeking their independence from Colombia. The Colombians over the last few years only maintained control through the help of the U.S. fleet. With the debate raging in the U.S. over which site to choose, both countries were courting the U.S. to choose their site. A volcano in Nicaragua may have been the final straw in making the choice for Panama. At the Pan-American Congress in Mexico the Colombian delegate signed the Hay-Herran Treaty to insure that Panama would be the site. The Republic of Colombia was under the control of a dictator, J.M. Maroquin, who had seized power in July of 1900. At the time he had been elected Vice-President, but assumed office when he had the President M. A. Sanclamente killed. In 1903 the French Panama Company had rights to build a canal through Panama. The U.S., however, prior to the Hay-Herran Treaty worked with the French Panama Company and signed the Hay-Pauncefote treaty in order to get rights to build the canal. The U.S. Hay-Herran treaty offered the payment of $250,000 a year plus a $10 million dollar signing bonus to give the U.S. control of a six mile wide strip of land for ninety-nine years. This treaty would need to be ratified by both countries before the digging could begin. To Roosevelt’s surprise the Colombian government rejected the treaty. It was believed that Maroquin wanted to try to squeeze more money from the Americans and thus created a puppet Congress to reject the legislation. The puppet Congress suggested that the U.S. wait another year before the Congress would reconvene and possibly ratify the treaty. The Colombians wanted to wait another year, because by that time the French Panama Company would have to forfeit its rights to build the canal, thus leaving more money for the government of Colombia. Roosevelt was outraged by this and began to think of other plans. The Panamanians still seeking there independence from Colombia saw a golden opportunity in the Colombian rejection of the treaty. Roosevelt received information that the Panamanians might again be ready to revolt. Once again U.S. warships were sent to Panama only this time they were sent to protect the insurgents. Panama declared its independence and the United States immediately recognized their independence. A treaty was signed with Panama and the U.S. began construction of the Panama Canal. In November of 1906 Roosevelt would break precedence by going to Panama to inspect the work of the canal and thus become the first sitting President to leave American soil. The 1904 election was very important to Roosevelt. His ascent to the Presidency was through the death of McKinley, and he desperately wanted to win the prize of his own accord. His Democratic counterpart was New York jurist Alton Parker. Parker and the Democrats attacked the Republicans saying that they were shaking down the large trusts to get the financial backing they needed to carry on the campaign. In the end the election did not wind up being close as Roosevelt received 7.6 million votes to Parker’s 5.1 million. In the electoral college Parker only received 140 votes to Roosevelt’s 336. The most shocking thing about the entire election was TR’s statement on election night that he would not run for a third term. The statement would come back to haunt him in later years, but in 1908 he remained true to his promise. In 1904 a war broke out between Japan and Russia. The Japanese defeated the Russians early using a sneak attack (the same approach they would use years later against the Americans in World War II). The Japanese continued to win victory after victory, but the Russians were not seeking peace. They instead counted on their Baltic battle fleet to deliver a decisive blow to the Japanese fleet. A decisive blow was given, but not by the Russians. The Japanese fleet annihilated this Russian force in May of 1905. The Japanese for their part had won significant gains and sought a quick peace so as not to bring on the ire of the rest of the European nations. The Russians after the defeat of their Baltic fleet understood they would not be able to win back what was already lost. Both sides looked for peace, but the terms of that peace would be the sticking point. The Japanese, not wanting to look like they were looking for peace, quietly came to Roosevelt asking him to approach the Russians about a peace. The czar also not wanting to appear to be seeking peace, also agreed to come to the table. Both sides wanting the peace table to be in Washington and not at the Hague with Roosevelt himself as the mediator. Because of the heat in Washington during the summer months, Roosevelt had the negotiations moved to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The primary problem was that each side had over zealous expectations as to what to get out of the peace. The Russians for their part did not want to pay any indemnity to the Japanese even though a defeat of that nature would have required it. The Japanese had promised their people at home a large indemnity and it would be difficult for them to save face with their people returning home with less. Roosevelt worked both sides trying to get them closer together. The Japanese accepted Roosevelt’s suggestion to change the terms of the agreement from indemnity to a payment for the transfer of control of lands to ease the language and help the czar safe face, but the Russians would have nothing to do with this. Nicolas had fears of revolution from his own people, and felt that showing any weakness toward the Japanese would push the revolutionaries over the edge. Roosevelt also worked on the Japanese by insisting that holding up the peace negotiations over an indemnity might cost them more in the long run due to the expense of the war. Roosevelt also appealed to the Japanese high moral standard in the advent of them being a world leader to bring peace. At the same time, Roosevelt appealed to the British, who had much closer ties to Japan, to put pressure on the Japanese. Roosevelt appealed to the German Kaiser to speak with the czar in order to get the czar to move on the issues. Roosevelt hoped that the Kaiser, whom the czar trusted, would be far more convincing than anything which came from Washington, of whom the czar did not trust. Finally the Japanese agreed to drop all thoughts of receiving any indemnity, realizing that Roosevelt was right that it would in the long run cost them more to continue the war. In the end, Roosevelt persevered and brought peace to the region. For his part in the Russo-Japanese Treaty Roosevelt would win a Nobel Peace Prize in 1906, becoming the first American to win any Nobel Prize.