

The Breakfast Club

Constitutional Minute for 22 February 2025

Channeling Teddy Roosevelt

Getting tired of winning?

I don't know this for a fact; but Donald Trump seems to have read (and perhaps committed certain parts to memory) *Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography* (first published in 1913, now in the public domain). Twenty-sixth U.S. President "Teddy" Roosevelt is generally regarded as our first progressive President. What more proof need I offer than that Roosevelt formed the **Progressive Party**, aka, the **Bull Moose Party**, after he lost the Republican Party presidential nomination to his former protégé-turned-rival, incumbent president William Howard Taft, who went on to complete a second term.

A succinct biography of Roosevelt can be found on [Wikipedia](#) (note: many entries on Wikipedia have been "wokified;" always read Wikipedia with caution). I won't bore you with the details of Roosevelt's exceptional career, you can read them for yourself, but it is clear Teddy Roosevelt led a truly remarkable, adventure-filled life, mostly of his own making.

The Progressive Era (generally regarded as beginning in the 1890s and ending in the 1920s) "was a period in the United States characterized by multiple social and political reform efforts." And Roosevelt was nothing if not a reformer.

As an aside: I often wonder why today's political scientists have not labeled the period in our history from 1990 to the present as *The Progressive Era, Part Deux*. Progressives have certainly tried exceptionally hard to exert themselves in the political arena these last 35 years, spurred on by "King of the Modern Progressives:" Barack Obama himself.

Teddy Roosevelt gathered notoriety wherever he went, as a magnet gathers iron filings. While William McKinley was the first US president to be featured in a motion picture, Teddy Roosevelt was the first president to have his life and career chronicled in multiple films:

Terrible Teddy, the Grizzly King was a 1901 American silent film directed by Edwin S. Porter (no relation -- that I know of). It was the earliest use of political satire in American film.

The "Teddy" Bears was a 1907 silent film also directed by Porter. It began mimicking the fairy tale *Goldilocks*, and ended once again as political satire of Roosevelt.

Roosevelt in Africa, was a 1910 documentary about the Smithsonian–Roosevelt African Expedition and featured Roosevelt himself.

And who can forget the 2006 classic ***Night at the Museum*** where a super-charged Robin Williams brings the "Rough-Rider" back to life.

Reminiscent of the admonition in James 1:22-25, Teddy Roosevelt was definitely a “do-er” and not simply a “hearer.” Put a man of action in the White House and you will get...action.

In Roosevelt’s autobiography, in Chapter X, entitled: “*The Presidency; Making an Old Party Progressive,*” you’ll find these words:

“The most important factor in getting the right spirit in my Administration, next to the insistence upon courage, honesty, and a genuine democracy of desire to serve the plain people, was my insistence upon the theory that the executive power was limited only by specific restrictions and prohibitions appearing in the Constitution or imposed by the Congress under its Constitutional powers. My view was that every executive officer, and above all every executive officer in high position, was a steward of the people bound actively and affirmatively to do all he could for the people, and not to content himself with the negative merit of keeping his talents undamaged in a napkin. I declined to adopt the view that what was imperatively necessary for the Nation could not be done by the President unless he could find some specific authorization to do it. My belief was that it was not only his right but his duty to do anything that the needs of the Nation demanded unless such action was forbidden by the Constitution or by the laws. Under this interpretation of executive power I did and caused to be done many things not previously done by the President and the heads of the departments. I did not usurp power, but I did greatly broaden the use of executive power. In other words, I acted for the public welfare, I acted for the common well-being of all our people, whenever and in whatever manner was necessary, unless prevented by direct constitutional or legislative prohibition. I did not care a rap for the mere form and show of power; I cared immensely for the use that could be made of the substance.”

If that is not an apt description of what we are seeing unfold in Trump 2.0, I don’t know what would better suffice. Donald Trump’s “blizzard” of Executive Orders never seem to letup. Some obviously stretch the limits of Presidential power, or take entirely novel views of that power, but I take comfort in knowing that these EOs have been planned for years and have been written by a team of lawyers who know both the constitution and statute law better than 99.9% of Americans.

If you want to read Roosevelt’s words in context, [Amazon sells a republished version](#) of the Autobiography and, since it is in the public domain, a free, downloadable version in several formats can be found [here](#)).

Do not take me to mean I view Donald Trump as a progressive, I do not, and he is not, at least not in the traditional understanding of progressivism that sprang up in the early 20th Century.

But consider this: I asked my new AI-linked browser “What is a progressive?” and I received several answers; here’s one of them:

“What are progressives in politics? Ans: Progressives were interested in establishing *a more transparent and accountable government* which would work to improve U.S. society” (emphasis added). Sound like anything you’ve heard in the last 30 days?

Perhaps what we are witnessing is a conservative takeover of the progressive movement, or at least the use of progressive strategies to return us to limited, accountable government.

Time will tell; but keep your seat belt fastened; arms and legs inside at all times.

For further reading:

[The Progressive Era, Liberal Renaissance or Liberal Failure](#), Arthur Mann, ed. 1965 (only used copies available).

[How Progressives Rewrote the Constitution](#), by Richard A. Epstein, 2006.

[Dupes: How America's Adversaries Have Manipulated Progressives for a Century](#), by Paul Kengor, 2010.

[Plundered, How Progressive Ideology is Destroying America](#), by Michael Coffman, 2012.

[God's Chaos Candidate, Donald Trump and the American Unraveling](#), by Lance Wallnau, 2016.

[All Out War, The Plot to Destroy Trump](#), by Edward Klein, 2017.

Prepared by: Gary R. Porter, Executive Director, Constitution Leadership Initiative, Inc. for The Breakfast Club.
Contact: gary@constitutionleadership.org; 757-817-1216

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