



Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life

Kathleen Dalton

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Theodore Roosevelt made himself the hero of his own strenuous life. He transformed himself from a sickly and fearful patrician boy into a fiercely adventurous--and always active--hunter, sportsman, writer, politician, and finally president. But one self-making was never enough for TR. He slowly fashioned himself into a man of the people, a defender of the poor and downtrodden, and a prophet of political ideas advanced for his day. This is the story of his personal and political development, of one man's struggle to conquer his own fears and to build a greater nation out of a divided collection of states. He urged America to engage life to the utmost, as he did.

Kathleen Dalton's **Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life** incorporates the latest scholarship into a vigorous narrative. It stands as the only full-length biography to use manuscripts recently discovered in Roosevelt attics. Dalton sheds new light on young Theodore's life during the Civil War and his fascination with the new natural history, his shame over his father's failure to enlist in the Union army, his struggle to achieve manhood, and his desperate pursuit of and sometimes less than idyllic marriage to Alice Hathaway Lee, the daughter of a banking magnate, when she was seventeen. Her death four years later left Roosevelt a grieving widower and father at twenty-six, and he went west to make himself a cowboy and western writer, before he could recommit himself to a new life and a new love in the East.

No other biographer has described how formative Roosevelt's marriage to Edith Carow proved to be in shaping his political career. In an account that may be compared with Joseph Lash's *Eleanor and Franklin*, Dalton demonstrates how Edith and Theodore's marriage, with its ups and downs, remade our history. In partnership with Massachusetts political mastermind Henry Cabot Lodge, Edith served as her husband's advisor, image builder, conscience, and at times censor. Dalton unravels the complex relationship between Roosevelt's initial political conservatism and the growing mood of progressivism that swept the nation in the early 1900s. He found unlikely allies among the army of women reformers who campaigned for pure milk and clean streets in the cities, and by 1912 he had become an active suffragist.

Out of this biography emerges a new picture of the Progressive Era, of state-building and reform won in partnership between TR and activists such as Jane Addams and Frances Kellor. In his political maturity Roosevelt aspired to be the builder of the modern American welfare state in order to give industrial workers a better life and at the same time to stand up more forcefully against the arrogance and greed of large corporations. Dalton shows how TR called for a revival of American arts and letters, and how his career as a scientist affected his reform program and his views on race, and how toward the end of his life he finally committed himself to the cause of racial equality. Both an updated political interpretation and an intimate personal story of a loving but difficult man, his wife, his family, and his loyal friends, **Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life** will change persuasively the way we see this great and complex man and his times.

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