



Theodore Rex

Edmund Morris

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Theodore Roosevelt and his two-term presidency (1901-9) deserve a king-size, seize-the-man biography - and Edmund Morris has provided one. "TR" typifies the "can do" American; his famous maxim, of course, was "Speak softly but carry a big stick." Morris presents eyewitness history through the voices of the makers and shakers. His exhilarating narrative will captivate readers, providing welcome confirmation that this nation can produce presidents who bring leadership to great issues, hold to their purpose, and shape the destinies of nations.

President McKinley's assassination brought the 43-year-old TR a challenging presidency, one to which Morris is a clear-sighted guide. At home, TR had to persuade Congress to curb competition-stifling corporate trusts, monopolistic transcontinental railroads, and unhygienic food industries that saw consumers as sheep. He also faced labor and racial strife. Abroad, the American presence in Cuba and the Philippines brought criticism, the Russo-Japanese conflict threatened major power shifts in the Far East and Europe, and a politically and financially fraught decision on the Central American canal route - Panama or Nicaragua? - had to be made. TR rose to every challenge. Despite the demands of family and social life, he read, wrote, and traveled extensively. Not least, TR put national parks and conservation of natural resources on the legislative agenda.

All TR's notable contemporaries - including historian Henry Adams, naturalists John Burroughs and John Muir, robber barons E. H. Harriman and James J. Hill, poet Oliver Wendell Holmes, financier J. P. Morgan, fellow politician William Howard Taft, civil rights leader Booker T. Washington, and novelist Owen Wister - appear onstage, their clear voices projecting the excitement of the day.

Morris is blessed with the imagination and skills to write gripping popular history. He doesn't dilute but illuminates events in presenting an account that immediately sparks interest and captures the mind. Readers will note that American interventionism abroad (today's major issue) was much debated during TR's presidency, when major interventionist imperatives challenged the new superpower's tradition of relative restraint in foreign affairs.

Theodore Rex is the long-awaited second volume of the TR saga. Morris delivered the first volume, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, in 1979. It won a Pulitzer Prize; *Theodore Rex* is a solid bet for another.
(Peter Skinner)

Theodore Rex Details

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From Reader Review Theodore Rex for online ebook

Nick Black says

not as good as the first book in the trilogy (The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt), but then it's hard to imagine how that would be possible. less punch-out narrative here, likely because even so ursine a character as the Knickerbocker can't get away as President with all the roughhousing of a free citizen, *l'outrance qui est dans sa nature* notwithstanding. there's also a wider cast of characters here, despite fewer pages; they tend to enter, drive disparate drama for a score of pages, and leave. i was forced to turn to the index several times, which never happened in volume 1. still, well worth reading by any measure, though more on the level of Caro's LBJ books (though at least here you're assured conclusion of the work, whereas we're all wondering whether Caro will last through the fifth volume of *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*).

i'd summarize by saying that The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt is required reading for all people, whereas *Theodore Rex* is optional, though i doubt anyone who reads the first volume will skip this one. i'm a bit worried about the third volume, though it's definitely in the on-deck circle.

Hana says

Three and a half stars. One has to have almost as much energy as Teddy himself to get through this massive history of Roosevelt's presidency. I did not enjoy it anywhere near as much as Morris's earlier book, The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt. *Theodore Rex* was too often a rather dry chronology with little context or analysis of Roosevelt's place in history. Still....Bully for Teddy! He was a giant.

Checkman says

The second installment of Edmund Morris's biographical trilogy of Theodore Roosevelt. Densely written, well researched and with excellent research notes *Theodore Rex* is a *serious* piece of political biography. I'm not a slow reader, but I took my time goingg through this one.

Political biographies can be challenging for me. All the in-fighting and maneuvering can be tedious at times, but also fascinating. It just isn't fast reading for me. In some respects the book is rather old-fashioned in it's writing style and layout, but I found it refreshing for this very reason. This is a book meant to be read a few chapters at a time. Not something you blow through while waiting at the doctor's office or on the family Christmas visit. Morris didn't write a book for the smartphone and twitter crowd (I'm very aware that I'm using social media/technology to post this review).

There is nothing brief or vapid in this book. There are detailed accounts of politics, Roosevelt's 1904 presidential campaign, foreign affairs and ,of course, the Roosevelt clan. Of the three books "Theodore Rex" covers the shortest span of time - a mere eight years. This is Roosevelt at his peak both professionally and physically. There are hints (actually more than just hints) of what the future holds in store for Theodore's health, but those troubles are still in the future. The Roosevelt children are just that and the many issues that would bedevil them are not an issue in this installment. It's the Roosevelt Golden Age.

If you're interested in Theodore Roosevelt and the Ragtime era I recommend this book. Actually the entire trilogy which I'm reading backwards from the end to the beginning. Why? Just because. I recommend the trilogy as companion piece for Big Trouble: A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets off a Struggle for the Soul of America, Ragtime, An American Tragedy and The Jungle. The works are fiction and non-fiction and were written during different decades over the past 110 years (approximately), but together they can give you a very interesting look at America when the nineteenth century became the twentieth.

Dave says

Theodore Rex by Edmund Morris from Modern Library is the second in a three volume biography of the 26th President of the United States. The first volume The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography in 1980, setting high expectations for the rest of the series. In my opinion, this book easily meets those expectations. This is a fantastic biography, in which Mr. Morris does an excellent job of bringing Theodore Roosevelt's presidency to life.

This prologue of the book starts with the death of President McKinley on September 14th, 1901, and the epilogue is March 4th, 1909, the day he hands the Presidency over to Taft. In-between is a well researched, richly entertaining discussion of his time in the White House. It covers not only the actions, but the decisions, the political feeling in the country at the time.

Mr. Morris does an outstanding job of providing the entire scope of the events, and presents them in a way that makes the reader feel as if he is observing them at the time they are occurring. The perspective one gets on race issues, labor vs. business, and North vs. South during that period, is excellent. Also well discussed is the near war with Germany, and a understanding of the relationship between the U.S. and Japan that would ultimately result in war when a different Roosevelt was in office nearly 40 years later.

I received this book as a gift, and read it without first reading The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt. From that perspective, I can say that this book does not require the reading of the first volume, but that I expect that doing so would enhance the experience. I certainly intend to go back and read the first book, and look forward to reading the third as well. Theodore Rex easily earns 5 stars.

Jim Cooper says

This is the second book in Edmund Morris' three-book series on Roosevelt, and while the first one won the Pulitzer Prize and gets all the accolades, I found this one to be more enjoyable and considerably more fascinating.

You get to charge through the first decade of the 20th century right next to the most exciting president we've ever had. Morris illuminates big events (Panamanian independence, war between Russia and Japan) while painting you a picture of what American life and government then was like (his explanation of how State of the Union addresses worked was incredible).

Looking forward to book three.

Max says

In Morris' second volume we are introduced to President Roosevelt. He is a far more seasoned and mature person than the TR described in the first volume. While still given to outbursts and instantaneous action, he displays political astuteness and an ability to balance his impulsiveness with pragmatism. No longer is TR the NY City Police Commissioner who walked the streets making sure cops were on their beats and who alienated so many New Yorkers by zealously enforcing the unpopular and widely disregarded Sunday alcohol laws. Nor is he the Civil Service Commissioner who personally investigated cases of the pervasive corruption of the patronage system without regard for the political consequences he would bear. His hardheaded sense of duty gives way to a nuanced rationality.

The changed TR is captured by newspaperman Henry Herzberg in 1903, "Mr. Roosevelt is bold and fearless yet timid and wary; he is ambitious and striving, but circumspect and cautious. He is imperious in mind, but thoughtful and considerate in action." By 1906 TR is playing the political game with a style easily recognized today. As Morris points out, "Roosevelt's by now compulsive habit of following every statement with a counterstatement (positives neutralizing negatives and on the other hand used as a kind of conjunction) muted the overall effect of his speech."

In foreign policy TR demonstrates a new deftness, forestalling the German and British impending attack on Venezuela and skillfully avoiding conflict with patient diplomacy. This new TR is in stark contrast to the one who a few years earlier was a jingoist Assistant Secretary of the Navy salivating in anticipation of the Spanish American war. While he resorts to forceful intimidation of Columbia to support the Panamanian revolution and secure the Canal Zone in 1903, in stark contrast he grants Cuba its independence in 1902 and settles the Philippine war with amnesty for all combatants. His adroit handling of the Russo-Japanese peace negotiations in 1905 wins him a Noble Peace Prize. His restraint and mediation ability shine in 1906 when he avoids direct involvement in the Tangier crisis and convinces France to hold a peace conference with Germany at Algeciras to resolve a conflict which threatens war in Europe.

In domestic policy TR is similarly adept. He champions breaking up the giant trusts such as Standard Oil and the Northern Securities Company which controls major railroads. He initiates a role for the federal government in regulating railroad rates. He takes on Wall Street carefully never going so far as to permanently alienate this powerful Republican constituency, presenting the argument that if nothing is done, the common people will revolt and put Progressive Democrats in control. He applies the same mediation skill to labor disputes that was effective in foreign disputes, most notably the 1902 anthracite coal miner's strike that threatens a nation facing a winter without fuel. His political polish is recognized. Writes the *Washington Post* in 1906, "...that he has more political acumen in one lobe of his brain than the whole militant tribe of American politicians have in their combined intelligence; that his political perception, so acute as to amount almost to divination, is superior to that of any American statesman of the present or immediate past era."

As his presidency enters its last years more and more he embraces the growing Progressive movement. He wins passage of the Meat Inspection Act, Pure Food and Drug Act and Railroad Rate Regulation act in 1906. Perhaps his greatest legacy lies in his conservation efforts. His establishment of the many national parks, national monuments and national forest reserves is based on a reverence for nature unique among Washington politicians. His deep love of the wild means he values its salvation so much that he does not flinch in taking on the money interests dominating Washington bent on its destruction for quarterly profits.

His 1907 Message to Congress proposes graduated inheritance and income taxes. His 1908 Special Message

to Congress directly attacks corporate greed, “The vast individual and corporate fortunes, the vast combinations of capital which have marked the development of our industrial system, create new conditions, and necessitate a change from the old attitude of the State and the Nation toward the rules regulating the acquisition and untrammeled business use of property.” Even famous muckraking author Upton Sinclair and Democratic Progressive leader William Jennings Bryan approve. In the Message he pushes for and eventually gets meaningful employer liability and workman’s compensation laws. He calls for extending the Interstate Commerce Commission’s authority to financial supervision of railroads. Later he invites Bryan, someone in the past he had ridiculed, to a dinner at the White House and after a long conversation calls him, “a wonderful man”. If TR had wanted a third term he could have easily had it with widespread support despite the strong reservations of Wall Street and the Old Guard.

The foregoing are just a few highlights. Morris covers much, much more. TR is constantly challenged as he crafts new policies to cope with the rapid social, economic and technological change that is quickly transitioning the United States from an insular rural society to an industrial age world power. TR meets the challenge, he not only grows into the job, he continues to grow with the job. While Morris is an excellent writer, all the details can get a bit dry at times. But if one is to truly understand the man and the period, they are all probably necessary. And to understand American history it is important to understand this gifted man and what his remarkable ability to lead meant to America and its future.

Chrissie says

Theodore Roosevelt – what a guy!!! A whirlwind . A remarkable individual way, way, way ahead of his time. I recommend reading this book to those of you interested in all the details of his presidency AND to those of you who like reading about exceptional human beings. I cannot think of any other person at all similar. You must of course start with the first book of the trilogy: The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt. This is the second, and I am off to read the third: Colonel Roosevelt. I know they are long, but they are worth it.

Should I list some of the remarkable things Theodore achieved during his presidency? Is that what you want to know? The Panama Canal, the Pennsylvanian coal strike settlement, negotiations to end the Russo-Japanese War and the Moroccan Crisis of 1906 for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize, the National Conservation Conference and anti-trust legislation, to name but a few. By reading the book you will understand the magnitude of each accomplishment. You will understand how he pulled off these accomplishments and why he chose to do what he did. Who is Theodore Roosevelt? How did his mind tick? Was he brave? Was he moral? Was he impetuous? Yes, yes, yes! Did he make mistakes? Of course! Perhaps Brownsville was one. Read and judge for yourself.

Please read this book. You will be astounded by the exuberance of this man, by his intelligence and his morals. More than just discovering what he did you will discover how this man was under the surface. He is complicated. How could he be both a hunter and a conservationist? How did he balance might versus right, wealth versus labor’s demands? I cannot adequately explain how he looks on African-Americans. I’d have to write a book to explain this accurately, but that is not necessary since you have this book. You end up understanding not only what he did but who he was. Now, in the final book Theodore is off on a safari to Eastern Africa. I will be accompanying him and his son Kermit. What a guy! I don’t want to leave him.

I think this book isn’t quite as good as the first. I wanted to know more about his familial relationships, about his wife and children. There is a bit, but not enough. Maybe that is not the author’s fault. There is little

information. Edith was reserved. Letters were destroyed. Privacy was kept. Or maybe I will get this in the next volume? I know that the narration by Nathan Marosz really made it difficult at times to pay attention to the words being read. His voice has a terrible sing-song lilt. He drew out in length the final words of a sentence. Then he pauses; it sounds terribly condescending! In any case the narration is completely inappropriate for Theodore who is known to have bitten off his words, spitting them out in a sharp staccato manner. Marosz mispronounces not only French, but German and even English words too. As you follow the amusing lines of the author, you can hardly appreciate the humor, the narration is so distracting. OK, Marosz did have me laughing, not at the author's lines, but at the bizarre mispronunciations. Wait till you hear how he says the words liqueur, and Steiff (the stuffed teddy bears) and Slav. There was one French name that I was totally incapable of deciphering. Thankfully, both the first and the third books of the trilogy use the narrator Mark Deakins, and he does a magnificent job. Many times lines were read twice, but this, of course, is not the narrator's fault. I kind of think it was the narration that made it so impossible for me to really enjoy this book as I should have, but at times I did feel just a little bit bored. My advice? If you cannot get the second volume narrated by Mark Deakins, read the paper book instead! You simply cannot hop over any of the books. They should be read together.

Arminius says

The book is an excellent account of the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. Based on this book I can see why he is often rated a top rate president. The book starts at the assassination of President McKinley where Theodore, as McKinley's vice president, was unexpectedly thrust into the country's most important job. Theodore justifiably became concerned about being an assassin's automatic target as the nation's leader. His father's hero Abraham Lincoln as well as President James Garfield (who was assassinated in Theodore's lifetime) and now his immediate boss were slain by an assassin's bullet. So he increased the president's security team.

I must say that if there was ever a person who was more qualified to be president, besides Washington, I could not name him. He was classically educated by his wealthy father at an Ivy Leagues school and he had been to many countries including the most remote regions in the world. He was a war hero, as well as an avid reader and successful author. He had been a police commissioner and under secretary of the U.S. Navy. He was unable to be intimidated and he could empathize with the less fortunate.

These skills would come to be tested almost immediately upon his accession into the presidency. In 1902 Anthracite coal miners of North eastern Pennsylvania decided to go on strike due to poor pay and working conditions. The strike threatened to freeze thousands of people, when winter struck, who depended on coal for heat. Theodore met with Coal mine owner George Baer to find a solution and became infuriated with Baer's pompous attitude. So he handpicked a commission with equal representation of labor and management to determine an agreement. What the miners wanted was a 20% pay raise and an eight hour workday. What they received was a 10% pay raise and a nine hour work day. It was viewed, however, by the public as a significant win for the working class and helped increase the new president's popularity.

Also, in 1902 an attempt was made to control the country's railroad system. Some of the country's wealthiest business men included James Hill, John Rockefeller and JP Morgan consolidated rail road companies under the name of The Northern Securities Company. Amidst a great public outcry Roosevelt sued the large company under the Sherman Anti Trust Act. In 1904, in a close decision, the Supreme Court ruled against Northern Securities and in support of President Roosevelt. The Northern Securities Company was therefore

dissolved. And Roosevelt's popularity amongst the general public swelled.

In 1903 he became frustrated with Columbia's delaying tactics regarding the building of the Panama Canal. At the time Panama was an isthmus owned by Columbia. So he supported a Panamanian separatist movement by sending warships to block the only Columbian military entrance route into Panama ensuring the separatists success. The U.S. quickly recognized the independent Panama and construction of the canal began shortly afterwards.

In 1905 Roosevelt mediated the ending of the Russo-Japanese War with such satisfaction for both sides that he was given a Nobel Peace prize. In 1906 he commissioned an investigation of the meat packing industry somewhat in response to Upton Sinclair's book "The Jungle." He sent two men that he trusted to do surprise inspections of the Chicago meat packing industry. They reported back to him that the conditions of the plants were as bad as Sinclair's book had stated. Out of this report came two important consumer acts - The Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food Act.

He authorized the building of 11 Navy battleships. When he left office America had gone from a small Navy to the second largest in the world just behind England.

He signed into the law the establishment of more than twenty national parks and monuments. He also appointed three Supreme Court justices and welcomed Oklahoma as the 46th state of the Union in 1907. He also negotiated with the Japanese government to control Japanese immigration into the Golden State. At the same time, he protected the Japanese American community by banning Japanese-American segregation in California schools.

In addition to his accomplishments he was an excellent campaigner and a manipulator of the press garnering much positive press. He was quoted as saying that he loved being the president. And by all accounts he seemed to really enjoy every aspect that goes with being a politician.

He gracefully left the office in 1909 being fully confident that his preferred successor William Howard Taft would continue his progressive policies. He left office as one of the most popular presidents to ever serve. But with tons of energy and ambition he retired to private life planning his next adventure - a great African safari hunt.

Shawn says

This, the middle book of a three book trilogy, is focused solely on Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. The book is excellent. Richly detailed in all that happened during his presidency. The book captures more than a presidency but also the man himself, his energy, his faults and his strengths. Paired with the first book, this makes a wonderful duology. However, if you are just looking to read about his presidency, this book can just be read on its own.

Lorna says

Theodore Rex is a meticulously researched and beautifully written biography of Theodore Roosevelt and the second book of the trilogy by Pulitzer prize-winning author, Edmund Morris, of one of our more beloved presidents. The book opens with Vice-President Roosevelt being summoned to Buffalo, New York after the assassination attempt and imminent death of President McKinley in September 1901. The book is divided into two parts, each comprising the first and second presidential administrations of Theodore Roosevelt, respectively. The many facts that are contained within these pages are riveting as the President, the youngest man to hold office, brings his progressive values to the White House, promising fairness for all Americans, the breaking of long-held trusts and conglomerates, regulation of railroads and the conservation of America's natural resources being of primary importance as he established national parks, monuments and forests, whether by executive order or through the coaxing and persuasion of Congress. Roosevelt was also committed to the building of the Panama Canal as he dealt with tensions in Cuba and Central America. As his second term is nearing completion, he grooms William Howard Taft as his successor in order to ensure his policies will prevail. One of his signature achievements was the expansion of the United States Navy and sending the Great White Fleet around the world, to culminate their tour in February 1909 as the conclusion of his presidency.

"At Hampton Roads on 22 February, Roosevelt stood for the last time as Commander-in-Chief on the bridge of the 'Mayflower.' . . . 'Here they are,' he eventually shouted, feeling rather than seeing, as the sound of twenty-eight ships' bands playing the 'The Star-Spangled Banner' grew in volume, to the rhythmic crash of cannon. The music, the gunpowder, the echelons of saluting blue jackets: all were for him, and for history."

"That is the answer to my critics,' he said, his top hat glistening in the wet air. 'Another chapter is complete, and I could not ask a finer concluding scene for my administrations."

"Seven years and a hundred and sixty-nine days before, on another lowering evening, he had come along this same track, eager to begin work as the President of the United States. . . . he had been happy then, as he was happy now; happy at the large things he had managed to achieve--a canal, a coal-strike settlement, a peace treaty, a national conservation conference--contented with myriad smaller triumphs. . . . "

"But for millions of contemporary Americans, he was already memorialized in the eighteen national monuments and five national parks he had created by executive order, or cajoled out of Congress. The 'inventory,' as Gifford Pinchot would say, included protected pinnacles, a crater lake, a rain forest and a petrified forest, a wind cave and a jewel cave, cliff dwellings, a cinder cone and skyscraper of hardened magma, sequoia stands, glacier meadows, and the grandest of all canyons."

Atchisson says

My second favorite President. Reading this, you may be struck at how he would be skewered by the Left today. Like Reagan, he seemed to have a natural understanding of his age and the important issues that needed to be addressed. He did it with strength, courage, resolve, and charisma. This book does a great job of following him from the earliest hours of assuming office and then staring down some of his most important battles.

Darwin8u says

A brilliant biography. IT is hard to separate my love of Morris' second Roosevelt biography from my love of TR. The book captures the dynamo-President's force, eccentricities, and political skill while also accurately capturing the politics of the time and the rise of America's global power. Occasionally, a person enters the global stage with such energy, power, competence and audacity that it seems the earth moves for them and water separates. I can only think of a couple other leaders that capture the Nietzsche' Übermensch ideal (Napoleon, Fredrick the Great, Alexander, Caesar, etc) as well. Even when Teddy wasn't super, he was still super lucky.

Joe says

Theodore Roosevelt was a larger-than-life president and Theodore Rex is a Teddy-sized biography to match his presidency. The text contains 554 pages and the bibliography adds another 150 or so. And that's just to cover the (slightly less than) 8 years of Teddy's governing terms. If you're looking for a real-life story with breadth and detail, you won't go wrong here. I admit that on multiple occasions I put the book down for months at a time even though I enjoyed every chapter; all that information can be intimidating as well as enlightening.

What struck me the most was how smoothly Roosevelt's presidency went. The closest thing to a war he faced came during the Panamanian Revolution (which America didn't technically participate in), which involved a single fatality. Most of the better-known American presidents gained acclaim for their leadership during war (heck, Washington is far more famous for his exploits as a general) so it's nice to see one that isn't, even if his rough-rider days form a sizable part of his image.

By contrast, Roosevelt's peacetime accomplishments are numerous; the Panama Canal, workers rights, trust-busting, environmental protections and a brokered peace between Japan and Russia. And all the while he oversaw a burgeoning economy and enhanced American prestige around the globe. He won re-election easily for himself and just as easily for his chosen successor, William Howard Taft. His progressive policies made him many enemies among the wealthy elite, but he was so popular they couldn't hurt him. 'Nobody likes him now but the people,' one ambassador quipped near the end of Roosevelt's reign.

To put things in perspective, one of the most frustrating moments for Roosevelt came when his administration won a trust-busting Supreme Court case. For the decision was razor-thin and a good friend of his on the court dissented. May all of our worst moments come in victory.

Even Roosevelt's biggest failure as president illustrates how forward-thinking he was. When he hosted Booker T. Washington for dinner, the press reaction was so vile (barely concealed racism from the Northern papers and hideous slurs from the Southern ones) that no other African-American would be invited to the White House for another 30 years.

You'd struggle to write a movie-script about TR's presidency despite his engaging personality and wilderness adventures. Things went too well; there's too little tension, too little loss to serve as counterpoint to the accomplishments. There would be troubles down the road; a falling out with Taft and a failed 'Bull Moose' political party. But when his presidency was newly ended, it must have felt like a casual stroll into a glorious sunset.

Edited 10-9-2017

Steve says

<http://bestpresidentialbios.com/2015/...>

“Theodore Rex” is the second volume in Edmund Morris’s highly acclaimed three-volume biography of Theodore Roosevelt. The series’ inaugural volume debuted in 1979 but more than two decades elapsed before this second volume was published in 2001. Morris spent much of that time working on his now-infamous memoir of Ronald Reagan.

“Theodore Rex” conveniently picks up where “The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt” left off – with Vice President Roosevelt receiving word of President McKinley’s imminent death and his inheritance of the presidency.

The first forty pages cover his breathless dash from a remote cabin in the Adirondack Mountains to take the oath of office in Buffalo. The remainder of this biography covers his almost eight-year presidency in extensive and attentive – if not uniformly fascinating – depth.

Similar to its predecessor volume, “Theodore Rex” is unpretentious but erudite. It feels like a biography written by a keen observer of people, and events, rather than one authored by an ivory-tower academic. But readers who appreciate Morris’s reputation for careful research will not be disappointed. Countless letters, newspaper articles, diary entries and other sources are parsed in search of unique insights and critical observations.

At times, its 555 pages are dense and detailed – and yet this volume lacks the heavy-handed scholastic impression that often accompanies a book with more than 160 pages of endnotes. And the author often allows Roosevelt’s own words to speak on his behalf, providing a sense the biography has tapped directly into the mind of this whirling dervish.

Focused exclusively on Roosevelt’s presidency, “Theodore Rex” lacks much of the excitement and adventure of the first volume. But this is hardly surprising; the tedious grind of managing the nation’s affairs can hardly compete with the rambunctious exploits of Roosevelt’s intrepid youth and his early career.

But Morris makes up for this lack of similarly-spirited raw material by refining his writing style. Where the first volume was often clunky and cumbersome, this installment is more elegant and sophisticated. Interminable sentences no longer punctuate each page and the author’s masterful talent for scene-setting has been perfected. Morris’s ability to capture a person’s essence in one or two paragraphs is breathtaking.

Unfortunately, though, Morris falls short in fully covering Roosevelt’s family and other contemporaries. His wife and children make infrequent appearances and there is a relative lack of focus on important advisers (and adversaries) whose political or personal orbits intersected with his own. It almost seems as though TR proves such a commanding presence that no one else can be afforded much time on the stage.

And although Morris provides a brief (and useful) glance at Roosevelt’s political legacy in the book’s final pages, a deeper and more satisfying discussion of his impact on the presidency is lacking. Or perhaps Theodore Roosevelt’s lasting impression on history is so self-evident it does not require elaboration?

Overall, "Theodore Rex" is an admirable and satisfying successor to "The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt." There is little doubt it lacks the drama and intensity of the first volume and is far more prone to dry, serious moments. But this second volume of Morris's series performs a valuable service, providing an interesting and thoughtful historical narrative if not so much an interpretation of Theodore Roosevelt's presidency.

Overall rating: 4½ stars

Matt says

WALK SOFTLY AND CARRY A BIG STICK

Morris places this African proverb at Roosevelt's feet in this second volume of the biography, and aptly so. President Roosevelt, who began using the phrase just before entering the White House, turned it into his mantra and he shifted the view of the United States, both within the borders of its territory and amongst the international community.

The ongoing expansion of my knowledge of historical figures has me tackling the presidential period of Roosevelt's life, two terms so full of information and international saga that it is hard to have compacted them into a single book. Morris again uses extensive research to lay out strong narratives and to examine some of the key themes throughout, drawing threads related to many happenings in Roosevelt's presidency. Leading the narrative through these themes--American race relations, forging the American superpower persona, and carving out strong national sustaining policies--Morris depicts Roosevelt as both a man eager to make a name for his country and to push it into the 20th century, prepared to face any challenge.

The second volume, reviewed here, encompasses the presidential life of Theodore Roosevelt from 1901 through to 1909. Morris begins the narrative with a wonderful bridging of Roosevelt's vice-presidential period, a mere six months, and the announcement of McKinley's assassination, thrusting him into the role of POTUS. Early in his presidency, Roosevelt began to tackle the issue of race relations within the United States. At times subtly, Morris ensures the reader is aware that many of the politicians who surround themselves with Roosevelt (party leaders, senators, stalwarts) might have fought in the Civil War or remembered its passionate division. Roosevelt was, therefore, enveloped by opinion on the matter, whether he liked it or not. Early meetings with the likes of Booker Washington led to scandalous press reports and strongly worded criticisms of the president. While lynchings were not yet unheard of, Roosevelt moved forward to forge strong race relations, primarily between the African American population [please excuse any misuse of proper race titles] and their white counterparts. Roosevelt sought to push ahead and nominate many African Americans to positions of authority in their respective states, in hopes of diminishing the animosity. This did, for lack of a better word, add kindling to the fire and saw the states lash out and segments of the Republican Party to threaten his re-election should he not stop. I could not help but think of Robert Caro's third (?) volume of his LBJ biography, when the Senate Majority Leader sought to forge ahead with racial integration laws, fighting a powerful Democratic south in the Senate, where LBJ would not let up and kept pushing for race relations into his time as president. The parallel that came to mind was that, when push came to shove, Roosevelt would not push. He chose to go only as far as he could to help, but not far enough to sacrifice his own success. Morris's illustration of early race relations moved on to tackle the Cuban population (as he was front and centre in the Spanish-American War), Japanese workers either detained or forced to leave the country, and even a small mention of the aboriginal population of the western states, some of whom wandered into the Union. Morris does not paint Roosevelt as the saviour of the races, stitching together the quilt of equality, but he did lay some groundwork to begin these discussions, a

foundation on which LBJ surely forged his groundbreaking strategies sixty years later.

Morris also explores the birth of the United States as a superpower, a newly coined phrase at the time. While European powers had dominated for centuries and the Ottoman Empire was still holding on, America came out of its Civil War battered and bruised, unsure of how and where it wanted to go. Pushing the Spanish back to 'free' Cuba and the Philippines, Roosevelt and the United States (he was still not in the White House at this point) began to show the American desire to cut the shackles of the 'oppressed' and to free them into the land of democratic freedom (call it the Dubya way of thinking, where 'democracy is the only thing a state wants on the menu, no matter its insistence that they are fine). As Roosevelt and his numerous congresses moved ahead to create a canal for use in the Western Hemisphere, the debate between one in Nicaragua or Panama (part of Columbia at the time) became prevalent. Here, Roosevelt let his congressional leaders choose the locale and focus on which made the most sense. After choosing Panama, it became a drawn-out negotiated affair to not only enter into treaty negotiations with the Columbians, but also to ensure the space could be paid for without issue. After negotiations entered rocky terms and with Panamanians wishing to toss off the shackles of their oppressors (Panama being a state of Columbia for a while), Roosevelt stood by and prayed that America would be able to forge a deal with the eventual victors in this quasi-civil war. Doing so, he created the Panama Canal, with its 99 year lease, and placed America on the map. His largest claim to fame on the superpower front would have to be engineering the final peace armistice between Russia and Japan in their war over what I am led to believe was the Korean Peninsula (pardon me if I am confused, as audio books can sometimes drone on in sections and flipping back requires overly dexterous fingers of which I do not possess). Earning the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts, Roosevelt and America showed that they were ready to enter the international theatre as the newly minted leaders they eventually came to be. This lasted for upwards of a century, until the George W Bush gaffes led many to realise superpowers turn despotic with age (a la Britain and the Ottomans).

Morris's third theme is highly intriguing to readers who've made the effort to read both volumes of the biography. While a young Roosevelt was always interested in understanding all that grew or developed around him, Morris comes full circle in accentuating the passion Roosevelt felt towards conservation and natural resource development. Known by some as the Father of American Conservation policy, Roosevelt forged into the policy wilderness to create National Park policy and legislation that stands even today. Taking his love for flora and fauna, Roosevelt ensured it could be enjoyed by all for decades to come, and did so in a way that accentuated the various parts of the United States. Inter-state commerce surely rose because of this, as did the allure of the United States to the outside world. While not on the same plane, Roosevelt's involvement in the coal mine disputes in Pennsylvania sought to formulate strong policy on union and natural resource policy by the White House. Labour disputes had not regularly been the business of the president, but Roosevelt made it his business, with a desire to strengthen America in a time when political tensions helped pull strong states apart. Morris's keen means by which he draws this parallel is quite useful and poignant to the perceptive reader.

It is worth noting that the volume is not equally divided between the two administrations. One who reads the volume with a passing glance would see the time and effort put into the first administration and how, even for the listener, the second administration passes as swiftly as a ride on a roller-coaster. While brevity may be an unfortunate occurrence in the second part of the book, its content is no less interesting, as Roosevelt wrestles with his coming major decision about seeking a third term or not. While this is surely a thought shared by his fifth cousin, eventually, Theodore chooses not to seek his party's nomination and his last six months in office leave him introspective and wondering about life after the White House. A man not yet a half century old, Morris paints Roosevelt as a man full of vigour and ready for another fight. The perfect segue into the final volume of the Theodore Roosevelt biography.

As the Roosevelt journey continues, kudos continue for Mr. Morris. An excellent depiction of the White House years of a very quirky and intuitive man.

Matt says

We are in the dregs of December. Soon we will experience the long dark of January, the utter waste of February, and the vindictiveness of March. And then it will probably rain. It's a time of year meant for misery. The weather is cold and gray; you didn't get what you wanted for Christmas; you're broke; and you probably gained fifteen pounds. Want to feel a little worse? Read a book about Theodore Roosevelt.

While your life is spent sunk into an overstuffed couch, drinking cheap domestic beer while watching the Minnesota Vikings play out the string on a crushingly disappointing season (and yes, I'm projecting a bit), Teddy's life was spent in grand motion and noble pursuit. He was a writer, naturalist and Harvard graduate. He was a police commissioner, governor, and once caught a rustler. He won the Nobel Peace Prize and the Medal of Honor. He was a soldier and a statesman. He even managed to shoot a Spaniard.

As I noted in my review of *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, Teddy Roosevelt is easy to love, tough to hate, and impossible not to find annoying. There is something eternally grating about his optimistic bluster and his myopic can-do spirit. You can see him now, in your mind's eye, swaggering about with his shoulders thrown back and his stomach thrust out, a monocle in his eye, twirling a cane and bleating "Bully!" at everything he sees. He strikes me as the kind of guy who never realized the leg-up in life that his wealth gave him. While he was out at the dude ranch, pretending to be a cowboy, with a copy of Tolstoy shoved in his pocket, it probably didn't occur to him why the other cowboys weren't reading *War and Peace*.

Leaving aside my seasonal bitterness, it is clear that Teddy lived a life in full. *Theodore Rex*, the second volume in Edmund Morris's Roosevelt trilogy, begins where *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* left off: with Teddy learning the news that President William McKinley has been assassinated by anarchist Leon Czolgosz. The book covers both Roosevelt's terms, and ends as he leaves office and hands the reins of power to the monumentally fat William Howard Taft.

By any measure, Roosevelt's presidency was quite successful: he got the Panama Canal under way, kept the Germans and British out of Central America, brokered peace between Russia and Japan, engaged in literal gunboat diplomacy, dealt with a thorny labor dispute, busted a few trusts, and saved great swaths of America from rapacious developers. (It is this last feat, the creation of our National Parks, that is Roosevelt's enduring legacy. Don't believe me? Hike into the backwoods of Yosemite, away from the RVs and Nikon-wielding day-trippers, wake up at dawn, and find a vantage point from which to observe Yosemite Falls as the sun comes up. You will hit your knees and thank God and Teddy Roosevelt).

The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt was a narrowly-focused epic. Morris got as deep into Teddy's soul as a biographer can get. However, the extreme focus on Teddy came at the cost of the context in which he lived. *Theodore Rex* opens up the scope a little bit wider. The best part of the book, in my opinion, is actually the prologue, in which Teddy takes the train from Mount Marcy to Buffalo, where McKinley had been shot. During this trip, Morris has Teddy looking out the window. When Teddy sees some coal workers, Morris gives a disquisition on early 20th century labor. When Teddy sees some black people, Morris describes the state of America's race relations. While this section seemed a bit imaginative on Morris's part, it's a clever

way of describing the state of America as Teddy ascended the throne.

Make no mistake: this is a great book. It's about as good as biography gets. For the academic-minded, you can rest that Morris's research is both broad and deep. Despite some occasional flourishes, *Theodore Rex* is impeccably sourced, and has wonderfully illuminating endnotes that add a lot to the text if you aren't averse to flipping back and forth. For the literary-minded, the writing is top notch. Morris knows how to tell his story clearly, but he is also able to slip into an evocative prose that brings you into events:

Indistinguishable as the whistle-stops soon became, even to him, each was supreme drama to a little audience that had been looking forward to it for weeks. Some buggy travelers had come one hundred miles to perch on the platform and peer endlessly at the horizon, waiting for a smudge of smoke to signal that "Teddy" was imminent. Then a speck growing in the smoke, a crescendo of wind and wheels, a great locomotive advancing – too fast, surely, to stop? Despair as it indeed keeps moving. Relief when it halts, after all, under the water tank one hundred yards down the track. A general stampede toward the *Elysian*, where Roosevelt stands grinning in frock coat and vest. He leans over the rail, pumping hands and tousling cowlicks. "Dee-lighted!" Rearing back, he begins to orate, punctuating every sentence with palm-smacks and dental percussion, while his listeners stand mesmerized. The engine bell rings; the train jerks forward. Another grin, and a farewell wave. The Cheshire-cat flash of those teeth float in the sky long after the train is a speck again.

Like all biographers, Morris is enamored of his subject. However, he doesn't neglect Teddy's shortcomings as president. Chief among these was race relations. Teddy started off well, having the temerity to invite Booker T. Washington to dinner at the White House. By the end of his term, however, Teddy had screwed the pooch with blacks by his shameful handling of the Brownsville mutineers. (A group of black soldiers was accused of leaving their barracks and shooting up the town of Brownsville; despite a complete lack of evidence, Roosevelt had all the men in these companies dishonorably discharged). The amount of time Morris spends on race issues makes it clear that he is no simple apologist.

If there was an area of Teddy's life that I wished got more play, it would be in the arena of his personal life. There is very little space devoted to his family life, specifically, his wife Edith. The only other Roosevelt besides Teddy to spend much time on the page is Alice Roosevelt, Teddy's daughter by his first wife. Alice is described so winsomely, that I was actually a bit let down when I saw her photograph.

Since this is a biography, I feel compelled to compare Morris to the great Robert Caro. This urge comes from the nagging sensation that *Theodore Rex*, for all its equities, lacked something intangible. By any measure, this is a five-star book, yet I set it down thinking four-stars. What was the missing fifth star?

In order to solve the puzzle, I had to reach back to my Caro, and his *Years of Lyndon Johnson*. Finally, it struck me: there was no conflict. In order to have drama, there has to be conflict, a protagonist and an antagonist. In Caro's books on LBJ, Caro is always able to set up conflicts within his story. Sometimes that conflict is between two men, such as LBJ's senate race against Texas legend Coke Stevenson. Sometimes that conflict is between a man and a goal, such as LBJ's work to get the Voting Rights Act passed. In either case, the story of a man's life is crafted – perhaps with a bit of authorial license – into a dramatic arc.

Morris doesn't do this. He takes a strictly chronological approach. This happened. Then this. Then that. As a consequence, you are jumping from one event to the next, with the ultimate resolution for each event coming

farther down the road. In fairness, that's probably how it is to be president: you don't get to sit down and focus on one problem; rather, you have to keep all these balls in the air. Still, it's not the best way to tell a story, because it requires you to remember all the details of all these flare-ups as Morris leaves them for hundreds of pages before circling back.

Robert Caro's greatest trait is to expand the world of his biography. He doesn't just tell you about his subject, he spends a lot of time – sometimes entire chapters – describing the characters who came into his subject's orbit. At times, Morris seems to grasp for these heights. For instance, Morris devotes a lot of time to Senator Mark Hanna, who opposed Teddy's Progressive instincts (and who reminded me of the top-hatted Monopoly guy). Unfortunately for the story (and for Hanna, I suppose), Hanna is struck dead early in *Theodore Rex*, leaving Teddy without a counterweight. I think Morris missed an opportunity to really explore the lives and personalities of men such as Taft and John Hay (Lincoln's former secretary turned Secretary of State).

Caro's writing thrills you with anticipation for what happens next; he writes as though history is still unspooling before his eyes. Morris, on the other hand, surrenders to the immutability of the past. He assumes you know how things went down, and simply tries to tell this story at the highest level. It's not a bad approach. It just fails, ultimately, to reach that highest level of biography, where you forget that you are reading about a President, and begin to feel that you know a man.

Steve says

I've been fascinated by Theodore Roosevelt since I was a kid. Morris has written a compelling biography that captures many facets of TR's complex personality, focused in this volume on his years as President. Morris has done his research, making good use of primary sources (diaries, letters, papers, memoirs) to recreate day-by-day and even hour-by-hour scenes of Roosevelt making decisions, negotiating with legislators, ambassadors, and heads of state, talking (he was a non-stop talker) with friends and acquaintances, and traveling, playing, reading, and writing. (He surely ranks as one of the top 5 best-read Presidents we've had, and probably the most prolific writer.) I didn't find a dull page in the book. I still am not sure what I think of TR. He had great moral integrity--but he was also prone to racism, defensive when criticized, and a first-rate politician. He did NOT see himself as an idealist (he scorned people who weren't pragmatic). But he disturbed conservative Republicans and capitalists because, as Morris points out, he did not see money as the ultimate goal for himself or our society and believed in strong federal regulation of business and trade. As the book ends, Roosevelt seems to be moving in a more progressive direction; it would have been interesting to see what he would have done with a second elected term, which he could have had for the asking. I strongly recommend this book if you have any interest in TR, this period of US history, and human nature.

Joe says

Ol' Teddy Roosevelt. One of two Republicans that it is okay for liberals to like (the other is Abraham Lincoln of course. Who did you think I was talking about? Rutherford B. Hayes?)

I've always liked this guy because of the snippets of history you hear about him: "Speak softly and carry a big stick." Big game hunter. Conservationist. Great public speaker. Teddy Bear.

I feel like I've grown up listening to his "Greatest Hits" and this is the first time I've actually sat down to listen to all of his albums, in context. (Yeah, I don't know where I'm going with this metaphor either.)

An interesting read. To be sure, his foreign achievements seem quite impressive. He personally negotiated several volatile situations in Central America and Japan that no modern day President would ever DREAM of attempting. He rolled the dice big several times and won big, most notably in securing the Panama Canal. However, I believe it was these successes during his presidency that led to his overconfidence (hubris?) that ultimately tarnished his legacy later in life, but that'll be covered in the next book.

His biggest domestic policy contribution was environmental conservation. It is so funny that he was the first President to ever promote conservation and that if he did that in the modern day Republican party he would be crucified as a commie-liberal-pinko. He shoved several pieces of conservation legislation and executive orders that had long ranging effects on our country. Clearly he had a big impact with this, I mean, his face is carved into a mountain for crying out loud.

The Teddy Roosevelt in this book is the one we remember but he had many miles to go before he slept. This is all covered in the next volume, "Colonel Roosevelt" which I plan on reading ASAP.

A decent read but too short and not enough detail for my taste. In that regard, it reminded me of "Truman" by David McCullough. After this book you'll know all of the facts but not necessarily know the man.

Joe B says

I simply learned that TR was a bad ass, plain and simple. I am sorry, Obama, Clinton, and Bush, this guy makes you look like the janitor of America. I think he may be the only president who could help us open the greatest canal in the world's history, help thwart a recession (very similar to ours today) by telling the rich people, "Hey you like making money? Then you save Wall Street, not the government!", create the greatest group of fighters, The rough riders, and have many life stories such as moving to Wyoming and tackling and killing a mountain tiger with a knife. Love him or hate him, this is a great look into TR. I only gave this four stars because the book does not cover his post presidency: His huge trip to Africa which is the only reason for most of our artifacts in our museums and his hatred for his successor Taft. He actually ran against Taft and came in second to Woodrow Wilson. Therefore, Taft is the only current incumbent of the presidency to come in third in a presidential election.

Amy Johanning says

I read this book primarily to get a different perspective of Theodore Roosevelt than that provided by James Bradley in his work, *The Imperial Cruise: A True Story of Empire and War*. In the latter, the author left a stinging picture of TR, describing him as an egomaniac, racist and staunch xenophobe. Morris's portrait is less striking - and portrays a strong, fair and popular leader who vacillated between conservative and progressive political opinions.

The dichotomy between the two accounts must be that Morris focuses primarily on domestic affairs (although America's involvement in the Sino - Japanese War negotiations, the Kaiser's obsession with Moroccan affairs and Latin and South American politics - specific as they related to the Panama Canal

Treaty) while Bradley stayed intent on the Pacific Theater and U.S. relations with Japan in the early 20th century. It was in the Pacific Theater that Roosevelt's imperialistic and overt racism and belief in Western supremacy was obvious - resulting in a true negative perception of TR and his bully pulpit Administration. Morris focused on domestic policy and where necessary, spoke to foreign activities (Panama Canal Treaty, European divisions and Japanese militaristic behavior) through American eyes, thus providing a more positive interpretation of the President and his Administration.

Upon completion, I was left with two thoughts. First, one cannot assess persons or events based on a single telling - but rather, opinions should result from a synthesis of information. Succinctly stated: There is always a second side to the same story. Second (and lastly), the American political culture has not changed in two hundred and fifty years. The same intra and inter - party squabbles that exist today, were evident in earlier times. Vitriolic and abusive political diatribes are found throughout history, to the extent that one cannot, in good conscience, consider the current political dialogue unique or unprecedented. It's actually a calming realization - to accept that the vitriol and bile that emanates from inside the Beltway today existing long before the construction of the massive thoroughfare. It can be found in any era - and especially during the TR years - regardless of one's character assessment of the man.
