

# “Keep Your Eyes on the Stars, but Remember to Keep Your Feet on the Ground”:<sup>1</sup> Theodore Roosevelt and the Political Rhetoric of Conservation

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## ABSTRACT

At the turn of the twentieth century the Progressive Era conservation movement gained momentum with the help of President Theodore Roosevelt, who championed conservationism. This study examines the existing literature that discusses both Theodore Roosevelt’s conservationism and conservationism in general. It asserts that the existing literature can be divided into thematic categories that include political, cultural, and economic examinations of conservationism, and it argues that there is a need to reexamine the typical political arguments that exist regarding Roosevelt’s conservationism. The study then analyzes Roosevelt’s messages to Congress as a means of demonstrating that Roosevelt was not as politically aggressive as scholars have typically argued. In fact, the study found that Roosevelt used logic and political pragmatism when trying to achieve his conservation goals.

**Keywords:** conservation movement; Progressive Era; and Theodore Roosevelt

In November 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt arrived in Mississippi and headed to the wilderness for a bear hunt. Roosevelt’s hunting party settled into camp on November 13, and the following day Roosevelt confronted an old and lame 230 pound bear.<sup>2</sup> When the hunt leader found the bear he “...jumped from his horse, knocked the bear over the head with his rifle...and tied it to a tree.”<sup>3</sup> The leader then called for Roosevelt, who, upon seeing the suffering animal, declined the opportunity to kill the bear as it would go against the sportsmen’s code “to never shoot any captured animal for recreation.”<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt’s display of sportsmanship appealed to the public, and those who were fascinated by the story found various ways to show their veneration. In fact, a candy maker designed two stuffed bears commemorating Roosevelt’s actions, and in 1903 sent a letter asking Roosevelt’s permission to market the toys as teddy bears.<sup>5</sup> The President modestly replied, “I don’t think my name will mean much to the bear business..., but you’re welcome to use it.”<sup>6</sup> He was clearly

mistaken as the teddy bear has endured for over a century.

The 1902 Mississippi bear hunt reveals more than the origins of the teddy bear, it also provides an important political and cultural context for the American conservation movement. By the time Roosevelt became President in 1901, the conservation movement was prominent and Roosevelt’s adherence to conservationism through his refusal to kill the bear provides a concrete example of wildlife preservation, which, although just one part of conservationism, sheds light on the ideology of Progressive Era conservationism. The Progressive Movement developed as a response to the problems of monopolies, government corruption, widespread poverty, poor living conditions, and resource exploitation that resulted from the industrialization and urbanization of the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, Samuel P. Hays explains that the “...progressive revolt of the early twentieth century... was an attempt to control private, corporate wealth for public ends.”<sup>7</sup> For conservationists, this “progressive revolt” manifested itself in a desire to halt the exploitation of natural resources by businesses and poor use practices.<sup>8</sup>

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Roosevelt's Chief of Forestry, Gifford Pinchot, was one of the leading men of conservationism and his conservation beliefs provide insight into how the "progressive revolt" was applied to conservationism. According to W. Todd Benson, Pinchot "...abhorred waste, monopoly, and profiteering at the public expense..." and he argued that conservation required "...the recognition of the right of the present generation to the...use of all the resources with which this country is so abundantly blessed."<sup>9</sup> Pinchot's conservation principles illustrate that conservationists sought to preserve resources so they could wisely be used by many; however, preservationists like John Muir also wanted to stop the wasteful use of natural resources. Benson asserts that Muir was devoted to preservation so that future generations could appreciate all of nature's wonders.<sup>10</sup> Although Muir's and Pinchot's end goals were different, they shared a passion for stopping environmental exploitation which led them to be highly influential during the Progressive Era conservation movement. Indeed, Muir and Pinchot influenced Theodore Roosevelt, who, Benson claims, recognized both the aesthetic and the economic value of preservation.<sup>11</sup>

While Gifford Pinchot and John Muir were significant figures of the conservation movement, it was Roosevelt who gave it prominence.<sup>12</sup> Historians have examined Roosevelt's conservationism from a range of political, cultural, and economic perspectives. In regard to the political examination of Roosevelt's conservationism, much has been written about his characteristic assertiveness. However, focusing on Roosevelt's assertiveness downplays two key aspects of his political character. As was typical during the Progressive Era, Roosevelt heavily relied on logic and science to bolster his arguments for conservationism.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, he understood that political power changes throughout a presidency, and to be effective he needed to recognize when to show deference to Congress and when to call upon his executive authority, which generally involved the use of the "bully pulpit."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, an analysis of Roosevelt's Annual Messages to Congress reveals that as his power grew during his presidency his conservation rhetoric also became stronger; yet despite his prominence he still employed logic and political astuteness to his arguments as a means of trying to achieving his goals for conservationism.

#### LITERATURE DISCUSSING CONSERVATIONISM IN THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S AMERICA

In his Seventh Annual Message to Congress, President Theodore Roosevelt declared, "The conservation of our natural resources and their proper use constitute the fundamental problem which underlies almost every other problem of our national life."<sup>15</sup> Clearly, Roosevelt felt pas-

sionate about conservationism, and his role as a symbolic leader of the Progressive conservation movement has been widely examined by historians. When scrutinizing Theodore Roosevelt's conservationism, scholars have focused on politics, culture, and economics. These themes are typically approached independently, which is illustrated through an examination of Douglas Brinkley's politically focused book, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America*, and Andrew C. Isenberg's culturally and economically focused book, *The Destruction of the Bison: an Environmental History 1750-1920*. Although both of these approaches are valid and offer insight into Theodore Roosevelt's conservation movement, incorporating the two methods together could lead to an even deeper understanding of the approach he took as he led the conservation movement. In this regard, David Blackburn's landmark *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* offers a synthetic model for the way in which Theodore Roosevelt's conservationism can be analyzed.

#### A Political Examination of Roosevelt's Conservationism

In *The Wilderness Warrior*, Brinkley analyzes Roosevelt's disdain for exploiting natural resources by employing the political approach scholars generally use when addressing Roosevelt's conservationism.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Brinkley argues that Theodore Roosevelt was a politically assertive conservationist and, as a result, effectively shaped the new legislation that governed America's natural environment. He emphasizes that "Overnight, from the relative obscurity of the vice-presidency, Roosevelt was now in a governmental position where his every action could be a thunderbolt."<sup>17</sup> Clearly, Brinkley strongly believes Roosevelt was assertive politically, and in an effort to support his claim and provide new insight into the bold political nature of Roosevelt's early twentieth century conservationism, Brinkley draws upon Roosevelt's interactions with Congress and examines the underlying messages Congress received from the President.

Using Roosevelt's First Annual Message to Congress as evidence of his assertiveness in conservation matters, Brinkley asserts the president claimed, "The preservation of our forests is an imperative business necessity... We have come to see clearly that whatever destroys the forests...threatens our own well being."<sup>18</sup> In relation to this declaration, as well as other statements in the First Annual Message, Brinkley argues, "Nothing about Roosevelt's conservationist rhetoric could have been misconstrued as give-and-take. He was telling Congress the new lay of the land."<sup>19</sup> By focusing on the connotation of Roosevelt's words, Brinkley supports his assertion that Theodore Roosevelt put himself in the driver's seat for ad-

vancing conservation policy. Additionally, by concentrating on the significance of the intentions behind his words, Brinkley is able to add a new dimension to the traditional argument that Roosevelt was an aggressive conservationist. Through his analysis, Brinkley demonstrates that it is not just the President's actions that illustrated his assertiveness; his uncompromising conservationism could also be found in the aggressive undertones that were present in the messages he sent to Congress.

### **A Cultural and Economic Examination of Roosevelt's Conservationism**

While Brinkley examines the political nature of President Theodore Roosevelt's conservationism, other historians have taken a cultural and economic approach to the conservation movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>20</sup> In *The Destruction of the Bison*, Andrew C. Isenberg investigates the causes behind the population decline of one of the nation's iconic creatures, and in doing so he also explores the reasons that led men such as Roosevelt to try and stop the exploitation of the bison. Isenberg argues that, "the combination of Eastern sentiment and Western cupidity was instrumental in persuading the United States and Canadian governments to create national reserves for the bison."<sup>21</sup> Clearly, this approach places great emphasis on the important roles culture and the economy played in influencing the decision to protect the bison population.

In order to prove that culture influenced the decision to save buffalo, Isenberg draws upon the language of Theodore Roosevelt, which, although poignant, does not prove that cultural factors caused the population decline of the bison. Isenberg reasons, "The preservation of the bison was not an end in itself but a means to an end: the preservation of an imagined, masculine, frontier culture."<sup>22</sup> To support this argument Isenberg highlights Theodore Roosevelt's dislike of the lack of masculinity in Eastern men by employing his statement, "...the physical type in the Eastern States had undoubtedly degenerated."<sup>23</sup> This quote effectively demonstrates a preference for the culture of the American West. However, even though a correlation can be inferred regarding preservation of the bison and Western culture, Roosevelt's declaration does not manage to explicitly show a causal relationship between the desire to save the frontier culture and the preservation of the bison.

Yet, the cultural element is only one part of Isenberg's argument; he also claims there was an economic factor that resulted in ending killing bison en masse. Isenberg employs both verbal and statistical evidence to demonstrate bison were saved as a way to make an economic profit, and in doing so he is again able to prove a correlation ex-

isted. As a way to verify his claim, Isenberg quotes Texas rancher Charles Goodnight, who exclaimed, "...the buffalo is the most profitable farm animal in America today."<sup>24</sup> In addition to Goodnight's statement, he also offers quantitative evidence that bison were an economic commodity by explaining that a pure bred buffalo could sell for \$250.<sup>25</sup> Both of these pieces of evidence provide a strong indication that economic profit drove some individuals to advocate bison preservation. However, like Roosevelt's quote, this evidence is not able to prove causation. This creates a weakness in Isenberg's argument because he claims the desire to maintain the frontier culture and the desire for economic profit were the factors that resulted in the conservation of bison. Although Isenberg does not manage to establish direct causation, the inference that preserving the frontier culture and gaining wealth led to saving the bison is strong enough that the argument enhances the existing scholarship regarding the conservation movement.

### **A Holistic Approach to Conservationism**

While historians have typically focused on the individual themes of Roosevelt's conservationism, David Blackbourn's examination of Germany's mid-twentieth century conservation movement effectively brings the themes of politics, culture, and economics together and offers a model for a more holistic examination of the Progressive impulse. In his book, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, Blackbourn argues that although Adolf Hitler appeared to politically support the conservation movement, often conservation gave way to the military culture and the economic concerns of industry. Using German laws and the actions of Hitler as evidence, Blackbourn adroitly demonstrates the ways in which concerns of conservationism were placed behind the military culture and economic goals of Germany. He notes that Hitler vetoed an ecologically unsound reclamation project for the Pripet Marshes on the grounds that the marshes "provided ideal terrain for military maneuvers," and "because draining them might adversely affect the local climate..."<sup>26</sup> By highlighting this veto Blackbourn is able to demonstrate that although the environment was a concern and Hitler was making a decision that benefited the environment, the military culture of Germany figured greatly into decisions about land use.

In a similar manner, Blackbourn supports his argument that the German economy was placed before conservation by emphasizing, "While nature conservation was starved of funds, the Labor Service received almost a billion reichsmarks in 1934-37 alone."<sup>27</sup> This astounding figure effectively buttresses Blackbourn's argument by

illustrating that the Labor Service, an institution that encouraged rural colonization and farming as a way to strengthen the country-side and extract needed revenue from farming for the war effort, received far more funding than conservation and thus negatively affected the movement.<sup>28</sup> In discussing the political, economic, and cultural factors influencing German conservationism, Blackburn adds a new perspective to the scholarship on the conservation movement by aptly demonstrating that the success of the conservation movement often hinged on the way in which leaders interpreted and framed those factors. For Germany, the politics of Hitler, the military culture, and the economy worked together to put conservationism on the back-burner.

The literature on various conservation movements focuses on the ways in which politics, culture, and the economy influence conservationism. An assessment of Brinkley's and Isenberg's work reveals that these factors have traditionally been considered independently of each other when discussing Roosevelt's conservation movement. However, an analysis of Blackburn's literature about the German conservation movement demonstrates that the themes of politics, culture, and the economy can be brought together to provide a multifaceted understanding of conservationism. Thus, Blackburn's environmental history of Germany offers a model for a new, holistic approach to studying Theodore Roosevelt's conservationism; yet, it is also equally important to study individual themes, such as politics, in new ways to gain insight into the "conservation president." Theodore Roosevelt is generally regarded as a politically aggressive president who bulldozed through any obstacles Congress put in his way. Indeed, Brinkley asserts Roosevelt's "every action could be a thunderbolt."<sup>29</sup> However, an examination of his Annual Addresses to Congress brings to light the fact that President Roosevelt reserved powerful rhetoric for times when he was politically powerful; therefore, he actually dealt with Congress in a politically astute and reasonable manner in his attempts to bring his goals of conservationism to fruition.

### **THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S SHREWD CONSERVATIONISM: A NEW POLITICAL APPROACH**

President William McKinley's assassination in the fall of 1901 launched the Vice-President, Theodore Roosevelt, into the presidency and for eight consecutive years he served as president and delivered annual messages to Congress. While the content of these messages often varied, the topic of the conservation of natural resources was omnipresent. An analysis of the conservation messages Roosevelt delivered to Congress at key transitional points during his presidency reveals that he logically crafted his

arguments to mirror his political strength. In his first State of the Union Address Roosevelt's awareness that he was not an elected president was especially evident when he began discussing conserving America's resources. Instead of simply telling Congress what needed to be done, Roosevelt constructed a logical argument that conserving natural resources would be beneficial for the country. Once he was inaugurated in 1905 and felt he had the mandate of the people, Roosevelt relied less on persuasive arguments and began using the bully pulpit to assert what should be done for the National Park System and forest preservation. When he chose not to run for re-election in 1908 Roosevelt recognized that he did not need to be as diplomatic with Congress, and his tone became more forceful about the need to conserve natural resources in his final State of the Union Address.

### **Working with Congress: Roosevelt's First Annual Message**

Following his unexpected embarkation into the presidency in the fall of 1901, Theodore Roosevelt delivered his first Annual Message to Congress on December 3, in which, among other things, he discussed the conservation of natural resources. Understanding that he was not actually elected president, Roosevelt built a case promoting forest preservation as a way to demonstrate to Congress the logic of utilitarian conservationism. In his address he avowed, "Forest protection is not an end of itself; it is a means to increase and sustain the resources of our country and the industries which depend upon them."<sup>30</sup> The importance he placed on conserving the forests as a means of promoting industry can not be overemphasized as conservation and industry shared an important interconnected relationship. Indeed, the connection that existed between industry and conservationism has been noted by Hays, who asserts that the economic growth that accompanied the Progressive conservation movement intrigued the railroad companies who, "...cooperated with conservationists in developing Western resources, and gave special aid to federal irrigation, forest, and range programs."<sup>31</sup> Congressmen would have paid attention to aid given to federal projects by the railroad industry; therefore, by pairing forest preservation with industrial growth Roosevelt made conservationism seem less like a pet project and more like an important economic move. This economic argument also highlights that Roosevelt understood the intricacies of politics, because, rather than attempt to dictate orders to Congress at a time when he did not have a public mandate, he prudently employed economic reason to persuade Congress that forest preservation was important.

President Roosevelt's shrewd use of politics during his first term has also been noted by former Secretary of

the Interior Stewart L. Udall, who emphasized Roosevelt's need to work with Congress. Udall asserts Roosevelt faced "an unsympathetic Congress," and he "...won over hostile Western congressmen by supporting a new federal program to build dams and homestead-style irrigation projects in arid parts of the West."<sup>32</sup> The fact that he supported projects favored by the congressmen demonstrates that Roosevelt wisely coaxed Congress to achieve his goals. He was clearly aware that he would need to gain Congress's support for his conservation projects, and to do so it would be essential for him to present appealing legislation to the Congressmen.

Roosevelt did not just rely on economic reasons and appealing legislation to convince Congress that preserving the national forests was an important issue. Following the Progressive political tendency to rely upon scientific findings, he also drew upon empirical evidence. When discussing the importance of forest preservation, Roosevelt declared,

Forests are natural reservoirs. By restraining the streams in flood and replenishing them in drought they make possible the use of waters otherwise wasted. They prevent the soil from washing, and so protect the storage reservoirs from filling up with silt.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to conveying his knowledge of the political climate, this statement also illustrates that Roosevelt understood the importance of presenting Congress with scientifically informed arguments at a time when he was politically vulnerable due to the manner in which he ascended the presidency. Indeed, in his autobiography Roosevelt wrote, "...in the practical activities of life no man can render the highest service unless he can act in combination with his fellows, which means a certain amount of give and take between him and them."<sup>34</sup> Obviously, Roosevelt comprehended the need to work with the Congressmen and provide them with well constructed arguments in his effort to convince them that Progressive conservationism was an important legislative issue.

The importance of conservationism as a legislative issue did not stem solely from President Roosevelt's concerns about the matter. During Roosevelt's presidency the conservation movement in the United States was gaining momentum, and often the issues that Roosevelt asserted were important for Congress to address were issues that conservationists cared deeply about. For example, forest preservation, which Roosevelt discussed at length in his first State of the Union Address, was a matter of great concern for conservationists. Douglas Brinkley reveals that the Secretary of the Interior, Ethan Allen Hitchcock, was a "low-grade conservationist" who "was deeply concerned that some of America's richest timberlands had been reck-

lessly destroyed and others were on the verge of destruction."<sup>35</sup> Hitchcock's anxiety about the destruction of forests demonstrates that Roosevelt's desire to conserve the country's natural resources was shared by others. Even people who were not staunch conservationists, like Hitchcock, were alarmed at the rapid pace with which forests were disappearing. Clearly, Theodore Roosevelt's annual messages to Congress were more than just an avenue for him to express his opinions about conserving resources; they echoed the larger national trend of conservationism that Roosevelt continued to foster during his second term.

### **The Ever Growing Authority of the President: Roosevelt's Post-inaugural and Last Annual Messages**

On December 5, 1905, Roosevelt delivered his fifth Annual Message to Congress as an elected and inaugurated president, and his words regarding conservationism reflected his achievement. In his 1905 message to Congress, Roosevelt did not demonstrate deference to the Congressmen as he had in his first message; instead, he pronounced what should be done to further conservationism, illustrating that as an elected president he was fully willing to utilize the power of the office for a bully pulpit. Indeed, he believed he had the mandate of the public and did not need to cooperate with Congress on all matters. In his analysis of Roosevelt's conservation achievements, Udall emphasizes,

In his second term he rewrote the rulebook on presidential power by placing his signature on sweeping Executive Orders and proclamations, rejecting his timid predecessors' 'narrowly legalistic view' that the President could function only where a statute told him to....<sup>36</sup>

Roosevelt clearly employed various methods to assert the power he believed he gained through the public mandate, and as an elected president he was a formidable force, especially when it came to his messages to Congress.

Roosevelt's assertiveness with Congress is evident in his discussion about the National Park System. In a firm manner, Roosevelt declared, "The boundaries of the Yellowstone National Park should be extended to the south and east, to take in such portions of the abutting forest reservations as will enable the Government to protect the elk on their Winter range."<sup>37</sup> This statement exemplifies the authoritarian stance Roosevelt took with Congress as a newly elected president, particularly through his use of the phrase "should be." By telling the Congressmen what "should be" done in the National Park System, Theodore Roosevelt used his presidential authority to try and achieve his conservationist goals. The assertive language Roo-

sevelt employed was a departure from his statement in his first Annual Message that “Additions should be made to [forest reserves] whenever practicable...”<sup>38</sup> Although Roosevelt used the phrase “should be” in this declaration as well, he used it in a manner that showed deference to Congress. The rhetorical differences that exist between the two declarations clearly show that Roosevelt no longer felt he needed to work with Congress to further the conservation effort; now he believed he could dictate what steps they should take to support conservationism.

Roosevelt’s statements regarding the national parks were not the only instances in which he flexed his presidential muscle with Congress for the purpose of protecting the natural world he fervently cared about. He also used his authority to help preserve the bison of the West. In regard to the buffalo, Roosevelt related that herd numbers had declined, and he stressed, “...game refuge provision should be made for the preservation of [bison].”<sup>39</sup> Once again, Roosevelt implemented the phrase “should be” as a means to tell Congress what needed to be done for conservationism. However, there is a subtle difference between the authority he asserted for the national parks and the authority he asserted for the bison. When telling Congress what needed to be done for the buffalo, Roosevelt did provide a logical reason by affirming, “I believe that the scheme would be of economic value as the robe of the buffalo is of high market value...”<sup>40</sup> In supplying a reason for bison preservation, Roosevelt indicated that even though he had become assertive with Congress he still believed in the legislative process.

In addition to providing a rational, economic reason that Congress would respond to, President Roosevelt was also demonstrating his knowledge of the national feelings regarding buffalo preservation. In, *The Destruction of the Bison*, Isenberg affirms that “preservationists” saved bison “not as a functioning part of the plains environment, but as a functioning part of the American economy: a curiosity, tourist attraction, target for hunters, and domesticated beast.”<sup>41</sup> Isenberg’s declaration that buffalo were an economic asset in the United States illustrates that Roosevelt spoke to broad feelings in America when he claimed bison had financial value. Many individuals looked at buffalo with dollar signs in their eyes, and Theodore Roosevelt was able to draw on that sentiment in his fifth State of the Union Address.

Closer to the end of his presidency, Roosevelt continued to express his knowledge of the public’s feelings regarding conservation; however, he became more aggressive with Congress as he sensed the impending end of his tenure in office. In his final address to Congress in December 1908, Roosevelt’s language was especially poignant and dramatic as he delivered his message for the

conservation of natural resources. He decried that the continuing and extensive deforestation had occurred at such a level that it would take years to “undo the mischief that has already been done.”<sup>42</sup> At the time Roosevelt proclaimed this, trees were felled three times as fast as they could grow and people were beginning to notice the disappearing forests.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, John Muir proclaimed, “...our forests...have been mismanaged long and come desperately near to being like smashed eggs and spilt milk.”<sup>44</sup> This declaration demonstrates that the opinion Roosevelt fervently expressed about the state of the forests was shared by many of his fellow Progressives.

Following his prediction that it would take years to undo the damage caused by deforestation, the President went on to stress, “But we can prevent further mischief being done; and it would be in the highest degree reprehensible to let any consideration of temporary convenience or temporary cost interfere with such action...”<sup>45</sup> By making such a strong statement, he was condemning the members of Congress for any future inaction on their part regarding forest conservation. His use of the word “reprehensible” illustrates that he was not going to tread carefully when discussing conservation of natural resources in his last message to Congress. Indeed, it is clear that in his last State of the Union Message Roosevelt intended to give weight to every word in order to ensure his address would have maximum impact and hopefully catapult the Congressmen into action.

Toward the end of his discourse on the preservation of national forests, Roosevelt increased the intensity of his language. He passionately proclaimed,

Nothing should be permitted to stand in the way of the preservation of the forests, and it is criminal to permit individuals to purchase a little gain for themselves through the destruction of forests when this destruction is fatal to the well-being of the whole country in the future.<sup>46</sup>

This assertion harkened back to Roosevelt’s claim that forests were important to industry and the national economy in his first Annual Address; however, there is a significant difference between the two statements. His last statement is much more insistent and forceful regarding the importance of preserving forests, which is evident through the use of the loaded words “criminal” and “fatal”. By declaring that not preserving the forests would be “criminal” and “fatal,” Theodore Roosevelt indicated that he meant his last message to Congress on the conservation of natural resources to be his strongest, and, undeniably, it was an incredibly dynamic message. The last State of the Union Address Roosevelt delivered to Congress was

overflowing with powerful words that related the importance the President placed on conservationism.

### CONCLUSION

Theodore Roosevelt is often called the “conservation president,” and as such he employed both logic and his political position wisely in an attempt to induce the members of Congress to pass legislation that would promote the conservation of natural resources. Roosevelt’s conservation politics has garnered the attention of the conservative intellectual, Peter W. Huber who affirms, “T.R.’s distinction was to give conservation its name and, more importantly, to transform it into an enduringly popular political movement.”<sup>47</sup> The distinction of Roosevelt that Huber discusses is evident through the ways in which Roosevelt cleverly used politics for conservationism in his first, fifth, and eighth Annual Messages to Congress. Each of these messages was delivered at a time of significance in Roosevelt’s political career, and the language he used poignantly reveals that he understood how his political position as president influenced the way in which Congress should be addressed to achieve maximum congressional action. In his first message, Roosevelt was McKinley’s replacement, and as such he recognized the need to cooperate with Congress. This cooperation ended, however, when Roosevelt was elected president in his own right and felt he could more assertive. When Roosevelt delivered his last State of the Union Address he was aware that it was his final chance to persuade Congress to act in support of conservationism and this was reflected in his assertive speech. Theodore Roosevelt cared deeply for the conservation movement, and his State of the Union Addresses illustrate his passion and demonstrate how he used politics and reason in his favor to try and advance conservationism.

The passion Roosevelt had for conserving natural resources is embodied in the teddy bear that was created as a tribute to his values regarding nature. Although it is a toy, the teddy bear symbolizes Theodore Roosevelt’s conservationism by linking the president to a creature he would not shoot in an unjust situation. The symbolic teddy bear became an extremely popular toy, which is made clear by Douglas Brinkley’s assertion that in 1907 a larger factory was built to accommodate “. . . the demand for the cuddly stuffed bears. . .”<sup>48</sup> Just as the public was enamored with the teddy bear, many historians have been captivated with the man who the toy represents and have written about the political, cultural, and economic themes of Roosevelt’s conservationism. Yet, despite the abundant existing literature about President Roosevelt, there are still new interpretations that need to be considered. Theodore Roosevelt has traditionally been seen as politically aggressive; however, his words to Congress about conservation indi-

cate that he was a wise politician who carefully considered his political situation before acting. Roosevelt was America’s “conservation president,” and as such he proceeded with the thought necessary to warrant the creation of a lasting legacy.

### ENDNOTES

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- 5 Wilson, “Teddy Bear,” *Washington Post*.
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- 7 Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1959), 261.
- 8 Conservation is defined as the wise and regulated use of natural resources, which guided the creation of state forest land. Conversely, preservation is strictly no use and is defined as setting land aside that will only be used for tourism or recreation purposes, such as national parks.
- 9 W. Todd Benson, *President Theodore Roosevelt’s Conservation Legacy* (Haverford, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2003), 22.
- 10 Ibid., 25.
- 11 Ibid., 26.
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- 13 Hays emphasizes that progressive politics resulted in the government transforming “. . . into a highly organized, technical, and centrally planned and directed social organization which could meet a complex world with efficiency and purpose.” He also asserts that this transformation was coupled by an increasing reliance on logical scientific and technological findings. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, 265.

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- 30 Ibid., 8.
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Keep your eyes on the stars, but remember to keep your feet on the ground. Theodore Roosevelt. Stars, Eye, Generous Spirit. Theodore Roosevelt (2015). "Theodore Roosevelt on Bravery: Lessons from the Most Courageous Leader of the Twentieth Century", p.13, Skyhorse Publishing, Inc. 10 Copy quote. Show source. Keep your eyes on the stars, and your feet on the ground. Theodore Roosevelt. Love, Dream, Stars. In November 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt arrived in Mississippi and headed to the wilderness for a bear hunt. Roosevelt's hunting party settled into camp on November 13, and the following day Roosevelt confronted an old and lame 230 pound bear.<sup>2</sup> When the hunt leader found the bear he jumped from his horse, knocked the bear over the head with his rifle and tied it to a tree.<sup>3</sup> The leader then called for Roosevelt, who, upon seeing the suffering animal, declined the opportunity to kill the bear as it would go against the sportsmen's code to never shoot any captured animal for recreation.