

A Roundtable on John M. Thompson, *Great Power Rising: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy*

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Introduction to the Roundtable on John M. Thompson, *Great Power Rising: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of US Foreign Policy*

Thomas J. Knock

From the day he returned from Cuba in the summer of 1898 to the night he died at home in January 1919, Theodore Roosevelt was America's most electrifying politician. No president before or since (with the possible exception of his distant cousin, Franklin) dominated his own times more completely, exercised power with greater relish, or personified his country more vividly than did the Republican Roosevelt. In addition to becoming the first great reform president of the 20th century and the original architect of Big Government, he carved out an equally significant legacy in the realm of international relations by setting the United States irreversibly on the path to world power.

Roosevelt the historian wrote in 1889, in *The Winning of the West*, that "the spread of the English speaking peoples over the world's waste spaces" was the most profound development of the previous three centuries—and "ordained by God." In his assessment, "in the long run civilized man finds he can keep the peace only by subduing his barbarian neighbor." Together with the "civilizing mission," the president's deeds in foreign policy were guided by economic and strategic interests, patriotic nationalism, and the search for order. These considerations impelled him to take the Canal Zone, to dispatch Marines to Santo Domingo and issue his Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, and to send sixteen battleships and 12,000 sailors on a round the world cruise.

In a historiography large (and sympathetic) enough to please Roosevelt himself, popular writers and scholars have now engaged these matters for more than a century. Yet, as all four of our reviewers attest, John M. Thompson has admirably met the challenge of making an authentic contribution to this huge field of study. He has done so in an analysis and narrative that scrutinizes the role of domestic politics and TR's grasp of public opinion. Thompson renders the latter crucial element through a careful examination of news reports and editorial pages that the president regularly read and his immense correspondence with influential journalists and politicians. Public opinion and domestic politics, the author finds, fundamentally "shaped his foreign policy agenda."

Robert David Johnson is persuaded by Thompson that Roosevelt had no choice but to tutor and rally the public in order to counter committed anti-imperialist groups; and that his successes were a direct function not only of his

considerable political skill, but also of supportive public opinion. Therein, Johnson observes, the volume "provides several fresh ways to examine long-explored topics." For example, at the start of the Venezuela crisis of 1902-03, Roosevelt did not believe that the Monroe Doctrine protected that country against Anglo-German chastisement for its misconduct; but public opinion was growing increasingly intolerant of European inference. Then, in the instance of Panama, majority opinion stayed on course with Roosevelt, in part owing to the inability of the anti-imperialists to overcome the popular embrace of the idea of a trans-isthmian canal, while southern Democrats had a clear economic interest in expediting the venture. And so, as the Dominican imbroglio unfolded in 1904, the Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine met with negligible criticism because TR showed comparative restraint in his actions to forestall another European intrusion and delayed his interposition until after the presidential election. Johnson views all these retellings as "quite original," "most intriguing," and laden with "fresh insights."

Nicole Phelps likewise admires *Great Power Rising* for its explication of (in the author's words) Roosevelt's "sophisticated grasp of how domestic politics, public opinion, and international affairs were connected." She especially appreciates Thompson's broad geographical selection of newspapers, including America's most prominent German language publication of the era. TR read German, she notes, and, among the study's many benefits, "we can more clearly see the impact of German-American voters on the calculations of national politicians" during the years before 1914-18. She also welcomes the chapters on China and Japan as illustrations of the interaction of domestic politics and foreign policy that inhered in Roosevelt's endeavors, particularly to calm the antipathy of Samuel L. Gompers and the American Federation of Labor. (Johnson, too, underscores this timely perspective on immigration, xenophobia, and trade and tariff policy.)

None of the reviewers is more admiring of the book (or of TR) than Jeremi Suri. Like Johnson and Phelps, he lauds how the author crafts his brief for Roosevelt's use of the press as a vital part of his "bully pulpit." Thompson, he states, "is tireless in his reading of contemporary newspapers and encyclopedic in his knowledge of congressional and other political personalities." Among other things, Suri singles out as "particularly enlightening" the account of the impact of Gompers and the AFL on diplomacy towards China and Japan. Invoking Tip O'Neill, he thus observes that the book "documents beautifully how . . . all strategy is local." At the same time, though, Suri suggests that Thompson errs in downplaying important geopolitical pressures that also left their mark on Roosevelt's policies and in not adequately

integrating the sense of vision that guided his decisions concerning the Panamanian crisis and the voyage of the Great White Fleet.

Ellen Tillman implicitly differs with Suri regarding “vision.” From Thompson’s argument—that, unlike most studies, TR saw the public, not as a problem, but as “a crucial part of the solution”—she infers that the president felt duty-bound actively to educate public opinion and that, indeed, “this stemmed from his sense of the U.S. role in the world.” Otherwise her chapter-by-chapter appraisal agrees with most of what the others have to say. For example, she remarks on Roosevelt’s skill in keeping German-Americans on his side during his Latin American gambits; and she sees the chapters on China and Japan as “probably the most compelling” for their current timeliness. Moreover, she echoes Johnson’s verdict that the final chapter, on the post-presidency, could be stronger than it is. During World War I Roosevelt became the country’s most obstreperous pro-Allied extremist and Woodrow Wilson’s and Robert LaFollette’s most wrathful critic. The manner and proportions of his antagonism were inappropriate and unbecoming of Roosevelt, and Thompson duly reproaches him. But the author then claims that, had he lived to be president in 1920, he would have “transcend[ed] the personal feuding and lack of discipline that plagued him after 1909.” Johnson considers this assertion “too optimistic” while Tillman describes it as an unjustified “desire to vindicate Roosevelt.” (The conjecture is hard to discern in his major addresses during his last few months of life. “We are not internationalists. We are American nationalists,” he ranted to thousands of admirers. “To substitute internationalism for nationalism means to do away with patriotism. The professional pacifist and professional internationalist are equally undesirable citizens.”)

The only other significant shortcoming, referred to by Phelps alone, is that the work does not discuss “the importance of racial hierarchy to Roosevelt’s worldview,” nor “seriously engage with gender” (or “manliness”). The criticism has some merit. At a time when the United States was consolidating apartheid at home, Roosevelt’s sense of mission in international relations, his vision of the future for which he hoped to gain the support of the American people, was intertwined with concepts of race, masculinity, and civilization. As Phelps points out, Thompson uses many quotations that raise such issues, but he declines to explain them or weigh their implication. For example, she cites a letter to Henry Cabot Lodge in which TR likened Californians’ antipathy to the Japanese to “foolishness conceived by the mind of a Hottentot.” Also, in dealing with Colombia, he complained to Rudyard Kipling about the “corrupt pithecoïd [apelike] community in Bogota.” Numerous references to manliness on TR’s part go unremarked upon, too. “No nation can achieve greatness if its people are not . . . essentially manly,” he declared during the Venezuela crisis. The basis of “sound morality,” he wrote in an editorial in November 1914, was “the virile strength of manliness.” He tended as well to impugn the masculinity of his detractors. Opponents of intervention in Panama were “shrill eunuchs,” and he worried that anti-imperialists would not “stand up manfully” in quarrels with other powers. Thompson notes in passing that Roosevelt’s colleagues in Albany dubbed him “Oscar Wilde” early in his career ostensibly because they wondered if he was up to coping with New York’s roughhewn politics. In fact, they called him that (and far worse) because, as TR well knew, they thought he was effeminate. Roosevelt was already keenly aware of the importance to public opinion of not having one’s manliness questioned; initially looking westward, he set about correcting his image.¹

In any event, the Roundtable membership is unanimous. By any fair measure, John M. Thompson’s *Great Power Rising* is an impressive achievement. As Jeremy Suri puts

it, “This is a compelling portrait of Roosevelt the strategist and politician—the ultimate Clausewitz.”

Note:

1. Interestingly, he witnessed close-hand how William McKinley’s reluctance to avenge the *Maine* in 1898 subjected the president to ridicule as an unmanly leader, including cartoons depicting him as a befuddled old woman wearing an apron and bonnet. See the pioneering works of Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (1995) and Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Provoked the Spanish American and the Philippine American Wars* (2000).

Review of John M. Thompson, *Great Power Rising: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy*

Nicole M. Phelps

One of the major methodological conundrums for historians of the United States in the long nineteenth century is how to make a causal argument that ultimately rests on the relationship among politicians, newspapers, and “public opinion.” Do newspapers shape public opinion, or do they reflect it? Do politicians influence the newspapers, or are they just influenced by the papers? Who exactly is “the public” anyway?

In *Great Power Rising*, John M. Thompson wades into this quagmire and produces some solid evidence for the way the relationship worked during Theodore Roosevelt’s political career. Roosevelt emerges as a talented politician who had an excellent sense of what voters and members of Congress would support and tailored the content and timing of his foreign policy actions accordingly. For Thompson, Roosevelt’s “achievements” were a product of “a sophisticated grasp of how domestic politics, public opinion, and international affairs were connected,” and he developed that grasp very early in his political career, long before he held the presidency (9).

To measure public opinion, Thompson relies on the same sources that Roosevelt and his contemporaries used “with confidence”: newspaper and journal editorials from around the country and especially from New York City; letters from the public, especially the elite; letters from lobbyists and ethnic organizations; and from members of Congress, whose opinions, it was often assumed, reflected the views of their constituents (6–7). Thompson has retraced these materials for several specific foreign policy actions, including the 1902–3 Venezuela crisis with Germany and Britain, the efforts to secure rights to the canal route in Panama, the articulation of the Roosevelt Corollary, (failed) attempts to liberalize some elements of the Chinese Exclusion Act, and efforts to maintain positive U.S.-Japanese relations in the face of anti-Japanese fervor on the West Coast.

Importantly, Thompson takes us beyond what this measure of public opinion tells us. He uses Roosevelt’s voluminous correspondence to show how the president cultivated relationships with journalists to influence what they wrote and how he adjusted elements of his policies and the timing of their announcement based on feedback from the public and the press and with a careful eye on his electoral prospects. That voluminous correspondence was often quite frank, allowing for a clear picture of what was going on. It also provides ample evidence of Roosevelt’s skilled politicking, as he offered enthusiastic encouragement in some quarters and attempted to soothe ruffled feathers by downplaying his enthusiasm in others.

Thompson’s primary source research is extensive and impressive. His selection of newspapers is particularly

good, with wide geographic coverage and a range of political viewpoints represented. I was particularly pleased to see the use of the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, the most prominent of the German-language papers at the time. It is the only foreign-language title on Thompson's list, and the author does not clarify for us that Roosevelt read German (he did), but to include any foreign-language press in a study like this is a great step forward. (There is also some German-language historiography in the bibliography, which is also welcome.) One of the resulting benefits is that we can more clearly see the impact of German-American voters on the calculations of national politicians in a time period other than 1914–18.

Thompson also uses the president's mailbag—letters received at the White House from the general public—to good effect. He argues that “public sentiment was not nearly as inclined toward isolationism as many accounts of this period claim” (5). One of the ways he supports that claim is by noting the absence of complaints about foreign policy issues in the mailbag; other subjects could generate a great deal of protest.

Another strength of the book is the way in which Thompson talks about Roosevelt's political opponents. They are not just Democrats. Indeed, Thompson frequently refers to “Democrats and anti-imperialists” as Roosevelt's primary political antagonists. He goes further at times, pointing to mugwumps, who are best described as independents in this study, and Northeastern business elites, who constituted a powerful conservative Republican group. Thompson maintains that Roosevelt was usually successful in getting support for his foreign policies despite opposition from the leaders of all these groups; with proper “leadership” and education from Roosevelt and his administration, the broad voting public supported his policies (4). He also argues that Roosevelt was “cautiously optimistic” about public sentiment, despite historiography that points to his pessimism. That pessimism seems to have been reserved for Congress (4).

The book's three chapters on the Caribbean Basin and the Monroe Doctrine remind us of the importance of a nuanced chain of events—a chain that, in this case, definitely included the 1904 election. Thompson presents a public that was out ahead of Roosevelt in their interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine in the 1902–3 Venezuelan debt crisis; they had already expanded their definition of the doctrine to oppose virtually all European military presence in the region. Roosevelt was not there yet, believing that “civilized” countries like Germany, Britain, and the United States should cooperate to maintain order (35). The crisis taught him that the Monroe Doctrine needed to be updated to align with public sentiment, but the process of doing that was complicated and slowed by his handling of the treaty crisis with Colombia and subsequent Panamanian independence.

Although Roosevelt faced plenty of criticism for his actions regarding Panama, his political opponents were largely neutralized by the broader public, which favored the canal, regardless of the means used to deliver it. As the Dominican debt crisis emerged in the wake of the Venezuelan and Panamanian episodes, Roosevelt tried a variety of unconventional policies to deal with the situation before adopting the strong language of “international police power” in the Roosevelt Corollary after he had secured his re-election in 1904.

In addition to the chapters focused on the Monroe Doctrine, Thompson's book also features a chapter on Roosevelt's political career before the presidency. There are two chapters on Asian exclusion, with one focused on China and the other on Japan. The chapter on China is especially welcome, as it reminds us that the Chinese Exclusion Act was not made permanent until 1902. (It was ended in 1943, not 1965, as the author claims in passing on

page 119.) According to Thompson, Roosevelt favored the continued exclusion of laborers but argued for access for non-laborers and for fair treatment for all Chinese after they arrived in the United States. In this chapter and the subsequent chapter on Japan, Roosevelt's interactions with Samuel Gompers, the leader of the American Federation of Labor, loom large, as Roosevelt tried to curb the anti-Asian rhetoric and actions coming from the AFL and its affiliates in the interest of better U.S. relationships with the Chinese and Japanese governments.

The book concludes with a chapter on Roosevelt's post-presidency years that deals with his 1912 presidential campaign; his efforts to help prepare the country for war; and the possibility of a 1920 presidential run, which was, of course, cut short by his death in 1919. Thompson is most critical of Roosevelt in this chapter, finding particular fault with his advocacy of a plan to tie suffrage to military service and his attacks on antiwar advocates like Wisconsin senator Robert La Follette.

For all of the study's strengths with primary sources, there are some problems when it comes to secondary sources. The book is very centered on mid-twentieth-century scholarship on Roosevelt and on public opinion. Those are certainly key literatures to engage. What is missing is more of an engagement with more recent literature on the time period, much of which prominently features Roosevelt, even if he is not in the title. There are many quotations from Roosevelt in the book that explicitly reference manliness, and still more that reflect the importance of racial hierarchy to Roosevelt's worldview, such as when he described West Coast anti-Japanese sentiment to his close friend Henry Cabot Lodge as being “as foolish as if conceived by the mind of a Hottentot” (121). Thompson does not seriously engage with gender or race, however. Studies like Kevin Murphy's *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, and the Politics of Progressive Era Reform* (Columbia University Press, 2008) and Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds's *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) would only strengthen Thompson's analysis, as they deal, respectively, with Roosevelt's electability and his correspondence with foreign politicians engaged in shaping exclusionary Asian immigration laws in their own countries. Incorporating this more recent literature would raise the historiographical stakes of *Great Power Rising* and add more elements to Roosevelt's foreign policy calculus.

Review of John M. Thompson, *Great Power Rising: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy*

Jeremi Suri

Scholars still define the evolution of American foreign policy by the personalities of presidents. Historians use common labels such as “Wilsonianism,” the “Nixon Doctrine,” and the “Reagan Revolution” and associate these labels with substantive policy preferences for democratization, multilateralism, or regime change. The presumption behind all of these descriptions is that the president and his closest advisers make American foreign policy, and the other institutions of government follow. Public debates matter for elections, but scholars generally assume that they have limited effect on the projection of American power overseas, particularly in the decades since the Second World War. Politics seem to end at the water's edge.

John M. Thompson's deeply researched book begins with the proposition that this common adage is in fact a myth. He explains that although presidents are “widely seen as wielding a degree of power unmatched in human

history," they "face many potential constraints," including frequent elections, congressional opposition, partisanship, and, of course, intensive critical scrutiny from the media. For all the talk of grand strategy and national interests, presidents concentrate their attention on managing public opinion. Otherwise, the best-laid policies are doomed to failure in America's terribly messy democracy.¹

Thompson focuses intensely on President Theodore Roosevelt as a case study. His book adds to a rich body of scholarship that examines the first president elected in the twentieth century as both a pioneer of new executive powers and a representative of broader shifts in American politics.² Like his scholarly predecessors, Thompson immerses himself deeply in Roosevelt's almost endless writings—letters, books, articles, speeches, and conversations. He mines these voluminous materials to craft a careful reconstruction of how the president adjusted his policies on various foreign policy issues, including the building of the Panama Canal, intervention in the Dominican Republic, and relations with Japan and China. Thompson excavates Roosevelt's original thinking and narrates how it shifted with his political circumstances. This is a compelling portrait of Roosevelt as strategist and politician—the ultimate American Clausewitz.³

Thompson focuses on the press, and newspapers in particular. He examines how major publications in New York, and local publications around the country, pervaded the politics of the early twentieth century. During the years between 1880 and 1909, he notes, newspaper circulation in the country tripled. "Americans of this era, especially policymakers, considered newspapers to be among the best, if still crude, measures of public opinion" (6).

Roosevelt surely agreed. He was an avid consumer of daily newsprint, and his words often filled the pages. The president used the press as an essential part of his "bully pulpit" to promote his message across the country and abroad. At the same time, Thompson shows, Roosevelt relied on newspapers to keep up with the pulse of the public, and he adjusted his discourse accordingly.

The former Rough Rider had a consistent and articulate set of foreign policy beliefs. He promoted an expansive, often aggressive vision of American power. He also pursued a sophisticated set of economic and cultural interests across the globe—a mix of markets and prestige for Americans seeking gains abroad. For Latin America, this meant American domination; for Asia and Europe, it meant a seat at the table among the great powers. With this thinking, and backed by a growing economy and navy, Roosevelt made the United States into a major international diplomatic and military actor. Not surprisingly, Henry Kissinger and others have remembered Roosevelt as one of America's great practitioners of *realpolitik*.⁴

Although Thompson does not reject this portrait, he adds important qualifications. In doing so, he challenges many of the assumptions about *realpolitik*, at least in a democracy. Thompson shows that behind the cocksure public rhetoric, Roosevelt was actually more skilled politician than grand strategist. He focused little on geopolitical analysis and much more on newspapers, rallies, and other mechanisms for assessing and shaping public opinion. Unlike politicians who patronized the public, such as Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt "believed that the public's often pivotal role was appropriate," and he "criticized politicians and members of the eastern elite who disdained the masses or sought to diminish their influence" (184). Roosevelt was elitist, but he did not trust elites to make policy.

That attitude frightened Roosevelt's blue-blooded detractors. He appealed to the masses and drew on their energy to shape his policies. He was cerebral, but also populist; sophisticated, but rarely refined. His energies and interests reflected the street more than high society. "It is difficult," Thompson aptly observes, "to imagine

Rooseveltian statecraft outside the context of domestic politics" (185).

Thompson's book departs from the large body of literature on Roosevelt as international strategist to reexamine this formative president as domestic politician. His policies, in the author's recounting, were shaped, timed, and implemented with a close eye to public opinion at home. Public opinion mattered more to Roosevelt than anything else, including the national interest.

Acquiring the land to build an isthmian canal through Central America was one of the cardinal achievements of Roosevelt's foreign policy, and it is appropriately described as an expression of his emerging global strategy for American expansion. Thompson, however, chronicles the stubborn opposition Roosevelt confronted from Democrats and advocates of alternative routes. He shows how the president's ideas shifted and adjusted to take account of those objections, and how Roosevelt worked to manipulate public opinion wherever he could. By fomenting a revolution against Columbian rule in Panama and negotiating for American access, Roosevelt turned a divisive issue into a popular cause for liberty and trade.

Thompson is at his best when he digs into the details of domestic politics, chronicling how Roosevelt worked closely with members of Congress and appealed carefully to different voting blocs, especially German Americans, at the turn of the century. Thompson is tireless in his reading of contemporary newspapers, and he is encyclopedic in his knowledge of congressional and other political personalities. His account of Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor's influence on Roosevelt's foreign policies, which shows how ethnic and labor politics came together to shape Roosevelt's worldview, is particularly enlightening.

In his chapter on the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which was announced by the president in December 1904, Thompson describes how Roosevelt maneuvered between numerous complex positions. Most Americans did not want a war over Venezuela, a country that had defaulted on its debts and faced intervention from Britain and Germany. Americans did not, however, wish to see other foreign influences grow in the region. The Roosevelt Corollary was a rhetorical measure designed to display American toughness but still keep the country out of war, even as it became more deeply involved in South America. A similar dynamic applied to China and Japan, where Roosevelt increased America's reach while continuing to cater to isolationist and racist sentiments at home. Peeking behind the intrepid rhetoric of the president, we can see that his policies in all these areas contained more political compromise at home than clear-eyed strategy abroad.

Great Power Rising documents beautifully how, to paraphrase former House Speaker Tip O'Neill, all strategy is local. Roosevelt was a political animal, a newspaper junkie, and a dealmaker. His rhetoric was more absolutist than his policies, and that is why he accomplished so much. He lost his bearings after leaving the presidency, when he became shriller and more militant than before, and perhaps too focused on recovering his power. Getting back to the presidency became Roosevelt's final political obsession.⁵

Thompson's book offers an insightful and compelling analysis of the domestic roots of American foreign policy. Theodore Roosevelt is a revealing case, because he appears focused on international *realpolitik* until you look closely, as Thompson has done. Too many writers have allowed Roosevelt's rhetoric to distort their image of a man who was shiffter and more complicated than his stalwart words would indicate.

Although *Great Power Rising* is a compelling book, it overreaches at times in its efforts to correct previous accounts. Concentrating on domestic politics, Thompson

sometimes diminishes the geopolitical pressures that pushed Roosevelt, and continued to push his successors. The growth of German and British power in the Caribbean, and their renewed efforts at expansion, motivated serious policymakers in both parties—including Woodrow Wilson and William Howard Taft, as well as Roosevelt—to pursue more interventionist activities in the region. There is a striking continuity across administrations in the pursuit of hemispheric expansion, despite serious domestic political divergences.⁶

More significant, the American presidents in this period appeared to have enormous power in shaping public opinion. Thompson makes this point, but he places greater emphasis on how public opinion influenced the president, not the reverse. Roosevelt was committed to an isthmian canal, a world-class navy, and “great power” status for America before his presidency began, and he re-defined American policy and politics in accord with that personal vision. He was particularly skillful in persuading and manipulating domestic society, as Thompson shows, but the president’s vision still seems paramount in understanding the building of the Panama Canal, the circumnavigation of the “Great White Fleet,” and the Portsmouth Conference. None of these initiatives would have emerged, at that time, without Roosevelt. Historians will debate whether he was a man of peace, but the efficacy of Roosevelt’s forceful international leadership explains why he was the first American to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906.

Perhaps Edmund Morris is therefore correct when he writes of the “Rise of Theodore Roosevelt” as a personal phenomenon that in some ways transcended the political limits on his predecessors. Roosevelt’s magnetism, energy, and intellect seemed to alternatively attract and pulverize potential opponents. His rhetoric mobilized supporters. Roosevelt did not merely play the game; he changed it. Morris quotes a contemporary British diplomat and member of Parliament who had met the president. “Do you know the two most wonderful things I have seen in your country?” he asked. “Niagara Falls and the President of the United States, both great wonders of nature!”⁷

Thompson is of course correct that even the most powerful leaders are constrained by the politics of their time. *Great Power Rising* offers a bold and persuasive account of why Roosevelt’s awareness of his political context, and his skillful ability to exploit it, was crucial for the success of his presidency. The man in the Executive Mansion (renamed the “White House” by Roosevelt) cannot accomplish anything worthwhile without the cooperation of countless political actors at home and abroad. That said, the ideas, energy, and charisma of the leader matter enormously. Presidents have the ability to define what their presidencies are about, even if they cannot always deliver on preferred outcomes.

Theodore Roosevelt set the model for future presidents because he created new sources of power in his person, and he drew politics to himself. That personal dynamic made Franklin Roosevelt and every Cold War president possible. It also brought us to the current era, when the person in the White House is holding the politics of his own party hostage. Theodore Roosevelt led the Republican Party by force of his personality; Donald Trump has hijacked the party to feed his narcissism.

Notes:

1. Julian Zelizer makes a similar argument about the primacy of domestic politics in American national security policy since the Second World War in *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security* (New York, 2010).

2. Among many others, see John Morton Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt* (Cambridge, MA, 1954); Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (Baltimore, MD, 1956); John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, MA, 1985); Frank Ninkovich, *The Global Republic: America’s Inadvertent Rise to World Power* (Chi-

cago, 2014), 65–95; Jeremi Suri, *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America’s Highest Office* (New York, 2017), 103–36.

3. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ, 1976).

4. See Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, 1994), 29–55.

5. For a more flattering focus on Theodore Roosevelt’s progressive positions in the 1912 election, see Sidney M. Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy* (Lawrence, KS, 2009).

6. See, among many others, Alan McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations* (Oxford, UK, 2014); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* (Cambridge, MA, 1999); Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), esp. 152–252; Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba under the Platt Amendment* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1986).

7. Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York, 1979), xxiv.

Review of John M. Thompson, *Great Power Rising: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy*

Robert David Johnson

John Thompson’s book is particularly timely, as the United States has retreated of late from a more robust international role, first under Barack Obama and now under Donald Trump. This study of the U.S. emergence on the international stage most stands out, however, for its decision to approach Theodore Roosevelt’s foreign policy through the lens of domestic politics and public opinion. Thompson’s goal, in which he largely succeeds, is to examine the “complex nature of the political context in which presidents govern and the key role that plays in foreign policy” (2).

Roosevelt, Thompson contends, embodied a “paradox” of U.S. foreign policy. He recognized the growing strength of the United States and the positive strategic position the nation enjoyed, but he also understood the challenges the situation posed. Growing influence internationally could threaten the U.S. system of government. Moreover, the constitutional system generated a tendency in favor of the status quo. In the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, that tendency represented the rather unimaginative anti-imperialism of the Cleveland administration.

The book offers three principal arguments. First, Thompson contends that Roosevelt needed to rally public support to overcome the opposition of anti-imperialists, who—although not a majority—enjoyed disproportionate cultural and economic influence. Second, because Roosevelt had to make his case for a more robust U.S. international role to the public, understanding the political landscape of the era was particularly important. Finally, Roosevelt’s general foreign policy triumphs reflected not just his political skill but also the public opinion of the era. In this respect, Roosevelt succeeded not merely because he had vision and considerable political skill, but because his political leadership rarely got too far ahead of the public. The result was a figure who “globalized the presidency, leading to an unprecedented spread of influence for the executive branch and for the United States” (180–1).

Determining the precise nature of public opinion in the pre-polling era, of course, is no easy task. (In the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. and 2019 Australian elections, perhaps the process is impossible even in a time of numerous polls.) Thompson, however, relies on the strategy pioneered by Ernest May in *American Imperialism*, suggesting that the May model—closely examining newspapers, in particular—provides a way for scholars to reconstruct early twentieth-

century public opinion.

While Thompson's book begins (and ends) with brief biographical sketches of Roosevelt's life, its core structure focuses on a series of specific international crises, as a way of showing how Roosevelt's understanding of the importance of domestic opinion shaped his foreign policy agenda. He carried with him, of course, his personal background to the presidency. Thompson contends that Roosevelt's careful cultivation of the press and his recognition of the media's value in democracy had formed well before he entered the White House. So too did the influence on his thinking of future Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge.

Lodge's realism appealed, but so too did his partisanship—especially for a man like Roosevelt, who deeply distrusted the Democratic Party's position in American political life and saw the opposition as an obstacle to both reform and a muscular foreign policy. Roosevelt once remarked that Grover Cleveland had "done as well as his party would let him . . . His numerous shortcomings and failures simply show that under the most favorable circumstances the Democratic Party . . . is not fit to be entrusted with the care of the National Government" (23). Democrats were not the only figures that Roosevelt viewed as enemies. He blasted the "perverse lunatics" who embraced the Mugwump view and expressed his trust in the perspective of the "plain people" as he portrayed himself as defending the nation's honor (28).

Roosevelt, of course, became president by accident. Though soon the most popular politician in the country, he never had a firm grasp of the congressional GOP caucus. He also faced something of a political conundrum. Committed to partisanship, he led a party supported by most German Americans, while at the same time he saw Germany emerging as a problem in Latin America. How to address this tension, according to Thompson, provided the "first significant foreign policy question Theodore Roosevelt faced as president" (33).

In the end, Roosevelt largely (and not for the first time in his career) got lucky. His initial approach to the crisis in Venezuela, where three European countries threatened military intervention after the country refused to service its foreign loans, tried to thread the needle between defending the Monroe Doctrine and not committing to U.S. military intervention. He twice informed Congress that the doctrine was the "cardinal feature" of U.S. foreign policy, but he also maintained that the policy did not guarantee a Latin American nation against "punishment if it misconducts itself" (35).

Roosevelt quickly discovered, however, that public understanding of the doctrine had evolved. Americans were no longer willing to tolerate overt European military intervention—which culminated in the sinking of the Venezuelan navy—in the Caribbean Basin. As the crisis persisted, he began to reconsider his sense that the Monroe Doctrine did not need strengthening. He especially worried about the intersection between arbitration and the continued health of the doctrine, since arbitration threatened to involve the Hague Court in hemispheric affairs.

Confronting a press that portrayed Germany in a hostile fashion, even among the three blockading powers, Roosevelt started pressuring the Europeans to end the blockade.

In this respect, Thompson portrays Roosevelt as mostly reactive. He worried that public opinion might become, in the author's words, "too passionate" and thus force a reckless policy (40). Ironically, British reluctance, rather than anything Roosevelt did, helped to terminate the crisis. In the aftermath, Roosevelt needed not only to ensure that relations with Germany did not further deteriorate, but that the controversy did not hurt his standing with German American voters. In this task, the German ambassador

and the Roosevelt administration served as *de facto* allies, combating the efforts of British public diplomacy to turn U.S. opinion in a more pro-London direction.

This is, in short, a quite original retelling of the Venezuelan crisis, one that stresses the tension between Roosevelt's long-term international goals and his short-term political needs as the shaky head of a party for which German American voters were a critical constituency. It would be difficult, by contrast, to provide much that is new about the story of the Panama Canal, though even here, the domestic lens offers fresh insights. Thompson notes that the president feared "losing control of the debate" as he tangled with Congress over whether the canal might go into Nicaragua rather than Panama (61).

The book focuses almost entirely on the domestic side of the debate. Thompson correctly observes that despite the flagrantly imperialistic nature of Roosevelt's actions, Democrats and their allies in the anti-imperialist movement struggled to articulate a positive alternative to the president's policy. They particularly divided over whether to support the Panama Treaty, while Senate Democrats worried that the public could conclude that Roosevelt backed the idea of a canal more passionately than they did. Nonetheless, the administration had to aggressively lobby Southern opinion—especially Southern business interests—to ensure that Southern senators did not vote en masse against the resulting treaty. Thompson argues that Roosevelt defanged the Democrats with business pressure and outmaneuvered surviving northeastern anti-imperialists, such as Massachusetts senator George Hoar, by ensuring that the Panamanian government was nominally independent before negotiating any treaty.

Roosevelt's foreign policy accomplishments helped him enter the 1904 election as a strong favorite. Nonetheless, the president struggled to use the campaign to increase support for more aggressive policies in his second term. He took from the Venezuelan affair, Thompson argues, a belief that the Monroe Doctrine needed to more closely mirror the public consensus against any European military intervention in the hemisphere, for any reason. He first articulated his new vision through a letter read at a 1904 banquet celebrating the U.S. intervention in Cuba.

Strong Democratic criticism of the address, however, coupled with lukewarm GOP support, led Roosevelt to shelve the idea of additional action on the question until after the election. Democrats, meanwhile, futilely tried to make foreign policy an issue of their own, portraying Theodore Roosevelt as a would-be monarch and suggesting that he wanted the United States to play a role as "continental policeman" (83). This approach failed in the short term, as Roosevelt swept to victory. Ironically, however, it might have encouraged him to prematurely announce he would not run for re-election, which weakened his support among congressional Republicans between 1905 and 1908.

Perhaps the most intriguing section of the book is Thompson's portrayal of the Roosevelt Corollary. He portrays the move as largely defensive, an attempt to translate evolving public opinion into public policy. Nonetheless, the move encountered significant opposition both in the Senate and among elite public opinion, which understood how much the policy veered from the anti-imperialist consensus that had shown considerable strength in the 1880s and 1890s. The debate, Thompson contends, crystallized Roosevelt's distrust of the Senate's role in foreign policy—leading him "to conclude that the Senate was 'wholly incompetent' to be an equal partner in the conduct of foreign policy" (90). This contempt for the Senate also prompted Roosevelt to try and rally the public to support his policy, a task that proved more difficult than he anticipated. Thompson quotes Roosevelt remarking that he maintained public support "only by minimizing my interference and showing the clearest necessity for it" (91).

While most of the book features episodes widely covered in the literature (albeit often presented here in a fresh fashion), Thompson also explores other areas of inquiry. The chapter discussing Roosevelt's policy toward China touches on themes that resonate in our current environment—xenophobia, business concerns with boycotts and economic pressure, the limitations of presidential power. Ultimately, however, Roosevelt failed to ameliorate the exclusion policy that had predated his presidency and could not generate enough public support for a military intervention to break the boycott of U.S. goods in China. A more significant defeat was avoided only by the emergence of tensions with Japan. While Thompson is, perhaps, too generous in his appraisal of Roosevelt's China policy, he sharply criticizes the president's handling of relations with Japan. He labels Roosevelt's approach "foolhardy," and seems unsympathetic to Roosevelt's blaming the public for his difficulties (121).

The book's concluding (and weakest) chapter extends beyond Roosevelt's presidency to examine his approach to the European tensions that culminated in World War I. Thompson (not entirely convincingly) notes that Roosevelt's distaste for Taft's 1911 arbitration treaties helped to drive the former president out of retirement. Once war began, however, Roosevelt struggled with how to approach the conflict as a private citizen, torn between his outrage over Germany's treatment of Belgium and his public commitments to avoid partisanship. He bitterly lamented his lack of influence over U.S. public opinion; Wilson's more pacific approach, he claimed in 1915, spoke "for the country" (155). But his personal and ideological enmity toward Wilson led him to take an increasingly public role nonetheless. His bid for the GOP presidential nomination in 1916 took on aggressively nationalist tones, which carried over once war was declared. His willingness to cast doubt on the loyalty of Wisconsin senator Robert La Follette, Thompson contends with some understatement, assumed an "ominous" tone and "left a stain on TR's legacy" (169).

As Roosevelt distanced himself from many progressives, who increasingly embraced an antiwar approach, he moved closer to the northeastern cultural and financial elite that he had often battled as president. The reconciliation was not enough to give him the nomination in 1916, which instead went to Charles Evans Hughes, but it paved the way for a type of ideological transformation at the tail end of his life, a theme the book could have done more to explore. (Roosevelt blamed the Republicans' 1916 loss on the party's decision not to nominate him.) Disappointed by Wilson's sidelining him during the war, he played an inconsistent role in the early debates about the postwar peace, seeming more interested in furthering his crusade against Wilson and keeping the Republican Party together than offering positive, concrete proposals.

Thompson speculates, however, that if Roosevelt had lived and prevailed in the 1920 election, he would have "been able to transcend the personal feuding and lack of discipline that plagued him after 1909," allowing him to focus on "ideas and objectives" and provide a capstone to his career (179). We will, of course, never know, but this seems like a too optimistic reading of events. And while Thompson is probably correct in his claim that only John Quincy Adams had a comparable postpresidential career, that situation more reflects the scant examples.

Those who have championed redefining the field as international history and downplaying or ignoring the myriad ways in which both U.S. political culture and the constitutional structure have shaped U.S. foreign policy probably will find little of use in this book. If so, that's unfortunate, because it provides several fresh ways to examine long-explored topics. Thompson's TR is the man memorialized by Henry White, who observed that Roosevelt was the only person he had ever met who

"combined the qualities of an able politician at home with those of an equally good diplomatist abroad" (185).

Review of John M. Thompson, *Great Power Rising: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy*

Ellen D. Tillman

John M. Thompson's insightful and well-written monograph seeks to shed new light on our understanding of Teddy Roosevelt as statesman. It analyzes the ways Roosevelt used the press in governing, from befriending editors and influencing publications to interpreting the public's mood in part through what came out in the press across the country. Thompson argues, often convincingly, that historians should reconsider TR's relationship to the press and to public sentiment. He states that his book's goal is to "provide an in-depth study of the politics of an individual president's foreign policy decision-making, while offering the first comprehensive study of this aspect of TR's career" (3).

Thompson organizes his book around three central arguments and in the process takes on some of the older interpretations and truisms about TR's administration. First, he contends that Roosevelt was much more optimistic about the public's character and role in government than has generally been held. Second, he maintains that, rather than public opinion simply limiting TR's ability to maneuver after foreign policy actions had been enacted, domestic politics shaped and "influenced his decision-making at all points of the process" (5). Finally, he argues that "public sentiment was not nearly as inclined toward isolationism as many accounts of this period claim" and that TR's active foreign policy actually found wide support among the public (5).

Thompson's work is well researched and a welcome addition to our understanding of some of the nuances in Roosevelt's evolving relationship with the press and his attitude toward public sentiment. Combining analysis of the press, press releases, and private and inter-governmental correspondence, the work shows clearly the ways TR struggled to maintain a balance that was indeed influenced by shifts in public sentiment. This close analysis of TR's own words and arguments does show that he often maintained an optimism about public sentiment and its role and importance in democratic government. While at times he was clearly frustrated with a reticent public and occasionally he even believed that some circumstances might call for circumventing public opinion, he emphasized the need to interpret broad public sentiment throughout the largest major foreign policy challenges of his career, particularly in regions and with groups that would help maintain the supremacy of his own Republican Party. He also believed it was necessary to rally public support for what he and his closest advisers considered the best courses of action.

In sum, this is one of the strongest cases Thompson's work makes and one of its most important contributions to the historiography: during his presidency, Roosevelt genuinely seems to have believed, more often than not, that it was his administration's duty to educate and rally the public, rather than simply to manipulate or "work around" it. This belief stemmed from his sense of the role the United States should play in the world.

Chapter 1, "The Education of TR: Politics and Foreign Policy, 1882–1903," argues that from the earliest days of his career, Roosevelt began to hone the statercraft that would serve him well through his presidency. He cultivated rhetorical skills and was committed to "public participation in politics" in ways that not only shaped his own career but also changed multiple aspects of what the presidency meant

and how presidents related to the public. Especially upon ascending to the presidency (although certainly before that as well), Roosevelt kept an eye upon the global and moral obligations of the United States as he turned increasingly to foreign policy.

Chapter 2 deals with an episode from the early years of his career. It focuses on how domestic politics affected the way TR dealt with the 1902–3 Venezuelan crisis and influenced his deep conviction about the need for U.S. naval expansion. Thompson shows how Roosevelt worked to strike a balance throughout the crisis. For the president as for the public, the extent to which the United States should intervene in European disputes with Latin America was central. Thompson also notes that “some historians have suggested that the frequent allusions to public opinion on the part of Roosevelt, Hay, and White” during the European blockade of Venezuela “did not represent primarily expressions of concern about an emerging political problem for the administration, but were rather part of a coordinated strategy to force an end to the blockade” (41). Here as elsewhere, however, Thompson calls for more nuance. He shows how carefully attentive TR was to the public’s reaction to the European blockade and to other events, and he examines the ways in which the president sought to balance general reactions and maintain the goodwill of German American voters as he sought to gain political support for the upcoming presidential election.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with two more major episodes in U.S.-Latin American relations: the U.S. role in Panama’s independence and the development of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in relation to the Dominican interventions between 1902 and 1904. Both chapters clearly show how TR’s concerns about public opinion and the 1904 election influenced his decision-making and how his policies developed incrementally over time as he felt out public opinion, yet the episodic nature of the chapters makes it difficult at times to see the greater nuances in the progression of Roosevelt’s approaches. Most convincing and helpful here is Thompson’s in-depth analysis of the care the president took to maintain the impression that his administration had done nothing to directly encourage Panama’s independence declaration.

Through the progression of Thompson’s work on Roosevelt’s efforts to revise policy, the president’s views emerge. In this instance, Thompson addressed the Monroe Doctrine, for which Thompson shows that TR skillfully gained acceptance by emphasizing that it was a revision of long-held doctrine rather than a radical change. Although the “prevailing interpretation” is that “TR had an essentially realist understanding of public opinion and viewed his countrymen as uninformed and mainly a hindrance to sound policymaking,” Thompson writes, “the Dominican episode demonstrates that Roosevelt believed the public, rather than being the main problem, was a crucial part of the solution” (91).

Probably the most compelling chapters within Thompson’s generally episodic approach are actually those that follow related foreign policy issues over time, particularly the chapters dealing with the Roosevelt administration’s relations with China and Japan from 1904 to 1909. The overlap between these chapters enables the reader to see a great deal more of the evolution-of-policy approach. One of the points that Thompson makes strongly throughout the work, and that comes out most clearly in this set of chapters, is his challenge to the somewhat common notion in the historiography that TR generally bullied, ignored, or simply sought to manipulate the public to get his way. In the often-frustrating back-and-forth that the TR administration conducted over these years with organized labor (particularly the AFL) and groups such as the Exclusion League, Thompson powerfully underscores

his point that the president saw public relations as a keystone of democratic government.

While his administration certainly made decisions about what they believed ought to be done, Roosevelt continued to lobby and work with the public in an attempt to get agreement and support for his views. Frequently, his own language emphasized the need to educate a sometimes-reticent public so that the government could make the “right” (and, importantly, moral) foreign policy decisions. This was often a delicate task, and Roosevelt did not take it lightly, as Thompson shows clearly throughout. Likewise, when some among the public brought up the possibility of war with China or Japan, the administration worked tirelessly through press and rhetoric to calm their fears while still seeking sufficient public support for naval expansion.

Although much of the historiography against which Thompson is working is now much older, he is correct in arguing that there is still a great need for a close analysis of TR’s relationship to the press, particularly where foreign policy issues are concerned. The ways that TR saw domestic politics as necessarily intertwined with foreign policy are clear throughout the work, as is the way that these elements of statecraft were, as TR himself often said, part of the national character and special role of the United States in the development of international relations globally.

The final chapter, “The Stern, Unflinching Performance of Duty: TR and World War I, 1909–1919,” uses many of the same approaches the early chapters do but is necessarily very different. Here the reader sees—again, often in TR’s own words—the president’s growing frustration with public sentiment. He first broke with Taft and the Republican Party, and then he criticized Woodrow Wilson, calling for more attention to war preparedness as the European conflict raged. Thompson speculates throughout on why TR may have apparently broken with so many of his former ideals and political approaches, and he does show TR’s continued courting of and attention to the press and public opinion after his presidency, but one of the major points of the chapter seems to be the argument that this period of his political life may have led to most of the negative aspects of his legacy.

I am sure that much of the change in Roosevelt’s approach in this period left “black marks” on his legacy, but overall, I was less convinced by Thompson’s argument here. Throughout the book, he clearly details strong (if not overwhelming) opposition to some of what TR and his administration did, including opposition from within the Republican Party that sometimes led to extensive negative press (see chapter 3 in particular). He points out that TR’s administration did in fact engender quite a lot of suspicion at times because of his “unprecedented expansion of the powers of the presidency” (180). Examples of this can be seen throughout, although perhaps most clearly in the chapter about Panama, and, in my reading, seem to hint at a desire on the part of the author to vindicate Roosevelt. Some statements, especially in the introduction and conclusion, also seem somewhat out of place in a historical monograph: Thompson maintains that TR was “one of the most adept statesmen in U.S. history” (9), for example, and “the most gifted politician of his era” (10).

Those objections aside, this nuanced interpretation is highly welcome and promises to open significant and useful discussions about how we understand Teddy Roosevelt’s historical legacy and the ways that he went about changing the presidency. What Thompson does show clearly about Roosevelt throughout the entire work is that “the ample evidence of his faith in the people—which bent at times but never broke—and his conviction that they would almost always support a sensible foreign policy, so long as the president provided leadership, should put to rest the idea that he maintained a negative or

condescending view of public opinion" (183). While there is certain to be some fruitful discussion and disagreement about how accurate this assertion is, it becomes abundantly clear through Thompson's work that it was more accurate than the historiography generally suggests.

Author's Response

Jack (John M.) Thompson

One of the most daunting aspects of writing an academic monograph is anticipating how it will be received by fellow scholars. Will they uniformly disparage it? Or, even worse, will they ignore it? Thankfully, neither fate has befallen *Great Power Rising*. For that, I am grateful to Andy Johns, who organized this roundtable, and to the lineup of distinguished historians he assembled, all of whom read the book with care and in good faith. Robert David Johnson, Nicole Phelps, Jeremi Suri, and Ellen Tillman offered praise for *Great Power Rising*, even as they raised thought-provoking questions about some potential shortcomings.

I will turn to their comments in a moment, but first some background. My goal in writing *Great Power Rising* was two-fold. I wanted to provide the first comprehensive account of the roles played by domestic politics and public opinion in Theodore Roosevelt's foreign policy. The influence of domestic factors is a recurring theme in studies of TR's career, but it has never been fully explored. This oversight has led to some problems in the historiography. Perhaps the most notable misapprehension, as Suri observes, is that Roosevelt was essentially a practitioner of realpolitik whose main concern with domestic politics and public opinion was the extent to which they constrained his ambitious agenda.

Great Power Rising seeks to provide a more complex portrait of the twenty-sixth president. I argue that TR was often frustrated by the nature of the U.S. system but that he also revered it. He often complained about the challenges of dealing with a partisan and myopic Congress, yet he tirelessly engaged with senators and representatives in both parties, frequently—though by no means always—to good effect. He worried about the tendency of the press toward sensationalism, but he skillfully influenced coverage of his policies and treasured his friendships with journalists.

Most importantly, Roosevelt was anything but disdainful of the American people, whom he did not seek to manipulate, but to lead. Certainly, he considered the attitudes of many members of the cultural, economic, and political elite to be pernicious. As Phelps writes, although TR was a fierce partisan, it was not only Democrats with whom he clashed. He loathed anti-imperialists and mugwumps (essentially political independents) for what he viewed as their misguided ideas and their disproportionate influence in public debates. Meanwhile, he harbored a striking faith in the essential decency and common sense of the average voter, and though this conviction occasionally wavered, it never shattered. As Tillman notes, this belief was the fuel for his indefatigable efforts to convince the voters to back his policies.

My other principal objective in writing this book was to use TR as a case study for exploring how presidents navigate the challenges posed by the U.S. political system, which, as Robert David Johnson observes, sometimes presented TR with seemingly intractable conflicts between his geostrategic and domestic political goals. Though there is a sizeable body of scholarship on this subject, to the best of my knowledge there are no career-length studies of individual presidents. I hoped that scrutiny of the gifted (albeit flawed) Roosevelt would provide insight into the ways in which U.S. structures and political culture compel presidents to formulate policy with at least one eye on the

domestic context. To a considerable extent, "all strategy is local," as Suri neatly puts it.

One of my conclusions is that this conception of strategy was a cornerstone of Roosevelt's mostly successful foreign policy. By providing a compelling vision for national greatness, maintaining faith in the people and in the design of the U.S. system, emphasizing principled leadership, and exercising impressive political dexterity, TR largely mastered the art of the politics of foreign policy. When he stumbled, it was often because he had become impatient with aspects of democracy or the rule of law, or because he (often unfairly) dismissed his opponents as ignorant, cowardly, unscrupulous, or unpatriotic. All presidents face such challenges, but some handle them better than others.

I was very pleased to see that in the main the reviewers agree with my basic argument. However, each takes issue with secondary aspects of my approach. Broadly speaking, the critiques fall into three categories. Suri and Johnson wish I had explored themes raised in the book more fully. Suri contends that I pay insufficient attention to the geopolitical pressures that influenced Roosevelt, such as the growth of German power in the Caribbean region. In my (partial) defense, I would note that such pressures are mentioned throughout the book, and that it was never my intention to attribute TR's actions solely to domestic factors. However, I readily acknowledge that my focus on the domestic side of the equation may have at times overshadowed the crucial role of the international context.

Suri also writes that I downplay the extent to which TR shaped public opinion. I don't think that we really differ on this issue, as the book is filled with examples of TR swaying journalists or other opinion-shapers, setting the terms of public debate, and getting most or even all of what he wanted during fights over key policies.

Johnson argues that *Great Power Rising* does not sufficiently explore what he calls "a type of ideological transformation at the tail end of his life," when TR found common cause with members of the cultural and financial elite on the most pressing issue of the era, World War I. Though I do not fully agree with Johnson's point—I think TR cooperated with these men because they mostly agreed about the war, not because he abandoned his progressive worldview—there is a case to be made that after 1914, TR de-emphasized his domestic political priorities in order to focus on trying to persuade Americans to see the issues at stake in the European war as he did. Put differently, his will to power, along with his conviction that the importance of the war transcended all other issues, was the most important influence on him during his final years, one that led him back to the Republican Party for another shot at the presidency.

Tillman adopts a different approach by raising the issue of whether it is appropriate for academic historians to assess the performance of policymakers positively. She questions what she views as my "desire to vindicate Roosevelt" and argues that laudatory statements about TR's historical legacy are "somewhat out of place in a historical monograph." In this instance, I am less willing to cede ground. Though my assessment of TR is often favorable, it is hardly hagiographic: it includes frequent criticisms of his decisions and his motives. Perhaps more importantly, I do not understand the hesitancy to make assessments of a political actor, or to try to place his or her performance into a broader historical context. Given the widespread concerns about the disconnect between the academy and the rest of society, this is, to my mind, precisely the sort of debate that professional historians should engage in more often.

Finally, Phelps's criticism of my use of secondary sources recalls, at least to my mind, the debate about high politics versus culture in the historiography. She questions my engagement with "mid-twentieth-century scholarship on Roosevelt and public opinion" and argues that I should

have engaged more with the recent literature on gender and race. Doing so, she writes, would have “raise[d] the historiographical stakes” of the project. I have no quarrel with scholarship that assesses TR’s foreign policy through a cultural lens, and in fact, where relevant, such studies are cited in the book. However, this literature has little to say about the nexus between domestic politics, public opinion, and foreign policy. That is why *Great Power Rising* pays more attention to the large body of work focusing on this debate—work that is not, by the way, limited to mid-twentieth scholarship. It would have been unproductive to proceed otherwise.

More importantly—and I think the other reviews bear this out—more intensive engagement with the high politics side of the literature does not lower the historiographical

stakes. On the contrary, rethinking the roles of public opinion and domestic politics in TR’s statecraft leads to insights about crucial subjects of enduring relevance. These include not only the nature of TR’s foreign policy, but also the process by which the United States emerged as a great power and, more broadly, the ways in which presidents navigate the complexities of the U.S. system.

Given the sobering state of affairs in Washington and the continued salience of public opinion and domestic politics in the making of U.S. foreign policy, I believe that the issues raised in this roundtable deserve the continued attention of historians. It has been a privilege to debate them with Johnson, Phelps, Suri, and Tillman, and to contribute, if only in a small way, to a fuller understanding of the subject.



Thanks to a partnership between SHAFR and Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), all back issues of *Passport* (formerly known as the *SHAFR Newsletter*) are now available electronically. Issues published since April 2009 are available on the SHAFR website: <https://shafr.org/publications/review>, while older issues are available through the MTSU Institutional Repository: <https://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/handle/mtsu/4769>. This initiative both preserves the history of our organization and field and makes it more widely available.

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