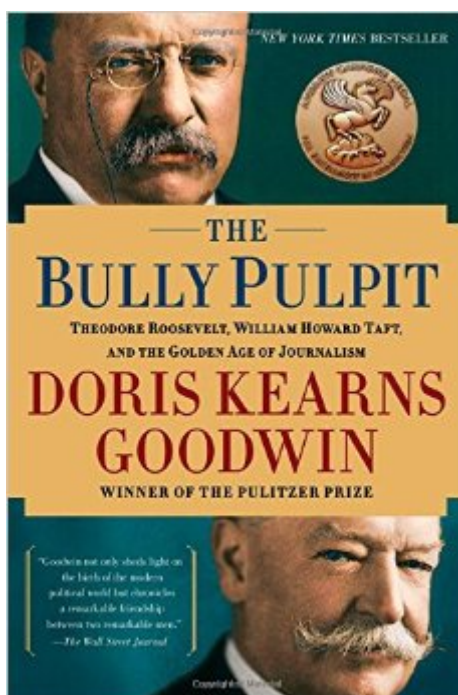


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The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, And The Golden Age Of Journalism



Synopsis

One of the Best Books of the Year as chosen by The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Economist, Time, USA TODAY, Christian Science Monitor, and more. "A tale so gripping that one questions the need for fiction when real life is so plump with drama and intrigue" (Associated Press). Doris Kearns Goodwin's *The Bully Pulpit* is a dynamic history of the first decade of the Progressive era, that tumultuous time when the nation was coming unseamed and reform was in the air. The story is told through the intense friendship of Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft "a close relationship that strengthens both men before it ruptures in 1912, when they engage in a brutal fight for the presidential nomination that divides their wives, their children, and their closest friends, while crippling the progressive wing of the Republican Party, causing Democrat Woodrow Wilson to be elected, and changing the country's history. *The Bully Pulpit* is also the story of the muckraking press, which arouses the spirit of reform that helps Roosevelt push the government to shed its laissez-faire attitude toward robber barons, corrupt politicians, and corporate exploiters of our natural resources. The muckrakers are portrayed through the greatest group of journalists ever assembled at one magazine "Ida Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker, Lincoln Steffens, and William Allen White" teamed under the mercurial genius of publisher S.S. McClure. Goodwin's narrative is founded upon a wealth of primary materials. The correspondence of more than four hundred letters between Roosevelt and Taft begins in their early thirties and ends only months before Roosevelt's death. Edith Roosevelt and Nellie Taft kept diaries. The muckrakers wrote hundreds of letters to one another, kept journals, and wrote their memoirs. The letters of Captain Archie Butt, who served as a personal aide to both Roosevelt and Taft, provide an intimate view of both men. *The Bully Pulpit*, like Goodwin's brilliant chronicles of the Civil War and World War II, exquisitely demonstrates her distinctive ability to combine scholarly rigor with accessibility. It is a major work of history "an examination of leadership in a rare moment of activism and reform that brought the country closer to its founding ideals.

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Customer Reviews

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "bully pulpit" means "a public office or position of authority that provides its occupant with an outstanding opportunity to speak out on any issue." It was first used by Theodore Roosevelt, when asked for his view on the presidency, in this quotation: "I suppose my critics will call that preaching, but I have got such a bully pulpit!" The word bully itself was an adjective in the lingo of the time meaning "first-rate," somewhat comparable to the recent use of the word "awesome." Hence the title of this review. The term "bully pulpit" is still used today to describe the president's power to influence the public. "The Bully Pulpit" clocks in at a hefty 928 pages in the hardcover edition, the reason why I chose the e-book version, and is lavishly illustrated. Each chapter starts with a contemporary photograph or cartoon beneath the chapter-title, and there's a separate photograph-section at the back of the e-book that has 68 photographs. Although a massive tome, it should be noted that "only" about 56% of the book consists of the main narrative. The rest of the volume is taken up by the extensive endnotes and index. Rather than write another biography about a famous American President, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Doris Kearns Goodwin has chosen for a different approach. In "The Bully Pulpit", she recounts the birth of America's Progressive Era through the close friendship between two Presidents: Theodore Roosevelt and his successor William Howard Taft. But rather than focusing exclusively on these two, she enlivens her account by twisting through the narrative the story of the "muckrakers" (another term coined by TR): the group of investigative journalists from magazine McClure's.

A bully pulpit is a position sufficiently conspicuous to provide an opportunity to speak out and be listened to. Teddy Roosevelt coined this term and lived by it to set the direction of the 20th century with regard to role of the Presidency versus the capitalist elite. This wonderful book frames the man's character by presenting Roosevelt as a man making a stance by enforcing the Sherman Act of 1890 (an antitrust law) that was basically overlooked while the big business bosses established their vast monopolies & power in the late 19th to earlier 20th century. Roosevelt a New York

upper-class milieu confronts his fellow upper class rival J.P. Morgan by braking up his trans- ocean stream ship & railroad line thereby enforcing the Sherman Act. Typically monopolists caught bending this law were addressed behind closed door deals rather than on a national public stage. Roosevelt's and his people took the fight to Morgan & won a Supreme Court decision. You will read about the friendship & common cause between two Republican comrades that wish to reform and clean up corruption in politics. William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt both emerge as Progressive Republicans and soon become friends. Taft came from a privileged back ground as well, but had a mild manner wishing to please family versus Teddy's driven ambition to confront and change America. Roosevelt brings Taft along as his Secretary of war then supports him as his successor. Ms. Goodwin has cleverly developed the story of these two men by showing the path of Taft as President to push congress to reform big business through regulatory amendments and measures to enforce them, while Roosevelt who regretted not pursuing another term wishes to take action on child labor and women's work issues.

Doris Kearns Goodwin is a very popular historian, whose last work Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln was widely acclaimed, and therefore I was expectant of another such achievement in this new book, but it just wasn't for me. The research is extensive, the notes on primary sources exhaustive, the writing style is, as with all her work, excellent, but the book is too much. I can't help but think of a George Harrison song, Long Long Long. The first one hundred fifty pages are bios of TR and Taft, and their families. There is nothing new here. There have been so many works on Roosevelt, and I felt that Edmund Morris covered his early years best in The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt (Modern Library Paperbacks). While the information is good, it is too much. The writing concerning the "golden age of journalism" is good and an important part of the story of our nation's reform from more than one hundred years ago. The relationship between Taft and TR is the most interesting of the book, and that part moved quickly, and the differences in style and personality are nicely portrayed, but the inclusion of so many things from the journalism side just cluttered up the work. The book would have been less cumbersome and more interesting if the focus had been on the two men, with the journalism portion given only a supporting role. In the end, the split between the two great men ushered Woodrow Wilson into the White House.

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