

COURAGE, HONESTY, AND COMMON SENSE

Truman Library Teachers' Conference
"Presidential Character and Decision
Making"
July 2022

THEODORE
Roosevelt
CENTER
AT DICKINSON STATE UNIVERSITY



THEODORE ROOSEVELT CENTER

TR Center - Theodore Roosevelt x +
theodorerooseveltcenter.org
Entertainment Shopping Finance Affiliations Writing TR Center Facebook Twitter Reddit Heart River Properti...

THEODORE ROOSEVELT CENTER
AT DICKINSON STATE UNIVERSITY

Scholars | Students | Educators | News | Blog
SEARCH

HOME LEARN ABOUT TR RESEARCH GET INVOLVED ABOUT US

17th Annual Theodore Roosevelt Symposium
Join us as we explore the athletic world in the age of Roosevelt.
[READ MORE >](#)

THE ATHLETE IN THE ARENA:
Roosevelt and the Development of Modern Sports

LEARN ABOUT TR
Statesman, intellectual, adventurer and family man, Theodore Roosevelt lived "The Strenuous Life" with vigor and passion.
LEARN MORE ABOUT TR'S STORY
Theodore Roosevelt Biography in Brief
Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th President of the United States. He was born on October 27, 1858, in New York City and died on January 6, 1919. In the sixty intervening years he lived one of the most strenuous lives in American history.
READ OUR NEWEST ARTICLES
Latest Articles Index

EXPLORE THE TR TIMELINE
Find significant dates in Theodore Roosevelt's life, both personal and public, including the time he spent in the Badlands of Dakota Territory.
TR'S LIFE AT A GLANCE
The Life of Theodore Roosevelt
Learn about the major events of Theodore Roosevelt's life from his birth in 1858 to his death in 1919.
A LOOK AT TR IN THE DAKOTA BADLANDS
TR in the Badlands

DIGITAL LIBRARY
Search Our Digital Collections
FEATURED RECORDS
Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Melville Madison Bigelow
Theodore Roosevelt appreciates Melville Madison Bigelow's suggestion, which is more radical than h...
The kept judge

https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org

PRESIDENTIAL WISDOM

“In any moment of decision,
the best thing you can do is the
right thing, the next best thing
is the wrong thing, and the
worst thing you can do is
nothing.”

- Theodore Roosevelt



...NOT QUITE!



“I declined to adopt the view that what was imperatively necessary for the Nation could not be done by the President unless he could find some specific authorization to do it. My belief was that it was not only his right but his duty to do anything that the needs of the Nation demanded unless such action was forbidden by the Constitution or by the laws. Under this interpretation of executive power I did and caused to be done many things not previously done by the President and the heads of the departments. I did not usurp power, but I did greatly broaden the use of executive power.”

- An Autobiography, 1913.

TR'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE PRESIDENCY



TR'S PHILOSOPHY OF CHARACTER



“Character, which makes a man a good citizen in private life, which make him fit to do his share of the work of the state in public life. Character, into which so many elements enter, into which especially these three elements enter-the elements of courage, of honesty and finally common sense.”

- post-Labor Day speech, Sep 2, 1902, Worcester, MA

COURAGE

There is not a man of us here who does not at times fall, who does not meet failure; not one. And the difference between the man and the sham man is that failure daunts the one and merely makes the other try harder to overcome it. ... The intelligent man who is afraid he cannot do anything who meets an obstacle he cannot surmount, who is cowed by it - that man, with all his mental qualities in addition to a good body, will be passed by in the race of life as sure as the sun rises in the east.

[- Address to the YMCA, Topeka, KS, May 1, 1903](#)



<https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o293147>

HONESTY



<https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o289574>

“The first requisite of statesmanship is honesty. There is no stupidity equal to the stupidity of dishonesty. In the end it will frustrate even the most clever and brilliant maker of phrases and student of history; inevitably it makes a misuse of and misinterprets honest men and honest methods, trusts no one, shuts out good counsel and accepts only that of the able courtier rather than the honest patriot. Honesty is not only the best, it is the only policy that can win anything anywhere that is lasting and beneficial.”

- Letter to Mrs. Nicholson, July 18, 1916

COMMON SENSE

“Common sense teaches us to have high ideals and yet to be thoroughly practical in our efforts to realize them. Common sense teaches us not to push a good doctrine to an impossible extreme. Common sense teaches us that the best theory is useless unless it stands the test of actual experience, and that an ounce of performance is worth a ton of promise. Common sense teaches us that high sounding words are not merely useless but mischievous, unless they are translated into deeds that correspond to them. Common sense teaches us never to pass a law that we do not think can be enforced, never to make a treaty which we do not think a nation will live up to.”

[- Speech in Montevideo, Uruguay, November 5, 1913](#)



ANTHRACITE COAL STRIKE

“I made every effort to get the two sides to agree. When I failed, I decided that I would act myself. I held that where the public necessity was national and imperative it became the duty of the Chief of the Nation to act.”

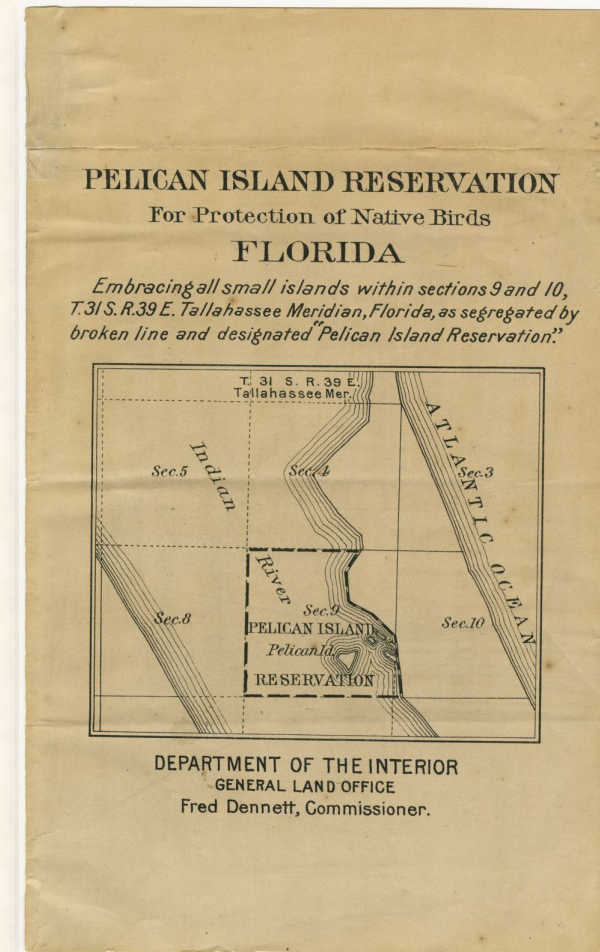
- Address, “The Square Deal in Industry,” October 14, 1916,
Wilkes-Barre, PA



PELICAN ISLAND

“Spring would not be spring without bird songs, any more than it would be spring without buds and flowers, and I only wish that besides protecting the songsters, the birds of the grove, the orchard, the garden and the meadow, we could also protect birds of the sea shore and of the wilderness. . . When I hear of the destruction of a species I feel just as if all the works of some great writer had perished; as if we had lost all instead of only part of Polybius or Livy.”

- [Excerpt from a piece in *The Outlook* magazine, Sep 16, 1911](#)
- (Originally written in a letter to Frank M. Chapman, Mar 22, 1899)



RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR



In international affairs, as things are in this very human world, each nation, while striving to act fairly by other nations, must rely on for its own safety only upon its own forethought and industrial efficiency and fighting edge. Unless it has this fighting edge it will go down. ... Moreover, looked at from the standpoint of a long course of years no nation can depend upon the mere friendship of any other, even though that friendship is genuine, unless it has itself such strength as to make its own friendship of value in return.

BROWNSVILLE INCIDENT



“I think it is even more important from the standpoint of the colored man than from the standpoint of the white man to establish the fact that in crimes generally there must under no circumstances be meted punishment, or favoritism shown the criminal, because of his color; and there must not be anything like race solidarity permitted in either punishing or shielding. The individual, not the race, must be held responsible for the crime, and this must be recognized alike by the race to which the criminal belongs and the race to which the victim belongs.”

- Letter to US Senator (R) from Indiana James A. Hemenway, June 17, 1907

THANK YOU

<https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/>

Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)!

William J. Hansard, PhD

Digital Collections Specialist - Social Media/Education

william.hansard@dickinsonstate.edu