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IN TURBULENT TIMES

ORIS EARNS

ƆODWIN

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THE LEADER AND THE TIMES: HOW THEY LED

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IN TURBULENT TIMES

Foreword

ıraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and ⅃yndon Johnson—the lives and times of these four men have ıccupied me for half a century. I have awakened with them in the morning and thought about them when I went to bed at night. By immersing myself in manuscript collections, personal diaries, letters, oral histories, memoirs, newspaper archives, and periodicals, I searched for illuminating details that, taken together, would provide an intimate understanding of these men, their families, their friends, their colleagues, and the worlds in which they lived.

After writing four extensive books devoted to these men, I thought I knew them well before I embarked on this present study of leadership nearly five years ago. But as I observed them through the exclusive lens of leadership, I felt as if I were meeting them anew. There was much to learn as the elusive theme of leadership assumed center stage. As I turned to works of philosophy, literature, business, political science, and comparative studies, in addition to history and biography, I found myself engaged in an unexpectedly personal and emotional kind of storytelling. I returned to fundamental questions I had not asked so openly since my days of college and graduate school.

Are leaders born or made? Where does ambition come from? How does adversity affect the growth of leadership? Do the times make the leader or does the leader shape the times? How can a leader infuse a sense of purpose and meaning into people's lives? What is the difference between power, title, and leadership? Is leadership possible without a purpose larger than personal ambition?

How fondly I remember long and heated sessions over just such questions with my graduate school friends, arguing through the night with a fervor surpassing our level of knowledge. Yet, at bottom, something in these discussions was exactly on the mark, for they engaged us deeply, tapped our idealism, and challenged us to figure out how we wanted to live our own lives. I realize now that debates such as these put me on the path to find my own calling as a historian.

In Part One we see the four men when they first entered public life. In their twenties, when they set forth to forge their public identities, they appear very different from the sober, iconic countenances that have since saturated our culture, currency, and memorial sculpture. Their paths were anything but certain. Their stories abound in confusion, hope, failure, and fear. We follow mistakes made along the way, from inexperience, cockiness, lack of caution, outright misjudgments, and selfishness, and see the efforts made to acknowledge, conceal, or overcome these mistakes. Their struggles are not so different from our own.

No single path carried them to the pinnacle of political leadership. Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt were born to extraordinary privilege and wealth. Abraham Lincoln endured relentless poverty. Lyndon Johnson experienced sporadic hard times. They differed widely in temperament, appearance, and physical ability. They were endowed with a divergent range of qualities often ascribed to leadership—intelligence, energy, empathy, verbal and written gifts, and skills in dealing with people. They were united, however, by a fierce ambition, an inordinate drive to succeed. With perseverance and hard work, they all essentially made themselves leaders by enhancing and developing the qualities they were given.

All four men were recognized as leaders long before they reached the presidency. And like rocks in a polishing cylinder, all four were brought to shine by tumbling contact with a wide variety of people. They had found their vocation in politics. "I have often thought," American philosopher

both the Great Depression and World War II—or of Lyndon Johnson, whose southern roots and legislative wizardry ideally fitted him for the great civil rights struggle that altered the face of the country.

Four case studies will reveal these vastly different men in action during defining events of their times and presidencies. These four extended examples show how their leadership fit the historical moment as a key fits a lock. No key is exactly the same; each has a different line of ridges and notches along its blade. While there is neither a master key to leadership nor a common lock of historical circumstance, we can detect a certain family resemblance of leadership traits as we trace the alignment of leadership capacity within its historical context.

There is little question that the first three leaders studied here—Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Franklin Roosevelt—rank among our greatest presidents. Despite flawed decisions and mistaken judgments, all have been accorded a stable and honored place in communal memory.

The case of Lyndon Johnson is more problematic. I have wrestled with his place in history since the days when I worked with him in the White House as a twenty-four-year-old White House Fellow. That White House fellowship nearly came to an unceremonious end before it had even gotten started. Like many young people in my generation, I had been active in the anti–Vietnam War movement. Several months before my selection, a fellow graduate student and I had written an article, which we sent to *The New Republic*, calling for a third party candidate to challenge Lyndon Johnson in 1968. *The New Republic* published the article days after my selection as a Fellow had been announced. I was certain I would be dismissed from the program, but surprisingly, President Johnson said: "Oh bring her down here for a year and if I can't win her over no one can!" I stayed on after the fellowship and when his presidency was over accompanied him to the Texas ranch to assist him with his memoirs.

While Johnson's conduct during the war will continue to tarnish his legacy, the passing years have made clear that his leadership in civil rights and his domestic vision in the Great Society will stand the test of time.

Lyndon Johnson entered Congress as a protégé of Franklin Roosevelt. From his desk in the Oval Office, Johnson gazed directly across to a painting of his "political daddy" whose domestic agenda in the New Deal

he sought to surpass with his own Great Society. As a young man, Franklin Roosevelt had daydreamed of his own political ascent molded step by step upon the career of Theodore Roosevelt. From childhood, Theodore Roosevelt's great hero was Abraham Lincoln, whose patient resolve and freedom from vindictiveness blazed a trail that Theodore Roosevelt sought to follow all his life. And for Abraham Lincoln, the closest he found to an ideal leader was George Washington, whom he invoked when he bade farewell to his home in 1861, drawing strength from the first president as he left Illinois to assume a task "greater than that which rested upon Washington." If George Washington was the father of his country, then by affiliation and affinity, Abraham Lincoln was his prodigious son. These four men form a family tree, a lineage of leadership that spans the entirety of our country's history.

It is my hope that these stories of leadership in times of fracture and fear will prove instructive and reassuring. These men set a standard and a bar for all of us. Just as they learned from one another, so we can learn from them. And from them gain a better perspective on the discord of our times. For leadership does not exist in a void. Leadership is a two-way street. "I have only been an instrument," Lincoln insisted, with both accuracy and modesty, "the antislavery people of the country and the army have done it all." The progressive movement helped pave the way for Theodore Roosevelt's "Square Deal," much as the civil rights movement provided the fuel to ignite the righteous and pragmatic activism that enabled the Great Society. And no one communicated with people and heard their voices more clearly than Franklin Roosevelt. He absorbed their stories, listened carefully, and for a generation held a nonstop conversation with the people.

"With public sentiment, nothing can fail," Abraham Lincoln said, "without it nothing can succeed." Such a leader is inseparably linked to the people. Such leadership is a mirror in which the people see their collective reflection.

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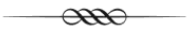

Ambition and the Recognition of Leadership

ONE

ABRAHAM

"Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition"

ıcoln was only twenty-three years old on March 9, 1832, when he eclared his intention to run for a seat in the Illinois state legislaıre. The frontier state had not yet developed party machinery to officially nominate candidates. Persons desiring to run simply put forward their own names on a handbill expressing their views on local affairs.

"Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition," Lincoln began. "I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem. How far I shall succeed in gratifying this ambition is yet to be developed. I am young and unknown to many of you."

For many ambitious young men in the nineteenth century, politics proved the chosen arena for advancement. While Lincoln's ambition was

"caught it," and even then was not able to rest until he had "bounded it north and bounded it south, and bounded it east and bounded it west."

Early on, Abraham revealed a keystone attribute essential to success in any field—the motivation and willpower to develop every talent he possessed to the fullest. "The ambition of the man soared above us," his childhood friend Nathaniel Grigsby recalled. "He read and thoroughly read his books whilst we played." When he first learned how to print the letters of the alphabet, he was so excited that he formed "letters, words and sentences wherever he found suitable material. He scrawled them in charcoal, he scored them in the dust, in the sand, in the snow—anywhere and everywhere that lines could be drawn." He soon became "the best penman in the neighborhood."

Sharing his knowledge with his schoolmates at every turn, he soon became "their guide and leader." A friend recalled the "great pains" he took to explain to her "the movements of the heavenly bodies," patiently telling her that the moon was not really sinking, as she initially thought; it was the earth that was moving, not the moon. "When he appeared in Company," another friend recalled, "the boys would gather & cluster around him to hear him talk." With kindness, playfulness, wit, and wisdom, he would explain "things hard for us to understand by stories—maxims—tales and figures. He would almost always point his lesson or idea by some story that was plain and near as that we might instantly see the force & bearing of what he said." He understood early on that concrete examples and stories provided the best vehicles for teaching.

He had developed his talent for storytelling, in part, from watching his father. Though Thomas Lincoln was unable to read or write, he possessed wit, a talent for mimicry, and an uncanny memory for exceptional stories. Night after night, Thomas would exchange tales with farmers, carpenters, and peddlers as they passed along the old Cumberland Trail. Young Lincoln sat spellbound in the corner. After listening to the adults chatter through the evening, Abraham would spend "no small part of the night walking up and down," attempting to figure out what they were saying. No small part of his motivation was to entertain his friends the next day with a simplified and riotous version of the arcane adult world.

He thrived when holding forth on a tree stump or log captivating the appreciative attention of his young audience, and before long had built a repertoire of stories and great storytelling skills. At the age of ten, a relative recalled, Abraham learned to mimic "the Style & tone" of the itinerant Baptist preachers who appeared irregularly in the region. To

the delight of his friends, he could reproduce their rip-roaring sermons almost word for word, complete with gestures of head and hand to emphasize emotion. Then, as he got older, he found additional material for his storytelling by walking fifteen miles to the nearest courthouse, where he soaked up the narratives of criminal trials, contract disputes, and contested wills and then retold the cases in lurid detail.

His stories often had a point—a moral along the lines of one of his favorite books, *Aesop's Fables*—but sometimes they were simply funny tales that he had heard and would retell with animation. When he began to speak, his face, the natural contours of which gave off a sorrowful aspect, would light up with a transforming "winning smile." And when he reached the end of his story, he would laugh with such heartiness that soon everyone was laughing with him.

Not all his humorous gifts were filled with gentle hilarity, and he would learn to muzzle his more caustic and mocking rejoinders. An early case in point was one Josiah Crawford who had lent Lincoln his copy of Parson Weems's *Life of Washington*. During a severe rainstorm, the book was damaged. Crawford demanded that Lincoln repay the value of the book by working two full days pulling corn. Lincoln considered this unfair, but nonetheless set to work until "there was not a corn blade left on a stalk." Later, however, he wrote a verse lampooning Crawford's unusually large, ugly nose, reciting "Josiah blowing his bugle" for the entertainment of his friends.

If he was the hub of his young circle's entertainment, he was also their foremost contrarian, willing to face their disapproval rather than abandon what he considered right. The boys in the neighborhood, one schoolmate recollected, liked to play a game of catching turtles and putting hot coals on their backs to see them wriggle. Abe not only told them "it was wrong," he wrote a short essay in school against "cruelty to animals." Nor did Lincoln feel compelled to share in the folkways of the frontier—a harsh culture in which children learned, for survival and for sport, to shoot and kill birds and animals. After killing a wild turkey with his father's rifle when he was eight years old, he never again "pulled a trigger on any larger game."

These attitudes were not merely moral postures. The young boy possessed a profound sense of empathy—the ability to put himself in the place of others, to imagine their situations and identify with their feelings. One winter night, a friend remembered, he and Abraham were walking home when they saw something lying in a mud hole. "It was a man, he

was dead drunk," and "nearly frozen." Abe picked him up and carried him all the way to his cousin's house, where he built a fire to warm him up. On another occasion, when Lincoln was walking with a group of friends, he passed a pig caught in a stretch of boggy ground. The group continued on for half a mile when Lincoln suddenly stopped. He insisted on turning back to rescue the pig. He couldn't bear the pain he felt in his own mind when he thought of the pig.

Lincoln's size and strength bolstered his authority with his peers. From an early age, he was more athletic than most of the boys in the neighborhood, "ready to out-run, out-jump and out-wrestle or out-lift anybody." As a young man, one friend reported, he "could carry what 3 ordinary men would grunt & sweat at." Blessed with uncommon strength, he was also favored with robust health. Relatives recalled that he was never sick. Lincoln's physical dominance proved a double-edged sword, however, for he was expected, from the age of eight to the age of twenty-one, to accompany his father into the fields, wielding an axe, felling trees, digging up stumps, splitting rails, plowing, and planting. His father considered that bones and muscles were "sufficient to make a man" and that time in school was "doubly wasted." In rural areas, the only schools were subscription schools, so it not only cost a family money to give a child an education, but the classroom took the child away from manual labor. Accordingly, when Lincoln reached the age of nine or ten, his own formal education was cut short.

Left on his own, Abraham had to educate himself. He had to take the initiative, assume responsibility for securing books, decide what to study, become his own teacher. He made things happen instead of waiting for them to happen. Gaining access to reading material proved nearly insurmountable. Relatives and neighbors recalled that Lincoln scoured the countryside to borrow books and read every volume "he could lay his hands on." A book was his steadfast companion. Every respite from the daily manual tasks was a time to read a page or two from *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Aesop's Fables*, pausing while resting his horse at the end of a long row of planting.

Some leaders learn by writing, others by reading, still others by listening. Lincoln preferred reading aloud in the presence of others. "When I read aloud," Lincoln later explained, "two senses catch the idea: first, I see what I read; second, I hear it, and therefore I remember it better." Early on, he possessed a vivid sensibility for the music and rhythm of poetry and drama; he recited long stanzas and passages from memory. When the time came to return the borrowed books, he had made them his

own. As he explored literature and the history of the country, the young Lincoln, already conscious of his own powers, began to imagine ways of living beyond those of his family and neighbors.

When his father found his son in the field reading a book or, worse still, distracting fellow workers with tales or passages from one of his books, he would angrily break up the performance so work might continue. On occasion, he would go so far as to destroy Abraham's books and whip him for neglecting his labors. To Thomas, Abraham's chronic reading was tantamount to dereliction, a mark of laziness. He thought his son was deceiving himself with his quest for education. "I tried to stop it, but he has got that fool idea into his head, and it can't be got out," Thomas told a friend.

At times, when the tensions with his father seemed unbearable, when the gap between his lofty ambitions and the reality of his circumstances seemed too great to bridge, Lincoln was engulfed by sadness, revealing a pensive, melancholy side to his temperament that became more pronounced as time went by. "His melancholy dript from him as he walked," said his junior law partner William Herndon, an observation echoed by dozens of others. "No element of Mr. Lincoln's character was so marked," recalled his friend Henry Clay Whitney, "as his mysterious and profound melancholy." Yet, if melancholy was part of his nature, so, too, was the life-affirming humor that allowed him to perceive what was funny or ludicrous in life, lightening his despair and fortifying his will. Both Lincoln's storytelling and his humor, friends believed, were "necessary to his very existence"; they were intended "to whistle off sadness."

In the end, the unending strain with his father enhanced, rather than diminished, young Lincoln's ambition. Year after year, as he persevered in defiance of his father's wishes, managing his negative emotions and exercising his will to slowly master one subject after another, he developed an increasing belief in his own strengths and powers. He came to trust "that he was going to be something," his cousin Sophie Hanks related, slowly creating what one leadership scholar calls "a vision of an alternative future." He told a neighbor he did not "intend to delve, grub, shuck corn, split rails and the like. I'll study and get ready, and then the chance will come."

Opportunity arrived the moment he reached twenty-one, the age of majority, releasing him from his near-indentured lot in his father's home. "Seeing no prospect of betterment in his condition, so long as his fortune

was interwoven with that of his father," one friend recalled him saying, "he at last endeavored to strike out into the broad world." Bundling his sparse possessions on his shoulders, he headed west, walking more than one hundred miles to reach New Salem, where he had been promised a job as a clerk and bookkeeper in a general store. A bustling small town, recently sprung up along the Sangamon River, New Salem boasted a gristmill that "supplied a large section of the county with its meal, flour and lumber." The entire settlement consisted of a few hundred people, fifteen log cabins, a tavern, a church, a blacksmith, a schoolmaster, a preacher, and a general store.

To the villagers of New Salem, the tall young stranger struck them as odd and unappealing. "Gawky and rough-looking," with dark weathered skin, great ears, high cheekbones, and black quill-like hair, he was dressed in "the most ludicrous character. His long arms protruded through the sleeves of a coat," and his pantaloons were "far better adapted for a man of much less height, which left exposed a pair of socks."

From this unprepossessing start, how was Lincoln able to establish himself so quickly in the minds of the residents that within eight months they encouraged him to run for a seat in the state legislature? The answer, one local man explained, lay in Lincoln's sociability, his "open—candid—obliging & honest" good nature. "Everybody loved him." He would help travelers whose carriages were mired in mud; he volunteered to chop wood for widows; he was ever ready to lend a "spontaneous, unobtrusive" hand. Almost anyone who had contact with him in the little community spoke of his kindness, generosity, intelligence, humor, humility, and his striking, original character. Rather than golden mythmaking tales spun in the wake of Lincoln's historic presidency, these stories, told by the score, join into a chorus of the New Salem community to form an authentic portrait of a singular young man.

Working as a clerk in New Salem's general store provided Lincoln with an ideal foundation upon which to build his political career. The general store "filled a unique place" on the frontier. Beyond the sale of groceries, hardware, cloth, and bonnets, the village store provided "a kind of intellectual and social center," a place where villagers gathered to read the newspaper, discuss the local sporting contests, and, mainly, argue about politics in an era when politics was a consuming, almost universal concern. For the farmers, who might ride fifty miles to grind grain into flour at the village gristmill, the store offered a common meeting place to unwind, exchange opinions, share stories.

only after being defeated "some 5 or 6 times" would he deem it "a disgrace" and be certain "never to try it again." So, along with the uncertainty of whether his ambition would be realized was the promise of resilience.

His campaign had scarcely begun when he volunteered to join the Illinois militia to fight against the Sac and Fox Indians during what became known as the Black Hawk War. To his surprise, he later said, he was elected captain of his company. No later "success in life," he told a journalist a month after he had been nominated for president, had provided him "so much satisfaction."

When he returned to New Salem after three months of service, he had only four weeks to campaign before the August election. Traveling by horseback across a sparsely populated county the size of Rhode Island, Lincoln spoke at country stores and small village squares. On Saturdays, he joined his fellow candidates in the largest towns, where farmers gathered at auctions, "vandoos"—"to dispose of produce, buy supplies, see their neighbors and get the news." The speaking would start in mid-morning and last until sunset. Each candidate was given a turn. Lincoln, one contender recalled, "did not follow the beaten track of other Speakers." He set himself apart by the candid way in which he approached every question and by his habit of illustrating his arguments with stories based on observations "drawn from all classes of Society" between men and women in their daily lives. At times, his language was awkward, as were his gestures, but few who heard him speak ever forgot "either the argument of the Story, the Story itself, or the author."

When the votes were counted, Lincoln found he had lost the election. His lack of success, however, "did not dampen his hopes nor sour his ambition," a friend recalled. On the contrary, he gained confidence from the knowledge that in his own town of New Salem, he had received an overwhelming total of 277 of the 300 votes cast. After the election, Lincoln worked several jobs to procure bread and keep "body and soul together." He served as New Salem's postmaster, and then, after teaching himself the principles of geometry and trigonometry involved in determining boundaries of land parcels, he was appointed deputy surveyor for Sangamon County, a position that allowed him to travel from one village to another. So swiftly did his reputation for storytelling precede him, a friend of Lincoln's recalled, that no sooner had he arrived in a village

than "men and boys gathered from far and near, ready to carry chains, drive stakes, and blaze trees, if they could hear Lincoln's odd stories and jokes."

In 1834, now twenty-five, he ran for the state legislature once again, making good on his seriocomic warning that he would keep trying a half-dozen times before giving up. Once again, he traversed the district on horseback, delivering speeches, shaking hands, introducing himself, joining in local activities. Seeing thirty men in the field during a harvest, he offered to help, taking hold of the scythe "with perfect ease," thereby winning every vote in the crowd. His ungainly appearance initially put people off. "Can't the party raise a better candidate than that," a doctor asked upon first seeing Lincoln. Then, after hearing him talk, he changed his mind: "Why, he knows more than all of them put together."

This time, having expanded his contacts throughout the county, Lincoln easily won. As he prepared to leave for the capital to take up his seat in the legislature, his friends chipped in to help him buy "suitable clothing" that would allow him "to maintain his new dignity." They recognized a leader in their midst just as surely as he had begun to feel the makings of a leader within himself.

The rookie assemblyman was, in the words of his friend William Herndon, "anything but conspicuous" during the opening session of the state legislature. He remained "quietly in the background," patiently educating himself about how the Assembly operated, acquainting himself with the intricacies of parliamentary procedure. He carefully monitored debates and discerned the ideological rifts between his fellow Whigs and the Democrats. Aware that he was in the presence of an unusually talented group of legislators (including two future presidential candidates, six future United States senators, eight future congressmen, and three State Supreme Court justices), Lincoln was neither bashful nor timid. He was simply paying close attention, absorbing, readying to act as soon as he had accumulated sufficient knowledge to do so. A finely developed sense of timing—knowing when to wait and when to act—would remain in Lincoln's repertoire of leadership skills the rest of his life.

Between legislative sessions, Lincoln began to read law, knowing that a legal education would nourish his political career. An autodidact by necessity, he "studied with nobody," he later said, poring over cases and precedents deep into the night after working long days as surveyor and

postal clerk. He borrowed law books, one at a time, from the set of John Stuart, a fellow legislator who had a law practice in Springfield. After finishing each book, he would hike the twenty miles from New Salem to Springfield to secure another loaner. An unwavering purpose supported him. "Get the books, and read and study them," he told a law student seeking advice two decades later. "Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed, is more important than any other one thing."

At the commencement of the second session, the transformation of Lincoln's demeanor and activity was clear. He was suddenly conspicuous, as if something in him had awakened. So thoroughly had he mastered both the legalese required for writing legislation and the intricacies of parliamentary procedure that his colleagues called on him to draft bills and amendments. The clear, legible handwriting he had perfected as a child proved invaluable when public laws and documents were initially written in longhand. More importantly, when he finally rose to speak on the Assembly floor, his colleagues witnessed what the citizens of New Salem had already seen—a young man with a remarkable array of oratorical gifts. "They say I tell a great many stories," Lincoln told a friend. "I reckon I do; but I have learned from long experience that *plain* people, take them as they run, are more easily *influenced* through the medium of a broad and humorous illustration than any other way." As people read his speeches in the newspapers or heard about his lively metaphors and analogies through word of mouth, awareness of Lincoln's signal ability to communicate spread throughout the state.

Heralded for his leadership in moving the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield, Lincoln, the second youngest member of the Assembly, was selected by the full Whig caucus as their minority leader. Their choice signified not only their deference to Lincoln's language skills and his mastery of parliamentary procedure, but what became known as his "crowning gift of political diagnosis"—his ability to intuit the feelings and intentions of his fellow Whigs and the opposing Democrats as well. After silently considering his colleagues' strategy and opinions, he would stand and simply say: "From your talk, I gather the Democrats will do so and so." If we want "to checkmate them," here are the maneuvers we should take in the days that follow. So clear was his recommended course of action that "his listeners wondered why they had not seen it that way themselves." It was "his thorough knowledge of human nature," one fellow legislator observed, that "made him an overmatch for his compeers and for any man that I have ever known."

"We followed his lead," a Whig colleague recalled, "but he followed nobody's lead; he hewed the way for us to follow, and we gladly did so. He could grasp and concentrate the matters under discussion, and his clear statement of an intricate or obscure subject was better than an ordinary argument." Democrats, of course, felt otherwise. How Lincoln responded to attacks directed against him and his party reveals much about his temperament and the character of his developing leadership. Such was the lure of politics in the antebellum era that discussions and debates between Whigs and Democrats regularly attracted the fanatic attention of hundreds of people. Opponents attacked each other in fiery, abusive language, much to the delight of raucous audiences, inciting an atmosphere that could burst into fistfights, even, on occasion, guns being drawn. While Lincoln was as thin-skinned and prickly as most politicians, his retorts were generally full of such good-humored raillery that members of both parties could not help but laugh and relax in the pleasure of his entertaining and well-told stories.

So memorable were several of Lincoln's counterattacks that citizens could recite them afterward word for word. The "lightning-rod" episode is a case in point. A crowd was beginning to disperse from a spirited rally at which Lincoln had spoken, when George Forquer stood up. A prominent Whig who had recently shifted to the Democratic Party after receiving a lucrative appointment as land register, Forquer had lately built a fancy house, complete with a newfangled lightning rod. Standing on the stage, Forquer declared that it was time for someone to take young Lincoln down, which he attempted to do with ridicule. Though the attack had "roused the lion within him," Lincoln remained quiet until Forquer finished, silently preparing his rejoinder. "The gentleman commenced by saying the young man would have to be taken down," Lincoln began, drolly admitting, "I desire to live, and I desire place and distinction; but I would rather die now than, like the gentleman, live to see the day I would change my politics for an office worth three thousand dollars a year, and then feel compelled to erect a lightning-rod to protect a guilty conscience from an offended God." The outburst of laughter provoked from the audience was thunderous.

On certain occasions, however, Herndon recalled, Lincoln's humor ran amok, his light mockery turning vindictive, even cruel. After Democrat Jesse Thomas had "indulged in some fun" at Lincoln's expense, Lincoln displayed an aspect of his great theatrical skill, resorting to mimicry, at which he had no rival. "He imitated Thomas in gesture and voice,

at times caricaturing his walk and the very motion of his body." As the crowd responded with yells and cheers, Lincoln "gave way to intense and scathing ridicule," mocking still further the "ludicrous" way Thomas spoke. Seated in the audience, Thomas broke down in tears, and soon the "skinning of Thomas" became "the talk of the town." Realizing he had badly overstepped, Lincoln went to Thomas and gave him a heartfelt apology, and for years afterward, the memory of that night filled Lincoln "with the deepest chagrin." Increasingly, though not always, he was able to rein in his impulse to throw a hurtful counterpunch. He was after something more significant than the gratification of an artfully delivered humiliation.

Even early on, Lincoln's moral courage and convictions outweighed his ferocious ambition. At the age of twenty-six, he made a public statement on slavery that threatened to drastically diminish his support in a state that was then largely settled by southerners. The rise of abolitionism in the Northeast, coupled with the refusal of some northern states to return fugitive slaves, had led legislatures in both South and North to pass resolutions confirming the constitutional right to slavery. The General Assembly in Illinois fell in line. By the disproportionate vote of seventy-seven to six, the assembly resolved that "we highly disapprove of the formation of abolition societies" and hold "sacred" the "right of property in slaves." Lincoln was among the six who voted no. Registering a formal protest, he proclaimed that "the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy." He had always believed, he later said, that "if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." Lincoln's protest stopped well short of abolitionism. Until such time as the Constitution empowered Congress to eliminate slavery, he felt that his hands were tied against interfering where slavery was already established. Fearing anarchy above all, he believed it essential to abide by a law until that settled law be lawfully changed. Though carefully worded and "pruned of any offensive allusions," the protest was, nonetheless, writer William Stoddard observed, "a bold thing to do, in a day when to be an antislavery man, even at the North, was to be a sort of social outcast and political pariah."

Remaining true to his original promise to do everything he could to secure governmental aid for infrastructure improvements, however, was more personal and pressing to Lincoln in these early years of his political career than the issue of slavery. He used the power of his leading position

followers' needs for liberty, equality, and opportunity. In less than half a dozen years, seemingly from nothing and from nowhere, he had risen to become a respected leader in the state legislature, a central figure in the fight for internal improvements, an instrumental force behind the planting of the new capital, and a practicing lawyer. Given his beginnings, he had traveled an immense distance; yet, given the inordinate nature of his ambition to render himself worthy of his fellow men, he had hardly begun.

TWO

THEODORE

"I rose like a rocket"

ıeodore Roosevelt, like Abraham Lincoln, was twenty-three years ɔld when he made his first foray into the political world—but here the similarities end. In Lincoln's rural environment, anyone who wanted to be a candidate could step up and nominate himself, "run on his own hook," and speak on his own behalf. Since voters came to encounter candidates firsthand in general stores and village squares, personal impressions mattered more than party affiliation. Lincoln's two-thousand-word statement announcing his aspiration for a seat in the state legislature revealed his deepest personal ambitions as well as his stand on local issues. In contrast, Roosevelt's thirty-three-word statement—devoid of promises, pledges, and personality—was a simple acknowledgment of a nomination already secured: "Having been nominated as a candidate for member of

Assembly for this District, I would esteem it a compliment if you would honor me with your vote and personal influence on Election Day."

In the half-century span between Lincoln's and Roosevelt's beginnings in public life, the means of entry into politics had radically changed. While Lincoln had stepped forward on his own, young Roosevelt was chosen to run by the local boss, Joe Murray, a burly red-haired Irish immigrant. The 21st Assembly District where Roosevelt dwelled embraced both the elegant brownstones along Madison Avenue and the crowded tenements on the West Side of Manhattan. Known as the Silk Stocking District, it was one of the few reliably Republican districts in the city. Young Roosevelt was not widely known. The boss "picked me as the candidate with whom he would be most likely to win," Roosevelt later granted. "I had at that time neither the reputation nor the ability to have won the nomination for myself."

In selecting Roosevelt, a second-year law student at Columbia, the Irish boss recognized the allure of the Roosevelt name. Theodore's father, the late Theodore Roosevelt Sr., had been a highly respected philanthropist who had worked to improve the lives of poor children through his work with the Children's Aid Society, Miss Sattery's Night School for Little Italians, and the Newsboys' Lodging House. Indeed, when the nomination of Theodore Roosevelt was announced, the *New York Daily Tribune* suggested that in voting for the son of "one of the most loved and respected" figures in the history of New York, voters would have the opportunity "to show their regard for an honored name." The boss also understood that Roosevelt had the means to contribute to his own campaign. So while Lincoln, as he conceded in his opening statement, had "no wealthy or popular relations" to recommend him, it was precisely those relations and that wealth that brought young Roosevelt to the attention of the Republican boss.

Looking back, Roosevelt credited "the element of chance"—the demographics of the assembly district and the power of his family name—as the chief instrument behind his first opportunity. He also understood, however, that when an opportunity comes, a person has "to take advantage" of that opportunity. "I put myself in the way of things happening, and they happened." Indeed, it was young Roosevelt himself who had taken the initiative to become a member of the local Republican Association, which held its meetings at Morton Hall at the corner of 59th Street and Fifth Avenue. Morton Hall was a large smoke-filled room over a saloon with shabby benches, cuspidors, and poker tables. To join the

party then was "no simple thing," Roosevelt later recalled. "The party was still treated as a private corporation, and in each district the organization formed a kind of social and political club. A man had to be regularly proposed for and elected into this club, just as into any other club."

When he began inquiring about the local Republican organization, he was warned by his privileged circle, "men of cultivated taste and easy life," that district politics were "low," the province of "saloon-keepers, horse-car conductors and the like," men who "would be rough and brutal and unpleasant to deal with." Their disdain did not dissuade Roosevelt, who turned their condescension on its head: "I answered that if this were so it merely meant that the people I knew did not belong to the governing class, and that the other people did—and that I intended to be one of the governing class; that if they proved too hard-bit for me I supposed I would have to quit, but that I certainly would not quit until I had made the effort and found out whether I really was too weak to hold my own in the rough and tumble."

So, once again, questions emerge: What attracted this abundantly privileged, sheltered young man to the alien and contemptible world of local politics? Where did his ambition come from?

When Roosevelt sat down at the age of fifty-three to trace the narrative that led from this first run for office to the White House, he provided his own useful, albeit sometimes misleading, answers to some of these questions. In order to frame the discussion, he methodically distinguishes two types of success—whether in the arts, in battle, or in politics.

The first success, he argues, belongs to the man "who has in him the natural power to do what no one else can do, and what no amount of training, no perseverance or will power, will enable an ordinary man to do." He cites the poet who could write the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the president who could "deliver the Gettysburg Address," and Lord Nelson at Trafalgar as manifestations of genius, examples of men assigned extraordinary gifts at birth.

The second and more common type of success, he maintains, is not dependent on such unique inborn attributes, but on a man's ability to develop ordinary qualities to an extraordinary degree through ambition and the application of hard, sustained work. Unlike genius, which can inspire, but not educate, self-made success is democratic, "open to the average man of sound body and fair mind, who has no remarkable mental

or physical attributes," but who enlarges each of those attributes to the maximum degree. He suggests that it is "more useful to study this second type," for with determination, anyone "can, if he chooses, find out how to win a similar success himself."

It is clear from the start of Roosevelt's story of his leadership journey that he unequivocally aligns himself with this second type of success. His story is the tale of a sickly boy with a timid temperament who, believing in "the gospel of will," transforms his body and emboldens his spirit. Through great effort and discipline, his weak body becomes strong; through visualization and practice, he confronts fear and becomes brave. "I like to believe that, by what I have accomplished without great gifts, I may be a source of encouragement to Americans."

This picture of a young boy building his character, brick by brick, until he develops a moral concept of leadership based upon that character, is simplistic and incomplete; yet, remarkably, however, it contains large elements of truth. "Teedie" Roosevelt was, indeed, a nervous, unhealthy, fragile child, whose boyhood was shaped by terrifying attacks of bronchial asthma. Generally stealing on him in the middle of the night, these attacks created the sensation of suffocating or drowning. Hearing his son coughing, wheezing, and struggling for breath, Theodore Senior, known as Thee, would rush into the bedroom. Taking his son into his arms, he would carry him around the house for hours until he could breathe and fall asleep. If this ritual proved inadequate, he would call for the servants to bring the horse and carriage round. Wrapping the gasping child in a blanket, he would drive the horse at a good clip through the gas-lit streets, believing that the bracing night winds would stir the child's lungs. "Nobody seemed to think I would live," Roosevelt later recalled. "My father—he got me breath, he got me lungs, strength—life."

While asthma weakened young Roosevelt's body, it indirectly spurred the development of an already precocious mind. "From the very fact that he was not able originally to enter into the most vigorous activities," his younger sister, Corinne, noted, "he was always reading or writing" with a most unusual "power of concentration." There was nothing ordinary about his intellectual vitality, his curiosity, or his ambitious dream life. Under the guiding eye of his father, who ceaselessly encouraged his son's intellectual and spiritual development, Teedie became a ferocious reader, transporting himself into the lives of the adventurous heroes he most admired—men with extraordinary bodily strength, who were fearless in battle, explorers in Africa, deerslayers living on the edge of the wilderness.

hotels and inns, in tents, and private homes. They spent two months in Rome, three weeks in Greece, two weeks in Lebanon, three weeks in Palestine, and an entire winter in Egypt. And always at night, Thee—solicitous father, mentor, minister, and tour guide—would read aloud the poetry, history, and literature of the region they were visiting. In Dresden they lived for two months with a German family. Thee had made arrangements to hire the host's daughter to immerse the children in the German language, literature, music, and art. Teedie was so intrigued with his lessons, which lasted six hours of the day, that he pleaded to extend them further. "And of course," Elliott complained, "I could not be left behind so we are working harder than ever in our lives."

While Abraham, gifted with physical agility and uncommon athletic prowess, had to *make* his mind, Teedie, privileged beyond measure with resources to develop his mind, had to *make* his body. By the age of ten, his chronic asthma required more and more days of bed rest. Thee feared that his son was becoming too familiar with illness, timidity, and frailness, following in the footsteps of his mother, who had become increasingly fragile after the destruction of her family's Georgia home during the Civil War. Plagued by palpitations, intestinal pain, debilitating headaches, and depression, she regularly withdrew to her room. Worried that Teedie, like Mittie, was becoming an invalid, Thee took his son aside: "Theodore, you have the mind but not the body, and without the help of the body the mind cannot go as far as it should. You must *make* your body. It is hard drudgery to make one's body, but I know you will do it." Teedie responded enthusiastically, promising his father: *"I'll make my body."*

With the help of his father, who hired the owner of a nearby gym to build a fully equipped gymnasium on the back porch, Teedie lifted weights and hoisted himself on horizontal bars, slowly, ever so slowly, expanding his physical capabilities and refashioning his body. That his bodily self-esteem remained vulnerable was apparent the following summer when he encountered two bullies while traveling alone on a stagecoach to Moosehead Lake in the north woods of Maine. "They found that I was a foreordained and predestined victim," he remembered years later, "and industriously proceeded to make life miserable for me." Finding he was unable to fight back, he resolved that he would "not again be put in such a helpless position." When he told his father he wanted to learn how to box, Thee hired the services of an ex-prizefighter to train his son.

Even when Teedie began studying for Harvard's entrance examinations, he continued his rigorous exercise regime. "The young man never

seemed to know what idleness was," observed Arthur Cutler, a recent Harvard graduate who had been hired to prepare Teedie for the exams. "Every leisure moment would find the last novel, some English classic or some abstruse book on natural history in his hands." Working long hours every day, Teedie studied Latin, Greek, literature, history, science, and mathematics, completing in two years what normally took three years of preparation. His ability to concentrate, one contemporary recalled, was such that "the house might fall about his head," and "he would not be diverted." When given an assignment, he rarely waited until the last moment. He regarded procrastination as a sin. Preparing ahead, he recognized, freed him from anxiety—a habit of mind that would set an example for his colleagues in the years ahead. Easily passing all eight examinations, he was admitted to Harvard, eager to leave his mark on the world, though not knowing exactly how.

"The story of Theodore Roosevelt," one biographer has suggested, "is the story of a small boy who read about great men and decided he wanted to be like them." There is a decided accuracy to this statement; but more than the fictional characters he admired, young Roosevelt found in his own father the most powerful exemplar of the heroic ideal. "My father was the best man I ever knew," Roosevelt later said. "He combined strength and courage with gentleness, tenderness, and great unselfishness." He was a public figure of great accomplishment in the philanthropic world, committed to "every social reform movement"; yet, "I never knew any one who got greater joy out of living than did my father." Roosevelt considered Thee not only "his best and most intimate friend," but a beloved mentor whose advice he heeded above all others. "It seems perfectly wonderful in looking back over my eighteen years of existence," he told his family, "to see how I have literally never spent an unhappy day, unless by my own fault!"

While more than intellectually prepared for his studies at Harvard, Theodore lacked the social skills of many of his fellow students. One classmate remembers him as "studious, ambitious, eccentric—not the sort to appeal at first." The shelves in his room were filled with dead lizards and stuffed birds. If academic nonchalance was in style, Theodore was strident and zealous, prone to interrupt class in order to barrage professors with objections and questions. He disdained fellow students who drank or smoked, and kept his distance from classmates until he could determine if their families shared his own station in life.

If young Roosevelt lacked the empathy and kindness that won Lincoln affection wherever he went, his original personality eventually captivated his classmates, who marveled at his irrepressible energy and lack of self-consciousness. Though he "never conquered asthma completely," suffering spasms at irregular intervals for decades, he had strengthened his body sufficiently so that he could participate in a wide array of sports. He wrestled and sparred, ran three or four miles a day, took up rowing and tennis, and continued to work out in the gym. Though he failed to excel in any of these activities, he derived immense satisfaction from the sheer fact of overcoming his earlier invalidism. While posting honor grades every semester, he organized a whist club and a finance club, joined the rifle club and the arts club, and was elected to the most prestigious social club of all, the Porcellian. Nor did he abandon his interest in birds, tramping miles from Cambridge to observe them, shoot them, and stuff them. In the midst of all this activity, he managed to teach Sunday school and take weekly dance classes. Of course he danced awkwardly—"just as you'd expect him to dance," a classmate recalled; "he hopped." His life at Harvard "broadened every interest," Corinne noted, "and did for him what had hitherto not been done, which was to give him confidence in his relationship with young men of his own age."

Theodore would need all the confidence he had developed at Harvard to withstand the single greatest sorrow he could possibly have imagined. In December of Theodore's sophomore year, his forty-six-year-old father fell ill with colon cancer. Earlier that fall, Thee had been nominated by President Rutherford B. Hayes to be collector of customs for the Port of New York, the most powerful federal post beyond the cabinet. Thee's nomination, which had to be approved by the Senate, was considered a triumph for civil service reformers and a blow to the corrupt politicians who, over the years, had treated the post as a private treasure chest. For weeks, the Senate was consumed by a battle between the reform element of the Republican Party and the machine politicians. The machine element won; Thee's nomination was turned down. "I fear for your future," Thee wrote his son. "We cannot stand so corrupt a government for any length of time"—a warning that would long reverberate in young Roosevelt's mind, helping to shape his embattled style of leadership.

Thee's death, three months after his diagnosis, brought Theodore unbearable sorrow. "I felt as if I had been stunned, or as if part of my life

had been taken away," he recorded in his diary. "If it were not for the certainty, that, as he himself has so often said, 'he is not dead but gone before,' I should almost perish." In the days that followed, Theodore filled his diary with thoughts of his father. "Every now and then it seems to me like a hideous dream," he wrote. "Sometimes when I fully realize my loss I feel as if I should go wild," for "he was everything to me; my father, companion, friend."

"The death of Mr. Roosevelt was a public loss," stated the *New York Times*. "Flags flew at half-mast all over the city. Rich and poor followed him to the grave." As Theodore contemplated his father's legacy, he began to take the measure of his own life. "Oh, how little worthy I am of such a father," he wrote in his diary. "How I wish I could ever do something to keep up his name."

For Theodore, who had been blessed with a positive temperament, it was only a matter of time before he recovered his spirits. In late June, he confided in his diary the surprising recognition that he was "leading the most intensely happy and healthy out of doors life," spending his days "riding on horseback, making long tramps through the woods and fields after specimens." In frenetic movement he found relief as well as an understanding of his fundamental character. "I could not be happier, except at those bitter moments when I realize what I have lost. Father was so invariably cheerful that I feel it would be wrong for me to be gloomy, and besides, fortunately or unfortunately, I am of a very buoyant temper, being a bit of an optimist."

"No one but my wife, if ever I marry," Theodore wrote in his diary, "will ever be able to take [my father's] place." The following fall, his junior year at Harvard, he fell in love with Alice Hathaway Lee, the seventeen-year-old daughter of a wealthy Brahmin family in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. "It was a real case of love at first sight," Theodore told a friend, "and my first love too." With the same single-mindedness he had given to his books, his specimen collections, and the building up of his body, he launched a crusade to make Alice his wife. He escorted her to parties and to dances, took her skating and sledding, on horseback rides over trails and long hikes through the woods. He introduced her to his friends at Harvard and brought her to meet his mother and siblings in New York. He laid siege to her family, playing whist with her parents, entertaining her younger brothers with ghost stories and tales of adventure. He made "everything subordinate to winning her." He asked her to marry him six months after they met. She turned him down, fearful

of taking such a big step at such a young age. Her rejection made him "nearly crazy," unable to study or sleep at night. He refused to give up, however, and eight months later, "after much pleading," she finally consented to be his wife. "I am so happy that I dare not trust my own happiness," he recorded the night she accepted. "I do not believe any man loved a woman more than I love her," he rejoiced two months later.

Privilege can stunt ambition, just as the lack of privilege can fire ambition. Privilege had not hampered the fierce drive that led Theodore to master every activity, from his voracious reading to the creation of the Roosevelt Museum of Natural History, from the rigorous workout regimen he maintained to the intense concentration that produced excellence at every stage of his education. Yet, under the sheltering wing of his father, privilege had allowed him to indulge his wide-ranging interests without the need of practical focus. Thee was the one who had provided his son with his own library, a private gym, a personal trainer, tutors in taxidermy and college preparation, and the means to collect specimens from around the world to fill his personal museum. During his freshman year at Harvard, his father had told him that if he were still committed to becoming a naturalist, he could do so. He explained "that he had made enough money to allow me to take up such a career and do non-remunerative work of value if I intended to do the very best work there was in me; but that I must not dream of taking it up as a dilettante." That Theodore Roosevelt did not become a naturalist he attributed to the curriculum at Harvard, where biology was treated "as purely a science of the laboratory and the microscope," ignoring the study of birds, animals, trees, and the outdoor world. For a young man who craved continual motion, who had methodically increased his physical endurance and strength over the years, the idea of a sedentary career, studying tissues under a microscope, held no allure.

Theodore's recognition that he was not suited for science revealed a growing self-awareness—a deepening understanding of his own temperamental strengths and weaknesses—that would become an essential tool in his leadership arsenal. Though he abandoned the prospects of a naturalist career, he never stopped pursuing outdoor adventures or his passion for the natural world. In the eighteen months after his father's death, he went on three expeditions into the deep wilderness regions of Maine, each sojourn further stretching the horizons of his cramped social

a monocle over one eye held in place by "a gold chain over his ear," a waistcoat and trousers "as tight as a tailor could make them," he looked the embodiment of a dandy, overly concerned with appearance and manners.

Yet, for Theodore and young Abraham, once the oddity of first impressions faded, perspectives shifted and people strongly connected with both of them. Week after week, Theodore visited Morton Hall, relaxing with working-class Irish and German immigrants, with butchers, carpenters, and grooms as they drank beer and smoked cigars, listening to their stories, joining them in games of cards, thoroughly enjoying the convivial, masculine atmosphere.

"I went around often enough to have the men get accustomed to me and to have me get accustomed to them," he later said, "so that we began to speak the same language and so that each could begin to live down in the other's mind what Bret Harte has called 'the defective quality of being a stranger.' " In time, the men at Morton Hall recognized they were in the presence of an exceptionally good-natured, earnest, appealing, intelligent young man, who fought for what he believed but accepted defeat with good humor. Watching Roosevelt over a period of months, local boss Joe Murray began to take "a paternal interest" in him, and finally concluded that this twenty-three-year-old son of privilege could make a credible run for the state legislature.

The time between the November first nomination and the election occupied but a single week, magnifying the vital role of the party organizations in bringing out the vote. To open the campaign, the boss planned to take Roosevelt on "a personal canvass through the saloons along Sixth Avenue." Saloonkeepers in those days played an instrumental political role, drawing up checklists of the "right" voters in the ward, making sure those voters got to the polls. The first stop was Valentine Young's bar. No sooner had Roosevelt been introduced to Mr. Young than trouble began. The saloonkeeper told Roosevelt that if he won, he expected him to vote for lowering the cost of the liquor licenses, which were much too high. Roosevelt replied that while he would treat all interests fairly, on the contrary, liquor taxes were "not high enough," and that he would vote to raise them. The boss swiftly shepherded Roosevelt away, deciding that he and his colleagues would henceforth take care of the Sixth Avenue vote, leaving Roosevelt to solicit votes among his neighbors and friends.

In the few statements he made, Roosevelt proclaimed that he was "owned by no man" and would enter the legislature "untrammeled and unpledged." With no sense of irony, he proclaimed that despite his friendship

with and key obligations to Joe Murray, he "would obey no boss and serve no clique." His pledge of independence struck a chord with the residents of the Silk Stocking District, who detested machine politics and rarely bothered to get involved in local elections. The strategy of running as an independent widened Roosevelt's appeal. Two days after the nomination, a list of twenty prominent New Yorkers, including future secretary of state Elihu Root and Columbia law professor Theodore Dwight, published a vigorous endorsement of young Roosevelt's candidacy. "We take much pleasure in testifying to our appreciation of his high character," the manifesto declared. "He is conspicuous for his honesty and integrity." That same day, Joseph Choate, the future ambassador to Great Britain, organized a circle of Thee's friends to contribute to Republican campaign coffers. "Men worth millions solicited the votes of their coachmen," journalist Jacob Riis reported, "and were glad to get them." On Election Day, the "brownstone vote" came out in much larger numbers than usual. Roosevelt won the Assembly seat with a margin almost twice the size of the typical Republican vote.

"My first days in the Legislature were much like those of a boy in a strange school," Roosevelt recalled. "My fellow-legislators and I eyed one another with mutual distrust." Not only was Roosevelt the youngest member, but the Democrats held a commanding majority, and he was a Republican from "the wealthiest district in New York." While Lincoln kept quietly in the background throughout his first session, watching and figuring, Roosevelt charged into action, often irritating his colleagues, violating the rules of parliamentary procedure.

With abrasive and manic energy, he interrogated his fellow assemblymen, aggressively soaking up everything they knew about how the Assembly operated. "How do you do this in your district and county," he would ask. "What is this thing and that thing?" Within a short period of time, "he knew more about State politics" than "ninety percent" of the veteran members did. In short order, he had divided the members into three groups: a small circle of fellow reformers, those he labeled "very good men;" another circle of "very bad men" beholden to Tammany Hall, New York's political machine, and susceptible to bribery; and a majority, "neither very good nor very bad," who could be swayed in either direction, depending on the strength of public opinion.

After scarcely two months in office, he seized the spotlight, displaying what would become a characteristic penchant for brash maneuvering.

Newspaper reports had accused state judge Theodore Westbrook of using court proceedings to help the Wall Street financier Jay Gould gain control of New York's elevated railway system. After investigating the matter further, Roosevelt was convinced that Westbrook had forged a corrupt alliance with the notorious robber baron. Rising from his seat, the rookie assemblyman delivered a fiery indictment of the judge that produced banner headlines, making Theodore Roosevelt "the most talked about man in the State." In an era of "subserviency to the robber barons of the Street," the *New York Times* editorialized, "it needs some little courage in any public man to characterize them and their acts in fitting terms."

At this introductory stage of his career, Roosevelt viewed politics in a puritanical light, as an arena where good battled evil. He had seen his father's dreams of high office undone by corruption; he had absorbed his father's warning that the country could not much longer stand "so corrupt a government." He was a knight embarked on a crusade to uncover corruption at the highest levels, jousting against the "black horse cavalry" of machine politicians. "There is nothing brilliant or outstanding about my record, except perhaps for one thing," he told a reporter, "when I make up my mind to do a thing, I act."

Even as his political star was beginning to rise, Roosevelt insisted that politics was not a proper occupation. As a citizen, one might intermittently engage in political activity, but it would be "a dreadful misfortune for a man to grow to feel that his whole livelihood and whole happiness depend upon his staying in office. Such a feeling prevents him from being of real service to the people while in office, and always puts him under the heaviest strain to barter his convictions for the sake of holding office."

Yet, it was already clear after this first year in the Assembly that Theodore Roosevelt had found his calling. Politics encompassed the activities he found most enjoyable and fulfilling: speaking, writing, connecting with people, assuming center stage. A fuse had been lit that would keep him in politics and public life for the rest of his days.

"I rose like a rocket," Theodore Roosevelt recalled of his ascent. Notwithstanding a statewide Democratic sweep, he had gained a second term, and despite his youth, he had been chosen by his Republican colleagues as their minority leader. But as his friend Jacob Riis shrewdly warned, "if they do shoot up like a rocket they are apt to come down like sticks." In the wake of these triumphs, Roosevelt lost perspective. His head "was

swelled"; he became indulgent and self-absorbed. He began to think that he alone had cornered the market on honesty and integrity. "There is an increasing suspicion," one observer noted, "that Mr. Roosevelt keeps a pulpit concealed on his person." The small circle of reformers who had idolized him at the start watched with growing concern as he became "a perfect nuisance," constantly interrupting Assembly business, yelling and pounding his desk with his fist. "He was just like a jack coming out of a box," one member recalled. When criticized by Democrats, he fired back venomously, castigating the entire party as "rotten." His friends pleaded with him "to sit on his coat-tails," warning that he was ruining himself and "everybody else" with his "explosive" and "indiscreet" attacks, but he "would listen to no argument, no advice," self-infatuated as he reveled in the headlines his colorful language generated.

After failing to mobilize support for several projects, however, he realized that he "was absolutely deserted," even by his friends. "My isolated peak had become a valley; every bit of influence I had was gone. The things I wanted to do I was powerless to accomplish." The "bitter experience" was a blow to his ego, to the dogmatic and self-righteous aspect of his nature that prevented him from working with others and learning to compromise. He began to see, he conceded, that he "was not all-important," and "that cooperation from other people" was essential, "even if they were not so pure as gold." And he learned that "if he could not get all he wanted, he would take all he could." He turned to help others, and they, in turn, gave him a hand. The world was far more complicated and nuanced than his categorical moral vision had led him to believe. The ability to learn from the excesses of his egocentric behavior, to alter course, to profit from error, was essential to his growth.

Roosevelt further revealed that capacity for growth when a union-sponsored bill to prohibit the manufacture of cigars in tenement houses was referred to one of the committees on which he sat. When the bill was first introduced, he presumed he would vote against it, as he had voted against minimum wage legislation and bills to limit the hours of the working day. Both his membership in the privileged class and the laissez-faire economics he had learned in college had "biased" him, he later said, "against all governmental schemes for the betterment of the social and economic condition of laborers." In the case of the cigar bill, he believed that tenement owners, who were also the manufacturers, had a right to do as they wished with their own property.

After meeting with labor leader Samuel Gompers and hearing his

description of the dreadful conditions in the tenement apartments where thousands of families lived and worked stripping, drying, and wrapping cigars, he agreed to make a personal inspection. Roosevelt was so stunned by what he found that he made a turnabout and agreed to become the bill's champion. Thirty years later, he would still remember one noxious tenement in which five adults and several children, all Bohemian immigrants who could barely speak English, were enclosed in a single room, compelled to work sixteen hours a day, with tobacco crammed in every corner, next to the bedding, mixed in with food. The investigation persuaded him "beyond a shadow of a doubt that to permit the manufacture of cigars in tenement-houses" was "an evil thing from every standpoint, social, industrial, and hygienic."

The incident suggests Roosevelt's developing sense of empathy. While Lincoln's seems to have been his by right of birth, Roosevelt slowly expanded his understanding of other people's points of view by going to places that a man of his background typically neither visited nor comprehended. "The real things of life were getting a grip on him more and more," Jacob Riis observed. In an essay on "fellow-feeling," written a decade and a half later, Roosevelt maintained that empathy, like courage, could be acquired over time. "A man who conscientiously endeavors to throw in his lot with those about him, to make his interest theirs, to put himself in a position where he and they have a common object, will at first feel a little self-conscious, will realize too plainly his aims. But with exercise this will pass off. He will speedily find that the fellow-feeling which at first he had to stimulate was really existent, though latent, and is capable of a very healthy growth." Indeed, he argued that a "very large part of the rancor of political and social strife" springs from the fact that different classes or sections "are so cut off from each other that neither appreciates the other's passions, prejudices, and, indeed, point of view."

By his third term in the Assembly, Roosevelt had begun to soften his abrasive self-righteousness. Working with Democrats, whom he had previously labeled as "rotten," he brought the two parties together to pass civil service reform and a host of bills to benefit the city of New York. He had taken his weaknesses, his physical liabilities, his fears, and the brash and self-centered aspects of his leadership style, and had carefully worked to overcome them.

At twenty-five years old, happily married and awaiting the birth of his first child, he now felt, he told his wife, that he "had the reins" in his own hands.

For generations, Democrats had held the seat, based largely on the Irish and Italian vote in Poughkeepsie. But the party hoped to reach out as well to the traditionally rural Republican areas within the district, and Mack thought Franklin might be "the right person for the job."

That Mack and Perkins considered Franklin the best choice had little to do with their perception that the young law clerk had within him the makings of a leader. The key to their interest lay in the resonance of the Roosevelt name in Republican circles. In 1910, after serving nearly two terms in the presidency, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin's fifth cousin, remained the most dominant figure on the national scene. Mack also understood that Sara Roosevelt's wealth would allow her son not only to pay his own campaign expenses but to contribute to the general Democratic coffers. So, while Abraham Lincoln took the initiative on his own to run for his first elective office and Theodore put himself in a position to gain the nomination by mingling with politicians at Morton Hall, Franklin Roosevelt was simply chosen to run.

What proved more compelling than why Franklin was chosen was the manner in which he responded to the proffered opportunity. "Nothing would please me more," he enthusiastically replied, "just tell me what to do, where to go, whom to seek out." What to do? Mack told him to spend time in the district, make the acquaintance of local Democratic activists. Franklin said he would start at once. He would spend as many summer weekends as he could in Hyde Park and Poughkeepsie, leaving his Wall Street firm on Friday afternoons, returning on Monday mornings. Whom to seek out? He should start with the Democratic committeeman from his home village—Tom Leonard.

Consequently, at three o'clock one August afternoon, he searched out Leonard, a house painter currently at work inside one of the houses on the Roosevelts' country estate. The estate resembled an English country manor, "with class lines separating the close little family of three at the top from the nurses and governesses, and these in turn from the maids and cooks indoors, and these in turn from the stable boys and farm hands outside." As a child, Franklin, seated on his pony, had ridden with his father every morning to survey the plantings and the various construction projects under way on the estate. As they rode by, employees "tipped their hats."

Never having been formally introduced to the house painter, Roosevelt rang the bell. "There's a Mr. Franklin wants to see you," the housekeeper told Leonard. "I thought for a moment," Leonard said, but after searching his memory, he concluded, "I don't know any Mr. Franklin."

Nonetheless, he stepped out to meet the gentleman, surprised to find none other than Mr. Franklin Roosevelt. "Hello, Tom," said the young patrician, smiling warmly and extending his hand in greeting. "How do you do, Mr. Roosevelt?" asked the puzzled painter. "No, call me Franklin. I'm going to call you Tom," he declared, telling him that he had come to ask his advice about getting into politics. That Roosevelt was able to extend his hand and seek counsel with such good-natured spirits and without a trace of affectation or pomposity won over Tom Leonard as it would soon win over thousands in Dutchess County. His manner, his affability, and his sincerity conveyed something authentic. With this first foray into politics, he had bridged, emblematically at least, a lifetime of social distance.

Everywhere he went, people were immediately struck by young Franklin's warmth and charm. He made arrangements for a driver with a horse and two-wheeled wagon to meet him at the Hyde Park train station on Friday evenings. On Saturdays and Sundays he traversed the district, attending political meetings, talking with people in general stores, stopping in village squares, standing outside manufacturing plants, shaking hands. He made a good impression, Tom Leonard recalled, "because he wouldn't immediately enter into the topic of politics"; instead, he encouraged people to talk about their work, their families, their lives. He had always loved to talk, but now he learned to listen, and to listen intently, his head nodding in a welcoming way, with an air of sympathetic identification, an attentive posture and manner that would become a lifelong characteristic.

With the assurance from the bosses that he would be nominated for the Assembly seat at the convention scheduled for early October, Franklin delivered his maiden political speech at the annual policemen's clambake on September 10. "On that joyous occasion of clams and sauerkraut and real beer," Roosevelt later recalled, "I made my first political speech and I have been apologizing for it ever since." Introduced by John Mack, Franklin began with a favorite phrase of Theodore Roosevelt's. "I'm dee-lighted," to be here, he said, summoning with phrases, gestures, and pince-nez glasses an identification with his famous relative, "and next year promise to be here again with all my relatives." No further record of the speech exists, though people who heard him speak in the weeks ahead remarked on his relaxed, conversational style. He mingled easily with crowds, pumped hands with enthusiasm, made friends everywhere he went. To the surprise of John Mack and other veteran officeholders,

it was beginning to seem, unaccountably, that this twenty-eight-year-old son of privilege, upon diving into the water for the first time, could swim like a seal!

How, one wonders, was this possible?

"Temperament," Richard Neustadt argues in his classic study of presidential leadership, "is the great separator." Four days after Franklin Roosevelt took the presidential oath on March 4, 1933, he paid a call on former Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was celebrating his ninety-second birthday. After Roosevelt left, Holmes famously opined: "A second-class intellect. But a first-class temperament." Generations of historians have agreed with Holmes, pointing to Roosevelt's self-assured, congenial, optimistic temperament as the keystone to his leadership success.

If temperament is the key, the answers to our questions take us back to Springwood, the rural estate in Hyde Park, where the very bedrock of Franklin Roosevelt's temperament was formed. "All that is in me goes back to the Hudson," Roosevelt liked to say, meaning not simply the tranquil river and the big country house but the atmosphere of love and affection that enveloped him as a child. The boy's personality flourished in the warmth of his environment. Those who knew him as a child invariably use the same adjectives to describe him—"a very nice child," "bright and happy," radiant, beautiful, uncommonly poised.

For his first eight years, Franklin enjoyed a childhood of extraordinary stability and balance. From all accounts, James and Sara Roosevelt had a genuine love marriage despite the difference in their ages; James, courtly, well-educated, and gentle, was fifty-two when Franklin was born; Sara, beautiful, strong-willed, and confident, was but half his age. The Roosevelt money had been made years before in real estate and the sugar trade, allowing Mr. James, as he was known, to lead the life of a country gentleman, adopting the habits and hobbies that imitated the English landed gentry. Franklin's still vigorous father introduced him to the masculine outside world while his mother supervised the inside world of books, hobbies, and governesses. "Never," Sara claimed, did Franklin observe conflict between his parents regarding his upbringing, for at all times they presented "a united front" in dealing with him. With but a single child, Sara suggested, "the problem of juvenile squabbles virtually dispensed with itself." Franklin alone was the focus of his parents' lives,

their joint vocation, heir and hub of the place that was both a landed estate and a state of mind, a place from which all unpleasantness and discord seemed banished.

In casting back her thoroughly idealizing light upon Franklin's upbringing, Sara failed to appreciate, as her great-grandson John Boettiger Jr. later observed, that "pain-killing can itself be a lethal act." Children are strengthened through sibling relationships; they learn to play, bicker, fight, and play again, to accept criticism and bounce back from hurt, to tell secrets and become intimate. "If there remained in Franklin Roosevelt throughout his life," Boettiger Jr. continued, "an insensitivity towards and discomfort with profound and vividly expressed feelings it may have been in part the lengthened shadow of his early sheltering from ugliness and jealousy and conflicting interests."

Yet, when Franklin was young, the impression that he was the center of the world produced a remarkable and lingering sense of security and privilege. For the rest of his life, Roosevelt remembered the peacefulness and regularity of his childhood days with great affection. Each passing season brought its unique cluster of outdoor activities. In winter, father and son went sledding and tobogganing down the steep hill that stretched from the south porch of the estate to the wooded bluffs of the river far below, maneuvering every curve with perfect ease. "We coasted!" Franklin needled his mother. "Nothing dangerous, yet, look out for tomorrow!!" With his father by his side, Franklin learned to ice-skate and ice-boat on the frozen Hudson. Then, with the first signs of spring, Franklin rode with his father each morning to survey the various constructions under way on the estate (he graduated from a donkey when he was two to a pony at six and a horse at eight). "Went fishing yesterday after noon with papa, we caught a dozen of minnows," Franklin enthusiastically wrote his mother when he was only six. Beyond lessons on how to fish, Mr. James taught his son how to observe birds and identify trees and plants in the woods, fostering a lifelong love of nature. In summers, the family went to the island of Campobello off far Downeast Maine, where Franklin learned to sail on Passamaquoddy Bay and to navigate the massive tides of the Bay of Fundy. In the fall, father and son went hunting together. With few playmates his own age, Franklin viewed his indulgent and protective father as a companion and friend.

While James nourished Franklin's love of the outdoors, Sara organized a carefully scheduled indoor regimen of regular mealtimes and specified hours for study and hobbies. Once, when Sara saw her

five-year-old son uncharacteristically melancholy, she asked him why he was sad. He refused to answer at first, so she repeated her question. "Then," Sara recalled, "with a curious little gesture that combined entreaty with a suggestion of impatience, he clasped his hands in front of him and exclaimed: 'Oh, for freedom!' " Worried that her rules and regulations were cramping her son's spirit, she proposed a day without rules so he could meander the estate as he chose. Straightaway, she reported, "quite of his own accord, he went contentedly back to his routine."

"We never subjected the boy to a lot of unnecessary don'ts," Sara maintained. "We were never strict for the sake of being strict. In fact, we took a secret pride in the fact that Franklin never seemed to require that kind of handling." If the young boy's independence was compromised by the protective care of both his parents, if there was little of the spontaneous explorations that enlivened Theodore's childhood, the disposition and temperament of Franklin Roosevelt would bear the indelible stamp of his optimistic spirit—a general expectation that things would turn out happily, testament to the immense self-confidence developed during this perfectly balanced time of his life.

Roosevelt's ability in later years to adapt to changing circumstances, to alter his behavior and attitudes to suit new conditions, proved vital to his leadership success. Adaptability was forced upon him at the age of eight, when the tranquil world of Springwood was shaken to the core. In November 1890, Mr. James suffered the heart attack that left him essentially an invalid for the remaining decade of his life and forever disrupted the family equilibrium.

The outdoor activities the father and son had shared were necessarily curtailed, pulling Franklin and his mother into a conspiracy to keep the father's life untroubled, free from anxiety. Ever after, Franklin's innate desire to placate, to mollify, and to please by being "a very nice child," was intensified by the fear that if he appeared sad or troubled he might be responsible for damaging further his father's heart. When a steel curtain rod fell on him, producing a deep gash on his scalp line, Franklin insisted that his father not be told. For days, he simply pulled his hat down over his forehead to hide the wound. The need to navigate the altered dynamic of Springwood required new measures of secrecy, duplicity, and manipulation—qualities that would later prove troubling but were at this juncture benign, designed only to protect a loved one from harm.

Franklin, Arthur Dumper later remarked, went about learning in a curiously "unorthodox" manner. He preferred to engage his tutor in conversation, talking over what he was learning, spending more time with his stamps than with his books. Through that passionate interest in stamps, however, Franklin assimilated a great deal of knowledge, cobbling together bits and pieces of information to form a complicated tissue of associated interests. Each stamp told a story—beginning with the place and date of issue, the image represented on the front, postmarks providing the time and location of its travels—stories as alive in Franklin's fantasy life as the adventure tales of James Fenimore Cooper had been for Theodore Roosevelt or *Aesop's Fables* for Abraham Lincoln. Sara's original collection had been assembled during her family's protracted sojourn in Asia. Other stamps came from Europe; still others from South America. When asked years later how he had gained such familiarity with obscure places in the world, Roosevelt explained that "when he became interested in a stamp, it led to his interest in the issuing country." Digging through the encyclopedia, he would learn about the country, its people, and its history. Finding words he didn't understand, he carried Webster's unabridged dictionary to bed at night, at one point telling his mother he was "almost halfway through."

He was learning in his own way, revealing a unique transverse intelligence that cut naturally across categories, a characteristic mode of problem solving, and a practical mastery of detail that would last a lifetime. A fascination with maps and atlases developed next, fixing in his mind an astonishing range of facts about the topography of countries, their rivers, mountains, lakes, valleys, natural resources—information that would prove invaluable when he was called upon in future years to explain to his countrymen how and where two wars would envelop the entire world.

Franklin's ability to adapt to changing circumstances was put to a punishing test when he was sent to boarding school at Groton at the age of fourteen. Most boys started at twelve, but Sara, unable to part with him, had kept him back for two years. "The other boys had formed their friendships," Franklin later told Eleanor. "They knew things he didn't; he felt left out." Unaccustomed to the ordinary give-and-take of schoolmates, the studied charm and mannered gentility that had impressed adults struck fellow students as stilted, foppish, affected, insincere. Nor did he possess the athleticism to shine or even participate in varsity team sports.

He later confessed that he "felt hopelessly out of things." He fiercely desired to be popular but had no idea how to court the favor of his fellow students, mistakenly assuming that he would be respected if he had no black marks for minor infractions.

Never once, however, did the lonely boy divulge his true feelings to his mother. On the contrary, in a string of cheerful letters, he insisted he was adjusting splendidly "both mentally and physically," that he was "getting on very well with the fellows," receiving good marks in his classes. Sara was relieved and thrilled. She had feared that arriving so late he might be seen as "an interloper," but "almost overnight," she proudly noted, "he became sociable and gregarious and entered with the frankest enjoyment into every kind of school activity." The image he projected was meant to placate his mother but also to hearten himself, blurring the distinction between things as they were and things as he wished them to be.

The ingrained expectation that things would somehow turn out positively allowed him to move steadily forward, to adjust and persevere in the face of difficulty; and in time, he found his own niche as a member of the debate team. In keeping with Groton's mission to educate young men for public service, all students were required to participate in debates before an audience. Franklin prepared hard and long for each of his debates, asking his father for advice, information, and pointers. His excellent memory put him in good stead, allowing him to speak directly to the audience without notes. Unlike Theodore Roosevelt, who shunned debating societies, believing they encouraged insincerity by training young men to take a position counter to their own feelings and beliefs, Franklin enjoyed considering an issue from different points of view, demonstrating a persuasive reasoning to express whatever side he was given. He connected emotionally with his audience and reveled in victory. "Over 30 votes were cast out of which our opponents received three!" he gloated to his parents. "I think it is about the biggest beating that has been given this year." He began to relax more with his classmates, and by his final year, he had made some good friends. Though failing to distinguish himself in his academic studies, he achieved high scores on the entrance examinations for Harvard, making his parents "immensely proud."

Nonetheless, these accomplishments did little to mark him as a leader among his schoolmates. It was not until the end of his first year at Groton that he realized how little he gained from being a well-behaved, well-mannered young man. "I have served off my first black-mark today [for talking in class] and I am very glad I got it," he told his parents, "as

I was thought to have no school-spirit before." Three decades later, after Roosevelt's election as president in 1932, headmaster Endicott Peabody observed: "There has been a good deal written about Franklin Roosevelt when he was a boy at Groton, more than I should have thought justified by the impression that he left at school. He was a quiet, satisfactory boy of more than ordinary intelligence, taking a good position in his form but not brilliant. Athletically he was rather too slight for success." Ostensibly accurate, such an assessment failed to recognize that upon his entry to Groton, the cosseted young boy had never experienced the jostle of relationships with boys his own age. He had been accorded the center of attention wherever he went, simply by being Franklin Roosevelt. Not yet a leader of the boys, not even accepted as one of the boys, he was learning to project a confident good cheer, to mask his frustrations, which, at this stage of his development, was a great achievement in itself.

The ambitious striving for achievement that had served as powerful catalysts to both Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt was not visible in Franklin Roosevelt's behavior when he entered Harvard College. In later years, when Sara was asked if she ever imagined that her son might become president, she replied: "Never, no never! That was the last thing I should ever have imagined for him, or that he should be in public life of any sort." Both she and her son, she insisted, shared a far simpler ambition. "It might even be thought not very ambitious, but to me, and to him, too, it was the highest ideal—to grow to be like his father, straight and honorable, just and kind, an upstanding American."

Sara could not fathom that her eighteen-year-old son was beginning to form dreams of his own, visions of a life beyond that of a country squire, who would lead a regular seasonal existence, managing the estate, summering in Campobello, dabbling in local affairs. Beneath his insouciant exterior, the young man who had held center stage the first decade of his life harbored desires to replicate that experience in the world at large, to accomplish something worthy of attention.

During his first semester at Harvard, the elements that had held Franklin's life in compliant balance careened out of joint when his father suffered a fatal heart attack. Suddenly, Franklin was forced to take stock of his position, desires, and ambitions. The college student was now expected to be the man of the family. He had already developed a profound, reciprocally dependent bond with his mother. Without the focus and

buffer of the father/husband, they were alone together. Unable to bear the "unthinkable" idea of living by herself at Hyde Park, Sara rented a townhouse in Boston to be near her son. "She was an indulgent mother," observed a family friend, "but would not let her son call his soul his own." Franklin's quest to achieve autonomy without wounding his mother required new levels of manipulation, nimbleness, and guile, a deeper resourcefulness, persistence, and willfulness—self-preserving qualities he would add to his developing capacities.

For the first time, he began to chart his own course, seeking a place where he could shine on his own, free from parental imposition and expectation. He found that place at the *Harvard Crimson*. He began at the lowest level, one of seventy freshmen vying for a position on the staff. "The competition was tough," a classmate recalled, "the drain on the candidate's thought and time exhausting." The challenge demanded his full attention, providing legitimate reasons to decline his mother's constant invitations for dinner or the theater. He worked harder than he had ever worked before, harder than he did on his studies, where he settled into a gentleman's C average. "My Dearest Mummy," he wrote, "I am working about 6 hours a day on [the *Crimson*] alone and it is quite a strain." Though he failed to make the first group of five freshmen selected in February, he refused to give up.

A combination of luck, initiative, boldness, and privilege opened the door two months later. After reading in the Boston newspapers that Theodore Roosevelt, who was then vice president, was coming into town, he contacted his famous relative to see if they could get together. Franklin had met Theodore a number of times during family outings at Oyster Bay. He had reveled in the stories Roosevelt told at a Groton chapel lecture about his days as police commissioner—stories that "kept the whole room in an uproar for an hour." Having developed a special fondness for Franklin, Theodore arranged to meet him directly after his guest lecture scheduled for Professor Lawrence Lowell's class the following morning. The lecture, intended only for the students in the class, had not been made public. Franklin hurried to the *Crimson* to break the news.

"Young man," the managing editor told him, "you hit page one tomorrow morning." Professor Lowell was livid when the front-page article brought two thousand people clamoring to get into the hall, but Theodore Roosevelt, never one to slight publicity, took it in stride. Weeks later, Franklin was elected to join the *Crimson* staff. Flush with his first electoral success, a more independent Franklin wrote his mother as summer

approached: "I don't want to go to Campo; neither do you." It would be too sad. Instead, he suggested a trip abroad. "We both will enjoy seeing new places & new things and it will quite take us out of ourselves." Landing back in New York in September, they learned that President William McKinley had been assassinated and that cousin Theodore Roosevelt was now president of the United States.

Returning to Harvard, Franklin slowly worked his way up the *Crimson* ladder—his sophomore year he was elected secretary, then assistant managing editor, then managing editor, and finally, his senior year, to editor in chief of the newspaper. Franklin's ascent at the *Crimson* was such a landmark in his developing sense of himself as a leader that he chose to take graduate courses in order to extend his position at the paper's helm. While many of his editorials reflected typical college concerns with flagging school spirit and athletics, in one revealing piece he recommended that students interested in politics would learn more "in one day" by venturing into Boston to observe ward politics—"the machinery of primary, caucus, convention, election and legislature"—than by listening to abstract lectures on government. Though he had "read Kant and a little of Rousseau," he confessed that in neither philosopher had he found "the decisive leader." Experience, he believed, was the "best teacher."

Roosevelt would look back in later years with prideful nostalgia on this first leadership position, much as Abraham Lincoln considered his first election as captain in the Black Hawk War the success that had given him more pleasure than any other in his life. While a few fellow editors found Franklin "conceited" and "cocky," more self-assured than his writing skills deserved, the majority agreed that he was "quick-witted and capable as an editor" and "a very good companion," with an optimistic spirit and an infectious sense of humor. "There were traits of his, which, as one looks back on them, become significant," one colleague recalled. "He had a force of personality . . . he liked people, and he made them instinctively like him. Moreover, in his geniality there was a kind of frictionless command."

At Groton, he had managed to survive; at Harvard, he had begun to thrive.

The first hint of a signature component of what would characterize Franklin Roosevelt's fundamental style—the ability to make decisions without hesitating or looking back, coupled with a propensity to keep the

of the love which you have given me. I have never known before what it was to be absolutely happy."

Eleanor knew, she later said, long before Franklin's run for the State Senate, that he wanted to go into politics. The impulse, she believed, had been stimulated by his admiration for her uncle, Theodore Roosevelt, whose every activity he followed with great attention. When their engagement was announced, President Roosevelt wrote Franklin: "We are greatly rejoiced over the good news. I am as fond of Eleanor as if she were my daughter; and I like you, and trust you, and believe in you. . . . You and Eleanor are true and brave, and I believe you love each other unselfishly; and golden years open before you." Franklin and Eleanor went to Washington together on March 4, 1905, to celebrate Theodore Roosevelt's inauguration, joining the inner circle at an intimate lunch, sitting with the family at the reviewing stand during the parade, and then attending the inaugural ball. Eleven days later, President Roosevelt, standing in his deceased brother's place, gave the bride away. "Well, Franklin," the president said with a smile, "there's nothing like keeping the name in the family."

Just as Theodore Roosevelt had recognized that when opportunity comes, a person has "to take advantage" of it, so Franklin, who seemed to be adrift when he entered his second year as a junior law clerk at Carter, Ledyard & Milburn, was simply waiting for the right moment to make his move. During a slack time at the office, he and his fellow clerks "fell into discussion" about their hopes and plans for the future. When Franklin's turn came, he disclosed that "he wasn't going to practice law forever, that he intended to run for office at the first opportunity." Indeed, he had already visualized and privately rehearsed the steps that he would in all likelihood take: election to the State Assembly would come first, leading to an appointment as assistant secretary of the navy, before becoming governor of New York and then, with good fortune, president of the United States. No mockery greeted young Roosevelt's hypothetical ascent, despite the fact that the twenty-five-year-old had never held a single public position. Franklin "seemed proper and sincere," one fellow clerk recalled, "and moreover, as he put it, entirely reasonable." After all, the career trail Franklin intended to follow was identical to the one Theodore Roosevelt had blazed to the White House.

The matter-of-fact manner in which Franklin had laid out his career course explains why he immediately embraced John Mack's suggestion that he run, with the party's full backing, for the Assembly seat from Hyde Park and Poughkeepsie. Even more revealing is Franklin's reaction when, only five weeks before the election, he learned that he was no longer the party's choice. The incumbent assemblyman, Lewis Chanler, had changed his mind, informing the Democratic chieftains that he had decided to retain his old seat in the Assembly after all. Feeling "snakebitten," Franklin told John Mack and Edward Perkins that he had come too far to stop; he just might have to run as an independent. The local bosses responded with a counteroffer. The convention had not yet decided on a Democratic candidate for the State Senate seat—clearly, a far more prestigious position. They conceded, however, that winning in the larger and mainly rural district was a long shot. Republicans, with a single exception, had held the Senate seat for almost half a century. The incumbent Republican, John Schlosser, had beaten his Democratic opponent by a two-to-one margin in the last election. The chances for victory, Mack surmised, were one in five, but if Roosevelt wanted the nomination, he could have it. How could he be certain he would get the nomination, Franklin asked. "It was made by a committee of three," Mack replied. He "was one," and he "was sure of another and quite sure of the third."

"I'll take it," Franklin said, with "absolutely no hesitation," and "I'll win the election." His immediate response revealed the decisiveness and sublime confidence that mark his mature nature. The acceptance speech he delivered after the nomination was longer than Theodore's thirty-three-word statement, but equally devoid of content and far removed from Lincoln's substantial and poignant introductory circular. By saying he did "not intend to sit still," however, he made it clear that he would give his all to the campaign.

From the start, Franklin "had a distinct feeling that in order to win he must put himself into direct personal touch with every available voter." The horse and wagon he had hired earlier in the summer had been sufficient when he was running for the Assembly, but the three-county Senate district was thirty miles wide and ninety miles long. Furthermore, only five weeks remained before the election. As he thought the problem over, he devised an innovative strategy. He would be the first candidate to crisscross the district in an automobile instead of a horse and buggy. Veteran advisers cautioned him. "The automobile was just coming into use," Mack recalled. "Get a horse!" farmers jeered when passing frequent

automobile breakdowns. Furthermore, Mack explained, "horses were terrified of the new 'contraption' and, when meeting one on the highway, would bolt, frequently upsetting the farmer's wagon with occasional injuries."

Despite such hazards, the idea of breaking precedent captivated Franklin, as it would again and again in the years ahead. Locating a driver and a splashy red Maxwell touring car, he invited two fellow Democrats running for different offices to accompany him on what turned into a rollicking circuslike adventure. People were drawn to the sight of the newfangled gadget, festooned with flags and campaign banners, traversing the rough country roads at a startling speed of 20 mph. Meanwhile, Franklin turned the potential liability into an advantage. He ordered the driver to bring the car to an immediate stop whenever they encountered a horse and buggy or wagon. Such deference not only impressed the farmers but afforded Franklin the occasion to introduce himself and shake hands.

Every aspect of the barnstorming process excited Franklin. He designed his own posters and buttons; placed ads in county newspapers; and, most importantly, reveled in direct contact with people. At crossroads, train stations, general stores, saloons, and front porches, he delivered short speeches, sometimes as many as ten a day. Franklin "spoke slowly" then, Eleanor recalled, "and every now and then there would be a long pause, and I would be worried for fear he would never go on," but he always did, and when he finished, Democratic committeeman Tom Leonard recalled, he moved easily and naturally among the crowd, flashing "that smile of his," introducing himself as Frank, approaching every person "as a friend."

This was his first political campaign, a local politician recalled, "but none of his later campaigns were entered with more will to win than was this Senatorial campaign of 1910." He promised voters that if they elected him, he would "be a real representative," giving his full energies to their concerns "every day of the 365, every hour of the 24. That is my promise. I ask you to give me the chance to fill it." He pledged to return regularly to the district, traveling from one end to the other, listening to voters' concerns. Over and over, he stressed his independence, vowing to stand against "the bosses" in either party. "I know I'm no orator," he liked to say. "You don't have to be an orator, Roosevelt," someone in the audience yelled back. "Talk right along to us on those lines, that's what we like to hear." When the votes were tallied on Election Day, Franklin learned

that he had vanquished his opponent, winning by the largest margin of any Democratic candidate in the state.

In analyzing Roosevelt's victory, one can cite the fortuitous historical moment, the split in the Republican Party between progressives and conservatives that produced Democratic victories across the nation; one can point to the reflected glow the presidential surname lent the aspiring state senator (along with the substantial funding made possible by the family's wealth); or summon the novelty of that red Maxwell barnstorming the country roads. But what was evident in the end was the fact that the cheerful, gregarious, disarmingly glamorous young man had out-worked, out-traveled, and out-strategized the Republicans by simply listening to the hopes and needs of whoever crossed his path. Long-visualized ambition and directed energy had finally brought him to the place where he wanted to be.

No sooner had Franklin entered the State Senate than he charged into battle against the entrenched Tammany machine that held a grip on the state Democratic Party. Just as Theodore Roosevelt had found in Judge Westbrook a vehicle to fight corruption, so Franklin found his instrument in Tammany boss Charlie Murphy's personal choice for the United States Senate—"Blue-Eyed" Billy Sheehan, a machine politician who had made millions through collusion with the streetcar industry. Hearing that a rebel group was forming in the Assembly to block Sheehan, Franklin became the first senator to sign the manifesto pledging the insurgent band to boycott the caucus as long as it took to foil Boss Murphy's choice.

Luck—the proximity of his dwelling to the Assembly, which made it the perfect place for the insurgents to convene—combined with Roosevelt's personal charm and celebrated name to make the novice senator the spokesman for the twenty-member group. "I never had as much fun in my life as I am having now," a beaming Roosevelt told reporters. Late at night, the esprit de corps among this fraternity was palpable. The "good fellowship" of his twenty comrades provided "the most pleasant feature." With cigar smoke curling in the air, "we sit around and swap stories, like soldiers at the bivouac fire," he said.

Invigorated by the battle and emboldened by the headlines, Roosevelt refused to compromise, even after Murphy withdrew Sheehan's name. The substitute Murphy put forward, Roosevelt declared, was equally unsuitable. Frances Perkins, then an Albany social worker lobbying on

behalf of unions, recalled how "disagreeable" and conceited young Roosevelt struck her during this period. "I can still see 'that' Roosevelt now, standing back of the brass rail with two or three senators arguing with him to be 'reasonable'—his small mouth pursed up and slightly open, his nostrils distended, his head in the air, and his cool, remote voice saying, 'No, no, I won't hear of it!' " Years later, Roosevelt admitted to Miss Perkins that he was "an awfully mean cuss" when he first entered politics.

Like young Theodore, Franklin had developed a grandiose sense of his own importance—and, like his cousin, he was heading for a fall. By the end of March, nearly three months after the battle had begun, the ranks of the weary insurgents finally began to break. When Murphy put forth yet another name, that of Justice James Aloysius O'Gorman, a Tammany man with an independent streak, enough insurgents decided to go along to bring the battle to an end. Though some critics contended that "O'Gorman was no better than Sheehan," Roosevelt "converted defeat into victory simply by calling it a victory," declaring that Murphy had been taught moderation and shamelessly maintaining that the party had "taken an upward step."

Recognizing, however, that his actual power within the chamber had dimmed even as his political star rose brightly, Franklin began to moderate his approach. He learned, in much the same way as Theodore Roosevelt had, to work together with different factions and strike bargains. He reached out to individual Tammany members, no longer categorically assuming that all of them were corrupt. On the contrary, many of them had forged enduring ties with the common men and women in their districts, dispensing aid, jobs, and comfort, working around the clock to satisfy their constituents' immediate needs. Indeed, it was Bowery boss "Big Tim" Sullivan and the Tammany organization that had taken the lead in sponsoring much of the progressive social legislation that Franklin eventually supported, including workman's compensation, the fifty-four-hour workweek, and women's suffrage. Franklin had been a quick study in learning the art of compromise in order to get things accomplished.

In hindsight, the most enduring impact of the Sheehan battle lay in the fact that the widespread coverage of this young Democratic crusader against Tammany had caught the eye of the newly elected Democratic president, Woodrow Wilson. Within two weeks of his inauguration, Wilson offered the state senator the coveted post of assistant secretary of the navy. "How would I like it: I'd like it bully well," an excited Roosevelt replied. "It would please me better than anything in the world. All my life