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1-28-2005

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Recommended Citation
Flanagan, Brian, "In Search of FDR and McKinley" (2005). *Features.* Paper 112.
http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/features/112

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In Search of FDR and McKinley

By Brian Flanagan

One was born in New York, the other died in New York; both died in office; both were succeeded by young, relatively untested vice presidents; both are among just six multiple-term, wartime presidents in our history; and both inspired loyal followers who would go on to help define the decades following their deaths. The birthdays of William McKinley and Franklin D. Roosevelt will be celebrated early next week, on January 29th and 30th.

In fact there are several other similarities between Presidents McKinley and Roosevelt. They came from states rich in presidential history. McKinley was born in Ohio, the birthplace of 7 presidents, and Roosevelt was born in New York, a state 6 presidents have called home. They served multiple-terms with multiple vice presidents. McKinley's first vice president, Garret Hobart, died in office and was replaced in the 1900 campaign with Theodore Roosevelt. FDR's first vice president, John Nance Garner, challenged him for the Democratic nomination in 1940. Henry Wallace replaced Garner as Roosevelt's running mate, served as vice president during his third term, but was dropped in favor of Harry Truman in 1944. As it turned out, both McKinley and Roosevelt entered their final term with rookie vice presidents -- both of whom would occupy the oval office within months.

Reelected in 1900, McKinley marks the transition from 19th century to modern presidents -- from the era of Lincoln to the era of FDR. His 1896 presidential campaign, run by fellow Ohio-native, Mark Hanna, is cited as the first modern campaign -- raising and spending more money than any previous candidate, employing poster and button distributors and stump-speakers, and communicating not just accomplishments, but ideas. FDR would benefit from four similar campaigns, contributing his own presidential first when he flew to Chicago to personally accept his party's nomination for the presidency. (Prior to FDR, candidates stayed home during nominating conventions and awaited notification of the outcome.) And after the conventions, both FDR and McKinley entered the White House to the delight of their parties -- McKinley, a Republican, took the helm after Democrat Grover Cleveland's second-term, and Franklin Roosevelt, a Democrat, took office after three consecutive Republican administrations.

The two are also linked by their internationalism. Many historians argue that by entering World War II and breaking with the isolationist policies of his predecessors -- Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover -- FDR was the culmination of internationalist trends reinvigorated by his cousin Theodore Roosevelt. TR's bigstick diplomacy, his support for Panamanian independence from Cuba, his subsequent championing of the Panama Canal construction, and later his mediation in the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War did indeed announce the United States's power on the world stage. But, in fact, McKinley had already begun to do so, if reluctantly, with his support for Cuban independence from Spain, the resulting Spanish-American War -- America's first with a European power since the War of 1812 -- and his conquest of the Phillippines. McKinley even wanted to take the largely symbolic step of traveling to Cuba, becoming the first acting president to travel outside of the United States. As it turned out, that honor would fall to TR after McKinley's death.

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Despite the many parallels between FDR and McKinley, differences in the abundance and quality of scholarship they inspire are considerable. On the one hand, in the last two years 10 major books have been published about FDR, one of the more popularly studied American presidents. On the other hand, only 4 have been written about McKinley in the same span -- and those four mark the largest number written about our 25th president in any other two-year period.

Books about FDR have also been considerably more successful over the years, winning, among other accolades, 8 Francis Parkman Prizes, 5 Pulitzer Prizes, 5 Bancroft Prizes, 2 National Book Awards, 1 National Critic's Circle Book Award, and 1 Los Angeles Times Book Prize. In the same time, only one book about McKinley has achieved comparable status. Margaret Leech's *In the Days of McKinley* won the Pulitzer Prize for history and the Bancroft Prize in 1960.

There is also a substantial difference in the amount of information available on the web about FDR and McKinley. Selections of Franklin Roosevelt's speeches, fireside chats, correspondence, and quotations can be found in multiple locations online. Considerably less information can be found on McKinley.

So how do we account for the differences in the popularity of FDR and McKinley today? Perhaps it is the closeness in the American collective memory of World War II and FDR, compared with the relative distance of the Spanish-American War and McKinley. Perhaps it's that the World War II generation that grew to love and revere their president still survives. Perhaps it's the thousands of images of FDR with Eisenhower, Churchill, Stalin, and other world and national leaders that people of post-WWII, post-New Deal, post-Cold War generations can still admire. Perhaps it's the fact that FDR is the only president elected 4-times, the resonance of the Roosevelt name, or the adulation passed down generation to generation for a man who fought the Nazis and the Depression. But although he doesn't have the status FDR does today, Margaret Leech's book shows that McKinley was every bit as revered a man in his own day:

> "Before the black-column newspapers thudded against the doorways, the people had heard the bells tolling heavily in the night.... There were five more days of mourning, of crepe-shrouded buildings and tolling bells and newspapers barred in black, while McKinley's bier traveled from the services to the rites at Washington and then to the resting place at Canton.... Never in history had the union of the States been joined in such universal sorrow. North and South, East and West, the people mourned a father and friend, and the fervent strains of 'Nearer, My God to Thee' floated like a prayer and a leave taking above the half-masted flags in every city and town. When at last McKinley's casket was carried from the white frame house in Canton, five minutes of silence ruled the land, all traffic and business suspended, while the people bowed in homage to the President who was gone."

In the Library and on the Web

In the last three years, four new books have contributed to our understanding of McKinley:

Morgan, H. Wayne. *William McKinley and His America*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003.

Perry, James M. M. *Touched with Fire: Five Presidents and the Civil War Battles that Made Them*. New York: Perseus, 2003.

Phillips, Kevin. *William McKinley*. New York: Henry Holt, 2003.

Rauchway, Eric. *Murdering McKinley: The Making of Theodore Roosevelt's America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2004.

In the same three years, 10 more major works have been published about FDR, and the authors have experienced similar success to their predecessors (FDR is a very generous subject):

Axelrod, Alan. *Nothing to Fear: Lesson in Leadership from FDR*. New York: Portfoio, 2003.

Black, Conrad. *Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Champion of Freedom*. New York: Perseus, 2003.

Hamby, Alonzo. *For the Survival of Democracy: Franklin Roosevelt and the World Crisis of the 1930s*. New York: Free Press, 2004.

Jackson, Robert H., and John Q. Barrett, ed. *That Man: An Insider's Portrait of Franklin D. Roosevelt*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Janeway, Michael. *The Fall of the House of Roosevelt: An Education in Influence and Ideas from FDR to LBJ*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Jenkins, Roy. *Franklin Roosevelt*. New York: Henry Holt, 2003.

Meacham, Jon. *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship*. New York: Random House, 2004.

Neal, Steven. *Happy Days Are Here Again: The 1932 Democratic Convention, the Emergence of FDR -- and How America Was Changed Forever*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004.

Powel, Jim. *FDR's Folly: How Roosevelt and His New Deal Prolonged the Great Depression*. New York: Random House, 2004.

Swift, Will. *The Roosevelts and the Royals: Franklin and Eleanor, the King and Queen of England, and the Friendship that Changed History*. Indianapolis: Wiley, John & Sons, 2004.

Overall, books about FDR have achieved considerable success through the years:

Burns, James MacGregor. *Roosevelt: Soldier of Freedom*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 2003 (1956-1970). Winner of the 1971 Pulitzer Prize for history, the 1971 National Book Award for history and biography, and the 1971 Francis Parkman Prize.

Davis, Kenneth S. *FDR: The Beckoning of Destiny, 1882-1928; a History*. New York: Random House, 1993 (1972). Winner of the 1973 Francis Parkman Prize.

Dallek, Robert. *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995 (1979). Winner of the 1980 Bancroft Prize.

Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995. Winner of the 1995 Pulitzer Prize for history.

Larrabee, Eric. *Commander in Chief: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, his Lieutenants, and their War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988. Winner of the 1988 Francis Parkman Prize.

Lash, Joseph P. *Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of Their Relationship Based on Eleanor Roosevelt's Private Papers*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1971. Winner of the 1972 Pulitzer Prize for biography, the 1972 National Book Award for biography, and the 1972 Francis Parkman Prize.

Leuchtenburg, William E. *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940*. New York: Harper Collins, 1989 (1963). Winner of the 1964 Bancroft Prize and the 1964 Francis Parkman Prize

Schlesinger Jr., Arthur M. *The Crisis of the Old Order*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003 (1957). Winner of the 1958 Bancroft Prize, and the 1958 Francis Parkman Prize.

Sherwood, Robert E. *Roosevelt and Hopkins*. New York: Enigma Books, 2001 (1948). Winner of the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for biography, and the 1949 Bancroft Prize.

Ward, Geoffrey C. *First Class Temperament: The Emergence of Franklin Roosevelt*. New York: Harper Collins, 1990 (1988). Winner of the 1989 National Book Critic's Circle Award, the 1990 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for biography, and the 1990 Francis Parkman Prize. Nominated Finalist for the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for biography.

Wilson, Theodore A. *The First Summit: Roosevelt and Churchill at Placentia Bay 1941*. Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 1991 (1969). Winner of the 1970 Francis Parkman Prize.

To learn more, see these resources on the web.

Franklin D. Roosevelt	William McKinley
New York Times Obituary	New York Times Obituary
White House Bio	White House Bio
National Historic Site	First Inaugural Address
Library and Museum	Second Inaugural Address
FDR Memorial	
Avalon Project Papers	