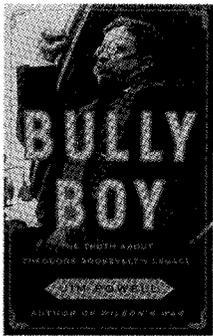


Bully Boy: The Truth About Theodore Roosevelt's Legacy

by Jim Powell

Crown Forum/Three Rivers Press • 2006/2007 •
317 pages • \$27.50 hardcover; \$15.95 paperback

Reviewed by John V. Denson



Jim Powell's new book on Theodore Roosevelt (hereinafter T.R.) is more of an economic history of the Progressive era than a biography of the former president. With it, he completes a valuable trilogy with his prior books, *Wilson's War* and *FDR's Folly*. In these books, he conclusively refutes many mainstream historical myths, and *Bully Boy* takes all the luster off T.R.'s reputation.

Powell demonstrates how T.R. created governmental monopolies while alleging that he was fighting monopolies created by the free market. His conservation efforts were counterproductive, and he was basically a champion of the "progressive" idea of increasing the power of the federal government while diminishing individual rights and the concept of federalism created by our Founders.

Although Powell doesn't compare T.R. with Mussolini, having read an excellent biography of the Duce (*Mussolini: A Biography* by Denis Mack Smith) shortly before reading Powell's book, I noticed many striking similarities. *Bully Boy* shows that T.R. deserves the label of "America's Mussolini." For example, Powell quotes T.R. as saying, "I don't think that any harm comes from the concentration of power into one man's hands." Both T.R. and Mussolini believed in personal rule via a vast bureaucracy to control the economy and no doubt Mussolini would have agreed with T.R.'s view that "politicians could solve the problems of the world if only they were given enough power."

The close similarities between Mussolini and T.R. aren't limited to their egocentric personalities and authoritarian economic policies, but are most glaring in their praise of war and its "benefits." Smith states that Mussolini "began to refer more frequently to war as one of the few truly ennobling and energizing facts of

human experience and to imperialism as the supreme test of a nation's vitality." Smith quotes Mussolini as saying, "War is the most important thing in any man's life" and that "only through military glory could a country become great, only battle makes a man complete. . . ."

That militaristic view closely matches T.R.'s. Powell writes, "Theodore Roosevelt believed war was glorious, even healthy for a nation. He thought that reasons for participating in war should not be limited to national defense. He insisted that the United States should intervene in affairs of other nations and enter into other people's wars to do good." Furthermore, T.R. claimed that war actually made for better men and a better world. He longed for the excitement of combat, and at the beginning of the Spanish-American War he resigned his position as assistant secretary of navy to seek glory on the battlefield. Powell also gives us this chilling T.R. opinion: "No triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumphs of war."

Powell's book discusses the many aggressive measures T.R. took in gaining federal control of the economy in order to eliminate the free market. Powell writes, "Theodore Roosevelt claimed that politicians and bureaucrats could achieve fairness by interfering with the economy." He introduced the slogan "The New Nationalism" by which he meant that the executive power should act as the steward of the public welfare—and of course it was only high-minded politicians like himself who could discern what "the public interest" was. T.R. was absolutely blind to the dangers of turning the power to control the economy over to government officials.

A point that comes out repeatedly in the book is that T.R. disliked the concept of laissez-faire capitalism and liked the concept of state capitalism, where politicians act in concert with favored businesses and industries. T.R. called himself "a Hamiltonian" with regard to the government's supposed need for broad powers to regulate the economy. If you connect the dots, you will see a straight line from Hamilton to Henry Clay to Lincoln to T.R. to Wilson and finally to FDR. All those politicians believed that the federal government should be in control of the economy, but certain businesses should be favored by a partnership with the government through subsidies and other benefits.

The funny thing about T.R.'s great confidence in his ability to direct the economy is the fact that his own attempt at running a business—a ranch he bought with some of his large inheritance—was a complete failure. Powell observes that “Roosevelt knew little about business, as his disastrous ranching losses made clear, and he certainly never seems to have thought about the function of prices in an economy.”

Although many people think that T.R. stood for “rugged individualism,” in actuality his authoritarian views were quite hostile to real individualism. In conclusion, Powell depicts T.R. as one of the most energetic presidents, but demonstrates that this trait was disastrous for the peace and prosperity of America.



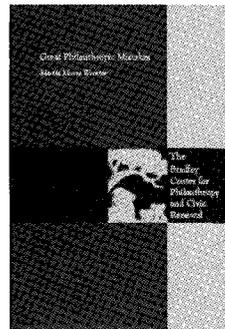
John Denson (donna.moreman@alacourt.gov) is editor of and contributor to two books, *Reassessing the Presidency* and *The Costs of War*. He is also author of *A Century of War*.

Great Philanthropic Mistakes

by Martin Morse Wooster

Hudson Institute • 2006 • 157 pages • \$14.95 paperback

Reviewed by George C. Leef



The University of Chicago was founded with John D. Rockefeller's money, and numerous public libraries were created through the philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie. People hear about philanthropic success stories and generally assume that charitable foundations are doing wonderful things with the fortunes of the nation's superrich. In fact, there is a common view that the charitable work done with the wealth amassed by business tycoons is a “giving back to society” that at least partially atones for their undoubted transgressions against law and/or morality.

But how often do people think about philanthropic blunders? Who reflects on the possibility that charitable foundations might actually do *harmful* things with the money at their disposal?

There is only one such person who comes to mind: Martin Morse Wooster, author of *Great Philanthropic*

Mistakes. Wooster has made quite a study of philanthropy. His earlier book *The Great Philanthropists and the Problem of Donor Intent* examined the tendency for charitable foundations to be taken over by “experts” who overwhelmingly have a leftist outlook and steer the foundation's giving in ways that are often radically at odds with the philosophy of the donor. With his current book Wooster delves into the hubris of those “experts” who usually think there is no limit to the good they can do with vast sums of money. The trouble is that they often do no good at all—and sometimes considerable harm.

Wooster focuses on eight cases where huge foundations made mistakes: the Rockefeller Foundation's attempt to recast American medical education; the Lasker Foundation's war against cancer; the population-control campaign of the Ford and Rockefeller foundations; the Ford Foundation's “Gray Areas” program; the Carnegie Corporation's public-television campaigns; the Ford Foundation's school-decentralization initiative; the MacArthur Fellows program; and the Annenberg Foundation's public-school-reform crusade. After reading about each one, my mind was drawn to Milton Friedman's observation that no one spends other people's money as carefully as he spends his own.

Foundations don't act. The people who run them do. Wooster's eight cases center on foundation decision-makers who had grand visions for changing the world. Arguably, the one who best exemplifies the typical mindset was Ford Foundation president McGeorge Bundy. Bundy, who ran the giant in the 1960s and 1970s, once declared, “I may be wrong but I am never in doubt.” It's that lack of doubt that is the root of the problem time after time. Ford's “Gray Areas” program is an excellent example.

The basic idea behind this program was to fund community organizations in impoverished areas, mostly inner cities. Ford Foundation officers assumed that activists in each community would know best what kinds of programs would be most beneficial. Thus Ford created new community organizations that would have great latitude to do whatever their leaders wanted. The result was a set of organizations “so flexible as to be virtually spineless, agencies whose very existence was dependent on their ability to write proposals that