

Edited by Gene Santoro

There is barely a mention of the Panama Canal, trust busting or the Great White Fleet

in this fact-packed, 940-page biography of Theodore Roosevelt. Instead Douglas Brinkley—who has authored biographies of Gerald Ford and Rosa Parks; edited Jack Kerouac's diaries; and chronicled post-Katrina devastation in *The Great Deluge*—details Roosevelt's lifelong love affair with nature. As he does, he crafts not only the definitive account of Roosevelt the conservationist, but maybe even, unexpectedly, of the man himself.

Roosevelt's zest for the outdoors was evident early on. As a child of 7 or 8, he made daily visits to a seal carcass for sale in a Manhattan fish market, measuring its girth and taking notes on the animal's flippers like a young Charles Darwin. In fact, evolutionary theory and Darwin's rigorous attention to scientific detail inspired Roosevelt and a like-minded generation of budding conservationists, such as John Burroughs and George Bird Grinnell, who would number among his closest friends. Enrolling at Harvard in 1876, Roosevelt endeavored to become the leading naturalist of his generation until he concluded that academic life was too lab-bound. For the rest of his days, whenever he needed to recharge his vitality from recurrent bouts of depression, he headed for some wilderness edge of America to do a naturalist's work and became one of the country's premier ornithologists and cougar experts. During his presidency he was able to turn his

Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America

by Douglas Brinkley
Harper

passion for nature into the nation's agenda. All told he created five national parks, preserved 234 million acres of land and championed environmental causes.

Brinkley tries to systematize Roosevelt's thinking on the environment into a coherent philosophy. It's a tall order. Roosevelt tirelessly worked to restore America's depleted bison populations, but as a chest-puffed big-game hunter, he shot one of the last black bears in northern Louisiana. He created scores of national forests, but at the same time pushed irrigation projects in the West that wreaked havoc on local ecosystems. Roosevelt's unruffled aristocratic character was complicated and at times compromised by a moral outlook that ultimately was reducible only to an outsized certainty that he was right. And, as Brinkley subtly shows, nowhere was this more evident than in Roosevelt's work on the environment.

Wilderness Warrior is a mammoth achievement. Roosevelt's personality is no easier to capture in words than are the sublime landscapes he preserved for posterity. But through exhaustive research combined with an evident fondness for both Roosevelt and the natural world, Brinkley manages to evoke the shape and feeling of both.

—Kevin Hartnett

He took notes about the animal's flippers like a young Charles Darwin

A trick photo made for Theodore Roosevelt's presidential bid in 1912, when he ran on the Bull Moose ticket, shows him looking "fit as a bull moose."