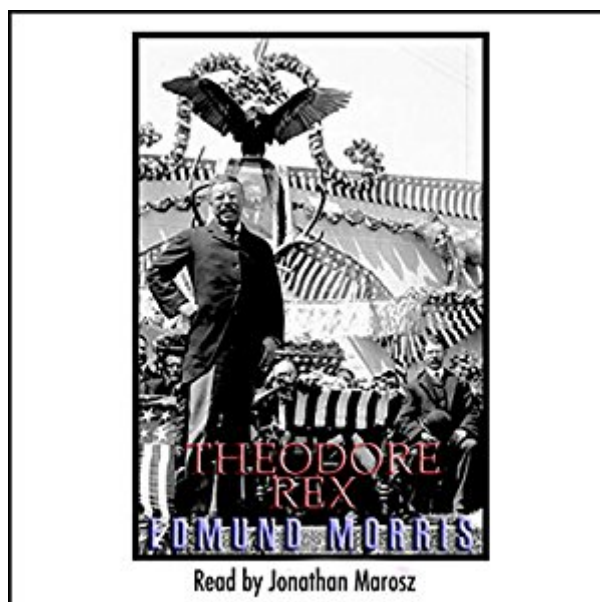


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Theodore Rex



Synopsis

Theodore Rex is the sequel to Edmund Morris's classic bestseller *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. It begins by following the new President (still the youngest in American history) as he comes down from Mount Marcy, New York, to take his emergency oath of office in Buffalo, one hundred years ago. A detailed prologue describes TR's assumption of power and journey to Washington, with the assassinated President McKinley riding behind him like a ghost of the nineteenth century. (Trains rumble throughout this irresistibly moving narrative, as TR crosses and recrosses the nation.) Traveling south through a succession of haunting landscapes, TR encounters harbingers of all the major issues of the new century--Imperialism, Industrialism, Conservation, Immigration, Labor, Race--plus the overall challenge that intimidated McKinley: how to harness America's new power as the world's richest nation. Theodore Rex (the title is taken from a quip by Henry James) tells the story of the following seven and a half years--years in which TR entertains, infuriates, amuses, strong-arms, and seduces the body politic into a state of almost total subservience to his will. It is not always a pretty story: one of the revelations here is that TR was hated and feared by a substantial minority of his fellow citizens. Wall Street, the white South, Western lumber barons, even his own Republican leadership in Congress strive to harness his steadily increasing power. Within weeks of arrival in Washington, TR causes a nationwide sensation by becoming the first President to invite a black man to dinner in the White House. Next, he launches his famous prosecution of the Northern Securities Company, and follows up with landmark antitrust legislation. He liberates Cuba, determines the route of the Panama Canal, mediates the great Anthracite Strike, and resolves the Venezuela Crisis of 1902-1903 with such masterful secrecy that the world at large is unaware how near the United States and Germany have come to war. During an epic national tour in the spring of 1903, TR's conservation philosophy (his single greatest gift to posterity) comes into full flower. He also bestows on countless Americans the richness of a personality without parallel--evangelical and passionate, yet lusty and funny; adroitly political, winningly natural, intellectually overwhelming. The most famous father of his time, he is adored by his six children (although beautiful, willful Princess Alice rebelled against him) and accepted as an honorary member of the White House Gang of seditious small boys. Theodore Rex, full of cinematic detail, moves with the exhilarating pace of a novel, yet it rides on a granite base of scholarship. TR's own voice is constantly heard, as the President was a gifted letter writer and raconteur. Also heard are the many witticisms, sometimes mocking, yet always affectionate, of such Roosevelt intimates as Henry Adams, John Hay, and Elihu Root. ("Theodore is never sober," said Adams, "only he is drunk with himself and not with rum.") TR's speed of thought and

action, and his total command of all aspects of presidential leadership, from bureaucratic subterfuge to manipulation of the press, make him all but invincible in 1904, when he wins a second term by a historic landslide. Surprisingly, this victory transforms him from a patrician conservative to a progressive, responsible between 1905 and 1908 for a raft of enlightened legislation, including the Pure Food and Employer Liability acts. Even more surprising, to critics who have caricatured TR as a swinger of the Big Stick, is his emergence as a diplomat. He wins the Nobel Peace Prize for bringing about an end to the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Interspersed with many stories of Rooseveltian triumphs are some bitter episodes--notably a devastating lynching--that remind us of America's deep prejudices and fears. Theodore Rex does not attempt to justify TR's notorious action following the Brownsville Incident of 1906--his worst mistake as President--but neither does this resolutely honest biography indulge in the easy wisdom of hindsight. It is written throughout in real time, reflecting the world as TR saw it. By the final chapter, as the great "Teddy" prepares to quit the White House in 1909, it will be a hard-hearted listener who does not share the sentiment of Henry Adams: "The old house will seem dull and sad when my Theodore has gone."--This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you did not like Mr. Morris's biography of President Reagan, give Mr. Morris another chance. Theodore Rex is the best book I have read on President Theodore Roosevelt's almost 8 years in office, after having started as our youngest president to that point in time. I found the recent David

McCullough biography of John Adams as the closest comparable work. Both biographers rely a lot on the subject's own words and those of the people he interacted with. I found three qualities of Theodore Rex to be superior to the Adams biography. First, Mr. Morris has chosen to magnify issues that are of more interest to us today which are often virtually ignored in conventional histories. Some of these subjects involved Mr. Roosevelt's attitudes towards minority groups including African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Jews. Other related subjects included what he chose to say and do about discrimination and lynchings, willingness to address a pogrom in Russia, and atrocities conducted by the Army in the Philippines. Second, Mr. Morris doesn't try to "pretty up" the ugly sides of his subject. In these first areas above, President Roosevelt did some good things . . . but he also did some pretty awful ones. His support for bad conduct dismissals of African-American troops after complaints in Brownsville, Texas, was particularly questionable, coming at a time when he had little at risk politically by doing the right thing and he was outspoken in other areas. Third, Mr. Morris has an eye for detail that makes the scenes come alive to extend beyond the mere words and events being presented. I particularly enjoyed the description of Roosevelt's first few days as president.

Edmund Morris has had an interesting career as a writer. A native Rhodesian (the African country dominated by whites, and replaced by the currently unstable Zimbabwe) he emigrated first to South Africa, then Britain, finally the United States. He then became a full time writer, and for his first book, "The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt" won a Pulitzer for biography. He was then appointed Reagan's official biographer (Reagan read the previous book and liked it) and produced "Dutch", a worthwhile addition to the library of books about Reagan, but one that will remain controversial because of the way Morris treated the subject, and the format in which he wrote the book. Morris's next book is the current one being reviewed, "Theodore Rex." This book covers his presidency, from the succession to the office on the death of William McKinley to his leaving office seven and a half years later. There is a great deal of detail about his life in office, his relations with his family and contemporaries, and the legislative issues that confronted him. The author, while pro-Roosevelt, isn't blindly so. There are instances in the book where he clearly disagrees with what the President did, and is critical of him in consequence. Most notable is the Brownsville Texas incident, where Roosevelt and the high command of the army decided that some black soldiers were guilty of rioting on the streets of that city, and the president decided to cashier the whole unit from the army without court martial or anything. Other characters of the administration are well-drawn and interesting.

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