

Black church in this era. I am most perplexed, however, about her assertion that her story “does not stand in for the story of every black church community” (10). Judicious scholars have never made such claims for “community” studies of this nature, but thoughtful, localized studies such as this book, do, in fact, give us insight into larger conversations and themes. And on those terms, *Soul Liberty* succeeds magnificently.

The Wind at His Back: American Public Opinion and Theodore Roosevelt’s Foreign Policy

Thompson, John M. *Great Power Rising: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. x + 270 pp. \$36.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-085995-4.

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The emergence of the United States as a global power in the early twentieth century has long fascinated historians of U.S. foreign relations. In this book, John M. Thompson offers a unique contribution to this well-studied topic by examining public opinion and the politics surrounding Theodore Roosevelt’s foreign policy decision-making. As Thompson observes, most historians portray Roosevelt as an activist president constrained from doing more to assert U.S. power overseas by “an isolationist and indifferent public and Congress” (3). Thompson disputes this interpretation, arguing that Roosevelt correctly perceived that “most of the time, his agenda reflected ideas that were acceptable to a majority of Americans” (5). A favorable political climate and Roosevelt’s influence over both public opinion and Congress allowed him to achieve his diplomatic-military goals and a broader quest to translate America’s “latent strength into great power status” (183).

Thompson most effectively defends his argument in chapters analyzing several important diplomatic episodes during Roosevelt’s presidency. These include the Venezuelan crisis of 1902–1903, the U.S. intervention in Panama that led to the construction of the isthmian canal, the development of the Roosevelt Corollary, naval expansion, and tensions with China and Japan over immigration. In his analysis of these events, Thompson exhaustively mines an array of newspapers and journals, congressional debates, and the correspondence of Roosevelt and other leading political figures to get a sense of public opinion. He details Roosevelt’s assessment of the political environment he faced, the tactics he pursued to shape it, and the impact it had on his policy choices. At times, Roosevelt faced opposition strong enough to cause him to modify his policy preferences, as in the case of immigration legislation. But Thompson shows that such an outcome was uncommon, and, more often, Roosevelt’s policies resonated with public opinion, boosting his popularity.

Thompson's selection of case studies is somewhat narrow. As the author concedes, he left out major episodes such as the mediation of the Russo-Japanese War and the president's "behind-the-scenes diplomacy during the First Moroccan Crisis" (7). Thompson suggests he chose the episodes he did because they had more evidence available for study than others. "Only by examining a large number of sources in a concentrated manner," he asserts, "can a comprehensive understanding of the influence of public opinion and domestic politics on Roosevelt's foreign policy emerge" (7). That approach certainly makes sense. Still, the list of presidential episodes Thompson selected for study is disappointing, as most of them focus on matters closer to home, such as issues relating to Central America and American immigration policy. Naval expansion is an exception, to be sure, but Thompson discusses that issue only in relation to the war scares that developed with China and Japan. One wonders if Thompson's thesis about the popularity of Roosevelt's foreign policy would hold up on a matter further afield, such as U.S. relations toward the Philippines. On one level, Roosevelt got what he wanted, since Americans supported retaining the islands despite a bloody war that lasted years. On the other hand, enthusiasm for formal imperialism rapidly faded once the war ended, to the point that Roosevelt believed the United States should rid itself of its new possession. Given the prominence of the Philippines issue in American politics during Roosevelt's first term, it would seem to have been an excellent case study for Thompson to have included for analysis.

In Thompson's defense, he does examine one episode involving great powers overseas: Roosevelt's response to World War I. This chapter, however, is later, and not as convincing as those dealing with Roosevelt's presidential years. Here, Thompson argues that Roosevelt's campaign for "preparedness and Americanism" was not initially popular with the American people, but, over time, the public moved in the former president's direction (158). Pointing to support for U.S. intervention in the war after April 1917, and to TR's emergence as a frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination in 1920, Thompson suggests that, ultimately, much of the public rallied to Roosevelt's defense policy and his views of the war. While partially true, other considerations lead to different conclusions. First, Thompson fails to note that little support existed among the public or in Congress for universal military service, the cornerstone of Roosevelt's preparedness program. Most Americans did come around to supporting preparedness by early 1916, but it was Woodrow Wilson's version, featuring a naval build-up and a rejection of universal military service. In addition, Thompson notes that Roosevelt saw Germany as a potential threat to the United States and thought that "Britain and the United States shared a special relationship" (171). Roosevelt did not make these strategic views public prior to America's entry into the war. Thompson mentions this only in passing, but it reveals that Roosevelt may have perceived that most Americans did not share his belief that the United States had a security interest in Britain winning the war. This possibility, as well as the complexity involved with public opinion on the preparedness issue, deserves more attention from the author.

Overall, though, this is an interesting and important book. It provides a thoughtful and much needed corrective to the idea that Americans were an obstacle for Roosevelt to overcome. Thompson shows that, in fact, they rallied to their president's agenda, at least when it came to asserting American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere and enlarging the U.S. navy. Whether or not that meant Americans embraced an active and ongoing engagement with great power politics overseas remains to be seen.