

Teddy Roosevelt Class SSU Osher Lifelong Learning Week Two

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Given Teddy Roosevelt's prickly intolerance of any opposition to his political outlook, it is rather remarkable—and admirable—that he could handle sharp criticism from the press, especially if the barbs were couched in humor. And side-splitting political/cultural humor was the stock in trade of one Finley Peter Dunne of the *Chicago Times Herald*. For an analogy, think Bill Mawr in today's media. Dunne lampooned Teddy regularly through his adopted persona, the irreverent Irish bartender Martin Dooley, and the bar's most loyal customer, Mr. Hennessy. Dunne was probably the country's most popular satirist, his weekly columns read by millions. Dunne had a field day with Roosevelt's endless bragging about his exploits in the Spanish-American war, tales which tended to emphasize his outsized contributions to victory in the "splendid little war." (As daughter Alice once said, "Most of my father's sentences began with the word 'I.'")

After reading Teddy's memoir of his wartime experiences, *The Rough Riders*, "Mr. Dooley" reviewed the book for Harper's Weekly, mocking Teddy's tendency to see himself as the indispensable central actor in the drama. In his inimitable Irish brogue, Mr. Dooley has this to say about the work: "Tis th' biography iv a hero be wan who knows. Tis th' darin' exploits iv a brave man be an actual eye witness. If I was him, I'd call th' book *Alone in Cubia*."

Just three days after Dunne's review appeared, Teddy wrote to Dunne—having obviously enjoyed Mr. Dooley's observations. Teddy wrote "I regret to state that my family and intimate friends are delighted with your review of my book. Now I think you owe me one, and I shall exact that when you next come east you pay me a visit. I have long wanted the chance of making your acquaintance." Roosevelt had shown he was a good sport, and was able to laugh at himself. This is not a trait shared by most large ego politicians, and for this he deserves credit. Good thing too that he had this capacity, because "Mr. Dooley" continued to lay it on Roosevelt. But his light hearted attacks never strained the odd friendship between journalist and politician. "I never knew a man with a keener humor or one who could take a joke on himself with better grace," Dooley later wrote.

Roosevelt would regale listeners for years with a story related to this incident. When Teddy was governor of New York he met a young woman at a reception who gushed "Oh Governor, I've read everything you've written." "Really, what book did you like best?" Teddy replied. "Why that one, you know, *Alone in Cuba*."