

# THEODORE ROOSEVELT

A P R E S I D E N T ' S V I S I O N

## PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHEET

**EXCERPT FROM THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S EIGHTH ANNUAL MESSAGE TO CONGRESS,  
DECEMBER 9, 1908.**

It is hard to say whether most damage to the country at large would come from entire failure on the part of the public to supervise and control the actions of the great corporations, or from the exercise of the necessary governmental power in a way which would do injustice and wrong to the corporations. Both the preachers of an unrestricted individualism, and the preachers of an oppression which would deny to able men of business the just reward of their initiative and business sagacity, are advocating policies that would be fraught with the gravest harm to the whole country. To permit every lawless capitalist, every law-defying corporation, to take any action, no matter how iniquitous, in the effort to secure an improper profit and to build up privilege, would be ruinous to the Republic and would mark the abandonment of the effort to secure in the industrial world the spirit of democratic fair dealing. On the other hand, to attack these wrongs in that spirit of demagoguery which can see wrong only when committed by the man of wealth, and is dumb and blind in the presence of wrong committed against men of property or by men of no property, is exactly as evil as corruptly to defend the wrongdoing of men of wealth. The war we wage must be waged against misconduct, against wrongdoing wherever it is found; and we must stand heartily for the rights of every decent man, whether he be a man of great wealth or a man who earns his livelihood as a wage-worker or a tiller of the soil.

It is to the interest of all of us that there should be a premium put upon individual initiative and individual capacity, and an ample reward for the great directing intelligences alone competent to manage the great business operations of today. It is well to keep in mind that exactly as the anarchist is the worst enemy of liberty and the reactionary the worst enemy of order, so the men who defend the rights of property have most to fear from the wrongdoers of great wealth, and the men who are championing popular rights have most to fear from the demagogues who in the name of popular rights would do wrong to and oppress honest business men, honest men of wealth; for the success of either type of wrongdoer necessarily invites a violent reaction against the cause the wrongdoer nominally upholds. In point of danger to the Nation there is nothing to choose between on the one hand the corruptionist, the bribe-giver, the bribe-taker, the man who employs his great talent to swindle his fellow-citizens on a large scale, and, on the other hand, the preacher of class hatred, the man who, whether from ignorance or from willingness to sacrifice his country to his ambition, persuades well-meaning but wrong-headed men to try to destroy the instruments upon which our prosperity mainly rests. Let each group of men beware of and guard against the shortcomings to which that group is itself most liable.

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## A P R E S I D E N T ' S V I S I O N

### QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What are two dangers that Roosevelt describes in the first sentence of this excerpt?
2. Roosevelt states that it would be “ruinous” to “permit every lawless capitalist, every law-defying corporation, to take any action, no matter how iniquitous, in the effort to secure an improper profit and to build up privilege.” List three ways that an individual or a corporation might “secure an improper profit” or unfairly “build up privilege.”
3. Roosevelt says, “It is to the interest of all of us that there should be a premium put upon individual initiative and individual capacity, and an ample reward for the great directing intelligences alone competent to manage the great business operations of today.” Using your own words, write one sentence summarizing Roosevelt’s message in this quotation.
4. Who is Roosevelt’s audience for this speech? Based on this excerpt, do you think Roosevelt tailored his speech specifically for this audience? Explain your answer.
5. List three things this excerpt tells you about life in the United States at the time Roosevelt delivered the speech.

### ACTIVITIES

Use your textbook and other print and online resources to complete the following activities.

1. Roosevelt is sometimes referred to as a “trust buster.” Using your textbook and reliable online resources, research this term and Roosevelt’s association with it. What is trust busting? Why was Roosevelt described as a trust buster? Were his actions as a trust buster consistent with his message in this speech? Explain your answer.
2. With a partner, develop a list of potential negative consequences of a few wealthy companies controlling most of the business in the country. As a class, discuss some of these examples and what the government could (or should) do to prevent them from happening.
3. Define the terms *anarchist* and *reactionary*. In three or four sentences, explain why Roosevelt would say that “the anarchist is the worst enemy of liberty and the reactionary the worst enemy of order.”

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