1. The Chief Sets the Tone

CHAPTER 1

THE CHIEF SETS THE TONE

BY THE AUTUMN OF 1943, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sensed that the Allies had seized the military initiative from the Axis Powers. Allied forces had already recaptured North Africa and landed on Italian soil, and plans were now being laid for the Normandy invasion. The Russians had stopped the Nazi onslaught just outside of Moscow, and the Red Army was driving the once-invincible Wehrmacht from Soviet soil. The disaster at Pearl Harbor had begun to fade from the minds of Americans, replaced by pride in the victories at Guam, Midway, and Guadalcanal. Finally, the tremendous losses to American shipping in the Atlantic Ocean from silent U-boat attacks had been dramatically reduced.

These military successes, holding out as they did the hope of an ultimate Allied triumph, heartened the president, but they mitigated only marginally the worst personal humiliation he had suffered in his decade as chief executive. In the closing days of September, his friend and loyal supporter since the advent of the New Deal, fellow New Yorker Sumner Welles, had been forced to leave his post as under secretary of state in

disgrace. Welles's resignation came just as Roosevelt needed his seemingly inexhaustible energy and perceptive counsel most urgently. Equally troubling was Welles's realization that Roosevelt had known that it was Secretary of State Cordell Hull, a man held in great esteem by the vast majority of Americans, who had engineered Welles's downfall, not because of policy differences or poor performance, but rather as the denouement of a personal vendetta.

The underlying issue was one of power, sometimes real and sometimes imagined—a contest between Hull and Welles over which of them was to run the State Department. Even though Hull was by then so physically incapacitated that he could not take charge of the department on a day-to-day basis, he could not admit to himself that Welles not only commanded the diplomatic bureaucracy but also functioned efficiently, with White House guidance, as America's global technician. Hull refused to accept that fact because he genuinely hated Welles. In October 1942 he seized upon a Federal Bureau of Investigation inquiry completed in early January 1941, documenting the fact that Welles had made homosexual advances to several Negro railroad porters, as the deadly weapon to drive Welles out of office.

For a brief moment in wartime Washington, the removal of Welles made the front page. But the tragedy slipped to the inside columns as soon as news of the shifting Allied battlefronts captured the public's attention. Thereafter Welles became one of many wartime casualties, mourned but then forgotten by all except a few loyalists.

Shortly after Welles's precipitous resignation, in a heated exchange with former ambassador William Bullitt in which Roosevelt lashed out at the diplomat for allegedly abetting Hull, the depth of the president's feeling was palpable: "You cannot speak that way about Welles to me. So far as Welles is concerned, he is an exceptionally able, honest, straight-forward, high-minded public servant. He would never stoop to malice. And I want to say to you, that when you and Welles meet St. Peter, Sumner will probably go to heaven, but you will go to hell. So far as I am concerned, that is where you can go now."[1] Yet, his anger notwithstanding, Roosevelt had only himself to blame for much of the

debacle. As chief executive, it was he who set the professional and personal standard for his administration.

If anyone was a creature of his environment, it was Franklin Roosevelt. Born and reared in the fading light of America's Gilded Age, he had seen his personality shaped long before he reached the White House. For the future president, the lessons learned from his upstate New York upbringing would always be at the core of his being.

Springwood was the name that James Roosevelt, a wealthy entrepreneur, chose for the large and comfortable home that he purchased for his first wife in Hyde Park, New York, shortly after the Civil War. The thickly wooded estate projected a mood of serenity and security. Shortly after James became a widower, in 1875, he courted and married Sara Delano, and in the autumn of 1880 she moved into the spacious seventeen-room estate. They enjoyed these rustic surroundings and their status as members of the aristocratic landed gentry. The only thing they lacked within this idyllic setting was a child of their own.[2]

James and Sara filled this void when their sole offspring, Franklin, was born in 1882. James was already past fifty when he became a father for the second time. His position in New York's social elite was secure, yet he differed from many of his relatives in belonging to the Democratic party. Sara also came from a patrician background, but unlike her husband, an only child, she was one of eleven children. Married relatively late (at the age of twenty-five), she devoted herself almost exclusively to her husband, and, after a difficult labor, divided her time between James and her young son.[3]

Franklin grew up in Hyde Park surrounded by a tranquil environment of open spaces and woods, with the Hudson River flowing past his comfortable home. His parents' marriage was a happy one, and he experienced the domestic stability about which many can only dream. As the scion of a Social Register family, he had private tutors to direct his early secular education and the Episcopal Church to provide him with a firm moral grounding. For recreation, he became an accomplished sailor;

yet he also found quiet pleasure in stamp collecting. As would be expected for a child of his standing, his parents took him on frequent holidays to Europe, especially to England and Germany—two nations that were to figure prominently in his adult life.

His formal education began in 1896, when he entered the Groton School, a prestigious Massachusetts boarding school. Its founder, Endicott Peabody—an Episcopal minister commonly referred to as "the Rector"—still ruled as headmaster. Franklin adapted to the school's exacting routine and grew to respect Peabody, whose virility and athleticism seemed to embody Groton's ideals and its patrons' aspirations. The affluent Americans who sent their sons to Groton expected a strong religious orientation in an academic setting. Peabody gladly provided that environment and inculcated in his young charges a sense of noblesse oblige. Children of the upper class, he held, had to recognize their sacred obligation to aid the needy. His students revered him for this idealism, and when they married it was often Peabody who was asked to officiate at the ceremony. When they had children, it was their old schoolmaster who christened their sons, as if his mere presence would ensure the transmission of an unbroken and unquestioned moral standard down through the generations.

As part of their training, Groton students conformed to strict guidelines that were intended to emphasize group identification rather than individualism. They lived in six-by-nine-foot bare wood dormitory rooms, in which the only pictures allowed were those of their families. The boys adhered to a Spartan routine. They took cold showers at 7:00 A.M.; breakfast was served half an hour later; chapel was compulsory at 8:15, seven days a week. Classes lasted until noon, and dinner was followed by sessions of Greek and Latin, algebra, English literature, and French. American history, of course, was excluded because it was not considered part of a classical education. Sports filled the rest of the afternoon. At supper, a stiff collar, black tie, and patent leather shoes were required. After supper the boys returned to the chapel for evening prayers, and then retired to their dormitories to prepare for the next day's activities. Yet even within this regimen, the privileged boys of Groton did not make their beds, wait on tables, or polish their shoes.

They were given twenty-five cents spending money and five cents for the Sunday collection plate. Peabody molded his charges to share a common set of values. The youngsters under his supervision were made to accept what his clients—their parents—considered the essential foundation for later life: completion of an academic program for college entrance, adherence to Episcopal beliefs, and the social contract that with wealth went responsibility.

Franklin was slightly older than many of his peers. He was also highly motivated and finished his four years at the academy in the upper fourth of his class. His extracurricular success came on the debating team, for he did not excel in the most popular sport, football. Like most of his classmates, Roosevelt headed to Harvard University upon graduation in 1899. His father died during his freshman year. The event had two immediate consequences for him: he lost his father's guidance, and Sara turned most of her energies toward her son. In contrast to his academic success at boarding school, Franklin's attention at college focused primarily on activities outside the classroom, for he found that his peers gauged his worth not so much by his grades but by his campus reputation. While receiving gentleman's C's, he tried to measure up to this social pressure but only emerged as a campus leader in his senior year, when he became editor of the *Harvard Crimson.* Despite this achievement, however, he could not duplicate his cousin Theodore Roosevelt's record of being tapped for Phi Beta Kappa and selected to Porcellian, the top social club. Franklin did not win either honor, never earned a varsity H in sports, and was not chosen as one of the three senior marshals who led the class in the commencement procession.

After graduating from college, he attended Columbia University Law School until he passed the New York bar examination in 1907. After joining the prominent Wall Street firm of Carter, Ledyard, and Milburn, who represented such business giants as Standard Oil and American Tobacco, he announced to his colleagues that his legal career was just a starting point. Profoundly impressed by his cousin's presidency, young Franklin told his peers that he also expected to make 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue his residence.[4]

During this formative period, and much to his mother's chagrin, on St. Patrick's Day in 1905 he married Eleanor Roosevelt, a distant cousin, who was extremely insecure. Tall and dark haired, Eleanor considered herself ugly. Orphaned at the age of ten, she had been raised by a stern grandmother, along with a neurotic aunt and an alcoholic uncle. Despite this unhappy setting, she grew up with a deeply rooted social conscience that led her to support assistance in many forms to those in need. She also desperately wanted to become a wife and mother, and that, too, was precisely what Franklin expected. As anticipated, their family quickly mushroomed to include five children.[5]

By the time he married Eleanor, Franklin had developed certain character traits. He was quite spoiled and accustomed to being the center of attention; he had many acquaintances but few close friends. He had become a practicing attorney, even though he never had to earn a living in this or any other profession. His mother would always make certain that her son and grandchildren were comfortable, and since Sara controlled her son's finances, she took it upon herself to interfere regularly in his family life, much to Eleanor's consternation.

Franklin did not seem bothered by his wife's complaints, preferring to focus his attention on the advancement of his career. In fact, he quickly tired of the legal profession and soon entered local politics. In 1910 he won a seat in the New York State Senate by cleverly associating the Roosevelt name with Teddy's popularity and profiting from a local split within the Republican party. As a freshman Democratic senator from the Twenty-Sixth Senatorial District, he was soon initiated into Democratic party politics, learning about the power of the Tammany Hall machine in New York City and the consequences for those who opposed it. He energetically associated himself with the progressive movement and its attempts to pass legislative measures calling for such reforms as child-labor limitations, direct senatorial elections, and agricultural improvements.

By speaking out for these causes, Roosevelt the novice politician had an opportunity to identify with a national as well as a state constituency. When Woodrow Wilson triumphed as governor of New Jersey on a progressive platform, Franklin became an early supporter of his legislative reforms: once Wilson decided to run for the presidency, Roosevelt

enthusiastically applauded this decision and offered to campaign for the governor. Wilson's stunning victory in 1912 moved Roosevelt a step closer to the White House. As a loyal Democrat and supporter of the president-elect, he asked for and received the position of assistant secretary of the navy, the same post that his cousin Teddy had once held.

Franklin left state politics for the federal government in the spring of 1913. As his principal assistant, he selected Louis Howe, a frail, ugly little forty-one-year-old man with chronic heart and asthma problems. They had met in 1910, when Roosevelt ran for the state senate, and two years later it was Howe who had directed Franklin's successful reelection bid. Trained as a journalist, Howe was also a shrewd political adviser. Most essentially, he and Roosevelt formed a close personal bond based on trust. Only with this most unlikely ally could Franklin let down his guard completely; Howe's reward was that, for the remainder of his life, he would hold the confidence of the future president.[6]

Roosevelt and Howe kept abreast of the wishes of their New York constituents because they formed Franklin's political base. In order to remain influential at the state level, the assistant secretary tried to direct federal patronage to his home district; although his recommendations were not always heeded, he came to recognize the importance of this powerful political weapon that national figures wielded. Roosevelt also interacted with powerful figures in other branches of the federal bureaucracy, for the department of the navy shared the same building with the departments of state and war. His decisions had far-reaching effects, and he preferred to confer with others in leadership roles. He also learned how to push for proposals within his own agency, in congressional committees, and with other cabinet officials. As an assistant secretary, he not only welcomed authority but also tried to broaden his powers, for with added responsibilities came more authority and the expanded role that Roosevelt coveted.[7]

The Wilson administration also served as an apprenticeship for Roosevelt through which he could gain managerial skills within the federal bureaucracy; he earned valuable national exposure by becoming a vocal proponent of rapid naval expansion to meet the challenge of a possible world war. He handled labor disputes and pressed for greater efficiency in the naval yards.

He also witnessed firsthand how German submarine warfare propelled the United States into the global conflict of World War I, and he expressed his own fervent brand of nationalism while warning his listeners of possible German penetration into the Americas, a theme upon which he would expand in speaking out against the Nazi menace in the late 1930s. In fact, Roosevelt developed such a profound distaste for Prussian militarism that he sometimes fabricated events to illustrate his point. For example, he claimed that during his teenage years he, his mother, and one of her friends were on a train bound for Berlin. They were sitting in a railroad compartment when a Prussian officer joined them and closed a nearby window. Sara's companion complained about a headache and asked that the window be reopened. Franklin complied, but the Prussian shut it again. This scene was repeated twice, and on the third attempt Franklin physically restrained the officer from touching the window. After the train reached its destination, he was arrested and taken to jail. Sara went to the United States embassy and had him released, but not before he had spent several hours incarcerated. Although this story was apocryphal, it showed the lengths to which Roosevelt would go to make his point. If lying served his purposes, the future president would not hesitate to do so.[8]

Yet such tall tales were immaterial compared to the severe test of his personal morality that almost destroyed his marriage. The handsome, youthful subcabinet member relished his official and social activities, whereas Eleanor, far more the introvert, was primarily a housewife caring for her growing youngsters. To assist with the obligations of an assistant secretary's spouse, in 1917 Eleanor hired Lucy Mercer—a young, tall, attractive woman from a well-respected Catholic family in Maryland—as her private secretary. In the intimate household setting, Franklin and Lucy became romantically involved. In the fall of 1918, Eleanor discovered their affair, and Lucy was summarily dismissed. Divorce temporarily threatened Eleanor and Franklin's marriage, but this option was soon discarded. The Roosevelts would remain together to raise their children, and to prevent Franklin's driving political ambition from being thwarted by public scandal. To reach the White House, he would have to create at least the illusion of marital bliss. As for

Eleanor, she never forgot the pain that this incident caused her, and she never forgave Franklin for his transgression.

With Lucy gone and the Wilson administration coming to an end, Roosevelt renewed his efforts to reach the White House in 1920 by following Teddy's example and accepting his party's vice-presidential nomination. He spoke out passionately in favor of the League of Nations, but the country, tired of world war and Wilsonian idealism, decisively rejected the Democratic ticket. Roosevelt found himself off the government payroll for the first time in almost a decade. Yet even in defeat he had matured politically, for he had had the opportunity to travel nationwide, meet with party leaders, and cement friendships that would serve him well in later years.

Roosevelt's loss at the polls did not affect his political future nearly so much as a crippling attack of poliomyelitis in 1921. He dealt with the affliction in several ways. At first, he had complete confidence that he would eventually walk again. Both he and his mother repressed their emotions about his paralysis, preferring simply not to address the topic. Refusing to acknowledge the reality of his permanent disability, he initially dismissed all thought of it. To remain in a positive frame of mind, he insisted on good cheer at all times from his staff, and he closely supervised immediate events to demonstrate that he was always in control. Eventually he recognized that he would in fact never recover the use of his legs and that he would need assistance for the rest of his life with everything from dressing to bathing. Able to remain erect for only short periods of time with the aid of crutches and ten-pound steel leg braces, he stood only on ceremonial occasions; otherwise, he spent his time in a specially designed wheelchair. He learned to endure great pain and to understand the power of patience, and he came to rely on others' eyewitness accounts and insights in formulating responses to a world that was now largely beyond at least his physical reach.

Franklin and Eleanor lived a partnership with little warmth or comfort; theirs had become a merger rather than a marriage. She became an additional set of eyes and ears and also substituted for Roosevelt in his speaking engagements. In addition to Eleanor, Howe, his closest political adviser and confidante, remained close to Roosevelt and continued to promote him, even in his bleakest days. He emerged as Roosevelt's

chief strategist, never doubting that his client would eventually enter the White House.

To treat the pain of his paralysis, one of Roosevelt's greatest pleasures was taking polio treatments at a resort near the town of Warm Springs, Georgia. He went there for the first time in 1924 to sunbathe and swim in the mineral water pool. Each morning, he exercised in the pool, and after lunch he rested or went for a drive in a custom-built car with special hand controls. Two years later he bought the estate as an investment for $200,000. It was never a financial success, but its economic viability was not his main concern. He found relief there; he was at ease in this setting. An added benefit was that Eleanor disliked Warm Springs, so she seldom accompanied him. If he wished to be alone or to invite companions of whom Eleanor disapproved, Franklin could travel to Georgia, confident that his wife would be absent.

Polio dramatically altered his life-style. He was alone and yet could never be by himself. The painful and debilitating disease and his limited recovery from it did not alter his basic beliefs, but instead added another dimension to his personality. Realizing that the stigma attached to polio victims could damage his chances to resume his political career, he hid his disability from the public. Many of his constituents did not even realize that Roosevelt was the nation's most celebrated polio victim. Of the 125,000 still photographs (25,000 of the president) in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, just two show him in a wheelchair: in one facing the camera and in the other with his back to the camera. No newsreels recorded his impairment; no cartoons or caricatures depicted him as a paraplegic. His constituents seldom perceived him as disabled, which was precisely the illusion he sought to convey.[9]

Although his paralysis permanently impeded Roosevelt's mobility and temporarily postponed his political ambitions, he never distanced himself from the Democratic party. In fact he attended the 1924 national convention at Madison Square Garden in New York to nominate his friend and political ally Governor Alfred Smith of New York for the presidency. Smith lost his bid for the nomination in the longest and most disastrous Democratic national convention ever. However, four years later he led the ticket, and Roosevelt campaigned for him in what was to be a losing run for the presidency. Yet to help his candidate even further,

Roosevelt agreed to run for governor of New York, and he was victorious by the narrowest of margins.

After the Depression struck, Governor Roosevelt spent the largest part of his time on such local issues as farming, the provision of cheap electric power, and judicial reform. His achievements as the chief executive of the nation's most populous state and his driving personal ambition propelled him into the race for the presidency in 1932. Winning the nomination virtually assured him victory in November. Republican President Herbert Hoover, who had taken credit for America's post–World War I prosperity, now had to offer solutions to the worst depression in American history. As the incumbent hopelessly groped for answers to incredibly complex questions, his challenger, riding a wave of anti-Hooverism, needed only to offer vague promises of economic solutions to achieve a brighter tomorrow. Roosevelt had only to guard against any obvious misstep as he watched his opponent self-destruct.[10]

Roosevelt entered the White House triumphant in March 1933, bringing with him beliefs that were to stay with him throughout his long presidential tenure. First and foremost, he was an elitist whose upbringing was decidedly more urban than rural. He appeared most comfortable with his own social class, preferring to face the East coast and Europe rather than the heartland of America. He was the consummate politician who refused to become doctrinaire, an approach that led him to experiment willingly with various New Deal alternatives. His magnetic personality mesmerized the vast majority of his supporters who listened to him in person or on radio. What others took to be inconsistency on his part never bothered him, as long as his ultimate objective was attained. This flexibility troubled many of his associates, who worried about compromising their own principles, but their feelings did not deter Roosevelt. Instead, he relied upon his charming personality to win virtually everyone over to his way of thinking.[11]

Roosevelt developed a leadership style in which he acted at his own discretion and chose to address those topics, large or small, that appealed to him; but seldom did he commit his thoughts to paper. Nevertheless his was the last word, and to prevent him from changing a decision once it was reached, those who understood the presidential style developed a practice that guaranteed closure. Subordinates drew up a

memorandum and Roosevelt initialed it: "FDR, OK." That ended discussion.

Such informal guidelines for the formulation of policy did not trouble Roosevelt. His imperative was control over everyone around him. Raised in a secure environment in which he had held center stage, he sought to continue to occupy such a position throughout his later public as well as private life. Indeed part of his reason for creating friction within government circles was to guarantee control. If an issue needed resolution, competing subordinates had to plead their cases to the ultimate arbitrator. Roosevelt welcomed this competition; in fact, he thrived on it.

Roosevelt quickly settled into the daily routine that would last throughout most of his years in the White House. He awoke early in the morning yet remained in bed, and at 8:30 A.M. habitually ate a hearty breakfast of grapefruit, coffee, cereal, and eggs. While eating, he skimmed major newspapers from New York City, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Baltimore and reviewed his schedule with aides as his valet dressed him. He had great difficulty getting up and sitting down, but once erect, he managed to walk with the support of the steel braces on his legs and with a cane for balance and support.

At approximately 10:00 A.M. a manservant brought in his armless wheelchair, helped him get into it, and took him to the private elevator on the second floor of the White House for the short ride down to the Oval Office on the first floor. Roosevelt worked steadily throughout the rest of the morning, occasionally taking out a cigarette, placing it in a long holder, and puffing away while signing official documents and correspondence, consulting with advisers, and receiving visitors. His staff tried to limit interviews to fifteen minutes, but these often lasted longer at Roosevelt's whim. He would readily put his guests at ease, and by the time their meeting ended most left satisfied that their concerns would be addressed. Here was a chief executive who truly enjoyed company.

At lunch Roosevelt ate with aides or guests and then returned to his desk and resumed the hectic schedule of reading, answering mail, and attending more meetings until 5:00 P.M. Twice a week for fifteen to thirty minutes he held off-the-record press conferences with reporters from newspaper and radio services who gathered around his desk. After

finishing his daily agenda, he sometimes swam in the enclosed heated White House pool and afterward enjoyed an alcohol rub. Roosevelt's work day ended with a review of his activities with his advisers and the making of plans for the following day. The "children's hour"—the name given to the time when his close associates, family, and staff gathered to review the day's events—began at 7:15 P.M. A social drinker who gained enormous satisfaction from mixing cocktails for his guests, Roosevelt sipped his own glass slowly and seldom had more than two drinks before dinner, all the while urging his concoctions on his company. The entire assemblage sat down to eat at 8:00. Afterwards, the president would converse with his company until he was tired and then retire to bed, usually by 10:00 or 11:00 P.M.

On Fridays the cabinet met in a long room at the White House whose tall windows looked out on the rose garden to the right of the south portico. Roosevelt chaired the meeting from the head of the table and would customarily open with his own statement about the issues he considered most pressing. The secretary of state sat to his right and the secretary of the treasury on his left; the remaining members sat alternately on either side down the length of the table in the order of the creation of their posts.

For relaxation, besides swimming, Roosevelt played penny ante as a social activity, bluffing excessively and losing more than winning. He was far more interested in his stamp collection, having been a philatelist since boyhood, and he tried to add to his huge holdings almost daily. He also enjoyed crossword puzzles and solitaire and liked to watch current movie releases in the company of friends. Although he made some effort to keep up with literature and popular songs, he was not widely read, nor did he appreciate classical music or fine art. Though raised a good Episcopalian, he was not a religious man and seldom turned to the church for direction in his daily life.

He traveled constantly by car, train, ship, or airplane and seemed reinvigorated by the slightest change of scenery. At Warm Springs, the mineral baths eased the pain of his polio. At Hyde Park, the secure setting comforted him and reminded him of his roots. As opportunities arose, he traveled on American warships to rest, sunbathe, fish, and assemble his thoughts.[12]

Franklin's wife and his domineering mother, however, had a significant impact on his family life. Sara sought to maintain her matriarchical standing by retaining control of a great deal of the family's wealth. Eleanor ran the household as best she could while serving him as an adviser. Although he wrote her "Dearest Babs" letters on his travels, they were not affectionate. Indeed, their marriage continued to be an accommodation in which each had loosely delineated tasks and obligations to the other. Any passion in their union had long since vanished. In fact, Eleanor and Franklin slept in separate bedrooms—a legacy of his infidelity. Yet the public never knew about this aspect of their private lives.[13]

Despite this lack of affection, Franklin coveted his patriarchical role and maintained a loving relationship with his five children. Over the years they brought him both pain and joy. Their divorces and the failed business ventures that traded on the president's popularity proved embarrassing, but Roosevelt seemed to accept these personal disappointments as part of his public charge.

His schedule revolved around politics, and he relished it. He thrived on the continual personal interaction that his office required. He was very patient with most of those in his orbit, but a mean streak occasionally surfaced; for example, he would deliberately appoint individuals to work together who hated each other. This cruelty sometimes caused bitter animosity among his subordinates, and when personal confrontations resulted, Roosevelt refused to intervene to settle the disputes. He preferred that the appointees become frustrated and then disillusioned, and finally resign in disgust. Such private antagonisms came to affect not only lesser officials but also cabinet members during his long tenure.

An apocryphal story reflects the lengths to which the president would go to avoid abrasive personal disputes, and the occasionally embarrassing consequences of his evasiveness. Roosevelt was sitting at his desk in the Oval Office working while Eleanor sat nearby knitting. A cabinet officer burst in and demanded that a bridge be built in Kentucky to reduce that state's unemployment. Roosevelt accepted the reasoning and told the official, "By George, you're absolutely right!" The official left, his victory in hand. Five minutes later another cabinet member rushed in and asserted that the bridge would hurt the local economy and therefore must not be constructed. The president looked puzzled for a

moment and then declared, "By George, you're absolutely right!" His second visitor departed, assured that he had prevailed. Finally Eleanor, still in the room, broke her silence: "I am confused. The first man asked to build the bridge; the second did not want it. You told each that he could have his way. Maybe you should think about the proposal a little more before they come back to see you." Roosevelt turned to his wife and loudly trumpeted, "Eleanor, by George, you're absolutely right!"

Roosevelt had won the presidency by promising to solve the staggering problems brought on by the Depression. During his campaign, he had refrained from making any major foreign policy statement, preferring to avoid looking abroad in the face of the crushing economic upheaval at home. Thus, when he delivered his inaugural address, he concentrated on strategies for domestic recovery, with only vague allusions to world affairs.[14]

This apparent oversight did not mean that the president was disinterested; in fact, he made no secret of his intention to be an activist president in foreign affairs. J. Pierrepont Moffat, a career diplomat, captured the significance of this intent early in the New Deal: "Of course President Roosevelt is being his own Secretary of State in the best T.R. and Wilson tradition. It has its advantages, but it makes everybody jumpy, as to what the President has said to foreign representatives." Moffat later added another observation about the strengths and weaknesses of the president's style: "It gives a distinct finality and I think a degree of consistency to our policy that will bear fruit. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult to know what has gone before and this doubt of knowing the background extends even in high circles."[15]

Moffat's words emphasized the serious dilemma that was to confront the diplomatic corps for the next twelve years: Roosevelt made policy decisions, yet often did not share them with those who were most affected. The president recognized this fact, but he was not concerned. His self-confidence, bordering on arrogance, led him to dismiss normal organizational procedures. This neglect resulted in confusion among his own foreign policy experts, for the White House would make commitments to other governments without informing the State Department. To demonstrate his executive authority, Roosevelt refused to dictate memoranda summarizing his talks with foreign statesmen, leaving the depart-

ment without a record of those discussions. This conscious refusal to provide the foreign service with presidential direction and policy goals continued throughout his years in office. Operating in this unorthodox manner, the president became the final arbiter. This crooked chain of authority caused unending confusion, but it accomplished the desired end—at least for the man at its origin.

Roosevelt took great pride in his knowledge of specific diplomatic issues and was acknowledged as one of the Democratic party's leading authorities on foreign relations. In 1928, for example, he wrote a widely read article, "Our Foreign Policy: A Democratic View," which was a partisan attack on Republican positions. In it he demanded an end to intervention in Latin America, the settlement of World War I debts, and naval disarmament. These pronouncements reflected the ideas of many prominent Democrats as a blueprint for the party but did not necessarily provide a clear picture of Roosevelt's global vision.[16]

Indeed, the president never followed a consistent set of principles in his conduct of international affairs. He had not carefully studied the subject in school, nor had he developed a scholarly interest in it in subsequent years. His views had been nurtured since childhood. Pivotal among them was a European orientation that remained with him throughout his years in the presidency. He grew to admire the British and the French, and these feelings were reinforced during World War I and throughout the years of Republican rule. After Roosevelt had won the presidency, he met with Hoover's secretary of state, Henry Stimson, early in 1933 and approved of the Hoover administration's initiatives for improved Anglo-French relations and European disarmament proposals. To achieve those ends, the new president held private discussions with the French and British, while excluding his own advisers. When his efforts failed, he unilaterally issued an unsuccessful appeal to world leaders for the elimination of offensive weaponry.

Conversely, Roosevelt grew to loathe German militarism. His election to the presidency closely paralleled the ascension of Adolf Hitler as chancellor of the Third Reich. The American chief executive ultimately came to despise everything the Nazis represented, especially their renewed efforts at rearmament and the brutality that they unleashed upon

their opponents. Almost from the very start of the New Deal, Roosevelt spoke out forcefully against the German government's persecution of its Jewish population. The president drew attention to this emerging reign of terror in its infancy because it offended the sense of decency and fair play that had been preached to him and those of his social class since his days at Groton. Those who misread his sympathies as philo-Semitism were wrong. He deplored the brutality that Hitler heaped upon a vulnerable minority, nothing more.

Although his primary focus remained on European matters, Roosevelt also came to emphasize inter-American cooperation. Initially, he supported his cousin's role in the taking of the Panama Canal and military intervention in Latin America. During his years in the Navy Department Franklin exerted his own brand of imperialism by calling for United States occupations in several Latin American nations. He even boasted that he had written Haiti's constitution, a false claim that would later return to haunt him when adversaries used it to depict him as an imperialist. During his years in office he gradually modified some of his basic assumptions, such as his unequivocal support for armed intervention and the shouldering of the "white man's burden" during the 1920s. Indeed, he eventually favored ending the marine occupations of Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic since these brought loud cries of American intervention. After he won the presidency, he stressed a "good neighbor" approach. The term soon struck a responsive chord and became synonymous with hemispheric solidarity. Voters applauded and embraced regional exclusivity, believing that the United States had an unquestioned obligation to Fortress America.

As for East Asia, the president had little background or interest in the region, and he had never actually visited it. Like many Americans, he idealized closer contacts with China. In fact, he endorsed Stimson's plans for halting Japanese expansion on mainland China through multilateral consultation with many nations; but this push toward international cooperation never gained a following.[17]

His love for sailing and years as assistant secretary of the navy added another dimension. His early advocacy of a large fleet was a direct result of his comprehension of the geopolitical significance of sea power and

his aggressive designs to expand the overseas role of the United States. During the 1920s he abandoned his call for a big navy as he saw the need for American forces to be stationed abroad diminish. Yet, despite these reduced military expectations, Roosevelt closely associated military preparedness with effective diplomatic action; few presidents have ever had a better grasp of the interplay of these imperatives than Franklin Roosevelt.

Finally, he believed in collective security, and he gave his unqualified support to Wilson's brand of internationalism, as expressed through his grand design for the League of Nations. During the 1920 presidential campaign, Roosevelt ardently preached this gospel and suffered the consequences of public rejection at the polls. To win the presidency twelve years later, he was forced to repudiate his earlier position endorsing U.S. entrance into the League, but he never totally abandoned the concept of global cooperation. As president, he cautiously advocated it as a means of bringing about a more peaceful world, but whenever opponents openly challenged him on this emotional issue, he retreated. He vividly remembered the humiliation of losing the 1920 election and had no intention of repeating the experience.

Roosevelt alone set the tone for his presidency. Self-assurance, strong management skills, political acumen, and an activist temperament were just a few of the qualities of the man who had set himself the task of leading the nation out of depression through an ethos of cooperation and sacrifice. He motivated like no president before him ever had, summoning up the best of his managerial, political, and personal qualities to advance his cause. Others gladly followed his lead, and he successfully moved his domestic programs forward.

Diplomatic affairs were another matter. Roosevelt came to the presidency with a frame of reference for deciding foreign policy issues that few before him had possessed. Always an elitist, he truly believed that he could resolve any problem by himself. Although his self-assurance helped him in making many decisions, it also brought to the fore his inherent weaknesses. He was not a team player and he greatly exaggerated the extent of his knowledge; he was secretive, and sometimes insensitive and inconsiderate. He set out to play a dominant role without

fully trusting the foreign service, and he acted unilaterally to illustrate his distrust. He had his own private agenda, which he seldom shared with anyone. Yet these impediments to the development of clear and consistent foreign policies had not yet crystallized at the beginning of the New Deal, as the country's prayers were centered on economic revival, not diplomatic advances.