

Part I

CONSIDERING TRUMAN IN
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Chapter One

TRUMAN IN HISTORICAL, POPULAR, AND POLITICAL MEMORY

Sean J. Savage

The perception and assessment of Harry S. Truman in historical, popular, and political memory have been influenced by the following factors. First, the American public and elites, namely, scholars, and politicians, have alternately argued and disagreed with each other's opinions of Truman's presidency in general and specific decisions in particular. For example, Truman's decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan was and continues to be broadly supported by the American public but is persistently controversial among historians. Conversely, Truman's decision to begin the racial integration of the military was initially unpopular with both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the general public. Eventually, however, this decision became widely accepted and supported by both elite and public opinion (Leuchtenburg, 2005: 224–5).

Second, an evaluation of Truman's life and presidency is influenced by whether it is based on the totality of his life or a particular aspect of his character or period of his life. Consequently, people who concentrate on Truman's reputation as a devoted husband and father have a more affectionate and admiring perception of Truman than those who focus on his participation in unsavory machine politics in Missouri (Truman, 1981; Algeo, 2009; Powell, 1948; Miller, 1986). In assessing the long-term consequences of his presidency in general, historians have consistently ranked Harry S. Truman as a "near great" president, along with Andrew Jackson and Theodore Roosevelt, and as one of the ten best presidents in American history (Stanley and Niemi, 1994: 260).

Third, the historical, popular, and political memory of Harry S. Truman has experienced both change and continuity according to major historical events and public expectations of presidential character and performance (Kirkendall, 2004). As Truman prepared to leave the presidency in December 1952, a Gallup poll revealed that his public approval rating was only 31 percent (Savage, 1997: 203). Truman's death on December 26, 1972 coincided with the remainder of Richard M. Nixon's

presidency. The Watergate scandals and Nixon's forced resignation from office led more Americans to yearn for a president who was scrupulously honest and ethical in his personal life, clear and straightforward in his public statements, and humble and patriotic in his respect for the office of U.S. president. More so than any other recent former president, Harry S. Truman seemed to satisfy this public desire. The peaceful end of the Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union also led to a more favorable public and scholarly appraisal of some of Truman's most controversial decisions of the Cold War, such as the Berlin Airlift and American military intervention in the Korean War (Haydock, 1999; Gaddis, 2005; Whelan, 1990). Recent presidents who have made difficult foreign and defense policy decisions and subsequently suffered low public approval ratings invoked the memory of Harry S. Truman. This was especially true of George W. Bush (Draper, 2007: 402).

Fourth, Truman's popular image as an earthy, unpretentious "everyman" has been promoted, disseminated, and solidified since his death by movies, a television mini-series, plays, songs, and best-selling books, especially biographies and collections of Truman's comments, letters, and interviews. Several actors, including James Whitmore, Gary Sinise, Ed Flanders, and E.G. Marshall, have portrayed Truman. Two rock songs from the 1970s, "Harry Truman" by the band Chicago and "So Long Harry Truman" by Danny O'Keefe, wistfully and nostalgically recall Truman as an honest, trustworthy president. This chapter will mostly survey, assess, and compare primary and secondary sources of these four factors regarding the topic of Truman in historical, popular, and political memory.

Useful primary sources that measure and disclose the public's perception of Harry S. Truman during his presidency include the first two volumes of *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971* (Gallup, 1972), *Vital Statistics on the Presidency* (Ragsdale, 1996), and *Vital Statistics on American Politics* (Stanley and Niemi, 1994). *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935–1971* (1972) provides public opinion polls on both Truman's overall job approval ratings and public opinion on some of his specific decisions and policies, such as his order to drop the atomic bombs on Japan and intervention in the Korean War. Some of the polling statistics serve as harbingers of future political events. For example, a Gallup poll reported that only 32 percent of the Americans questioned approved of Truman's job performance in October of 1946 (Gallup, 1972, vol. 2: 604). Two weeks later, the Republicans swept the 1946 elections and won control of Congress. Likewise, in a Gallup poll released on June 21, 1952, only 32 percent of the Americans surveyed approved of Truman's job performance (Gallup, 1972, vol. 2: 1070). The Republicans easily won control of the presidency and Congress in the 1952 elections.

Vital Statistics on the Presidency is especially helpful in providing researchers with statistics comparing Truman's job approval ratings at various dates in his presidency and to those of other presidents. This book reveals that Truman's job approval ratings ranged from a peak of 87 percent in May 1945 to a nadir of 24 percent in May 1951 (Ragsdale, 1996: 194). By comparison, those of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Truman's immediate successor in the presidency, ranged from a high of 79 percent in December 1956 to a low of 48 percent in March 1958 (pp. 195–6). Edited by Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics* does not provide as many relevant statistics on the public's perception and evaluation of Harry S. Truman compared to *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971* and *Vital Statistics*



Figure 1.1 Harry S. Truman of Missouri in 1937 or 1938. Photograph from the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., LC-H22-D-2618.

on the Presidency. Nonetheless, *Vital Statistics on American Politics* includes the rankings of U.S. presidents by historians since the Schlesinger poll of 1962 ranked Harry S. Truman as a “near great” president (Stanley and Niemi, 1994: 260–1).

During Truman’s presidency, mostly critical opinions of Truman’s personal character and leadership were expressed by Drew Pearson, a syndicated columnist and investigative reporter, and I.F. Stone, an iconoclastic, left-wing columnist. *Drew Pearson Diaries: 1949–1959* (1974), edited by Tyler Abell, is an insightful collection of Pearson’s privately stated opinions on Truman. In his diary entry of January 20, 1949, Pearson complained that Truman’s “swearing-in ceremony lacked dignity and good taste” (Abell, 1974: 13). In *The Truman Era: 1945–1952* (1953), a collection of his newspaper columns, I.F. Stone conveyed an image of Truman as a mediocre machine

politician whose foreign and defense policies needlessly antagonized the Soviet Union and worsened the Cold War. In a column commenting on Truman's 1949 inaugural address, Stone sardonically concluded that the president "spoke with malice toward none except half of mankind (Russia and China), and with charity toward all willing to give us military bases" (Stone, 1953: 60). In the foreword of this book, Stone complained that the Truman administration was filled with mediocre talent and petty corruption. According to Stone, Truman's presidency "was the era of the moocher. The place was full of Wimpys who could be had for a hamburger" (p. xxi).

The Truman Merry-go-Round (1950) reflects and promotes this journalistic image of a Truman administration plagued by influence peddling, conflicts of interest, and incompetence and of Truman being unable or unwilling to eliminate corruption in his administration. Written by journalists Robert S. Allen and William V. Shannon, *The Truman Merry-go-Round* mostly consists of belittling yet entertaining vignettes of Truman and other Washington political figures. For example, Matthew Connelly, Truman's appointments secretary in the White House, was eventually convicted and imprisoned on corruption charges. In their book, Allen and Shannon described Connelly as someone "who takes a restrained but exhilarating and almost childish glee in the trappings, aura, and glitter of his position and proximity to the President" (p. 52). However, while the more sensationalistic, tabloid-style *Washington Confidential* (1951) provides lurid tales of vice, favoritism, and corruption in the nation's capital during Truman's presidency, its authors, Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, admit that "Truman's personal life is dull and austere" (p. 176).

More objective, better researched, and reliable secondary sources on corruption during Truman's presidency include *The Truman Scandals* (1956) by Jules Abels, *The Truman Scandals and the Politics of Morality* (1984) by Andrew J. Dunar, and *The Kefauver Committee and the Politics of Crime, 1950-1952* (1974) by William H. Moore. Abels was a conservative business journalist and served in the Eisenhower administration as an economist, so his 1956 book may have a partisan bias against Truman. Nonetheless, *The Truman Scandals* is a well-documented book. Abels concludes, "Never had there been so much corruption practiced by so many public officials in so many different places" (p. 312).

By contrast, Dunar and Moore are both historians. Their books concentrate on Senate investigations of corruption. Dunar claims that Truman had such an unyielding, stubborn sense of loyalty toward his subordinates that he refused adequately to address congressional and media accusations of corruption in his administration. Since Senator Estes Kefauver's committee investigated links between organized crime and local politicians and police, Moore's book explains that the Kefauver committee investigations only occasionally and tangentially revealed connections between gangsters and the Truman administration's income tax officials. Despite these differences between them, the Dunar and Moore books indicate that these various corruption investigations and Truman's obstinate, belated responses to them made actual or alleged corruption in his administration a major, successful campaign issue for the Republicans in the 1952 elections.

However, during and long after Truman's presidency, no credible, irrefutable evidence has ever been found to prove that Truman personally engaged in or financially benefited from this corruption. Nevertheless, during and shortly after his presidency, Truman's apparent unwillingness or inability to respond effectively to this issue was

widely regarded as a major flaw in his leadership ability. After Truman's death and the subsequent revelations of the Watergate scandals, the corruption issue of Truman's presidency was forgotten by most Americans. Instead, Truman's staunch loyalty to friends and subordinates accused of corruption became widely perceived as a virtue. In *Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House* (1992), political scientist James D. Barber observed that, for Truman, "Loyalty to him was not some abstract emotion. It was personal" (p. 339). Likewise, in *The Presidents' Men* (1968), journalist Patrick Anderson noted that a striking contrast between FDR's White House staff and Truman's was that "Truman's was marked by loyalty down – the President's defiant support of men whose misdeeds caused his Administration to be smeared with scandal" (p. 103).

By the twenty-first century, many Americans have become so jaded about presidents and other politicians firing appointees or pressuring their resignations for the sake of their own political interests and images that they are willing to forget about the so-called "mess in Washington" of Truman era corruption while admiring Truman's protective loyalty toward his appointees.

This contemporary admiration of Truman's unwavering, selfless loyalty to friends and beleaguered, controversial political appointees has been developed and enhanced by the memoirs of several Truman administrative officials. In *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (1990), political scientist Richard E. Neustadt evaluates and compares individual presidents and the office of president from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Ronald W. Reagan. This book includes Neustadt's recollection of working in the Truman and Kennedy administrations. Neustadt comments that "never having let ambition for the White House shape his code of loyalty, Truman once he got there had no motive to reshape the code by which he had been living all his political life" (p. 146).

Clark M. Clifford, a prominent Washington, D.C. attorney who was Lyndon B. Johnson's second secretary of defense, served as special counsel on Truman's White House staff. Since Clifford worked for Truman more closely and extensively than Neustadt, Clifford's autobiography, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (1991), is an especially valuable insight into Truman's character and values and the reasons for Truman's improved public image long after his death. Like Neustadt, Clifford stated, "President Truman's famed honesty and bluntness were quite real, not part of a manufactured public image" (p. 281). Unlike the recollections of other Truman subordinates and associates, however, Clifford also expressed his belief that Truman's outspoken candor and fierce loyalty to his appointees who had become political liabilities were also flaws in his presidency because they damaged the regulations and effectiveness of his administration (pp. 281–2).

Ken Hechler, Truman's White House research director, provides a consistently enthusiastic, unequivocally admiring portrayal of Truman's treatment of his White House staff in his book, *Working with Truman: A Personal Memoir of the White House Years* (1982). According to Hechler, "President Truman always gave his staff the benefit of the doubt, usually backed them up one hundred percent, and was fiercely loyal to those who worked for him" (p. 19). In *Truman in the White House: The Diary of Eben A. Ayers* (1991), edited by Robert H. Ferrell, Ayers, who served as assistant press secretary under Truman, noted in his August 13, 1949 diary entry that Harry Vaughan, Truman's military aide who improperly accepted gifts of deep

freezers, “seems to have no realization of what harm he has caused the president and other people” (p. 323).

Unfortunately for Truman, during his presidency much of the American public and the news media perceived his White House staff to be a collective caricature of Vaughan. This perception contributed to low job approval ratings in public opinion polls and a belief that Truman lacked the dignity, gravitas, and judgment to be a successful president. Ironically and fortunately for the long-term public memory of Harry S. Truman, Truman’s staunch loyalty to and enduring friendship with Vaughan, an old friend from Missouri politics and the army, would later be valued by the popular memory of Truman as an unassuming man with small town virtues. Published in 1977, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry Truman, 1945–1948* is the first volume of Robert J. Donovan’s two-volume history of Truman’s presidency. In this volume’s preface, Donovan gives a more ambivalent, complex assessment of the loyalty aspect of Truman’s character. According to Donovan, Truman as president retained “certain characteristics one often sees in machine-bred politicians: intense partisanship, stubborn loyalty, a certain insensitivity about the transgressions of political associates” and a preference for friends who “were plain, obscure, even mediocre men who shared his love of politics and poker” (p. xv).

Donovan, therefore, stresses one of the sources of Truman’s characteristic of loyalty that contemporary Americans often forget or dismiss – machine politics. After Truman was elected to the Senate in 1934, he was derisively known in Washington as “the Senator from Pendergast” because of his affiliation with the notorious Pendergast machine of Kansas City. Two accounts of Truman’s involvement in the Pendergast machine are *Tom’s Boy Harry* by Eugene Powell and *Missouri Waltz: The Inside Story of the Pendergast Machine by the Man who Smashed It* by Maurice M. Milligan. Both books were published during the presidential election year of 1948. They both tend to be sensationalistic about the corruption of the Pendergast machine and how its unethical or illegal campaign and ballot practices benefited Truman’s political career in Missouri. Powell was a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, a bitter opponent of the Pendergast machine, and Milligan was the federal prosecutor whose efforts sent machine boss Tom Pendergast to prison. Milligan also ran against Truman in the 1940 Democratic senatorial primary. His brother, Jacob “Tuck” Milligan, was a congressman who ran against Truman in the 1934 Democratic senatorial primary. Thus, while both books provide useful facts, researchers need to be aware of their questionable objectivity and bias against Truman.

More objective, better researched scholarly books about the Pendergast machine, Tom Pendergast, and Truman’s relationship with them include *The Pendergast Machine* (1968) by Lyle W. Dorsett, *Pendergast!* (1997) by Lawrence H. Larsen and Nancy J. Hulston, and *Truman and Pendergast* (1999) by Robert H. Ferrell. Meticulously surveying the origins, rise, decline, and fall of the Pendergast machine, Dorsett asserts that Truman was an honest, efficient administrator on the Jackson County court. According to Dorsett, “Despite his association with the Pendergast machine, Truman had a spotless record” (1968: 136). *Pendergast!* is a richly detailed, colorful biography of Tom Pendergast and an excellent history of Kansas City during his political prominence. According to Larsen and Hulston, “Indeed, an understanding of Truman’s approach to politics and decision making requires a knowledge of the political environment of the Kansas City area and how Pendergast operated”

(1997: xi). They later note that Truman's sudden, unexpected appearance at Pendergast's funeral when he was vice president was controversial not only with Truman's critics in Washington but also with Pendergast's son (p. 187). At that time and for the rest of his life, Truman laconically explained that he attended Pendergast's funeral because of their friendship and that Pendergast never asked him to do a dishonest deed.

The growing hagiography of Harry S. Truman during the 1970s and 1980s neglected or minimized the role of machine politics in Truman's life and career. A controversial exception to this trend is Richard L. Miller's book, *Truman: The Rise to Power* (1986). It portrays Truman as a calculating, ambitious machine politician who intentionally benefited the Pendergast machine in order to advance his own political career. Miller argues that Truman, like Richard Nixon, always "emphasized that he made no financial profit from the corruption he fostered, as if money were the only thing of value the public could lose" (p. 247).

Truman and Pendergast by Robert H. Ferrell analyzes the relationship between these two men from the time that Truman met Pendergast in 1921 until Truman's victory in the 1940 Democratic senatorial primary. Ferrell is one of the most prominent and prolific historians specializing in Harry S. Truman's life and presidency. Published in 1999, Ferrell's book provides a more complex, sophisticated interpretation of the relationship between Truman and Pendergast. Its primary sources include those of the presidential libraries of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman and the State Historical Society of Missouri as well as personal interviews. Ferrell claims that Truman was able to maintain his personal integrity while compromising and cooperating with Pendergast on only the more reasonable patronage and policy favors requested by the machine boss.

Another aspect of Truman's character that became more valued by and popular with the American public was his reputation as a devoted husband and father, especially after revelations of adulterous affairs by John F. Kennedy and William J. Clinton during their presidencies and claims by Patty Davis that her father, Ronald W. Reagan, was aloof and apathetic toward her. Harry S. Truman's life, values, and behavior as a husband and father were further detailed and documented by the publication of his letters to his wife and daughter and his daughter's best-selling biography of her father, entitled *Harry S. Truman* (1974). These letters are included in such books as *Dear Bess: The Letters from Harry to Bess Truman, 1910–1959* (1983), edited by Robert H. Ferrell, *Letters Home by Harry Truman* (1984), edited by Monte H. Poen, and *Letters from Father* (1981), edited by Margaret Truman.

Dear Bess provides the most complete collection of letters from Harry to Bess Truman and is readily available in many university and public libraries. Fortunately for historians, biographers, and other researchers, Harry S. Truman was a prolific letter writer, especially to his wife Bess. The time span of the letters in *Dear Bess* ranges from December 31, 1910 to January 7, 1959. From 1910 until their wedding in 1919, Truman was a young farmer and later a soldier courting Bess Wallace. During this period, he was eager to impress her as an adoring suitor who was determined to become a financial success. When he was a county judge and then a senator, Truman occasionally confided about his ethical dilemmas in politics and government in his letters to Bess. In a letter written to Bess when he was a county judge, he complained that "every person I've ever had any association with since birth has wanted

me to take pity on him and furnish him with some county money without much return" (Ferrell, 1983: 342). The bulk of these letters cover the 1910 to 1944 period, and relatively few are dated from 1945 to 1959. Nonetheless, *Dear Bess* offers essential insight into the marriage of Harry and Bess Truman.

Letters Home by Harry Truman includes not only letters to his wife Bess and daughter Margaret but also to other family members, such as his sister Mary Jane, brother (John) Vivian, and mother Martha Ellen. *Letters from Father* mostly consists of letters between Harry and Margaret Truman from 1941 to 1963. In the preface to her book, Margaret Truman observes that her father's presidency made no difference in his close, loving relationship with her. According to her, these letters "show the warm human side of a man burdened with the most pressing problems in this world but never too busy or too preoccupied to take time out for the second great love of his life, his daughter" (Truman, 1981: 28).

Shortly after her father's death, Margaret Truman's biography of her father, *Harry S. Truman*, was published in 1973. Its first chapter begins with Margaret's role in her father's "whistlestop" presidential campaign in 1948. It ends with her reflections on her father during the Kennedy administration. *Harry S. Truman* is similar to other mainstream biographies and general histories of the Truman presidency in its coverage of major events, facts, and dates of his life and presidency. Its unique advantage compared to these other series, of course, is that Margaret Truman reveals her own conversations and experiences with her father and observations of her father regarding his life and presidency.

In particular, Margaret Truman recounts the famous story about her father's response to a scathing review of her 1950 singing performance at Constitution Hall. In a letter to Paul Hume, the *Washington Post's* music critic who wrote this review, President Truman threatened to assault Hume if they ever met each other. After the *Washington Post* published a story about Truman's threatening letter to Hume, White House aides feared that public opinion and media analysis of Truman would further perceive him as vulgar and unfit for the presidency. Instead, Truman proudly showed his staff thousands of letters of which approximately 80 percent supported him (Truman, 1974: 548). During and long after his presidency, this incident was the most memorable example of the public's perception of Harry S. Truman as a devoted father determined to protect his daughter, regardless of how such behavior might affect his image as president.

Truman, however, does not mention his letter to Hume in his two-volume history of his presidency: *Memoirs: 1945, Year of Decisions* (1955) and *Memoirs: 1946–1952, Years of Trial and Hope* (1956). Furthermore, he makes only brief, perfunctory references to his wife and daughter. The content and tone of his memoirs are highly detailed in their facts and dates, yet also dull and defensive. Published during the first term of the Eisenhower presidency, Truman's memoirs do not foreshadow the popular historical figure that he eventually became.

Disappointed by the initial sales of his memoirs, Truman was determined to improve his meager retirement income and historical reputation. After the opening of his presidential library in 1957, Truman conducted a series of paid lectures at Columbia University in 1959 and published another book, *Mr. Citizen*, in 1960. Truman's lectures at Columbia University were collected and published as a book entitled *Truman Speaks* (1960). *Mr. Citizen* consists of Truman's private reflections

and public statements on a variety of topics from 1953 to 1960. Truman's blunt, unequivocal statements on such controversial issues as his opposition to the relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II, disappointment with Adlai Stevenson as the Democratic presidential nominee of 1952 and 1956, and his insistence that he made the correct decision in ordering the use of atomic bombs on Japan contributed to his growing, more attractive reputation with the public as an unpretentious "everyman" who spoke his mind regardless of the reactions of academic, political, and media elites. Both of these books consist of such comments by Truman.

Compared to *Truman Speaks* and *Mr. Citizen*, *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman* by Merle Miller is a more detailed, interesting source of Truman's opinions and comments during his retirement. *Plain Speaking* is based on several, extensive taped interviews that Miller conducted with Truman during the 1960s. The paperback edition, however, was not published until October 1974. Partially because the paperback edition's publication approximately coincided with Richard M. Nixon's forced resignation from the presidency and the public's disgust with the Watergate scandals and revelations of the White House tapes, *Plain Speaking* quickly became a best-seller and contributed to the so-called "Truman Mania" of the mid- to late 1970s.

Much of *Plain Speaking* consists of Truman's autobiography. However, Truman communicates this part of the book in a style that is more humorous, candid, and engaging than his memoirs. Truman also regales Miller and the book's readers with his knowledge and interpretation of American history, his blunt opinions and morality, and his reflections on major events and decisions of his presidency, such as McCarthyism, the 1948 presidential election, and his removal of General Douglas MacArthur from command during the Korean War. Concerning MacArthur, Truman stated that he fired MacArthur because the general did not respect the authority of the president and not "because he was a dumb son of a bitch, although he was, but that's not against the law for generals" (p. 308).

Many Americans in the 1970s found this type of earthy, straightforward rhetoric from a recently deceased former president refreshing at a time when they expressed significantly less trust in the presidency, Congress, media, and other major institutions. The popularity of *Plain Speaking* stimulated the publication of more collections of Truman's quotations. Such books include *Give 'Em Hell, Harry!* (Goodman, 1974), *The Quotable Harry S. Truman* (Settel, 1975), and *The Wit and Wisdom of Harry S. Truman* (Ayres, 1998). *Give 'Em Hell, Harry!* provides the casual reader with the more witty and pithy remarks of Truman, including his answers to reporters' questions at White House press conferences and his opinions on such diverse topics as hunting and his grandchildren. *The Quotable Harry S. Truman* is probably less entertaining to casual readers and less useful to scholarly researchers of Truman. It consists almost entirely of excerpts from his presidential speeches.

The Wit and Wisdom of Harry S. Truman is organized alphabetically according to the topics of Truman's quotations. Several of them lack specific dates. The publication and broad retailing of books like these popularized Truman's aphorisms, especially, "The Buck Stops Here" and "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." They also stimulated greater public curiosity about Harry S. Truman's life, presidency, and character, and, consequently, a market for biographies and general histories of his administration beyond academia.



Figure 1.2 This photograph, taken on February 17, 1938 in Washington, D.C., was titled “Senatorial stickup” by photographers Harris & Ewing. In the photograph, Vice President John Nance Garner “playfully tries his ‘stickup’ technique” on Harry Truman, then a Senator from Missouri, with a pair of 45 caliber pistols formerly owned by the bandit Jesse James. Truman received the guns from the wife of a doctor who had received them as payment for his medical care of Frank James. Jesse James had reputedly “garnered nearly \$1,000,000 in a series of holdups with the guns.” Photograph from the Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C., LC-DIG-hec-29118.

Until Truman’s death in 1972, the small market for books on Truman limited the biographies of Truman and general histories of his administration intended for the non-academic, general public. Thus, three of the better-known books on Truman’s life and presidency were written by journalists instead of professional, academic historians. They are: *The Man of Independence*, *The Man from Missouri: The Life and Times of Harry S. Truman*, and *The Truman Presidency: The History of a Triumphant Succession*. First published in 1950 and later published as a paperback in 1998, *The Man of Independence* was written by Jonathan Daniels. Daniels briefly served as White House press secretary under Roosevelt and Truman. Most of *The Man of Independence* covers Truman’s pre-presidential life and political career. Initially published when Truman was increasingly unpopular, the tone and content of *The Man of Independence* are defensive about Truman’s decisions and policies and sentimental about his rural, Missouri background.

Written by Alfred Steinberg, *The Man from Missouri* relies heavily on interviews that Steinberg conducted of people who knew Truman before or during his presidency. Published in 1962, *The Man from Missouri* tends to be anecdotal, and its accuracy was later questioned. Published in 1966 and written by Cabell Phillips, *The Truman Presidency* is mostly based on the author's interviews, newspaper and magazine articles, and books for its sources. This book is most detailed in its chronicling of the 1948 presidential election and Truman's firing of General Douglas MacArthur. Its last chapter abruptly ends with Truman's last day in the White House in 1953 and does not provide a retrospective analysis of his presidency. In the epilogue, Phillips reveals that he tried but failed to secure an interview with Truman and that Truman's presidential library denied him access to many of the primary sources that he requested (p. 436). Consequently, Phillips modestly informs readers that his book "is not a definitive history of the Truman administration. Rather, it is the story of the Truman Presidency done in journalistic perspective" (p. xii).

By the late 1970s, there was a larger publishing market for biographies of Harry S. Truman and general histories of his presidency. One of the first to be published was *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945–1948* in 1977. Written by journalist Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis* is the first volume of Donovan's two-volume history of Truman's presidency. The second volume is *Tumultuous Years: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1949–1953*, published in 1982. Unlike the books by Steinberg and Phillips, Donovan's books rely heavily on primary sources from the Truman presidential library, especially sources on foreign and defense policies that were not open to researchers until after Truman's death. *Conflict and Crisis* and *Tumultuous Years* are highly informative for the general public and valuable secondary sources and references for those engaged in scholarly research on the Truman presidency.

Researched and written more for historians and other scholarly researchers of the Truman presidency, *The Presidency of Harry S. Truman* was published in 1984. Its author is Donald R. McCoy, a professor of history from the University of Kansas. McCoy had previously co-authored a well-regarded book on minority rights during the Truman administration. *The Presidency of Harry S. Truman* includes separate chapters on the Fair Deal and the beginning of the Cold War as well as an extensive, useful bibliographical essay. McCoy concludes this book by noting a previously overlooked and underestimated accomplishment of Truman's presidency, namely, the preservation and reform of the New Deal (pp. 314–15).

Harry S. Truman was a liberal Democrat whose Fair Deal proposals for expanding the welfare state included national health insurance and federal aid to elementary and secondary education. Nonetheless, Truman's image and status among academics, journalists, politicians, and the general public continued to improve during the generally conservative political environment of the 1980s. The continuing hagiography of Truman during the conservative 1980s was especially interesting and ironic because Ronald W. Reagan, the most conservative Republican president since the 1920s, had been a liberal Democrat and labor union president who actively campaigned for Truman in the 1948 presidential election. Meanwhile, Reagan's rhetoric, ideology, and domestic policy agenda seemed to be a rejection of the Fair Deal.

Shortly before Reagan's landslide re-election in 1984, supporters of Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale sentimentally hoped that the public opinion

polls would prove to be wrong and that Mondale would win an upset victory like Truman in 1948. One of the few books written about the 1948 presidential election before the 1980s was *The Loneliest Campaign: The Truman Victory of 1948* (1968) written by journalist Irwin Ross. Ross mostly relies on personal interviews and newspaper archives and, apparently, does not use any primary sources from the Truman presidential library. Thus, Ross's book is an interesting, chronological account of the major events and political figures of the 1948 presidential election. This book's last chapter is speculative and uncertain about the causes of Truman's victory.

By contrast, Frank Kofsky asserts that Truman won the 1948 presidential election partially because he exaggerated and dramatized Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union through the Berlin airlift of 1948–9. Kofsky's book was first published in 1993 and is entitled *Harry S. Truman and the War Scare of 1948: A Successful Campaign to Deceive the Nation*. Besides its controversial thesis, this book's value to a researcher is enhanced by the fact that its primary sources include previously classified government documents secured by use of the Freedom of Information Act.

The following three of Kofsky's books published from 1999 to 2008 convey more conventional, less controversial explanations of Kofsky's unexpected victory in the 1948 presidential election: *Truman Defeats Dewey*, *The Last Campaign: How Harry Truman Won the 1948 Election*, and *Truman's Whistle-stop Campaign*. Written by historian Gary A. Donaldson and published in 1999, *Truman Defeats Dewey* covers the major events and candidates of the 1948 presidential election. This book begins with the influence of the 1946 mid-term elections and ends with an extensive post-election analysis of the results of the 1948 presidential and congressional elections. According to Donaldson, Truman won the election "because of a broad urban-liberal-black-labor coalition that he and his advisers had consciously forged through 1947 and 1948" (p. 219).

Published in 2000, *The Last Campaign* by Zachary Karabell narrates much of the same material as Donaldson but in greater detail. Unlike Kofsky's and Donaldson's books, however, *The Last Campaign* both reflects and further contributes to the current popular and political memory of Truman winning the election partially because of his "populist, anti-Wall Street rhetoric" (p. 258). Written by Steven Goldzwig and published in 2008, *Truman's Whistle-stop Campaign* focuses entirely on the rhetorical style and content of Truman's campaign speeches. Goldzwig, a professor of communications, concludes that Truman's feisty, populist, "give 'em hell" campaign speeches were essential to Truman's upset victory and its enduring legacy in the public's memory. They remind contemporary political candidates that "there is no substitute for old-fashioned human contact" (p. 123).

My book on Truman, entitled *Truman and the Democratic Party* and published in 1997, includes a separate chapter on the 1948 presidential and congressional elections. In this chapter, I claim that Truman's unexpected electoral victory was a result of "a party-oriented, maintaining election for the Democratic party rather than a personal victory for Truman" (Savage, 1997: 139). For example, the vigorous, well-financed publicity and voter mobilization efforts conducted by organized labor and benefiting Truman were primarily intended to return Congress to Democratic control rather than to win the presidential election for Truman, which most labor leaders regarded as hopeless. Nonetheless, the public memory of Truman that persists is that Truman won the 1948 presidential election because most voters liked his feisty,

blunt, “give ’em hell” speeches from his campaign train given at “whistle stops” across the nation.

By the end of the 1980s, recently published scholarly works that assessed and compared Harry S. Truman to other presidents since Franklin D. Roosevelt included *In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan* (1989) by William E. Leuchtenburg and *Liberalism and Its Challengers: F.D.R. to Reagan* (1985) by Alonzo L. Hamby. Both Leuchtenburg and Hamby are professional historians. Leuchtenburg has focused most of his research and writing career on Franklin D. Roosevelt while Hamby has mostly specialized in Truman. At the end of his book’s chapter on Truman, Leuchtenburg concludes that Truman’s presidency was not fairly and objectively perceived and assessed by the public during and shortly after his administration because Truman was often unfairly and inaccurately compared to Roosevelt. In his book’s chapter on Truman, Hamby concludes that Truman’s policy accomplishments and promotion of a liberal policy agenda “resulted more from the effort, intelligence, and determination which enabled him to move beyond his limitations and establish himself as one of the most effective of American presidents” (p. 93).

Of all of the most controversial, significant decisions that Truman made during his presidency, perhaps the most dramatic, extreme change in the public’s memory of Truman occurred concerning his firing of General Douglas MacArthur in April 1951. Fiercely controversial, divisive, and unpopular during his presidency, this decision by Truman later became generally respected and supported by the public as a courageous, necessary decision to reaffirm the president’s civilian supremacy as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and prevent a further expansion of the war with North Korea and Communist China. It may be difficult for the contemporary public and political memory of Harry S. Truman to believe that his firing of MacArthur was so unpopular that he was burned in effigy by angry mobs, there was serious discussion of impeaching him, and one poll showed that 69 percent of the Americans surveyed supported MacArthur (McCullough, 1992: 844–8).

This complete change in the public, political, and historical memory of the Truman–MacArthur conflict was both reflected and promoted by two movies from the 1970s. It was the entire subject of *Collision Course: Truman vs. MacArthur*, a television docudrama broadcast in 1976, and part of the lengthy Hollywood movie, *MacArthur*, in 1977. In both films, Truman was portrayed as a modest yet principled “everyman” who courageously protected the Constitution and prevented a wider war while MacArthur was portrayed as an egotistical, power-hungry martinet.

More recent scholarly works on the Truman–MacArthur controversy provide more complex, nuanced interpretations. In his 1999 book, *Truman, MacArthur, and the Korean War*, Dennis D. Wainstock emphasizes that Truman had previously given MacArthur the discretion to invade Inchon and fight north of the Thirty-Eighth Parallel (p. 138). Likewise, in his 2008 book, *Truman and MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown*, Michael D. Pearlman, a retired historian for the U.S. Army, states that Truman “often deferred to MacArthur” and that the general “made a reasonable case that his policy would not lead to world war with the Soviet Union” (p. xvi). In this book’s conclusion, Pearlman equally criticizes both Truman and MacArthur for avoiding “a frank exchange of opinion” during their private meeting at Wake Island “which might have clarified concerns and thereby controlled their clash when China entered the conflict six weeks later” (p. 272).

Despite the persistent determination of most scholars to be constructively critical and objective when researching and writing about Truman and his presidency, the American public was ready for a heroic, “everyman as a great man,” epic-style biography of Harry S. Truman by the 1990s. Published in 1992, David McCullough’s *Truman* seemed to satisfy and even expand this market. McCullough is an independent scholar as well as a host and narrator of historical documentaries produced and broadcast by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). Exceeding one thousand pages in its hardcover edition, *Truman* quickly became a bestseller. It also became the major secondary source for a PBS documentary on Truman that McCullough hosted and narrated.

McCullough’s book also influenced a 1995 fictionalized miniseries on television. It was also entitled *Truman* and was produced and broadcast by the Home Box Office (HBO) channel. Unlike other portrayals of Truman in movies and plays, Gary Sinise, the actor who played Truman in the HBO miniseries, communicates shy, bland, mild-mannered, and occasionally guilt-ridden aspects of Truman’s personality. By contrast, in the one-man play, *Give ’Em Hell, Harry!: A Play in Two Acts*, written by Samuel Gallu, performed on Broadway, and filmed in 1975, actor James Whitmore portrayed Truman as a feisty, decisive, wisecracking extrovert.

Shortly after David McCullough’s book on Truman was published, two more major biographies of Harry S. Truman were published. Written by historian Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (1994) is a useful, narrative history of Truman’s life and presidency for both scholarly researchers and the general public. The quality, depth, and utility of Ferrell’s biography benefit from his many years of researching and editing the primary sources of Truman’s presidential library. Ferrell’s book provides more insight and analysis than other biographies of Truman about such topics as Truman’s nomination for vice president in 1944 and his conflict with the Supreme Court over his seizure of steel mills during the Korean War (pp. 370–5).

Published one year after Ferrell’s book, in 1995, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* was written by historian Alonzo L. Hamby. Like Ferrell, Hamby is a professor of history who has devoted many years to researching and writing about Truman. Hamby’s book covers much of the same content as the McCullough and Ferrell books. Hamby, however, clearly states in his introduction that his biography of Truman has a different theme and purpose compared to other biographies. According to Hamby, he has “attempted to present Harry Truman as a historical figure in whose career one finds not just an interesting and vivid individual, but a picture of the evolution of American social and political democracy in the first half of the twentieth century” (p. ix). In the epilogue of this well-researched, richly detailed, extensive biography, Hamby helps to explain the favorable public memory of Truman: “In the end, it was not *what* he did that made Harry Truman an American icon, but *who* Americans believed him to be” (p. 641).

Compared to the McCullough, Ferrell, and Hamby biographies, *Harry S. Truman* (2008) by historian Robert Dallek is a brief book that is not based on primary sources from the Truman presidential library. Approximately 150 pages in length, it provides a summary of Truman’s life, presidency, and legacy that may be useful to students and the general public seeking to understand and place Truman within the context of American history. Like Hamby, Dallek makes a similar conclusion about why the public’s memory and assessment of Truman became increasingly favorable after

his death. According to Dallek, Truman's "ultimate good sense and honesty in leading the nation through perilous times are a demonstration of how circumstances and human decency can ultimately produce a successful life – and a presidency that resonates as a model of how someone can acquit himself in the highest office" (pp. 152–3).

Harry Truman's Excellent Adventure: The True Story of a Great American Road Trip was written by public radio reporter Matthew Algeo and published in 2009. It is a well-researched and informative yet also lively and entertaining account of Harry and Bess Truman's automobile trip during the summer of 1953. As a retired former president, Truman unrealistically and innocently assumed that he and his wife, without Secret Service agents or any other personnel to accompany them, could tour the country and use the same restaurants, motels, and gas stations as millions of other Americans without being frequently pestered, however gregariously and respectfully, by autograph and publicity seekers and local newspapers. This 1953 automobile trip signified the last time that a former president could travel as an "everyman." In this book's preface, Algeo nostalgically yet somberly observes, "Harry Truman was the last president to leave the White House and return to something resembling a normal life" (p. 2).

Future scholarly research and interpretations of Harry S. Truman's life, presidency, and policies may change some facets of Truman in historical, popular, and political memory. For example, revelations about Truman's private use of racial epithets and stubborn, persistent belief that women should stay out of politics and government tarnish a mostly favorable, admiring memory of Truman. Nevertheless, the memory of Harry S. Truman as a previously obscure, seemingly average American who honestly, modestly, and courageously rose to the challenges of the presidency during an especially difficult period of American and world history shapes the American public's perception of Truman.

REFERENCES

- Abell, T. (ed.) (1974) *Drew Pearson Diaries: 1949–1959*. New York.
- Abels, J. (1956) *The Truman Scandals*. Chicago.
- Algeo, M. (2009) *Harry Truman's Excellent Adventure: The True Story of a Great American Road Trip*. Chicago.
- Allen, R.S. and Shannon, W.V. (1950) *The Truman Merry-go-Round*. New York.
- Anderson, P. (1968) *The Presidents' Men*. New York.
- Ayers, A. (ed.) (1998) *The Wit and Wisdom of Harry S. Truman*. New York.
- Barber, J.D. (1992) *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Clifford, C. (1991) *Counsel to the President: A Memoir*. New York.
- Dallek, R. (2008) *Harry S. Truman*. New York.
- Daniels, J. (1950) *The Man of Independence*. Columbia, MO.
- Donaldson, G.A. (1999) *Truman Defeats Dewey*. Lexington, KY.
- Donovan, R.J. (1977) *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945–1948*. New York.
- Donovan, R.J. (1982) *Tumultuous Years: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1949–1953*. New York.
- Dorsett, L.W. (1968) *The Pendergast Machine*. Oxford.

- Draper, R. (2007) *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush*. New York.
- Dunar, A.J. (1984) *The Truman Scandals and the Politics of Morality*. Columbia, MO.
- Ferrell, R.H. (ed.) (1983) *Dear Bess: The Letters from Harry to Bess Truman, 1910–1959*. New York.
- Ferrell, R.H. (ed.) (1991) *Truman in the White House: The Diary of Eben A. Ayers*. Columbia, MO.
- Ferrell, R.H. (1994) *Harry S. Truman: A Life*. Columbia, MO.
- Ferrell, R.H. (1999) *Truman and Pendergast*. Columbia, MO.
- Gaddis, J.L. (2005) *The Cold War: A New History*. New York.
- Gallu, S. (1975) *Give 'Em Hell, Harry!: A Play in Two Acts*. New York.
- Gallup, G.H. (1972) *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971*. 3 vols. New York.
- Goldzwig, S.R. (2008) *Truman's Whistle-Stop Campaign*. College Station, TX.
- Goodman, M. (ed.) (1974) *Give 'Em Hell, Harry!* New York.
- Hamby, A.L. (1985) *Liberalism and Its Challengers: F.D.R. to Reagan*. Oxford.
- Hamby, A.L. (1995) *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman*. Oxford.
- Haydock, M.D. (1999) *City Under Siege: The Berlin Blockade and Airlift, 1948–1949*. Washington, DC.
- Hechler, K. (1982) *Working with Truman: A Personal Memoir of the White House Years*. New York.
- Karabell, Z. (2000) *The Last Campaign: How Harry Truman Won the 1948 Election*. New York.
- Kirkendall, R.S. (ed.) (2004) *Harry's Farewell: Interpreting and Teaching the Truman Presidency*. Columbia, MO.
- Kofsky, F. (1993) *Harry S. Truman and the War Scare of 1948: A Successful Campaign to Deceive the Nation*. New York.
- Lait, J. and Mortimer, L. (1951) *Washington Confidential*. New York.
- Larsen, L.H. and Hulston, N.J. (1997) *Pendergast!*. Columbia, MO.
- Leuchtenburg, W.E. (1989) *In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan*. Ithaca.
- Leuchtenburg, W.E. (2005) *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Lyndon B. Johnson*. Baton Rouge.
- McCoy, D.R. (1984) *The Presidency of Harry S. Truman*. Lawrence.
- McCullough, D. (1992) *Truman*. New York.
- Miller, M. (1974) *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman*. New York.
- Miller, R.L. (1986) *Truman: The Rise to Power*. New York.
- Milligan, M.M. (1948) *Missouri Waltz: The Inside Story of the Pendergast Machine by the Man Who Smashed It*. New York.
- Moore, W.H. (1974) *The Kefauver Committee and the Politics of Crime, 1950–1952*. Columbia, MO.
- Neustadt, R.E. (1990) *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*. New York.
- Pearlman, M.D. (2008) *Truman and MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown*. Bloomington, IN.
- Phillips, C. (1966) *The Truman Presidency: The History of a Triumphant Succession*. New York.
- Poen, M.M. (ed.) (1984) *Letters Home by Harry Truman*. Columbia, MO.
- Powell, E.J. (1948) *Tom's Boy Harry*. Jefferson City, MO.
- Ragsdale, L. (ed.) (1996) *Vital Statistics on the Presidency: Washington to Clinton*. Washington, DC.
- Ross, I. (1968) *The Loneliest Campaign: The Truman Victory of 1948*. New York.
- Savage, S.J. (1997) *Truman and the Democratic Party*. Lexington, Kentucky.
- Settel, T.S. (ed.) (1975) *The Quotable Harry S. Truman*. New York.

- Stanley, H.W. and Niemi, R.G. (eds) (1994) *Vital Statistics on American Politics*. Washington, DC.
- Steinberg, A. (1962) *The Man from Missouri: The Life and Times of Harry S. Truman*. New York.
- Stone, I.F. (1953) *The Truman Era: 1945–1952*. New York.
- Truman, H.S. (1955) *Memoirs: 1945 Year of Decisions*. New York.
- Truman, H.S. (1956) *Memoirs: 1946–1952 Years of Trial and Hope*. New York.
- Truman, H.S. (1960) *Mr. Citizen*. New York.
- Truman, H.S. (1960) *Truman Speaks*. New York.
- Truman, M. (1973) *Harry S. Truman*. New York.
- Truman, M. (ed.) (1981) *Letters from Father: The Truman Family's Personal Correspondence*. New York.
- Wainstock, D.D. (1999) *Truman, MacArthur, and the Korean War*. Westport, CT.
- Whelan, R. (1990) *Drawing the Line: The Korean War, 1950–1953*. New York.

FURTHER READING

- Ferrell, R.H. (ed.) (1980) *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*. New York.
- Gallen, D. (1994) *The Quotable Truman*. New York.