

# **Truman Study Guide**

**Truman by David McCullough**

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# Plot Summary

Harry S Truman was born May 8, 1884, in Jackson County, Missouri. Both sets of his grandparents were Scotch/Irish pioneers who went west in search of fertile farmland. He grew up in a Tom Sawyer world where his small town neighbors of Independence, Missouri, knew and helped each other.

After his high school graduation in 1902, Harry could not afford to attend college because his father had gambled away all the family's holdings. Harry, his father, and his brother all took salaried jobs in Kansas City. In 1905 the family went back into farming and Harry worked at it for ten years. In 1918 he enlisted in the Army and served as a battery captain in France during World War I, where he showed courage in battle.

After the war, he returned to Independence and married his childhood sweetheart, Bess Wallace. He and a war buddy opened a haberdashery that went bankrupt within three years. Because Harry insisted on paying off all his business debts, he was broke for years.

When Truman was 38 years old, Tom Pendergast, the political boss of Kansas City, approached him to run for county judge. Harry won. He developed an outstanding record as judge, passing bonds to build roads, hospitals, courthouses, and other improvements. However, Tom Pendergast and his brothers were corrupt. They owned saloons, houses of prostitution, and gambling and illegal drug operations. They took bribes through the politicians they got elected. Truman was honest and idealistic, so his association with them hurt his reputation and physical health.

In 1934 Harry ran successfully for United States Senate where he was often snubbed as the "Senator from Pendergast." His first term was undistinguished, yet he won reelection against terrible odds. In his second term he made a name for himself as chairman of the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program. The "Truman Committee" investigated mismanagement in defense plants and saved the country billions of dollars.

After messy backroom dealings during the 1940 Democratic Convention, Truman emerged as nominee for Vice President on the ticket with Franklin D. Roosevelt. Less than four months after Roosevelt's inauguration, Roosevelt died and Truman became President. Within his first three months as President, Truman made momentous decisions such as ending the war in Japan through use of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, creating the United Nations, and deciding new European boundaries at the Potsdam Conference with Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union and Winston Churchill of Britain.

After the war, many worried that the United States would enter another Great Depression. As workers went on strike for more money, Truman dealt with some of the unions with a hard hand. He threatened to draft all striking railroad workers, for example.



Another grave post-war problem was the aggression of the Soviet Union and their leaders' inability to agree to any meaningful treaty. Churchill called the division of Europe "an iron curtain."

In this same era Henry Wallace claimed that British imperialism was worse than Soviet expansionism, so Truman made him resign. In the 1946 Congressional election the Republicans took the House and Senate. With a new Congress, Truman was no longer under Roosevelt's shadow.

The winter of 1946 was a disaster in Europe. People were starving. Secretary of State George Marshall toured Europe and reported things were worse than believed. A \$17 billion aid program, known as the Marshall Plan, was passed. Many historians believe Truman saved western civilization through the Marshall Plan. Later, after reading a devastating report about the Soviet Union, Truman outlined his "Truman Doctrine." Its basis was that the United States would support free peoples everywhere through economic aid.

J. Edgar Hoover was investigating communist infiltration of the United States government. Truman foolishly approved Hoover's tests of loyalty, opening the door for the Army-McCarthy hearings that ruined people's lives through rumor and innuendo. In this period of his Presidency, Truman spoke in favor of civil rights for Negroes and national health insurance for all. He approved the founding of the state of Israel and the partition of Palestine.

Truman was unpopular and unelectable in 1948, according to pundits who predicted a landslide for Republican Thomas Dewey. But Truman won reelection handily by touring the country on the Ferdinand Magellan, a train that stopped at every small town. People would yell "Give 'em hell, Harry!" Truman said he never gave anyone hell, he merely spoke the truth.

In his second term Truman helped create NATO to defend Europe against Communist aggression. People were edgy about the Soviet Union, especially after China fell into Communist hands under Chairman Mao. After the Russians tested an atomic bomb, Truman okayed the development of the hydrogen bomb, which was ten times more powerful than the atomic bomb.

On June 4, 1950, the North Korean Army invaded South Korea in violation of the Potsdam Conference. Truman sent American troops under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur to defend South Korea. As the war bogged down and the Red Chinese sent 200,000 soldiers, MacArthur publicly blamed the Truman administration for his lack of victory in Korea. Truman's decision to fire him was unpopular. MacArthur came home to adoring crowds and gave a memorable speech on television.

There are some signs that Truman would have run for the Presidency again had there been encouragement from his party. Democrats did not want him to run because his popularity was below 30%. Truman initially backed Eisenhower for the Democratic nomination, but when Eisenhower refused, Truman supported Illinois Governor Adlai



Stevenson. A few months after Eisenhower was elected as a Republican, the new President signed a treaty ending the Korean War on terms that Truman would have been criticized for accepting.

Truman retired to Independence, Missouri, and worked on his memoirs and the Truman Library. Neither Eisenhower nor Kennedy asked him for advice. Lyndon Johnson ignored him after Truman refused to endorse the Viet Nam war. Truman died in 1972. Only now are historians beginning to appreciate Truman. Many now rate him as either a "great" or a "near great" President.



# Part 1 Chapter 1

## Part 1 Chapter 1 Summary

Both sets of Harry S Truman's grandparents were frontier settlers who came to Jackson County, Missouri, for its fertile farmland. They were part of the great western migration of the early nineteenth century. Most of these settlers were young, Baptist, anti-Roman Catholic, Democrat, and of Scotch/Irish descent.

Solomon and Harriet Louisa Young went west in 1841 from their farm in Kentucky taking a steamboat down the Ohio River to the Mississippi. Paying \$1.25 an acre, Solomon bought 80 acres for a farm. By 1850 he was a wealthy man who owned over 5,000 acres.

Anderson Shippe Truman arrived in 1846 by horseback, probably because he could not afford a boat ticket. He was married to Mary Jane Holmes, a young woman who had defied her parents by marrying a man of lesser education and background.

In this era Truman's hometown of Independence, Missouri, was booming with new stores and crowded with new settlers. It was called the "Queen City of the Trails." However, in the 1850s violence often broke out over the issue of slavery in Missouri and its neighboring state of Kansas. The stereotype was that Kansas was full of New England abolitionists and Missouri was full of gun-slinging ruffians. This was not true - atrocities were committed on all sides and innocent people got caught in the violence.

Things worsened during the Civil War. The Lawrence, Kansas, massacre of August 21, 1863, was led by a man from Jackson County. Southern sympathizers murdered more than 150 men and boys in Lawrence. One of the murderers was a son-in-law of the Youngs, Jim Crow Chiles, a notorious criminal. In 1863, convinced that Jackson County was plagued with Confederate guerilla fights, the commanders of the Union Army moved to depopulate the area. Twenty thousand people were driven from their homes, and the Army burnt down their property. The Youngs lost almost everything.

The Young's daughter, Mattie Ellen, studied for two years at Lexington Baptist Female College and returned home. She met Mary Jane and Shippe's son, John Truman, at a dance. They married in 1881 when she was twenty-nine years old and he was thirty. Their first child was stillborn, but their second was born May 8, 1884. They named him Harry after an uncle. His middle initial of S stood for his grandfathers Solomon and Shippe.

## Part 1 Chapter 1 Analysis

Harry S Truman came from frontier stock on both sides. He did not come from a poor family, but rather wealthy farmers. The Youngs and the Trumans both came to Jackson County, Missouri, because of the fertile farmland there. During the Civil War violence in



the area split between the two sides, as was the case throughout the country. There were many segregationists in the area of Truman's birthplace. Truman's family history is colorful and contains some interesting characters such as Jim Crow Chiles, a mass murderer gunned down by a sheriff. By the time Truman was born in 1884, the family was prosperous.





# Part 1 Chapter 2

## Part 1 Chapter 2 Summary

Harry S Truman was born on a prosperous farm of more than 1,000 acres. There was an abundance of food on hand and plenty of space for him to play. The family could afford household help. He was surrounded by a loving family, including two parents and three siblings, and a large extended family. He often said he had the happiest childhood ever.

His mother taught him to read by age four. He got his first pair of glasses when he was only six, and his new ability to see the world changed his entire life.

Harry was a good student who loved to read, especially stories about great generals like Robert E. Lee and Hannibal. There were many books in his house and he read them all, including an entire set of Shakespeare. In later years he called himself a sissy, but people who knew him as a child said he was not really a sissy because other children respected him. However, he was a very good little boy who liked to please others. In fact he studied each person to discover the best way to please him or her. He had a sunny, outgoing personality, but he was very shy with girls and not particularly popular with boys because of his bookishness.

The family moved into the town of Independence, Missouri, when Harry was six so the Truman children could attend good schools. When he was eleven they moved to a fine house on Waldo Street, a neighborhood full of children. By fourth grade, Harry had a crush on his future wife, Bess Wallace, who usually sat behind him in school.

Harry's first job was at a drug store. There he noticed that many upstanding citizens in town had secret drinking problems.

His first foray into politics was attending the 1900 Democratic National Convention in Kansas City where he heard Williams Jennings Bryant speak.

He continued to be bookish and study hard in high school, although he did not win awards at high school graduation in 1902.

## Part 1 Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter is almost a cliché about the glories of small town life in turn-of-the-century America. Truman comes across as a boy who deliberately tries to please others, especially adults, and in doing that, he is not very popular with children. His love of books is remarkable. Neighbors help each other out and everyone in the town knows everybody else. They live by such axioms as "Never get too big for your britches," "Be of good cheer," and "Honor your father and mother." This is heartland America as good as it gets.



# Part 1 Chapter 3

## Part 1 Chapter 3 Summary

When Truman was eighteen, his father lost everything gambling in wheat futures. The family lost all their land and had to sell their home. They moved to Kansas City, where his father took a salaried job.

College was out of the question now for Harry, who went to work for the Santa Fe Railroad for \$30 a month. Here he was exposed to rough people for the first time. After eight months or so, he was able to land a better job at a bank in Kansas City. The job was tedious but paid well, and he stayed in it for two years.

During this time Harry's future wife experienced a family tragedy when her father committed suicide, leaving a widow and four children ages three to eighteen. Bess enrolled in a finishing school called Barstow, but did not keep in touch with Harry.

Harry spent his evenings reading and attending theater, and joined the National Guard. He avoided the saloon scene that was so much a part of Kansas City nightlife. He found a job with another bank and was making \$100 a month in 1905, very good money for the time. Late in that year his father decided to make another go at farming and demanded that Harry come home to help out.

Harry's life on the farm consisted of grueling days that began at 5 A.M. With the help of Harry, his brother Vivian, his father, and several hired hands the farm prospered. Harry's social outlet was his membership in a Masonic lodge. By age 26 he had become a prominent member of the local community through his Masonic connections. After his brother's marriage, their father made Harry a full partner in the farm and split profits with him while Harry assumed responsibility for half of his father's debts.

Around this period, 1909, Harry courted his childhood sweetheart, Bess Wallace. Her home was sixteen miles from his farm, a long trip by either horse and buggy or train. Nevertheless Harry visited her as often as possible and wrote her long, ardent letters not about love but rather his views on life and books. He proposed marriage by mail; she turned him down. He built her a tennis court on his property; she was unable to use it. Four years later, they finally became secretly engaged. That same year Harry's father died.

Left to run the farm by himself, Harry tried a get-rich-quick scheme and lost a lot of borrowed money. This meant he had to keep working the farm. Although no one who knew him well believed Harry was cut out for farming, he nonetheless had a successful run at farming for well over ten years.

## **Part 1 Chapter 3 Analysis**

Harry Truman's life completely changed when he was eighteen years old because his father lost everything. He had to abandon his college plans and work for several years in banking. He shows his devotion to his family by quitting town life and returning home to help his father run another farm. He displays his doggedness when he courts Bess Wallace for five years, even after she turns down his marriage proposal. And he perseveres at farming even when others doubt him.



# Part 1 Chapter 4

## Part 1 Chapter 4 Summary

Although he was two years older than draft age, Harry enlisted in the Army when the United States entered World War 1. Like most people, Harry took the view that the war would be over quickly. Legally blind in his left eye, he nonetheless passed his physical. Harry's going into the Army meant that his sister, Mary Jane, was left to oversee the farm and take care of their mother. Although Bess was willing to marry him before the war, he told her they must wait until he was safely home.

After several months in hard training, Harry arrived in New York City on March 19, 1918. There he bought six pairs of eyeglasses. He sailed to France on a confiscated German ocean liner and took artillery training. He was made a Captain and became commander of a battery of soldiers, most of whom were Roman Catholic. They traveled with a priest whom Harry came to admire. Harry was able to turn one of the worst batteries into one of the best through his genuine love of people and his ability to lead.

Truman's battery met with its first attack on August 29. One of the bullets hit Harry's horse, which fell upon him. At this point, everyone in the battery ran away except Harry and three others in what they later called "the Battle of Who Run." His fierce courage under fire won him more respect among his men.

Harry's battery of men marched toward Verdun, some of the 600,000 men who would fight between Verdun and the sea in the major battle of World War 1. It was a hundred-mile march; they moved mostly during the night and slept during the day. It was a wet and difficult march. They had to go on foot because the horses carried too much weight in equipment. The first day of battle was September 26, 1918, and as the fighting raged on, about half the Americans perished. The United States lost about 117,000 soldiers in France. The Germans surrendered November 11, and Harry wrote home that the quiet almost hurt his ears.

A flu epidemic hit Europe and the United States. Harry worried about his loved ones and wrote to Bess almost daily. During the war he never went in for the nightlife or women who made themselves available to soldiers both in France and New York.

Woodrow Wilson traveled to Europe to sign the peace agreement on the same ocean liner that had carried Truman to France.

Tested by war, Harry returned to Missouri a changed person.

## Part 1 Chapter 4 Analysis

The reader has to wonder if Harry Truman, who was unsuited for farm life, realized that enlisting in the Army was a chance to escape from work he did not like. His moral



character shines when he refuses to marry Bess before leaving for France because there was a chance she would become a young widow and when he remains faithful to her in France and New York in the face of temptation. His practical side comes through when he buys extra glasses in case they break during a battle.

## Part 2 Chapter 5

### Part 2 Chapter 5 Summary

The United States changed after World War 1 and entered the "jazz age," but in many ways Harry Truman remained a person of the nineteenth century. He never liked jazz or fast dancing, and indeed, he never liked typewriters, telephones, modern art, or the new fads for golf and bridge. Even so, he was not the same farm boy who went to fight in the trenches of France. The war and his marriage to Bess Wallace, the girl of his dreams, gave Harry new confidence. He had been a leader during the war, and now he had a following of his "battery boys" who looked up to him like a big brother.

After their wedding on June 28, 1919, Bess and Harry moved in with her mother, brother, and sister in their fashionable house in Independence, Missouri, even though Harry apparently did not want to do so. Harry invested \$15,000 in a men's clothing shop with his partner, Eddie Jacobson. The first year Truman & Jacobson took in \$70,000. The store became a hangout where men enjoyed each other's company. In their second year of business, however, farm prices crashed and Harry began to lend his friends money. In this same year, 1921, Harry was in charge of an American Legion Memorial Ceremony that involved over 60,000 marchers and 85 military bands. Calvin Coolidge spoke, and the ceremony was a huge success.

By 1922, with farm prices still low, Truman & Jacobson had to close, but the two partners did not declare bankruptcy. Harry assumed the debts and took more than twenty years to pay them off.

Kansas City politics was dominated by the Democratic Party, which served people on the local level and on a one-on-one basis. There were Democratic block captains and precinct chairmen that were always ready to help constituents, many of whom were immigrants from Ireland, Poland, Croatia and other Slavic countries, as well as African-Americans.

James Pendergast, known as "Big Jim," was an Alderman and the first of the "Pendergast" dynasty in Kansas City politics. Jim Pendergast and his brother Tom owned saloons as well as gambling and prostitution establishments. Their brother Mike was liquor license inspector for Jackson County. They were very good at "the politics of human contact." The Pendergasts could get favors done for people, and in turn, people would vote for their candidates. Sometimes people would vote more than once.

Jim Pendergast came up with the idea of running Harry Truman for County Judge, which was not a legal position but an administrative one. Harry, age 38, was an ideal candidate: a war veteran, a farmer, and well known as an honest man. His speaking style was plain and simple. The one charge against him - that he had once voted for a Republican— Harry openly said Miles was a war hero and close friend, so he had indeed "crossed over" just that one time. He wanted to win so badly that he was



tempted to join the very popular Ku Klux Klan, but he decided against that. After winning the Democratic primary, his election in the fall of 1923 was a formality.

His first term as County Judge went well, but he failed to win reelection. He took a job selling memberships in the Kansas City Automobile Club until he could run for County Judge again in 1926. With the help of the Pendergast organization, Harry served for two terms of four years each.

As County Judge, Harry won the approval not only of Democrats but also many Republicans and powers like *The Kansas City Star*. He got a large bond issue passed that paid for a massive new road system and a hospital. In his second term he oversaw the building of a new courthouse. Harry took such an interest in the courthouse and its architecture that he traveled around the United States at his own expense. Driving from city to city, Harry and a Pendergast operative named Fred Canfil looked at various courthouses for ideas. Even as an old man, Harry considered the Kansas City courthouse in Art Deco style with its statue of Andrew Jackson one of his proudest achievements.

However, working with the rough and tumble Pendergast organization took its toll on Harry's health. He suffered headaches, insomnia, and dizziness, partly because he was put into situations where people acted dishonestly. After the road bond issue passed, Harry stood up to the Pendergasts at a crucial meeting. He told their handpicked contractors that they would have to bid like any other contractor. After that, the Pendergasts were less inclined to ask the scrupulous Truman to do dishonest things. Nevertheless, he poured out his heart writing paragraph after paragraph about his disillusionment and conscience over the practice of politics. At one point he described how he had to allow someone to steal \$10,000 to keep a \$6 million deal afloat.

Harry's home life was happy, but complicated by the fact that his mother-in-law owned the house he lived in. She was a dominating, dignified lady with a formal style. In 1924, after suffering several miscarriages, Bess gave birth to a daughter named Margaret. Margaret had the good fortune of being an only child not just with her parents, but also among a large, childless extended family. She was the center of attention at home as well as when they visited the Truman side of the family at the farm in Grandview. Even in the middle of the Great Depression, Margaret never suffered materially. She had plenty of toys, clothing, and love. The family had servants.

Truman continued to join organizations like the Masons, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Elks, Eagles, and others as part of his political career. He was conscious that others were out to ruin his reputation by setting him up with women or trying to tempt him with bribes. He always had a male companion along whenever he entered a hotel room to avoid the appearance of impropriety.

It was in this period of Truman's life that he found his calling in life: politics. But politics exposed his family to problems, such as a kidnapping attempt on his daughter, and tainted his reputation through his association with the Pendergasts. The reality of

politics would always be in conflict with Truman's idealism. He worried that three things could ruin any man, including himself: power, money, and women.

## **Part 2 Chapter 5 Analysis**

Truman got a late start in life, especially for a man of his era. He was not married until he was 35 years old, and his only child was born when he was forty. His store failed when he was 38 years old and left him strapped for money for almost twenty years. He lived in his mother-in-law's house with her "children." When he finally found his calling as a politician, he was almost forty. His experiences as a farmer, businessman, and soldier helped him later in life as President.





## Part 2 Chapter 6

### Part 2 Chapter 6 Summary

In October, 1932, a few weeks before the November election, the Pendergast organization's handpicked candidate for governor, Francis Wilson, died. His wife called Tom Pendergast before she called the mortician. She believed that Pendergast should handle the death announcement and decide who would replace her husband as gubernatorial candidate.

Harry wanted to run for governor in Wilson's place, and Tom Pendergast had been aware of that when he picked Wilson over Truman earlier that year. When Wilson died, however, Pendergast passed over Truman in favor of the unknown Guy Park, who went on to win the election. Pendergast promised Truman he could choose between running for U.S. Congress and becoming county collector after his stint as county judge. Harry could not run for judge again because he had served two consecutive terms.

The Pendergast political organization had power over Truman's fate as well as power over the town of Kansas City. Even at the height of the Great Depression in the 1930s, Kansas City was a boom town because of its prevalent "industries" of gambling, racketeering, prostitution, bootlegging, and drug traffic - all run by the Pendergasts. One of their key lieutenants was Johnny Lazia, who controlled liquor licensing and the Kansas City police department. A lone rabbi, Samuel Mayerberg, spoke out against the city's corruption.

In the fall of 1933 Harry took over as head of state reemployment under the Roosevelt's federal program. He did not take any salary because others might have seen it as unethical since he still was serving as county judge. During the long commutes that were part of this job, Harry decided to run for Congress, although his wife did not like the idea. When he told Tom Pendergast, Pendergast replied that the offer was no longer on the table.

In May, 1934, Pendergast offered Truman the chance to run for United States Senate. While Truman's six-year record as county judge was good - he was responsible for building a \$20 million road system, an orphan's home, a hospital, and two courthouses — he was considered a lightweight. Congressman Jack Cochran was the favorite to win the Democratic nomination in the primary.

The summer of the primary election was the hottest on record with three-digit temperatures. In the middle of the campaign, Johnny Lazia was machine-gunned to death on the streets of Kansas City. This and other violence associated with the Pendergast organization worked against Truman. But when he came under attack for his association with Pendergast, Truman rose to the challenge and combated those against him. Truman won the primary by over 40,000 votes and went on to win election



to the United States Senate. Pendergast told him to "work hard, keep your mouth shut, and answer your mail."

His association with the Kansas City political bosses cost him when he got to the United States Senate. Many of his fellow Senators, including the other one from Missouri (Bennett Clark), snubbed Harry Truman and called him "the Senator from Pendergast." Truman defiantly hung a picture of his mentor Tom Pendergast in his Senate office.

Bess and Harry Truman did not have the money to buy a house in Washington, D.C. They rented one apartment after another in an effort to find something affordable. Truman had his teeth fixed by a public health dentist. When Bess's mother wanted to return to Missouri, Bess and Margaret, preferring home to D.C. anyway, went back to the house on Delaware Street with her. Living by himself, Harry often felt lonely, unappreciated, and homesick. Meanwhile Tom Pendergast was living extravagantly in New York City and taking cruises on the *Queen Mary*.

As a freshman Senator, Truman "spoke little and listened much." He was a staunch New Dealer who supported President Franklin Roosevelt's proposals, but he did not care for his snobby fellow liberals from the East Coast. A hard worker, Harry got to the office by 7 AM and spent evenings reading six different newspapers. As a member of the Interstate Commerce Committee, he worked hard on the Public Utility Holding Company Act against public power cartels. During this period he socialized with Justice Louis Brandeis and Joseph Kennedy, father of the future president. Harry attended the 1936 Democratic Convention in Chicago where Pendergast was one of several big city bosses along with Flynn of the Bronx, Kelly of Chicago, and Crump of Dallas.

When Roosevelt tried to change the rules of the Supreme Court to his advantage, Harry stood with him even though many other Democratic Senators opposed. When there was an opening for a new Senate Majority Leader, FDR wanted Arlen Barkley, but Harry supported Pat Harrison. Instead of calling Truman and asking him to vote for Barkley, Roosevelt's people called Pendergast to put pressure on Harry. This was a grave insult to Harry, who went ahead and voted for Harrison. Barkley won by one vote. But he continued to admire his friend Harry Truman for his directness, because Harry had told Barkley in person that he was voting for Harrison.

On December 20, 1937, Harry delivered a major speech about corporate greed and corruption, blaming the unemployment of the Great Depression on concentrated wealth. The speech received much press coverage as Truman led hearings on crooked railroad dealings.

Meanwhile, a Pendergast scandal was brewing in Missouri. Tom Pendergast had taken bribes of over \$700,000 from the Great American Insurance Company in January 1935. Now he was being investigated by a District Attorney named Maurice Milligan, whom Governor Lloyd Stack had asked to look into vote fraud. Stack fired Emmett O'Malley, the state's insurance superintendent. Stack and Roosevelt wanted Milligan renewed as District Attorney; Truman was the only one to oppose this. His opposition to Milligan almost ruined his career.



In April, 1939, Tom Pendergast was indicted for income tax evasion. His fines came to \$830,500, and he received a prison term of fifteen months. He died in prison. Governor Stack came out of this scandal looking very good. *Life* magazine provided national coverage of the governor's part in bringing down Pendergast. Truman did not come out looking good, even though he was never officially investigated. In September, Stack announced he would run for Senate, hoping to pry the Democratic nomination away from Harry S Truman and Maurice Milligan.

Franklin Roosevelt supported Stack and even offered Harry another job if he chose not to run. Harry chose to run without FDR's support and began to criticize the President publicly for breaking precedent and going for a third term. To his surprise he got support from Bennett Clark, who had never seemed to like him.

Truman campaigned in Missouri by himself. With the Pendergast machine in shambles, he could not count on a big margin of victory in Kansas City. He took a strong stand on Negro civil rights and ran on his record as a New Dealer. The odds favored Stack, who said again and again that Truman was Pendergast's lackey. On election night the Trumans went to bed after hearing on the radio that Stack had an 11,000-vote lead. However, Truman won the nomination, by carrying Jackson County by over 20,000 votes and because Bennett Clark campaigned for him in St. Louis. He defeated his Republican opponent in the fall by over 40,000 votes.

## Part 2 Chapter 6 Analysis

Truman had little control over his early political life - his future depended upon the Pendergast organization. He knew that his stint as country judge would soon be over, but he had no say in whether he ran for governor, Congress, or county collector. He was a last minute choice for U.S. Senate. The implication from Lazia's mafia-style murder was that the Pendergast organization had mafia ties through its bootlegging, gambling, and other enterprises. While Truman chose not to take bribes, he still was dependent upon a corrupt organization. The constant tension affected not only his career but also his health and marriage.



## Part 2 Chapter 7

### Part 2 Chapter 7 Summary

When the Senate reconvened after the 1940 elections, most people were more concerned about the war in Europe and Hitler's aggression rather than the domestic problems of the Great Depression. On December 29, 1940, Franklin Roosevelt gave one of his most memorable "fireside chats." He spoke of America's becoming "the great arsenal of democracy." The nation's role would be to supply the British in their fight against Hitler in a "lend-lease" program. The United States started to build one armament factory after another.

Truman became concerned that the plants and army camps in his home state were not run properly. He took a long automobile trip from DC through Florida and into the Midwest, inspecting many of the plants and operations himself. He spoke about his concerns in a personal meeting with Roosevelt, then gave a formal speech before the Senate on February 10, 1941. He became chairman of the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program. He already had a reputation as a talented investigator from his investigations of railroads and public utilities.

As head of the "Truman Committee," Harry had a difficult job. He did not want to appear to criticize the President or the war effort, yet he and his fellow committeemen were discovering mismanagement and sloppy administrative practices in many defense plants and Army camps all over the country. The Army camps were easier to take on than corruption in defense production. Harry, as always, was concerned about corporate greed. Alcoa had a monopoly on aluminum; Standard Oil and the Farben Company dominated oil and rubber respectively.

Harry tried to avoid name-calling and personalities, sticking to facts as much as possible. Still he had an impossible job, especially after the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor. No one really wanted to hear about corruption in defense plants. The pressures of his job almost ruined his health - he suffered a gallbladder attack as well as headaches, insomnia, and stomach upsets. The committee discovered that many of the materials the government was buying were not up to the standards they had been promised. Some of this sloppiness, such as defective engine parts and low-grade steel products, put soldiers' lives in danger. In a watchdog role, the committee saved the United States millions of dollars by exposing scandals such as "disappearing" equipment.

In the first of fifty reports, the Truman Committee recommended that one person be appointed as a "production czar." This person would have the power to get things done and immediately fix much of the mismanagement. The committee also recommended that all corporate executives be fired from their volunteer positions in defense production. Truman knew about top secret projects, such as the Manhattan Project that was designing the atomic bomb.

The Truman Committee had so much power that if someone threatened to take a matter to the committee, that was often enough to get the matter fixed immediately. Articles about Truman appeared in the national media like *Time*, *Look* and *The New York Times*, and he was voted one of the top men most vital to the war effort - the only civilian on that list.

Harry's personal life was stressed by continuing health problems and months separated from his wife and daughter. Margaret had grown into a lively teenager who wanted to become a professional singer.

## **Part 2 Chapter 7**

### **Part 2 Chapter 7 Summary**

It is ironic that Truman rose through the corrupt Pendergast organization to become a Senator who made a name for himself investigating corruption. As the chief investigator of the defense industry, Truman was in a difficult position. He had to be critical of a popular president and the war effort that involved in the entire American public. For this reason he kept all his work very factual and unemotional.



## Part 2 Chapter 8

### Part 2 Chapter 8 Summary

In 1943 President Franklin Roosevelt was under the care of a cardiologist who predicted he had less than a year to live. Everyone close to the President and even certain members of the press questioned the soundness of his health as he was posed to run for an unprecedented fourth term.

His vice president, Henry Wallace, was an unusual politician. Mystical and intellectual, Wallace spoke Russian and consulted with the spirit of a dead Sioux. He was not particularly interested in politics and would shut himself in a room to study Spanish rather than participate in Senate debate. Roosevelt and his political operatives wanted Wallace off the ticket. They knew that this presidential run would be harder than the other three, not only because of Roosevelt's health but also because of the strength of his opposition.

Jimmy Brynes and Senator Alben Barkley were discussed as vice presidential choices. Brynes was already almost "assistant president" in his role as Roosevelt's War Mobilization Director. Other names that came up were Sam Rayburn, William O. Douglas, Harry Truman, and Henry Kaiser. Brynes and Barkley, as southerners, would not run as well with the crucial black population. Douglas was considered too young. The decision-makers in the Democratic Party were leaning toward Truman because he was making a name for himself as an investigator of corruption. He was also from the Midwest and had taken liberal New Deal stands on civil rights and helping Jewish Europeans. But the Democratic Convention in Chicago was supposed to be "open." Wallace went there thinking he was still on the ticket. Meanwhile Brynes went to Chicago thinking he was the choice after a call from Chicago's Mayor Kelly. Meeting with Hannegan, Kelly and others, Brynes was assured he was the nominee.

When the convention opened July 14, most delegates did not know about the backroom negotiations and assumed Wallace was the vice president candidate.

In public Roosevelt acted as if he was running only out of wartime duty. He called himself "a good soldier" and kept a low profile, giving his speeches via radio. He wrote to Bob Hannegan, who was up for chairman of the Democratic Party and one of FDR's personal favorites in the Democratic power structure. FDR's letter dated July 19 read, "I would be happy to run with either Truman or Douglas." Putting Truman first implied he was FDR's first choice.

Truman gave an off-the-record interview to a reporter during the Convention. He told the journalist that he did not wish to run for Vice President because his Pendergast record would surface, and that historically it was always bad to be the person who took over for a dead president. It wasn't so much that he did not want to be Vice President as that he did not want to succeed Franklin Roosevelt. Meanwhile Roosevelt, operating from his



home in New York, gave a lukewarm endorsement of Wallace that was in reality his kiss of death. FDR's letter to Hannegan surfaced. Roosevelt told his operatives to tell Truman it was his duty to serve his country as Vice President.

A drunken Bennett Clark nominated Truman. On the first ballot the vote was 429 to 319 for Wallace and Truman respectively. New York boss Ed Flynn delivered his votes to Truman on the second ballot, and Truman pulled ahead. After more machinations, the final vote was Truman 1,031, Wallace 105 and William O. Douglas 4. Truman's acceptance speech was one of the shortest in history, ending with the words "Give me a chance."

Roosevelt had a seizure the night he was re-nominated, and his health was very frail during the campaign. Truman campaigned heavily by train after Roosevelt told him to avoid airplanes. Truman's association with Pendergast was a big negative issue for him. He was depicted as a lightweight who had failed at farming and small business, and who was in the pocket of corrupt big bosses. He was accused of being in the Ku Klux Klan. It was a close race. A shift of 300,000 votes in key areas would have put Dewey in the White House.

When Roosevelt invited Truman to the White House, Harry noticed that the President was shaking so much he could not pour cream into his coffee. They only met twice after that.

Truman's mother-in-law moved into the family's small D.C. apartment. When Tom Pendergast died a week after the presidential inauguration, Truman was criticized for attending the funeral of a criminal. Nevertheless Harry's status had improved in Washington. He told *Time* magazine that he thought of himself as a liaison between the executive and legislative branches. He embarrassed himself by having his picture taken with a flirting young actress, Lauren Bacall.

April 12, 1944, was a routine day for Truman. The speeches in the Senate were so dull he wrote a letter to Bess while he listened. Afterward he went to Sam Rayburn's office for drinks and was told to report to the White House. There he learned that Roosevelt was dead.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked Mrs. Roosevelt. She replied famously, "Is there anything I can do for you? You're the one in trouble now."

## Part 2 Chapter 8 Analysis

Even though the men who ran the Democratic Party knew that President Roosevelt was probably too ill to serve an entire fourth term, they chose a vice president based on who could help the ticket rather than who would make the best replacement. Roosevelt was devious in this process, not saying anything directly to the major candidates Henry Wallace, Jim Brynes, William O. Douglas, and Harry Truman. It was another instance in Harry's life where someone else had complete control and told him to take a job he



probably did not want. He told several people that he did not want to succeed Roosevelt when he died because that was historically a bad way to get to the White House.

## Part 3 Chapter 9

### Part 3 Chapter 9 Summary

Roosevelt died about five in the afternoon. Within two hours Truman called together his wife, members of his Cabinet, and Chief Justice Harlan Stone into the Cabinet Room where he took the oath of office under a picture of Woodrow Wilson with his hand on a Bible owned by a White House usher.

Americans reacted to their new President with some fear. His very ordinariness cut two ways. On the one hand, he seemed open and honest. On the other hand, he seemed too ordinary, especially after the patrician Roosevelt. Roosevelt had come from an upper class family with old money, but Truman had come from hardscrabble pioneer stock. Roosevelt had an aristocratic speaking mannerism developed at Harvard. Truman, who never attended college, spoke plainly and with a Midwestern accent. Roosevelt could be devious and indirect. Truman was the opposite. Roosevelt surrounded himself with aristocratic East Coast people. Truman replaced many of them with plain speaking Midwesterners. Roosevelt enjoyed gossip and intrigue and liked to read classified papers that J. Edgar Hoover provided with spicy intimate details of Washingtonian lives. Truman told Hoover he did not want such reports and said they were a civil rights violation.

Truman took over the American presidency in the middle of World War II. After he was sworn in, three generals (Bradley, Eisenhower, and Patton) sat up all night talking about the changes he would bring. About 197,000 Americans had already died in the War, and another 700,000 were wounded, missing, or imprisoned. Truman was now Commander in Chief of 16 million people in the armed services. Yet he had not been privy to information at the highest levels of the government until now.

Roosevelt's body arrived in the Capitol on Saturday, April 14, 1944. He was buried the next day near his home in Hyde Park, New York. On Monday, April 16, Harry Truman addressed a joint session of Congress, assuring the nation that things would remain on course. One of his first acts as President was to meet with the Russian, V. Molotov, and others about the formation of the United Nations.

Before he met with Molotov, he met with Averell Harriman, a wealthy East Coast insider who warned him against the Russians. Harriman thought the United States would someday face threats from the Soviets every bit as dire as the one the Nazis posed in World War II. Harriman briefed the new president about what had gone on secretly between Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin.

The landmark meeting April 23 with Molotov did not go well from the Russian standpoint. Truman, unlike Roosevelt, was to the point. The Allies wanted free elections in Poland, among other things. Molotov later said no one had ever talked to him as bluntly before.



Two days later Harry was in another important meeting with Henry Stimson and General Leslie Groves, who gave him more details of the secret atomic bomb. The enormity of the new power of such a weapon overwhelmed Truman. There were practical problems, such as getting it to detonate properly.

The first week in May both Mussolini and Hitler died, and victory was declared in Europe on May 7.

In Truman's personal life, things were only so-so. His wife, daughter, and mother-in-law announced their intention to spend the summer in Independence. They did not like the White House for a variety of reasons and wanted to "go home" after moving into it May 7. The President was able to visit them later in the summer and got a tremendous reception in his hometown.

Harry got rid of Roosevelt's style and made his own. For example, he got rid of FDR's desk and pictures in the Oval Office and removed all recording devices. He replaced half of the Cabinet with new people, mostly westerners. He invited Herbert Hoover to dinner. Hoover was someone Roosevelt ignored. He reappointed David Lilienthal to the Tennessee Valley Authority despite opposition from his party. He allowed Henry Morgenthau to resign as Secretary of the Treasury, which had put him next in line for the Presidency after the Secretary of State. He enjoyed an amazing 87% approval rating among American voters.

Winning the war against the Japanese weighed the heaviest on his mind. He had further discussions about using the atomic bomb. The bomb might provide the shock value necessary to get the Japanese to surrender. The Japanese had a formidable record of fighting to the death. The battle of Okinawa indicated they would fight to the death no matter what. In that battle more than 110,000 Japanese died, compared to 12,000 Allies. American bombing of Japanese cities seemed to have no effect. For example, more than 100,000 died in one night's bombing of Tokyo - to no real effect.

In planning a wide-scale invasion of Japan, his generals told Harry that at least a million American lives would be lost.

## **Part 3 Chapter 9 Analysis**

Harry Truman took over the presidency in the middle of World War II, even though he had not been a top player in the Roosevelt administration. He did not know the details of the atomic bomb in progress. He had never met Stalin or Churchill. He had to make powerful decisions in his first three months as president. Although there was victory in Europe, the Japanese remained a formidable enemy prepared to fight to their death. He also faced tremendous problems with Russian aggression.



## Part 3 Chapter 10

### Part 3 Chapter 10 Summary

Truman had been in office for only a few months when he had to travel to Germany to meet with Churchill and Stalin in a Berlin suburb. Stalin was a day late. Arriving in Germany, Harry was amazed at the war's devastation of the country. Even the house where he stayed was not in good condition.

Churchill and Roosevelt had been very compatible. They had a lot in common and both had a tremendous command of the English language. Truman's style was totally different, and many wondered how he would meet this challenge. Yet the new president made a strong impression on Churchill from the start. Harry's first impression was that Churchill was too smooth. Harry liked Stalin as a person. "Churchill talks all the time and Stalin just grunts," he said later. Churchill remembered that he "loathed" having someone take Roosevelt's place. Truman wore business suits; the other two dressed in military uniforms.

The Potsdam conference went on for about two and a half weeks, but nothing much was accomplished. Truman wanted free elections in Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, and other Eastern European countries that Stalin already occupied, but Stalin would not agree to anything. They discussed the borders of Germany and Poland, with Truman fighting to keep Poland's borders without taking more German territory. Stalin agreed to declare war on Japan; he already had a million troops at the Manchurian border. Truman and Churchill both worked under the assumption that since the Soviet Union had made the largest sacrifice in World War II, it somehow deserved more of the spoils. However, they overlooked how many millions Stalin had ordered killed in his country. Near the end of the Potsdam Conference, Churchill was voted out of office.

Truman stood firmly for setting up free governments in Poland, Finland, Romania, Bulgaria, and other satellite nations. He was also firm on the question of German borders. But Stalin kept postponing decisions and said, "If a government is not fascist, then that government is democratic." They finally came up with the Potsdam Agreement, which divided Germany into zones, dismantled the Nazi regime, and made it impossible for Germany to become a military power. However, the agreement was so vaguely worded it was a failure.

Generals Dwight Eisenhower and Omar Bradley met with Truman in Germany, where Eisenhower said he opposed using the bomb. Later Truman made a speech that became famous for its simplicity and the emotional response it achieved from its audience. The gist of what he said was the United States had gone into the war to achieve peace, not monetary gain. We were not fighting for conquest but "for peace and prosperity for the world as a whole."



Even as the Potsdam Conference continued, the United States was secretly testing the atomic bomb in New Mexico. Truman received encoded messages such as, "The baby is full of light and his crying can be heard from DC to New York" - meaning, the bomb went off perfectly and the light of it could be seen for hundreds of miles. Harry was very much aware of the power of the bomb. He knew it left a 1,000 foot crater and destroyed a massive 220 ton steel cylinder expected to survive the blast, the light of which could be seen for over twenty miles. He knew that using this weapon would have an enormous effect not only physically but also politically, and not only in Japan but also on the entire world. He received letters signed by hundreds of scientists both for and against using the weapon.

The biggest consideration was the loss of American lives if Harry decided not to use the bomb. Military experts warned him that up to a million soldiers would die in an invasion of Japan. The Japanese had demonstrated their will to fight no matter what. Thousands of kamikaze (suicide) pilots had sacrificed themselves in the war. No Japanese unit had ever surrendered. Even though the Japanese had been technically defeated by this time (July, 1944), they would fight if only for better terms of surrender.

From a practical point of view, the Roosevelt administration had spent over \$2 billion on the bomb project. There was little doubt FDR planned to drop it. If Truman had decided against using it, he would have to face the criticism that he could have won the war without sacrificing hundreds of thousands of American soldiers.

The Potsdam Conference released the Potsdam Declaration on July 26. It assured the Japanese would receive humane treatment and that the alternative to surrender was the complete and utter destruction of their nation. American planes dropped millions of copies of the declaration on Japanese cities. The Japanese leadership ignored the declaration. On July 31, Harry Truman signed the order to drop the bomb.

Truman left Europe on August 2. Aboard ship he briefed reporters on the atomic bomb. On Monday, August 6, American planes dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. Everyone on the ship was cheering. American soldiers all over the Pacific cheered, too, because this meant they would not be sent to invade Japan. Two days later there was no word from Japan. On August 9, America dropped a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki. A big question for Japanese surrender was whether the country could keep its Emperor. The Japanese did not surrender until August 14.

## **Part 3 Chapter 10 Analysis**

No other person took over the United States presidency when the stakes were so high. Later Truman told historians that he never lost sleep over dropping the atomic bomb on Japan. It is clear from this chapter that he and his advisers were aware of the enormity of what they were doing, but they never really debated their choice. The Japanese would not surrender. They would fight to the death and were prepared to keep fighting long after it was possible for them to win. Truman used the bomb to prevent an invasion of Japan that would have cost up to a million American lives.

The Potsdam Conference should have been the start of an era of peace and harmony among the victorious countries of Russia, the United States, and Britain. Instead, Stalin was obstinate and unyielding. The vague wording of the agreements led to their failure.



# Part 4 Chapter 11

## Part 4 Chapter 11 Summary

The Great War was over, and so was America's honeymoon with their new President. Newspaper columnists and editorial writers became increasingly critical of Harry Truman's indecisiveness and choice of advisors, claiming the people he had around him were not qualified to run the government - they were Midwestern hicks. His approval ratings fell from a high of 87% to 64% in 1944.

Truman thought that the American people had demonstrated their ability to unify and work together when there was a high purpose and common cause. He saw no reason why a similar spirit could not keep going in times of peace. But people quickly became consumed with more selfish concerns. A popular movie of the era depicted a returning soldier saying, "We used to live to fight the Japs. Now we live to make money."

One of Harry's biggest concerns was that after the war ended, the country might move into another depression. His own business had been a victim of the depression that followed World War 1 in 1920. Economists were making dire predictions that the same thing would happen again as defense plants laid off thousands of workers and soldiers returned from overseas needing jobs.

Harry allowed a few shake-ups in his cabinet. Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior and FDR insider, resigned. Truman fought with Secretary of State Byrnes, who never seemed to have gotten over the fact he could have been President himself. In other matters, Harry led a campaign for statehood for Hawaii and Alaska and organized the Central Intelligence Agency.

In February of 1946, Stalin announced that capitalism and communism were incompatible and therefore another war was inevitable. Churchill, now out of power, came to a small college in Fulton, Missouri, where President Truman introduced his speech. This was the famous "iron curtain" speech in which Churchill said that an iron curtain had descended on Eastern Europe. At the time most commentators wrote that the speech was too warlike. A long influential report from Moscow diplomat George Kennan indicated that the Soviets were paranoid and would continue to be impossible to deal with.

In the spring of 1946, Harry's biggest concerns were labor strikes. The United Mine Workers went on strike causing problems in coal production, especially with the steelworkers already on strike. But worst of all, the railroad industry was shut down on May 23 when that union struck. The railroad strike left commuters stranded and caused distribution problems for the entire economy. The worst of it was that people had no transportation to hospitals and other vital business.



Truman met with leaders of the railroad union the same day he hosted a reception for wounded soldiers. The contrast of the soldiers' selflessness and the union's greed was too much for him. He sat down and wrote a scathing seven-page draft of a speech saying that strikers would be drafted into the Army. The next day Clifford Clark and other advisers reworked the speech so Truman would not appear so out of control. Nevertheless, Truman did announce his intention in a speech before Congress -legal or not- of drafting railroad workers on strike. His proposal was roundly defeated in the Senate - 70 votes to 13. This strike ended within a few days, and the coal strike ended May 29. After his decisive leadership on these issues, Truman's popularity went up.

On a personal level, Truman hated living in the White House, calling it "the great white jail." He took a lot of criticism for inviting Pendergast to visit him. He took a vacation on a boat with eight male friends and enjoyed himself playing poker. His friend Canfil gave him a sign he had once seen in a federal reformatory in Oklahoma. The famous words on it were "The buck stops here."

In September, Truman mishandled what came to be known as "the Wallace affair." Henry Wallace, FDR's vice president and now Truman's Secretary of Commerce, had personal power as one of the few New Dealers left. Wallace was due to deliver a controversial speech in New York. When asked about the speech, Truman told reporters that everything he would say was in line with the administration. Truman had merely skimmed the speech.

Wallace said that British imperialism was a graver danger than Soviet Communism and that the United States should not interfere with the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. These views were different than those of Secretary of State Jim Byrnes and Truman himself. Truman held a press conference the next day and said there had been a misunderstanding. He had approved Wallace's right to give the speech, not the speech itself. A week later, the problem had not gone away. Wallace insisted that most people did not like the administration's "get tough with Russia" policy. Meanwhile Byrnes telegraphed Truman that he would resign, saying there can be only one Secretary of State. On September 20, Truman fired Wallace after writing him a scathing letter. Wallace graciously offered to destroy the letter.

After this Truman's popularity went down to 32% in public approval polls. He took a bigger beating in the press. He was accused of being a hick, too stupid to be President, and a Mama's boy. In the 1946 fall elections, Democrats asked him not to campaign for them. When the election ended, Republicans had a majority in both the House (526 to 188) and Senate (51 to 45). Democratic losses in big cities like New York, Philadelphia, and even Pendergast's Kansas City contributed to this defeat.

## Part 4 Chapter 11 Analysis

Once the United States was no longer in a war crisis, people felt free enough to criticize their president. Truman had come into office in an emergency and risen to the occasion. Without the war to unite them, people were more divided on what was important. How



Truman did things - his Midwestern blunt manner - was almost as important as what he did. His threat to draft striking railroad workers and his bungling in the Wallace affair did not help matters.



## Part 4 Chapter 12

### Part 4 Chapter 12 Summary

The Republican victory in the 1946 fall elections was in many ways good for Truman. There were new leaders in the House and Senate: Arthur Vandenberg, Joe Martin, and Robert Taft. The new faces and political dynamics freed Truman up for the first time to be his own man, no longer under the shadow of Roosevelt.

One of the best decisions he ever made as President was to replace Secretary of State Jim Byrnes, with General George Marshall. Marshall was an extremely measured person and never disloyal to Truman. He improved the morale of the State Department.

Truman struggled with getting David Lilienthal confirmed as head of the Atomic Energy Commission. Many of the Republicans in the Congress believed Lilienthal was too liberal, too leftist for the job, despite the moving speech he gave about how much he believed in democracy and freedom. Truman won this fight, but Taft's description of Lilienthal as "soft on communism" stuck.

Truman also did well on a trip to Mexico where he visited the memorial to Los Ninos Heroes. These were six boys who had been killed by Americans in 1847. The Mexicans appreciated the President's healing gesture and came out by the thousands to cheer him. It had been Truman's own idea to visit the Memorial because he felt "brave men should be honored no matter what."

The winter of 1946 had been a disaster in Europe. The British communicated that they would have to cut back on their military commitments because of their weakened economy. France, Italy, and Germany struggled as crops failed in the unusually cold weather. Europeans were hungry. There was some concern that the Soviets were going to take over Greece and Turkey.

Clark Clifford, George Kennan, and George Elsey had been working for almost a year on a report about Russia. Entitled "American Relations with the Soviet Union," the report called the Soviet Union a true menace that was rapidly building up its military power. The Soviets would acquire the atomic bomb, guided missiles, and other modern weapons. They had taken over Finland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria and wanted Austria. Their operatives were influencing French and Italian politics. The Soviets were actively working to establish friendly governments in Greece and Turkey.

Alarmed by the report, Truman asked that all copies of it be put under lock and key. On March 12, 1947, he gave one of the most important speeches in American history. He outlined what became known as the Truman Doctrine, in which he said there were two kinds of government. One is based on the free will of the people, and the other is based on the will of a minority forcibly imposed unto a majority. He said he believed that the



United States must support free peoples everywhere through economic and financial aid. He announced a \$400 million aid package for Greece and Turkey.

The speech cleared the air. There was less ambiguity about where America stood in matters with the Soviet Union. Privately, Truman said he did not see much difference between a communist police state and a Nazi one. On April 22, 1947, the aid to Greece and Turkey was approved.

J. Edgar Hoover and Clark Clifford headed a Loyalty Committee designed to investigate every federal employee's loyalty to the United States. Communists would have to be weeded out. Hoover saw the State Department in particular as a problem. Truman privately did not like the loyalty program and said later that he had made a colossal mistake by approving it.

Meanwhile, Marshall toured Europe and reported that things were worse than they thought. America had to act, he argued. "The patient is sinking while the doctors deliberate." He said the Europeans did not need relief but a restoration of industry, trade, and agriculture. Aid was not to combat communism but to restore the economic health of Europe. Truman, campaigning to give Europeans aid, said, "If Europe goes down the drain in some big Depression, so shall we." The price tag would be a gigantic \$17 billion.

Truman agreed to invite the Soviets to a conference in Paris to work out the details of the Marshall Plan. But the Soviets walked out because they did not want to pool their resources and agree to open accountings. When Molotov withdrew, so did all the satellite countries. The Soviet withdrawal helped Truman get the Marshall Plan through Congress. Historians would later write that through the Marshall Plan, Harry S Truman and the United States saved the free world.

On June 29, 1947, Truman made a civic rights speech at the Lincoln Memorial in front of tens of thousands of people. He called for the end of inequality in education and employment, and for the repeal of poll taxes and lynching laws.

The Republican majority passed the Taft Hartley Act, a measure to curtail labor unions. Truman vetoed it, but it was passed over his veto.

In the President's personal life, he went to Missouri when his mother had a stroke. She survived but died several months later at age 94. His daughter Margaret went on tour as a singer and received many kind reviews. Over 15 million people listened to her radio debut. Truman was known as even-tempered and generous to people who knew him well. This was contrary to his press image as cocky and hot-tempered.

Bess Truman never enjoyed her role as First Lady and kept out of public life. There is some evidence that she was emotionally detached from Truman because she was against his being President. She never gave speeches or took up causes, but servants and others who knew her said she was generous and warm in person. The Trumans never had enough money. His salary as President was \$75,000 a year, but he had to pay expenses, taxes, and food. After those deductions, they had less than \$4,200 left.

As Senator he made only \$14,500. They never had a family fortune, as did the Roosevelts, to use when they occupied the White House.

## **Part 4 Chapter 12 Analysis**

After the Republicans took over Congress in 1946, Truman came into his own. There were many new people in Washington and new leadership. The Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine were two of the greatest achievements of his administration.



# Part 4 Chapter 13

## Part 4 Chapter 13 Summary

Despite the general perception that Harry did not like being President and would not run for reelection in 1948, Truman decided early in 1947 that he would run again. He relished challenging the Republicans after recent Democrat humiliation, and compared himself to Jackson or Jefferson as a President "taking on the forces of reaction."

His State of the Union address delivered in January, 1948, called for national health insurance, raising the minimum wage from 40 cents an hour to 70 cents, creating more housing, and a new personal deduction of \$40 on income taxes. That winter he took a strong stand on civil rights after his commission presented a landmark report entitled "To Secure These Rights." Southern Democrats warned him this stand may cost him votes.

A political consultant named James Rowe Jr. advised Truman to appear less with politicians, in particular, those from Missouri. He told Harry to be photographed at least twice a week with prominent people from different walks of life, such as Albert Einstein, and to spend more time out of Washington, DC. He told Truman political machines were collapsing and his reelection would depend on the northern Negro vote. Truman refused to be photographed as advised. Meanwhile Henry Wallace was beginning a third party run for President.

Harry got himself in a controversy by building a balcony on the White House. He pointed out that the balcony would save about \$2,000 a year in awning maintenance, but representatives from the fine arts opposed the changes. The White House needed a complete renovation as walls and ceilings were literally falling down. Truman went ahead with the balcony, but postponed other renovations until after the election even though the floor of a sitting room had already caved in.

The most important issue that Harry Truman faced at this time was the creation of a Jewish state in the Middle East. Like most Americans he wanted to do what was right for the hundreds of thousands of European Jews who had suffered under the Holocaust. As a politician, his future depended on the Jewish vote in crucial states like New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. But the administration was divided on the question, even as Harry Truman received thousands of letters and requests from Zionists for the approval of the state.

One of the key people in opposition was the Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal. Forrestal and others argued that the United States would get into a war with the Arabs when our country had a critical need for Arab oil. Forrestal estimated that 100,000 American troops would be needed to secure the Jewish homeland, with little help from the British. This fact would necessitate a military draft. Secretary of State Marshall made similar arguments, especially warning about the European dependency on Arab oil. Clark Clifford was a key supporter of the new state of Israel.



Truman grew weary of being pounded by both sides. His old friend and business partner, Eddie Jacobson, went to the White House to win influence for a new Jewish state. Here was someone who could have a frank and open discussion with Truman. Jacobson convinced him to see Chaim Weizmann, a distinguished Zionist leader who would become the first president of Israel.

The general policy was to "partition" Palestine into two parts: one Jewish and one Arab, which would remain joined economically, with a U.N. trusteeship over Palestine until more details could be worked out. On November 29, 1947, the U.N. voted for partition with the United States leading the measure. Nevertheless, America's support for Israel was muddy because Truman himself was still ambivalent. Reports from Kennan and later the CIA indicated that partition would not work. Marshall warned about a war in Europe against the Soviets, with Middle Eastern oil as a vital reason for war.

On March 17, Truman spoke before Congress asking for the passage of the Marshall Plan, universal military training, and a temporary draft to meet challenges of the Soviet Union in Europe. The speech did not go over well, and Truman's popularity plummeted.

After meeting with Weizmann on March 18, Truman agreed to the creation of Israel but did not inform Marshall. Warren Austin, U.N. Ambassador, recommended abandoning partition and establishing U.N. trusteeship of Palestine. This news shattered the hopes of Jewish people everywhere and the reaction was immediate and intense. Truman was angry that he found out "by reading the morning papers" that his own State Department had reversed his policy. Marshall said in a press conference that not partitioning Palestine was the "wisest course." Eleanor Roosevelt tried to resign as a U.N. representative in protest, but Truman would not accept her resignation.

On May 12, just two days before the British mandate in Palestine was to expire, there was a crucial strategy session at the White House with Truman, Marshall, Clark Clifford, and others. Clifford argued the case for Israel. Marshall said he would not vote for Truman in November if he took that course because he thought it was wrong for the United States. Later Marshall assured Harry that he would not oppose him publicly or resign. On May 14, the first Jewish state in two thousand years was declared on schedule at midnight in Jerusalem with de facto recognition by the United States. This was the cause for great celebration all over the world.

In June, Harry took a 9,500-mile railroad tour of fifteen states, stopping along the way to make speeches. Republicans criticized his using government money for a campaign trip. At the University of California in Berkeley, he gave a key speech making the point that the unrest in the world and the failure to achieve peace after a terrible war was mostly the fault of the Soviet Union. On June 24, the Soviet Union announced a blockade of water, rail, and highway traffic to Berlin, hoping to starve out the people under Western control. Truman responded by calling for a Berlin airlift of food and supplies. From June until the end of September, 1949, American planes dropped food and supplies over the western side of Berlin.



On June 21, the Republicans nominated their "dream" ticket, Governors Thomas Dewey of New York and Earl Warren of California. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that they would win.

Truman's chances of reelection were so dim that many in his party wanted him to step down. Roosevelt's sons led a campaign to draft Eisenhower. Ickes wrote Harry a letter saying "You have the choice of retiring with dignity or being driven out of office." He was treated with open contempt in his own party. Democrats were afraid that not only was he going to lose, but that he would pull everyone down with him. William O. Douglas refused to run as Vice President. Wallace was mounting a third-party challenge.

The Democratic Convention of 1948 was known for its bad management and divisions, as well as floor fights on racial issues. The southern delegates threatened to walk out. Truman and Barkley were not nominated until 2 AM, so there was no radio and television audience for their speeches. Despite the heat of the auditorium and weariness of the delegates, Truman's brave speech about how he was going to win this one charged everyone up. He announced a sweeping platform, and then surprised everyone by saying he was calling Congress back into session. Not much really happened during that special session, except that Truman announced he was ending all discrimination in the armed forces and would guarantee fair employment in civil service jobs.

Meanwhile Berlin needed about 2,000 tons of food and 12,000 tons of fuel per day. American and British planes were making hundreds of runs a day, but Berliners worried about the winter months. Another airfield in Berlin had to be built.

Truman met with the National Security Council about who should have custody of the atomic bomb: the President alone or the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Truman believed that because it was not like other military weapons, the President alone should control the bomb.

## **Part 4 Chapter 13 Analysis**

Truman faced incredible odds when he ran for reelection. The Republicans controlled the House and Senate and nominated two attractive candidates. His popularity was low in the polls. Members of his own party approached him not to run this time and take everyone down with him. Even though he had performed time and again through one crisis after another, very few appreciated him.



# Part 4 Chapter 14

## Part 4 Chapter 14 Summary

Truman faced not only a challenge from Dewey, but also from two third-party candidates. Strom Thurmond was running as a segregationist and Henry Wallace as an extremely liberal "thinking man's" candidate. These two candidates would take votes away from Truman and divide Democrats. Everyone thought Truman would lose the South to Thurmond and New York to Dewey. Ordinarily these regions would be Democratic.

When the campaign began, the odds against Truman were the greatest in the history of the presidency. The Roper Poll had Dewey ahead by so much (44% to 31%) that it stopped wasting money on more polls. The President's low standing in the polls made it hard for him to raise money, especially from big corporate sources. At several points in the campaign, he had to appeal personally to small groups in the White House for money or else stop campaigning.

On the surface, Dewey was a more attractive candidate. He was eighteen years younger than Harry Truman, and he had a chic wife. He was liberal on many issues, and his smooth, polished exterior made Truman look like a rube from the country. The down side of this was that he could appear rehearsed, controlled, and even cold. Once, when his train almost broke down, Dewey's voice accidentally went over the loudspeaker. He said, "That engineer is the most incompetent we've ever had. He should be taken out and shot." This was widely reported.

The "Ferdinand Magellan" was Truman's own idea. The Magellan was a specially equipped train used by FDR. It was bulletproof, air-conditioned, and fast. Truman's idea was to ride the train all over the country, stopping at every small town as well as big cities. He would go on the attack against the "do-nothing" Congress and the Republicans who did not represent the average person but only big business and greed. Truman's speeches were often crude and full of earthy homespun language, but he drew big crowds wherever he went. He would speak from the back of the train and then introduce Margaret and Bess. Then the Magellan would travel at 85 mph to the next town and the "Tribune show" would go on again.

One famous line from the campaign occurred when a supporter yelled, "Give 'em hell, Harry!" Truman replied, "I just tell the truth but they think it's hell."

All the major newspapers like the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Los Angeles Star*, *The Kansas City Star*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Star*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* were predicting a substantial Dewey win. They also wrote editorials in support of a Republican presidency. Toward the end of the campaign, the newspapers and magazines like *Life*, *Look*, and *Newsweek* were running stories like "What Dewey Will Do" and "Truman: A Study in Failure."





Truman campaigned from 7 AM to midnight, remaining positive and upbeat even as his family and staff became exhausted. He kept pressing his attack, while Dewey ignored him. Dewey had run a negative campaign against Roosevelt in 1944 and did not wish to repeat his mistake. He too was using a train, but at a leisurely pace. Sometimes he would not even look out behind the curtains if he deemed the town too small for a speech. To Truman, no town was too small.

Some reporters began to comment on the size and enthusiasm of the crowds that Truman was attracting, but wrote that people were coming out of curiosity. With two weeks left to go, Truman had cut Dewey's lead to six points.

Truman got a huge reception in Chicago, with 500,000 lining the streets. It was similar in Boston. In New York City, he drew millions of people in a huge ticker tape parade. He made a civil rights speech in Harlem. Eleanor Roosevelt finally endorsed him in a radio broadcast from Paris. On Election Day, the polls stood 49.5% to Dewey and 44.5% to Truman.

Truman spent Election Day in Independence, Missouri, but not at his home on Delaware Street. He went to a hotel in a resort town and spent the night there as staff members followed the polling results. By midnight he was ahead by a million votes in the popular vote but losing in key states like Pennsylvania and New York. By 4 AM he was ahead by two million votes. Dewey conceded at 11 AM in New York City. The people of Independence declared a holiday and closed schools and offices to come out and cheer for Harry Truman.

Truman "shook the bones out of all the smarties," wrote H.L. Mencken. He carried Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and most of the West, including California. He took West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Missouri but lost four southern states to Thurmond. The Democrats carried a 54:42 majority in the Senate and 263:171 in the House of Representatives.

Truman had won the Presidency handily.

When Truman returned to Washington D.C. a crowd of 750,000, two thirds of the city's population, welcomed him.

## Part 4 Chapter 14 Analysis

After the election was over, political writers and experts analyzed how Truman won against all odds. Some said Dewey lost the election by being arrogant and not trying hard enough. Others said Truman won by his hard personal campaigning. Since Truman's time, many candidates behind in the polls - such as Bob Dole, George Bush, and others - have compared themselves to Truman and hoped for an upset, but so far it has never happened again.



# Part 5 Chapter 15

## Part 5 Chapter 15 Summary

Truman's Inaugural Day was January 20, 1949, and cost \$80,000, the most ever spent at that point on such an event. His parade drew more than a million people. In his Inaugural speech, Truman made "four points:" (1) the USA would support the United Nations; (2) the USA would continue the Marshall Plan; (3) the USA would form a North Atlantic treaty for the defense of Europe (NATO); and (4) the USA would share its scientific and technological knowledge with emerging countries. He called democracy "a vitalizing force" and said "actions resulting from Communist philosophy are a threat to free nations."

The Trumans finally announced the necessary White House renovations and moved into Blair House directly across the street. Harry got a salary increase to \$100,000 plus \$50,000 for expenses, to Bess's delight.

There were two immediate scandals in 1949. Secretary of Defense Forrestal displayed emotional instability, and Truman replaced him with Louis Johnson. On May 22, Forrestal hanged himself. Later that year Truman also accepted the resignations of long-time aids Clark Clifford and David Lilienthal.

The second scandal involved allegations that Truman's friend Harry Vaughan was a "five percenter," a person who takes 5% of contracts he can find by using personal political clout. Vaughan also gave away five freezers, including one to the Trumans, a fact that Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin focused on.

McCarthy, who had been voted by the press as the worst member of Congress, had announced that he knew of two hundred Communists in the government, but six weeks later, he still had been unable to name one. He used innuendo to accuse people of being Communist-leaning, yet no one was standing up to him. Senator Millard Tydings was in charge of a sub-committee to investigate McCarthy's charges. Truman called a press conference and announced he would release employee records to Tydings. This move was a mistake because McCarthy accused Truman of covering up through the Tydings Committee. Meanwhile accused Communist spy, Alger Hiss, was indicted for perjury. Hiss had been a high level government official. Republicans used Hiss' friendship with Truman's Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, to imply Acheson should be removed from office.

Major events occurred on the international level. China fell into Communist hands under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung, a particular blow to the United States, which had backed Chiang Kai-Shek's government with \$2 billion in foreign aid. Of even more concern, the Russians began to test their own atomic bomb. An American physicist named Klaus Fuchs had apparently supplied them with scientific information.



By a vote of 3 to 2, members of the Atomic Energy Commission recommended to the National Security Council that the United States should NOT develop a superbomb. Also known as the hydrogen bomb, this superbomb would have ten times the power of the one used at Hiroshima. Eleanor Roosevelt and Bernard Baruch supported its development; Albert Einstein went on television and said such a bomb would mean "world annihilation." Truman told the American people that the Russians had an atomic bomb and that the USA had to develop the hydrogen bomb in self-defense. Truman came under more and more pressure to build up the nation's military, an area where he previously had cut spending.

Senator McCarthy took advantage of the edginess produced by the Russian bomb, the Red Chinese, and the conviction of Hiss to continue his Senate hearings.

On June 24, 1950, Acheson phoned Truman in Missouri to tell him that a Russian-backed North Korean army had invaded South Korea. It came as a total surprise. The United Nations called for an immediate cease-fire. Acheson said, "An occupied South Korea will be a dagger pointed at Japan."

Within the next few days Truman had to make what he later called the most difficult decision of his presidency - a decision more difficult than the one to use the atomic bomb on Japan. If he authorized the United States to intervene in Korea, he was afraid he would start a third world war. Nevertheless, he decided that the United States would send troops there under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. The House extended a military draft and within weeks thousands of Americans were in Korea. Truman told reporters "This is a police action under the auspices of the United Nations. We are not at war."

## **Part 5 Chapter 15 Analysis**

Many people believed that the United States and Britain should have gone to war with the Soviet Union at the end of World War II, rather than allowing it to become a military power. The Soviet Union would remain the major threat to the United States until its collapse in the early 1990s. Senator Joseph McCarthy was able to conduct his witch-hunt for Communists in the American government because of a national underlying edginess about the power of the Soviet Union and the fear that the Russians would start another world war. Truman wanted to send a clear signal that the USA would not tolerate Soviet aggression when he entered the Korean conflict.



# Part 5 Chapter 16

## Part 5 Chapter 16 Summary

Korea, a country about the size of Greece, was divided in two at its 38<sup>th</sup> parallel at the end of World War II. This was done without a lot of thought, as the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel had no significance in Korean geography or history. Americans were sent to Korea to defend this arbitrary boundary between the Soviet-dominated North Korea and the democratic South Korea. The North Korean army had 90,000 troops, whereas South Korea had 25,000 with 10,000 Americans.

MacArthur immediately called for more troops, while many ordinary Americans told Truman by letter that he should just "nuke" the Soviets. Secretary of Defense Johnson and MacArthur did not get along; both were difficult personalities. MacArthur was seventy years old and a prima donna. By mid-September, more than 13,800 Americans died in Korea. In some places, casualties were at 30%.

MacArthur had a daring plan to "hit 'em from behind." He wanted an amphibious landing on the western shore of Korea at Inchon. Truman took a chance and okayed MacArthur's plan, which was an overwhelming success. He replaced Secretary of Defense Johnson with Marshall. The Inchon invasion took place September 15; by September 16, Seoul had fallen. By October 1, South Korea was under U.N. control. Most people believed Americans should finish the fight and destroy the enemy. By November, 1950, there were 15,000 Red Chinese soldiers in Korea.

On October 15, Truman flew to Wake Island to meet with MacArthur. Although some biographers have reported that MacArthur treated him badly, historical evidence indicates that the two got along very well. Truman praised MacArthur's "vision, judgement, indomitable will and unshakable faith."

On the afternoon of November 1, Truman was taking a nap at Blair House when two radical Puerto Rican nationals attacked his Secret Servicemen guarding the entrance. After two minutes of gunfire, one assassin and one Secret Serviceman lay dead. Truman went ahead to a ceremony as if nothing happened.

In the off-year election, Democrats held on to a slim majority in both houses of Congress. But terrible events in Korea were dominating the news. The decision to fight beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel had been Truman's, but the results were disastrous. After the Chinese pulled in 260,000 more soldiers, Marshall said Russia was trying to trap us into a war with China. Truman made a statement that we would continue to stand up to Russo-Chinese aggression and that no one should criticize MacArthur now that his luck was down. Truman briefly mentioned the use of more force - newspaper reporters twisted his words to imply that the USA would use the atomic bomb and MacArthur could authorize it. The Prime Minister of England made a special trip to the United States asking Truman to abandon his war in the east to keep Europe secure. MacArthur



said they were losing because the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Truman were restricting him too much.

Meanwhile, Truman's best friend and most trusted advisor, Charlie Ross, suddenly died. Reeling from his death and the Korean fiasco, Truman fired off a letter to a newspaper music critic who had panned Margaret Truman's singing. His famous rage at the critic and threat that if they met up, the critic would "need a new nose and maybe a supporter below" opened the President to intense criticism from everyone including Republicans to parents who had children in Korea. Many saw the letter as a sign of Truman's mental instability.

In Korea, Matthew Ridgway took over General Walton's command which seemed to turn the tide of the war. As MacArthur favored blockading China and dropping fifty atomic bombs on that country, Ridgway's efforts were able to stem retreat, even as he was outnumbered 480,000 to 385,000.

On March 24, MacArthur seized the initiative by talking directly to the Chinese in an effort to stop Truman from a cease-fire. Many people believed MacArthur was so vain that he reacted to Ridgway's success by putting himself in the limelight. MacArthur threatened to expand the war but also offered to negotiate a settlement himself.

Truman reacted to MacArthur's statement with complete outrage and disbelief. With his approval rating at 26% and more than 57,000 Americans dead in Korea, others used MacArthur's initiative to pound the President. Truman decided that he would not allow MacArthur to quit: he would publicly fire him.

Within the first two days of MacArthur's dismissal, Congressmen received over 44,000 telegrams against it. There was talk of impeaching Truman. Nevertheless, the press backed Truman's decision six to one.

When MacArthur came into San Francisco on April 17, a huge crowd met him at the airport. On April 19, he gave his famous "Old soldiers never die" speech to thunderous, emotional response in the Congress. Seven million people came out to a ticker tape parade for him in New York City. Meanwhile Truman was booed at opening day baseball ceremonies.

The Senate held hearings on MacArthur's dismissal, with the General himself testifying that his hands had been tied in Korea, otherwise he would have led the USA to victory. Generals Bradley and Marshall and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff disputed MacArthur's testimony.

On June 25, 1951, after about one year of American involvement in Korea, Russian's foreign minister proposed that there should be a settlement.

## Part 5 Chapter 16 Analysis

Truman said that firing MacArthur was one of the most difficult decisions he made as President. MacArthur was dramatic and popular in his own right, but he was not winning the war in Korea. His public statements that he could win if only the President and his staff would give him what he wanted and then his taking personal action at meeting with the Chinese went too far. Truman fired him because he was insubordinate. Many historians believe Truman was right, but he handled MacArthur's dismissal in a clumsy way.



# Part 5 Chapter 17

## Part 5 Chapter 17 Summary

Truman was 67 years old and had been President for seven years. He was physically fit and kept to a strict diet and exercise regime. He had the power to run for reelection. The new Constitutional Amendment limiting Presidents to two terms did not apply to him. But his popularity was low - he was at about 30% in the polls. Senator McCarthy's hearings were poisoning the atmosphere in Washington D.C. Also Democratic Senator Estes Kefauver was holding hearings on organized crime, which added to the feeling that something was very wrong.

When McCarthy went after George Marshall, Marshall retired. This was very distressing to Truman. He faced the usual accusations of cronyism. His friends Bill Boyle and Merl Young were investigated for corruption. Truman made an effort to clean things up, firing 113 Internal Revenue Service employees.

Truman was also taking a close hand in the supervision of the White House renovations. In May, 1952, he put the White House on display by hosting a television and radio broadcast tour of the newly refurbished mansion.

In April, 1952, he told his closest advisors that he would not run for reelection as President but was thinking of a run for U.S. Senator. Later his wife vetoed that idea. Truman wanted to help decide who his successor would be; he liked Fred Vinson for Democratic nominee. As someone who inherited the Presidency suddenly and with no help from anyone, Truman felt it was very important that he aid his successor in every way.

When Vinson refused to run, Truman invited General Dwight Eisenhower for lunch to discuss the presidential nomination. Ike informed him he was a Republican. Truman next looked at Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois. Stevenson was 51 years old, articulate, and had just won a landslide election. Stevenson vacillated and told Truman that letting the Republicans capture the Presidency might be good for the country. Truman did not want Taft, who was the front-runner, as President.

On March 29, Truman announced he would not run for President at a Jackson Day Democratic Dinner.

On April 8, 1952, Truman took the dramatic action of seizing American steel mills. The steelworkers had been on strike, and Truman argued that steel was necessary for munitions in the Korean War. He seized the mills as a "temporary last resort." The Supreme Court ruled this action was unconstitutional, which annoyed Truman because most of the judges were liberals.

The Democratic Convention was in Chicago on July 24. Stevenson kept vacillating, but finally won the nomination. Truman offered advice and his campaign skills, but



Stevenson did not seem to want either. Truman did campaign that summer on the Ferdinand Magellan, but he never appeared with Stevenson.

Truman was angry when Eisenhower made a joint campaign appearance with McCarthy that summer, especially because Truman knew that Marshall had been responsible for Eisenhower's entire career.

Truman's mother-in-law died as they spent their last months in the White House.

After Eisenhower won the Presidency, he flew to Korea to survey the situation, which annoyed Truman. On Inaugural Day, the Eisenhowers snubbed the Trumans by refusing the traditional last coffee with the out-going President. Truman did receive a nice reception at a final luncheon given at Dean Acheson's home as well as by crowds who saw his train off in Washington, D.C. and those who met him in Missouri.

## **Part 5 Chapter 17 Analysis**

Although McCullough emphasizes that Truman did not think it was ethically right to run again, he implies Truman may have run if he had gotten any support from his fellow Democrats. His popularity was so low that no one wanted him to run. In this chapter and the next, the reader can sense that Truman felt abandoned by his party and that he truly missed being the center of attention after he returned to Independence. Perhaps he would have run for Senate if Bess Truman had supported that idea.





## Part 6 Chapter 18

### Part 6 Chapter 18 Summary

Truman and his wife returned to Independence, Missouri, after Eisenhower's Inaugural. On an idealistic level, Truman wanted to be like his hero Cincinnatus, a Roman farmer who served Rome in its time of crisis and then returned to farming. On a practical level, Truman and his wife had few alternatives but to go back to Missouri. They had taken out loans in the last year of his presidency and were about to live on his soldier's pension of \$112 per month. Bess Truman inherited one-fourth of her mother's \$33,500 estate, and Truman had inherited part of the Truman farmland at Grandview.

The Trumans had no real money until Truman signed a \$600,000 book deal. As it turned out, he received only about \$37,000 from this deal after paying a staff to help him write it and then 67% in taxes. Ultimately, Truman had to ask Congress for an allowance, which he received in 1958. John McCormack helped him get an annual \$25,000 to be used as a pension and for staff expenses. Truman also received free mailing privileges.

Eisenhower signed a peace treaty to end the Korean War on March 5, 1953, just a few months after he took office. Had Truman accepted the terms of this treaty, he would have been roundly criticized in the press and by D.C. insiders. Truman did not return to the White House until John Kennedy became President. In his eight years as President, Eisenhower never asked Truman for advice. Although outwardly happy and upbeat, Truman missed the worldly people and stimulation of Washington, D.C.

The Trumans did manage a Hawaiian vacation, a long road trip across America, and a seven-week tour of Europe where they visited with the Churchills. On April 21, 1956, Margaret Truman married the foreign editor of *The New York Times*, Clifton Daniels, in the same church where her parents married many years before.

Truman spent most of 1952 to 1956 writing his memoirs and developing the Truman Library in Independence. His memoirs were so long (two million words) that they had to be published in two volumes. His work was compared to Churchill's history of World War II. Many critics thought he should have written a more personal book and that his book read like the product of a committee.

Truman wanted Averell Harriman to run against Eisenhower in the 1956 election. Nevertheless, Stevenson ran and lost a second time.

In 1958, Truman was invited to host a three-day seminar at Yale University. That year many celebrities and Democratic leaders like Eleanor Roosevelt attended a party in celebration of Truman's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In the 1960 elections, Truman did not like John Kennedy but thought the alternative, Richard Nixon, was an impossible choice as President. At the Democratic Convention, he worked for the nomination of Lyndon Johnson or Stuart Symington and gave a press



conference to the effect that Kennedy was too immature. He did this even though his best friend, Dean Acheson, wrote and advised him not to speak ill of Kennedy or any other Democratic.

When Kennedy won, he welcomed Truman to the White House on several occasions. However, he never sought out Truman for advice. He did seek advice from Acheson, a fact that wounded Truman. Truman was depressed when Kennedy was assassinated and attended his funeral, sitting next to Eisenhower.

As he grew older, Truman became crabbiest and sharper with people. All his contemporaries were dying - Marshall, MacArthur, Eisenhower, Stevenson, and Churchill. He cooperated with a biographer named Merle Miller, who produced some films about Truman and wrote a definitive biography. He also enjoyed his four small grandsons. In the early '60s, Bess Truman underwent a mastectomy and Truman himself was hospitalized after an accident in which he broke some ribs.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson honored Truman by signing the Medicare Bill at the Truman Library in Missouri. Even so, Truman refused to publicly endorse Johnson's war in Viet Nam.

Newly elected President Richard Nixon and his wife called on Truman at his home in Independence and toured the Truman Library in January, 1969.

In the summer of 1972, Truman went to the hospital for lung congestion. He never fully recovered. Readmitted on December 5, he died December 26, 1972. There had been plans for a big funeral in Washington, D.C. with the President's body lying in the Rotunda. Instead Bess and Margaret Truman kept the funeral a simple affair in Missouri. Some 75,000 people came to see Truman's body lying in a casket at the Truman Library, near where he was buried.

*The New York Times* ran a seven-page eulogy of the former President, and he was lauded throughout the world for his many accomplishments.

## Part 6 Chapter 18 Analysis

Truman's last years were spent where his wife wanted to be: in the small town of Independence, Missouri. His friendship and correspondence with Dean Acheson meant a lot to him as he was left out of the Eisenhower and Kennedy White Houses. Truman never received the recognition and praise he deserved until decades after his death.



# Characters

## Harry S Truman

This book is an exhaustive retelling of Truman's entire life, beginning with his pioneer grandparents and ending with his death in 1972. Truman lived in Independence, Missouri, as a student and farmer until he served in World War I when he was thirty-two years old. Returning home, he married his childhood sweetheart and opened a store in Independence. He was elected county judge (an administrative position) and then became a U.S. Senator. He ascended to the Presidency when Franklin Roosevelt died, and was elected in his own right in 1948. He died in 1972 after retiring in Independence.

## Bess Truman

Elizabeth "Bess" Wallace knew Harry Truman since they attended third grade together. He was madly in love with her and pursued her until she agreed to marry him. A small town girl at heart and a mama's girl, she never liked living in Washington, D.C. and often stayed in Independence, even when Truman was President. Her mother always lived with them, even in the White House. She was not an active First Lady and discouraged her husband from running for Senate after he retired from the Presidency.

## Franklin Delano Roosevelt

One of the giants of the twentieth century, FDR was elected President four times. He is credited for saving his country during the Depression and leading the Allies to victory in World War II. Truman had to follow in the shadow of this man. Their styles were very different - Roosevelt was articulate, funny and patrician, Truman was plain-speaking and homespun.

## The Pendergast Bosses

Jim, Mike, and Tom Pendergast were brothers and political bosses who controlled the state of Missouri by granting favors to voters. They owned prostitution houses, gambling establishments, and speak-easies and were involved with organized crime. They discovered Truman, encouraged him as county judge, and backed him all the way to the United States Senate. While other politicians under their patronage took bribes, Truman was always above that. The Pendergasts died wealthy men; Truman died poor.

## Douglas MacArthur

Renowned as a general in World War II, MacArthur was the commanding officer in Korea. As the United States clearly began to lose the Korean War, MacArthur spoke out



publicly for the need for more troops and munitions and suggested use of the atomic bomb. He also offered to negotiate with the Red Chinese. Truman fired him for insubordination, but Truman handled things in a clumsy fashion. MacArthur had been a popular hero to millions of people who backed him after Truman fired him.

## **George Marshall**

A popular general in World War II, Marshall became Truman's Secretary of State and key advisor. He and Truman worked out the Marshall Plan, which saved Western Europe from starvation and certain economic depression. Marshall was moderate when Truman could be hot-tempered, and the two worked very well together.

## **Winston Churchill**

The prime minister of England, Churchill worked with Truman at Potsdam to make peace after World War II. Churchill lost his reelection bid and retired after Potsdam.

## **Joseph Stalin**

Dictator of the Soviet Union, Stalin murdered millions of people who got in his way. He met with Churchill and Truman at Potsdam after taking over Eastern European countries like Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union remained a threat to the free world and the main issue of Truman's presidency.

## **Charlie Ross**

Truman's childhood friend, Charlie Ross, accompanied him to Washington, D.C. and served as press secretary. Ross had a way of keeping Truman calm and measured, especially in his relations with the press.

## **Margaret Truman**

The Truman's only child was a college student when they lived in the White House. She was a faithful campaigner for her father and pursued a singing career.



## Objects/Places

### Independence, Missouri

Truman's small rural hometown helped to shape his character and career. See "Setting" for more details about Independence.

### Trenches of World War I

Truman enlisted in World War I when he was in his thirties. He was captain of a small battalion that saw some combat in France, and he took part in a 100-mile march under terrible conditions. Truman proved to be a brave soldier and fought when nearly everyone in his battalion ran from battle.

### Truman & Jacobson, Inc.

Truman formed a partnership with Eddie Jacobson, a war buddy. As "Truman & Jacobson, Inc." they sold men's clothing. The store went bankrupt after a few years.

### 1944 Democratic Convention

Franklin Roosevelt was dying, so whoever was chosen for Vice President would probably become President. Harry Truman was chosen in a messy, haphazard way because he helped the ticket, not because he would be a good replacement for Roosevelt. When he ascended the Presidency just a few months later, Truman was not prepared because he had not been a true insider.

### Potsdam Conference

Stalin, Churchill, and Truman met at Potsdam, a Berlin suburb, to discuss the boundaries of Europe and the continued war with Japan. Truman was unable to make Stalin agree to free elections and other democratic measures in Eastern Europe.

### Atomic Bomb

Developed secretly by the United States at the end of World War II. Truman had to decide to use it on the Japanese in order to end the war and save American lives. Later he decided that the President, not military leaders, should control its use.



## **Wallace Affair**

Truman made a blunder when he told reporters that a speech to be made by Henry Wallace reflected the administration's views on foreign policy. Truman had not really read the speech before he said that.

## **Ferdinand Magellan**

This was the name of a specially equipped railroad that Truman used when he campaigned for the Presidency in 1948.

## **McCarthy Hearings**

Senator Joseph McCarthy suggested that he knew the names of 200 top-level government employees who were Communists or spies for the Soviet Union. He said many worked in the Army and State Department. Because his work was done on the Senate floor, he was free from restraints of a real court proceeding. His lies and rumors ruined many lives.

## **Korean War**

Backed by the Soviet Union and later the Red Chinese, North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950. Truman considered it an act of Communist aggression and sent American troops to restore the division of Korea along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Over 57,000 Americans died in Korea before the war ended in 1953.

## **Term Limits**

Since George Washington, United States presidents have traditionally limited themselves to two terms. Franklin Roosevelt broke that tradition by running four times. Truman had the right to run for a third term, but since he supported term limits and the term limit amendment passed while he was President, he left the Presidency after seven years.



# Themes

## Truman's Honesty

Truman grew up in a small town and in a family that honored ethics and moral values. Yet the people who controlled his political career in Missouri - the Pendergast bosses - were corrupt. There is some evidence that his career could have progressed faster if he had taken bribes. For example, he may have been allowed to run for governor in 1932. He also had to deal with corruption in the Democratic Party when he was nominated for Vice President. The Trumans were always strapped for cash and even their family farm was foreclosed. Harry never declared bankruptcy; he paid off every cent he owed. His ability to size people up according to small town values helped him when he dealt with people like MacArthur, Stalin, and McCarthy.

## Truman's Hatred of Corruption and Greed

Truman's first major speech in the Senate was against corporate greed. Over and over in his speeches he stood up for the ordinary person and attacked the Republicans as the party of corporate greed and corruption. As chairman of the Truman Committee, his job was to eliminate waste and investigate fraud in defense plants. In this capacity he probably saved the government several billions of dollars.

## Truman Standing Alone

Truman did not make decisions based on public opinion, which is partly why his standings were often below 30% in polls. He took action against the railroad and steelworkers' strikes because he thought they were harmful to the country. He led the country into the unpopular Korean War because he thought it was important to stand up to Soviet aggression. He sponsored the Marshall Plan at a time when Americans were tired of helping Europeans.

He won two elections in which the odds were very much against him. The first was his 1940 race for Senate when he went up against a popular governor. The second was the 1948 Presidential election which everyone "knew" Dewey would win.

## Truman's Following Franklin Roosevelt

Truman inherited the Presidency suddenly when Roosevelt died. Many Americans grieved for their fallen leader and resented Truman from the start. Churchill told Truman he loathed the idea that someone had taken the beloved Roosevelt's place.

Over and over Truman faced the problem that his personal style was different from his predecessor. Roosevelt was articulate and from an old, Eastern family with money;



Truman came from the heartland and had not attended college. Truman was direct whereas Roosevelt could be devious. Roosevelt's wife played a major public role and traveled all over the country for her husband. Bess Truman did not like being First Lady and preferred Missouri to the White House. Truman was constantly compared to Roosevelt, and it took decades for his accomplishments to be recognized in their own right.

## **Truman's Rising to the Occasion**

McCullough believes that "The whole pattern of Truman's life had been a succession of increasingly difficult tests of his capacity to prove equal to tasks seemingly too large for him." While Truman's style was that of the ordinary man from the heartland, he was an extraordinary man. He never used his political offices to get money even though he was always broke. He was unafraid to make momentous decisions such as dropping the bomb on Japan, getting into the Korean War, setting up the Marshall Plan, and running for elections no one thought he could win. He came into the Presidency with little preparation and followed a beloved leader, yet managed to lead the country through the challenges of the post-war era.





# Style

## Point of View

McCullough, using Truman's own diaries and letters, writes about his life on an almost day-by-day basis. If this book were a movie, the camera would always be on Truman. He would be in every scene.

Truman is the star, and everyone else is a supporting character. Even great men of the twentieth century like General Dwight Eisenhower, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and President Franklin Roosevelt are supporting players in the Truman show.

Other people in the book are either good or bad, depending on Truman's point of view. General Douglas MacArthur is one of Truman's villains because he embarrasses Truman during the Korean conflict and remains so stubbornly insubordinate that Truman has to fire him. On the other hand, Charlie Ross and General George Marshall are "good" because they support Truman in his efforts. They keep him from making quick decisions and saying the wrong thing in public.

Everything is from Truman's point of view, so when he is no longer in power, the book is no longer about great historical events. For example, in Chapters 15 to 17, Truman is President and at the heart of major decisions such as the next Democratic nominee for President and the steelworkers' strike. In Chapter 18, when he is out of power, the author does not write about events like the Bay of Pigs or Viet Nam. Instead McCullough reports on Truman's library and his birthday parties. Likewise in the beginning chapters when Truman is an ordinary citizen, historical events are not as important as the goings-on in Truman's clothing store.

## Setting

Truman's life has only two settings: Independence, Missouri, and Washington, D.C. Both places influence his character. The contrast between the two places is one of the themes of the book.

Independence is a small farming town. When the book opens in 1840, the town is the commercial center for pioneers who journeyed west. Truman grows up in a small town where everyone knows everyone else. In a setting like that, a person's character and reputation are very important and so are "small town values" such as religion, honesty, and care of the elderly. In his twenties, Truman works on a farm. The work is heavy—guiding a horse-drawn plow and harvesting by hand. His political career comes out of his reputation as a small town storeowner and farmer. He becomes a Senator through his small town connections. Independence, Missouri, shapes his character. He never really forgets his deep roots in this interconnected community.



Washington, D.C. is a different atmosphere. People in Washington, D.C. are very image-conscious and always promoting themselves. There are a lot of "phonies" and backbiters in Washington. You are only as good as your standings in the public polls. When Truman's standings drop below the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile, he loses "friends" and support within his own party.

Among Washington D.C. Democrats there are various cliques. The most challenging for Truman are the East Coast patrician politicians like Franklin Roosevelt. Many are from old wealthy families and attended prestigious prep schools and universities like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. They are capable of acting superior around Truman, who did not attend college.

Truman's family never adjusts to Washington, and is always returning to Independence. That makes Washington a lonely place for Truman. Ultimately, Truman loves both places. Washington, D.C. is more stimulating and sophisticated. Truman misses Washington when he is out of power, but Independence is always his home.

## Language and Meaning

McCullough told friends he was working on a "megabiography" of Truman, a big thick book in the style of a long Dickens novel. On many levels, he succeeds in doing just that. Like David Copperfield, Oliver Twist, or Pip, Truman starts off as an innocent young boy, but grows up to learn the mysteries and temptations of the adult world.

The author makes many literary references. For example, when he contrasts Truman with Roosevelt, he says Truman was a Sinclair Lewis kind of person - like someone out of the novel *Babbitt*. On the other hand, he writes, Roosevelt grew up in the world of an Edith Wharton novel. He refers to a colleague of Truman (Jim Vaughan) as a person who serves the role of fool in the Shakespearean sense - someone who speaks the truth but is thought of as dumb.

Some parts of the book have such a strong narrative that they read like a novel. But like every non-fiction writer, McCullough is limited by facts and does not have the novelist's flexibility to spice up the boring parts of his characters' lives.

McCullough could have done more editing. He includes every bit of research in his book no matter how trivial. For example, Truman as a county judge is so proud of his road building that he writes a little booklet about it, which is recorded page by page. McCullough often gives every detail of everything Truman did on several routine days and includes trivial information such as what his mother was wearing. The exhaustive detail bogs the book down.

## Structure

This book is divided into six parts; each has one to four chapters. Each chapter is about 50 pages long with subchapters. Each part forms a natural chapter in Truman's life.



Part 1, "Son of the Middle Border," describes Truman's ancestors and his childhood until age eighteen, when he is forced to forfeit college and take jobs in banks and farming. The last chapter is about his service in World War 1.

Part 2, "Politician," traces Truman's political career as county judge under Tom Pendergast, his successful run for U.S. Senator and his subsequent reelection, and his ascendancy to Vice President and finally President upon Franklin Roosevelt's death.

Part 3, "To the Best of My Ability," treats only the first three months after Truman suddenly took office in April, 1944. In these months he made many important decisions at the Potsdam Conference as well as the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan.

Part 4, "Mr. President," is about the rest of Truman's first term as president and ends with his amazing reelection and subsequent term.

Part 5, "The Weight of the World," treats Truman's second term and deals mostly with the Korean War.

Part 6, "Home Again," is about Truman's retirement years.



## Quotes

"Nearly all were farmers, plain-mannered and plainspoken, people with little formal education. Many of them were unlettered, even illiterate. They were not, however, poor or downtrodden." Part 1, Chapter 1, page 15

"Truman liked to say in later years that he had the happiest childhood ever." Part 1, Chapter 2, Page 39

"You were all that a girl could be possibly and impossibly. You may not have guessed it but I have been crazy about you ever since we went to Sunday School together. But I never had the nerve to think you'd even look at me." Part 1, Chapter 4, Page 84

"For years afterward at reunions in Kansas City, with whiskey flowing, there would be much lighthearted banter and kidding over this first encounter with the enemy, and Battery D's so-called "Battle of Who Run." But there was nothing the least comical about the situation at the time. With his blistering verbal barrage and the vivid example of his own fierce courage under fire, Captain Truman succeeded finally in getting things in control." Part 1, Chapter 4, Page 122

"He had not found his real work until late in life, not until he was nearly forty. But then, observed Ethel Noland, "hadn't he been a late bloomer all along? He didn't marry until he was thirty-five □ He didn't do anything early." Politics came naturally. "There," she said, "he struck his gait." Part 2, Chapter 5, Page 192

"It is 4 a.m. I have to make the most momentous announcement of my life. I have come to the place where all men strive to be at my age and two weeks ago I thought that retirement on a virtual pension in some minor county office was all that was in store for me." Part 2, Chapter 6, Page 204

"We worship money instead of honor. A billionaire, in our estimation, is much greater in these days in the eyes of the people than the public servant who works for public interests. It makes no difference if the billionaire rode to wealth on the sweat of little children and the blood of underpaid labor." Part 2, Chapter 6, Page 232

"The disclosures seemed to confirm many of his worst suspicions about big business in America. He was truly a Jeffersonian in spirit; Williams Jennings Bryan remained a political hero. The things Truman had said in the Senate in earlier years about the evils of big banks, big insurance companies, big corporations had been said in earnest. □ He never seemed to accept the view that a certain amount of corporate stupidity and corruption was inevitable in an undertaking so massive and involving." Part 2, Chapter 7, Page 272

"Truman's acceptance speech for vice president, one of the shortest in American political history, lasted less than a minute. The nomination was an honor for Missouri,



and an honor he accepted "with all humility." □ Then he stepped back slightly. "Now give me a chance," he said." Part 2, Chapter 8, Page 320

"Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me now. I don't know whether you fellows ever had a load of hay fall on you, but when they told me yesterday what had happened, I felt like the moon, the stars and all the planets had fallen on me." Part 3, Chapter 9, Page 353

"McCloy told Truman that the threat of the bomb might provide a political solution. "I would tell the Japanese we have the bomb and I would tell them what kind of a weapon it is. And then I would tell them the surrender terms□.Our moral position will be stronger if we give them warning." Truman indicated he would think about it." Part 3, Chapter 9, Page 401

"It would become part of the mythology of the Truman presidency in time to come that Churchill, at their first meeting, thought little of Truman, an idea amplified by Churchill himself in a famous toast years later on board the presidential yacht. "I must confess, sir," he began, "I held you in very low regard. I loathed your taking the place of Franklin Roosevelt." But in fact Truman made a strong impression from the start." Part 3, Chapter 10, Page 41.

"After the atomic bomb dropped on Japan, Truman wrote to a Senator, "I know that Japan is a terribly cruel and uncivilized nation in warfare but I can't bring myself to believe that, because they are beasts, we should ourselves act in that same manner. □ My object is to save as many American lives as possible but I also have a human feeling for the women and children of Japan." Part 3, Chapter 10, Page 458

"I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting subjugation □ I believe we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own ways .. I believe our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid essential to the economic stability " Part 4, Chapter 12, Page 548

"Recalling the events of 1947 and 1948, Clark Clifford would say, "I think it's one of the proudest moments of American history. What happened during that period was that Harry Truman and the United States saved the free world (through the Marshall Plan)." Part 4, Chapter 12, page 554

"The whole pattern of his life had been a succession of increasingly difficult tests of his capacity to prove equal to tasks seemingly too large for him." Page 4, Chapter 13, Page 585

"The main difficulty with the South is that they are living eighty years behind the times and the sooner they come out of it the better it will be for the country and themselves. I am not asking for social equality because no such thing exists, but I am asking for equality of opportunity for all human beings, and as long as I stay here, I am going to continue that fight." Part 4, Chapter 13, Page 589

"Truman was smiling, chatting with reporters, when someone handed him a copy of *The Chicago Tribune*, his least favorite newspaper, across the front of which ran the huge,



soon-to-be-famous headline "DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN." Holding the paper aloft with both hands and grinning from ear to ear, the man who had been given no better than a fighting chance seemed to be saying not only "Don't believe everything you read in the papers," but that in America it is still the people who decide." Part 4, Chapter 14, Page 718

"Later Truman would say that committing American troops to combat in Korea was the most difficult decision of his presidency, more so than the decision to use the atomic bomb. He did not want to start another world war." Part 5, Chapter 15, Page 782

"I've just read your lousy review of Margaret's concert. I've come to the conclusion that you are an eight ulcer man on four ulcer pay." Part 5, Chapter 16, Page 829

"I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barracks ballads of that day which proclaimed most proudly that, "Old soldiers never die. They just fade away." And like the old soldier of the ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away - an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty." Part 5, Chapter 16, Page 851

"Four years earlier in Truman's inaugural address, his emphasis had been on the world - democracy looking outward to the world. Now reviewing his time as President, he struck the same theme. His very first decision as President □ had been to go forward with the United Nations. He recalled the German surrender, his meeting with Churchill and Stalin at Potsdam, the first atomic explosion in the New Mexico desert, his decision to use the atomic bomb to end the war in Japan - all this within a little more than four months. "□A President has to decide," he said. "That's his job."" Part 5, Chapter 17, Page 918

"In a day of memorial tributes in the Senate chamber that he so loved, he was eulogized as the president who had faced the momentous decision of whether to use the atomic bomb, praised for the creation of the United Nations, for the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the Berlin Airlift, the recognition of Israel, NATO, for committing American forces in Korea and for upholding the principle of civilian control over the military." Part 6, Chapter 18, page 990

"Born in the Gilded age, the age of steam and gingerbread Gothic, Truman had lived to see a time of lost certainties and rocket trips to the moon. The arc of his life spanned more change in the world than in any prior period in history. A man of nineteenth-century background, he had to face many of the most difficult decisions of the unimaginably different twentieth century." Part 6, Chapter 18, page 991



## Topics for Discussion

People often talk about "heartland values." What are some of these values and how did they influence Truman?

What kind of politicians were the Pendergasts? What kind of politician was Truman? What did these differences cost him?

Discuss the similarities between Truman's 1940 primary run for Senate and his 1948 presidential campaign.

Truman's wife Bess and his daughter Margaret were only lukewarm about his political career and living in Washington D.C. Discuss what their lack of support meant to Truman personally and politically.

Why was the Potsdam Conference mostly a failure?

What factors did Truman consider when he decided to drop atomic bombs on Japan?

Discuss the significance of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan.

Truman vacillated in his support of the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Discuss some of the domestic and international issues that made him hesitant to support it at first, and why you think he finally decided to support Israel.

Discuss whether it was a good idea for the United States to enter a conflict in Korea without understanding the full intent of the Chinese and Russians. What else could Truman have done about Korea?

Discuss whether Truman was justified in firing General Douglas MacArthur. Was MacArthur reacting to Ridgway's triumph? Did Truman handle this incident badly?

McCullough believed that "The whole pattern of Truman's life had been a succession of increasingly difficult tests of his capacity to prove equal to tasks seemingly too large for him." Do you believe this? Point out examples that back up your opinion.

Discuss Truman's major achievements as President of the United States. Give examples of at least eight major decisions he made.

Shakespeare wrote: "Some men are born great, some men achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them." Do you think Truman was a great man? Discuss whether you believe Truman achieved greatness or had it thrust upon him.