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Preparation

The Making of an [American] Internationalist

American and Wilsonian Roots

International affairs held little interest for the vast majority of Americans when Harry S. Truman was born in Lamar, Missouri, in 1884, during the pedestrian presidency of Chester Arthur.[1] This was especially so for the future president's hardworking relatives and neighbors who made their living for the most part by tilling the fertile soil of the great Missouri–Mississippi Valley. Neither the nation's principal concerns at the time nor his particular circumstances connected Harry Truman to developments beyond the nation's shores, and little happened during his childhood in Independence to alter this situation. Unlike his privileged presidential predecessor, Truman had neither youthful experiences of foreign travel nor of living abroad. Unlike Franklin Roosevelt and John Foster Dulles, he had no relatives who participated in the evolving foreign policy establishment at the dawn of the twentieth century. He received no special education or training that sharpened his interest in the diplomacy of his nation. Instead his small-town boyhood is most distinguished by its sheer and parochial ordinariness – his glasses and piano lessons aside – and it hardly constitutes an auspicious start for this son of the midwest who would assume the vast responsibility of leading his nation through the final months of World War II and into the postwar era.

One should not assume, however, that the seasoned if unsophisticated politician whom Chief Justice Harlan Fiske Stone swore into office on April 12, 1945, maintained the same essentially blank slate on foreign policy matters as, say, the young man who graduated from Independence High School in 1901. Much

[1] This section relies heavily on the marvelous research of the three major Truman biographies. Specific quotations are noted, but this general acknowledgment is essential. See David McCullough, *Truman*; Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman*; and Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People*. The observant reader will note quickly a sharp difference in interpretation in this chapter from that offered by Arnold Offner's *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945–1953* (Stanford, CA, 2002).

happened in the intervening decades, although it did not happen dramatically or quickly in Truman's case. For much of the early part of the twentieth century, he was quite unconcerned with matters of international relations and of America's role in the world. America's and his own participation in World War I significantly broke the drought of his disinterest, but his return home soon led him to focus anew on more provincial matters. Only his arrival in the U.S. Senate in 1935 forced him to devote some sustained – if, at times, naïve – attention to defense and foreign policy questions. But as he gained confidence within that deliberative body, he eventually emerged as a forthright advocate of military preparedness in response to fascist aggression in Europe and Asia and then, during the war, as an active proponent of American involvement in a postwar international organization specifically and in world affairs generally. Far from being some sort of human tabula rasa on the subject, he carried with him into the Oval Office deeply held views on foreign policy as well as various attitudes and certain elemental convictions about the United States. These influenced his actions there considerably.

Little in Truman's early life indicated that he would become a politician, let alone a major world leader; nevertheless, it was during this time that his character, convictions, and outlook on life were formed. His parents raised him in an environment that emphasized such virtues as honesty, modesty, loyalty, patriotism, responsibility, and moral purpose, which Truman, with little evidence of any rebellion, took to heart. His religious formation in a Presbyterian Sunday School and as a member of Grandview Baptist Church further confirmed such qualities in and for him. His education gave him the standard fare for the beginning of the century, which probably meant a stronger knowledge of geography and better writing skills than many high school graduates at the beginning of the twentieth-first century. What Truman's education did not provide, as Alonzo Hamby astutely has noted, "was a sense of complexity and relativity [because] standards were clear, fixed, and simple." This had important consequences for the man Truman would become. "Harry's schooling conspired with his moral and religious upbringing to leave him with the conviction that personal behavior, and by extension that of societies and nations, should be guided by universally understandable Victorian maxims, that distinctions between good and evil were unambiguous, that there were few gray areas in life."[2]

Truman's high school years bridged the turn into the new century when the United States put behind it memories of the depression of the 1890s and burned brightly with new confidence. Truman and his classmates assuredly sensed this national confidence if only indirectly, and they shared a deep faith in the American project. While some Truman relatives had sympathized with the South during the Civil War, and while he held Robert E. Lee among his heroes, there was no doubt about his devotion to his country, one and indivisible. It was simply a part of him that required no articulation. Undoubtedly he shared something of the common American view that Providence had smiled especially

[2] Hamby, *Man of the People*, p. 13.

kindly on the United States. He would not have contested the notion that this nation had some divine commission to witness its virtues to other nations and that its democratic system was superior to any others. During his senior year and moved by the poetry of Tennyson, Truman copied some verses from "Locksley Hall." The poem held forth a vision of the future that concluded:

> Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
> In the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World.
> There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
> And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.[3]

Even though Truman carried these verses in his wallet right through to his presidency, there is no evidence that the one-world philosophy that underlay them exercised real influence on him or his thinking at the time. This high school senior was hardly a Wilsonian before Wilson.

In school and to a lesser extent afterward Truman read voraciously, as is well known, favoring Mark Twain and Charles Dickens and, most passionately, works of history. "Reading history, to me," he later recalled, "was far more than a romantic adventure. It was a solid instruction and wise teaching which I somehow felt that I wanted and needed."[4] In encyclopedic fashion, he paid some attention to all the major civilizations, but his real focus was on the lives and actions of great men and women. Late in his presidency he recalled reading "about the World's Great" as a teenager and listed over sixty individuals – among them Moses and Joshua, Darius I and Cyrus the Great, Hannibal and Caesar, Charlemagne and Jenghis Khan, Elizabeth of England and Frederick the Great – who attracted his interest.[5] His approach to history, however, remained rather simpleminded. Jonathan Daniels, one of his early (and friendly) biographers who knew Truman in the White House, observed that the president "imagined himself a great historian but actually . . . knew the kind of history that McGuffey would have put in his readers, and he liked the historical anecdote that expressed a moral."[6] He eventually developed what one of his biographers generously describes as "a rough philosophy of history" which "emphasized personalities and assumed patterns." In Truman's thinking, men made history rather than history the man. In order to move the world forward, he assumed, the men who make history would draw on the lessons of the past and avoid the mistakes of those who preceded them.[7] He certainly would apply this approach to history as he contemplated the proper course

[3] For the full poem and discussion of its significance, see Hamby, *Man of the People*, p. 13, and Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman,* p. 21.

[4] Truman quoted in David McCullough, *Truman*, p. 58.

[5] Diary entry January 1–2, 1952, in Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (New York, 1980), pp. 224–25. In a letter to journalist Edward Harris, July 19, 1950, Truman opined "that real history consists of the life and actions of great men who occupied the stage at the time." Ferrell, ed., *Off the Record*, p. 187.

[6] Jonathan Daniels quoted in Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman*, p. 20.

[7] The argument here and the direct quotations are from Hamby, *Man of the People*, p. 14.

for the United States as his nation struggled to defeat the Axis powers and to fashion a lasting peace.

Truman's reading of history did not draw him into any serious engagement with contemporary issues and events, especially issues of foreign policy. The Spanish-American War, the debate over Empire, Theodore Roosevelt's more activist diplomacy including the taking of the Panama Canal Zone, appear to have troubled him little if at all.[8] Perhaps his decision to join the Missouri National Guard in 1905 owed something to the nationalist fervor of the time and reflected his patriotism, but his desire for camaraderie and some adventure seems to have been just as important.[9] Nonetheless his membership in the Guard sustained an interest in military affairs first demonstrated by his unsuccessful effort to gain admission to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point prior to his high school graduation. His Guard membership in time played a key part in his story, but his training with the Guard from 1906 to 1911 seemed of little consequence at the time, aside from giving him a break (of sorts) from farming when his artillery battery spent a week in camp each summer.

Truman never suffered any doubts concerning his political outlook. His family provided him with an identity as a Democrat, which he adopted as inheritance and retained as conviction. The little boy who went to first grade with Grover Cleveland's name on his cap became the teenager who personally heard William Jennings Bryan's oratory at the 1900 Democratic Convention in Kansas City, who in turn became the young man who thrilled to the news of Woodrow Wilson's election in 1912 and held Andrew Jackson as his great hero. But his engagement in political affairs even at the local level was minimal, and his family hardly pushed him to it. Instead, after his brief experience as a bank clerk in Kansas City, his family recalled him to run its farm in Grandview. He responded dutifully, demonstrating during his long, hard, and unexciting years as a farmer a notable capacity for work and a deep sense of responsibility. His long courtship of Bess Wallace perhaps leavened his toil, but in the years prior to World War I his life seemed lodged in a rut deeper than any furrow he plowed. The sheer drudgery of farm life and the never-ending holding pattern quality of his relationship with the woman he adored might have soured a man on life. Truman, it seems, was not such a man. Perhaps he was engaged in an interior struggle to "become the sort of man who would win the respect of his peers and, above all, of his father" and could not dare relent or question his own life.[10] But there seemed also to be an inner toughness, a determination to keep doing one's duty come what may or, at least, until there came a higher call.

Although Truman openly admitted little unease with his own lot, he expressed more concern over the broad direction of his nation during the years prior to the outbreak of war in Europe. In 1911, before he left on a trip to South

[8] Ferrell makes essentially this point in his *Harry S. Truman*, pp. 20, 35.
[9] On Truman's experience in the National Guard, see Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman*, pp. 35–36.
[10] Hamby, *Man of the People*, p. 3.

Dakota, Harry wrote Bess that "I bet there'll be more bohunks and 'Rooshans' up there than white men" and went on to describe it as "a disgrace to the country for those fellows to be in it." Adopting the yeoman-farmer stance of a "purist" Jeffersonian democrat he went on to explain that "if they had only stopped immigration about twenty or thirty years ago, the good Americans could all have had plenty of land and we'd have been an agricultural country forever. You know as long as a country is one of that kind, people are more independent and make better citizens. When it is made up of factories and large cities it soon becomes depressed and makes classes among people. Every farmer thinks he's as good as the President or perhaps a little better."[11]

Truman presumably considered himself a superior American to the various late-arrivals who apparently threatened his pure vision of the republican experiment. Truman's correspondence to Bess Wallace contained a number of insulting references to other races and ethnic groups. He described Mexico as "Greaserdom" and also wrote Bess in 1911 that "I think one man is as good as another so long as he's honest and decent and not a nigger or a Chinaman. Uncle Will says that the Lord made a white man from dust, a nigger from mud, then threw up what was left and it came down a Chinaman. He does hate Chinese and Japs [sic]. So do I. It is race prejudice I guess. But I am strongly of the opinion that negroes ought to be in Africa, yellow men in Asia, and white men in Europe and America."[12] Such racial and ethnic prejudices occasionally burst forth in Truman's private remarks throughout his political career, but they were hardly determinative. The man who would enter a business partnership with his Jewish friend, who worked as part of the urban, ethnic machine of an Irish Catholic political boss, and who spoke out more forcefully for civil rights for African Americans than any president since Lincoln proved that he was not dominated by his racist views and could move some distance beyond those he held as a young man.[13]

The Great War in Europe that brutally decimated a generation of that bloody continent's young men initially did not have much noticeable impact on Truman. As Robert Ferrell observed, Truman rarely commented either on the

[11] Truman to Bess Wallace, October 16, 1911, in Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Dear Bess: The Letters from Harry to Bess Truman, 1910–1959* (New York, 1983), pp. 52–53.

[12] See Ferrell, ed., *Dear Bess*, pp. 34, 39.

[13] This view differs considerably from that of Offner's *Another Such Victory*, p. 5, which presents Truman as entrapped by his "parochial nationalism." One should also note the rather sad reality that racist and discriminatory comments were hardly the preserve of farmers from Missouri during the early decades of the twentieth century. For example, note the observations by Ellen Feldman regarding Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt's ethnic slurs and racism during the same decade that Truman made his most egregious comments. According to Feldman, "during the early days of their marriage ER wrote her mother-in-law that the 'Jew party' at Bernard Baruch's was 'appalling. I never wish to hear money, jewels, or labels mentioned again.'" Furthermore, "in 1917, on an official trip to Haiti, FDR's behavior to his hosts was as unfailingly courteous as his enjoyment of his colleagues' racist jokes was hearty." See Ellen Feldman, "FDR and His Women," *American Heritage*, 54 (February/March 2003), p. 59. Note also that evidence of Woodrow Wilson's racism and bigotry is substantial.

carnage at the front or even on the submarine issue which so divided the United States and Imperial Germany from 1914 through 1916. Instead, "like millions of other Americans, he . . . felt as remote from Europe as if Jackson County were somewhere in China surrounded by the Great Wall."[14] This changed quickly when on April 6, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson signed a declaration of war against Germany. "Stirred," as he later put it, "in heart and soul by the war messages of Woodrow Wilson, and since I'd joined the National guard at twenty-one I thought I ought to go." He remembered feeling like "a Galahad after the Grail."[15] He easily could have avoided military service on any of several grounds, including his age (now thirty-three), his miserable eyesight and his occupation as a farmer. But he signed up immediately. It was truly "the turning point in his life" and a liberation of sorts.[16]

Truman left the definition of war aims and the articulation of the conflict's meaning to the president, but he undoubtedly thrilled to the high-minded purpose that Wilson established for his nation. For the United States, this could not be a struggle motivated by something so base as national interest or designed merely to restore the balance of power in Europe. In Wilson's brilliant oratory, the war became a crusade to make the world safe for democracy and to establish a new international order based on self-determination for all people. Wilson put it best: "we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts – for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own government, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free."[17] Truman gladly assented, filled with admiration for the president and a genuine "democratic idealism," which Wilson so effectively tapped.[18]

While Wilson defined the war, Truman prepared to fight it, and after a year of training, he left the United States for the first time as Captain Harry Truman commanding Battery D of the 129th Field Artillery attached to the 35th Division. In France, he saw some fierce and bloody action and participated in the Meuse-Argonne offensive of 1918. Across the Atlantic and far from home, he discovered that he possessed courage under fire and that he could lead men. The latter discovery redirected his life for leading men in war suggested to him the possibility of leading them in peace. Furthermore, his wartime friends gave him a core group of political supporters. "My whole political career," he once said with only slight exaggeration, "is based upon my war service and war associates."[19]

The guns in Truman's battery stopped firing as scheduled at eleven o' clock, November 11, 1918. Later that month, he and some fellow officers obtained

[14] Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman*, p. 56.
[15] Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *The Autobiography of Harry S. Truman* (Boulder, CO, 1980), p. 41.
[16] McCullough, *Truman*, p. 102.
[17] Ferrell quotes Wilson in *Harry S. Truman*, p. 56.
[18] Hamby, *Man of the People*, p. 57.
[19] Truman quoted in Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman*, p. 57.

leaves and spent some time in Paris – where he caught a brief glimpse of Wilson – before heading south to Marseilles, Nice, and Monte Carlo with a brief side-trip into Italy. It was his first real travel in a foreign country, and one is struck by the conventional sightseeing quality of his touring – everything from Notre Dame cathedral to the *Folies Bergere*. After two weeks, Captain Harry rejoined his men and waited impatiently to go home. Their job was done he thought. The Paris peace conference meant little to him. "For my part," he observed, "and every A. E. F. man feels the same way, I don't give a whoop (to put it mildly) whether there's a League of Nations or whether Russia has a Red government or a Purple one, and if the President of the Czecho-Slovaks wants to pry the throne from under the King of Bohemia, let him pry but send us home."[20] The stirring appeal of Wilson's war message seemed long forgotten as he wrote his cousins of his anxiety "that Woodie [sic] cease his gallavantin' around and send us home at once and quickly." His regiment finally left Brest on April 9, 1919, and reached New York eleven days later. Truman resolved "that if old lady Liberty in New York harbor wanted to see me again she'd have to turn around."[21]

Truman rushed home to the welcoming arms of Bess Wallace whom he soon married at long last. Perhaps understandably given his lengthy wait to wed his childhood sweetheart, he doesn't appear to have spared much time to sympathize with Woodrow Wilson in his unsuccessful attempts to gain Senate ratification for the Versailles treaty and American participation in the League of Nations for which it provided. Yet Truman's wartime experience provided him with an intellectual and emotional rapport with past American foreign policy. Under the pressure of world events during the late 1930s, the fact of his participation in the war and his recognition that he had in some sense fought for Wilson and his Fourteen Points became significant formative influences on his thinking.[22] History sometimes does play a part in making the man.

Politician

Truman's stint in the army freed him from the farm for other possibilities. The pure Jeffersonian democrat readily succumbed to the lure of Kansas City. The newly married war veteran turned his attention first to a business venture as America entered the roaring twenties. His famous haberdashery partnership with Eddie Jacobsen soon foundered on the twin shoals of excessive debt and meager sales.[23] Truman refused to declare bankruptcy and insisted on paying

[20] Truman quoted in Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman*, p. 69.
[21] Ferrell, ed., *The Autobiography of Harry S. Truman*, p. 51.
[22] For later evidence of this, see Oral History Interview with Dr. Walter H. Judd, April 13, 1970, by Jerry Hess, Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter HSTL). Judd, a sometime congressional colleague of Truman, recalled that "I had been a young soldier in World War I, and he had been a captain in the field artillery, and when we got to know each other better we talked about our various military experiences. He felt, as I did, that we had made a mistake in 1918 and '19 when we imagined that we could pull back from the world, not recognizing our own situation in the world had changed."
[23] On "Truman and Jacobsen," see Hamby, *Man of the People*, pp. 94–100.

off all his creditors – an obligation he proudly met. The failed businessman's rescue from his embarrassing commercial foray came from an unlikely source. Boss Tom Pendergast enlisted Truman to run with the backing of his corrupt political machine for eastern county judge of the Jackson County Court in 1924, and so a political career began.[24] Although defeated in 1926 Truman came back two years later to win election as his county's presiding judge, an office rather like a county executive which he held until he left for the Senate. He energetically pursued his responsibilities of building and maintaining county roads, buildings, and facilities.

Those who tend toward Truman hagiography argue that the future president was a beneficiary of the Pendergast machine's political power but remained unsullied in any way by its corrupt practices. No doubt Truman appears as a moral giant compared to some of his machine associates whose principal aim in life centered on lining their own pockets. He had a positive vision for the future, genuinely sought to use government to improve the lives of citizens, occasionally tried to limit the corruption involved in the letting of contracts, and, most notably, never profited personally from the illegal activities of the machine. The rosy view of Truman as the epitome of moral rectitude and pure as driven snow stretches the truth however. It ignores Truman's own troubled conscience, which forced him to wrestle privately with the question of whether the good ends he sought justified the suspect means he used. "I wonder if I did right to put a lot of no account sons of bitches on the payroll," he pointedly mused in the early 1930s, "and pay other sons of bitches more money for supplies than they were worth in order to satisfy the political powers and save some $3,500,000 [this figure was part of a bond issue and represented the amount he estimated the "crooks" would have taken if he had not fended them off with small compromises]." He concluded somewhat tentatively that "I believe I did do right," although to add reassuring weight to this side of his own internal debate he noted that "anyway, I'm not a partner of any of them and I'll go out poorer in every way than when I came into office."[25]

Truman's qualms about financial corruption do not seem to have extended to deep concerns about the vote fraud which undergirded Boss Tom's remarkable ability to deliver tremendously lopsided victories for his candidates, such as Judge Harry Truman, in districts under his control. Truman the politician knew he needed the Pendergast organization's votes if he wanted to obtain office, and he welcomed everyone of them. His moral outlook on life made what William Lee Miller rightly has called a "rather stark compromise with realities" in pursuit of political victory.[26] His political compromise with the Pendergast machine helped carry him to victory in the U.S. Senate race of 1934.

[24] For a critical view of "Boss Tom" and the Pendergast machine, see Lawrence H. Larsen and Nancy J. Hulston, *Pendergast!* (Columbia, MO, 1997). Also see Lyle W. Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine* (New York, 1968), and on Truman's relationship with Tom Pendergast, see Robert H. Ferrell, *Truman and Pendergast* (Columbia, MO, 1999).

[25] Truman is quoted in and this paragraph relies upon the fine essay by William Lee Miller, "Two Moralities," *Miller Center Journal*, 2 (Spring 1995), pp. 22–23.

[26] Miller, "Two Moralities," p. 24.

Even when the Pendergast machine collapsed under attack from federal investigations and its aging leader found himself dispatched to Leavenworth for tax fraud, Truman did not jump ship and disassociate himself from the organization. He might easily have done so, as Miller insightfully has suggested, rationalizing that his obligation was minimal because the Pendergasts after all had initially needed "a well-respected veteran, a farmer and a Baptist, to provide their reach out into the rural part of the county" and later "needed his accomplishments as an honest, efficient, road-building, courthouse-building county judge to provide a deodorant for their doings of other kinds."[27] Political opportunism perhaps called for a break with his backers of old. His enduring association with the Pendergasts hurt his national reputation especially after Boss Tom's imprisonment. It severely threatened his chances for reelection to the Senate in 1940. Whatever the weight of these pressures, Truman stayed steadfastly loyal to his first political sponsor even, while vice president, attending Tom Pendergast's funeral. Loyalty was a prime political virtue for him. He would give it and, at times more tellingly, turn on those whom he believed had not extended it to him.

Truman learned other key and lasting lessons during his training in the political school of Jackson County in addition to overseeing projects and winning close elections. He learned how to cooperate and how to compromise in the interest of gaining agreements and completing tasks. One keen historian rightly has commented that "conciliation and adjustment, Truman believed, were the lifeblood of politics; although he had principles they did not lead . . . to inflexible policies."[28] Truman was not rigid and certainly not averse to accommodation for a worthy political end. His Protestant and rural background hardly prevented him from collaborating with the urban Catholics who staffed much of the Pendergast organization. His lack of a well-developed public philosophy made it easier for him to be pragmatic. He was as far from being an ideologue as possible, scraping by with a vague and worthy sense that government should be utilized for the good of the people. He considered politics to be an honorable calling and in pursuing his work he placed high value on the importance of keeping one's word.[29] He "judged men by their reliability in keeping agreements, and it was the standard by which he, in turn, wanted to be judged."[30] It proved to be a standard that he thought also should apply to nations in their behavior.

[27] Miller, "Two Moralities," pp. 24–25.

[28] John Lewis Gaddis, "Harry S. Truman and the Origins of Containment," in Frank J. Merli and Theodore A. Wilson, eds., *Makers of American Diplomacy: From Theodore Roosevelt to Henry Kissinger* (New York, 1974), p. 192.

[29] In an undated handwritten manuscript, circa late 1940s or early 1950s, Truman defined a politician as "a man [sic] who is interested in good government." He counseled that "more young men and young women should fit themselves for politics and government," and notably commented that "I would risk my reputation and my fortune with a professional politician sooner than I would with the banker or the businessman or the publisher of a daily paper!" Raymond H. Geselbracht, compiler, "Harry Truman Speaks," *Whistlestop: Harry S. Truman Library Institute Newsletter* (Fall 2002), p. 2.

[30] Gaddis, "Harry S. Truman and the Origins of Containment," p. 192.

The world of Kansas City politics notably failed to provide Truman with any sustained instruction in international relations. Boss Tom was not the type selected for charter membership of the Council on Foreign Relations, and his machine cared little for matters beyond its purview. Pendergast eventually supported Franklin Roosevelt at the 1932 Democratic convention in Chicago, which Truman attended as a delegate, primarily because he hoped the New York governor would win and would assist in tackling the Depression.[31] Truman's political circle contained few individuals who thought conscientiously about foreign policy questions. Truman's own intellectual curiosity appears never to have led him to read seriously anything on crucial international matters such as the Kellogg–Briand Pact or the London Economic Conference. Even after his election to the Senate, he managed to pursue his career without regularly reading journals like *Foreign Affairs*, without paying much attention to columnists like Walter Lippmann, without cultivating foreign contacts, and without consulting either formal or informal advisers on international relations. His membership in organizations like the American Legion and the Masons proved valuable for personal friendship and political support but contributed little to enlarging his worldview.

Truman's mind was neither inquisitive nor especially wide-ranging. In the Senate, he diligently applied himself to the careful study of a few issues such as transportation and interstate commerce. His efforts reflected earnest and hard work but not a superior intellect at work. In comparing Truman to Lyndon Johnson, Dean Acheson (who loved Truman) suggested that "they were cut from the same cloth. They both come from border states, they are both profound patriots, good politicians and genuine progressives in policy. But Johnson has an A mind and Truman a B mind."[32] Now a superb intellect is hardly an essential requirement for a politician, and the failures of "brilliant" politicians litter the historical landscape, including those of the president to whom Acheson compared Truman unfavorably. Similarly, high intellect is no strong predictor of success in pursuing the affairs of state. In Truman's case, however, it must be noted that he demonstrated minimal facility for creative or conceptual thinking and no eagerness to rush into unfamiliar areas. He never claimed either the ability to be a "quick-study" on issues or the capacity to reformulate policy hastily and to chart a new direction.[33] This was not his style and, his reputation for decisiveness notwithstanding, he rarely moved precipitously.[34] As president,

[31] On Pendergast and Truman at the 1932 convention, see McCullough, *Truman*, p. 195.

[32] Acheson quoted in Eugene V. Rostow, "The Apotheosis of Harry," *Times Literary Supplement*, November 27, 1992, p. 4.

[33] In this context, one might also note Jonathan Daniels' comment that "Roosevelt's mind, intellectually, was far less stereotyped than Truman's, and maybe that explains why Roosevelt was not as simple and direct as Truman." Daniels quoted in Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman*, p. 404.

[34] Alonzo Hamby has made this point in considering Truman's decision making as president concluding that "every major decision of his presidency . . . was the product of careful political or diplomatic planning and group consensus, not individual whim. The man who liked to present himself as a quick decision maker was actually slow and cautious on the big things." See