



Post-War America

Truman: Career and Character

- Although he was associated with the notorious Pendergast political machine in Kansas City, he personally stayed clear of all corruption.
- He held a county judgeship for nine years, then served as U.S. Senator from 1935 until 1945, when he became Vice President.
- He won the nomination for the Vice Presidency for his vigorous prosecution at the head of the Senate Committee investigating corruption in war contracts.

Truman: Career and Character



- Shock of having a new president.
- Truman much different from FDR.
- Compromise VP choice, only a middling Senator.
- FDR had left him largely out of the loop

Truman: Career and Character

- When Harry S. Truman succeeded to the Presidency April 12, 1945, he seemed humbled by the weight of his sudden responsibilities.
- However, he proved to be a decisive leader in critical situations and vigorously worked for the measures he advocated.

Post War Economic Anxiety

- After the war, many Americans worried that economy would slip back into depression.
- At first these predictions seemed to be coming true
 - GNP dropped in '46 and '47
 - Prices rose by 33% in '46-47.
 - Strikes swept key industries.
- In retrospect, these were simply rebound effects

Rapid Demobilization

- Truman was faced with demands at home for the return of the servicemen and demonstrations at many army establishments abroad.
- These compelled the government to carry out a hasty release of the men and abandonment of bases and materials all over the world.
- The first peace-time draft, in 1946, conscripted replacements for the discharged troops.

Early Economic Moves

- Sold war factories and other government installations at very low prices.
- Employment Act (1946) creates Council of Economic Advisors. Purpose?
- GI Bill: Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.
 - helps to expand the middle class and absorb returning GIs
 - made home loans available to them, and
 - gave free education in vocational schools and colleges.



Rapid Demobilization

- Consumer annoyance with scarcities and manufacturers' demands for removal of price controls caused a brief period of decontrol during which prices jumped about 20%.
- Inflationary price rises continued to harass the returned veterans, while organized labor went out on a series of long strikes.
- These strikes resulted in settlements that gave workers the same earnings as in wartime but without their having to work overtime.
- Each succeeding year saw new labor negotiations bring increased wages or equivalent benefits to the bargaining table.

The Taft-Hartley Act (1947)

- In the mid-term election of 1946, people were tired of wartime deprivations.
- As a result, the Republicans gained control in the 80th Congress, for the first time since 1930.
- Unauthorized strikes during the war, particularly by John L. Lewis's coal miners, antagonized the public; a majority was convinced that labor had now grown too strong under the Wagner Act.

The Taft-Hartley Act (1947)

- To restore the balance between labor and management, the Republican Congress passed the **Taft-Hartley Labor Relations Act** in 1947.
- Leading provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act:
 - 1) permitted employers to sue unions for breaking contracts or for damages suffered from jurisdictional strikes;
 - 2) prohibited the closed shop but permitted the union shop under certain conditions;

The Taft-Hartley Act (1947)

- 3) provided that the government might secure an injunction to postpone serious strikes;
- 4) prohibited certain unfair practices, such as “featherbedding”;
- 5) forbade contributions by unions to political campaigns;
- 6) required union officials to take a non-Communist oath in order to secure benefits of government mediation of disputes.

Taft-Hartley

- Congress passed the **Taft-Hartley Act** over Truman's veto.
- Labor hated this law. Why?
- Union attempts to grow into new areas and industries were frustrated.
 - South was resistant to unions. Why?
 - Workers in rapidly growing service sector were hard to organize. Why?

Truman Limp into 1948



- Truman popularity low. Reasons:
 - Economic readjustment after war
 - Twangy and blunt
 - Democrats in control for 16 years
- Republicans get majority in Congress in 1946
- Most assume he can't win.
- Democrats nominate him after Ike refuses to be drafted.
- Nomination splits the party

The Election of 1948

- The Republican congressional victory in 1946 was interpreted as a certain indication that the party would capture the Presidency too in 1948.
- The Democrats could not induce Eisenhower to accept the nomination and accepted Truman somewhat reluctantly.
- President Truman's strong advocacy of civil rights to prevent discrimination because of race, color, or creed, alienated conservative Southern Democrats, who nominated Gov. **Strom Thurmond** of South Carolina. (*Dixiecrats*)

The Election of 1948

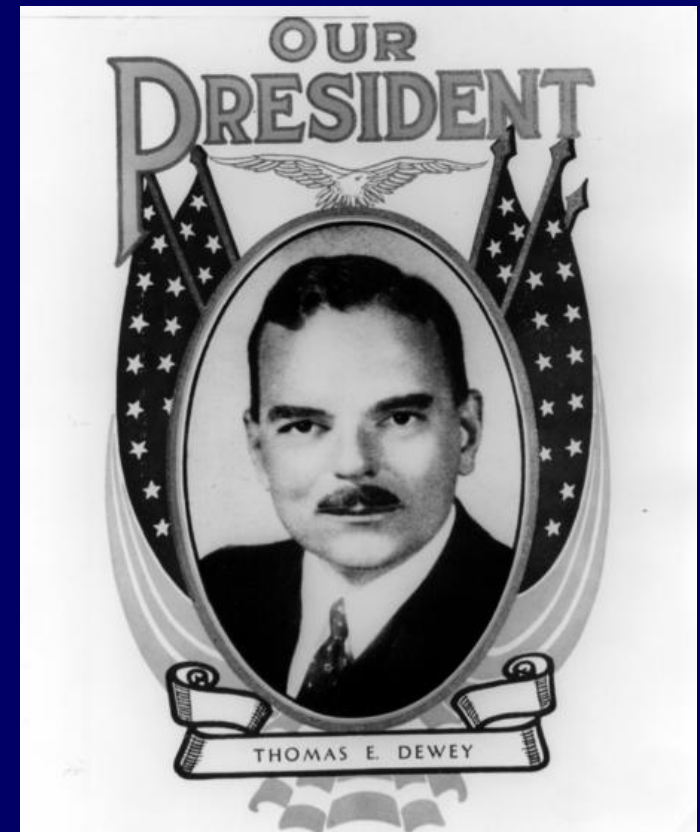
- The Democratic extremists on the left, who favored a friendly policy toward Russia, organized a Progressive Party.
- They nominated **Henry Wallace**, but suffered from Communist support.
- The Republican Party nominated Governor Dewey of New York and Governor **Earl Warren** of California.

The Election of 1948

- The Republicans were overconfident of victory, especially because of the splintering of the Democratic Party and the predictions of pollsters.
- Therefore, they made few commitments and talked in vague generalities facing a beleaguered Truman → a “safe” campaign.
- Almost alone, Truman fought a “**give-'em-hell**” campaign in which he made specific promises to the voters to support social legislation and farm price supports.

Give 'em Hell Harry

- Truman's whistle-stop tour throughout the country.
- Rails against the "do-nothing Congress"
- Crowds get more and more enthusiastic.
- Dewey still thinks he is winning. Polling is still not very good.



Dewey Wins! (or not)

- Truman wins handily and stuns about everyone.
 - Democrats win House; keep it for the next 44 years.
- Truman makes the **Fair Deal** the cornerstone of his second term.



Truman's Fair Deal

- Truman called his program the “Fair Deal,” since he favored an extension of the New Deal.
- The Fair Labor Standards Act was amended to increase the minimum wage from 40 cents to 70 cents/hour.
- A huge program for slum clearance and low-rent housing was passed.
- The Social Security Act was extended to cover an additional 10 million persons and benefit payments increased.
- Agriculture was given high supports for commodity prices.

The Conservative Coalition

- The Republican and conservative Southern Democratic opposition formed an alliance.
- They defeated Truman's program to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act and to pass a national health insurance program.
- A filibuster of Southern Democrats defeated a civil rights program.

Decline of Truman's Popularity

- Several factors combined to bring a decline in the popularity of President Truman within two years of his election victory in 1948.
 - Basically, the postwar rise in conservatism accounts for the change.
- Truman's decisive stand against the Communists in the Korean War won public applause.
- However, as the war dragged on and Gen. MacArthur was dismissed, Truman suffered increasing criticism.

Decline of Truman's Popularity

- A combination of Southern conservatives and of Republicans in Congress stalled the liberal Fair Deal program Truman sought to pass.
 - The Republicans further strengthened themselves in Congress in the election of 1950
- The Democrats were blamed for American frustration in the Cold War, especially the loss of China.
- At home, the administration was criticized for an alleged softness toward Communist influence in government and for considerable corruption in various federal departments.

Election of 1952

- President Truman chose not to run for the Democratic nomination in 1952, even though the Twenty-Second Amendment limiting the tenure in the presidency did not apply to him as the incumbent.
- **Governor Adlai Stevenson** of Illinois apparently was drafted for the nomination, but **Senator Estes Kefauver** tried hard to win it.

Election of 1952

- **Dwight D. Eisenhower**, the popular hero of the European War, finally announced himself as a Republican and admitted his willingness to accept the nomination.
- **Senator Robert A. Taft** of Ohio vigorously sought the nomination, but the delegates felt the conservative senator could not win and gave the nomination to Eisenhower.

Election of 1952

- Stevenson, in the campaign, had the enthusiastic support of the liberals in his party.
- Stevenson promised the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act, supported civil rights, and endorsed the New Deal reforms.
- His speeches reveal unusual literary skill, but his voice and seemingly stilted sense of humor did not win the masses → labeled an “egghead”

Election of 1952

- Stevenson's persona contrasted markedly with the friendly personality and broad smile of the hero General, Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower → "I like Ike."
- His affability helped Ike overcome being less articulate than Stevenson.
- The Republicans criticized the Democrats for corruption, softness towards Communism, extravagance, and for involvement in the Korean War.

Election of 1952

- Just before the election, Eisenhower promised that if elected he would “go to Korea.”
- Eisenhower won by a landslide vote, but the victory in the House was thin and in the Senate Republican control depended on the support of conservative Democrats.
- The victory was an Eisenhower victory rather than a party victory.