THIRD EDITION

THE MAKING OF

THE NATION FROM 1945 TO THE PRESENT

MODERN AMERICA

GARY A. DONALDSON

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Gary A. Donaldson
Xavier University

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Executive Editor: Jon Sisk
Associate Editor: Katelyn Powers
Cover Designer: Sally Rinehart

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Preface

The Making of Modern America is a history of the nation from the end of World War II to the present. It is an attempt to explain how we, the American people, made that journey, how we got to where we are today—the routes we took, the trip we made. These are the events that have shaped us, shaped our nation, and formed our character.

This book is designed to meet the needs of students for a concise narrative of America's recent past. It provides an overview of the most important personalities, trends, and events of that period. It also explores the principal economic, political, social, and international problems the nation has experienced as it moved from the heady days of the postwar years through various waves of economic expansion, promises, hopes, war, and, certainly, the fears and failures of the age.

At the end of each chapter, I have added a reading and an important document. The purpose is to focus on a point that punctuates the period. Several of these readings are designed to interject into the historical narrative an event that does not fit well, an event that was nevertheless an important part of the national conversation at the time. In addition, there have been many important figures in American history whose accomplishments, deeds, and misdeeds cannot be easily shoehorned into the text as written, but whose impact on history has been enormous.

This modern era is unique in American history—in fact, all of history. Most historical times are best evaluated in retrospect. That is, an era must be judged by its impact on the eras that follow it. The modern era has, of course, no future from which it can be analyzed or judged. This is the primary complaint for those who argue that modern history is, in fact, not history at all, but something else. It is often argued that it is impossible to be accurate and

impartial about a historical period that has impacted the historian's life. It may seem like a good argument. But should we, then, not study the recent past? Should we wait for the recent past to become the not-so-recent past? Must we wait for the memory of Betty Friedan to fade before we can study the origins of modern American feminism, or wait for George McGovern's image to pass before we can take a critical look at the 1972 presidential campaign? Of course not. The immediate past is a historical era like any other. We must study it, analyze it, and evaluate it. Future historians will do the same, and undoubtedly interpretations will change.

This book is the culmination of reading, writing, and teaching I have done over the past thirty years at Xavier University in New Orleans. I've always felt a need to thank the university, its administration, and most of all the faculty of the Department of History for their continued support of my work over the years.

• 1 •

Postwar Adjustments

World War II changed America. It revitalized the nation's economy; it altered its social structure; it ended the nation's age-old isolationism; and it thrust the United States onto the world stage as a superpower. Americans seemed to expect the change. They knew instinctively that they were entering a new era that would be different from the years before the war. At the same time, they yearned for a world without the danger and personal sacrifices of war and without the struggles and uncertainties of economic depression. But the return to normalcy was difficult, wracked with labor troubles, runaway inflation, shortages, political uncertainties, and the growing specter of communism at home and abroad.

It should not be surprising that when the war ended the American people had tremendous confidence in the future—in their own futures and that of their nation. Most thought the powerful wartime economy would be retooled and redirected toward consumer needs, that the new economy would provide for everyone, maintain full employment, and make the United States the richest nation in the world. Personal income continued to rise after the war, while inflation was low. Factory production increased, and the gap between rich and poor narrowed unlike any other time in the twentieth century. The birthrate rose rapidly; the death rate declined, health improved, and the median life expectancy increased by five years. Generally, all this translated into optimism, a better life, and a better standard of living for more Americans. It was a dynamic time.

In addition, the war, and the prosperity that followed it, brought on new ways of thinking, new ways of living, and a new attitude toward life and what life might bring. But those years also saw frustrations, fears, and anxiety as events began to unfold throughout the world. New enemies replaced old

ones, and aggression, again, had to be dealt with through force. America was changing—more rapidly than most Americans could ever realize.

ENTER HARRY TRUMAN, THE "LITTLE MAN FROM MISSOURI"

On February 20, 1945, Vice President Harry S Truman heard that Franklin Roosevelt was dead. Truman had been in office for only a few weeks, and he had met with the president only once or twice. The prospect of inheriting the weight of the nation from Roosevelt's broad shoulders frightened Truman. "I did not want to think about the possibility of his death as President," Truman wrote in his memoirs. When the rumors turned out not to be true, Truman breathed a sigh of relief. But less than two months later, on April 12, Roosevelt was dead, stricken by a massive brain hemorrhage in Warm Springs, Georgia—and Harry Truman was president of the United States. "Maybe it will come out alright," the new president wrote his mother a few days later.

Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) was a symbol for an age, and on April 12, 1945, that age came to an end. He had carried the nation through two of its greatest crises, the Great Depression and World War II. He had served in the White House for over twelve years, more, by far, than any other president. For many Americans he was the only president they had ever known. At the time of his death, he was as much a world leader as he was a leader of the American people. Roosevelt did not live to see the war's end, but events in Europe and the Pacific were about to reach their climax, and all the goals and aims for which the Allied armies had fought and died were about to be realized in total victory.

But for Harry Truman, on that fateful day in April 1945, the problems seemed to outweigh the prospects. Could the American economy absorb ten million war workers and another twelve million soldiers returning from war? There was great concern that the nation's economy had only briefly flourished because of wartime demands and production, and that the end of the war would bring on a resumption of the Great Depression. Or would the opposite occur? Prominent economists predicted runaway inflation as Americans spent their wartime savings on consumer goods, goods that had been denied them during the war. How, then, would organized labor react to the rising cost of living in an inflationary economy? World affairs seemed even more tenuous. The war had to be brought to a successful conclusion, most likely as a result of a costly invasion of Japan. After the war, how should the Soviets be dealt with in a new world order that was bound to emerge from the ashes? All of

this hit Truman hard in April 1945. "I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me," he told friends.

Americans also were hit hard by the change in Washington. Roosevelt was urbane and witty, charming and inspiring. Truman was often described as ordinary, a "wooden" speaker, "the little man from Missouri." He had risen from the ranks of the small-time politicians and had ridden the Kansas City Pendergast political machine into the U.S. Senate. There he had made a name for himself as one of only a few Southern Democrats to stand by Roosevelt and the New Deal through the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Truman had begun his life on the frontiers of western Missouri, where opportunities were few and prospects were bleak. Unlike FDR, who had, by all accounts, led a charmed life, there was for Truman no prominent family name, no family wealth, no Harvard education. He served his country in World War I, and then afterward failed twice at private business before going into politics. At the 1944 Democratic Party convention, when southerners and big-city bosses threatened to revolt unless Vice President Henry Wallace was replaced, Roosevelt relented and accepted Truman on the ticket. The two men had never met.

The war in Europe seemed to end quickly. Following Germany's last gasp at the Battle of the Bulge in late 1944 and early 1945, the Nazi war machine collapsed under the barrage of American and British troops advancing from the west and Soviet armies pinching the Germans from the east. Hitler committed suicide in his bunker on April 30 as Russian soldiers crashed through Berlin.

In the Pacific, the end also seemed near, but many analysts feared that Japan might never surrender, forcing a full-scale (and horribly costly) invasion of the Japanese home islands. In February 1945, American troops took the Japanese-held island of Iwo Jima at great cost, and then attacked Okinawa in April—just four hundred miles from the Japanese mainland. The three-month battle for Okinawa was devastating and seemed to show what the United States might expect if it became necessary to invade Japan. The Japanese threw more than fifteen hundred kamikaze planes at the American fleet, killing nearly five thousand sailors. On the island, American troops suffered a 35 percent casualty rate, the highest of any battle in the war. Fourteen thousand Americans were killed in the island fighting, and forty thousand soldiers and sailors were wounded. Perhaps the most frightening statistics came from the Japanese side: some 110,000 Japanese died in the fighting.

U.S. control of islands close to Japan allowed for regular and devastating bombing campaigns, made all the more ferocious by the nearly complete destruction of the Japanese air force and its ability to defend itself against bombing attacks. In March 1945, General Curtis LeMay led three hundred American B-29s in a massive firebomb raid of Tokyo, which killed over one

hundred thousand people and destroyed much of the city. In the following months, B-29s pounded Japan's cities at will.

Truman came to office just as these monumental events in Europe and Asia were unfolding. Generally uninformed on most issues, he stood back and allowed predetermined decisions to be carried out. His first major wartime decision concerned the use of the atomic bomb. Truman was told about the bomb for the first time just after he took the oath of office on April 12. Then in July, when he was told that the bomb had been successfully tested, he was decisive; he did not hesitate to order the bomb dropped on Japan. He later wrote that he never lost a wink of sleep over the decision. As Truman saw it, the bomb had been devised by his predecessor as a weapon of war for use against the enemy. Several million dollars and thousands of man-hours had been spent in its development and production, and, perhaps most importantly, it would end the war quickly and save the lives of American soldiers. There were those who argued against using the bomb. Several scientists who helped develop it argued that an exhibition of the bomb's power would convince the Japanese to surrender. But Truman held firm to his decision, and on August 6, 1945, a B-29 christened the *Enola Gay* (after the pilot's mother) dropped an atomic bomb over the Japanese industrial city of Hiroshima, killing close to one hundred thousand people, most instantly. Thousands more died in the next days, months, and years from the effects of radiation poisoning. Three days later, a second bomb was dropped on the southern city of Nagasaki, killing almost forty thousand. On August 14, the Japanese asked for peace. The war ended officially on September 2 with the signing of surrender documents on the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Harbor. The war was over.

The new president believed his place was to fulfill Roosevelt's term in office, to achieve FDR's goals as best he could. To that end, Truman sought to extend the tentacles of the New Deal, and in doing so he carried the liberalism of the New Deal into the postwar age. On September 6, he announced his twenty-one-point program to expand many of the New Deal programs. He called for a full employment bill, an increased minimum wage, national housing legislation, an extension of Social Security, a new public works program, and the establishment of a Fair Employment Practices Commission. To this he added a request for an atomic energy control board, federal aid to education, and national health insurance. It was a broad, aggressive program, and a significant extension of the New Deal. However, only two of Truman's twenty-one proposals passed through Congress within the next two years, in part because Congress was becoming more and more conservative, and in part because the president was willing to compromise his domestic reform package in exchange for his foreign policy initiatives, which were perceived as more important. Conservatives in Congress (from both sides of the aisle) also argued

that the nation no longer needed Truman's New Deal–style programs, that the economic difficulties of the Great Depression had passed, and that there were new problems that related more to the proper distribution of abundance than to any need to rev up the economy.

THE POSTWAR ECONOMY AND ITS IMPACT

The war revived the American economy, pulling the nation out of the clutches of the Depression and beginning an era of personal affluence that stretched well into the 1970s. At the end of the war, Americans enjoyed the highest standard of living of any of the world's major nations. Only 7 percent of the world's population lived in the United States, but the nation generated a full 40 percent of the world's income. Real personal income more than doubled during the war years, and because of wartime jobs, income was distributed more evenly after the war than any time before or since. Everyone, it seemed, had come out of the war with money in their pockets and hopes for the future.

The nation's population at the end of the war was about 140 million, not much different from the prewar years. But in the immediate postwar period, the population began making the major shifts that would define the nation's demographics through the rest of the twentieth century. Perhaps the most significant was that a great mass of Americans flowed out of the rural areas and into the nation's cities, completing a trend that had been ongoing for several decades. Not unlike the early years of the twentieth century, Americans left the farms in droves for the good-paying factory jobs in the upper Midwest, mostly in cities where the war industries had thrived during the war years. Part of this had to do with the advent of new farm machinery that allowed for greater efficiency on the farm—fewer workers could cultivate more land. The excess labor made its way into the northern factories. One great exodus took place in the Deep South, where the invention of the mechanical cotton-picking machine meant an end to the need for the labor that had picked the South's cotton by hand for two centuries. That manual labor, much of it African American, abandoned the South (and its racist institutions) for better jobs in the North and West.

Much of this big population shift was westward—particularly to California. During the war, the population of California increased by 40 percent. Most of those immigrants had followed the rumors of opportunity and wartime jobs associated with the Pacific theater. California was, of course, the point of departure for most American soldiers headed west into the Pacific, and the point of return following the war. Not surprisingly, many stayed in

California, and the population and the economy there boomed. The population of the state jumped from about seven million before the war to nearly eleven million in the early postwar years. California continued to be a symbol of opportunity for Americans.

The California population boom, as significant as it was, was only the focus of a larger shift to the Sunbelt. States like Florida and Texas, and later Arizona, also surged with population growth. Miami, Tampa, Houston, and Dallas were on the road to rivaling the nation's biggest cities of the Midwest and Northeast. In the early 1960s, when air conditioning became practical, these areas would grow even faster.

These migration patterns changed the very character of the nation. Before the war, wealth in America was distributed unevenly; generally it was held in the hands of a few. America was also a rural nation of farmers, with a few industrial outlets and identifiable urban areas in the Northeast and upper Midwest. The rural life was perceived as something of an American ideal, a lifestyle that built the American character and made it distinct from the rest of the world. But by about 1960 much of that Jeffersonian agrarian ideal was erased from the American psyche. By then, only about 8 percent of Americans worked on farms, down approximately 63 percent from a century earlier. Farming was still hard work, and American farmers fed the world, but the farm life was no longer the cornerstone of the American character.

These population shifts also reshaped American politics. By the late 1940s it had become apparent that voters in northern cities were voting primarily Democratic and outvoting the predominantly Republican rural areas. In response, the Republicans, by the early 1960s, began to abandon their old coalition of Northeastern moderates and Midwestern conservatives for a new coalition that abandoned the moderates and pulled together conservatives from the Midwest and the far West. The shift made for a more conservative Republican Party while turning the Democrats into a party of ethnic groups, organized labor, and voters from the urban-industrial Northeast and upper Midwest. In the process, the white South made a long, slow shift from solidly Democratic to nearly solidly Republican, and African Americans left the party of Lincoln for the Democrats. All this would take time—in fact, many of these patterns would not be apparent until well into the 1960s—but the process got its start in the immediate postwar years with the big wartime and postwar population shifts.

THE AMERICAN FAMILY

One major aspect of the era was the rising birthrate. It first became apparent in 1942 and 1943 as a result of what were called "good-bye babies," those

Figure 1.1. Birthrate, 1940–1970. Compiled from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Bicentennial Edition, Washington, DC, 1975.

babies conceived just before the father was shipped off to war. But it was when the war ended, and the soldiers returned from duty, that the birthrate really soared. The result was the baby boom. Between 1945 and 1960 the population of the nation grew by almost forty million, an increase of nearly 30 percent, the largest in the nation's history. In the 1950s alone the population grew by twenty-nine million—something like twenty-five births per one thousand people. The growth truly changed the face of the nation.

This unpredictable population increase confronted a housing industry that had been dormant for nearly twenty years. The result was a postwar housing shortage that plagued the entire nation. By 1947, six million families were living with friends or relatives and another half million were living in Quonset huts or other temporary housing provided by the government. One part of the answer was to make money available to these new families (mostly ex-servicemen) to buy new homes. The GI Bill of Rights (officially the Servicemen's Readjustment Act) provided this in 1944, through which the

federal government guaranteed home mortgages to veterans. The second part of the answer was to build the houses, and guaranteed federal loans made that easy. The result was an unprecedented building boom. Single-family housing starts increased from 114,000 in 1944 to almost 1 million just two years later. By 1950 housing starts were up to 1.7 million per year. The growth was a spectacular tribute to American capitalism and the forces of the free market.

As Americans moved from the immediate postwar era into the 1950s and the 1960s, this baby boom generation would transform the nation, the family, and the American way of life.

THE CHANGING PLACE OF WOMEN

The role of women in American society had been changing since the turn of the twentieth century; that process was accelerated during World War II and into the immediate postwar period. When the war broke out, six million women entered the workforce. By the war's end, over nineteen million women were employed in wage-earning jobs, constituting over 35 percent of the national workforce. In addition, about 350,000 women joined the armed forces as nurses and as WACS (Army), WAVES (Navy), and SPARS (Coast Guard)—newly created military auxiliary units. Wartime propaganda encouraged women to show their patriotism by taking jobs in defense plants. These jobs paid much better than the low-wage jobs traditionally assigned to women, like restaurant workers, laundry workers, and domestic housekeepers. Just before the war, only thirty-six women worked in the nation's shipyards; by war's end, close to 160,000 were employed in all aspects of ship construction. By 1944, 75 percent of these female war workers were married and most had children.

The most enduring symbol representing these women was "Rosie the Riveter," a fictional defense plant worker created by government public relations experts. The hand-drawn Rosie appeared on countless magazine covers throughout the war. Perhaps the most famous Rosie was painted by Norman Rockwell. She appeared on the May 29, 1943, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, complete with blue jeans, a rivet gun, big muscles, and welding goggles on her forehead.*

Despite all the patriotic hoopla, these jobs provided little for women in the forms of benefits, pensions, labor contracts, or job security—and certainly

* Rockwell borrowed Rosie's pose from one created by Michelangelo of the prophet Isaiah from the ceiling fresco of the Sistine Chapel. Although the reference may have been lost on most Americans, Isaiah warned (740s BC) about the dangers his nation of Judah faced from the growing military powers of Assyria and Egypt.

not equal pay for equal work. Factory owners and government officials expected women to put in their time only for the duration of the war. Women in the workplace were perceived as a temporary situation for the good of the war effort, and when the war ended the women were expected to give up their jobs and take their place again in the home. The women, however, expected more. Near the end of the war, the Department of Labor recorded that 75 percent of the women working in industry intended to continue working after the war, and of that number, 86 percent expected to stay in their wartime occupations. But they would be disappointed. When the soldiers came home, the women were forced out of their high-paying defense jobs, mostly as a result of pressure to give up those jobs to the men returning from the war—again, they were asked to do their patriotic duty for the good of the nation. Married women particularly were shamed into giving up their jobs and returning to their traditional roles. Within the first year after the war, women's participation in the workforce dropped from 37 to 31 percent.

The baby boom, coupled with a lack of any sort of adequate daycare, added to the exodus of women from the factory back to the home. By 1950, society had begun to romanticize—even celebrate—domesticity, motherhood, and the traditional concepts of the woman in the home, while rejecting the wartime notions of independence, strength, and American women in the workplace. In 1963, Betty Friedan would chronicle much of this in her pathbreaking *Feminine Mystique*. Friedan and her work are discussed more fully in chapter 7.

This trend from the factory to the kitchen, although real, should not be exaggerated. In fact, the number of women in the workplace in 1950 was about eighteen million, only one million or so below the number of women in the workplace in 1945 and at least five million above the prewar number. It is probably more significant that Rosie the Riveter was forced to turn in her rivet gun for a typewriter or a waitress's apron. In the new postwar economy, working-class families often needed two incomes to make ends meet, while the demand for female office workers and low-paying service jobs grew rapidly. Women in the lower classes continued on the job, but with less fanfare, less money, and less prestige than the women who placed their lives on hold during the war and went to work for the national effort.

TRUMAN, THE ECONOMY, AND ORGANIZED LABOR

Truman entered the White House with a strong 87 percent approval rating owing, most likely, to a combination of anonymity and expectations. The nation seemed to sympathize with his difficult job, while giving him their support

at that critical moment in the nation's history. But within eighteen months, Truman's numbers had crashed to a paltry 32 percent—mostly because of his poor handling of the national economy. Truman wanted to expand the New Deal and continue with FDR's vision, but the economic situation after the war was considerably different than during the Depression years before the war. It was, in fact, really the opposite. The postwar economy boomed. All those fears of a postwar depression evaporated almost immediately as the nation's war industries were switched over to peacetime production to meet the growing demand of consumer goods. Demobilization of the armed forces was rapid, with 8.5 million soldiers (out of 12 million) discharged and sent home within a year. Consumer income was up; production was up. Truman's worries had little to do with the New Deal–era problems of widespread poverty and the burdens of inequality. The concern now was how to distribute the new abundance more equally.

In an attempt to maintain a grip on the economy, Truman decided to carry the wartime wage and price controls into the postwar period, a policy that was immediately unpopular. Not surprisingly, Americans saw the end of the war as a release from all the hardships and sacrifices of the war. Truman, it seemed, wanted to drag that agony on. Workers had socked away 25 percent of their take-home pay in the last two years of the war, and by the summer of 1945 the nation's liquid assets totaled about $140 million—three times the national income in 1932. The nation was an economic explosion waiting to happen. Truman's price controls led to a rapidly growing black market, a flouting of the price-control laws that contributed to the rapid drop in Truman's popularity. Finally, in June 1946 Congress was forced to act. By emasculating the Office of Price Administration (the government agency responsible for implementing and enforcing the controls), Congress lifted nearly all restrictions. The result was an immediate jump in prices, even hyperinflation in some sectors of the economy. The administration feared the worst, but the economy was basically sound. The large infusion of cash spurred business and industry to convert rapidly to peacetime production in order to meet the demand, and production soared.

All of this economic expansion left labor hemmed in, out of the economic loop. During the war, unions had agreed not to strike and not to make demands, all for the war effort. It seemed like a good trade in exchange for good jobs, lots of overtime pay, and even job security. But when the war ended and prices rose, labor appeared ready, willing, and certainly able to shut down the nation's economy in order to achieve economic parity with the rest of the nation's workforce. In fact, they had a good argument. In 1941 the average American laborer's real wage was $28.12 per week. That had risen to $36.72 at the end of the war. But by the fall of 1946, inflation and price hikes

(along with a drastic reduction in overtime pay) had pulled union workers' real wages back to the 1941 level. The pie was expanding, but labor's share had remained the same. Industry, however, refused to raise wages. They complained of being stuck with the cost of retooling—from wartime to peacetime production. At the same time, industry was forced to carry much of the burden of Truman's price controls. To become locked in long-term labor contracts in such uncertain economic times was inconceivable to industry leaders. Neither side would budge. Strike was in the air.

The first wave of strikes hit in the spring and summer of 1945, almost immediately after the war in Europe ended. The nation experienced forty-six hundred work stoppages involving five million workers. Then, when the war ended in the Pacific, the bottom seemed to drop out. In September, forty-three thousand oil refinery workers went out on strike, cutting off one-third of the nation's oil supply. In late November, the United Auto Workers struck General Motors, idling nearly 325,000 workers. Then in January 1946, 750,000 steelworkers walked out; 200,000 electrical workers and another 200,000 packinghouse workers followed.

The fate of the postwar economy (and the nation's prosperity) seemed in jeopardy, and the nation looked to the White House for answers. Truman followed a timeworn method of dealing with labor issues by setting up a blue-ribbon committee of labor leaders and industry management to recommend answers. They had none. On April 1, 1946, John L. Lewis, the bushy-browed head of the United Mine Workers, ordered 340,000 soft-coal miners out on strike, which threatened to grind the nation's industry to a halt. Truman would have to act. The big showdown between the president and the unions came in May, when the nation's railroad engineers and trainmen struck, threatening to shut down the nation's commerce. Truman went to Congress, and in a fiery speech asked for the authority to draft railroad workers into the army to keep the trains running. It was a bold move, and probably unconstitutional. But just as Truman spoke, the unions succumbed to the threat and settled the strike. It was a big victory for the president; however, as he would soon see, he had lost the support of organized labor, an integral part of the Democratic Party coalition.

By mid-1946, with the midterm elections approaching in November, Truman's ratings had slipped to just above 30 percent. His obvious mishandling of reconversion (a word used at the time to describe the immediate postwar economy), along with the debilitating strikes (which most Americans either blamed on him or considered him unable to settle), cut deeply into his popularity. Added to that, labor's rank and file had come to see him as anti-union. Even his own party had lost confidence in his ability to win votes. The Democratic National Committee decided in the 1946 campaign that it was

better to buy radio time and broadcast some of FDR's old speeches than to send Truman out to campaign for congressional candidates.

The inability of Truman to keep control of the party faithful became all too apparent when, in the 1946 elections, the Democrats lost control of Congress for the first time since 1930. Truman could count himself as the most unpopular president in the twentieth century—and now he had to face a hostile Congress. Democratic Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas suggested that Truman was in such an untenable position that he should simply name a Republican Secretary of State (then successor to the presidency in the absence of a vice president) and step aside. From then on, Truman called Fulbright "Senator Halfbright." Truman, however, would hang on for the coming political wars.

ORIGINS OF THE MODERN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

World War II unleashed a whole series of social, political, and economic changes in America. Black Americans, after 1945, would stand at the center of many of those changes. Just fifty years before, during the last decade of the nineteenth century, African Americans had little hope for their future. Segregated from the white population and disenfranchised by law, they had been forced into a kind of peonage that kept them powerless—just where white southerners wanted them. There was only one method of protest available: migrate, and leave the South for the North where opportunities might be better. The result was the Great Migration, an event that made possible the modern civil rights movement.

The migration of blacks to the North began to show up in census and statistical reports as early as the 1890s. Over the next twenty years, 200,000 African Americans protested the racism and deplorable situation in the South by migrating to urban centers in the North. In the next decade, from about 1910 to 1920, another half million made the trip, most hoping to get jobs in the war industries. In the 1920s, 750,000 followed those who had gone before. The migrations slowed during the Great Depression, but picked up again as war clouds formed at the end of the 1930s. During the war, as many as one million African Americans moved out of the South in search of wartime jobs. Many found opportunities in the war industry plants in California, where they stayed on after the war.

In the 1930s and 1940s, large numbers of those African Americans who left the South were pushed out by the new mechanization of agriculture. Owners of large farms could make use of tractors, mechanized cotton-pickers, and other machinery to farm large amounts of land. They no longer needed

Figure 1.2. The Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North in the early twentieth century.

the same number of tenant farmers or sharecroppers to farm small sections of the land and then share the crop with the owner. These sharecroppers and tenant farmers, both black and white, were pushed off land that their families may have farmed for generations but did not own. During the twenty years following the beginning of the Great Depression, perhaps as many poor whites moved North and West as did poor blacks—and for mostly the same reasons.

This Great Migration of African Americans out of the South had a huge impact on the nation on several levels, but it was in the political arena that the new black populations in the North had the greatest significance. These African Americans could vote, and for the first time since Reconstruction they could cast their votes in numbers significant enough to influence elections. The jobs these migrants wanted were most often in the large industrial cities of the Upper Midwest, Northeast, and Far West. These cities were almost always located in states with the largest electoral votes. Between 1940 and 1947, the number of African Americans in New York City grew from 100,000 to over 800,000; in Chicago from 300,000 to 420,000; in Philadelphia from 300,000 to 415,000; and in Los Angeles from 100,000 to 210,000. By the end of the war African American voters in these cities held the balance of power in close elections that could deliver the big state electoral votes in New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and California. The Great Migration, and the political power it

brought, would be a significant factor in the advancement of African Americans in the postwar period.

The end of the war brought tremendous optimism to the African American community; the booming postwar economy promised to raise up African Americans along with the rest of the nation—if only relatively. Median black income rose from $1,614 in 1947 to $2,338 in just five years; and as a percentage of white income, black earnings increased from 41 percent in 1947 to 57 percent in 1952. When the war ended, one million more African Americans had civilian jobs than before Pearl Harbor, and those working in government service jobs had jumped from sixty thousand to three hundred thousand.

African Americans had other reasons to be optimistic about the future. Over five hundred thousand blacks had served in the war. The armed services had remained segregated, and black soldiers continued to be led by white (often southern) officers, but in almost all cases black soldiers served with distinction. Perhaps the most noteworthy were the Tuskegee Airmen, who were praised for their action in North Africa and Italy. In the European theater black and white units were often integrated in times of emergency with no discernable concern from either blacks or whites, leading a number of generals to argue that segregation no longer served any real purpose in the armed forces.

At the same time, racism was quickly losing whatever intellectual respectability it once had. At the nation's universities new attitudes toward race began to emerge after the war, particularly in sociology courses where the social problem of America's race relations became a popular theme. Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, published in 1944, was one of several important works that set out to destroy the turn-of-the-century pseudoscientific beliefs that had been the underpinning of white supremacy. By the mid-1950s, many Americans had come to see the old-time racism as little more than narrow-minded bigotry.

On the world stage, Hitler's racism had turned into a European holocaust. Japan's own racism against its Asian neighbors, particularly the Chinese, was no less brutal than the Nazi death camps. In addition, the growing Cold War pitted the United States and the Soviet Union in competition for the support of the mostly nonwhite Third World, while the Soviets ran an effective propaganda campaign to show the dark-skinned peoples of Africa, Asia, and South America the hypocrisy of American racism. It quickly became clear after the war that if the United States were to be a leader in a multinational world, its racial policies in the South would have to change.

Thus the stage was set. African Americans had gained considerably from the expansion in jobs and income, from service in the military, and from the political power derived from the northern migrations. All this came together in the first few years after the end of the war. For the first time in the nation's

history, black Americans had all the tools necessary to launch an aggressive attack on racism. There was tremendous optimism and hope.

Just as the modern civil rights movement began to take its first steps, however, it was thrown back by the Red Scare, the fear of communism that permeated the nation in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The civil rights movement was hardly radical in these years, but unfortunately for blacks it was tagged as radical, with radical goals and radical leadership. This accusation was further fueled by white supremacists, who were prepared to grasp any opportunity to maintain the South's social and political structure. They were able to argue, with some effect, that anyone who championed racial equality or the integration of the races was either a Communist or somehow soft on communism. They also argued that there was a growing Communist movement inside the black community. These tactics kept the civil rights movement at bay through the first half of the 1950s. Civil rights leaders backed away from direct action as a method of protest, fearing the mark of radicalism.

The response was for the movement to adjust its tactics. The promise of direct action was replaced by the old standbys of litigation, legislation, and lobbying—the hallmarks of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). The association spent the first decade after the war concentrating on fair housing, fair employment practices, voting rights, equal facilities for blacks, and the passage of federal antilynching and anti–poll tax laws. Most of this work took place in the nation's courtrooms and state capitols and in the halls of Congress, and was generally invisible to the African American community. But little by little the NAACP chipped away at the walls of segregation and discrimination. For many black Americans the work of the NAACP was slow and inadequate, and delivered only symbolic victories. But by 1945 the NAACP was on the road to a major breakthrough that would change the movement—and America—forever.

In the meantime, there was a series of subtle victories for the civil rights movement. In sports, segregation was voluntary and generally smooth. In 1946 Kenny Washington and Woody Strode signed with the Los Angeles Rams football team. A year later, in possibly the most important civil rights advancement outside of politics and the courts, Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers and brought an end to segregation in baseball. Robinson's great play on the field, and his strong character off, made him a source of pride for the black community, a true symbol of what the future of race relations in America might become.

At just the same moment, a symbol of southern racism was crumbling. In the 1946 midterm elections, Theodore Bilbo was returned to his Senate seat from Mississippi. A staunch segregationist, Bilbo had won the election by intimidating black voters with such statements as "You and I know what's the

best way to keep a nigger from voting. You do it the night before the election. I don't have to tell you more than that." A bipartisan Senate committee refused to allow Bilbo to take his seat until they could review the election. While awaiting the Senate's decision, Bilbo died in August 1947. As Robinson had come to symbolize the hopes and future of African Americans, Bilbo symbolized the racism of the past, still deeply imbedded in southern society but clearly about to be challenged.

TRUMAN, THE EIGHTIETH CONGRESS, AND THE ELECTION OF 1948

As Truman's poll numbers plummeted, the Democrats split, and then split again. Not surprisingly, the Republicans approached the 1948 presidential election with high expectations. They had come to see their victories in the 1946 congressional elections as a national mandate to dump the New Deal programs and change the direction of the nation. The Republicans in the Eightieth Congress had won their majority in both houses with an effective national campaign that revolved around the phrase "Had enough?" Apparently the answer had been a resounding "yes," although it was not quite clear if voters had had enough of Truman or the New Deal, or both. The Republicans also campaigned hard (really for the first time with significant success) on the topic of anticommunism, insisting that the Washington bureaucracy was awash with Communists.

The Republicans coalesced around Ohio senator Robert Taft, "Mr. Republican," the dour prewar isolationist, the son of a president. Taft was eying his party's nomination, but his lack of public appeal was nearly legendary. Most Americans saw Taft as both dull and arrogant. Those Republicans who opposed him touted a motto that dogged Taft through at least three attempts to win his party's nomination: "Taft can't win." They were probably right.

The relationship between Truman and the Eightieth Congress is legendary in American politics. On domestic matters it was a gloves-off affair, with the president vetoing seventy-five bills (five vetoes were overridden) in the two sessions and with very little accomplished. On foreign affairs, however, the two parties worked together to establish a Cold War foreign policy that endured for over forty years. In the final analysis, the record of the Eightieth Congress benefited Truman more than the Republicans, helping the president ride a surge of popular support to victory in the 1948 election. Congress became Truman's foil. By introducing liberal legislation that he certainly knew the conservative Eightieth Congress would not pass, Truman was able to portray Congress as the political arm of big business, insensitive to the needs of

the average American and unwilling to act on much-needed domestic reforms. Truman emerged as the defender of the common man, a fighter against oppression, and the real successor to the New Deal—a program the American people were not prepared to abandon. On foreign affairs, Truman stood up to the Soviets (generally a popular stance with the American people), giving him the image of a strong world leader.

The Republicans seemed to want to jump into the trap. They killed Truman's liberal programs, and then passed a number of bills designed to dismantle the New Deal and aid the wealthy. A Republican bill to cut taxes in the upper-income brackets was passed over Truman's veto; and the Republicans excluded several groups from Social Security benefits, overriding two presidential vetoes to get the job done. They turned down Truman's request to expand public power projects in favor of private power interests, and they killed a bill supported by Truman to provide aid to education. A bill to increase the minimum wage failed without so much as a hearing, and a bill to provide housing for veterans met a premature death. Southern Democrats, seeing no real need to follow Truman down to defeat in 1948, supported the Republicans in exchange for their support in killing civil rights legislation. This Republican–Southern Democrat antiadministration coalition was insurmountable, but it allowed Truman to raise his image with the American people as their representative in Washington—in hand-to-hand combat against the forces of big business and privilege.

Perhaps Truman's biggest "victory" over the Eightieth Congress was his veto of the Taft-Hartley Act, a bill designed to curb the excesses of labor and to get some control over the strikes that were sweeping the country. Passed in 1947, Taft-Hartley outlawed closed shops, allowed for court injunctions to end strikes, and banned industry-wide bargaining. It was not harsh, particularly in light of the recent wave of strikes. But the unions called it the "slave labor bill," and it gave Truman the opportunity to get back into labor's good graces. He vetoed the bill, and Congress promptly overrode the veto. Not only did Truman get a law that allowed him to keep the unions under some control, he won back labor's support in the process.

As the 1948 campaign approached, Truman's chief advisors began to counsel the president to shift to the political left and rebuild the old New Deal coalition of the 1930s. The American people, they argued, had not turned their backs on most New Deal programs, and they would continue to support federal aid and intervention into various sectors of the economy. They advised Truman to veto Taft-Hartley, attack the Eightieth Congress, support civil rights, and promote a national health insurance program, fair employment legislation, and federal housing. They identified the various groups from the old New Deal coalition and suggested to Truman how each might be satisfied in order to win their support and votes.

Perhaps Truman's most significant concession was in the area of civil rights in an effort to win black votes. By 1948 a powerful coalition had emerged in the nation's largest cities that included African Americans, liberals, and organized labor, and it was clear that the president would need that support to win in November. This group called for liberal reform, and that included some movement on civil rights. In the late 1940s, however, support for civil rights meant a loss of support from the white South. The question for Truman was, Would the South hold if he made concessions to blacks? That is, could he take both the northern big cities and the Solid South? His advisors told him he could, that the South would continue to vote Democratic. Even if a number of southern states deserted him (for the Republicans or possibly a third-party candidate), it would be a good trade if he won the large and closely contested electoral states in the North while losing a few electoral votes in the rural South.

At the same time, several unusually heinous lynchings in the South (some of ex-servicemen) were reported graphically in the national press and brought an outcry from northern whites. In response, Truman created the President's Committee on Civil Rights to look into the nation's race relations. The PCCR deliberated for a year, finally publishing its report, *To Secure These Rights*, in the fall of 1947. This report blamed segregation for the problems that African Americans faced, and then placed the responsibility for solving those problems squarely on the shoulders of the federal government. It called for an end to the poll tax, an end to Jim Crow laws, and the immediate desegregation of the armed forces. It argued for federal legislation to end lynching, and it insisted that federal aid be withheld from both public and private agencies that practiced segregation or discrimination. By February 1948, the U.S. Government Printing Office, private printers, and various interest groups had distributed over one million copies of *To Secure These Rights*. Truman could not ignore it.

The president responded to the report with a message to Congress in early February 1948 that incorporated many of the recommendations from *To Secure These Rights*. He called for a civil rights division in the Justice Department, the enactment of a federal antilynching law, and protection for the right to vote. He also asked for a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), and he proposed a law that would end discrimination in all interstate transportation services. The Republican Eightieth Congress accommodated Truman by killing all of these proposals and initiatives. African Americans would vote Democratic in November.

All of this set off a shock wave in the South. White southerners saw such an appeal for African American votes to be the beginning of an infringement on their political power, and ultimately an attack on the southern way of life.

It also seemed clear that the northern coalition of labor and liberals was about to eclipse the South's place in the Democratic Party. In response, a movement emerged in the South to force the Democrats at their convention to repudiate civil rights and embrace states' rights, which of course included the right to segregate the races. Their plan was simple: If Truman and the Democrats refused to denounce civil rights, southern leaders would leave the party and select alternative candidates for president and vice president. The Democratic Party, they determined, was simply not big enough for white southerners and black liberals.

While the right wing of the Democrats prepared to bolt, the left wing began to coalesce around Henry Wallace, Roosevelt's vice president in his third term. Wallace had agreed to serve as Truman's secretary of commerce, but the two men had conflicted over the issue of U.S.-Soviet relations, and Wallace was asked to leave the administration in the fall of 1946. He immediately became the darling of those liberals who believed that Truman was too conservative. Through 1947 Wallace attained a great deal of popularity, and it seemed possible that he might make a run for the Democratic nomination. But in December 1947 he announced that he would accept the nomination from the Progressive Party. By then, however, Truman was beginning to shore up his left by supporting civil rights and giving labor what they wanted. Wallace was already on a downhill slide into the abyss of American third-party movements. He also accepted support from American Communists (insisting that he would not exclude any group from his coalition of supporters), and he called for rapprochement with the Soviet Union while defending Soviet aggressions in Europe. To many Americans, this sounded like Soviet sympathy just as U.S.-Soviet relations were worsening.

Truman won his party's nomination on the first ballot with no real competition. Democratic liberals forced a strong civil rights plank into the party's platform, and the Mississippi delegation, along with about half the delegates from Alabama, left the convention in protest. On July 17, delegates from throughout the South met in Birmingham, Alabama, to form the States' Rights Party, quickly dubbed the Dixiecrats by the press. They nominated South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond for president and Mississippi governor Fielding Wright for vice president.

The Republicans turned for a second time to New York governor Thomas Dewey. They met at their convention amid an air of victory; they were certain that they were nominating the next president. Dewey was young, only forty-six. His greatest appeal was among progressive urban voters, particularly in the Northeast. He was, however, not particularly appealing, usually described as standoffish, priggish, and often openly self-important. "You have to know Dewey really well to dislike him," one Republican Party leader said.

Dewey seemed well on the road to victory against the fragmented Democrats, but his overconfidence led him to steer clear of the central issues, and to avoid Truman altogether. His advisors told him just to keep his name before the public as much as possible and the White House would be his. Dewey did nothing more.

Truman attacked the 1948 campaign with a fervor that has become legendary. He traversed the nation on his celebrated whistle-stop tour, traveling twenty-two thousand miles and delivering 271 speeches that were heard by an estimated twelve million Americans across the country. His message was simple: The average American was being hurt by the "do-nothing" Eightieth Congress that had caused high prices, high rents, and a housing shortage. The Republicans had hurt labor and cut programs that benefited the working classes and farmers. He spoke of "Wall Street reactionaries" and the "economic tapeworm of big business." The people listened. As he left on one of his train trips, Truman's vice presidential candidate, Alben Barkley of Kentucky, yelled at the president as his car pulled away from Union Station in Washington: "Go out there and mow 'em down, Harry." "I'll mow 'em down," Truman replied. "I'll give 'em hell." The exchange was overheard by reporters and made the evening papers. By the time Truman reached the West Coast, people in the crowds were yelling, "Give 'em hell, Harry!"

The polls were unanimous: Dewey would win. In September, pollster Elmo Roper announced that he would no longer poll the nation on the election because Dewey's victory was such a certainty that he refused to burden the country with useless data. Very few, it seemed, believed in Truman—besides Truman. The Democratic National Committee, so certain that Truman would lose, did not even reserve a room for a victory party. But Truman pulled together a convincing win. In the electoral vote, Truman's margin was 303 to 189. The popular vote was closer, 24.2 million to Dewey's 22 million. Thurmond raised 1.2 million votes and took thirty-nine electoral votes in the South. Wallace was ineffectual. The next day, Truman told reporters "labor did it," but Truman lost most of the nation's biggest industrial states. It was the African American votes that made the difference in close voting in California, Illinois, and Ohio; and black voters may have kept Florida, Georgia, and Texas from going to the Dixiecrats. The farm vote in Ohio, Iowa, and Wisconsin helped turn those states over to Truman in close elections.

Truman won the center by purging the conservative white South and the ideological left. The third-party moves by Thurmond and Wallace helped Truman even more. Wallace (with his support from the Communists) allowed Truman to deflect charges from the Republicans of being soft on communism. From the right, the Dixiecrats continued to charge Truman with supporting civil rights. Truman did not deny the charge, and African Americans voted

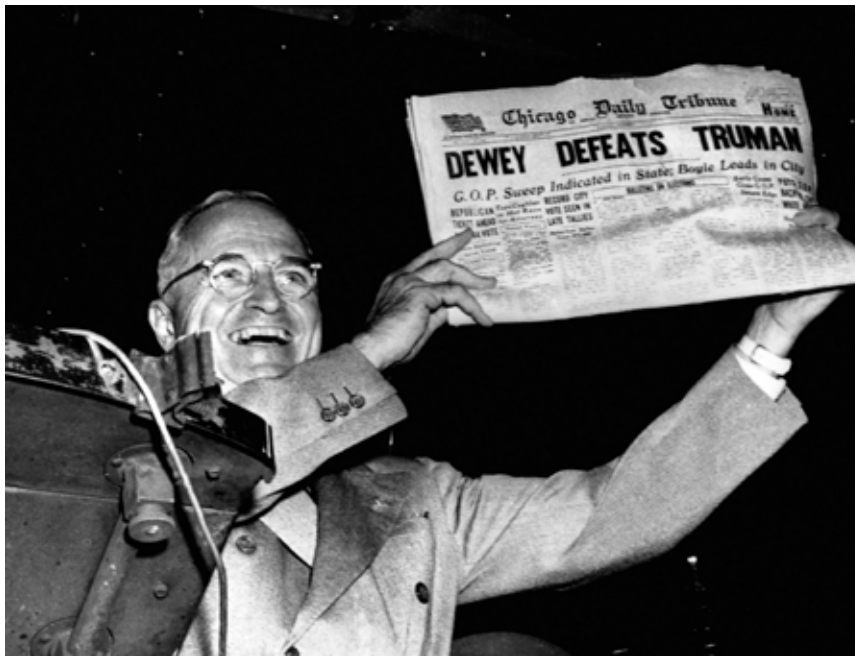

Figure 1.3. On the morning following Election Day, 1948, an aide (reportedly Clark Clifford) placed a copy of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on President Truman's chair at breakfast. Truman spent most of the morning holding up the paper for photographers. The *Tribune* and its owner, "Colonel" Robert McCormick, had vehemently opposed Truman's candidacy. Source: Bettmann/Getty.

for him in droves. On election night, the Republican Party standard *Chicago Daily Tribune* wrote its well-known headline "Dewey Defeats Truman." An aide placed a copy on the president's breakfast table the next morning.

THE FAIR DEAL AND TRUMAN'S SECOND TERM

Truman was vindicated. He reached a high point in his popularity, and the new Eighty-First Congress had a Democratic majority. In his State of the Union address, Truman told the nation that "every segment of our population and every individual has a right to expect from our Government a fair deal." And with that, he gave his program a name, clearly intended as an extension of the New Deal. He called for an immediate increase in the minimum wage, an expansion of Social Security, national health insurance, federal aid to edu-

cation, low-cost housing, and a repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act. To pay for it, Truman proposed a tax increase. He intended to put a liberal stamp on the next four years.

For several reasons, however, most of the Fair Deal never got past Congress. Although Democrats held a majority in both houses, conservative southerners continued to vote with Republicans on a number of issues in exchange for Republican opposition to civil rights measures. This alliance was successful. It generally suppressed Truman's Fair Deal programs and killed all civil rights initiatives. At the same time, Truman often failed to give his Fair Deal bills the full weight of the presidency. His greatest successes had been in foreign policy, and he was always willing to sacrifice domestic legislation to further his foreign policy agenda. Consequently, several Fair Deal measures opposed by conservatives were allowed to die in order for Truman to receive Republican support for his foreign policy initiatives. But probably the most important reason that the Fair Deal measures did not pass is that the tone of the nation in 1949 was not liberal. The heady days of the New Deal had passed, and the American people were already enjoying much of the prosperity that would be associated with the 1950s. Truman simply may have been trying to push a liberal agenda when the prevailing winds were blowing from the right.

Truman's plan for federal aid to education died quickly, mostly over whether aid should be given to private schools. Southerners also opposed the bill because they assumed that federal aid would be followed by federal regulation, and that might threaten segregation in southern schools. The president's national health insurance plan was popular with the public, but the American Medical Association carried on a national campaign hyping the horrors of "socialized medicine," and Congress killed the bill. Even some of the Fair Deal's successes failed to achieve the administration's goals. Congress passed the president's request for a minimum wage, but it reduced the number of eligible recipients. In the president's most significant victory, the National Housing Act of 1949, Congress authorized the construction of over eight hundred thousand low-income housing units. But fifteen years later, fewer than half of those units had been built or even funded.

The Fair Deal was a failure within the boundaries of U.S. domestic politics in Truman's second term, but it did maintain much of the New Deal in place, and thus extended many of the New Deal programs into another era. The Fair Deal set the agenda for the reforms of the 1960s, particularly in civil rights, federal housing, Medicare, slum clearance, and federal aid to education. Soon the New Deal would become obsolete and unnecessary, when even the most sacred cows of the New Deal era would grow fat and wasteful. But in 1950, the American people were not yet ready to give up the New Deal. One of Truman's many legacies would be to extend Roosevelt's New Deal during

a time when the capitalist economic order was expanding rapidly while still maintaining an extensive social welfare safety net provided by the New Deal programs.

The conservative coalition in Congress also killed Truman's initiatives on civil rights. Legislation outlawing the poll tax, making lynching a federal crime, establishing a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), and prohibiting segregation and discrimination in interstate transportation all met defeat. Truman, however, seemed determined to do something to fulfill his campaign promises to African Americans. His most significant act was to order the desegregation of the military. In 1950, an administration-appointed committee decreed that all branches of the service should be desegregated at once. The process was generally completed by the early 1950s.

To add to Truman's many problems, some illegal dealings cropped up in Washington, and the administration got stuck with the blame. In 1951 a scandal broke at the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) that resulted in a series of resignations and eventually prosecutions. The public outcry was enormous; the nation's taxpayers were understandably sensitive to corruption in an agency so close to their personal interests. Truman responded by insisting that there really was no scandal, only a few unscrupulous characters that had betrayed the public trust. He was finally forced to put his attorney general, J. Howard McGrath, in charge of an investigation of the BIR. McGrath was perceived as a Truman political crony, and when McGrath stumbled in the investigation and Truman had to fire him, it turned the entire mess into a monumental embarrassment for the president.

Truman's second term seemed to sink into an abyss. Congress was killing his bills as quickly as they were introduced, the war in Korea had reached a stalemate, and there were charges of corruption in Washington that were being blamed on the administration. Perhaps most importantly, the nation was clearly moving to the right. A Gallup poll at the end of 1951 gave Truman the dismal approval rating of 23 percent. As the 1952 campaign approached, the Truman administration began to take on the stench of rotting from within.

CONCLUSION

In the immediate postwar years there was a feeling in America that the hardships had ended, the crusades were over. The United States could finally look to the future, get back to normal, and deal with all the problems that had been pushed aside for decades. America, it seemed, had all the resources and the will to effect its own change and, if necessary, the changes in the world. Hope for the future seemed to be on everyone's mind. The United States, however,

had a number of problems, most of which were not yet apparent. When these problems finally emerged, this time of postwar exuberance would be seen as a time of innocence.

READING: A. PHILIP RANDOLPH

A. Philip Randolph did not quite fit the mold of the postwar civil rights leader. That movement had its origins in the southern churches, and was led mostly by southern church ministers like Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, and their followers. Randolph was, by most accounts, not a man who counted religion highly in his life: he was older than most of the postwar civil rights leaders, he came from a completely different background, and his objectives were always a bit different than the other leaders of the movement.

Randolph was, primarily, a labor leader. He had founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1925, and worked hard his entire life to strengthen that organization within the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and, later, in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). In 1937, Randolph successfully negotiated a contract with the Pullman Company and brought the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters into the mainstream of the labor movement.

Through his entire life, Randolph was an avowed Socialist who saw the plight of the black man in America as a struggle for equality in the workplace. He founded the radical Harlem newspaper *The Messenger* (later *The Black Worker*), a well-known Socialist publication targeting the nation's black working classes. In 1918, Randolph and Chandler Owen (coeditors of *The Messenger*) were charged with breaking the World War I–era Espionage Act for articles they wrote in *The Messenger*; the courts ruled that the articles were seditious and anti-American. In 1919, Randolph argued in *The Messenger* that the black workers should join the International Workers of the World, a radical Socialist labor union that advocated syndicalism—the control of industry and government by labor organizations.

Randolph was also an early follower of Marcus Garvey, often introducing him to audiences in New York and supporting his early work and ideas. Garvey promoted an early form of black nationalism and race segregation that grew into a strong back-to-Africa movement. But by 1920, Randolph and others in the civil rights movement of that era

began to back away from Garvey and his back-to-Africa schemes. Randolph's disenchantment turned to strong opposition, and he began using the pages of *The Messenger* to launch the "Garvey must go" campaign; finally, he supported a federal investigation of Garvey.

Although Randolph was born in the South, he lived most of his life in Harlem, well outside the rural, church-based, civil rights movement that emerged in the postwar years. Randolph, however, seemed to bridge an important gap between the civil rights movement of the early part of the century (when Garvey was most active in New York, and when W. E. B. Du Bois was ascending as a spokesman for African Americans through the magazine *Crisis*) and the postwar movement led by King and others.

Randolph may not have had the same background as the civil rights leaders of the 1950s and 1960s, but in many ways he laid the foundations for their work. That is particularly true of Randolph's dealings with President Roosevelt in 1941. Roosevelt had won the 1940 election with a great deal of black voter support, and Randolph decided that it was time to cash that check. Just before the war began, Randolph (along with Bayard Rustin and A. J. Muste) insisted that Roosevelt issue an executive order creating a fair employment practices committee (FEPC) to ensure that there would be no race discrimination in wartime industries. He also insisted that the armed forces be desegregated. When Randolph threatened a march on Washington of one hundred thousand supporters, FDR relented and agreed to the wartime FEPC (Executive Order 8802), but insisted that Randolph drop his demand to desegregate the armed forces. Much to the disgust of many black radicals in the nation (particularly black newspaper editors), Randolph agreed to call off the march. Throughout the remainder of his life, however, he worked diligently for the desegregation of the military and for a permanent FEPC.

In 1962, Randolph, again along with Bayard Rustin (and many others), planned a second march on Washington, known officially as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Unlike the planned 1941 march, for which Randolph intended to include only black-led organizations, the 1963 march was to be a collaborative effort of all of the major civil rights organizations, along with the more progressive wing of the labor movement, and other liberal organizations. The march was intended to free up the civil rights bill proposed by the Kennedy administration, which had become bound up in Congress by a coalition of conservative Republicans and Southern Democrats. President Kennedy, like Roosevelt before him, tried to convince Randolph to call off

the demonstration, insisting that Congress would be much less likely to act "with a knife to its throat," as Kennedy described the march. The march, however, was a success. More than two hundred thousand demonstrators gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, where King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. The Civil Rights Act was finally passed in July 1964.

Randolph died in New York in 1978. He was perhaps best known, between the time of the march on Washington and his death, for opposing the radicalism of the black nationalism and the black power movements, which he believed did little to aid in the cause of the nation's African Americans.

* * *

DOCUMENT: PRESIDENT HARRY TRUMAN'S DECISION TO DROP THE BOMB (1945)

The dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan in August 1945 contributed to the American image of the "Good War," a war in which the forces of "good" surmounted an obvious "evil," with decisive and uncomplicated results. Since Americans, generally, did not see the awful deaths and destruction caused by the bombs, the events appeared to be little more than a decisive strike that ended the war and saved lives of American soldiers. It was also, to many Americans, payback for the horror and deception of the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941.

But the bomb was more than that. Whether Truman intended it or not, the events surrounding the development and use of the bomb caused the relationship between Washington and Moscow to become strained. Stalin, who was, of course, an ally of the United States and Great Britain during the war, had been left out of the loop in the bomb's development. However, his spy network in the United States had kept him fairly well abreast of the program (known as the Manhattan Project) almost from the beginning. All this added to Stalin's legendary fear that the capitalist West was conspiring to destroy the Soviet Union. Some historians have referred to the atomic blasts as the first salvo of the Cold War. To be sure, the events surrounding the development of the bomb added to the growing distrust between the United States and the Soviets in 1945.

President Truman's decision to drop the bomb is interesting. Truman was an intelligent man; if nothing else, he was well read in the history of the world. But he was also a simple man. In the document below, Truman recounts his fateful decision. For him, it was not a difficult one, as he describes it here in his memoirs, written some ten years after the events. Years later, he said he did not lose a wink of sleep over the decision.

The Hiroshima bomb killed close to ten thousand people; the Nagasaki bomb killed about thirty-six thousand. Many more died in the following days and years from radiation sickness and cancer. On August 9, three days after the Hiroshima bomb was dropped and just a few hours before the Nagasaki bomb, the Soviets entered the war against Japan by attacking Japanese troops in Manchuria. Japan accepted surrender terms on August 14, 1945.

The historic message of the first explosion of an atomic bomb was flashed to me in a message from the Secretary of War [Henry] Stimson on the morning of July 16. The most secret and the most daring enterprise of the war had succeeded. We were now in the possession of a weapon that would not only revolutionize war but could alter the course of history and civilization. This news reached me at Potsdam the day after I had arrived for the conference of the Big Three. [The "Big Three" were Truman, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, and British prime minister Winston Churchill. On July 28, in the middle of the conference, Churchill was defeated in a national election and replaced by the new prime minister, Clement Attlee, the leader of the British Labor Party.]

Stimson flew to Potsdam the next day to see me and brought with him the full details of the test. I received him at once and called in Secretary of State [James] Byrnes, Admiral [William] Leahy, General [George] Marshall, General [H. H.] Arnold, and Admiral [Ernest] King to join us at my office at the Little White House. We received our military strategy in the light of this revolutionary development. We were not ready to make use of this weapon against the Japanese, although we did not know as yet what effect the new weapon might have, physically or psychologically, when used against the enemy. For that reason the military advised that we go ahead with the existing military plans for the invasion of the Japanese home islands.

At Potsdam, as elsewhere, the secret of the atomic bomb was kept closely guarded. We did not extend the very small circle of Americans who knew about it. Churchill naturally knew about the atomic bomb project from its very beginning, because it had involved the pooling of British and American technical skill.

On July 24 I casually mentioned to Stalin that we had a new weapon of unusual destructive force. The Russian Premier showed no special interest. All he said was that he was glad to hear it and hoped we would make "good use of it against the Japanese."

A month before the test explosion of the atomic bomb the service Secretaries of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had laid their detailed plans for the defeat of Japan before me for approval. . . . The Army plan envisaged an amphibious landing in the fall of 1945 on the island of Kyushu, the southernmost of the Japanese home islands. This would be accompanied by our Sixth Army, under the command of General Walter Krueger. The first landing would then be followed approximately four months later by a second great invasion, which would be carried out by our Eighth and Tenth Armies, followed by the First Army transferred from Europe, all of which would go ashore in the Kanto plains near Tokyo. In all, it had been estimated that it would require until the late fall of 1946 to bring Japan to her knees.

This was a formidable conception, and all of us realized fully that the fighting would be fierce and the losses heavy. But it was hoped that some of Japan's forces would continue to be preoccupied in China and others would be prevented from reinforcing the home islands if Russia were to enter the war. . . .

The entire development of the atomic bomb had been dictated by military considerations. The idea of the atomic bomb had been suggested to President Roosevelt by the famous and brilliant Dr. Albert Einstein, and its development turned out to be a vast undertaking. It was the achievement of the combined efforts of science, industry, labor, and the military, and it had no parallel in history. The men in charge and their staffs worked under extremely high pressure, and the whole enormous task required services of more than one hundred thousand men and immense quantities of material. It required over two and a half years and necessitated the expenditure of two and a half billions of dollars.

Only a handful of the thousands of men who worked in these plants knew what they were producing. So strict was the secrecy imposed that even some of the highest-ranking officials in Washington had not the slightest idea of what was going on. I did not. Before 1939 it had been generally agreed among scientists that it was theoretically possible to release energy from the atom. In 1940 we had begun to pool with Great Britain all scientific knowledge useful to war, although Britain was at war at the time and we were not. Following this—in 1942—we learned that the Germans were at work on a method to harness atomic energy for use as a weapon of war. This, we understood, was to be added to the V-1 and V-2 rockets with which they hoped to conquer the world. They failed, of course, and for this we can thank Providence. But now a race was on to make the atomic bomb—a race that became "the battle of the laboratories. . . ."

My own knowledge of these developments had come about only after I became President, when Secretary Stimson had given me the full story. He

had told me at that time that the project was nearing completion and that a bomb could be expected within another four months. It was at his suggestion, too, that I had then set up a committee of top men and had asked them to study with great care the implications the new weapon might have for us. . . . It was their recommendation that the bomb be used against the enemy as soon as it could be done. They recommended further that it should be used without specific warning and against a target that would clearly show its devastating strength. I had realized, of course, that an atomic bomb explosion would inflict damage and casualties beyond imagination. On the other hand, the scientific advisors of the committee reported, "We can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war; we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use." It was their conclusion that no technical demonstration they might propose, such as over a deserted island, would be likely to bring the war to an end. It had to be used against an enemy target.

The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used. The top military advisors to the President recommended its use, and when I talked to Churchill he unhesitatingly told me he favored the use of the atomic bomb if it might aid to end the war.

In deciding to use this bomb I wanted to make sure that it would be used as a weapon of war in the manner prescribed by the laws of war. That meant that I wanted it dropped on a military target. I told Stimson that the bomb should be dropped as nearly as possible upon a war production center of prime military importance. . . .

On July 28 Radio Tokyo announced that the Japanese government would continue the fight. There was no formal reply to the joint ultimatum to the United States, the United Kingdom, and China. There was no alternative now. The bomb was scheduled to be dropped after August 3 unless Japan surrendered before that day.

On August 6, the fourth day of the journey home from Potsdam, came the historic news that shook the world. I was eating lunch with members of the *Augusta*'s crew when Captain Frank Graham, White House Map Room watch officer, handed me the following message:

TO THE PRESIDENT FROM THE SECRETARY OF WAR

Big bomb dropped on Hiroshima August 5 at 7:15 p.m. Washington time.

First reports indicate complete success which was even more conspicuous than earlier test.

I was greatly moved. I telephoned Byrnes aboard ship to give him the news, and then said to the group of sailors around me, "This is the greatest thing in history. It's time for us to go home. . . ."

On August 9 the second bomb was dropped, this time on Nagasaki. We gave the Japanese three days in which to make up their minds to surrender, and the bomb would have been held off another two days had weather permitted. During those three days we indicated that we meant business. On August 7 the 20th Air Force sent out a bomber force of some one hundred and thirty B-29s, and on the eighth it reported four hundred and twenty B-29s in day and night attacks. The choice of targets for the second atom bomb was first Kokura, with Nagasaki second. By the time Kokura was reached the weather had closed in, and after three runs over the spot without a glimpse of the target, with gas running short, a try was made for the second choice, Nagasaki. There, too, the weather had closed in, but an opening in the clouds gave the bombardier his chance, and Nagasaki was successfully bombed.

The second demonstration of the power of the atomic bomb apparently threw Tokyo into a panic, for the next morning brought the first indication that the Japanese Empire was ready to surrender.

Source: Harry S. Truman, *1945, Year of Decision: Memoirs by Harry S. Truman* (New York, 1955). Reprinted by arrangement.

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QUESTIONS

1. How was Harry Truman able to win the 1948 election "upset"?
2. Why was the civil rights movement able to finally get off the ground in the years after the war?

• 2 •

The Early Cold War

Americans believed, if only for a short moment, that the victories of World War II had brought an end to world hostilities and conflicts. The United States emerged from the war strong, the world's only nuclear power, while much of the rest of the world was laid waste as a result of the war.

So, it seemed, World War II had been a good war. Americans hailed its end as a total triumph over the very forces of evil, with all goals realized in a complete and moral victory. The sacrifices had been tremendous, but the end of the war had left the United States astride the world, free of any serious enemies, and free to convert its economy to peacetime production.

But all too quickly it became clear that World War II, like most wars, caused as many problems as it solved. The most apparent concern was the huge and dangerous power vacuums exposed by the retreating German army in Europe and the Japanese army in Asia. In Eastern Europe, the Soviets placed friendly governments in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Austria as they pushed the retreating Nazi armies back into Germany; at the war's end, the Soviets occupied every Eastern European capital except Athens. In Asia, Soviet troops were in Iran, Manchuria, and the northern half of Korea. At the same time, Communist insurgencies were trying to topple governments in China, Vietnam, Greece, Turkey, and even Italy. For most Americans, communism and its spread became the new fear.

YALTA AND THE END OF THE WAR

As the war in Europe began to wind down, the representatives of the soon-to-be victorious nations met at Yalta in the Soviet Union. President Franklin

Roosevelt met there with Premier Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom. It was at Yalta, in February 1945, that the Americans and the Soviets found themselves at loggerheads over the treatment of the postwar world. The agreements at Yalta, as they pertained to postwar Europe, revolved around the disposition of two nations, Poland and Germany. Stalin demanded that any government in postwar Poland must be friendly to the Soviet Union, and he refused to budge on the point. Roosevelt could do little. Short of declaring war against an ally (an ally that was fully mechanized by then and entirely capable of fielding an army twice the size of the combined armies of the United States and Great Britain), Roosevelt agreed to a compromise on Poland. The government there would be made up of a coalition, one part friendly to the West and one part friendly to Moscow. This government would remain in power only until elections could be held. Stalin agreed, even speculating that elections might be held within a month. Roosevelt then persuaded Stalin to sign an ambiguous and vaguely worded "Declaration on Liberated Europe," which spelled out the

Figure 2.1. Participants in the Big Three Conference at Yalta in February 1945: British prime minister Winston Churchill, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Soviet premier Joseph Stalin. The meeting in Crimea (now the Ukraine) in the Soviet Union determined the shape of postwar Europe. Roosevelt had only a few weeks to live. Source: AP Photo.

formation of governments throughout Eastern Europe that would be "broadly representative of all democratic elements in the population and pledged to the earliest possible establishment through free elections of governments responsive to the will of the people." It was hardly specific and held Stalin to nothing, but, as FDR told Admiral William Leahy, "It's the best I can do for Poland at this time." He almost certainly planned to push Stalin harder at their next meeting.

All agreed at Yalta that Germany should be dismembered. The Americans, the British, and eventually the French would occupy the western zone of Germany and the Soviets would occupy the east. Berlin, inside the eastern zone, was also to be divided east and west. This was intended as a temporary situation, to relieve the obvious problem of a political and security vacuum in Germany.

Roosevelt and Churchill understood the need for an economically viable Germany if Europe were to maintain any economic balance. Certainly, they had learned that lesson from the 1920s, when the postwar German economy collapsed and much of the world suffered. Stalin, however, saw all this differently. He wanted Germany to pay the price for the damage it had inflicted on the Russian people in the war. And he wanted a weak Germany for the future, a Germany that would not again rise and attack the Soviet Union. To that end, he insisted that Germany pay stiff reparations. In addition, he wanted to strip Germany of its industrial might by confiscating its machinery and shipping it to the Soviet Union to rebuild his war-damaged economy there. The decisions at Yalta did not resolve these differences, and that would become a major point of contention in the growing Cold War.

The Yalta agreements pertaining to the Far East were more easily determined. Roosevelt had high hopes of obtaining Stalin's aid in defeating Japan, something that the Soviet leader was willing to do in exchange for a few fairly insignificant concessions in the Far East, mainly influence in Mongolia and Manchuria. Roosevelt also insisted that Stalin recognize Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and the Nationalist Chinese as the only legitimate government in China. This was important to Roosevelt because it denied Soviet support to Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists. The Nationalists and the Communists had been locked in a bloody civil war since the late 1920s, but during the Japanese occupation of China both groups had moved to the Chinese frontier regions to wait out the war. It was no secret that when the war ended and the Japanese armies left China, the Chinese civil war would resume. Roosevelt feared that a hot war in Asia between Communist and anti-Communist forces might damage U.S.-Soviet relations—or worse, draw the United States and the Soviet Union into the conflict. Roosevelt hoped that by pushing Stalin to support the Nationalists instead of the Communists that Mao would be