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I have been writing books now for thirty-five years, and from that experience and the writing of this book in particular, I have learned a very valuable lesson—one that leads me to make a modest proposal to the publishing industry. I have come to believe that it should be required of authors of every nonfiction book that they agree to revisit that same topic twenty years later and write another book on the same topic. I float this proposal with tongue only mildly in cheek; the book that follows sprang from just such a revisitation, and it was a career-changing experience.

In 1985, I published my first book, *The Crusade: The Presidential Election of 1952*. It was a(n ever so slightly) revised dissertation, which meant two things. First, while it was the best I could do at the time, the writing wasn't great. And two, I was trying to break into the business by defending a revisionist thesis that would make me stand out from the academic crowd. My archival research was strong—I vaguely remember driving all over the country in a well-dented Ford Pinto and consulting every document I could find. I looked at the documents with the eye of a youthful skeptic. I argued that in 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Adlai E. Stevenson II, both of whom repeatedly told their supporters and the world that they did not want to be candidates or to campaign for the presidency of the United States, were little more than Machiavellian dissemblers. Indeed, I came within a hairbreadth of calling both of them liars. Instead, I settled for a new term (dissertations and first books are full of new, catchy terms)—“Non-Participant Politics”—arguing that while they consistently said that they didn't want to run, in reality they did want to run. But saying that they didn't want to run was part of a calculated strategy designed to make both men more appealing to a public that was sick of politics as usual, particularly during the Korean War phase of the Truman administration. I liked what I wrote, and I was proud of the output. I moved on to other things.

For whatever reason, I have remained the only writer to have produced a book-length monograph on the whole of the presidential election of 1952. Thus, while I was toiling in different historical vineyards, I continued to be called upon to speak on the subject, which I gladly
did, without revising the conclusions I had come to in 1985. My “Non-Participant Politics” argument was great fodder for audiences that loved either Eisenhower or Stevenson, and during the question-and-answer session they would often come at me with a vengeance, charging that I had characterized their hero as a liar. My thesis was like red meat thrown at angry lions, and the resulting give-and-take was always fun.

That is, until I was asked by Daniel Holt, then the director of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas, to deliver the keynote address at a daylong conference, titled “The Great Crusade: The Road to the White House, 1952,” held in November 1992 on the fortieth anniversary of Eisenhower’s victory. My job was to set the table, so to speak, for the alumni of the era who had joined the panel—including Abbott and Wanda Washburn of the Citizens for Eisenhower, former governor of Minnesota Harold Stassen, NBC News correspondent Ray Scherer, and Herbert Brownell, Eisenhower’s political Yoda in 1952 and ultimately his attorney general. When I spoke, I laid it on thick about Eisenhower and Stevenson and their political deceit. Polite applause followed my talk, and then we adjourned. As I moved away from the podium, I saw the panelists huddling. I started to walk toward them, but Scherer intercepted me. With a wide grin, he quietly mumbled, “Dr. Greene, you don’t want to go over there.” I froze and took my seat at the table onstage. Sitting next to me was Brownell, who, as was his wont, immediately began to make small talk with me while we reset for the next session. But I could not help myself. “General Brownell,” I quietly pleaded, “what were you folks discussing over there?” He smiled but did not look me in the eye as he slowly intoned, “Oh, we liked your speech. But you know, don’t you, that you are dead wrong?” Believe me when I tell you that no negative book review can hit you quite as hard as that. They were gentlemen all; none of them—not Brownell, not Abbott Washburn (who quietly took me to task on another break)—said anything remotely critical about my work in public during the conference, and they continued to be polite with my lame attempts to wheedle into their conversation with the audience about the campaign (I mean, for a bit, I was shaking). But my notes for that day’s conference belie a bit of an epiphany; on the back of a program, in big block letters, I scribbled: “Was I wrong?”

That question would dog me for the next two decades. Although given the opportunity to speak on the election on several more occasions, I found myself backing off from the stridency of my thesis. I used words that had not been in my younger lexicon—words like “might” and
“perhaps.” I began to consider revisiting the election, but the opportunity to rethink The Crusade was buried in a host of other projects and responsibilities: that is, until 2013, when I first spoke with Fred Woodward, then the director of the University Press of Kansas and now the emeritus director of that press, about writing a book on 1952—a new book—for its American Presidential Elections series. Fred always reminded me of what I like to think the editors of the great trade houses in New York City were like: nurturing their authors’ ideas, tolerating their peculiarities, and, in general, being shepherds who help the author move a good book from his or her mind to the printed page. Thus, he didn’t shoot me down when I said that I wanted to “fix” (I think I used that word—if I didn’t, I should have) The Crusade. After finishing a few books that I had been working on, including one for Kansas, where, for the first time, I revised and expanded a previous work, I was ready to begin on 1952.

So I read. There was much to read. I reread each of the major sources used for The Crusade, as well as the wealth of new writing on Eisenhower and Stevenson. I revisited the Eisenhower Library and the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library at Princeton University, repository of the Stevenson papers. I revisited Walter Johnson’s edition of Stevenson’s papers, which was available to me in 1985, but which I found I had simply glossed over. I read Clarence E. Wunderlin’s new edition of the papers of Ohio senator Robert A. Taft, Eisenhower’s chief opponent for the Republican nomination, as well as the magnificent editing job done by Louis Galambos and others on Eisenhower’s papers (as I claim in my bibliographical essay, the epitome of manuscript publication projects). I read them as carefully as I could, with a patience that I do not believe is inherent in a doctoral student and is rarely present in anyone writing his or her first book. I tried to practice what I have preached in more than thirty years of the teaching of historical methodology to eager undergraduates: let the sources come to you. Don’t read into them. Let them talk to you. And then judge them.

Finally, I felt it was time to reread The Crusade. I had not read it in three decades, and as I did so, I continually heard Brownell whispering in my ear that I had been wrong. What I found were two things, both of which ultimately informed this volume. The first was that I had, indeed, made very few factual errors in 1985. Several sections of The Crusade, I humbly believed, were still pretty good. With some fine-tuning, they are included herein as parts of I Like Ike (for which I am grateful to the Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group). But the second thing was
the unmistakable, unalterable revelation that Brownell had been absolutely right. After reading the sources with patience and context, I had come to a completely different conclusion than I had thirty years ago. This present volume will argue that both Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson were absolutely sincere in their desire not to run for the presidency in 1952. However, for myriad reasons that were different for each man, they ultimately changed their minds. While they never lost their disdain for the process and never lost their hope that somehow, in Stevenson’s borrowed words at the Democratic Convention in July 1952, the cup would pass from them, they both eventually decided that they had to run. Neither man was drafted—on that point I was clear in The Crusade, and I have held to that point even more emphatically in I Like Ike. But there was nothing Machiavellian or dissembling about their efforts. “Non-Participant Politics” was a great catchphrase, but it is no longer how I see the evidence.

Quite aside from recasting my basic thesis, I found myself reintroducing myself to the protagonists in the story. I found a new, deeper role for Bob Taft. I found a much less important role for Richard M. Nixon, Eisenhower’s running mate, than most scholars have assigned him, and I now see his famous “Checkers Speech” in the full light of this revelation. I brought Harry Truman into the narrative—loudly and earthily, of course—in a manner that had eluded me before. Most important, I found a deeper respect for the political skills and the intellectual sincerity of both Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson. If the reader continues to believe, as did I thirty years ago, that Ike and Adlai were Machiavellians who coyly sold Americans on their reticence, when in fact they wanted to be sought out for the job, I continue to respect that point of view. It has many strong and worthy adherents, many of whom I have referenced when relevant. But I would ask the reader to reconsider the election of 1952, as I hope I have done, on its own terms, without straining the evidence. Should he or she persist in supporting “Non-Participant Politics,” I might well smile and softly mumble, “But you’re wrong.”

My biggest debt of gratitude goes to two directors of the University Press of Kansas: first, Emeritus Director Fred Woodward, who let me read and reflect on this material in a timely fashion; second, Charles Myers, who showed patience with this project and possesses the wit of a writer (writers know what I am talking about). I am proud to claim Kansas as my publishing home; my thanks to Mike Kehoe, Karl Janssen,
Andrea Laws, Larisa Martin, and Sara Henderson White for their efforts and skill. Special thanks to Kelly Chrisman Jacques, who guided this project from start to finish, and copy editor Susan Ecklund, who improved this book with every query. My friend and colleague Professor Roxana Spano read the entire manuscript, offering many thoughtful and probing insights.

Cazenovia College has been my intellectual home for almost four decades. I cannot imagine teaching anywhere else, and teaching there has no doubt helped me evolve into a better writer. I particularly thank Interim President Margery A. Pinet, Vice President of Academic Affairs Sharon Dettmer, and Division Chair Stewart A. Weisman for their daily support. I also thank Sarah Diederich and Anna Marchant, late of the Academic Affairs Office at Cazenovia, and Michele Tesch and Rebekah Beckwith, presently of that office, for their cheery goodwill and professional expertise. Money can often be tight at a small school, but at Cazenovia College, there has long been a true commitment to the fostering of innovative scholarship throughout the faculty. The institution as a whole must be thanked for its financial support, both through a yearly professional development grant and through other research and travel grants, such as the Margery A. Pinet Fund. I would also like to thank my friend Paul J. Schupf, who not only lends his name to my title—one that I have worn with pride for many years now—but whose largesse has also allowed me to expand my travel and research opportunities to a higher level. The Cazenovia College librarians are par excellence—ask, and the researcher shall receive. I thank Library Director Heather Whalen-Smith and librarians Judy Azzotto, Nanette Bailey, and Lauren Michel. I was particularly well served by the research efforts of three notable undergraduates: Lydia Dorward, Yvette Fall, and Joanna Stach.

Traveling to archives is one of the perks of the writing game. Working with these materials not only can lead to the discovery of new historical theses but also is a royal good time. This project benefited from two of the best archival repositories in the nation. I thank the staff at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (Abilene, Kansas), particularly Timothy Rives, Valoise Armstrong, and Kathy Struss. I also thank the staff at the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library at Princeton University, holder of the Adlai E. Stevenson Papers as well as several other collections of note—particularly Dan Linke, university archivist and curator of public policy papers, April Armstrong, and Crista Cleeton. I am beyond grateful to the Eisenhower Foundation, particularly to Meredith Sleichter, for
its generosity in granting me a research and travel grant in 2014. At the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri, I was helped by archivists David Clark, Janice Davis, Randy Sowell, and Tammy Williams; at the Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library I was aided by Jon Fletcher. I also appreciate the help of Cooper Hawley in securing the permission of the Republican National Committee to include several of the photos found in this volume.

I noted above the many conferences and other speaking opportunities over the years where I was fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to speak on 1952. I learned from each of them, but two stand out. The first was the aforementioned “The Great Crusade: The Road to the White House, 1952,” held at the Eisenhower Library in November 1992. Once again, I would like to thank Dan Holt, then director of the Eisenhower Library, for inviting me to attend. The other was held at Gettysburg College in October 2002. This conference on the 1952 election, directed by my friend Shirley Anne Warshaw of Gettysburg’s Department of Political Science, was particularly helpful.

All works of modern history are somewhat parasitic. I thank each of the scholars and writers enumerated in my bibliographical essay, whose work has affected my own thinking.

I like to write in diners. I don’t really know why. But to everyone who has brought me coffee, scrambled eggs, and wheat toast, and then watched me read with a pen in my hand—particularly Darlene’s Kitchen in Chittenango, New York, and Dave’s Diner in Cazenovia, New York—my thanks for the hard work of personal service that you do. Special thanks are also due the Kibby family for their generosity during my research travels.

And to my family, by whom all things are made possible, once again, my gratitude for the help you give in allowing me to be both a teacher and a writer.

Chittenango, New York
April 2017
Congress sent the Twenty-Second Amendment, imposing a two-term limit on presidents, to the states for ratification on March 21, 1947. Although the amendment stated that “this article shall not apply to any person holding the office of President when this article was proposed by the Congress”—namely, President Harry S. Truman—Truman wrote in his diary on April 16, 1950: “Eight years as President is enough and sometimes too much for any man.” Looking ahead to the next election in 1952, he added: “I am not a candidate and will not accept the nomination for another term.”

If not Truman, whose popularity steadily sank in any event throughout the remainder of his tenure, then who? The Democrats had become the nation’s majority party during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s tenure, winning five presidential elections in a row. This made the Democratic nomination obviously worth having, and several nationally prominent politicians lined up to seek it, including Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, Vice President Alben W. Barkley of Kentucky, and diplomat W. Averell Harriman of New York. The candidate who eventually got the nomination, after repeatedly eschewing any ambition other than reelection as governor of Illinois, was Adlai E. Stevenson II, the grandson of a former vice president and, in the end, Truman’s favorite.

Looking at recent electoral history through different lenses, ambitious Republicans also coveted their party’s 1952 nomination. Five defeats in a row was the most for any competitive major party in American history, meaning the GOP’s fortunes were surely about to change. Senate Republican leader Robert A. Taft of Ohio—the son of a former president and, to many of his fellow partisans, “Mr. Republican”—emerged as the leading candidate for the party’s nomination in a field that also included Governor Earl Warren of California, the party’s vice presidential nominee in 1948.

Standing offstage was the preferred nominee of both parties, and the only near-sure winner on the national scene: Dwight D. Eisenhower. The wildly popular supreme allied commander in World War II, now serving in Brussels as supreme commander of the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) while on leave from the presidency of Columbia
University, was Truman’s first choice for the Democratic nomination and most eastern Republicans’ first choice to lead their party as well. As John Robert Greene argues, “Eisenhower’s coming to terms with his own political future is, in many ways, the most important story of the presidential election of 1952.”

Eisenhower first declared himself a Republican and then decided not to run but—an important consideration, in his mind—to allow himself to be put forward as a candidate for the party’s nomination. “There is a vast difference between responding to a duty imposed by a national convention and the seeking of a nomination,” Ike wrote to his chief advocate, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts. Referring to his current NATO post, he wrote to his friend Swede Hazlett, “A man cannot desert a duty, but it would seem that he could lay one down in order to pick up a heavier and more responsible burden.” Facing defeat by Taft, however, Eisenhower eventually left Europe and started running hard, barely edging out his rival at the convention.

In the end, Greene shows that the 1952 election was fought between two avowedly reluctant warriors in a campaign marked by television news coverage and televised political commercials, the first such election in history. Eisenhower won in a landslide, breaking the GOP’s losing streak and extending sufficiently long coattails to bring in a narrowly Republican Congress. But as Greene argues, Ike’s victory came less as a partisan mandate and more as a manifestation of his being “clearly the most popular American of the post–World War II period,” a person “who was somehow above politics.”
I LIKE IKE
INTRODUCTION
TRUMAN’S TROUBLES, 1949–1951

On 2 November 1948, Harry S. Truman was ecstatic. He had just been elected to his own term as president of the United States, and in so doing, he had confounded the políticos, the pundits, and the American people—virtually all of whom had declared his defeat. Every poll had him dead and buried, so one can only smile and forgive the feisty Missourian for his moment of gloat as he waved aloft a copy of the Chicago Tribune, which had predicted with premature certainty that his opponent had beaten him.

Yet as early as the summer of 1949, Truman was threatening to quit. In a note to his wife on 29 June, Truman wistfully remembered past vacations: “Remember the Blackstone, the first visit, not the last, Port Huron, Detroit Statler and the trip home? Maybe in 1953 we will be able to take that trip over again.”1 Within a year’s time, he was making plans. The first sentence of Truman’s diary entry for 16 April 1950 read simply: “I am not a candidate for nomination by the Democratic Convention.” After rambling a bit about the electoral history of George Washington, James Madison, Woodrow Wilson, and others, Truman mused, “Eight years as President is enough and sometimes too much for any man.” Although he had not served eight years, and he was not bound by the terms of the Twenty-Second Amendment to the Constitution (passed in 1951, limiting the president to two terms), Truman was adamant to himself: “To reestablish the [two-term] custom, although
by a quibble I could say I’ve had only one term, I am not a candidate and will not accept the nomination for another term.”

Nothing happened over the next two years that made Truman regret his decision. Failure to pass his legislative packages; a series of scandals; a failure of policy in China; a war in Korea; and attacks on the loyalty of both him and his administration served to harden his resolve. In mid-November 1951, at his Key West retreat, Truman got his staff together and read to them his April diary entry, telling them that while for the present he required their secrecy, he would release that entry as a public statement in the spring of 1952. Truman began crafting that statement in his diary on 30 January 1952, an entry that he labeled as a “revision” of the 16 April 1950 entry. In a detailed, formal tone, Truman penned what was clearly a future public announcement. Once again, he began his entry with the phrase “I am not a candidate for re-election.” But then he crossed out that phrase as he began to think about his life: “When January comes [1953] I will have been in elective public office for thirty years, less two from January 1, 1925 to January 1, 1927. . . . I’ve given the country and the world everything I am capable of giving.” After engaging in a bit of legacy creation (“We’ve whipped the Communists at every turn. We’ve saved the free world. We’ve succeeded in maintaining a balanced economy at home”), he closed with finality: “I am not a candidate for re-election in 1952. I’ll say to you what Sherman said, ‘If nominated I won’t run. If elected I won’t serve.’”

It is easy to understand why.

TRUMAN DEFEATS DEWEY: 1948

Truman had won his own term in 1948 despite the fact that his policies had led to significant defections from the political coalition of disparate and often oppositional interest groups—laborers, labor unions, racial and ethnic minorities, liberal intellectuals, urban dwellers, urban bosses, farmers, Catholics, Jews—that Franklin Roosevelt had forged. Truman’s antipathy toward the Soviet Union and its leadership, as well as his unyielding opposition to its policies, led to protests from Henry A. Wallace, his secretary of commerce and former vice president under Roosevelt. Along with a sizable portion of the party’s more liberal wing, Wallace believed that Americans must negotiate with the Soviets, lest both sides find themselves on a path toward nuclear Armageddon. He also believed that Truman’s concentration on the foreign policy of the
Cold War was distracting the nation from a discussion of social welfare policy issues. When Wallace took his criticisms to the public, Truman fired him, and his party’s left wing exploded in opposition. Truman professed disinterest—in a letter to his mother and his sister, he quipped: “[Wallace is] out and the crackpots are having conniption fits.” But by the end of 1947, Wallace had agreed to run for the presidency in 1948 at the head of the United States Progressive Party ticket.

Truman also suffered defections on his party’s right flank. Truman had proved to be the most activist president on civil rights since Abraham Lincoln. On 28 June 1947, he joined Eleanor Roosevelt at the Lincoln Memorial, becoming the first president to address the annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: “We must keep moving forward with new concepts of civil rights . . . each man must be guaranteed freedom of opportunity.” And Truman would not stop with mere rhetorical flourishes. On 2 February 1948, he became the first president to send a civil rights message to Congress, presenting legislators with a ten-point plan that included an antilynch law, a repeal of the poll tax, a permanent commission on civil rights, the prohibition of segregation on interstate transportation, and the end of discrimination in the armed forces. Most significant was Truman’s call for a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), which he had supported publicly since a 5 June 1945 speech to black leaders. In his address, Truman argued that “the federal government has a clear duty to see that the constitutional guarantees of individual liberties . . . are not denied or abridged anywhere in our nation.”

Southern Democrats were furious at the progressive nature of Truman’s civil rights policies. This anger was only augmented by his stand over their oil. At the turn of the century, immense amounts of oil in submerged lands—the Tidelands—were discovered just off the shores of Louisiana, Texas, and California. As soon as the oil was tapped, the states laid claim to the black gold; just as immediately, the federal government began to apply for federal drilling leases. Immediately prior to World War II, the Interior Department put a halt to the federal applications, preferring to wait until the courts ruled on the ownership of the Tidelands. However, in September 1945, Truman stayed that order, issuing an executive order proclaiming that the Tidelands belonged to the federal government and putting the control of those lands under the auspices of the secretary of the interior. Congress balked immediately, passing a law in 1946 that gave control of the Tidelands back to the states; but Truman...
vetoed the bill, and his veto was sustained. Moreover, the Supreme Court ruled in both 1947 and 1950 that the Tidelands belonged to the federal government. But this did not quell the controversy, as southern Democrats from Louisiana and Texas attacked both the Court and the Truman administration on the issue. One reason for not letting the issue go was, of course, the money; according to the *New York Times*, there was $40 billion in oil in the Tidelands waiting to be added to either the state or the federal Treasury. When mixed with the civil rights issue, the Tidelands oil controversy was but one more dispute in the growing states’ rights crisis. Indeed, a biographer of Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn observes that Truman’s vetoes and the Supreme Court’s decisions moved Texas Democrats “to hysterical behavior.”

Talk began to circulate of a southern walkout at the upcoming Democratic Convention. Southern Democrats had been, at best, fickle members of the Roosevelt coalition, often voting against New Deal legislation that they felt encroached on the prerogative of the states. But they and their local machines had supported Roosevelt for president since 1932—it was a stretch to believe that Truman, or any other Democratic candidate, could win without the South. Accordingly, Truman tried to salve southern wounds by opposing a strong civil rights plank in the party’s platform, proposed by Minneapolis mayor Hubert H. Humphrey, that read in part, “We again state our belief that racial and religious minorities must have the right to live, the right to work, the right to vote, the full and equal protection of the laws, on a basis of equality with all citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution.” Truman tried for compromise, but Humphrey (“there will be no hedging, and there will be no watering down”) and most of the northern delegates would have none of it. Against his better judgment, Truman backed the plank, which passed. Most of the southern delegates walked out of the convention in protest, waving Confederate flags and singing “Dixie” as they left the hall. They would reconvene later in Birmingham to form the States’ Rights Democratic Party, which would be derisively nicknamed the “Dixiecrats” in the press, and would be led by South Carolina governor J. Strom Thurmond. Because the Dixiecrats controlled the Democratic Party machinery in the South, Truman would have to face the election knowing that his name would not even appear on the ballot in at least ten states.

Yet Truman would win the election on his own terms despite these defections. In the fall of 1948, the feisty president was in his element, his bombastic temperament perfectly suited to his underdog status.
He attacked the Republican front-runner, New York governor Thomas E. Dewey, head-on, employing a shrewd use of the incumbency, good old-fashioned name-calling, and the endurance of a man half his age. First, he called a special session of Congress for August, before which he placed several pieces of semi-important legislation. The Republicans in Congress were busy with their own campaigns and—literally, in some cases—planning for a transition to the expected Dewey administration. When, as he knew it would, the Congress balked at the proposals and passed nothing of substance, Truman lambasted it as the “Do-Nothing Eightieth Congress.” From that point on, he refused to take his foot off the accelerator, organizing an impressive whistle-stop campaign of mammoth proportions. That fall, he traveled 31,000 miles, speaking to some 6 million people. On the other hand, Dewey’s lethargic campaign, as well as his monotonous call for a bipartisan foreign policy, was just plain boring.

In a result that confounded everyone (except, of course, Truman), Truman won 49.5 percent of the popular vote and 303 electoral votes, to Dewey’s 45.1 percent and 189 electoral votes. Thurmond and Wallace combined for 4.8 percent and 39 electoral votes—all in the South, and all for Thurmond. Dewey won the entire industrial Northeast and still lost the election. Truman won the election by winning in the heartland. He captured Wisconsin and Ohio, two states that had gone for Dewey in 1944. He then won all states west of the Mississippi River, save the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oregon (a total of 28 Dewey electoral votes). Moreover, Truman reversed the results of the 1946 off-year elections, winning back both the Senate (54–42) and the House (263–171) for the Democrats.

Truman won the labor vote, the farm vote, and the black vote—all groups that were part of the Roosevelt coalition. There was never any doubt that Truman would carry those in the lower-income stratum—indeed, Dewey’s share of that vote dropped by 50 percent between 1944 and 1948. There was equal certainty that Dewey would carry the upper-income stratum of voters—the Republican percentage of the top income earners jumped from 57.4 percent in 1944 to 61.6 percent in 1948. But no one was prepared for the shellacking that the Republicans took among those voters who could be called “middle-class”; the Republican share of middle-class voters shrank by one-fifth between 1944 and 1948, and their share of the rapidly growing “upper middle class” shrank by one-tenth between the two elections.13
Truman's victory gave him a more unified party, in that one revolt—that of the Progressive Party—had been discredited. The party's liberal wing, satisfied for a moment that it had legislative control and looking forward to the passage of new, liberal legislation, buried the hatchet and momentarily embraced its president. Not so, however, the southerners. Thurmond's victories in the South showed the depth of the party split over civil rights, one that could easily flare up in time for the next election. Those southern Democrats went back to their alliance with conservative Republicans, and their rekindled coalition was strong enough to stall or defeat Truman's policies on the Hill.

This they did. While not as liberal as the progressive wing would have liked, Truman's second-term domestic policies, christened his “Fair Deal,” certainly addressed issues that the New Deal had not been too terribly concerned about. Over the voices of southern protest, Truman sent Congress a far-reaching civil rights package, featuring a permanent FEPC. Despite the protests of conservative Democrats, Republicans, and medical lobbies, he proposed sweeping health-care legislation that featured a plan for national health insurance. Despite the cries of those who
protested both its cost and its federal overreach, Truman proposed an ambitious plan for stabilizing farm income (the Brannan Plan) that supported prices at 90 percent of parity. Truman also called for the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act (1947), which had placed significant limitations on the powers of organized labor. All these bills, and more, were defeated by the Eighty-First and Eighty-Second Congresses.\textsuperscript{14}

**SCANDALS**

Along with his lack of success on the Hill, Truman had to deal with the revelation of scandal within his administration. In 1949, the antics of the “Five Percenters”—Truman appointees who obtained government contracts for their friends—were revealed. Later that year, General Harry H. Vaughan, Truman’s closest personal confidant, went to jail for influence peddling. Senator J. William Fulbright (D-AR) convened a congressional committee to investigate reports of misdeeds in the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. There was also documentation of income tax fraud from within the administration. The fastidious, basically honest Truman was never personally implicated in any of these scandals, and, as pointed out by Andrew J. Dunar, the most thoughtful student of the Truman scandals, no evidence to the contrary has yet been unearthed by historians.\textsuperscript{15} But Truman badly mishandled the investigation of those scandals (he appointed Republican lawyer Newbold Morris to head a federal investigation; for his part, Morris poisoned the well by interrupting a senator who was questioning him before a committee, telling all present that they had “diseased minds”).\textsuperscript{16} Nevertheless, Truman found himself tainted by a rather broad brush, seen by his growing list of opponents as having an administration that harbored incompetents and crooks. In February 1952, 52 percent of those asked in a Roper poll believed that “there [was] lots of corruption in [the] federal government.”\textsuperscript{17}

**THE “LOSS OF CHINA”**

The brutal repression of the Czechoslovakia Coup of February 1948 and the ongoing response to the Berlin Blockade (the American-led airlift of goods ran from 24 June 1948 to 12 May 1949) offered ample evidence to Truman that the Soviet Union was a legitimate threat. As a result, Truman and his new secretary of state, Dean Acheson, believed that a mutual defense treaty with Western Europe was a primary necessity. On 4
April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was signed, binding together the United States, Great Britain, France, Canada, and eight other Western European nations.

In the debate over ratification, Senate Republicans, led by Taft, were particularly incensed at Article 5 of the treaty: “An armed attack against one or more (members) shall be considered an armed attack against them all.” But their cries were for naught; the Democrats controlled the Senate, and in June 1949, NATO was ratified by a wide margin. In response, the Warsaw Pact was immediately formed, binding together the Soviet Union and seven of its Eastern European satellites. In February 1951, Truman sent General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then serving as president of Columbia University, to Paris with the task of converting the alliance into a fully functional European command.

However, the Far East threatened to become even more of a Cold War flash point than had Europe. The Chinese civil war, pitting the Nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek against the Yan’an Communists of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung), began in 1927 and ran through World War II. The United States had thrown its lot in with Chiang’s Nationalists despite the fact that his government was notoriously corrupt and his military force was hapless and inefficient. By 1945, Mao controlled much of northwest and north central China. While many felt that Chiang had spent more time fighting Mao during World War II than he had spent fighting a rearguard action against the Japanese, a desire to maintain a wall against the encroachment of communism in the Far East led to Chiang’s being given an increase in American aid as well as one of five permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council. This, along with $700 million in lend-lease funds to Chiang’s government (which promptly swallowed it up in graft), led the Truman administration to believe initially that it had steadied the Nationalists against Mao’s advancing forces.

Such beliefs were ill-founded. By 1947, China found itself in full-scale civil war, and Truman’s advisers were torn. Some, led by General Albert Wedemeyer, the commander of American forces in China, argued that Truman should send more aid to Chiang; others, led by Truman’s secretary of state George Marshall, argued that Truman should abandon China to its own devices and concentrate on directing more aid to Japan to stabilize the region. Truman sided with Marshall. Chiang had been abandoned by the United States. On 1 October 1949, Mao proclaimed the creation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC); in December 1949, Chiang took what was left of his army and government and fled to
Formosa, an island off the shore of mainland China. Republicans exco-
riated Truman for his “loss of China,” a cry they would keep up for the
better part of the next decade.

KOREA
On 25 June 1950, the forces of North Korea poured over the thirty-eighth
parallel, which formed the border between itself and its sister nation to
the south. From the very beginning of the crisis, Truman assumed that
it was a Soviet-sponsored attack. This goes a long way toward explaining
why his initial response to the invasion was a measured one—he firmly
believed that one false move would bring the Soviets and possibly their
nearby client, the PRC, directly into the war. To meet the initial attack,
Truman ordered General Douglas MacArthur, then in Tokyo, to send
supplies to the South Korean forces and to order the American Seventh
Fleet to position itself between China and Formosa.

But such steps were short-lived. On 27 June—the same day that the
United Nations (UN) formally condemned the North Koreans for the
attack—Truman committed both American ground and naval troops to
action. Despite the fact that American troops would soon be joined in
Korea by troops from other UN nations, the Korean War was an Ameri-
can war. At any given point in the war, 50 percent of all ground and air
troops would be American, as would 95 percent of all naval forces. By
August, the front had stabilized enough so that MacArthur could attempt
a courageous rearguard action. On 15 September, in what would become
the greatest amphibious operation in military history, MacArthur’s X
Corps landed behind North Korean lines at Inchon. Catching the enemy
completely off guard, MacArthur began to push the North Koreans back
toward the thirty-eighth parallel.

The decision to cross the thirty-eighth parallel and take the war into
North Korea was the most ill-advised move of the Truman administra-
tion. Truman found himself buoyed by advice such as that from Ache-
son, who told the president, “I should think it would be sheer madness
for the Chinese to intervene” in the conflict. In retrospect, it seems fool-
ished to have assumed, as Truman clearly did, that the PRC would stay out
of the fight when they began to see the North Korean army being pushed
northward to the Yalu River, which formed the border between North
Korea and the PRC. Yet the possibility of eradicating communism from
the Korean Peninsula proved to be too much temptation for Truman. In
a complete refutation of his own containment policy, Truman ordered MacArthur to cross the border into North Korea, to liberate that nation from the yoke of communism. MacArthur’s forces sliced through the retreating North Koreans, and by November his troops were literally yards away from the Chinese border; American troops could see Chinese troops on the other side of the Yalu. Truman’s confidence that the Chinese would stay out of the conflict was shattered on the morning of 25 November when thousands of PRC “volunteers” poured across the Yalu, forcing thousands of U.S. Marines into a bloody retreat. By early January 1952, the UN front had stabilized below the thirty-eighth parallel. The war soon settled into a stalemate of unknown duration.

Truman believed that American might would ultimately prevail, no matter what the conditions or circumstances. All Truman’s advisers, including MacArthur, agreed with that assessment. After the Chinese entered the war, Truman began to hear from those who now believed that a negotiated settlement was necessary. But from MacArthur, Truman got pleas for a full-scale counterattack against the PRC, including an economic and military blockade, approval of previously restricted reconnaissance flights over the Chinese mainland, the unleashing of Chiang Kai-shek’s tiny army against the PRC, and the use of nuclear weapons. Stunned by the ferocity of the Chinese counterattack, and justifiably concerned with any action that would draw the Soviet Union directly into the conflict, Truman refused to order the third atomic attack of his presidency.

Believing in the power of American exceptionalism to the point where he viewed American military power as ultimately invincible, MacArthur refused to accept Truman’s orders as final. Displaying a rather rare form of overt insubordination, MacArthur directly lobbied Capitol Hill in favor of tactical advice that had been rejected by his commander in chief. On 11 April 1951, Truman relieved MacArthur of his command. Truman’s reasoning for the dismissal was absolutely clear. In the first sentence of his address that purported to explain his decision to the American people Truman said: “In the simplest terms, what we are doing in Korea is this: We are trying to prevent a Third World War.” But Truman had fired an icon, and the reaction against his decision was both immediate and severe. In May 1951, Taft wrote a soldier fighting in Korea, “I believe that General MacArthur is right in almost every proposal that he makes.”20 House Minority Leader Joseph Martin (R-MA) called for Truman’s impeachment.
A majority of Americans, now saddled with a bloody quagmire that promised no end in sight, now saw Truman as an ineffectual wartime leader, and many began to look forward to his possible replacement in the next election. Historian Elmo Richardson neatly summarized the prevalent feeling: “Instead of making Americans distrust military men, the war made them view the prospect of a soldier in the White House as desirable.”

Wake Island, 14 October 1950, Harry S. Truman and General Douglas MacArthur (U.S. Navy, courtesy Harry S. Truman Library)
THE STEEL STRIKE

The Korean War also had a profound impact on Truman’s domestic policies. Still feeling the sting of the postwar inflation, and with memories of World War II sacrifices still fresh in their minds, the American people were loath to sacrifice too much in order to pay for war in Korea. Truman’s attempts to mobilize the American economy for war thus met with continued resistance. Although, in September 1950, Congress passed the Defense Production Act (DPA), giving the president wide-ranging authority over the economy and the power to enact wage and price controls, Truman would not dare to exercise that authority until the Chinese counteroffensive of November 1950. In an attempt to stabilize the American economy as it settled in for a lengthy siege in Korea, Truman used his new powers under the DPA to create the Wage Stabilization Board (WSB), which attempted to limit wage increases to a cap of 10 percent. The outcry against this decision was inevitable and loud.

The crisis of mobilization came to a head over the demands of the steel industry. The major steel companies wanted a price increase; the United Steelworkers of America wanted a wage increase. Truman decided to send their dispute to the WSB and asked both labor and management for patience. On 20 March 1952, the WSB recommended an eighteen-month contract with a wage increase of 12.5 cents per hour, retroactive to 1 January 1952, an additional 2.5-cent increase effective on 30 June 1952, and some fringes. This satisfied no one.

Described by biographer Alonzo L. Hamby as “drawn by his lifelong belief in strong executive authority to something more dramatic and more dangerous,” Truman preferred the seizure of the steel mills by the federal government to what would surely be a prolonged negotiation. Under Section 18 of the Selective Service Act of 1948, the president was allowed to place an offer for goods needed by the armed forces with a manufacturer; if the company failed to deliver, the president could take possession of the property. Thus, on 8 April 1952, Truman signed an executive order announcing that to prevent a strike, the federal government was seizing eighty-seven steel mills, all owned by companies that were involved in the dispute with the union. Truman argued that his Article II powers as commander in chief gave him the authority to seize the mills. This led to an immediate showdown. On 26 May, Senator Pat McCarran (D-NV) announced that he intended to propose an amendment to the Constitution to deny the president any power to seize private property except under processes prescribed by law; the next day
a House Judiciary subcommittee decided to hold public hearings on the issue of either censuring or impeaching the president.\textsuperscript{27}

The steel strike dragged on until the early part of the summer, as did a series of lawsuits in which the steel companies sued for return of their property, providing both a backdrop to the entirety of the preconvention campaigns and a constant reminder of the innumerable problems that faced the administration. Robert Taft, by then an announced candidate for the Republican nomination, would continually remind his audiences that the seizure of the mills was a “valid case” for impeachment and that “the president once again is usurping power which is not conferred upon him . . . [and] is showing the same disregard of the Constitution and the laws of the United States which he has shown in many other cases.”\textsuperscript{28} Earl Warren, governor of California and also a candidate for the Republican nomination, said that he would go before Congress and ask for a law to be passed giving him the authority to seize private property before he would have seized the steel mills.\textsuperscript{29} As a whole, the American people disapproved, too, in numbers that approximated their disapproval of the war in general.\textsuperscript{30} It would not be until 2 June that the Supreme Court, in \textit{Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company v. Sawyer,}\textsuperscript{31} ruled 6–3 that the president’s actions were unconstitutional.

\section*{Domestic Communism}

The events of the Cold War had led many Americans to the conclusion that the Soviet Union was capable of inflicting great destruction on the United States with a nuclear attack. In September 1949, the Soviet Union announced that it possessed the atomic bomb. Any questions as to how the Soviets might have procured the secrets of its construction seemed to be answered with the January 1950 arrest of Klaus Fuchs, a British scientist who had worked on the Manhattan Project. Fuchs confessed in London that he had been part of a spy ring that had supplied nuclear research to the Soviets. That confession also implicated four Americans, two of whom, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, would be executed for espionage in 1953. The Fuchs and Rosenberg arrests, along with the surprise invasion of Korea, elevated an already present fear of communism—both domestic and foreign—to a fever pitch. In September 1950, Congress hastily passed the McCarran-Walter Internal Security Act, which required any communist organization to register with the federal government, and created a board empowered to investigate
any organization deemed to be subversive. Truman vetoed it, but his veto was overridden. The “Second Red Scare” was on; any Americans—college professors, high school teachers of Russian history, intellectual critics of government, Hollywood screenwriters, obscure street corner organizers—could be placed under suspicion of being communists or communist sympathizers. Careers and reputations were destroyed beyond any hope of repair. Even the Constitution itself could not be used as a defense. In *Dennis v. U.S.* (1951), the Supreme Court ruled that an American Communist Party leader did not have the right to disseminate his beliefs and then claim that he had a First Amendment right of freedom of speech.\footnote{32}

The most celebrated case was that of Alger Hiss, a former State Department official. In 1948, *Time* magazine editor Whittaker Chambers testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) that Hiss had passed him classified documents between 1937 and 1938. Hiss denied the charge, and in October 1948 he sued Chambers for slander. At Hiss’s slander trial, Chambers produced microfilm that had been hidden inside a pumpkin on his Maryland farm that he said proved the charge of espionage. While the statute of limitations kept Hiss from being tried for treason, he was ultimately convicted of perjury before HUAC. Quite aside from their national security implications—implications that continue to be debated hotly by historians to the present day—the Hiss trials were important for the role they played in the developing careers of two politicians who were about to see their stars rise into the stratosphere. As a member of HUAC, Republican senator Richard Nixon of California was relentless in his pursuit both of Hiss and of the attendant publicity; he got both and was instantly on everyone’s list of possible vice presidential nominees, no matter who the presidential nominee was. And Illinois governor Adlai E. Stevenson would quietly, by deposition and not by personal appearance, give a statement to the court of personal support of Hiss’s character—an act of some bravery but one that would have serious political consequences in the fall of 1952.

The Second Red Scare also jump-started the career of Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI). On 9 February 1950, in a Lincoln Day address in Wheeling, West Virginia, McCarthy claimed to “have in my hand 57 cases of individuals who would appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the communist party, but who nevertheless are still helping to shape our foreign policy.” The claim was wildly exaggerated—right after the speech, McCarthy joked with reporters: “Look,
you guys. That was a political speech to a bunch of Republicans. Don't take it seriously." But Americans took it absolutely seriously. McCarthy had many supporters, and the numbers were growing. The leadership of his party, recognizing quickly that despite McCarthy's histrionics (when Truman fired MacArthur, McCarthy called the president a "sonofabitch" who had acted while he was drunk on "bourbon and Benedictine"), the issue of domestic communism could easily be used as a bludgeon against Truman, left the senator to his own malfeasant devices. There were precious few who joined the protest of Maine senator Margaret Chase Smith when, on 1 June 1950, she publicly denounced McCarthy on the floor of the Senate. The issue of domestic communism figured prominently in the fall 1950 elections, which saw the Republicans gain twenty-eight House seats and five Senate seats. Four of the Democratic senators went down to defeat in elections where the issue of domestic communism played a key part.

By mid-1951, Harry Truman, his administration, and his party were damaged goods—little wonder that Truman would tell his staff that he didn't want another term. He was at the helm of an administration that was tainted by scandal, had a floundering domestic policy, was being besieged by McCarthy and his ilk, and was fighting an unpopular and stalemated war in Korea.

But the Republicans did not yet know that Truman was planning on quitting. They were planning to face him once again for the presidency and, given his upset victory in 1948, that was a less than appealing prospect. Moreover, the Republicans themselves were beset with divisions, divisions that might stand in the way of the party's first presidential victory in two decades.