

lace; at the outset of the Truman presidency these liberals believed that the country's leader from Missouri was junking FDR's foreign policies just as he was abandoning the Roosevelt heritage in domestic politics.²⁷ The usual demonstration of Truman's tough attitude toward the Russians is to point to his treatment of Molotov when the Soviet foreign minister passed through Washington in April, 1945, en route to the San Francisco Conference of the United Nations.²⁸

It is an interesting speculation to think of one leader reversing the policy of his predecessor, and Schlesinger has pointed out the dramatic temptation

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here, and yet this theory about a change in policies has less to it than meets the eye.²⁹ Roosevelt was a compromiser, sometimes to the point of dissimulation. At other times he could be so devious, or unable to communicate his purposes, as in his withdrawal of support of James F. Byrnes for the vice-presidential nomination at the Chicago convention in 1944, that to the present day one is uncertain what he originally had in mind, if he had anything in mind. An individual with this makeup could drive his straightforward subordinates to distraction, or fury. General George C. Marshall never really trusted Roosevelt, and the only time Marshall went to Hyde Park to see the President, despite many invitations, was on the occasion of Roosevelt's funeral. As compared to Roosevelt, Truman was an enormous breath of fresh air, so open and businesslike. All these points

have been made many times and are well known. But to push them into a conclusion that Truman, whose *modus operandi* was so different, sought to reverse Roosevelt's foreign policy is to make an historical mistake.

Truman in 1941 had delivered himself of a snap judgment that Soviet publicists, and the revisionists, would never forget, for shortly after the Germans attacked the Soviet Union he had said he was delighted and hoped they would fight each other to the death, with the United States helping whichever side was losing; but this opinion had given way to more maturity of thought long before 1945 and the presidency, and there is every reason to believe that despite the little talk session with Molotov the President loyally undertook to carry out the foreign policy of his predecessor. For one thing, he was too new at the job to have many detailed opinions on foreign policy. For another, he was properly sensitive to the fact that he had been elected Vice-President only because he was on the ticket with Roosevelt, and it would have been presumptuous of him in April, 1945, to have started off on his own presidential policies, foreign or domestic. For a third, his actions in the spring of 1945 showed that he wanted to get along with Stalin. Churchill was after the new president, for the old Britisher as well as many of the members of Roosevelt's disgruntled official family eagerly anticipated a more straightforward presidency. As is well known, the Prime Minister wanted a showdown with the Russians. To Churchill's intense chagrin Truman refused to allow American troops to remain in the parts of the Soviet-designated zone of Germany into which they had entered in the last days of the war against Hitler.³⁰

The revisionists like to show that at the outset of his presidency Truman was

listening to some hard-line advisors (to use a later expression). Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson was upset because of the anti-Russian feeling among Truman's advisors, notably Averell Harriman and the latter's Moscow assistant in charge of Russian lend lease, Major General John R. Deane. But Herbert Feis' last book, *From Trust to Terror*, points out that at this time Harriman was not on the inside of Truman's group of advisors, nor for that matter was Stimson. The new President had turned for advice to FDR's chief of staff, now his own, Admiral William D. Leahy.³¹ At the outset Truman's opinions on foreign policy seem to have been so uncertain that at the same time he sent Harry Hopkins to Moscow to assure Stalin of the new administration's desire to cooperate with the Soviets to achieve European peace he enlisted Joseph E. Davies to go on a mission to see Churchill in England. Davies, to be sure, was a well-known "softie" on communism, who must have made a simply awful impression on Churchill, who when ambassador to Russia prior to the Second World War had justified the purge trials and in his book, *Mission to Moscow*, described how Stalin was no tyrant, that a child would sit on the dictator's lap and a dog would sidle up to him.

In trying to show that Truman took a hard line after Roosevelt's more subtle approach, the revisionists in one respect have struck some fire, at least some good quotations. In addition to relying for diplomatic advice from Admiral Leahy, Truman turned to Byrnes, and almost immediately designated the South Carolinian to be Secretary of State, after the end of the San Francisco Conference when it would be possible to get the hopelessly naive Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., out of the secretaryship. The arrange-

(continued on page 28)

26. For the article see *ANR*, vol. 75 (1969-70), 1046-1064. It produced an utterly unprecedented flow of letters to the editor, to which the authors responded with as much heat and sarcasm as the critics bestowed. See *ANR*, vol. 75, 2155-2164; vol. 76 (1970-1971), 575-580, 856-858. It all reminded the present writer of the nineteenth-century raileries from and to Thomas Carlyle in which critics did not fail to mention Carlyle's wife Jane, one of them remarking that Thomas and Jane deserved each other.

27. Alonzo Hamby, "The Liberals, Truman, and FDR as Symbol and Myth," *Journal of American History*, vol. 56 (1969-1970), 863.

28. "He had never been spoken to like that before, exclaimed Molotov. But knowing who his boss was, one must assume that the Soviet statesman was exaggerating." Adam B. Ulam, *The Rivals: America and Russia since World War II* (New York, 1971), p. 64.

29. "Origins of the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 46 (1967-1968), 27-52. This article, which still seems to the present writer an admirable piece in every way, stirred the revisionists to fury. From the heartfelt nature of the wrath one had the feeling that Schlesinger had skewered several of their favorite illusions, to use Gardner's word.

30. On this point, which surely needs a book, see William M. Franklin, "Zonal Boundaries and Access to Berlin," *World Politics*, vol. 16 (1963-1964), 1-31; David Herschler, "The Grand Alliance and Germany - 1945: the Decision to Withdraw the Anglo-American Forces from the Soviet Zone of Occupation," M.A. thesis at Brooklyn College, 1972, done under the direction of Hans L. Trefousse.

31. *From Trust to Terror: The Onset of the Cold War, 1945-1950* (New York, 1970), pp. 17-19.

Philip C. Brooks

A President in Retirement — and History

Harry S. Truman's physical vigor and his habit of regular exercise helped him to survive many years in retirement. He saw not only countless changes in political and social America, but also the completion of a library focused on the years of his career, which became the center of his attention. Only two presidents lived to greater ages than he, and only six for longer periods after leaving the White House.

Mr. Truman's retirement was divided into three parts: the first, from January 1953 to July 1957, was spent in getting reacquainted with private life (never as private as the Trumans would have liked), in travel, and in a busy political life. He spent most of his time in the handsome Victorian house in Independence which has been the Truman home for more than thirty years, and in an office in Kansas City only ten miles

away. In the second period, from July 1957 to June 1966, he spent six-and-a-half days a week in his office at the Truman Library close to his home in Independence, reading, writing, keeping up a massive correspondence, continuing his political interest, and seeing innumerable visitors—leading figures of public life, groups of all kinds, personal friends, and strangers who were often surprised to be able to talk with him. The third period,

during which he was ill from time to time, was spent at home, reading, taking his daily walks for most of these years, and still seeing many visitors.

Mr. Truman spent nine years at the Library, longer than he was in the White House by nearly two years. He enjoyed what Mr. Roosevelt had hoped for: an institution built to house the papers and other historical materials of himself and his contemporaries, which would become an important research center. He once wrote that if the "Library had been conceived as a memorial to me personally, I would have done everything I could to prevent its establishment during my lifetime...I encouraged the building of the Library only because it was to be a center for the study of all the Presidents and the Presidency as well as the history of the United States." (Harry S. Truman, *Mr. Citizen*, New York, 1953, Bernard Geis Associates, 239 p.)

Once the institution was established, however, he showed the same ability to depend on specialists for operations that had marked his terms as president; "the Library belongs to the Government," he told the Director, "and it's all up to you to run it." He did not seek to influence the priority of persons whose papers would be sought, nor the equality of access by all scholars to the Library's holdings.

His interest in the Library continued to demonstrate his lifelong historical bent. His early extensive reading of history—especially biographies of the presidents—has often been noted. He was, in a sense, a history buff—not an academic historian in any sense (the academicians with their esoteric language sometimes amused him). But he put his knowledge of history to serious purpose, adducing historical analogies countless times in connection with his own actions. He was still invoking a regard for history in what was probably his favorite retirement activity (aside from politics), talking to groups of young people. "Study your history," he would advise them, saying that they should learn how the greatest government in the history of the world got to be that way. And he

would admonish them that it was the responsibility of their generation to keep it that way.

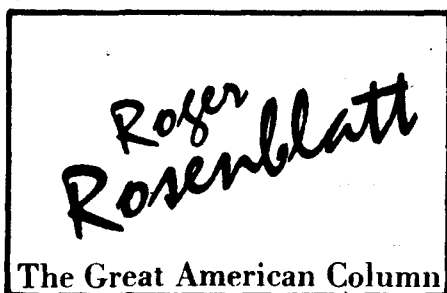
Mr. Truman in retirement showed none of the pomposity often associated with "elder statesmen." But he was consulted by innumerable politicians, and every succeeding president came to see him at some time. He played active roles in the campaigns of 1952 and 1956. In his knowledgeable comments and his judgment in handling people he showed some of the characteristics that had proved valuable to him as president. He is often thought to have been unprepared for that position, but events proved that he was unprepared only insofar as his current knowledge of Roosevelt's actions was concerned. Judgments made of him often suffer from misunderstanding of a peculiarity of Missouri law in which county administrative officials were known as "judges." Thus, uninformed people often supposed that he had been some kind of justice of the peace instead of the chief administrative official of a county of four hundred thousand people.

His experience in World War I combat, on the farm, and in the rough-and-tumble of local politics contributed to another misunderstanding that was partly of his own making. His candor and his close affinity with the "man on the street," plus a good deal of humor, often caused him to speak in a way that many people thought too casual, but which belied both his rather conservative personal character and his great respect for the presidency. His quick comments "from the hip" were usually grounded in deep-set beliefs and principles, and his decisions on firm convictions about what he felt was the right thing to do. Those who knew him well always speak of his thoughtfulness, his graciousness, and his devotion to friends and family—qualities that went far to explain the loyalty that he inspired among his associates.

Among the viewpoints that Mr. Truman enjoyed belittling, in retirement as before, was that strange myopia that causes some people to regard any Middlewesterner—who has not disavowed it—as *ipso facto* "average" (used as a

term of opprobrium) and dull. He had himself shown qualities of leadership as early as World War I that made him other than average. What was important was that he knew and understood the people that were "average" (in the best sense) and communicated with them. Although the policies which gained him broad support as president largely concerned foreign affairs, his own program dwelt heavily on the needs of the common man.

Mr. Truman was conscious that he would have a place in history himself, and to some extent he probably regarded the Library as representative of posterity. Like many other former presidents he wrote memoirs explaining and justifying his actions, and later quite a different kind of book about his first few years in retirement. (Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, New York, 2 vol., 1955, 1956, Doubleday & Co.; *Mr. Citizen*, *op. cit.*) Mr. Truman knew that the "revisionists" would come, from both the Right and the Left, as they do after every historical period. And they worried him little when they did come, even though some of them had worked at the Truman Library. Nor was he concerned about the perennial and ever-changing game of "rating the presidents." He was pleased but not boastful when his attention was called to an article that rated him seventh among all the presidents in general prestige, and sixth in "accomplishments of their administrations." (Gary M. Maranell, "The Evaluation of Presidents: an Extension of the Schlesinger Polls," *Journal of American History*, 17:104-113, June 1970.) He was not heard to mention it again. That article was based on a poll of more than five hundred historians, as against the seventy-five of the poll by Professor Arthur Schlesinger in 1962, which had placed him ninth in greatness. (Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Our Presidents: a Rating by Seventy-Five Historians," *New York Times Magazine*, July 29, 1962.) After 1948 he had reason to be skeptical of polls, and he always said we wouldn't know anyway for fifty years whether or not a man had been a good president. □



Movies About Schools

Every time a college or high school is to be depicted in the movies, we know precisely what the settings will look like: a bird's eye view of a great lawned quadrangle, shot at a couple of hundred feet, descending carefully towards ivy-covered neo-Georgian buildings, finally settling at ground level to catch students in clusters, all walking at the same ceremonial

pace, elaborately toting different sized books, and chattering furiously. In the case of high schools, the ivy is removed, the students walk faster, and the noise is at a higher pitch. When such pictures snapped on the screen twenty years ago, they were accompanied by a massive male chorus humming "Gaudeamus Igitur," or, as in the radio program, "Halls

of Ivy," an anagram of it. Now, as in *The Graduate*, we usually get the picture songless to suggest stark modernity, but the conception of a world apart remains unchanged.

The figures who populate these settings are also foreknown to us. One grandly befuddled teacher, lost in and to his subject of study, unable comically (*The Bells of St. Trinians*) or pathetically (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolff?*) to make connections with his students or outside realities. One dean, president, or headmaster, equally out of things, either because he stands for order in a madhouse (*Horse Feathers*), or because he functions as a businessman in the world of ideas. One football coach, ordinarily Jim Backus, obsessed, gruff, loud but lovable, another blunderer. Trustees, blunderers all, too crass to understand what education is all about. And students, individually or in groups, also blunderers, but only insofar as they are