

OFF THE RECORD:  
THE PRIVATE PAPERS OF HARRY S. TRUMAN

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell  
Harper and Row / \$15.00

John Muggeridge

**O**ff the Record, Robert H. Ferrell's edition of the private papers of Harry S. Truman, is nothing of the sort. The memos, diary entries, appointment sheets, and letters here assembled are all from the Harry S. Truman Library, a documentary Mount Rushmore which the late president busied himself for nearly twenty years carving his face in. What Professor Ferrell has xeroxed is the official

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Truman legend. We meet in his pages those old campaign-trail favorites, the farmboy President, the Midwest wiseacre, the comradely comrade-in-arms, the fond family man. This is the Harry S. Truman everyone knows; in happier show-business times *Off the Record* would surely have been turned into *Hello, Harry*, a Broadway musical along the lines of *Fiorello* with a big Oval Office scene at the end of act one where the newly sworn-in president, accompanied by Bess, Margie, and a chorus of fedora-hatted party aides, celebrates his rise from Eastern District Judge to Chief Executive in a song called: "Ain't that Sum-pin'!"

In *Off the Record* we meet not only the familiar faces of Harry Truman, but also his familiar evasions. One of these concerns the famous Senate primary of 1934 which Truman won with the help of 50,000 fraudulent votes supplied by the Pendergasts of Kansas City, and which, incidentally, set him on the road to the White House. In a memorandum dated January 1952, to dispell what Professor Ferrell calls "the usual loose talk about Truman's association years before with the Pendergast machine," the president gives the following explanation of that enigmatic contest: "I was elected to the Senate in 1934 over severe opposition in the Primary. . . . By going into sixty of Missouri's 114 counties I won the nomination by a plurality of over 40,000 votes. . . ." And that's it; not even a footnote.

Another such document gap covers Truman's connection with the Alger Hiss affair. Hiss is not mentioned in *Off the Record*. On the record, of course, Truman called the case against the ex-State Department official a "red herring." The only document touching on it in his published papers is a memorandum written in November 1953 concerning Harry Dexter White, a Hiss contemporary who continued to serve in the Truman administration despite the fact that both Whittaker Chambers and Mrs. Bentley had named him to the FBI as a Communist

agent. Why this should have been so neither the president nor his editor seems to have thought it worthwhile going into. Truman, as he often does, falls back on name-calling, labelling Chambers a louse and Mrs. Bentley a crook, and reminding his readers that White himself had testified before a congressional committee both as to his own loyalty and as to the untruthfulness of Chambers and Bentley. There, as far as Truman was concerned, the matter ended. When, for example, the House Un-American Activities Committee, as part of an inquiry into White's activities, "audaciously" (to use Professor Ferrell's revealing adverb) subpoenaed the ex-president, he refused to appear. The truth stops here.

**T**he uncritical nature of Professor Ferrell's editing is not, however, surprising. The Truman everyone knows happens also to be the Truman everyone believes in. He is the one president in recent times to have escaped the myth-wreckers. Camelot has its Mattress Jack; the Silent Majority, its Dirty Dick; and the Great post-Watergate Awakening, its Plains-speaking Jimmy. But for some reason the Truman Years still do not have their Wheeler-Fair-Dealer Harry. The closets containing his particular skeletons just don't seem to get broken into.

Perhaps it is simply a case of folksiness conquering all. The unstuffed-shirt-in-high-places image induces us to make the willing suspension of disbelief in its owner's duplicity. We cannot persuade ourselves that a president who calls his wife "the boss," never quite gets used to being served by butlers, and worries about making a public show of going to church could have led a double life. The very sprightliness of his style seems to rule out subterfuge. No man with a burdened conscience, we feel, would go around calling Senator Kefauver "cowfever" or describing how he ended a solitary dinner at the White House by "taking a hand bath in the finger bowl."

But the most disarming thing about Truman is the panache with which he parades his prejudices. He has no hesitation, for example, in calling Jesus Christ a Protestant, or in giving a list of human benefactors consisting of: Buddha, Jesus, Cincinnatus, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Woodrow Wilson. "I've no ax to grind," he wrote in 1959, "only the welfare of the United States and the Democratic Party. They are synonymous." The antonym of both (as well, no doubt, as of

Buddha, Jesus, and Woodrow Wilson) was the Republican party, to whose newspapers Truman gave what he seems to have considered a scientific appellation, the "sabotage press."

The appeal of an enlightened Archie Bunker, however, still does not fully account for the kid-glove treatment that Truman continues to receive from the image-makers. Nixon, after all, tried on the same persona and was laughed out of the television studios. The Truman legend survives because Truman himself played an essential role in maintaining a bigger and more important legend: that of the Democratic party. Truman's achievement was to make the leftism embraced by postwar Democrats look American. He brought the New Deal down to earth. He gave a small-town luster to big government; he even, through the rhetorical wizardry of the Truman Doctrine, managed to make resigning Eastern Europe to the Soviets seem anti-Communist. He boasted that he had stopped Tito from taking Trieste, at the same time that he was tacitly allowing the Russians everything east of the Elbe. He laid the ghost of Henry Wallace without blunting Democratic progress leftwards. He was Khrushchev to FDR's Stalin.

**A**nd, as his private papers make clear, he knew it. The whole election campaign of 1948 was an American version of the Twentieth Party Congress. "I don't believe the USA wants any more fakirs," he wrote in his diary on July 16, 1948, "Teddy and Franklin are enough. So I'm going to make a common sense, intellectually honest campaign. It will be a novelty—and it will win." It did win. What gave him the election was his average-American progressivism. He believed in unions, but stood up to John L. Lewis; "Big money," he wrote, "has too much power and so have big unions—both are riding to a fall because I like neither." He campaigned for civil rights, but dismissed ERA as "a lot of hooey about equal rights." He worshipped at the shrine of science and education but remained firmly attached to traditional values. He had a talent, above all, for making the shifting currents of American foreign policy sound like horse sense. In 1945, still warmed by the afterglow of victory, he called Stalin "honest, but smart as hell" and referred to the deepening confrontation with the Soviet Union as a "mote and beam affair." Seven years later, when Joseph McCarthy's crusade had not yet become a witch-hunt and Bertrand Russell

publicly bet a British television interviewer that the Wisconsin senator would be the next president, Truman, again quoting Scripture, told a visiting Bishop "that Stalin and his crowd had no moral code . . . and that all I wanted to do was to organize Exodus XX, Matthew V, VI & VII to save morals in the world." He was a Kissinger from Missouri.

And now the Democratic party's image again needs refurbishing. Trumanism is dead, destroyed by the fact that its agenda has been imple-

mented, abroad in Vietnam, at home in our schools and public housing projects. Truman himself, however, remains the last Democratic pied piper whose music was not only followed but believed in. Reissuing the Truman legend may well, therefore, turn out to have been a shrewd publishing venture. Listening to popular music from the good old days is always pleasant. With *Kiss Me Jimmy* having been a box office disaster, this may just be the right time to bring on *Hello, Harry*. □

## PSYCHOLOGY AND LAW: CAN JUSTICE SURVIVE THE SOCIAL SCIENCES?

Daniel N. Robinson / Oxford / \$14.95, \$5.95

Walter Berns

The author of this book belongs to no familiar school and the book itself is not readily categorized. He is a psychologist, even a professor of psychology, but the book could not have been written by someone who is only a psychologist. Its perspective is that of legal philosophy, sometimes called jurisprudence, but, again, not the sort of legal philosophy taught in the law schools or characteristic of the work of our jurists. Daniel Robinson is both old-fashioned and thoroughly modern: old-fashioned insofar as he unabashedly discourses on the relation between law and morality, and modern insofar as he knows modern psychology and its works. This combination of talents proves to be formidable; it enables him to understand and to persuade us of the perils involved in allowing the law to be invaded by what he calls "the psychosocial point of view."

Although Robinson, so far as I can recall, never provides an explicit definition of this term, the reader is left in no doubt as to its meaning or, at least, its characteristics. It is the perspective of social science, which claims to be a science but is not (as Robinson demonstrates in his first chapter), but which is nevertheless accepted as science by the law. The psychosocial perspective is a form of reductionism, the attempt made by psychologists and sociologists to reduce individuals to the characteristics of the groups to which they belong and to explain their words and

deeds as manifestations of these characteristics. In this way, complex moral judgments are reduced to, because they are seen as, mere opinions whose causes are psychological or sociological but never moral. In these respects, the psychosocial perspective differs fundamentally from the human perspective. As Robinson also makes clear in his first chapter, the moral response, of which only human beings are capable, is inherent in the concept of justice and in its instrument, the law. As he says, the law is just "when it obliges us to do what we would genuinely desire to do were we to perform the rational analysis that stands behind every genuinely moral wish." But social science denies the existence of rationality in this sense; human beings look for and give reasons, but social science looks for causes and would if it could culminate in neurophysiology or neurology. Such a perspective is a denial of the purpose of law because it is a denial of human freedom.

Robinson traces the effects of the law's adoption of the psychosocial point of view in successive chapters devoted to the criminal law, the right of a testator to dispose of his property as he sees fit, commitments to mental institutions, educational testing, and, in a chapter entitled "Persons: Their Nature and Their Rights," to abortion, the Karen Quinlan problem, and psychosurgery.

The influence of this psychosocial perspective has been greatest in the criminal law, and especially at the

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# Who reads The American Spectator?



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