An ordinary man

His extraordinary journey

Harry Truman was a reluctant farmer and a
commanding soldier. A struggling businessman
and a controversial statesman. A devoted
husband and an attentive father. He was an
unlikely President, whose journey to the White
House was circuitous and unplanned.

But this everyday man changed the course
of American history. And his decisions as the
33rd President of the United States have
made an enduring impact on our world.
“OUR GOAL MUST BE — NOT PEACE IN OUR TIME — BUT PEACE FOR ALL TIME.”

— HARRY TRUMAN, JULY 4, 1947
Harry S. Truman
"I've always had a sneakin' notion that someday maybe I'd amount to something."

HARRY TRUMAN, IN A LETTER TO FUTURE WIFE BESS WALLACE, 1911

On April 12, 1945, Harry Truman received an urgent call. President Franklin Roosevelt was dead. Truman was a farmer, a war veteran, a failed haberdasher, and a county judge. He was a little-known Senator from Missouri, and Vice President for just 82 days. Now, he was the President of the United States. The world was at war, and the country questioned if he was ready.

To meet the challenges that lay ahead, Truman leaned on his midwestern background, strong values, diverse life experiences, and close personal relationships.

What in Truman's past prepared him for the Presidency?
“I’ve had a few setbacks in my life, but I never gave up.”
PEACE AT LAST

"The peace of this big African place and the people. It seems clear that, in the long run, the African will be the hero of the African continent."

- President Woodrow Wilson

"The peace of this big African place and the people. It seems clear that, in the long run, the African will be the hero of the African continent."

- President Woodrow Wilson
Senator from Missouri

Judge Truman hoped to be nominated for Missouri Governor, but the Pendleton pleased him by. Finally, in 1934, the machine delivered. After four initial candidates declined, the Pendletons endorsed Truman for United States Senate. He launched a vigorous campaign – and won. In Washington, Truman thrilled in the familiarity of the Senate. He worked hard to distinguish himself. By 1942, he gained national acclaim by uncovering fraud in the defense industry.

New Deal Democrat

Truman was the first Lagrange's photographic studio to beat him in the Senate. Although he was a Democrat, his appeal to a broad coalition of workers, farmers, and industrialists made him appealing. As a Senator, he introduced legislation that brought about improved trade relations with the United States and helped establish social security. He was a co-founder of the Truman Doctrine, which sought to contain communism in Europe and Asia.
a reputation
sell influence and
be cussed if I'm right."

- HARRY TRUMAN,
IN A LETTER TO BESS TRUMAN,
JUNE 28, 1935.
“I am hoping to make a reputation as a Senator...I won't sell influence and I'm perfectly willing to be cussed if I'm right.”

HARRY TRUMAN,
IN A LETTER TO BESS TRUMAN,
JUNE 20, 1936.
When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States was suddenly thrust into World War II. President Roosevelt, now presiding over a brutal war, decided to run for an unprecedented fourth term in 1944.

Truman did not seek the 1944 Vice-Presidential nomination. He knew the Democrats, including the President, saw him as weak and could not be the Vice-President. He knew the President was nearly 60, and many believed Vice-President Henry Wallace was too liberal to assume the reins in wartime. In a brainstorm meeting, Roosevelt and with Democratic Party bosses, they discussed possible replacements for Wallace, knowing that whatever they chose might cost the nation.

**A DIFFICULT CHOICE**

Editorial advisory: The Democratic National Convention, held at Baltimore’s Memorial Hall in July 1944, nominated Vice President Henry Wallace as its Presidential candidate. After defeating a challenge from Missouri, the ticket included the vice-presidential candidate. The Republican National Convention, held at Chicago’s Coliseum, nominated Vice President Thomas E. Dewey as its Presidential candidate. Despite Dewey’s prominence as a senator from New York, the Republican ticket included the vice-presidential candidate, Vice President John J. Rankin.

**THE MISSOURI COMPROMISE**

Editorial advisory: The Democratic National Convention, held at Baltimore’s Memorial Hall in July 1944, nominated Vice President Henry Wallace as its Presidential candidate. After defeating a challenge from Missouri, the ticket included the vice-presidential candidate. The Republican National Convention, held at Chicago’s Coliseum, nominated Vice President Thomas E. Dewey as its Presidential candidate. Despite Dewey’s prominence as a senator from New York, the Republican ticket included the vice-presidential candidate, Vice President John J. Rankin.
Presidential Roosevelt had shared little with his Vice President. Now Truman faced some of the most momentous decisions ever faced by an American President. On the day he was sworn in, kindergarten teacher Truman was untested and uncertain. He had to learn on the job. By August he had been vindicated and resolute. The decisions he made in those first four months ended the Second World War and determined the intense new challenges of the emerging world. At the time, Truman and his family struggled to adjust to their new home in the White House and in the spotlight.

What traits help us handle sudden adversity?

Truman and his family struggled to adjust to their new lives in the White House and in the spotlight.

What traits help us handle sudden adversity?

Vice President Truman is sworn in at President of the United States.
April 12, 1945.
SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

Few Presidents have sparked as much controversy as President Truman. The decision to use atomic weapons against Japan was the boldest step in the history of the world. How do you think President Truman and his advisors evaluated the international situation in August 1945? Did the decision save more lives than it cost? Were there alternatives for ending the war?

“Without an atomic weapon, the Japanese would have continued the war for months or years, incurring untold numbers of lives on both sides. It was a decision calculated in cold blood, for though the lives of the thousands of Japanese who would die with the atomic bomb were to be included, the fate of all the many millions that would die in the war was not to be considered.”

—President Harry S. Truman
JAPAN SURREnders

On August 15, 1945, Japan's 24-year-old emperor issued a correctamente worded surrender statement. Only a few days after its release, Japanese leaders formally signed the surrender document at the American fleet flagship USS Missouri. The surrender ended the Pacific War and brought World War II to a close. The United Nations, while still in its formative years, witnessed the conclusion of the war.

Visit our exhibit on the Pacific War to learn more about the events leading to Japan's surrender.
IT TOOK 2,000 TONS OF FOOD PER DAY TO FEED THE CITIZENS OF BERLIN.

PILOTS DELIVERED 4,652,812,000 POUNDS OF SUPPLIES ON 277,000+ FLIGHTS, AVERAGING ALMOST 600 FLIGHTS PER DAY.

THE CANDY BOMBER
German crews unloaded each aircraft in 20–30 minutes.

The Russian Blockade lasted from June 24, 1948 to May 11, 1949, but the airlift continued for several more months in order to stockpile supplies for the city.

Accidents and crashes took the lives of 39 British, 32 Americans, and 7 Germans. They are remembered on the Berlin Airlift Monument at Tempelhof Airport.
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ARMY ENGINEERS AND BERLIN VOLUNTEERS BUILT THE TEGEL AIRFIELD WITHIN THE FRENCH SECTOR IN JUST 3 MONTHS.

ACCIDENTS AND CRASHES TOOK THE LIVES OF 39 BRITISH, 32 AMERICANS, & 7 GERMANS. THEY ARE REMEMBERED ON THE BERLIN AERLIFT MONUMENT AT TEMPELHOF AIRPORT.
THE
TRUMAN
DOCTRINE
AND CONTAINMENT

"...it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. ...So long as we have the leadership, we have no option but to do more than merely condemn the writers of this hatred..."

Following strong American pressure, the Soviet Union had withdrawn its aid to South Korea in 1950. Soviet losses in the Manchurian region, as well as expected Chinese presence, had left the Korean Peninsula vulnerable. Truman saw this as a threat to American security. As a result, he persuaded Western European nations to agree on the Truman Doctrine, which committed the United States to support anticommunist resistance in Greece and Turkey. Western Europe would be next. The United States pledged $400 million to support Greece and Turkey, and $300 million would be provided by the United Nations. This new policy would become known as the Truman Doctrine.
"...It must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. If we fail in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world... and we shall surely endanger the welfare of this Nation."

-PRESIDENT TRUMAN IN AN ADDRESS BEFORE A JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS, MARCH 12, 1947

Following strong American protests, the Soviet Union had reluctantly withdrawn its troops from Iran in 1945. But by 1947, Communist governments ruled Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. Communist Yugoslavia pressed Italy for control of Trieste. Great Britain had withdrawn from Greece and Turkey, and both nations faced strong Communist pressures. Truman saw this as a threat to national security. If Greece and Turkey fell, he reasoned, Western Europe would be next. He secured $400,000,000 in aid during an emergency joint session of Congress. The use of aid to "contain" Soviet expansion became the basis of the Truman Doctrine.
... an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.

— WINSTON CHURCHILL, FULTON, MISSOURI, 1946

NATO: MUTUAL DEFENSE

Before World War II, U.S. policy was to stay clear of foreign wars. Truman moved away from this isolationist policy by committing the United States to a mutual defense pact as a way to enforce the policy of containment. On April 4, 1949, America joined Great Britain and ten European nations in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). An attack on one member of the alliance was to be considered an attack on all. NATO promised security in Western Europe. It also paved the way for the Truman Doctrine. When West Germany joined NATO in 1955, the Soviet Union and an Eastern bloc countries responded by forming their own collective defense treaty, the Warsaw Pact.

COLD WAR BATTLEGROUNDS

MAP KEY
- STANDBY STATUS
- URGENT STATUS
- COLD WAR CRISIS (1949-1976)

IRAN CRISIS
- SEPTEMBER 1941 - OCTOBER 1941

GREEK CIVIL WAR
- MARCH 1946 - OCTOBER 1946

TURKISH STRAIT'S CRISIS
- AUGUST 1955 - MAY 1955
The Truman Doctrine articulated America's approach to Soviet expansion in Europe. Yet policy toward Communism in Asia was less defined. The legacy of colonialism and World War II left deep scars on the region. Truman and his advisors sometimes misunderstood longstanding historical conflicts. They also incorrectly assumed Stalin was the driving force behind Communist movements in China and Korea. Truman received heavy criticism for failing to stop the spread of Communism in Asia. In a matter of years, it would be here, too, that the Cold War would turn hot.
GENERAL GEORGE C. MARSHALL

Why No Marshall Plan in Asia?
The Marshall Plan provided assistance only to Europe, leaving critics like Republican Congressman John Hamilton with questions about the rationale behind this decision. Hamilton, along with Senator Robert A. Taft, wrote the House of Representatives to express his concern that the Department of State's approach to the Marshall Plan was inconsistent with international law. He also wanted to ensure that American aid was used to promote the ideals of the American Revolution around the world.

POSTWAR EUROPE

Postwar Europe suffered poverty, starvation, and political unrest. Floods, drought, and later winter storms worsened the situation. As the Soviet Union threatened Eastern Europe, Communists in France and Italy gained strength. Great Britain faced shortages and loaning bankruptcy threatened other key European allies. President Truman sought to support President Herbert Hoover to address the situation. Upon his return, Hoover advised supplying food to Western Europe. His report became part of the rationale for the Marshall Plan. Truman trusted Hoover. He also knew that, as a Republican, Hoover was key to winning bipartisan support for the costly international aid program.

A DIVISIVE SOLUTION

The cabinet debate over the Marshall Plan was intense. The President was thinly veiled, and the bipartisan agreement over the Marshall Plan was ultimately the result of high-level political negotiations, not just the President's request. Harry Trumman's decision to support the Marshall Plan was a critical moment in world history. His vision for a divided Germany and the struggle to rebuild Europe after the war is a testament to the challenges faced during this period.
DISPLACED PERSONS

By the end of World War II, more than 260,000 Jews had been forced from their homes. East & Portuguese of the UNRRA Administration on Refugees helped Truman on Allied forces "displaced persons" names in August 1945. Palestine's war's described tragic conditions. Many Jews did not feel safe in Europe, and their options were limited - anti-Semitism and politics restricted Jewish immigration to the U.S. and Canada. Britain, Spain, and Sweden opposed the British, hoping to keep immigration restrictions in Palestine, where some Jews hoped to move. The United Nations, functioning under the mandate of the United Nations, took the initiative. Immigration quotas.

"Today, not tomorrow" - we must do all Earth's resources to provide America and a place of safety for all those who can be evacuated from the lands of the displaced peoples. Five lands must be opened to these.

MANDATE OF PALESTINE

Palestine has long been the site of political conflict. In 1917, the British government issued a document framing the establishment of a Jewish national home there. Known as the Balfour Declaration, the statement was in part: "To the Jews for their support of the British during the recent war.

After the war, the British occupied the region, eventually known as the British Mandate of Palestine in 1922. With Britain's help, and in cooperation with the Arab leaders, the British divided the region into two countries. When a large influx of Jews to the 1800s, living West, now in the region, caused conflict with the Palestinians. The map reflects the situation in 1947.

U.N. PARTITION PLAN OF 1947

The United Nations voted on a partition plan in 1947, dividing the region into two states: one Jewish and one Arab. The plan was approved, and the state of Israel was established. The Arab territories became the state of Jordan. However, the plan was not accepted by the Arab states, leading to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
WHAT IS ZIONISM?

Zionism is a political movement that supports the establishment of a Jewish national home in the Land of Israel. It is based on the belief in Jewish national rights and the idea of a Jewish state. The concept of Zionism was formulated in the 19th century and gained significant momentum in the 20th century with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Zionism has played a crucial role in the history of the Middle East and continues to be a subject of discussion and debate.

PERSPECTIVES ON PALESTINE

Perspectives on Palestine are diverse and complex. Many Palestinians believe in the right of return for all refugees and displaced persons, who have left their homes or villages because of the Nakba (catastrophe) in 1948. The Nakba refers to the displacement of Palestinians as a result of the establishment of the State of Israel. Palestinians also demand the end of the Israeli occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"The basis of the conflict is that one people is displacing another people and this has to come to an end. It is not a conflict between equals. There is no equivalence between Palestinians and Israelis. It is an occupation of one people by another people." - Paulo Freire
Perspectives on Palestine

Opinions on what to do about Palestine varied within Truman's political inner circle outside of it. He received impassioned letters, postcards, and telegrams from a variety of citizens and organizations; even First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt wrote to share her thoughts. Arguments in favor of establishment of a Jewish state focused on sympathy for displaced Jews and concerns over an ongoing war. Opposing arguments focused on everything from human rights concerns for the people of Palestine to anti-Semitism.

"I think it is a glaring mistake and an insult to let a country like this be destroyed.

"My feelings in this: Too much United States energy being spent upon Jews in Palestine. There must be a reason why a Jew is so badly received throughout the world. My impression is that they are extremely lucky to have a haven here. However, it is one Haven which they are rapidly making untenable."

From FDR to FDR:
New York, New York
November 10, 1947

From Eleanor Roosevelt:
Los Angeles, California
March 30, 1947
“...the Jewish people have absolutely no moral right or legal right to land which their ancestors have not controlled politically for more than 2000 years. The civil rights of the Arabs must be observed.”

“We absolutely approve of your new plan to settle the Palestinian muddle and do away with the partitioning of Palestine into two states. For partitioning would create a tremendous number of enemies from among the Mohammedans, as well as no real satisfaction among Jewish people. It is exceptionally wise to create a trust of the Holy Land, for Palestine has become a very important political center in the world, and the Jewish People have never shown the ability to maintain a permanent state.”
“I am not asking for social equality, because no such thing exists, but I am asking for equality of opportunity for all...”

-Harry Truman, August 19, 1948

Harry Truman's own modest background, reinforced by his appreciation for the shared sacrifices of ordinary fellow Americans during the Second World War, led him to endorse initiatives favoring the common man over business elites. The idea of "fairness" was a guiding principle for Truman. After the war, he sought to hold corporations accountable and address inequality. Yet Congress rejected his ambitious 21-point domestic agenda. In 1949, his growing awareness of racial violence led him to desegregate the military and civilian Federal Government workforces by Executive order. This marked a historic turn in the Democratic Party toward support for civil rights. Truman stunned the nation when he won his 1948 re-election campaign. As President in his own right, he re-branded his agenda as the "Fair Deal."

How does a President balance general welfare and personal liberty?
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How does a President balance general welfare and personal liberty?
TO SECURE THESE RIGHTS

In 1947, the President’s Committee on Civil Rights put forth its report, To Secure These Rights. Drawing its name from the Declaration of Independence, the report exposed differences between America’s promise and its reality: while the country served as a global beacon of freedom and equality, many Americans were actually being denied their Constitutional rights. The Committee used infographics and charts to illustrate its findings, which were based on public hearings, witness testimony, and existing staff studies.

"...there are many backwaters in our political life where the right to vote is not assured to every qualified citizen."

— The Report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights

Every citizen in the United States is guaranteed the right to participate in the political process, but the Committee found that many states have intentionally made voting more difficult for certain segments of the population. Eight states that required payment to register to vote (known as a poll tax) were enforcing it selectively, in a way that discriminated against non-white citizens. This greatly reduced voter turnout in those areas.
test. The United States uncovered spies in its own atomic weapons program, and Communist forces threatened to prevail in China. These events prompted anti-Communist paranoia in the U.S. Panic and insecurity ripped through American culture, politics, and society. Truman hoped to preempt anti-Communist hysteria with his 1947 “Loyalty Order.” But fear was too powerful a political tool for lawmakers like Senator Joseph McCarthy.

**How does a nation balance national security with individual privacy?**
**HISTORY OF THE HUAC**

In 1934, the House of Representatives formed the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to probe alleged disloyalty and subversive activity. During World War II, it looked into detention of Japanese Americans. During the Truman administration, it investigated State Department official Alger Hiss and many famous writers, actors, and activists. The HUAC folded in 1975. Its duties moved to the House Judiciary Committee.

**ALGER HISS AND THE PUMPKIN PAPERS**

In 1948, Time editor and former Communist Whittaker Chambers made a startling claim before the House Un-American Activities Committee: Alger Hiss, a former Trustee official, was part of a Communist conspiracy. Hiss sued for libel, but Chambers had proof. He removed mimeographed copies of State Department documents from a hollowed-out pumpkin on his Maryland farm. Hiss was indicted for perjury after an initial denial, and when Truman dismissed the charges, Republicans accused the president of being a ‘soft on communism.’

**THE LAVENDER SCARE**

Government by secrecy and its “needful secrecy,” according to President Harry S. Truman, was at the root of his administration’s anti-communist policies. The loyalty oaths that Truman ordered in 1947 required employees at the Department of Labor to acknowledge: “I hereby affirm that I am not a member of any subversive organization; that I have not knowingly given support to any such organization; and that I will not knowingly give support to any such organization in the future.” The oath required that employees sign it under penalty of perjury. Those who refused to sign were fired. If an employee refused to sign the oath, they would be automatically removed from the workforce, and their job would be lost. This led to an exodus of LGBT workers and many other employees who were not gay. The result was a loss of expertise and talent, which was detrimental to the government’s ability to function.
“This is the Greece of the Far East. If we are tough enough now, there won't be any next time.”

- Harry Truman, on entering the war in Korea
“This is the Greece of the Far East. If we are tough enough now, there won’t be any next time.”

- Harry Truman, on entering the war in Korea
“I’ve worked for peace for five years and six months and it looks like World War III is here.”

— Harry Truman, in a longhand note, December 9, 1950
“I’ve worked for peace for three years and six months and it looks like World War III is here.”

— HARRY TRUMAN, IN A LONGHAND NOTE, DECEMBER 9, 1950
"The President is the present executive office in the history of the world. I say that not because I hold it but because I become acquainted with it by experience."

—CLINTON R. FADDIS, FOCUS ON THE FUTURE: EXHIBIT B, 2004

In a 1952 speech at Columbia University, Harry Truman detailed what he called the "Six Jobs of the President." A close look at his appointment calendar from April 1, 1952, reveals that occasionally he performed all six roles in a single day!

Conforming to the President, the President’s cabinet, and various agencies, boards, committees, and commissions, the executive branch’s primary role is to carry out and enforce the laws passed by Congress. But the President’s job has a number of different facets, from increasing the ordinary to managing the executive to conducting relations with other nations.

[Image of a meeting at the White House]

[List of the six jobs of the President]

1. Executive Legislator
2. Commander-in-Chief
3. Foreign Policy Maker
4. Administrator
5. Public Welfare Administrator
6. Director of Public Health

[Handwritten notes on the back of the poster]
The legislative branch, also known as Congress, drafts, revises, and passes laws. It is composed of two chambers — the Senate and the House of Representatives — both of which can introduce legislation. Bills, or proposed laws, often face a long and challenging road to passage. Members of Congress go through a rigorous process of research, writing, debate, editing, and, finally, voting. After this process, some bills end up being more than 1,000 pages long!

Here is what needs to happen for a bill to become a law:

1. **Introduce the Bill**
   A member of one of the chambers of Congress introduces the bill.

2. **Go to Committee**
   If the bill is selected, a small group from that chamber meets to discuss its details, conduct research, and make changes. They decide if the bill should continue on to the next step.

3. **Debate and Vote**
   If the bill is approved by committee, it is then debated by all members of the Congressional house where it was introduced. If it passes, it is sent to the other house. This process takes place in both chambers.

4. **Reconcile Differences**
   If the two chambers of Congress each pass a different version of the bill, a Conference Committee consisting of members of both chambers works out a compromise that must then pass in both the House and Senate.

5. **Presidential Action**
   After passing both houses, the bill goes to the President. If the President signs it, it becomes a law. If the President vetoes it, or rejects it, it goes back to Congress where they can vote to override the veto. That requires a 2/3 majority vote.
"By the actions he took, the institutions he built, the alliances he forged and the enemies he set down, President Truman laid the foundations for America’s victory in the Cold War."

"I don’t have words about what more can be done to the President. It’s not like that every President, when he was elected, can be more, and yet, sometimes, some people expect out of people what isn’t. We realize in that people who we elect are their future and in understanding the priority of their needs, and we also in constant notes our judgments."
Many men and women who have served this nation uniform owe so much to President Harry S. Truman Executive Order 9981."

"Harry S. Truman was my first American President. Because of his vision and that of his generation, I have been privileged to live my life in freedom."

"We decided at the general election campaign on Labor Day right in the independent because I wanted people to believe that if we were elected, I was going to honor the value, the policy, the direction, and the estimates of President Truman."

-- Former Secretary of State Colin Powell

-- Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright
“I and so many men and women of color who have served this nation in uniform owe so much to President Harry S. Truman and to Executive Order 9981.”

— FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE COLIN POWELL