Post-War America
Truman: Career and Character

- Although he was associated with the notorious Pendergast political machine in Kansas City, he personally stayed clear of all corruption.
- He held a county judgeship for nine years, then served as U.S. Senator from 1935 until 1945, when he became Vice President.
- He won the nomination for the Vice Presidency for his vigorous prosecution at the head of the Senate Committee investigating corruption in war contracts.
Truman: Career and Character

- Shock of having a new president.
- Truman much different from FDR.
- Compromise VP choice, only a middling Senator.
- FDR had left him largely out of the loop
When Harry S. Truman succeeded to the Presidency April 12, 1945, he seemed humbled by the weight of his sudden responsibilities.

However, he proved to be a decisive leader in critical situations and vigorously worked for the measures he advocated.
Post War Economic Anxiety

- After the war, many Americans worried that economy would slip back into depression.
- At first these predictions seemed to be coming true
  - GNP dropped in '46 and '47
  - Prices rose by 33% in '46-47.
  - Strikes swept key industries.
- In retrospect, these were simply rebound effects
Rapid Demobilization

- Truman was faced with demands at home for the return of the servicemen and demonstrations at many army establishments abroad.
- These compelled the government to carry out a hasty release of the men and abandonment of bases and materials all over the world.
- The first peace-time draft, in 1946, conscripted replacements for the discharged troops.
Early Economic Moves

- Sold war factories and other government installations at very low prices.
- Employment Act (1946) creates Council of Economic Advisors. Purpose?
- GI Bill: Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944.
  - helps to expand the middle class and absorb returning GIs
  - made home loans available to them, and
  - gave free education in vocational schools and colleges.
Rapid Demobilization

- Consumer annoyance with scarcities and manufacturers’ demands for removal of price controls caused a brief period of decontrol during which prices jumped about 20%.
- Inflationary price rises continued to harass the returned veterans, while organized labor went out on a series of long strikes.
- These strikes resulted in settlements that gave workers the same earnings as in wartime but without their having to work overtime.
- Each succeeding year saw new labor negotiations bring increased wages or equivalent benefits to the bargaining table.
The Taft-Hartley Act (1947)

- In the mid-term election of 1946, people were tired of wartime deprivations.
- As a result, the Republicans gained control in the 80th Congress, for the first time since 1930.
- Unauthorized strikes during the war, particularly by John L. Lewis’s coal miners, antagonized the public; a majority was convince that labor had now grown too strong under the Wagner Act.
The Taft-Hartley Act (1947)

- To restore the balance between labor and management, the Republican Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Labor Relations Act in 1947.

- Leading provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act:
  - 1) permitted employers to sue unions for breaking contracts or for damages suffered from jurisdictional strikes;
  - 2) prohibited the closed shop but permitted the union shop under certain conditions;
The Taft-Hartley Act (1947)

– 3) provided that the government might secure an injunction to postpone serious strikes;
– 4) prohibited certain unfair practices, such as “featherbedding”;
– 5) forbade contributions by unions to political campaigns;
– 6) required union officials to take a non-Communist oath in order to secure benefits of government mediation of disputes.
Taft-Hartley

- Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act over Truman’s veto.
- Labor hated this law. Why?
- Union attempts to grow into new areas and industries were frustrated.
  - South was resistant to unions. Why?
  - Workers in rapidly growing service sector were hard to organize. Why?
Truman Limps into 1948

- Truman popularity low. Reasons:
  - Economic readjustment after war
  - Twangy and blunt
  - Democrats in control for 16 years

- Republicans get majority in Congress in 1946

- Most assume he can’t win.

- Democrats nominate him after Ike refuses to be drafted.

- Nomination splits the party
The Election of 1948

- The Republican congressional victory in 1946 was interpreted as a certain indication that the party would capture the Presidency too in 1948.
- The Democrats could not induce Eisenhower to accept the nomination and accepted Truman somewhat reluctantly.
- President Truman’s strong advocacy of civil rights to prevent discrimination because of race, color, or creed, alienated conservative Southern Democrats, who nominated Gov. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. (Dixiecrats)
The Election of 1948

- The Democratic extremists on the left, who favored a friendly policy toward Russia, organized a Progressive Party.
- They nominated Henry Wallace, but suffered from Communist support.
- The Republican Party nominated Governor Dewey of New York and Governor Earl Warren of California.
The Election of 1948

- The Republicans were overconfident of victory, especially because of the splintering of the Democratic Party and the predictions of pollsters.
- Therefore, they made few commitments and talked in vague generalities facing a beleaguered Truman → a “safe” campaign.
- Almost alone, Truman fought a “give-'em-hell” campaign in which he made specific promises to the voters to support social legislation and farm price supports.
Give ‘em Hell Harry

- Truman’s whistle-stop tour throughout the country.
- Rails against the “do-nothing Congress”
- Crowds get more and more enthusiastic.
- Dewey still thinks he is winning. Polling is still not very good.
Dewey Wins! (or not)

- Truman wins handily and stuns about everyone.
  - Democrats win House; keep it for the next 44 years.
- Truman makes the Fair Deal the cornerstone of his second term.
Truman’s Fair Deal

- Truman called his program the “Fair Deal,” since he favored an extension of the New Deal.
- The Fair Labor Standards Act was amended to increase the minimum wage from 40 cents to 70 cents/hour.
- A huge program for slum clearance and low-rent housing was passed.
- The Social Security Act was extended to cover an additional 10 million persons and benefit payments increased.
- Agriculture was given high supports for commodity prices.
The Conservative Coalition

- The Republican and conservative Southern Democratic opposition formed an alliance.
- They defeated Truman’s program to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act and to pass a national health insurance program.
- A filibuster of Southern Democrats defeated a civil rights program.
Decline of Truman’s Popularity

Several factors combined to bring a decline in the popularity of President Truman within two years of his election victory in 1948.
- Basically, the postwar rise in conservatism accounts for the change.

- Truman’s decisive stand against the Communists in the Korean War won public applause.

- However, as the war dragged on and Gen. MacArthur was dismissed, Truman suffered increasing criticism.
Decline of Truman’s Popularity

- A combination of Southern conservatives and of Republicans in Congress stalled the liberal Fair Deal program Truman sought to pass.
  - The Republicans further strengthened themselves in Congress in the election of 1950
- The Democrats were blamed for American frustration in the Cold War, especially the loss of China.
- At home, the administration was criticized for an alleged softness toward Communist influence in government and for considerable corruption in various federal departments.
Election of 1952

- President Truman chose not to run for the Democratic nomination in 1952, even though the Twenty-Second Amendment limiting the tenure in the presidency did not apply to him as the incumbent.

- Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois apparently was drafted for the nomination, but Senator Estes Kefauver tried hard to win it.
Election of 1952

- **Dwight D. Eisenhower**, the popular hero of the European War, finally announced himself as a Republican and admitted his willingness to accept the nomination.

- **Senator Robert A. Taft** of Ohio vigorously sought the nomination, but the delegates felt the conservative senator could not win and gave the nomination to Eisenhower.
Election of 1952

- Stevenson, in the campaign, had the enthusiastic support of the liberals in his party.
- Stevenson promised the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act, supported civil rights, and endorsed the New Deal reforms.
- His speeches reveal unusual literary skill, but his voice and seemingly stilted sense of humor did not win the masses labeled an “egghead”
Election of 1952

- Stevenson’s persona contrasted markedly with the friendly personality and broad smile of the hero General, Dwight D. “Ike” Eisenhower → “I like Ike.”
- His affability helped Ike overcome being less articulate than Stevenson.
- The Republicans criticized the Democrats for corruption, softness towards Communism, extravagance, and for involvement in the Korean War.
Election of 1952

- Just before the election, Eisenhower promised that if elected he would “go to Korea.”
- Eisenhower won by a landslide vote, but the victory in the House was thin and in the Senate Republican control depended on the support of conservative Democrats.
- The victory was an Eisenhower victory rather than a party victory.