

A Second Look at Presidential Libraries

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N EARLY 4 years ago I had an opportunity to express publicly my enthusiasm for presidential libraries.¹ My views then were shaped chiefly by experiences in the Roosevelt Library, but since that time I have worked frequently in the Truman Library and have observed the activities of other scholars here. Although my enthusiasm persists I now recognize that I was too optimistic about the rate at which work on Truman and his administration would progress. The Roosevelt Library provided an inadequate basis for prediction. Many scholars have worked at the Truman Library, but the results so far, measured in terms of publication, have been disappointing. Publication on Truman has progressed much more slowly than on Roosevelt. Estimates of the significance of the two Presidents perhaps provide a partial explanation of this, but another reason is that the Truman Library is not the equal of the other Library in the value of the manuscripts made available. Manuscripts here do provide a basis for significant work. In fact our knowledge of Truman would be greater if all who have published books on him recently had explored his papers. Yet, while gaps in the available sources have handicapped some scholars at Hyde Park, gaps in the Truman papers create greater difficulties, especially for a biographer. They hamper his efforts to explore Truman's early development and his most significant activity—his role in international relations.

By now President Truman has been out of the White House more than 12 years. Twelve years after 1945, several major books on Roosevelt drawing heavily upon his papers were available: three volumes of Frank Freidel's biography, Bernard Bellush's

The author is a member of the faculty of the department of history of the University of Missouri, Columbia. This paper was read before the Organization of American Historians at the Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo., on April 24, 1965, as a part of a session, concerning Presidential Libraries, of the 58th annual meeting of the OAH. Dr. Kirkendall wishes to express his gratitude to the Research Council of the University of Missouri and to the Harry S. Truman Library Institute for the financial support needed to conduct his research on the life of Harry S. Truman. He is grateful also to his colleague, Walter V. Scholes, for his helpful criticism of the present paper. Several of the unpublished studies mentioned have been published since this paper was read before the OAH.

¹ "Presidential Libraries—One Researcher's Point of View," in *American Archivist*, 25: 441-448 (Oct. 1962).

analysis of Roosevelt as Governor of New York, Daniel Fusfeld's study of Roosevelt's economic thought prior to 1933, the one-volume biography by James MacGregor Burns, and one volume of the *Age of Roosevelt*, by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.² A student of research on both Woodrow Wilson and F.D.R. was able to suggest that Roosevelt scholarship had almost reached the same stage as Wilson scholarship.³ Although these works did not deal thoroughly with all aspects of Roosevelt's career, they did make major contributions in two areas: his development before 1933 and his conduct as President of domestic affairs.

In 1965 work on Truman is far behind the stage that work on Roosevelt had reached in 1957. This is so despite the substantial scholarly interest in Truman and his administration, indicated by the use of the Library by more than 250 scholars in the nearly 6 years that it has been open. The interest of some of these people has apparently not been very strong, for about half of them have worked here for less than a week.⁴ Furthermore, a high percentage of the users have been involved in senior essays, seminar papers, and master's theses with no plans for publication. Others, however, have had greater interest and more ambitious plans but have been handicapped as publishing scholars by the early stage of their development. I refer to those working on doctoral dissertations, who have engaged in some of the most significant studies. Selecting their topics with care, most of these students have focused their attention upon areas in which the available materials are quite rich: domestic politics and policies and the public relations rather than the policymaking side of foreign and military affairs. The grant-in-aid program of the Truman Library Institute, by making grants to young scholars, has encouraged them to work here, and this practice seems justified by the experiences of the Roosevelt Library, for two of the early and important works on F.D.R.—the ones by Bellush and Fusfeld—originated as dissertations. The work on dissertations, then, provides a basis for optimism about

² Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Apprenticeship* (Boston, 1952), *The Ordeal* (1954), and *The Triumph* (1956); Bellush, *Franklin D. Roosevelt as Governor of New York* (New York, 1955); Fusfeld, *The Economic Thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Origins of the New Deal* (New York, 1956); Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York, 1956); Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933* (Boston, 1957).

³ Richard L. Watson, Jr., "Franklin D. Roosevelt in Historical Writing," in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 57:112 (Winter 1958).

⁴ This information is drawn from records on the researchers in the Library. I am grateful to Director Philip C. Brooks for making this material available to me and helping me in many other ways.

future output.⁵ At the moment, however, little of this work has moved from typescript into print.

The scholars who have studied in the Truman Library have published fewer than 25 books and articles reflecting this work, and these publications add nothing to our understanding of Truman before he became President and contribute only slightly to our knowledge of the man and his Presidential administration. On domestic affairs, items deal with the significant activity by President Truman and his White House aides in defense of constitutional rights, the more questionable record in this area of other people in the administration, especially the Attorney General, and the efforts to deal with the recession of 1949 and to promote the St. Lawrence Seaway.⁶ Several books and articles deal with aspects of politics and the political process, including the significance of the special session of Congress in 1948 and the whistle-stop campaign that followed,⁷ the very large and successful efforts of the Democrats that year to gain support from the various ethnic groups,⁸ and the transition from the Truman to the Eisenhower administration.⁹ Other publications consider the techniques that Congress and the executive employed in order to communicate

⁵ An example is William Berman's study, "The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration" (Ohio State University, 1963), a work which rests in part upon a long period of study in the Library and depends heavily upon the papers of Truman and his aides for its skillful handling of the inner workings as well as the public relations of the administration on this issue.

⁶ Richard Longacker, *The Presidency and Civil Liberties* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1961); R. Alton Lee, "Federal Assistance to Depressed Areas in the Postwar Recessions," in *Western Economic Journal*, 2: 1-23 (Fall 1963); Carleton Mabee, *The Seaway Story* (New York, 1961).

⁷ R. Alton Lee, "The Turnip Session of the Do-Nothing Congress," in *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, Dec. 1963, p. 256; Richard O. Davies, "Whistle-Stopping Through Ohio," in *Ohio History*, 72: 113-123 (July 1962). See also Davies, "Mr. Republican Turns 'Socialist': Robert A. Taft and Public Housing," *ibid.*, 73: 135-143 (Summer 1964). The last two articles are byproducts of Davies' larger investigation of "The Truman Housing Program" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Missouri, 1963). Another product of the study was a paper at the 1963 meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, where for the first time a session in a meeting of a historical association dealt with the Truman administration. Graduate students from the University of Missouri, the largest group of researchers in the Library, have produced four dissertations drawing upon its resources and have a substantially larger number underway. For another early product see Eugene F. Schmittlein, "Truman's First Senatorial Election," in *Missouri Historical Review*, 57: 128-155 (Jan. 1963). It should be noted, however, that scholars have come from all parts of the country and from places as far from Independence as India. Harvard, for example, has been a major source of researchers. Obviously the Library's location far from the Atlantic coast does not explain the smallness of output.

⁸ Louis L. Gerson, *The Hyphenate in Recent American Politics and Diplomacy* (Lawrence, Kans. 1964).

⁹ Laurin Henry, *Presidential Transitions* (Washington, Brookings Institution, 1960).

with and influence each other on foreign relations, the idea of collective security during the Truman period, the development of the administration's attitude toward Communist China, and the administration's response to famine in India.¹⁰ Although most of the authors spent only a few days in the Library and located but a small number of relevant documents for studies drawing mainly on other materials, the Library did help these scholars to make some valuable contributions. Their work, however, does not tell us nearly so much about Truman and his administration as we learned about Roosevelt from the early work in the first presidential library.

No significant, overall treatment of Truman or his administration has as yet come out of the early efforts.¹¹ The one biography—that by Alfred Steinberg—certainly cannot be compared with the distinguished volume on Roosevelt by Burns. Although Steinberg's opportunities were not so great, neither were his labors. Unhappy with the manuscripts, he spent only a few days exploring them and produced a book that has no apparent debts to them and adds almost nothing to our knowledge of Truman. The book rests chiefly upon earlier publications.¹² Likewise, Sidney Warren's three-chapter survey of Truman's conduct of foreign relations, while reflecting more work in this Library, contributes little but a useful survey of its subject.¹³

Certainly the available work fails to provide an adequate test of the rating of President Truman reported by Arthur M. Schle-

¹⁰ James A. Robinson, *Congress and Foreign Policy-Making* (Homewood, Ill.; Dorsey Press, Inc., 1962); Roland N. Stromberg, *Collective Security and American Foreign Policy: From the League of Nations to NATO* (New York, 1963); Sheldon Appleton, *The Eternal Triangle? Communist China, the United States and The United Nations* (East Lansing, Mich., 1961); and M. S. Venkataramani, "The Soviet Union and the Indian Food Crisis of 1946," in *International Studies*, 4: 241-264 (Jan. 1963). Professor Venkataramani, of the Indian School of International Studies in New Delhi, has prepared a monograph on the evolution of American policy toward food crises in recent years in India. The study employs Truman materials in its chapters on American responses to the famines of 1946 and 1951 and indicates that the Truman Library contains some materials of value on foreign relations. "The United States and India's Food Crisis, 1946," unpublished manuscript; Venkataramani to Philip C. Brooks, Jan. 7, 1964, in the Truman Library.

¹¹ One by William F. Zornow should soon appear.

¹² *The Man From Missouri* (New York, 1962). A biographer of Wayne Morse, A. Robert Smith, in *The Tiger in the Senate* (New York, 1962), seems to have derived at least as much as Steinberg did from the manuscripts in the Truman Library. Both Steinberg and Cabell Phillips, another author who has attempted a book-length study of Truman and his administration but has not published the results, have criticized the quantity and quality of manuscripts that were made available to them. Steinberg to Brooks, Apr. 5, 1960; Phillips to Brooks, Feb. 6, 1962.

¹³ *The President as World Leader* (Philadelphia and New York, 1964).

singer. According to him, Truman is now regarded by leading scholars as a "near great" President.¹⁴ One of the most industrious students of the Truman Presidency, Barton J. Bernstein, has major doubts about this rating and has expressed them in a well-documented article on the administration's handling of the postwar famine and the price control program in 1945-46 and in a brief and general but provocative and well-informed essay.¹⁵ Reasons for doubt are indicated also in the very significant work on 20th-century Presidents as leaders of public opinion, written by Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr. Also depending in part upon materials here, the work portrays Truman as lacking skill in this very important role.¹⁶

Restrictions on use of sources block efforts to make an adequate test of the hypothesis about Truman's greatness. According to Schlesinger, the rating rests upon the significance of Truman's major decisions in foreign and military affairs, an area in which the available unpublished sources are scarce. The records on research activities in the Library show a strong scholarly interest in this subject and the frustrations of those who have attempted to explore it. Although nearly 40 percent of those working here have focused their attention upon the subject, it has been represented by less than 25 percent of the scholars remaining more than the average amount of time—10 days—and by less than 17 percent of those working more than a month. Domestic policies, on the other hand, while attracting a smaller group—about a fourth of the scholars—have been able to hold people for longer periods. More than 40 percent of those remaining a month or more have worked in this

¹⁴ *Paths to the Present*, p. 105-106 (Boston, 1964).

¹⁵ "The Postwar Famine and Price Control, 1946," in *Agricultural History*, 38:235-240 (Oct. 1964); also "The Presidency under Truman," in *Yale Political*, 3:8-9, 24 (Oct. 1964). Several other articles by this author will be published in the near future; Bernstein to Brooks, Jan. 20, 1965. Allen J. Matusow, who, like Bernstein, studied at Harvard with Frank Freidel and spent a substantial period in the Truman Library, has also raised doubts about the high rating in his significant work on agricultural matters, samples of which he presented in papers at the 1963 meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and the 1964 meeting of the Southern Historical Association.

¹⁶ *Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1965). For an earlier product of Cornwell's research see "The Presidential Press Conference: A Study in Institutionalization," in *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 4:370-389 (Nov. 1960). Compare Walter Johnson, who refers to Truman as the "Man of Great Decisions" when discussing his foreign policies and then emphasizes his lack of "artistry in public relations," describing him as a "willful, bumpitious partisan, given to rash outbursts which weakened his effectiveness as chief of state and exposed him to mounting attack," and contrasting him with Stevenson, who in the 1952 campaign "spoke with a clarity and eloquence the Truman Administration lacked." *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue: Presidents and the People Since 1929*, p. 222, 255 (Boston, 1963).

area.¹⁷ Frustrations experienced by many have been expressed by the authors of one of the major books on the period, the study of the early development and use of atomic power by Richard G. Hewlett and Oscar E. Anderson, Jr. Concerning their topic, they have written: "The materials open to researchers at the . . . Truman Library . . . are not particularly helpful. Mostly incoming correspondence reflecting public opinion, they do not touch the main stream of policy in 1945 and 1946."¹⁸

Research on Truman, in other words, is being hampered by restrictions upon the most important sources on his administration. Unlike Roosevelt's, Truman's administration was not equally significant in both domestic and foreign affairs, although it did make progress in some areas, such as civil rights, public housing, and public power, and it did defend the New Deal successfully against powerful opponents.¹⁹ Truman's significance in foreign affairs provides scholars with their major justification for devoting a great deal of attention to him. Manuscript materials in this area, however, have traditionally become available much more slowly than sources on domestic affairs. Although the establishment of the presidential libraries constituted a break with the past, no break has taken place in the tradition governing control of materials. In fact, at least one student of American foreign relations has been able to see Truman items in another collection that cannot be seen in the Truman papers. In his work on James Byrnes as Secretary of State, George Curry was able to see in the Byrnes papers such items as the transcript of the trans-Atlantic conversation between the President and his Secretary of State during the Wallace episode,

¹⁷ My other categories are "Truman" and "politics and the political process." Ten percent of the scholars and 26 percent of those remaining more than a month have focused their attention upon Truman, while approximately one-fourth of the scholars and 17 percent of those working for more than a month have dealt chiefly with politics and the political process. There are difficulties, of course, in this system of classification.

¹⁸ *A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission*; vol. 1: *The New World, 1939/1946*, p. 659 (University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962).

¹⁹ Note that Schlesinger's poll rated Roosevelt a "great" President, that the rating rests upon his accomplishments in both domestic and foreign affairs (*Paths to the Present*, chapter 6), and that Burns' very substantial contribution rests chiefly upon his handling of the domestic side of Roosevelt's career. ". . . unhappily, scholars as yet do not have the records, memoirs, and other data necessary for a full account and analysis," Burns wrote in 1956. "I have tried to meet this dilemma by treating the war years synoptically and by presenting in the Epilogue and elsewhere an estimate of Roosevelt's character that may help explain his handling of certain war problems as well as the nature of his earlier leadership. The full account of the war years must wait." *Roosevelt*, p. x. Facing similar restrictions, a biographer of Truman has a more serious handicap.

but this document is not available in the Truman papers.²⁰ Mr. Truman's copy presumably remains in his possession.²¹ Apparently discouraged by a report that an item he wished to consult was not available and might be among the papers that Mr. Truman had not yet transferred to the Library, Curry did not visit Independence before sending his publisher his essay on Truman's second Secretary of State.²²

Other authors of recently published and significant works on Truman and his administration have also limited their work to other research centers. Included are the studies of one of the most important and controversial members of the Truman administration, James Forrestal. Both the very solid study of *Forrestal and the Navy* by Robert Greenhalgh Albion and Robert Howe Conner²³ and the provocative psychological portrait by Arnold Rogow²⁴ depend chiefly upon Forrestal's papers in the Princeton University Library. The authors apparently doubted that trips to Independence would be worthwhile. Both books call attention

²⁰ Curry first assisted Byrnes in the preparation of his memoir *All in One Lifetime* (New York, 1958), but others can obtain permission to consult the Byrnes papers. Curry to Kirkendall, Oct. 17, 1964.

²¹ This draws upon Professor Curry's paper at the 1964 meeting of the Southern Historical Association and my comment upon it. In this session my comments on Matusow's paper as well as Curry's provided illustrations of both strengths and weaknesses in the Truman papers. My preparations for this gave me an excellent illustration of the efficiency of the staff of the Truman Library. After I discussed the paper with Philip D. Lagerquist, the Research Archivist, he and his assistant, Harry Clark, supplied me with many items on Byrnes, although these were scattered widely in the Truman papers. Further discussions with Lagerquist revealed that no items on Byrnes in the collection were closed. From this we concluded that copies of key documents used by Curry but not available in the Truman papers must be in President Truman's possession. Another important document in this category is the Harold Smith Diary. Richard Neustadt, allowed to see the copy that President Truman has, commented on its great value in *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (New York, 1960, p. 174, 216), but others were not able to see it. Recently the original and a xerox copy have become available in the Roosevelt Library and the Bureau of the Budget, but Truman's copy remains in his files.

²² Curry to Brooks, Apr. 4, 1963; reply, Apr. 8, 1963. Other documents apparently in this category include Roosevelt's letters to Robert Hannegan on vice-presidential possibilities in 1944, Truman's letter-memorandum to Byrnes of Jan. 5, 1946, and the Charles Ross Diary. Curry's study of Byrnes will soon appear as part of the new series on *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*. Robert H. Ferrell, one of the editors of the series, did make some use of the Library for his forthcoming volume on George Marshall. Ferrell to Brooks, Jan. 11, Mar. 7, 1965. Raymond O'Connor also used materials in the Library for an essay that will soon be published on Truman and the powers of the President in foreign affairs. O'Connor to Brooks, Aug. 13, 1964.

²³ (New York, Columbia University Press, 1962).

²⁴ *James Forrestal: A Study of Personality, Politics and Policy* (New York, 1963).

to conflicts between Forrestal and Truman, and Rogow writes (p. 47) that after Forrestal's suicide,

on White House orders, a number of papers and documents were removed from Forrestal's files, either for "security" reasons or for other reasons. Although evidence is not conclusive, it is probable that certain individuals, for a variety of reasons, were reluctant to make Forrestal's private papers available until they had been properly "screened." Two such individuals, apparently, were President Truman and Secretary of Defense Johnson.

Donald H. Riddle did not use the Truman papers for his study of the Truman Committee.²⁵ In this case, the neglect of the papers constitutes a serious deficiency that prevented the author from producing a book as important as Bellush's analysis of the development of Roosevelt's ideas and practices while Governor of New York. The subjects are equally significant, for Roosevelt's role as Governor and Truman's as wartime investigator contributed in major ways to their rise to the Presidency. But while Bellush relied heavily upon the Roosevelt papers, Riddle ignored items in the Truman Library that deal significantly with subjects he considers, including Truman's motives in seeking establishment of the committee in February 1941.

Relying upon several published accounts, Riddle emphasizes Truman's fears about waste, corruption, and the concentration of defense contracts and suggests that a large volume of letters complaining about the construction of Fort Leonard Wood initially pushed the Senator into action.²⁶ But where are those letters? They are not in the Truman papers. Letters there do reveal some concern about waste and corruption. "While I believe it is conceded that 94 or 95% of the people are honest," Truman wrote the Assistant Secretary of War late in 1940, "it has been my experience with contracts that the percentage is exactly reversed when public funds are at stake." Thus the Missourian promised to help Patterson "prevent robbery of the treasury and immense scandals."²⁷ The papers suggest, however, that the committee's early emphasis upon waste and corruption in building camps reflected a decision about tactics. "We are looking into camp contracts now," Truman informed a friend in May 1941, "... and ...

²⁵ *The Truman Committee: A Study in Congressional Responsibility* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1964). Riddle did base his work upon the most important sources for his subject: the committee's published hearings and reports and its records in the National Archives.

²⁶ P. 12-13.

²⁷ Truman to Robert P. Patterson, Nov. 19, 1940, in Truman Library.

have shown that millions of dollars have been shoveled out by both the Army and Navy on these contracts." This investigation, he believed, "had justified the existence of the Committee" and guaranteed that it would get the funds it needed to carry on its work. He had avoided "the real controversial issues" in the "preliminary stage" in order to build support for his work and thus be able to move on to such matters as "the dollar-a-year men" and the efforts "to keep the little men out of business."²⁸

While providing only slight evidence of concern about waste and corruption, the papers testify to great interest in the distribution of defense contracts. During 1940 business groups in Missouri pressed their Senator to do something about the administration's failure to let contracts in their area.²⁹ A Midwest Defense Conference was organized. Invited to participate in its Kansas City meeting late in August, Truman was warned by a Chamber of Commerce official that failure to be present would be "fatal."³⁰ Furious, he replied that the Chamber had "made an effort to make it fatal to me in the Primary" and could not do much more in the general election. In addition, he wrote that there was not much these men could do in Kansas City to get contracts. "The work will have to be done right here in Washington, at the head of things, and it will have to be done by some one who is at least friendly to the Administration," he suggested—and then added: "I don't suppose that had occurred to you."³¹

The pressures continued, and Truman's resentment mounted. Finally, he replied to one leader of the conference:

I have just been through one of the bitterest primary campaigns that has ever been held in Missouri The Chambers of Commerce in the State, particularly in the big cities, were rabidly opposed to my renomination, and the people in Kansas City who were sponsoring this meeting left no stone unturned to discredit me in that city—they didn't succeed.

He did not "appreciate the fact" that he was "being threatened by people who had already done everything they could to put an end to my political career."³²

Although he did not attend the meeting, he did take other steps to bring defense industry to Missouri and thereby strengthen him-

²⁸ Truman to Lou Holland, May 1, 1941.

²⁹ Kansas City *Star*, July 26, 1940; Kansas City *Times*, July 27, 1940.

³⁰ Louis W. Reps to Truman, Aug. 8, 1940.

³¹ Aug. 13, 1940. See also Truman to J. Orrin Moon, Aug. 13, 1940; Truman to Frank T. Evans, Aug. 14, 1940.

³² Frank T. Evans to Truman, Aug. 24, 28, 1940; Truman to Evans, Aug. 26, 1940; Morris Thompson to Truman, Aug. 15, 1940; Truman to Evans, Aug. 30, 1940.

self politically.³³ He joined with other midwestern Senators who believed it was "necessary to take some concerted action in calling to the attention of the National Defense Council the desirability and practicability of locating such establishments in the Middle West." They discussed the defense program with the officials in charge of it, a step that he believed "laid the groundwork for real accomplishment" in Washington.³⁴ "I personally know that Senator Truman made several telephone calls and several personal calls to the office of the Secretary of War and the Defense Commission insisting that Missouri be given more consideration in the construction of defense projects," his secretary informed a troubled supporter as election day approached. "The Senator was very much concerned and didn't mince any words in making his position known." Aware of the importance of congressional committees and hoping to reassure Truman's supporter, the secretary reminded him that the Senator was a member of the Appropriations Committee.³⁵ Before returning to the campaign in Missouri, he discussed the location of sites and related matters with Assistant Secretary Patterson, and before the end of the year Truman achieved some results but remained dissatisfied. "I know exactly just what is going on," he informed Lou Holland, "and I have been doing everything I can to stop it but haven't succeeded yet in doing much more than make an impression."³⁶ Obviously, his position on the Appropriations Committee did not provide enough power.

By this time, Truman was working closely with his friend Holland, a Kansas City businessman who was president of the recently formed Mid-Central War Resources Board. This was a private agency designed to obtain a larger share of the defense program for the area by demonstrating to the Government that it need not depend so heavily upon big business in the East but could call upon the Middle West, especially its smaller industries, for help.³⁷

³³ Truman to Thomas N. Dysart, June 1, July 1, 1940; Meredith B. Turner to Truman, June 5, 1940; J. C. Nichols to Truman, Aug. 8, 1940.

³⁴ Sen. Bennett Champ Clark to Truman, Aug. 1, 1940; Truman to Evans, Aug. 14, 30, 1940; Truman to B. J. Thomas, Aug. 13, 1940; Truman to Moon, Aug. 13, 1940.

³⁵ V. R. Messall to Cecil W. Roberts, Oct. 7, 1940; see also Truman to H. B. Holman, Aug. 20, 1940.

³⁶ Robert P. Patterson to Truman, Oct. 3, 1940; Messall to Patterson, Oct. 5, 1940; Truman to Patterson, Nov. 19, 1940; Truman to Holland, Sept. 30, 1940; *Kansas City Journal*, Nov. 6, 1940; Martin B. Dickinson to Truman, Dec. 31, 1940.

³⁷ Holland to Truman, Aug. 20, 1940; Truman to Holland, Aug. 31, Sept. 13, 30, 1940; Frank T. Priest to Truman, Apr. 30, 1941.

Truman liked Holland's plan and agreed with his friend that unless the defense program were brought into line with it "the little fellow" would receive only "the crumbs off the rich man's table." Confident that Kansas City should be the center of the defense industry, Holland feared that the area would be ruined if developments elsewhere continued to drain away its manpower. "If we don't fight this thing through to a successful conclusion right at this time, God help the middle-west," he advised Truman in January 1941.³⁸

By that time, however, Truman had plans that seemed capable of producing the necessary results. "I paid a visit to the President yesterday and discussed our program from A to Z for nearly half an hour," he informed Holland early in February. "He assured me your program was a good one and that he would try his best to get things worked out." Although fearful that F.D.R. might have given him only "cordial treatment," Truman promised to lay the program before the Senate just as soon as he got his "papers in order." Soon, armed with his committee, he was criticizing defense officials for "discrimination against Midwestern contractors"³⁹

In other words, the papers suggest that the decentralization of the defense industry was Truman's leading motive and that the move to establish the committee was another illustration of sectional conflict in American history.⁴⁰ A leader in the Kansas Chamber of Commerce was pleased to read in *Business Week* early in March 1941 that the investigation would "evolve into a crusade for further decentralization of war industry. That's the real purpose of the probe's promoter"⁴¹ And a year later the Senator explained to two Missourians that "what we had in mind when we first began our Investigating Committee was to get a feasible plan whereby the production facilities in the smaller cities and towns could be used in manufacturing the necessities of war" and

³⁸ Truman to Holland, Jan. 16, Feb. 1, 1941; Holland to Truman, Sept. 19, 1940, Jan. 29, 1941.

³⁹ Holland to Truman, Jan. 30, 1941; H. H. Vaughan to Capt. Frank Priest, Apr. 30, 1941; Truman to Holland, Feb. 4, 1941; Truman to Brig. Gen. L. H. Campbell, Jr., June 18, 1941; see also Truman to James R. Kearney, Sr., Apr. 2, 1941.

⁴⁰ The investigation of the defense industry was related to Truman's earlier efforts on transportation legislation, for he believed that the trans-Mississippi West was being "strangled by discrimination on freight rates." Truman to James T. Blair, Jr., Apr. 1, 1941.

⁴¹ Samuel Wilson to Truman, Mar. 11, 1941; see also "Capitol Comments" by Rep. Richard P. (Dick) Gale, Apr. 5, 1941, and Ruby D. Garrett to Truman, Mar. 29, 1941.

that his committee had "been trying desperately for over a year to bring about the necessary decentralization to keep the people stabilized and employed at home."⁴² Although he had not cooperated with the Midwest Defense Conference, he shared the interest of its members in seeing that the defense program did "not become the occasion of a social and economic tragedy for this region" with it "reduced to a position of Agricultural slavery" and in persuading the Government "that the central part of the country is the proper place to put defense plants." By the summer of 1941 members of the conference were applauding Truman's "fine work."⁴³

This consideration of the establishment of the Truman Committee reveals some of the riches in the Truman papers and suggests that if some of those who have published on Truman recently had been more industrious they could have made more substantial contributions.⁴⁴ If, however, Truman did receive the letters on Fort Leonard Wood, then the discussion discloses gaps as well. The question of his pre-Presidential views on international relations clearly illustrates both weaknesses and strengths. As a consequence of the importance of his role in this area after he became President, a full-scale study of the subject could contribute as much as Fusfeld did in his book on Roosevelt's economic thought, a book with much evidence on F.D.R.'s early years and the forces that shaped the growth of the economic philosophy that he brought to the White House.

The papers supply a substantial yet incomplete amount of evidence on the development of Truman's thinking on foreign relations.⁴⁵ The papers reveal that, although this was not his major interest, he did not ignore the subject before he became President and he did enter the White House with a rather well-defined position on it. They also suggest that his views had major roots in

⁴² Truman to F. A. Meinershagen, Apr. 8, 1942; Truman to Wallace Crossley, Mar. 3, 1942.

⁴³ Richard W. Robbins to Truman, Sept. 4, 1940; Truman to Harry B. Rutledge, Dec. 14, 1941; Truman to G. H. Murray, Jan. 15, 1942; *Kansas City Journal*, Mar. 27, 1941; *Kansas City Times*, Mar. 28, 1941; George W. Catts to Truman, June 7, 1941; see also Louis W. Reps to Truman, Mar. 25, 1943.

⁴⁴ This is true of Steinberg as well as Riddle. The former does recognize Truman's concern about Missouri's failure to obtain defense contracts but repeats the story about the many letters of complaint about Fort Leonard Wood, in *The Man from Missouri*, p. 180-181. Truman's own account does not mention these letters and does emphasize concern about concentration. *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman*, 1:164-166 (2 vols., Garden City, N.Y., 1955-56).

⁴⁵ On this subject, the senatorial papers contain well over a hundred items, chiefly letters but also a few speeches, scattered widely through the collection.

World War I: in the influence of Wilson's wartime leadership and his subsequent failures and in Truman's experiences as a soldier and the activities to which they led in the Army Reserve, the Reserve Officers Association, and various veterans' organizations, including the American Legion.

Long before April 12, 1945, Truman was a Wilsonian who believed that the United States had an obligation to play a large role in world affairs as a member of an international organization. He frequently employed Wilsonian rhetoric and expressed his admiration for Wilson's internationalism and resentment of the criticism of Wilson, although admitting that there were gaps in his knowledge of European affairs. Truman insisted on many occasions that the defeat of Wilson's efforts to make the United States a member of the League of Nations led to World War II by depriving that organization of the power it needed to check the rise of aggressors. He often lashed out at isolationists for their role in Wilson's defeat and warned that they might triumph again in 1945. To prevent this, he campaigned as a Senator, as a candidate for the vice-presidency, and as the Vice President for American participation in an international organization after the Second World War.

The papers suggest also that the influence of Wilson alone does not explain Truman's point of view, which involved a much heavier emphasis on military power than Wilson had advocated. Pacifist ranked with isolationist in Truman's list of troublemakers; this attitude seems to have grown out of his experiences as a soldier and veteran. Throughout the 1920's and 1930's, according to the papers, he not only served in the Army Reserve, the American Legion, and similar organizations but championed a program of military preparedness. By 1941 he resented the label "warmonger" that the pacifists had pinned on him and others, he blamed them for the limited state of American preparations, and he insisted that lack of military power was a major source of the Nation's difficulties. During the war he continued to worry about the influence of pacifists, for he insisted that the United States would need a powerful Army and Navy after the war in order to play its proper role. Reflecting his preference for the citizen-soldier rather than the professional, he advocated universal military training as a means of developing the necessary strength.

Thus, Truman did not look upon an international organization as a substitute for military power; he believed that the United States should rely upon both instruments. Without an international organization, however, the Nation would be forced to build a gi-

gantic and very costly military establishment that would lead to a reduction in the American standard of living.

This is but a brief summary of what the papers reveal about the point of view that Truman brought to the White House. Although the collection tells us a good deal, it has major shortcomings from a biographer's point of view. It does not enable him to deal adequately with Truman's development in the field of foreign policy, the subject that was of paramount importance in his career. The earliest relevant document is dated 1937, and only a very small number of manuscripts precede 1941. There is no source, for example, on his vote in favor of the Neutrality Act of 1937, a vote that seems out of harmony with my generalizations.⁴⁶ Various items refer to his earlier attitudes and activities and imply that his ideas were full grown by 1921, but the references given are not satisfactory evidence. Thus the papers provide only a basis for hypotheses about his early development and the forces that shaped it.

This discussion points to one of the basic weaknesses of the Truman papers. Although quite rich from 1940 on, they contain no items from his pre-senatorial career and only a few from his first term in the Senate. Where are the manuscripts from the first 56 years of his life? Unless they become available, we shall not get a biography of him that is as informative as Freidel's work, which is based upon an excellent collection of materials on Roosevelt's life before 1933 and which describes and explains his development in detail and with skill.

The staff of the Truman Library is developing an oral history project to compensate for this weakness in the papers. The early products of the project are very valuable, for the interviews were

⁴⁶ He explains in his *Memoirs*, 1:153, that he voted this way because he "thought it would keep us out of involvement in the civil war then going on in Spain" and that he was "misled by the report of the munitions investigation." It seems significant that the Senior Senator from Missouri, Bennett Champ Clark, was one of the most active and influential members of the Nye Committee that made the investigation and was a leading promoter of neutrality legislation although he did not like the discretionary powers that the 1937 law gave to the President. Wayne S. Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations*, p. 71, 101, 117-118 (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1962). Truman worked throughout his years in the Senate to develop good relations with Clark, even though they disagreed on many questions of policy; and as a consequence Truman was criticized in 1944 for urging the people of Missouri to reelect this critic of Roosevelt's foreign policies. See for example Truman to E. H. Steedman, Jan. 19, 1943; Truman to Anne E. Nolen, June 1, 1944; John F. McDermott to Truman, June 13, 1944; Mrs. Edith Daugherty to Truman, June 14, 1944.

conducted with a great deal of skill and preparation. As to changes, scholars can advise only that the project be expanded and accelerated. But there are limits on the amount that such a project can add to our knowledge. The authors of the early works on Truman relied upon this method. The present project does avoid the difficulties inherent in interviewing people who are in the midst of controversies affecting matters under discussion. Jonathan Daniels, for example, depended chiefly upon interviews in 1949, and those interviewed frequently gave him views of the past (such as the relations between Truman and Byrnes during the latter's term as Secretary of State) that were distorted by the feelings of the moment.⁴⁷ Yet, although the oral historians here can supply more reliable accounts, scholars need good manuscript collections in order to use the oral history interviews with confidence and discrimination. In considering Truman's early development especially, the researcher can see the ways in which the interviews are plagued by weak memories and uncritical and unsophisticated observations, and this experience strengthens his desire for the discovery of a trunk filled with letters from those early years. I fear, however, that none will be found, for thus far the unusually successful manuscript collecting program to which Philip Brooks has been giving much of his time has produced only a few items on that period.

Before concluding, I should note that there may be an element of unfairness involved in comparing Truman with Roosevelt scholarship. The latter reflects an unusual, perhaps unique, situation: an extremely rich collection and a very liberal policy governing its use.⁴⁸ One British scholar, D. C. Watt, unhappy with things at home, has recently suggested a picture quite different from mine by comparing the situation of the Truman papers with the deplorable rules governing access to foreign policy materials in Great Britain. His appraisal, however, relies upon only the "briefest of glances" at the contents of the Library and depends in part upon predictions of publications within the next 3 years, not upon books

⁴⁷ Curry's paper, mentioned above, and my opportunity to comment upon it helped me to become aware of this feature of *The Man of Independence* (Philadelphia, 1950). On Truman and Byrnes see especially p. 316.

⁴⁸ "This is the largest collection of materials relating to one man to be found in the United States, and all but a small portion is open to examination," one student of Roosevelt has written. "The size and range of the collection and its availability to scholars so soon after the donor's death, are without precedent in American historiography." Thomas H. Greer, *What Roosevelt Thought: The Social and Political Ideas of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, p. 229 (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1958).

in existence now.⁴⁹ With a longer opportunity to work here, he too would locate the pockets of poverty as well as the wealth in the collections.

Significant progress in research is taking place in the Truman Library. The list of valuable publications should lengthen considerably in the very near future, especially as several studies move beyond the dissertation stage. So far, however, output has not fulfilled the great expectations generated by the example of the Roosevelt Library. One can assume with confidence that the passage of time will solve many of the problems by removing restrictions upon access to existing materials and increasing the number of collections that supplement the Truman papers, thereby enabling scholarship to benefit more fully from the excellent facilities and staff of the Library. The passage of time, however, may not solve the great problem of scarcity of materials dealing with the years before 1940.

⁴⁹ "Restrictions on Research: The Fifty-Year Rule and British Foreign Policy," in *International Affairs*, 44: 90-91 (Jan. 1965).

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