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THE GREATEST AMERICAN COMEBACK: HARRY S. TRUMAN AND THE 1948
ELECTION

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
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The Greatest American Comeback: Harry S. Truman and the 1948 Election

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When *Newsweek* published the predictions of the top 50 political analysts for the 1948 election, every single one of them gave the incumbent president the thumbs down. The day after the election President Harry S. Truman stood holding an issue of the *Chicago Tribune* with the large headline, “Dewey Defeats Truman”. However, Truman appeared jubilant and excited. The headline was wrong. Truman was not actually defeated. An election so close as it ran into the early morning, the *Chicago Tribune* made their title before the final results came in. Truman had in fact, pulled off an amazing comeback victory.

The blueprint to get Truman elected in his own right had to be pragmatic and crafty. James H. Rowe, a lawyer and strong supporter of Franklin Roosevelt’s initiatives during the New Deal, detailed the framework and strategy for Truman’s difficult campaign ahead. Special Counsel Clark Clifford added his input along with Rowe’s and delivered this memorandum, “The Politics of 1948”, to Truman himself.¹ This critical memorandum, along with speeches made by Truman, private papers of the Truman administration, oral histories of those close to the election, and speculations from key historians unravel the puzzle that was Harry Truman’s extraordinary victory.

The victory is extraordinary because of the overwhelming doubts of political experts, the media, and the public as a whole that Harry Truman could win the job, since his first few years as President saw the country hit hard economic times in the chaotic and uncertain period after World War II. During this trying post-war transition, many in Truman’s Democratic Party lost faith in their president, looked elsewhere for a possible leader and left a ripe opportunity for the Republicans to win the confidence and support of the public. The Truman team understood that regardless of the hit to his popularity at the time, if Truman reached out to groups that voted

¹Stephen R. Goldzwig, *Truman’s Whistle Stop Campaign*, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2008) 7.

Democratic under Roosevelt, like organized labor and farmers, while also reaching out to African-Americans and Progressive voters, he would have the numbers needed to win.

The Storm over Truman

Once Truman took the oath of office after Franklin Roosevelt's sudden death in 1945² the United States underwent a dramatic transformation. World War II finished only to find Truman caught up in the challenges of a nation recovering from a long and strenuous war effort followed by a new world order emerging around him. The American public felt anxious about a housing crisis, increasing inflation, labor unions in protest, and shortages in consumer goods. Truman struggled to pass any of his initiatives through Congress.³ Adding to these issues were two additional concerns that forced Democrats into soul-searching. Growing tension with the Soviet Union evolved into the Cold War while a growing demand for civil rights sparked frustrations white voters in the South. Both of these issues would ultimately produce ruptures in Truman's own party at the worse time for the president.⁴

Truman's Republican opposition pounced on the American public's frustration with the Democratic Party. Many Americans by Truman's first few years in office felt that the Democrats' New Deal initiatives were an unnecessary burden now that the country had recovered from the Great Depression. On a more personal note, much of the country felt

² Andrew E. Busch, *Truman's Triumphs: The 1948 Election and the Making of Postwar America* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 27-28.

³ Stephen R. Goldzwig, *Truman's Whistle Stop Campaign*, 5.

⁴ Memo, Clark Clifford to Harry S. Truman, November 19, 1947. Clifford Papers, Political File. Confidential Memo to the President Clifford-Rowe Memorandum. The 1948 Election Campaign Research File. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Online. URL; https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/1948campaign/large/docs/documents/index.php?documentid=1-1&documentdate=1947-11-19&pagenumber=1. Accessed March 2017

uncertain that Truman was capable of the highest office of the land.⁵ The public was losing faith in Truman to such a point that campaigning Democratic Congressmen tried to steer clear of their own president during the 1946 midterms.⁶ In those midterm elections the Republicans ran with the slogan, “Had Enough? Vote Republican.”⁷ The American public did. Republicans took away 55 seats from Democrats in the House of Representatives and a dozen seats from the Democrats in the Senate. It was the first time the Republican Party controlled both Houses of Congress since before the 1929 Stock Market Crash. On top of the Congressional sweep, Republicans added four governors to their winnings, herding most state capitols to their camp.⁸ In New York Republican Thomas E. Dewey accomplished the biggest gubernatorial landslide victory in that state’s history, setting him up nicely for bigger ambitions soon to come.⁹

It was widely understood by Truman’s campaign team that Governor Dewey was going to get the Republican nod. They also noted that the governor “will be a resourceful, intelligent, and highly dangerous candidate.”¹⁰ While a short man like Truman standing at 5’8”’, Dewey appeared more composed, relaxed, and in control than President Truman. Born in Owosso, Michigan in 1902, he was also nearly two decades younger than Truman. Achieving his law degree from Columbia University, Dewey quickly became a prominent district attorney in New York. He first ran for governor of the state unsuccessfully at the age of 36 in 1938 only to rebound and win the office four years later. His only true drawback appeared to be, of all things, his mustache. Actress Ethel Barrymore remarked about Dewey’s upper lip that he appeared

⁵ Andrew E. Busch, *Truman’s Triumphs: The 1948 Election and the Making of Postwar America*, 20

⁶ Stephen R. Goldzwig, *Truman’s Whistle Stop Campaign*, 6.

⁷ Zachary Karabell, *The Last Campaign: How Harry Truman Won the 1948 Election* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 24.

⁸ Andrew E. Busch, *Truman’s Triumphs: The 1948 Election and the Making of Postwar America*, 16

⁹ David McCullough, *Truman* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 523

¹⁰Clifford-Rowe Memorandum.

“like the bridegroom on the wedding cake.” Theodore Roosevelt’s first daughter Alice notoriously repeated that quip in social occasions.¹¹

The discord of Truman’s Party challenged the image of the President as a leader. The issues at the forefront of this divide, racial conflicts at home and an expanding Soviet Empire abroad, required a leader charismatic and certain in his vision and command. Many Democrats at this time thought that such a leader still needed to emerge out of the crowd and take the helm of the Party. With the Cold War building, Truman stubbornly distrusted Moscow. Following the feedback he received for George Marshall, the president felt that diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union were pointless and that the Soviets were unwaveringly steadfast on consuming all of Europe.¹² In what famously became the Truman Doctrine, Truman made it clear in his address to Congress on March 12, 1947 that the United States would play a pivotal role in containing Soviet ambitions in Europe¹³

The other major factor that created rupture in the Democratic Party was civil rights. The plea for civil rights went neglected for decades in the United States and the numbers displayed the cost of that neglect for African-Americans in particular. Between 1882 and the end of World War II nearly 3,500 African-Americans were lynched. Mississippi, Georgia, and Texas made up over a third of that total alone.¹⁴ Jim Crow laws ruled southern society dictating a “separate but equal” use of facilities from parks to schools to neighborhoods.¹⁵

¹¹ McCullough, *Truman*, 670-672.

¹² McCullough, *Truman*, 582

¹³ Address of the President to Congress, Recommending Assistance to Greece and Turkey, March 12, 1947. Elsey Papers, Harry S. Truman Administration. March 12, . Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Online. URL; https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/doctrine/large/documents/index.php?documentid=5-9&pagenumber=1. Accessed May 2017.

¹⁴ Lynchings by States 1882-1945.R22 [“To Secure These Rights”] [2of3]. The Department of Records and Research. Tuskegee Institute Alabama. Truman Library.

¹⁵] “President’s Committee on Civil Rights Recommends”. President’s Committee on Civil Rights-Report RG 220 [“To Secure These Rights”] [2of3]. Truman Library

Truman's time as president witnessed the biggest push for civil rights since Lincoln.¹⁶ In early February of 1948 Truman proposed major new institutions and laws to ensure greater civil rights such as establishing a civil rights committee under Congress, enacting a Federal Anti-Lynching Act, and a Federal Anti-Poll Tax Act, among other initiatives.¹⁷ Truman also pushed for the desegregation of the military.¹⁸ These proposed progressive initiatives enraged many southern Democrats.

The issues of civil rights within the U.S. and diplomatic tensions with the Soviet Union abroad exposed the tensions between the Democratic Party's conservative and liberal flank. Neither factions of the Party were satisfied with the leadership of President Truman, and both felt emboldened to challenge him. The first individual to pose a threat to Harry Truman from the Democratic ranks came from the progressive camp of the Party. He was Truman's former Secretary of Commerce and the former Vice President, Henry Wallace. Wallace held much more open and cooperative views of the Soviet Union. In New York in 1947, Wallace made a controversial speech that welcomed to Moscow's presence in other areas of Eastern Europe. He declared the imperialism of close ally Great Britain to be the real threat to the world rather than the ideology of the Soviet Union, and argued that America's and Great Britain's nuclear arsenal be voluntarily handed over to the United Nations. Wallace then declared that his speech had been approved by President Truman himself. Truman relieved Wallace as Secretary of Commerce

¹⁶ Karabell, *The Last Campaign*, 41.

¹⁷ Revised Draft of Omnibus Civil Rights Bill, February 3, 1948. Truman Papers, Murphy Files. Civil Rights. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Online. URL; https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/civilrights/documents/index.php?documentid=9-2&pagenumber=1. Accessed May 2017.

¹⁸ Memo "Concerning the Interpretation of the President's Order...", ca. 1948. Record Group 220: Records of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, Fahy Committee Members and Staff. Sengstacke, John. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Online. URL; https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/desegregation/large/documents/index.php?documentid=5-20&documentdate=1948-00-00&pagenumber=1. Accessed April 2017.

eight days later.¹⁹ Truman's team suspected that Wallace would run as an independent candidate in 1948.²⁰ While many in the Democratic Party believed Wallace to be too far to the left as well as too socially aloof, he none-the-less became a very well-known political figure among the public. Iowa born and raised, he came from a notable background as his father had once been the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. He made himself not only successful but also very wealthy through his innovative work in hybrid corn, and served as Secretary of Agriculture himself under Franklin Roosevelt.²¹ Wallace may not have been popular with much of the Democratic establishment, but he did earn great respect from President Roosevelt. The President's admiration for Wallace rose to such a height that Roosevelt threatened to not run again in 1940 unless the party let him put Wallace on his ticket.²² Roosevelt would give in to dissenting Democrats in 1944 and released Wallace from the ticket in the next election, which of course went to Truman. Roosevelt then offered Wallace the position of Secretary of Commerce.²³ After being relieved by Truman from that position Wallace did in fact announce himself as an independent candidate for president in 1948.²⁴

Another notable dissenter was South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond, who became Truman's second challenger from the Democratic Party. Of all the Southern Democrats upset by Truman's civil rights initiatives, Thurmond had shown himself to be one of the most reactionary and dangerous. Thurmond was complicated on race at times, in that he helped increase salaries for educators both black and white and in his support for the detaining of the white suspects of Willie Earle murder, receiving applause from the National Association for the Advancement of

¹⁹ Busch, *Truman's Triumphs*, 39-40.

²⁰ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum.

²¹ Zachary Karabell, *The Last Campaign*, 14.

²² McCullough, *Truman*, 294.

²³ Karabell, *The Last Campaign*, 14.

²⁴ Busch, *Truman's Triumphs*, 41.

Colored People. He was nonetheless vehemently opposed to civil rights and turned into a bitter critic of Truman. Thurmond would lead the Dixiecrat Party, or the States Rights Democratic Party as it was formally known, in the 1948 election against Truman. While only strong in the South, Thurmond—in combination with Wallace—threatened to steal enough electorates away from Truman to win the election.²⁵

The Strategy

Considering the realities Truman was up against, James Rowe with Clark Clifford composed their political memorandum in November of 1947 to prepare Truman for the long haul ahead. The memorandum laid out the political challenges that stood before the President. Acknowledging the foremost importance that standards of living for voters, Rowe and Clifford felt that “The High Cost of Living will be the most controversial issue of the 1948 campaign—indeed the only domestic issue.” The Memorandum carried on that “Whichever Party is adjudged guilty of causing it will lose the election.” It stated also that Truman needed to present legislation to curb inflation to appear as the man to fix the problem rather than just the man pointing the finger across the aisle. It did not matter if the written legislation could not appeal to bipartisan cooperation with Republicans. They were likely to vote against anything Truman put forth on an election year anyhow. The legislation just had to appeal to the common American. If the legislation did not pass through the Republican dominated Congress, which it likely would not, Truman could use this as an attack on Republicans in the campaign.

The Memo sought to maintain unity of Democratic voters coming from different regions and social backgrounds. It described the Democratic Party as a collection of “three misfit groups”

²⁵ Karabell, *The Last Campaign*, 42-44.

that the President needed to hold on. Notably first were the conservative Democrats in the South.²⁶ Southern Democrats lost much enthusiasm with Truman after he addressed the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People in person in mid-summer of 1947.²⁷ Not only was Truman the first president to speak before the NAACP, his speech addressed racial concerns so genuinely some saw it as the “most forthright speech on race relations ever made by a president in modern times.”²⁸ Governor Strom Thurmond stood as the prominent figure for the upset Southern branch of the Party ready to lock horns with the President.²⁹ Thurmond remained loyal to Franklin Roosevelt when he spoke of the need for greater civil rights for African-Americans. With Harry Truman though, it was different. When Truman addressed civil rights in Thurmond’s view, he “really *means* it.”³⁰

Constituents out in the Western United States were another of the Democratic “misfits” about which the reelection team were concerned, and in the eyes of the authors the “Number One Priority”. The authors saw the Western states as a hotbed for progressivism and prominent among Western voters were issues of care and protection for the land. They needed assurance that the Federal Government would provide aid after natural disasters like flooding, back measures for land reclamation, and support farmers and their crops throughout the region. Clifford and Rowe also noted that Westerners felt uneasy about the powerful influence of industry and big business boasted by the East Coast.³¹ The President understood from this aspect that individuals out West wanted to build up their own industry and achieve greater

²⁶ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum.

²⁷ White, Phillip. *Whistle Stop: How 31,000 Miles of Train Travel, 352 Speeches, and a Little Midwest Gumption Save The Presidency of Harry Truman.* (Lebanon, NH: ForeEdge, 2014), 20.

²⁸ “Truman’s Speech Makes History”. RG 220 Truman’s Speeches [newspaper clippings]. *The Call* (K.C.-black newspaper). July 4, 1947.

²⁹ White. *Whistle Stop*, 20.

³⁰ Words from Strom Thurmond to journalist quoted in Truman’s *Memoirs*. Truman, Harry S. *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman; Vol. 2: Years of Trial and Hope.* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1956), 183.

³¹ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum.

independence from East Coast manufacturers and businesses.³² Much in line with the distrust of Eastern big businesses, Western states seemed intrigued by the progressive measures of Henry Wallace. This included his no holds barred aggression towards Wall Street and financial elites. Wallace also posed a threat of gaining support from younger progressive voters “because he dared talk in an idealistic strain” when he visited Western states in the past.³³ Clifford and Rowe noticed that allies of Wallace were already setting the groundwork for him to make headway in the West, making the Western States vital for Truman.

Another critical group that fell outside of Clifford and Rowe’s Democratic “three misfits” but shared with the Western constituents the title of “Number One Priority” were the farmers. The memo noted that farmers were Republican by custom but that under Democratic leadership in recent years they had prospered. Truman’s Marshall Plan garnered more support from agricultural interests. Clifford and Rowe felt that the President had already supplied the policies to earn the farmer vote, but they still worried that financial security may persuade farmers to back the GOP. Clifford and Rowe feared that if farmers felt inclined to go Republican because of economic success, there would be little more Truman could do politically to entice farmers to his camp.

The last “misfit” the Truman camp needed to secure its relationship with was the labor movement. The President’s team felt less worried about organized labor voting Republican but did fear that too many union laborers just might not feel motivated to vote at all in 1948.³⁴ The poor Democratic performance in the midterm elections of 1946 came just months after Truman took a hard line against labor and threatened to draft the railway strikers into the army if they

³² White. *Whistle Stop*, 163.

³³ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum. Quote found on Pg. 38-39.

³⁴ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum.

continued to halt transportation of the trains.³⁵ Truman reestablished faith of many union supporters when he vetoed the anti-union Taft-Hartley Bill the next year and then denounced those Republicans who overrode his veto, but Clifford and Rowe worried now that labor was too “well fed” to be inspired to vote.

The “Politics of 1948” memo detailed the realities and concerns regarding progressives, union workers, and farmers. The memo also warned Truman of his biggest opponents lurking behind the corner such as Henry Wallace and Thomas Dewey. If Truman drew these three key interest groups into his campaign, the numbers to win were on the board. Clifford and Rowe then laid out for Truman the actions he needed to take in order to secure those key groups at the polls come November.

In late 1947, both Rowe and Clifford believed that regardless of whatever frustrations Southern Democrats had with the Truman Administration and its progressive initiatives, the south would remain a safe Democratic stronghold. Succeeding in the Western states, in Rowe and Clifford’s reasoning, needed Truman’s full attention. If Truman captured the Western states that had voted for Roosevelt in the previous election along with the Southern states they believed were guaranteed, Truman would only be 50 electoral votes shy of the needed total. Truman’s team were confident that Republicans in Congress had disappointed Westerners in their regional demands such as agriculture, flood prevention and relief, and land reclamation. Rowe and Clifford argued that if the President keyed on such issues, taking the West was no problem.

While Henry Wallace had not declared his intention to run as a third party contender by this time, preparations were underway in case he ran. While a third party candidate likely could not get on all state’s ballots (making victory highly improbable), Rowe and Clifford feared that

³⁵ Oral History. Dr. John R. Steelman, Special Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion. Feb 29, 1996. Truman Library. Online. URL; [https://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/ steelm2b.htm](https://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/steel2b.htm). Accessed October 2017.

Wallace was truly eying the 1952 Democratic nomination with a strong showing in 1948 to make his case to the Party. If Wallace achieved great success campaigning in 1948, the Democratic vote would be fractured. Truman's team figured that the Soviet Union and the American Communists aspired to see Wallace split the Democratic vote. This alleged Communist conspiracy believed that a victorious Republican candidate would destroy the American economy and bring about a class revolution in the United States.³⁶ The issue lay in persuading progressives who did not align with Communism but liked Wallace's ideals to stay with Truman for the general election. It was paramount first to try to prevent Henry Wallace from running, while also painting a picture of him as a dangerous Communist in the event that he did run.

Truman needed to do more than decry Wallace as Communist or a tool of the Communists. He also needed to attract the young progressive base and anyone leaning towards independent party options for that matter. Rowe and Clifford recognized that the traditional party machines of American politics had lost much of their foothold by this time. Both Clifford and Rowe speculated that the fall of party machines meant that greater concern should be made in appealing to "pressure" groups or focus groups like farmers, union workers, and different ethnic and religious groups.

The memorandum considered a strong emphasis on the farmer vote, combined with winning the votes out West, "Priority Number One." Farmers leaned to the right traditionally but had done well under Truman's leadership in the Oval Office. The Marshall Plan projected greater success for American farmers as well. The only notable negative against Truman among farmers was the tax program. The fear was whether or not economic success would entice

³⁶ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum. (Pg.4) (The concern about a Communist conspiracy for class revolution within Rowe and Clifford's document reveals that even members of Truman's administration were not immune to the hysteria about the Soviet Union during the early periods of the Cold War.)

farmers to vote Republican. Unfortunately for Truman, there were few further initiatives that could be done to persuade the farming community at that point.

With regard to the labor vote, Rowe and Clifford warned that “[i]t is dangerous to assume that labor now has nowhere else to go in 1948.” The memo then underlined, “Labor can stay home.” This had happened in the 1946 midterms as the document reminded, and it devastated the Democrats. The memorandum noted that laborers who were doing well would be “well fed” during the upcoming election. This was a note of caution since labor workers voted most enthusiastically during struggling times. Extra effort would be required to get them to the polls. Truman’s veto of the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act that year did not guarantee keeping labor morale on his side for the next year.

Another two important focus groups that shared similar interests were African-Americans and progressives. Rowe and Clifford saw the support of northern African-Americans as significant in securing electoral votes in states like Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. African-American voters were concentrated in the urban areas of states with large electoral value, and were thought to vote nearly in unison. While Truman supported extending civil rights, black voters knew Southern Conservative party members would do all they could to block such measures. It was possible that African-Americans may try their hand at Dewey, who pushed New York to pass an anti-discrimination act. Clifford and Rowe worried that Congressional Republicans will write up their own civil rights legislation like an anti-lynching bill and an end to poll taxes in order to woo black voters. The memo notes that in order to secure African-American support, Truman should “go as far as he feels he possibly could go in recommending measures to protect the rights of minority groups.” Clifford and Rowe recognized “[t]his course

of action would obviously cause difficulty with our Southern friends but that is the lesser of two evils.”³⁷

In the minds of the memo writers, the focus group of far left progressive was small but still pivotal. The key factor of progressive support was the large number of intellectuals in that group. As intellectuals, they possessed the means of communicating their support or frustration through writing, filmmaking, broadcasting, and other means. Building greater support among progressives was significant because the large influence of Southern conservatives in the Party caused many progressives to lose enthusiasm for backing Democratic candidates.³⁸

Truman’s confrontation with Communism and the Soviet Union would also likely prove beneficial for the observation that “[i]n times of crisis the American citizen tends to back up his President.” The memo speculated that the more confrontational things became between the Soviet Union and the United States, the more the public would support the Commander in Chief. As long as Truman assured voters that his Party did not possess Communists within it, then the friction with the Soviet Union should do him no harm in the election. Still, the memo noted that Republicans had and would continue to blame the growing influence of Moscow throughout Eastern Europe on policy errors from Democratic leadership and claim the Marshall Plan to be an ineffective waste of money.

With an opposition led Congress during an election year Rowe and Clifford assumed that not only economic legislation but all legislation would be opposed ferociously by Republicans.

³⁷ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum. (Pp.11-12)

³⁸ Along with rural farming communities, urban labor, and African-Americans and progressives, Clifford and Rowe emphasized that Truman should still keep in mind Jewish and Catholic groups. The Jewish vote was largely a matter of winning New York, a potentially nice steal from Governor Dewey. The Palestinian region and a potential Jewish state there were what Jewish voters were most interested in. Catholic voters normally sided with the Democrats but anxieties over the Cold War could swing their votes the other way. Clifford and Rowe advised that the President should still reach out to Catholics and not rely completely on his past tough confrontations with Moscow.

The logic here was that Truman should not waste energy politicking with Congress to create bipartisan legislation. They recommended that the President write up bills that appealed directly to the public instead of writing up bills that allowed for deal making and negotiations by both parties to pass. The President must appear unwavering in his support for the public needs.³⁹

Truman already had proven willing to be unpopular with Congress regarding Civil Rights. The President by this time established a Committee on Civil Rights by executive order⁴⁰ and became the first sitting president to address the NAACP in person with a speech that, as one black newspaper in Kansas City wrote, was the “most forthright speech on race relations ever made by a President in modern times.”⁴¹ Still, with the election a significant distance away, Truman needed to keep swinging for greater change if he expected progressives and voters of color to keep faith in him. He wasted no time pushing this agenda further once the election year began.

The Execution of the Plan

With the strategy laid out before the starting blocks of the election year, Truman could not waste any time hitting his stride. Only a week into 1948, Truman had a powerful platform in the State of the Union Address to begin executing the election strategy. Truman made use of his address before Congress on January 7th to promote his agenda. The President, still unannounced in his bid for Presidency, began his address with a positive message that set the stage for an ambitious campaign before hitting the issues hard. “On this occasion, above all others, the Congress and the President should concentrate their attention, not upon party but upon the country; not upon things

³⁹ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum.

⁴⁰ Executive Order 9808. George M. Elsey Papers. 1948 Presidential Campaign-Civil Rights. Truman Library.

⁴¹ “Truman’s Speech Makes History”. RG 220 Truman’s Speeches [newspaper clippings]. *The Call* (K.C.-black newspaper). July 4, 1947.

which divide us but upon those which bind us together—the enduring principles of our American system, and our common aspirations for the future welfare and security of the people of the United States.” He then made certain no one doubted that he stood for progressive change.

He stated his concerns bluntly. Regarding civil rights, he mentioned the stark inequalities that persisted in education, social mobility, discrimination at voting booths, and the overall security under the legal system. “Whether discrimination is based on race, or creed, or color, or land of origin, it is utterly contrary to American ideals of democracy.” Truman then spoke of progressive reforms for health, education, and housing, noting the widening gaps that further stretched between the financially secure and insecure.

Later in the speech, the President addressed inflation. Truman argued for his initiatives of tax reform to lessen the heavy financial bearing on the average family. Mentioning also that corporations had done well in recent years, Truman felt large businesses bore a greater responsibility in tax shares while many Americans managed through rough times. The speech itself was not too popular for many in the capital. Nonetheless, at this point in his Presidency, Truman felt more concerned about people far beyond Washington. With this State of the Union address, Truman established the foundation he needed to build a winning campaign.⁴²

Clifford and Rowe included in their Memo the need for Truman’s cabinet to vouch for their boss this election cycle.⁴³ They stepped up and followed through by late January. The Secretary of Agriculture Clinton P. Anderson, Secretary of Labor Louis B. Schwellenbach, and Administrator of the Federal Security Administration Oscar R. Ewing gathered for a panel discussion syndicated for national radio broadcast in late January. The three men acknowledged times were rough economically but they knew which way to swing the public’s frustration.

⁴² McCullough, *Truman*, 586.

⁴³ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum.

The economic situation as it was, Schwellenbach stated, was the fault of the Republican led 80th Congress. In Schwellenbach's view, the 80th Congress' initiatives for price decontrol saw wages fall behind and not keep up with the market. This laid the path to sell the President's progressive anti-inflation program that included "restraints upon business and consumer credit, and commodity speculation". The administration's initiatives for price and rent control to help the common individual, noted the Secretary of Labor, against the private interests of the Republican-charged Congress.

Ewing, in his role heading the Federal Security Administration, injected his firsthand account that Truman desired to improve health standards in the country. Truman regarded health as a matter of national security and wanted in place a "national health insurance program" to assure higher standards for the sake of national security.⁴⁴ Truman saw the campaign for healthcare to be a prominent concern for both national security and civil rights as non-white Americans fared worse in numbers affected by disease and death. Progressive healthcare reform required greater availability of healthcare against both economic and racial segregation.⁴⁵

Another prime opportunity to promote civil rights came in February 1948 after Truman consulted with his committee on civil rights. Once he heard the committee's findings and suggestions the president went before Congress again to lay out his initiatives. In this speech Truman reminded everyone of the values of equality aspired by the Declaration of Independence and noted that he felt the generation he resided in boasted the greatest claim to fulfilling those values. "Unfortunately," he continued, "there are still examples-flagrant examples--of discrimination which are utterly contrary to our ideals." Noting how he saw discrimination still

⁴⁴ NBC Democratic Panel Jan. 25, 1948. Records of "DNC" 1948 Democratic Campaign. Radio/T.V. Coverage Broadcast. Truman Library.

⁴⁵ To Secure These Rights Draft Report. Records of the President's Committee on Civil Rights. Record Group 220. General Correspondence and Administrative Records. Report ["To Secure These Rights"] [2 of 3]. The Rights to Health Services. To Secure These Rights Draft Report. Truman Library.

affecting the lives of many Americans he offered the objectives he believed Congress needed to address. The President wanted the Committee on Civil Rights to be a permanent body, not just one that came, gave its story, and dissolved out of the public's awareness. He also wanted civil rights bodies in Congress and the Department of Justice. He desired to increase the power of the civil rights initiatives already in effect and secure the voting rights of all Americans stronger than ever. He stated that employers should not go unchallenged when racially biased and called for true action against the horror of lynching. He even went as far in this period just after World War II to call for amendments for Japanese-Americans held in internment camps during the war.⁴⁶

Southern Democrats were appalled. Truman understood that when he spoke of civil rights, Southern Democrats knew he intended to follow through on what he said.⁴⁷ Truman wanted to stay above the fray of sparring with his southern colleagues. When a news reporter asked the President a few days after the address how he thought of their disapproval, the President stated, "The comments are being made in the press itself and over the radio. I have no comment."⁴⁸ Later that month when the press asked Truman whether he planned to meet with the leaders of the Southern resistance, the President stated brief and clearly, "No, I do not." Truman offered no life line to anyone in the South that wanted him to turn back the clock on civil rights.⁴⁹

The Truman campaign team felt that the president could not wait until the official campaign to begin for him to interact with public across the country. He needed to get a feel for the political climate of the country, especially in the West, which James Rowe feared might be

⁴⁶Special Message to the Congress on Civil Rights. February 2, 1948. 20. Public Papers. Harry S. Truman 1945-1953. Truman Library. Online. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1380>. Accessed June 2017.

⁴⁷ Truman, Harry S. *Memoirs*, 183.

⁴⁸ The President's News Conference. Feb 5, 1948. 21. Public Papers. Harry S. Truman 1945-1953. 21. Truman Library. Online. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1381>. Accessed June 2017.

⁴⁹ The President's News Conference. Feb 12, 1948. 26. Public Papers. Harry S. Truman 1945-1953. 26. Truman Library. Online. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1387>. Accessed June 2017.

drifting to the Republican Party in some areas. Truman's team needed a good excuse to travel to the opposite coast before his campaign began. That opportunity came in early summer. In June the Undersecretary of the Interior, Oscar Chapman, reached out to the President of the University of California Berkeley and persuaded him to receive President Truman as the commencement speaker that year. This gave an opportunity for Truman to travel through and interact with the key Western states that he needed to carry in the upcoming election.⁵⁰ Truman quipped his Western swing as a "nonpartisan, bipartisan trip", and he did so humorously, enjoying the clearly unconvincing façade of this tour being "non-political". Making many stops along the way Truman assailed the 80th Congress for standing in the way of progressive initiatives to fight the rising costs of living for the common American. Vouching for a new Congress this election Truman stated he wanted one "that will work in the interests of the common people, and not in the interests of the men who have all the money."⁵¹

Once Truman reached Omaha, Nebraska, the president prepared his pitch to farm country, while a festival awaited him.⁵² The festival was not simply because the president was coming to town; the reason was more sentimental than that. During the First World War Truman held the rank of captain for Battery D in the 35th Division,⁵³ and June 5th set the day that the 35th would have their reunion in Omaha.⁵⁴ The afternoon began well for Truman. He and the men he led in World War I marched gallantly down the parade route as a large crowd cheered on each side of the street. The president look as confident and revered as ever.⁵⁵ The image of the underdog

⁵⁰ White, Phillip. *Whistle Stop*, 16-17.

⁵¹"Truman Opens Western Tour, Fists Swinging." *Washington Post*. June 5, 1948. Records of the Democratic National Committee. Library Clippings File, 1944-1963. Edward T. Folliard. Truman Library.

⁵² Oral history from Edward D. Mckim, who served with Truman in World War I and took part in planning the arrangements for his visit to Omaha. Feb. 19, 1964. Truman Library. Online. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/mckimed2.htm>. Accessed October 2017.

⁵³ Busch, *Truman's Triumphs*, 28.

⁵⁴ Oral history from Edward D. Mckim. Feb. 19, 1964.

⁵⁵ "The Truman Album" MP 2007-1 Reel [1 of 2]. Truman Library Film Archives.

president that day seemed certain to appear positive and uplifting, until a communication mishap occurred before Truman gave his speech geared to the farmers of the region.

When Truman arrived later in the evening to give his speech, over four-fifths of the seating in the 10,000-seat coliseum remained bare and vacant. The local press never reported that this speech Truman was about to give was a public event, and an impression throughout the city was that the evening event was only for the old 35th Division itself. The low turnout served as golden material for the national media to embarrass the president. Nonetheless, Truman did not let the mishap phase him and instead set his sights on his mission to the farmers. When an army comrade and co-chair to this event, Ed Mckim, apologized Truman for the gaffe, Truman responded, “Eddie, I don’t give a damn whether there’s nobody there but you and me. I am making a speech on the radio to the farmers... [t]hey’re the ones I’m going to talk to.”⁵⁶

To the farmers that did listen on the radio, the president made known that he knew their background, sharing his own recollection of farming with his brother. He reminded them of the economic struggles that farmers experienced after the First World War and commented that the national failure to raise the agriculture industry out of this hardship ultimately served as the kindling for the Great Depression. After the Great Depression remark Truman found himself set up for his rallying call, “We can’t let that happen again, and if I have anything to do with it, it won’t happen again!” Referring to recovery efforts since then between farmers and the federal government, Truman stated that the country currently resided in “the rebirth of American agriculture”, due in large part of the legislative efforts put in place by Democratic Administrations since 1932.

Despite record highs in income and bank deposits and savings for farmers, complemented with a 25 percent drop in mortgage debt in the last seven years, Truman exclaimed that this did

⁵⁶ Oral history from Edward D. Mckim. Feb. 19, 1964.

not mean that farmers and the government could relax.⁵⁷ The President remembered Clifford and Rowe's fear that if farmers felt economically content, the party could lose them.⁵⁸ Truman exclaimed that the path to recovery still lay unfinished. Many agricultural families still lived with substandard housing, healthcare, and schools, as well as poor infrastructure. Preaching that he would call on Congress to initiate price support programs for farmers to follow the end of the wartime price programs Truman reaffirmed he would not let farmers again find themselves in the same situation they had after the First World War, but instead continue to address and tackle issues that remained. The President used his homegrown folksy wit when he addressed soil conservation, exclaiming "You know what I think? A large part of the fertile topsoil of Iowa and Nebraska and Missouri and Kansas is down at the mouth of the Mississippi River trying to make another county for Louisiana, and we mustn't let that keep up!" Truman offered his initiatives to continue his fight for farmers, including securing farming markets and enhancing distribution methods of produce. The president reminded his audience that he had offered all these proposals to the 80th Congress, and Congress had shot them down.⁵⁹

By June 12th Truman shifted the aim of his message to matters on progressives' minds. His trip finally reached the University of California at Berkeley and while civil rights remained a prime issue for progressives, resolving tense relations with the Soviet Union stood as another major concern. When the president gave the commencement address, he stressed both the United States' and his own personal desire as president for rational cooperation with the Soviet Union during this time. He noted that "[I]ong before the war the United States established

⁵⁷ Address in Omaha at the Reunion of the 35th Division. June 5, 1948. Public Papers Harry S. 117. Truman 1945-1953. Truman Library. Online. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1648>. Accessed May 2017.

⁵⁸ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum.

⁵⁹ Address in Omaha at the Reunion of the 35th Division. 117. June 5, 1948.

normal diplomatic and commercial relations with the Soviet Union”, relieving anyone who doubted whether the United States could “get along with a nation whose economic and political system differs sharply.” Playing the United States as cooperative for a peaceful reconstruction of world affairs, Truman pushed the scale of guilt on the Soviet end. “We [the United States] have no hostile or aggressive designs against the Soviet Union or any other country. We are not waging a ‘cold war’...The cleavage that exists is not between the Soviet Union and the United States. It is between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world.” He reiterated the moral image that the U.S. wanted to work as companions with Moscow and was “devoted to the principle of discussion and negotiation in settling international differences.” This speech allowed Truman to appear rationale and cooperative as a world leader while maintaining a stiff stance against “obstruction and aggression” from a foreign power.⁶⁰

A Spectacle at the Democratic National Convention

When the Democratic National Convention gathered in mid-July civil rights loomed anxiously over the delegates. A new civil rights plank proposed by progressive members of the convention’s platform committee faced rejection by their colleagues. Instead the civil rights plank adopted contained language unclear of any direct measures and kept many Southern delegates at ease. That progressive element remained determined and figured that if greater civil rights are not openly fought for by the Party at the convention, it would persuade more progressive Democrats to back Henry Wallace.⁶¹ Those who called for a more assertive message on civil rights found their pinnacle moment during the speech of Minneapolis mayor Hubert

⁶⁰Commencement Address at the University of California. June 12, 1948. 129. Public Papers Harry S. Truman 1945-1953. Truman Library. Online. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1674>. Accessed July 2017.

⁶¹ White, *Whistle Stop*, 80-81.

Humphrey. Humphrey's speech claimed that the United States was "172 years too late" on the matter of civil rights and delivered a direct blow to the South when he chimed that the Democratic Party and the country must "get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights."⁶²

After the speech the progressives in the party returned their version of the civil rights plank up to the stage for a vote by the entire convention. It passed although highly contested. Many southern delegates felt that this was the final straw. During the tally to officially declare the Democratic Nominee, Alabama delegate Leven Ellis announced his strong disapproval of the civil rights measure and proclaimed "we bid you good-bye" as 13 members of the Alabama delegation marched out of the Democratic National Convention, followed by the Mississippi delegates who shouted "Good-bye Harry!"⁶³

Truman, who witnessed Humphrey's speech televised, was taken aback by the assertive rhetoric on civil rights that Humphrey gave in his speech. He worried if it jeopardized too many Southern voters⁶⁴, and in fact it did. Several days later, 6,000 Southerners rallied in Birmingham with members of the convention walkout among them. The rally was the State's Rights Democratic Convention and Strom Thurmond officially accepted their nomination for President. Fortunately for Truman, not all prominent Southern Democrats, like Richard Russell of Georgia and Harry Byrd of Virginia, abandoned him.⁶⁵ Regardless, Clifford and Rowe's assumption that the South remained a safe Democratic stronghold collapsed with one grand spectacle at the DNC.

After the Southern revolt, Truman's persona before his acceptance speech appeared as wounded and beleaguered as ever. Truman defied the negative momentum. Truman had before

⁶² Ibid, 87.

⁶³ "The Truman Album" MP 2007-1 Reel [1 of 2]. Truman Library Film Archives.

⁶⁴ White, *Whistle Stop*, 88.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 99.

him at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia a pivotal opportunity to show himself ready and eager to fight for his key interest groups. Here he must reinforce the objectives of his strategy in one monumental speech before one large assembly with radio broadcasts reaching living rooms across the nation. While Truman's chance to speak came around 2 o'clock in the morning of the convention's last sweltering hot day, Truman would not waste this key opportunity. After Truman accepted the nomination of his Party, he then bellowed defiantly to anyone who doubted him, "Senator Barkley and I will win this election, and make these Republicans like it--don't you forget that!" He soon thereafter gave the rallying cry, "Now it's time for us to get together and beat the common enemy!" The President now put the audience into a loud frenzy.

With the crowd enthused, Truman directly reached out to two key interests groups he needed; farmers and labor. With regard to farmers, the president boasted that their income increased by over \$16 billion under 16 years of Democratic leadership. His followed this impressive statistic with a stiff and blunt message, "Never in the world were the farmers of any republic or any kingdom or any other country as prosperous as the farmers of the United States; and if they don't do their duty by the Democratic Party, they are the most ungrateful people in the world!"

Appealing to organized labor, Truman used the same formula. He mentioned the large increase recorded for wages and salaries under Democratic Administrations, in this case a \$99 billion uptake, and then echoed his call on labor strictly, "And I say to labor what I have said to the farmers: they are the most ungrateful people in the world if they pass the Democratic Party by this year." The president needed support of these two critical groups of farmers and laborers, but he also knew he needed to stand before those groups as a leader staunch in his call for loyalty.

He then recognized other accomplishments of the past Democratic Administrations since Wilson, from national income to foreign policy, including Truman's own Marshall Plan. The President countered his party's record with that of his Republican opponents. He made certain to throw the weight of negative attention onto the opposition led Congress, as stressed from a cardinal rule from the Clifford-Rowe Memorandum. The president spared no feelings in his critiques. He stated, "Ever since its inception, that [Republican] party has been under the control of special privilege; and they have completely proved it in the 80th Congress...They proved it by the things they failed to do. Now, let's look at some of them--just a few." Truman's list included the Republican Congress' overly long efforts to figure a bill to extend price controls. Truman claimed he was cornered into signing their last effort, "because they quit and went home" at that point. He pointed the finger at the 80th Congress for a long list of issues. The list included: Rising inflation, neglecting to combat poverty, failure to come to a quick and effective solution on the housing crisis, hurting blue-collar workers with the Taft-Hartley Act, shutting down a proposal to raise minimum wage, ignoring education funding needs, healthcare needs, and eliminating 750,000 citizens from social security benefits.

The president also ridiculed the Republican majority 80th Congress for ignoring the civil rights program the president outlined. This set Truman up to rally his final interest group, progressives. Truman pledged he sought civil rights initiatives "because I believed it to be my duty under the Constitution." Truman acknowledged that there were members of his own Party that disliked his civil rights measures but concluded that at least, "they stand up and do it openly! People can tell where they stand." He wanted to keep the focus of frustration for failed initiatives on the folks across the aisle. Truman attacked, "But the Republicans all professed to

be for these measures. But Congress failed to act... [Republicans] had enough people in that Congress that would vote for cloture.”

President Truman by this point in his acceptance speech reiterated his consideration and concern for the key interest groups he focused on, farmers, labor, and progressives. He hammered the 80th Congress for their stubbornness as the cause of the country’s problems and presented himself as the embattled fighter who would never give up his campaign for the common American. Now Truman lashed out one last swing to put his opponents on their heels and prove himself ready for another round of bouts. Truman proclaimed, “My duty as President requires that I use every means within my power to get the laws the people need on matters of such importance and urgency. I am therefore calling this Congress back into session on the 26th of July!” The Convention Hall roared in cheers and applause for the next 30 seconds. Truman struggled to calm them down to finish his speech. Once the crowd allowed their nominee to continue, Truman recalled a line that his predecessor, Franklin Roosevelt, gave in his first acceptance speech for the Democratic Nomination in 1932: “[t]his is more than a political call to arms. Give me your help, not to win votes alone, but to win in this new crusade to keep America secure and safe for its own people.”

Whistle Stop Tour

During the “non-political” tour earlier that year in which Truman assailed the 80th Congress mercilessly, Republican Senator Robert Taft retaliated with a quip, “The President is blackguarding the Congress at every whistle stop in the country.” The term “whistle stop” referred to towns so small they were almost irrelevant on the public’s conscience.⁶⁶ The slight

⁶⁶ Karabell, *The Last Campaign*, 133.

became symbolic for Truman's campaign. In September after Truman secured the Democratic nod, he charged the "Whistle Stop Tour" through key regions of the country that the President needed in order to catch up to the Governor of New York.⁶⁷

Labor Day provided the ideal opportunity for Truman to reach out to the organized labor voters that the Clifford-Rowe Memo highlighted. That day over 100,000 spectators crowded into Cadillac Square in Detroit to see the President speak.⁶⁸ Near Truman were Frank Martel, President of the Detroit Federation of Labor, and Walter Reuther, President of the United Automobile Workers. Prominent in the crowd were members of the major labor unions, the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Truman understood that blue collar workers wanted a straight talker as their president, and he remembered Clifford and Rowe's advice that laborers needed to be concerned about the future, rather than satisfied about today, in order to come out in large numbers in November. With a slight jest early in the address that gracefully flowed into sobering awareness, Truman remarked, "as you know, I speak plainly sometimes. In fact, I speak bluntly sometimes. I am going to speak plain and bluntly today. These are critical times for labor and for all who work. There is great danger ahead." Truman placed that looming danger on the Republican Party's philosophy towards the market. Since the turn of the century the President concluded, Republican control of the economy had let laborers down during several critical periods, spanning from the economic woes of 1907 and 1908 to the recent Great Depression.

This opened the door for Truman to continue his attack on the current Congress. "That 80th Republican Congress failed to crack down on prices but it cracked down on labor all right!" Truman recalled the damage that the Taft-Hartley caused to labor unions and reminded that it

⁶⁷ White, *Whistle Stop*, 8-9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 140.

only went through because that opposition body overrode his veto of it. With the blunt delivery he promised, Truman reiterated that doom laid ahead if labor did not act; “I know that the Taft-Hartley law is only a foretaste of what you will get if the Republican reaction is allowed to continue to grow...[a]nd if you stay at home, as you did in 1946, and keep these reactionaries in power, you will deserve every blow you get!” Truman rallied to the crowd, “I tell you that labor must fight now harder than ever before to make sure that its rights are kept intact.”⁶⁹

The ambition to win over the farmer found prime opportunity at the National Plowing Match in Dexter, Iowa on September 18. Clifford and Rowe already worried that economic prosperity might persuade many farmers to vote Republican.⁷⁰ Iowa previously demonstrated this possibility. Dewey had won Iowa against Roosevelt in 1944. In fact, Iowa during this time bore practically no allegiance to Democrats as the governor, and its eight congressmen and two senators in Washington were all Republican. The President remained optimistic nonetheless as he recalled that the state’s farmers overwhelmingly backed Roosevelt and the Democrats during the Great Depression.⁷¹ In this speech before 80,000 spectators within a deeply Republican state, Truman hammered away at the Republicans nearly the entire time.

Truman addressed the crowd first with praise for “the record-breaking harvests” and declared that the vast supply of food that farmers offer the world “are helping to save the world from communism.” Similar to his appeal to union workers, Truman underscored the hard times that the farming communities had experienced under Republican Administrations, notably Hoover and the Great Depression, and the recovery found under Democratic Administrations, notably with Roosevelt. Truman followed the cardinal rule laid down by the Clifford-Rowe

⁶⁹ Labor Day Address in Cadillac Square, Detroit. Sep 6, 1948. 184. Public Papers. Harry S. Truman 1945-1953. Truman Library. Online. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1798>. Accessed July 2017.

⁷⁰ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum.

⁷¹ McCullough, *Truman*, 658.

Memo and swung more blows at the “do-nothing” 80th Congress. He stated memorably, “This Republican Congress has already stuck a pitchfork in the farmer’s back” and noted that wheat prices, for instance, dropped under that Congress’ alterations to price supports.⁷² Truman’s grandstanding blows to Congress reaped replies of “Give ‘em hell, Harry!” from the crowd.⁷³ The President and his team noted the wealthy harvest of crops that awaited in the fall on their voyage to the Midwest,⁷⁴ and Truman knew he needed to bash his Congressional opponents for cutting government sponsored storage bins. He portrayed the Republicans in Congress as the puppets of the “Wall Street economic dictatorship” that are on course to “let prices crash to the bottom.” He championed Democrats as the party “planning to aid the farmers of America” in the “farmer’s battle.” Truman portrayed himself at the end of his overwhelmingly biting speech as a humble crusader concerned for the common good. The President remarked, “I’m not asking you just to vote for me. Vote for yourselves! Vote for your farms...and vote for your future!”

The Democratic National Committee during the election cycle established a Research Division that gathered specific facts and details about each “whistle stop” they arrived at. This allowed the President to construct a unique and relevant speech to give to each community.⁷⁵ Such detailed research helped execute Clifford and Rowe’s strategy of reaching out to the rural farming communities. In Oxford, Iowa, the President knew that the town commonly yielded 100 bushels of corn to an acre, and unlike the rest of the state during this period, voted Democratic since the Civil War. The preparation notes for Truman’s speech there included a warming jest,

⁷² Campaign speech, Dexter, Iowa, September 18, 1948. Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files. September 18. The 1948 Election Campaign Research File. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Online. URL; https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/1948campaign/large/docs/documents/index.php?documentid=7-6&documentdate=1948-09-18&pagenumber=1. Accessed May 2017.

⁷³ McCullough, *Truman*, 663.

⁷⁴ McCullough, *Truman*, 659.

⁷⁵ Oral History. David C. Bell, Special Assistant to the White House. Aug 20, 1968. Truman Library. Online. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/bell.htm>. Accessed November 2017.

“Now I’d just like to say that people who can grow 100 bushels of corn to an acre—and raise more hogs than anybody else in the whole country—and vote Democratic—they are really smart people.”⁷⁶ In Price, Utah, Truman knew ahead of his speech to praise the Fish and Wildlife Service of the community because it protected “one million dollars’ worth of lambs” from predators.⁷⁷ In October in Crawfordsville, Indiana he mentioned his joy in being in “the hometown of General Lew Wallace” and mentioned that earlier he visited nearby Greenfield, the hometown of poet James Whitcomb Riley.⁷⁸

Truman’s specific speeches to each small community contrasted sharply with his opponent Thomas Dewey. Dewey’s speeches came across as ambiguous and uninspiring.⁷⁹ One editor noted that Dewey’s speeches possessed predominantly “pleasant-sounding generalities.”⁸⁰ A speech by Dewey in Kentucky provided an example of generalities in Dewey’s speech that contrasted to Truman’s speeches. Dewey’s particular speech drew out the message of peace redundantly. He began, “The most important job that faces the American nation today is to create a lasting peace... There must be peace with justice in the world. We must wage peace with all the skill and courage and determination with which we waged and won the war.” The speech continued and ended on virtually the same vague message, “we shall pray for peace and we shall work for peace with a strength and competence we have so long and so desperately needed. It is an endeavor to which I am pledged. With the cooperation and the determination of all Americans, this endeavor cannot fail. Strong and united, we shall wage the peace together.”⁸¹

⁷⁶ Oxford, Iowa Notes. 1948 Presidential Campaign. Sep 18, Iowa. Elsey Papers. Truman Library.

⁷⁷ Price, Utah Notes. 1948 Presidential Campaign. September 21, Springville, Helper, and Price, Utah. Elsey Papers. Truman Library.

⁷⁸ Crawfordsville, Indiana Notes. 1948 Presidential Campaign. October 12, Crawfordsville, Indiana. Elsey Papers. Truman Library.

⁷⁹ Karabell, *The Last Campaign*, 202.

⁸⁰ White. *Whistle Stop*, 241.

⁸¹ Text of the Address of Governor Thomas E. Dewey. October 12, 1948. Records of the DNC-Library Clippings File. Harry S. Truman File-Dewey Campaign-Dewey Campaign in General [2of2].

The efforts of the DNC's Research Division to appeal to rural and predominantly farming communities, as stressed in the Clifford-Rowe Memo, produced an image of Truman as more interested in the lives of average Americans versus Thomas Dewey. Reporters like *The New York Daily News*' Charles Green noted easily the contrast in reception between the Truman and Dewey crowds.⁸²

As Truman made his way westward, he extended his effort to reach out to progressive voters, the third interest group he needed to secure. Truman already made clear back in late July that he meant to follow through on his progressive rhetoric. On July 26th, Truman signed two prominent executive orders over the issue of civil rights. The first, Executive Order 9980, required fair employment in federal jobs regardless of race, creed, or national origin.⁸³ The following Executive Order brought an end to discrimination in the military.⁸⁴

Now back in California, Truman spoke at Gilmore Stadium in Los Angeles. Truman described the Democratic Party as the Party of "Four Freedoms: Freedom from Want; Freedom from Fear; Freedom of Worship; and Freedom of Speech," while his Republican opponents stood for "big business first." Truman rallied off the progressive accomplishments of his Party in the last decade and a half including "social security; the farm program; collective bargaining; the minimum wage law...low rent housing; soil conservation, reclamation and irrigation projects; [and] full employment." After the President attacked the Republican Congress for their neglect with his initiatives to increase school funding and fight inflation, he acknowledged that they were liberals in the country convinced of a third party alternative. A hint at Wallace and his

⁸² Karabell, *The Last Campaign*, 202.

⁸³ Executive Order 9980: Regulations Governing Fair Employment Practices within the Federal Establishment. July 26, 1948. Executive Orders. Harry S. Truman 1945-1953. Truman Library. Online. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/executiveorders/index.php?pid=29>. Accessed June 2017.

⁸⁴ Executive Order 9981: Establishing The President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces. July 26, 1948. Executive Orders. Harry S. Truman 1945-1953. Truman Library. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/executiveorders/index.php?pid=869>. Accessed June 2017.

campaign of course. Truman replied bluntly, “To these liberals I would say in all sincerity: Think again.” Truman adhered to the Memorandum’s recommendation that Wallace should be portrayed as a Communist puppet. The President stated, “The fact that the Communists are guiding and using the third party shows that this party does not represent American ideals.” Truman then followed with the “wasted vote cliché” to anyone still not convinced, “The third party has no power in the Government” and therefore “cannot achieve peace...cannot achieve better conditions here at home, because it is powerless.” “The Democratic Party is the party which truly expresses the hopes of American liberals”, the President added, “and which has power to fulfill those hopes.”⁸⁵

Truman’s speeches in Detroit and Los Angeles revealed his undertaking to persuade progressive minded and labor union voters as advised in the “Politics of 1948” Memorandum composed by James Rowe and Clark Clifford. The President’s speech in Dexter, Iowa as well as his specifically designed speeches at each whistle stop, revealed his ability to follow the Memo’s advice to court the farmer vote. Throughout all his speeches Truman followed the judgement of Clifford and Rowe to hit the Republican led 80th Congress on issues important to Americans. Election night on November 2nd put the Memo and Truman’s political savvy to the test.

The Election and the Outcome

On election night Truman wanted to escape the crowd and find a quiet peaceful place to compose himself after the long and strenuous effort. Truman with the help of his aides slipped into a hotel room in Excelsior Springs. The head of the secret service resided that night at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York where Dewey stayed, convinced that Dewey would be his new boss. Truman

⁸⁵ Address at the Gilmore Stadium in Los Angeles. Sep 23, 1948. 205. Public Papers. Harry S. Truman 1945-1953. Truman Library. Online. URL; <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1955>. Accessed November 2017.

ate a small meal and listened to early results on the radio. By eight o'clock that night Truman carried the popular vote, but Dewey took electoral strongholds like Pennsylvania and New York.⁸⁶ By nine o'clock Truman decided to shut off the radio, turn off the lights, and go to sleep. At four a.m. the President awoke to the light jolting of a secret service agent. "We've won," exclaimed the agent.

The result was official a few hours later that morning.⁸⁷ Truman with 28 states held 303 electoral votes, Dewey won 16 states for 189 electoral votes, Thurmond carried 4 states for 39 electoral votes, and Wallace's campaign fizzled to carry no states. The electoral map showed undoubtedly that Clifford and Rowe's "number one priority" to gain the Western states came through in Truman's campaign. Every state west of the Dakotas, save Oregon, went for the President. That in itself totaled 65 electoral votes.⁸⁸ The Memo regarded Western states as a progressive region and Truman met their demands in action as well as in his campaign speeches. Truman's executive orders to end discrimination in federal careers and in the military, solidified his commitment to progressives in the West and elsewhere. It also spelled doom for Wallace's chances to appear as a credible third option candidate to Truman.

The interest group of farmers that Clifford and Rowe believed to be so pivotal to the election largely backed Truman also. Iowa exhibited a key example of Truman's push to win farmers. As noted earlier Iowa sided predominantly Republican before the 1948 election. All of Iowa's 10 representatives in Washington and its governor were Republican, plus the state backed the Republican Dewey in his bid for the White House in 1944. In 1948 Iowa backed a Democrat

⁸⁶ McCullough, *Truman*, 705-706.

⁸⁷ White, *Whistle Stop*, 237-238.

⁸⁸ Electoral Votes for President and Vice President 1941-1953. National Archives and Records Administration. U.S. Electoral College. Online. URL; https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/votes/1941_1953.html. Accessed July 2017.

again for the White House. The most populated Midwestern states around Iowa, such as Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Missouri backed Truman as well.

While the West and much of the farm strong Midwest went for Truman, the fallout from the Democratic National Convention assured that the South would not be “safely Democratic”.⁸⁹ Nonetheless Truman handled the brunt of the Thurmond’s Dixiecrat challenge well in the South. Thurmond took his own state of Alabama along with Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and one electoral vote from a faithless elector in Tennessee. Truman still managed to win notable southern states like Texas, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and the other 11 electoral votes of Tennessee.⁹⁰

The third interest group that Truman needed to influence, according to Clifford and Rowe were union laborers. Truman’s vigorous appeal to laborers received respect and high praise that election year. “Our Laboristic President” described Truman on a *Fortune* cover story for the candidate that earned the support of nearly nine out of 10 auto factory workers. Overall laborers came out in powerful numbers⁹¹ to the relief of Clifford and Rowe who earlier stressed to the President, “Labor can stay home.”⁹² The President’s push for labor demands along with his relentless assault on Republicans in Congress produced a positive dual affect for both Truman himself and Congressional Democrats. The Democratic Party reversed their disastrous tide in 1946 and regained the majority of seats in Congress.⁹³ Nearly all of the House and Senate Democrats that defeated an incumbent Republican carried a strong backing by labor unions. The American Federation of Labor saw 14 of the 16 Senate candidates it supported win their

⁸⁹ Clifford-Rowe Memorandum. (pg. 3)

⁹⁰ Electoral Votes for President and Vice President 1941-1953. National Archives and Records Administration.

⁹¹ Jacobs, Meg. *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 241.

⁹² Clifford-Rowe Memorandum.

⁹³ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 241.

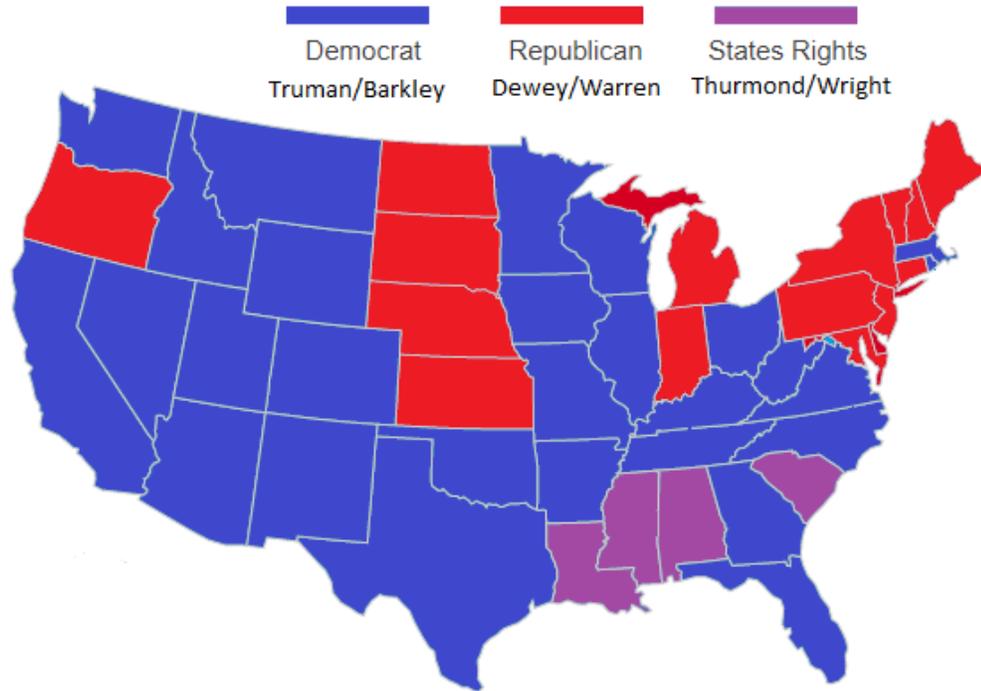
elections while over four-fifths of the House candidates it endorsed won.⁹⁴ Two new members to the Senate that election, Minnesota's Hubert Humphrey, and Illinois' Paul Douglas, would carry on the legacy of Truman's political theories for future generations in the Senate⁹⁵ while a third new elected member of the Senate that year, Lyndon Johnson, carried those political theories into the White House again.⁹⁶ Truman came away after the election not just with the title of President on his own right but with a Congress politically aligned with his philosophy and fine-tuned to create a lasting impact.

⁹⁴ Busch, *Truman's Triumphs*, 182.

⁹⁵ Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 241-242.

⁹⁶ Busch, *Truman's Triumphs*, 171.

Electoral Map of the 1948 Presidential Election



Source: *Time Magazine*. Online. <http://time.com/4561347/presidential-election-results-interactive/> (Thurmond won one electoral vote in Tennessee by an elector that defected from the popular vote of that state.)